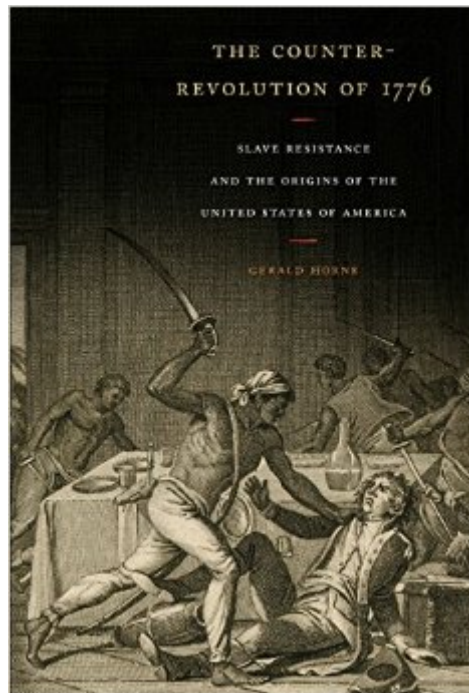


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The Counter-Revolution Of 1776: Slave Resistance And The Origins Of The United States Of America



Synopsis

The successful 1776 revolt against British rule in North America has been hailed almost universally as a great step forward for humanity. But the Africans then living in the colonies overwhelmingly sided with the British. In this trailblazing book, Gerald Horne shows that in the prelude to 1776, the abolition of slavery seemed all but inevitable in London, delighting Africans as much as it outraged slaveholders, and sparking the colonial revolt. Prior to 1776, anti-slavery sentiments were deepening throughout Britain and in the Caribbean, rebellious Africans were in revolt. For European colonists in America, the major threat to their security was a foreign invasion combined with an insurrection of the enslaved. It was a real and threatening possibility that London would impose abolition throughout the colonies—a possibility the founding fathers feared would bring slave rebellions to their shores. To forestall it, they went to war. The so-called Revolutionary War, Horne writes, was in part a counter-revolution, a conservative movement that the founding fathers fought in order to preserve their right to enslave others. The Counter-Revolution of 1776 brings us to a radical new understanding of the traditional heroic creation myth of the United States.

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Customer Reviews

Generally I don't review a book till I have read every last word. I make an exception only when I find work so excellent that I am convinced that if the book ended right where I am, right now (about 75 percent through, and of course I checked the sources), it would still be worth the full cover price. I will read the rest, but you need to know about this book RIGHT NOW. Reading this galley, courtesy

of the publisher, New York University, made me feel as if the American history I studied as an undergraduate and then taught for twenty years in the public school system was so incomplete as to be incorrect. If you care about American history; if you have ever wondered why Black anger still runs so deep, especially in certain parts of the USA; if you scratched your head over parts of American history as it has been presented and the ways it did not make sense, then you must read this book. The fact is that America's early Black population, as well as that of Blacks in the Caribbean, behaved with much more courage and savvy than they are given credit for in standard history texts. The role of Spain that Horne explains here, as well as that of the Catholic Church, and of the Cherokee people, is startling news. And the fact is, what I read here makes me ask questions about all sorts of other events, such as the Louisiana Purchase (the significance of having included Florida in the deal is a monster once this new information is merged with what we knew before), to the Trail of Tears and banishment of the Cherokee Nation from Georgia, to the question I was never able to adequately answer for my own bright students: "Where did the free Blacks come from?" It's here. It's all here. America's students have been robbed, up to this point. If you are a teacher, you have to get this book, even if it means buying it out of your own pocket. You can't tell the truth without this book! In reading this outstanding work, knowledge of basic place-name geography is critical. A lot of people these days have no idea, for example, where the Bahamas stand in relationship to North America, which US states are where, or even which European nations are closest to the Caribbean and the USA, and if you are fuzzy in this regard, you may need to pull out a map or grab a globe so that you can see how much that proximity matters. Those miles are important miles, and this information is massively different from what I was taught, and it is well enough documented that I am convinced it is true. And it makes so much sense. I can't hold this review until I have finished the book. I want all scholars who have been stuck in the dark through wrongful and errant selection of information in their own educations to know this book is available, and that what it imparts is huge. Black students deserve to know the truth; their history in the US is not one of pure terror and subjugation; their ancestors fought, and they thought, and they behaved politically. This knowledge is a basic right, not only for them, but for anyone who cares about the truth!

