

African Americans and the American Revolution

An Online Professional Development Seminar



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GOALS

- To understand why Patriots committed to defending their own liberty could continue to hold others in slavery.
- To understand why most (but not all) native peoples preferred to support the British in suppressing the revolution.
- To understand why northern blacks tended to favor the revolution while southern blacks tended to help the British.

From the American Memory Timeline from the Library of Congress: Revolutionary War: The Home Front.

1. [British Invasion of New York Encourages Loyalists and Indians, July 4, 1776](#)
2. [The Continental Congress Deals with the "Savages," 1776-1778](#)
3. [Two Continental Congress Addresses to the Six Nations, 1776-1777](#)
4. [Tories Spread Falsehoods in Canada, February 1776](#)
5. [Continental Congress Resolutions Concerning Loyalists, 1776](#)
6. [Loyalists in Delaware and Maryland, 1777](#)
7. [Reverend Jacob Duche to George Washington, October 8, 1777](#)
8. [An Address of the Congress to the Inhabitants of the United States of America, May 8, 1778](#)
9. [To the Inhabitants of the United States of America, May 16, 1779](#)
10. [Proclamation by Brigadier-General Benedict Arnold, October 20, 1780](#)
11. [A Loyalist Tract, November 28, \[1781?\]](#)
12. [George Washington to John Laurens, January 15, 1781](#)
13. ["Exhortations to Renewed Vigor," 1780-1781](#)
14. [Recruiting African Americans into the Continental Army](#)
15. [Alexander Scammel's Report on Negroes in the Continental Army, August 24, 1778](#)

Alan Taylor



Distinguished Professor
Winner of the Pulitzer Prize in History
University of California, Davis

National Humanities Center Fellow, 1993-94

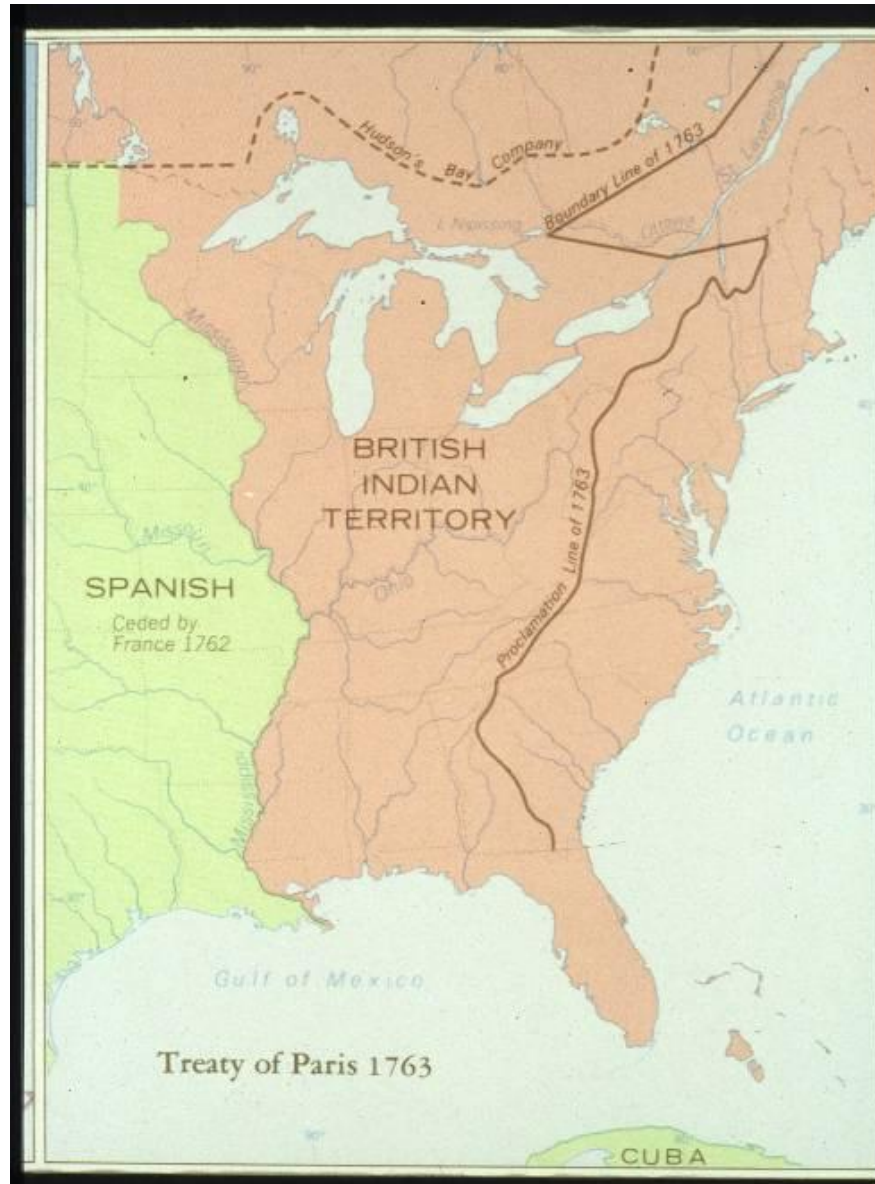
*The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in
Virginia, 1772-1832*
(2013)

