

Hidden History

The Unsung Saga of the Black Man

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A Secret Organization For Freedom, 1856

A remarkable story of secret revolutionary organization culminating in 1856, after a decade of work, is told by the Rev. Moses Dickson. He was born in Ohio in 1824 and as a very young man traveled for three years through the South in the capacity of a barber. In August, 1846, according to his own story, he and eleven others -- John Patton and Henry Wright of South Carolina, James Bedford and Silas W. Green of Mississippi, Irving Hodges of Alabama, Peter Coleman and Willis Owens of Virginia, James Orr of Louisiana, Miles Graves of North Carolina, Henry Simpson of Georgia, and Lewis Williams of Tennessee--met in St. Louis and formed the Twelve Knights of Tabor. This organization was active in the Underground Railroad; its other plans and activities through 1857 are told in Dickson's own words below.

Dickson himself was a minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church from 1867 to his death in 1901. He was a militant fighter for civil rights in Missouri, a leading post-Civil War Republican and a founder of Lincoln Institute, now Lincoln University, in Jefferson City, Missouri.

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"THE ORGANIZATION of the order of Twelve that was made in Galena, Ill., in 1856, was made to perpetuate the names of the Twelve Knights of Tabor, who were so successful in enrolling the 47,000 Knights of Liberty, for the purpose of aiding in breaking the bonds of our slavery. This secret organization of the Knights of Liberty was one of the strongest and most secret of any organization ever formed by men. The question of giving the history of this organization to the world is one that has had my most earnest thoughts for several years. There are so many families of the old men of renown, both in this country and England, that are now living and hold high positions, that they might be injured by revealing the secrets of the Knights of Liberty and giving the names of their fathers. I had almost decided to let this part of our history rest in the grave, more especially since God found other means to give us our manhood and freedom; but the names of the twelve men who were instruments in God's hands in preparing and organizing 47,000 men of undoubted courage to do battle for our freedom shall be perpetuated. God fixed the time, and every man was at his post. In their death struggles they gave us the boon of liberty. Precious be their memory...

"This organization (Knights of Liberty) was known among its members by the name of Knights of Tabor--a name that gave the members courage. That God was with Barak and Deborah, in Israel's great battle with the immense army of Sisera; they, with only ten thousand men, assembled on Tabor, to fight Jabin's army, and if possible, win the victory and break the bondage of the Israelites. God was with Israel, and gave the victory to the bondsmen, though they were opposed by twenty times their number. Our cause was just, and we believed in the justice of the God of Israel and the rights of man. Under the old name of Tabor we resolved to make full preparation to strike the blow for liberty. We felt sure that the Lord God was on the side of right and justice, our faith and trust was in him, and that he would help us in our needy time.

"FROM THE VERY origin of the organization of the Knights of Liberty, the necessity of secrecy was impressed on each member. Let not your right hand know what your left hand does; trust no one and test every man before he is admitted to membership. A part of the oath was: 'We can die, but we can't reveal the name of a member or make known the organization and its objects.' It was absolutely a secret organized

"JUSTICE MARSHALL COULD SURPRISE" - Sen. Javits

WASHINGTON - (NPI)--Thurgood Marshall, confirmed by the Senate as the nation's first Negro Supreme Court justice, could "surprise a lot of the critics" when he begins his duties in October.

That was the prediction of Sen. Jacob K. Javits (R.-N.Y.), who noted that Chief Justice Earl Warren, Justices Hugo L. Black, Byron R. White and others had followed judicial philosophies different from what had been generally expected before they became justices.

It was said that Marshall would assure an activist, liberal majority on the Supreme Court. This was seen in view of his past record as NAACP lawyer, when he successfully argued the 1954 school desegregation case before the court.

STILL HURTING from that decision, Senators from the South voted almost unanimously against his confirmation. They called him a "constitutional iconoclast" and charged that his addition to the Supreme Court would tilt the court even more in favor of criminal defendants at the expense of the public good.

In answer to these charges, Sen. Javits said Marshall should be given a chance to take his stand, rather than being held accountable for the court's past actions.

As the nation's attorney in the U.S. Supreme Court, he has prosecuted cases defending the government's authority to quell civil disturbances.

A man of long association with no more radical an organization than the NAACP, he could surprise his critics by lining up on occasion with the conservative faction on the court,

body. We know of the failure of Nat Turner and others, the Abolitionist in the North and East. The underground railroad was in good running order, and the Knights of Liberty sent many passengers over the road to freedom.

"We feel that we have said enough on this subject. If the War of the Rebellion had not occurred just at the time it did, the Knights of Liberty would have made public history.

