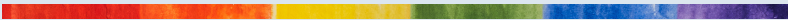


LGBTQ HISTORY THROUGH PRIMARY SOURCES



Researched and annotated by
Wendy Rouse, PhD

UCDHP The History Project
AT UC DAVIS

COPYRIGHT © 2022 REGENTS OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA. RESEARCHED
AND ANNOTATED BY WENDY ROUSE, PHD.
EDITED BY DON ROMESBURG, PHD AND
KATHARINE CORTES, PHD.



A horizontal banner with a rainbow background, divided into vertical stripes of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. The text "AMERICAN REVOLUTION" is centered in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Overview:

The American Revolution was less than revolutionary in many aspects. The impact of the Revolution varied greatly depending on a person's gender, race, sexuality, and class. Women did not find that the war itself dramatically changed their political or social status in the new nation. Enslaved people discovered that the new nation's ideals of liberty and justice for all did not necessarily apply to them. The Revolution also did little to end settler-colonialism and the continued encroachment of European and American settlers onto the land of Indigenous people. The degree of acceptance of queer people and same-sex relationships depended greatly on an individual's race and class.

The War for Independence was not just a revolution against British rule. Some Americans began to challenge the gender and sexual norms of the era by using the very language about liberty and equality articulated in the nation's founding documents. Individuals reflecting a range of genders and sexualities contributed to the war effort and found new opportunities in the war itself. Religious revivals and awakenings during the period represented another type of revolution that sometimes allowed for greater individual expressions.

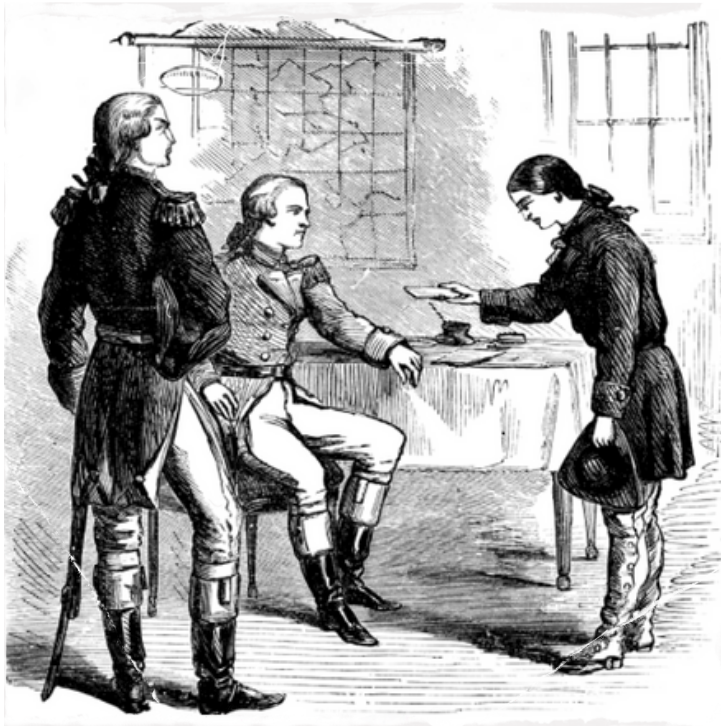
Framework Alignment:

8th Grade

The Development of American Constitutional Democracy

11th Grade

The Nation's Beginnings



Focus Questions:

How did individuals challenge gender and sexual norms during the era of the American Revolution?

What was the significance of the Revolution to those who existed outside of gender and sexual binaries?

How did the social status of people transgressing gender and sexual norms in the Revolutionary era shape people's reactions to them?

Citation:

"Deborah Simpson i.e., Sampson presenting the letter to General Washington. , . [No Date Recorded on Caption Card] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2002698474/>

Further Reading:

- “A Revolutionary War Hero,” Washington Post, April 8, 2019.
- Rachel Hope Cleves, “Revolutionary Sexualities and Early National Genders,” in *The Routledge History of Queer America*. Don Romesburg, editor (New York: Routledge Press, 2018), 27–38.
- Richard Godbeer, “Colonial North America (1600s–1700s),” in *The Routledge History of Queer America*. Don Romesburg, editor (New York: Routledge Press, 2018), 15–26.
- Deborah Miranda, “Extermination of the Joyas: Gendercide in Spanish California,” *Gay & Lesbian Quarterly* 16, nos. 1/2 (2010): 253–284.
- Will Roscoe, “Sexual and Gender Diversity in Native America and the Pacific Islands” in *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study* (Washington, D. C.: National Park Foundation & National Park Service, 2016), 1–29.
- Public Universal Friend, Throughline, National Public Radio, <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/04/812092399/public-universal-friend>