*The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern
Borderland of the American Revolution*
(2006)

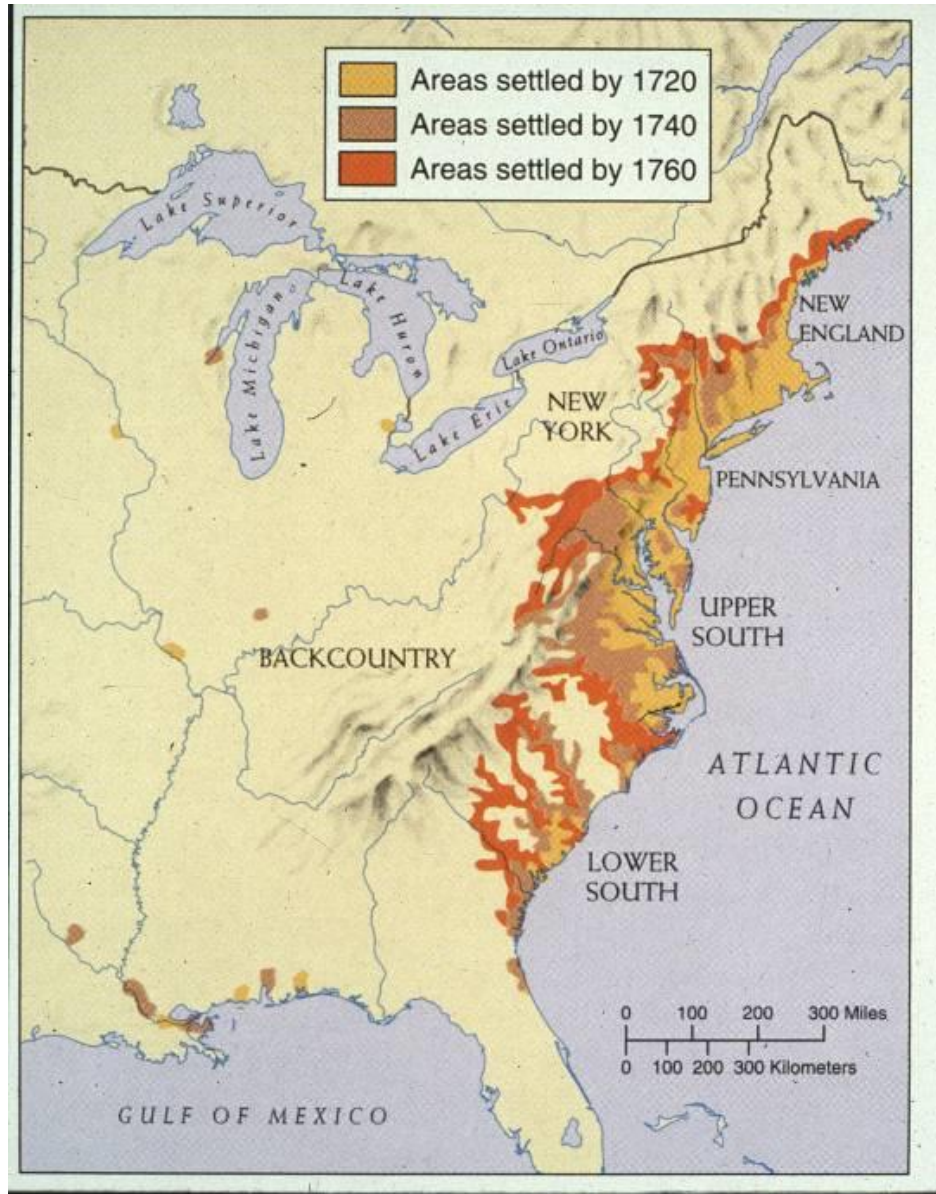
American Colonies
(2001)

*William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the
Frontier of the Early American Republic*
(1995)

Post Treaty of 1763 Imperial Claims



Spread of Settlement 1720-1760



Building a Log Cabin



Joseph Brant





Death of General Montgomery



And whereas great Frauds and Abuses have been committed in purchasing Lands of the Indians, to the great Prejudice of our Interests, and to the great Dissatisfaction of the said Indians . . . We do, with the Advice of our Privy Council strictly enjoin and require that no private Person do presume to make any purchase from the said Indians of any Lands reserved to the said Indians.

