



# Black History in Putnam County

*1620s to the Civil Rights Movement*

*Supported by: American Historical Association &  
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***The PHM's Black History in Putnam County booklet*** provides a brief introduction to several influential Black individuals who lived in Putnam County; from the arrival of enslaved Africans to the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement. This booklet serves as a brief survey and introduction. To learn more, please see the further resources section of this booklet.

# Before the American Revolution

## 1626 – 1775



*The Charles, a Philipse Family owned slave ship. Drawing from 1789, Collection Rijks Museum, Amsterdam.*

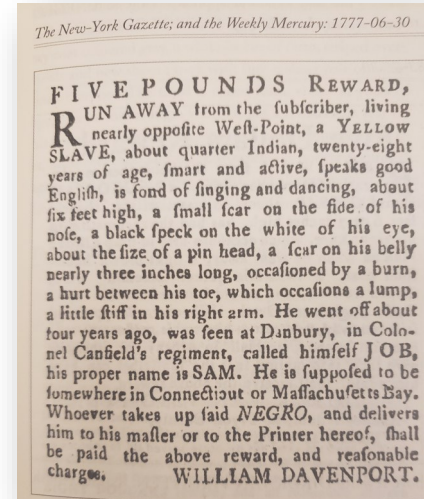
As early as 1626, the Dutch West India Company forcibly transported enslaved Africans to work in the colony of New Netherland (later, British and American controlled New York.)

A feudal system of landowners and tenant farms took shape up and down the Hudson River during this time. Under unfair, at times inhumane, conditions, landowners maintained almost complete power and wealth as they orchestrated the settling of New York. Both the large landowners and

the tenant farmers used enslaved African people as part of their labor force. Clues from contemporary “runaway slave advertisements” indicate that enslaved Africans in the North worked as bakers, blacksmiths, musicians, stone carvers, silversmiths, ship pilots, and in many other capacities.

Enslaved people often suffered brutal separations from their families and the communities they had created. Many were sold or hired out to other owners for a length of time. This was a profoundly isolating experience — marriages between enslaved people were not recognized by law, and their freedom to move or relocate was severely curtailed. Unlike life in New Amsterdam (NYC) and Albany where enslaved people had access to churches, courts, taverns, and other institutions that allowed congregation and extremely limited empowerment, life in Putnam County, remote and rural as it was, was more likely defined by profound isolation.

The area today known as Putnam County was part of the Philipse Patent, owned by the wealthy Philipse family from 1692 until the American Revolution. The Philipse family were wealthy merchants, landlords, and enslavers who profited off the slave



*Above: A 1777 notice announces a \$5 reward for an enslaved person who went missing in Cold Spring, NY | In Defiance: Runaways From Slavery in New York's Hudson River Valley, 1735-1831.*

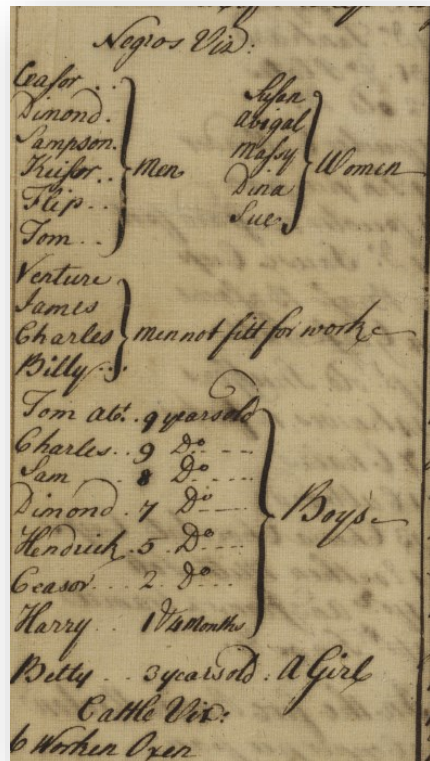
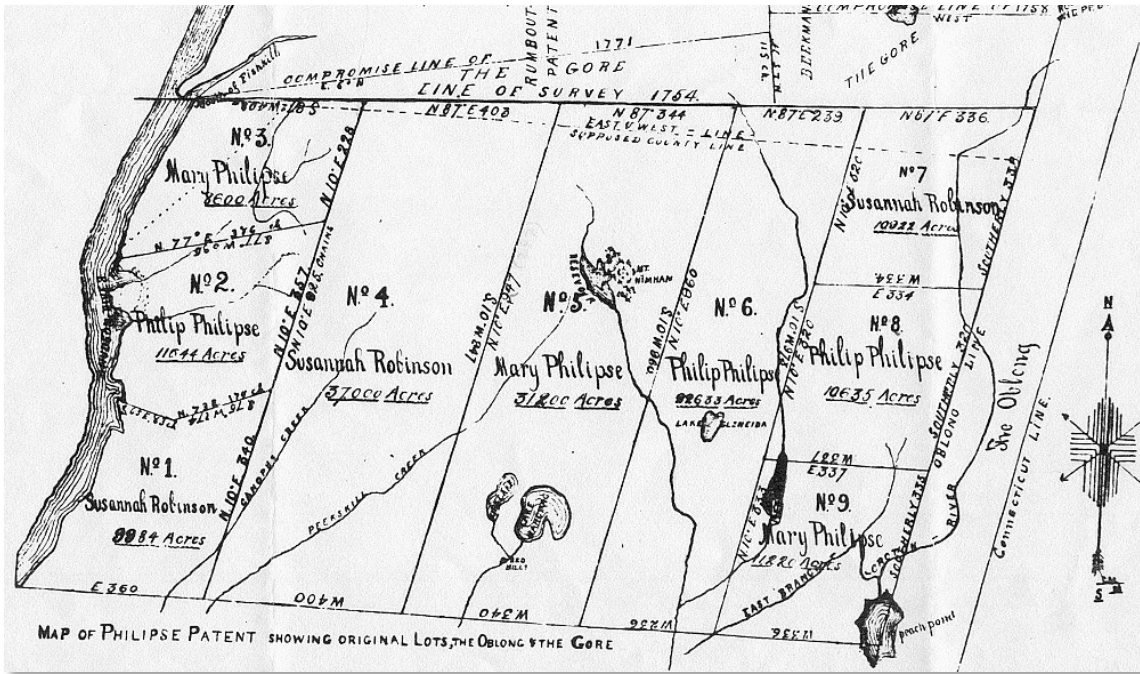
*Below: “Van Bergen Overmantel” depicts the Marten Van Bergen farm in Leeds and visually represents Dutch life in America. Of note are the Africans, Native Americans, and Europeans in the painting. Fenimore Art Museum, Photograph by Richard Walker.*