TWO SPIRITS

Context:

The Revolutionary Era had especially significant implications for Indigenous people. At the same time that English colonists were seizing Indigenous territory, Spanish and French settlers were also occupying Indigenous land and imposing their own government and cultural system on Indigenous people. This source, written during the time of the American Revolution describes the disapproving attitude of Spanish missionaries toward Indigenous gender and sexual norms. Two-spirit is a modern term used by Indigenous people to describe a variety of queer Indigenous identities. Father Pedro Font, a missionary from Spain describes the two-spirit people he encountered during an exploration of California in 1775-1776. Font's response reflects the general attitude of settler colonialism and the goal of eradicating Indigenous cultural beliefs, including beliefs about gender and sexuality. American settlers held similar views and the American victory in the Revolution essentially guaranteed the continued encroachment of settlers into Indigenous territories and their imposition of their own cultural beliefs onto Indigenous people.

Citation:

Pedro Font, Complete Diary of the Second Anza Expedition, translated and edited by Herbert Eugene Bolton, volume 4 (Berkeley: University of California, 1930-31), 105. <https://archive.org/details/anzascaliforniae03bolt/page/104/mode/2up>

“Among the women I saw some men dressed like women, with whom they go about regularly, never joining the men.... I asked who these men were, and they replied that they were not men like the rest, and for this reason they went around covered this way.

From this I inferred they must be hermaphrodites, but from what I learned later I understood that they [did not identify as men and were] dedicated to [wicked] practices. From all the foregoing I conclude that... there will be much to do when the Holy Faith and the Christian religion are established among them.”

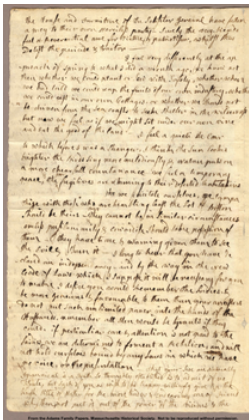
ABIGAIL ADAMS

Context:

The rhetoric around liberty and equality generated in the spirit of the American Revolution, allowed for some questioning of the limitations of rigid and binary gender roles. Abigail Adams for example famously challenged her husband John Adams to “Remember the Ladies” and restrict the unlimited power of men. In March 1776, Abigail wrote this letter to John, who was serving as the Massachusetts representative to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia.

Citation:

“Abigail Adams to John Adams, 31 March 1776,” Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0241> [Original source: The Adams Papers, Adams Family Correspondence, vol. 1, December 1761–May 1776, ed. Lyman H. Butterfield. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963, pp. 369–371.]



“...I long to hear that you have declared an independence -- and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember, all Men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.

That your Sex are Naturally Tyrannical is a Truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute, but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of Friend. Why then, not put it out of the power of the vicious and the Lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity with impunity. Men of Sense in all Ages abhor those customs which treat us only as the vassals of your Sex. Regard us then as Beings placed by providence under your protection and in imitation of the Supreme Being make use of that power only for our happiness.”

DEBORAH SAMPSON



Context:

There are multiple examples of gender crossings that are known to have occurred during the American Revolution. Deborah Sampson was assigned female at birth but served in the Continental Army under the identity of Robert Shurtliff. Because we don't know what Sampson's gender identity was, we will use gender neutral pronouns (they/them) here to refer to Sampson. After the war, Sampson lived as a man and then later as a woman marrying Benjamin Gannett and bearing three children. A fictional biography of Sampson made them a national celebrity and they toured the country telling their story. The US government even awarded Sampson a pension recognizing their status as a veteran.

