American Revolution of 1776

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The power struggle between major European powers in North America created the preconditions for the American Revolution. The term refers primarily to the successful struggle of British colonists for independence and secondarily to the internal social and political upheavals within the colonies. Religious and national rivalries between Catholic Spain and France and the Protestant Netherlands and England framed their transatlantic extension of Western civilization into the Americas.

By the eighteenth century, Britain emerged as the dominant colonizing power on the Atlantic seaboard of North America, though French based in Canada explored and claimed much of the vast interior to the Mississippi River, and the Spanish had a tenuous hold on most of the rest. After a first failed attempt at Roanoke (1585), the English established Jamestown, the inception of Virginia (1607), the plantations of which extended north with Maryland, even as Puritan dissenters from the Church of England, settling at Plymouth (1620), Boston, and other communities later subsumed into Massachusetts. The preoccupations of the English Civil Wars (1642–51) and their aftermath postponed aggressive colonization until the Restoration (1660) of the monarchy, after which it added or reorganized Connecticut, North Carolina, New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. After the establishment of Georgia (1732), 13 adjacent English colonies shared more with each other than with England.

The Crisis of the Old Order

Western Civilization in the New World

Several decisive and overriding differences rendered impossible the replication of European societies in the New World. Native populations in the Americas faced exposure to epidemic diseases to which they had no immunity, and the "Great Dying" took an estimated 80–95 percent of the population often before it had any direct contact with the Europeans. In contrast to Latin America, English settlers displaced the Indians in North America, partly through intensely violent, if localized, conflicts like King Philip's War (1675–6) in New England or the Tuscarora War (1711–13) and the Stono Rebellion (1739) in South Carolina. In central New York, the Iroquois declared wisely, if impossibly, that they would remain neutral in any future colonial wars (1701).

Anglo-America offered tremendous untapped resources and possibilities without having a labor force to realize those possibilities. After experiments with the Indians proved unpromising, the English introduced indentured servants who, in return for passage to America, signed themselves into service for seven years, the system recruiting large numbers of Irish and German peasants rather than English freemen. Those who survived the five-year "seasoning" to regain freedom either returned to Europe or exacerbated the shortage by becoming competitors in the search for cheap labor.

As Virginia turned to tobacco, they imported the first African servants to Jamestown (1619). Thirty years later, contractors brought large numbers of blacks into the Chesapeake. The adoption of comprehensive Slave Codes in Maryland (1661), then in Virginia (1670) and elsewhere, formulated the legal underpinnings of slavery as a lifelong, inherited, and racially defined labor system.

The nascent global imperial system integrated the colonies. The "triangular trade" between North America, the West Indies, and Africa involved the transportation of rum to Africa, slaves to the Indies, and molasses to New England. Most trade within the colonies remained maritime and coastal, although roads linked some of the more important towns. Colonists also manufactured some goods (like beaver pelt hats) for a broader market.

The social formation followed the hierarchic pattern of the old country. Merchants in the seaboard city and the gentlemen-planters on the vast commercial farmlands formed the colonial elites, while the "lower orders" included slaves, indentured servants, day laborers, unskilled workers, farm labor, and a growing group of skilled craftsmen unable to achieve self-employment in their own shops. A significant portion of white men constituted what contemporaries called the "middling sort," mostly small-scale family farmers, professionals, and artisans. Colonial doctors, lawyers, and scientists shared English attainments, and groups like the American

Philosophical Society (1743) reflected their interests. Artisans and craftsmen – usually referred to as "mechanicks" – often shared this standing.

Local records indicate that the balance of these groups varied considerably with climate, geography, and levels of settlement. Society became increasingly stratified as one moved from the "frontier" through subsistence farming areas to commercial agriculture. In the last category, wealth concentrated in relatively few hands and required a large propertlyess laboring class. The commercial farming society of the Mid-Atlantic "bread basket" colonies with its day labor and indentured servants clearly differed from the plantations of the Chesapeake, where slaves performed the work.

Finally, the nature of urban life meant that the vast majority of city dwellers could not have afforded the cost of even the small amount of land for home ownership, while the elite there did business globally. Only Philadelphia had nearly 70,000 and New York roughly 40,000. These, with Boston, Charleston, and Newport, were the only cities with more than 8,000, although an additional fifteen towns – a total of twenty – have more than 3,000.

English Values in the American Setting

Colonists shared the taste for political debate that had defined the conflict, protest, and upheaval back in England. In royal colonies, governors appointed by the king clashed with assemblies elected by those white males meeting the proper religious and property requirements. These bodies tended to be "bicameral" (two-chambered), with a more broadly elected lower house and an upper chamber (a council or senate) representing a more exclusive franchise. Assembly deliberations often reflected the tensions between the more settled tidewater and the underdeveloped back country. These conflicts erupted in popular upheavals like Virginia's Bacon's Rebellion (July–October 1676), New York's Leisler's Rebellion (May 31, 1689–March 19, 1691), and other risings against local officials of King James II in Maryland and New England during the "Glorious Revolution" (1688) which overthrew James back home.

The late seventeenth-century British experience codified ideas that would be essential to the American Revolution. Thomas Hobbes described monarchy as less a divinely ordained order than a rational social contract necessary to order. Writing after 1688, John Locke enumerated conditions that justified setting aside that contract, specifically emphasizing the centrality of individual liberty.

Despite the English terms of the argument, many of the 3,000,000 colonists had no particular allegiance to Britain. Next to the English, Africans constituted the largest group in the colonies, but several hundred thousand Germans and Scotch-Irish resided there, as did locally significant numbers of Huguenots (French Protestants) in New York, Virginia, South Carolina, and Massachusetts; Jews at Newport, New York, and Charleston; and Dutch or Swedes, who remained in, respectively, New York and Delaware.

Moreover, English settlers did not represent a cross-section of the society at home, where the elite lacked an incentive to migrate and the poor the means to do so. Therefore, the human materials used in the construction of an essentially English hierarchy in the colonies would be the "middling sort" who would essentially reproduce the Old World hierarchies. This filling in of a British social pyramid created an elite that had disproportionately risen in the world, and a lower class of families that had actually experienced a relative decline and often returned to the old country. The former shaped the cultural and social self-perceptions, while the latter became largely unnoticeable. Too, ordinary colonists, if actually free, experienced higher wages because of the labor shortage, greater success due to the expanding economy, and a higher level of literacy and learning.

