

1779. Escapes to the British Lines

Source: Hodges, G. (1999). *Root & Branch, African Americans in New York & East Jersey, 1613-1863*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 139-140.

In November, 1775, Lord Dunmore, the governor of the Virginia colony and a former governor of New York, offered freedom to any slave or indentured servant who joined British forces trying to suppress the American rebellion. On Long Island, angry farmers burned Dunmore in effigy. In response to the British offer, thousands of enslaved Africans fled to the British lines. George Washington, who at first rejected all African soldiers, changed his position after the Dunmore declaration.

As I was at prayer one evening, I thought the Lord Heard Me, and would mercifully deliver me. Therefore putting my confidence in him, about one o'clock in the morning, I went down to the river side and found the guards were either asleep or in the tavern. I instantly entered the water, but when I was a little distance from the opposite shore, I heard the sentinels disputing among themselves. One said, I am sure I saw a man cross the river. Another replied, there is no such thing. When I got a little distance from the shore I got down on my knees and thanked God for this deliverance. I traveled until five o'clock in the morning and then concealed myself until seven o'clock at night, when I proceeded forward thro' brushes and marshes for fear of being discovered. When I came to the river, opposite Staten Island, I found a boat and altho it was near a whale-boat, I ventured into it and cutting the rope, I got safe over. The commanding officer, when informed of my case, gave me a passport and I proceeded to New York.