

VIOLENCE & CONSEQUENCES

HISTORICAL JUDGMENT

Sections 10-11: Up Goes Huddy | Never a Good War

CENTRAL QUESTION When independence finally arrived, who enjoyed its benefits, who paid its price, and did peace heal the divisions that made the Revolution a civil war?

VIOLENCE, PEACE & CONSEQUENCES TIMELINE

OCT 1781	Cornwallis surrenders at Yorktown	MAR 1782	Loyalist Philip White is killed
APR 1782	Joshua Huddy is hanged	1782	Asgill selected for retaliation
NOV 1782	Asgill freed; preliminary peace	SEP 1783	Treaty of Paris recognizes the U.S.
NOV 1783	British evacuate New York	1784+	Families, exiles, and nations reckon

Victory Did Not End the Civil War

Yorktown made American independence increasingly likely, but it did not immediately stop revenge killings, family conflict, or the struggle over property and belonging. The final sections ask what victory looked like for people whose loyalties and futures were fundamentally different.

- **Retaliation:** The hanging of Joshua Huddy nearly produced the execution of an uninvolved British prisoner.
- **Peace:** Diplomats secured independence, but the treaty could not restore every home, relationship, or lost life.
- **Judgment:** Patriots, Loyalists, Black Americans, and Native nations experienced the same settlement in sharply different ways.

READING LENS A war can produce a valuable political outcome without making every wartime action just or every consequence equally beneficial.

Two Final Movements

- **Section 10:** Huddy's death, William Franklin's Loyalist network, and the Asgill crisis reveal how vengeance outlived the decisive battles.
- **Section 11:** Peace negotiations, Loyalist exile, slavery, Indigenous dispossession, and divided families complicate the meaning of American victory.

UP GOES HUDDY

A retaliatory hanging exposes the ferocity of the Revolution's conflict among Americans.

TITLE IDEA A message attached to Joshua Huddy's body declared "UP GOES HUDDY FOR PHILLIP WHITE," announcing that one death was intended to answer another.

Yorktown Ends a Campaign, Not Hatred

On October 19, 1781, British forces under Lord Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown to an allied American and French army. The victory changed the strategic picture, but British forces remained in New York, and bitter local fighting continued in communities such as Monmouth County, New Jersey.

- **Between governments:** Formal negotiations had not yet produced a final peace treaty.
- **Between neighbors:** Patriot and Loyalist irregulars remembered previous raids, arrests, deaths, and losses.
- **Between armies:** Commanders struggled to control local actors who considered private vengeance a form of justice.

The Death of Philip White

In March 1782, Loyalist Philip White died while in the hands of Patriot forces. Accounts of the circumstances differed, but his death intensified demands for retaliation among the Board of Associated Loyalists and other supporters of the Crown.

- **The Loyalist claim:** White's death required an answer because ordinary protection and justice had failed.
- **The Patriot concern:** Retaliation aimed at an unrelated prisoner would amount to murder, not lawful punishment.
- **The civil-war pattern:** Each side remembered its own victims first and framed its response as necessary defense.

DISCUSSION STARTER When communities no longer trust the same courts or authorities, how easily does justice become revenge?

UP GOES HUDDY

Joshua Huddy's execution connects the local violence to William Franklin and Washington's dilemma.

Joshua Huddy Is Taken and Hanged

Joshua Huddy was a New Jersey Patriot captain already held as a prisoner. Associated Loyalists obtained custody under the pretense of a prisoner exchange. Instead, he was hanged on April 12, 1782, and a placard identified his death as retaliation for Philip White.

- **Huddy was not tried:** The killing bypassed ordinary legal procedures and targeted a captive.
- **The message was deliberate:** The placard turned the hanging into a public declaration of retaliatory justice.
- **Local outrage spread:** Residents warned Washington that they might pursue their own revenge if authorities failed to respond.