Among white men, an ideology of secular success emerged, personified by Benjamin Franklin, a printer, who became a major power in the colonies. His annually published *Poor Richard's Almanac* (1732–57) gained great popularity for interspersing the usual data found in such works with aphorisms and sayings, such as "Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise." Franklin himself personified this drive for upward mobility through industry and ambition.

This emphasis on individualism drew strength from the dislocations from the faith of their forebears – and the crisis of Puritanism in a yet unpurified world. These inspired nondenominational revivals called the Great Awakening (1739) that appealed to the emotions, emphasized lay preaching, and carried Protestantism still further from the Catholic idea of salvation through ritual sacraments among a community of believers towards the idea of individual redemption.

That kind of self-reliance inspired protests over the checking of their elected assemblies by the appointed royal governors, the royal vetoes of colonial laws and revoking of colonial charters, the British imposition of Writs of Assistance to search for smuggled goods, and the quartering of redcoats in the colonies. In Boston, James Otis argued in a 5-hour oration at the State House (1761) that the writs represented a violation of the natural rights of the colonists that contemporaries saw as an argument for resistance.

Most fundamentally, these values among the colonists strained at their colonial status. Codified in a series of Navigation Acts and Acts of Trade, British policies reflected "mercantilism," measures European powers established to shape colonial commerce in ways compatible with that of the mother country. Goods going to and from the British colonies were to be carried on British ships and properly taxed. Its colonies were to provide raw materials and purchase manufactures from Britain. With English authorities preoccupied at home, colonial merchants and artisans found their own way around the system, essentially an exaggeration of how Britons behaved at home. The royal authorities called ignoring the law "smuggling," but were in no position to stop, regulate, or tax it.

The colonists moreover participated loyally alongside British soldiers in fighting King William's War (1689–97), Queen Anne's War (1702–13), and King George's War (1744–8), after which the New World itself became the focus of mid-century tensions between England and France. Conflicting claims to the Ohio valley brought explorers, soldiers, and surveyors into the disputed territory. One of the latter, the 22-year-old George Washington, heard rumors of a combined French and Indian ambush and led the British militia with Indian allies of their own against the French at what became Jumonville Glen (May 28, 1754), an event that sparked what became known as the French and Indian War, or the Seven Years' War in Europe. After the defeat of a British force at Monongahela (July 9, 1755), Washington took command and saved the column. Having also played a vital role in the Hudson Valley and Canada, colonists expected to enjoy its benefits. The Treaty of Paris (February 10, 1763) ceded to the British almost everything east of the Mississippi River.

Prerevolutionary Crisis, 1763–1774

Unwilling to accept this division of territory, the Indian leader Pontiac built a broad alliance of native peoples to prevent the British occupation of the area. After destroying a series of forts, Pontiac surrendered at Detroit on October 31, leaving the fate of his people in British hands. To placate his now more numerous Indian subjects, the authorities issued the Proclamation of 1763, pledging to prevent settlement of the West beyond a certain point.

A succession of British measures sought to address the problems. They also began asserting more control over the more immediate functioning of the colonial economy with the American Revenue Act or "Sugar Act" (April 5, 1764) attempting to collect those taxes on molasses and sugar by reducing the amount owed, and the Currency Act (September 1), controlling the use of paper money by colonists. Finally, hoping to recover some of the costs of the war, Parliament passed the Stamp Act (March 22, 1765), requiring an impressed seal on legal documents, permits, contracts, and printed matter like newspapers, tracts, and playing cards, and authorizing appointment of specially appointed stampmasters to oversee its actual enforcement.

Although colonial assemblies prepared to make their protests, Samuel Adams and others in Boston opted to organize to prevent enforcement of the Stamp Act by forcing the resignation of the stampmasters. Directed by an amorphous "Sons of Liberty," this resistance had small and secretive local leadership, the "Loyal Nine" in Boston. However, these leaders relied directly upon "mob" actions, which required street leaders like Ebenezer Macintrosh, the Boston shoemaker, and John Webber, a Newport sailor, to agitate and manage the crowds of common seamen and mechanics. The August demonstrations in New England generated a great deal more violence and destruction of property than expected, although the "Liberty Boys" held more orderly protests elsewhere. The radical strategy worked, forcing the resignation of the stampmasters.

The gathering of representatives of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and South Carolina in the Stamp Act Congress (October 7–25, 1765) voted its resolutions of protest (October 19). While Parliament did repeal the Stamp Act, it passed a Declaratory Act

(March 18, 1766) asserting its authority to levy such taxes. Legislators then sought to establish the precedent with the Townshend Revenue Act (June 15–July 2, 1767). This set up a Board of Customs Commissioners to collect the duties on the imported lead, glass, paint, oil, tea, and paper. With an eye to the Stamp Act Riots, colonial leaders opted for a strategy of "non-importation" – or "boycott" – of British goods. Local committees of correspondence coordinated these efforts.

The strategy both had an impact on Britain and kept the conflict off the streets. However, it also polarized merchants who made their living directly through commerce and "mechanicks," who benefited from having to make the items not imported. As time went on, the division found reflection in the formation of distinct mechanics' parties and associations, committed to more militant action.

From Resistance to Revolution: Establishing Dual Power

Moreover, there were dramatic and sometimes violent encounters with the authorities. The British seized John Hancock's ship *Liberty* (June 10, 1768), and sent troops to maintain order in Boston. As these occupation troops sought part-time work in the city, tensions flared, most notably in the Boston Massacre (March 5, 1770), where soldiers who had earlier rioted at the ropewalks opened fire on a crowd that included individuals with whom they had earlier brawled. Clashes over a liberty pole raised outside a public house led to New York's "Battle" of Golden Hill (January 19, 1771). Royal authorities in North Carolina closed the local "War of the Regulation" with back country farmers with the battle of Alamance Creek (May 16, 1771), and Rhode Island radicals attacked and destroyed the British ship *Gaspee* (June 9, 1772).

