

David George, a former slave, left the American colonies for Nova Scotia in 1781. There, he preached to both whites and blacks and formed mixed churches. Later, he moved to help begin a colony in Sierra Leone. No matter the hardships, David never quit, never lost faith that someday his people would be truly free - in body, spirit and heart.

MIGHTY OAKS

By Arlene Angwin

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MIGHTY
OAKS

Arlene Angwin

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ISBN: 978-1-64718-826-9

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

This is a work of historical fiction. While this book is based on actual persons and events, the author has taken creative liberty with many details, including adding dialog, to enhance the reader's experience.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2020

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Angwin, Arlene
Mighty Oaks by Arlene Angwin
Library of Congress Control Number: 2020915308

“I tell my students, ‘Each one of us has a divine purpose. You’re not here by happenstance or by accident. You are great. Others helped you along that path to greatness, so you have to reach back to bring other people along.’”

~ Amir Jamal Touré, J.D., Resident Scholar of Geechee Kunda and Day Clean: The African Soul and professor at Savannah State University (SSU), Africana Studies Program.

As an African-American Director and Producer of documentary films, I have a passion for studying history because it holds the keys to unlocking a better future. So, when Arlene asked me to read *Mighty Oaks*, I became very excited. As I began reading, I was drawn into the intriguing life of David George, a prolific historical figure whose story has not been broadly told. With poetic grace and dignity, Arlene brings to life David’s hope and trust in God as he draws on his faith to survive slavery, war, religious persecution, deadly disease, and many other issues. David George’s steadfast faith truly is a testament to the power of God working through the least likely person to transform the lives of many other people. I truly believe this work of creative nonfiction holds some historical keys that can unlock a better future for us all.

Dr. Miller Bargeron, Jr.
Director & Producer
We Came To Conquer Entertainment, LLC

CHAPTER 1

I's dead, for sure.

David's breath caught as footsteps approached and stopped inches from his crouching form. *He be killin' me now.*

"Yer a runaway, ain't ya?" The slave raised his eyes to the man towering over him, pitchfork in hand.

David nodded, eyes shining in mute appeal.

"I ain't gonna turn ya in." The man stepped back to press the pointed tines into the soft dirt of the barn's floor. "I don't cotton ta one human ownin' another." He spat.

"Tain't right, I say."

David let out the breath he'd held since the stranger had discovered him hiding in his barn.

"Come on." The man gestured toward the door. "I reckon yer hungry."

David followed the man into his house.

"Sarah, I found this here stranger in the barn." He crooked his thumb over his shoulder. "Can ya give him some vittles?"

The man's wife turned from the stove, wiping her hands on a stained apron.

"Aye." She pointed. "Sit down. We ain't never seen a runaway yet that warn't half-crazy with hunger."

David sank into the nearest chair, his stomach growling its assent.

"Sarah makes a mean squirrel stew." The farmer sat across from him. "What's yer name?"

"David." He pushed the single word from trembling lips.

"We ain't gonna hurt you, boy. Where ya come from?"

"Virginy."

"Virginia?" The man's eyes widened. "You've walked a fir piece."

"Where I is now?"

"South Carolina."

“Some kind folks helped me through ’Ginny. I stays with dem until dey hear my massa was after me. The man tol’ me to hightail me south to the Savannah River.”

“He done good and so have ye. This here river be the Savannah.”

“Kin you be my massa?”

“No.” The farmer shook his head. “Don’t like folks ownin’ folks,” he repeated. “However ...” He tossed his wide-brimmed hat on the table and ran a hand through his thinning hair. “I can use me some help here. You can earn your keep workin’ for me.”

“You do dat for me?” David’s chocolate-hued eyes widened.

“Aye.” The man thumped the table. “Then, it be settled. Name’s Green. John Green. Anyone asks, I just be tellin’ them yer my boy.”

“Thank you, suh.”

As David worked with Mr. Green, the scars on his back and heart faded from his former master’s punishment of slaves, excessive even by the standards of the day. Master Chappell treated all his slaves, male and female, with equality. *Everyone* was subject to the song of the whip. David and his older brother, Dick, had endured many such beatings, enough to bathe their bodies in blood and leave a permanent lattice of reminders on their backs.

When David reached his late teens, he watched Dick slide out of bed late at night and creep toward the door of their hut.

“You crazy?” he whispered.

Dick held a finger to his lips.

“Dey be killin’ you for dis.”

“It be worth it,” Dick hissed. “Cain’t take no more.”

Cold terror settled over David’s body. He stared at the rough ceiling until the first fingers of dawn pierced the darkness. Dread weighted his heart and steps for the next few days.

Every cell of his body quivered with horror when men dragged his brother into the yard a few days later, hounds baying and bragging. In a flash, Dick twisted out of their grip and sprinted again.

Dey kills him for sure when dey gits him back.

Mr. Chappell's lips bled white the next time two brawny men dragged Dick into the yard.

"Gather the hands," he shouted. "*All of them.*"

Every slave on the plantation scampered to the yard, terror flashing in every eye. David stood behind his brother.

Cain't look at his face. Cain't.

Mr. Chappell tied Dick's wrists together then threw the end of the rope over a stout branch of a nearby cherry tree. He turned and pointed to two barrel-chested blacks.

"Pull him up." The men leapt forward because the slightest hesitation assured a similar fate. They grasped the dangling cord and heaved.

Dick groaned as his arms bore the full weight of his now-suspended body.

"Far enough," Chappell grunted when Dick's toes dangled some 18 inches from the ground. He bent to tie his feet together, then thrust a thick pole between them.

"Come here." He motioned to his two sons. "One on each end."

The boys obeyed.

"Sit on it to hold it down," he commanded. Everyone knew their weight would keep Dick's body from spinning once the lash fell.

"Yes, Father."

Mr. Chappell stepped back and scowled at the overseer. "Now!"

