

“... Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

ISBE recognizes individuals and groups who have fought and continue to fight for American values of freedom, equality, and independence from the nation's birth to present day despite experiences of oppression and prejudice.

## Equity heroes of the American Revolution



**Enslaved peoples of the 13 colonies** – General George Washington initially rejected the notion of allowing Black men to join the Continental Army, but changed his mind due to a desperate need for more soldiers. The British Army hired enslaved and freed Black men, and they fought both to gain freedom to stand against the nation that had enslaved them. However, slavery continued long after this war.



**Crispus Attucks** – He was an escaped enslaved man of African and Native American descent who historians consider to be the first man to die for the rebellion. Attucks was killed during the Boston Massacre in 1770.



**The 1st Rhode Island Regiment** – The Colonial Army's first integrated regiment was established in 1778.



**Phyllis Wheatley** – She was a freed enslaved woman who became the first Black person and only the third woman to publish a book of poetry in America. Wheatley is celebrated as a patriot and abolitionist who supported freedom for both the nation and enslaved peoples.



**Deborah Sampson** – She was the only woman to earn a full military pension after serving in the Revolutionary War. Sampson disguised herself as a man named Robert Shurtleff.

Who do you think of as an unsung hero of American independence?  
Tell us at [equity@isbe.net](mailto:equity@isbe.net).

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**Illinois**  
**State Board of**  
**Education**

## Equity heroes of recent history



### Admiral Michelle J. Howard

She was the first female four-star admiral of the U.S. Navy and first woman of color to achieve a four-star rank in the U.S. armed forces.

### The Navajo Code Talkers

These Native Americans used their tribal languages to send secret communications during World Wars I and II. Members of the Navajo, Cherokee, Comanche, Choctaw, and other tribes served the U.S. military in this manner. Congressional Gold Medals were given to Navajo Code Talkers in 2001.



### Ellen Ochoa

She was the first Hispanic woman to go into space when she served on a space shuttle mission in 1993 and the first Hispanic director of the Johnson Space Center in 2013.

### The Tuskegee Airmen

This group of African American military pilots and airmen fought in World War II. President Roosevelt announced the military would begin training Black pilots in 1940 after they had been barred from flying due to racist beliefs that Black soldiers were inferior.



### U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth

She was among the first women to fly combat missions for the Army as a Blackhawk helicopter pilot during Operation Iraqi Freedom. She served as director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs from 2006-09 and as an assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs from 2009-11.

## Organizations of note



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[History.com: 6 Unsung Heroes of the American Revolution](#)

[Mental Floss: 9 Women who helped win the American Revolution](#)

[Unsung Heroes: The Story of America's Female Patriots \(video\)](#)

[Know It All: African Americans' Roles in the American Revolutionary War](#)

[Who is the brother in the boat with George Washington?](#)