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**A House Divided (25): Slave
Fugitives - Battle of Christiana– I**

Lead: One hundred and fifty years ago the Republic was facing its greatest crisis. This continuing series examines the American Civil War. It is "A House Divided."

Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: “The only way to make the Fugitive Slave Law a dead letter, said African American leader Frederick Douglass, “is to make half a dozen or more dead kidnappers.” Nothing was more

illustrative of the deteriorating national situation in the 1850s than the poisonous circumstances surrounding fugitive slaves and the federal assistance demanded by the South in its securing human property. The greater the success the South had, the more vigorous was the resistance in the north. It did not take long after the 1850 law went into effect that it was dipped in blood.

Christiana, Pennsylvania was a generally peaceful Quaker town not far from the Maryland border. On September 11th, 1851, an armed slaveholder with relatives and Federal marshals in tow showed up

seeking two of his slaves said to hiding out in the village. He was met by two Quakers who warned him to withdraw or else. He replied, "I will have my property or go to hell." Well the hell part is up for discussion, but when the firing broke out he lay very dead. Several others were wounded, but the ex-slaves escaped and their leaders were off for Canada.

In retaliation, President Fillmore sent in more marshals and marines and arrested three dozen blacks and whites and prepared to try them for treason. Then the government case began to fall apart under the weight of ridicule and local resistance. When the first

Quaker defendant was acquitted, the U.S. gave up and dropped the remaining charges.

The so-called “Battle of Christiana” divided the country, North and South and in the North as well. It was either ‘the first blow for freedom,’ or an “act of insurrection.” Would the rule of law or a “higher law” prevail? Things would not get better. Next time: Shadrack.

In Richmond Virginia, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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