
UNIT 3 THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

The American Revolution freed the American colonies from the British imperial control. This had not only economic but also important socio-political significance in the future development of America. After reading this Unit you should be able to:

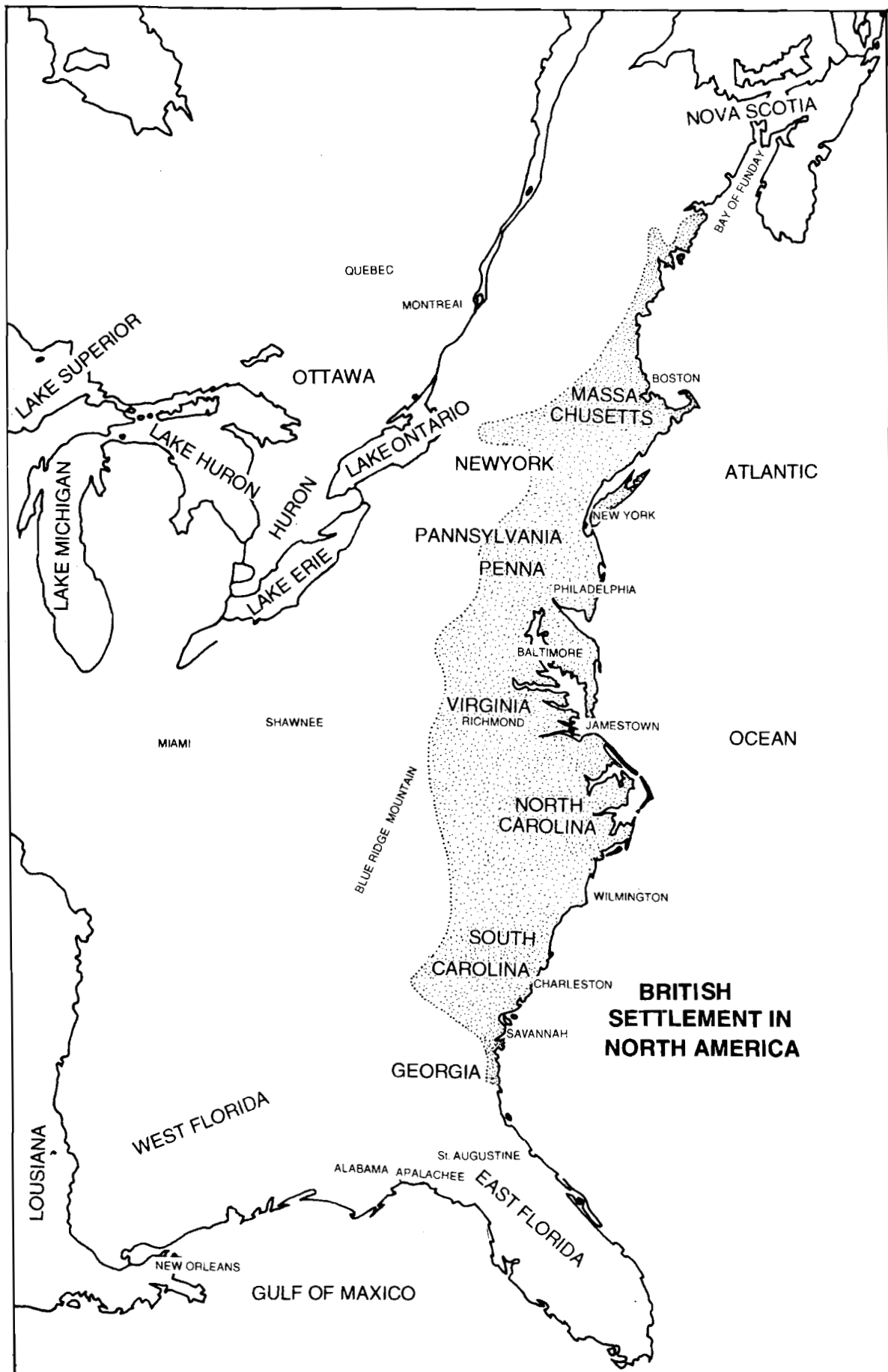
- understand the pre-revolutionary American society,
- explain the circumstances leading to the American Revolution,
- analyse the main thrust of the American Constitution, and
- learn about the institution of slavery and the development of democratic politics in America.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The American Revolution of the late 18th century has been regarded as a war of Independence which lacked the social radicalism of the great revolutions like the French Revolution of 1789. However, by destroying monarchy and creating a republic the Americans changed not only their government but also their society. The American Revolution played an important role in the social transformation of America into a democratic and capitalist society; though 'democratic revolutions' were bringing about social change in Western Europe too about this time - late 18th to early 19th century - the American Revolution helped to democratize American politics and society more substantially than in Europe. In the subsequent sections we will first introduce you to the characteristics of pre-revolutionary America and how did the revolution come. Framing of the new constitution and slavery as an institution central to American democracy have been explained. Finally, you will learn about the development of mass politics and Jacksonian democracy.

