Possibility One. This assignment will be worth up to 5 points towards your final grade. It will be due the last day of class, Wednesday, December 10th at the beginning of the class period. Any assignment submitted after this time will not be graded. Simply submitting the assignment does not guarantee the full compliment of points—it will be graded as to content and analysis. You may submit either Possibility One or Two—NOT BOTH!! If you have missed more than 2 quizzes, you are not eligible for this extra credit assignment.

Freedom & Slavery in late 18th & early 19th century America

After the American Revolution, northern states began abolishing slavery. By 1808, slavery was outlawed in every northern state (which did not mean that all slaves were free however). Blacks were merged into an emancipated society where all persons were ostensibly to be treated equally. In the South, this general emancipation never occurred.

This activity asks you to compare first person and literary accounts, census data, and legal cases found on the following web sites and draw conclusions on whether emancipation meant equality and if there was a universal free northern experience. It also asks you to determine how the experiences of slavery shaped life in late colonial, Revolutionary, and early national Virginia and whether the Revolution meant the same things for all Virginians.

Resources:

UVa. Census site: http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/

George Washington, Philadelphia, and Slavery:
http://www.ushistory.org/presidentshouse/slaves/index.htm

Colonial Williamsburg site:
http://www.history.org/Almanack/people/african/aahdr.cfm
& especially browse the links concerning Dunmore’s Proclamation & the Biographical Fact Sheets- also check out the links to the journal articles
 Also check out the African-American Podcasts at
http://www.history.org/media/podcasts_category.cfm
Click on the category African-Americans under People & listen

The following exercise should be submitted as a 4-5 page analytical paper. Please give ample space to both the primary source documentation (Steps One & Two) as well as the conclusions you draw from the web-based information itself (Steps Three & Four).
Step One: Using the census information from the UVa. site, search the database for data pertaining to the states of Virginia and Pennsylvania from 1790-1840 (1790 is the 1st year data is available), using the variables of “slaves” or “slave population” and “slaveholders.” What evidence did you find? What did your findings reveal about the population composition of the north (Pennsylvania) and the south (Virginia) during those years and the status of African-American life?

Compare the statistical data with the analysis and information available from the Presidents’ House site. What perspectives on African-American slavery and freedom are offered by residents of this Mid-Atlantic state shortly after the American Revolution? What did the Revolution mean to the President’s African-American slaves—especially living in Philadelphia?

Then go to the Colonial Williamsburg site. What does it tell you about the lives of African-Americans in Virginia? How does it add to your knowledge of the Revolution in Virginia? What does it tell you about the meaning of freedom in the colony (and later state) considered the intellectual birthplace of the American Revolution?

Step Two: Drawing from the resources you have examined, draw some conclusions on why and how blacks either gained freedom or remained slaves during this period. What were the conditions in Virginia in the time period just preceding the Revolution? What were the conditions of African-Americans in Pennsylvania following the Revolution? Can we compare these 2 colonies/states?

Step Three: What conclusions did you draw from your research into the websites? Discuss the process of working with this information. In what ways did you find the data revealing or problematic? What did you learn from using these documents on this topic?

Step Four: What did you learn about the notions of slavery and freedom from engaging with this material and this activity? Did the process raise important questions or encourage critical thinking and analysis? What issues did the exercise raise about the challenges historians face as they conduct research in primary sources and use other materials? What does it suggest about the kinds of conclusions that can be derived from sources of this type?

What are the most important advantages and disadvantages of examining primary sources such as these? How would such a process compare with only using secondary sources such as a textbook? Does the use of new media such as the Internet change the process in significant ways? What are the possibilities and pitfalls of using the Internet for historical research? Are the PodCasts on the Colonial Williamsburg site valuable as historical sources?