

Reading Guide
These Truths: A History of the United States, Part 1, pages 1-149
By Jill Lepore

Chapter 3
“Of Wars and Revolutions”

Taxation without representation...is rule by force, and rule by force is slavery. –p. 81

“How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes?”
--Samuel Johnson, British essayist

“Can you be surprised that the Negroes in Jamaica should endeavor to Recover their Freedom when they dayly hear at the Tables of their Masters, how much the Americans are applauded for the stand they are making for theirs?” --p. 84

“What a parcel of Hypocrites and Deceivers we are.” --Benjamin Lay, early abolitionist

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*In Chapter 3, Jill Lepore explains how Britain’s North American and Caribbean colonies were squares in the chess match in the global power struggle among the Great European powers (Britain, France, Spain, Netherlands, Portugal, Prussia, and Russia) in the eighteenth century. It was an expensive struggle which ultimately compelled the victorious British to tax their American colonies, and the British imposition of taxes led the thirteen colonies to revolt against the British, win their independence, and establish a form of government rooted in democracy—for white landed males.*

*Woven throughout this chapter, Lepore underscores the hypocrisy of Americans rebels condemning British tyranny while embracing the enslavement of peoples of African descent. She describes individual examples of slaves rebelling against those who enslaved them. In addition, she highlights Jane Franklin and Abigail Adams, both of whom argued that women deserved political and social equality.*

*This chapter, in other words, presents the American Revolution in a different light, one not so honorable, straight, and true—as if history was always meant to produce the United States—but one twisted and adulterated by racial, social, and economic inequality that was to exact a high, sometimes very bloody price.*

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Note: This chapter reading guide will not summarize every fact. It will frame the key concepts and themes Jill Lepore is making.

p. 72-76 The story of Benjamin Lay – “[God] did not make others to be slaves to us.”

p. 74. Stories of everyday escapes... Bett, Primus, Jack, Sam, Will...

“The American Revolution did not begin in 1775 and it didn’t end when the war was over....The Revolution began with the seeds sown by people like Benjamin Lay.” -- p. 75

p. 76-91. ***Part I***: The events leading to the Revolutionary War



76. Young George Washington

77. The French and Indian War (1754-1761), a theater of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), the world's first world war.

78. British General Edward Braddock's treatment of the American colonists during the French and Indian War.

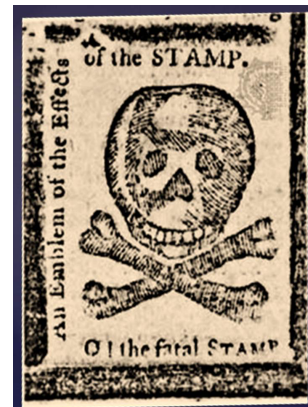
78-79. Differences in title and rank, in notions of equality between British and American soldiers.

80 Britain, though victorious, was nearly bankrupt. The high cost of waging the war led the British to break the promise that the King would pay for the waging of the war. This broken promise would lead the colonists eventually to break with England.

The British imposed a series of acts to tax the Americans. Parliament imposed the taxes, but Americans had no representation in Parliament.

81. *The Sugar Act* of 1764. The act wasn't radical but the American response to it was radical

82-83. *The Stamp Act* of 1765 ... led to the colonies convening the *Stamp Act Congress* in protest.



At the end of the French and Indian War there was a *contraction of credit*, which means that people could not borrow money, and a depression and several years of poor crops followed. When money gets tight, people get angry.

83-84 Benjamin Franklin appeared before the House of Commons to explain the colonists' refusal to pay taxes.

84-86. But Quebec and the sugar islands paid the taxes. In the Caribbean this was due to the fact that blacks outnumbered whites 8 to 1 and the West Indian planters needed the protection of the British Army from the threat of slave revolts.

86. Some saw the hypocrisy of slavery: James Otis, Jr., and George Mason in Virginia.

86-87. Jane Franklin exemplified the political awakening of a few who argued that women should have political equality as well

87. In 1766 the Stamp Act was repealed, followed by the passing of the *Declaratory Act* in 1766 and the *Townshend Acts* in 1767. Matters deteriorated.

The Boston Massacre, March 1770.



A view of Boston & British ships landing their troops, 1768

88. The zeal for liberty raised the question of ending slavery: *Somerset v. Stewart*, 1772.

Two lessons learned from *Somerset v. Stewart* by people held in slavery: look to the courts to secure freedom, Britain was better place than the colonies to win freedom.

The Tea Act of 1773 led to the *Boston Tea Party*, a protest against taxation (and a tactic to weaken the East India Company, which sold tea in competition with colonists who sold tea on the black market)

89. Parliament passes the *Coercive Acts* in 1774 to punish Boston. Matters get more tense.

90. *James Madison, Jr.*



The First Continental Congress meets in Philadelphia. 56 delegates from 13 colonies. Southern colonies were not inclined to favor independence, northern colonies were.

91. A question: How was the Congress to calculate representation? By white population per colony or one vote for colony? This quandary was to set in motion deliberations for “a new body politic.”

p. 91-100 *Part II*: This section discusses this new kind of government being made.

91. Jamaica refused to join the 13 colonies in rebellion

92. April 19, 1775 The Battles of *Lexington* and *Concord*, Boston occupied by the British Army.

93. *The Second Continental Congress* convenes... George Washington named commander of Continental Army.