trade. One of the first Black people recorded as living in Philipse Precinct, as Putnam County was then called, was a man named Jack. He is mentioned in the will, written in 1746, of one of the first white Europeans to build a home in Putnam County, Thomas Davenport. Davenport arrived in Cold Spring sometime between 1716-1732. Jack likely lived in the Davenport homestead, which was located near the modern Cold Spring Methodist Church. In the will, Davenport left Jack to his wife.

In 1712, following a slave rebellion in New York City, there was a climate of hysteria amongst New York lawmakers. They enacted laws that made the enslaver pay 200 pounds to the colonial government in order to free an enslaved person, about \$50,000 today. This was cost-prohibitive for the low-income tenant farmer enslavers. Manumission, or the freeing of an enslaved person by an individual enslaver, was rare during this period. Prior to 1783, only one record exists for a manumission in the Philipse Patent.



# Revolutionary War 1776 – 1783



Above: Map of the Philipse Patent. The Philipse family owned Philipsburg Manor; the estate's boundaries were the Spuyten Duyvil Creek to the south, the Croton River to the north, the Hudson River to the west, and the Bronx River to the east (approx. 52,000 acres). The Philipses used enslaved labor to build all structures on their estate and to operate their mills. Adolphus Philipse, Frederick's son, would expand upon the family's holdings in 1697 when he laid claim to the unceded Indigenous land from outside of Philipstown all the way to the Connecticut border. Philipse proceeded to engage in a decades long legal battle with the Wappingers, led by Chief Daniel Nimham, who eventually sued the Philipse family for unlawful appropriation of their land.

Left: An inventory made in 1749 of the people enslaved by Adolphus Philipse. New York Public Library via the Highlands Current, "Always Present, Never Seen" Series.



A Black soldier of the First Rhode Island Regiment, 1781. Library of Congress.

Enslaved people during the American Revolution were on both sides of the conflict, but many aligned themselves with the British. This is because the British promised to free any enslaved person regardless of age or gender who came to their side. The latter part of the war was fought mostly in the southern colonies, which were heavily dependent on the labor of enslaved peoples. The British wanted to economically devastate those states, so that the Continental government would lose support. However, when the war ended, the British made good on their promise, and over 3,500 formerly enslaved Black people relocated to Nova Scotia.

Two men from Putnam County were among those who made their way to Canada after turning to the British. Their information was recorded in the documentation of all free Loyalists heading to Canada:

- ◆ John Simonsbury, 43, healthy. Formerly slave to Charles Collins, Fredericksburg, Dutchess County; left him four years past by proclamation.
- ◆ Abraham Thomas, 20, stout lad. Formerly slave to Samuel Willet, Fredericksburg, Dutchess County; says he was born free in the town of Westchester.

Fredericksburg is modern-day Patterson and Pawling. Putnam County was a part of Dutchess until 1812.

The Continental Army was conflicted on the role that Black people should play in the war. Many of the Founding Fathers were afraid of slave rebellions if they armed enslaved men, and most opposed enslaved people being allowed in the army. New York and other northern states did pass laws that said a white man did not have to

answer the draft if he provided a substitute, and that substitute was often a person he enslaved. Many states in the North had been recruiting free Black men into their forces for years, due to a failure to meet high recruitment quotas set by Congress. Many of these recruiters did not question any person's status for want of troops.

One formerly enslaved man, Job, escaped from his Cold Spring enslaver William Davenport, and joined the Continental Army in 1780. Four years later, William Davenport tried to enslave him again by putting out a runaway advertisement for him in the newspaper. He described Job as "twenty-eight years of age, smart and active, speaks good English, is fond of singing and dancing, about six feet high." He was reportedly seen with the Continental Militia, in Colonel Canfield's Connecticut Regiment.

Another soldier with local ties was Prince Cornwall, who was a part of Colonel Philip Burr Bradley's Regiment from Connecticut, was freed from slavery following his military service. Local legend says he also served General George Washington once during the war. He spent the last 15 years of his life working for Putnam resident David Kent. Cornwall lived to the age of 104 and is buried at the Second Kent Baptist Church Ground (1118 North Horsepound Road, Carmel, NY 10512).



Putnam County Brewster High School Students researched and submitted the application for this New York State Historic Marker for Tone's Pond in Nov. 2021. Photo by Jennifer Garry.

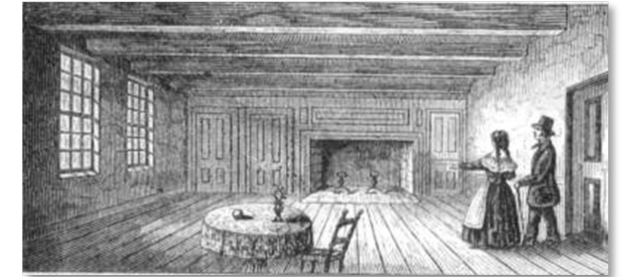
Many free Black people also contributed to the Revolution. Tonetta Lake, just north of Brewster, was formerly named Tone's Pond. Tone was a freed Black man whose enslaver reportedly freed him after Tone served in the Continental Army. After the war, Tone settled on this lake, rented boats, and may have even operated a tavern for fishermen.

