

Half a Revolution

“A rich man’s war and a poor man’s fight.” This much-quoted phrase seems as relevant today as it did during the Revolutionary War. The documents in “Half a Revolution” illustrate this fight and the way in which it was carried out during and immediately after the Revolutionary War. Independence, it seems, did not bring an end to the fighting between various “factions.” To Joseph Plumb Martin, the “poor soldiers” served their country well during the war, but afterward “they were turned adrift like old worn-out horses.” Samuel Dewees recalled that the soldiers at York “were afraid to say or to do any thing” for fear of punishment, and Dewees avoided encountering officers lest they might “construe my conduct in some way or other into an offense.” Henry Knox described the need of “men of reflection, and principle” to be protected “in their lawful pursuits” from “the violence of lawless men.” And James Madison worried about ways to control “the majority” who may be led by “the mischiefs of faction.”

These factions, and the way in which both the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution dealt with them, resulted in “half a revolution.” Indeed, a revolution in its entirety would have required an end to class conflict by welcoming American Indians into North American society, outlawing slavery, and granting equal rights to American women—in other words, creating a new society characterized by economic, social, racial, and political equality.

Document-Based Questions

JOSEPH CLARKE’S LETTER

1. Why did the sight of Colonel John Worthington raise the “spirits” of the citizens of Springfield? Why were the ordinary people so upset by his actions?
2. Do you think the beliefs and actions of the colonists in Springfield,

Massachusetts, were typical of colonists in other regions of the British colonies?

3. What words and phrases did Joseph Clarke use to describe the spirit and atmosphere that accompanied rebellion? How do these descriptions compare and contrast with those you might use to describe a rebellion? Do you think Clarke was in favor of the rebellion or against it? How and why?

JOSEPH PLUMB MARTIN

1. Summarize Joseph Plumb Martin's grievances about his treatment at the hands of the Continental Army during the war. Do you think Martin's experiences during his enlistment in the Continental Army were similar to those of other soldiers who served during the Revolutionary War? How and why?
2. In explaining his experiences after the war, Martin claims, "The truth was, none cared for them; the country was served, and faithfully served, and that was all that was deemed necessary. It was, soldiers, look to yourselves; we want no more of you" (p. 96). How does he support this assertion throughout the letter?
3. Martin wrote his "Narrative" fifty-four years after his experiences in the Revolutionary War. For whom do you think he wrote this letter? Would it have had a different audience, and a different purpose, in 1830 than it would have if he had written it in 1783? How and why?

SAMUEL DEWEES

1. Why do you think the officers in charge ordered such a brutal punishment? Why did they force the soldiers to "look upon the bodies" after they were shot and killed?
2. Dewees remarked that the offenses for which the men were shot appeared to be "trivial." How might such extreme punishment for trivial offenses affect the relationship between the soldiers and officers? Do you think, as Howard Zinn posits, that this was yet another example of "class conflict inside the Revolutionary Army" (p. 100)? Why, or why not?
3. Do you think that Dewees really believed his statement that "[t]he execution

of these men . . . was undoubtedly brought about by a love of liberty, the good of country, and the necessity of keeping proper subordination in the army, in order to ensure that good ultimately”? Provide support for your answer with quotes from his recollection.

HENRY KNOX

1. How did Henry Knox see the new federal constitution as working “inversely to the public good” (p. 105)?
2. According to Knox, the accusation by “desperate and unprincipled men” of increased taxation was “a deception.” How does he support this belief? Do you agree or disagree with his assessment?
3. Why is “a body of 12 or 15,000 desperate and unprincipled men” such a threat to “every man of principle and property in New England”?

“PUBLIUS” (JAMES MADISON)

1. Why do you think James Madison used a pseudonym when writing this paper in 1787?
2. Why does Madison support a new constitution that creates a strong central government?
3. How does Madison describe “a faction”? How does he propose, “curing the mischiefs of faction” and “removing the causes of faction”? Do you agree with his remedies? How and why?
4. Do you agree or disagree with Madison that “a pure democracy . . . can admit of no cure for the mischiefs of faction”? How and why? How does he define a democracy? How does he define a republic? How are they similar and different? Which does he support and why?

