

## Fighting Slavery in Early America

How do you slay a many-headed monster? How do you destroy an entrenched special interest that profits from treating people like property? In the decades between 1619, when the first enslaved Africans arrived, and 1787, when delegates in Philadelphia drafted the new Constitution, men and women committed to opposing the spread of slavery in North America grappled with these questions. This six-week course offers you the opportunity to meet a large and often unfamiliar cast of characters—both Black and white, enslaved and free—who developed a range of tools and tactics, means and methods to escape slavery or try to resist it.

### Course Objectives

- Study and debate the rise and entrenchment of race slavery in America before 1787
- Study and debate the range of tactics + methods mounted by individuals to fight slavery
- Broaden the cast of characters in the early phases of the anti-slavery fight

### Course Schedule

Each session features two topics with Q&A and a brief break in between.

#### Session One

**Fighting Slavery:** Introduces the course's core proposition: that the demise of slavery in America was the result of many decades of struggle, opposition, and resistance by a large and often unfamiliar cast of characters.

**Why Slavery Spreads: Origins of Slavery in the British Empire:** Explores the demand-drive rise of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the ruthless efforts of English slave traders to steal market share from the Spanish and Portuguese

#### Session Two

**Opposing the Slave Trade in Africa:** Examines varieties of resistance to the Transatlantic Slave Trade within Africa, before any African captives ever boarded the great prison hulks that would carry them across the Atlantic.

**Saltwater Slaves:** Explores the ways captives—working sometimes individually, sometimes collectively—fought slavery on the Middle Passage.

#### Session Three

**Anthony Johnson:** Examines what was possible for black slaves in 17th century Virginia, using the changing fortunes of a black man named Anthony Johnson as a case study.

**Quakers & Puritans:** Explores the first antislavery activism by white Europeans in colonial America, focusing on religious communities in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts.

#### Session Four

Why Slavery Spreads: Thomas Thistlewood and the Plantation Revolution: Explains how the 18th century plantation revolution succeeded in terrorizing black-majority populations across the South, using the plantation management strategies of Jamaica's Thomas Thistlewood as a case study.

Phibbah Thistlewood: Explores forms of resistance that were particular to black women on 18th century southern plantations, using Thomas Thistlewood's long time sexual partner, an enslaved woman named Phibbah, as a case study.

#### Session Five

The Negro Insurrections: Examines the common elements in the dozens of slave uprisings or suspected conspiracies in British North America, using the 1739 Stono Rebellion in South Carolina as a case study.

The Hermit, The Shopkeeper, The Schoolteacher: Reconstructs the crusades of three Quaker men—Benjamin Lay, John Woolman, and Anthony Benezet—who succeeded into turning most Quakers to the cause of antislavery in the middle decades of the 18th century.

#### Session Six

Declaring Independence: Examines the multifaceted ways that black Americans seized the unique opportunities provided by the war for independence to declare their independence from slavery in the eighteenth century.

Claiming Legal Freedom: Explores black activists' efforts to secure the abolition of slavery in the northern states after the Revolution and enslaved southerners' far less successful efforts to do likewise in states south of Pennsylvania.