Black people played a role in espionage as well. A 1777 letter to Pierre Van Cortlandt in Poughkeepsie reported that "a mulatto wench had lately passed through this place from New York; she brought intelligence to the inhabitants from their friends in New York, and in all probability she [has] gone to

Burgoyne's [British] army." She likely traveled up the Old Albany Post Road and was apparently never apprehended.

### **Beverley Robinson & Enslaved Peoples during the Revolution**

Originally from Virginia, Philipstown landlord and enslaver Beverley Robinson served with George Washington in the French and Indian War before moving to New York and marrying Susannah Philipse. As an heir to the Philipse family landholdings, Susannah owned property on the eastern shore of the Hudson River that ran from north of St. Philips Church in Garrison down to Anthony's Nose in Peekskill. They had a home built that they referred to as Beverley, located at the base of Sugar Loaf Mountain. The house was destroyed in a fire in 1892, but its location is still preserved by a historical marker on Route 9D.



*Drawing of the interior of the Robinson House from 1851, published in Harper's Weekly.*

Like his wife's family, Robinson was a Loyalist. After the British took control of New York City in 1776, he refused to sign an oath of allegiance to the American cause. In 1777, New York Loyalists, including Robinson, were given ten days' notice to flee the state. Their estates were seized by the Continental government and sold to help fund the war effort. This included enslaved people.

After the war ended, many Loyalists fled for Canada and England. At this time, Robinson petitioned the Crown to reimburse him for the loss of his estate due to his loyalty to the British; which they did, but only in part. In this petition he lists names, ages, and his estimated value of eight enslaved people (listed to the right). He claimed they were all born to enslaved people his family kept at their plantation in Virginia.

One woman named Rose, likely the same woman enslaved by Robinson, was sold by the Continental government to Colonel John Brinkerhoff, whose home still stands in

Dutchess County. It served as headquarters for General George Washington from October 1-8, 1778.

Robinson’s move to New York from Virginia split up many established families. The records of enslaved families on the Robinson's Virginia plantation at Hewick suggest that children were often named after elder members of the community, the names ‘Sarah’ and ‘Rose’ being present as far back at the late 1600s. Due to limited records, we may never know if the people enslaved by Robinson were directly related to the individuals who share their names, or highly valued members of the community.

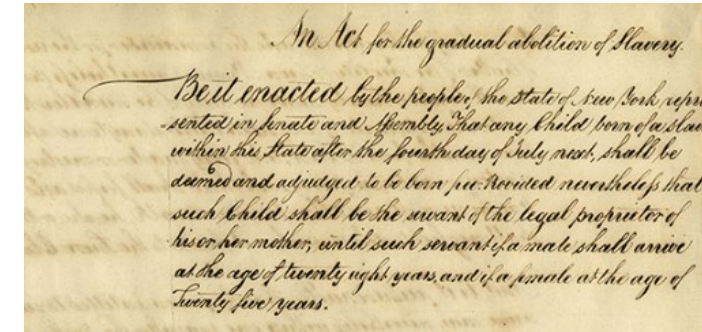
Many of the names listed below are historically English in origin, except Coobaugh. Traditional baby naming practices in several cultures in west Africa sometimes name the baby after the day that they were born. Coobaugh’s name originates from the Akan language family, which could place her ancestry in modern-day Ghana or Côte d'Ivoire. Her name means Wednesday.

Name	Sex	Age in 1777
Harry	M	19
Rose	F	20
Coobaugh	F	20
Belinda	F	18
Sarah	F	18
Phillis	F	15
Candis	F	15
Clarinda	F	13

*List of enslaved people claimed by Beverley Robinson.*

## Early-to-Mid 1800s

By Act in 1786, the New York Legislature freed all of the enslaved people who had become the property of the state due to the banishment of their Loyalist owners. It is unclear how many enslaved people were freed by this act. Some, like Rose, who had been sold already, did not fall under the jurisdiction of this act and remained enslaved.



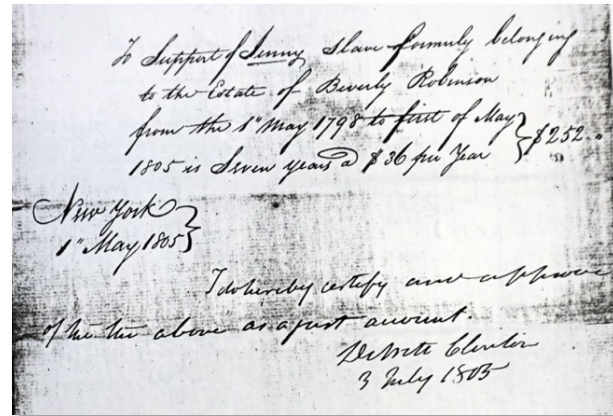
Later in 1799, the New York State Legislature passed “An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery.” (Above) It stated that:

“any child born of a slave within this state after the fourth day of July next shall be deemed and adjudged to be born free: Provided nevertheless. That such child shall be the servant of the legal proprietor of his or her mother until such servant, if a male, shall arrive at the age of twenty-eight years, and if a female, at the age of twenty-five years.”

The person entitled to such service may choose to abandon their right to such service,

“in which case every child abandoned as aforesaid shall be considered as paupers of the respective town or city where the proprietor or owner of the mother of such child may reside at the time of its birth; and liable to be bound out by the overseers of the poor on the same terms and conditions that the children of paupers were subject to before the passing of this act.”

