

A winter scene featuring a log cabin and a wooden fence in the snow. The cabin is constructed of stacked logs and has a corrugated metal roof. The fence is made of weathered wooden posts and rails. The ground is covered in a layer of snow, and there are bare trees in the background. The sky is overcast and grey.

The American Revolution

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

A Revolutionary War soldier in a blue coat and tricorn hat is shown in profile, firing a long rifle. The rifle is emitting a large plume of white smoke. The soldier is standing in a field of tall, dry grass. In the background, there are green trees and a clear sky.

Table of Contents

Setting the Stage	5
<i>by Jimmy Carter</i>	
Revolutionary War Timeline	6
In Search of the American Revolution	17
<i>by Charlene Mires</i>	
"Collection of Memories"	19
The Path Toward Independence	26
<i>by Pauline Maier</i>	
"Volumes Had Been Written..."	46
"Principles, Opinions, Sentiments, & Affections"	47
The War for Independence	49
<i>by Don Higginbotham</i>	
"Useful Lessons"	50
"The Die is Now Cast"	65
Forgotten Americans	73
<i>by Gary B. Nash</i>	
"Silken Slippers... Wooden Shoes"	80
"Discover, Uncover, Rediscover, and Recover"	97
The Revolution's Legacy	99
<i>by Gordon S. Wood</i>	
"Moved to a New Resolve"	101
"If Men Were Angels"	116
"E Pluribus Unum?"	117
"A Political Duty of Grave Importance"	118
Related Sites	119
Index	126
Image Sources	128
Acknowledgments	129



Setting the Stage

The American Revolution opened a new chapter in human history. For the first time, a nation made two moral and philosophical principles the basis of government and society: that all men are created equal and that all the powers of government are derived from the consent of the governed. The decision by three million American colonists to stake their future on the principles of equality and representative government has shaped the nation's history over more than two centuries.

America has not always lived up to the ideals of the Declaration of Independence, but those ideals have never been eclipsed. They have served as guiding beacons, available to backwoods revolutionaries from Georgia to Massachusetts and later to Abraham Lincoln, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Martin Luther King, Jr., to call upon in extending the benefits of liberty and equality to all citizens. Beyond that, America's founding principles have captured the imagination of freedom-loving people the world over.

In this volume, in essays that address the background of the Revolution, the war itself, lesser-known participants in the struggle, and its legacy, historians offer their perspectives on the American Revolution. The essays are meant to provide a broad context for the stories told by the National Park Service at its many American Revolution sites. I hope that the material in this handbook will enhance your visits to these irreplaceable historic places. The American Revolution set the stage for the development of the United States. We only can benefit from continuing to study and reflect upon its multiple meanings and lasting legacies.

—Jimmy Carter,
President of the United States, 1977-1981

The Revolution was effected before the War commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people; a change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations. This radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affections of the people, was the real American Revolution.

—John Adams

Revolutionary War Timeline



British North America, 1775

Early Americans had made the risky Atlantic crossing seeking a better life, adventure, religious freedom and political autonomy. They built a society in the New World and for generations ran it with little outside meddling. After the French and Indian War, Britain initiated policies aimed at bringing the colonists under closer control. Tensions grew. Many Americans stood firm in their belief that the King had suspended their natural rights.

Increasingly, resistance leaders banded together. The stage for the Revolution was set.

1763-1774

February 10, 1763 The Treaty of Paris ends Seven Years' War (French and Indian War). Left in debt from war, Great Britain looks to colonies for revenue to pay for future colonial protection.

October 7, 1763 Proclamation of 1763 bars settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains.

April 5, 1764 Sugar Act imposes stricter trade regulation and duties on sugar and molasses.

March 22, 1765 Stamp Act places tax on printed matter and legal documents.

June 29, 1767 Townshend Revenue Acts create new import duties for the colonists.



October 1768 British soldiers arrive in Boston to enforce compliance with new regulations.

March 5, 1770 "Boston Massacre." King's troops kill five civilians before British back off and troops leave Boston. All Townshend duties removed except for tax on tea.

December 16, 1773 Chests of tea destroyed in protest at Boston "Tea Party."

March-June 1774 Coercive Acts close port of Boston, bring Massachusetts's government under crown control, and allow for quartering of British troops on private property.

September-October 1774 First Continental Congress meets in Philadelphia and approves collective strategy to deal with Coercive Acts. Declare common grievances and adopt comprehensive boycotts of British goods.

October 1774 "Minute Man" companies formed.

1775 "Rage Militare"

On the eve of the Revolution the patriots succeeded in organizing a home defense; militias stood mobilized and ready. Fighting broke out at Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts, on April 19. At the Battle of Bunker Hill in June, the patriots lost, but learned that they could stand against British regulars. Soon after, George Washington assumed command of the newly created Continental Army.

April 19 Battles of Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts, occur. A rallying militia drives British back in retreat to Boston.

May 10 Second Continental Congress convenes in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Fort Ticonderoga, New York, captured by Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold.

May 11 Battle of Crown Point, New York.

June 14 Congress establishes Continental Army.

June 15 Congress appoints George Washington as commander-in-chief.



June 17 At the Battle of Bunker Hill (Breed's Hill), Massachusetts, the British seize their objective, but suffer severe casualties.

July 3 George Washington assumes command of the Continental Army in Massachusetts.

July 5 Continental Congress adopts *Olive Branch Petition* in effort to reconcile differences with Britain.

Mid-July Continental Army encamps at Cambridge, Massachusetts.

August 28 Hoping to gain a fourteenth colony to aid in fight against Britain, patriots begin a campaign to capture Quebec, Canada.

October 13 Congress authorizes Continental Navy.

October 18 British Naval forces bombard and burn Falmouth, Maine.

November King George III rejects *Olive Branch Petition*.

November 7 Lord Dunmore, Royal Governor of Virginia, offers freedom to slaves who join Crown forces.

November 10 Congress establishes Continental Marines.

November 14 General Richard Montgomery's forces occupy Montreal.

December 9 Patriots defeat British at Great Bridge, Virginia.

December 30 George Washington orders recruiting officers to allow free blacks to join the Continental Army.

December 31 Battle of Quebec, Canada.

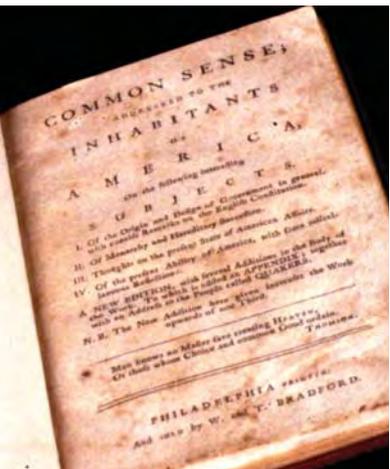
1776 Independence?

While pens declared political independence on paper, the cause was nearly lost on the battlefield. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* won many over to the cause. Congress took the dramatic step of declaring independence from Britain in July. After being pushed to the brink, the Continental Army's daring Delaware River crossing and victory over the Hessians at Trenton gave new life to the cause.

January 1 British thwart Montgomery and Arnold's assault on Quebec; invasion of Canada fails.

January 5 New Hampshire becomes the first colony to declare full independence.

January 19 Thomas Paine publishes *Common Sense*.



February 27 Patriots defeat a loyalist force at Battle of Moores Creek Bridge near Wilmington, North Carolina.

March 2 Americans fortify Dorchester Heights, Massachusetts, using cannon brought from Fort Ticonderoga by artillery chief, Henry Knox.

March 3 Congress appoints Silas Deane as diplomatic agent to France, in hopes of securing military aid.

March 3–4 Continental Navy and Marines raid on the British colony of Nassau, Bahamas, yields quantities of valuable military stores.

March 17 American siege forces British to evacuate Boston.



March 31 Abigail Adams issues historic plea for women's rights, urging her husband, John to "remember the ladies" as Congress drafts new laws.

April Continental Army leaves its first winter encampment at Cambridge, Massachusetts.

April 1 Continental Army enters and begins to erect defenses in New York City.

May 2 The French government consents to send secret military aid to the colonies, sending \$1 million worth of arms to America.

May 10 Congress authorizes each of the thirteen colonies to form new state governments.

June 7 Virginia delegate Richard Henry Lee offers a formal resolution calling for American independence.

June 12 Congress appoints a committee to prepare a draft of a working government entitled the Articles of Confederation.

June 28 Jefferson presents his draft of the Declaration of Independence to Congress.

American defenders repulse British attack at Fort Sullivan (Fort Moultrie), Charleston, South Carolina.

June–July British armada arrives in New York carrying over 30,000 British and Hessian troops intending to crush the rebellion.

July 2 Continental Congress votes in favor of Richard Henry Lee's resolution for independence.

July 4 Congress formally adopts the Declaration of Independence.

August 2 Delegates sign Declaration of Independence. Demonstrating the new nation's potential for religious tolerance, the list of signers includes one Catholic, Charles Carroll of Maryland.

August 27–29 British commanded by William Howe defeat Washington's outnumbered army at the Battle of Long Island, New York. Americans evacuate to Manhattan.

September Congress appoints Arthur Lee and Benjamin Franklin to assist Silas Deane in diplomatic mission to France.



September 12 Washington evacuates New York City.

September 16 Americans hold off British at the Battle of Harlem Heights, New York.

September 22 British hang patriot Nathan Hale for spying.

October 11–12 British overpower Benedict Arnold's small fleet at the Battle of Valcour Island on Lake Champlain, New York, but this valiant action halts British lake-route invasion of New York.

October 13 British occupy Crown Point, New York.

October 28 Howe's army achieves a costly victory over Washington at the Battle of Red Bank, Pennsylvania.

November 16 British capture Fort Mifflin, Pennsylvania, on the east side of the Hudson River.

November 20 Americans forced to abandon Fort Mifflin, New Jersey, on the west side of the Hudson River. New York City is now in British hands.

December 19 Thomas Paine publishes *The Crisis*, which helps rekindle the fires of liberty during the darkest hour of the Revolution.

December 25 With army enlistment about to expire at year's end, Washington must act. Continental Army begins daring Christmas night crossing of the Delaware River.

December 26 Washington's victory over the Hessians at Trenton, New Jersey, gives new life to the cause. In the coming year, Congress and Washington build an army for the war based on long-term enlistment.

1777 At What Price?

In 1777, the Americans cut short a British plan to divide and conquer the colonies. The British surrendered a large force to the Continental Army after the battles of Saratoga in New York, but were able to capture the patriot capital at Philadelphia. In December, an optimistic, but weary Continental Army marched into winter quarters at Valley Forge.

January 3 Washington follows up triumph at Trenton with a victory at the Battle of Red Bank, New Jersey.



January 6 Continental Army enters second winter encampment of the war at Morristown, New Jersey.

May After facing defeat by patriot militia along the southern frontier, Cherokee Indians are forced from their land in South Carolina.

May 28 Continental Army leaves Morristown, New Jersey, encampment.

June British under General John Burgoyne begin lake-route invasion from Canada.

July 6 British force Americans to abandon Fort Ticonderoga.

July 20 After struggle with patriot forces along the Carolina and Georgia frontiers, Cherokee give up land in western North Carolina.

July 27 Marquis de Lafayette arrives in Philadelphia to volunteer for the American cause.

August 2–23 Patriots successfully defend Fort Mifflin, New York, against intimidating British assault, halting one prong of planned English offensive.

August 6 In one of the bloodiest actions of the war, Mohawk war chief Joseph Brant and British-allied Indians ambush and engage New York militia outside Fort Stanwix at Oriskany, New York.

August 16 Hessian component of General Burgoyne's offensive defeated at Bennington (Vermont).

August 25 British land at Head of Elk (Chesapeake Bay), Maryland, and begin campaign to capture Philadelphia.

September 2 Zealous Pennsylvania government arrests prominent Philadelphia Quakers for not supporting patriot causes and sends them into exile in Virginia.

September 11 Washington gives ground after losing hard-fought Battle of Brandywine, Pennsylvania.

September 19 At the first Battle of Saratoga (Freeman's Farm), New York, Burgoyne's army is shaken by encounter with Arnold and Morgan's riflemen.

September 21 British carry out victorious nighttime bayonet assault on Anthony Wayne's Pennsylvania troops at the Battle of Paoli, Pennsylvania.

September 22–26 English outmaneuver Continental Army and capture Philadelphia.

October 4 Washington's bold counter attack at the Battle of Germantown, Pennsylvania, falls short.



October 7 At Second Battle of Saratoga (Bemis Heights) New York, Arnold defeats British again and forces them to retreat.

October 17 Burgoyne surrenders his trapped army to General Horatio Gates.

October 22 Hessian attack on Fort Mercer, New Jersey, is firmly repulsed.

November 10–15 Fort Mifflin, Pennsylvania, reduced and evacuated after valiant American defense.

November 15 Articles of Confederation adopted by Continental Congress in York, Pennsylvania.

December 19 Continental Army enters the third winter encampment of the war at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.



1778 The Tide Turns

European recognition, assistance, and military professionalism came to America in 1778. By February, American diplomatic efforts and military achievements yielded an alliance with France. At the Battle of Monmouth, New Jersey, in June, the Americans claimed victory over their opponent. In November, the army set up their winter quarters with businesslike efficiency at Middlebrook, New Jersey.

February 1 Rhode Island Assembly enacts temporary law granting freedom to slaves who enlist in the predominantly African American First Rhode Island regiment.

February 6 French Alliance treaties signed in Europe.

February 23 Former Prussian officer Baron von Steuben arrives at Valley Forge to begin training program.



May 6 Continental Army formally celebrates French Alliance at Valley Forge.

June 18 British withdraw from Philadelphia.

June 19 Continental Army leaves Valley Forge in pursuit.

June 28 Steuben-trained Continentals prove their mettle and force the King's troops from the field at Battle of Monmouth, New Jersey.

July George Rogers Clark carries out audacious operation against British-held posts in present-day Indiana and Illinois, capturing Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Fort Sackville at Vincennes.

July 10 France declares war on Great Britain.

August 29 French Alliance gets off to a rocky start as uncoordinated Franco-American attack on Newport, Rhode Island, fails.

November Continental Army begins fourth winter camp at Middlebrook, New Jersey.

November 11 Loyalist leaders Walter Butler and Joseph Brant lead Tory and Indian attack on Cherry Valley, New York.

December 17 British retake Vincennes.

December 29 British expedition captures Savannah, Georgia.

1779 World at War

By 1779, the war had spread across the globe. In spring, Spain entered the war as an ally of France and soon declared war on Great Britain. As the year closed, the Continental Army entered into winter camp at Morristown, New Jersey, where they would endure fiercer weather conditions and subsist on fewer supplies than they had at Valley Forge.

January 11 Lafayette returns to France to plead for additional support.

January 29 British occupy Augusta, Georgia.

February 25 George Rogers Clark recaptures Vincennes.

April 12 Spain, which had been contributing aid to the Americans, enters war as an ally of France.

May Continental Army leaves Camp Middlebrook, New Jersey.

June 1 British occupy Stony Point and Verplancks Point, New York, and secure strategic Kings Ferry on the Hudson River.

June 21 Spain formally declares war on Great Britain.

July 16 Anthony Wayne captures formidable fortress Stony Point, New York, during daring night assault.

July-August American attempt to attack Penobscot (Maine) fails miserably.

August 29 In only battle of General John Sullivan's punitive campaign against the Iroquois, Continental Army defeats Tory and Indian force at Newtown, New York.

August 19 Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee carries out successful offensive against Paulus Hook, New Jersey, a British stronghold on the Hudson River.

September–October Allied forces fail to dislodge British garrison during the disappointing Siege of Savannah, Georgia.

September 23 John Paul Jones defeats frigate *Serapis* near English coast.

September 25 Congress appoints John Jay minister to Spain.

December 1 Continental Army comes into the war's fifth winter encampment at Morristown, New Jersey, where the army endures an extraordinarily harsh winter.

1780 A Bad Year

A worsening economy, military disaster in the South, and treason, all undermined the war effort in 1780. Two South Carolina defeats: the capture of Charleston and its large American garrison, and subsequent loss at Camden, made the patriot situation in the South extremely tenuous. Benedict Arnold's treasonous attempt to hand over the plans to Fort West Point, New York, added insult to injury.





March 14 Spanish take British-held post at Mobile (Alabama).

March 29–May 12 British General Sir Henry Clinton besieges Charleston, South Carolina, and compels the surrender of its garrison of 5,500 troops.

May 29 Brutal treatment of surrendering force at the Battle of Waxhaws, South Carolina, by “Bloody” Banastre Tarleton arouses patriot fury.

June 22 Continental Army leaves Morristown encampment.

June 23 Continentals under Nathanael Greene repulse attack led by General Knyphausen at the Battle of Springfield, New Jersey.

July 10 5,500 fresh French troops arrive in Newport, Rhode Island.

Summer–Fall Guerilla leaders Francis Marion, Thomas Sumter, William Davies, and Elijah Clarke carry the war against British and loyalist troops in the South.

August 16 British defeat last major southern continental force at the Battle of Camden, South Carolina.

September Washington foils Arnold’s plot to surrender West Point, New York, but Arnold escapes.

October 7 Intimidating British tactics backfire as swarms of riled frontiersmen annihilate Patrick Ferguson’s Tory force at the Battle of Kings Mountain, South Carolina.

December England declares war on Holland.

Continental Army enters sixth winter with encampments in New York’s Hudson Highlands and Pompton and Morristown, New Jersey.

December 2 Nathanael Greene assumes command of beleaguered southern army and puts British off guard by dividing his forces in the face of superior numbers.

1781 Upside Down

Nathanael Greene’s masterful strategies as well as Franco-American cooperation secured victory in the South. After Greene frustrated General Lord Charles Cornwallis’ designs in the Carolinas, the British general moved to Virginia where the Allies trapped his army. Yorktown was not the end of the war, as Washington and his generals had to contend with the British garrisons that remained.

January Pennsylvania and New Jersey troops mutiny over pay and enlistment grievances. To prevent further spread of revolt among army, Washington and his officers deal harshly with the mutineers, executing several men.

January 17 Daniel Morgan wins one-sided victory against British at the Battle of Cowpens, South Carolina.

February 14 Continental Army under Greene’s command exhausts Cornwallis in marching contest, covering forty miles in sixteen hours.

February 20 Congress appoints Robert Morris, “The Financier of the Revolution” as Superintendent of Finances. During trying financial period, Morris astutely manipulates accounts to keep the war effort funded.

March 1 States formally ratify the Articles of Confederation.

March 15 Greene further weakens British stamina in a fierce clash of arms at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, North Carolina.

April 25 Finding his position untenable, Greene withdraws during the Battle of Hobkirk’s Hill, South Carolina.

May 9 Spanish capture British outpost at Pensacola (Florida).

July 6 Finding himself outnumbered nearly 10 to 1, Anthony Wayne saves his troops from capture by charging straight into Cornwallis’ men at Green Spring Plantation, Virginia.

August 21 Combined armies of Washington and Rochambeau slip away from New York before the British can discover them missing, marching south to confront Cornwallis in Yorktown, Virginia.

September–October Allied siege of Yorktown, Virginia, by land seals Cornwallis’s fate.

September 5 The Battle of the Virginia Capes and subsequent naval operations prevent the British fleet from entering Chesapeake Bay to rescue Cornwallis.

September 8 Greene fights sharp action at Eutaw Springs, South Carolina, and orders another tactical withdrawal.

October 19 Cornwallis surrenders along with his full contingent of 8,000 troops, marking the beginning of the end for the British.



November The Netherlands extends the first of four crucial loans to the United States.

Continental Army returns to Hudson Highlands and New Jersey for its seventh winter encampment.

1782 Stay The Course

By spring, England initiated peace negotiations, yet fighting continued. On the seas, British, French, and Spanish navies continued to battle for supremacy. In America, warfare threatened security on the frontier and in the South. By November, however, Britain and the United States signed a draft peace agreement.

January As the British begin to withdraw forces, loyalists flee the United States in great numbers. Over the course of the war, 100,000 Tories depart.

April 12 Peace talks between Britain and the United States begin in Paris.

April 19 The Netherlands recognizes American sovereignty.

July 11 British end their occupation of Savannah, Georgia.

August 1 Haym Salomon, broker to the office of finance, delivers the first of many large sums that help alleviate the nation’s financial crisis at war’s end.

August 15–19 Tories and Indians attack Bryan’s Station (Kentucky). Daniel Boone and Kentuckians lose skirmish at Blue Licks.

August 27 John Laurens, promising young leader and former aide-de-camp to Washington, dies in fight at Combahee Ferry, South Carolina.



November Continental Army moves into its eighth and final winter quarters, the New Windsor cantonment in the Hudson Highlands.

November 10 In the last battle of the American Revolution, George Rogers Clark attacks Shawnee town of Chillicothe (Ohio).

November 30 American and British ministers agree upon preliminary peace treaty.

December 14 British evacuate Charleston, South Carolina.

1783 Peace

In 1783, America acquired independence, but domestic troubles threatened. As the war wound down, George Washington drew on his leadership ability to keep order amongst a mostly idle, unpaid, and discontented army. On September 3, ministers signed the Treaty of Paris that officially ended the war. Washington bade a tearful farewell to his officers and then resigned his commission.

January 20 Britain signs preliminary peace articles with France and Spain.

April 11 Congress proclaims cessation of hostilities.

April 19 Washington declares end to fighting eight years to the day after war began.



September 3 Final peace treaty between Britain and the United States signed in Paris.

British-allied tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy lose most of their lands as they are left out of the settlement. Some bands settle in southern Ontario with Joseph Brant.

November 2 Washington issues farewell orders to the "Armies of the United States."

November 25 British finally evacuate New York.

December 4 Washington bids farewell to his officers at Fraunces' Tavern in New York City.

December 23 Washington resigns his commission before the Continental Congress in Annapolis, Maryland.

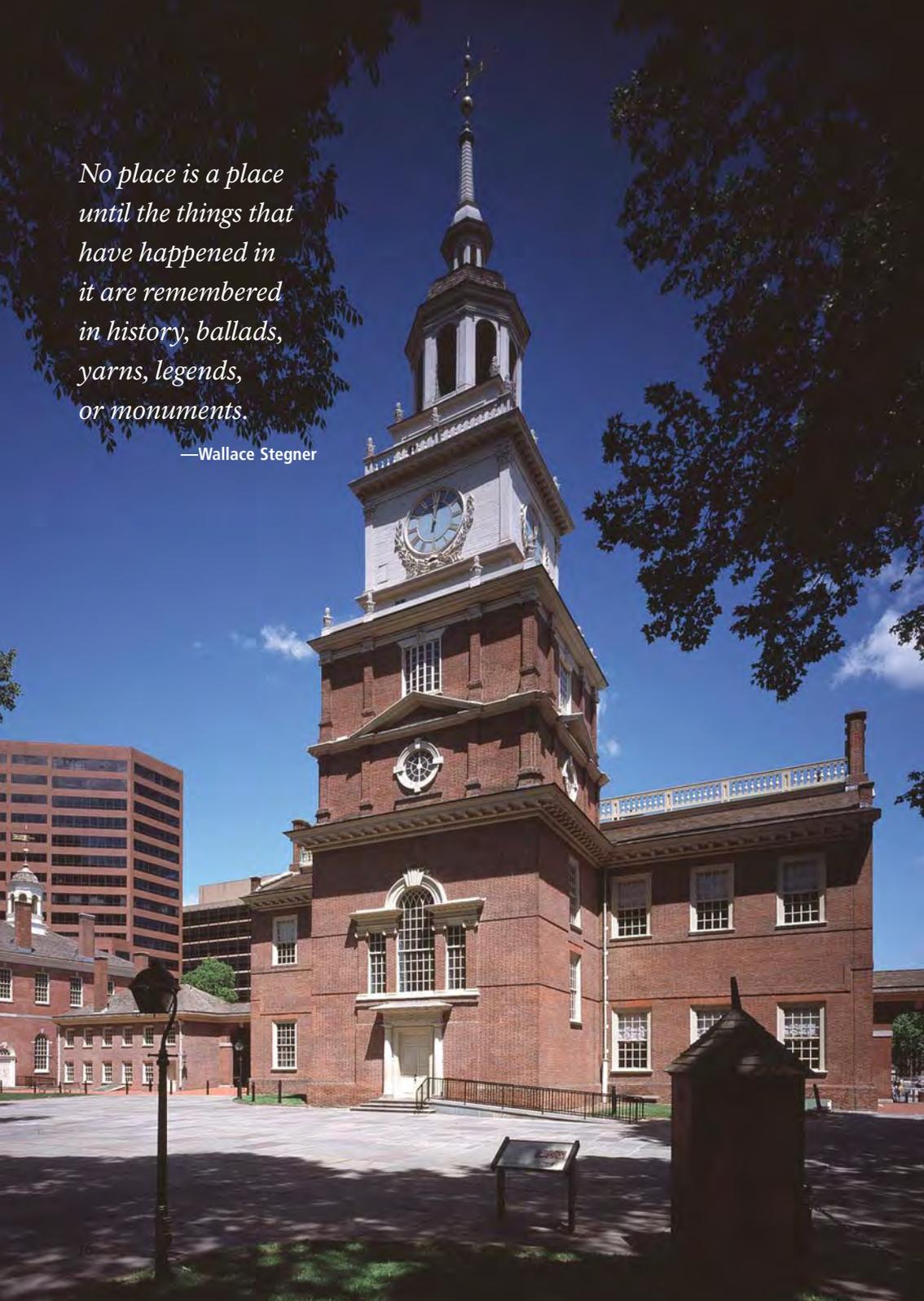
Legacy

On a personal level, the Revolutionary War produced a mixed legacy of positive and negative consequences. On the patriot side, the cost of founding an independent republic was high. Approximately 25,000 sacrificed their lives, and many forfeited their livelihood. The success of the Revolution brought scorn to those loyal to the Crown, and most of them lost fortunes and homes. The war broadened the horizons and prospects of many revolutionaries. Numerous former soldiers felt wanderlust and formed the vanguard of westward expansion. In turn, this relentless advance forced thousands of American Indians off their rich domain. For some African Americans, service brought freedom, yet many remained enslaved. While women gained new outlooks, their actual status remained unchanged. As the sound of combat grew fainter, the battle for individual rights began.



*No place is a place
until the things that
have happened in
it are remembered
in history, ballads,
yarns, legends,
or monuments.*

—Wallace Stegner



In Search of the American Revolution

by Charlene Mires, *Associate Professor of History,*
Villanova University

The American Revolution maintains a powerful hold on public imagination. More than 225 years after the Declaration of Independence, Americans still celebrate the Fourth of July. We may be more likely to gather for a baseball game than for a patriotic oration, but the attachment to that resonant date continues. The language and memory of the American Revolution echo in American politics. The stories are staples of school textbooks from the earliest grades through college. The drama of the American Revolution is retold in movies, plays, television documentaries, and best-selling biographies. And by the millions, Americans and visitors from abroad travel each year to the places most associated with the founding, birth, and early struggles of the United States: Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill, Independence Hall, Morristown, Saratoga, Valley Forge, Kings Mountain, and Yorktown, among many others, all part of the National Park System.



Each building, monument, statue, and cannon located in a national park commemorating the American Revolution helps retell the Revolution's countless stories.

Shown are Independence Hall (far left), the statue of William Prescott in front of the Bunker Hill Monument (above), and a vintage picture complete with an enthusiastic pilgrim sitting on one of the many cannons guarding the encampment sites at Valley Forge (left).



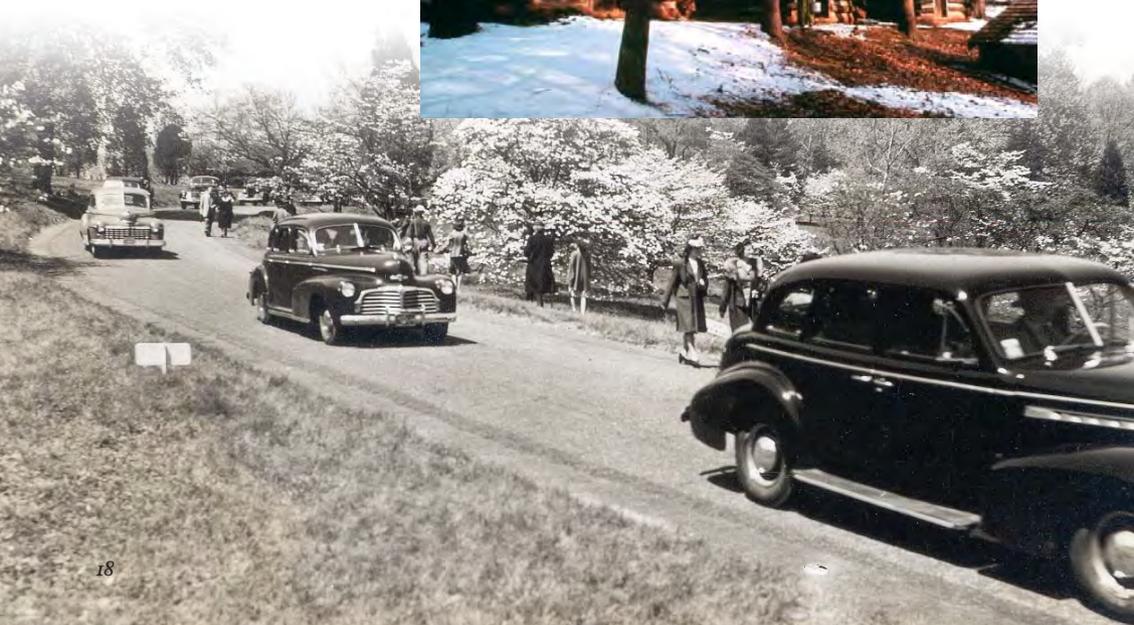
“Collection of Memories”

Visitors planning a national park trip have many options. They can travel to Wall Street in New York City to see the site of George Washington’s first inauguration (below).



Visiting the historic places of the American Revolution is a way of standing at the intersection of the past and present. Surrounded by a battlefield, or the authentic furnishings of a restored 18th-century building, we can try to peer back into history and grasp its meaning for our own time. But this can be a difficult task. Like objects in a time capsule, carefully safeguarded, treasured artifacts are separated nonetheless from the people and events that gave them meaning. The landscapes of history present their own challenges. We may stand in the footsteps of John and Abigail Adams, George and Martha Washington, Crispus Attucks, or Joseph Brant, but a direct view of the past is obscured by the 21st-century cities which have grown over the sites of 18th-century towns. Suburban sprawl has encroached upon Revolutionary-era fields. To get the full view of the encampment at Valley Forge or the siege at Yorktown, we travel from site to site by automobile.

