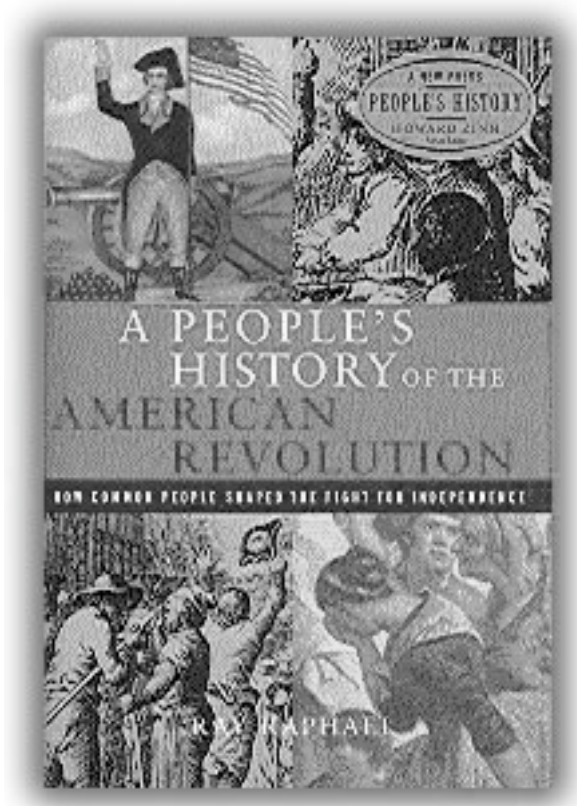


A People's History of the American Revolution:



A Guide for Teaching and Readers' Groups

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2004

CHAPTER 7: THE BODY OF THE PEOPLE

PEOPLE'S HISTORY AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Review:

1. How was the daily work of common people affected by the American Revolution?
2. What were the extra burdens imposed on common people by the American Revolution?
3. (a) Describe how three particular groups of Native Americans “played the system” during the American Revolution. (b) Describe how African Americans in both the South and the North “played the system” during the American Revolution. (c) Describe how farmers “played the system” towards the end of the American Revolution.
4. How did the mechanisms for enlisting soldiers insure that poor people did a disproportionate share of the fighting?
5. (a) How did white patriots, including common people, withhold their support from the British government in the years leading up to the Revolution? (b) What kind of “boycott” did slaves stage?
6. Explain how three different groups tested the limits of authority just prior to the Revolution.
7. (a) In 1774, what repression was triggered by the Boston Tea Party? (b) How did the farmers of Massachusetts respond to this repression? (c) How did the fear of slave revolts lead many masters to become “revolutionaries”? (d) How did the fear of slave revolts affect the manpower available to the army in the southern states?
8. (a) How did common people participate in the overthrow of the British government? (b) How did lower class loyalists participate in the “transforming hand of revolution”? (c) How did slaves participate in the “transforming hand of revolution”? (d) How did Native Americans participate in the “transforming hand of revolution”?

Historical Reasoning/ Discussion:

1. How helpful do you find Raphael's framework for ways in which common people participate in the historical process? What has he left out? Can you add to his list, or alter it, to make it more useful?
2. Choose any other era (it doesn't have to be a war), study it in some depth, then try to apply Raphael's list. Does it help elucidate the role of common people in this era? Does your refinement of this schema in the previous question work any better? In light of new information from your era, can you refine this framework some more?

WHO'S IN AND WHO'S OUT

Review:

1. (a) What does Gordon Wood think was the most radical concept fostered by the American Revolution? (b) According to Wood's critics, whom has he neglected to consider?

2. Do the findings of Jackson Turner Main on the wealth of legislators before and after the war argue for or against Wood's thesis?
3. According to John Shy, how did activities during the war alter the relations between classes?
4. What happened in rural Massachusetts exactly 12 years after the court closures that ushered in the American Revolution?
5. How widespread was popular discontent in the mid-1780s?
6. Gordon Wood and others have maintained that the revolutionary concept of equality, although not fully realized at the time, paved the way for future gains. Raphael does not disagree with this, but he does give it a new perspective. What qualifications does he offer?
7. (a) What did the patriots of Longmeadow do to Samuel Colton? (b) How did they justify their actions?
8. (a) During the Revolutionary War, what groups suffered abuse at the hands of "the body of the people"? (b) How has this kind of abuse been repeated in the 19th and 20th centuries? Give some examples. (c) What crowd actions in the 20th century have led to greater equality in American Society?