One of the women enslaved by Beverly Robinson had a daughter, named Jenny, before 1798. The person who enslaved Jenny's mother (after Robinson) forfeited their claim to her service. Jenny was under the jurisdiction of the Overseer of the Poor until at least 1805, when the government ceased paying for the program. Until then, the overseer was paid \$3.50 a month for her care.



Invoice for Jenny's care from the Overseer of the Poor. New York State Archives.

Throughout this period, abolitionist ideology continued to grow. In 1817, the New York Legislature determined that all enslaved persons would be freed. And by 1827, all slaves born in New York were legally free. Yet, slavery in New York continued after 1827. Enslavers who traveled to New York who brought enslaved people with them could stay up to nine months without legal consequences; that was if those legal consequences were enforced. Enslaved people who were **born after 1799** in a different location and then brought to New York remained slaves until 28 years of age for men and 25 years of age for women. Those **born before 1799** and imported into New York were not affected and apparently could have remained enslaved indefinitely. The census of 1830 shows that such situations were rare, but not unheard of.

With a growing free Black population, the question of extending voting rights to Black men became a concern to white citizens. In the early days of New York State, there were no legal limitations to voting based on race. New York State eradicated property requirements for voting in the gubernatorial election in 1822, but in the same act also put one in place for all elections for Black voters. This made it so Black men had to own \$250 worth of property before they could vote, which was prohibitively expensive. There were votes on constitutional amendments in 1846 and 1860 to abolish the property qualification for voting for Black men, but both were defeated statewide and in Putnam County: 32-1346 in 1846, and 104-1372 in 1860. It was not until the Civil War that opinions of many white residents began to change.

## The American Civil War 1861 – 1865



Frank Myers grew up on the corner of Route 312 and Brewster Hill Road. This 1867 map of Southeast shows the location under his father's name, James Myers. Putnam History Museum.

During the American Civil War, Putnam County contributed a substantial number of soldiers to the Union Army despite its relatively small population. While the white soldiers were overwhelmingly in groups with their neighbors, Black soldiers were enlisted in segregated regiments, often out-of-state. For those who had lived in Putnam County their whole lives, joining the army brought them into a Black community that was not available in their hometowns.

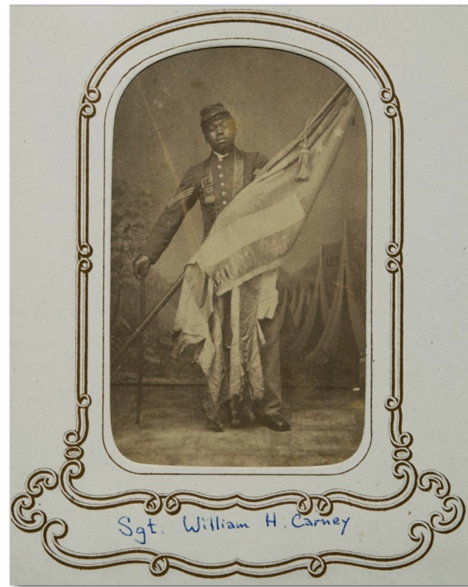
Francis, or Frank Oliver Myers, was a part of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment of Colored Troops, Company K. His home at the time of enlisting was marked as Patterson, NJ, but it is likely a clerical error and instead was Patterson in Putnam County, near Dykmans (or Dykeman's) Station.

In the dead of night on July 18, 1863, the 54th Regiment marched at the front of the procession to attack Confederate Fort Wagner in South Carolina, led by Colonel Shaw. Union leadership expected it to be an easy win, as the Navy had been firing on the fort for some time. The soldiers came up to 100 yards of the Confederate fort, and then the order was given to charge. Immediately the Confederate soldiers opened fire, devastating the Union forces. Shaw and the soldiers gathered under intense fire and crossed the moat, to climb up the parapet.

Later, Private Myers would recall what he saw that night to fellow Regiment member and author of *A Brave Black Regiment*, Luis F. Emilio. Emilio writes "[Myers] stood

under the uplifted arm of Colonel Shaw, while that officer was on the parapet, waving his sword, and crying "Forward, Fifty-fourth!" He saw the colonel suddenly fall, and was struck himself a moment after." Colonel Shaw was killed, and Myers' arm was shattered. They continued to fight despite heavy casualties. Union troops were briefly able to break into Fort Wagner but were unable to capitalize on this because of the heavy Confederate artillery fire. Early on July 19th, the battle came to an end as Union troops were forced to retreat. The 54th Regiment saw over 280 men killed, wounded, captured, or missing and presumed dead, out of their original 600.

Myers was in the hospital recovering from his injury until at least February 7, 1864, when he was mustered out because of disability. While there, he told a reporter for the *New York Evening Post*, "Oh I thank God so much for the privilege; I went in to live or die, as he please."



Sergeant William H. Carney of the 54th Regiment. Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Sargent William H. Carney of the 54th Regiment, who bravely retrieved the flag that night after the flagbearer died, became the first African American man to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor.

The 54th Regiment not only fought the Confederates in the field, they also took up the call for equal pay and fought against discrimination from the U.S. Government. Myers was buried in the Milltown cemetery in Southeast as "F. O. Myers, Co. K 54th Massachusetts." It is clear from his military gravestone that it was an important part of his life.

The tale of Myers and other soldiers of the 54th Regiment was depicted in the 1989 Oscar-winning film *Glory*.