Many long, agonizing minutes later, the master strode forward while the overseer moved back. In a single vicious slice to the rope, Dick tumbled to the ground. Chappell picked up a bucket filled with salted water and hurled it over the slave's flayed back. Dick screamed. Chappell grinned. After rubbing the water into the mass of torn flesh, he growled, "Get up."

Dick staggered and fell.

"You want more?"

Dick stood. Barely.

"Get back in the field."

David gaped as his brother limped away.

"You'd best get moving unless you want the same," Chappell snapped.

David scampered.

Someday I gits outta here and I ain't gonna git caught.

That vow kept him moving from one dreary day to the next — until he was 19 years old. The day Mr. Chappell dragged David's mother into the yard for another beating. As the lash carved deep grooves into her naked back, he recalled her stories of home.

Both David's mother and father had been captured in Africa and brought to the colonies. Judith cooked for the master's family while his father worked in the fields. Late at night, David's mama whispered stories of her privileged upbringing as princess to her children. It all ended the day a rival native tribe captured her to sell to foreigners. She recounted the terror of seeing such white skin for the first time, the horror of the passage to the colonies and the abject dread of living under the master's eager lash.

As the beating progressed, David's heart broke while resolve rose.

She cain't survive dis. I's goin'. Dis night. I ain't gettin' caught, nohows.

Making his way south, David met some white travelers who helped him cross the Pee Dee River where he found work. For a few weeks, he lived in peace.

Then, while David worked in the fields one day, his benefactor approached him.

"Got some bad news." The man pulled a rag from his pocket to wipe omnipresent sweat from his face. "Your master isn't happy about your escape. I saw a bulletin posted in town. He has offered 30 guineas to anyone willing to turn you in. That's a fair amount of money. His description was accurate enough that I recognized you. Somebody's going to want that money." He shook his head. "I want no hand in that. I advise you to keep moving south and don't stop until you reach the Savannah River."

David scooted out that night. Several weeks later, Farmer Green had discovered him crouching in the hay. David stared in terror at the pitchfork in the stranger's hand. "I won't harm you." Green stuck the implement in the hay. "Was coming to feed my cows." He gestured to the barn's open door.

"Come on. You gotta be hungry."

Two years later, Sarah placed a bowl of steaming opossum stew on the table. After setting a plate of corn pone next to it, she sat.

Mr. Green grunted as she ladled a bowlful and handed it to him. She poured a second for David.

“Thank you, ma’am.”

Mr. Green grunted again.

“Husband.” She pushed the cornpone toward him. “Take some and pass it to David.”

He complied in silence.

“Husband,” she repeated. “What be occupin’ yer mind so’s you can’t even talk?”

“Heard something bad in town this morning.” Green picked up a piece of pone to crumble into his stew. He picked up his spoon. Laid it down.

“Please!” Mrs. Green leaned across the table to touch his hand. “Tell us what be goin’ on and don’t be leavin’ us in suspense.”

Green nodded. Sighed. He turned to David.

“Ya be ’bout the best worker I ever had, but ...” He scowled. “I heard your master’s found yer trail, and he’s determined to git you back. Ya need to skedaddle — and soon.”

David groaned.

“Keep walking southwest. ’Ventually, ya’ll be outta colonial territory. Might be safer in Injun land.”

David nodded and fled that night. Around 125 miles later, he arrived at the Ocmulgee River (near Macon, Georgia, today).

Cain’t cross dis without a raft. Focused on building a vessel that would place yet another river between him and his master, David failed to hear the whispered steps of several braves. He threw his hands up as they surrounded him.

“Runaway,” one grunted while pointing at David’s footprints in the sandy dirt.

“How ...?” Confusion colored David’s face.

The leader tapped his head and grinned.

“Me know.”

“How ...?” David repeated.

“Feet flat.” The native placed his own bare foot next to David’s print and lifted it. “All runaway — flat feet.”

David studied the two prints. Sure enough, the natives had arches in the midsection of their feet where few blacks did.

I done never notice.

“What you be doin’ with me?” he asked, hands still upraised.

The leader motioned for him to lower them. He pointed to his chest. “Me Blue Salt. You *mine*.”

It’s a slave again. David’s heart ached as he followed Blue Salt. Several warriors walked behind.

How be de natives treatin’ de slaves? Likes my massa? Worse? Better? Is dey anybody on dis here earth de black man can be trustin’?

The hunting party led David many miles into the woods to their camp filled with bear and deer meat, wild turkeys and potatoes.

So much food. I hopes I gits to eat some.

“Sit.” Blue Salt pointed to a fallen log while several of the braves busied themselves with cooking.

“Eat.” He handed his captive a large chunk of roasted meat.

David’s hands trembled as he bit into it.

“You like?”

David grunted as he tore off another bite.

Blue Salt laughed.

“You mine,” he repeated. “You my prize. You stay here.” David soon learned he was an important king in the Creek nation.

“We go home now.” Blue Salt announced four months later. “Plenty food for wives. Children.” David followed them to their settlement near Augusta on the Savannah River, where the chief put him to work of tending the crops of corn, beans, squash, and sweet potatoes.

I be still a slave, but de folk treats me better dan de whites.

Other slaves, either natives of warring tribes or runaways, lived and worked in the village.

“David.” A young buck ran across the field where he weeded. David’s hoe stilled.

“Yes, Chitto?”

“White folk in village. Men.” Chitto shook his head. “Not nice.”

“What dey wanting?” David’s stomach knotted.

“You.” Chitto pointed. “Man give Blue Salt rum. Linen. Gun. Say for you.” Chitto frowned. “Why?”

“It nuttin. Nuttin.” David kept his voice low and calm. He even forced a laugh. “Don’t be worryin’. It nuttin.”