3.2 PECULIARITY OF BEING A NEW SOCIETY

The decline of feudalism in Europe during the sixteenth century had far reaching consequences in the economic, political and cultural fabric of European society. The Renaissance and Reformation movements of this period contributed to the growth of a spirit of individual independence and made people more adventurous. Both political and economic developments of this period stimulated people at Europe to explore and conquer new countries. The American settlements on the eastern sea board of the United States were part of the New World as well as the Western World. As part of the New World these American colonies had experienced a population explosion since the colonists were in a position to expand all over the land abundant in North American continent. The population of America grew from one million to two million between 1750 to 1770 rising to four million by 1790. Immigrants from Britain, France, Germans, Scotland and Ireland also swelled the population of these colonies. This demographic growth coupled with the opportunities for westward expansion created the American 'frontier' and the more democratic spirit of the people who



inhabited this frontier. This frontier moved continually westwards over the 19th century creating a society which was more democratic and American than it had been during British colonial rule, as the historian Turner observed in the late 19th century.

A commercial revolution which began in the 1740s led to a considerable expansion in American imports and exports. The value of imports from Britain rose from less than a million pounds in 1747 to nearly 4.5 million pounds by 1772. The process of commercial change which was mainly because of expansion in internal trade and use of paper money enabled people of "middling rank" to break away from traditional patron-client relationships. The religious revival known as the Great Awakening also weakened traditional authority and the position of the gentry and the established Anglican clergy.

The growth of republican ideas in America in the mid 18th century has been linked to the existence of a strong democratic tradition based on the absence of feudalism and rigid class boundaries within American society. There were aristocratic families and merchant princes in the 18th century America but with the exception of Virginia and New Hampshire they were not dominant in state politics. The upper echelons of society in colonial America wielded much less economic and political power than in Britain. On the other hand the majority of American farmers owned their own land unlike in Britain which had a majority of marginal tenants and landless agricultural workers. Two-thirds of the white colonial population owned land in America while only one-fifth of the population owned land in Britain. The relative weakness of the aristocracy, the existence of a large body of land owning farmers, the absence of a large indigenous population and the possibility of acquiring land by westward movement imparted a strong republican flavour to the politics of the 18th century America.

Although American society was more egalitarian than that of other western countries it did have an aristocracy, a monarchical tradition and ties between elite and commoners based on patriarchal dependence. Americans were aware of various forms of legal dependency or unfreedom. At one point of time according to experts as much as one-half of colonial society was legally unfree. Apart from a half million Afro-Americans who were hereditary slaves there were thousands of white immigrants who came as indentured servants or apprentice with written contracts binding on them for several years and sometimes decades. One half to two-thirds of all immigrants to the colonies are estimated to have come as indentured servants being bound to their masters for periods varying between seven to fourteen years. Labour was valuable in America and since it was expensive to import indentured servants their movements were restricted and controlled to prevent flight. The colonial bonded servants were in fact closer in status to black slaves in America than they were to English servants, who had considerable freedom and signed only one year contracts. The widespread use of indentured servants not only made American colonists aware of the rigours imposed by legal dependence but also probably of the value of freedom.

The eighteenth century Enlightenment produced ideas which undermined traditional beliefs and social relationships in a variety of ways. By adopting enlightenment ideas the ruling elites and those in authority undermined their own authority whether as rulers magistrates, masters and fathers. A revolution against patriarchy took place simultaneously with a general growth of republican ideas. With the growth of commercialization in the 18th century contracts which had been based on patriarchal relationships between husbands and wives or masters and apprentices in an earlier period were replaced by contracts which were positive bargains between two equal parties representing specific transactions rather than social relationships. This contractual perception of all superior-subordinate relationships effected the American perception of the relationship between the crown and the colonies. In fact, the parent-child image to describe the imperial relationship effected both the Whig and Tory writings prior to the American revolution. The widespread adoption of the language of modern legal contractualism made it easier for the American colonists to break with the mother country and the patriarchal authority of the British king.

