

740 History of Slavery in America OLLI Spring 2021
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Week 5 Slavery in the Age of Revolution

Youtube: Africans in America Episode 2

Sources: Nash, Gary The Forgotten Fifth; African Americans in the Age of Revolution
Berlin, Ira Many Thousand Gone, The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America
Davis, David Brion The Problem of Slavery in an Age of Revolution
Taylor, Alan The Internal Enemy War and Slavery in Virginia

Summary: This week we will examine the changes in the status of enslaved people in the North, Chesapeake and Low Country as the 18th century progressed. The ideas of the age of revolution had an impact on the colonists both black and white. The Somerset Decision a judicial ruling in Britain set off a hope, anxiety and rumors in the colonies. As war approached we will see how enslaved people made agonizing decisions, fraught with risk, on which side of the conflict would best lead to their own freedom. The Dunmore Proclamation of 1775 and the Philipsburg Proclamation of 1779 promised freedom to the enslaved who left their patriot masters and fought for the British in the Revolution. In the Northern colonies the Revolution marked the start of the end of slavery. In Massachusetts and the new state of Vermont the end was quick and complete. While in Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey there were still enslaved people well into the 19th century. We will look at the Constitutional provisions that the southern colonies, now states, had to protect the institution of slavery. In closing we will hear about the post war fate of some of the enslaved who joined the British troops to obtain their freedom.

Essential Understanding

- differences in northern colonies and southern colonies view of independence
- role of black troops in fighting the war

Suggested Activities and Reading

- Visit the Revolutionary War Museum in Philadelphia
- Continue to watch the PBS series on Africans in America. In episode 2 pay particular attention to the description of George Washington's upbringing and his ambivalence about slavery