"They were fully prepared to enter the conflict, and to do battle for the freedom of the bondmen. The year 1856 found them well drilled, with ample arms and ammunition. Wealthy friends, both in this country and England, had provided money to get supplies of all kinds; these were safely hid away near the camps of the Knights. The plans were carefully made, and the leaders of companies and divisions were instructed in the line of march from their various headquarters to Atlanta, Ga., where the entire army was to unite. In the month of July, 1857, orders were received at every camp to hold themselves in readiness to march at any time that the Chief gave the command. It was a gigantic, desperate movement, and demanded the closest study of every move that was to be made. We expected to arrive at Atlanta with at least 150,000 well-armed men. The Chief's positive orders were to spare women and children, and to parole non-combatants; capture all of the arms and ammunition found anywhere; treat their prisoners well. March, fight, and conquer was the command, or leave their bodies on the battle-field. It was a death-struggle for freedom, and God is just. He will give us the victory. The flag under which the Knights of Liberty were to fight, the bars were green, red, and blue; in the center were twelve stars in the form of a cross. The time for each company and division to report at Atlanta was fixed, and from there circumstances were to shape their future movements. The South was taking it easy over a slumbering volcano; a word from one man would have started the eruption to rolling. Death and destruction would have marked its way through the Southland at the command of one man....

"The Chief was almost ready to give the command to move forward in July, 1857, but he paused and scanned the signs that were gathering over the Union. The North and South were having a terrible struggle for mastery on the slave question. The Chief called a halt and notified the Knights that it was plainly demonstrated to him that a higher power was preparing to take a part in the contest between the North and South...."

*Footnote: Moses Dickson, Manual of the International Order of Twelve of Knights and Daughters of Tabor containing general laws; regulations, ceremonies, drill and landmarks (10th ed., Glasgow, Mo., 1918 (copyright, 1891), Moses Dickson Pub. Co.), pp. 16-21. Copy in University of Minnesota library.

rather than the activists, as predicted.

After being approved, 69-11 by the Senate, Marshall reaffirmed his "deep faith in this nation and its people." He pledged to be ever mindful "of my obligation to the Constitution and to the goal of equal justice under law."

Despite his advance billing, he could turn out to be the Constitution's strictest interpreter.

THIS WEEK IN NEGRO HISTORY

AN "NPI" FEATURE

- Sept. 21, 1909 President Kwame Nkrumah of the Republic of Ghana was born.
- Sept. 22, 1862 President Abraham Lincoln issues first Emancipation Proclamation freeing all Negro slaves in Confederate states.
- Sept. 22, 1906 John Henry Cooyers was first Negro to be admitted to the U.S. Naval Academy.
- Sept. 23, 1863 Mary Church Terrell, prominent club woman who was a leader in breaking down racial barriers in Washington, D.C., was born in Memphis, Tenn.
- Sept. 23, 1945 Joe Louis, former world's heavyweight boxing champion, was awarded Legion of Merit for services to his country during World War II.
- Sept. 24, 1786 Jupiter Hammond published address to Negroes of New York.
- Sept. 23, 1817 American Colonization Society, which conceived the idea of establishing Liberia on the west coast of Africa as a new home for Negro slaves, was founded in New York City. Liberia, in 1967, observed her 120th year of Independence.
- Sept. 24, 1957 President Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered Federal troops into Little Rock, Ark., to carry out integration of Central High School.
- Sept. 25, 1863 First U.S. regiment organized. It was called the 45th Regiment.
- Sept. 25, 1788 The first African Baptist Church was founded in Savannah, Ga., by the Rev. A. Marshall, white, and the Rev. Jesse Peters, Negro.
- Sept. 25, 1957 Nine Negro pupils escorted safely into Central High School, Little Rock, Ark., by federal troops.
- Sept. 26, 1864 Thirteen Negroes won the Congressional Medal of Honor.
- Sept. 26, 1866 Slavery abolished in Cuba.
- Sept. 27, 1950 Ezzard Charles retained heavyweight boxing title by defeating Joe Louis at Yankee Stadium, New York City.
- Sept. 27, 1948 Rosa Lee Ingram was sentenced to die for defending herself. Sentence was commuted due to nationwide protest.
- Sept. 27, 1918 George Henry White died in Philadelphia. He was the last Reconstruction congressman of South Carolina.

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CHARLES I. WEST, M.D. - Publisher
ALICE KEY - Executive Editor * DOROTHY WEST - Treasurer
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EDITORIAL, ADVERTISING & CIRCULATION OFFICES
900 West Bonanza Rd., Suite A-B (Moulin Rouge Hotel)
Las Vegas, Nevada 89106 * Telephone: 384-3117

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