Chitto skipped across the rows of corn shoots. David glanced around before sauntering toward the nearby woods. As soon as he melted from sight, he bolted into a dead run, never stopping until he ran into a party of Natchez braves. They escorted him to their own king, who proudly wore the English name of Jack.

“Work for me.”

David nodded.

I hopes he be treatin’ me same as Blue Salt.

A short while later, David’s heart pounded as a strange white man strode into the village. He had learned enough of the native tongue to know that those around him were chattering about how Mr. Chappell’s son had decided to stay in the area, hoping the price on David’s head would entice someone to give him up.

“John. John Miller!” King Jack held one hand high in greeting.

Be he comin’ for me?

King Jack shook the stranger’s hand before turning to David.

“John Miller. Good friend.” He grinned. “Honest. Miller, this David. He mine.”

David lowered his eyes.

“David?” Miller studied the slave’s face.

“Yes, suh.”

“I hear your master’s son is sniffing all over this area looking for you.” He paused. “Quite determined, I might add.”

David nodded. His shoulders fell.

I be done dis time. Dis Miller be makin’ money off my back.

“King Jack.” John turned to the chief. “There’s something about this slave that I like. He appears to be a hard worker.”

“He work hard,” the king agreed.

“Maybe you and I can negotiate with his master. I’ll buy him for my boss.”

“He mine.” King Jack crossed his arms.

“Yes, yes.” Miller laughed. “But I think I can make a deal that will work for both you and Chappell.”

“Good.” Jack grunted.

David watched as the men departed. Despair seeped into his being.

Sold like a cow. Again. Hows I knowin’ Miller be any different? Or his massa?

Miller returned to the village several hours later. “The deal is done.” He smiled. “Both Chappell and King Jack are pleased. You don’t have to be afraid of your former master any longer because you now belong to Master Galphin.”

David’s eyes flickered over the peaceful village.

What I be leavin’ dis for? Whippins? Another cruel massa?

Miller seemed to sense David’s apprehension.

“You’ll like Mr. Galphin. He is a kind and fair man. But you’ll not be meeting him for some time.”

“Suh?” David dared raise his eyes as far as Miller’s chin.

“No. I work here for him. Trading with the natives. Once a year, I take all the deerskins I’ve purchased to Galphin’s trading post on the Savannah River.”

The Savannah?

David’s body tensed as he moved back a pace. Miller stepped forward.

“You’re safe, David. Your former master has no more legal authority over you. You don’t have to fear him any longer.”

He cain’t never drag me backs to his plantation and be makin’ example to dem other poor souls. He cain’t.

“Thank you, suh.” David breathed deep several times. “I works hard for you, suh.”

“I’m sure you will.”

The two labored in the wilderness, collecting and curing deer pelts.

“It’s time to pack and go to the post,” Miller announced some months later.

“How far we travelin’?”

“Oh, I expect some 400 miles.”

“Suh?”

“Yes. Lots of rivers betwixt here and there as well. That’s why we’ve fashioned those leather boats.” He grinned. “It’s tough but doable.”

The men packed everything and set out with their horses, toting skins and boats.

“Galphin built his post on the Savannah River,” Miller explained during the journey. “He built it on the South Carolina side. Downriver from Augusta. Place called Silver Bluff.”

“Silver Bluff?”

Miller laughed. “Legend has it that folks thought there was silver, lots of silver, on the river in that area because the cliff sparkled in the sun. The Spaniards named it *Farol de Plata* — Silver Bluff. The name stuck, even after the supposed silver turned out to be nothing more than an outcropping of mica.”

David nodded. Nothing more. Again, John seemed to sense his unease.

“Galphin’s a fair man, David. Unique. He understands the natives. And blacks. All folks, black, white and red, work as equals for him.”

On David’s third trip to Silver Bluff, he asked Galphin if he could stay on and work for him.

“You lived with the Creek for some time, did you not?”

“Yes, suh.”

“So, you know their tongue. Their ways?”

“I do, suh.”

“Good, good.” Galphin rubbed his hands together. “I’ve worked among them for years. Understand them and their language. You can be of great help to me in negotiations.” He laid a hand on David’s shoulder. The slave froze. Galphin’s face softened.

“I don’t beat my people.”

David's body relaxed.

How be dis man thinkin' so kindly of me?

George Galphin was born in Ireland, the eldest of seven children to a linen weaver and his wife. He left behind a wife when he sailed to America in 1737 and never returned to her or his native land.

He discovered a talent for trade among the natives of the Creek and Cherokee nations, eventually trading as far south as the Gulf Coast and west to the Mississippi River. The natives came to trust him for his honesty, fairness and friendship. He learned their language and served as an interpreter for the South Carolina Commons House of Assembly, trading messages between the nations and representing the colony to important native leaders.

In the early 1740s, he built his spacious Silver Bluff trading post and enclosed it with a wooden palisade. After demand lessened for the deer hides, he turned his attention to expanding his holdings into a lucrative plantation.

Galphin had adopted numerous native practices, including polygamy. He married a second white woman as well as several native brides and a mulatto. He doted on the children from all his wives and showed no partiality in their upbringing.

After living and working at Silver Bluff for four years, David took his own wife. Phillis was also a slave as well as part Creek. Before long, she presented her husband with his firstborn, a son they named Jesse.

Shortly after the birth, a black man from Charleston, named Cyrus, came to transport goods to the coast. After several days, he motioned for David to come to him.

The young man complied.

"I been watching you, David. Now you listens to me." Cyrus stared into David's eyes and frowned.

"Suh?"

"I sees how you's livin'. Drinkin'. Swearin'. Mean to others. Boy, you ain't never gonna see de face of God in glory if you keeps livin' like you is."

David laughed and returned to his chores. However, those words echoed in his head for days. Weeks.

I ain't got no fear of death or hell. He paused to gaze out over the Savannah River. Why's that botherin' me? Life been hard, but to never see God at the end of dis road — I don't know if I can take that. Maybe I best get to prayin'.

