

Figures of the American Revolution

by Don Neal

Commemorating the 250th anniversary of the United States, on April 10, 2026, in Washington, D. C., the United States Postal Service® issued the **Figures of the American Revolution** stamps featuring original portraits of 25 individuals whose vision, leadership, and sacrifices helped define the American Revolution and were vital to achieving American independence and shaping the new nation.

Representing a range of roles and perspectives, from political thinkers and military leaders to writers, diplomats, and everyday citizens, the honorees reflect the collective effort that defined the Revolution. The stamps' images feature original artwork by 12 contemporary artists and depict various women and men, including Native Americans, African Americans, and immigrants who contributed to the cause.

Between 5,000 and 10,000 African Americans — both free and enslaved — served in the American Revolution, fighting for either the Patriots or the British, often motivated by promises of freedom. They played crucial, often overlooked roles in the American Revolution. They served as soldiers, sailors, laborers, spies, nurses, teamsters, cooks, stewards, seamstresses, and camp followers on both sides of the conflict. Their participation highlighted the contradiction between the colonies' fight for liberty and the persistence of slavery.

Black minutemen fought at Lexington and Concord; dozens served at Bunker Hill, including Salem Poor, praised for bravery. Many Continental Army regiments were integrated, with Black soldiers serving alongside White and Native American troops. The 1st Rhode Island Regiment, formed in 1778, included up to 140 Black soldiers, many freed in exchange for service. It fought at Yorktown.

African Americans were indispensable participants in the American Revolution. Their service — driven by courage and the pursuit of freedom — shaped the war's outcome and laid early foundations for the abolitionist movement and the Underground Railroad.

A few of the honored people in **Figures of the American Revolution** are Black, but I took on the challenge to connect Black history to the other people in the issue because as we know but don't often learn, Black history is American history. This project not only was enlightening but also fulfilling, and I'm proud to present this additional information to you.

Meet the Artists



Alex Bostic

Raised in Brooklyn, New York, Alex Bostic earned a BFA in illustration from Pratt Institute and an MA in illustration from Syracuse University. He worked for several design studios and served as an illustrator draftsman for the U. S. Navy before opening his own studio. He has also devoted decades to teaching,

including appointments at Virginia Commonwealth University and, since 2010, Mississippi State University. His illustrations and cover art have appeared widely in magazines, books, exhibitions, and museum collections.

After more than 40 years as an illustrator, he has increasingly focused on traditional figurative painting. For this pane, Bostic created portraits of **James Armistead** and **Thomas Paine**. “It was a real honor and privilege to work on this project,” he says. “I felt a great deal of pride painting these portraits and being part of such a meaningful collaboration.”



Alex Bostic created the stamp art using casein, a milk protein-based paint that dries to a flat, matte surface with little sheen, producing an image with a firm, stable finish. Once dry, casein becomes water-resistant, and its quick setting time limits revision on the surface.

Bostic also was the artist for the 2022 Black Heritage stamp, **Edmonia Lewis**.



Julia Bottoms

Based in Buffalo, New York, Julia Bottoms creates portraits that celebrate individuality and challenge the stereotypes often found in popular media. Her work has appeared in EBONY, the New York Times, AfroPunk, Hyperallergic, and HBO’s Insecure, and is

held in the permanent collections of the Burchfield Penney Art Center, the Flint Institute of Art, and the Buffalo AKG Art Museum.

For this stamp pane, Bottoms created portraits of **Abigail Adams** and **Lemuel Haynes**, an experience she describes as deeply meaningful. “I found myself inspired by the monumental legacies of each figure,” she says. Reflecting on the project, she adds, “I can’t help but believe they would smile knowing that I — both Black and a woman — was the person to honor their stories. This is such a special moment for me both as an artist and as an American.”

Painting in oil on canvas using traditional methods, Julia Bottoms worked from a highly refined reference image and aimed to capture a classical feeling in the finished portrait. She also used references from human models to establish color, texture, and lighting for the final image.



NOTE: All of the artists and the stamps they illustrated can be viewed at www.stampsforever.com/american-revolution/artists



Gary Kelley

A lifelong fascination with the nation's past informed Gary Kelley's portraits of **John Dickinson** and **James Madison**. "I have always been interested in American history, so doing these images was a real treat," Kelley recalled. Raised and educated in Iowa, he studied at the University of Northern Iowa and received an honorary doctor of humane letters from his alma mater in 1995.



His work, which has been honored by the Society of Illustrators as Best in Show and with multiple gold and silver medals, has been exhibited across the U. S., as well as in Tokyo and Paris. Kelley illustrated nearly 30 picture books and lectured at institutions including the Smithsonian, Chicago Art Institute, Rhode Island School of Design, and Art Center College of Design. In 2006, he was inducted into the Society of Illustrators Hall of Fame.

Kelley also was the artist for the 1998 **Gospel Singers**, 2010 Black Heritage, **Oscar Micheaux**, and 2020 **Voices of the Harlem Renaissance** stamps.



Tim O'Brien

From his Brooklyn studio, Tim O'Brien brings decades of experience and meticulous skill to portraits that capture the complexity of historical figures:

Agwalongdongwas, Cornplanter, Elizabeth Freeman, John Jay, and George Washington. A native of New Haven, Connecticut, he earned a BFA from

Paier College of Art and has illustrated for *TIME*, *Esquire*, *GQ*, *Der Spiegel*, *Rolling Stone*, and *National Geographic*, as well as book publishers including HarperCollins, Penguin, Scholastic, and Simon & Schuster. The 2009 Hamilton King Award recipient and current president of the Society of Illustrators has also taught at Pratt Institute and received an honorary doctorate from Lyme Academy of Fine Art.

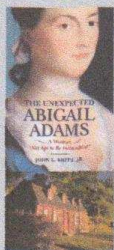


"Working on this project," O'Brien reflects, "I discovered just how messy and complicated the formation of the United States was, and how people from all walks of life shaped its story. Bringing these figures to life has been thrilling."

O'Brien also was the artist for the 2006 Black Heritage stamp, **Hattie McDaniel**, and 2021 Black Heritage stamp, **August Wilson**.



Abigail Adams / Phoebe Abdee



A staunch antislavery advocate, Abigail Adams was furious when the Declaration of Independence's "most Manly Sentiments," denouncing the slave trade, were, after debate, heavily struck from the final draft. Plain-spoken about the need for Black American freedom on paper, Abigail Adams' actions also deserved merit.



ABIGAIL ADAMS
Eloquent advocate for
American independence
and women's rights
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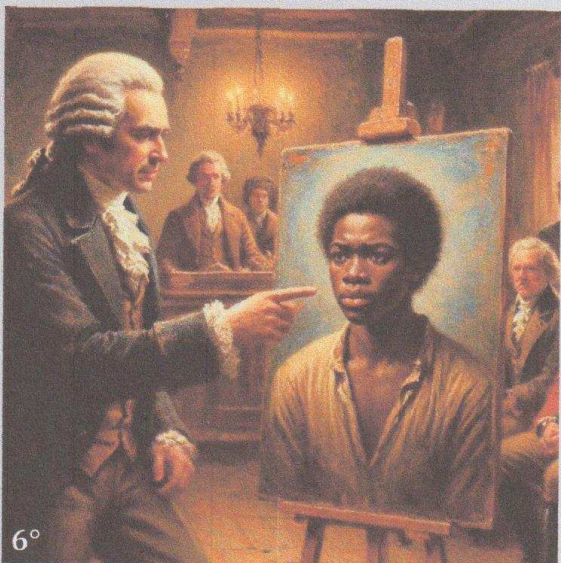
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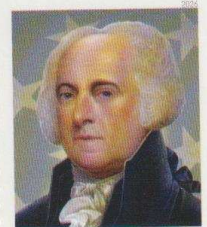
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Abigail employed her father's former slave, Phoebe Abdee, whom she loved and looked up to and whom she once called her "parent," to run the family farm. Abigail educated Black servants in her Quincy parlor. When a neighbor balked at Abigail sending one of her staff, James, to school, she argued for him in a letter to John Adams: "The boy is a freeman as much as any of the young men, and merely because his face is black, is he to be denied instruction? How is he to be qualified to procure a livelihood? Is this the Christian principle of doing to others, as we would have others do to us?" The question of James' education was settled in 1797. Three busy years later, Abigail set out for the President's House to join her husband but lost her way through the thick woods bordering Baltimore and the "wilderness city" of Washington, D.C. She hired a Black man to help her navigate the wilderness. Later, from her window in the White House, Abigail Adams observed enslaved laborers working outside the President's House, describing their conditions as deplorable, and the public display of slavery in the nation's capital distressed her.