Or, they can visit rough-hewn, reconstructed soldier huts (right), enjoy the pink-tinged blossoms of the commemorative dogwood trees that bloom each spring at Valley Forge (below), or stand before the resolute-looking bronze patriot in Minute Man National Historical Park (far right).



They are familiar, instantly recognizable. They reawaken fading memories and jump start emotions weakened by time. Call them icons. Call them symbols. We know them when we see them, and we often see them in national parks. Like the statues of minute men that guard Lexington Green and Concord’s North Bridge. Like the larger-than-life Washington that overlooks Wall Street. Like the Franklin that presides over an echoing Philadelphia rotunda. Like the Liberty Bell, the monuments to Washington and Jefferson in the nation’s capital, and the rough-hewn log cabins at Valley Forge, they beckon modern-day pilgrims to places of national remembrance.

The interesting thing about icons is that while many people firmly believe they know what each symbolizes, in reality, personal experiences and passing time influence meaning. The Liberty Bell, for example, stands for freedom, but is it the political freedom included in Pennsylvania’s Charter of Privileges? Pennsylvania legislators thought so when they purchased the bell in 1751. Is it freedom from human bondage as abolitionists thought when they adopted the bell’s “Proclaim liberty...” inscription? Is it independence from England per a fictional story written before the Civil War? Or is it freedom from the oppression of 20th-century dictators? At different times, for different people, the Liberty Bell has represented each of these and more.

As the protector of many icons, national parks offer opportunities for discussion of different viewpoints, places to explore multiple (and changing) meanings. As David Glassberg suggests in *Sense of History*, the contemporary task of historic sites “may be...to create safe spaces for...dialogue about history and for the collection of memories, and to ensure that various voices are heard in those spaces...” Another revolutionary idea?



Most parks have an iconic object, landscape, or building. Some of the most widely recognized symbols are:

- Minute Man Statue:**
Minute Man National Historical Park
- George Washington Statue:**
Federal Hall National Memorial
- Benjamin Franklin Statue:**
Benjamin Franklin National Memorial
- Liberty Bell:**
Independence National Historical Park
- Independence Hall:**
Independence National Historical Park
- Soldiers’ Cabins:**
Valley Forge National Historical Park

With a wealth of assistance available from knowledgeable people at every historic site, the complexity of the American Revolution might best be glimpsed during a tour, but the experience is necessarily limited in time. The essays in this volume, written by eminent historians, will deepen and expand the experience. What led the American colonists to break from England? Professor Pauline Maier leads us into the streets of Boston, where visitors today may follow the emerging resistance by walking the Freedom Trail, part of Boston National Historical Park, and to Philadelphia, where Continental Congresses gathered in Carpenters' Hall and the Pennsylvania State House (now Independence Hall), both situated in Independence National Historical Park. How did Americans manage to defeat the dominant superpower of the 18th century? Professor Don Higginbotham of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, takes us to the battlefields, headquarters, and encampments of an epic conflict. His narrative connects the stories of individual sites—Saratoga, Fort Stanwix, Cowpens, Guilford Courthouse, and others—and reveals a struggle of generals and armies, to be sure, but also a war enmeshed in the international rivalries of Europe. The multiple layers of Revolution history are embedded in national park sites like Minute Man National Historical Park, Morristown National Historical Park, and the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail through North and South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.

Traditionally, political and military stories and artifacts have predominated at historic sites of the American Revolution. But in recent decades, scholars have broadened the stories and have shown that the Revolution had far-reaching consequences for society. What about women, American Indians, and people of African descent, both free and enslaved? Professor Gary Nash of the University of California, Los Angeles, brings the experiences of everyday people to life and shows that the Revolution consisted of struggles for independence on many levels. He ushers on stage a new cast of characters seeking freedom in the streets of Boston and Philadelphia, on battlefields, and in American Indian territories within and beyond the 13 colonies. What would these experiences mean for everyday people, their leaders, and the new nation as



On July 18, 1776, Thomas Crafts stood on the balcony of Boston's Old State House (above) and read the Declaration of Independence to those assembled. A carved lion to his right and a unicorn to his left, symbols of the United Kingdom, framed the scene.

Jefferson tried to shape his legacy by writing a gravestone epitaph (far right) citing the Declaration of Independence, Virginia's religious freedom statute, and the University of Virginia as his most important contributions.

the American Revolution passed from current emergency into the pages of history? Professor Gordon Wood of Brown University sees the legacy of the American Revolution spanning the centuries from the drafting of the United States Constitution in 1787 to Americans' responses to the attacks of September 11, 2001. He traces the tradition of constitution-writing and the spread of the language of equality across time and around the globe.

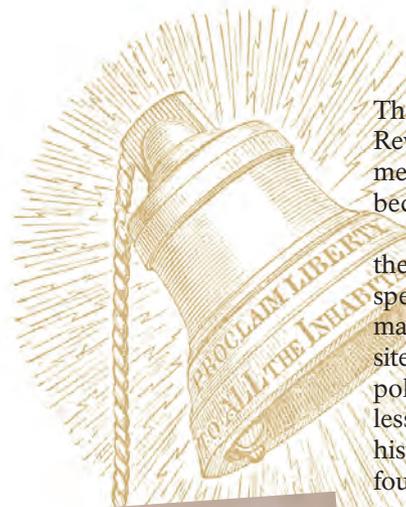
As each writer shows, there is much to learn about the American Revolution, far more than may be readily apparent during a visit to a historic site. The buildings we visit, the artifacts we observe, and the stories we hear are themselves products of history. Each generation grapples with the meaning of the American Revolution on its own terms. Their perceptions of the American Revolution echo across time in buildings preserved, objects displayed, or tours led by rangers. Within a single generation, however, perspectives on the American Revolution may differ. Was the American Revolution an achievement of freedom, or the beginning of a long struggle toward an elusive goal? Why are some aspects of the Revolution more apparent at historic sites than others?

For several decades after the Revolution, Americans devoted little effort to preserving the places, buildings, or objects of the event. They celebrated the Fourth of July and honored the "founding fathers" and the veterans of the war, but they did not designate historic sites to sustain the memory. This changed in the early 19th century, as the 50th anniversary of the Revolution approached and only a few aged veterans remained. In 1818, the City of Philadelphia purchased the old Pennsylvania State House, meeting place of the Second Continental Congress and the Constitutional Convention, rather than see the building demolished and its square developed into building lots. In 1824-25, a tour of the United States by the Marquis de Lafayette touched off a national frenzy of celebration for the aged former general and spurred new regard for artifacts of the American Revolution. The 1820s and 1830s were a period for forming historical societies and collecting documents and objects of the Revolution. The importance of these efforts was underscored dramatically on July 4, 1826, with the deaths of both

Americans of various ideological persuasions come, not always reverently, to compete for the ownership of powerful national stories and to argue about the nature of heroism, the meaning of war, the efficacy of sacrifice, and the significance of preserving the patriotic landscape of the nation.

—Edward Linenthal
in *Sacred Ground*





Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. As the Revolutionary generation passed from history into memory, physical reminders of their achievements became essential touchstones for the nation.

Through the 19th century, interest in sustaining the memory of the founding generation became the special project of their descendants. For this reason, many of the buildings and objects preserved at historic sites represent an elite perspective, often celebrating political or military heroes. Other perspectives may be less visible, but are nonetheless embedded in many historic places. For example, the memory of the founding fathers was treasured during the mid-19th century by nativists, the native-born Americans who feared that immigrants posed a threat to the nation envisioned by the founders. The legacy of the American Revolution echoed in other ways through the continuing struggles of African Americans, women, and organized labor. As professors Nash and Wood point out in their essays, the language of freedom and equality used during the American Revolution resonated strongly with people who did not yet share in the “life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness” expressed in the Declaration of Independence. They wrote petitions, held meetings, and organized demonstrations to call attention to their continuing struggles, often at the same historic sites that were celebrating the heroic achievements of the Revolution. Until recent times, these battles for independence received less attention than the lives and actions of famous leaders at our nation’s historic sites.

Myth-making also embellished the memory of the American Revolution during the 19th century, creating stories still retold by Americans today. If you can recite, “Listen my children and you shall hear, of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,” you have absorbed the poem that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow composed in 1860. Yes, Paul Revere did ride, but the poem’s focus on the daring deed neglects the less dramatic tale of the coordinated action which alerted the people of Massachusetts to the movement of the British army. If you arrive in Philadelphia with a notion that the Liberty Bell rang on July 4, 1776, you have absorbed a fictional short story penned in 1846 by George Lippard, a best-selling author of “Legends of the

American Revolution.” Lippard’s fiction propelled the Liberty Bell to prominence as a symbol of the American Revolution. For decades, this association obscured the Liberty Bell’s other place in history as a symbol used by anti-slavery activists wishing to “proclaim freedom throughout all the land.”

The historic properties placed in the care of the National Park Service in the 20th century often bear the hallmarks of this history of memory-making. They also reflect the concerns of the 20th century. Patriotism swelled during the two world wars and the Cold War. Revolutionary-era icons like the Minute Man and the Liberty Bell helped to raise money for war bonds. To demonstrate that their homelands had been essential to American success, new immigrants to the United States staged parades and erected monuments to heroes of the American Revolution like Casimir Pulaski, Friedrich von Steuben, and John Barry. Patriotism, aided by the automobile, spurred visits to historic sites by families who wished to educate their children in the nation’s founding principles. Reflecting the patriotic mood, historic sites often were treated and experienced as shrines. The National Park Service, in keeping with its mission to preserve the nation’s treasures and make them accessible, scientifically restored buildings, professionally catalogued and conserved artifacts, and conducted research to provide a strong foundation of factual information for visitors.



National parks, including buildings like Washington’s Headquarters at Valley Forge (left) or commemorative souvenirs (above) produced for patriotic celebrations, explore the meaning of their physical collections.



An image of the Liberty Bell was first used in the *Sonnet*, 1839, Published in *The Liberty Bell*, Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, Boston (far above).

The Bellman informed of passage of the Declaration of Independence, *Graham’s Magazine*, (above) Philadelphia, June 1854.



The mall (above) across from Independence Hall provided 20th-century protesters with a space to express their opinions. Poor People's March protesters with posters of Martin Luther King, Jr., May 14, 1968.

...the meanings of a place are socially created, multiple, and change over time.

—David Glassberg
in *Sense of History*

The celebratory nature of historic sites, especially during the 1950s, reflected trends in history-writing at the time. But like so many other aspects of American life, history-writing changed during the tumultuous 1960s, and historic places did not remain isolated from a renewed struggle over the meaning of the American Revolution. Continuing a tradition of protest from the 19th century, advocates for the civil rights of African Americans, women, and homosexuals found strength in the language of the Declaration of Independence, and often gathered at historic places to demonstrate for their full inclusion in the rights of American citizenship. When the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963, he spoke of the Declaration of Independence as a promissory note which had not yet been paid. Civil rights activism coincided with the controversy over Vietnam, which fostered new understandings of the American Revolution, as Professor Higginbotham notes in his essay. The deeply divisive Vietnam conflict also attracted pro-war and anti-war demonstrators to sites of the American Revolution. Protesters marched at Morristown, at Valley Forge, and at many other sites. Pro-war and anti-war demonstrators faced off in Independence National Historical Park. Such activities co-existed with the ongoing flow of patriotic tourism.

Demonstrations and controversies pass quickly from the scene, while buildings and landscapes remain. As a result, it may be difficult to see the many dimensions of meaning that successive generations have attached to the historic places of the American Revolution. In the wake of the Cold War, the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, and the war on terrorism, the sites of the American Revolution acquire new meanings as today’s visitors look to the past through the lens of the present. We are perhaps more determined to safeguard the treasures of the nation’s history, even if security measures curtail the public’s direct interaction with the touchstones of our collective past. But perhaps we also are more willing to confront the contradictions between the ideals of the Revolution and the continuing quest by many to translate those ideals into reality. The NPS today presents the evolving story of freedom at sites which acknowledge the women’s rights movement and the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Every visitor to a historic site has the opportunity to bring meaning to the place as well as to absorb its history. This is the continuing process of appreciating and grappling with the legacy of the American Revolution.

Across time, supporters and dissenters of many causes have embraced national symbols, including those associated with national parks. Even as they seek to call attention to their movement, demonstrators can influence perceptions, and even alter public understanding of the past. Vietnam War protesters purposefully assembled outside Independence Hall (below), displayed placards with eagles, carried American flags, and selectively quoted revolutionary rhetoric.



The Path Toward Independence

by Pauline Maier, *Professor of American History
Massachusetts Institute of Technology*

Independence was not what the colonists wanted, not in 1763 when they celebrated Britain's triumph in the French and Indian War. Nor was it their goal a decade later, in 1776, when they accepted a "separate and equal station" among the "powers of the earth" with more resignation than joy. But in the mid-1760s, as the two sides began a series of conflicts that led where neither wanted to go, the story began with a dispute over taxes.

No Taxation Without Representation

Britain did not ask the colonists to help retire the heavy debt it acquired in the course of the French and Indian War. But after a massive American Indian uprising known as Pontiac's Rebellion, the British government decided it had to keep an army in North America to hold and police its new possessions, and that the colonists should help foot the bill.

In March 1764, George Grenville, the King's first lord of the treasury, asked Parliament to enact a series of new or revised duties on certain goods imported into the American colonies, including a three pence per gallon duty on molasses from the non-British West Indies. The preamble of that measure, known as the Sugar Act, said it was meant to raise revenue in America "for defraying the expense of defending, protecting, and securing the same."

Then, because the Sugar Act was unlikely to raise enough money, Grenville announced plans for another measure, a stamp tax that would require the attachment of tax stamps to certain items sold in America. The Stamp Act that Parliament finally passed in March 1765 imposed stamp taxes on pamphlets, almanacs, newspapers and newspaper advertisements, playing cards and dice, and a wide range of legal documents. Never before had Parliament imposed taxes directly on the colonists. Moreover, the new taxes had to be paid in gold or silver, which were not readily available

everywhere in America. And violators would be tried in Admiralty Courts, which had no juries and whose jurisdiction was usually confined to cases that concerned shipping and the seas.

Some Americans raised economic objections to the Sugar Act. If strictly enforced, they said, the molasses duty would choke off trade with the non-British West Indies and seriously erode the colonists' capacity to purchase British goods. Other critics argued that a duty designed to raise revenue was a tax, and since the tax was "laid on us without our Privity and Consent," as the North Carolina legislature said in October 1764, it violated the colonists' "Inherent right" of "Imposing our own Taxes."

Opposition to the Stamp Act was more widespread and passionate than opposition to the Sugar Act. It turned exclusively on the issue of rights. In Britain, the colonists insisted, taxes were "free gifts of the people" that could be granted to the government only by the people personally or through their representatives. Freedom from taxes without consent was "the undoubted right of Englishmen" including "His Majesty's liege subjects" in America, who were, as the colonists' Stamp Act Congress

Inspired by revolutionary unrest, many artisans embellished everyday items—like the allegorical print (far below) and teapot protesting the Stamp Tax (below)—with protest messages. As unrest turned to war, decorative items also commemorated events and celebrated heroism. Many of these objects survive in the collections of historic sites.



His Majesty's liege subjects [are] "intitled to all the inherent rights and liberties of his natural born subjects within the kingdom of Great Britain.

—Stamp Act Congress, 1765



declared in October 1765, “intitled to all the inherent rights and liberties of his natural born subjects within the kingdom of Great Britain.” Since colonists did not send representatives to the British House of Commons, Parliament had no right to tax them. Only their elected provincial assemblies could do that. And Parliament could not interfere with the colonists’ “inherent and invaluable right” to trial by jury. By laying taxes on the colonists and extending the jurisdiction of Admiralty Courts, the Stamp Act had “a manifest tendency to subvert the rights and liberties of the colonists.”

British defenders of the Stamp Act usually agreed with the principle of “no taxation without representation.” They insisted, however, that the colonists were represented in Parliament. That the Americans elected no delegates to the House of Commons was irrelevant, they said; nine-tenths of the British people could not vote for members of Parliament. Like Englishmen who could not vote, and, indeed, like all British subjects, the colonists were virtually represented by members of Parliament who spoke not only for their constituents but also for the good of all the British people everywhere. Parliament, therefore, could tax them just as it taxed other subjects of the King.

But the situation of colonists differed from that of nonvoting Englishmen, replied the pamphleteer Daniel Dulany of Maryland in 1765. Members of Parliament, their constituents, and nonvoting subjects all had to pay whatever taxes the House of Commons approved. They therefore were held together by a bond of interest that did not include the Americans. Instead, the more Parliament taxed the colonists, the more it relieved the tax burden of Britons at home. Virtual representation might work within Britain, Dulany suggested, but it could not cross the Atlantic.

Dulany’s pamphlet made him a hero throughout the colonies. But before long, Richard Bland of Virginia went one step further. Virtual representation made no sense anywhere, he said. “I cannot comprehend,” Bland wrote, “how Men who are excluded from voting at the Election of Members of Parliament can be represented in that Assembly, or how those who are elected do not sit in the House as Representatives of their Constituents.” If 90 percent of the people within Britain were disenfranchised, that was “a great Defect”

in the British system of government from Bland’s perspective, a “putrid Part of the Constitution” that some “patriotick Spirits” should repair.

Confident that they could be represented only by delegates chosen by themselves, the colonists denied Parliament’s right to tax them in petitions that Parliament refused to receive. They also passed resolutions asserting their rights in both their provincial assemblies and the Stamp Act Congress at New York, where delegates from nine colonies (all but New Hampshire, Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia) met in September and October 1765. Finally, when all else failed, they prevented the Stamp Act from going into effect.

On August 14, 1765, a crowd in Boston displayed, paraded, and finally destroyed an effigy of Andrew Oliver, the man appointed to distribute stamps in Massachusetts. Later a mob attacked Oliver’s home; the next day he resigned his office. Since nobody was likely to replace him, the Stamp Act could not be executed in the Bay Colony. Soon stamp distributors throughout the colonies resigned their offices to avoid Oliver’s fate. By November, the Stamp Act could be implemented only in the frontier colony of Georgia, and even there for only a short time. The colonists also began a limited boycott of British imports in an effort to build support for repeal of the Stamp Act within Britain.

By the spring of 1766, Grenville was out of office, and his replacement, Lord Rockingham, who had never liked the Stamp Act, was ready to give in. Parliament repealed the Stamp Act, but it also passed a Declaratory Act that asserted its power to bind the colonies “in all cases whatsoever.” Then, rather than leave bad enough alone, the British government again tried to tax the colonists.

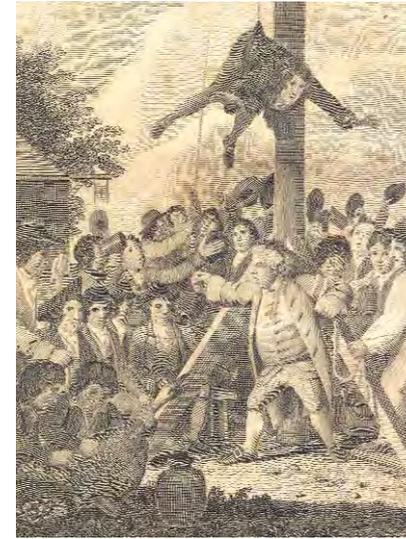
The Townshend Crisis

In 1767, after Rockingham had left office, the chancellor of the exchequer, Charles Townshend, proposed to raise money in America by levying new duties on imported glass, lead, paint, paper, and tea. The Townshend Act or Revenue Act of 1767 was designed, as its preamble said, to raise a revenue “for defraying the charge of administration of justice, and the support of civil government in such provinces

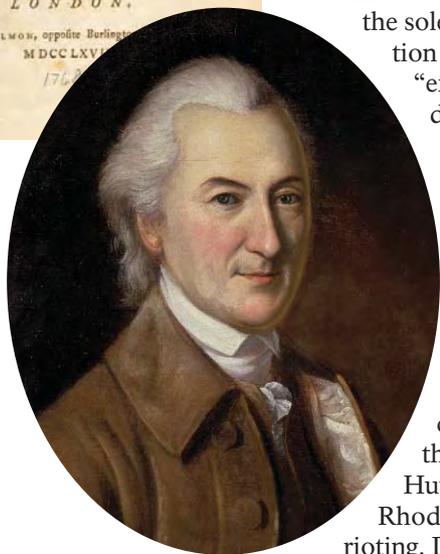
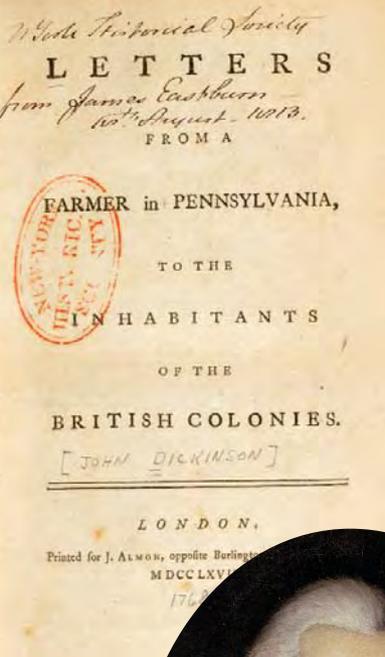


In 1770, when King George III posed with Queen Charlotte and their six children (above), the royal family of colonies already showed the signs of estrangement. Disagreements over the exercise of authority, arguments over finances, and distance each played a role in growing imperial tension.

Between 1762 and 1783, while George III fathered 15 children, his paternalistic attitudes helped lose the American colonies. “I wish nothing but good,” he said, but “everyone who does not agree is a traitor or a scoundrel.”



While colonial protesters could hurl only verbal threats across the Atlantic, they managed to lay rough hands on unfortunate royal surrogates, particularly those in Massachusetts, who tried to collect the Stamp Tax (above).



The cause of liberty is a cause of too much dignity to be sullied by turbulence and tumult.

—John Dickinson

where it shall be found necessary” and to help pay for “defending, protecting, and securing the said dominions.” That was a double attack on the colonies’ elected assemblies: it denied their exclusive power to tax their constituents and threatened their role as paymaster of royal officials, a role they used to make those appointees respect colonial interests.

This time, a Philadelphia lawyer called his countrymen to action. John Dickinson’s *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* first appeared as a series of essays in the *Pennsylvania Chronicle*. They were widely republished in other colonial newspapers and later printed together in a popular pamphlet. Dickinson defined a tax as “an imposition on the subject, for the sole purpose of levying money.” The distinction bandied about in London between “external” and “internal” taxes—between duties on trade and taxes raised within the colonies—was meaningless; all measures to raise revenue were taxes. The Townshend duties were for Dickinson as objectionable and as worthy of opposition as the Stamp Act.

During the resistance to the Stamp Act, crowd violence sometimes got out of hand. In Boston, for example, a mob attacked several officials involved in a crackdown on smugglers and tore down the home of Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson. A demonstration in Newport, Rhode Island, led to four days of uncontrolled rioting. Dickinson wanted to avoid similar outbreaks of disorder. “The cause of liberty,” he wrote, “is a cause of too much dignity to be sullied by turbulence and tumult.” Instead, he recommended starting with another round of petitions. He was confident they would work. “We have an excellent prince, in whose good dispositions toward us we may confide,” he wrote, and “a generous, sensible, humane nation” to ask for redress. But if the colonists’ petitions failed, he recommended that the colonists withhold from Britain “the advantages she has been used to receive from us.” That is, the colonists should cut off imports and see “if our ingenuity, industry and frugality, will not give weight to our remonstrances.” Colonists

everywhere toasted the “Pennsylvania Farmer” and followed his advice. When petitions failed, they negotiated provincial nonimportation agreements. In some ports, those agreements cut imports by more than half. British exporters managed to blunt the impact of the colonial boycotts by selling more in other markets. Nonetheless, by 1770, the King’s new minister, Lord North, recommended repeal of the Townshend duties on commercial principles. Parliament agreed but kept the duty on tea to show that it retained the right to tax the colonists—the same reason it had passed a Declaratory Act when it repealed the Stamp Act four years earlier.

Some colonists wanted to maintain the nonimportation agreements until all their grievances were redressed. But, one by one, the colonies deserted the agreements and resumed trading. Sometimes, as at New York and Philadelphia, colonists continued an informal boycott of legally imported tea and instead got their tea from smugglers. At Boston, however, a handful of merchants who had never joined the nonimportation agreement happily paid the Townshend duty on imported tea and apparently had no problem selling it to retail customers.

The Tea Crisis

To some, the years after 1770 were a time of quiet. For others, like Boston’s Samuel Adams, it was instead a period of “sullen silence.” The issue of what rights Parliament had over the American colonies remained unresolved. Moreover, the faith in the British King and nation expressed by John Dickinson began to be seriously questioned. During the mid-1760s, colonists had frequently explained Britain’s violations of Americans’ rights as a result of misinformation from unfriendly governors and other royal officials within the colonies. Soon, however, the government in London adopted other policies—toward the English radical John Wilkes and toward Ireland, for example—that echoed those applied to America. First the members of Parliament, then the King’s ministers, and occasionally, by 1770, even the King himself seemed involved in a plot to undermine the liberty of Britons both in America and elsewhere, including England itself.

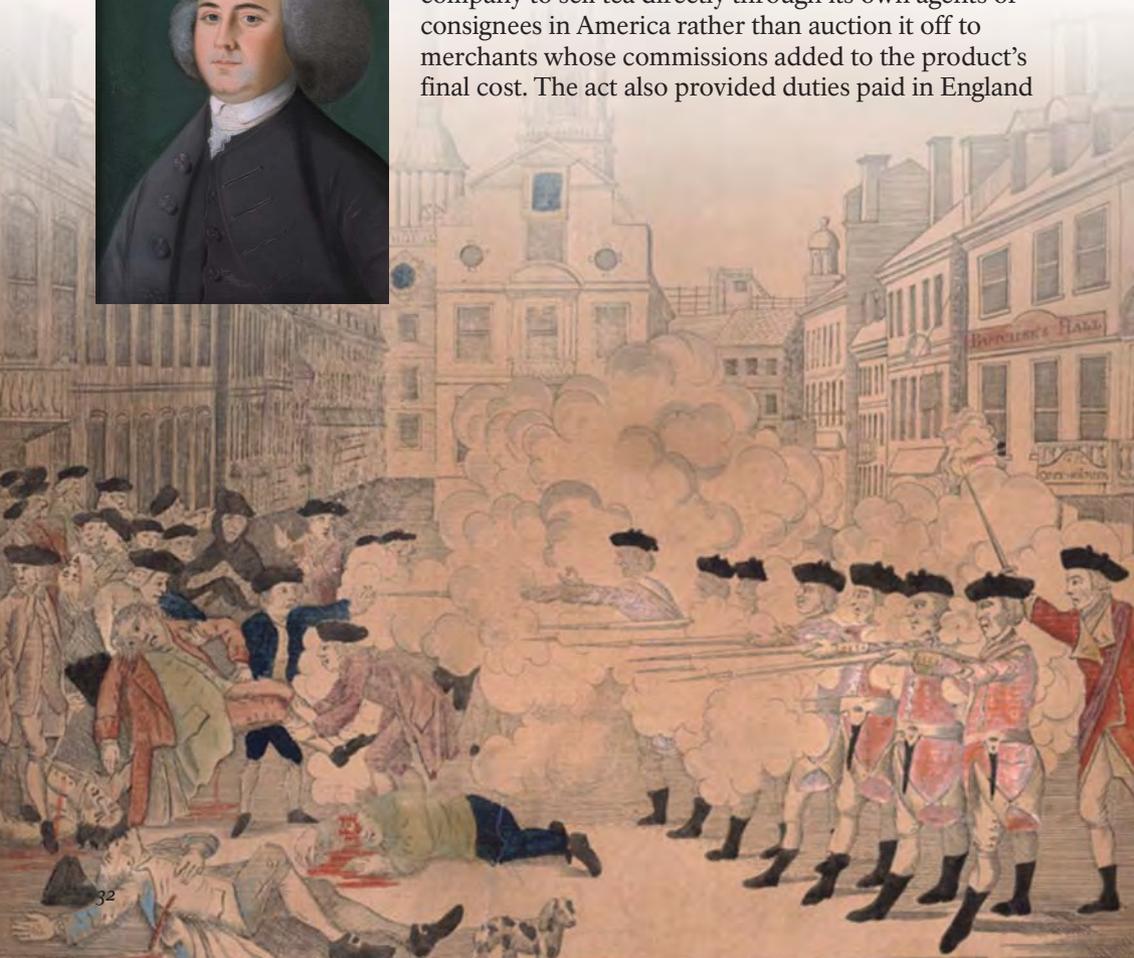
John Dickinson (far left) foresaw his dilemma. In the 1760s, he wrote, “What particular circumstances will in any future case justify...resistance [by force] can never be ascertained till they happen.” In 1776, he refused to vote for independence, but joined the militia.

Other colonies resisted the temptation to join the unrest brewing in Massachusetts. As late as May 1776, Maryland congressman Thomas Stone wrote, “To cut the only Bond which held the discordant Members of the Empire together seems to me the most weak and ill judged Measure I have ever met with in a State which had the least Pretention to wisdom or knowledge in the Affairs of Men.”

The British government sent troops to Boston in 1768 to reinforce the authority of royal officials. On March 5, 1770, a handful of soldiers shot into a hostile mob and killed five Bostonians, an event remembered as the Boston Massacre. Two years later, a crowd of men from Providence, Rhode Island, attacked and burned a royal ship, the *HMS Gaspée*, that had been disrupting trade in Narragansett Bay. The Crown appointed a special investigating commission with power to send accused persons to England for trial and to call for British troops if that seemed necessary.