By making the duties a dead letter, the colonists encouraged the parliamentary repeal of all but the tax on tea. To save the East India Company, the government bought massive amounts of tea and the Tea Act (April 27–May 10, 1773) authorized moving it to the colonies, where it would be sold at a reduced rate, even with the addition of a tax, to the colonists. Seeing this as a precedent for levying the internal tax, the Boston city fathers protested the measure, and looked the other way when the Sons of Liberty boarded the ships and threw the cargo overboard in the Boston Tea Party (December 16, 1773).

British authorities responded with what the colonists called "the Intolerable Acts." Parliament's four "Coercive Acts" aimed at forcing restitution for the destruction of the tea through the Boston Port Act (March 31, 1774) closing the harbor until the community paid for the destruction of property; the Administration of Justice Act and the Massachusetts Government Act (May 20) effectively suspended the colonial government and subjected colonists accused of political crimes to royal justice; and a Quartering Act of 1774 (June 2) making the city responsible for the sheltering and feeding of occupation troops in private homes. The colonists grouped these with a fifth, the Quebec Act (June 22), which placed administration of the western territory west of the Alleghenies and north of the Ohio River under the administration of the King's Catholic but still orderly subjects in Quebec.

The leadership of other colonies realized that the British assertion of this kind of authority over any colony involved a precedent that had implications beyond Massachusetts. Representatives of 12 of the 13 colonies (all but Georgia) gathered at that point in a general Continental Congress on September 5–October 26, 1774. This First Continental Congress responded to the Coercive Acts with a Colonial Declaration of Rights and Grievances (October 14), demanding the repeal of over a dozen acts of Parliament and agreeing to a Continental Association that would do no business with Britain until the matter was resolved. Britain responded with the New England Restraining Act (March 30, 1775) which barred those colonies from trade with the rest of the empire and from the North Atlantic fisheries. In April the royal officials extended the restrictions to Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Virginia, Maryland, and South Carolina. The British outlawing of colonial assemblies did not abolish those governments but placed their functioning beyond the imperial constitutional structure. This establishment of rival governments sewed the real seeds of independence.

The Outbreak of the War: The New England Phase, 1775–1776

General Thomas Gage, commanding the British military occupation of Boston, had to act against a Massachusetts assembly that just refused to dissolve itself. When the British confiscated munitions and equipment near Boston, the Powder Alarm (September 1, 1774) created a reliable mechanism for watching and communicating about British activities. Town leaders in the area agreed to organize a third of the local militia into special companies of "minutemen." The system bloodlessly thwarted a British attempt to seize munitions at Salem (February 27, 1775). When the Boston resistance realized that the British were sending a column of about 800 west from the city to seize colonial supplies, Dr. Joseph Warren sent Paul Revere, William Dawes, and others to ride an alert to the Massachusetts officials. When rebels in the Old North Church flashed a prearranged signal, the messengers began their Midnight Ride (April 18–19).

As the English moved west from the city, less than eighty local militia turned out under arms at sunrise to meet the advance of this massive column of regulars at Lexington (April 19, 1775). Their captain was said to have told the men "if they mean to have a war, let it begin here." The advance companies of the British column wheeled into place against them. When they refused to disperse, shooting began and 18 militia fell as the rest scattered. The later rationalization was that they had bought time for the militia further west to mobilize, but the "first blood" of the war was less a battle than a protest gone terribly wrong. The British reached their goal, where the militia cautiously withdrew across the Old North Bridge to a hill overlooking town. There several hundred militia drove about 115 regulars back into the town.

As the rebel force grew to nearly 2,000, the British regulars abandoned the town and began counter-marching towards Lexington. There, at about 2:30 pm, a reinforcing brigade from Boston brought the British total to about 2,000. By then, about twice as many militias were converging on the road back to Boston, skirmishing and sniping all along the way. Some of the British who returned to Boston had marched 40 miles in 21 hours, 8 under fire, but many never made it back.

Ethan Allen and other settlers from Connecticut had moved north into the New Hampshire Grants, west of land claimed by both that state and New York. Led by radicals like Dr. Thomas Young, settlers adopted the name Vermont and declared their independence simultaneously from Britain and the two states that claimed them. It sought admission to the emerging US but was essentially barred by the two states that still claimed the land. When Vermont also adopted the radical constitution of Pennsylvania, it found itself further isolated.

Rebel leaders, in turn, had their own plans to get at the British artillery and stores at Fort Ticonderoga, a "Gibraltar" built to protect the route up the Hudson River towards Lake Champlain and Canada. Ethan Allen, the Connecticut leader of settlers on the New Hampshire Grants, raised one force, and Benedict Arnold organized a group in Massachusetts. The two combined and elected Allen to lead them. A detachment took the small garrison at Crown Point, while the main force managed, without a shot being fired, to seize Fort Ticonderoga on May 10. Gage's forces found themselves bottled in Boston by a militia force from Massachusetts and neighboring colonies that grew to 8,000 or more. General William Howe brought 4,000 British reinforcements on May 15, after which they planned an aggressive attempt to break what there was of a siege.

Fearing British plans to cross the Charles River and fortify the Charlestown peninsula, about 1,400 to 1,500 militia, including a number of African Americans, hurried there to dig some defenses, which they mistakenly dug on Breed's Hill (June 16). In the heat of the next day, it took some 6 hours for the 2,600 redcoats with their wool uniforms and 60-pound field packs to move against the rebels on what most on both sides thought to be Bunker Hill (June 17). The militia lacked discipline, and some began to slip away through the course of the fighting. One officer, variously identified, advised them, "don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes," and the ill-trained defenders held against two assaults. British reserves came up for the third attempt, but the defenders had already run out of ammunition, and most had no bayonets with which to turn back the assault.

In the end, the Americans broke and ran, but only after having stood up to some of the best troops in the world for as long as they had powder. British naval fire consumed Charlestown and militia casualties ran to 450, but the British lost 1,054, disproportionately officers, who had been prominent in leading their men forward. Open warfare followed. The British government replaced Gage with Howe, who remained ever cautious after Bunker Hill, and a British naval expedition from Boston burned Falmouth (near present Portland) on October 18, 1775.

