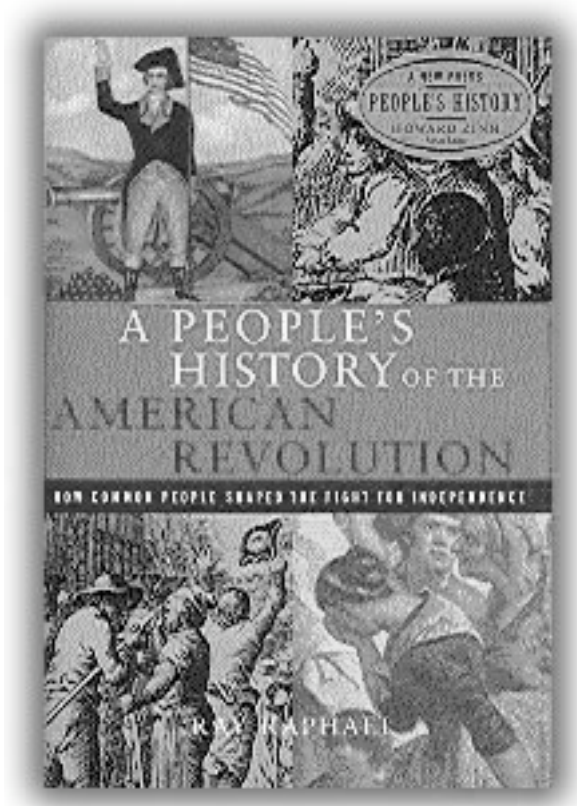


A People's History of the American Revolution:



A Guide for Teaching and Readers' Groups

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CHAPTER 6: AFRICAN AMERICANS

THE PROMISE AND THE PANIC OF '75

Review:

1. (a) In April of 1775, what were whites in Virginia scared might happen? (b) What did Governor Dunmore do on April 21? (c) How did the white citizens of Williamsburg react? (d) What was Dunmore's initial justification for his actions? (e) Later, what did Dunmore threaten to do?
2. (a) What was decided in the *Sommersett* case? (b) How did this affect slaves in America?
3. What did masters fear even more than a revolt among slaves?
4. According to reports from whites, what happened in the Tar River region of North Carolina?
5. When Andrew Estave's 15-year-old slave tried to escape, where did she go, and why did she choose to go there?
6. How and why did Dr. Cobham's slave die?
7. Upon what evidence was George of St. Bartholomew Parish hanged?
8. (a) What did Joseph Harris do for the British? (b) What did he do for himself?
9. (a) What was the charge against Jeremiah of Charleston? (b) What was the evidence? (c) Do you think race was a factor in his sentencing? Explain.

Historical Reasoning/ Discussion:

1. According to Philip J. Schwarz in his book *Twice Condemned: Slaves and the Criminal Laws of Virginia*, in 1774 there were 50 accusations of felonies leveled against slaves in Virginia; during 1775, the height of revolutionary fever, the number of trials for felonies increased to 81. Why the rise? Do you think this was due to increased unrest among the slaves or heightened fears among whites? Is there any evidence that might help answer this question?
2. Why do you think the *South Carolina Gazette* used the term "N*****s"?
3. Why do you think rumors of slave uprisings were so ubiquitous?
4. Historian Patricia Bradley, in her recent book *Slavery, Propaganda, and the American Revolution*, wrote of the Tar River incident that "a slave uprising was discovered hours before it was to go into effect over three counties." In St. Bartholomew Parish, she said, slaves tried "to mount a countywide plan of death to whites." Do you think that Bradley and other historians are correct in accepting the reports of whites at face value? Explain your reasoning.
5. Based on the experiences of George and Jeremiah, discuss the workings of the justice system in a slave society that feels threatened. How is "evidence" acquired? How is it tested?

