



RESISTANCE AND AGENCY

"Liberty in Our Grasp" lesson plans were developed through a partnership between the Delaware Historical Society and the Hard History Project with financial support from the State of Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs and M&T Bank.

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Delaware History Standards

- **History 2 (6-8):** Students will examine historical documents, artifacts, and other materials, and analyze them in terms of credibility, as well as the purpose, perspective, or point of view for which they were constructed.

Lesson Essential Question

- How did enslaved people resist slavery?

Teaching Hard History Summary Concept Grades 6-12:

- **Summary Objective 10:** Students will analyze the growth of the abolitionist movement in the 1830s and the slaveholding states' view of the movement as a physical, economic, and political threat.
- **Summary Objective 11:** Students will recognize that enslaved people resisted slavery in ways that ranged from violence to smaller, everyday means of asserting their humanity and opposing their enslavers.

Time required: 90-120 minutes

Materials:

- Lesson presentation slide deck
- [Article with student questions: Portraits of Protest: Black resistance throughout U.S. history](#)
- Video: [How did enslaved people resist slavery?](#)
- Optional video: [Boy Runaway](#)
- [Worksheet: Closed sort](#)- Types of resistance in Delaware
- [Worksheet: Document Analysis - Types of resistance in Delaware](#)

- Book/Video: [The Remarkable Story of George Moses Horton](#)
- [Exit ticket](#)
- [Delaware Historical Society primary sources](#) and [transcriptions](#)

Delaware Historical Society Primary Sources:

- Freedom Seekers
 - **Source 1.** [Advertisement, reward for freedom seeker Ben Boulden in the Delaware Gazette, May 5, 1826](#)
 - **Source 2.** [Advertisement, reward for woman and child, freedom seekers, in the Delaware Gazette, June 20, 1845](#)
- Abolitionist Societies/Abolition Groups
 - **Source 3.** [Printed memorial of the Abolition Society with original signatures, 1786](#)
 - **Source 4.** [Copy of Quaker Memorial and Petition to General Assembly of Delaware for gradual abolition in the state, December 27, 1785](#)
- Petition for Freedom
 - **Source 5.** [Petition of George Laws, an enslaved person, to Hon. Peter Robinson, July 7, 1833](#)
- Freedom Seekers on the Underground Railroad
 - **Source 6.** [Copy of article from The Liberator. Letter from Samuel D. Burns \[Burriss\], a freed Black man held in prison for helping enslaved people escape to freedom, June 1848](#)
 - **Source 7.** [The plantation police or home-guard examining Negro passes on the levee road below New Orleans / from a sketch by our special artist, F.B. Schell](#)
 - **Source 8.** [Twenty-eight fugitives escaping from the Eastern Shore of Maryland](#)
 - Optional additional source: **Source 9.** [An Incident in the Corbit Mansion in the Days of Slavery Before the War of 1861–4](#)
- Other
 - **Source 10.** [Come and join us brothers](#)

Procedure:

1. Warm-up: Slide 2—Ask students to look at the images and answer the question: What do these images have in common? This activity is used to activate students’ knowledge of the word resistance, which is defined on Slide 3. Elicit any examples of how students have resisted something.
2. Guide students to the lesson’s objectives.
 - a. What am I learning today?
 - b. Why am I learning this?
 - c. How will I know that I learned it?
3. First, students will fill out the **Before Reading** anticipation guide for the article (top and bottom), *Portraits of Protest: Black resistance throughout U.S. history* (see Appendix A). You can have students in pairs taking turns reading the article aloud or the teacher may want to read the article and model finding

the main idea and questioning the text; reinforce students to annotate the text as the teacher reads aloud by circling forms of resistance. After reading the article, students will fill out the “After Reading” column in the top and bottom. Allow students to discuss their answers within small groups or in a class discussion. Ensure students use evidence from the article in their responses. [answers: true, true, false, false]