Interesting twist: Slaves were offered their freedom if they joined the British Army.

93-94. “The colonists’ vulnerability to slave rebellion, that Achilles’ Heel, was hardly a secret: it defined them.”

94. Forty-seven of George Washington’s slaves fled at one time or another... Many founding fathers owned slaves...

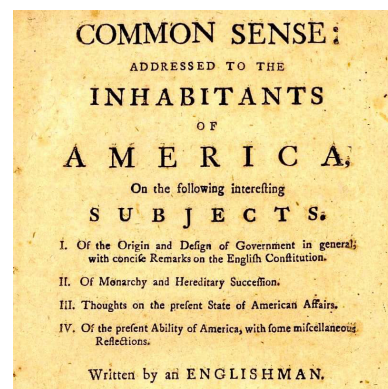
The story of *Harry*, George Washington’s slave.



The “Mt. Vernon” mural by Victor Arnautoff at George Washington High School in San Francisco. Painted in 1936, the murals have come under criticism over the decades for their portrayals of enslaved African Americans and Native Americans. In the Spring and Summer of 2019 critics called for these murals to be destroyed for their depictions of enslaved African Americans and Native Americans. The left-leaning Arnautoff intended the murals as a counter narrative to the prevailing high school textbooks of the time because his representation of the westward expansion included the slaughter of Native Americans, and he presented Washington as a slave owner, both facts the official narrative back then tended to either ignore or gloss over.

95. *Thomas Paine’s Common Sense* made the philosophy of John Locke understandable to everyday readers.

Paine invoked the Magna Carta: “a natural right to revolution.”



96. The Virginia Declaration of Rights and Form of Government was an important source document: “All power is vested in, and consequently derived from, the people.”

James Madison, author of the first-ever constitutional guarantee of religious liberty—“a fundamental right.”

“If all men belonging to a civil society are free and equal, *how could slavery be possible?*”

Virginia’s Answer: “that Africans do not belong to a civil society, having never left a state of nature.”

96-97. And *women*, too, were outside the contract by which civil society was formed. So said men.

97. The creation of the *Articles of Confederation*.

98. The writing of *the Declaration of Independence* – “an act of state” --not a declaration of war— “meant to have force within the law of nations.”

“The Declaration that Congress did adopt was a stunning rhetorical feat, an act of extraordinary political courage. It also marked a colossal failure of political will, in holding back the tide of opposition to slavery by ignoring it, for the sake of a union that, in the end, would not and could not last.” –Lepore, p. 99

Jefferson’s deleted section in which he blamed *King George III* for African slavery. It was deleted by the *Second Continental Congress*.

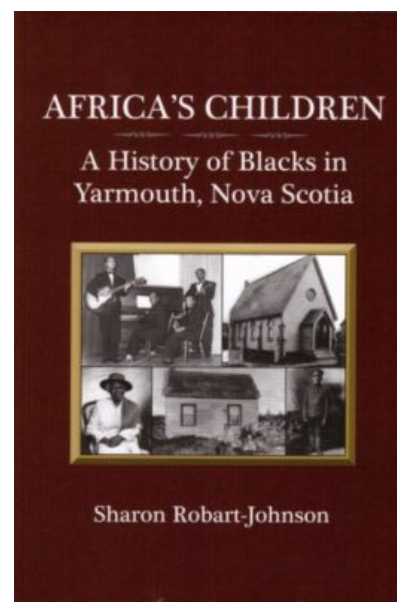
p. 100-108 [Part III](#).

100. One in five slaves fled American slavery in search of British liberty.

101. “For Britain, the American Revolution formed merely one front in a much larger war, a war for empire, a world war.”

102. “To Americans, the Revolutionary war was not a world war but a civil war.”

When Britain’s attempt to win the hearts and minds of Americans failed, “Britain didn’t so much lose America as abandon it.”



103. Proof? *The Battle of the Saintes* in Jamaica, 1782 – “Britain kept the Caribbean but gave up America.”



Surrender of *Cornwallis* at *Yorktown*, October 1781.



The Battle of the Saintes in Jamaica, 1782

104. “After the British surrender, 75,000 people, about one in every forty people in the United States, evacuated with the British....None were more desperate to escape than the 15,000-20,000 ex-slaves who were part of that exodus.”

Harry Washington departed for Nova Scotia.

105. A “BB” Certificate – “Born Free Behind British Lines”

“The Revolution was at its most radical in the challenge it presented to the institution of slavery and at its most conservative in its failure to meet that challenge.”

The threat of slave revolts -- “*America’s Achilles’ Heel*”

106. The story of *James Madison* and *Billy*

107. The fate of Harry Washington in Nova Scotia. “It was as terrible a disaster as Jamestown.”

The *Treaty of Paris* was signed in September 1783, ending the American Revolutionary War.

108. The antislavery movement grew in England, but not so in the United States. “...the American challenge to empire was contributed to a political and moral critique of slavery that was felt far more deeply in the British Empire than in the United States.”

“England would have no slaves. And America would have no king.”



Above right: Ignatius Sancho (c1729–1780), an escaped slave, gained fame in his time as a man of letters. An active 18th-century British abolitionist and anti-racism campaigner, as "the extraordinary Negro," he also became a symbol of the humanity of Africans. He sold rum, sugar, and tobacco, goods mostly produced by slaves.

