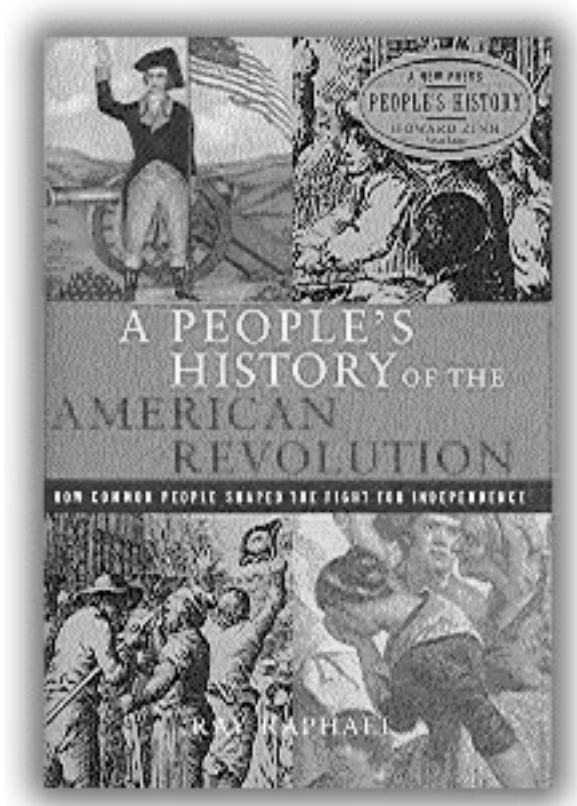


A People's History of the American Revolution:



A Guide for Teaching and Readers' Groups

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CHAPTER 3: WOMEN

EXPECTATIONS

Review:

1. How did taxation by Parliament lead to an additional workload for colonial women?
2. (a) What were the original “spinning bees”? (b) What was the new spin on spinning bees? (c) Who was the “black regiment,” and what did they have to do with spinning bees?
3. Why did male patriots who opposed the tax on tea have to enlist the support of women?
4. Why did Washington feel nurses should be female?
5. Summarize this section by making a list of the various expectations placed on revolutionary women by male patriots.

Historical Reasoning/Discussion:

1. Why did male patriots try so hard to convince women to embrace the cause?
2. Was Christopher Gadsden's letter to “Planters, Mechanics, and Freeholders” respectful towards women? Explain your response.
3. (a) Which of the expectations you listed in review question #5 were *explicitly* expressed with some frequency? (b) Do you think that expectations have to be stated explicitly, or can they be merely assumed? (c) Discuss at greater length any assumptions you think were merely assumed.
4. How did traditional gender roles contribute to the expectations placed on female patriots?

A DUTY WE OWE

Review:

1. What did the “Lady from Philadelphia” have to say about taxation without representation?
2. Which documents did women sign in support of the patriotic cause?
3. The Newport Daughters of Liberty offered conditional support to the patriots. What was the catch?
4. Compare the patriotic acts of men and women as set forth by historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich.
5. According to historian Mary Beth Norton, what was the effect of the war on women's consciousness?
6. What did Abigail Adams mean by “Remember the Ladies”?
7. (a) What was the “Offering of the Ladies”? (b) Who decided how to spend the money that was collected? (c) How was the money spent?
8. (a) Were the majority of women in Revolutionary times literate or illiterate? (b) How does this affect our knowledge of how women experienced the Revolutionary War?

9. Raphael claims that much of the evidence showing that women became politically active refers to two particular groups. (a) Which groups? (b) Name some other groups of women who might have experienced the war quite differently.

10. How does Ulrich account for spinning bees?

11. What were the concerns of female rioters during the Revolutionary War?

Historical Reasoning/ Discussion:

1. The Edenton petition, an indication that women were acting on their own behalf, was satirized in the British press, which questioned women's capacity to participate in politics. But on Feb. 12, 1770, the *Boston Gazette* reported on a gathering of "upwards of one hundred ladies" and explained that they had "of their own free will and accord come into and signed an agreement." In the *Virginia Gazette* of Jan. 20, 1774, a female poet proclaimed that the use of tea "will fasten slavish Chains upon my country," but to justify her view she said only "because I'm taught (and believe it true)." Were women acting on their own and of their own free will? In your response take some account of these three items from the contemporary press.