Discussion Questions

- What problem did the British Crown want to solve by issuing this proclamation?
- What solution did the Proclamation offer to that problem?
- When the revolution came, would most of the Indians side with the British or the colonists? Why?

Brothers; - We know that these settlers are poor, or they would never have ventured to live in a country which have been in continual trouble ever since they crossed the Ohio [River]; divide therefore this large sum of money which you have offered to us, among these people, give to each also a portion of what you say you would give us annually over and above this very large sum of money, and we are persuaded they would most readily accept of it in lieu of the lands you sold to them, if you add also the great sums you must expend in raising and paying Armies, with a view to force us to yield [to] you our Country, you will certainly have more than sufficient for the purposes of repaying these settlers for all their labour and improvements.

Discussion Questions

- What problem did the Indians want to solve?
- What solution did they offer?
- How would the United States react to this proposal?

The Battle of Bunker's Hill



Death of General Montgomery



Battle of Cowpens



William B. Riney, "The Battle of Cowpens," Oil on canvas. Photo by Sam Holland. Courtesy South Carolina State House.

Continental Army Soldiers



It have Never Bin Considered that Every Principle from which America has Acted in the Course of their unhappy Difficulties with Great Briton Plead Stronger than A thousand arguments in favors of your petitioners. [T]hey therefor humble Beseech your honours to ... cause an act of the legislature to be past Whereby they may be Restored to the Enjoyments of that which is the Natural right of all men and their Children who [were] Born in this Land of Liberty may not be held as Slaves after they arrive at the age of twenty one years so may the Inhabitance of this States No longer [be] chargeable with the inconstancy of acting themselves that part which they condemn and oppose in others.

Discussion Question

- According to these slaves, why should the legislature set them free?

I do hereby further declare all indentured Servants, Negroes, or others, (appertaining to Rebels,) free that are able and willing to bear Arms, they joining his MAJESTY'S Troops as soon as may be, for the more speedily reducing [of] this Colony to a proper Sense of their Duty.

Discussion Questions

- Did Dunmore try to free all of the slaves in Virginia?
- What did he hope to achieve by freeing some slaves?
- How would white Virginians react to this proclamation?

[A] report prevailed at New-York, that all the slaves, in number 2000, were to be delivered up to their masters, altho' some of them had been three or four years among the English. This dreadful rumour filled us all with inexpressible anguish and terror, especially when we saw our old masters come ... and seizing upon their slaves in the streets of New-York, or even dragging them out of their beds. ... For some days we lost our appetite for food, and sleep departed from our eyes.

Discussion Questions

- Why did the runaway slaves fear the return of peace?
- Who did they consider the true champions of liberty?

Cato's Letter and Petition to the Pennsylvania Assembly, 1780

[We] are informed [that] your honourable house are about to pass a law to return us to our late masters Whilst it pleased the great author of our beings to continue us in slavery, we submitted to our hard lot, and bore it with habitual patience; but rescued from our misery, and tasting the sweets of that liberty, for the defence of which this whole continent is now involved in war, we shall deem our selves the most wretched of the human race, if the proposed act should take place.

Discussion Question

- What did Cato fear, and why did he fear it?

[When] slaves who are happy and contented with their present masters, are tampered with and seduced to leave; when a conduct of this sort begets discontent on one side and resentment on the other . . . it is oppression in the latter case, and not humanity in any, because it introduces more evils than it can cure.

Discussion Questions

- Did Washington blame himself when some of his slaves ran away?
- What did Washington mean when he wrote that encouraging slaves to runaway "introduces more evils than it can cure"?

(a) “When the British parliament usurped a Right to dispose of our Property without our consent we dissolved the Union with our parent country and established a ... government of our own. We risked our Lives and Fortunes, and waded through Seas of Blood...We understand a very subtle and daring attempt is made to dispossess us of a very important Part of our Property .. TO WREST US FROM OUR SLAVES, by an act of Legislature for general emancipation.”

“[Emancipation] is productive of Want, Poverty, and Distress, and Ruin to FREE citizens, Neglect, Famine and Death to the black Infant. . . . The Horrors of all Rapes, Murders, and Outrages which a vast multitude of unprincipled, unpropertied, revengeful and remorseless Banditti are capable of perpetrating” [will bring] “sure and final Ruin to this now flourishing, free, and happy Country.”

Discussion Questions

- What did these petitioners oppose? Why?
- How did they define the purpose of the American Revolution?
- Would they agree that "all men are created equal"?
- Why did they fear free blacks?

Final slide.

Thank You.