William Franklin's Loyalist Connection

The Board of Associated Loyalists was headed by William Franklin, Benjamin Franklin's Loyalist son and New Jersey's former royal governor. Huddy's death placed William's political world at the center of an episode that horrified the Patriot leadership. Specific responsibility for the decision was disputed, but his connection to the organization intensified the family tragedy.

A Father and Son on Opposite Sides

- **Benjamin Franklin:** Negotiated for an independent United States and sought an end to a destructive war.
- **William Franklin:** Remained committed to the Crown and led an organization associated with militant Loyalist resistance.
- **The deeper irony:** The same family embodied both the diplomatic pursuit of peace and the brutal persistence of civil conflict.

Washington Faces Public Pressure

Washington and his senior officers believed the killing could not go unanswered. If the Patriots appeared unable to protect their prisoners, further abuses might follow. Yet retaliating against an uninvolved British officer threatened to repeat the very injustice they condemned.

MORAL PROBLEM Could Washington deter future atrocities without punishing a person who had no part in Huddy's death?

THE ASGILL CRISIS

An innocent young British prisoner becomes the target of proposed retaliation.

A Prisoner Is Chosen by Lot

Washington ordered that a British officer of comparable rank be selected for possible execution. The choice fell to Captain Charles Asgill, a young officer captured at Yorktown who had no personal connection to Huddy's hanging. His selection raised questions about the protections promised at the British surrender.

- **Washington's objective:** Pressure British authorities to punish those responsible and prevent similar killings.
- **Asgill's predicament:** A prisoner uninvolved in the crime faced death because he belonged to the opposing army.
- **The legal problem:** Retaliation against a Yorktown prisoner risked violating surrender protections and damaging American credibility.

A Mother Seeks Mercy

Asgill's mother appealed for help, and the French foreign minister, the Comte de Vergennes, intervened. The matter became an international diplomatic issue as well as a test of Washington's judgment and America's treatment of prisoners.

Congress Chooses Release

After months of uncertainty, Congress decided that Asgill should be freed. Washington informed him of the decision on November 13, 1782. Mercy prevented another death, but the episode demonstrated how difficult it was to escape a cycle of retaliatory violence.

- **Why release mattered:** The new nation avoided executing a prisoner for someone else's crime.
- **Why the threat mattered:** Even Washington contemplated collective retaliation under intense wartime pressure.
- **Why France mattered:** An ally could influence the moral and diplomatic choices of the emerging United States.

BOOK CLUB TAKEAWAY Huddy and Asgill expose the danger of answering one unlawful death with another and show why the Revolution's civil violence did not end at Yorktown.

Ask While Reading

- Was threatening Asgill a necessary deterrent, an immoral act, or both?

NEVER A GOOD WAR

Diplomacy secures independence while exposing the human costs that victory cannot repair.

TITLE IDEA Benjamin Franklin concluded that there had never been a good war or a bad peace - a judgment made more powerful by his own divided family.

From Yorktown to Negotiation

Yorktown persuaded British leaders that continuing the war would be increasingly costly, but a decisive surrender was not the same thing as a signed peace. Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and John Jay negotiated with British representatives over independence, boundaries, debts, fisheries, and the future of Loyalist property.

- **Preliminary peace:** American and British negotiators signed preliminary articles on November 30, 1782.
- **Final settlement:** The definitive Treaty of Paris was signed on September 3, 1783.
- **International reality:** The conflict and peace process also involved French interests and the wider European balance of power.

What the Treaty Accomplished

- **Independence:** Britain formally recognized the United States as a separate and sovereign nation.
- **Territory:** The settlement established expansive American boundaries reaching toward the Mississippi River.
- **Prisoners and evacuation:** The agreement provided for releases and the withdrawal of British forces.
- **Loyalist property:** Congress agreed to recommend restitution and reconsideration by the states, not to guarantee complete restoration.
- **Future prosecutions:** The treaty called for an end to new confiscations and penalties based on wartime allegiance.

