**White Workers/Indentured Servants**

You are shoemakers in the city of Boston, Massachusetts. Before this you were indentured servants for seven years. (At the beginning of the Revolution there were 200,000 indentured ser- vants in the colonies.) You came to the 13 colonies from England because you were promised a good life. In order to pay for your boat trip here, you agreed to work for a wealthy person for seven years for no pay. It was a hard seven years. You were almost like slaves, although your white skin allowed you freedom. Because of your experience as indentured servants, you understand more what it must be like to be a slave. You don’t think any- one should have to be a slave or servant to anyone else.

You have families with small children. You barely make enough money to live. You want the right to vote so that you can make sure that the government represents people like you, and not just rich people. The rich are the ones who should pay more taxes, not poor and working people.

You fought in the Revolutionary Army, unlike the rich plantation owners or the bankers who either sent their sons or paid someone else to take their place. You didn’t do it for the money. In fact, the government didn’t pay you in money. They gave you IOUs, which weren’t worth anything.

Now that there is talk about writing a new constitution, you’re concerned about how the new government will deal with people like you who are poor and own no property. You’ve also heard

that some people at the Constitutional Convention don’t even want to allow people like you to be able to vote in elections. No property, no vote, they say. Who do they think they are? When people were dying in the war, it was the farmers and workers who did most of the bleeding, not the rich plantation owners, bankers, and merchants.

**Questions for Thought**

1.How do you make your living?

2.What are some of the similarities between being an indentured servant and being enslaved? What are the differences?

3.If a runaway slave appeared at your home, what would you do? What is your position on slavery?

4.Who should have the right to vote?

**Possible Historical Figures:**

Very few have been recorded in historical records. Please make up your own name.

**Enslaved African Americans**

The year is 1787. Eleven years ago the Declaration of Independence stated that, “all men are created equal.” And yet because your skin is black, and you were born in slavery, you still remain enslaved. Obviously the American Revolution didn’t mean freedom for everyone. In fact the man who wrote those words in the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, is himself a Virginia slave owner. And the man who led the Continental Army, George Washington, is also a slave owner. There are about 700,000 enslaved Africans in the new United States.

Your life in slavery is harsh. Up when the sun rises, you must work until it is dark. Then there are more chores when you return from the fields. You are under constant control by your master, though with your family you have tried to make the best out of your life. However, you know the owner could sell you to South Carolina or wherever he wanted, away from your family, if he felt like it.

The Constitutional Convention raises the possibility of freedom. Slavery might be outlawed. A number of states in the North have already abolished slavery, and there is much talk about abolishing the slave trade—the bringing of new enslaved Africans into the country. Thousands of enslaved people have been allowed to buy or earn their freedom in Virginia in recent years. Maybe slavery will not be outlawed in every state, but perhaps slaves would be allowed to keep their freedom if they escaped into a free state. True, the Revolution didn’t really free you, but the talk of liberty and justice makes you want your fair share.

**Questions for Thought**

1.What things worry you?

2.What do you hope the Constitution will do for you?

3.Who do you think should have the right to vote?

**Possible Historical Figures**

Slaves who fought for the Americans became free after the war, so there are few records of slaves in 1787. Please make up your own name.

**Free African Americans**

You are free African Americans. There are over 59,000 of you in the 13 colonies. (Unfortunately, there are nearly 700,000 enslaved African Americans!) You know that African Americans— both free and enslaved—make up 20 percent of all the non-Native American people in the colonies. And yet you have virtually no rights:

•You are not allowed to own property in many of the 13 colonies.

•You are not allowed to vote.

•You are not allowed to speak in court.

•You are not allowed to serve on a jury of any kind.

•You are not allowed to attend most schools.

Even though you are free, if a slave catcher catches you and takes you back to the South or sends you to the Caribbean, it would be very difficult for you to prove that you are free. Some people argue that the Constitution should allow slave owners to come into Northern states where there is no slavery and take runaways back South. The “runaway” may be you—even though you are free. If slavery exists anywhere in the United States, it is a threat to free African Americans, such as yourselves.

