

Pregnant women ran, too, in hopes that their newborns would earn their freedom papers in the form of a "BB" certificate: "Born Free Behind British Lines."⁹⁰

Reaching New York or Charleston or Savannah was only the beginning of the journey. In New York, Boston King, a runaway from South Carolina, heard a rumor that all the slaves in the city, some two thousand, "were to be delivered up to their masters," and he was haunted by fear of American slave owners marching through the city, "seizing upon their slaves in the streets, or even dragging them out of their beds." King, a carpenter, wrote in his memoirs that blacks in the city were too frightened even to sleep. A Hessian officer reported that as many as five thousand slave owners entered the city to recapture their slaves. George Washington had in fact ordered the keeping of the "Book of Negroes" so that owners might later seek compensation for slaves carried off in British ships. In Charleston, soldiers patrolled the wharves to hold back the hundreds of people desperately seeking to realize what would be, for most of them, their last chance at securing the blessings of liberty for themselves and their posterity. Despite the patrols, dozens of people leapt off the docks and swam out to the last longboats heading to the British warships, including the aptly named *Free Briton*. The swimmers grabbed the rails of the crowded boats and tried to climb aboard. When they would not let go, the British soldiers on the boats tried to hack off their fingers.⁹¹

The Revolution was at its most radical in the challenge it presented to the institution of slavery and at its most conservative in its failure to meet that challenge.

1) Highlight the thesis.
2) On the back, explain why the slaves are desperately trying to get to England. →