These events were local and isolated, although news of them spread through the colonies. Nothing awoke widespread opposition to Britain until 1773, when Parliament passed a Tea Act to help the financially strained East India Company sell its large stock of imported tea in colonial markets. The act allowed the company to sell tea directly through its own agents or consignees in America rather than auction it off to merchants whose commissions added to the product's final cost. The act also provided duties paid in England

By representing the soldiers charged in the Boston Massacre (far below), John Adams (below) risked his reputation and patriot credentials. His defense was, Adams wrote in his diary, "one of the most gallant, generous, manly and disinterested Actions of my whole Life..."



on tea that was shipped to America. Perhaps the company could then price its tea low enough to compete with smugglers. East India Company tea would, however, remain subject to the old Townshend duty, which Lord North refused to repeal. The new arrangements also gave the company a monopoly that squeezed many American merchants out of the tea trade. To make matters worse, the company chose as consignees merchants who had been opponents of the old nonimportation movement, including the sons of Thomas Hutchinson, then the royal governor of Massachusetts.

Opposition in New York and Philadelphia succeeded in getting the consignees to resign, and then persuaded the captains of tea ships to return to England with their cargoes. In Boston, however, the first tea ship, the *Dartmouth*, slipped into the harbor on November 28, and others followed in early December. The consignees refused to resign and fled to the protection of British troops on an island in the harbor. If customs duties on the *Dartmouth's* cargo remained unpaid 20 days after the ship's arrival, customs officials could seize it. And then the tea would surely be released to the consignees, who would pay the duties, opening the way for more Parliamentary taxation, and disgrace Boston in the eyes of patriots elsewhere.

For 20 days, opponents of the Tea Act from Boston and neighboring towns tried unsuccessfully to get clearance papers from customs agents and the governor so the ships could return the tea to England. Finally, on the night of December 16, 1773, a group of men dressed as "Indians" boarded the ships and tossed 342 chests of tea into the harbor. They acted in a quiet, disciplined manner; bystanders heard only the sound of axes cracking open the chests and the "plop, plop, plop" of tea dropping into the water. The "Indians" destroyed nothing else. When a small padlock was inadvertently broken, they found another to replace it, and when a participant stuffed some tea into his pockets, he was stripped of his clothes and forced to run home naked.

The news from Boston threw the King's ministers into a fury. In 1774, Parliament approved four Coercive Acts, which the colonists soon labeled the "Intolerable Acts:"

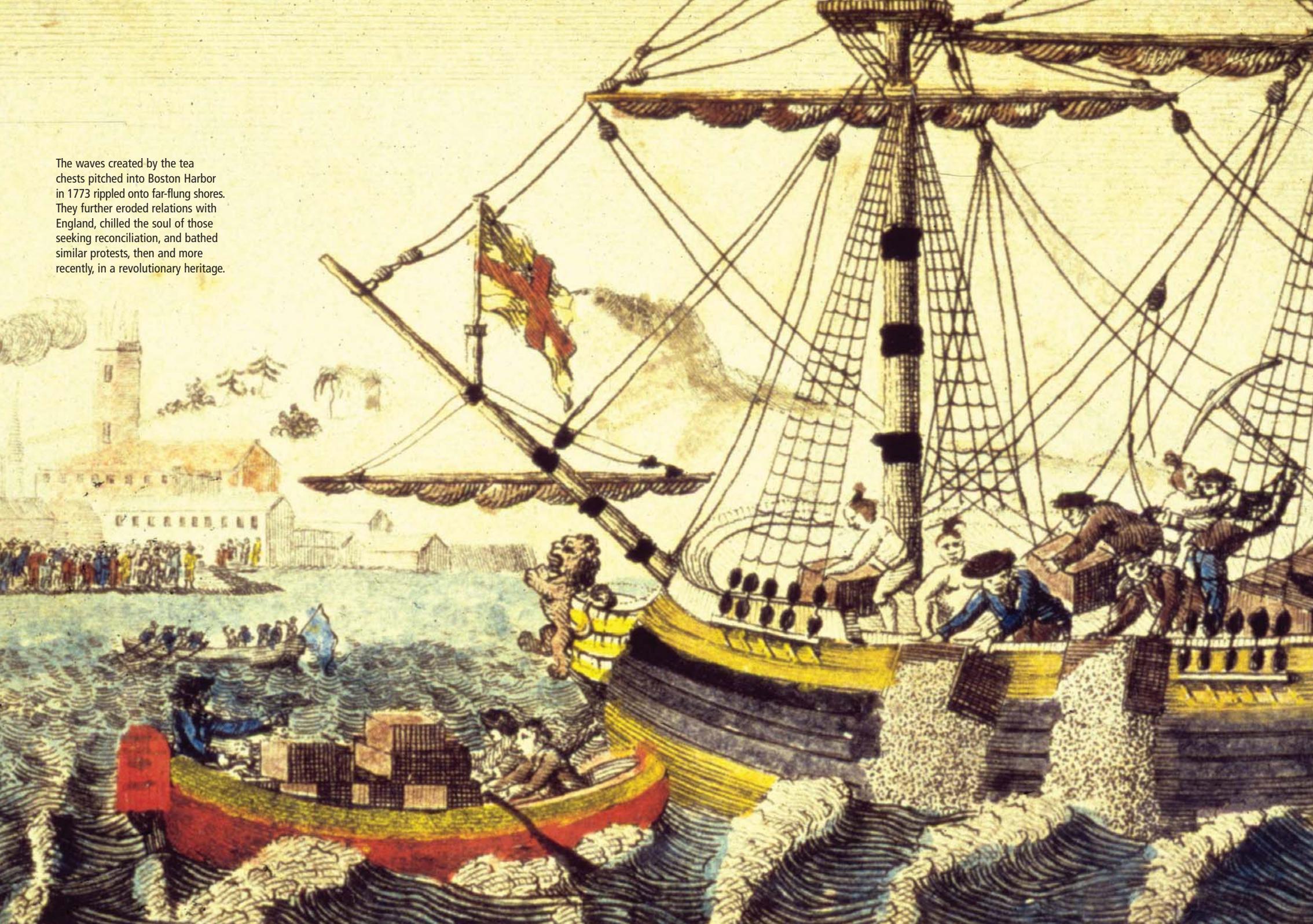
Unity proved an elusive goal for colonial activists. In 1754, during the French and Indian War, Ben Franklin lamented "the present disunited state of the British Colonies," published his "Join or Die" political cartoon (below), and provided a rallying cry for the decades to come.



No! Ne'er was mingled such a draught In palace, hall or arbor, As freemen brewed and tyrants quaffed That night in Boston Harbor.

—Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894) *The Ballad of the Boston Tea Party*

The waves created by the tea chests pitched into Boston Harbor in 1773 rippled onto far-flung shores. They further eroded relations with England, chilled the soul of those seeking reconciliation, and bathed similar protests, then and more recently, in a revolutionary heritage.





■ The Boston Port Act closed the port until the town paid for the destroyed tea and compensated customs officers who had suffered damage during uprisings there.

■ The Massachusetts Government Act changed the charter of 1691 by making members of the council or upper house of the legislature appointed by the Crown rather than elected by the lower house; allowed the governor to remove on his own authority all judges; ended the election of juries; and abolished all town meetings except one each year for electing officials. That substantially reduced the colonists' participation in their government and increased the power of the Crown. Adding insult to injury, the King appointed General Thomas Gage governor of the colony, essentially putting Massachusetts under military rule.

■ The Administration of Justice Act allowed Crown officials accused of committing murder while executing their offices to be tried in England if the royal governor decided they could not get a fair trial in Massachusetts. The colonists quickly called it "the Murder Act" because they feared it would encourage royal officials to kill colonists.

■ A new Quartering Act, which applied to all of the colonies, allowed military commanders to quarter troops in vacant houses and other buildings. Standing armies, it seemed, were going to be a standard fixture in America even though, as the colonists kept saying, free men weren't governed at the point of a gun.

With these measures, the Anglo-American conflict moved far beyond a dispute over taxation. If the people of America refused to submit to the Coercive Acts, the King's minister for the American colonies said, "they say in effect that they will no longer be a part of the British empire." From the colonists' perspective, however, submission required surrender to a government determined to destroy the colonies' English liberty. As the Virginia planter George Washington wrote on July 4, 1774, the existence of "a regular, systematic plan" against American freedom had become "as clear as the sun in its meridian brightness." The only acceptable response, it seemed, was resistance.

British General Thomas Gage (far above) advised, "If force is to be used...it must be a considerable one...To begin with small numbers will encourage resistance, and not terrify; and will in the end cost more blood and treasure."

After the Tea Act, 51 women in Edenton, North Carolina, formed an alliance to "give memorable proof of their patriotism" and boycott British tea and cloth. In 1775, a London newspaper satirized the "Edenton Tea Party" in an early political cartoon (above).

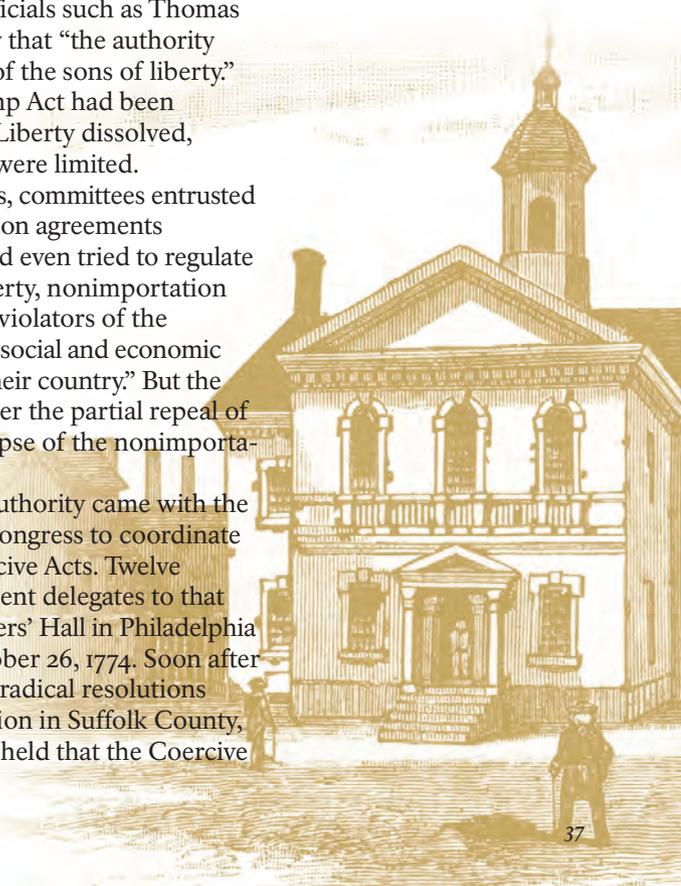
Beginnings of Self-Government

Resistance was not revolution. It was meant to prevent would-be oppressors from having their way and to safeguard lawful rights, but not to undermine the rule of law or overturn the government. The colonists, however, took over, crisis by crisis, more and more powers of self-government. In late November 1765, for example, after enforcement of the Stamp Act had already been stopped, organizations called the Sons of Liberty began to appear throughout the colonies. The first Sons of Liberty group was a quasi-military organization that promised to assist New York if the Crown used the royal army to enforce the Stamp Act there. Later the Sons worked to keep the Stamp Act from being implemented while preventing acts of private vengeance. Sometimes, as at Albany, New York, they professed their loyalty to the King and the British constitution while establishing an elaborate committee structure for processing accusations against accused Stamp Act supporters. Royal officials such as Thomas Hutchinson complained bitterly that "the authority of every colony is in the hands of the sons of liberty." After news arrived that the Stamp Act had been repealed, however, the Sons of Liberty dissolved, a sure sign that their objectives were limited.

During the Townshend crisis, committees entrusted with enforcing the nonimportation agreements assumed authority over trade and even tried to regulate prices. Like the old Sons of Liberty, nonimportation committees tried and punished violators of the agreements, usually by imposing social and economic boycotts on those "enemies of their country." But the committees also disappeared after the partial repeal of the Townshend duties and collapse of the nonimportation agreements.

A more lasting transfer of authority came with the meeting of a first Continental Congress to coordinate colonial opposition to the Coercive Acts. Twelve colonies—all except Georgia—sent delegates to that Congress, which met at Carpenters' Hall in Philadelphia from September 5 through October 26, 1774. Soon after assembling, it endorsed a set of radical resolutions passed by an extralegal convention in Suffolk County, Massachusetts. The resolutions held that the Coercive

When political resistance shifted to the First Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia's Carpenters' Hall (below), local activists seized the day. Prevented from serving as a delegate, Charles Thomson, "the Sam Adams of Philadelphia," became secretary of the first and all successive Continental Congresses.



...the sincerity of their...
of devotion becoming the most dutiful subjects
t affectionate colonists
that your Majesty may...
that your descendants may...
to themselves and happiness
and fervent prayer
John Adams
Langdon
has bushing
Adams
Adams
that Prince

Acts were unconstitutional and should not be obeyed, discouraged paying taxes to the royal government of Massachusetts, and called on colonists to arm. Later, the Congress told the patriots in Massachusetts to act only on the defensive. If, however, the Crown tried to enforce its policies with armed force, “all America ought to support them in the opposition.”

The Congress went on to approve a declaration of the colonists’ rights and a list of parliamentary acts that violated those rights, much as the British Parliament had done in 1689. Congress also petitioned the King for redress and sent addresses to the people of Britain, Québec, and America. Above all, to bring pressure on the British government, it adopted a broad nonimportation, nonconsumption, and nonexportation agreement called the Continental Association. Committees elected in every county, city, and town in America, by persons qualified to vote for members of their provincial assemblies, would enforce the association. Finally, the Congress called for the meeting of another Congress on May 10, 1775, if America’s grievances had not been redressed.

By that date, news of the outbreak of war at Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts, on April 19, 1775, was spreading through the country. At first, military matters dominated the agenda of the Second Continental Congress. Soon other issues commanded Congress’s attention. As royal governments collapsed, the Congress advised first Massachusetts, and later New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Virginia, how to reconstitute civil governments. Congress also established a Continental Post Office, took charge of Indian affairs, regulated trade, tried to settle disputes between colonies, and published directions on how to treat colonists who sided with the King. It became, in effect, the first government of what would become the United States.

The Congress, however, did not advocate separation from Britain. Military operations were undertaken to prevent British conquest until American rights could be secured. Even the new provincial governments established under Congress’s direction were to remain in effect only until the Anglo-American conflict was settled. In July 1775, Congress issued a Declaration on Taking Up Arms that said the Americans had no inten-

tion of dissolving “the Union which has so long and happily subsisted” between them and Britain. The Congress’s *Olive Branch Petition* to the King, drafted in the most respectful terms by John Dickinson and adopted by Congress on July 5, asked the King’s help in achieving a “permanent and happy reconciliation” between Britain and America.

The King refused to receive the petition from Congress’s emissaries or to issue an official answer. On August 23, 1775, however, he issued a proclamation stating that the Americans were engaged in an “open and avowed rebellion.” And on October 26, he told Parliament the American rebellion was “manifestly carried on for the purpose of establishing an independent Empire.” All the colonists’ “expressions of attachment to the parent State” and “professions of loyalty to me,” he said, were “meant only to amuse” or distract Britain’s rulers “whilst they were preparing for a general revolt.” Some members of the House of Commons said King George III was putting the word independence in the colonists’ mouths and, by treating them “upon suspicion, with every possible violence,” was forcing them “toward that, which must be our ruin.” But the majority approved the King’s speech and in December 1775, replaced earlier restrictions on colonial trade with a drastic act that prohibited all trade with the 13 colonies. The Prohibitory Act declared the American ships and their cargoes forfeit to the Crown “as if the same were the ships and effects of open enemies” and allowed American seamen to be impressed or drafted into the King’s navy.

...many of our subjects in divers parts of our Colonies and Plantations in North America... have at length proceeded to open and avowed rebellion, by arraying themselves in a hostile manner, to withstand the execution of the law, and traitorously preparing, ordering and levying war against us...

—King George III

In the summer of 1775, the colonists spoke with at least two voices. The Second Continental Congress sent George III the *Olive Branch Petition* (shown here) expressing hope for “a happy and permanent reconciliation.” But a confiscated letter from John Adams claimed that war was inevitable.



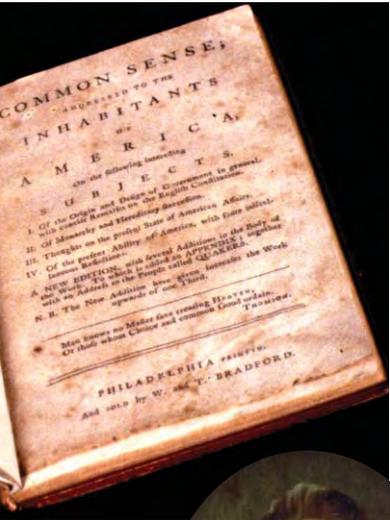
King George III (left) resisted criticism. In 1779, he wrote that he expected his officials to agree “to keep the Empire entire and that no troops shall be consequently withdrawn from thence nor independence ever allowed.” Equally persistent, royal critic Edmund Burke observed, “They defend their errors as if they were defending their inheritance.”

Independence

News of the King's October speech to Parliament arrived in Philadelphia on January 8, 1776. The next day, the first issue of *Common Sense* appeared. The work of Thomas Paine, a previously undistinguished Englishman who had arrived in America a little over a year earlier, the pamphlet for the first time publicly advocated independence. Americans could never be secure in their freedom under British rule, it said, because the constitution of England included two major errors: monarchy and hereditary succession. What freedom the British had depended not on complex checks and balances, Paine said, but on the republican or elective component of their government, the House of Commons, which had been hopelessly corrupted by the Crown.

Americans were slow to abandon British rule, he said, because they had no plan for a new government. And so, in the hope that his "hints" would "be the means of giving rise to something better," Paine laid out a plan for new state and continental governments founded entirely on popular choice, with no hereditary rulers—a republic as the Americans came to understand that term. The Americans had it in their power, he said, to "form the noblest, purest constitution on the face of the earth" to the benefit of all mankind. Written with language accessible to everyone, *Common Sense* rapidly spread through the colonies. Suddenly Americans everywhere were debating independence.

Not everyone believed Paine's assurance that Americans could hold out against Britain, his insistence that American products would find a market, or his criticisms of the British constitution. The colonists would surely lose a war with Britain, the strongest military power in Europe, Paine's critics said, and be worse off than before. To solicit the help of France would risk subjection to a monarch more absolute than George III. The American economy would stagnate without British purchases. And republics throughout history were short-lived; they dissolved in chaos, which usually led to military rule. Where Paine looked to "the birthday of a new world," loyalists—Americans who rejected independence—saw disaster.



Thomas Paine (above) arrived in the colonies just in time to ignite the debate over independence with his immensely popular pamphlet *Common Sense*.

In response, in his own pamphlet titled *Plain Truth*, loyalist James Chalmers characterized Paine's vision as "quackery." Chalmers served as a lieutenant colonel in the First Battalion of Maryland Loyalists, and returned to England where he socialized with other expatriates like Ben Franklin's son William.

In the end, perhaps 20 percent of the American population sided with the King for a variety of reasons: because they thought the American cause would fail, because they feared for their own rights in a government ruled by the majority, or sometimes because they lived in remote places unaffected by the events that had eroded the loyalty of other colonists. The loyalist ranks included many men who had held royal appointments, from local sheriffs to governors like Thomas Hutchinson, as well as wealthy merchants and landholders, many recent immigrants, and ordinary American-born farmers, artisans, and former slaves, many of whom joined the British lines in a search for their own freedom.

In fact, most colonists who advocated independence did so because they saw no alternative but military defeat. In May, news arrived that the King had secured German-speaking soldiers to help suppress the rebellion. Obviously, America needed help, and France was her most likely ally. But the French would only help the colonies if they broke away from Britain; it was, after all, in France's interest to dismantle her enemy's empire, not to help put it back together.

Finally, on May 10 and 15, 1776, the Continental Congress adopted a resolution with a radical preface that called on the colonies to form new governments. It began by attacking the King—which signaled revolution—for approving the Prohibitory Act, refusing to answer the colonists' petitions for redress, and turning "the whole force" of Britain "aided by foreign mercenaries" against "the good people of these colonies." It had become necessary, it said, "that every kind of authority under the said Crown should be totally suppressed, in all the powers of government exerted, under the authority of the people of these colonies..." The pronouncement, as John Adams observed, was a declaration of independence in all but name. The final vote, however, was seriously divided.

On the same day, May 15, Virginia instructed its congressional delegates to propose independence. And so, on June 7, Richard Henry Lee moved "that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved

I wish the good of the colony when I wish to see some further restraint of liberty rather than the connexion with the parent state should be broken...such a breach must prove the ruin of the colony.

—Thomas Hutchinson



Unlike English-born Thomas Paine and James Chalmers, Thomas Hutchinson (above), the last civilian governor of Massachusetts colony, boasted a long Boston pedigree. During his royal service, Hutchinson offered advice on American affairs based on his distrust of popular government.

Dogged by discontent and violence, Hutchinson finally sailed into exile after the Boston Tea Party. Although he died in England before the war ended, Hutchinson's three-volume *History of Massachusetts Bay* reflected his deep Massachusetts roots.

This unfinished engraving by Edward Savage proved to be almost as good as a photograph. Based on a painting by Robert Edge Pine, Savage captured important details of the Assembly Room of Independence Hall, details that the Park Service used years later when restoring the room.





Congressman Thomas Jefferson (above) rented two second-floor rooms in the newly constructed home of Philadelphia bricklayer Jacob Graff, Jr. There, Jefferson wrote his draft of the Declaration of Independence, perhaps attended by his longtime companion and enslaved valet, Jupiter.

Artist Charles Willson Peale took advantage of the fact that Philadelphia served as national capital during and after the Revolution. He cajoled Jefferson and dozens of Founders to sit for portraits. Today, many of Peale's portraits hang in the Second Bank of the U.S.

from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved." Following his instructions, Lee also called for the negotiation of foreign alliances and the preparation of a plan of confederation for the consideration and approval of the colonies.

Congress debated Lee's first resolution on June 8, a Saturday, and the following Monday. Even those who opposed the motion conceded that independence had become inevitable and argued only for delay. Negotiations with France should precede the adoption of independence, they said, or the Americans would have less bargaining power. Moreover, the instructions issued to their congressmen by several colonies, including New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Maryland, did not allow them to vote for independence—only to work for reconciliation. The colonies needed to be united on so momentous a decision, and opinion was ripening quickly. In the end, Congress delayed the vote until July in the hope it would then get stronger support. But on June 11, it appointed a committee of five delegates to draft a declaration on independence.

The committee met, discussed the document, decided on its structure, and appointed its chairman, Thomas Jefferson, to prepare a draft. Jefferson probably did that in a few days and then submitted his text for comments to fellow committeemen John Adams and Benjamin Franklin. Later, the drafting committee, which also included Roger Sherman of Connecticut and Robert R. Livingston of New York, reviewed the revised draft and asked Jefferson to make some additional changes before sending it to Congress on June 28, 1776.

In the meantime, an intense campaign within the various colonies managed to get all but New York to give its delegates power to adopt independence. Towns, counties, grand juries, and other local groups met in the late spring and early summer, urged their legislatures to endorse independence, and sometimes explained why. One after another mentioned how they had loved the British King and people. Their feelings had changed because of the "cruelty and injustice of the British Government." The "United Colonies" had "tried to get redress of grievances, by decent, dutiful,

and sincere petitions...giving every assurance of our affection and loyalty," the freemen of Charles County, Maryland, said, but got in return "an increase of insult and injury."

"Both sides grew every day more and more incensed," wrote the Freeholders of Buckingham County, Virginia, until the confidence necessary to continue under British rule seemed "entirely annihilated." Now it was necessary to "bid the last adieu" and hope "some foreign power may, for their own interest, lend us an assisting hand."

These local statements occasionally echoed the language of *Common Sense*, but their complaints were against the King, his ministers, members of the British Parliament, and those British people who failed to support the colonists. Nonetheless, they assumed, and sometimes explicitly demanded, that their future government would be republican, like the temporary constitutional government recently established in South Carolina. "What every one once dreaded as the greatest misery," separation from Britain, "they now unexpectedly find their greatest advantage," a grand jury in the remote Cheraws District of South Carolina said. The people best capable of governing the American people, they had discovered, were themselves.

When Congress resumed discussion of independence on July 1, it remained divided. But the next day, with some shifts in votes, a few strategic absences, and the timely arrival of another delegate from Delaware, it adopted Lee's resolution on independence by a vote of 12 to 0, with New York abstaining. A week later, New York added its consent, but not without lamenting "the cruel necessity which has rendered that measure unavoidable."

With independence adopted, Congress turned to the draft declaration of independence. It spent most of the next two days editing the document—removing words, phrases, and one whole passage; adjusting the language; and replacing part of the final paragraph, the one that declared independence, with words from the Lee resolution. Finally, on July 4, the delegates approved the text and sent it to printer John Dunlap. Within days, copies went out to the states and army with instructions that it be so distributed that the mass of the people know that "these united colonies" had become at last "free and independent states...absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown."



Like the members of Congress, the furnishings in Independence Hall's Assembly Room (far above) ranged from modest to flamboyant. Uncarpeted wood floors and simple green table covers contrast with the elegant silver inkstand made by Philip Syng (above) probably used to sign the Declaration.

“Volumes Had Been Written...”

The Revolutionary generation employed the pen long before brandishing the sword. As early as 1776, Thomas Paine observed that volumes already had been written on the conflict between England and America.

The newspapers of colonial cities like Boston filled columns of type with political philosophy. Broad­sides hawked on streets tried to sway public opinion. Poet Phillis Wheatley, the first published African American woman in North America, used a cautiously optimistic poem to appeal to King George III for enlightened leadership. As the divide between country and colony widened, blatant propaganda—like Paul Revere’s drawing of the Boston Massacre—used images to heighten opposition to King and Parliament. The Continental Congress, meeting in Independence Hall, resorted to words again by sending George III the *Olive Branch Petition*. Spoiling for a confrontation, the King responded with words of his own—he declared the colonies in open revolt. Many individual founders participated in this written dialogue. John Adams, for example, wrote his influential *Thoughts on Government* just as one colony after another drafted constitutions replacing British rule.

After warfare erupted, the pen became a powerful ally of the sword. In his immensely popular pamphlet *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine denounced British rule, fomenting revolutionary sentiment. As the American army encamped at Valley Forge, his *The Crisis* bolstered support for independence.

In 1776, the Second Continental Congress, no longer conciliatory, resorted to words again when it prepared a declaration of independence. Members had no illusions that they would sway King or Parliament. Instead, they addressed not-yet-committed colonists and the community

of nations. Jefferson’s powerful words did more. They echoed across time in Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, the speeches of Frederick Douglass, the Declaration of Sentiments written at the Women’s Rights Conference, and Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream Speech” at the Lincoln Memorial.



To discover the power of the pen visit:

[Boston National Historical Park](#)

[Independence National Historical Park](#)

[Valley Forge National Historical Park](#)

[Adams National Historical Park](#)

[Gettysburg National Military Park](#)

[Lincoln Memorial](#)

[Frederick Douglass National Historic Site](#)

[Women’s Rights National Historical Park](#)

[Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site](#)



“Principles, Opinions, Sentiments, & Affections”

On February 13, 1818, John Adams wrote Hezekiah Niles a letter. “The Revolution,” Adams advised, “was effected before the War commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people; a change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations... This radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affections of the people, was the real American Revolution.”

While national parks protect a superior collection of landscapes, buildings, and artifacts, they also preserve less tangible treasures like ideas, ideas that shaped the “duties and obligations” shouldered by ancestors.

What motivated the “embattled farmer” to confront the British at Lexington and Concord? Why did loyalist Scots from the Carolina upcountry shout “King George and Broad­swords” as they attacked patriots across Moores Creek Bridge? Why did Polish military engineer Thaddeus Kosciuszko join the Continental Army? Why did Oneida warriors ally with the patriots while other Six Nation tribes fought with the British? How did Charles Pinckney justify enslaving Africans while he fought for “liberty?” Parks also conserve “principles, opinions, sentiments, and affections.”

Sites commemorate landmark events in the history of freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, and freedom of the press. Red Hill commemorates the genius of Patrick Henry, an orator skilled at capturing and expressing political sentiments. Independence National Historical Park not only preserves original printed copies of the Declaration of Independence and U.S.

Constitution but also explores principles like “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The Liberty Bell challenges visitors to think about the liberties they enjoy, and where liberty remains unattained. Federal Hall (site of the first U.S. capitol) focuses on leadership, precedents, individual rights, and limited government.

A trip to a number of national parks puts the wisdom of John Adams to the test. Was he correct, were “radical” changes afoot?

[Adams National Historical Park](#)

[Saint Paul’s Church National Historic Site](#)

[Minute Man National Historical Park](#)

[Boston National Historical Park](#)

[Moores Creek National Battlefield](#)

[Thaddeus Kosciuszko National Memorial](#)

[Fort Stanwix National Monument](#)

[Charles Pinckney National Historic Site](#)

[Thomas Stone National Historic Site](#)

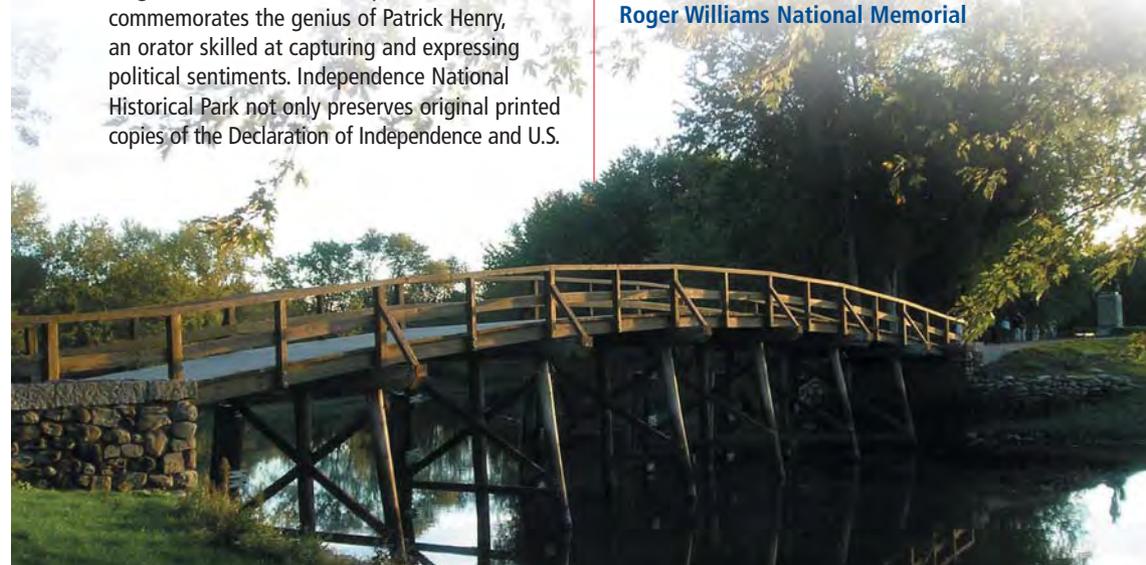
[William Floyd’s Home \(Fire Island National Seashore\)](#)

[Red Hill Patrick Henry National Memorial](#)

[Independence National Historical Park](#)

[Federal Hall National Memorial](#)

[Roger Williams National Memorial](#)



Washington fought from beginning to end. From the day the Second Continental Congress chose him to command the Continental Army in 1775, until the day he resigned his commission in 1783, Washington built an impressive record for military resilience. He not only survived battle, he outlasted political intrigue and the jealousy of rivals. At war's end, he even survived success, choosing to retire voluntarily to Mount Vernon.