David prayed what he knew: The Lord's Prayer. He'd learned it during the years he and the rest of the slaves were forced to attend the white man's church. The more he prayed, the dirtier he felt his heart truly was.

God, I ain't nuttin' but a mass of sin, top to bottom, through and through. Ever' time I tries to do better, de worst gets de best of me. I be hopeless. Hopeless.

One day, conviction hit him so hard he told Master Galphin he was sick, took himself to a quiet place and resumed his struggles.

I cain't read de Bible. I been prayin' and prayin'. It ain't helpin' me. I feels dirtier and dirtier. God, save me!

He groaned and sank to the ground. A single word floated into his conscious thinking.

Mercy.

"Mercy," David whispered out loud. "Dat be it. I cain't save myself. Only God can. Dat's why Jesus died on dat cross. 'Cuz of God's mercy to me. *Me.*" He stood up and threw his arms wide.

"God done it! He already done it. He saves me 'cuz he loves me, even though I be a poor black sinner. He done sent Jesus to show me mercy. Hallelujah!"

Not long after that, George Sharpe, a boyhood friend of David's, came to Silver Bluff.

"George!" David hastened to shake his old friend's hand. "Never thought I ever be layin' eyes on you again. Clear from 'Ginny. What'cha doin' here?"

George laughed, deep and pleasant. "My master moved his whole house to Georgia back when I was a striplin' lad. Been there ever since."

“But why here? At Silver Bluff?”

“God saved my soul and Master gives me leave to preach to our own people. I came to talk to y’all about God’s mercy. Master Galphin already gave his permission.”

“Why you talkin’ like white folks?” David frowned.

“Master allowed me to learn to read and write. I want to speak the same as the printed word. Besides, he also allows me to preach to white folk, and I want to speak their language. I want them to hear what God has to say to them and not hear it with slave talk.”

“Dey ain’t thinkin’ you uppity?”

“Not in our congregation. In fact, after I saw my need for salvation in Jesus Christ alone, I became so burdened for our folk I preached day and night. Master heard of it and asked me to preach to his congregation. Preach to white folk.”

“No!”

“Yes, I did. They all said they felt I had a talent from God for speaking, and every one of them voted to make me a minister. Imagine that! A Negro minister of God. Master gave me my own Bible, and he has encouraged me to preach to slaves and whites alike. That’s why I be here today.”

David grinned when George slipped back into slave dialect. Sharpe laughed. “When I preaches to de slaves, it come back and I talks just like dem again.”

David laughed. “I wants to read, too. Don’t your massa be carin’ dat he be breakin’ de law ’bout lettin’ you read?”

“He knows the law but ignored it anyway. Master Sharpe and his wife’s brother, Pastor Moore, be believin’ that Negroes possess just as much soul as whites. That’s why I be preachin’ to our folk now.” Sharpe laid a hand on David’s shoulder. “Trust me, my friend. If you wants to be readin’, God will make a way.”

“Now you talkin’ like us again.” David grinned. “White folk talk give me de jitters.”

They both laughed.

Later, David listened carefully to George Liele’s sermon, based on Matthew 11:28. “Come to me, all ye who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Nobody be needin' dat message more den de slaves, David thought. I gots to tell my friend dat I gots dat rest. God done give it to me dat day I prays to him in de woods.

Soon after George Sharpe's visit, a stranger rode into the trading post yard, dressed in black with a snowy collar at his throat. David moved forward to grab the horse's reins.

"Good day." The stranger threw one leg over the saddle and slid to the ground. "May I ask where your master may is?"

"Master Galphin be ..." David threw an arm to the east. "Checkin' de cotton fields, he be."

"Thank you." The man stepped forward and thrust out a hand. Horror gripped David in the gut. Shaking hands with a white man could earn him a severe flogging, no matter how lax his master appeared to be.

The man dropped his hand but smiled. "Name's Palmer. Reverend Wait Palmer from Connecticut. I'm sorry I put you in a bad place. We're not so restrictive in the North."

David relaxed — somewhat.

"Now, how will I recognize your master? He's widely known to have a more liberal mindset. I've come to ask him if I can preach to his people."

"Preach? Here, suh?"

"Of course. I believe the Negro has just as much soul as any white man and just as much need of salvation to see God's glory."

God's glory. Just what de man from Charleston, dat Cyrus, done told me.

"Yes, suh. You be findin' Master Galphin with no trouble, suh. He be wearing a large, white hat."

"Thank you."

Galphin gathered all his slaves in front of the big house late that afternoon. The reverend stood next to him.

"This gentleman has come to talk to all of you of your need for God. If you want to hear what he has to say, meet him in front of the mill at sundown."

That night Palmer preached a powerful message of God's mercy, and how none could be saved without it.

Mercy. Dat's just what God done give me.

As the reverend prepared to depart, David walked with him a short distance and shared how God had saved his soul alone in the woods.

"David, I'm staying with relatives not far from here, and I can see there is much work to be done among the slaves. I'd like to return. Would your people welcome that?"

"Yes, suh. I been talkin' to dem and some of dem want Jesus like what I has."

"Good. Good."

The next time Palmer visited, more slaves begged him to return. Galphin granted him permission to come as often as he wished.

Soon, David's wife and six others embraced salvation through faith alone.

"This is wonderful," Palmer exclaimed. "Eight souls is enough to start a congregation."

"A what, suh?"

"Your own church." Palmer laughed. "I've already asked your master, and he agrees that a church for the slaves will help everyone live better."

"Yes, suh."

"In our faith, we baptize people with total immersion."

"Immersion?"

"Yes, David. We find a pool of water and lower the recipient into it until he is completely under."

David looked confused.

"We don't drown anybody." Palmer laughed again. "It's a sign, David. A symbol that the old David is dead and gone. Now he lives to God."

