



# Robert Smalls

## Fearless Defender of Black America

### Critical Thinking & Discussion Questions

#### Virtues of Community Service

- What is the virtue (i.e., good quality) of being a servant? How did Smalls serve residents in his region?
- What is the virtue of being a leader? Name reasons why Smalls was elected to so many political offices?
- In what ways can you serve those around you: peers, family, and neighbors?
- What characteristics do you have that would be helpful in a leadership position?
- How would you respond to a leader who liked to serve versus a leader who liked to be served?

#### Virtues of Courage and Conviction

- Freedom for Smalls and his wife was worth risking his life. Would you have done the same? Why or why not?
- How did Smalls benefit by giving away some of his prize money?
- Smalls was determined to help people and solve problems in the part of South Carolina where he lived. Give examples of people where you live who are determined to help people and solve problems.
- Besides the word *determination*, think of another word to describe **conviction**.
- People who live by their convictions stand firm in the face of criticism, stay resolute despite rejection or misunderstanding from others, and find meaning through something bigger and longer lasting than their own lives. What convictions do you have?
- In what ways has your life benefitted from the convictions of the following people:

George Washington Carver Jr.

Robert Woodson

Florence Nightingale

Jonathan Isaac

Mary Jackson (NASA scientist)



## The Power of Virtue

Robert Smalls was a man who experienced the brokenness of humanity and society. A slave from birth, as an older man, free and successful, he ended up buying the house of his slave master and letting the slave master's wife live out her days in her original bedroom. Despite his popularity as a politician, white supremacists in the Democratic Party were able to get elected. Smalls kept his focus and changed what was within his power to change.

Few lead, many follow. Think about Smalls's example.

- What character traits do you want to develop to follow in Smalls's footsteps of success?
- How does Small's extension of grace to Mrs. McKee reveal the qualities of a servant-leader?
- Which of the ten Woodson Principles do you see exemplified in Smalls's life?
  - 10 Woodson Principles: Competence, Integrity, Transparency, Resilience, Witness, Innovation, Inspiration, Agency, Access, Grace

The desire for freedom motivated Robert Smalls to **risk** his life.

- Why is freedom so important to human beings?
- Obtaining and maintaining freedom requires what type of mindset and what kind of action?

Robert Smalls saw an **opportunity** to get possession of the ship, created a plan, and achieved his goal.

- What goals do you have for this year?
- If an opportunity presents itself for you to work toward a goal, what are the first three items that would be part of your plan to reach your goal?
- How does fear rob a person from reaching a goal?

Smalls lived with the **conviction** that past wrongs should be made right, and **grace** was worth giving.

- What perspective did he have that allowed him to give his former slave owner's wife "radical grace"?
- Do you have convictions that you can carry into your future career?



## Facing Opposition

Read this quote by Robert Smalls: “My race needs no special defense, for the past history of them in this country proves them to be the equal of any people anywhere. All they need is an equal chance in the *battle of life*.” **How did the battle with the white supremacists of the Southern Democratic Party compare with his battle meeting his basic needs when he was a slave?**

Read these quotes by Benjamin Tillman: “We of the South have never recognized the right of the Negro to govern white men, and we never will! ... I would to God the last one of them was in Africa and that none of them had ever been brought to our shores.” **Does this statement reflect the sentiments of all white residents of South Carolina? Why or why not? Support your answer with specific information from the lesson slide deck.**

As you have discovered, the election of Benjamin Tillman and President Woodrow Wilson set progress back for equality, respect, and prosperity in South Carolina for African Americans. **When opposition comes, what mindset can you have to avoid feeling defeated and continue on your destiny with courage and undeterred conviction?**

What is your most memorable fact about the life of Robert Smalls?

How has learning about Smalls affected you?

What hardships have you faced that give you the desire to help those that will face similar hardships?