The arrival of General George Washington, sent by the Continental Congress, transformed the militia into a Continental Army. After that, Washington occupied Dorchester Heights (March 4, 1776). Although fearing another Bunker Hill, Howe moved into position for an attack, but a late snowstorm gave his officers the opportunity to dissuade him. In the end, he informed the Continentals of his change of plans and, warning that he would burn Boston should the rebels try to interfere, evacuated Boston for Nova Scotia (March 17).

Beyond New England

Virginia, the most populous of the colonies, mobilized and drove from power the royal governor. The determined and coherent assembly convinced the governor, Lord Dunmore, to withdraw with his supporters from the capital at Williamsburg to fall back to the coast near Norfolk. From there, they pillaged the plantations and farms of the rebels, offering freedom to slaves who would run away. The Tories won a skirmish at Kemp's Landing and then moved south to protect the approach to Norfolk from the Carolinas. There, the British encountered a large Continental force at Great Bridge in early December, which resulted in the withdrawal of Dunmore, the British, and many Tories from the colony. Virginia issued its own Declaration of Rights on June 12, 1776.

A combined Continental naval and military expedition captured New Providence Island in the Bahamas on March 3, 1776, but American naval strategy rested upon privateers (private ships licensed for war duty) under John Barry and John Paul Jones, among others, who inflicted great damage upon British commerce and prestige. Jones, aboard the *Bonhomme Richard*, captured the British man-of-war *Serapis* near the English coast at Flamborough Head on September 23, 1779. In the course of the encounter, Jones replied to a call for his surrender, "I have not yet begun to fight." Although so damaged that it would sink later that day, the *Bonhomme Richard* continued to fight until the British surrendered and allowed the Americans to board the *Serapis*.

A Continental move into Canada grew directly out of the experience of these colonists who had helped Britain take the area from France. General Richard Montgomery led about 1,700 Continentals north towards Montreal, and Arnold took 750 towards Quebec. Montgomery's column quickly besieged about 300 enemy infantry at Fort St. Jean (August 21–November 3) on the Richelieu River at the north end of Lake Champlain. The British won but refused to compromise the security of Quebec by moving forward any of its 2000-man force at Montreal.

During the siege, Ethan Allen led a detachment of about 200 of Montgomery's men towards Montreal, where they met about 260 of the enemy on the banks of the St. Lawrence at Longue-Pointe (September 24). The Americans were turned back and Allen himself captured, but the intransigence of the British command in bringing forward its large force at Montreal led to a disintegration of much of the militia. With the surrender of Fort St. Jean, the Continentals occupied Montreal (November 13).

By this point, Arnold had 600 men poised above Quebec on the Plains of Abraham, while Montgomery was supposed to be moving 300 of his force against the lower town, protected by only 100 British regulars supplemented by hundreds of militia. In the attack on Quebec (December 31), Montgomery was killed and Arnold badly wounded. Having failed miserably to take the city by storm, Arnold held the tattered remains of his expedition together through the winter, and American reinforcements arrived in March 1776, bringing the total to 2,000. These had to retreat to New York when 8,000 British arrived in May.

The reinforced British moved quickly, driving the Continentals back up the St. Lawrence. They captured over 500 Americans at Les Cèdres (May 15–16, 1776), though about 2,500 Americans tried a strong counter-attack on 3,000 British pursuers at Trois-Rivières (June 8) about halfway to Montreal. Arnold abandoned Montreal on June 15.

The US Navy claims to have fought its first engagement at Valcour Bay or Valcour Island (October 11–13). Although defeated, Arnold had delayed the British sufficiently to where winter would immobilize them until the spring.

War for Independence: Toward a New Nation

By 1776 what had begun as an armed protest was beginning to turn into a revolution. The British government, claiming to be suppressing a rebellion of Englishmen, contracted to hire Hessian troops for use against them. Meanwhile, the colonists formed a Second Continental Congress on May 10, 1775 at Philadelphia. While offering its Olive Branch Petition to Britain, it appointed Washington the commander of a unified Continental Army and issued its Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking up Arms on July 6, 1775. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* appeared in January of 1776 and urged that the colonies embrace independence not only as a practical necessity under the circumstances, but as an opportunity to transform the New World into a new kind of civilization. This pamphlet eventually became a published work second in readership only to the Bible.

Because most of the old proprietary government of Pennsylvania clung to the imperial regime, its overthrow became essential to American independence. The radicals favorable to independence clashed with the conservatives over assembly elections, but this failed amid charges of widespread vote fraud and large-scale exclusion of Germans. The Continental Congress subsequently passed a resolution authorizing colonists to establish new institutions where "no government sufficient to the exigencies of their affairs has been hitherto established." Some 4,000 Philadelphians then demonstrated outside the State House for both American Independence and a new constitution. The Committee of Privates, based in the militia, then organized elections for a constitutional convention at Carpenters' Hall.

Richard Henry Lee proposed independence on June 7, and the Congress appointed a committee of five to write a declaration in justification of the move. The committee, in turn, left the initial draft to Thomas Jefferson. The Congress voted for independence on July 2 and sent the declaration to be signed at the printer's on July 4. The declaration not only protested the specific acts of George III, but began with a concise statement of basic Enlightenment assumptions about government and human rights that remain essential, if selectively ignored, to the modern world:

> 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 to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, – That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

The vagaries of these assertions reflect the ambiguities implicit in the coalition that had resisted the British, read *Common Sense*, and wanted independence.

The Mid-Atlantic War: New York to Philadelphia, 1776–1778

Despite the earlier expulsion of the British from Virginia, fighting continued to take place in the South. North Carolina Patriots mobilized to block a march by Loyalists to a rendezvous with the British north of Wilmington, routing them at Moore's Creek on February 27, 1776. In Charleston Harbor, the Continentals used palmetto trunks to protect against the unsuccessful British barrage on the Sullivan's Island emplacements that later became Fort Moultrie.

Still, after the British evacuation of Boston, it was clear that they would need a major seaport from which to manage and supply the subjugation of the colonies. The best target, for a myriad of reasons, would be New York. The British enjoyed an unchallenged and unchallengeable naval superiority and July brought into the harbor Howe's massive army that vastly outnumbered the Continentals. Washington saw no viable plan for defending the vast islands and inlets of New York or for reinforcing or evacuating any part of the area. Nobody could have stopped the British from landing in the area, and it was virtually unimaginable to slow or stop them. However, it would have been politically impossible to abandon the area to the British without a fight, so Washington took an untried revolutionary army and entered into a failing campaign.

