

NJS Presents***Teaching NJ History*****In This Issue:*****Important NJ African American Resources from the Revolutionary War Era*****By Sue Kozel****DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14713/njs.v7i1.232>**

The 250th anniversary of our nation's break from England to seek its independence will occur in 2026. New Jersey public school teachers, along with college and university faculty and staff, can start now to envision public history projects and classroom lessons that will highlight diverse and inclusive stories from the American Revolution. This article highlights important New Jersey African American resources to help teach history about the American Revolution.

The *NJEA Review* editorial staff in October 2020 published a four-page description of NJ resources that I authored, and placed on the web an over 30-page expanded guide titled “Black Lives Matter in the Past and Present: New Jersey African American Resources for the American Revolution.” Because of the New Jersey public school requirements for New Jersey history and Social Studies teaching and learning, the list highlights numerous resources including the New Jersey State Archives, the New Jersey State Library, the New Jersey Historical Commission, the NJ Amistad Commission, the university websites for projects at Princeton, Rutgers, and Kean Universities, and national and local non-profit organizations dedicated to presenting the African American experience. The web link is <https://www.njea.org/aaresourcesnj/> Because I cannot list all the groups here, please visit the article for the detailed source descriptions, web links, and primary documents. Thank you to the *NJEA Review* for allowing me to share some text in this excerpt in the hopes of bringing it before an even wider audience.

When I first proposed writing this piece in early Spring, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others had not yet been murdered. Community leaders, citizens, clergy, and the Black Lives Matter movement pushed for racial justice and built broad coalitions of support. In late August, Jacob Blake was shot seven times in the back by police. Any article on New Jersey African American history resources during the American revolutionary period must note that Black Lives Mattered, always, whether acknowledged or not in historical records. This article lists many primary documents, lesson plan sources, examples of secondary source readings, and digitized documents that can help 6-12 grade teachers and even college and university faculty engage students in discussions of freedom, enslavement, citizenship or the lack thereof, and the rights of Americans in pursuit of liberty during the American Revolutionary Era.

In the full article, I focus much attention on the New Jersey State Archives, which includes some digitized records as well as extensive original documents to explore. Let me highlight one resource featured: *Petitions opposing and supporting emancipation*. The Archives has extraordinary resources available to help teach African American history. These petitions, for example, show us how contested the idea of freedom was for enslaved African Americans, and how many residents of cities and towns submitted petitions against and for the freedom of enslaved people on the eve of the American Revolution. A special thank you for to the State Archives for allowing a few new resources to be digitized for the recent *NJEA Review* article. Students will be able to think about the idea of equality and freedom and question why, on the eve of the Revolution, New Jersey residents wanted to keep slavery. The image of the first page of a Petition to Governor William Franklin in 1774, for example, underscores how many white people were fearful of African Americans who would be freed from slavery. This “hard” history might be labeled as “controversial” by some, but I believe the language describing African Americans as “a very

Dangerous people” goes to the heart of why their freedom was denied by racist whites, even in a time where citizens were fighting a revolution for their own freedom from British tyranny.

Best wishes for creative, thoughtful, accurate, and meaningful historical teaching that can engage, inspire, and educate young New Jerseyans and share public history lessons with our broader New Jersey communities.

Caption, next page: Petition of Citizens of Perth Amboy to the General Assembly, opposing slave manumissions, Jan. 12, 1774: This petition, directed to Royal Governor William Franklin captures how many white citizens feared free African Americans and slaves in Perth Amboy. A direct quote with exact language, “from the long experience wee have had of Negros: both in slavery and freedom: that they are A Very Dangerous People.” Source: From Collection: Department of Education, Bureau of Archives and History Manuscript Collection, SEDSL006, Box 24. Reproduced with permission of the NJ State Archives.

Sue Kozel is an independent scholar who recently retired from teaching recently at Kean University and Mercer County Community College. Developing two book projects related to the American Revolution in New Jersey and African American responses to freedom and slavery in this period and the story of enslaved “Wench Betty” and her murder, Sue is also documenting a possible Potter’s Field for African American slaves in Western Monmouth County, New Jersey. In August 2021, she will be a residential fellow at the International Center for Jefferson Studies affiliated with Monticello, where she will continue to research the Quakers who worked with Jefferson on his slave plantations.