John Adams / Crispus Attucks



After the March 5, 1770 incident in Boston, when British Redcoats fired into a crowd of colonists killing five, the soldiers and their captain were arrested. John Adams defended the eight British soldiers and their Captain Thomas Preston in the Boston Massacre trials. The case became a landmark in early American jurisprudence and a defining moment in John Adams' career.



JOHN ADAMS
Delegate to the Continental Congress,
signer of the Declaration of Independence,
and second U.S. president
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Even before independence, John Adams's views on slavery and race were more complex than most historians believe. He was not an abolitionist, nor was he especially antislavery. He never initiated an antislavery measure on the local, state, or national level. As a young man in the critical year 1765, employing a pseudonym's anonymity, he employed rabidly racist rhetoric. Even more boldly, in 1770, Adams publicly voiced contempt for Black Massachusetts martyr Crispus Attucks, a now-iconic victim of the Boston Massacre. Conducting the legal defense of the British officers charged with Attucks's murder, Adams devoted most of his defense argument to discrediting the murdered Attucks, a runaway slave and unemployed dockworker, as a violent felon. Amplifying his newspaper rhetoric from five years before, Adams peppered his speech to the jury with racial and ethnic slurs. He described Attucks and his fellow patriot rioters as "a motley rabble of saucy boys, Negroes and mulattoes, Irish teagues, and outlandish jack tars." Preston was acquitted; six of the soldiers were acquitted; two were convicted of manslaughter.

Agwalongdongwas / Louis Cook



(left) Colonel Louis of the Oneidas. John Trumbull sketched this pencil drawing in 1785. (below) Colonel Louis defiantly raises his tomahawk in *The Death of General Montgomery in the Attack on Quebec, December 31, 1775*, an 1786 oil painting by John Trumbull.

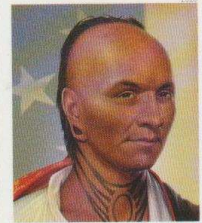


The Oneida are a proud people of the Native American Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) Nation, one of the 'Six Nations' Confederacy who had thrived in northern Pennsylvania and throughout western and northern New York. During the American Revolution, the Oneida and Tuscarora supported the Americans — apart from the Cayuga, Mohawk, Onondaga, and Seneca of their confederation who sided with the British.

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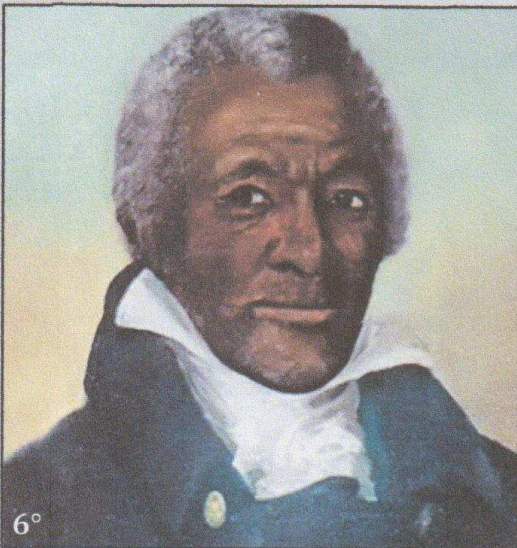
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AGWALONGDONGWAS
Oneida leader called "Good Peter," who supported American forces and worked for his people's future.
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Known to English speakers as "Good Peter," Agwalongdongwas, a leader of the Oneida nation, became a leading advocate for cooperation with the American cause. He served as a guide, interpreter, and intermediary for American forces, using his knowledge of the Mohawk Valley in New York to support movements and communication. He also acted as a diplomatic bridge, conveying messages between Native leaders and American officials. Louis Cook (Mohawk: Akiatonharónkwen) (died October 1814) was a Mohawk Haudenosaunee leader, born to an African father and an Abenaki mother. He was the highest-ranking Indigenous officer in the Continental Army during the American Revolution, achieving the rank of lieutenant colonel. He led Oneida warriors, who were allied with the rebels.

James Armistead

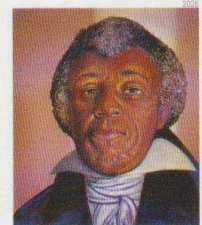


To infiltrate the enemy, James Armistead posed as a runaway slave looking for work. His cover was so convincing that he eventually was hired as a laborer and personal servant for British General Charles Cornwallis. While the British believed Armistead was a loyal servant, he actually was a master of psychological warfare.

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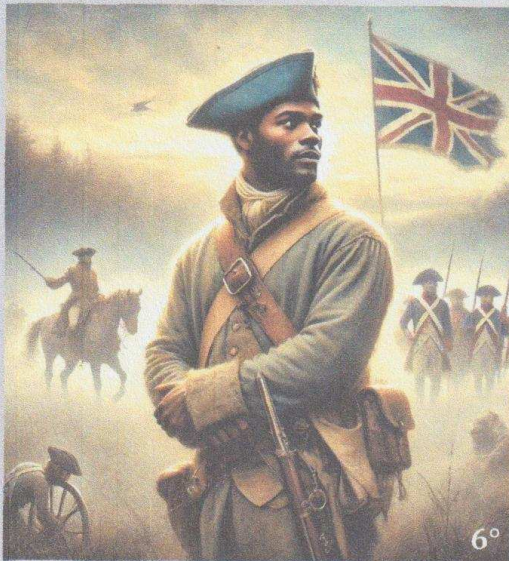
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JAMES ARMISTEAD
Enslaved African American who gathered intelligence for the Continental Army
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The American Revolution often is depicted as a clash of uniformed armies on open battlefields, but its most decisive victory actually was secured through the shadows. At the heart of this clandestine warfare was James Armistead, an enslaved man whose daring espionage turned the tide of history and paved the way for American independence. Armistead was a double agent and spy for the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. Serving under the Marquis de Lafayette in 1781, he posed as a runaway slave to infiltrate British camps, gaining the trust of Benedict Arnold and later Lord Cornwallis. His intelligence on British troop movements, supply levels, and strategic plans was pivotal to the Franco-American victory at the Siege of Yorktown, the battle that effectively ended the war. But the end of the war did not bring immediate freedom for Armistead because he was a spy rather than a formal soldier. Armistead was emancipated in 1787 after Lafayette's intervention, adopting "Lafayette" as his surname, and later received a pension.

Cornplanter/Colonel Tye

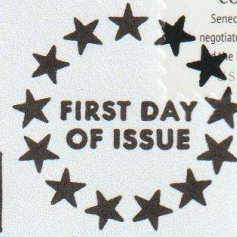


John Abeel III, the son of a Seneca woman and a Dutch trader, was known as Cornplanter and fought in the American Revolutionary War as a war chief of the four nations that allied with the British: the Mohawk, the Seneca, the Onondaga, and the Cayuga. Cornplanter played a significant role during the 1777 Siege of Fort Stanwix, the 1778 Battle of Wyoming, and led the Seneca at the Cherry Valley Massacre in 1778.