2. Below is the complete diary entry in which Betsy Foote used the expression "felt Nationly." (a) How would you summarize the main gist of this passage? What is the most obvious conclusion you can draw from it? (b) Why do you think modern writers have focused on the two words, "felt Nationly"?

"Fix'd Gown for Prude Just to clear my teeth, — Mend Mother's Riding-hood.— Ague in my face,— Ellen was spark'd last night,— Mother spun short thread,— Fix'd two Gowns for Welch's girls,— Carded tow,— spun linen— worked on Cheese Basket,— Hatchel'd Flax with Hannah and we did 51 lb a piece,— Pleated and ironed,— Read a sermon of Dodridge's,— Spooled a piece — milked the cows — spun linen and did 50 knots — made a broom of Guenea wheat straw,— Spun thread to whiten,— Went to Mr. Otis's and made them a swinging visit,— Israel said I might ride his jade,— Set a red Dye,— Prude stayed at home and learned Eve's Dream by heart, — Had two scholars from Mrs. Taylor's — I carded two pounds of whole wool and felt Nationly, — spun harness twine,— scoured the Pewter." [Linda Grant De Pauw, *Founding Mothers: Women in America in the Revolutionary Era*, 154-5.]

3. Read carefully the selection from Temperance Smith, the parson's wife. What can you infer from this one passage?

4. Below are additional passages from Eliza Wilkinson's "perfect statesmen" letter. (a) What can you conclude from this letter about the development of Wilkinson's political consciousness? (b) What can you infer from her last two sentences?

"They [male authors, Homer in particular] won't even allow us the liberty of thought, and that is all I want. I would not wish that we should meddle in what is unbecoming female delicacy, but sure we may have sense enough to give our opinions... without being reminded of our spinning and household affairs as the only matters we are capable of thinking or speaking of with justness or propriety. I won't allow it, positively won't... What will the men say if they should see this? I am really out of *my sphere* now, and must fly to Homer for direction and instruction of household matters. Begone, pen; I must throw you by until I can keep you in proper order."

5. Raphael challenges Norton's assertion that "it seems possible to allow the literate portion of the female population to speak for their illiterate counterparts." (a) Argue for either side of this issue. (b) Explain how this disagreement affects the methodology of historians studying women during the Revolutionary era.

WOMEN AND THE ARMY

Review:

1. What tasks did "camp followers" perform for the army?
2. What type of women were likely to become camp followers?
3. Summarize George Washington's attitude towards camp followers.
4. How did Washington and common soldiers disagree over the issue of women riding in the wagons?
5. Why did women make good messengers and spies?
6. Why was Nancy Morgan Hart regarded as a heroine?
7. What did Deborah Sampson, Margaret Corbin, and "Molly Pitcher" have in common?
8. (a) List the women known to have fought in the war disguised as men, and state what happened to each one. (b) Were their attempts to serve their country valued at the time? (c) Were they valued later?

Historical Reasoning/ Discussion

1. Discuss the factors that contributed to the low status of camp followers.
2. (a) Do you think women camp followers experienced an increase in "personal aspirations" and "self-assessments" because of their revolutionary activities? (b) Compare and contrast their experiences with those of Eliza Wilkinson and Esther Reed.
3. (a) Why was prostitution more accepted in the British army than in the American army? (b) Discuss the difficulties in assessing the success of the American ban against prostitution.
4. (a) Discuss the difficulties in determining the facts with respect to Deborah Sampson. (b) What do we know, and what don't we know, about "Molly Pitcher"? (c) How do you think the "Molly Pitcher" story came to be?

SHAMING

Review:

1. According to historian Linda Kerber, what was "shaming"?
2. Kerber offered three stories in which women sent men into battle. What were the sources of these stories?
3. (a) How did Hannah Dickinson, Hannah Robertson, and the carpenter's wife from Maryland react when their husbands joined the army? (b) How did Sarah Hodgkins feel about her husband's re-enlistment? (c) How did the mother of the sick youth from Massachusetts feel about her son's joining the army? (d) What do all these anecdotal tales have in common?
4. According do Raphael, which group of females *did* urge men and boys into battle? Consult footnote #81.

