

John Laurens: Revolutionary War Hero Stands Up Against Slavery

Process Paper

Ali Brugh, Aleksandra Dunjic, Ella Mathewson

Senior Division

Group Website

Website Word Count: 1200

Process Paper Word Count: 499

Why We Chose This Topic: In light of the divisive 2016 election, we believe taking a stand for equality is of the utmost importance. With his abolitionist views, John Laurens did exactly this. We initially heard about him because of his role in the popular *Hamilton* musical. We were interested to learn more about a man who was opposed to slavery during a time where it was widely accepted. Throughout the American Revolution, where he served as an aide-de-camp and a lieutenant colonel, he made strides for abolitionism, making him an outlier. Although unsuccessful in spreading his abolitionist ideas, Laurens's actions began a push for equality that is still fought for today. We admire Laurens for his courage and dedication to justice, which is why we researched him and his ideas.

How We Conducted Our Research: We researched Laurens by using primary and secondary sources. Through the Cleveland Public Library, we accessed a microfiche of Laurens's letters in *The Army Correspondence of Colonel John Laurens*, which helped us understand his personality. Another microfiche we examined was David Duncan Wallace's *The Life of Henry Laurens: With a Sketch of the Life of Lieutenant-Colonel John Laurens*. We also learned a great deal about Laurens through secondary sources like Gregory Massey's *John Laurens and the American Revolution*, which depicts Laurens's life. Furthermore, we used biographies on other historical figures, like Alexander Hamilton and George Washington, as well as government sites, to glean summaries of Laurens's experiences.

How We Created and Developed Our Website: We used the National History Day-Weebly site to create our project. We organized our website and made it easy-to-use by adding

navigational tools and ensuring each page was in chronological order. To make our site aesthetically pleasing, we included pictures of Laurens and his contemporaries and followed a consistent theme and layout. Lastly, we added information pertinent to understanding Laurens and his abolitionist goals on every page, placing an emphasis on quotations.

How Our Project Relates to this Year's NHD Theme, "Taking A Stand in History":

Laurens relates to this year's theme because of his radical ideas about equality. As a man who defied his upbringing, Laurens stands out in his opposition to slavery. He opposed not only his southern family's beliefs, but also the ideals of his society. Laurens felt so passionate about the subject that he refused to stop promoting his anti-slavery views; as a soldier in the Revolutionary War, he attempted to start a black regiment where slaves would fight in exchange for their freedom. Despite facing fierce resistance from southern society, as southern aristocrats wanted to keep their slaves, Laurens continued fighting. He pushed for his plan several times in the South Carolina House of Representatives, but the House rejected it each time. Laurens never saw his plan come to fruition, and since he died at a young age, he was unable to pursue other abolitionist courses. However, Laurens's stand for racial equality in a conservative time remains inspiring; even though he was losing the battle, he never backed down. To stand for one's beliefs, especially in the face of overwhelming defeat, is courageous. Ultimately, Laurens deserves to be recognized for his brave stand against discrimination.