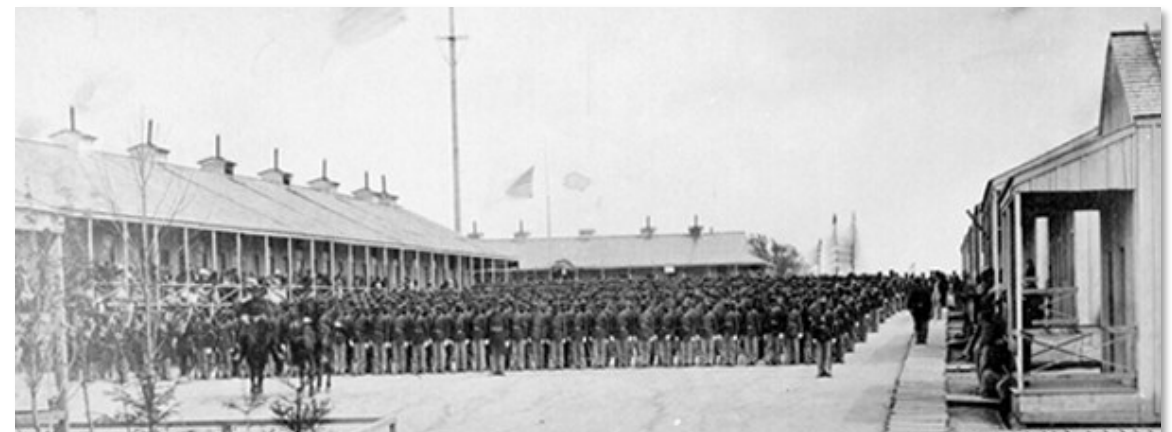
The bravery shown by the men of the 54th Regiment convinced the Union Army to

increase the recruitment of Black enlistees. Almost 200,000 African Americans served from 1863-1865, comprising roughly ten percent of the Union forces.

The story of the 54th Regiment inspired many Black men to join the fight to eradicate slavery. This might have been one of the reasons Joshua Crawford, of Philipstown, joined the 54th Regiment in December of 1863. In the 1864 census of Cold Spring, he is listed as living with his wife, Sarah Crawford, their two children, David (4) and Maria (6 months), as well as another family, David and Mary Crawford and their children Joshua (3) and Cornelius (2 months). It is likely that David Sr. and Joshua Sr. were brothers. They are listed as working in a saloon. After the war, Joshua and Sarah settled in Cortlandtown and had a total of eight children together. Their gravestones are in the Old Van Cortlandville Cemetery.



Regimental Flag of the 26th U.S. Colored Infantry. New York Correction History Society.



Brothers Lewis and William Hines from Southeast both joined the 26th U.S. Colored Infantry, one of only three regiments for Black soldiers organized in New York. Featured above is the 26th Regiment on parade, New York Correction History Society.

## Excerpts from “The Colored Volunteers” by Frank Myers

We've passed our brethren in their chains, nor sought to set them free;  
But now we fight to save them, and our flag of liberty.  
We'll fight them, though the earth be strewn with brothers slain,  
We'll fight them, and ne'er falter, 'till liberty we gain.  
O, give to us a flag which, through the march of time,  
Shall wave in glorious triumph o'er all this southern clime;  
It is our Abraham's choice, and gives us all good cheer,  
For underneath its folds fights the Colored Volunteer.

Old Jeff says he'll hang us, if we dare to meet him armed.  
'Tis a very big thing, but we're not at all alarmed;  
For he has first to catch us before the way is clear,  
And that's what's the matter with the Colored Volunteer.  
Forth, with the flaunt of banners, and the drum's inspiring sound,  
We swept his treacherous hordes from freedom's holy ground.  
There were brave hearts among us, and we sent them to the rear;  
So that's why they hate us, the Colored Volunteer.

The gallant Fifty-fourth! they're fearless and they're bold;  
May their courage never fail, and their ardor ne'er grow cold.  
Then rally round the flag, for to us it is most dear,  
Bright star of liberty to each Colored Volunteer.  
The train is moving slowly on, never mind the past;  
We've had a hard road to travel, but good days are coming fast.  
For God is for the right, and we have no need to fear;  
The Union must be saved by the Colored Volunteer.

*Broadside, 1863. Quotes Frederick Douglass's speech on the 54th Regiment. Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.*



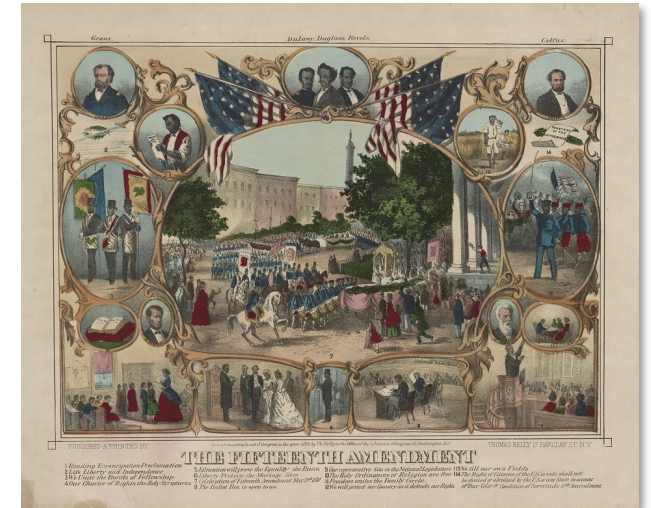
## Reconstruction & Jim Crow Era 1865 – early 1900s

The Reconstruction Era in the United States (1865-1877) was a period of political, social, and economic transformation following the Civil War. The federal government implemented significant reforms to rebuild the South and protect the rights of newly emancipated Black Americans.

While slavery had been abolished, Black Americans faced an uncertain future during the process of reuniting and rebuilding the country. During Reconstruction, the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution were ratified, abolishing slavery (1865), granting national citizenship to Black people (1868), and prohibiting the denial of the right to vote based on race (1870).

To help newly freed individuals, the Freedmen's Bureau was established in 1865. It provided aid, education, and economic opportunities to many Black Americans, despite facing challenges from opposition and limited resources.