David nodded.

"I be wantin' dat."

"Good. Do you know of a good place to do this?"

"Yes, suh. Dead River, off de Savannah. It be our mill river."

"Dead River? Sounds ominous."

"It be called dead on account dere ain't no current, so it be calm."

Mighty Oaks

“Wonderful. Perfect. Perhaps the name is appropriate. Dead for all the folks who’ll be leaving their old, dead selves in the water.”

“Dat be what I want. To be showin’ folks dat I be new.” David patted his muscled chest. “Right in here.”

CHAPTER 2

“Allays glad to see my good friend.” David held the reins while George Sharpe swung out of the saddle. “And to hear you preach.”

“Thank you, David.” George paused. “I have been pondering on how to get doctrine into our folks, since they can’t read.”

David nodded. “I beg and beg de good Lord how I can learn so’s to read de Bible for myself.” He grinned. “Now, I’s readin’ ever’ chance I be gittin’.”

“How?” George asked as the two men sauntered into the shade of the barn.

“I finds a spellin’ book. Learn da ABC’s from it.”

“How’d you do that?”

“I asked one of Master Galphin’s chillens to help. She do. When I gots questions, she answer dem. I started findin’ dose words in de Bible. She allays lets me knows when I be wrong.” He chuckled. “Or right.”

“Galphin not mind?” George asked.

“Not at all. He ask if I wants to sit in on his chillin’s lessons — providin’ I gets my work done.”

“He did?”

“Yes, suh.” David smacked his hands together. “Now I reads. Not ever’thin’, but I reads de Bible.”

“The Lord is kind.” George slapped his friend’s back. “I figured out a way to help the folks learn doctrine.”

“How?”

“Through teaching hymns. The more they sing, the more they’ll remember.” He paused. “It eases my mind to know you can read to them when I can’t be here.” Sharpe snapped a small stick in half. “That could be soon.”

“How dat?”

“You know my master is a Loyalist as well as Pastor Moore and our entire congregation.”

He sighed. “Everyone else around us is Patriot. They’re becoming more and more hostile towards us.”

George Liele referred to the two opposing groups of what is now known as the American Revolution (1775-1783). While victorious over the French in the French and Indian War (1754-1763), — fought to determine who would win supremacy in the New World — the British Crown had exhausted its financial resources. Desperate to refill coffers, the government began levying taxes on the American colonists, reasoning that the war had benefited them the most.

As taxation became more insidious and odious, many colonists rose in protest. *Taxation without Representation* became the cry that increasingly bound colonists together. The growing movement created a complete schism between them. The Loyalists supported the king and his government. They maintained debate and diplomacy would eventually resolve their complaints.

However, the rebels, or Patriots, began shouting for a complete break with the mother country. They preached a complete overthrow of British control — radical thinking for that time. The *Revolutionary War* that followed could arguably be referred to the nation’s first civil war in that it pitted British colonists against the Crown *as well as* one another.

“Why dey be gettin’ unfriendly?”

“The Patriots are terrified of a slave uprising should war come to us. The authorities may soon disallow any preachers from coming here to preach to them. That would include me. And Reverend Palmer. You may be all they have.”

“No surprise. I knows Master Galphin’s a Patriot hisself. That be why he done built a fort.”

Silver Bluff lay between Augusta and Savannah, a busy road that both armies soon struggled to control.

“Master Sharpe confirmed that there are rumors circulating amongst slaves. Lord Dunmore has offered freedom to any Negro willing to join His Majesty’s army. He’s heard they’re leaving other plantations like flies.”

“Not a body done left here.”

“It can happen with the hope of freedom so close.” He slapped David’s knee. “Good to know you can take care of our believing brothers and sisters.”

“We be up to 30 now.”

“The Lord is good. He always takes care of his people.”

The British had sent John Stuart as Superintendent of Indian Affairs south as early as 1775. Prior to this assignment, he had traded successfully with the Cherokee and enjoyed close ties with three other nations as well: Creek, Choctaw and Chickasaw.

From the time of his appointment, he discovered a formidable foe in George Galphin, who had been cultivating both trade and the trust of the native peoples for many years. As the war intensified, both the British army and Rebels (or Patriots) had tried to entice the native tribes to fight on their side. Because of his reputation for honest dealings and respect for them, Galphin had proved instrumental in keeping the natives neutral and out of the war.

Stuart’s frustration grew so great; he contacted the governor of East Florida, Patrick Tonyn, asking him to dispatch Florida Loyalists to dispatch Galphin — to his death. Tonyn sent out a posse under the command of Samuel Moore to carry out Stuart’s orders.

Several natives learned of their intent, slipped into Galphin’s fort and warned him. After thanking them, Galphin provided an armed escort of Georgia militiamen to see them safely home, while he — the intended target — remained behind. Moore’s men ambushed the unit and shot the leader, Captain John Gerard, dead. Thinking the mission accomplished, the Florida Loyalists returned to report their success to Stuart.

Meanwhile, General McIntosh, a leader of the Continental Army, had learned of the plan and dispatched soldiers to protect the Loyalists’ target. Although arriving after the murder attempt, they stayed on, fully expecting Stuart to strike again. When Moore returned to murder the true Galphin, McIntosh’s men attacked, killing him and capturing nine Loyalists.

A few months later, news traveled with the boats coming from Savannah. The plantation learned the British had taken the city. Flush

with victory, Lieutenant Colonel Archibald Campbell prepared to invade the interior.

“David.” Galphin called from his front porch early one morning a few days later.

“Suh.” David stepped over and stood on the bottom step.

“The British have taken Savannah and now they’re moving toward Augusta.” He paused. “You know what’s been going on here on my property.”

“Yes, suh.”

“I never wanted to take sides in this war.” He paused to gaze at the now denuded fields in all directions.