The War for Independence

by Don Higginbotham, *Professor of History, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill*

The American Revolution, like most successful revolutionary struggles, involved violence and bloodshed, but it also brought about significant transformations. If the Revolution had not succeeded militarily, the state constitutions would have been revoked, the U.S. Constitution would never have been written, and the social, cultural, and economic changes that resulted from the separation from Britain would not have taken place.

How was it possible for the 13 colonies, often fractious and suspicious of one another, to prevail over Great Britain, which after her defeat of France in the French and Indian War, had become 18th-century Europe's dominant superpower? George Washington said at the conclusion of hostilities that the question would always challenge historians, for the outcome bore all the marks of fiction. Not surprisingly then, most scholars until recent years have maintained that Britain had not taken advantage of her vast resources—a professional army, the world's most powerful navy, and Europe's most sophisticated financial and industrial complex. Moreover, they claimed, the British war effort suffered from mediocre political and military leadership.

America's failure in the Vietnam War, however, generated new perspectives on superpowers engaging in conflicts in distant parts of the world. Problems of public opinion at home, logistics, and an unfamiliar environment where traditional methods of fighting and campaigning came up short also could explain, in some measure, Britain's inability to maintain its hold on the 13 colonies. Moreover, Britain confronted an aroused countryside—angry citizens in arms who brought about both a political and a military revolution. The 18th-century military system, with its highly trained armies and upper-class officers, faced a new challenge, one that would be repeated in the era of the French Revolution and countless times in the next two centuries. This simple fact explains one great, often overlooked advantage of the American revolutionaries.

If hvistoriographers should be hardy enough to fill the page of History with the advantages that have been gained with unequal numbers (on the part of America) in the course of this contest, and attempt to relate the distressing circumstances under which they have been obtained, it is more than probable that Posterity will bestow on their labors the epithet and marks of fiction; for it will not be believed that such a force as Great Britain has employed for eight years in this Country could be baffled in their plan of Subjugating it by numbers infinitely less, composed of Men oftentimes half starved; always in Rags, without pay, and experiencing, at times, every species of distress which human nature is capable of undergoing.

—George Washington, 1783

“Useful Lessons”

George Washington had an interesting view of history. “We ought not to look back,” he said, “unless it is to derive useful lessons from past errors, and for the purpose of profiting by dear-bought experiences.”



If they agreed with Washington, those who have molded the National Park System must have felt that Washington’s life had many lessons to teach. No one is better represented by NPS sites than George Washington—from his Virginia birthplace, to his first test in battle, to the sites of his inaugurations as U.S. president.

The plantation of Augustine Washington embraced son George; the child’s formative influences included a financially comfortable family living on a rural Virginia plantation dependent on enslaved Africans. The frontier battlefield location of Fort Mifflin sheds light on Washington’s development as a military officer. Chosen commander of the Continental Army by Congress meeting in Independence Hall, Washington took up headquarters in a Cambridge, Massachusetts house later purchased by poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Following his retreat from New York, Washington helped New Jersey earn its reputation as the Crossroads of the Revolution. With Washington in command, more battles occurred in New Jersey than in any other state. Valley Forge and Morristown reveal

Washington’s struggle to keep his army intact, and his willingness to defer to civilian control of the military. In 1781, Washington marched his army through New Jersey again, now accompanied by French allies, on the way to Yorktown. His leadership on the battlefield persuaded many that they needed him in national service after the war, first as president of the Constitutional Convention when it met in Independence Hall, and then as U.S. President when New York and then Philadelphia served as the nation’s capital.

The NPS, it seems, is intent on allowing generations of visitors to rediscover “useful” lessons in Washington’s “past errors” and “dear-bought experiences.”

George Washington Birthplace National Monument

Fort Mifflin National Battlefield (first combat for Washington and only surrender)

Independence National Historical Park (Independence Hall, site of the President’s Mansion, Congress Hall)

Longfellow National Historic Site (Washington’s Headquarters)

Valley Forge National Historical Park

Morristown National Historical Park

Crossroads of the American Revolution National Heritage Area

Colonial National Historical Park (Yorktown)

Federal Hall National Memorial (site of Washington’s first inauguration)

Initially, they controlled the local infrastructure everywhere. The colonial assemblies, now calling themselves provincial congresses and, after 1776, state legislatures, continued to dominate the domestic sector, making laws that threatened or coerced people who opposed the rebellion. Their chief weapons for securing the homefront were the old colonial militias, activated and reorganized. As a result, the Crown’s adherents, the loyalists or Tories, remained mostly silent or ineffectual except when a British army arrived to rally or embolden them.

The Continental Congress, made up of representatives from the colony-states, topped the revolutionary command structure. Local authorities deferred to Congress in the interest of securing independence, especially after it became apparent by early 1776 that Britain intended to continue to resolve the imperial crisis by means of a military rather than a political solution. The Declaration of Independence, however, did not mean that the American states were ready to create a strong national government. Instead, Congress existed as an extralegal institution until its efforts to establish a loose constitutional union, the Articles of Confederation, was ratified in 1781. The Articles essentially confirmed the jurisdiction that the states had informally bestowed upon the Congress at the outset: the power to raise military forces, conduct foreign relations, deal with Indian tribes, coin money, and set up a post office.

After the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773, Britain had sent several thousand troops to the Massachusetts capital and appointed the military commander in North America, General Thomas Gage, governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Tensions built and fighting erupted on April 19, 1775, when a British column, seeking to destroy militia supplies at Concord, came under heavy fire as it fell back through Lexington seeking the safety of Boston. Hundreds of men from nearby towns joined in the assault. The column, under Lieutenant Colonel Francis Smith, might have been annihilated had Gage not sent out support under General Hugh, Earl Percy. Before the exhausted, frightened regulars made good their escape, they had suffered 274 casualties as opposed to 93 American casualties. The attackers—their numbers

Nothing can be more hurtful to the service, than the neglect of discipline; for that discipline, more than numbers, gives one army the superiority over another.

—George Washington, 1777



Plate II A View of the Town of Concord



swelling to almost 20,000 as all of the New England colonies joined Massachusetts in the conflict—quickly encircled the land side of Boston and confined the British there. Nearly two months later, on June 17, Gage endeavored to retake the Charleston peninsula. His troops won the misnamed Battle of Bunker Hill on Breed’s Hill, but it was one of numerous costly victories in the war. The British swept up the terrain, only to be driven back with heavy losses before they finally prevailed, too bloodied and disorganized to follow up their hollow accomplishment. One British officer called it “a dear bought victory.” Another victory like it “would have ruined us.”



Concord’s North Bridge (above) reminds us that warfare erupted more than a year before independence. When the colonials, warned by a lantern (far right) hung in a Boston steeple, gathered to oppose the British, battle was just hours away, first at Lexington and then at North Bridge.

Amos Doolittle prepared several engravings illustrating the events of April 1775, including these showing the British in Concord (right). A Connecticut engraver and silversmith, Doolittle visited the scenes of battle and interviewed eyewitnesses. Nonetheless, his version reflected a colonial perspective; the British had their own narrative of events.



John Trumbull's painting of Bunker Hill is focused and personal. It captures, Trumbull explained, "the moment when... British troops became completely successful and masters of the field. Abigail Adams said her "blood shivered" when she saw the original sketch. British General John Burgoyne, watching from afar, instead described the panorama of war. And now ensued, Burgoyne wrote, "one of the greatest scenes of war that can be conceived..."

From July 1775 until April 1776, George Washington (below) made the Cambridge home of John Vassall, Jr., now Longfellow National Historic Site, his military headquarters.



Our cruel and unrelenting enemy leaves us only the choice of brave resistance, or the most abject submission. We have, therefore, to resolve to conquer or die.

—George Washington, before the Battle of Long Island, 1776

Later that June, in response to a plea from Massachusetts, Congress agreed to “adopt” the New England militia forces. They became the Continental Army, and the delegates chose George Washington of Virginia as commander-in-chief. The appointment of a leader from the South would be another step in making it truly an American war, not just a New England enterprise. Even so, Washington emerged as the best candidate in his own right. As a prominent figure in the resistance movement prior to entering Congress, he had proved his military credentials with impressive service in the French and Indian War. Wearing his old uniform in Congress, Washington signaled his readiness to serve. He had been outside the military profession for more than 17 years, but military theory and technology had scarcely changed, and the British generals he would face had been only majors and colonels in the last war with France.

Washington arrived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to take command of the newly designated Continental Army in July 1775, beginning an eight-and-a-half-year assignment, a record of continuous service without a leave of absence unparalleled in American history. From his headquarters, a mansion abandoned by a fleeing loyalist family, Washington confronted the first of his numerous challenges in the Revolutionary War—containment of British forces in Boston. It proved easier than he might have thought. His opponent, General Sir William Howe, who replaced Gage, hardly relished another bloodbath after Bunker Hill. As it turned out, the more pressing challenge was to bring order and discipline to the New England militiamen ringing the city. They were ill-disciplined, poorly trained, and plagued by rivalries among different provinces. Furthermore, the civilian population had a long history of opposing military forces in their presence. If Washington whipped his regiments into shape, he also created a common bond in the army and bolstered the prestige and authority of the Continental Congress. He made it clear that he took orders only from Congress, even as he remained tactful in dealing with Massachusetts civil authorities. In all these endeavors, he set precedents he would follow throughout the conflict.

Washington succeeded in New England, but a column from his camp in Cambridge and another force advancing up the Hudson River failed to wrest Canada from the Crown. At the city of Québec, they met defeat on December 31, 1775, resulting in the death of General Richard Montgomery and the wounding of Colonel Benedict Arnold.



In the spring of 1776, Washington and his army were on the move headed for New York City. Howe had evacuated Boston a few weeks earlier, choosing to regroup, await reinforcements from Britain, and then attack where the Americans seemed more vulnerable. Reports had it that he would soon assemble a huge force for an attack on New York. The British unfolded an ambitious plan for the campaign of 1776. General Howe and his brother, Admiral Lord Richard Howe, rode at anchor before New York City in August. Their armada, huge by that day’s standards, consisted of 73 warships and several hundred transports carrying 32,000 troops. Their objectives were to take New York

Hoping to incite a French Canadian uprising, the Americans invaded Canada. On a snowy December 31, 1775, during an unsuccessful assault on Québec, General Richard Montgomery died in action. After the war, John Trumbull used his art to immortalize a patriot hero’s death (above).

General William Howe (below) captured cities—he occupied Boston, Philadelphia, and New York—but failed to win the war.



*He comes, he comes,
the Hero comes,
Sound, sound
your trumpets,
beat your drums.
From port to port
let cannon roar
Howe's welcome to
this Western shore.*

—Loyalist greeting
General Sir William Howe
to New York City, 1776

City and then isolate New England, which they considered to be the storm center of the rebellion. In doing so they sought to draw Washington into a full-scale battle, destroy his army, and bring about the collapse of resistance. It all might have worked. Between August and December, William Howe bested Washington in a series of contests in the greater New York City area—at Brooklyn Heights on Long Island, at Kip's Bay and Harlem Heights on Manhattan Island, and at White Plains on the mainland. In defending the islands, Washington risked encirclement but, thanks in part to luck and Howe's lethargy, he managed to extract most of his army (the British captured 2,000) and pull back to other positions.

Initially, as he fled through New Jersey, Washington's situation seemed to go from bad to worse. Howe's advance units nipped at his heels, his small army unraveling from expired enlistments and desertions. Although Washington escaped into Pennsylvania, his departure allowed Howe to station garrisons throughout the Jerseys and to detach a force that seized Newport, Rhode Island. The campaign of 1776, however, did not end with the calendar. Washington bounced back with two brilliant assaults. Crossing back over the Delaware River to Trenton, New Jersey, on Christmas night, he picked off the celebrating German troops, the so-called Hessians. Returning briefly to Pennsylvania, Washington gathered militia support and again crossed into New Jersey. Outmaneuvering British reinforcements from New York, he captured Princeton and gained the protection of the mountains near Morristown for the winter.

Leaving garrisons in New York and Rhode Island, William Howe moved against Philadelphia, the patriot capital. He decided to take his army by sea rather than by land. Not only longer, this sea route meant that he and General John Burgoyne, in command of a smaller army in Canada, would remain in the dark about each other's location and intentions. It seems incredible that Lord George Germain, the British colonial secretary and the man supervising military operations in America, authorized this campaign without insisting on coordination and cooperation between Howe and Burgoyne. But similar miscommunications and conflicts within the British command structure would be repeated throughout the war, with serious consequences.

Departing on July 23, 1777, Howe sailed down the coast and on August 25 landed at the head of Chesapeake Bay. Washington positioned his army across Howe's line of advance and confronted him on September 11 at Brandywine Creek in Pennsylvania. In fierce fighting, Howe eventually turned Washington's right flank and the Americans withdrew. Washington suffered 1,000 casualties in all categories, twice that of Howe, and could only watch as his adversary occupied Philadelphia. Then, before dawn on October 4, Washington struck Germantown, where Howe had quartered part of his army. The contest was intense, with each side experiencing roughly the same number of losses as they had at Brandywine. Howe knew that his triumphs were costly, because he could not count on reinforcements and Washington could. He settled in for the winter at Philadelphia, while Washington retired to Valley Forge, 22 miles northwest of the capital, to keep an eye on Howe.

Meanwhile, Burgoyne's 1777 campaign from Canada, aided by a diversionary movement of 2,000 troops under General Barry St. Leger moving east along the Mohawk Valley, started well. Burgoyne exuded confidence, but he and Lord George Germain failed to comprehend that the Americans could quickly increase their Northern Army, commanded by General Philip Schuyler and later by General Horatio Gates. Burgoyne, with a force of 7,000 British regulars, Germans, Indians, and Tories, retained his optimism for the time being. According to the fascinating journal account of Baroness Frederika von Riedesel, wife of the Brunswick commander, Burgoyne partied along the way in scandalous fashion, fueled by wine and the charms of his mistress. Traveling up Lake Champlain in June, he placed heavy artillery above Fort Ticonderoga, forcing the Americans to evacuate the post. Facing minor opposition, he moved to Skenesborough, 25 miles from the Hudson River, where he rested for three weeks awaiting his supply wagons slowed by upstate New York's rough, forested terrain. The delay was a major error. It gave the Americans a chance to create obstructions and to

John Burgoyne's (below) bold plan to divide the northern colonies failed when Horatio Gates, and the American wilderness, forced him to surrender at Saratoga.



The military career of Horatio Gates (left), buoyed by Saratoga, went awry thanks to political intrigue and defeat at the Battle of Camden.

reorganize and augment their Northern Army on the west side of the Hudson. As Burgoyne lurched forward, he was bedeviled by downed trees and flooded creeks designed to slow his pace. He needed 24 days to reach the Hudson, which he crossed only to encounter a revived and well-entrenched American Northern Army. That was not the end of the bad news. St. Leger's expedition, half British and half Indian, had been turned back at Fort Stanwix and Oriskany. And Burgoyne's eastern wing, a column searching for horses and foodstuffs, fell to patriot militia in what became known as the Battle of Bennington.

In France, Benjamin Franklin played a critical role in the American success at Saratoga. Jonathan Dull, senior associate editor at the Franklin Papers, points out that "most of the muskets used at Saratoga by the Americans were French, as were the cannon."

Merchant Elkanah Watson, in France when news of Saratoga (far right) arrived, wrote that "Franklin's great influence at the Court of France was the primary cause of producing this bold enterprise..."

Geography bedeviled the British. When General Burgoyne reached Saratoga, his slog through New York had exhausted his supplies and men. The Hudson River (right), proved to be his final barrier when he tried to retreat after punishing combat at Freeman's Farm and Bemis Heights.



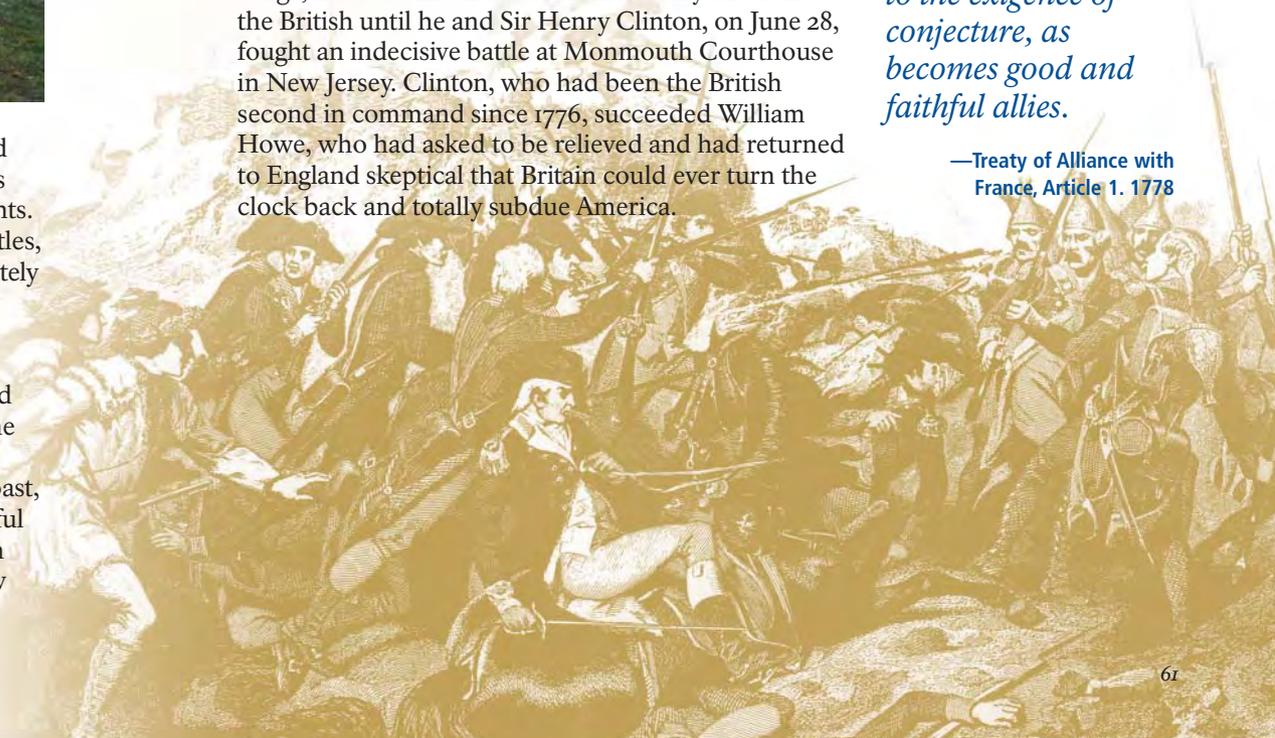
Burgoyne's choices were grim: turn around and struggle back through the north country or fight his way through the Americans waiting on Bemis Heights. Always a gambler, Burgoyne fought two bloody battles, September 19 and October 7, and suffered approximately 1,200 casualties, more than the American losses. Encircled and aware that the British garrison in New York City could not extricate him, the Briton capitulated on October 17 at Saratoga. Burgoyne and Howe, by their failure to cooperate, had botched the campaign of 1777. In one respect, however, Howe displayed superior judgment. He stayed near the coast, never venturing far from his supply lines and mindful of the fact—having served in America in the French and Indian War—that the wilderness could swallow up a British army.

Gates's victory at Saratoga gave France the final nudge to becoming an overt American ally. Washington and his generals stressed to the lawmakers in Philadelphia that military aid from abroad was imperative because America lacked the know-how to manufacture large quantities of military stores. In fact, Congress's resolution for independence included language calling for foreign alliances. Even before July 1776, Congress began sending representatives abroad. Led by Benjamin Franklin, they dealt skillfully with the French and gained the confidence of the normally cautious Foreign Minister Comte de Vergennes. For over two years, French agents surreptitiously supplied the Americans with arms and munitions. With the victory at Saratoga, France and America signed treaties of commerce and alliance (February 1778) formally bringing the French into the war. It was an auspicious beginning to a year that marked a turning point in the war.

Although they continued to hold New York and Newport, the British had little to show for three years of campaigning in New England and the middle states. In June 1778, they evacuated Philadelphia and their forces returned overland to bolster the garrison in New York. Washington, after the winter at Valley Forge, fielded a much better-trained army. He trailed the British until he and Sir Henry Clinton, on June 28, fought an indecisive battle at Monmouth Courthouse in New Jersey. Clinton, who had been the British second in command since 1776, succeeded William Howe, who had asked to be relieved and had returned to England skeptical that Britain could ever turn the clock back and totally subdue America.

If war should break out between France and Great Britain during the continuance of the present war between the United States and England, his majesty and the said United States shall make it a common cause, and aid each other mutually with their good offices, their counsels, and their forces, according to the exigence of conjecture, as becomes good and faithful allies.

—Treaty of Alliance with France, Article 1. 1778



For the next three years, as the British continued to concentrate their remaining forces in the vicinity of Long Island and New York City, Washington engaged in a holding operation in the middle states. Even when it lost, the Continental Army fought reasonably well, and continued to improve. German officers observed in their journals that Washington's officers seemed to be well informed on European military literature. In America, senior officers like Henry Knox and Nathanael Greene made references to the tactics of Caesar, Charles XII, Frederick the Great, and Comte de Saxe. In light of this, perhaps, the so-called "Baron" Friedrich von Steuben has received too much credit.



A product of the Prussian military, Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin von Steuben (above) spoke no English when he arrived in America in 1777. Instead he relied on French to communicate with bilingual army officers like Alexander Hamilton and Nathanael Greene.

The former member of Frederick the Great's staff did standardize critical practices, including drill formation and moving in column and line. But he did so in what amounted to collaboration with Washington, who oversaw his writing and made improvements before publication of *Regulations for the Discipline of the Troops of the United States*.

As a result of his experiences at Valley Forge, Washington spread his forces in a kind of arc around the enemy in New York, just as he had deployed them when containing Howe's army in Philadelphia in 1778. That way he could better control much of the countryside, support the patriot militia, and harass the loyalists.

Because Washington had all he could handle in controlling the Continental Army in the Middle Department, he could not effectively supervise and instruct the American commanding generals in the New England, Northern, Western, and Southern Departments. Thus far, except in the Northern Department where Gates bested Burgoyne, most of the action had taken place in Washington's theater. In the West, small forces and their Indian allies had fought sporadically but furiously with both sides committing gruesome atrocities. Owing to old grievances against colonial expansion, most Indians sided with the King rather than with the Continental Congress. Daniel Boone sought to defend Kentucky

settlers from British and Indian raiders based in Detroit. George Rogers Clark of Virginia staged a campaign of retaliation into the Illinois Country seizing Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes. Although Spain entered the war on the side of France, occupying West Florida and parts of the lower Mississippi, neither side gained control of the vast interior. The one decisive American victory came when General John Sullivan destroyed numerous Iroquois tribal villages in the New York backcountry. But permanent peace in the frontier awaited diplomatic events in Europe.

The war took a new direction in late 1778 after Britain reversed its policy of largely ignoring the American South. In 1776, a small British military and naval expedition under Clinton and Commodore Sir Peter Parker had been ordered to stir up loyalist support along the coast of the Carolinas. Since the North Carolina loyalists had prematurely taken up arms and suffered a total defeat at Moores Creek in February, Clinton and Parker sailed on to join the armada for the assault on New York City. The loyalists had hoped to establish a beachhead near Charleston, South Carolina, but in June the city's defenders drove off the attackers. This setback hardly dampened the enthusiasm of loyalist leaders and exiled southern royal governors. They assured Germain that the population from Virginia to Georgia was overwhelmingly committed to the Crown, that the loyalists there had been intimidated by the patriot minority, and that the appearance of a British army would bring them rallying to the King's standard.

Regardless of how well-intentioned an occupying nation may be, rarely have a people enjoyed being occupied. The South was no exception. In the winter of 1778-1779, small British forces had seemingly subdued Georgia except for scattered resistance in the backcountry. Fighting was indecisive in the Georgia-



Battles like the one that occurred at Moores Creek (above) illustrate the diversity of the 13 colonies. Scottish settlers, fiercely loyal to King George III, charged across the partially dismantled bridge spanning Moores Creek into the withering musket and cannon fire of 1,000 North Carolina patriots waiting in the morning fog. The patriot victory ended British rule in North Carolina forever.

The Americans, though not all in uniform, nor their dress so neat, yet exhibited an erect, soldierly air, and every countenance beamed with satisfaction and joy. The concourse of spectators from the country was prodigious, in point of numbers was probably equal to the military, but universal silence and order prevailed.

—Dr. James Thacher,
October 19, 1781, Yorktown

South Carolina borderlands in 1779. South Carolina was a greater test and a greater prize because of its enormous wealth and sizable population. That challenge did not come until early 1780. Slow to implement fully the southern strategy, Clinton finally brought the bulk of his army from New York to South Carolina and landed just below Charleston. He soon put the city under siege. Charleston’s dignitaries insisted that General Benjamin Lincoln lay down his arms rather than see their beautiful metropolis destroyed. On May 12, Lincoln surrendered the state capital and about 5,500 men, the largest group of American prisoners taken anywhere during the war. Within two weeks, South Carolina appeared to be completely subdued. Many prominent Charlestonians, backcountry loyalists, and neutralists pledged allegiance to George III. Clinton paroled hundreds of militiamen captured at Charleston in return for their promise to remain neutral or to sit out the war. Yet in just two months, Clinton and his subordinate, Lord Charles Cornwallis, alienated countless former patriots and even some longstanding loyalists. Loyalists complained that Britain was slow to restore civilian control. The Clinton parolees, told that if called upon they must take up arms for Britain, felt their pledge of neutrality had been violated. Even the defeat of a small force of Continentals and militia under General Gates on August 16 at Camden, in the South Carolina backcountry, did not dampen renewed resistance. Patriot guerrilla chieftains—Francis Marion, Thomas Sumter, and Andrew Pickens—took to the field in response to threats and mistreatment from marauding loyalists. On October 7, at Kings Mountain, patriot militia wiped out Major Patrick Ferguson’s 1,000-man loyalist force, noted for its harsh treatment of former patriots.

When Clinton returned to New York, he left Cornwallis in command of South Carolina with permission to advance into North Carolina and Virginia if “the safety of Charleston and the tranquility of South Carolina” was assured. With South Carolina’s backcountry in revolt, Cornwallis marched north, justifying his offensive on the grounds that the patriots were being supplied from North Carolina.

The American patriots chose a formidable enemy, Great Britain, an 18th-century superpower. So how could the British army, highly trained, professional, equipped with the most sophisticated weapons, and backed by extensive financial and industrial resources, possibly lose to an enemy with none of those advantages? The Revolutionary War parks of the NPS offer clues to how at least one “superpower” lost a war.

As political unrest increased, the patriots first outmaneuvered loyalists and gained control of local infrastructure, including militia. Britain then failed to expand loyalist support, while alienating neutrals and infuriating patriots. Each time the British army marched inland from a port city, the countryside swallowed them up. Lexington and Concord, Fort Stanwix and Saratoga, Fort Sackville, Kings Mountain, Cowpens, Guilford Courthouse, Ninety Six, and Yorktown all reflect the dangers inherent in moving outside an occupying army’s safety zone. An ocean from home, the British found limited resources lost in battle, particularly troops, difficult to replace. International support, at first from individuals like Kosciuszko, von Steuben, and Lafayette, and then from governments—France, the Netherlands, and Spain—forced Great Britain into another budget-busting global conflict.

On the patriot side, the Continental Army’s stubborn struggle to survive, well illustrated by the leadership of George Washington and the winter encampments at Valley Forge and Morristown, prolonged the war. The King and his supporters remained intractable, refusing to diverge from an all or nothing strategy. “The die is now cast,” George III wrote in 1774, “the colonies must either submit or triumph... we must not retreat.” With patriot privateers pestering British commerce at sea, the length and expense of the land war, as it dragged on, eroded British public support. The “superpower” blinked, and then focused attention on other international threats.



National parks include many sites that illustrate how to battle a “superpower.”

- [Colonial National Historical Park \(Yorktown\)](#)
- [Morristown National Historical Park](#)
- [Valley Forge National Historical Park](#)
- [Saratoga National Historical Park](#)
- [Fort Stanwix National Monument](#)
- [Governors Island National Monument](#)
- [Thaddeus Kosciuszko National Memorial](#)
- [Cowpens National Battlefield](#)
- [Guilford Courthouse National Military Park](#)
- [Ninety Six National Historic Site](#)
- [George Rogers Clark National Historical Park](#)
- [Arkansas Post National Memorial](#)
- [Kings Mountain National Military Park](#)
- [Fort Moultrie \(part of Fort Sumter National Monument\)](#)
- [Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail](#)
- [Crossroads of the American Revolution National Heritage Area](#)
- [Salem Maritime National Historic Site](#)

William Ranney's 1845 painting of Cowpens shows a legendary sword fight between Banastre Tarleton and Lieutenant Colonel William Washington. As the colonels engage in face-to-face combat, Washington's "waiter" rides up to help drive Tarleton from the field.



