

## Discussion Questions for *The Crossing* by Howard Fast

Page references are to the movie tie-in version of the book.

1. Did you like the book? If yes, why? If no, why not?
2. I enjoyed this passage. It's a little historical note that I assume Fast found in a letter or other document from the time (p. 92):

Washington's headquarters were at the Keith house, but as often as not he centered his affairs and his command post at McKonkey's. For one thing, McKonkey ran a public house; and if a hundred men in wet boots and dragging spurs clumped in and out in the course of a day, well, that was what the house was for, and Old Man McKonkey liked the trade, not only for the money it brought but because he was heart and soul a rebel. He was flattered with the big Virginian and all the other fine gentlemen giving him their patronage, and since he had never catered to so genteel a trade before, he could never quite get over their courtesy. He took to bowing to ladies and changing his shirt twice a week.

Were their passages or parts of *The Crossing* that really struck you?

3. Did this book alter your opinion of George Washington?
4. What qualities made General George Washington a successful leader?
5. As Fast notes, "most Americans derive their information about this crossing from the famous painting by Emanuel Leutze". He goes on to point out a number of factual errors in the picture (p. 135). [Pass around a book containing the picture or a printout the picture, and a New Jersey quarter if you have one.]
6. Did this book alter your opinion of Hessian soldiers?
7. General Horatio Gates was a British officer who had joined the American cause. Gates felt that he should have been given command of the army instead of Washington. When Washington decided to take the army across the river to attack the Hessian soldiers in Trenton, he ran his plan by Gates. Gates listed a number of strong objections and advised retreat instead. The next day: "Gates and his aides rode off to Philadelphia. Washington had not relieved him of his command; he simply informed him that his little army of eight hundred men remained here in the encampment. As for Gates, he would go where he desired. He was still a brigadier; but his brigade was no longer his." (p. 103) Why did Washington send Gates away? Was this a risk?
8. I had never heard of John Glover before becoming acquainted with this book. Had you? Fast says, "likely enough Washington would have traded half his army for a few hundred men like John Glover.... For all the constant estrangement and bitterness between himself and Colonel Glover, throughout the long retreat Glover's men had been the steadiest, the best disciplined and always the most dependable." (p. 114) Why is Glover such an unknown founding father?
9. What do you think of the way the USA got its start? Is it different from what you previously thought?

10. What did you think about General Charles Lee allowing himself to be captured by the British (pp. 67-69, 75-76 below).

There was also a tendency to blame Washington for the capture of Lee, for the congressmen refused to accept the fact that so brilliant and much-touted a soldier as Charles Lee could have walked into so silly and stupid a trap.

There were also some men in Congress, supporters of Washington, who immediately leaped to the conclusion that Lee was a traitor and had been in cahoots with the British all the time and had betaken himself to the isolated inn in order to fulfill the conditions of capture arranged in advance.

But there is absolutely no evidence in history for this kind of thinking, and the only explanation for Lee's capture is the foolish and petulant behavior that led him to it, although there is serious question as to whether he did not enter into a treasonable arrangement with the British during or after his capture.

11. Do you think the war could have been won if George Washington had not led the Colonies?
12. Do you think the men and women of our generation could have fought they way the colonists did during the revolution?
13. What do you think might have happened if England had retained the Colonies?