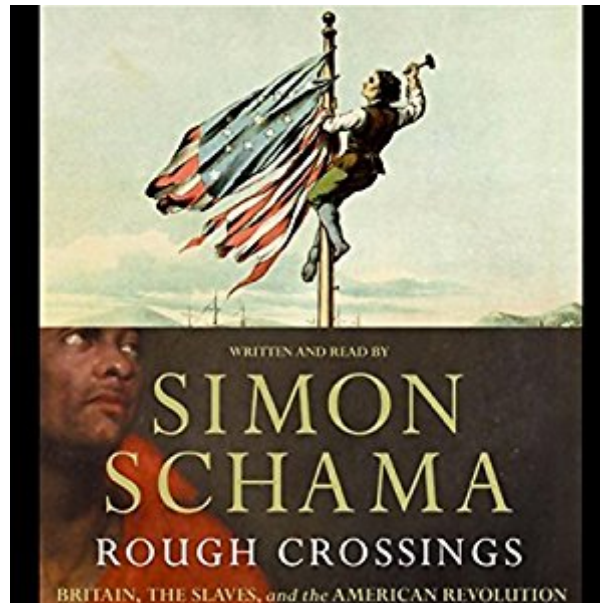


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# Rough Crossings: Britain, The Slaves, And The American Revolution



## Synopsis

Set against the backdrop of the American Revolution and its aftermath, *Rough Crossings* is the gripping and bitterly tragic tale of the slaves' struggle for freedom. Schama follows the terrifying ordeal of the escaped slaves into the fires of the war, and then into inhospitable Nova Scotia where they were betrayed by the British Crown they had just fought for. Masterfully evoked and incredibly moving, this impassioned book sheds necessary light on a dark corner of Canadian and British history. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

For those readers who enjoyed last year's best seller, David McCullough's "1776," the present volume by Simon Schama will show the events of that same period in a whole new light. Once you thought you had the definitive story, a book such as this comes along and turns the story upside down. In this book, Schama writes of the promise of freedom offered by the British Monarchy to the American slaves who were willing to serve on the side of the crown. The offer of course was not entirely altruistic; King George had much to gain from depriving the ungrateful colonists of their workforce. But for the slaves this was an offer they couldn't refuse, and they were willing to risk life and limb to cross over to the British side. Much has been said about the Founding Fathers and the fact that they were slaveholders; Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin had all anguished over the morality of it. Yet not only did they retain their slaves, they acquiesced to the southern slaveholding states to allow it in order to get the constitution ratified. This poisoned the republic from the beginning and festered until it erupted with the Civil War many years later. It was one of the tragic

ironies of the American Revolution; for all their high-minded ideals of independence and freedom, they could not let go of the institution of slavery which had given them their prosperity. Schama's wonderfully written account of this little-mentioned struggle is very engaging and sorrowful. Those slaves who found themselves under British rule after 1787 were shipped either to Nova Scotia, the Caribbean, or London, where they encountered new hardships and a sense of betrayal. To a great extent the British, having lost their struggle to control the colonists, were looking for places to unload their new subjects.

There appears to be two kinds of political history: that which is hidden from us completely by the special interests, and that which can be dug up and exposed when it is "safe". *Rough Crossings* by Simon Shama is of the latter, and will stir up a storm of indignation when it is published in the USA in 2006. Starting even before the Revolutionary War, so-called American Patriots and our founding fathers exhibited the same kind of special interest/self interest that schoolchildren today are taught is beneath public service. Patrick (Give me liberty or give me death!) Henry could not for the life of him understand why he should free his own slaves. Thomas Jefferson's first declaration of independence in 1775 cited the British government's rumored incitement of Negroes to rise up for their freedom as one of the prime movers of the colonies to break free of the tyranny of England. He was proven right in that tens of thousands of slaves ran away to fight on the British side, against the colonists. The "Patriots" killed every runaway they could find before they got to the English ships. (The same was to occur in 1812, when the British and the Americans clashed again) The British, who of course taught the Americans everything they knew about slavery in the first place, had only recently begun to abhor it. Using the courts, English activists were able to obtain the freedom of people who were being captured in England to be shipped off to sugar plantations. The British public, caught up in this humanitarian, headline-making campaign, was offended by the tyranny of the Americans, just as the Americans were offended by the tyranny of the British in things like taxation. The result was armed conflict.

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