The progress of Reconstruction was overshadowed by discriminatory practices like Black Codes and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. Black Codes curtailed the legal and economic rights of Black citizens and penalized Black individuals unfairly for committing the same crimes as white individuals. These oppressive measures aimed to restrict the rights of Black Americans, leading to racial segregation, violence, and inequality.



*The Fifteenth Amendment, Celebrated May 19, 1870. Lithograph created by Thomas Kelly. Library of Congress.*



Jim Crow laws, implemented in the late 1800s, enforced racial separation in public places, treating Black individuals as inferior to white people. In the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court case of 1896, the "separate but equal" doctrine allowed legal segregation as long as facilities were deemed equal. This further institutionalized segregation and discrimination. The influence of Jim Crow extended beyond the South, impacting the North as well. Businesses in the North inundated the country with commercial products and art that depicted Black individuals as laughable, inferior, or threatening. And Black individuals faced discrimination in housing and public accommodations, despite having the right to vote.

During this time, the Hudson Valley also saw discrimination, intimidation, and violence against Black Americans. Several 1870s *Putnam County Courier* editorials express displeasure at Black Americans holding public office and discontent on Black males' right to vote. And incidents such as the crowd-response to the alleged assault of Ella Stocum by Sam Pine in 1883 near Somers, and the lynching of Robert Lewis in 1892 near Port Jervis highlight the injustices faced by Black individuals in the local area.



Attendees of the NAACP's Amenia Conference. The Amenia Conference, organized by the NAACP in 1916, aimed to unite supporters of Booker T. Washington and NAACP activists. Led by W.E.B. DuBois and Joel Spingarn, the conference took place at Spingarn's estate near Amenia, New York. Around 50 participants agreed on a "Unity Platform" that emphasized education, political freedom, and better race relations. The conference marked a significant milestone in the NAACP's rise as a prominent force in the Civil Rights Movement. Image courtesy of the NAACP, accessed via the Library of Congress.

Despite these challenges, Black Americans in New York actively resisted and challenged Jim Crow. They formed strong communities and civil rights organizations, churches, and community groups played vital roles in advocating for social and political change. Their efforts laid the foundation for the later Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s.

## Early 20th Century & Civil Rights Movement

The national rise in hate groups, especially in the 1920s, was felt in Putnam County. The Ku Klux Klan had at least one chapter in the county around this time. One particularly tense stand-off happened between the Klan and a young interracial couple who wanted to get married in Brewster in 1926. A preacher refused to perform the marriage ceremony, and as they returned to their car, Klan members surrounded the couple. They threatened them to call off the marriage, due to the woman being of mixed-race and the man being white. Three weeks later they were able to find a willing person to marry them and they married regardless of the Klan's threats. The bride's parents reportedly guarded their home with shotguns and put up a sign that declared "we defy the Klan!" The groom's family, afraid of threats from the KKK, did not allow the couple to stay in their homes. The story made headlines and was even published in the *New York Times*.

Despite the Klan's presence, two families established resorts for Black travelers in the 1920s and 1930s. These resorts provided a safe haven for Black travelers from racism and discrimination. Augustus and Mary Fearn Moran founded Snowdale Farm, a summer resort catering to Black American travelers near Brewster in the early 1920s. The Moran's advertised in the *New York Age* and *The Green Book*. *The Green Book* was written by Victor Hugo Green as a guide to locations where Black travelers would not experience discrimination.

While at Snowdale, guests enjoyed farm-to-table meals, swimming, tennis, horseback riding, hiking, and fishing among other outdoor sports. The Moran's



Advertisement for Snowdale Farm. PHM Collections.

hosted many honorable guests at Snowdale, including Dr. E. R. Alexander, a prominent medical specialist at Harlem Hospital; Mrs. Cecelia Cabaniss Saunders, General Secretary and legendary fundraiser for the 137th Street YWCA, New York's first Black YWCA branch; Stafford Neilson, an immigrant chauffeur who became one of the first Black officials of the Harlem Unit of the Taxicab System; and Eugene Perry Roberts, one of New York's earliest Black physicians.

Virginia Green and her husband Travis, a WWI Veteran, also ran a farm and resort hotel for Black Americans. Their resort was called Magnolia Farm and was located near the current Thunder Ridge Ski Area in Patterson. It also appeared in *The Green Book* in 1938. Once at Magnolia Farm, guests enjoyed "delicious chicken dinners...swimming, camping, and picnic grounds."

Sumner Lark, a Black lawyer and community leader, began purchasing real estate in Putnam Valley in 1922, in the vicinity of Barger Brook. His holdings eventually amounted to about 200 acres. He wanted to create an African American community in Putnam Valley. In the spring of 1924, he resigned from the Brooklyn District Attorney's office to devote more time to the project.

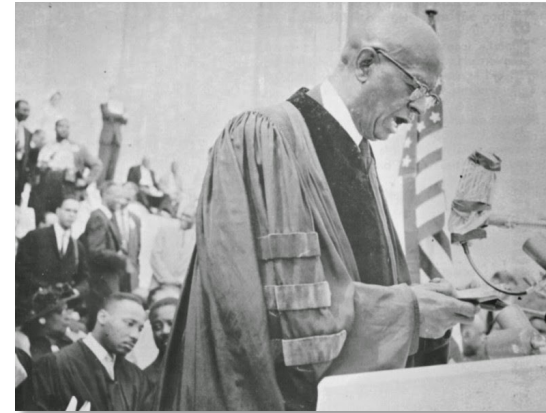
Lark also dedicated some of his land for use as a cemetery for Black Americans. Concerns about burials in New York were high at the time because the state legislature had forbidden the use of land in the New York metropolitan area to create new cemeteries. Many feared that there would be no more room in the city for burials, so this new cemetery, comprised of about 30 acres, was a welcome relief. It was named the Emmanuel Cemetery. Family plots cost \$125, which was paid in monthly installments, and included eight interments.