“LIBERTY TO SLAVES”

Review:

1. (a) Which side of the war was Lord Dunmore on? (b) What did Lord Dunmore proclaim on November 14, 1775? (c) Cite three ways in which patriot masters countered Dunmore's proclamation.
2. (a) What was the response to Dunmore's proclamation among slaves? (b) Specifically, what was the response of Landon Carter's slaves?
3. (a) What percent of runaways arriving on H. M. S. *Scorpion* appear to have been female? (b) Is this result similar or dissimilar to Gary Nash's findings cited in footnote #46?
4. What military actions did the “Ethiopian Regiment” undertake?
5. Describe the obstacles faced by runaways trying to reach British ships?
6. (a) What happened to people who tried to escape to the British but were captured? (b) What happened to the majority of those who reached the British ships successfully?
7. (a) What happened on Sullivan's Island? (b) What happened on Tybee Island?
8. Between late 1776 and late 1778, why did fewer southern slaves try to escape?

Historical Reasoning/ Discussion:

1. “Stay, you d--d white bitch, till Lord Dunmore and his black regiment come, and then we will see who is to take the wall.” Why do you think this one small story was taken up by the informal “wire service” of the times and reprinted in the newspapers of several states?
2. (a) Why were masters like Henry Laurens and Robert Carter not likely to get a straight response from their slaves? (b) Discuss the implications for our ability to recover historical evidence.
3. With no written testimony from slaves, and with the information we get from masters unreliable, sometimes we can only conjecture. What kinds of discussions do you think occurred within the slave quarters on Virginia plantations late in 1775? What factors did the people consider as they tried to decide whether or not to flee to Lord Dunmore?
4. (a) How do you think the mood within the slave quarters had changed by the end of 1777? (b) What forms of resistance were at the slaves' disposal when the British were nowhere present?

A BOARD GAME

Review:

1. According to contemporary estimates, approximately how many slaves from Georgia, South Carolina, and Virginia ran away during the Revolutionary War?
2. Did General Clinton promise freedom to slaves who ran to the British?
3. What work did runaway slaves perform to aid the British army?
4. More slaves escaped than the British army could handle. What happened to the “excess”?
5. Did the British arm runaway slaves? If so, under what conditions? If not, why not?

- 6 (a) What and where were “maroon” communities, and how did the people survive? (b) What did slaves do on plantations abandoned by patriot masters?
7. What options were considered by slaves on plantations owned by patriots?
8. What happened at Yorktown to former slaves who had joined the British?

Historical Reasoning/ Discussion:

1. What can you learn from the list of Washington's slaves who ran away?
2. (a) “[E]very soldier had his Negro.” How did the prevailing social relationships of the times affect the lives of slaves who had hoped to find freedom with the British?
3. (a) A loyalist from Charleston wrote that “it was not uncommon for persons to let out the Negro girls to British Officers,” while a patriot complained that he was unable to retrieve a slave named Esther from the British at Camden because “she was hid in an Officers room.” [Robert Olwell, *Masters, Slaves, and Subjects*, 255.] Do you find it plausible that former slaves became prostitutes for British officers? (b) What kind of documentation might confirm or refute your answer? Why might documentation be difficult to discover?
4. The loyalist John Cruden argued that slaves running to the British strengthened rather than weakened the slave system. Explain his reasoning and argue for it or against it.
5. Imagine you are a slave in 1780 on a plantation owned by a patriot, and you are trying to decide whether to run to the British army, now 50 miles away. Create a specific character — male or female, single or married, etc. Outline the options available to you (review question #7), then explain why you plan to follow a specific course of action. Why does this seem the best choice?
5. Examine the documentation cited for the fate of former slaves at Yorktown (see footnotes #118, #119, and #120 as well as the text). Can we trust this evidence? Does it come from biased sources on one side only? Can we draw a firm conclusion? If so, state it. If not, why not?