CORNPLANTER
Seneca war chief and peace negotiator between Native nations and the U.S. after the Revolution
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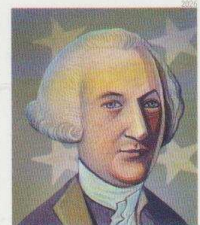
Titus Cornelius, also known famously as Colonel Tye (c. 1753 – September 1780), was an enslaved man of African descent in the Province of New Jersey who escaped from his master and fought as a Black Loyalist during the American Revolutionary War; he was known for his successful raids and battles. He fought with a volunteer corps of escaped Virginia Colony slaves in the Ethiopian Regiment, and he led the Black Brigade. He was one of the most feared and effective guerrilla leaders opposing the American patriot forces in central New Jersey. Often considered one of the most brilliant and effective Black soldiers of the Revolution, Tye made significant contributions to the British cause against American Patriots, earning his honorary title as a sign of respect for his tactical and leadership skills.

John Dickinson/John Brock



Three formerly enslaved men central to Dickinson College's post-war development: Robert Young, Noah Pinkney, and Henry Spradley

American Founding Father John Dickinson was born into a slaveholding family in 1732 in Maryland and continued to maintain his ownership of human beings well into his adulthood residing in Pennsylvania and Delaware. This created moral problems for him as sentiment in those places turned against slavery. John Dickinson's view on slavery evolved from inherited acceptance to cautious opposition. Dickinson freed his slaves, the only Founding Father to do so during his own lifetime.



JOHN DICKINSON
"Penman of the Revolution," whose writings articulated America's revolutionary ideals
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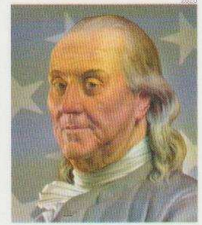
Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, was chartered on September 9, 1783, making it one of the first colleges established after the formation of the United States. The college, named in honor of John Dickinson, was founded by Benjamin Rush, a Founding Father and signer of the Declaration of Independence who was well known for his strong antislavery views. Yet, he came from a slaveholding family, married into a prominent slaveholding family from New Jersey (the Stocktons), and held slaves within his own household as a doctor in Philadelphia. At least 60% of Dickinson's founding board of trustees were slaveholders who were closely involved in the construction of the first college buildings, supplying both materials and enslaved labor. Dickinson's first Black graduate was John Brock in 1901.

Benjamin Franklin / Phillis Wheatley

6°



Playwright Debra Wiess presents *Uplifting Every Story: Writing for Liberation and Justice*, a 70-minute one-act play about the little-known meeting in 1773 between two of Boston's Colonial icons: enslaved African Poetess Phillis Wheatley and American Founding Father Benjamin Franklin.



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN
Signer of the Declaration of Independence,
first U.S. Postmaster General, and president
of the nation's oldest abolition society
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A Revolutionary Encounter in London

*A Conversation Between
Phillis Wheatley and
Benjamin Franklin*

A play by Debbie Wiess



FREE Admission **BOSTON TEA PARTY** July 6 & 7 at 7pm
*Registration Required **FRANKLIN CENTER** 706 Congress Street, Boston

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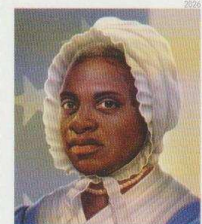
Phillis Wheatley, the first published African-American poet, traveled to London in 1773 to finalize arrangements for the publication of her book *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*. During this visit, she was introduced to several prominent figures, including Benjamin Franklin, who met her face-to-face and was impressed by her intelligence and poetic talent. This meeting occurred despite some objections from loyalist members of the Wheatley family, reflecting the social and political tensions of the time, but the meeting with Franklin remains a notable historical event because it validated Wheatley's literary abilities to influential figures in both America and Britain. This meeting is commemorated in historical plays and reenactments.

Elizabeth Freeman



6°

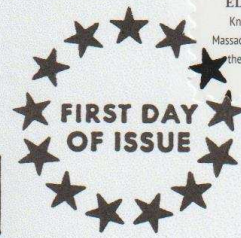
Courageous, clever, selfless, steadfast, iron-willed, and independent, a woman stood up to a great injustice and won. History books rarely mention the lawsuit that bore her name — *Bett and Brom v. Ashley*. And the argument was simple yet radical, and its ruling that state law did not support slavery was cited in other high-profile freedom suits. By the time of the 1790 federal census, there were no recorded slaves in Massachusetts.



ELIZABETH FREEMAN
Known as Mumbet, used the 1780
Massachusetts Constitution to help secure
the abolition of slavery in the state.
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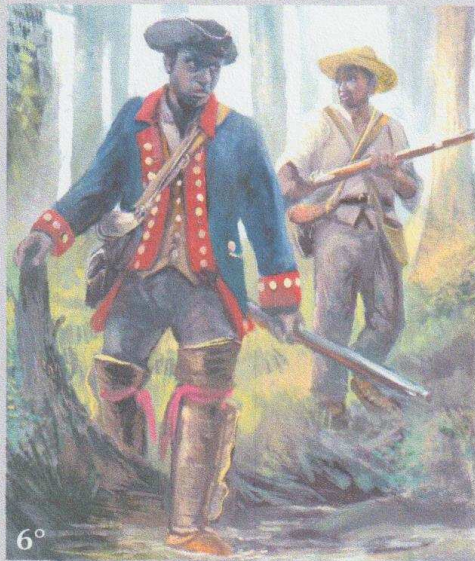
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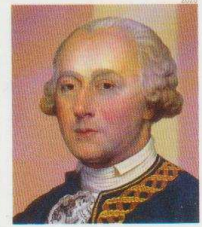


In 1780, the woman was known only as "Mum-Bett," an enslaved laborer, sent as a wedding gift when she was only a teenager, in the Sheffield, Massachusetts home of Colonel John Ashley. He was one of the White revolutionaries that drafted the Sheffield Declaration, a precursor to the Declaration of Independence written in 1773. It was a public reading of the newly ratified state constitution, which asserted that "All men are born free and equal," that prompted Bett to solicit a lawyer, Theodore Sedgwick, to make her case in court. He added another of Ashley's slaves, a man named Brom, to the suit. On August 21, 1781, the all-White, all-male jury ruled that Brom and Bett were indeed granted their freedom simply because *all* people were owed freedom. It said so right there in the constitution. Following the court decision, Bett changed her name to Elizabeth Freeman, joined the Sedgwick household as a paid domestic worker and governess, and eventually saved enough to purchase a house and land for herself and her children.

Bernardo de Gálvez / Noël Carrière



During the American Revolutionary War, Spanish Governor Bernardo de Gálvez led a diverse, multicultural force in Louisiana that included free and enslaved Black soldiers. While Spain did not declare war on Britain until 1779, Gálvez had been supporting the American cause since 1778 and specifically requested free and enslaved Black sharpshooters or *tireurs on chasseur*, valued for their marksmanship and ability to operate in difficult terrain, to accompany him during the Mississippi River Campaign.



BERNARDO DE GÁLVEZ
Governor of Spanish Louisiana who aided patriots and drove the British from West Florida
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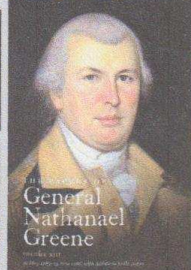
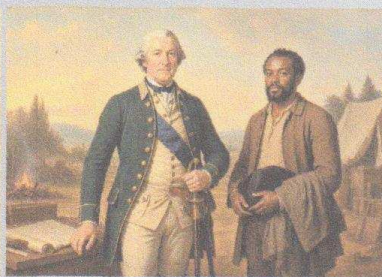
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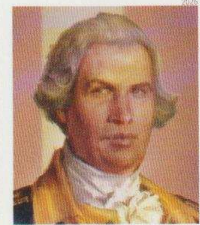
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Spain's long-standing practice of arming Africans and their descendants in the Spanish colonies meant that Black soldiers were familiar with military service before the American Revolution. They served alongside Acadian exiles, free Black militiamen, indigenous allies, and Canary Island settlers and joined Gálvez's Spanish troops to defeat British forces at Manchac and Baton Rouge, and to capture key cities such as Pensacola, Mobile, Biloxi, and Natchez. Gálvez's recognition of Black soldiers' contributions was significant. Their service helped secure the Gulf Coast for the American cause, and their descendants are recognized as Patriots by organizations such as the Sons of the American Revolution. Noël Carrière, born on a plantation downriver from New Orleans to African-born enslaved parents in 1745, purchased his own freedom in 1771 and became second lieutenant of Louisiana's free Black militia. He was commended for his leadership and bravery by Governor Bernardo de Gálvez in the Battles of Baton Rouge (1779), Mobile (1781), and Pensacola (1781) that ended British control of West Florida.