“Just wanted to live out my life in peace, unlike my homeland. But ...” He shrugged. “War doesn’t care who wants peace. You know, had the natives been pulled into this mess, they’d have swung it either way.”

“You be good to them, suh. You allays keeps your word.”

“Yes. Yes, I do. I’ve always tried to treat every man as I want to be treated — white, black or red.”

“Dat’s why dey trusts you, suh.”

“Well ...” Galphin sighed. “You know it’s almost cost me my life. I’d have been killed in that ambush had I not been warned. As it is, Gerard paid the price. Bloody business, this war.”

“Yes, suh.”

“Anyway.” Galphin tapped his riding crop across his boot. “I’ve got to get my family to safety — soon. But I will return. I promise you that.”

“Yes, suh. May de Lord protect you.”

“Thank you. May he protect you as well.”

“David! David!” Somebody pounded on the shack’s door early the next morning.

David leaped out of bed, prepared to defend his wife and children.

“What, what?” he hissed. “Why you makin’ all dis noise?” He glared at the house cook, trembling in front of him.

“Massa done leave,” she said.

“I ’speck as much.”

“He gone wid his wives and chillens. What we do?” She clasped her arms across her chest and squeezed as though she needed protection.

“Guessin’ he done left us to our own fate.”

“What we do?” she repeated.

“Head south.” David grinned. “To Savannah. De British be protectin’ us. Dey promise freedom. Massa say so.”

The other slaves gathered in front of his home, all looking to David for guidance.

“We be followin’ de river,” he said as the plantation’s 50 slaves, including his wife and small children, gathered in the yard. “We travels at night so’s no Patriots finds us.”

“When?” she asked.

“Come dark, we’s goin’.”

Twenty-five miles later, they arrived in Ebenezer, already in British hands.

“We’s safe now,” David exclaimed. “Praise de good Lord.”

The Salzburgers, a Germanic people escaping religious persecution in Europe, had founded Ebenezer in 1734, the year after James Oglethorpe landed in Georgia and started laying out Savannah. He had chosen their location as a buffer between his infant city and possible hostile tribes.

The arrival of Lt. Colonel Maitland leading British troops had thrown the quaint town into chaos as the inhabitants were deeply divided in their loyalties. Some wished to remain under the king’s protection because he had authorized their flight to the New World. The staunchest Loyalist was their pastor, Reverend Christopher F. Triebner.

“We must stay loyal to the Crown,” he argued. “King George is German, a Hanoverian, and it was his parliament that cleared the way for us to come!”

Most villagers sympathized with the Patriot desire to throw off the yoke of an oppressive government. Maitland seized all their properties, forcing many to relocate to their farms outside city limits.

The British troops threw up a redoubt close to the brick church, which they used as a hospital for wounded soldiers. Later, the building

was converted to a horse stable, with irreverent soldiers using the swan-shaped weathervane atop the church for target practice.

However, General Maitland treated the new arrivals with kindness. He sent them to a location across the Ogeechee River for processing and later, moved them all to Yamacraw, just outside Savannah city limits.

“George! George Sharpe!” David pounded his friend’s back when he ran into him at the new settlement. “How you been? How you git here?”

“You remember my master was a Loyalist,” George said.

“Was?”

“Yes. Sharpe was killed in battle at Tybee.”

“Sorry, my friend.”

“He was a good man to me. He gave me my freedom before he moved his family and slaves to British-held Savannah. I have the papers to prove it.”

“Praise be to God.”

“He asked me to be his body servant when the army stationed him on Tybee. That’s where he fell. I was able to get the body back to his people. And ...” George grinned. “I’m not George Sharpe any longer. I go by George Liele now.”

“Liele? Who he be?”

“Liele is my father’s name. You know I was sold before I could have any real memory of my folks, Liele and Nancy.”

David shook his head.

“I was told by both white and black folk that my father was the only God-fearing black they knew. That always stuck with me.”

“For what?”

“David, I didn’t want to hear about the white man’s God or listen to white men preaching at us slaves all the time. Always telling us to obey our masters because that’s what the Bible ordered. I knew most masters didn’t believe Negroes possessed souls anyway, so why were they preaching at us? Just to get us to work hard and do what we were told.” George studied the horizon for a few moments.

“Yet, I never could forget what folks told me about my own father. He feared God. That made me want to be like him, though I never

knew him. I began hearing those preachers with my heart. Pastor Moore preached different, too. Like I told you, he believed Negroes possess souls, and his message was getting to mine. The day I fell on my knees, told God I was a helpless sinner and begged for mercy, love flowed through my entire body. Love for Jesus. Love for his willingness to die for me — *me!* A humble slave.” George Liele slapped his hands together.

“I couldn’t stop talking about that love. How much Jesus loves me and how much I love him. You know Master had allowed me to read and write. After I turned to Jesus, he gave me my own Bible. I devoured it. He let me take time off from work to study. He wanted me to preach to his slaves.”

“Amazing.”

“Then I found the most wonderful story. The exodus of the Jewish slaves and how God rescued them from the most powerful ruler on earth — the Pharaoh of Egypt. They were just like us. Hated. Used. Beaten. But God came to rescue them. Moses told that pharaoh, ‘Let my people go.’ The Egyptian king laughed. Then God showed up. This message is burning in my heart every day.”

“I sees why.”

“Our people are helpless. In bondage just like the Jewish slaves. Then God showed up. He’s going to show up for us, too, someday — the Day of Jubilee. I have to tell my people there’s hope. Hope in God. Hope in deliverance. Hope for a better future. I don’t know when, but it will come.”

“Blessed be de Lord.”

“So, when Master Sharpe saw that passion, not only did he allow me to preach to his slaves, he saw how faith in God began to change them. Soon other masters, like yours, invited me to preach at their plantations as well. That’s when Master Sharpe freed me. I have all the papers to prove I’m a freedman, too.”