Over 5,000 African American men fought in the Revolution. They were promised their free- dom if they fought. After the war, some of them were not given their freedom and had to fight their former owners to get it. Remember that the first American killed by the British in the War was Crispus Attucks—whose father was African and whose mother a member of the Massachuset (Indian) tribe. He was killed in the Boston Massa- cre in 1770. African Americans have petitioned the

government to end slavery. And between 1780 and 1786, the states of Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, and New Jersey passed laws against slavery.

**Questions for Thought**

1.Did most Africans want to be brought to the United States?

2.What role did Africans—enslaved and free— have in creating the wealth of the 13 colonies?

3.What arguments can you use to convince people to oppose slavery?

4.Who do you think should have the right to vote? Why?

**Possible Historical Figures**

Phyllis Wheatley, Peter Salem (fought at Bunker Hill), William Lee (aide to General Washington), Oliver Cromwell (with Washington at Delaware).

**White Women**

You live in Boston. Some of you are married to men who fought in the Revolution. Some of you are widows because your husbands were killed in the war. You and your women friends organized in favor of the American Revolution. Women built the organization “Daughters of Liberty,” which organized campaigns to refuse to buy British products. Abigail Adams was one leader of such activities. During the war many women continued their support of the Revolution through “Ladies Associations.” They donated clothing and medical supplies to the Continental Army led by George Washington. In Philadelphia alone, the Ladies Association collected about $300,000 in Continental money. The money was used to buy shirts for the sol- diers. The women organized sewing circles throughout the colonies to spin, weave cloth, and make clothing for troops. They also passed resolutions supporting the rebel cause and pledged not to do business with merchants who imported British goods or didn’t support the Patriots’ cause. On one occasion 500 Boston women held a protest against a merchant found to be hoarding coffee.

The women also kept the country going. While their husbands were off fighting the war the women kept small businesses open, kept the farms running, and took care of the children. You know that some women actually fought in the Revolution. Deborah Sampson fought in the army. Others like Lydia Darragh acted as spies. Why shouldn’t women benefit from the Revolution if they helped with it?

You also know that you pay taxes when you buy certain things. Wasn’t one of the main issues of the Revolution “no taxation without representation”? Right now in many ways you are little more than the property of your husbands or fathers. Even a decade after the Declaration of Independence you don’t have the right to do many things, just because you are a woman:

•You do not have the right to vote.

•You do not have the right to own property.

•You do not have the right to speak in court.

•You do not have the right to be a member of a jury in court.

•You do not have the right to be a government official.

•You do not have the right to go to most high schools and colleges.

In 1776, Abigail Adams wrote the following to her husband, John Adams:

*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, no repre- sentation.*

*Rethinking the U.S. Constitutional Convention—Zinn Education Project***9**

**Questions for Thought**

1.Should you have the right to vote? Why?

2.How is the position of women in our nation similar to that of being enslaved? How does it differ?

3.What do you think of slavery and the slave trade?

**Possible Historical Figures**

Abigail Adams, Deborah Sampson, Lydia Darragh.

**Male Southern Plantation Owners**

You live in Virginia and are tobacco plant- ers. Your family owns about 30 black slaves and you are quite wealthy. Your wealth, however, depends on your slaves. Slaves do all the hardest work. They plant, harvest, dry, pack, and load the tobacco to get it off for sale. You wouldn’t know where you’d get people to do the work if you had no slaves.

From time to time a slave will run away. You hire a slave catcher and usually the runaway is brought back. Sometimes the slaves get up into the North before they’re caught. But slaves are your property, and fortunately you usually get them back.

The American colonies defeated Great Britain in the Revolution but there are still lots of prob- lems. One problem is that there is a lot of protest from the common people, the “rabble”—the poor farmers, the unemployed, and workers in the towns and cities. Up in the state of Massachusetts, Daniel Shays led a rebellion against the govern- ment and large property owners. As property owners yourselves, when these people talk about “equality” you wonder if they mean to take away your property so you’d be equal to them! These people scare you. In some places they’re even allowed to vote and run for office. Sometimes they make laws that threaten the safety of private prop- erty: your property.

**Questions for Thought**

1.How do you make your money?

2.How do you feel about slavery?