Nathanael Greene / George Sambo



Nathanael Greene, a Rhode Island-born Quaker and one of George Washington's most trusted generals, is remembered for his strategic leadership through maneuver warfare to weaken British control in the Southern theater of the American Revolutionary War—earning nicknames like "The Savior of the South" and "The Fighting Quaker." However, his legacy is complicated by the fact that he also was a slaveholder.



NATHANAEL GREENE
Quaker and skillful general whose tactics turned the tide of war by ending the British occupation of the South
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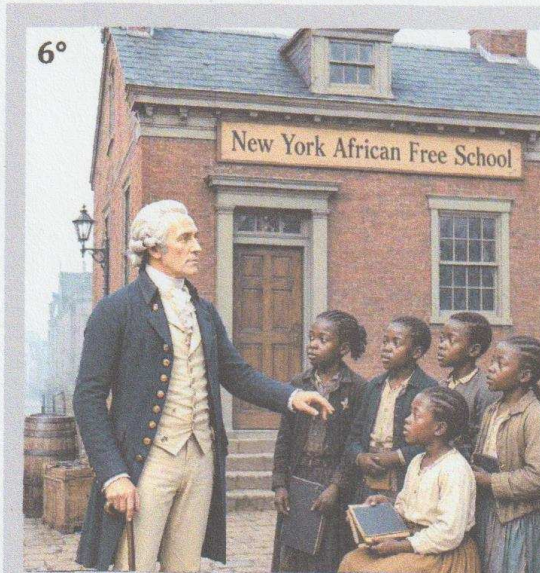
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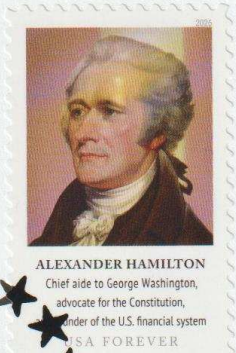
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During the war, General Nathanael Greene would come to rely upon the use of personal servants, including formerly enslaved men from within the regiments and from his own home. The specific duties of a personal servant for an officer included cooking, cleaning the officer's quarters, bathing, and dressing the officer, and tending to his personal grooming. A servant might run errands and deliver messages containing orders to fellow officers. One well documented servant of Greene's during the war was George Sambo, a free man of likely of Black and Indigenous heritage. Sambo enlisted in the Ninth Rhode Island Regiment of Continentals in early 1776 and in the First Rhode Island Regiment of Continentals in May 1777. Sambo had survived the Battle of Rhode Island and the brutal winter encampment at Valley Forge. In the spring of 1778 while at Valley Forge, he began serving as a waiter to General Greene. Sambo served with Greene during the Rhode Island Campaign and later in New York, where he died on October 1, 1779. In October 1780, Washington appointed Greene to command the Southern theater.

Alexander Hamilton / NY African Free School

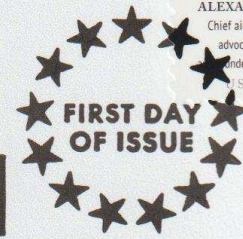


Alexander Hamilton led a conflicting lifestyle regarding slavery. He is not known to have enslaved people, although his family did. When most White leaders doubted the capacity of Blacks, Hamilton believed slavery was morally wrong and wrote that "their natural faculties are as good as ours."



ALEXANDER HAMILTON
Chief aide to George Washington,
advocate for the Constitution,
founder of the U.S. financial system
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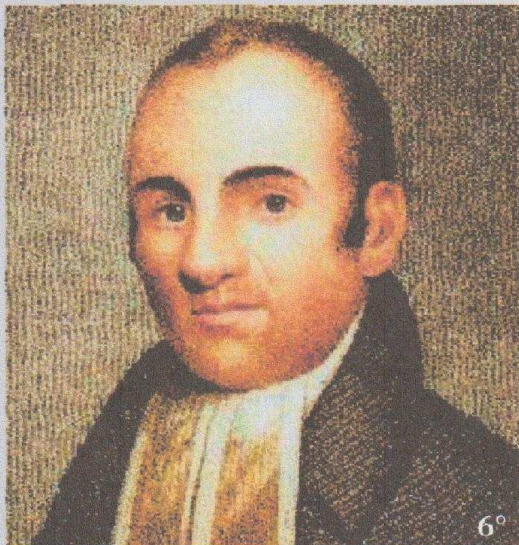
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Hamilton was active during the Revolutionary War in trying to raise Black troops for the Continental Army with the promise of freedom. In the 1780s and 1790s, he generally opposed pro-slavery southern interests, which he saw as hypocritical to the values of the American Revolution. In 1785, Hamilton had been among the founders of the New York Manumission Society, which successfully promoted the abolition of the international slave trade in New York City. He served as the secretary of the organization, which established the New York African Free School and aided in the passage of a 1799 state law that freed the children of enslaved people. However, as a New York delegate to the 1787 Constitutional Convention, Hamilton saw the need for compromise in order to establish a new, strong federal government, so he supported the so-called "three-fifths" clause, which counted each enslaved worker as three-fifths of a person for the purposes of determining state population. Hamilton asserted to the New York Ratifying Convention, "Without this indulgence, no union could have possibly been formed."

Lemuel Haynes



Lemuel Haynes quotes the Declaration of Independence heavily in "Liberty Further Extended," underscoring the former's emphasis on equality and liberty as unalienable rights and pointing out its irreconcilability with the institution of slavery. "An African, or, in other terms, ... a Negro ... has an undeniable right to his Liberty" — equally "as good a right ... in common with Englishmen."



LEMUEL HAYNES
Military veteran and ordained
minister who condemned African
American enslavement
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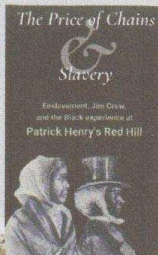


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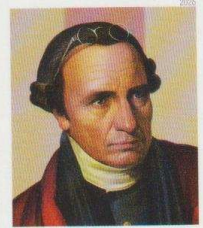
In 1776, Lemuel Haynes was a young veteran of the War of Independence who was envisioning his future. He had been an indentured servant from his birth as a bi-racial child in 1753 to his coming of age in 1774 when he began training as a Minute Man. He marched in the militia from western Massachusetts to Roxbury after the Boston Massacre in 1775. He traveled to Fort Ticonderoga to secure the prize, taken months earlier by Ethan Allen, in 1776. His service finished, he began writing. Two of his early manuscripts — "The Battle of Lexington" and "Liberty Further Extended" — deserve attention as we observe the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. After producing these two works, Haynes traded labor on farms for tutoring in theology, Latin, and Greek, and he successfully sought ordination in 1785. From 1792 to 1821, he was the most prolific Black American author, crafting not only theological works but also social commentary touching on racism, slavery, and the legacy of the American Revolution.

Patrick Henry / Red Hill

6°



Like many of his compatriots who pursued liberty for the colonies, Patrick Henry had a deeply complicated relationship with slavery. As the Voice of the Revolution, Henry campaigned eloquently for liberty above all else and famously declared, "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!"