The British landed at Staten Island and bided time until they had sufficient force to sweep the Americans from the area. After six weeks, they began transporting what became over 20,000 men across the narrows to Brooklyn. Half of the Continentals waited on Manhattan, while the other half took defensive positions around Flatbush, meeting the British in the battle of Long Island from August 27–30. British General Henry Clinton then led a night march that seized

Jamaica Pass, turning the Continentals' left flank, and the subsequent fighting proved very one-sided. The battle ended with a remarkably fortunate night evacuation of some 9,000 Continentals.

The experience on Long Island underscored the problems of defending Manhattan with a small force that could not possibly block all possible points of landing. A few weeks after the fighting in Brooklyn, Howe landed some 4,000 British troops at Kip's Bay on Manhattan (near present 34th Street). With reinforcements landing throughout the day, they easily maneuvered the rebels out of New York City on September 15. Some 2,000 Continentals then took positions in the rugged terrain of the island north of the city (present Morningside Heights and west Harlem), where they met a British force that eventually grew to about 5,000. The fighting at Harlem Heights on September 16 ended when Lord Charles Cornwallis arrived with fresh British troops.

This dismal period gave rise to some of the great legends of the Revolution. In New York, the Connecticut schoolteacher-turned-spy Nathan Hale faced his British executioners on September 22 with "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country." Thomas Paine, participating in the dismal retreat across New Jersey, wrote the first of his *Crisis* papers: "These are the times that try men's souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman." Continentals could draw little inspiration from their rear guard actions at Pell's Point (October 18) in the Bronx, and at White Plains (October 28).

What the British did while they controlled New York provided a standing argument against an American acquiescence to the reestablishment of royal authority in the New World. In the aftermath of the battle, the city lost 400 to 500 buildings in the great fire of New York (September 21–22), which each side blamed on the other. The city provided the base for devastating raids that destroyed Danbury (April 25–26), Fairfield (July 8), Norwalk (July 10), and other Connecticut communities. The British hold on New York made it a special nightmare for legions of American prisoners, some 11,000 of whom died of malnutrition, exposure, mistreatment, and disease in the overcrowded prison ships moored on the Brooklyn side of the East River at Wallabout Bay.

Based at Philadelphia, the Continental government struggled to survive and desperately sought some demonstration of the continued viability of the Revolution while Washington gambled on an unexpected counter-attack, crossing the Delaware and capturing nearly a thousand Hessians at Trenton (December 26). Expecting a strong British drive from Princeton towards his position, Washington held the British at a Second Battle of Trenton (January 2) before slipping away. Rather than retreat across the Delaware into Pennsylvania, though, Washington took his army by back roads to strike the British successfully at Princeton (January 3, 1777) before going into winter quarters at Morristown (January 6–May 28). In the spring, the British marched from New Brunswick and routed a small part of the Continental Army at Bound Brook (April 13), but then counter-marched back toward New York.

Howe assembled and transported about 17,000 men to the upper Chesapeake (August 25) and then began moving north toward Philadelphia, the seat of the rebel government. Washington had less than 11,000 to stop him. After several days of preliminary harassment, the Continentals met Howe's British advance at Cooch's Bridge on September 3, 1777 in Delaware, but the redcoats pressed on, inflicting a major defeat on the Continentals at Brandywine Creek (September 10).

In the aftermath of the defeat, disasters compounded each other. Washington's attempt to counter-attack the British was rained out in the Battle of the Clouds on September 16. The British occupied Philadelphia (September 26), putting the Continental government to flight, and Washington's counter-attack at Germantown on October 4 failed miserably. The British failed to capture Fort Mercer (October 22) but captured Fort Mifflin (November 16). When Howe heard that Washington was moving off for the winter, he made a final attempt to lure the Continental Army into a position in which it could be destroyed, but several days of inconclusive skirmishing at White Marsh (December 5–8) ended with Howe's withdrawal to Philadelphia.

The Turning Point

The previous year, American resistance on Lake Champlain, though ending in defeat (October 11, 1776), had put an end to British ambitions to invade the Hudson Valley. The operation, under General John Burgoyne, looked simple on a map. He was to push south from Canada, while Howe kept the bulk of the Continental forces preoccupied to around New York City. In fact, the French had tried the same thing in the Seven Years' War and the poor roads and logistical problems had dissipated their efforts.

Initially, Burgoyne did quite well, moving three columns south through New York. His forces captured Fort Ticonderoga (July 5–6, 1777) and attacked the Continentals' rear guard at Hubbardton (July 7). However, the column charged with moving through the Mohawk Valley failed to reduce Fort Schuyler (old Fort Stanwix) on August 3, and an American relief column struck the redcoats at Oriskany on August 6. Then, a detachment of Hessians met disaster at Bennington on August 16. The farther south the expedition pressed, the more distant they were from their line of supply and the more Continental militia they faced.

The American occupation of strong defensive positions on Bemis Heights over the Hudson River blocked Burgoyne's way south. About 9 miles south of Saratoga, he concentrated his army on the west side of the Hudson and tried to sweep the Continentals from the high ground in the battle of Freeman's Farm, or Saratoga (September 19). This ended with both sides unable to gain ground. Burgoyne realized that his force was down to 6,000 with no reinforcements and dwindling supplies, while the Continentals had a total of about 7,000 and growing.

The British made a second attempt at Bemis Heights, or Second Saratoga, on October 7, but the Continentals held their ground, largely due to the personal leadership of Benedict Arnold. By the end, Burgoyne had lost enough to where he was outnumbered and his army pulled back several miles to the north. In the end, Burgoyne and 5,791 of his men surrendered (October 17).

Meanwhile, the British at New York City did little to relieve the pressure on Burgoyne. They engaged the Continentals at Fort Clinton and Fort Montgomery (October 6, 1777) near Bear Mountain.

