

Madison Washington: The Free Man Who Led A Successful Slave Revolt



Madison Washington

Madison Washington was a man born into slavery in Virginia who managed to escape, but risked his own freedom to help free his beloved Susan. Washington was described as having extraordinary African features, superb leadership qualities and a fierce spirit. He was considered a fugitive for escaping slavery and heading north to Canada, eventually finding work with a farmer named Mr. Dickenson. Even as a small child he would rebel against the inhumane treatment of him and his people; but rebellion is what eventually earned Washington his place in history. Around the age of twenty Washington would meet the love of his life, the beautiful Susan who he would make his wife. His plan was to escape from slavery freeing himself and his wife, but his plans didn't quite work out. His plans to escape were found out, and to prevent himself from being sold away from his wife, he escaped from the farm and hid into the woods for months. While in hiding he was able to keep an eye on his wife and he also began planning to lead a rebellion. His plans once again failed and he eventually traveled north to Canada to live in free lands.

While in Canada Washington's plan was to get a job and save enough money to buy the freedom of his wife Susan. He was becoming discouraged in carrying out his plans because he realized it would take five years to raise the money needed to free his wife. Washington had made his mind up that he would return back into the grasp of slavery, if it meant the freedom his Susan. Mr. Dickenson the farmer tried his best to persuade Washington to take another course of action. He eventually left Canada with his wages and his freedom papers heading south to Virginia. He was able to reach an area close to the farm where his wife was held, but had to conceal his identity to

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prevent being captured. Washington was still considered a fugitive and anyone who recognized his would have blown his cover. Being a man of tact and organization, Washington carried miniature files and saws within the lining of his coat; these would help him break out of any chains used to restrain him. "Liberty is worth nothing to me while my wife is a slave;" uttered Washington as he held conversations with fellow travelers who tried to convince him to abandon up his plans.

As he traveled closer and closer to the farm that held his wife, he was forced to travel at night for fear of being recognized by someone. Washington would find temporary shelter in the woods near the farm where his wife was held; he would often try to gain information about her but was unsuccessful. One night while in hiding, he heard singing off in the distant woods and the singing was coming closer and closer to where he was hiding. As he investigated the singing he eventually became a part of the singing, there he learned that he stumbled upon a "corn shucking." A corn shucking was a mass gathering of slaves who peeled loads of corn, and after peeling the corn they were able to have a huge dinner with whiskey and dancing, which was provided by the owner of the plantation where the corn shucking took place. Washington refused to eat the food for fear of being discovered, he also was very careful to ask only a few questions and remain in the shadows. At the corn shucking he did manage to learn that his wife had not been sold and was still on the old farm.

Being too eager to see his wife, Washington entered the parameter of the farm but was spotted by an overseer, the overseer alerted other white men on the farm. The first three men to approach Washington were struck in the face and knocked to the ground unconscious. Eventually Washington was subdued, shipped to Richmond, Virginia and sold to the slave owners Johnson and Eperson. New Orleans was the destination for The Creole, a ship controlled by Captain Enson and owned by Johnson and Eperson. Washington and one-hundred and forty four other slaves were loaded upon The Creole along with other cargo the men were carrying to New Orleans. As the slaves were loaded upon The Creole the men were placed in one cabin and the women were placed in another. For fear of rebellion the men were heavily chained; Washington particularly was chained to the floor of the cabin, the women were not chained and able to roam the cabin freely.

As Washington lay chained to the floor his attitude was rather jovial than the expected gloom the other slaves displayed. The overseers didn't know that while Washington was displaying a docile and cooperative attitude, he was secretly picking the men he would use to overthrow The Creole. They also didn't know that Washington concealed mini saws and files within the lining on his coat to use when the time was right. In 1841, on the ninth day of the voyage, The Creole encountered rough seas which made a number of the slaves very sick. Because a number of the slaves were sick the overseers did not watch them properly, this created the perfect opportunity for Washington and his men to attack. Washington used his mini saw and file to free himself and at least eighteen other men. Once free, the slaves found weapons and made their way to the deck where the ship's crew was stationed. When the slaves attacked the ship's crew it was unexpected as well as startling to the crew, the men barley moved making them easy targets for the slaves.

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Hewell the Negro slave driver and others from the crew drew their guns and begin shooting some of the slaves. Washington spotted Hewell wielding his gun, approached Hewell from behind, and struck him in the head wounding him severely. Washington led his men into battle with iconic flair, fueling his men to earn their victory; the slaves then dominated the crew and gained control of The Creole. Washington's men wanted to kill the remaining crew members who were still alive but Washington did not allow any more killing. For some reason Washington was not very interested in killing the men, only gaining the freedom of his people, and his wife. The next morning Madison Washington was named "Captain Washington" the commander of The Creole, by his men. That same morning, Washington requested that the cook prepare a wonderful meal for the men and women who were once captives on the ship. This meal would be the first time the men and women would see each other. Little did Washington know his beautiful wife Susan was one of the women held in the cabin on The Creole. As the meal ensued and the men and women mingled, while Washington and Susan shared a tearful reunion. After years of being separated because of slavery, Madison and Susan Washington were once again husband and wife.

Once Washington and his men defeated the crew of the Creole, he ordered that the men not be killed and their wounds treated. Once the wounds of the white men healed they tried to regain control of the ship but were defeated once more. Because of the bravery and brilliance of Washington one-hundred and forty four people were able to gain their freedom upon The Creole. The Creole didn't make it to New Orleans, Washington and his men landed in Nassau, Bahamas because they learned it was a free island. Washington was able to use the love he had for his wife, to free his wife, as well as free others who he did not know. The Story of Madison Washington and The Creole is a story many of us have never heard before; a man of African lineage who embraced freedom was able to not only change history, but literally change the lives of others. This story is important because it shows that once organized black people can gain their freedom, it also showed the commitment of a black man to his black wife, which is counter to the normal narrative which usually degrades the black family. If we unite and trust each other we can make the impossible, possible. Mr. Madison Washington, we proudly stand on your shoulders.

J.A. Ward

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