Citation:

"Deborah Simpson i.e., Sampson presenting the letter to General Washington. . . [No Date Recorded on Caption Card] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2002698474/>

THE PUBLIC UNIVERSAL FRIEND

Context:

The Public Universal Friend was an individual who challenged traditional gender roles by sharing that they were a genderless individual “neither male nor female.” Friend was born in Rhode Island, named Jemima Wilkinson, and assigned female at birth. During the Revolutionary War, Wilkinson contracted typhus and became very ill. A near-death experience led to a religious awakening. After recovering, they announced that they had been reborn and called by God to preach the word. They also took the name “Publick Universal Friend.” The Friend was rejected as a heretic and ejected from their local community of Quakers. The Friend began traveling as an itinerant preacher and soon gained a popular following. In the years that followed, they formed the Society of Universal Friends, one of the first intentional communities in the early nation, in western New York. As a religious leader, Friend offered a message of universal friendship. The Friend advocated establishing respectful relationships with Indigenous people and spoke out against slavery.

Citation:

“The Masculine Woman,” Illustrated Post Card & Novelty Company, New York, 1905, Marshall Weeks Collection,
<https://outhistory.org/exhibits/show/postcards/item/196>



"March 15. — I this morning proceeded to the grand parade, where I was a spectator to the drumming out of Lieut. Enslin of Col. Malcom's regiment. He was first drum'd from right to left of the parade, thence to the left wing of the army; from that to the centre, and lastly transported over the Schuylkill with orders never to be seen in Camp in the future. This shocking scene was performed by all the drums and fifes in the army— the coat of the delinquent was turned wrong side out."

Context:

Same-sex relationships occurred among service members in the military during the Revolutionary War. But, homosexual behavior could be grounds for dismissal from service. On March 10, 1778, continental soldier Lieutenant Frederick Gotthold Enslin was court-martialed for having relationships with other men. He was ordered to be literally drummed out of military service. Lieutenant James McMichael recorded the event in his diary on March 15, 1778

Citation:

Diary of Lieutenant James McMichael, reprinted in Pennsylvania Archives (Second Series), William Henry Egle, editor., volume 15, Harrisburg, PA: E.K. Meyers, State Printer, 1890. <https://archive.org/details/pennsylvaniaarc22penngoog/page/n231/mode/1up?view=theater&q=enslin>

LIEUTENANT FREDERICK GOTTHOLD ENSLIN



FREDERICH WILHELM von Steuben

Context:

Baron Frederich Wilhelm von Steuben was a famous military leader during the American Revolution. Von Steuben had apparently been dismissed from Prussian military service for intimate relations with other men. He offered his military expertise to George Washington who welcomed him and admired him for his skills as a drillmaster. Although other soldiers, such as Lieutenant Frederick Gotthold Enslin, had been court-martialed for homosexuality, Von Steuben's high status as a military leader shielded him from criticism, even as he continued to have relationships with men during his American military service. He became a Revolutionary War hero for commanding an American division at Valley Forge. Von Steuben's training was essential to the success of the American Revolution.

Citation:

Abbey, Edwin Austin, Artist. Baron von Steuben training Washington's army at Valley Forge. United States, None. [Between 1940 and 1950] Photograph.
<https://www.loc.gov/item/2002725153/>



Inscription:

Erected by the Congress of the United States to Frederick William Augustus Henry Ferdinand Baron von Steuben in grateful recognition of his services to the American people in their struggles for liberty.

Born in Prussia November 15, 1730

Died in New York November 28, 1794

After serving as aide-de-camp to Frederick the Great of Prussia he offered his sword to the American colonies and was appointed Major General and Inspector General in the Continental Army. He gave military training and discipline to the citizen soldiers who achieved the independence of the United States.

MCMX

Citation:

Von Steuben Statue, Washington, D.C. United States Washington D.C. District of Columbia Washington D.C, None. [Between 1916 and 1917] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016826218/>

A horizontal bar at the top of the page with a rainbow color gradient from red to purple.

All resources presented here are for educational use and are free of charge. We have secured copyright permission where necessary, to the best of our abilities, and have indicated that information. Please, dear user, do not publish these materials or distribute beyond its original intent. Users are responsible for all issues of copyright.

If you are the rightful copyright holder and our online use constitutes an infringement of your copyright, please contact us by email at historyproject@ucdavis.edu to discuss its removal.

A horizontal bar at the bottom of the page with a rainbow color gradient from red to purple.