



Slavery, Propaganda, and the American Revolution

By Patricia Bradley

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Slavery, Propaganda, and the American Revolution By Patricia Bradley

Under the leadership of Samuel Adams, patriot propagandists deliberately and conscientiously kept the issue of slavery off the agenda as goals for freedom were set for the American Revolution.

By comparing coverage in the publications of the patriot press with those of the moderate colonial press, this book finds that the patriots avoided, misinterpreted, or distorted news reports on blacks and slaves, even in the face of a vigorous antislavery movement. *The Boston Gazette*, the most important newspaper of the Revolution, was chief among the periodicals that dodged or excluded abolition. The author of this study shows that *The Gazette* misled its readers about the notable Somerset decision that led to abolition in Great Britain. She notes also that *The Gazette* excluded anti-slavery essays, even from patriots who supported abolition. No petitions written by Boston slaves were published, nor were any writings by the black poet Phillis Wheatley. *The Gazette* also manipulated the racial identity of Crispus Attucks, the first casualty in the Revolution. When using the word slavery, *The Gazette* took care to focus it not upon abolition but upon Great Britain's enslavement of its American colonies.

Since propaganda on behalf of the Revolution reached a high level of sophistication, and since Boston can be considered the foundry of Revolutionary propaganda, the author writes that the omission of abolition from its agenda cannot be considered as accidental but as intentional.

By the time the Revolution began, white attitudes toward blacks were firmly fixed, and these persisted long after American independence had been achieved. In Boston, notions of virtue and vigilance were shown to be negatively embodied in black colonists. These devil's imps were long represented in blackface in Boston's annual Pope Day parade.

Although the leaders of the Revolution did not articulate a national vision on abolition, the colonial anti-slavery movement was able to achieve a degree of success, but only in drives through the individual colonies.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Based on a thorough reading of 18th-century pamphlets and newspapers plus an impressive array of secondary works, this book offers an important new interpretation of American attitudes about slavery and blacks during the Revolutionary era. Bradley demonstrates that by the late 1760s Samuel Adams was the top agent directing the patriot press and that the press largely ignored the slavery issue. When black servants or slaves were mentioned at all, the patriot press usually portrayed them as deceitful, unreliable, or dangerous. There were many antislavery crusaders during the period, but their pamphlets and newspapers did not have the same circulation as the major patriot organs. Moreover, antislavery groups like the Quakers were suspected of being sympathetic to Britain, which weakened their influence on the broad American public. This original study is highly recommended for academic and large public libraries. Thomas J. Schaeper, St. Bonaventure Univ., NY

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From the Publisher

Schoolchildren must wonder, as they are taught the story of the American Revolution, why happened to the slaves I this saga of the coming of liberty. Reading *Slavery, Propaganda, and the American Revolution* may help their teachers explain it to them.

--The Philadelphia Enquirer

Anyone interested in U.S. History, race relations, or the press will want to read it for what Bradley ...reveals about the relationship among the three at a time before this country was a country.

--Brill's Content

Based on a thorough reading of 18th century pamphlets and newspapers plus an impressive array of secondary works, this book offers and important new interpretation of American attitudes about slavery and blacks during the Revolutionary era. ... this original study is highly recommended.

--Library Journal

From the Inside Flap

A study of how blacks were excluded from the Revolutionary patriots' goals for American liberation

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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