Soon after, Washington's Continental Army went into another desperate winter at Valley Forge (December 19, 1777–June 19, 1778). However, the arrival of Frederick William Rudolph Gerald Augustus von Steuben, Baron von Steuben, brought the best European battlefield tactics to the rebels and used the hiatus to begin the serious training and drill of the Continentals. More importantly, the French recognized the US and concluded a military alliance on February 6, 1778, landing troops in Rhode Island by the following August.

The British sought to improve their performance from the top down, replacing Howe with General Henry Clinton on March 7, 1778. As Washington bestirred his army, a small force under Lafayette, sent to screen his movements, clashed with the British at Barren Hill (May 20).

As Clinton began withdrawing toward New York, Washington attacked his rear guard at Monmouth on June 28. Both sides had a bit over 13,000 men, and the horrific heat, which probably topped 100 degrees, kept the fight inconclusive, but it was the largest pitched battle of the war, and the Continentals well demonstrated that they could stand up to the best of the British, which they could not have done earlier. Indeed, they displayed a persistence and combativeness that unnerved British strategists. "Mad" Anthony Wayne defeated and captured most of the British garrison of 700 at Stony Point (July 15–16, 1779) and "Light Horse" Harry Lee made a bold night attack on British Paulus Hook (August 19) in New Jersey.

Republican Liberties and Imperial Rivalries: Whose Revolution?

In the wake of the French, Spain agreed to enter the war on April 12, 1779. The united Provinces of the Netherlands then decided to join the alliance, and England declared war on Holland on December 20, 1780. Thus, the war reached global proportions.

A number of internal tensions surfaced among the revolutionary forces. Some of the newly independent states, such as New Hampshire, kept many of the same officials, while others, notably Pennsylvania, experienced an almost complete turnover in the government of the state. More important was the structure of government itself. Since the colonists had overthrown their existing governments, closed courts, and drove British agents and governors from their homes, they needed to establish a new framework within which they could govern themselves. Some simply kept their colonial charters, deleting the references to the king. Others sought a far more thorough transformation.

The course of Pennsylvania reflected some of the arguments of *Common Sense* that went beyond mere independence. Paine had argued for a structure of government that, in effect, would supersede professional office holding by vesting power exclusively in the hands of a single representative assembly, the members of which would serve for a year and not succeed themselves in office. Executive power, in the hands of a presiding officer, would be directly dependent on the representatives and any process of judicial review would be in the hands of a committee of censors chosen from the assembly. Other tracts like *The People the Best Governors* expressed similarly egalitarian and republican views. Farmers and artisans generally supported Pennsylvania's new constitution that lowered the property requirement for voting to almost nothing, and established a unicameral legislature, but the elite resisted the functioning of the most radically representative government in the former colonies.

The resident Continental government tolerated such republicanism, but did not share the arguments of *Common Sense*. In response, John Adams penned his far less popular but much more influential *Thoughts on Government*. Adams rejected purely representative institutions for a "mixed" government, which he, like contemporaries, saw embodied in the British system. Adams hoped to incorporate into his system the alleged virtues of monarchy in a fully independent executive branch with extensive authorities to appoint officials and the power to veto legislative enactments. He also hoped to preserve the bicameral system with a co-equal, deliberately non-representative upper house. Significant property requirements for voting would also confine citizenship to those with wealth at stake in the deliberations of government.

These differences largely reflected the extent to which the previously disenfranchised were capable of influencing events. Massachusetts and New York adopted largely conservative structures, partly because the artisans of Boston and New York City had either scattered or were excluded by the British occupation. In contrast, Pennsylvania's radical course reflected a mobilized artisan base in Philadelphia, and officials in other states waged a persistent struggle against it, until the state adopted a similarly bicameral and hierarchic structure in 1790.

As all these events strangled commerce, urban prices exploded and radicals began mobilizing against profiteering. "Joyce Junior," a figure who had mobilized Boston crowds against the Stamp Act, now led mixed "mobs" of workingmen and market women against merchants believed to be gouging prices. Sanctioned by their radical government, Philadelphians formed price-fixing committees and confronted local businessmen in a series of meetings and demonstrations, culminating in the Fort Wilson Riot on October 4, 1779, in which armed Americans confronted each other.

The mixed nature of the American Revolution and its impact is more evident when looking to the rural folk, who had less contact with and hostility towards the British. Particularly outside of New England, they remained more ambivalent. Tenants of rebel landlords in New York or more recent immigrants in the Carolinas would have been as likely as not to have seen the Revolution as a hypocritical disordering force and remained loyal to Britain. Where they sided with the Revolution, as did the settlers on the New Hampshire Grants, they could be very independent. Their "fourteenth" state, Vermont, not only declared its independence from New Hampshire and New York, but adopted Pennsylvania's radical constitution. It would not be admitted to the US until well after the Revolution.

Social tensions also strained the Continental Army. One of the more conservative American leaders, General Benedict Arnold, had a long history of hostility to the radicals in Pennsylvania. Despairing of the future of the Revolution, he made arrangements to cede West Point to the British (September 21–25, 1780). Discontent with officers, non-payment of the paltry wages due the soldiers, payment in grossly inflated paper script, and similar grievances became worse towards the end of the war, when soldiers were held in service beyond their term of enlistment. After a series of mass desertions and mutinies, the entire Pennsylvania Line rose up and marched on the government (January 1–7, 1781), demanding their discharge with the option of reenlistment. A similar mutiny by the New Jersey Line (January 20–27, 1781) was put down in blood.

The Revolution certainly improved some features of the position of women, though that varied so widely depending on circumstances. Not only did some women such as Abigail Adams and Mercy Otis Warren emerge as individuals from the sources, but the Revolution also offered glimpses of some women in far less social prominence, such as the elusive “Molly Pitcher,” one of the many women who brought water to the men in the midst of battle and, in the case of the battle of Monmouth, replaced a wounded soldier at his post at a battery of artillery. They participated in crowd activities and returned to spinning and weaving to make the boycotted materials. In the end, some women gained additional rights. Divorce became easier in some states, and some propertied women got the right to vote in parts of Connecticut and New Jersey.

