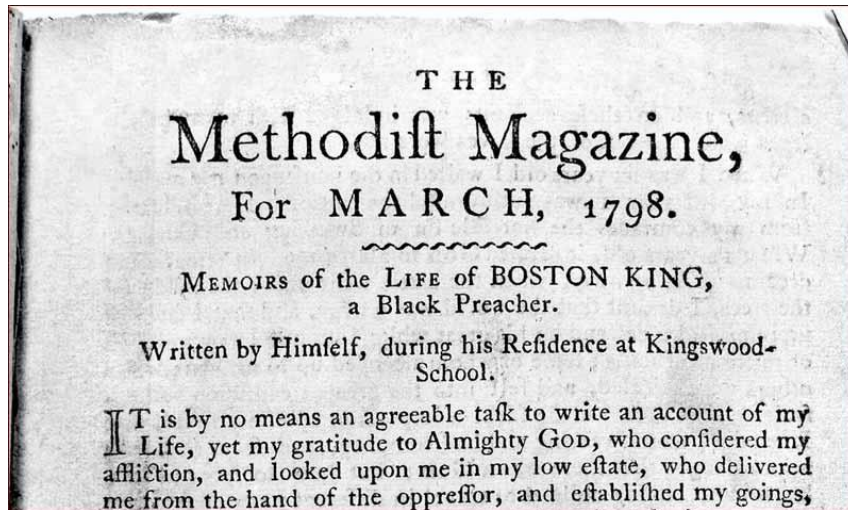




Boston King (c. 1760-1802)

Memoir: “Memoirs of the Life of Boston King, a Black Preacher. Written by Himself, during his Residence at Kingswood-School.” *The Methodist Magazine*, March-June, 1798.



Source Context

Boston King was born into slavery in South Carolina around 1760. His father, who was taken from his home in Africa when he was young, made a strong effort to make his family happy and encouraged them to read and pray. Although his family life was pleasant, King went through a lot of hardship and abuse from his masters for most of his young life. In 1780, while the British were occupying South Carolina during the Revolution, King made the decision to flee to Charleston and join the British Army so he could escape the cruelty of his masters. While he was with the British, he often feared that he would be captured by Americans and returned to slavery. After the war, he and his wife were among a few thousand Black people who were given certificates of freedom by the British and moved to Canada to live with other Black Loyalists.

In Canada, Boston King became a Methodist minister, partly because of the strong influence his father had in his childhood. In 1796, he wrote about his life and experiences in a series of memoirs, or essays, that were published in the *Methodist Magazine*. These essays shared many of King's thoughts on his family, his enslavement, joining the British, and his hope for freedom.



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Source Transcription

Joining the British Army, 1780

. . . Having **obtained** leave one day to see my parents, who lived about 12 miles off, and it being late before I could go, I was **obliged** to borrow one of Mr. Waters’s horses; but a servant of my masters, took the horse from me to go a little journey, and stayed two or three days longer than he expected the severest

obtain (*verb*): get, acquire, or secure something

oblige (*verb*): make legally or morally tied to an action

readily (*adverb*): willingly, without hesitation

punishment, because the gentleman to whom the horse belonged was a very bad man, and knew not how to shew mercy. To escape his cruelty, I determined to go to Charles-Town, and throw myself into the hands of the English. They received me **readily**, and I began to feel the happiness of liberty, of which I knew nothing before, altho’ I was much grieved at first, to be obliged to leave my friends, and reside among strangers . . .

Being Captured by Americans, 1783

. . . I then went out on a pilot-boat. We were at sea eight days, and had only **provisions** for five, so that we were in danger of starving. On the 9th day we were taken by an American whale-boat. I went on board them with a cheerful **countenance**, and asked for bread and water, and made very free with them. They carried me to Brunswick and used me well.

provisions (*noun*): supplies, such as food, drink, or equipment

countenance (*noun*): a person’s face or facial expression

distressed (*adjective*): suffering from anxiety, sorrow, or pain

victuals (*noun*): food or supplies

Notwithstanding which, my mind was sorely **distressed** at the thought of being reduced to slavery, and separated from my wife and family . . . I was thankful that I was not confined in a jail, and my master used me as well as I could expect; and indeed the slaves about Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York, have as good **victuals** as many of the English; for they have meat once a day, and milk for



breakfast and supper; and what is better than all, many of the masters send their slaves to school at night, that they may learn the Scriptures. This is a privilege indeed. But alas, all these enjoyments could not satisfy me without liberty! . . .