For Cornwallis, the results proved disastrous; he was outgeneraled by Nathanael Greene, Washington's most able subordinate, who now commanded the Southern Department. Greene moved cautiously into South Carolina, dividing his army so that each division sat on one flank of Cornwallis at Winnsboro. Greene took a position on the Pee Dee River, while General Daniel Morgan and the South Carolina militia under Andrew Pickens advanced southwestward into the state, beginning a game of cat and mouse. Cornwallis sent Banastre Tarleton's British Legion after Morgan, but on January 17, 1781, Morgan decisively defeated Tarleton at the Cowpens. Morgan pulled back into North Carolina, where he and Greene reunited their wings and escaped northward. Fleeing to Virginia, Greene reorganized his force and added Virginia militia before returning to North Carolina, where he challenged Cornwallis at Guilford Courthouse in present-day Greensboro. The fighting was intense. Greene left the field to Cornwallis after inflicting more than 500 casualties while suffering 250 of his own. It was another costly victory for Britain. Cornwallis's battered and bruised army limped to Wilmington on the coast. He had put a European military machine through stresses and strains too great to bear. Greene, meanwhile, would not let up and again turned southward. In 1781, he fought two indecisive battles at Hobkirks Hill and Eutaw Springs and laid siege to a garrison at Ninety Six. The British commanders in the state, Lord Rawdon and Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Stewart, could not stop Greene. Coordinating his moves with his local allies, Greene picked off all the enemy-held interior posts. Although large-scale fighting ended in the lower South in 1781, Greene's forces stood guard until the British evacuated Charleston and Savannah in 1782. Greene had never won a pitched battle, but he and the South Carolina partisans had fought a brilliant coalition war, a predecessor of 20th-century guerrilla conflicts.



Nathanael Greene (left), in command of the American army during the Southern Campaign,

had a simple explanation for his brilliantly successful strategy against Cornwallis (above). "We fight," he said, "get beat, rise, and fight again." Battle after battle, Greene maneuvered Cornwallis toward the trap sprung by Washington at Yorktown.

Cornwallis, having abandoned the lower South to Greene, plodded up to Virginia. He rested and resupplied his bedraggled force and took under his command British raiding parties led by General William Phillips and the turncoat Benedict Arnold. After random skirmishing for two months, he retired to the coast and erected fortifications at Yorktown, perhaps believing that joint Franco-American operations against him remained unlikely.

In New York, Clinton was baffled and angered by Cornwallis's wandering, but essentially continued to give him a free hand. Clinton, an insecure man, hated confrontation and failed to order Cornwallis to move to a more secure location.

Although planning to attack New York City, Washington saw new possibilities when he learned that French Admiral de Grasse's fleet in the West Indies was heading to the Chesapeake Bay. The 5,500 French troops under Comte de Rochambeau and the American armies under Washington hurried southward hoping to trap Cornwallis on the Virginia peninsula. The Yorktown campaign of 1781 had begun.

At the same time, the Comte de Barras's small French naval squadron in New England waters headed down the coast for Chesapeake Bay. Simultaneously, a small American contingent that had been in Virginia all summer, commanded by the Marquis de Lafayette, blocked Cornwallis's escape inland. Amazingly, in an age without instantaneous communication and rapid transportation, all land and sea forces arrived about the same time. Cornwallis's days were numbered, especially after de Grasse beat off Admiral Thomas Graves's outmanned British naval expedition, hastily dispatched by Clinton to counter the French fleet.

Outnumbered by more than a two-to-one margin and subjected to a ceaseless artillery bombardment, Cornwallis surrendered his roughly 8,000 men on October 19, two months to the day from Washington's letter to de Grasse setting the gigantic undertaking in motion. Lafayette wrote that the play was over and "the fifth act has just been closed."



The French played critical roles in the victory at Yorktown. Lafayette (far right), serving with the Continental Army, defended Virginia when Cornwallis invaded. Comte de Rochambeau (above), in command of thousands of French troops, marched from Rhode Island to join Washington as they both hurried south to confront the British. At the Battle of the Chesapeake, Rear-Admiral Comte de Grasse defeated the Royal Navy sent to re-supply Cornwallis.



The surrender at Yorktown provided a bit of symbolic theater captured by John Trumbull (far below). After first attempting to surrender to Rochambeau, a British officer then tried to surrender to Washington. Washington also refused because Cornwallis himself did not attend. Instead, General Benjamin Lincoln, field commander of the American forces, accepted the English sword.



It was unclear to Washington and Congress that Britain, in fact, had lost the will to continue the American war. To continue might well have required the kinds of sacrifices that Britain's 18th-century ruling classes were unwilling to pay. Peace negotiations began in Paris in 1782, with Benjamin Franklin and John Jay representing the United States and Richard Oswald, an old friend of Franklin, handling matters for the British. On November 30, 1782, the three diplomats approved a preliminary treaty between Britain and America to take effect when Britain and France came to terms. Hoping to win her former colonies away from the French, the London government agreed to remarkably generous terms, especially the concession of the Mississippi River as the new nation's western boundary.

Although in the years before the Revolution the colonists had often complained that they had been dragged into the wars of the Old World, European rivalries and conflicts between 1775 and 1783 had aided profoundly in securing American independence.

Britain, with numerous enemies, fought without European allies for the first time in centuries. French military supplies and military intervention and loans from the French court and Dutch bankers were critical to the American cause. Spain had entered on the side of France late in the war, but its role was minor and the Madrid court did not recognize American independence at the time.

Although word of the final treaty brought great rejoicing in America, Washington, numerous congressmen, and other Confederation officials were sobered by internal tensions and other difficulties. The states, considering the war over, were increasingly unresponsive to congressional appeals for troops and financial aid. Tensions between army officers and the lawmakers increased because of the military's justifiable complaints about unpaid salaries and Congress's failure to follow through on a fixed plan for postwar compensation. Discontent climaxed in March 1783 at Washington's encampment at Newburgh, New York. Responding to the inflammatory Newburgh

Addresses circulated in the camp, Washington persuaded the officers to let him present their grievances to Congress. The army peacefully disbanded and melted into civilian life. Washington bade farewell in an emotional parting with his officers at Fraunces Tavern in New York City. Then he rode to Annapolis, Maryland, to resign his commission before Congress.

The war had transformed Washington and his senior officers into strong American nationalists. They were convinced that the new nation would not survive without a firmer kind of union than the existing Articles of Confederation.

They worked with civilian leaders of similar sentiments, men like James Madison, James Wilson, and numerous others who had served in Congress or held posts in the Confederation government. They too had found the war to be a nationalizing experience. The result was the Philadelphia convention of 1787 that created the U.S.

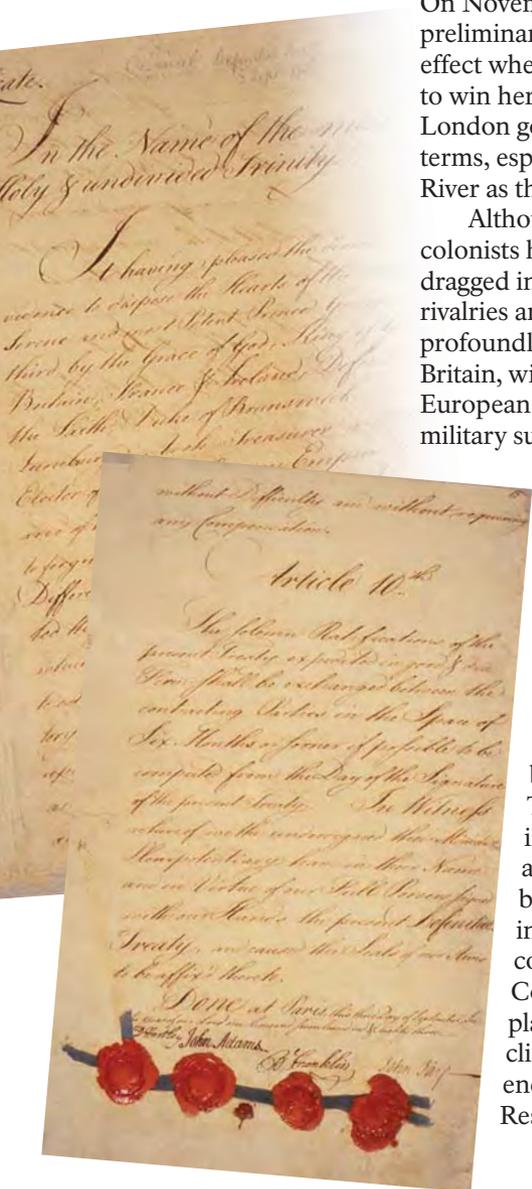
Constitution, a military as well as political document. It perpetuated the twin military traditions of the past—a professional army and a system of state militia—but greatly enlarged Congress's war and defense powers and permitted state militias to be called into federal service in time of crisis. It was to the great credit of Washington and the Continental Army that, despite the stresses and trials of the Revolution, they remained committed to civil control of the military. Without that commitment, Americans would never have agreed to such a dramatically new form of political engineering as the Constitution.

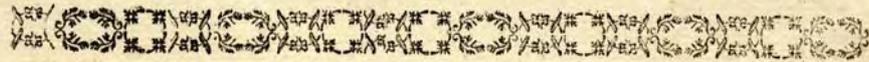
When Washington resigned from the army (below), just months after the Treaty of Paris (far left), he again deferred to civilian authority. "Having now finished the work assigned me," he said, "I retire... and bidding an affectionate farewell to this august body under whose orders I have so long acted, I here offer my commission..."



The President shall be Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the Militia of the several States, when called into the actual Service of the United States...

—United States Constitution, Article 2, Section 2





CHARLESTOWN, *April 27, 1769.*

TO BE SOLD,

On WEDNESDAY the Tenth Day of
MAY next,

A CHOICE CARGO OF

Two Hundred & Fifty
NEGROES:



ARRIVED in the Ship
COUNTESS of SUSSEX, THOMAS DAVIES,
Master, directly from GAMBIA, by

JOHN CHAPMAN, & Co.

*** THIS is the Vessel that had the Small-Pox
on Board at the Time of her Arrival the 31st of
March last: Every necessary Precaution hath since
been taken to cleanse both Ship and Cargo thoroughly,
so that those who may be inclined to purchase need not
be under the least Apprehension of Danger from In-
fection.*

The NEGROES are allowed to be the likeliest Parcel

Forgotten Americans

by Gary B. Nash, *Professor of History,
University of California, Los Angeles*

Revolutionary War historic sites properly lavish attention on the founding fathers of the American Revolution because they led the movement to gain independence from Great Britain and wrote the now sacred documents upon which the new nation was built. But until recently these sites, like textbooks and many other forms of history, largely ignored huge numbers of people—African Americans, American Indians, women, and laborers—who played vital roles in the unfolding of the American Revolution and whose contributions to the cause were indispensable to the outcome.

In the last several decades, the outpouring of scholarship focused on each of these groups has raised awareness and provided factual materials that can be used in public education. We all now possess a rich and multi-stranded tapestry of the Revolution, filled with engaging biographies, local narratives, weighty explorations of America's greatest explosion of political thinking, annals of military tactics and strategies, and discussions of the religious, economic, and diplomatic aspects of what was then called the "glorious cause."

Notwithstanding this prodigious scholarship, we still do not fully appreciate the lives and labors, the sacrifices and struggles, the glorious messiness, the hopes and fears of the diverse groups that fought in the longest and most disruptive war in our history, with visions of launching a new age filling their heads. The iconic founding fathers are surely part of our story.



When British soldiers in Boston opened fire on March 5, 1770, they killed three outright—sailor Crispus Attucks (above), a ropemaker, and a mariner.

In the 1850s, abolitionists returned to the story of Attucks. A circa 1856 chromolithograph (far above) shows Attucks in the center of the chaotic scene.

In 1775, in his essay "Taxation No Tyranny," Englishman Samuel Johnson turned his famous literary talents and wit on the Americans. Among other pointed criticisms, Johnson wanted to know "how is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty from the drivers of Negroes?" Benjamin Latrobe's sketch dated 1798 (below) captured "an overseer doing his duty."



Lord Dunmore (far right) was not alone in championing slave enlistments. Young South Carolinian John Laurens proposed freeing the slaves that he would eventually inherit, roughly 40 able-bodied men, and enlisting them as the core of a regiment of black soldiers in the Continental Army.

But in reality, those in the nether strata of colonial society and those outside "respectable" society were most of the people of revolutionary America. Without their ideas, dreams, and blood sacrifices, the American Revolution would never have occurred, would never have followed the course that we can now comprehend, and would never have reverberated around the world among oppressed people down to the present day.

This human complexity and richness, stories like those in this essay, ought to be an essential part of the history curriculum in our schools and woven into the interpretive storylines of historic sites. They should be mainstreamed into the core of our national narrative, never treated like optional footnotes.

The Black Struggle for Freedom

We can only imagine how the spirits of enslaved African Americans, one-fifth of the colonial population, were affected by what they heard of the movement for liberty. They would have gleaned much from the dinner-table conversation of their masters, working in taverns and coffeehouses where Revolutionary politics were hatched, and reading or hearing of pamphlets denouncing the slavery imposed by Britain on its colonial subjects.

What is certain is that many of the enslaved acted on their hatred of their clanking chains to petition for their freedom in ways calculated to prick the conscience of the master class. Couched cautiously at first, their petitions became bolder as the war approached. "We expect your house [the legislature] will...take our deplorable case into serious consideration, and give us that simple relief which, as men, we have a natural right to," remonstrated four slaves in rural Massachusetts in 1773. Six years later in Connecticut, slaves echoed these claims to freedom: "We do not ask for nothing but what we are fully persuaded is ours to claim," for "we are the Creatures of that God, who made of one Blood, and Kindred, all the Nations of the Earth."

Therefore "there is nothing that leads us to a belief, or suspicion, that we are any more obliged to serve them [our masters] than they us, and...can never be convinced that we were made to be slaves."

By its very nature, the Revolutionary Era created unprecedented situations and opportunities for slaves. A wave of black insurrectionary activity coursed through South Carolina in the 1760s. More than 100 slaves made a concerted attempt in 1765 to establish a refugee colony in the interior. White Charlestonians took alarm the next year when black men paraded through the streets chanting the white rhetoric "Liberty, Liberty!" White authorities put the city under arms for a week as rumors of insurrection spread through the colony. A nervous legislature quickly passed a three-year prohibitive tariff on imported slaves that had the desired effect of choking off the flood of nearly 7,000 slaves who had arrived from Africa in 1765.

With the huge movement of both civilian and military populations in and out of nearly every major seaport from Savannah to Boston between 1775 and 1781, urban slaves had unprecedented chances for making their personal declarations of independence and for destabilizing the institution of slavery. Similarly, as loyalist and patriot militia crisscrossed the countryside plundering the farms and plantations of their enemies, slaves found ways of tearing holes in the fabric of slavery.

A turning point came in November 1775, when the royal governor of Virginia, Lord John Dunmore, issued a dramatic proclamation that guaranteed freedom to slaves and indentured servants who escaped their masters and reached the King's forces. Against this concrete offer of unconditional freedom, slaves could only hope that the American patriots would respond to calls for the end of slavery advocated by the first abolition society established in Pennsylvania just a few months before. Waiting for freedom as a gift at some indeterminate point turned out to be a poor substitute for immediate freedom. When word of Dunmore's proclamation quickly spread through the South, hundreds of slaves fled their masters to British lines where officers formed them into the Black Regiment of Guides and Pioneers. Some marched in uniform with the inscription on their breasts, "Liberty to Slaves."



And I hereby further declare all indentured servants, Negroes, or others (appertaining to Rebels) free, that are able and willing to bear arms, they joining His Majesty's Troops, as soon as may be, for the more speedily reducing the Colony to a proper sense of their duty, to this Majesty's crown and dignity.

—Lord Dunmore's Proclamation, 1775



With the blessing of George Washington, Rhode Island authorized the 1st Rhode Island Regiment (soldier shown on the far left) to be composed of "able-bodied negro, mulatto, or Indian man-slaves." Each recruit was "immediately discharged from the service of his master or mistress."

The 1st Rhode Island marched with Washington to Yorktown and helped capture Redoubt 10.

[P]eace 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 2000, were to be delivered up to their masters, altho' some of them had been three or four years among the English.

—Boston King's memories of the evacuation from New York

Dunmore's proclamation galvanized the South against England, for it conjured up a vision of a large body of free Negroes, armed by the British, abroad in the land. "Hell itself," wrote one southerner, "could not have vomited anything more black than this design of emancipating our slaves." But thousands of slaves did find freedom by reaching British lines. The black war for independence occurred in every part of the country and was especially intense whenever slaves were within running distance of the British army or navy.

In the South, the pursuit of freedom through flight to the British was so large that the British army was often hard-pressed to provision the fleeing slaves. Thomas Jefferson, Virginia's wartime governor, reported that 30,000 slaves fled their masters during the British invasion of Virginia in 1780-1781. Twenty-three of Jefferson's slaves fled his plantations to join the British, as did 17 of Washington's slaves. In South Carolina and Georgia, probably one-third to one-half of the enslaved fled to the British during the southern campaigns between 1779 and 1781. Without doubt the American Revolution marked the greatest slave rebellion in the long history of North American slavery. But seeking freedom with the British had its own risks. Many found themselves returned to masters who were loyal to the English Crown. Many more died of camp fevers and smallpox. Only a minority of those who fled for freedom survived the war to take up life as free people.

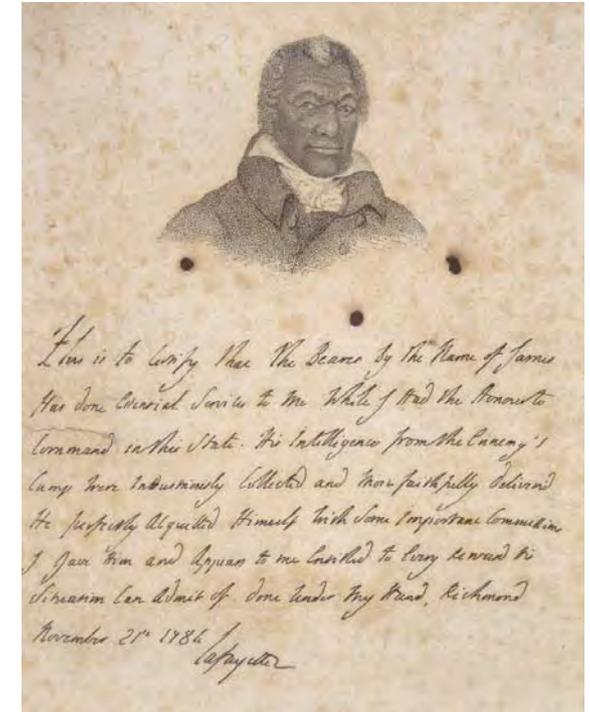
In the North, where about one-tenth of the colonies' half-million enslaved African Americans lived, the hungering for freedom was no less intense. Even in the budding capital of American abolitionism, Philadelphia, where many believed that the city's slaves were docile and contented, whites were shocked when a "gentlewoman" walking near Christ Church was insulted by a black man only a few weeks after Dunmore's proclamation. When the woman reprimanded him, he replied: "Stay you d[amne]d white bitch 'till Lord Dunmore and his black regiment come, and then we will see who is to take the wall." When the British occupied Philadelphia in September 1777 for nine months, hundreds of Philadelphia slaves fled to the British, confirming one Lutheran leader's belief that it "is almost universal among the Negroes in America" that they secretly hoped for the British to

whip the Americans, "for then all Negro slaves will gain their freedom."

In New York City and its surrounding hinterland, the flight of slaves was even greater. The slave of Quaker John is illustrative. Named Tye by his master, this 21-year-old fled his master in 1775. Going by the name of Tye, he soon was organizing other slaves and free African Americans to fight against the patriots. For five years he led a local guerrilla band that terrorized the patriot farmers of northern New Jersey. Tye's struggles to end slavery ended with battle wounds and lock-jaw, but he remained a symbol of black rebellion.

While most black Americans chose the British side, many free African Americans and a small number of slaves fought for the American cause. Prince, the slave of a New Hampshire soldier, pulled the stroke oar carrying Washington across the Delaware River in a piercing snow and sleet storm on Christmas night, 1776. James Armistead, a Virginia slave whose master allowed him to enlist under the Marquis de Lafayette, played a dramatic role as a double-spy. Posing as a runaway slave, Armistead infiltrated the British lines at Yorktown and took back crucial information that gave the Americans the upper hand in the climactic siege of the war. After the war, the Virginia legislature purchased Armistead's freedom in recognition of his service.

Freedom came gradually for many African Americans in the North. A small percentage gained their freedom from conscience-stricken masters or escaped to melt into small free black communities taking root in the cities. Some gained freedom by legislative or judicial decree. Vermont's constitution of 1777 declared slavery illegal. In Pennsylvania, a gradual



Lafayette's return to the United States in 1824 triggered celebrations across the nation. Perhaps in conjunction with Lafayette's tour, artist John Blennerhassett Martin captured James Armistead's likeness (above) and paired it with Lafayette's description of Armistead's service during the Revolution.

“Silken Slippers...Wooden Shoes”

French philosopher Voltaire observed that “history is filled with the sound of silken slippers going downstairs and wooden shoes coming up.” Usually, however, history reveals more about the owner of the slippers and little about the servant clad in wooden shoes. We know volumes about George Washington, but much less about Thomas Stone (a signer of the Declaration). We know little about Stone’s wife, and virtually nothing about those enslaved on Stone’s plantation.

But there are ways to sidestep preservation biases. At national parks, history often is preserved in building fabric—scholars use house inventories, written accounts, land surveys, archeological, and architectural evidence for reconstruction and refurbishing. Morristown’s Ford Mansion reveals as much about Theodosia Ford, her children, and servants as it does about her wartime tenants—George Washington and his “family” of aides. The cabins at Morristown and Valley Forge reflect the lives of soldiers. Signers’ homes—Adams, Stone, Floyd, Pinckney—or the room where Jefferson wrote the Declaration, place the famous in parlors, bedrooms, and kitchens. Birthplaces—Adams and Washington—suggest influences on adult attitudes.

Many park collections include documents that widen perspectives on events—political cartoons, petitions, broadsides, and first person observations like the Spanish commander’s account of

the British attack on Arkansas Post or the journals of the Baroness von Riedesel, wife of the commander of Germans fighting for the British. Personal diaries and letters of everyday people provide details of individual lives. Eighteenth-century newspapers overflow with information—what was for sale or who was in business. Notices describing runaway slaves or servants help document the extent and nature of American servitude. Oral traditions fill gaps in written records. Artifacts—like wooden shoes—illustrate the lives of servants, women, and children.

Novelist Virginia Woolf writes, “History is too much about wars; biography too much about great men.” Those who agree will find additional points of view at:

- [Boston National Historical Park](#)
- [Independence National Historical Park](#)
- [Morristown National Historical Park](#)
- [Valley Forge National Historical Park](#)
- [Fort Stanwix National Monument](#)
- [Crossroads of the American Revolution National Heritage Area](#)
- [Ninety Six National Historic Site](#)
- [Castillo de San Marcos National Monument](#)
- [Charles Pinckney National Historic Site](#)
- [Thomas Stone National Historic Site](#)
- [Colonial National Historical Park](#)
- [Salem Maritime National Historic Site](#)
- [Gloria Dei \(Old Swedes’\) Church National Historic Site](#)
- [Touro Synagogue National Historic Site](#)



This depiction of James Armistead, shown with Lafayette and holding the general’s horse, differs radically from the Martin portrait on page 79. As author Ralph Ellison observed, John-Baptiste Paon’s portrait “intensified the hierarchical, master-servant symbolism of his composition by rendering the black orderly’s features so abstract, stylized, and shadowy that the viewer’s attention is drawn not to the individuality of Armistead’s features but to the theatrical splendor of his costume.”

A fierce enemy during the American Revolution, Thayendanegea (Joseph Brant) traveled to Philadelphia twice in the 1790s as the invited guest of the U.S. government. The Washington Administration asked Thayendanegea to help negotiate a truce with the American Indians in the Northwest Territory, but the talks failed. During his second visit, in 1797, Thayendanegea sat for a Charles Willson Peale portrait (below).



abolition act in 1780 promised freedom to all those born of slaves, but not until they reached 21 if they were females and 28 if they were males. Massachusetts abolished slavery in 1783. Other northern states—New Jersey and New York, for example—passed abolition laws only at the end of the century or early in the 19th century.

For those who fought with the British, freedom had to be pursued on other shores. There could be no staying in the land of the victorious Americans, for the new United States was still slave country and black Americans who had fought with the British were particularly hated and subject to re-enslavement. England itself wished no influx of ex-slaves because London and other cities already felt burdened by growing numbers of impoverished blacks seeking public support. Black loyalists could not be sent to English sugar islands in the West Indies where slavery reigned. The answer was to send the black refugees to Nova Scotia, where they had to struggle among scattered old French settlers and a mass of British soldiers who were settling on this new frontier rather than returning to England. Among the thousands of blacks sent to Canada, most found life discouragingly difficult. About half returned to Africa in 1792 after the English set up a refuge in Sierra Leone for former American slaves and poor free blacks residing in England.

The American Indian Revolution

For some 150,000 American Indians living between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mississippi River, the Revolutionary War was a time to “try men’s souls.” Thayendanegea, or Joseph Brant, stands as an illuminating example. Brant was born a Mohawk, one of the Indian tribes that comprised the Six Nations (sometimes called the Iroquois Nation). In 1755, at age 13, Brant fought in the French and Indian War with William Johnson, the English superintendent of northern Indian affairs. In 1763, Brant proved his loyalty to the American cause by battling against Pontiac’s uprising, when Ottawa and other Indian warriors tried to expel British soldiers and their encroaching American cousins from the Ohio country.

Despite a trading alliance that the Six Nations had maintained with the northern colonists for generations, and despite the close ties that the Mohawks maintained with William Johnson, as Brant matured he realized that the growth in non-Indian population threatened his people. Barely 20,000 colonists inhabited New York in 1700, but by 1770, the number had increased to 160,000. Many times, rapacious New York land speculators and frontiersmen had swindled the Mohawks out of land. So, as war clouds gathered in 1775, Brant went to London to see what King George III would offer the Six Nations for their support in a war that, while still not formally declared, had been in the shooting stage since April. Brant left London convinced that liberty, the protection of life, the retention of ancient homelands, and Indian independence might best be preserved by fighting against the independence-minded Americans. Brant arrived back in North America a few weeks after the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Symbolic of the complexities of the Revolution, the war caused the first major split among the Six Nations—many Tuscarora and Oneida sided with the Americans while the Seneca, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Mohawk, including Brant, remained loyal to Great Britain. As fighting intensified, Brant seemed to be everywhere. He was at Oriskany in August 1777, when the British and their Indian auxiliaries, in one of the bloodiest battles of the war, defeated the New York militia and their Oneida Indian scouts trying to reach the besieged, strategically located Fort Stanwix. He fought at Cherry Valley in the summer of 1778, and helped drive farmers from their fields in southern New York and northern Pennsylvania. He participated in many skirmishes in 1779 when American General John Sullivan burned Indian towns in pursuit of his blunt motto: “civilization or death to all American savages.” For the entire war, Brant fought to prevent the New York-Pennsylvania backcountry from contributing grain and meat to the Continental Army. “A thousand Iroquois and five hundred Tory rangers,” historian Anthony Wallace wrote, “were able to lay in waste nearly 50,000 square miles of colonial territory.”

...the Six Nations shall and do yield to the United States, all claims to the country west of the said boundary, and then they shall be secured in the peaceful possession of the lands they inhabit east and north of the same...

—Treaty of Fort Stanwix, October 22, 1784, between representatives of the United States and the Six Nations



Though not militarily defeated during the war, Brant and his Indian allies lost one-third of their people, only to be abandoned by the British at the peace talks in Paris. When peace came in 1783, they were left to cope with an aggressive, combat-hardened, and land-hungry American people. Confronting insurmountable odds and thunderstruck that British diplomats sold them out, the Six Nations, at Fort Stanwix in 1784, signed a treaty on terms dictated to them. Brant spent the last 20 years of his life adjusting to the harsh new realities by which proud and independent people found that the pursuit of happiness by white Americans required them to surrender life, liberty, and property.

In the interior of eastern North America, almost all Indian nations sided with the British. The logic of nearly two centuries of abrasive contact with colonizing Europeans compelled the choice, for it was the settler-subjects of the English King who most threatened Indian autonomy. American Indians fought an anti-colonial war against those attempting to slip their own colonial yoke.

The Shawnee of the Ohio country and the Cherokee of the upper South allied to attack the encroaching Virginians even before the Continental Congress declared independence. “From being a great nation,” the Shawnee sorrowfully told the Cherokee in May 1776, “[we are now] reduced to a handful.” Once they had “possessed lands almost to the seashore,” but “red people who were once masters of the whole country [now] hardly possessed ground enough to stand on.” Knowing that the white settlers intended to destroy them, the Shawnee argued that it was “better to die like men than to dwindle away by inches.”

Two months later, Cherokees led by Dragging Canoe, a young militant chief from the Overhill, or western, Cherokee villages, fell upon settlements on the frontier of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. The frontiersmen under attack had settled west of the Proclamation Line of 1763, in defiance of royal decree, on lands ceded by older or impoverished Cherokee chiefs who made cessions without the consent of the Cherokee Nation. Now the frontiersmen felt the wrath of young Cherokee warriors. Failing to obtain support from the powerful Creek Nation to their south and far from British trade sources, the Cherokee, however,

Painted by Francis Parsons in 1762, the Cherokee chief (far left), known as either Cunne Shote or Oconostota, captures the resolve of many Indians determined to resist colonial expansion. Although the Cherokee initially supported the British against the French, they soon waged their own independent war, led by Cunne Shote, on “those in red coats.”

The American Revolution further tested Cherokee unity as tribal members sporadically attacked outlying colonial settlements. Although a number of Indian bands negotiated a peace treaty with the United States in 1785, others continued to resist encroachment, sometimes with violence.

found themselves short of ammunition and other supplies. This left them vulnerable to southern militia eager to extirpate the Cherokee and drive them, as Jefferson recommended, beyond the Mississippi River. In the summer and fall of 1776, four expeditions of southern militiamen punished Cherokee towns severely.