Historical Reasoning/ Discussion:

1. Holly Mayer, citing Kerber and Norton, concludes that women willingly sent their own loved ones into battle: "Finally, in her most patriotic act, one demonstrating that women, no less than men, were capable of public virtue, a woman could subordinate her needs to those of the nation and send her father, husband, brothers, and sons to war." (*Belonging to the Army: Camp Followers and Community during the American Revolution.*) Evaluate this statement in light of the evidence cited in this section, including footnote #81.

2. The evidence cited on both sides of the "shaming" debate is anecdotal. (a) Can you think of any way to recover "hard" evidence covering a wider sample of the female population? (b) If not, does the limited evidence mean we can posit no hypotheses? Discuss the uses and abuses of anecdotal evidence, with particular reference to this issue.

3. Now that you've discussed the evidence, join the debate over "shaming" men into battle. How do you see this issue?

WHERE GOD CAN WE FLY FROM DANGER?***Review:***

1. When armies advance, women faced a choice: to remain at home or to flee. What were some of the dangers of each option?

2. The text mentions several women affected by the war: Elizabeth Drinker, Rachel Ferguson, Lidia Currey, Rachel Wells, Eliza Wilkinson, Abigail Palmer, Molly Dibblee, Phebe Ward, Sally Logan Fisher, and Mary Donnelly. Group these women according to the ways in which they were victimized.

4. (a) Why is it difficult to document instances of rape? (b) One class of women were not subject to rape. Which class, and why not?

5. (a) What type of court-martial did Lord Rawdon consider "entertaining"? (b) In light of his attitude, what verdicts do you think were rendered?

6. Where did all the refugees go?

7. What did widowed women have to do to receive (a) benefits from the government, and (b) private charity?

Historical Reasoning/ Discussion:

1. Why do you think most history texts pay little attention to the suffering caused by wars?

2. The choice of staying home or fleeing must have been a "defining moment" in the life of each woman forced to decide. Undoubtedly, they pondered the issue carefully. What factors do you think they considered as they made their decisions?

3. Discuss the similarities and differences between the experiences of Eliza Wilkinson and Abigail Palmer.

4. (a) Refer back to the letter by Phebe Ward, printed in the Introduction. Discuss the implications of her husband's decision to take sides in the war. (b) Look ahead to the story of Mary Gould Almy in chapter 4, "Choosing Sides." Discuss the implications of her husband's decision to take sides in the war.

5. Emotionally, how do you think the absence of a body impacted the relatives mourning a dead soldier? If possible, draw from the more recent experiences of the relatives of Vietnam veterans still reported as "Missing in Action."

WHAT WAS DONE, WAS DONE BY MYSELF

Review:

1. Why do we know so little about "the women who worked the hardest" during the war?
2. When Joseph Hodgkins went to war, which relatives did he leave behind? Of these, who did most of the work?
3. Which men did Sarah Hodgkins help, and what did she do for them?
4. (a) How did Sarah Hodgkins feel when her husband re-enlisted for his second term? (b) How did she cope with her feelings? (c) What did Joseph do after finishing his second term? (d) How did Sarah react?
5. Explain what happened to two of Joseph's sons while he was away in the army. How do you think Joseph's absence at these crucial junctures affected the relationship between Sarah and Joseph?
6. Cite three (or more) passages from Sarah's letters that gave you a sense of how she felt, or that moved you personally.

Historical Reasoning/ Discussion:

1. "While upper class women might have felt exhilarated by the partial breakdown of gender roles, lower class women probably felt more oppressed." Comment on this hypothesis with reference to specific women mentioned in this chapter.
2. Why do you think women received so much praise for their labors at the beginning of the war and so little attention at the end?
3. (a) Discuss the apparent changes in the relationship between Sarah and Joseph Hodgkins over the course of the war. (b) Discuss Sarah's ways of coping with the prolonged absence of her husband.
4. The passage from Temperance Smith "reveals how religion, politics, work, and family, thoroughly interwoven, enabled women to carry on." Analyze this selection closely to show how these four factors affected her consciousness.