PATRICK HENRY
Orator whose passionate speeches rallied the patriots against British rule
USA FOREVER

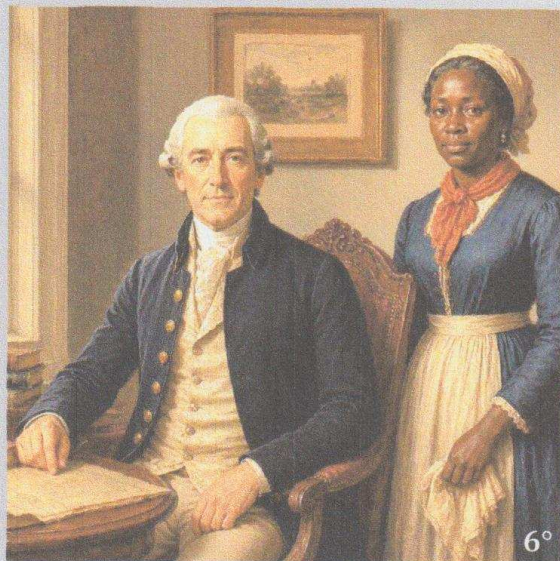
FIGURES OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



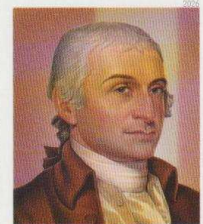
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And yet, as an enslaver, he partook in a practice that was the height of hypocrisy. Red Hill was not just the home of a prominent Founding Father; it is a repository of stories that stretch back before European colonization. Tradition also says an indigenous man named James lived in a nearby cave, the last of a generation of first peoples to do so. James may have fathered a woman who would later give birth to Harrison Henry, an enslaved man at Red Hill. Red Hill, the working 2,930-acre tobacco plantation, was Patrick Henry's last home and burial site. In July 1799, just one month after his death, 67 enslaved people lived on the property in what was known as Quarter Place. They were responsible for cultivating tobacco, growing wheat and corn, caring for the livestock, working in the main house, and operating the tannery, distillery, plantation store, and blacksmith shop. Harrison Henry lived with the family since childhood. Around the age of 108, Harrison outlived three generations of White Henrys at Red Hill. He continued to live on the property after emancipation. Harrison's Cabin can still be visited at Red Hill.

John Jay / Abigail



Abigail, an African woman enslaved by John Jay, is remembered for her brief but significant role in the final days of the American Revolutionary War. No primary documentation details Abigail's exact origins—such as her birth, African provenance, or initial enslavement—but the Jay household enslaved Abigail since at least 1776. Abigail was one of at least 17 people Jay enslaved.



JOHN JAY
Skilled diplomat who helped negotiate the Treaty of Paris, securing U.S. independence
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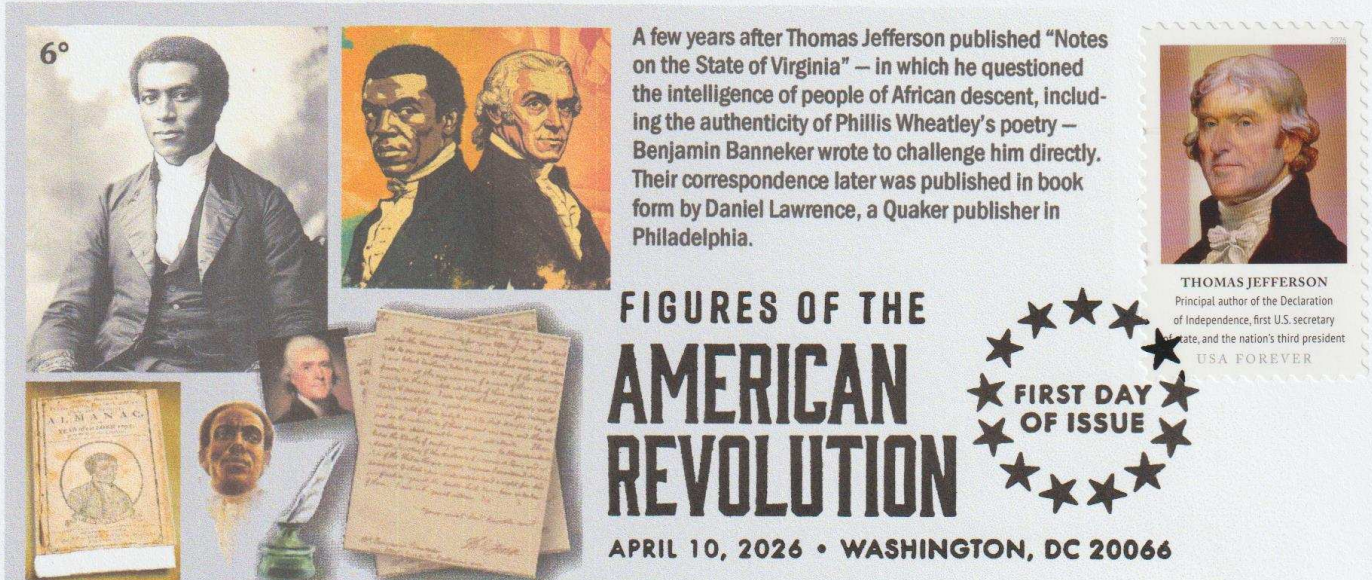
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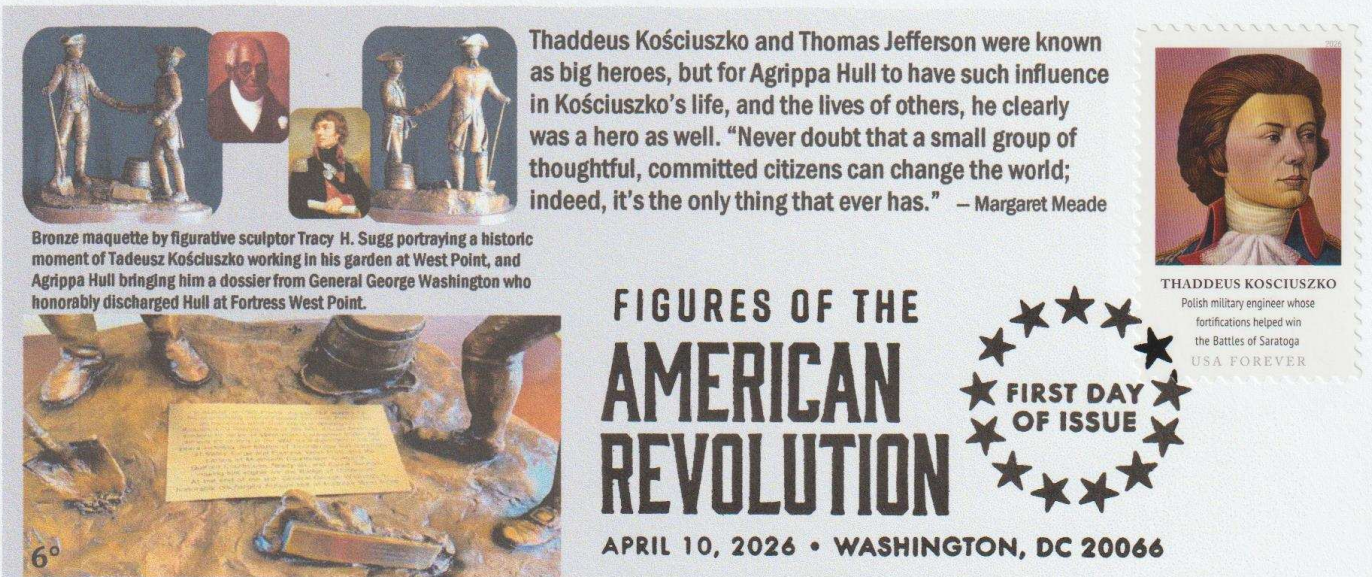
In 1779, Abigail was the only enslaved person Jay and his family took on their trip to Paris where Jay helped negotiate the Treaty of Paris to secure America's independence. Abigail's duties encompassed personal care, household assistance, and childcare, earning praise from Sarah Jay for her "attention & proofs of fidelity." However, Abigail experienced notable isolation amid Paris's sizable free Black population, with limited social connections and separation from family back home. In Paris, slavery's bonds loosened just enough to permit Abigail to rethink her future. In October 1783, Abigail left Jay's home, intending not to return. Paris police searched for Abigail and found her, and she was detained in the city jail, as suggested by Benjamin Franklin, where she contracted a severe illness, compounded by the harsh conditions of incarceration. Abigail asked to "come home" to the Jays and died within two weeks of release. Much of what we know about Abigail comes from the surviving letters of John Jay, Benjamin Franklin, and their families; otherwise, no grave, records, or signs of her life remain.