During the winter of 1780-1781, American militias once more ravaged Cherokee towns. The Cherokee and Shawnee raided sporadically throughout the war, but they never mounted a sustained assault on the Americans. The war deeply divided the Cherokees, with Dragging Canoe leading the young Cherokees south and west to establish new towns along Chickamauga Creek in Tennessee. There they remained militantly anti-American through the 1780s. By 1788, the Cherokees had lost three-quarters of their land and had seen half of their towns destroyed.

Throughout the Illinois country, the heroics of Lt. Colonel George Rogers Clark turned the tide against the American Indian allies of the British. During early 1779, Clark led a ragtag body of Kentuckians through icy rivers and across 157 miles of frozen terrain to attack an English outpost at Vincennes in present-day Indiana. Even though the Americans were outnumbered two to one by the British regulars and their still-loyal, local French militiamen, Clark fooled the fort's defenders into believing that his force was much larger. Convinced that he faced disaster, the British commander surrendered after a fierce, 38-hour siege. This marked the beginning of a momentous collapse of pan-Indian efforts, aided by the British, to drive the frontiersman out of ancient Indian homelands in what became Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois.

The Shawnee captured Daniel Boone during February 1778, and later, during September 1778, laid siege to the frontier post of Boonesborough—a post which threatened Shawnee territory between Kentucky and Virginia. For the Shawnee, the war throughout the West brought terrible destruction. Some Shawnee villages tried to remain neutral, and a few pledged allegiance to the Americans, but most villages gravitated toward the British. Clark's invasion of Shawnee country in the summer of 1780 began an annual series of search-and-destroy missions to burn Shawnee crops and villages, deeply disrupting Indian

cycles of subsistence farming and hunting. Like the Six Nations, the Shawnee were shocked when the British sued for peace in 1783 and abandoned them to the victorious Americans.

Some Indian tribes, mostly small ones surrounded by colonists and greatly reduced by disease and earlier wars, allied with the Americans. The Passamaquoddy and Penobscot in Maine, who had sustained bitter losses in the French and Indian War fighting against New Hampshire rangers, now fought alongside the rangers against the British. The Stockbridge in Massachusetts, an amalgam of remnant Indians from the Hudson River Valley and western Massachusetts who had fought alongside Robert Rogers's Rangers in the French and Indian War, served with Washington's troops at Boston in 1775 and later in New York, New Jersey, and Canada. The Oneida in New York, and the Tuscarora and Catawba in North Carolina all pledged allegiance to the Americans and contributed scouts and warriors to the Revolutionary cause. But the Indians who gave support, usually because they were dependent on American trade and surrounded by a sea of settlers, or because of the welcomed influence of Protestant missionaries, reaped little benefit from their efforts. Although grateful state governments compensated a number of Indian warriors after the war, they did little to protect tribes from land-hungry Americans.

In the end, American Indians lost heavily in the war partly because they did not overcome intratribal and intertribal factionalism and partly because the supplies of British trade goods on which they depended—especially guns, powder, and shot—were seriously disrupted during the war. The pro-British stance cannot be counted as a failure of judgment on their part. Had they sided with the Americans, they would have fared no better, as the disheartening postwar experience of the Tuscarora and Oneida demonstrates.

Facing the heavily armed Americans who had voracious appetites for new land after 1783, almost all Indian nations found themselves in a new war—a war of national expansion waged by the victorious Americans. Joseph Brant's second trip to London in 1785 brought limited aid from the British, while new efforts to foster intertribal cooperation led to fierce Indian resistance in the Old Northwest. A new generation of resistance leaders—Black Hawk, Tecumseh,

The utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians; their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and, in their property, rights, and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress; but laws founded in justice and humanity, shall from time to time be made for preventing wrongs being done to them, and for preserving peace and friendship with them....

—Northwest Ordinance, 1787

Soon after their marriage in 1764, John and Abigail Adams (below) bought a matching pair of pastel portraits from Benjamin Blyth. Their legendary relationship survived until Abigail died in 1818 at age 73. John lived until July 4, 1826.



I have done as much to carry on the war as many that set now at the helm of government.

—Rachel Wells

Charles Willson Peale painted miniature portraits of both George and Martha Washington (far right). On the reverse of Martha's miniature is a portrait of her son John Parke Custis (Jacky), who died of camp fever soon after the Battle of Yorktown.

and others—led spirited attempts to protect their homelands against the veterans of the war swarming across the Appalachians. In the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, the new American nation promised that the “utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians; their lands and property, rights and liberty ... shall never be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress.” The ordinance went on to promise that “laws founded in justice and humanity shall from time to time be made, for preventing wrongs being done to them, and for preserving peace and friendship with them.” The promise, as it turned out, would be honored mostly in the breach as the war of national expansion grew in intensity in the 1780s and 1790s.

Daughters of Liberty

Women played a vital role in the movement toward revolution and some drew upon revolutionary arguments to define their own goals. Women signed non-importation agreements, which pressured English policymakers through a boycott of British finished goods. They harassed non-complying colonial merchants, and they helped organize “fast days” during which communities prayed for deliverance from English oppression. Their most important role was facilitating the boycott of English goods, like textiles. From Georgia to Maine, women and children of all classes began spinning yarn and weaving cloth. Towns often vied patriotically with each other in the manufacture of cotton, linen, and woolen cloth as the women staged open-air spinning contests to publicize their commitment to non-consumption pacts. In 1769, the women of tiny Middletown, Massachusetts, set the standard by weaving 20,522 yards of cloth, about 160 yards each.

After the Tea Act in 1773, women began boycotting their favorite drink. Newspapers carried recipes for tea substitutes and recommendations for herbal teas. In Wilmington, North Carolina, women paraded solemnly through the town and then made a ritual display of their patriotism by burning their imported tea. Many women could agree with one Rachel Wells: “I have done as much to carry on the war as many that set now at the helm of government.”

Colonial protests and petitions against England’s

arbitrary uses of power also changed women’s perception of their role. The more male leaders talked about England’s intentions to “enslave” the Americans and England’s callous treatment of its colonial “subjects,” the more American women began to rethink their own domestic situations. The language of protest against England reminded many American women that they too were badly treated “subjects” of their husbands, who often dealt with them cruelly and exercised power over them arbitrarily. If there was to be independence, new laws must be passed, Abigail Adams reminded her husband, John, on March 1, 1776. As they did their work, the male lawmakers should think about the rights of women and their enslavement by men. Choosing words and phrases that had been used over and over in the protests against England, she wrote: “Do not put such unlimited power into the hand of the husband...Put it out of the power of the vicious and the lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity,” she insisted. “Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could.” Borrowing directly from the republican ideology used to protest Parliament’s attempts to tax the Americans, Abigail Adams warned that American women “will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice, or representation.” She even promised that women would “foment a rebellion” if men did not heed their rightful claims.

Many American women, still bound by the social conventions of the day, were not ready to occupy the new territory to which Abigail Adams laid claim. But the protests against England had stirred up new thoughts in the minds of many people about what seemed arbitrary or despotic in their own society. Hence, many agendas for change appeared and with them a new feeling that what had been endured in the past was no longer acceptable. “We have it in our power,” Abigail Adams warned her husband, “not only to free ourselves but to subdue our masters, and without violence throw both your natural and legal authority at our feet.”

If not challenging “arbitrary power” as directly as Abigail, women in all parts of the rebelling colonies played important public roles in the Revolution that gave them greater legitimacy than as dependents of fathers, husbands, and brothers. Once war was under-

Amidst the distress and sufferings of the Army, whatever sources they have arisen, it must be a consolation to our Virtuous Country Women that they have never been accused of withholding their most zealous efforts to support the cause we are engaged in...

—George Washington to Sarah Bache, daughter of Benjamin Franklin, 1781. Bache led an association of women who purchased dry goods with their own money and sewed shirts for soldiers.



Politics pervaded the life of Mercy Otis Warren—her brother James Otis and husband James were active patriots. Shown here in John Singleton Copley's 1763 portrait, she needed little prompting to contribute her own literary talents to revolution. In 1772, she wrote *The Adulateur*, a satirical play targeting Governor Thomas Hutchinson. Her *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution*, published in 1805, consisted of three volumes and over 1,300 pages.



way, women provided indispensable services. Some women became spies—on both sides of the Revolution. By night, Lydia Darragh served evening meals to British officers occupying Philadelphia in 1777-1778; by day, she smuggled messages sewed into the linings of her pockets. What she overheard as the British discussed their spring campaign plans over dinner reached General Washington at Whitemarsh.

Many more women—as many as 20,000 according to one careful estimate—traveled with the armies, cooking, laundering, nursing, and comforting the men. Some even accompanied their husbands into battle, loading guns and attending the wounded. Sometimes acting as informal commissaries, they scoured the countryside for food and clothes. In the winter of 1777-1778, Mary Frazier, as her granddaughter later recounted, “day after day collected from neighbors and friends far and near, whatever they could spare for the comfort of the destitute soldiers the blankets, and yarn and half worn clothing thus obtained she brought to her own house, where they would be patched and darned and made wearable and comfortable ... She often sat up half the night, sometimes all, to get clothing ready. Then with it, and whatever could be obtained for food, she would have packed on her horse and set out on her cold lonely journey to the camp—which she went to repeatedly during the winter.” At the climactic battle at Yorktown, Sarah Osborn cooked for the American troops and brought them food under fire because, as she remarked to Washington, “it would not do for the men to fight and starve too.”

Off the battlefield, women like Abigail Adams helped redesign the political culture of a democratizing society. They encouraged—often shamed—men to go into battle in the interest of the state. Abigail Adams's friend Mercy Otis Warren and other women wrote plays to whip up patriotism. They were even more in the public eye when they took to the streets to enforce

*We may destroy
all the men in
America, and we
shall still have all
we can do to defeat
the women.*

—Lord Cornwallis



By 1854, when Dennis Malone Carter painted *Molly Pitcher at the Battle of Monmouth* (above), revolutionary legends were common. By then, “Molly Pitcher” referred to women like Mary Hayes McCauley, Mary Ludwig, and Margaret Corbin who carried water for swabbing cannon, and replaced wounded husbands in battle.



Margaret Kemble Gage (above) may have lived a double life. Born in New Jersey, she married General Thomas Gage. Rumors suggested that Margaret warned of the British raids planned for Lexington and Concord. True or not, Gage removed any temptation by sending his wife to England.

ethical conduct in the marketplace. The prolonged clash of arms led to food shortages, depreciated currency, and unscrupulous attempts to withhold goods while waiting for prices to rise or even corner the market in commodities such as coffee and sugar. Time after time, women in the cities and small towns descended on grasping retailers to regulate market prices that had gone awry. In one case, in September 1777, a crowd of women seized monopolizers and price gougers in Boston and carted them out of the city. Two months later, about 60 women and a handful of men seized the sugar of a merchant in nearby Beverley, forced other merchants to surrender their sugar, and put a woman shopkeeper in charge of selling the sugar at a reasonable price. Women became arbiters of what was fair, what was patriotic, and what was necessary to serve the needs of the whole community.

After the war, women carved out new roles for themselves in shaping the republic. If “our principles, opinions, and manners” had to be changed to fit “the forms of government we have adopted,” as Benjamin Rush put it, women were vital in nurturing an understanding that every adult—both women and men—had to play a part in shaping a society of educated, thoughtful, involved citizens. Precisely for these reasons, female academies began to spring up as the idea spread that the “daughters of liberty” could not serve the new nation without an expansive outlook and the ability to read, write, think, and reason.

Revolutionary Reform from Below

“Can America be happy under a government of her own?” Thomas Paine wrote in answering an attack on *Common Sense*. “As happy as she please; she hath a blank sheet to write upon.” In these two, pithy sentences Paine captured the under-noticed side of the American Revolution—the struggle the patriots faced in remaking America after renouncing the English charters and laws under which they had functioned. Under what kind of laws, political arrangements, and constitutionally protected liberties did they wish to live? By what means should they create new state governments? Would everyone enjoy the unalienable rights expressed in the Declaration of Independence? If the slate had been wiped clean, who

was entitled to put new words on the slate and how would people with different agendas for the future resolve their differences? These questions, faced in each of the 13 states, brought forth a torrent of reformist ideas. Some would be implemented, others defeated, and others deferred.

Our historical sites are so focused on the War for Independence that they give visitors little sense of the wave of reform that swept America even while the battle against England wore on. It does no discredit to the magnificent work of the Founders to point out that some of the most advanced reformist ideas came from the lower strata of American society. On farms, on seaport docks, in taverns, and on streets, ordinary Americans were not only indispensable to the success of any reform movement but in many cases were the cutting edge of reform ideas.

Of all the reform notions, the mightiest was that of the capability of the ordinary man to be an active political player, both as voter and officeholder. Way before the “Age of the Common Man,” usually associated with the Jacksonian politics of the 1820s and 1830s, urban craftsmen and country farmers abandoned deference to upper-class merchants, lawyers, and planters. They played a central role in forging a non-importation agreement in 1768, calling public meetings, publishing newspaper appeals, organizing secondary boycotts against foot-dragging merchants, and ferreting out and tarring and feathering opponents. Cautious merchants in Philadelphia, for example, complained that mere artisans had “no right to give their sentiments respecting an importation” and called the craftsmen a “rabble.” But artisans forged ahead, soon filling elected municipal positions and insisting on their right to participate equally with their social superiors in nominating assemblymen and other important officeholders.

As agitation against English policy intensified in the 1770s, the power of people in the lower orders frightened many upper-class leaders. Losing control of the protests they had initially led, many abandoned the resistance movement against Britain. Non-privileged members of colonial society also began lobbying for reform laws. Led by new radical leaders, they demanded internal reforms: opening up opportunity; curbing the

*I see with trembling,
that if disputes
continue with
Britain, we shall
be under the
domination of
a riotous mob.
It is to our interest,
therefore, to seek
a reunion with
the parent state.*

—Gouverneur Morris, 1770

That share of common sense, which the Almighty has bountifully distributed amongst mankind in general is sufficient to quicken everyone's feeling, and enable him to judge rightly, what advantages he is likely to enjoy or be deprived of, under any constitution proposed to him.

—Committee of Mechanics,
New York City

accumulation of wealth by merchants; abolishing the property requirement for voting; allowing militiamen to elect their officers; and imposing stiff fines on men who refused militia service to be used for the support of the families of poor militiamen. Although Philadelphia's reformers never controlled the city, they always jostled for position with prosperous artisans and shopkeepers of more moderate views and with cautious lawyers and merchants. And mobilization of artisans, laborers, and mariners in Philadelphia and other cities became part of the chain of events that led toward independence.

After the Declaration of Independence, states had to fashion constitutions to live under. This is where radicals of no conspicuous standing made their greatest contributions to a more democratically designed system of self-government. In some states, constitution writing was confined to upper-class representatives who wrote conservative constitutions that mimicked the old colonial order. But in states such as Pennsylvania and Vermont, notions that may not seem radical today but were decidedly radical then took hold. Most important was severing the vote from property ownership. Almost everywhere, "the people" began to think of themselves as the only source of authority for constructing fundamental law. But for the elite, "the people" really meant those "with a stake in society," a way of saying that those without a certain amount of property were not entitled to vote or hold office. In Pennsylvania and Vermont, however, citizenship required no property ownership at all. "The great secret of government," wrote the humble men of one Massachusetts town, "is governing by all." From this basic proposition of universal male suffrage followed the idea that men of humble status and limited education were just as capable of becoming wise legislators as the well-born, wealthy, and educated.

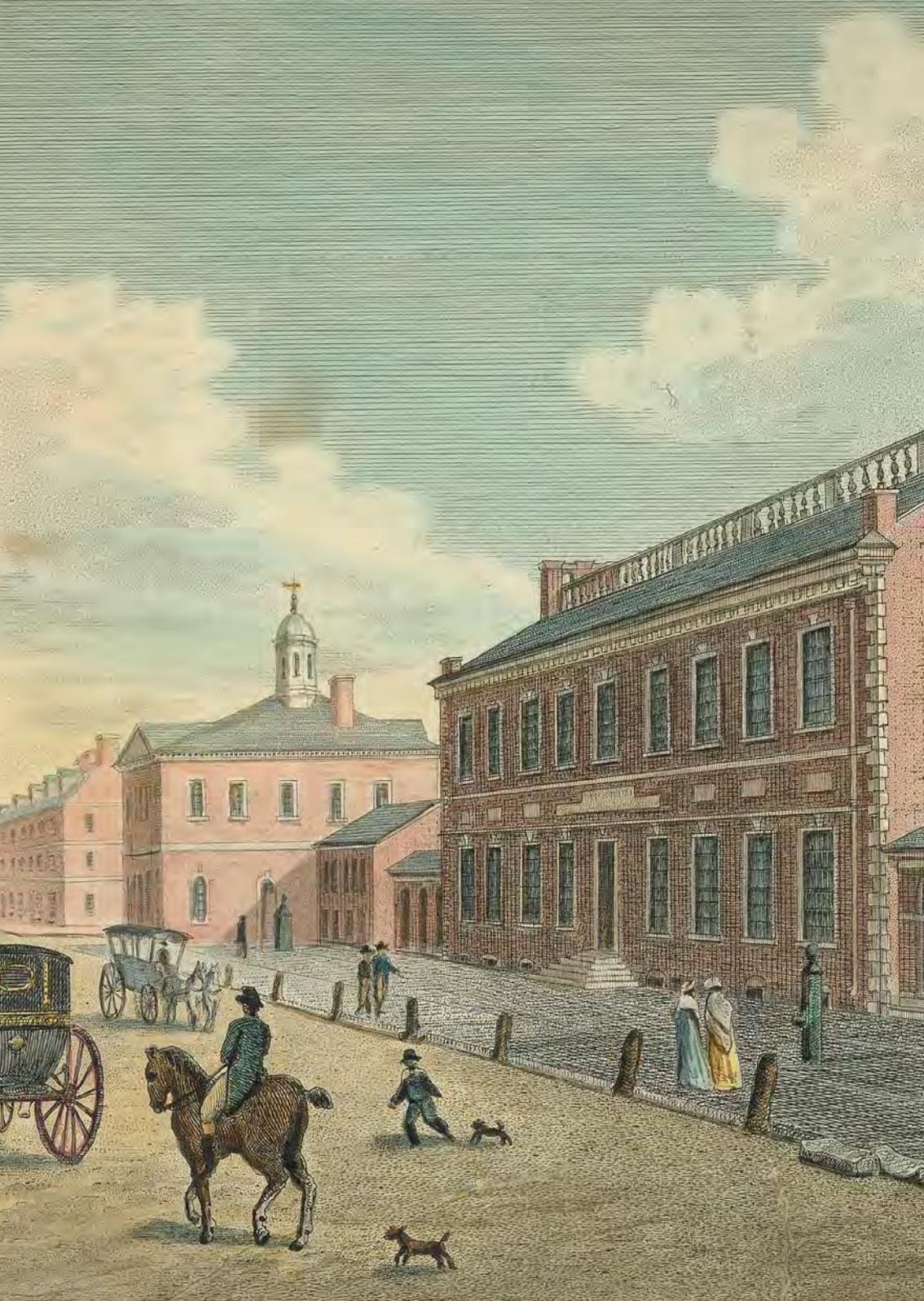
This principle also applied to the notion of the people's right to examine a constitution drafted by their delegates and approve it before it became the law. The Committee of Mechanics in New York City argued that if every working man was not capable of writing a constitution, every citizen could judge one and ought to be consulted in a general referendum. "That share of common sense, which the Almighty has bountifully distributed amongst mankind in general," they reasoned,

"is sufficient to quicken everyone's feeling, and enable him to judge rightly, what advantages he is likely to enjoy or be deprived of, under any constitution proposed to him." In Maryland, "Watchman" wrote in the press that "every poor man has a life, a personal liberty, and a right to his earnings, and is in danger of being injured by government in a variety of ways" and therefore "should enjoy the right of voting for representatives to be protectors of their lives, personal liberty, and their little property, which, though small, is yet, upon the whole, a very great object to them."

A host of political reforms flowed from this expansion of the politically relevant part of the community. Several states installed a unicameral legislature unfettered by a governor armed with veto power over legislative acts. The legislative chambers were thrown open to the public, and the proceedings and votes of legislatures were published so the public would know exactly what they were doing. Annual elections in most states kept the elected representatives close to their constituents' interests. Bans against holding office in more than one branch of government were another innovation. Term limits prevented an entrenched set of politicians, even if the public kept voting them back into office.

Other reforms of the revolutionary era deeply concerned ordinary Americans and became tests of the Revolution's success in accomplishing what Tom Paine predicted: "We have it in our power to begin the world over again... The birthday of a new world is at hand." Among the tests of this new world for people of middling and lower status were abolishing imprisonment for debt, the creation of tax-supported public schools, the phasing out of indentured servitude, the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, the right of labor to bargain for fair wages and working conditions, tax reform to end the patently unequal poll tax system, and passage of laws making divorce less restrictive. Not all of these reforms were accomplished in the Revolutionary era. Some, such as women's suffrage and the abolition of slavery, took generations to complete. But all of them became part of an agenda to be pursued.

“Discover, Uncover, Rediscover, and Recover”



Individuals, groups, and nations preserve the life stories of some and forget many others. Historian John Hope Franklin bluntly states that “history reflects the interests, predilections, and even prejudices of a given generation.”

National park sites prove that point; as a public agency, the NPS is influenced by “interests” and “predilections.” Those who leave the most intriguing record receive attention. Not only have the letters that Abigail Adams wrote to husband John been preserved, they also are fascinating to read. The literate and artistic have an advantage. Written documents received wider circulation than oral tradition. Charles Willson Peale’s portraits, painted to show famous Americans of his day, are a treasure, but nearly all are white men.

Recognizing these “prejudices,” national parks still can broaden perspective by viewing history not as a canon of facts but as a process, “a relentless struggle to discover, uncover, rediscover, and recover” aspects of the past “that have been swept from public consciousness.” [NPS Cultural Heritage Needs Assessment, 2004]

For example, Castillo de San Marcos adds the Spanish colonial experience to the British. The frontier settlement of Ninety Six figures into the Revolutionary War narrative twice, but beyond those days of combat the town flourished for decades as a center of trade and seat of colonial justice. European and American Indian cultures intermingled at Fort Stanwix; built on the site of the Great Carry—a portage linking waterways—Fort Stanwix is more about complex intercultural negotiations, motivations, and survival than famous generals. Revolutionary-era sites in New Jersey reveal the impact of civil war on ordinary people. Tradesmen, workers, and sailors swelled town meetings at Faneuil Hall, and Philadelphia’s master builders offered Carpenters’ Hall to the First Continental Congress. Visitors who walk Yorktown’s streets discover the unexpected—the pottery factory of Virginia’s “poor potter.”



“Uncover” the histories of everyday, forgotten people at:

- [Boston National Historical Park](#)
- [Independence National Historical Park](#)
- [Morristown National Historical Park](#)
- [Fort Stanwix National Monument](#)
- [Thaddeus Kosciuszko National Memorial](#)
- [Castillo de San Marcos National Monument](#)
- [Charles Pinckney National Historic Site](#)
- [George Rogers Clark National Historical Park](#)
- [Ninety Six National Historic Site](#)
- [William Floyd’s estate \(Fire Island National Seashore\)](#)
- [Crossroads of the American Revolution National Heritage Area](#)
- [George Washington Birthplace National Monument](#)
- [Yorktown \(Colonial National Historical Park\)](#)
- [Valley Forge National Historical Park](#)
- [Arkansas Post National Memorial](#)
- [Salem Maritime National Historic Site](#)

The Revolution's Legacy

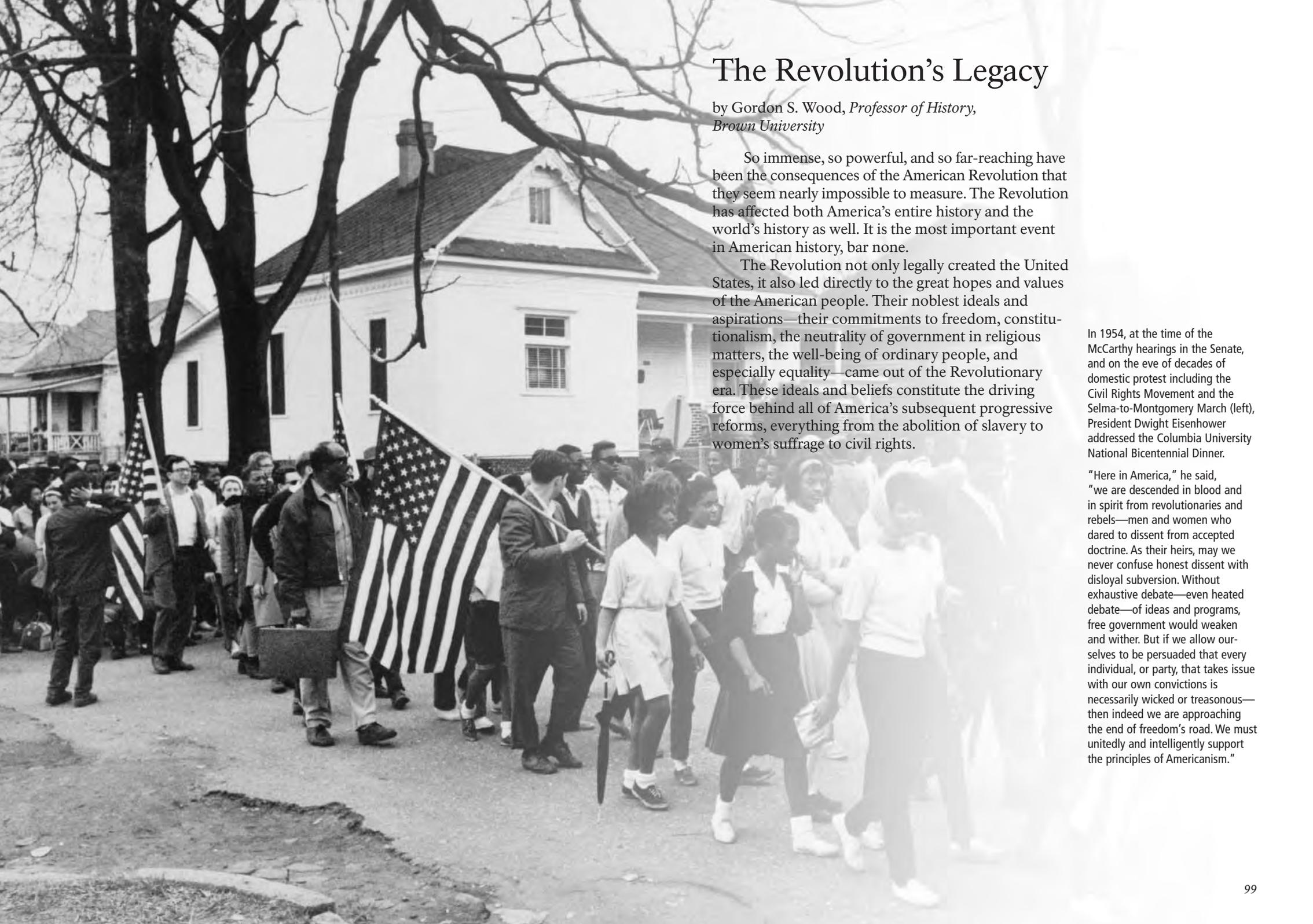
by Gordon S. Wood, *Professor of History,
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So immense, so powerful, and so far-reaching have been the consequences of the American Revolution that they seem nearly impossible to measure. The Revolution has affected both America's entire history and the world's history as well. It is the most important event in American history, bar none.

The Revolution not only legally created the United States, it also led directly to the great hopes and values of the American people. Their noblest ideals and aspirations—their commitments to freedom, constitutionalism, the neutrality of government in religious matters, the well-being of ordinary people, and especially equality—came out of the Revolutionary era. These ideals and beliefs constitute the driving force behind all of America's subsequent progressive reforms, everything from the abolition of slavery to women's suffrage to civil rights.

In 1954, at the time of the McCarthy hearings in the Senate, and on the eve of decades of domestic protest including the Civil Rights Movement and the Selma-to-Montgomery March (left), President Dwight Eisenhower addressed the Columbia University National Bicentennial Dinner.

"Here in America," he said, "we are descended in blood and in spirit from revolutionaries and rebels—men and women who dared to dissent from accepted doctrine. As their heirs, may we never confuse honest dissent with disloyal subversion. Without exhaustive debate—even heated debate—of ideas and programs, free government would weaken and wither. But if we allow ourselves to be persuaded that every individual, or party, that takes issue with our own convictions is necessarily wicked or treasonous—then indeed we are approaching the end of freedom's road. We must unitedly and intelligently support the principles of Americanism."



“Moved to a New Resolve”

The story of the United States is not a simple, linear tale. Rather, the trajectory of American liberty has been uneven, and for many, inequitable. While not a perfect reflection of this complex history, national parks reflect the on-going struggle to achieve the Revolution’s promise.

Since several founders owned enslaved Africans, national parks that commemorate the lives of founders—George Washington, Thomas Stone, and Charles Pinckney, for example—and many antebellum and Civil War sites explore the contradiction between revolutionary ideals and slavery.

The long-term impact of the Revolution is evident in the stories of many other sites. In 1863, just months after the Emancipation Proclamation, President Lincoln spoke at the Soldier’s National Cemetery at Gettysburg. His two-minute speech reminded listeners that the U.S. was “conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal,” a clear reference to the Declaration of Independence. Similarly, visitors to Seneca Falls, New York, discover that delegates at the Women’s Rights Convention symbolically modeled their Declaration of Sentiments on the Declaration. And, on August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. used his “I Have a Dream” speech at the Lincoln Memorial to explain that “When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.”

In addition to civil rights, the preservation of civil liberties is fundamental to American freedom. Debates about freedom of expression versus national security have a long history that includes the Alien and Sedition Acts passed when Congress met in Congress Hall in Philadelphia. The internment camp at Manzanar recalls the treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II. U.S. troops attacked and massacred Cheyenne and Arapaho women, children, and elderly at Sand Creek, Colorado in 1864.

Historian John Hope Franklin, explained the importance of sites like these. “The places that commemorate sad history are not places in which we...wallow in remorse,” he said “but instead places in which we may be moved to a new resolve, to be better citizens.”