3.Do you think that you should have the right to go to northern states and get your property (slaves) if they try to run away?

4.How do you feel about the common people?

**Possible Historical Figures**

George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James

Madison.

**Northern Merchants and Bankers**

You are rich. Some of you own ships, some own mills, and some own banks. You were strong supporters of the Revolution because the British didn’t let you trade and make deals with countries other than Britain. Now you can trade with the French, the Dutch, the Spanish, and Portuguese. You are getting richer and richer. While you didn’t fight directly in the battles, your son served as a leader in the Continental Army (George Washing- ton’s army).

While you are not as set in your ways as the southern plantation owners, you still have many questions regarding who should vote and how slavery should be handled. While slavery may not be OK in Boston, the South is different. The slaves in the South harvest the tobacco you smoke and the cotton that comes to your mills. If it wasn’t for them you wouldn’t be so well off.

Very upsetting things have been happening recently. Many state legislatures have passed laws allowing “debtors”—people who owe money—topay their debts “in kind” with corn, tobacco, or other products whether or not they may be of any value. In other words, a banker might lend $100 and get paid back two cows and a bushel of

corn. That’s outrageous! There is very little respect for property anymore. The state legislatures have entirely too much power. Maybe if all those poor people didn’t vote, this kind of unfairness would not happen.

You were educated in school and speak Eng- lish and French. You believe in democracy and the right to vote, but really only for those who have the schooling and money that give them the knowl- edge and time to understand the issues.

**Questions for Thought**

1.How do you make your money?

2.Why might it be against your interests if lots of people could vote?

3.How do you benefit from slavery and slave trade?

**Possible Historical Figure**

John Hancock.

**Native Americans: Iroquois Nation**

You are members of the great Iroquois League of Nations. You live with your families in a Seneca village on the Genesee River in New York. You live in a longhouse with your families and grandparents. You have attended the Grand Council—the meeting of leaders from the original Five—now Six—Nations of the Iroquois. At that council the leaders tried to solve their differences peacefully. The American War of Independence changed all that. Some of the Iroquois—the Oneida and Tuscarora Nations—generally supported the Americans. But manyIroquois—under the leadership of Mohawk Chief Joseph Bryant and Seneca Chief RedJacket—fought on the side of the British. They were so angry at the Americans for taking their land that they hoped that the British would win, and the Americans would no longer be able to steal Iroquois land. Even though you fought on the British side, you feel people at the Constitu- tional Convention should listen to you and your ideas for several reasons:

•Some members of the Iroquois Nation met Benjamin Franklin many years ago when Franklin was a young journalist who made a study of the Iroquois governmental system. Franklin was impressed with the fine workings of democracy among the Iroquois—withits checks and balances

among different “branches” of government. Franklin was so impressed that he drew up a similar plan for the 13 colonies (called the Albany Plan) but few people paid attention to it. The Iroquois’ “League of Nations” has six tribes or nations. The government of the Iroquois includes three parts—executive,

an assembly, and a judicial system. That’s the same as the proposal that the new United States government have a President (executive), a Congress (an assembly), and a court system (the judicial system). A key difference is that the Iroquois allow all people to vote, and in fact, women are the ones who run your court system—the ones who make the final decision when there is a disagreement.

•The American settlers have taken much of your land. They have paid you almost nothing. They keep breaking treaties. They

say they won’t take any more land and then a few years later settlers start moving in. You need the right to vote in order to get laws passed to protect Native Americans.

•You have suffered under the armies of George Washington. During the War of Independence, Washington was angry at Iroquois support for the British and so he ordered an army into Iroquois lands specifying that it should “not merely be overrun, but destroyed.” The American army was to scorch the earth, and they did—burning towns, stealing things,

uprooting crops, chopping down orchards, slaughtering cattle, and destroying grain supplies. He ordered the destruction of your villages and the killings of women and children.

•You know that your Native American relatives have suffered as slaves ever since the time Columbus came to this part of the world. The Europeans eventually decided not to use Indians for slaves because you could run away so easily—you knew the land. Plus, by using Africans, their black skin was a way to identify them as property.

**Possible Historical Figures**

Red Jacket, Joseph Bryant.