Thomas Jefferson / Benjamin Banneker



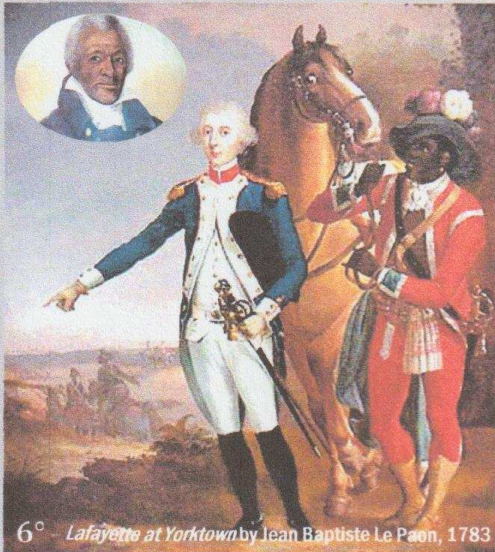
In his August 19, 1791, letter, Benjamin Banneker, a free Black mathematician, astronomer, and surveyor, addressed Jefferson with respect while confronting the widespread assumptions about Black intellectual inferiority. He sent a manuscript of his forthcoming almanac as evidence of his scientific and mathematical abilities, aiming to counter Jefferson's earlier assertions in "Notes on the State of Virginia." Drawing parallels between the colonists' struggle for independence and the oppression of Black people, Banneker appealed to Jefferson's Christian and moral values, emphasizing that all humans are created by one universal Father and endowed with the same faculties, regardless of race. Citing the biblical story of Job, Banneker urged Jefferson to empathize with the enslaved — "put your soul in their souls' stead" — and to use his influence to promote justice and dignity. While Jefferson's response was polite and expressed a belief in racial equality, it was ambivalent in light of his role as a slaveholder, and Jefferson's later writings suggest he doubted Banneker's independent authorship of the almanac.

Thaddeus Kosciuszko / Agrippa Hull



Somewhere between 300 and 400 Black men served in the Continental Army during the battle of Saratoga, one of the moments credited with the turning the tide during the American Revolution. One of those men was Agrippa Hull — a free Black man who served for nearly six years, most of them as a batman or orderly, assigned as a personal servant to Thaddeus Kosciuszko, a military engineer from Poland who was the mastermind architect of the Continental Army's successful stand at the Battle of Saratoga. Hull served at Kosciuszko's side, sending messages, getting his uniforms ready, preparing his tent, whatever Kosciuszko needed. But the two had a much deeper relationship because Kosciuszko's service with Black soldiers, particularly Hull, had a great impact on him. Kosciuszko came to admire the young men, and Hull was the inspiration behind Kosciuszko's effort to free hundreds of American slaves. But that goal, clearly stipulated in his will, ended up being thwarted by his friend — founding father Thomas Jefferson.

Marquis de Lafayette / James Armistead



Marquis de La Fayette, in a letter published by *The Liberator*, a weekly abolitionist newspaper printed and published in Boston by William Lloyd Garrison, said, "I would never have drawn my sword in the cause of America, if I could have conceived that thereby I was founding a land of Slavery."



MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE
French general who played a key role in the Continental Army's victory at Yorktown
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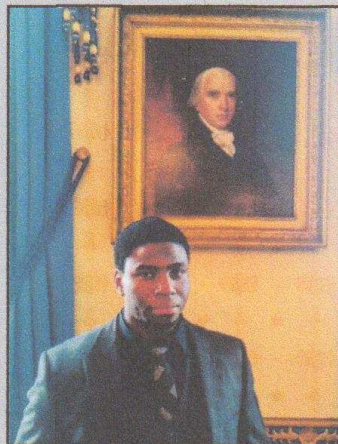
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James Armistead Lafayette was an enslaved Black man who served the Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War under the Marquis de Lafayette, who was a French military officer and politician who commanded Continental Army troops in the decisive siege of Yorktown in 1781, the Revolutionary War's final major battle, which secured American independence. Lafayette, aware of James' enslaved status, instructed him to pose as a runaway slave to gain access to British forces. As a double agent, James infiltrated Benedict Arnold's camp and worked in Lord Charles Cornwallis' headquarters and fed the British false information while delivering accurate intelligence to the Americans. His reports on British troop movements and strategies were critical in the American victory at Yorktown. Despite his vital contributions, James remained enslaved after the war. He adopted "Lafayette" as his surname in gratitude to Marquis de Lafayette, a staunch opponent of slavery, whose advocacy led to James' manumission in 1787.

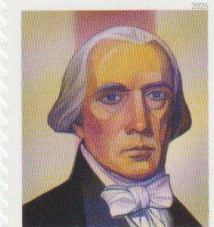
James Madison / Paul Jennings



Above: Okieriete Onaodowan in front of historical James Madison portrait. Top right: brick mosaic of Sawney as a child. Right: Paul Jennings



James Madison popularly was acclaimed for his pivotal role in drafting and promoting the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights. He also owned more than 100 enslaved Black Americans at his Montpelier plantation and maintained complex, often contradictory views — criticizing slavery as morally wrong while continuing to profit from enslaved labor throughout his life. Upon becoming the fourth President of the United States in 1809, he brought slaves to serve him in the White House.



JAMES MADISON
Key architect of the Constitution, co-author of *The Federalist*, and fourth U.S. president
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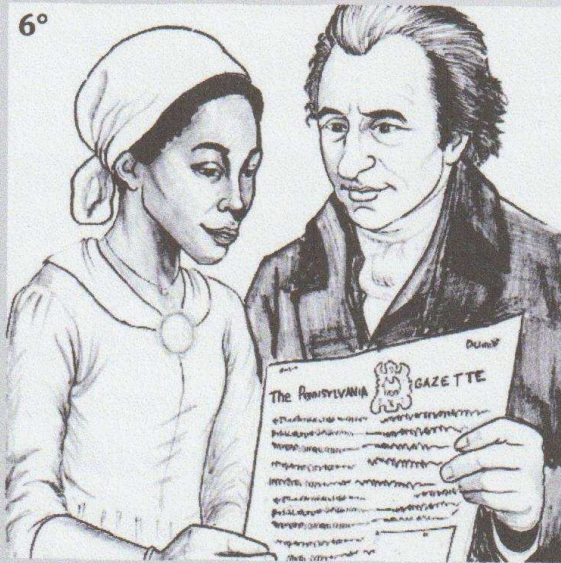


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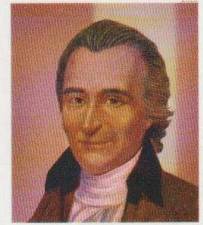
Throughout his life, James Madison (1751-1836) had long relationships with specific enslaved individuals. Sawney, born about the same year as Madison, traveled with him to Princeton University in 1769 and was the overseer of a tract at Montpelier by 1785. In 1780, Madison brought a 21-year-old slave named Billey to attend to him at the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. Madison's maternal grandmother had deeded Billey to 8-year-old Madison when Billey was an infant. He became a constant companion to Madison in his youth. Billey was the only slave Madison would ever emancipate, and after his manumission, Billey took the name William Gardner and remained in contact with Madison until his death in 1795. Paul Jennings (1799-1874), born at Montpelier, served as Madison's footman and body servant during two presidential terms (1809-1817), after which he returned to Montpelier and joined the elderly Sawney, who now cared for Madison's ailing mother. Jennings' most valuable contribution to history is his memoir, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*. Ironically, Okieriete Onaodowan, an American actor and singer of Nigerian lineage, originated the dual roles of Hercules Mulligan and ... James Madison ... in the 2015 Broadway musical *Hamilton*.

