

How This Founding Father Helped Launch 1 of America's Great Black Churches

One of America's Founding Fathers, Dr. Benjamin Rush, helped launch one of America's most successful Black denominations today. Rush (1745-1813), a Presbyterian, was a Philadelphia physician, member of the Continental Congress and signer of the Declaration of Independence who became surgeon general during the Revolutionary War at George Washington's request.

Rush was a passionate abolitionist and helped form the first Abolition society in America in his hometown of Philadelphia. He called slavery a "Hydra sin," calling on the pastors and ministers of America to take a public stand against it. He wrote,

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But chiefly—ye ministers of the gospel, whose dominion over the principles and actions of men is so universally acknowledged and felt, —Ye who estimate the worth of your fellow creatures by their immortality, and therefore must look upon all mankind as equal; —let your zeal keep pace with your opportunities to put a stop to slavery. While you enforce the duties of "tithe and cumin," neglect not the weightier laws of justice and humanity. Slavery is a Hydra sin and includes in it every violation of the precepts of the Laws and the Gospels (Hyatt, "1726: The Year that Defined America," 100-101).

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Rush was a supporter of the Great Awakening, which ignited a

powerful antislavery movement in 18th- century Colonial America. He was influential in turning many against slavery, including some of his fellow Founding Fathers. As the esteemed Black scholar Dr. Thomas Sowell has said,

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“Among those who turned against slavery in the 18th century were George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry and other American leaders. You could research all of 18th century Africa or Asia or the Middle East without finding any comparable rejection of slavery there” (Hyatt, “Abolitionist Founding Fathers,” 9).

Rush became friends with former slave and successful evangelist Richard Allen, who moved to Philadelphia after a time of successful ministry to both Black and white audiences. In fact, his ministry was so successful in bridging racial and cultural divides that Paul Strand, former Washington, D.C., correspondent for CBN, called him “America’s Black Founding Father.”

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