The Revolution did change the circumstances of many African Americans. Thousands joined the Continental Army, though the British sometimes positioned themselves as supporters of slave liberation against the hypocritical slaveholding Continentals. Most Revolutionary leaders believed that Independence would put slavery on the road to extinction, ended the transatlantic slave trade, and ultimately eliminated slavery in half the state.

The indigenous peoples would be the great losers of the American Revolution, as the colonists brushed aside the Proclamation of 1763. Insofar as Native Americans became involved, they wisely sided with the British. South of the Ohio River, Daniel Boone led the first white settlers into what became Kentucky (1775), clashing repeatedly with Indian allies of the British. In New York, Continentals after Oriskany entered the river valleys of the Iroquois Confederacy and began the “Burning of the Valleys” to drive potential allies of the British from the area. A Virginia expedition under George Rogers Clark crossed the mountains and descended the Ohio River, beaching their boats at abandoned Fort Massac in present Illinois. They walked overland to surprise and capture Kaskaskia (July 4, 1778), and, with support of local French inhabitants, secured Fort Sackville and the trading village of Vincennes (present Indiana). British Governor Henry Hamilton, however, led a force that personally retook these posts. In February, Clark led 172 volunteers on a desperate trek through over 200 miles of “drowned country” to retake it. Convincing the British that he had more than three times as many men as he did, he threatened to storm the garrison, giving no quarter, driving home this threat by personally tomahawking Indian prisoners. The British surrendered Fort Vincennes on February 25.

The Continentals never managed to mount a force to seize the British base at Detroit. However, the British could never seriously challenge the allies in their control over the interior of the continent. Indeed, although vastly outnumbered, the Spanish turned back a British-organized Indian attack on the tiny settlement of St. Louis (May 26, 1780). By then, the British pinned their hopes for success on the South, in part because of the high proportion of Loyalists among the planter elite there.

War in the South: The Final Phase 1778–1781

The different styles of warfare also inspired a series of Continental charges of British atrocities. These included the Paoli Massacre (September 21, 1777); the Wyoming Valley Massacre (July 3, 1778); the Baylor Massacre (present River Vale, NJ) (September 27, 1778); and the Tappan Massacre (September 28, 1779). Most of these seem to have largely reflected the fondness of some redcoats for the bayonet, a weapon to which the Continentals never warmed.

The British occupied Savannah, Georgia on December 29, 1778. As the winter permitted, they attempted to expand their holdings along the coast at Beaufort or Port Royal Island (February 3, 1779), and they began recruiting Loyalists. The Americans caught 340 of them encamped at Kettle Creek (February 14), however, and inflicted a defeat sufficiently humiliating to dampen enthusiasm for actively joining the Crown’s cause. After another raid on Charleston, the Continentals made an all night march to attack the British, who sought to establish a garrison on New Cut Church Flats, covering Stono Ferry. They suffered heavy losses, made worse by the heat and exhaustion.

A joint Franco-American force of 5,000 then besieged the 3,200 British in Savannah (September 16–October 18). The effort included a major assault on October 9, which mortally wounded Count Kazimierz Pułaski among the Continentals. Several hundred free blacks from Saint-Domingue also fought among the French allies.

The arrival of Clinton and 14,000 British in South Carolina besieged and forced the surrender of Charleston on May 12, 1780 with its 5,000 defenders. Thereafter, Clinton returned to New York, leaving Lord Charles Cornwallis with instructions to finish the subjugation of South Carolina and continue into North Carolina. American reinforcements on their way south counter-marched, but Banastre Tarleton's "British Legion," composed of local Loyalists, caught up with – and overran – the Continentals near the border with North Carolina, at Waxhaw Creek on May 29. American accounts indicate that some 113 of the 350 soldiers attacked and were killed, allegedly after trying to surrender. Rebels later used this in justifying incidents in which Tories were given "Tarleton's Quarter."

In general, the British won victories in the field but made little headway in the overall war. Americans responded in large part by a guerilla war conducted by leaders like Francis Marion, a veteran Indian fighter and planter on the Santee River who used local knowledge of the terrain and excellent intelligence to execute hit-and-run guerilla tactics against the occupation. (Tarleton referred to him as the Swamp Fox.) With such tactics, Americans routed a British force at Ramseur's Mill (June 20) in North Carolina and at Hanging Rock (August 6) in South Carolina. Most importantly, the Continentals raised a new force. General Horatio Gates quickly marched over 4,000 southward, encountering a British force of roughly 2,200 under Lord Cornwallis just north of Camden (August 16).

Cornwallis entered North Carolina in September. A loyalist contingent under independent command near the border with South Carolina warned locals that they would "lay waste to their country with fire and sword" should resistance continue. Various independent units of frontier militia converged on the British at King's Mountain (October 7). Using tactics learned from the Indians, the Continentals kept moving and under cover, taking little longer than an hour to force the surrender of the loyalists, though some of the rebels apparently shot some trying to surrender.

Soon after, Washington assigned Nathanael Greene (October 14) to take charge of the rebel forces in the South. That winter, the Americans also turned back a careless pursuit by Tarleton's 1,100 Loyalists near the cattle-grazing site of the Cowpens on January 17, 1781, from which a mere 260 British escaped. The spring would end British illusions that they had actually gained anything in the South.

Cornwallis moved decisively to destroy Greene's troublesome little army in North Carolina, but Greene turned on the British at Guilford Court House (March 15). The British attacks broke on a succession of American lines, leaving a battle reduced into bitter hand-to-hand fighting. To resolve this, Cornwallis ordered his artillery to fire indiscriminately into the contested part of the field, after which the Continentals quickly fell back, but the British had lost a third of their men and still faced a Continental Army. Convinced that they could not retain territory, the British decided to concentrate their forces in Virginia and, that May, Cornwallis disembarked from Wilmington for Virginia.

Rather than follow Cornwallis, though, Greene took his forces back into South Carolina. Despite defeats like Hobkirk's Hill (April 25) near Camden, or the two attacks around Eutaw Springs at Fort Ninety-Six (May 22, September 8), the Continentals began gradually retaking everything the British had seized earlier beyond Charleston and Savannah.