Historical Reasoning/ Discussion:

1. Was the cup of the Revolution half full or half empty? How does the answer change depending on which group you're looking at? Give your own evaluation of the inclusions and omissions in the revolutionary move towards equality.
2. Compare and contrast the Massachusetts court closures of 1774 and 1786.
3. (a) How does the term "Shays' Rebellion" lead to a mis-reading of the farmers uprising of 1786? (See footnote #11.) (b) How does a failure to acknowledge the court closures of 1774 lead to a mis-reading of the court closures of 1786?
4. What is your interpretation of Hannah Griffitts' poem?
5. Throughout United States history, the "body of the people" has "empowered and deprived." (a) Historically, how has the concept of the "common good" conflicted with minority rights? Give examples. (b) Are these always in conflict? Can attention to the rights of minorities further the "common good"? Consider the case of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, or the movement for gender equality, or any other movement which promoted equality.

THE HUMAN FACE OF FREEDOM

Review:

1. (a) How did common soldiers apply the spirit of the Revolution to army life? (b) What did their officers think of this?
2. "New lords new laws." Who were the lords and what were the laws?
3. (a) Who was Charles Asgill, and how did he get caught up in post-war politics? (b) In June of 1782, what did George Washington say of the intended execution? (c) How did he feel about it later? (d) Why did he turn the matter over to Congress? Why didn't he free Asgill himself?
4. What does the Asgill affair tell us about the "dictates of war."

5. (a) What does Raphael think was the most pervasive feature of the American Revolution? (b) How does his concluding story illustrate that feature?

Historical Reasoning/ Discussion:

1. Is the concept of a “freedom-loving soldier” self-contradictory? Is “a proper degree of Subordination” necessary for an army to function? Was there any way to blend revolutionary ideals with military necessity?

2. During the Vietnam War, many (perhaps most) Americans held that the United States might have made a mistake by committing to the war, but once committed, there was no choice but to continue. Compare this to Washington’s experience in the Asgill affair. Can you think of similar instances in United States history? How does the logic of “saving face” contribute to the perpetuation of war?

3. “The world is already too narrow.” Why/how did the Revolutionary War box people into corners? What was its peculiar dynamic? Do all wars box people into corners in a similar fashion? If so, explain how this works. If not, state a counter example and explain how your example differs from the Revolutionary War.

4. “People were scared. They didn’t know how it would all turn out.” How does the fact that we *do* know how the war turned out keep us from a more complete understanding of the people of the times?

5. “The people of the Revolution had become players, for better and worse.” What was the “better,” and what was the “worse”?

UNIT PROJECTS FOR CHAPTER 7: THE BODY OF THE PEOPLE

1. “In order to survive, everybody had to pay attention to public happenings, project how their own personal actions might be construed, and calculate how those actions might affect the course of events.” Choose one person from each of the first six chapters and describe how he/she participated in this process.

2. Pick an instance from the history of the United States in which you think the “body of the people” acted as a repressive force. Pick another instance in which you think the “body of the people” acted as a progressive force. Study them both in greater detail. (a) How do you account for the differences? What make one repressive and the other progressive? (b) How could the people involved in both instances claim roots in the American Revolution?

3. Compare/contrast the treatment of “freedom” in this book with that in another book (or books) on the American Revolution. How does the focus on common people here contribute to any difference in tone?

4. Raphael calls the American Revolution the “total war” of its times. The Civil War and World War II have often been characterized as “total wars,” whereas the Revolution generally is not. Study the effect of the Civil War or World War II (or both) on common people, then compare/contrast with the Revolutionary War. How did technological changes affect the nature and sweep of later wars? If you allow for the less developed technology of warfare, do you think the American Revolution can be considered the “total war” of its time? Like the Civil War and World War II, did the workings of the American Revolution envelop the entire population?