

RS#23: James Forten Quote

At age 15, James Forten, a free black man, served in the American navy during the Revolutionary War on the privateer Royal Louis. The ship was captured by the British in 1781 and Forten was sent to the English prison ship Jersey. There, Forten made friends with the ship Captain's son in a game of marbles. Usually captured African-American sailors would be sent to the West Indies, where they would be forced back into slavery. Instead, his fortunate new friendship enabled Forten to be treated as a regular prisoner-of-war. In fact, Captain Beasley even offered to send Forten back to England with his son to receive an education there. Forten refused, shouting out:

“I am here a prisoner for the liberties of my country; I never, NEVER, shall prove a traitor to her interests.”

The War for Independence ended while Forten was still aboard the Jersey, so all American prisoners-of-war were released. Forten became a leading citizen of Philadelphia as a successful businessman and abolitionist.