IMPORTANT DISTINCTION Diplomatic recognition ended the legal war; it did not automatically resolve local grievances, confiscation disputes, slavery, or family estrangement.

THE UNEQUAL PEACE

Loyalists, Black Americans, and Native nations faced sharply different consequences after independence.

Loyalists Confront Exile

Many Loyalists faced confiscated property, damaged reputations, broken relationships, and uncertainty about whether they could remain in the new United States. Some left for Britain, Nova Scotia, other parts of British North America, or elsewhere in the empire. What Patriots celebrated as liberation could look to a Loyalist like dispossession and forced migration.

- **Property:** A treaty recommendation did not ensure that states would restore every confiscated estate.
- **Belonging:** People born in America could become outsiders in the country where they had lived.
- **Memory:** The victorious national story often treated Loyalist suffering as secondary or deserved.

Boston King and Jeffrey Brace

Brands contrasts two Black men whose experiences complicate a simple Patriot-versus-Loyalist narrative. Boston King pursued freedom through the British and eventually joined Black Loyalist migration. Jeffrey Brace served with American forces and later obtained his freedom. Each man sought liberty within a society that continued to defend slavery.

Black Loyalists Leave New York

When British forces evacuated New York in 1783, formerly enslaved people who had reached British lines faced possible re-enslavement if they remained. The register commonly called the Book of Negroes documented many Black evacuees. Some resettled in Nova Scotia, where discrimination and broken promises made freedom difficult; some later went to Sierra Leone.

Native Nations Were Not Asked

The Treaty of Paris was negotiated without Haudenosaunee representatives, even though members of the Confederacy had fought on different sides. Britain transferred claims to lands that Native nations did not believe the Crown had the right to surrender. Independence therefore expanded American claims while threatening Indigenous sovereignty and homelands.

BOOK CLUB TAKEAWAY The meaning of “peace” depended on whose land, freedom, security, and political voice were protected.

A FAMILY, A NATION, A VERDICT

The Franklin family's partial reconciliation becomes a lens for the Revolution's unresolved legacy.

Benjamin and William After the War

Benjamin Franklin emerged as a celebrated architect of American independence. William Franklin, his son, ended the war as a Loyalist exile. Correspondence in 1784 shows an attempt to revive their relationship, but reconciliation could not simply erase imprisonment, opposite allegiances, or years of political and personal bitterness.

- **Public victory:** The father helped secure the recognition of a new independent nation.
- **Private loss:** The son had remained loyal to the government the father helped defeat.
- **Historical meaning:** Peace between governments did not guarantee peace within families.

Was It Really America's First Civil War?

- **Evidence in favor:** Americans attacked, imprisoned, dispossessed, and sometimes killed other Americans over rival loyalties.
- **Necessary qualification:** The conflict was also an imperial, international, and Indigenous war.
- **The interpretive gain:** Calling it a civil war restores the experiences of people omitted from a simple unity-and-independence story.

The Strength of Brands's Approach

Brands uses prominent individuals, family divisions, letters, and dramatic episodes to make political choices vivid. The Franklins, Grace Galloway, Washington, Benedict Arnold, and the Huddy-Asgill affair reveal how competing definitions of loyalty reshaped private lives and public institutions.

A Fair Criticism of the Book

One specialist reviewer argues that the book depends heavily on famous or elite figures and does not fully analyze ordinary Loyalists, their communities, their political organization, or the larger scale of Loyalist participation. The book's powerful individual stories may therefore illuminate the civil-war thesis without exhausting it.

FINAL VERDICT Independence was a genuine political achievement, but the nation's birth also produced exile, unequal freedom, contested land, family rupture, and violence among Americans themselves.

SYNTHESIS & FINAL JUDGMENT

The final settlement produced independence, but its benefits and burdens were not evenly shared.

WHO WON, WHO LOST, AND WHO WAS LEFT OUT?