As Thomas Paine predicted, the ideals espoused by the revolutionary generation were “not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest.” Challenges to realization of the revolutionary vision remain, as evident at these national parks and many others:

[Statue of Liberty National Monument](#)

[African Burial Ground National Historic Site](#)

[Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site](#)

[Frederick Douglass National Historic Site](#)

[Lowell National Historical Park](#)

[Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site](#)

[Trail of Tears National Historic Trail](#)

[George Washington Birthplace National Monument](#)

[Thomas Stone National Historic Site](#)

[Charles Pinckney National Historic Site](#)

[Gettysburg National Military Park](#)

[Independence National Historical Park](#)

[Women’s Rights National Historical Park](#)

[Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site](#)

[Lincoln Memorial National Memorial](#)

[Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site](#)

[Manzanar National Historic Site](#)

[Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site](#)

[Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail](#)



“O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
America will be!”

Martin Luther King, Jr. (his Atlanta birth home, shown here) criticized the Vietnam War by quoting “Let America Be America Again” by Langston Hughes.

On November 9, 1989, the BBC reported, "The Berlin Wall has been breached (below) after nearly three decades keeping East and West Berliners apart. At midnight, East Germany's Communist rulers gave permission for gates along the wall to be opened after hundreds of people converged on crossing points.... Ecstatic crowds immediately began to clamber on top of the wall and hack large chunks out of the 28-mile...barrier."



Moreover, these beliefs and values made, and still make, the United States a nation. To be an American is not to be somebody, but to believe in something. That is why the United States has always been particularly receptive to immigrants. People from every part of the world have come to America and become American citizens simply by subscribing to these beliefs and aspirations. These common ideals and values are what hold Americans together. Without them the United States, composed of so many different races, religions, and ethnicities, might very well fall apart. When there was a fundamental disagreement over these ideals and values in the middle of the 19th century, the United States did, in fact, fracture in a bloody civil war. Only President Abraham Lincoln's steadfast belief that the United States was a grand experiment in self-government and the last best hope for democracy in the world brought the nation through the crisis.

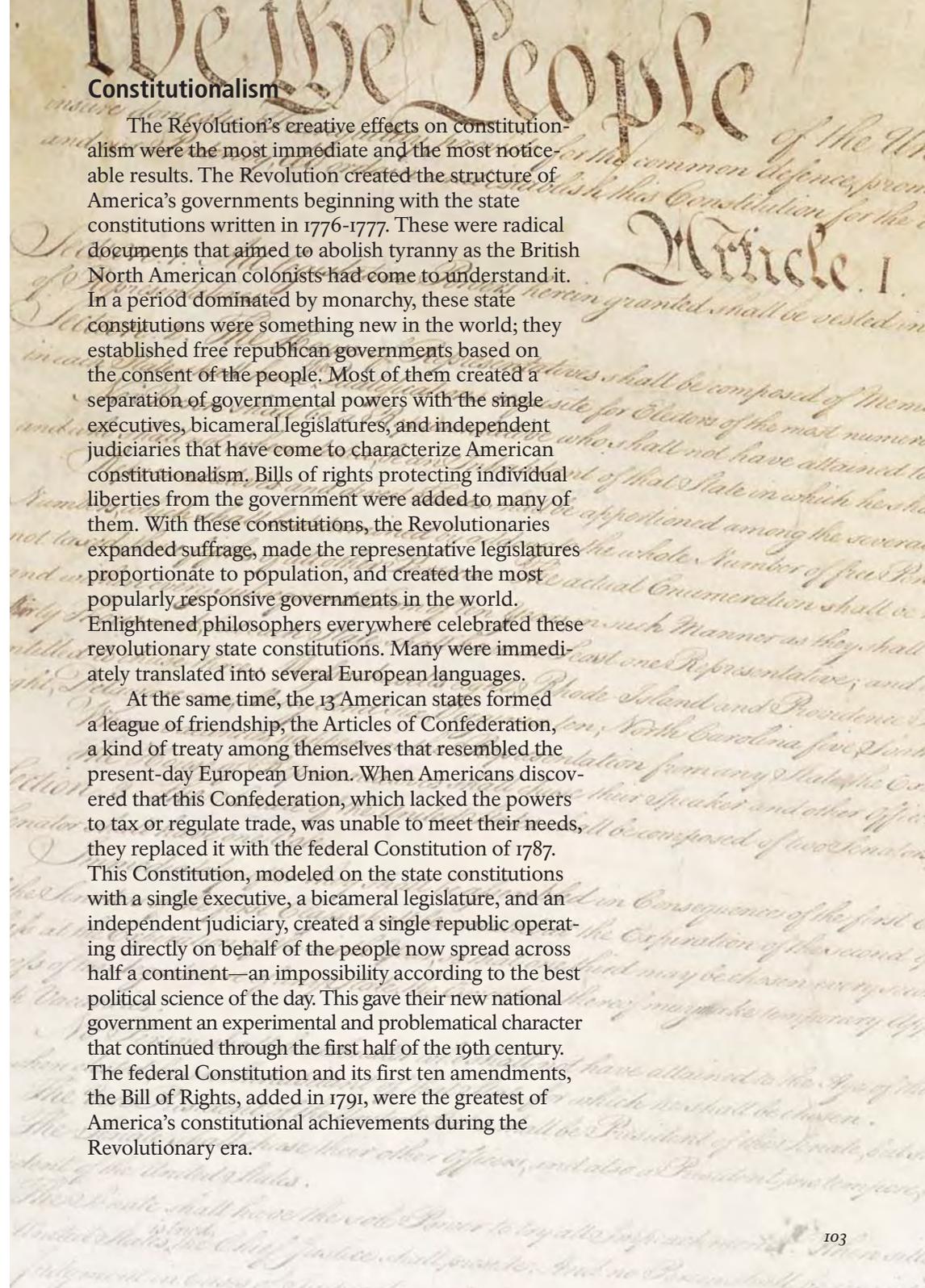
As Lincoln suggested, the American Revolution may not be just the most important event in American history. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the discrediting of Communism, and the emergence of the United States as the most powerful nation the world has ever seen, the American Revolution may also have become the most important event in modern world history.



Constitutionalism

The Revolution's creative effects on constitutionalism were the most immediate and the most noticeable results. The Revolution created the structure of America's governments beginning with the state constitutions written in 1776-1777. These were radical documents that aimed to abolish tyranny as the British North American colonists had come to understand it. In a period dominated by monarchy, these state constitutions were something new in the world; they established free republican governments based on the consent of the people. Most of them created a separation of governmental powers with the single executives, bicameral legislatures, and independent judiciaries that have come to characterize American constitutionalism. Bills of rights protecting individual liberties from the government were added to many of them. With these constitutions, the Revolutionaries expanded suffrage, made the representative legislatures proportionate to population, and created the most popularly responsive governments in the world. Enlightened philosophers everywhere celebrated these revolutionary state constitutions. Many were immediately translated into several European languages.

At the same time, the 13 American states formed a league of friendship, the Articles of Confederation, a kind of treaty among themselves that resembled the present-day European Union. When Americans discovered that this Confederation, which lacked the powers to tax or regulate trade, was unable to meet their needs, they replaced it with the federal Constitution of 1787. This Constitution, modeled on the state constitutions with a single executive, a bicameral legislature, and an independent judiciary, created a single republic operating directly on behalf of the people now spread across half a continent—an impossibility according to the best political science of the day. This gave their new national government an experimental and problematical character that continued through the first half of the 19th century. The federal Constitution and its first ten amendments, the Bill of Rights, added in 1791, were the greatest of America's constitutional achievements during the Revolutionary era.



The purpose of a written constitution is to bind up the several branches of government by certain laws, which, when they transgress, their acts shall become nullities; to render unnecessary an appeal to the people, or in other words a rebellion, on every infraction of their rights, on the peril that their acquiescence shall be construed into an intention to surrender those rights.

—Thomas Jefferson, 1782

Although most nations in the world have not followed the American pattern of separating the powers of the legislature from the executive and creating complicated checks and balances, they nevertheless have been profoundly affected by America's constitution-making experience.

First of all, the Americans established the modern idea of a written constitution, a written document that is both a blueprint for government and a limitation on that government. Written constitutions had existed before in Western history, but the Americans in the Revolutionary era did something new. They made written constitutions a practical and everyday part of governmental life. They showed the world not only how written constitutions could be made truly fundamental, distinguishable from ordinary legislation, but also how such constitutions could be interpreted on a regular basis and altered when necessary. Moreover, they offered the world concrete and usable governmental institutions for carrying out these constitutional tasks. All in all, these were extraordinary achievements, scarcely duplicated by any other nation in such a brief period of time.

Before the Revolution, a constitution was rarely ever distinguished from the government and its operations. Traditionally, in English culture, a constitution referred both to the way the government was put together or constituted and to the fundamental rights the government was supposed to protect. The 18th-century English constitution was an unwritten mixture of laws, customs, principles, and institutions.

By the end of the Revolutionary era, however, the Americans' idea of a constitution seems to be no part of the government at all. It was a written document distinct from and superior to all the operations of government. A constitution was, as Thomas Paine said in 1791, "a thing antecedent to a government; and a government is only the creature of a constitution." And, Paine said, it was "not a thing in name only; but in fact." For Americans, a constitution was something written, possessed by every family, and carried about like the Bible to be quoted and cited article by article. Such a constitution could never be an act of the legislature; it had to be the act of the people themselves, declared James Wilson in 1790. Wilson, one of the

principal framers of the Constitution of 1787, added, "in their hands it is clay in the hands of a potter; they have the right to mould, to preserve, to improve, to refine, and to furnish it as they please."

Although 18th-century Englishmen, like the writer Arthur Young, scornfully dismissed the American definition of a constitution as if it "were a pudding made from a recipe," it was the American idea of a constitution as a written document separated from government that carried the day and has lasted into our own time. When people today talk about forming a new constitution for their nation they instinctively think of a written constitution.

In 1776, when Americans made constitutions for their newly independent states, they naturally sought to make them fundamental and explicitly wrote them out in documents. It was one thing, however, to define the constitution as fundamental law, different from ordinary legislation and circumscribing the institutions of government; it was quite another to make such a distinction effective. In the years following the Declaration of Independence, Americans struggled with this problem of distinguishing fundamental from statutory law, and none did so more persistently than Thomas Jefferson. In 1779, Jefferson knew from experience that no legislature "elected by the people for the ordinary purposes of legislation only" could restrain the acts of succeeding legislatures. Thus he realized that to declare his great act for Establishing Religious Freedom in Virginia to be "irrevocable would be of no effect in law; yet we are free," he wrote into his bill, that "if any act shall be hereafter passed to repeal the present [act] or to narrow its operation, such act will be an infringement of natural right."

Eventually enacted by the Virginia legislature in 1786, Jefferson's bill contributed to one of the greatest of America's constitutional achievements—the separation of church and state. Nowhere else in Christendom did religion become so free of government, and yet nowhere else did religion flourish as it did in early 19th-century evangelical America. Other enlightened states in the 19th century developed high degrees of religious toleration, but only the United States neutralized the role of government in religion, creating true religious freedom that was eventually protected by the first of the Bill of Rights.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

—Amendment 1 Ratified and added to the U.S. Constitution, 1791

*Here is the limit of
your authority;
and hither shall
you go, but no
further.*

—George Wythe, 1782

Still, the problem of distinguishing fundamental law from statutory law raised by Jefferson was not easily solved, and he and other leaders continued to seek some means of making constitutional principles superior to ordinary legislation. To make the constitution truly fundamental and immune from legislative tampering, it would have to be created, as Jefferson put it, “by a power superior to that to the legislature.” By the early 1780s, the answer had become clear. “To render a form of government unalterable by ordinary acts of assembly,” wrote Jefferson, “the people must delegate persons with special powers. They have accordingly chosen special conventions or congresses to form and fix their governments.”

Massachusetts had shown the way. In 1780, it had elected a convention specially designated to form a constitution and had then placed that constitution before the people for ratification. When the Philadelphia Convention drew up a new constitution for the nation in 1787, it knew what to do. It declared that the new Constitution had to be ratified by the people meeting in state conventions called for that purpose. Constitutional conventions and the process of ratification made the people themselves the actual constituent power. These devices were distinctive contributions the American Revolution made to world politics.

But the idea of special conventions to draw up or amend constitutions and the process of popular ratification of constitutions were not America’s only contributions to constitutional understanding. With the conception of a constitution as fundamental law immune from legislative encroachment more firmly in hand, some state judges during the 1780s cautiously began to impose restraints on what the assemblies were enacting as law. They told the legislatures, as George Wythe, judge of the Virginia Supreme Court, did in 1782: “Here is the limit of your authority; and hither shall you go, but no further.” These were the hesitant beginnings of what would come to be called judicial review—that remarkable practice by which judges in the ordinary courts of law have the authority to determine the constitutionality of acts of the state and federal legislatures.

The development of judicial review came slowly. It was not easy for people in the 18th century to believe

that unelected judges could set aside acts of the popularly elected legislatures; this seemed to be undemocratic usurpation of power. But, as early as 1787, James Iredell, soon to be appointed a justice of the newly created Supreme Court of the United States, saw that the new meaning Americans had given to a constitution had clarified the responsibility of judges to determine the law. A constitution in America, Iredell said, was not only “a fundamental law” but also a special, popularly created “law in writing...limiting the powers of the Legislature, and with which every exercise of those powers must necessarily be compared.” Judges were not arbiters of the constitution or usurpers of legislative power. They were, Iredell said, merely judicial officials fulfilling their duty of applying the proper law. When faced with a decision between “the fundamental unrepeatable law” made especially by the people and an ordinary statute enacted by the legislature contrary to the constitution, they must simply determine which law was superior. Judges could not avoid exercising this authority, Iredell concluded, for in America a constitution was not “a mere imaginary thing, about which ten thousand different opinions may be formed, but a written document to which all may have recourse, and to which, therefore, the judges cannot wittingly blind themselves.”

Although Iredell may have been wrong about the number of different opinions that could arise over a constitution, he was certainly right about the direction judicial authority in America would take. The way was prepared for Supreme Court Justice John Marshall’s decision in *Marbury v. Madison* in 1803 and the subsequent development of the doctrine of judicial review. With this doctrine, judges in America came to exercise an extraordinary power over governmental life. It is the kind of judicial power that is now being copied by many judiciaries everywhere in the world.

These then were the great contributions to constitutionalism that Americans in the Revolutionary era made to the world: the constitution as a written document, the separation of church and state, the device of the convention for creating and amending constitutions, the process of popular ratification, and the practice of judicial review. Only by recognizing that the people had a political and even legal existence



John Marshall’s opinion in *Marbury v. Madison* argued, “If then the courts are to regard the constitution; and the constitution is superior to any ordinary act of the legislature; the constitution, and not such ordinary act, must govern the case to which they both apply.”

outside of all the institutions of government were Americans able to create these constitutional institutions and practices. No institution of government, even all of them put together, could completely embody the sovereign people of America in the way the House of Commons embodied the British people.

By thinking of the people in this way, the Americans were able to conceive of federalism, that is, the remarkable division of power between central and provincial governments. By creating two legislatures with different powers operating over the same territory—the Congress and the separate state legislature—the Americans offered the world a new way of organizing government. In the 19th century, libertarian reformers everywhere in Europe and Latin America, struggling to put together central governments in the face of strong local loyalties, appealed to the American example of federalism. German reformers in 1848 cited the American example in their efforts to build a confederation, and liberal reformers in Switzerland called the United States Constitution “a model and a pattern for the organization of the public life of republics in general, in which the whole and parts shall both be free and equal...The problem,” they said, with more enthusiasm than accuracy, given America’s growing federal crisis that resulted in the Civil War, “has been solved by the new world for all peoples, states and countries.”

A Belief in Equality

American constitutionalism is not the only important legacy of the Revolution. The Declaration of Independence, with its statement that “all men are created equal,” probably has had a greater impact on America and the world than America’s constitutional system. Ho Chi Minh invoked those very words in the 1945 declaration of independence that he wrote for the Republic of Vietnam.

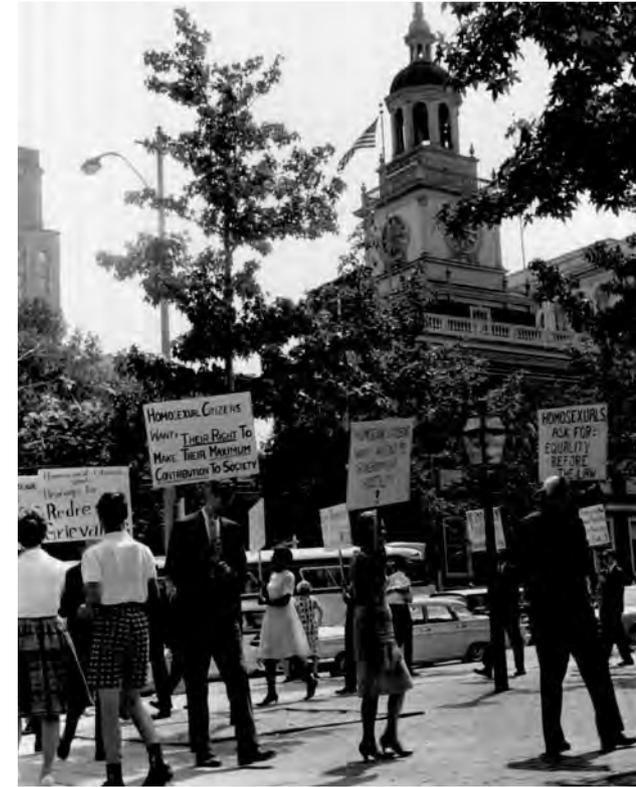
For Americans themselves the idea of equality was certainly the most radical and powerful force let loose in the Revolution, and it was much more radical and powerful than Thomas Jefferson or any of the founders realized. Once invoked, the idea of equality could not be stopped, and it tore through American society and culture with awesome force. It became

what Herman Melville, author of *Moby Dick*, called “the great God absolute!” The “Spirit of Equality,” Melville said, spread a “mantle of humanity” over all Americans and brought “democratic dignity” to even “the arm that wields a pick or drives a spike.”

Southerners and would-be aristocrats in the North vainly tried to argue that Jefferson could never have meant that all men were literally equal and that they all had equal rights. But that was precisely what most Americans, at least in the North, came to believe; and some came to say not just white men but black men had these equal rights; and some eventually went so far as to say that not just men but women had these rights. The anti-slavery movement and the women’s convention at Seneca Falls in 1848 were the consequence of this American commitment to equality.

Within decades following the Declaration of Independence, the United States became the most egalitarian nation in the history of the world. Indeed, the desire for equality continues to drive most of America’s current public debates—whether over affirmative action, gay rights, or the role of women.

Jefferson and the other Revolutionary leaders made much of equality, but they did not mean by equality a leveling of their society. They thought of equality primarily as equality of opportunity. They wanted positions of leadership determined by talent and merit, not by lineage or social position. They wanted what Jefferson called a natural, not an artificial, aristocracy, and they concocted three-tiered systems of public education in order to recruit talented leaders from society. They thought that making merit the criterion of leadership would lead to a circulation of elites, and no traditional aristocracy would have time to harden and perpetuate itself.



Icons of the American Revolution often serve as meaningful backdrops for protesters seeking redress. In 1965, the Mattachine Society (above), seeking equality for the homosexual community, chose Independence Hall.

The history of the past is but one long struggle upward to equality.

—Elizabeth Cady Stanton



Elizabeth Cady Stanton (above) remained married for 47 years. Nonetheless, she felt that “(t)he custom of calling women Mrs. John This and Mrs. Tom That and colored men Sambo and Zip Coon, is founded on the principle that white men are lords of all.”

In the end, the concept of equality meant more to the founders than equality of opportunity. Indeed, if equality had meant only equality of opportunity or even a rough equality of property holding, it could never have become, as it has, the single most powerful and radical ideological force in American history. Equality became so potent for Americans because it came to mean that everyone was really the same as everyone else, not just at birth, not in talent or property or wealth, and not just in some transcendental religious sense of the equality of all souls. Jefferson and many of the other founders came to conclude that all humans were basically alike, that they all partook of the same common nature. They believed that there was something in each human being, some sort of moral sense or sympathetic instinct, which made possible natural compassion and affection. Even the lowliest of persons, they assumed, had this sense of sympathy for others and the capacity to tell right from wrong. “State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor,” said Jefferson; “the former will decide it as well, and often better, than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules.”

This belief in the equal moral worth of every individual was the real source of America’s democratic equality, an equality that was far more potent than merely the idea that everyone started at birth with the same blank slate. Ordinary Americans came to believe that no one in a basic down-to-earth and day-in and day-out manner was really better than anyone else. They came to have a sense of self-worth and dignity that allowed them, regardless of their lack of wealth or education, to look others in the eye and treat them as equals and to expect to be treated as equals in return.

The Revolutionaries’ idea of equality was very permissive, and those who invoked it had little inkling of the lengths to which it could or would be carried. Equality immediately rendered suspect all kinds of distinctions, whether naturally derived or not. In a free and independent republic, it was said in the 1780s, “the idea of equality breathes through the whole and every individual feels ambitious to be in a situation not inferior to his neighbour.” Among Americans, “the idea of inferiority, as of pursuing a mean employment or occupation...mortifies the feelings, and sours the

minds of those who feel themselves inferior.” Consequently, everyone strives to be equal with those above him, “in dress, if in nothing else.” A society that had no place for inferiorities of occupation and dress was an unusual society indeed. This was drawing out the idea of equality faster and further than any of the founders had expected.

Under these circumstances “aristocracy,” natural as well as artificial, quickly became a pejorative term, at least in the North, and many of those who wished for a political career had to appear as plain and as straightforward as the people who voted for them. Politicians played down their college educations and claimed that they were just ordinary folk born in log cabins. White servants refused to call their employers “master;” for many the term “boss,” derived from the Dutch word for master, became a euphemistic substitute. The servants themselves would not be called anything but “help.”

By the early 19th century, there were greater disparities of wealth in American society than had existed in the colonial period. Yet the society felt more equal and lauded itself for its egalitarianism—a paradox that has puzzled more than one historian. With “the disappearance or diminution” in America of nearly all the traditional aristocratic distinctions, as Alexis de Tocqueville noted in the 1830s, there was “hardly anything left but money” to separate one person from another. For many Americans in the new democratic society, the ability to make money had become the sole and only proper means for distinguishing one person from another. Catherine Sedgwick spoke for all the old aristocracy when she observed of the emerging 19th-century entrepreneurial hierarchy: “Wealth, you know, is the grand leveling principle.”

Leader of the Free World

All these consequences alone make the American Revolution one of the great revolutions of world history. But perhaps the most important legacy of the Revolution is the way in which it has affected America’s conception of its role in the world, a conception that still seems to have resonance today. The Revolutionary War began on April 19, 1775, with, as Emerson put it in the mid-19th century, a “shot

heard round the world.” That, in fact, was how the Revolutionaries and sympathetic foreigners saw the Revolution: as an event of worldwide significance. For the people of America—numbering only two and one-half million huddled along a narrow strip of the Atlantic coast, three thousand miles from the centers of civilization—to claim that their little colonial rebellion possessed universal importance was the height of audacity. Yet the Revolutionaries and their heirs in the 19th century sincerely believed that they were bringing liberty and republicanism not only to America but also to the rest of the world. America’s conception of itself as the leader of the free world began in 1776.

Americans launched their Revolution with very high hopes that other peoples would follow their lead, throw off monarchies, and become republics. Naturally, at first, they saw the French Revolution of 1789 as a copy of their own Revolution, and they welcomed the effort. But its rapid perversion and excesses, ending in Napoleonic despotism, disillusioned many Americans about the ability of other peoples to emulate them in becoming republican and tempered their optimism about the future.

These doubts soon played into American attitudes toward the Latin American colonial rebellions that broke out in the early decades of the 19th century. If any revolutions were emulations of the American Revolution these rebellions against Spanish imperialism certainly seemed to be. And, of course, Americans such as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson welcomed them. But at the same time they were skeptical of the South Americans’ ability to create free republican governments. “I feared from the beginning,” Jefferson wrote in 1821, “that these people were not as yet sufficiently enlightened for self-government; and that after wading through blood and slaughter, they would end in military tyrannies, more or less numerous.”

Thus Americans from the outset had an ambiguous attitude toward republican revolutions in other parts of the world. Naturally there was no hostility, only sympathy and enthusiasm mixed with a kind of patronizing pessimism bred of an anxiety that other peoples would not have the social and moral qualities necessary to carry through successful republican

revolutions. Nevertheless, Americans continued to believe that they, and not the French, were the center of the international revolution.

Despite promising not to intervene in Europe’s internal affairs and expressing a desire to have no entangling alliances with Europe, most 19th-century Americans remained very concerned with what went on there. Yet they were reluctant to get directly involved in any revolutionary ventures that might endanger their own republican experiment. Believing that people who were ready for republicanism would sooner or later become republicans as they had, Americans concluded that they could best accomplish their mission of bringing free governments to the rest of the world simply by existing as a free government, by being an exemplar to the world.

So Americans watched and encouraged all the 19th-century revolutions. They did not intervene in deed, but they did in every other way. Individuals raised money for the rebels and some went off to fight on behalf of revolutionary movements. In all the European revolutions of the century—the Greek revolt of 1821, the French constitutional transformation of 1830, the general European insurrections of 1848, and the overthrow of the Second French Empire and the establishment of the Third French Republic in 1870—the United States was usually the first nation to extend diplomatic recognition to new revolutionary regimes.

After all, in the Americans’ eyes these European revolutions were simply efforts by oppressed peoples to become like them, all species of the same revolutionary genus *Americanus*. At first, Americans were unthreatened by these revolutions and had no fear whatsoever of the spread of revolutionary ideas—except the successful African slave rebellion that occurred in Haiti in 1804; the United States did not recognize the Haitian republic, the first free black republic of its kind, until the Civil War. But Americans welcomed all the others and toasted revolutionary patriots, like the Hungarian Louis Kossuth in 1852, when they came to America in search of money and support.

Naturally this encouragement of revolution did not endear us to the European monarchies, but 19th-century Americans were proud of their example and

The right of revolution is an inherent one. When people are oppressed by their government, it is a natural right they enjoy to relieve themselves of oppression, if they are strong enough, whether by withdrawal from it, or by overthrowing it and substituting a government more acceptable.

—Ulysses S. Grant, 1885



A leader in the fight for independence in Latin America, Simon Bolivar (above) revealed his ambivalence toward his North American neighbor. “The United States,” he reportedly said, “seems destined by Providence to plague the American continent with misery in the name of liberty.”

simply assumed that they were the cause of all the revolutionary upheavals in Europe. When the Hapsburg monarchy protested American sympathy for the Hungarian revolution of 1848, Secretary of State Daniel Webster accepted nothing less than full American responsibility for the European uprisings. In 1870, President Ulysses S. Grant even had the audacity to congratulate the French for using “American political ideas” in overthrowing the Second Empire and establishing the Third Republic. With the Russian Revolution of 1917, however, everything changed. At first, with the March 1917 overthrow of the tsar and the formation of the Provisional Government, Americans welcomed the Russian Revolution as they had welcomed earlier anti-monarchical European revolutions. Seven days after the tsar abdicated, the United States extended diplomatic recognition to the new Russian government, the first power in the world to do so. President Woodrow Wilson now thought he had “a fit partner for a league of honor,” a league that he hoped would be a means for the worldwide extension of democracy. In May 1917, the American ambassador in Moscow wrote that he expected Russia to come out of its ordeal “as a republic, and with a government...founded on correct principles,” that is to say, principles similar to those of the American republic.



When Warren Harding delivered his State of the Union address to Congress in 1921, the government's position on the Russian Revolution had solidified. “We do not recognize the government of Russia,” he said, “nor tolerate the propaganda which emanates therefrom...”

When the Bolsheviks took over the revolution in the fall of 1917, however, all this initial enthusiasm quickly disappeared. Instead of its firmest friend, the United States suddenly became the bitterest enemy of the Russian Revolution. Instead of quickly extending diplomatic recognition to the new regime, the United States withheld diplomatic recognition from the Soviet Union for 16 years and four American presidencies, making the United States the last major Western power to recognize the revolutionary regime.

In light of America's earlier revolutionary tradition this was a remarkable turnabout—a turnabout, however, that is explicable only in terms of that earlier revolutionary tradition. The cause of the abrupt change of attitude can be found in the nature of the Bolshevik appeal, the new character of the Communist ideology. The Bolsheviks claimed not simply to be leading another anti-monarchical republican revolution in emulation of the American or French models. The

Russian Revolution was a new revolutionary genus altogether, a totally new departure in world history.

The antagonism that sprang up between the United States and the Soviet Union rested not simply on power politics or on contrasting marketing systems, but, more importantly, on the competitiveness of two very different revolutionary traditions. The Cold War really began in 1917. The Soviet Union threatened nothing less than the displacement of the United States from the vanguard of history. For the first time since 1776, Americans were faced with an alternative revolutionary ideology with universalist aspirations equal to their own. The Russians, not the Americans, now claimed to be pointing the way toward the future.

With this dramatic emergence of an opposing revolutionary ideology, Americans in the 20th century grew more and more confused about themselves and their place in history. They could not very well stand against the idea of revolution, but at the same time they could no longer be very enthusiastic about revolutions that they assumed would be Communist. America's Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union eventually culminated in its disastrous intervention in Vietnam in the 1960s. Most Americans thought they were simply following President John F. Kennedy's call in 1961 to “pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend or oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.”

Suddenly, in 1989, everything changed again. The Soviet Union collapsed, and with it collapsed its revolutionary aspirations to make the world over as Communist. But before the United States could fully enjoy its victory over this rival Soviet revolutionary ideology, it found itself, on September 11, 2001, in a new and very different war, a war against terrorism. Whether America's revolutionary tradition and its long-existing desire to make the world safe for democracy will enable it to wage this war successfully remains to be seen. But the United States still sees itself, as it did in 1776, as the leader of the free world and assumes that the democratic principles for which it stands resonate universally around the globe.

“If Men Were Angels”

“If men were angels,” wrote James Madison, “no government would be necessary...neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.” Alas since men, and women, fail to attain the moral stratosphere of Heaven, the founders adopted the dual concepts of separation of power and checks and balances. As Thomas Jefferson wrote to John Adams, “The first principle of a good government is certainly a distribution of its powers into executive, judiciary, and legislative...” Add the concept of federalism—distribution of government among federal, state, and local officials—and the U.S. Constitution begins to take shape.

