



## Black Patriots of the American Revolution

### Materials:

- PowerPoint Black Patriots of the American Revolution
- List of black patriots and units in the American Revolution (PDF)
- Illustrations of black patriots

### Plan of instruction:

#### **1. Introduction:**

African Americans served on both sides of the American Revolutionary War (1775 – 1784) for the promise to gain freedom. Estimates range from 9,000 to 15,000 blacks served in the Patriot or British armies during the Revolutionary war. They fought and died in the battlefields, roamed the countryside as couriers, were servants to officers, led their communities in the war, and were spies. The enslavement of black Americans was prominent, but their accomplishments are not often found in history books. Here is what Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote in October 1855.

“In considering the services of the Colored Patriots of the Revolution, we are to reflect upon them as far more magnanimous, because rendered to a nation which did not acknowledge them as citizens and equals, and in whose interest and prosperity they had less at stake. It was not for their own land they fought, not even for a land which had adopted them, but for a land which had enslaved them, and whose laws, even in freedom, oftener oppressed than protected. Bravery, under circumstances, has a peculiar beauty and merit.”

These brave men and women served America brilliantly only to find that the freedom that they were promised, in some cases, would not be granted.

#### **2. Lecture: Background Information:**

##### **a. Slide 1: *Black Patriots of the American Revolution***

##### **b. Slide 2: *Crispus Attucks, March 5, 1770***

The Boston Massacre occurred on March 5, 1770. British troops were sent to Boston to support a sentry that had been heckled by a crowd. The British troops let loose a round of shots into the crowd of American patriots. This was known as “the shot heard around the world,” and the first patriot to die was a member of the Sons of Liberty, Crispus Attucks, a free black man. Attucks was in the front line of a group of 50 patriots and was hit with two bullets in the chest. A total of three were killed, and five were severely wounded.

Attucks was representative of thousands of blacks who fought for an independent America.



c. **Slide 3: Battle of Lexington and Concord, April 19, 1775**

The Battles of Lexington and Concord were the first military engagements of the American Revolutionary War (1775-1784). Here the slaves and free blacks fought for their country's liberty and served in an integrated army. The Battle of Lexington was won by the British, but the Americans introduced the British to guerrilla warfare in the Battle of Concord.

Some of the black patriots that served in these battles were, Prince Estabrook, Caesar Augustus, Lemuel Hayes, and Peter Salem.

**Prince Estabrook** was one of ten black patriots that served in the Battle of Lexington and were wounded at Lexington Green, making him the first black soldier to fight in the American Revolution. **Caesar Augustus** was the last colonist wounded in the Battle of Lexington. Born a free black, **Lemuel Hayes** joined the Minutemen; he did not fight at Lexington but wrote a ballad-sermon about it. He received an excellent education as a child and in 1804, became the first black in America to receive a master's degree from Middlebury College. **Peter Salem** was a slave who fought alongside his former owners. He was a celebrated marksman who would later kill British Major John Pitcairn at the Battle of Bunker Hill.

d. **Slide 4: The Battle of Bunker Hill, June 17, 1775**

Early in the Revolutionary War, the British thought they would quickly isolate and punish the colonial rebels in Boston and bring all the other colonies in line. The colonists led by Colonel William Prescott built a fortification on top of Breed's Hill overlooking Boston. The original site for the construction of the fortress was Bunker Hill, but Breed's Hill was closer to Boston.

Underestimating the rebels' tenacity, the British launched a reckless frontal assault on the American positions on Breed's Hill. The British suffered heavy casualties until the colonists ran out of ammunition. British Major John Pitcairn called for the surrender of the rebels. Peter Salem then shot the major.

The British defeated the Americans at the Battle of Bunker Hill, but the battle provided the inexperienced rebels with confidence as they caused significant casualties against the enemy. There was an outpouring of support from other New England towns, and it was clear that the British would need a new strategy.

e. **Slide 5: Peter Salem, (1750 – 1816)**

Peter Salem was a slave whose owner allowed him to enlist in the Massachusetts Minutemen at which time he was freed. Salem was a celebrated marksman who played a vital role in the Battle of Bunker Hill.

After the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the Americans confronted the 5,000 British Troops stationed outside of Boston. It began well for the Americans until they ran out of ammunition. British Major John Pitcairn shouted, "the day is ours," and commanded the colonists to surrender. Salem raised his musket and shot Pitcairn. The British were confused. The colonists lost the battle, but they introduced the British to guerrilla warfare and proved that the Americans were capable of fighting against the British.



Peter Salem can be seen on the lower right-hand side of the painting.

f. **Slide 6: Washington Crossing the Delaware, December 25, 1776**

General George Washington's plan to cross the ice-choked Delaware River on December 25, 1776, was for a surprise attack upon the Hessian soldiers located around Trenton, New Jersey. Washington crossed the Delaware with a Continental Army with low morale. On December 26, 1776, George Washington won the Battle of Trenton.

g. **Slide 7: Read Slide 7 with class discussion: Oliver Cromwell**

h. **Slide 8: Battle of Trenton, December 26, 1776**

After the night crossing on the Delaware River, the surprise attack at the Battle of Trenton, on the following morning, provided a quick victory against the Hessian garrison. The Continental army needed a morale-boosting victory to encourage more men to join the ranks.