Group	What changed?	What remained unresolved?
Patriot leaders	Independence, sovereignty, and western claims.	Political unity, debt, and the meaning of liberty.
Loyalist families	Exile, confiscation, separation, or uncertain return.	Restitution, belonging, and relationships.
Black Americans	Some gained freedom through wartime service or flight.	Slavery continued; freedom and equality were unequal.
Native nations	Their lands were claimed in a treaty they did not sign.	Sovereignty, displacement, and future conflict.
The Franklins	Father and son ended the war on opposite sides.	Personal reconciliation could not erase the rupture.

The Entire Book in Four Movements

- **Part 1 - The Road to Revolution:** Imperial conflict, colonial experience, and disputes about authority weaken confidence in Britain.
- **Part 2 - Choosing Sides:** War and independence force Americans to decide where loyalty and legitimate government reside.
- **Part 3 - Divided Loyalties and Betrayal:** Faction, confiscation, family conflict, and Arnold's conspiracy expose divisions within the struggle.
- **Part 4 - Violence and Consequences:** Retaliation, peace, exile, unequal freedom, and unresolved grievances reveal the price of national birth.

Questions for Historical Judgment

- **Justice:** Can independence justify the treatment of prisoners, Loyalists, women, or Native nations?
- **Memory:** Which people disappear when the Revolution is remembered only as a unified fight for freedom?
- **Reconciliation:** What would a genuinely inclusive peace have required beyond a signed treaty?

CORE INTERPRETATION America's founding created a new political nation while exposing conflicts over loyalty, liberty, race, property, and belonging that independence alone did not resolve.

DISCUSSION & SOURCES

Eight discussion questions, a one-minute spoken summary, and the principal historical references.

Best Discussion Questions

1. Was Joshua Huddy's execution an act of war, an act of revenge, or a breakdown of lawful authority?
2. Did Washington's willingness to threaten Charles Asgill protect American prisoners or betray the principles he claimed to defend?
3. How does William Franklin's connection to the Huddy affair change our understanding of his break with Benjamin Franklin?
4. Did the Treaty of Paris offer Loyalists meaningful justice, or mainly the appearance of reconciliation?
5. How do Boston King and Jeffrey Brace complicate the claim that one side of the Revolution represented freedom?
6. Can a treaty be called a just peace if Native nations are excluded while their lands are claimed by others?
7. Was Benjamin Franklin right that there was never a good war, even if independence was worth achieving?
8. After reading all four parts, does Brands prove that the Revolution was America's first civil war, or mostly retell familiar history through divided individuals?

One-Minute Spoken Summary

SUMMARY The Revolution's final chapters show that victory did not end America's internal conflict. After Yorktown, Loyalists hanged Patriot captain Joshua Huddy in retaliation for Philip White's death. Washington then threatened to execute Charles Asgill, an uninvolved British prisoner, until political and French intervention helped secure his release. Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and John Jay won recognition of American independence in the Treaty of Paris, but peace did not restore every Loyalist home, abolish slavery, protect Native lands, or reunite divided families. Boston King and Jeffrey Brace pursued freedom on different sides, while the Haudenosaunee were excluded from decisions about their own territory. Benjamin and William Franklin's fractured relationship captured the personal cost. Brands's central lesson is that the United States emerged from both a war for independence and a bitter civil struggle among Americans themselves.

Source & Copyright Note

This reading companion is an original interpretive summary and does not reproduce the book's text. Events are grouped thematically; precise section boundaries may vary by edition. Principal references: H. W. Brands, *Our First Civil War*; George Washington's Mount Vernon, the Asgill affair and prisoners of war; National Park Service, Yorktown, British evacuation, and the Book of Negroes; National Archives, Treaty of Paris and Black Loyalist migration; U.S. Department of State, 1783 peace negotiations; Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, Haudenosaunee exclusion; The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, 1784 correspondence with William Franklin; and *Journal of the American Revolution*, review of *Our First Civil War*.