

Americanness of Absalom Jones and Phillis

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Slavery, Freedom, and the Historical Meaning of Americanness

Blacks were brought to America as slaves from Africa. These slaves were used as workers in the fields in the southern states of America. The Civil War of 1861-1865, fought between the southern and northern states of America, ended slavery in America. President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed the slaves of the southern states, and the basis was laid to end slavery throughout the country. But before all this, the lives of blacks were miserable, and they were subject to cruelty and inhumanity. During this era, two personalities, Absalom Jones and Phillis Wheatley, played their part in guiding the African Americans to the right path and helped them significantly.

Absalom Jones, born in 1746, was an African American born as a slave in Delaware. He was sold in Philadelphia, where he attended a school and learned to write. He later got married to a slave and worked with her to purchase his and his wife's freedom by the year 1784. He was a true Christian and served as a lay preacher for the black members of St. George Methodist Episcopal church. The membership of the congregation increased, but this was a disappointment to the white members of the congregation. The white congregation tried to segregate the blacks. This was the moment when Absalom Jones showed his Americanness, and instead of creating upheaval, he and his friend Richard Allen, along with other black members of the congregation, left the church as a group. In 1787, Allen and Jones founded the Free African Society. This organization was founded to help those in need. In 1793, the yellow fever epidemic swept in Philadelphia and killed many. The

Absalom Jones, the Free African Society, and Community Service

Free African Society contributed to taking care of the sick. African Americans, under the leadership of Absalom Jones, worked to build new bonds with the larger community of whites (Will). They proved their citizenship and demonstrated their responsibilities as Americans. This shows the Americanness of Absalom, who also guided other blacks to be good citizens of America. Absalom Jones became the first priest of African descent in the United States. Absalom Jones led the congregation of St. Thomas church, which was a centre of social and religious life for the African-American community in Philadelphia. His sermons advocated the abolition of slavery. In 1799, he sent a petition to the Pennsylvania State Legislature for the abolition of slavery. And in 1800, to the United States

Congress.

He was one of the first groups of African Americans who stood against slavery. The life of Absalom Jones was dedicated to the betterment of the lives of African Americans. He was also an educationist. He founded a school for blacks and was a teacher as well. He also stood against the sale of alcohol (Newman). The efforts by Absalom to make the lives of African Americans better and to work for American society, including both blacks and whites, proved that he was an American who not only thought of African Americans but also of the whole country.

Phillis Wheatley was one of the most famous and well-known poets of the 18th century in America. She was born in 1753. At the age of seven, she was transported to North America and sold as a slave. She was an example of art and intellect and a proof that blacks can also be creative and intelligent. Her poems were a catalyst for the antislavery movement. Phillis Wheatley applied biblical symbols to comment on slavery. In her poem *On Being Brought from Africa to America*, she emphasized that Africans should also be included in the Christian stream. This was her love towards African Americans; her poems proved to be a source of [freedom and relief for African Americans](#). She was the first person to applaud America as Glorious Columbia, and this showed her love for America (Steele). In her poetry, she sometimes expressed that slavery is good in America as it brings the slaves close to God.

Phillis Wheatley, African American Achievement, and National Belonging

Looking at the lives and efforts of Phillis Wheatley and Absalom Jones, it is not wrong to believe that they were true Americans from the heart, even though they lived in an era when African Americans and whites were not on friendly terms with each other. Both of these personalities played their parts in the events of America as true Americans. Absalom's leadership towards caring for yellow fever patients and Phillis Wheatley's love for America, as depicted in her poems, showed that they were active citizens who were working for the welfare of their country. They were fully indulged in the events happening in America and never gave an impression of alienation towards the white people of America. The social thought of both Absalom Jones and Phillis Wheatley was to bring the African Americans and the whites close to each other. They struggled to create awareness about the conditions of the African Americans.

During the 18th century, African Americans lived as slaves of white people. The presence of two different races with different social-cultural backgrounds in the same region and grudges against each other was a worrisome situation. It was important to bring the two races together, and for this, the right vision and the right leader were required. Phillis Wheatley was the source of the right vision who not only supported the African Americans but also tried to build tolerance in the hearts of African Americans towards the whites by calling the nation great and by showing her love and gratitude towards the country she was living in. Absalom Jones proved to be the right leader for African Americans, who guided them towards being better human beings. Helping patients with Yellow fever

was a positive gesture towards the Americans. His Episcopal Church was the centre of social harmony and peace. The efforts of these two showed that race plays an important part.

The Americanness of two prominent personalities of the United States of America who belonged to African origin brought to America as slaves is an important question because they were the catalysts in shaping American history. Their work and efforts inspired many others who moved the anti-slavery campaign and succeeded in changing the lives of millions of African Americans who were living a life of distress and misery. The anti-slavery sentiments in the hearts of white Americans belonging to northern states helped in the emancipation of blacks and the change in the Constitution of America. It was essential to have someone in that era who could take the lead of the subservient race and create feelings of goodwill in the heart of the dominant race. Absalom Jones was proof that blacks are not always violent and hateful. Under his leadership, he led a community of Blacks who worked for the welfare of the poor and the needy. This was quite contrary to the image of African Americans, who were always portrayed as mean and arrogant. Phillis Wheatly was a symbol of intellect and art; her poetry was a source of awareness that African Americans are not less human and they have equal abilities. I believe that Absalom and Phillis were prominent personalities who devoted their lives to making America a great country that provides equal rights and opportunities to all its citizens. Their love for America should be appreciated and adopted by every American citizen.

Works Cited

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