

A Catastrophic Event: The Underground Railroad

Suppose you are a black slave around the mid-1800s. You are tired of being mistreated, disrespected, starved, beaten and doing work for white men for hours upon hours, without breaks and not even a drop of water! The blazing Sun beaming directly on you as if it follows your every move. Looking for even the slightest sign that its setting, the only happy feeling you'll ever get.

You're tired of this! In your shed sleeping, you hear a slight, quiet, faint sound. If it wasn't for your light broken down shed, you wouldn't of heard it. "Ahh, it's probably just a bird". You hear the creak of the door opening. "Hello"? You whisper. "Shh! Who's there? Shh! Follow me"! The unrecognizable shadow says. "I'm here to help you become a free black citizen." "Ok," you say. You're not sure where it is taking you. You follow the now noticeable black woman through a series of paths until you reach a little hut. "How many miles have we ran"? "About Twenty-seven miles" She says. "Can you tell me where I'm going, what I'm doing, and is there a possibility I might die"? "My name is Harriet Tubman, and I'll inculcate you on everything about the Underground Railroad. There is a possibility you could get caught; this is a risky but one shot opportunity."

"I'll risk it."

The Underground Railroad started in 1780 and spanned until 1862. The Underground Railroad wasn't really underground, neither was it a railroad. It was just a term that was created to throw off Bounty Hunters (slave catchers) that captured slaves and either killed them or returned them back to their owners.

It was also called that because to designate a system of secret networks or escape routes and secret hideouts used by runaway slaves searching for safety as they made their way from the South to the free North. To help these runaways, thoughtful Americans served as "conductors" along these land and water routes stretching out of the South, in and out of the North and safely into Canada.

The concept of a system of escape paths out of slavery predates the antebellum era, when the making of train travel inspired the genius appellation "Underground Railroad." During the colonial times, a viable system of escape routes as both a protest and political movements. The "railroad" of these years engaged blacks both free and enslaved, Caucasians, and profusely, Native Americans.

The "Underground Railroad" is one of the most important events that occurred in American history. It was a passage of freedom for thousands of slaves that changed our ancestor's lives forever.

"During the initial phase, Native American nations like the Tuscaroras aided fugitive slaves as part of their war against the colony of North Carolina at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Tuscaroras and blacks formed a community, first in eastern North Carolina, and then as maroons in the great Dismal Swamp. When the Tuscaroras were invited to join the Five Nations of Iroquois Confederacy, the center for the Native American freedom networks shifted to Iroquois country in colonial New York. After American independence, fugitives could fabricate

new identities through the Iroquois bi-national system of encampments. Native Americans in the deep South often accommodated slavery, but on the frontier of planter society they endangered the slave holders enterprise. The outlying Seminole nation, an Afro-Indian people in Florida, took abetting fugitive slaves to its logical limit. Blacks among the Seminoles became not only free but also constituent citizens and soldiers". ("Underground Railroad." *Dictionary of American History*. 2003. Encyclopedia.com. 30 Jan. 2013 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.)

"It is important to realize that while conductors and fugitive slaves were participating on the Underground Railroad, all of their actions were illegal. The federal government had passed Fugitive Slave Acts as early as 1793 that allowed slave catchers to come north and force runaways back into slavery. By the 1830s and 1840s, these laws were expanded in reaction to increased Underground Railroad activity. With the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, assisting or helping hide fugitive slaves became a federal offense, making all Underground Railroad activity subject to six months in prison and a \$1,000 fine. Escaping from slavery or helping someone to escape from slavery was a very difficult and dangerous task". ("History of the Underground Railroad in America: National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio." *History of the Underground Railroad in America :: National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio*. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Jan. 2013.)

"The early freedom networks organized by European settlers in British North America originally stemmed from religious conscience". ("Underground Railroad." *Dictionary of American History*. 2003. Encyclopedia.com. 30 Jan. 2013 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.) German Quakers in Pennsylvania were one of the first to renounce slavery on religious authority in 1688. Quakers and other priests slowly moved from benevolence toward blacks to a faith-driven collaboration to save fugitives. Like the "righteous gentiles" of a later time, these conscientious believers took personal responsible for the earthly fate for the oppressed. "Quakers, Dunkers, Mennonites, and Shakers, later joined by those from the theologically radical wings of Baptism and Methodism, almost certainly constituted the first institutional skeleton of the later, secular, and more elaborate Underground Railroad". ("Underground Railroad." *Dictionary of American History*. 2003. Encyclopedia.com. 31 Jan. 2013 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.)

In its third phase, the sophistication of the Underground Railroad of the antebellum period was activated by tons of important developments. "The rise of a republican "conscience"- a secular antislavery sensibility parallel to the Christian one-- swelled the numbers of Americans willing to risk aiding fugitives". ("Underground Railroad." *Dictionary of American History*. 2003. Encyclopedia.com. 31 Jan. 2013 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.) The ideology of the Revolution and consequent state emancipations in New England raised serious doubts about the compatibility of republicanism and slavery. Moreover, the rapidly growing state of free blacks became the new engine for the railroad. Harriet Tubman's amazing career is emblematic of this important shift. Free blacks identified with the slaves, provided places of refuge in their settlements, and were most often the engineers to freedom in both South and North.

The Underground Railroad as a social movement matured during the first half of the nineteenth century, its various constituencies began to merge ideologically as abolitionists and intellectually as a spiritually influenced grassroots republican faction. The spokesmen for slavery were correct to fear this movement. The railroad was, in an important sense, a functional arm of radical abolitionism. It engaged abolitionists, committed and concrete action against slavery. In addition, in helping individual women and men escape to freedom, the railroad facilitated creation of the most potent weapon of abolitionism: first-hand testimony on the evils of slavery. Frederick Douglass was the most famous of these witnesses. Douglass, in turn, assisted hundreds of runaways to freedom from his home base in Rochester, New York. ("Underground Railroad Facts, information, pictures Encyclopedia.com articles about Underground Railroad." Encyclopedia.com | Free Online Encyclopedia. N.p., n.d. Web. 31 Jan. 2013. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Underground_Railroad.aspx>.)

The political, and financial effectiveness of the railroad was underscored in the congressional debates of 1850, which grew the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. This extreme extension of federal power in the interest of slavery incited fierce protest in the North and set the fugitive slave clause of the Constitution against and over the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth amendments. The railroad almost certainly provoked this political blunder.

The "Underground Railroad" was one of the most catastrophic events to ever occur in U.S history. Our ancestors will never forget this even. This event saved thousands of lives and will always be cherished by those who got saved and future generation as well. Harriet Tubman made this even be a topic her help has influenced millions and will always be one of my idols.

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