Main Points in *Voices*, Chapter 5, “Half a Revolution”

After reading Chapter 5 in *Voices*, students should be encouraged to identify what they believe to be the main points therein. Following are five possible main points.

1. For at least a hundred years before the Revolutionary War, the colonies were divided by class conflict.
2. Internal class conflict was only temporarily obscured during the Revolutionary War; when the war was over, class conflict reemerged.
3. The Declaration of Independence provided the legal framework for, but not the full achievement of, a democratic nation.
4. The Founding Fathers deliberately created a Constitution that was designed to control the rebellious spirit of ordinary Americans and to maintain “law and order.”
5. The Revolutionary War did not dramatically change the internal structure or content of American society for women, laborers, slaves, and other “unimportant” people.

Main Points in *Voices*, Chapter 5, “Half a Revolution,” and in *A People’s History*, Chapter 5, “A Kind of Revolution”

If your students are also reading *A People’s History*, they should be encouraged to identify what they believe to be the main points in chapters 5 in both books. Following are five additional points to be stressed when *Voices* and *A People’s History* are used together.

6. The Revolutionary War was a *war of independence* from colonial domination, a *civil war* between the various forces within American society, and a *world war* fought both in North America and on the European Continent.
7. Economic interests motivated the political clauses of the United States Constitution.
8. In order for the Founding Fathers to gain enough support for the war, they had “to woo the armed white population.”
9. As early as the Revolutionary War, the American military was an avenue for the poor to achieve upward social and economic mobility.
10. The unequal political, social, economic, and ideological structure of American society remained intact after the Revolutionary War.

General-Discussion Questions for *Voices*

While the following questions are designed for classroom discussion about all the voices read in Chapter 5, they can also be rewritten and included as evaluation tools.

1. How do you think the “unimportant” English men and women felt about losing their North American colonies? The “important” English leaders?
2. Why do you think this chapter is entitled, “Half a Revolution”? What is half of a revolution? How is it different from a whole revolution? Do you think the Revolutionary War was half or a whole revolution? How and why?
3. What evidence of class conflict do you find in the entries in this chapter? Do they adequately support Howard Zinn’s belief that the Revolutionary Army was rife with class conflict? How and why?
4. In Henry Knox’s letter to George Washington, he stated that after the war, “Our political machine constituted of thirteen independent sovereignties, have been perpetually operating against each other, and against the federal head, ever since the peace.” How do the other documents in this chapter support this contention? What were the main issues that pitted Americans against Americans? Colony against colony?
5. Henry Knox was clearly frustrated that “the powers of Congress” were “utterly inadequate to preserve the balance between the respective States.” What powers did the Articles of Confederation give to Congress? To the states? Do you agree with Knox’s belief that the new constitution pitted “State, against State” (p. 105)?
6. How is liberty described in these various entries? Is liberty the same as freedom? Do you think the ordinary, unimportant men and women of the new republic defined liberty and freedom the same as the propertied, important men and women? The same as the slaves? Do you think ordinary men and women today define liberty and freedom differently from those men and women in power? How and why?
7. How is tyranny described in these various entries? Do you think the ordinary, unimportant men and women of the new republic defined tyranny the same as the propertied, important men and women? The same as the

slaves? Do you think ordinary men and women today would define tyranny differently from those men and women in power? How and why?

8. Did rich and poor have different reasons for supporting the Revolution? Explain.
9. How did the voices in this chapter reinforce any of the five themes listed in “Main Points in *Voices*”?
10. Which of the voices in this chapter did you find most powerful? Least powerful? How and why?

General-Discussion Questions for *Voices* and *A People's History*

These general-discussion questions are additional questions for students who have read Chapter 5 in both books. For all questions, discussion must focus on ways the materials in both chapters help students formulate and articulate their answers.