CLASS ACTIVITIES FOR CHAPTER 3: WOMEN

1. Stage a simulation of "women-in-the-wagons." Characters can include: private soldiers, women camp followers, officers, George Washington. What happens when officers come by and see women in the wagons? What happens when Washington himself observes women still riding in the wagons? De-brief: how did the women feel? How did officers and privates feel? How did Washington feel when his orders were ignored?
2. Conduct two court-martials of a British soldier accused of rape. First, do it as Lord Rawdon did. Then conduct one the way you would like it to have happened. De-brief: How did each of the characters feel after each trial? Why wasn't justice achieved in Rawdon's court martial?

3. Write a dramatic script depicting the adventures of "Molly Pitcher," then perform it as "readers' theater." Since little is known, feel free to make things up. Treat the script as propaganda: you are trying to promote patriotism among women.

4. Prepare a TV news broadcast covering riots over the price of food. Be sure to interview participants.

5. Simulate a radio talk show. The topic: women camp followers have just marched through Philadelphia after the men. Listeners call in with their views of this incident.

6. Write an article on a spinning bee for a patriot newspaper.

7. Prepare a petition from a widow of a Continental soldier asking for relief.

8. Create a female character from the times. Be specific as to age, marital status, location, class, etc. Then write a diary/journal in which your character observes any event, or series of events, during the war. Be sure to make the observations appropriate for the particular character you have created.

9. Interview one of the women who actually fought in the war.

10. Interview a number of women whose husbands, brothers, or sons have volunteered for the army or have been drafted. What's life like back on the farm? How do they feel about their husband's absence? How do they relate to the struggle for liberty?

11. Write a series of letters between a soldier and his wife at home.

12. During World War II the government invented "Rosie-the-Riveter" and featured her image on posters which encouraged women to leave home and work in the factories. Draw a poster ("Frances-the-Farmer"?) which encourages women of the Revolution to produce home-made goods and/or boycott British products.

13. Draft a chapter for a 5th grade textbook telling how the Revolutionary War affected women of various classes and situations. Make your text understandable for elementary students, but try to give enough sense of the complexities so as not to constitute an over-simplification of history.

UNIT PROJECTS FOR CHAPTER 3: WOMEN

1. Recent textbooks include more material on women than older texts. But are they misleading? Consult footnotes #62 and #66. (a) If you agree with Raphael, why do you think these textbook writers have gone astray? If you agree with the textbooks, what is wrong with Raphael's argument? (b) Examine the treatment of women in other textbooks. Does the term "women" in these texts pertain only to certain groups?

2. Elizabeth Evans has collected several primary sources in her book *Weathering the Storm: Women of the American Revolution*. Use these sources to test some of Raphael's statements and hypotheses. (a) Discuss Jemima Condict Harrison's journal (pp. 33-51) with respect to Raphael's statement: "Revolutionary-era women coped with their many troubles by renewing their faith in God... Women felt little control over their own destinies; always vulnerable, they placed themselves in the hands of a higher power." (b) Does Sarah Wister's letter (pp. 110-151) contradict or support Raphael's treatment of "shaming" men into battle? (See footnote #49 for other renditions of Wister's letter.) (c) Compare and contrast the experiences of two women whose husbands were political exiles: Elizabeth Drinker (pp. 152-184) and Phebe Ward (from Raphael's Introduction).

How can you account for the differences? (d) What dilemma did Mary Gould Almy face (pp. 245-270)? Discuss Almy's letter with respect to the "shaming" debate.

3. Read Joy and Richard Buel's biography of Mary Fish Silliman, *The Way of Duty: A Woman and her Family in Revolutionary America*. Read also the complete letters of Sarah Hodgkins (Herbert T. Wade and Robert A. Lively, *This Glorious Cause: The Adventures of Two Company Officers in Washington's Army*). Compare and contrast the experiences of these two women with respect to politics, religion, family life, female roles, literacy, and social class.