

## Session Notes

### American Revolution and American People: A Comparative Inquiry

**July 8, 2002: Equality** with Marla Miller and Tracey Pinkham.

**Discussion:** Groups paired up to review the quote below. The task was to determine who wrote the quote, when, where, and why.

“I am not a Know-Nothing. That is certain. How could I be? How can anyone who abhors the oppression of Negroes, be in favor or degrading classes of white people? Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we began by declaring that “*all men are created equal*.” We now practically read it “all men are created equal, *except Negroes*.” When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read “all men are created equal, except Negroes, and foreigners, and Catholics.” When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretence of loving liberty-to Russia for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, without the base alloy of hypocrisy.”

Groups report many different time frames including the 1960's. Interesting how this quote seems to make sense in many different circumstances. **Answer:** 1855 letter written by Lincoln to a friend regarding his thoughts on slaves and equality. (Original letter read in class).

**Homework:** Group reports back on examples of the phrase “all men are created equal” being evoked in the years following the Revolution-during any time period.

Some responses include,

- Constitution a “dead” document
- Neil Armstrong “One Giant step for mankind”
- Advertising- “online prices not created equal”
- “school vouchers equality of opportunity v. equality of quality”
- equality in women's sports-ESPN
- etc.

The phrase is so evoked in our culture that you can pick up a paper any day and find it.

What does equality mean?

- It means that you start off the same but if “I” did more in life I could move to a higher status.
- Parents with two children- one excels the other high school drop out. The parents feel the same affection for both. That is equality.
- Property: If you don't “buy into” the community you are not a part of it.-Constitutional equality.
- Electoral Vote: Smaller states v. larger states. Not equal when populations are different.
- White mans burden-or white man property owner burden. Need to be the leader because they have the education.
- Thomas Paine's “Common Sense”

**Workshop:** “Grandmother's Teapot: a workshop in teaching with things at museums” led by Signe Hanson.

Signe explains the Collection Project. We asked kids to choose 3-4 objects that were interesting, then assemble them all as the kids talked about why they chose the objects. Some swapping went on. We then asked them to do some research about the objects. They made labels to assemble in an exhibit. We then asked them to mentor the next group but that is where it broke down.

Signe takes out her Grandmother's teapot. She begins to talk about her grandmother using objects inside. She incorporates all the senses to make the story come alive. Ex: taste- Chocolate covered coffee beans; touch- games like jacks; smell- coffee; sound- sings a song her grandmother used to sing, visual-photograph of her grandmother, teapot, etc.

Three small groups are formed each with the task of creating their own exhibit of Grandmother's kitchen. It will be viewed by families of three generations. In it will be: Cabinets, which make good cases; Counters, easy to work on; Table; and a large sink.

What else would you incorporate? How will you run it?

- Living history- objects in the kitchen being used creating smells and sounds. Stations will be set up for families to take part in the preparations of food etc.
- Family Reunion-hands on activities such as pumping water, husking corn, apple pie making, and apple cider.
- Depression Era- showing the kitchen during the depression. Rations and making do with what you had.

## Measuring equality and inequality in early America: probate activity.

Probate records are lists of assets one possessed at time of death. You can view these records today at probate courts. Probate records can explain a lot about how one lived, however it only tells you about one place in time and many times these people gave things away to family and friends anticipating death therefore, lists are not always the most complete.

**Activity:** Participants are paired off with probate lists of three men- John Brooks, William Murray, and Samuel Ingram. Using the lists determine the occupation, family life and stature of each man.

The lists include information on the following:

- Clothing- Money determined how many sets of clothes one had as well as the possession of suits etc. People usually bought things in which they had a use for.
- Beds and Bedding- Could tell how many family member may have been living in the house.
- Kitchen equipment- determine wealth by looking at how many pieces or what materials they were made of ie. brass.
- Food Storage- eating habits can determine refinement ex; vinegar cruet, cream pot, tea canister.
- Tableware- again depending upon the material and number of place settings determine refinement and number in household.
- Furniture
- Grooming
- Textiles and clothing processing, production and maintenance
- Farm products
- Farm tools
- Livestock
- House, barn and land

What was determined?

- John Brooks is a joiner. He has joiners tools, hatchet, handsaw, auger, “round” hammers, etc. , and some farm equipment. He has a small household-just a bed and trundle, so he is probably married (pillion) with kids.
- Samuel Ingram is a gentleman farmer. Sidesaddle probably means he is married. Nothing about house or land; perhaps in old age and already gifted them to his kids?

Wells-Thorn House tour and discussion with Jessica Neuwirth.