

Race and revolution a book by gary nash history essay

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This review outlines the reason for Gary Nash's book "Race and Revolution", is to help understand the reasoning behind why the Founding Fathers of this country did not abolish slavery while building the new colonies and government. The book highlights the true issues our Founding Fathers had regarding slavery during the American Revolution. The author shows how those building the new colonies and its new government failed to free those who were enslaved and abolish slavery under their watch. Nash further displays the reasoning behind why they chose to settle with keeping the institution of slavery as a necessary evil to ensure the states stayed united in their cause of their fight for freedom during the revolutionary war. This book was written to provide those who have an interest in the abolition movement and anti-slavery to understand the efforts or lack thereof of the founding fathers to put an end to slavery long before the civil war. The basis of much of his references come from thoughts and opinions from the documents provided in the back of the book pulled the essays Nash drafted as part of the Merrill Jensen Lectures in Constitutional Studies presented at the University of Wisconsin in 1988. Through his review of documents, letters, and the viewpoints stated in writings from members in politics of that era such as Ben Franklin, James Forten, and the Attorney General of Maryland at that time Luther Martin he eloquently states his points regarding how the issue of slavery was truly an issue at the forefront of the political and social makeup during the revolutionary period.

In Race and Revolution Gary B. Nash addresses the issue of slavery, an issue Americans have dealt with both politically and socially since the inception of our country and those governing it since the first Continental Congress and

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the drafting of those documents that are the founding basis for our government, The Declaration of Independence and The U. S. Constitution. When Americans focus on slavery they don't often consider the Revolutionary period as a critical crossroads in the battle for the abolition of slavery. Most focus on the civil war the period leading up to it and the years following. However, Nash takes great strides in highlighting the revolutionary period and the years surrounding it because of the overwhelming data that many during this time had a strong desire to end slavery. The book discusses the internal struggle our Forefathers dealt with regarding how contradictory the institution of slavery was to the very foundation of freedom we were fighting for and building the new government upon. At that time, contradictory to what many think, there was a growing distaste for the institution of slavery as stated by James Otis in his pamphlet Rights of the British Colonies (1764) " The Colonies are by the law of nature free born, as indeed are all men are white or black. ...Does it follow that tis right to enslave a man because he is black?" (Nash 1990) It is with reference to these growing sentiments that throughout this book Nash looks at those from the north who were most against slavery and tries to discover were they against slavery because their livelihood was not directly tied to the employment of slavery to survive economically. Nash discusses many instances that he feels led to the failure of those trying to abolish slavery at a time even though evidence was there to show a high probability they could have succeeded. The main focus of his research is to provide evidence as to who was to blame for the change in attitude regarding the abolition of. Were those from southern states whose income and prosperity relied heavily on

slave labor for harvesting their fields, managing their plantations, and generating their incomes responsible? Or, was it the blame of those northern politicians that were afraid they would lose support from the south in the battle for freedom that turned a blind eye to the plight of those enslaved. He also discusses the challenges in abolishing slavery that our forefathers encountered, would southern slave owners prosper economically if slavery were to be abolished, how would they be compensated if slavery were abolished, would the fragile economy as a whole in the newly established colonies remain solvent, and lastly would the colonies remain united in the cause of freedom during the revolutionary war if slavery was ended.

It is discussed throughout the book that the framers of the new government had many opportunities to take steps to free the slaves, but did not. Instead putting to their minds that slavery itself would run its course and with the outlawing of importation of slaves it would all soon be done and all would be free through the general course of time. Later in the book discussed the efforts of freed men such as Prince Hall and James Forten that drove forward the efforts to build up the black communities and gain support for the ending of slavery in all states for all men enslaved. Lastly, we are provided supporting documentation through essays, articles and other documents that support Nash's stance that the desire of many to end slavery was there, but the follow through and execution was absent no matter how much those in power disliked the institution and the hypocrisy that came with enslaving men, yet seeking freedom for themselves.

Through his thorough review of the writings of that time he is able to display a consistent theme of anti-slavery and expounds on the theme that during the American Revolution battle of ideals regarding slavery was ever present between those who chose to break from England and establish the new colonies and those who practiced the slave trade, or between the common people of the fledging society who felt it was in direct contradiction to the principles of why they came to the new country to escape the laws, taxes, and rule of the King of England. So much focus is placed on the historical events of the American Revolution; its governing principles, the battles fought and drafting of the documents that we still hold as the staple of our government, that the issue of slavery that was on the minds of many of that time is overshadowed. It is throughout this book, accompanying essays, and documents Nash takes us back to see the rest of the history of that time specifically in regards to slavery and forces us to see, as he displays, that the abolition of slavery could have been another great victory of the American Revolution.

Through reading this book I was enlightened to facts, writings, and historical accounts of the years building up to, during, and following the American Revolution. These accounts allowed me to see that just as race in America is still a subject that remains a very volatile social and political issue, but it was also an issue that was ever present on the minds of those men who built this nation. I agree with the points made that had the steps been taken to abolish slavery at the outset of this great republic many years of harsh treatment of blacks in America could have been avoided as could have a civil war that

slated brother against brother. It is also evident that in order to remain united in the cause of freedom that should slavery be outlawed that the southern states would most likely have remained loyal to England and we would not have survived as a nation. The sad casualty to the freedom of our country was the abolition of slavery. Nash was thorough in his introduction of facts and in his sharing of the writings of the day to display the sentiments regarding slavery. The questions that arose in my mind were answered the further I read as he outlined his opinions with support through the reference of the opinions and writings of some of the great leaders of that time. This book has brought to light information that many of those who thought slavery was an issue that the leaders of our country faced during the years of Lincoln and the Civil War, will find was something that was a legacy issue left behind by the very founders of this nation, the framers of our government as we know it.