In a simplified nutshell, Gerald Horne's argument in this book is that the Revolution was in large measure a response to the colonists' fear of London's drive towards abolition of slavery. Horne argues that slavery underpinned every aspect of the pre-1776 economy and as such was seen as crucial by the colonists, even while slave resistance was growing and slave revolts were becoming

more common. The Royal African Company's loss of monopoly over the slave trade in the late 17th century meant that free-traders had entered the slave markets, and the consequent uncontrolled rise in slave numbers led to fears that the slave owners did not have the capacity to stifle such resistance. While London was showing signs of beginning to think that the solution might lie in abolition, (with the added benefit that Africans could then be armed to assist in the ongoing turf wars with Spain and France on the American continent), the colonists feared a situation where Africans could be given some kind of equality or even superiority within the armed forces or, still worse, in civilian life. So, Horne argues, the Revolution was as much about maintaining the institution of the enslavement of Africans as achieving 'liberty' for 'white' colonists. Horne makes two further assertions, both leading from this central argument. Firstly, he shows that Africans largely sided with Britain or one of the other European powers in the Revolution and prior to that had often looked to both Spain and France as possible liberators. From this, Horne argues that some Africans saw the war as not just a possible route to freedom but hoped that a victory could lead to some kind of league between themselves, the indigenous people of America and one of the European powers to form a government in place of the white colonists. Secondly, and leading on from that, much of the subsequent ill-treatment of Africans, as slaves or free citizens, can be attributed to them having picked the wrong side..."...the ongoing persecution of descendants of mainland enslaved Africans is - in part - a continuing expression of what tends to befall those who are defeated in bloody warfare: often they are subjected to a heinous collective punishment." Horne concludes therefore that the general view of the creation of the republic as a great leap forward for humanity is erroneous - an example of history being written by the winners, in this case the white colonists and their descendants. On the whole, I found Horne's arguments partially but not wholly convincing. The book is a strange mix of history and polemic, written by someone who frequently lets his anger show through in the language he chooses to use - '...profit-hungry settlers were willing to sell the rope that might be used to encircle their pasty necks', 'the supposed trailblazing republic and its allegedly wondrous constitution' etc; while his desire to avoid the use of the words 'slaves' and 'black' leads him at points into rather fanciful terminology, my favourites being 'men of ebony' and 'the melanin rich'. When reading a history of a period of which one has very little existing knowledge, written by a historian unknown to one, the challenge is to decide how much confidence to have in the author's interpretation of the facts. Really the only way I can ever think to do this is to see what the author says about a subject I do know a little about. Very early on in the book, Horne talks about the influx of Scots to the colonies, and his description of the causes and effects of the Jacobite rebellions was so over-simplified and frankly misleading that it left me gasping and gaping. I was left feeling,

therefore, that I would have to take many of Horne's interpretations with a large dose of scepticism. I also felt strongly that, while obviously Horne was speaking specifically about the impact of slavery, he failed to give enough emphasis to the other causes that combined to bring about the Revolution; and I felt this tunnel-vision approach weakened his argument rather than strengthening it. The style of writing is somewhat clumsy at times and Horne repeats the same information again and again throughout. He constantly jumps backwards and forwards in time rather than taking a linear approach. And he often refers to places or incidents without clarifying them, which can be problematic for a reader without an existing familiarity with the period and locations. All of these factors combined to make this a book that I somewhat struggled through rather than enjoyed. However, despite all of these problems, I still felt that there was a basic validity in much of what Horne was saying, in particular with regards to his main argument. Certainly worth reading to understand why he has extrapolated the conclusions that he has from that, but should perhaps be treated with the extra caution that applies to polemic rather than history. 3.5 stars for me, so rounded up. NB This book was provided for review by the publisher, NYU Press.

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