Lark fell ill before he could complete his work at Larksburg, and he passed away on June 26, 1931. His funeral was attended by a diverse group of people, and nine limousines transported family and friends to Emanuel Cemetery. He was buried at the



*Sumner Lark, From the New York Almanack.*

graveyard's highest point. At the time, about 200 graves were already filled there. A graveside service was conducted by two of Lark's friends, the Rev. Dr. Henry Hugh Proctor and Bishop R. C. Lawson. About a month after Lark's death, Bishop Lawson was selected as president of the Larksburg Cemetery Corporation. Over time, Lawson took control of much of the Larksburg property, and began making improvements.



*Bishop Lawson at the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, 1957.*

Eventually, Larksburg, which also became known as Lawsonville, became a resort that offered Black Americans a respite from New York City. It reportedly had three cottages, a 20-room hotel, a cattle barn, and a grocery store. Throughout this time, Lawson gained fame as a preacher, and he was part of the 1957 March on Washington D.C., "Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom." It took place on the three-year anniversary of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision,

which determined that segregated schools were unconstitutional. The march was organized in part with the goal of convincing the Eisenhower administration to publicly stand for the desegregation of schools. It included a performance by gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, and speeches from several Black Civil Rights leaders, including Bishop Lawson and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

King's speech, "Give Us the Ballot," was the first time he addressed a national audience, and it propelled King to national recognition. Bishop Lawson and his wife were both interred at Emmanuel Cemetery when they passed.

In 1949, a concert by famed Black baritone Paul Robeson was scheduled in Peekskill. Robeson was known to be in favor of unions, a civil rights activist, and anti-colonialist. On the eve of McCarthyism and in the midst of the Red Scare, this was not received well. Efforts to prevent the concert were led in part by the Peekskill American Legion post. Police stood by as protestors gathered at the concert grounds and attacked



*Attendees and protestors at the Robeson Concert, 1949.  
The Field Library.*

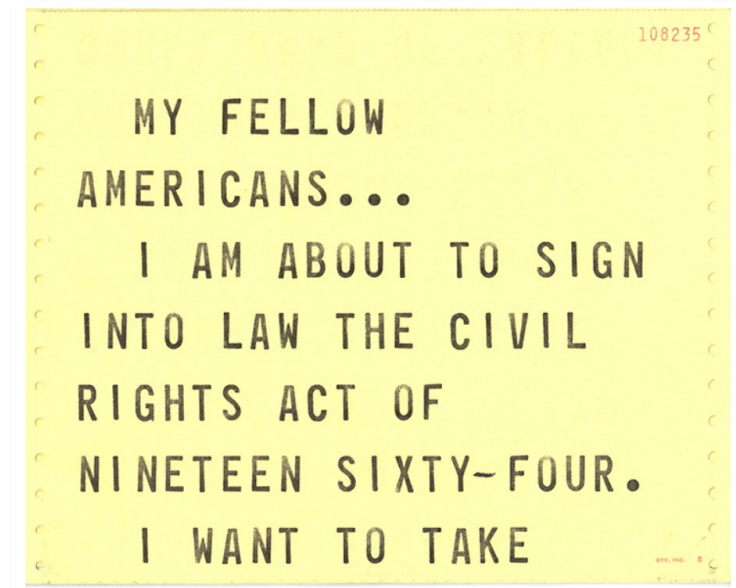
attendees with rocks and baseball bats. The mob lynched an effigy of Robeson, and he was prevented from performing. Putnam County residents stood on both sides of the conflict.

Afterwards, the concert was rescheduled with additional support. The Communist Party and labor unions helped organize security for the musicians and attendees and were able to hold back any protestors for the duration of the concert. Robeson was accompanied by Pete Seeger, a well-known political activist and folk singer from Putnam County. As the concert ended, however, those who were leaving the grounds were swarmed by protestors, who threw rocks at car windows and yelled racial slurs. Some people were dragged from their cars and severely beaten. Over 140 people were injured. Though video recordings were taken of the events of the night, no members of the mob were ever charged. In the weeks following, Robeson and the concertgoers were blamed for 'instigating' the riots. Many of Robeson's concerts were cancelled as venues feared retaliation. The State Department even revoked Robeson's passport to keep him from speaking out abroad.

For several months following the concert, the *Putnam County News and Recorder* published weekly letters to the editor on the front page, written by the president of the same American Legion that had instigated much of the violence. In it, he condemned communism, trade unions, and Robeson, blaming them for the attacks.

The band the Weavers, formed by Lee Hays, Pete Seeger, Ronnie Gilbert, and Fred Hellerman wrote a song called "Hold the Line" about Hays and Seeger's experience at the concert. This song, and Robeson's testimony in the House Committee on Un-American Activities can be found in the further resources section.

Through these and many other endeavors of activists from around the country, the Civil Rights Act passed 290–130 in the House of Representatives. In the Senate, after a 54-day filibuster, it passed 73–27. The Civil Rights Act prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin. The representative for the southern Hudson Valley, including Putnam County, abstained from voting for the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Both senators for New York voted in favor.



*Teleprompter feed for Lyndon B. Johnson's speech at the signing ceremony of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, July 2, 1964. Courtesy of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum, Austin, Texas (194.01.00).*

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## The 1970s to Today

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The passing of the Civil Rights Act did not eliminate racism. In 1966, Jackie Robinson, the first Black player in Major League Baseball, and his business partner a Black banker, attempted to buy the Putnam Country Club in Mahopac for 1.4 million dollars. The owners responded by immediately removing the property from the market. Complaints filed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) were dismissed. It eventually sold to Ed Levrey and Lou Lubitz for less than Robinson offered, only 1.1 million.

Today, Putnam County is more diverse than ever before. The percentage of African American residents of Putnam County rose from .3% in the 1960s to around 4.5% today according to the U.S. Census, with most of the increase happening after 2000.