4. Watch the video [How did enslaved people resist slavery?](#) and ask students for examples of resistance that the historian included that were not included in the article.
5. Teachers will now move the lesson into:
 - a. How did enslaved people resist enslavement?
 - b. How did enslaved people attempt to have control over their lives?
6. Optional activity: Please use this activity if you feel students need more support understanding how enslaved people resisted enslavement. Students can learn about William Henry Singleton who was born enslaved in 1843 and resisted his enslavement in many ways. After reading the short introduction on Singleton, ask students in what ways did William Henry Singleton resist slavery? This can include running away. Use this as an opportunity to review with students that enslaved people had families that could be split up at any time. ([Click here](#) for more information about William Henry Singleton.)
7. Optional activity: Students will watch the video, [Boy Runaway](#), about Singleton and add to their list of how enslaved people resisted slavery. Teacher will add it to the classroom list from step 3.
8. Using Slide 13, ask students to brainstorm, either with another student or with a group of students, other ways enslaved people resisted slavery and had control over their own lives. Give students 3-5 minutes to brainstorm answers and after 3-5 minutes, ask a student to represent their group and stand up to share their answers. Students will share out loud the items from their list, one after another, circling around the room until all students have shared their lists (students sit down when all their answers have been shared). The answers provided can be added to a class list if the teacher prefers. Once everyone has shared, project Slide 14. Ask students to compare their list to the list on Slide 14 and see which methods were missing from their class list, checking for understanding and addressing any misconceptions through the process. Ask what each column has in common. Use the next slide to explain that overt methods include ways that were easily distinguished and seen while covert methods are more discreet.
9. After students have gained knowledge on the different methods of resistance, students will now categorize how enslaved people resisted slavery using sources from the Delaware Historical Society and the [Closed sort – Types of resistance in Delaware](#). It is important to note that up to this point, learning has been centered on the resistance of enslaved people, but some white people were also allies in this process. In the following documents, students will examine acts of resistance from Black and white people.
10. Divide students into groups of three or four. Students will be given all the Delaware Historical Society sources and will examine each source for types of resistance. Students will divide up the sources among

their group and read the source(s) and answer the questions on the [Document Analysis - Types of resistance in Delaware](#) worksheet (Appendix A) and listed below:

- a. Who is the author (if you know)? What does the source say?
 - b. What is the purpose of this source?
 - c. Is the resistance overt or covert?
11. You may want to differentiate this activity in a few ways:
- a. Divide students into expert groups and only receive one type of resistance.
 - b. Instead of groups, hand out 3 sources to each student.
12. Students will then share their source answers with their group and look for trends in the sources [when the resistance occurred, were they overall violent/non-violent, overt/covert, performed by men, women, or children, who created the source, etc.] by identifying what they notice and wonder about the sources. You can also use Slide 20 to illustrate other examples of resistance. Debrief answers with students.
13. Use Slide 21 to introduce students to examples of resistance using the story of George Moses Horton. George Moses Horton was born into slavery in 1798 and became the first African American man to publish a book in the South. Based on the description on Slide 22, have students discuss with one another ways Horton resisted. This can include learning to read, write, publish books, buying his time, etc. ([Click here](#) to read more about George Moses Horton.)
14. Students will then listen to the book, [The Remarkable Story of George Moses Horton](#), by Don Tate. This is a children's book and will provide students with many examples of Horton's resistance. Ask students to keep a list of ways Horton resisted slavery. After the video/story, ask students other ways Horton resisted slavery. Use Slide 25 to show an example of Horton's poetry and as a way to review that enslaved people hated being enslaved and resisted bondage in many ways, including writing.
15. Students take part in a metacognition activity, where students will answer the question: "Why is it important to learn about different resistance methods?"
16. Students should go back to the initial article, [Portraits of Protest: Black resistance throughout U.S. history](#), and examine the article again, questioning the text by answering the following questions. This can be done as a think-pair-share, debriefing as a small group, or on their own.
- a. What does the article include about resistance?
 - b. What does the article leave out about resistance?
 - c. What questions do you have about resistance?
17. [Assessment/Exit Ticket](#) - Students will answer the following questions, finishing each sentence frame.
- a. Enslaved people resisted slavery because,
 - b. Enslaved people resisted slavery by,
 - c. Enslaved people resisted slavery but,
 - d. Enslaved people resisted slavery so,

Name: _____

Date: _____

Portraits of Protest: Black resistance throughout U.S. history - Student questions and article

Directions: Read each statement and answer true or false.