“Is dat what you be doin’ here in Savannah?”

“Yes, and farming. You must meet my good friend and our brother, Andrew Bryan. His master is Jonathan Bryan. He owns several plantations, both in South Carolina and here. Andrew works on his Brampton plantation just outside of Yamacraw. They grow rice there.”

“His master be willin’ fer you to preach to his slaves too?”

“Yes.” Liele laughed. “More than willing.”

Jonathan Bryan had been converted under George Whitefield, a renowned evangelist of the Great Awakening that charged through the American colonies. Whitefield convinced Bryan that Negroes possessed souls the same as any white person. After his conversion, Bryan allowed any preacher, black or white, to visit his plantations and speak to the enslaved. He even gave them a barn to use on his property, which became the site of the first Black congregation in the region.

“Andrew is getting on,” Liele continued. “Probably older than 60 years old, but he’s tireless when preaching. Just as Master Sharpe treated me, his master allows him to preach on both his and all the neighboring plantations. He’s a good speaker, and his church is growing.”

“I’s happy to meet him,” David said. “I brings my folk to be part of his church.”

David moved his family into the city of Savannah, already overcrowded with escaped slaves in search of the promised freedom. Familiar with the lowland marshes, many became river guides. Others worked as cooks, laborers and spies. David managed to find an empty stable to provide shelter for his wife and children.

Angered over their loss of Savannah, Patriots resorted to guerilla warfare. At times, they lobbed cannon balls into the city at night.

“Lord Jesus, save us!” Phillis shrieked as an errant ball crashed through the roof of their makeshift dwelling. She gathered her children to her. “Have mercy, Lord, have mercy.”

David helped his brood out of the rubble and into the street before returning to check the damage.

“Cain’t repair dat stable. It be destroyed.” He shook his head. “Ain’t safe here in de city.”

“Maybe we goes back to Yamacraw?” Phillis asked. Her arms circled their growing family.

“I thinks dat be best. “Sides, it be good to be close to Liele again. I likes preachin’ to our folk with him.”

“I’m a freedman now,” David announced to Liele soon after his return to Yamacraw. “De British be keepin’ dere word and give all de

slaves dere freedoms.” He laughed. “Likes you, I gots de papers to prove it.”

George Liele grinned.

“You knows how de black folk take on de name of der massas.”

Liele nodded. “As I was George Sharpe before I changed my name.”

“Yes, brother. I been David Chappell, David Green and den David Galphin.”

Both men laughed.

“Now that I’s free, I takes me the name I wants.”

“Which is?”

“From dis day on I be David George.”

“David *George*?” Liele stepped back. Confusion shone in his eyes.

“Dat be correct, brother. You been my friend and mentor a long time nows. I wants to carry yer name.”

“I’m speechless.” Liele shook his head.

“Why? You honors your daddy by takin’ his name. I be honorin’ you by takin’ yours.”

They both laughed. Again.

A year after their return to Yamacraw, on the outskirts of Savannah, David slumped in his chair.

“I feelin’ hot.”

Phillis laid a hand on his forehead and cheeks.

“Yes, you be hot.”

“Don’t let the chillens by me.”

“Chillens? Why?”

“I done seen too much of dat smallpox. It been runnin’ through de army. Through town. I cain’t let de chillens get dis. It be a killer.”

Sure enough, his temperature spiked, and he began vomiting. Days later, a rash spread across his tongue and mouth.

“It be smallpox,” David groaned. “Lord have mercy.”

“We gots to eat,” Phillis stated.

“Take de chillens and return to Savannah. I knows General Clinton. Maybe he gets you work.”

“I be doin’ dat.”

Sir Henry Clinton, normally stationed in British-controlled New York, had sailed south, greatly encouraged by Savannah’s takeover. He docked his fleet off Tybee Island in January of 1780, hoping to crush the rebels. He had set his sights on Charleston, which fell into British hands on May 12. Having accomplished his goal, he returned to New York, leaving Lord Cornwallis in command of Southern operations.

Phillis appealed to him during the time of his short stay, and he hired her as his washerwoman. She kept the family fed as she watched her husband sicken further. Meanwhile, furious over losing Charleston, their second major city, the Patriots ramped up their harassment, resorting once again to guerilla warfare. They often struck during the darkest hours of the night.

“You gots to take de chillens and get out of here,” David repeated. “Dem rebels is gonna kill us all. I gonna die anyways, but I needs to know my wife and chillens be safe. Go, please go,” he begged.

Phillis and the children wept as they packed their few belongings. One stepped close to David’s bed.

“Back, back.” He held up a pustule-packed hand. “Phillis, don’t lets ’em touch me.” His wife cried harder as she pulled the child away.

“Say goodbye to yer daddy. Maybe God be gracious and save his life.”

David’s fever raged as the pustules ravaged his body. Finally, they scabbed over and fell off. Concerned neighbors brought him food.

I cain’t believe I ain’t dead yet. I be feelin’ it comin’ any day but it ain’t yet.

David continued to recover and, although weak, managed to walk the three miles into town to reunite with his family. He found work as a butcher to support his wife and four children.

News of the fall of Yorktown on October 19, 1781, sent the Loyalists into panic, which escalated as the British yielded one held outpost after another. The Patriots increased their harassment of Savannah’s outlying area.

“I gots only three squirrel today,” David grumbled while Phillis stirred up a batch of cornpone.

“Ain’t enough to feed us, it ain’t.”

“Ever’body’s sufferin’ from hunger.” Phillis lifted her apron to wipe sweat from her face.

“Dats what I sayin’.” David ground a fist into his open hand. “Who’da thought dose Rebels could get the best of His Majesty’s army? Who?” He repeated.

