

"Masterly."—Richard Stengel, *New York Times Book Review*

THE
CAUSE

*THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION
AND ITS DISCONTENTS*

1773—1783



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ham. This was the advance party of a larger force Howe intended to lead across the Bronx River into the path of the retreating Continental Army.

Enter, once again, John Glover and his Marblehead Mariners, who had by chance been assigned to guard Pell's Point, this time coming to the rescue with muskets rather than rowboats. Upon seeing a flotilla of two hundred British ships approaching his position, Glover remembered his hands were shaking: "Oh! the anxiety of mind I felt for the fate of that day." The anxiety was fully justified since he was outnumbered five to one. But Glover commanded some of the most disciplined troops in the Continental Army. He placed his 750 men behind a series of stone walls and invited an attack.

As the British and Hessian troops advanced, one row of Glover's men rose to fire, then retreated as the next row rose up to deliver another salvo, and so on from wall to wall. The net effect was a constant stream of lead providing no relief to the advancing columns of redcoats, who were mowed down before they came close enough to use their bayonets. (Glover later recalled that his men remained calm throughout the engagement, "almost as if they were shooting ducks.") The British lost more in one hour at Pell's Point than they lost in the entire New York campaign, over 300 dead and wounded, the Americans only 20.⁸⁶

Howe was stunned when apprised of the unexpected setback. He ordered an immediate halt to the British advance inland. Glover's troops retreated to join Washington's army, which had just crossed the Harlem River at King's Bridge and was trudging up the west side of the Bronx River. They arrived at the hills of White Plains on October 21, two days before Howe's army was sighted on the southern horizon. The long-deferred and awkwardly executed second escape had just happened. Fortune or luck, what Washington called providence, had once again smiled upon The Cause, allowing it to survive an extended bout of honor-driven hesitancy that could have proven fatal. The window of opportunity for Great Britain to destroy the Continental Army had just closed.



PROFILE

HARRY WASHINGTON



In mid-August 1776, two weeks before Washington escaped across the East River, his enslaved namesake at Mount Vernon escaped down the Potomac. Harry Washington was not fleeing the British army, but seeking to join it. More specifically, he hoped to join what was called the Ethiopian Regiment recruited by the royal governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore, who offered freedom to all Virginia slaves owned by rebels who joined his flotilla in the Chesapeake. When word spread through the slave community at Mount Vernon that Dunmore's ships were anchored at the mouth of the Potomac, it was all Harry needed to know. He commandeered a small skiff and sailed toward freedom.

The juxtaposition of the two Washingtons, each making bold dashes, one to escape capture or death, the other to escape enslavement, exposes the moral paradox that slavery posed for The Cause. For George Washington believed, with good reason, that he was fighting for American liberty from British tyranny. While Harry, for equally good reason, believed that Great Britain represented liberation from America's unique form of tyranny. Both men were acting on the same moral conviction about the primacy of independence.

Thanks to the prodigious research of the Australian historian Cassandra Pybus, we know what happened to Harry. It was a truly epic odyssey.

Dunmore's fleet deposited him in New York, where he was made a corporal in the Black Pioneers, a loyalist regiment attached to the Royal Artillery Department. He was in the British army that laid siege to Charleston in 1780 and remained with the British occupation there for two years before he returned to New York in 1782. On July 31, 1783, he boarded *L'Abondance* as part of the loyalist exodus bound for Nova Scotia.

Harry remained in the black loyalist community at Birchtown, Nova Scotia, for almost a decade. There he met and married Sarah, also a former slave, fathered three children, and worked a small farm. Conflicts with white loyalists in nearby Shelburne, plus the harsh Canadian winters, prompted an exodus of one thousand black loyalists to the British colony of Sierra Leone in 1792. Harry and his family joined the exodus. A year later he owned a small farm just outside the newly named Freetown.

The record goes quiet for eight years. Then, in 1800, the Freetown residents staged a protest against the Sierra Leone Company. (Intriguingly, they claimed they were being taxed without their consent.) As one had come to expect, Harry joined the protest, which was suppressed after considerable carnage by the British army. He appeared in the court records as one of the captured rebels. But instead of being executed for treason, he and his family were banished from Freetown.



Harry Washington Saddling Nelson, a depiction by Marianne Miller, 2020. (Courtesy of Mount Vernon)

By then he was approaching seventy years, with multiple children and grandchildren. Most probably he lived out his life with the local Korya Temme tribe in the neighboring jungle. It was located only a few miles from the notorious prison camp where he had been held before boarding the slave ship that had carried him to Virginia fifty years earlier.