Before Reading	Statement	After Reading
	1. African Americans wanted control over their lives.	
	2. African Americans have resisted racial injustice throughout America's history.	
	3. Enslaved people could do very little to resist their enslavement.	
	4. African Americans only resisted slavery by organizing rebellions and seeking freedom (escaping or running away).	

Explain why each statement is true or false. Use evidence from the text in the After Reading boxes.

Before Reading	After Reading
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.

Portraits of Protest: Black resistance throughout U.S. history

Modified from Newsela

Black people have resisted racial injustice throughout America's history. This history of resistance began with uprisings by enslaved people against their enslavers. It continued through the end of legalized slavery. Resistance against injustice extended all the way through the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. It also shapes current efforts, including the Black Lives Matter movement which began as a way to bring attention to victims of racial violence and police brutality.

Below are some examples of acts of resistance.

Long History of Black American Protests

When people think of how African Americans resisted enslavement, revolts, rebellions and seeking freedom usually come to mind. Revolts and rebellions by enslaved people were early methods of resistance in the Americas, but there were many other methods African Americans used to gain control over their lives. Numerous uprisings occurred up to the end of slavery. One of the most famous rebellions was led by Nat Turner, an enslaved Black man, in Virginia in August 1831. Turner and his group killed many white people. White enslavers and law enforcement then killed even more Black people in response. After this, more laws were passed to further limit Black freedoms.



The Underground Railroad was a network of safe locations and people. The goal was to help enslaved people escape to places where they could live more freely.

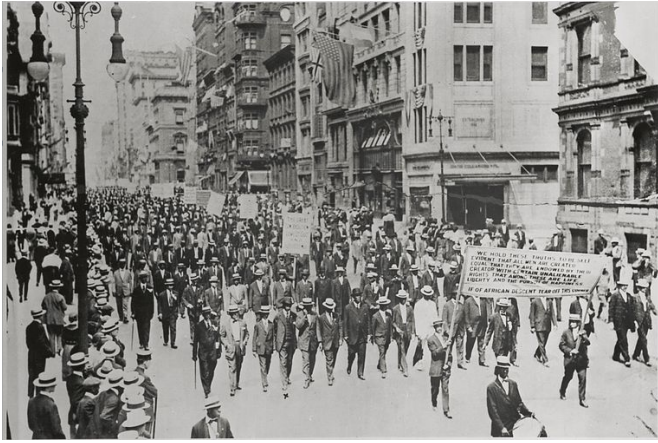
Through the Underground Railroad, thousands of Black people were able to resist and gain their freedom. This helped undermine the institution of slavery.

Revolts and rebellions by enslaved people were early methods of resistance in the Americas, but there were many other methods African Americans used to gain control over their lives. These include marrying, learning to read and write, and working slowly.

It is important to remember that it was extremely difficult for enslaved people to rebel and revolt and everyday acts of resistance show the lengths enslaved people used to gain control over their lives.

The Reconstruction era was the time period after the American Civil War. It led to some educational and political gains for formerly enslaved people. However, racial tensions remained, especially in southern states where slavery had been more widespread. Laws were crafted to dial back newly won freedoms, but Black people resisted.

Protest Movement Gains Strength



The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was one of the earliest civil rights organizations of the 20th century. It is also called the NAACP. The NAACP led efforts to condemn racial segregation and violence against Black Americans.

For example, in May and June of 1917, at least 40 Black Americans in St. Louis, Missouri were killed by white Americans. Historians believe this number could have been even higher. The NAACP put together a protest march in New York City. Nearly 10,000 people came.

The 2020 death of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man killed by police in Minnesota, sparked protests around the world. The massive protest movement saw responses from politicians, businesses, and the media. These moves towards empowering Black voices were major steps forward in the continued fight for social justice.

Do not answer these yet!

Directions: You will answer these questions **at the end** of the lesson to evaluate this text.

1. What does the article include about resistance?

2. What does the article leave out about resistance?

3. What questions do you have about resistance?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Closed Sort - Types of Resistance

Directions: Examine the sources from the Delaware Historical Society and determine the category for each type of resistance.

Freedom Seekers	Abolition Societies	Petition for Freedom
Manumission	Fought in the Civil War	Violence

Name: _____

Date: _____

Document Analysis - Types of Resistance

Source	Who was the author (if you know)? What does the source say?	What is the purpose of the source?	Is the resistance overt or covert?