Thomas Paine / Phillis Wheatley

6°



Phillis Wheatley's patriotic poetry was so popular that it was sold in Europe. Thomas Paine included her work in his publication *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. Thomas Paine's books and newspaper were the most prominent voices for the Revolutionary War.



THOMAS PAINE
Author of influential pamphlet
Common Sense, which helped convince
the colonists to break with Britain
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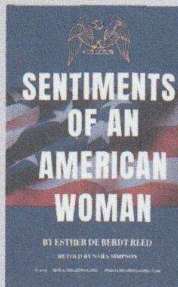
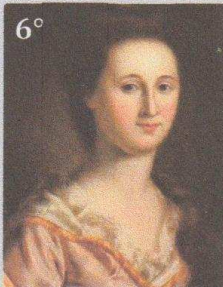


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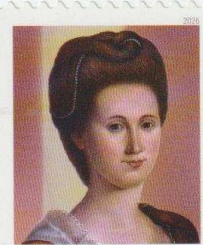
Around the time of the Revolutionary war, a movement called the Age of Reason began to encourage logical thinking. The Age of Reason had a significant impact on many colonial American writers such as Phillis Wheatley and Thomas Paine. Paine was born in 1737 in Thetford, England. After brief stints as a sailor and tax official, Paine was introduced to Benjamin Franklin in London in 1774 and subsequently moved to Philadelphia and was a supporter of the American Revolution. As anger at Great Britain deepened and armed conflict erupted in the American colonies, Paine wrote his most famous pamphlet, *Common Sense*, which appeared in January 1776. Paine's *The American Crisis* contains his famous words, "These are the times that try men's souls."

Esther de Berdt Reed / Absalom Jones

6°



Esther de Berdt was born in London, England, in October 1746. She met Joseph Reed, a law student from New Jersey, in London in 1763. They wed in 1770 and then moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. While Joseph was president of the Supreme Executive Council of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Esther was active in the American Revolutionary War as a civic leader for soldiers' relief and organized a fundraiser with the Ladies Association of Philadelphia in 1780, raising over \$300,000 for the Continental Army. Just months later, she died from dysentery.

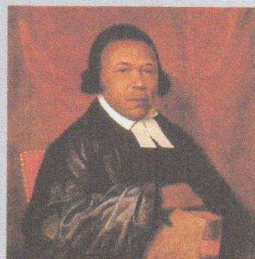
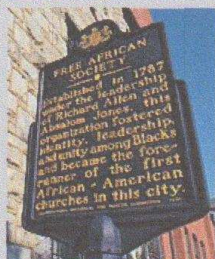


ESTHER DE BERDT REED
Author of "The Sentiments of an American
Woman," which helped raise funds
for the Continental Army
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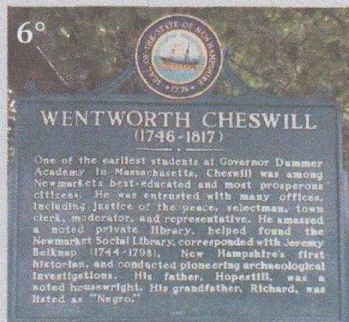


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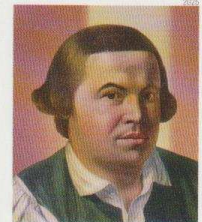


Absalom Jones was born into slavery in Delaware in November 1746. Inspired by revolutionary ideals, his enslaver manumitted him in 1784. Jones became an abolitionist and clergyman who was prominent in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. During the war, Jones lived in a period of political ferment and religious revival, but disillusioned by racial discrimination in White-led churches, he founded the Free African Society with Richard Allen in 1787, a mutual aid society for Black Americans in the city. The Free African Society included many people newly freed from slavery after the American Revolutionary War. In 1794, Jones founded the first Black Episcopal congregation; in 1802, he was the first Black American to be ordained as a priest in the Episcopal Church of the United States. He died in 1818.

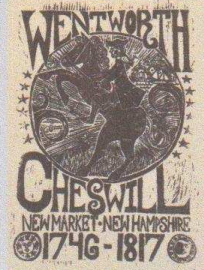
Paul Revere / Wentworth Cheswell



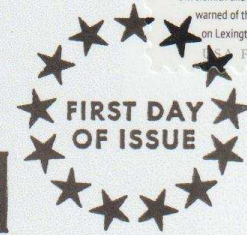
Before the more famous ride in April 1775 from Boston to Concord and Lexington and the "shot heard around the world," came the 66-mile wintry ride in December 1774. Paul Revere carried information to neighbors in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where the grandson of a slave and son of a free Black man, Wentworth Cheswell, of Newmarket, rode to Exeter as a member of the secret network of patriot messengers, or dispatch riders, to help organize the resistance.



PAUL REVERE
Silversmith and artisan who famously warned of the British advance on Lexington and Concord



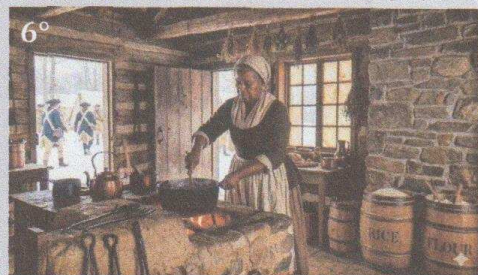
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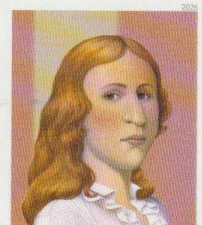
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Wentworth Cheswell was born on April 11, 1746, to a biracial father, Hopeskill Cheswell (sometimes spelled Cheswill), and Katherine Keniston, who was White. Hopeskill was the son of a White woman and an enslaved Black man, Richard Cheswell, who eventually bought his freedom, and in 1717, he purchased 20 acres of land in Newmarket, New Hampshire. On December 13, 1774, Wentworth rode with Paul Revere to warn Portsmouth citizens of the approach of two British warships. The British intended to retake gunpowder and weapons stolen by the colonists from Fort William and Mary in Portsmouth Harbor. Wentworth Cheswell then rode to Exeter to find out from the Committee of Correspondence where the Newmarket volunteers should go. The next day, 400 New Hampshire men marched on the fort and forced it to surrender. The ships never arrived, but the patriots used the gunpowder and weapons in the Siege of Boston. When the American Revolution broke out in earnest, Cheswell enlisted in Col. John Langdon's Company of Light Horse Volunteers and fought at the Battle of Saratoga. Cheswell died March 8, 1817.

Deborah Sampson / Hannah Archer Till



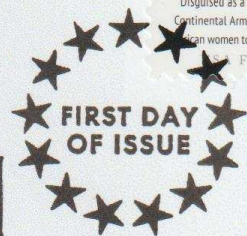
Free and enslaved Black people served in the Continental Army and colonial militias. Many women contributed as soldiers, sailors, laborers, spies, guides, and battlefield support personnel such as cooks, laundresses, and nurses. Others joined British Loyalist units like the Ethiopian Regiment, which was formed to recruit Black soldiers, including women, for combat and engineering work.



