

Unveiling the Untold Stories: North Carolina Free People Of Color 1715-1885

Hidden within the pages of history, lies a community whose stories are not widely known. The North Carolina Free People of Color from 1715 to 1885 have a remarkable tale of freedom, resilience, and determination. From their establishment amidst a landscape of slavery to fighting for their rights, this article is a captivating journey into a rarely explored aspect of American history.

Defining North Carolina's Free People of Color

In the midst of chattel slavery in the United States, North Carolina was home to a distinct group of individuals who were classified as "Free People of Color." These were individuals who were not enslaved and held a unique status within society. While often categorized as "mulatto," they had diverse racial backgrounds, including Native American, European, and African ancestry.

From the early 18th century to the late 19th century, this community flourished despite the daunting challenges they faced. They formed tight-knit communities, established businesses, owned property, and even fought for their rights to education and suffrage.



North Carolina's Free People of Color, 1715–1885

by Warren E. Milteer Jr.(Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 2651 KB

Text-to-Speech : Enabled

Screen Reader : Supported

Enhanced typesetting: Enabled

Word Wise : Enabled

Print length : 478 pages



Tracing the Roots: Formation and Growth

An examination of North Carolina's historical records reveals the origins of this resilient community. Many Free People of Color can be traced back to the families of Native American tribes, slaves, and European settlers. Through intermarriages and complex family ties, they created a unique hybrid culture that celebrated their diverse heritage.

As the number of Free People of Color grew, so did their communities. Areas such as Hayti in Durham, Fourth Ward in Charlotte, and Wilmington's Brooklyn neighborhood became hubs of cultural exchange and economic prosperity.

The Challenges Faced by North Carolina's Free People of Color

Living in a society entrenched in slavery, the Free People of Color faced numerous challenges and restrictions. Despite their relative freedom, they were subjected to oppressive laws that limited their social mobility and economic opportunities.

In an era of racial segregation, this community fought for their right to education. Despite facing adversity in the form of limited resources and discriminatory practices, they established schools and pursued knowledge to empower themselves and future generations.

The fight for suffrage rights was another battle waged by the Free People of Color. While excluded from voting, they fervently advocated for their constitutional rights as citizens of the United States.

Contributions and Achievements

The North Carolina Free People of Color made lasting contributions to society. They were skilled artisans, educators, doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs, and community leaders.

John Chavis, a notable figure, was an African American preacher and teacher who established a successful school for white and black students. His impact on education in North Carolina echoed far beyond his time.

Lewis Sheridan Leary, a mixed-race man who fought alongside John Brown in the famous raid on Harpers Ferry, exemplified the resilience and determination of the Free People of Color in their quest for freedom and equality.

The Legacy Today: A Testament to Resilience

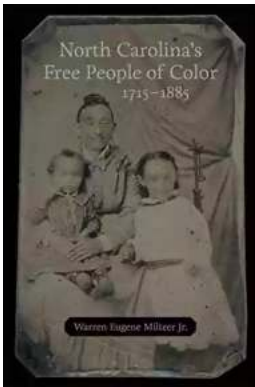
While historical records offer glimpses into the lives of North Carolina's Free People of Color, their rich legacy can still be witnessed today. Descendants of this community continue to uphold their ancestors' values of liberty, education, and community building.

From annual reunions and historical preservation efforts to the celebration of their unique heritage, the North Carolina Free People of Color have left an indelible mark on the state's history and society.

The story of North Carolina's Free People of Color from 1715 to 1885 is a testament to human resilience, determination, and the fight for freedom. Their contribution to the state's culture, economy, and social fabric deserves recognition and celebration.

As we delve deeper into the transformative power of history, it is crucial to uncover and explore these lesser-known stories. The North Carolina Free People of Color serve as an inspiration and a reminder of the strength that lies within

communities facing adversity, illuminating the path towards a more inclusive future.



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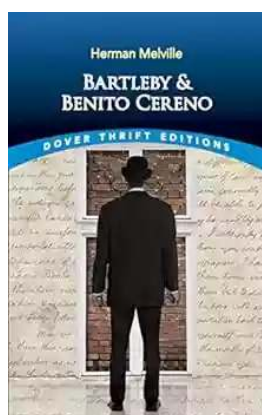


In *North Carolina's Free People of Color, 1715–1885*, Warren Eugene Milteer Jr. examines the lives of free persons categorized by their communities as “negroes,” “mulattoes,” “mustees,” “Indians,” “mixed-bloods,” or simply “free people of color.” From the colonial period through Reconstruction, lawmakers passed legislation that curbed the rights and privileges of these non-enslaved residents, from prohibiting their testimony against whites to barring them from the ballot box. While such laws suggest that most white North Carolinians desired to limit the freedoms and civil liberties enjoyed by free people of color, Milteer reveals that the two groups often interacted—praying together, working the same land, and occasionally sharing households and starting families. Some free people of color also rose to prominence in their communities, becoming successful businesspeople and winning the respect of their white neighbors.

Milteer's innovative study moves beyond depictions of the American South as a region controlled by a strict racial hierarchy. He contends that although North

Carolínians frequently sorted themselves into races imbued with legal and social entitlements—with whites placing themselves above persons of color—those efforts regularly clashed with their concurrent recognition of class, gender, kinship, and occupational distinctions. Whites often determined the position of free nonwhites by designating them as either valuable or expendable members of society. In early North Carolina, free people of color of certain statuses enjoyed access to institutions unavailable even to some whites. Prior to 1835, for instance, some free men of color possessed the right to vote while the law disenfranchised all women, white and nonwhite included.

North Carolina's Free People of Color, 1715–1885 demonstrates that conceptions of race were complex and fluid, defying easy characterization. Despite the reductive labels often assigned to them by whites, free people of color in the state emerged from an array of backgrounds, lived widely varied lives, and created distinct cultures—all of which, Milteer suggests, allowed them to adjust to and counter ever-evolving forms of racial discrimination.



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