When you are done, share your answers with your group and answer these questions together.

1. Identify a notice from the sources.
2. Identify a wonder from the sources.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Exit Ticket

Directions: Finish each sentence frame to explain what you know about how people resisted against slavery.

1. Enslaved people resisted slavery because...

2. Enslaved people resisted slavery by...

3. Enslaved people resisted slavery but...

4. Enslaved people resisted slavery so...

Primary Source Transcriptions

Source 1. [Advertisement, reward for freedom seeker Ben Boulden in the Delaware Gazette, May 5, 1826](#)

This is an advertisement in the Delaware Gazette newspaper from 1826.

Subscriber - person who wrote the advertisement

Source 2. [Advertisement, reward for woman and child, freedom seekers, in the Delaware Gazette, June 20, 1845](#)

This is an advertisement in the Delaware Gazette newspaper from 1845.

Subscriber - person who wrote the advertisement

Source 3. [Printed memorial of the Abolition Society with original signatures, 1786](#)

The Delaware Abolition Society was a group of people who wanted to end slavery.

Abolition - end of slavery

Abolition Society - group of people who worked to end slavery

Transcribed:

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the
State of Delaware,
The Memorial of the subscribers, citizens of said State

Respectfully sheweth:

That we hold these truths to be self-evident, *that all men are created equal*; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are *life, liberty*, and the pursuit of happiness: That we believe most sincerely, *slavery* to be unjustifiable upon any principles of reason or justice, and inconsistent with the divine precepts of religion and morality.

Under the influence of these impressions, we beg leave to call your attention to this very important and truly interesting subject; in which the welfare and honor of the State, appear to us materially concerned; and we submit to your *justice* the propriety of passing a law for the *gradual abolition of Slavery*, and there by paving the way to *Universal Emancipation*.

Source 4. [Copy of Quaker Memorial and Petition to General Assembly of Delaware for gradual abolition in the state, December 27, 1785](#)

The Quakers were a religious group that believed slavery was wrong.

Transcribed:

To the General Assembly of the Delaware State

The memorial and Address of the People called Quakers, inhabitants of the said State, respectfully Sheweth,

That having been long affected with the oppression exercised over the black people, by many inhabitants of this State, as also in other parts of this Continent, We have been anxiously Solicitous for their relief; and with Satisfaction observe that a Sense of the evil of withholding from them their their (sic) just and natural right of personal freedom hath so far prevailed that the Legislatures in Several of the United States have interposed their authority for the abolition of Slavery: Encouraged by which and a persuasion, that divers (sic) members of your House behold the enslaving our fellow men to be contrary to every Christian and moral Obligation, we take the liberty to address you on this very important subject, earnestly desiring it may claim your most serious disinterested attention and that a Legislature capacity you will be pleased to apply a remedy for re-moving the reproachful evil. It is well known that the Africans many of whom have been inhumanly Brought into bondage among us, possess a considerable territory, in which they Enjoyed their freedom; but through the avarice of professed Christians have been Encouraged in oppression and tyranny one over another, and after being forced from their native country, separated from the nearest connections in life are subjected to a State of abject Slavery and severe distress; many of whom and their offspring, are now groaning under oppressive bondage in this Government.

It is also known that many religious persons among us of different denominations from a conviction of the abomination and complicated evil of holding them in Slavery have been induced to manumit and restore them to liberty, but former Legislators in this Government actuated by mistaken policy or other motives have increased the difficulty by enhancing the Security required to indemnify the public against the charge of providing for them in the case of their falling into want, which being thought unreasonable is therefore Seldom complied with, as healthy negroes, set at liberty in the prime of life, are mostly subject to immediate taxation, by which contributing to the common charges of the Community, are they not justly en-titled to the common privileges of other free men, contrary to which in being ap-prehended for misdemeanors, they have denied an open free trial, and convicted on unequal laws, and other modes prescribed, different from what are provided for the common benefit of other members of civil community, and the cost are doing therefrom, and the damages adjudged have been considered as debts against their former masters, by whom they were emancipated, under the place of neglecting to give the security by law required, whereby, Some who could not, (crossed out words) consistent with a good conscience, detain them in bondage, have become liable to heavy penalties.