When only Savannah and Charleston remained in British hands, the Continental Army’s General “Mad” Anthony Wayne ordered Lt. Col. James Jackson to place his troops around Savannah. The Rebels relished the opportunity to harass the occupiers and strike any troops outside the city — constantly and with deadly precision.

“Nows we gots to stay in de city,” David moaned. “Cain’t even git out to Yamacraw no mores to farm or see our brothers out dere. Ain’t lookin’ good, Phillis. Not at all. I gots to think of a way to get my family to safety.” He stood to look out their glass-less window.

“Gots to find a way to get us to Charleston. Dey be lotsa Loyalists lookin’ to flee dis mess.”

David bought several pigs to raise and butcher to make enough money for passage to that city.

“Bad happenin’s today,” he groaned to his wife. “De British army done stole my pigs. What I do now?”

“De Lord provide.”

“Yes. He allays do.”

David talked a few neighbors into loaning him enough money to buy more pigs, young ones which he raised.

“Look, Phillis.” David held his palm open a few months later. “I done kill de pigs and sells de meat. I gots us enough to travel to Charleston. De Lord be good.”

His wife smiled.

“We gots enough to go, Phillis. Soon.” His shoulders relaxed for the first time in many months. I’ll get me down to de docks and get us out of dis town before the Rebels overrun it.” He scowled. “An’ take us all back into slavery. Ain’t happenin’.” He shook his head. “Ain’t.”

“I gots to get my family out of here,” he told Major General James Patterson upon his arrival to Charleston.

“You’ve got several choices,” Patterson said. “England, Jamaica or Nova Scotia.”

“Don’t think I do’s good in England.” David shuddered. “Cain’t even think ’bout Jamaica. Dey be lotsa slaves dere.” He shook his head. “Not for me. Don’t wants to go dere. No suh.”

“Don’t blame you.” Patterson laughed softly. “I wouldn’t either. Then I suggest Nova Scotia, a Crown colony. It’s mostly uninhabited. Unlimited opportunities lie there for all Loyalists, white and black. The Crown wishes you to establish your own community there.” He pointed to the ship moored nearby.

“This one’s leaving tomorrow. Get your family here, and we’ll get you all on board.”

“You do dat for us, suh?”

“Absolutely. Come.” He pointed to a tall officer. “That is Colonel Hamilton. I will have you meet him now.”

David returned home an hour later.

“It be fixed,” he told Phillis. “We be goin’ tomorrow.”

“Where?”

“Charleston, first. Den up to Nova Scotia.”

“It be far?” Phillis clutched 1-year-old Jane to her bosom. “Can we do it?”

“It be, and we makin’ it because our God be with us. Allays. But now ...” He caressed the baby’s head for a moment before moving back to the front door. “I gots to talk to Brothers George and Andrew.” He paused.

“Probably last time I’s ever gonna see my brothers dis side of heaven,” he whispered. He left at a slow gallop.

Andrew and George looked up in surprise as David burst through Liele’s door.

“Tomorrow’s de day,” he announced. “My family and I be leavin’ early in de morning.”

“God be praised.” George rose to shake his friend’s hand. He turned to Andrew.

“How about you, brother?”

“No.” Andrew shook his head. “You both be young. I’s too old.”

“Brother, you could be free. *Free.*”

“Too old to start over.” Bryan shook his head again. “No, I leaves dat to you young mens. I stays. Stays to feeds de flock God gives me here in Savannah.”

“God keep you.” George Liele laid a hand on the older man’s shoulder. “I am guessing life still will be hard for all of us, but God promises to never leave his children.”

“What about you, George,” David asked. “Surely you won’t stay. Your massa’s family be tryin’ to takes you back to bondage. You cain’t do dat.”

“I waits. God be providin’ in his time.”

“God bless you.”

“God be with you.”

“De Lord Almighty keeps you.”

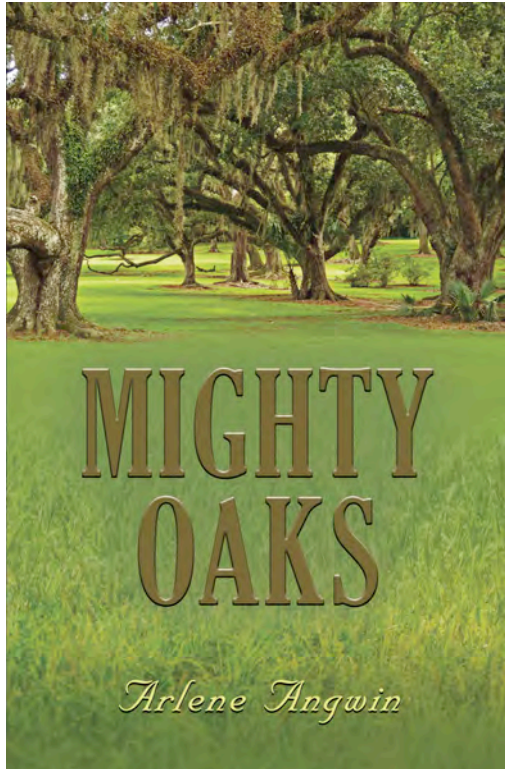
The three men embraced before hurrying back to their families.

The next morning, the Georges rushed to the dock. Chaos reigned as Loyalists, black and white, moved about in terror of the victorious, advancing Patriots.

“Hurry, hurry,” Phillis urged the children. “Stays close now.”

However, David became separated from them in the press of humanity pushing up the gangway and only discovered their absence after the ship had set sail.

“God, protects dem, protects my wife and chillens,” he sobbed as the city shrank on the horizon. “God bless and keeps dem safe.”



David George, a former slave, left the American colonies for Nova Scotia in 1781. There, he preached to both whites and blacks and formed mixed churches. Later, he moved to help begin a colony in Sierra Leone. No matter the hardships, David never quit, never lost faith that someday his people would be truly free - in body, spirit and heart.

MIGHTY OAKS

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