Recently, many Putnam residents have joined the nationwide Black Lives Matter movement, with the goal of ending systematic racism in the American legal system. Moreover, the Putnam County Community Engagement & Police Advisory Board (CEPAB) was established as a public advisory board in June 2021. Its purpose is “to share concerns of the public, ensure transparency through the free flow of information and promote community engagement to foster trust, fairness, and legitimacy. As this advisory board, CEPAB cooperates with the Legislative Committees of the Putnam County Legislature. It is a community based, 501(c)3 organization located in Patterson, NY that addresses any racial bias and disproportionate policing of communities of color and offers recommendations to the Sheriff regarding police policies and procedures.”

Additionally, many Putnam County and Hudson Valley residents have banded together to form organizations dedicated to preserving and presenting Black history, including the Mid-Hudson Anti-Slavery Project, the Northern Slavery Collective, and the African American Heritage Trail of the Hudson Valley.

Putnam County has been shaped by its history, and the impact of that history is still felt today. With an openness to exploring our shared challenging histories, we (modern citizens) may be better prepared to affect positive change in our communities.

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## Further Resources

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### Books and Articles

- "Always Present, Never Seen," by Chip Rowe and Leonard Sparks. Article series, published in the *Highlands Current*. Series available (free) at the Putnam History Museum.
- "The African-American Struggle Against Slavery in the Hudson Valley," by Michael Growth. Transcribed lecture, [www.hudsonrivervalley.org/struggle](http://www.hudsonrivervalley.org/struggle)
- "Hold the Line" by Lee Hays and the Weavers. [www.archive.org/details/sim\\_sing-out\\_1950-05\\_1\\_1/](http://www.archive.org/details/sim_sing-out_1950-05_1_1/)
- *In Defiance: Runaways from Slavery in New York's Hudson River Valley 1735-1831*, by Susan Stessin-Cohn and Ashley Hurlburt-Biagini.
- "James F. Brown, Runaway Slave, Master Gardener and Journal Keeper" by Mount Gulian, [www.mountgulian.org/history/james-f-brown](http://www.mountgulian.org/history/james-f-brown)
- *Spaces of Enslavement: A History of Slavery and Resistance in Dutch New York*, by Andrea C. Mosterman.
- *Slavery and Freedom in the Mid-Hudson Valley*, by Michael E. Growth.
- "Slavery in New York and Scarsdale" by the Scarsdale Historical Society, [www.scarsdalehistoricalsociety.org](http://www.scarsdalehistoricalsociety.org)

### Websites & Bibliographies

- Putnam History Museum Black History & Culture Resources Portal [www.putnamhistorymuseum.org/education/black-history-culture-resources-hudson-valley-hudson-highlands-and-putnam-county/](http://www.putnamhistorymuseum.org/education/black-history-culture-resources-hudson-valley-hudson-highlands-and-putnam-county/)
- People Not Property, [peoplenotproperty.hudsonvalley.org/bibliography](http://peoplenotproperty.hudsonvalley.org/bibliography)
- Philipse Manor Hall State Historic Site, [philipsemanorhall.com/explore/bibliography](http://philipsemanorhall.com/explore/bibliography)

## Virtual Tours & Exhibitions

- *African American Presence in the Hudson Valley Collection* by New York Heritage & Historic Huguenot Street. [www.nyheritage.org/collections/african-american-presence-hudson-valley](http://www.nyheritage.org/collections/african-american-presence-hudson-valley)
- *Black Citizenship in the Age of Jim Crow* by the New-York Historical Society. [www.nyhistory.org/exhibitions/black-citizenship-age-jim-crow](http://www.nyhistory.org/exhibitions/black-citizenship-age-jim-crow)
- *In Washington's Shadow: An African American Walking Tour of Newburgh* by the Sound and Story Project. [www.soundandstory.org/directories/inwashingtonshadow.html](http://www.soundandstory.org/directories/inwashingtonshadow.html)
- *Slavery in New Netherland* by the New Netherland Institute. [www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/history-and-heritage/digital-exhibitions/slavery-exhibit](http://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/history-and-heritage/digital-exhibitions/slavery-exhibit)
- *The Missing Chapter: Untold Stories of the African American Presence in the Mid-Hudson Valley* by Hudson River Valley Heritage. [www.omeka.hrvh.org/exhibits/show/missing-chapter/Videos](http://www.omeka.hrvh.org/exhibits/show/missing-chapter/Videos)

## Videos

- *Testimony of Paul Robeson before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, June 12, 1956* by James Earl Jones. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhnCrHZkgNk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhnCrHZkgNk)
- *People Not Property* by Historic Hudson Valley. [www.peoplenotproperty.hudsonvalley.org/](http://www.peoplenotproperty.hudsonvalley.org/)
- *PHM in Conversation with Peter Bunten of the Mid-Hudson Anti-Slavery History Project* by the Putnam History Museum. [www.youtube.com/@phmcollections652](http://www.youtube.com/@phmcollections652)

Scan this QR code to be taken to the PHM's Black History and Culture resources Portal.



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## Reflection Prompts

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*Reflect on the resilience and strength demonstrated by Black individuals and communities you met throughout this pamphlet. Consider the challenges they faced, the strategies they employed to overcome adversity, and the lasting impact of their contributions.*

*Reflect on how historical events and policies, many of which are covered in this pamphlet, have shaped the experiences of Black Americans and influenced social, economic, and political dynamics in the present day.*

*What parts of the history presented in this pamphlet resonate with you?*

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## Notes/Ideas for Further Research

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*Putnam History Museum*

*63 Chestnut Street*

*Cold Spring, NY 10516*

*845-265-4010*

*[www.putnamhistorymuseum.org](http://www.putnamhistorymuseum.org)*



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