TWO ÉMIGRÉS

Review:

1. (a) Were most African American emigrants after the war free or enslaved? (b) Where did the slaves go? (c) Where did those who were free go?
2. What happened to African American emigrants who went to England?
3. What danger did former slaves face while they waited for their boats in New York City?
4. (a) What circumstances led Boston King to escape to the British? (b) What happened to him as soon as he did? (c) What was his first occupation with the British? (d) Why did Boston King run from Captain Lewes? (e) What other jobs did Boston King perform? (f) What happened when he shipped to sea? (g) How did he escape from Brunswick? (h) Why were the initials “G. B. C.” so important to Boston King?
5. What and where was the largest settlement of free blacks in North or South America?
6. (a) How were David George, his siblings, and his mother treated by their master? (b) How many times did David George flee for his freedom before his religious conversion? (c) How did David George become a preacher? (d) How did he learn to read?

(e) What did David George and his family do when their patriot master left? (f) How did they support themselves while in Savannah? (g) Where did they go after the war? (h) What happened when David George tried to preach in his new home?

7. (a) What percent of the slave population gained their freedom and moved to Canada? (b) Describe the living conditions for former slaves in Canada. (c) Where did David George, Boston King, and many other former slaves go next?

Historical Reasoning/ Discussion:

1. Since there are only a handful of primary sources from slaves and former slaves, we must examine the few we have very carefully. What can we infer from Judith Jackson's petition?

2. Compare and contrast the backgrounds of Boston King and David George. Were there different "classes" among slaves?

3. Why do you think religion figured so prominently in the lives of Boston King and David George?

4. (a) How did Boston King and David George utilize the American Revolution to their own advantage? (b) What new dangers did the American Revolution create?

5. How did you react emotionally to these personal narratives?

PATRIOTS OF COLOR

Review:

1. (a) About how many African Americans lived in the northern states at the time of the American Revolution? (b) What percent were still enslaved?

2. What type of evidence indicates that African Americans fought at Concord and Bunker Hill?

3. In the fall of 1775, what policy did Washington and his Council of War adopt towards "Negroes in the new Army"?

4. What factors led Washington to reverse this policy shortly thereafter?

5. What two laws in Connecticut led to increased African American participation in the army?

6. (a) Make a list of African American soldiers from Connecticut discussed in the text, and next to each name note briefly what happened to that soldier. (b) Tabulate the results. Although this is not a random sample, it does give an idea of the range of outcomes.

7. (a) What was unique about the First Rhode Island Regiment? (b) How well did it perform in battle? (c) What happened to its veterans?

8. (a) Were African Americans recruited for the army in the mid-Atlantic states? If so, were distinctions made between slaves and freemen? (b) Were African Americans recruited for the army in Virginia? If so, were distinctions made between slaves and freemen? (c) Were African Americans recruited for the army in South Carolina and Georgia? If so, were distinctions made between slaves and freemen?

9. (a) What happened to Ned Griffin after he served in the army as a substitute? (b) Was Griffin's petition granted?

10. Why were African American sailors perceived by whites as less of a threat than African American soldiers?

Historical Reasoning/ Discussion:

1. Discuss the changing policy towards African Americans in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. How did racism and the fear of arming blacks intersect with the need for soldiers?
2. What factors might have contributed to the disproportionate number of African American soldiers who served long tours of duty?
3. Imagine you are a slave in Connecticut or Rhode Island. Create a specific character for yourself: age, marital status, etc. Would you agree to serve as a substitute in the army — and thereby risk your life — in return for a promise of freedom at war's end? What factors would you consider in making your decision?
4. Why do you think the First Rhode Island Regiment fought so well?
5. Compare and contrast white policies towards black soldiers in the following regions: (a) New England (b) Mid-Atlantic (c) Upper South (Virginia and North Carolina) (d) Deep South (South Carolina and Georgia). How do you account for the differences?