Instances have also occurred of some who had restored their Slaves to freedom unjustly reclaiming and again endeavoring to reduce them to a State of bondage. We therefore Entreat you to take the afflicted case of the oppressed negroes in this State under your mature consideration, and grant them such relief as justice, humanity, the common natural rights of mankind, and above all the precepts and injunctions of the Christian Religion require; desiring your minds may be influenced by Divine Wisdom for your direction.

We are your respectful friends-

Source 5. [Petition of George Laws, an enslaved person, to Hon. Peter Robinson, July 7, 1833](#)

A petition is a formal request made for something.

Transcribed:

To the Honorable Peter Robinson Esquire, a judge* (sic) Judge
of the State of Delaware

The Petition of George Laws negro by his sent friend George Laws, humbly
shareth, that on the twenty seventh day of July eighteen hundred and thirty three, he
was unlawfully bound to a certain Isaac Lotlove* of Cedar Creek by Peter Hall Esquire
a Justice of the Peace, and John Wilson a Justice of the Poor paid bounty of Sussex*, in
as much as your Petitioner, who was bound as a poor black child, had at the time a
consider-ble personal estate which was coming to him from his father a certain Isaac
Laws late of Sussex County-aforesaid deceased; and had at the time and now has
a Mother who was and is will able and willing to Afford Maintain and raise your
petitioner. That the Mother of your Petitioner never had any notice of such binding
or of the intentions & said your Petitioner, how was she present at the time when your
Petitioner was to bound as aforesaid! And your Petitioner familiar therewith that the
indentures (of your petitioner) were not lodged in the office of recording of deed in and
of the county of Sussex until after the expiration fifty days from the date of said
Indentures.

Your Petitioner therefore may your Honour a- prove (sic) a summons to be
directed to the Sheriff or to the constable of said County to summon the said Isaac
Lotlove* & to appear before your Honour at a time and place therein mentioned, to
answer the Complaint of your Petitioner, and of the hearing the proof and allegations, to
discharge your Petitioner in from his said servitude, & to make any other such order as
to your Honour shall deem meet and your Petitioner as is duty bound will ever prayeth.

Witness
Jos. Hollock

George Laws
By his sent friend
his
George (X)**Laws
mark

*= unsure if word is correct because of legibility.

**= the x is his actual signature

Source 6. [Copy of article from The Liberator. Letter from Samuel D. Burns \[Burris\], a freed Black man held in prison for helping enslaved people escape to freedom, June 1848](#)

The Liberator was a weekly abolitionist newspaper that promoted the end of slavery.

Transcribed:

The Liberator.

LETTER FROM ANOTHER MARTYR IN THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM

The following letter is from Samuel D. Burns, a worthy, colored citizen of Wilmington, Delaware, who was sentenced some time since to a cruel imprisonment in the Penitentiary of that State, on charge and conviction of having remembered those in bonds as bound with them, by giving aid and counsel to certain wretched slaves, who attempted to make their escape to Canada. Hear this martyr! – [The letter was sent to a friend in Nantucket] –

Dover, (Delaware,) 3d mo. 29th, 1848.

Dear Brother:

I now write a few words to you from my loath-some prison. I beg to be excused for not writing to you before; but as things have come so near to an awful crisis, I deem it my duty to inform all my Christian brethren of my present condition, which I suppose you have long since heard, that I was ar-rested on the 10th day of July last, charge with be-ing concerned in helping slaves to regain their free-dom, which in the State of Delaware is a crime next to that of murder, if committed by a colored man. I was also committed to prison, and there I remained, hand-cuffed and leg ironed; until near the middle of August, during which time I suffered, if possible, more than death. I then gave bail in the sum of one thousand six hundred dollars, for my appear-ance at Court of Quarter Sessions, which was to commence on the 25th of October, 1847; but my adversaries being informed of the same, came forward and demanded special bail for my damage in the sum of five thousand and five hundred dollars more, which they knew I could not give, on account of which I was thrust back into prison – there to stay and suffer until court, and then go in to trial, unprepared, as the slaveholders intended that I should do. Court came on, and without sufficient preparation, I was forced in for trial; and as might have been expected, I was convicted on two indictments, and sentenced on both to pay five hundred dollars fine and cost, and prison charges, and be imprisoned ten months, and be sold as a slave for a period of fourteen years; to be exported, transferred or assigned over to slave-traders, or whatever else the inhuman purchaser may choose to do with me. Of course, I have been here in prison ever since, looking forward, with an anxious mind, to the day in which the sale of my body in the first case will take place, with is the 5th of May next, 1849 – after which, I am to be brought back to prison, to suffer four months longer, and then sold a second time, on the second case. Each case re-quires that I should be sold to the highest bidder or bidders, for a period of seven years – to serve as a slave to all intents and purposes. From this, you may imagine how much true Christianity exists in the State of Delaware, especially when we consider that the Church, which holds the balance of power in this state is altogether responsible for the un-just punishments thus inflicted on us poor people. This day there was a slave-trader from Bal-timore to see me, and to find out when the sale of my body was to take place. He stated that I need not think hard of him for wishing to buy me, for he intended, if he was the purchaser, to sell me to no man who he thought would not use me well, if I behaved well, and that I ought to not have been convicted from the evidence that the slaveholders produced against me; but so it was. He said also that the evidence adduced against me here would not have convicted me in Maryland &c. This trader's name is Mass Fountain, who has shipped 165 human beings from Slaughter's slave prison in Baltimore at one time, to the great slave market of New Orleans. He visits the courts of Delaware regularly twice a year, in order to buy all the con-victs which the State holds for sale, to be exported. Now you may say that this trader is an inhuman ty-rant, because he buys and sells human beings; but you will

recollect that this man is only doing a law-ful business, encouraged and protected by the laws of the State of Delaware – laws which were enacted by men professing to be Christians – laws which are esteemed and called sacred by men, who say they are called by the Great Spirit to go forth and de-clare the word of truth and justice to a dying people – men who pretend to say that they are opposed to sin and unrighteousness of any and every kind; yet they uphold and applaud those slave traffickers, and those inhuman and unmerciful leeches, in their soul-damning conduct, by making the colored people legal subjects for their bloody principles to feast on; for whatever is lawful, of course ought to be right, and whatever is right is justice, although ig-norance of the law excuses no one. I have suffered enough to know, that the constructions of an unjust law ought to excuse any one. My dear brother, you will hear from me no more until after my first sale.

[missing line]

attended, is yet so contrary to common honesty, and is so precarious a thing, that he must want sense, honor, courage, and every virtue, who can prefer it in his choice. A man who has so little sense of hon-or as bear to be a slave, when it is in his power to prevent or redress it, would make no scruple to cut the throats of his fellow-creatures, or do any other wickedness that the wanton and unbridled will of a tyrannical master should suggest.

I have now given you, my dear brother, a short sketch or outline of my sentiments, concerning the institution of slavery; and now I beg to close my remarks without any expectations of ever seeing you again in this world; and let me further add, that my religion teaches me to believe, that as the con-dition of our heart is, when our mortal leaves us, so judgement will find our never-dying souls; and if so, what will be the condition of those who lived and died in neglect of that golden rule, do un-to others as you would that others should do unto you? Is there a slave-dealer who would be willing to be made a slave himself? I say, no.

I have said this much, and leave comments for you; while I remain your affectionate brother in

the Lord until death,
SAMUEL D. [BURNS} (Samuel Burris).

Source 7. [The plantation police or home-guard examining Negro passes on the levee road below New Orleans / from a sketch by our special artist, F.B. Schell](#)

Harper's Weekly was an American political magazine based in New York City. Published by Harper & Brothers from 1857 until 1916

Underground railroad - network of people, African American as well as white, offering shelter and aid to escaped enslaved people from the South

Source 8. [Twenty-eight fugitives escaping from the Eastern Shore of Maryland](#)

Underground railroad - network of people, African American as well as white, offering shelter and aid to escaped enslaved people from the South

Source 9. [An Incident in the Corbit Mansion in the Days of Slavery Before the War of 1861-4](#)

Optional Additional Source:

Source 10. [Come and join us brothers](#)

In 1862, President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation opened the door for African Americans to enlist in the Union Army. Although many had wanted to join the war effort earlier, they were prohibited from enlisting by a federal law dating back to 1792.

Recruit - enlist (someone) in the armed forces