

What about My Freedom?

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Framing Question

Was there evidence that allegiance to either the Patriot or British/Tory side would change the lives of colonists--particularly the disenfranchised? (African Americans and women who did not have the right to vote or own property)

Goals/ Objectives

Students will be able to understand that:

- Regardless of choice of sides, colonists with limited rights (slaves, women) expected a change for the better.
- Both the British government and the American colonists used propaganda to gain supporters.
- Different men and women had different motivations for telling colonists that their lives would change for the better.
- Colonists's actions were affected by their expectations.

Primary Sources

1. Document

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams on March 31–April 5, 1776. Massachusetts Historical Society: <http://www.masshist.org/database/5>

Critical Thinking Questions:

- Why did Abigail want her husband to “remember the ladies”?
- Who voted on political matters in colonial times?
- Why couldn't women vote for themselves?
- What rights did women think they would gain after the Revolutionary War?
- Compare/contrast the rights of women to free and enslaved African Americans.

2. Landscape

The grave marker of John Jack, slave in Concord, Massachusetts. Photograph by Mark Parker, August 2, 2010.

This epitaph is on the gravestone of John Jack, a slave owned by shoemaker Benjamin Barron of Concord, Massachusetts. The grave sits on the back side of the Burying Hill in Concord. The epitaph was written by Daniel Bliss, a Tory.



Text:

God wills us free
Man wills us slaves
Gods will be done
Here lies the body of John Jack,
Native of Africa. Who died March 1773
Aged about sixty years
Tho' born in a land of slaves
He was born free
Tho' he lived in a land of liberty
He lived a slave,
Till by his honest tho' stolen labour
He acquired the source of slavery
Which gave him his freedom;
Tho' not long before
Death the grand tyrant
gave him his final emancipation,
and put him on a footing with kings
Tho' a slave to vice
He practiced those virtues
Without which kings are but slaves. "

Critical Thinking Questions:

1. Compare and contrast the placement of John Jack's grave site and the sites of other people in Concord that died at approximately the same time.
2. What do you think the author of the epitaph was trying to say through his poem? What was the author's purpose in writing this epitaph? Explain how the fact that the author was a Tory played a role in his purpose.
3. Rewrite the epitaph in your own words. Make sure that you keep the same main idea.

4. Give a situation in modern America for which a similar type of epitaph could be written. Write an epitaph that makes a statement for that situation.

3. Images

A. *Four Soldiers* (watercolor on paper), by Jean Baptiste Antoine de Verger, circa 1781.

<http://atlanticportal.hil.unb.ca/acva/blackloyalists/en/context/gallery/deverger.html>



De Verger depicts, from left to right, a black soldier of the 1st Rhode Island Regiment, a New England militiaman, a frontier rifleman, and a French officer. The British actively recruited slaves belonging to Patriot masters and thus more blacks fought for the Crown. The estimate of the slave population at the beginning of the Revolution is about 400,000 to 500,000, or 20% of the population. An estimated 80,000 to 100,000 slaves escaped, died or were killed during the American Revolution — again, about 20% of the slave population. About 10,000 blacks were recruited and fought for the British side and about 5,000 blacks fought for the American side.

B. *The Death of Major Peirson* (oil on canvas), by John Singleton Copley, 1782-1784.

<http://atlanticportal.hil.unb.ca/acva/blackloyalists/en/context/gallery/copley.html>



John Copley was a Massachusetts Loyalist who fled to England. He completed *The Death of Major Peirson* in England. While the Black regiment called the Royal Ethiopians fought under Lord Dunmore, none of them were at this particular battle (the 1781 Battle of Jersey).

At table groups, partners will analyze a painting, and then compare thoughts with tablemates. They will write their important thoughts and share final thoughts in whole class discussion.

Critical Thinking Questions:

1. Look carefully at this painting. What do you notice about the uniforms, and the soldiers themselves? Who are these soldiers and which side are they on? Why do you think so?
2. Painting A: The artist was a French man, Jean Baptiste Antione de Verger. The French were allies of the colonists. Look at where the African American soldier is placed in the painting. How does this painter feel about racial equality? How does it make you feel? What do you think was the artist's reason for painting this painting?

3. Painting B: The artist was a Massachusetts Loyalist who fled to England, and painted this there. How does he feel about the Revolution? What makes you think this? Look at the placement of the African American soldier. How does the artist want you to feel about this soldier? What is most important to the artist? Look at all the people in the painting. Share your thinking about their feelings.
4. With a partner, read Lord Dunmore's proclamation delivered in November, 1775. (You can find a copy of the proclamation here: <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-revolution/4238>.) Imagine yourself a slave in 1775. Discuss what this meant for slaves at the time. To leave a master was to risk severe punishment or death. Would you risk it? Why or why not?
5. James Armistead was a slave that served in the place of his master and spied on the British for the French commander, Lafayette. The information he learned was important to the colonist's victory. He did not receive his freedom after the peace treaties because his service was 'secret'. What do you think about this? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Final Assessment Activity

Students will write a letter from the perspective of a slave or woman. Students will choose a position (Patriot or Loyalist), explain their expectations, and provide a clear detailed rationale for their choice. They will describe the possible positive and negative consequences of their choice.