Worrying About Being Returned to Slavery, 1783

. . . About which time, the horrors and devastation of war happily **terminated**, and peace was restored between America and Great Britain, which **diffused** universal joy among all parties, except us, who had escaped from slavery, and taken **refuge** in the English army; for a report **prevailed** at New-York, that all the slaves, in number 2,000, were to be delivered up to their masters, altho' some of them had been there three or four years among the English. This dreadful rumour filled us all with **inexpressible** anguish and terror, especially when we saw our old masters coming from Virginia, North-Carolina, and other parts, and seizing upon their slaves in the streets of New-York, or even dragging them from their beds. Many of the slaves had very cruel masters, so that the thoughts of returning home with them **embittered** life to us. For some days we lost our appetite for food, and sleep departed from our eyes. The English had compassion upon us in the day of our distress, and issued out a Proclamation, importing, That all slaves should be free, who had taken refuge in the British lines, and claimed the function and privileges of the **Proclamations** respecting the security and protection of Negroes. In consequence of this, each of us received a certificate from the commanding officer at New-York, which **dispelled** all our fears, and filled us with joy and gratitude . . .

terminate (*verb*): bring to an end

diffuse (*verb*): spread among a large number of people

refuge (*noun*): condition of being safe or sheltered from danger

prevail (*verb*): to be or become effective

inexpressible (*adjective*): too strong to be described in words

embitter (*verb*): cause someone to feel bitter or resentful

proclamation (*noun*): an important public or official announcement

dispel (*verb*): to make a doubt or feeling disappear



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Source Simplification

Joining the British Army, 1780

. . . I was able to leave for one day to see my parents, who lived about 12 miles away, and since it was late, I was grateful to borrow one of Mr. Waters’s horses. However, my masters’ servant took the horse from me to go on a little journey, and stayed two or three days longer than he expected. I expected the severest punishment, because the gentleman who owned the horse was a very bad man and did not show mercy. To escape his cruelty, I decided to go to Charleston, and join the English. They accepted me immediately, and I began to feel the happiness of liberty for the first time. Although, at first, I was very sad to be forced to leave my friends and live among strangers . . .

Being Captured by Americans, 1783

. . . I then went out on a boat. We were at sea for eight days and only had enough supplies for five days, so we were in danger of starving. On the 9th day we were caught by an American whale-boat. I happily went on board with them, and asked for bread and water, and got along well with them. They carried me to Brunswick and used me well. Still, I was worried about returning to slavery, and being separated from my wife and family . . . I was thankful that I was not locked up in a jail, and my master used me as well as I could expect. Actually, the slaves in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York have good food just like many of the English. They have meat once a day, and milk for breakfast and supper. Best of all, many of the masters send their slaves to school at night, so that they can learn the Scriptures. This is definitely a privilege. But still, all these enjoyments could not satisfy me without liberty! . . .

Worrying About Being Returned to Slavery, 1783

. . . At this time, the horrors and devastation of war were over, and peace was restored between America and Great Britain. This spread joy among everyone except us, who had escaped from slavery and were protected in the English army. A report was present in New York that stated that all the slaves, which were about 2,000 people, were to be returned to their masters, even though some of them had



been with the English for three or four years. This terrible rumor filled us all with deep anxiety and fear, especially when we saw our old masters coming from Virginia, North Carolina, and other areas, and taking their slaves from the streets of New York, or even dragging them from their beds. Many of the slaves had very cruel masters, and the thoughts of returning home with them made us bitter about life. For some days we lost our appetite for food and could not sleep. The English had compassion for us and released a public statement that said all slaves who had served with the British should be free and have security and protection. With this, each of us received a certificate from the commanding officer at New York, which chased away all our fears, and filled us with joy and gratitude . . .



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Memoir: Excerpts from “Memoirs of the Life of Boston King, a Black Preacher. Written by Himself, during his Residence at Kingswood-School.” *The Methodist Magazine*, March-June, 1798.

Source Discussion Questions

- Think about Boston King’s experiences and perspective. Why did he choose to join and stay with the British Army, even though some of his experiences with the British were difficult?
- Think about the promises of freedom that the British gave to Boston King and other formerly enslaved people. When the British lost the war, what did King and others think was going to happen to them? While many people were happy the war was over, why was King nervous and fearful?
- Boston King had to make a lot of difficult decisions throughout his life – running away from his master, leaving his home and friends, trusting the British with their promise of freedom, moving to a new place to protect his freedom, and many more. Do you think you would have made the same decisions he did, even though some were risky? Why or why not?