11. What is the significance of the titles of both chapters, “Half a Revolution” and “A Kind of Revolution” respectively? Do you think the examples used in both chapters support Howard Zinn’s assertion in these titles? How and why?
12. Howard Zinn argues that prior to the Revolutionary War, many colonists did not support the war and thus, the Founding Fathers “would have to woo the armed white population” (*People's History*, p. 77). How does he support this contention? Do you agree or disagree with Howard Zinn on this point? How and why?
13. Was Alexander Hamilton correct when he wrote, “If we are saved, France and Spain must save us” (*People's History*, p.77)? What role did France play in helping the Americans win the war?
14. How does this chapter support the phrase, “It was a rich man’s war and a poor man’s fight”? Do you agree or disagree with this belief? How and why? Do you believe that this phrase is applicable to today’s American army? How and why?
15. How were the class conflicts between rich and poor suppressed during the

Revolutionary War? Why did they reemerge after the war's conclusion?

16. The threat of mutiny and actual mutinies occurred throughout the Revolutionary War. What were the grievances and actions of the mutineers? How were mutinies handled during the war? Do you think the threat of mutiny continues to be a problem with American combat troops? How and why?
17. Howard Zinn mentions that in Maryland after the war, ninety percent of the state's population could not vote. Do you think this was typical of the other states? How and why? When was the electorate broadened to include all men, regardless of property ownership? To include all American citizens?
18. How did the events before, during, and immediately after the Revolutionary War affect the major Indian Nations? Why did most Indians fight for Great Britain during the Revolution?
19. What did the enslaved and free African Americans stand to gain—or lose—from the Revolution? Why did Washington refuse to allow enslaved African Americans to fight the British in exchange for their freedom?
20. According to the historian Charles Beard, why did the wealthy want a strong federal government?

Evaluation Tools

SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENTS

These assignments can be adapted to meet any classroom need—homework, short- or long-term research projects, individual or group work. The end product should be flexible, depending on teacher interest and student abilities—papers, journals, oral reports, visual aides, and the like.

1. Watch any of the following movies: *The Patriot*, *The Madness of King George, 1776*, *Liberty* (PBS documentary, four parts). What do you think was historically accurate in the movie? Inaccurate? What new information about the Revolutionary War did you acquire? Would you recommend this movie to a friend? Why, or why not?

2. In pre-Revolutionary America, we often learn of various people who were tarred and feathered. What are the origins of this type of punishment? Who resorted to such behavior and what were their goals in using it? Was it an effective means of deterring behavior? Is this punishment in contemporary usage? How, when, and where?
3. After the Revolutionary War, many veterans shared grievances similar to those of Joseph Plumb Martin. Learn as much as possible about the expectations of and benefits received by the veterans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. How did the allocation and actual receipt of benefits change after World War II? What benefits do you believe veterans should be entitled to after serving our nation?
4. In Samuel Dewees recollection, he mentions the threat of mutiny and actual mutinies that occurred during the Revolutionary War. What is a mutiny? Learn as much as you can about any mutinies that actually occurred during the course of the War. How many were officially recorded? What were the goals and accomplishments of the mutineers? Do you think the threat of mutiny continues to be a problem with American combat troops? How and why?
5. Samuel Dewees mentions the presence of Macaroney Jack's wife who was "with him in camp" (p. 100). Do you think her role, to keep him "very clean and neat in his appearance," was typical of the role women played in the Revolutionary War? How and why? Learn as much as you can about women's participation in the war. How do their roles compare and contrast with the roles of American women in war today?
6. One of the most best-known anti-government, anti-taxation movements that occurred in the early Republic era was the Whiskey Rebellion. What were the goals, actions, and consequences of the Whiskey Rebellion? How was this rebellion similar to those discussed in this chapter?
7. When Charles Beard published *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*, he revised what Americans had generally been taught about the Founding Fathers. After reading Howard Zinn's description of the book, find out more about Beard's view of the Constitution. When did he write it? Specifically, what did he find after conducting his research? How did the American public react? How do the documents in this chapter support or refute his primary findings?