The development of constitutional ideas is well illustrated at several national parks focused on individuals—John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, Charles Pinckney, and Patrick Henry—while other sites trace the application of constitutional concepts. When delegates wrote the U.S. Constitution, they met in the Assembly Room of Independence Hall. Interestingly, Congress met in this same space when it produced the first U.S. constitution, the Articles of Confederation, a document that gave considerable power to states, included no chief executive, and had only one legislative branch.

Following ratification of the Constitution, the new Congress met on the site of Federal Hall in New York. With members of Congress present, George Washington, newly elected chief executive, took his oath of office and then delivered his inaugural address to both legislative houses. Reacting to criticism of the constitution, Congress adopted and sent a bundle of amendments—the Bill of Rights—to the states for ratification.

After Congress moved to Philadelphia in 1790, the Supreme Court held its first session, George Washington rented a residence a block away, and the government set about refining how each branch would function in the unheavenly reality of American politics.



Explore the application of revolutionary ideas to government at:

- [Independence National Historical Park](#)
- [Federal Hall National Memorial](#)
- [Red Hill Patrick Henry National Memorial](#)
- [Adams National Historical Park](#)
- [Hamilton Grange National Memorial](#)

“E Pluribus Unum?”

In the national pantheon of heroes, the founders have achieved mythic proportions. Legislators and jurists routinely refer to the founders’ “intent.” The motto E Pluribus Unum—from many one—appears to ratify the idea of monolithic harmony.

Using national parks that focus on the lives of founders, visitors can test that linguist equation—E Pluribus Unum—for themselves. It’s easy to find similarities, consensus, and interlocking relationships. John Adams and Benjamin Franklin hailed from greater Boston. Thomas Stone, Charles Pinckney, and George Washington lived on plantations dependent on enslaved Africans. Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson served in Washington’s cabinet. William Floyd, Stone, Adams, and Franklin signed the Declaration of Independence. Washington and Pinckney served as officers in the army during the Revolution. Washington, Pinckney, and Hamilton attended the Constitutional Convention and played important roles in drafting the Constitution.



But what about the pluribus side? By the Revolution, the colonies already were ethnically, religiously, economically, and racially diverse. At the Battle of Kings Mountain virtually all the combatants on both sides were Americans. French settlers helped George Rogers Clark capture Fort Sackville. The Ethiopian Regiment of ex-slaves fought with the British in Virginia. While elected leaders included no women or African Americans, even this reduced sample of founders contains intriguing differences.

Hamilton was an immigrant from the West Indies. He and Thomas Jefferson squabbled continually. Franklin and Adams held radically different outlooks on personal lifestyle. Patrick Henry’s speeches electrified patriots, but he “smelt a rat” when delegates—Washington, Hamilton, and Pinckney among others—met at the Constitutional Convention. Henry and a diverse group of other Anti-Federalists vigorously opposed the Constitution. Optimistic motto aside, many wondered whether national unity or irreconcilable diversity would carry the day.

Look for both the unum and the pluribus at:

- [Benjamin Franklin National Memorial](#)
- [Red Hill Patrick Henry National Memorial](#)
- [Adams National Historical Park](#)
- [Independence National Historical Park](#)
- [Thomas Stone National Historic Site](#)
- [Hamilton Grange National Memorial](#)
- [Charles Pinckney National Historic Site](#)
- [William Floyd’s home \(part of Fire Island National Seashore\)](#)
- [Boston National Historical Park](#)
- [George Washington Birthplace National Monument](#)
- [Washington Monument](#)
- [Thomas Jefferson Memorial](#)
- [Federal Hall National Memorial](#)
- [Friendship Hill National Historic Site \(home of Albert Gallatin\)](#)
- [Roger Williams National Memorial](#)
- [Saint Paul’s Church National Historic Site](#)



Landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted had a gift. Sometimes, it seemed, he could see into the future. Calling park creation “a political duty of grave importance,” in 1864 he predicted that a national system of parks would emerge from political acts—public laws or executive orders. If alive today, Olmsted could simply survey the creation of parks highlighted in this handbook and see how the political process he envisioned has worked.

Many of the parks commemorating independence focused on military history. The War Department preserved forts and battlefields like Yorktown, Cowpens, Kings Mountain, Moores Creek, Morristown, Castillo de San Marcos, and Fort Mifflin as textbooks on combat. But Horace Albright, NPS director in the 1930s, inserted an interesting dynamic into the history of these federally owned sites. As part of his strategy to expand the NPS, Albright turned to historic preservation. He personally lobbied Franklin Roosevelt to use executive authority to transfer 44 historical areas to the NPS. This massive reorganization, in 1933, marked a milestone in NPS evolution. It expanded the agency’s role in the preservation and interpretation of history, and increased NPS presence in the East.

Olmsted, no doubt, would notice that the politics of park creation often reflected the times. Following the World War II triumph of allied democracies, both Adams National Historical

Park (1946) and Independence National Historical Park (1948) entered the NPS. John Adams and John Quincy Adams served as congressmen, diplomats, and presidents, not soldiers. Independence Hall symbolized the power of ideas, not military prowess.

Similarly, celebrations played a recurring role in NPS expansion. In tandem with the 200th anniversary of George Washington’s birth (1932), his birthplace became a national monument. The Revolution’s bicentennial brought several more historical parks into the system—Valley Forge, Ninety Six, Fort Stanwix, and Boston National Historical Park, a cluster of sites commemorating the city’s revolutionary spirit. St. Paul’s Church focuses on religious freedom, and Thomas Stone’s country home provides a venue for exploring tensions inherent in declaring independence. As the nation commemorated the Constitution, the Pinckney plantation provides opportunities to interpret nation-building and the paradox of slavery.

Personalities also fueled politics and park creation—sites need political sponsors to maneuver them through Congress. Senator Hugh Scott, for example, along with civic leaders like Judge Edwin Lewis, championed Independence National Historical Park. Inside Congress, Phillip Burton presided over an unprecedented effort to establish new parks. Historians categorize his National Parks and Recreation Act (1978) as “the most sweeping piece of environmental legislation ever to pass the Congress.” The new areas in Burton’s bill included Thomas Stone National Historic Site and St. Paul’s Church.

Ever since historical parks took their place within the NPS, politicians have promoted sites commemorating the Revolution and its legacy. Sites associated with national expansion and the clash of cultures, women and women’s rights, and human and civil rights have inspired community leaders and elected officials to exercise their “political duty” to create an expanded, more inclusive park system.

Boston National Historical Park Boston, Massachusetts

A revolutionary generation of Bostonians blazed the trail from colonialism to independence. Sites throughout the city interpret the complexities of that journey, peopled by heroes of history (like Paul Revere) as well as by anonymous individuals, patriots and loyalists, caught in war’s turmoil.

www.nps.gov/bost

Longfellow National Historic Site Cambridge, Massachusetts

From July 1775 to April 1776, the Longfellow mansion served as headquarters for George Washington, commander-in-chief of the newly formed Continental Army. There Washington honed his military skills—he planned the siege of Boston, forced the British out of the city, and embarked on eight years of dogged preservation of his diverse army.

www.nps.gov/long

Adams National Historical Park Quincy, Massachusetts

Adams National Historical Park commemorates the personal and public lives of a family famously dedicated to national service. Over the span of five generations (from 1720 to 1927), the Adams family boasted two U.S. presidents (including patriots John Adams and his wife Abigail), three U.S. ministers, historians, and writers.

www.nps.gov/adam

Minute Man National Historical Park Concord, Massachusetts

Minute Man National Historical Park brings to life “that famous day and year” when colonial militia defended liberty. By firing the “shot heard ‘round the world” and harassing British soldiers as they marched along “battle road,” citizen soldiers ignited the Revolution. Who were these men, on both sides, and why did they fight and die?

www.nps.gov/mima

Salem Maritime National Historic Site Salem, Massachusetts

Salem, like many other 18th-century American seaports, served as a haven for privateers, privately owned vessels of all sizes and descriptions commissioned by Congress to disrupt enemy shipping. In lieu of a significant navy to challenge the British, America’s nearly 800 privateers captured or destroyed about 600 British ships.

www.nps.gov/sama



Saratoga National Historical Park Stillwater, New York

Site of the first significant American military victory, Saratoga ranks among the 15 most decisive battles in world history. American forces met, defeated, and forced a major British army to surrender, leading France to recognize U.S. independence and enter the war as an ally. What turned the tide on Europe’s superpower?

www.nps.gov/sara

William Floyd Estate (Fire Island National Seashore)

Mastic Beach, New York

When William Floyd sided with the patriots—as a militia officer, member of the Continental Congress, and signer of the Declaration of Independence—he not only imperiled his own life but also that of his family. In 1777, when the British invaded Long Island, Floyd, his wife Hannah, and three children fled their home.

www.nps.gov/fiis/historyculture/williamfloyd.htm

Saint Paul's Church National Historic Site
Mount Vernon, New York

In 1733, Saint Paul's stood beside a village green, scene of an election that denied Quakers the right to vote. The legal struggle that followed marked an early victory for religious freedom, a tenet of the revolutionary generation. After the battle at Pell's Point (October 1776), the church opened its doors to the wounded.

www.nps.gov/sapa

Fort Stanwix National Monument
Rome, New York

The outpost at Fort Stanwix, a major venue of cultural exchange with the tribes of the Six Nations, controlled a principal route from the Hudson River to Lake Ontario. After patriots rebuilt an old fort at the site, American and Indian resistance contributed to the American victory at Saratoga by repulsing a British and Indian invasion from Canada.

www.nps.gov/fost

Crossroads of the American Revolution Heritage Area
New Jersey

Situated between British headquarters in New York and the patriot capital of Philadelphia, New Jersey was the scene of more Revolutionary War engagements than any other colony. As a result, her citizens suffered through some of the worst days of the struggle, including civil war between

loyalists and patriots. Crossroads of the American Revolution preserves and interprets dozens of sites related to the military and civilian struggle for independence.

www.nps.gov/crossroads

Federal Hall National Memorial
New York, New York

Events on the site of Federal Hall laid a firm foundation for an evolving framework of government. In 1765, the Stamp Act Congress met there to protest British policy. After independence, Congress, meeting at the Wall Street site, hosted Washington's first inauguration, created the federal judiciary, and endorsed individual rights and limited government in the Bill of Rights.

www.nps.gov/feha

Governors Island National Monument
New York, New York

Strategically positioned in New York Harbor, the military installations on Governors Island have protected the harbor, the city, the nation, and the ideals symbolized by the nearby Statue of Liberty for over two centuries.

www.nps.gov/gois

Hamilton Grange National Memorial
New York, New York

Alexander Hamilton, owner of "The Grange," earned his place on the \$10 bill. An immigrant from the West Indies, he served on Washington's staff during the Revolution and became convinced that the U.S. needed strong central government. Hamilton attended the Constitutional Convention and co-authored the Federalist Papers. As treasury secretary, he helped secure the nation's financial health.

www.nps.gov/hagr

Morristown National Historical Park
Morristown, New Jersey

During two winters (1777 and 1779–80), Morristown sheltered the encamped Continental Army and served as headquarters for Commander-in-Chief Washington. The now peaceful meadows and stately Ford Mansion commemorate the hardships faced by American soldiers, the impact of war on loyalist and patriot civilians, and the ability of George Washington to preserve the army.

www.nps.gov/morr

Benjamin Franklin National Memorial
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The massive, iconic statue of Benjamin Franklin by James Earle Fraser commemorates one of the most famous Founders, a disciple of the Enlightenment and firm believer in progress. Only Franklin signed the Declaration of Independence, the Treaty of Paris, and the U.S. Constitution.

www.nps.gov/archive/inde/ben-frank.html



Independence National Historical Park
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Independence National Historical Park, home of familiar icons like Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell, offers an ideal place to explore many facets of the Revolution, including the promises and paradoxes of revolutionary rhetoric and the struggle to find common cause among diverse peoples and ideas. Discover how revolutionary the American Revolution really was.

www.nps.gov/inde

Thaddeus Kosciuszko National Memorial
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Thomas Jefferson called Thaddeus Kosciuszko, "As pure a son of Liberty as I have ever known." Born in Poland and trained as a military engineer, Kosciuszko was one of the first Europeans to aid the Revolution, designing fortifications at Saratoga and West Point. A global champion of freedom, Kosciuszko returned to Europe and led a failed attempt to free Poland.

www.nps.gov/thko

Valley Forge National Historical Park
Valley Forge, Pennsylvania

Valley Forge commemorates more than the sacrifices of the revolutionary generation, it pays homage to everyday individuals who overcome adversity and persevered in extraordinary times. Despite the privations of the winter encampment of 1777-1778, George Washington, his officers, and his soldiers built a unified, professional military that ultimately won independence.

nps.gov/vafo

Fort Necessity National Battlefield
Farmington, Pennsylvania

At Fort Necessity, troops commanded by young George Washington lost the first battle of the French and Indian War. More importantly, they began a global struggle to control North America that set the stage for revolution. By war's end, Washington had valuable military experience, Great Britain had a larger empire, and France had a desire to get even.

www.nps.gov/fone



Thomas Stone National Historic Site
Port Tobacco, Maryland

In 1776, the world of country lawyer and slave owner Thomas Stone changed forever. By signing the Declaration of Independence, Stone literally wrote himself into history. As Stone's experience illustrates, independence, once achieved, reordered not only personal and political lives, but also reshaped the dialogue on the use of enslaved labor in the U.S.

www.nps.gov/thst

Red Hill Patrick Henry National Memorial
Brookneal, Virginia

As the last home and burial place of Patrick Henry, "Red Hill" commemorates not only the life of a man but also the power of words. Henry's compelling speeches kindled the fires of revolution and fueled the quest for independence.

www.redhill.org/

George Washington Birthplace National Monument

Washington's Birthplace, Virginia

Augustine Washington's plantation, the birthplace of his son, George, suggests the earliest influences on the man destined to become America's first national hero. Thanks to the reputation George built as commander of the Continental Army, embellished by his two terms as president, Washington became "first in peace, first in war, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

www.nps.gov/gewa

Colonial National Historical Park
Yorktown, Virginia

Colonial National Historical Park includes two of the most historic places in North America—Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement in North America, and Yorktown, the final major battle of the American Revolution. These sites, connected by the Colonial Parkway, commemorate the beginning and end of English colonial America.

www.nps.gov/colo

Moore's Creek National Battlefield
Currie, North Carolina

The battle at Moore's Creek Bridge (February 27, 1776) was all about allegiance. Loyalists, many in tartans, shouted "King George and Broad Swords!" as they charged out of morning mists. The defenders, fed up with colonial politics as usual, answered with musket and cannon. The patriot victory ended British and loyalist plans to regain control of North Carolina quickly.

www.nps.gov/mocr

Guilford Courthouse National Military Park
Greensboro, North Carolina

After the largest, most hotly contested action of the Southern Campaign, Lord Charles Cornwallis forced General Nathanael Greene to withdraw, apparently winning the Battle of Guilford Courthouse. In reality, March 15, 1781, proved to be the high water mark of the British invasion of the South and their efforts to rally loyalists. With fading hope of re-supply, Cornwallis abandoned the Carolinas for Virginia.

www.nps.gov/guco

Kings Mountain National Military Park
Blacksburg, South Carolina

The Battle of Kings Mountain, the first major patriot victory following the British invasion of the South, turned the campaign's tide of fortune. On October 7, 1780, patriot militia from the Carolinas, Georgia, Virginia, and present-day Tennessee surrounded and captured Major Patrick Ferguson and his army of loyalists. All but one of the soldiers (Ferguson) at King's Mountain were American.

www.nps.gov/kimo

Cowpens National Battlefield
Chesnee, South Carolina

Daniel Morgan knew both his men and his opponent well. At Cowpens, in the first month of 1781, Morgan played the cards he held, using his mix of Continental veterans, militia, and cavalry to defeat Banastre Tarleton's British regulars. Following a patriot victory at Kings Mountain, Cowpens marked the second defeat for British forces invading the South under Cornwallis.

www.nps.gov/cowp

Charles Pinckney National Historic Site
Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina

Charles Pinckney's coastal plantation, "Snee Farm," is a fitting site to ponder the meaning of freedom. What did freedom mean to Pinckney, a Revolutionary War veteran, wealthy planter, lawyer, and principal author and signer of the U.S. Constitution? And how did Pinckney's concept of liberty compare to that of the enslaved African Americans who toiled on his plantation?

www.nps.gov/chpi

Ninety Six National Historic Site
Ninety Six, South Carolina

Ninety Six, a strategic trading post in South Carolina's backcountry, became the battleground for bloody tests of loyalty. In 1775, patriots and loyalists fought to a draw in the fields and fencerows of Ninety Six. Six years later, Nathanael Greene's Continental troops laid siege to loyalists defending the town's star fort. Although the siege failed, the loyalists burned Ninety Six and marched away.

www.nps.gov/nisi

Fort Moultrie (Fort Sumter National Monument)

Sullivans Island, South Carolina

Days before Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, Great Britain threatened both Boston and Charleston. On June 28, 1776, at an unfinished fort defending Charleston harbor, American militia fought off a British invasion fleet. According to legend, the fort's soft palmetto logs did not crack but absorbed the cannons' shot. This victory deterred British activity in the South for three years.

www.nps.gov/fomo

Arkansas Post National Memorial

near Gillett, Arkansas

Settled by the French (1686), Post de Arkansae was the first permanent European colony in the Mississippi River Valley. One of many outposts of European empire entangled in global warfare, it played a valuable role in the struggle to dominate the fur trade. In the westernmost action of the Revolution, the British attacked the post's Spanish garrison, allies of the French.

www.nps.gov/arpo

George Rogers Clark National Historical Park

Vincennes, Indiana

The 1778-1779 campaign of George Rogers Clark, aided by French residents, stymied British attempts to dominate the Ohio and Illinois country. Using surprise attacks, adroit diplomacy with Indian nations, and extraordinary leadership skills, the 26-year-old Clark paved the way for the cession of the Northwest Territory to the new United States.

www.nps.gov/gero

Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail

North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee

Through four states, the 330-mile Overmountain Victory Trail preserves and commemorates the route used by the patriot militia who, angered by brash British threats, initiated the campaign that led to American victory at Kings Mountain in October 1780.

www.nps.gov/ovvi

Castillo de San Marcos National Monument

St. Augustine, Florida

A bastion of the Spanish Empire, the largest European empire ever created, the Castillo guarded the edge of Spain's known world. After winning Florida in the French and Indian War, Britain held the fort during the Revolution, using it to attack the rebellious colonies. Three of South Carolina's signers of the Declaration, imprisoned in Castillo cells, personally experienced rebellion's price.

www.nps.gov/casa



Index

Adams, Abigail, 8, 8, 54, 88, 89, 91
Adams, John, 8, 14, 32
Administration of Justice Act, 36
African Americans, 7, 10, 14, 22-23, 24, 24, 44, 46, 72, 73, 74-82, 74, 76-77, 98-99
Alabama, 12
Allen, Ethan, 7
America, leader of the free world, 111-115
American Indians, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 63, 82, 88, 84
Armistead, James, 79, 79, 81
Arnold, Benedict, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 57, 68
Articles of Confederation, 8, 10, 13, 51, 103
artillery, 8, 17, 60
Attucks, Crispus, 73

Bache, Sarah, 89
Bahamas, 8
Barras, Comte de, 67
Battle of Bennington, 60
Battle of Brandywine, 10
Battle of Breed's Hill, 7, 53, 54-55
Battle of Bunker Hill, 7, 17, 53, 54-55
Battle of Camden, 12, 59, 64
Battle of Concord, 7, 52
Battle of Cowpens, 13, 66
Battle of Crown Point, 7
Battle of Eutaw Springs 67
Battle of Freeman's Farm, 10
Battle of Germantown, 10, 10
Battle of Guilford Courthouse, 13
Battle of Harlem Heights, 9
Battle of Hobkirk's Hill, 13
Battle of Kings Mountain, 12, 64
Battle of Lexington, 7
Battle of Long Island, 8
Battle of Monmouth, 10, 11, 61, 91
Battle of Moores Creek Bridge, 8, 63, 63
Battle of Paoli, 10
Battle of Princeton, 9, 9
Battle of Quebec, 7, 57
Battle of Saratoga, First, 9, 10, 60-61, 60-61
Battle of Saratoga, Second, 9, 10, 60-61, 60-61
Battle of Springfield, 12
Battle of the Chesapeake, 68
Battle of the Virginia Capes, 13
Battle of Valcour Island, 9
Battle of Waxhaws, 12
Battle of White Plains, 9
battle, last, 14
Berlin Wall, 102
Black Regiment of Guides and Pioneers, 75
Bland, Richard, 28
Bolivar, Simon, 112
Boone, Daniel, 13, 62-63, 86
Boston, 7, 7, 8, 20, 32, 34-35, 51, 53, 73
Boston Massacre, 7, 7, 32, 73
Boston Port Act, 36

Boston Tea Party, 7, 33-36, 34-35,
Brant, Joseph, 10, 11, 14, 82-83, 82, 85, 87
British armada, 8
Burgoyne, John, 9, 10, 54, 59-60, 59, 60
Butler, Walter, 11

Camp Middlebrook, 11
Canada, 7, 8, 9, 14, 57, 57, 59
Carpenters' Hall, 37
Carroll, Charles, 8
Castillo de San Marcos National Monument, 124
casualties, 14, 51
Catawba Indians, 87
Chalmers, James, 40
Cherokee Indians, 9, 84, 85-86
Chesapeake Bay, 10, 13, 68
civil rights, 24, 98-102, 109
Clark, George Rogers, 11, 14, 63, 86-87
Clarke, Elijah, 12
Clinton, Sir Henry, 12, 61, 63-64, 68
Coercive Acts, 7, 33, 36-38
Cold War, 115
Common Sense, 8, 8, 40, 40, 92
Concord, 52-53
Connecticut, 74-75
Constitution, U.S., 103, 103, 114-115
constitutionalism, 103-108, 116
Continental Army, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 56-68, 83
Continental Congress, 7, 10, 14, 37-39, 41, 45, 51
Continental Marines, 7, 8
Continental Navy, 7, 8, 13
Corbin, Margaret, 91
Cornwallis, Lord Charles, 12, 13, 13, 64, 67, 68, 67, 68
Craft, Thomas, 20
Cunne Shote, 84-85

Darragh, Lydia, 91
Davies, William, 12
Deane, Silas, 8, 9
Declaration of Independence, 8, 20, 42-43, 44-45, 44-45, 51
Delaware River crossing, 9
Dickinson, John, 30-31, 30, 39
diplomacy, 8, 9, 10
Dorchester Heights, 8
Dragging Canoe, 85-86
Dulany, Daniel, 28
Dunmore, Lord John Murray, 7, 74-75, 75, 78

E Pluribus Unum, 117
encampments, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14
equality, 5, 108-111

Falmouth, 7
Federal Hall 18

federalism, 108, 116
Ferguson, Patrick, 12, 64
financing the revolution, 8, 13
1st Rhode Island Regiment, 10, 76-77
Florida, 13, 124
Fort Lee, 9
Fort Mercer, 10
Fort Mifflin, 10
Fort Moultrie, 8
Fort Necessity, 122
Fort Stanwix, 9, 10, 83, 85
Fort Sullivan, 8
Fort Ticonderoga, 7, 8, 9, 59
Fort Washington, 9
Fort West Point, 11, 12
France, alliance with, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 44, 60, 61, 68
Franklin, Benjamin, 9, 9, 14, 33, 61, 89
Franklin, William Temple, 14
Frazier, Mary, 91
Frederick Law Olmstead National Historic Site, 118
free blacks, 7, 14, 78, 79
freedom, icons of, 19-25
French and Indian War, 6
French Revolution, 112

Gage, Margaret Temple, 92
Gage, Thomas, 36, 51-53, 56, 92
Gates, Horatio, 10, 59, 59, 60, 64
Georgia, 9, 11, 13, 63
Germain, Lord George 58-59
Grant, Ulysses S., 114
Grasse, Comte de, 68, 68
Graves, Thomas 68
Greene, Nathanael, 12, 13, 67-68, 67

Hale, Nathan, 9
Hessian troops, 8, 9, 10
Hook, Paulus, 11
Howe, Lord Richard, 57
Howe, Sir William, 8, 9, 56-59, 58, 61
Hudson River, 9, 11, 57, 59-60, 60
Hutchinson, Thomas, 41, 90

icons, 19-25, 53
Illinois, 11
independence, 40-45
Independence Hall, 16, 23-25, 42-43, 45, 96, 116
Indiana, 11, 86
individual rights, 14
Iroquois Indians, 11, 14, 63, 82, 83

Jay, John, 11, 14
Jefferson, Thomas, 8, 20-21, 44, 44, 105, 106, 117
Jones, John Paul, 11
judicial review, 106-107

Kennedy, John F., 115
Kentucky, 13
King George III, 7, 27, 28, 39, 39, 83
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 24, 46, 100
Knox, Henry, 8
Knyphausen, Wilhelm, 12

Lafayette, James Armistead, 79, 79, 81
Lafayette, Marquis de, 9, 11, 21, 68, 68-69, 79, 79, 81
Lake Champlain, 9, 59
Latin American colonial rebellions, 112
Laurens, Henry, 14
Laurens, John, 13
Lee, Arthur, 9
Lee, Henry "Light Horse Harry," 11
Lee, Richard Henry, 8, 41, 43
Liberty Bell, 19, 22-23, 22
Lincoln, Abraham, 46, 46
Lincoln, Benjamin, 69
Lincoln Memorial, 15, 46
Ludwig, Mary, 91

Maine, 7, 11, 87
maps, 6, 13, 69
Madison, James, 71
Marbury v. Madison, 107
Marion, Francis, 12, 64
Marshall, John, 107, 107
Martin Luther King, Jr. Birth Home, 100
Maryland, 8, 10, 14, 71
Massachusetts Government Act, 36
Massachusetts, 7, 74, 82, 87
Mattachine Society, 109
McCauley, Mary Hayes, 91
memorialization, 19-25
military tactics, 49, 51-71
Minute Man, 7, 18, 19, 19
Minute Man National Historical Park, 18, 47, 97
Mohawk Indians, 10, 82-83
Molly Pitcher, 91
Montgomery, Richard, 8, 57, 57
Morgan, Daniel, 10, 13, 67
Morris, Robert, 13
Morristown, 9, 11
Morristown National Historical Park, 12
Murder Act, 36
mutiny, 13

Netherlands, alliance with, 13
New Hampshire, 8, 52
New Jersey, 9, 9, 10, 11, 12, 12, 13, 79
New York, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 79, 83, 87
Ninety Six, 67
North Bridge, 47, 52, 97
North Carolina, 8, 9, 12, 13, 36, 63, 63, 87, 88

Oconostota, 84-85
Ohio, 14, 85
Old State House, 20
Olive Branch Petition, 7, 38, 39
Olmstead, Frederick Law, 118, 118
Oneida Indians, 87
Oriskany, 60
Osborn, Sarah, 91

Paine, Thomas, 8, 9, 40, 40, 92, 95, 104
Parker, Peter, 63
parks, American Revolution historical, 119, 124
parks, creation of historical, 118
Passamaquoddy Indians, 87
peace process, 13, 14, 70
Pennsylvania, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 18, 19, 78, 82, 83
Penobscot Indians, 87
People's March, 24
Philadelphia, 7, 9, 10, 11, 37, 50, 61, 78-79
Phillips, William, 68
Pickens, Andrew, 64, 67
Plain Truth, 40
Prescott, William, 17
President's Mansion, 50
Proclamation of 1763, 6
Prohibitory Act, 39, 41

Quartering Act, 36

Rawdon, Lord, 67
representative government, 5
Rhode Island, 11, 12
Riedesel, Frederika von, 59
Rochambeau, Comte de, 13, 68, 68-69
Russian Revolution, 114-115, 114

St. Leger, Barry, 59-60
Salem Maritime National Historic Site, 119
Salomon, Haym, 13
Saratoga, 59-61, 59-61
self-government, 37-39
Selma-to-Montgomery March, 98-99
Seven Year's War, 6
Shawnee Indians, 14, 85-87
Siege of Savannah, 11
Six Nations, 82-83, 85
slavery, 7, 10, 14, 22-23, 72, 74-82, 74
Sons of Liberty, 37
South Carolina, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 45, 63, 64, 75
Soviet Union, 115
Spain, alliance with, 11, 12, 13, 63
spies and spying, 9, 91, 92
Stamp Act and Stamp Tax, 6, 26-29, 26, 27, 29, 30, 37
Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, 110
Statue of Liberty, 121

Steuben, Friedrich von, 11, 11, 62
Stewart, Alexander, 67
Stockbridge Indians, 87
Sugar Act, 6, 26-27
Sullivan, John, 11, 63, 83
Sumter, Thomas, 12, 64
symbols, 19-25, 53

Tarleton, "Bloody" Banastre, 12, 66, 67
taxation, 26-35
Tea Act, 31-36, 36, 88
Thayendanegea, 10, 11, 14, 82-83, 82, 85, 87
The Crisis, 9
Thomas Jefferson Memorial, 117
Thomas Stone National Historic Site, 80
Thomson, Charles, 37
Tories, 11, 12, 13, 83
Townshend Revenue Acts, 6, 7, 29-31
treason, 11, 12
Treaty of Paris, 6, 14, 14, 70, 70-71
Trenton, 9
Tuscarora Indians, 87

U.S. Constitution, 103, 103, 114-115

Valley Forge, 9, 10, 11, 17, 18, 23, 61-62, 65
Valley Forge National Historical Park, 10
Vergennes, Comte de, 61
Vermont, 10, 79, 82
Vietnam War, 25
Virginia, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 41, 78, 79
voting rights, 94-95

Warren, Mercy Otis, 90, 91
Washington, George, 7, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 36, 48, 49-51, 56-59, 56, 61-62, 70-71, 71, 77, 80
Washington, Martha, 88-89
Washington Monument, 15, 125
Wayne, Anthony, 10, 11, 13
westward expansion, 6, 14
Wheatley, Phillis, 46, 46
Wilson, James, 71, 104-105
Wilson, Woodrow, 114
winter camps, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18
women during the American Revolution, 88-92
women's rights, 8, 14

Yorktown, 13, 13, 68, 68, 69, 77, 79

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