The Battle of Trenton was small but a pivotal battle in the American Revolutionary War led by General Washington. Washington captured two-thirds of the Hessian force with few losses for the Continental army. The battle significantly increased the morale and inspired re-enlistments. Washington's decision was a strategic success. The element of surprise guaranteed victory over the highly trained Hessians.

i. **Slide 9: Prince Whipple**

Prince Whipple may have been a member of an African royal family. He was sent to America to get an education and sold into slavery in Baltimore. He was bought by Founder William Whipple of New Hampshire, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. When William Whipple joined the revolution, Prince accompanied him. Prince fought in the Battle of Saratoga in 1777, and the Battle of Rhode Island in 1778, and was eventually given his freedom by General William Whipple.

j. **Slide 10: Battle of Brandywine, September 11, 1777**

The Battle of Brandywine was one the most massive battles of the war, with 15,500 men on the British side led by General Sir William Howe and 14,600 men on the American side led by General George Washington. Washington tried to defend the American capital of Philadelphia but was pushed back General Howe's troops.

The defeat allowed the British to occupy Philadelphia, but most of the Continental Army survived to fight another day.

k. **Slide 11: The Battle of Monmouth, June 28, 1778**

The Battle of Monmouth took place in Monmouth, New Jersey. It was here that the Americans intercepted the British. After the terrible winter at Valley Forge in 1777 and



1778, Washington worried about running out of food and ammunition. British General Howe wanted to be relieved of his duties in America and was replaced by Lieutenant General Henry Clinton. Clinton's orders were to follow a defensive strategy, and he abandoned Philadelphia and moved his army north.

The British had plenty of ammunition and supplies, and their heavy cannons slowed them down as they retreated. General Washington caught up with them and overtook them at Monmouth. This battle is considered a draw because, by late afternoon, both sides were exhausted, and the fighting stopped. General Clinton slipped away to the coast, and Washington did not follow.

**l. Slide 12: Read Slide 12 with class discussion: Salem Poor**

**m. Slide 13: The Battle of Yorktown, September 28 – October 19, 1781**

The final battle in the Revolutionary War was at the Battle of Yorktown in Virginia. General Washington commanded a combined army of 20,000 made up of patriot and French forces. Nine thousand British were eventually hemmed in between the French fleet and General Washington's Franco-American forces.

After six days of cannon fire that bombarded the fort, a sneak night attack overran British General Lord Cornwallis troops and forced Cornwallis to surrender on October 19, 1781.

A significant factor in the defeat of the British in the Battle of Yorktown lies with the double spy, James Armistead, a black slave who worked with Major General Marquis de Lafayette to bring intelligence to the colonies.

**n. Slide 14: James Armistead: (1760 – 1830)**

James Armistead was a black spy in the Revolutionary War, born into slavery in Virginia and owned by William Armistead. James joined the Continental army in 1781 and was assigned to French General Marquis de Lafayette, commander of the French allied forces, and a key ally of General Washington. James was assigned to Lafayette to infiltrate the British army through espionage.

Enslaved people could fight for either side, with the promise of freedom, so he convinced the British that he was a runaway slave. After Armistead gained the trust of the British General Cornwallis, he was assigned the task of spying on the colonies. James would also provide information to Lafayette about troop movements, supplies, and other strategic British information. This helped the American forces to win at the Battle of Yorktown. The information that he gave to the British General Cornwallis was filled with inaccuracies.

One of the most invaluable pieces of information that Armistead supplied to Lafayette was Cornwallis's move from Portsmouth to Yorktown, along with the expected arrival of 10,000 troops at their new location. The response that General Washington and his troops initiated severely weakened Cornwallis's troops and gave Washington the Yorktown victory and ended the war.



**o. Slide 15: Summary**

In the American Revolutionary War, there were thousands of blacks that served as free blacks or slaves with the promise of freedom at the end of their service. By 1779, fifteen percent of the Continental Army was black. Every colony except South Carolina and Georgia sent black men with white men to fight in an integrated army.

Three all-black regiments discharged their duty with zeal and fidelity. The first was the Rhode Island First regiment, who fought with distinction at Newport, Monmouth, and Yorktown; the second was the Black Bucks of America of Massachusetts; and the Volunteer Chasseurs, a regiment brought over from the French allies.

Blacks fought in every battle from Lexington and Concord to Yorktown and served with devotion and bravery despite persecutions that faced them. During the war, public opinion was so strongly in favor of abolishing slavery that some towns voted to have no slaves before them.

Sadly, the promise of freedom for the brave slaves who fought in the war, was not granted for some after the war.

**Sources:**

List of Free African Americans in the Revolution

<http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/revolution.htm>

Black heroes and Founders of the Great American Revolution

<https://iusbvision.wordpress.com/2011/01/24/black-heroes-and-founders-of-the-great-american-revolution/>

***The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*** by William C. Nell, published 1855

James Armistead

<https://www.history.com/news/battle-of-yorktown-slave-spy-james-armistead>

Oliver Cromwell

<https://newsone.com/3015828/oliver-cromwell-black-soldier/>

Crispus Attucks, first casualty of American Revolution

<http://www.crispusattucksmuseum.org/crispus-attuck/>