TOWARDS FREEDOM?***Review:***

1. (a) What was the argument of the Massachusetts slaves who petitioned for their freedom on May 25, 1774? (b) What was the argument used by black residents of Dartmouth in 1780? (c) Why would these arguments appear more forceful during the era of the Revolution than twenty years earlier?
2. Not all northern whites pushed for the abolition of slavery, but some did. Name two groups that opposed slavery.
3. Make a chart listing the northern states. Next to each state, give the date (a) when that state *started* the legal termination of slavery, and (b) when the last slaves, according to the laws of that state, would *actually* receive their freedom.
4. Name five African Americans who achieved some degree of success after the Revolution, and state what each one did.
5. According to John Shy, what was the impact of the Revolution on the institution of slavery in the South?
6. According to Raphael, was the death toll extracted by the Revolutionary War higher for slaves fleeing to the British or for white soldiers?
7. What happened to William Hooper's slaves?
8. Explain why Raphael takes issue with the notion that African Americans "contributed" to the American Revolution.
9. Explain how the American Revolution affected (a) Limus (b) Samuel Johnson (c) Frederic.

Historical Reasoning/ Discussion:

1. (a) Compare the number of southern slaves who found their way to freedom during the Revolutionary War with the number who died in the process (consult footnotes #219 and #220). (b) What are the implications of these (approximate) numbers? How do you weigh the disparate impacts of the American Revolution on slaves in the South?

2. Did the American Revolution either contribute to the abolition of slavery or strengthen the institution of slavery? Consider: (a) the North (b) the South (c) the nation as a whole.

3. Slaves had to develop means of coping with domination by their masters. Some slaves, like those of Robert Carter and Henry Laurens, “sucked up” to their masters (see also footnote #222). Others, like Frederic, engaged in work slow-downs. How did each of these methods help slaves survive? What attitudes might slaves develop to help them cope with their apparent powerlessness? What power does a slave have?

4. (a) Were Limus, Samuel Johnson, and Frederic “heroes”? (b) Was George Washington? Joseph Plumb Martin? (c) Can we compare white and black “heroism” in the Revolutionary War?

CLASS ACTIVITIES FOR CHAPTER 6: AFRICAN AMERICANS

1. Stage a simulation of plantation slaves trying to decide whether to flee to the British. Characters include men and women, married and single, old and young. Include some children. If married, are the spouses and children on this plantation or another? Spend some time developing the various characters before you engage in the simulation, since their particulars should have some bearing on their various responses.

2. Give George and Jeremiah fair trials. Also try to re-enact the trials they probably received. What factors precluded their getting fair trials?

3. Write a dramatic script of an escape to Lord Dunmore's ship, then perform it as “readers' theater.” Not all of the runaways have to make the escape successfully.

4. Prepare a TV news broadcast covering the siege at Yorktown and focusing on the blacks cast into the no-man's-land between the armies.

5. Simulate two radio talk shows, one in the South and one in the North. The topic: should the Continental Army recruit free blacks and/or slaves?

6. Write a dispatch for a patriotic newspaper on Governor Dunmore's seizure of gunpowder at Williamsburg.

7. Prepare a petition from a black emigrant in Halifax to British officials. Ask for some form of relief or assistance. Why do you need it? Why do you feel you are entitled to it?

8. Create the character of a specific slave who lived through the Revolutionary War. What is your age, gender, marital status, location? Who is your master? When were you, your parents, or your ancestors sold into slavery? Assume it is the year 1800 and tell your children (or grandchildren) about your experiences during the war.

9. Interview an African American refugee waiting for a boat to Canada at the close of the war. How did he/she escape from slavery? How did he/she get to New York? What are his/her expectations? What are his/her fears?

10. Interview an African American soldier in the Continental Army. How did he get there? How does he take to military life? How is he treated by his peers? By his officers? What are his hopes and fears?

11. Prepare a diorama depicting African Americans at Yorktown.

12. Draw a poster encouraging blacks in Rhode Island to enlist in the First Regiment.

13. Draft a chapter for a 5th grade textbook telling how African Americans participated in, and were affected by, the Revolutionary War. 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 6: AFRICAN AMERICANS

1. Read the complete narratives of Boston King and David George (see footnotes #132 and #133 for citations). (a) To understand the importance of the American Revolution in their personal lives, consider: how might their lives have evolved *without* the Revolution? (b) Compare the importance of religion in the lives of Boston King and David George to the importance of religion for women during the Revolution, as discussed above in chapter 3.

