**African Americans and the American Revolution: Where does Freedom lie??**

**Directions:** Read the following documents and judge the American Revolution from the perspective of African Americans during the period. Answer the questions that follow:

***Document 1:*** While the Patriots were ultimately victorious in the American Revolution, choosing sides and deciding whether to fight in the war was far from an easy choice for American colonists. The great majority were neutral or Loyalist. For black people, what mattered most was freedom. As the Revolutionary War spread through every region, those in bondage sided with whichever army promised them personal liberty. The British actively recruited slaves belonging to Patriot masters and, consequently, more blacks fought for the Crown. An estimated 100,000 African Americans escaped, died or were killed during the American Revolution.

Had George Washington been less ambivalent, more blacks might have participated on the Patriot side than with the Loyalists. When he took command of the Continental Army in 1775, Washington barred the further recruitment of black soldiers, despite the fact that they had fought side by side with their white counterparts at the battles of Lexington, Concord and Bunker Hill. By the winter of 1777-78, the Continental Army had dwindled to 18,000 from disease and desertion. This, together with the active recruitment of enslaved blacks by the British, finally convinced Washington to approve plans for Rhode Island to raise a regiment of free blacks and slaves. In October 1781, as Patriot and French ground forces and the French fleet surrounded Cornwallis' men at Yorktown, Virginia, the British sent their black allies to face death between the battle lines. After Cornwallis' surrender, the Americans rounded up the surviving blacks for re-enslavement. For the next year, as Loyalists withdrew from southern ports, scores of black refugees sought passage to New York -- the last British stronghold.
--PBS.org, *African in America*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Reasons to fight for the British:  |  |
| Reasons to Fight for the Patriots:  |  |
| Which choice is better- British or Patriot? Why:  |  |

***Document 2:*** Many thousands of African Americans who aided the British lost their freedom anyway. Many of them ended up in slavery in the Caribbean. Others, when they attempted to leave with the British, in places like Charleston and Savannah, were prevented. And there are incredible letters written by southerners of Africans after the siege of Charleston, swimming out to boats, and the British hacking away at their arms with cutlasses to keep them from following them. So it was a very tragic situation. And of the many thousands of Africans who left the plantations, not many of them actually got their freedom.
-- Margaret Washington, historian

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Reasons to fight for the British:  |  |
| Reasons to Fight for the Patriots:  |  |
| Which choice is better- British or Patriot? Why:  |  |

***Document 3:*** Peace was restored between America and Great Britain, which diffused universal joy among all parties, except us, who had escaped from slavery, and taken refuge in the English army; for 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 rumor filled us all with inexpressible anguish and terror, especially when we saw our old masters coming from Virginia, North-Carolina, and other parts, and seizing upon their slaves in the streets of New-York, or even dragging them out of their beds. Many of the slaves had very cruel masters, so that the thoughts of returning home with them embittered life to us. For some days we lost our appetite for food, and sleep departed from our eyes.

-- Boston King, escaped slave

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Reasons to fight for the British:  |  |
| Reasons to Fight for the Patriots:  |  |
| Which choice is better- British or Patriot? Why:  |  |

***Document 4:*** On February 14, 1778, the Rhode Island Assembly voted to allow "every able-bodied negro, mulatto, or Indian man slave in this state to enlist into either of the Continental Battalions being raised.” The assembly further stipulated that "every slave so enlisting shall, upon his passing muster before Colonel Christopher Greene, be immediately discharged from the service of his master or mistress, and be absolutely free."  Rhode Island slave owners opposed the new law fearing that consequences of armed ex-slaves on those still in bondage.  Their opposition prevailed and in June the Rhode Island Assembly repealed its law.  In that four-month period, however, over 100 free and formerly enslaved African Americans enlisted.
- 1st Rhode Island Regiment at the Battle of Bloody Run Brook,Aug. 28, 1778

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Reasons to fight for the British:  |  |
| Reasons to Fight for the Patriots:  |  |
| Which choice is better- British or Patriot? Why:  |  |

***Document 5:***

THREE POUNDS Reward.
RUN away from the fubfcriber, living in Shrewfbury, in the county of Monmouth, New-Jerfey, a NEGROE man, named TITUS, but may probably change his name; he is about 21 years of age, not very black, near 6 feet high; had on a grey homefpun coat, brown breeches, blue and white flockings, and took with him a wallet, drawn up at one end with a ftring, in which was a quantity of clothes. Whoever takes up faid Negroe, and fecures him in any goal, or brings him to me, fhall be entitled to the above reward of *Three Pounds* proc. and all reafonable charges, paid by *Nov. 8, 1775*. JOHN CORLIS.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Reasons to fight for the British:  |  |
| Reasons to Fight for the Patriots:  |  |
| Which choice is better- British or Patriot? Why:  |  |

***Document 6:*** In 1776, British troops under the command of General Billy Howe captured New York City. The city continued to be a British stronghold for the duration of the war, and large numbers of enslaved blacks sought refuge there. When the British evacuated Savannah in July, 1782 and Charleston five months later, they transported thousands of black men and women, many of whom had escaped from enslavement to Patriot masters. This emerged as an issue of protest for the Continental government, affecting the terms of the peace treaty.

Prior to the evacuation of New York, Congress instructed General Washington to obtain American property held by the British, including slaves, as stipulated under the terms of the agreement signed in Paris in November, 1782.

Sir Guy Carleton, negotiating on behalf of the British, dismayed the Americans when he expressed an intention to honor the proclamations of freedom issued by previous commanders, claiming that to do otherwise would be a "dishonorable Violation of the public Faith." Carleton proposed to compensate slave-owners for the loss of property. Carleton assigned three men to compile a register of Negroes who were eligible for evacuation from New York, and Congress appointed a three-man commission to inspect and supervise the process. For the next several months the British board and the American commission met each Wednesday at the Queen's Head, a tavern owned by Samuel Fraunces, a free black, and reviewed cases brought by slaveowners.

Within a year, the British had compiled a register of 3,000 former slaves who had joined them prior to the signing of the 1782 provisional treaty; all others were to be returned. Among the 3,000 who departed New York in November, 1783 were 1119 men, 914 women, 339 boys, 335 girls and 76 children whose gender was unidentified. Of these, the largest group comprised those who had joined the British military and therefore claimed freedom by proclamation; the second largest was those who claimed to have abandoned their master during the war; and the third largest group was those who claimed to have been born free or to have been emancipated.
--PBS.org *The Book of Negroes*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Reasons to fight for the British:  |  |
| Reasons to Fight for the Patriots:  |  |
| Which choice is better- British or Patriot? Why:  |  |

**Short Answer:***If you found yourself as a black man in 1770’s America, forced to make a choice between aiding the British Crown or the American colonists, what choices would you make? What factors would you take into consideration? Explain your thought below, being sure to incorporate details or quotes from at least 3 of the documents:*