DEBORAH SAMPSON
Disguised as a man to serve in the Continental Army and one of the first African women to earn a military pension



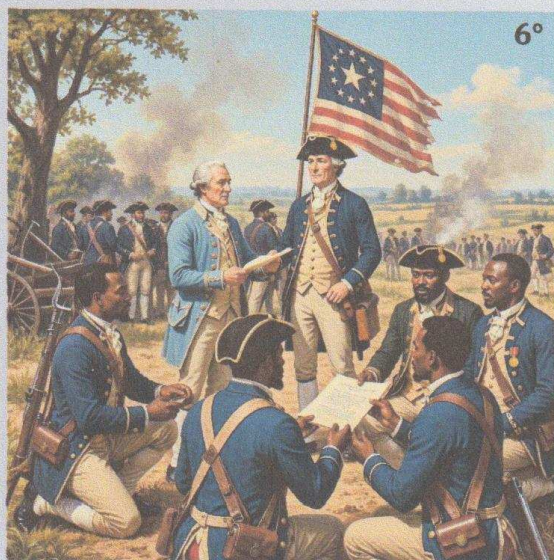
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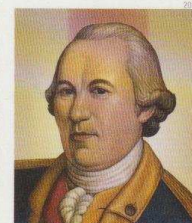
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The closest Black counterpart to Deborah Sampson is Hannah Archer Till, a formerly enslaved woman who directly served the Continental Army and appears alongside Sampson in historical discussions of hidden Revolutionary-era participants. Like Sampson — who disguised herself as a man to fight — Till (c. 1721 – 1826) provides a parallel narrative for Black Americans — showing how enslaved and free Black individuals contributed to the Revolutionary cause despite racial barriers and lack of recognition. For six and a half years, Till worked as a paid cook and personal servant for General George Washington and accompanied him on all of his American Revolutionary War campaigns and was present at Valley Forge. She was honored as a Patriot by the Daughters of the American Revolution in 2015.

Baron von Steuben/Salem Poor



6° Baron Friedrich von Steuben, a Prussian-born military officer, had a major role in the American Revolutionary War by reforming the Continental Army into a disciplined and professional fighting force. Arriving at Valley Forge on February 23, 1778, he reported for duty as a volunteer drill master. His involvement in the American Revolutionary War included at Valley Forge (PA), Battle of Monmouth (NJ), Battle of Blandford — a.k.a the Battle of Petersburg (VA), and the Siege of Yorktown (VA).



BARON VON STEUBEN
Prussian military officer who helped professionalize and transform the Continental Army into a formidable force
FOREVER

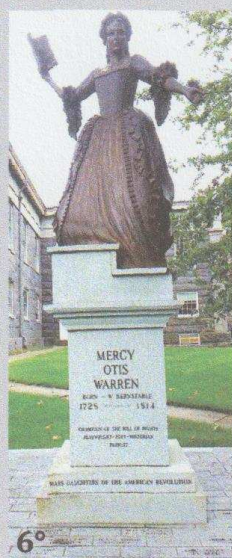
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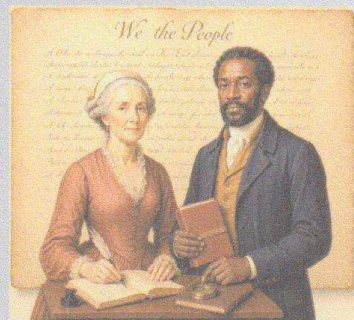
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Von Steuben drilled the soldiers, improving their battle and formation techniques. Under his leadership, the Continentals practiced volley fire, improved their maneuverability, standardized their march paces, exercised skirmishing operations, and drilled bayonet proficiency. These new efforts to train and discipline the army also improved morale among the soldiers. Increasing military efficiency, morale, and discipline improved the army's well being, along with a better supply of food and arms. One of the first results of von Steuben's training was in evidence at the Battle of Monmouth on June 28, 1778. The following enslaved and free Blacks served in the Battle of Monmouth: Salem Poor, Henry Hill, Oliver Cromwell, Samuel Charlton, and Peter Salem. Poor later was honored with a petition from the Massachusetts legislature. Hill later was buried with honors. Cromwell received a military pension and medal from General Washington. Charlton received General Washington's commendation for his courage and devotion to the cause of liberty. Salem received honors for his service from General Washington.

Mercy Otis Warren/Benjamin Banneker



6° Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814) and Benjamin Banneker (1731-1806) were two prominent figures in early American history. While there is no direct historical record of Warren and Banneker meeting, both were active in the intellectual and civic life of the early United States. Warren's political writings and historical scholarship reflected Enlightenment ideals, much like Banneker's work in science, surveying, and abolitionism. Both challenged the Constitution and prevailing norms — Banneker as a Black man in a predominantly White, male-dominated field, and Warren as a woman in a male-dominated political sphere. Their lives and works exemplify the diverse contributions of early Americans to the nation's founding.



MERCY OTIS WARREN
Poet, playwright, and historian whose works chronicled the Revolution
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Although she had no formal education, Mercy Otis Warren studied with her brothers and became a skilled political writer, historian, and central figure in the Patriot cause. She used the pseudonym "A Columbian Patriot" to publish political satires and plays that criticized British rule and promoted independence, and she was one of few women to publicly engage in the heated debates and conversations about the ratification of the Constitution. Similar to other Anti-Federalists opinions, Warren criticized the Constitution in her profound pamphlet, *Observations on the New Constitution, and on the Federal and State Conventions* (1788), where she shared concerns such as the Constitution not setting limits on judicial power, lack of office rotations or term limits for federal officials, the Founding Fathers' contradictory owning of enslaved individuals while fighting in word and deed for liberty from the "slavery" imposed upon them by Great Britain, and Congress determining their own salaries. Her biggest criticism was that the Constitution contained no bill of rights and guaranteed no protection of individual civil liberties.

George Washington/Phillis Wheatley

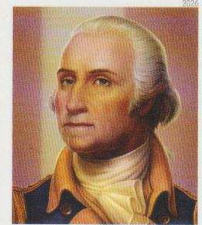


Phillis Wheatley wrote inspiring poems about General George Washington and the Colonial Army. Washington took time during the war to meet with her to personally thank her for her contribution to the war effort. Historians disagree whether Wheatley and Washington ever did meet in person.

Celestial choir! enthron'd in realms of light,
Columbia's scenes of glorious toils I write;
While freedom's cause her anxious breast alarms,
She flashes dreadful in refulgent arms.
Shall I to Washington their praise recite?
Enough thou know'st them in the fields of fight
Thee, first in place and honours,—we demand
The grace and glory of thy martial hand.
Fann'd for thy valour, for thy virtues mov'd...
Prove'd, great chief, with virtue on thy side,
Thy ev'ry action let the goddess guide.
A crown, a mansion, and a throne that shine,
With gold unading, Washington! be thine.
Hear every tongue thy guardian aid implore!

Phillis Wheatley
Poem dedicated to
George Washington, 1775

6°



GEORGE WASHINGTON
Commander in chief of
the Continental Army
and first U.S. president
USA FOREVER

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Phillis Wheatley was a strong supporter of the fight for independence from Britain and used her poetry to show support for the movement. She wrote a poem in 1776 titled "To His Excellency General Washington" in which she praised the military commander of the Continental Army, George Washington. She sent her poem with a letter to General Washington, who would one day be the first U. S. president. Washington appreciated her poetry so much that he invited her to visit him in his quarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in March 1776, just months before the official start of the American Revolution. In her poems, Wheatley often wrote of Columbia, a goddess used to symbolize the United States. It is where the District of Columbia, the nation's capital, gets its name.

The American Revolution was never the work of a single visionary or small circle of founders. Highlighting 25 individuals, the **Figures of the American Revolution** stamps display a compelling cross-section of the complexity that defined the Revolutionary era, revealing the overlapping efforts that pushed the colonies toward independence and shaped the uncertain years that followed.

Some of the other stamps that relate to this topic —