2. Upon the conclusion of the American Revolution, Patrick Henry ("Give me liberty or give me death!") owned 66 slaves. Thomas Jefferson ("All men are created equal") owned 204 slaves. George Washington, who directed the "War for Independence" to its successful conclusion, owned 390 slaves. These three men achieved fame as apostles of freedom, but they gained their fortunes by the sweat and tears of other human beings whom they claimed to own. Did they see the contradiction? Did it bother them? And, if so, what did they do to resolve it?

To understand how Henry, Jefferson, and Washington confronted and/or avoided the issue of slavery, consult these sources:

Patrick Henry. Richard R. Beeman, *Patrick Henry: A Biography* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974); David A. McCants, *Patrick Henry, the Orator* (New York and Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990); Robert D. Meade, *Patrick Henry: Patriot in the Making* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1957); Henry Mayer, *A Son of Thunder* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1986).

Thomas Jefferson: William Cohen, "Thomas Jefferson and the Problem of Slavery," *Journal of American History*, 56 (1969), 509; John C. Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery* (New York: The Free Press, 1977); Annette Gordon-Reed, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Heming: An American Controversy* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997); for DNA evidence that suggests an affair between Jefferson and Sally Heming, see Eugene A. Foster, M. A. Jobling, P. G. Taylor, P. Donnelly, P. de Knijff, Rene Mieremet, T. Zerjal, C. Tyler-Smith, "Jefferson Fathered Slave's Last Child," *Nature*, 396 (Nov. 5, 1998), 27-8. *Primary sources:* Jefferson's most complete statement of his views concerning slavery appears in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955; first published in 1785). The major collections of Jefferson's letters and other writings are Paul L. Ford, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1893) and Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950-1965). In the Ford and/or Boyd collections, consult the following dates for letters in which Jefferson addresses the issue of slavery: June 26, 1786; August 30, 1791; May 11, 1805; February 25, 1809; August 25, 1814; April 22, 1820; December 26, 1820; February 4, 1824; August 7, 1825; January 18, 1826; April 8, 1826; June 24, 1826.

George Washington: Fritz Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery: A Documentary Portrayal* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997). *Primary*

sources: Washington's writings are collected in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1931-44) and W. W. Abbot and Dorothy Twohig, eds., *Papers of George Washington* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983—). Consult entries for the following dates: July 2, 1766; November 12, 1775; August 15, 1778; February 24, 1779; September 9, 1786; November 6, 1786; November 24, 1786; February 1, 1787; February 4, 1787; November 23, 1794; November 13, 1797; August 18, 1799; July 9, 1799.

Compare the responses of Henry, Jefferson, and Washington. Although similar in many respects, how do they differ? Did one try harder than the others to match his deeds with his words?

3. With so few primary sources from the slaves themselves, we must rely on information written by whites, in many cases their masters. Although we do not have to accept the masters' accounts at face value, they do provide us with a window into the world of the slaves. Perhaps the most revealing information comes in the form of advertisements for runaway slaves (see, for instance, the ads placed by Andrew Estave, Joshua Eden, and Peregrine Thorn cited in the text). These ads have been collected in several books, the most complete being the multi-volume *Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790*, edited by Lathan A. Windley. Look through this or any other collection of advertisements for runaways. What can you learn about specific people? What can you learn about the institution of slavery?

4. The death toll among white soldiers was approximately the same as that of slaves who perished as they tried to flee to freedom during the Revolutionary War. The toll among African Americans, considered as a percentage of their population, greatly exceeded that of Euro-Americans. The cry of "liberty" had a greater impact for those who were actually enslaved than for those who complained about the laws of Parliament. Despite all this, the fate of African Americans is treated only tangentially in most texts on the Revolution. (a) Look through various books which cover the American Revolution. What percent of the space do they devote to African Americans? Do they integrate the story of African Americans into the narrative? (b) How would you integrate the African American experience of the Revolutionary War into the overall narrative? Try it. Do you have to re-write some other parts of the traditional story to account for African Americans?