8. No program of national conscription existed during the Revolutionary War. Instead, each colony/state had its own laws for creating a militia—some of which relied on conscription. What is conscription? When and why did the United States enact its first national conscription law? How did conscription laws change during World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam? What are the current laws governing conscription? How might they change in the twenty-first century? How do you think the Founding Fathers might have felt about passage of a national conscription act?
9. A great deal of contention existed between Patriots and Loyalists before, during, and after the war. Who were the Loyalists? How were they treated by the Patriots? What happened to them after the colonists won the war? Locate at least one primary document written by a loyalist about his/her treatment during the war. Do you think this treatment was typical? How and why?
10. The Sedition Act of 1798 was the first attempt to legally limit our rights under the First Amendment. What did it do and how was it enforced? What other similar attempts occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? How are any of these efforts similar and dissimilar to the PATRIOT Act passed by Congress in October 2001?

SUGGESTED ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Support or refute one of Howard Zinn's primary contentions in this chapter, such as his assertion that social class divisions dominated American society before, during, and after the Revolutionary War.
2. In Federalist No. 10, James Madison argues for the need to "break and control the violence of faction" (p. 108). Referring to all the entries in this chapter, do you think the various authors would agree that such factions existed? If so, how did they describe them? If not, why not?
3. Do you agree or disagree with Madison's statement, "But the most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property" (p. 109). Provide examples from the documents in this chapter to support your answer. Madison continues that the "principal task of modern legislation" is the "regulation of these various and interfering interests." In Federalist No. 10, what specific regulation does Madison suggest?
4. What do you think are James Madison's most convincing arguments for

creating a federalist system of central government? For supporting the creation of a republic rather than a “pure democracy”? Which are his least convincing arguments? Do you think that Henry Knox would support his arguments? Why, or why not?

5. Howard Zinn argues that prior to the Revolutionary War, many colonists did not support the war, and thus the Founding Fathers “would have to woo the armed white population” (*People’s History*, p. 77). Using examples from the chapter (or both chapters), demonstrate how he supports this contention. Do you agree or disagree with Howard Zinn on this point? How and why?
6. The American Revolution brought about the separation of church and state. Support or refute this statement. Do you believe that it is important today to adhere to the separation of church and state? Why, or why not?
7. What voices of resistance in chapters 5 in both *Voices* and *A People’s History* were of most interest to you? How and why? Which did you find most compelling and why? Least compelling?
8. How do the voices and information in these two chapters improve your understanding of the Revolutionary War? Of the Constitution? Of the Founding Fathers? What information was especially useful? How and why?
9. According to Alexander Hamilton, one of the writers of the Constitution, the rich deserve more say in politics than the “mass of the people.” Why didn’t Hamilton trust the “mass of the people”? Do you think Hamilton’s attitude was shared by other Founding Fathers? Explain.

SIMULATIONS AND OTHER CREATIVE APPROACHES

1. Write a letter that you think George Washington might have written in response to the letter from Henry Knox. Write another letter from Washington to either Joseph Plumb Martin or Samuel Dewees in which the General responds to their particular wartime grievances.
2. Read the Declaration of Independence aloud and then have students role-play King George’s reaction. Or have students stage an imagined trial in which the British Crown tries George Washington and Thomas Jefferson for acts of treason.

3. Stage an imagined debate among the Founding Fathers about a particularly contentious part of the Declaration of Independence.
4. Bring General George Washington and the five contributors in Chapter 5 in *Voices*—Joseph Clarke, Joseph Plumb Martin, Samuel Dewees, Henry Knox, and James Madison—together for a press conference. The attending journalists (all the students in the class who will be sitting in the room) should have a series of politically astute questions ready for each of these men. One student should be assigned the role of anchorman or anchorwoman to conduct the business of the press conference.