Once landed in Virginia, Cornwallis effectively established a base for his 7,000 to 8,000 men on part of the old Virginia Peninsula, the site of the original British settlements in the New World. His forces drove back the Continentals near Green Springs Farm on July 6, 1781, but faced enough serious opposition that they settled near Yorktown to await a juncture with more British forces. From here, everything went wrong. A French fleet under Admiral François Joseph Paul, Marquis de Grasse, thwarted the attempt of the Royal Navy to reach Cornwallis, defeating it at the mouth of the Chesapeake (September 5). American and French land forces under Washington and Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, Comte de Rochambeau, backed Cornwallis to Yorktown (October 6–19), where he awaited help from the navy until Admiral de Grasse showed up with the French fleet. After a remarkable joint night operation where the French and Americans respectively captured two redoubts overlooking the York River (October 14), Cornwallis surrendered his army (October 19). As the imperial troops filed out of their positions, the British bands played "The World Turned Upside Down," a tune from the English Revolution.

Who's Victory?

By the time of the surrender, the US had already emerged from the war. After the Congressional writing of the Articles of Confederation (November 15, 1777), enough of the rebellious colonies had adopted it for ratification (March 2, 1781) to secure a unified national authority.

News of Yorktown prompted Parliament to abandon plans for military subjugation, and Lord North resigned as British prime minister (March 20, 1782). By default, then, the mother country ceded the US its existence. Thereafter, the British evacuated Savannah (July 11, 1782), Charleston (December 14, 1782), and New York (November 25, 1783).

However, the War for American Independence continued for almost two years after Yorktown, as great empires strove to shift the balances of power among themselves. American alliances made the Revolution. Not surprisingly, the naval war became intense in the West Indies where the French threatened the British sugar plantations. The French seized and held Saint Vincent Cape (1779–83), although the Royal Navy defeated the French at Les Saintes (April 12, 1782).

Fighting also took place across European waters. British and French ships fought twice in the waters near Ushant (July 27, 1778, December 12, 1781), the second clearly reaffirming the superiority of British naval power. The British fleet also reaffirmed its superiority over Spanish naval power at Cape Saint Vincent (January 16, 1780) off the coast of Portugal. A combined French and Spanish force retook Minorca (February 5, 1782), one of the Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean, and a combined fleet also threatened British supply lines to Gibraltar until the battle at Cape Spartel (October 20, 1782). The entry into the war of the Netherlands became the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780–4), although the engagement at Dogger Bank (August 5, 1781) largely bottled the Dutch fleet in its harbors. A French naval expedition surprised and disabled a British squadron at Porto Praya (April 16, 1781) in the Cape Verde Islands, off west Africa, and then continued on into the Indian Ocean, where it campaigned against the British with the help of the Mysore leader, Hyder Ali, and some Dutch bases in Sri Lanka. The British had captured from the Dutch Negapatam on the Indian coast near Cuddalore and Trincomalee (January 8, 1782) in Sri Lanka. The French ships struck a squadron at Sadras, just south of Madras (February 17), then threatened the British hold on Trincomalee, moving on nearby Providien (April 12).

In India the French clashed with the British at Negapatam (July 6), then recaptured Cuddalore. A few weeks later they attacked the small British garrison at Trincomalee (August 25–31, 1782), thwarting a British naval attempt to relieve it (September 3). The British also made one final effort to retake Cuddalore (June 13–20, 1783), but the timely arrival of French naval forces helped end the effort.

Restoring the balance of imperial power preoccupied the negotiations France hosted. The result was the Second Treaty of Paris (September 3, 1783). The major powers denied each other any further claims to most of the territory west of the Alleghenies and east of the Mississippi River, and the US adopted a series of Land Ordinances (April 23, 1784, May 20, 1785), culminating in the Northwest Ordinance (July 13, 1787). These were based on the Treaty of Fort McIntorsh (January 21, 1785) with native peoples.

Washington resigned as Commander of the Continental Army (December 23, 1783), voluntarily submitting military authority to the civilian government. This did not diminish the importance of war and conquest. Almost immediately, settlers clashed with Indians in Kentucky and northern Ohio, leading to the Northwest Indian War (1785–95).

The war saddled the new nation with massive debts to its foreign allies, to the states, and to individuals holding promissory notes issued during the war, many of the latter having been sold out of desperation by the soldiers, merchants, and farmers who got them at a fraction of the price. The US began owing speculators and investors, and the drive to establish a new, more powerful central authority capable of meetings its obligations pressed. These clashed repeatedly with American debtors, such as the participants in Shay's Rebellion (1786–7), which began when rural folk closed the western Massachusetts courts.

Adams' "mixed government" not only emerged as a wartime alternative to Paineite republicanism, but it also became the postwar model for ensuring "domestic tranquility." Representatives of the states eager for a stronger central government gathered for the Annapolis Convention (September 11–14, 1786), which adjourned to reassemble in Philadelphia (May 25–September 17, 1787), proposing a new Constitution to take effect after its ratification by 11 states. The old government under the Articles of Confederation acknowledged ratification of the Constitution on September 13, 1788, and the new government formed with the inauguration of George Washington on April 30, 1789.

Foundation of State

At the close of the war, Dr. Benjamin Rush wisely advised against confusing American Independence with "the American Revolution," which, he wrote, had just begun. The US sought to govern itself through a system of checks and balances. Positive action required a general agreement between different and theoretically competing executive, legislative, and judicial branches, with the legislative embedding a bicameral tension between a lower house representing enfranchised voters and an upper house representing all states equally. This placed many problems – most obviously slavery – beyond the realm of national government. However, the almost immediate ratification of ten amendments, the Bill of Rights (December 15, 1791), restrained the government from restrictions on freedoms of speech, religious worship, assembly, the press, and other rights. Almost immediately, Americans sought to claim their acknowledged right "to alter or to abolish" governments that fail to assure the "inalienable rights" of the people to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

The same argument had always had international ramifications. Even as the US formed, the economies of its former allies collapsed and the French Revolution began (1789). The anti-imperial assertion of the right of nations to self-determination has plagued the US not only in terms of its relations with native peoples but with countries around the world.

SEE ALSO: American Revolution of 1776, Women and; French Revolution, 1789–1794; Paine, Thomas (1737–1809); Shay's Rebellion; Whiskey Rebellion

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