It was precisely because the level of equality and prosperity which the American colonies enjoyed was unusual in the western world at the time that the Americans were so concerned to defend their rights and privileges. The threats to their liberty and prosperity were consequently exaggerated by the Americans. Furthermore economic and social changes added to the anxieties of people in a period of commercialization, decline of patriarchal relationships and growth of popular politics. The very rapidity of the rise of several members of the elite created anxieties about the decline in their fortunes with a change in British imperial policy. The hardening of British policy after the Seven Years War, 1757-1763, leading to the imposition of the Stamp Act in 1765 created considerable anxiety about the threat to the prosperity and

freedom of the Americans. The colonial assemblies which had become fairly vocal by the mid 18th century according to Jack Greene now became institutions around which to rally in a fight against royal authority and imperial policy. In the growing popular resistance to British imperial assertiveness the fight against Despotism and Corruption snowballed into a struggle for independence.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What do you think differentiates the American Society from others? Answer in 100 words.

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- 2) Explain in five sentences the reasons for the growth of democratic spirit in America.

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3.3 TOWARDS THE REVOLUTION

The British government believed that colonies should serve the interest of the mother country. Britain adopted mercantilist policies in colonial America which were designed to promote British economic interests mainly in the form of a favourable balance of trade. Various Navigation Acts of 1651, 1660 and 1663 ensured that trade was carried only in British or colonial ships; that most European goods had to pass through Britain before entering the American colonies; that certain goods like tobacco and rice declared enumerated goods could be shipped only in Britain; that bounties would be paid for the production of certain enumerated goods to promote British economic self-sufficiency. Moreover colonies were not allowed to export manufactured goods under various Acts effecting wool and woolen textiles in 1699, the hat industry in 1732 and iron products in 1750.

The mercantilist policies of Britain were exploitative but the overall burden in per capita terms was not very significant. Britain paid the colonists less than the world market prices for goods on the enumerated list particularly in the case of tobacco which Britain re-exported to Europe. Imports from Europe through Britain raised the price of imports or forced the colonists to buy relatively more expensive products from Britain. However, the restrictions on American manufacturing did not have a serious negative effect because America was primarily an agricultural country during the 18th century.

After the Seven Years War the British tried to pass on the burden of defence of America to the colonists as the burden of taxes in Britain was considered fairly high. The Sugar Act of 1764 and the Stamp Act of 1765 were the initial measures of the British Prime Minister Grenville backed by the King George III, to raise resources for colonial defence. Although the Sugar Act cut in half the duties of the Molasses Act of 1733 the British government indicated its resolve to actually enforce the law. The Stamp Act was a tax on contracts, wills,

newspapers, the Townshend Acts of 1767 imposed duties on paper, glass, lead and tea. Widespread boycott of British goods in America following these Acts led to the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766 and partial repeal of the Townshend Acts in 1770. The British government retreated in the face of widespread opposition but wished to assert the right to tax the colonies by introducing the Tea Act of 1773. It was not merely the burden of these new taxes introduced by Britain which aroused the colonists to revolt but it was also because they came in a period of economic difficulties and depression.

The colonists also paid several excise taxes and fees to Britain and lost nearly two per cent of income owing to the operation of the Navigation Acts. If all these are added together and designated as 'tax' then the per capita tax paid by the American colonists came to about one-third of the British. The fear of additional British taxes and administrative enforcement of some measures of the pre 1763 mercantilist system undoubtedly provoked resistance among the colonists, specially those who bore a disproportionate burden.

3.3.1 Economic Problems: Depression

The economic causes of the American Revolution are not only about the burdens of mercantilism but those related to shifting fortunes associated with the fluctuations of the colonial economy. Following the expansion of credit to the American colonies by British merchants from 1745 to 1760 there was a showdown in business activity during the 1760s. After 1760 the British economy entered a period of slow growth and the flow of credit was cut down to a fraction of what it was earlier. This worsened the depression of the 1760s and muted the recovery between 1769 and 1771.

"In all colonies, however", observes M Egnal, "the depression, particularly as it worsened during the second half of the decade, presented the expansionists with a challenge almost as grave as the one posed by British measures." The expansionists were a group of wealthy individuals who believed in "the strength and bountiful future of the New World" and opposed oppressive British proposals. These upper class patriots were opposed by non-expansionists, also a wealthy group, but less confident of an American future without Britain, though in favour of more benign British policies towards the colonies. Egnal has argued that though the affluent expansionists were keen to create a "mighty empire" in America they would not have risen in revolt against the King if Britain had adopted a more conciliatory approach.

Egnal sees an interlude between popular protests and mobilizations of the late 1760s and the early 1770s - the "quiet years" before the agitation against the Tea Act in 1773. The expansionists were "sobered by lower class excesses in the 1760s" as well as hopes of British moderation between 1771-1773. "Nowhere did an upper - and lower class alliance truly solidify or patriotic fervour reemerge" before the protests against the Tea Act in 1773. It was during the period 1774-1776 that the expansionists were able to overcome the resistance of the non-expansionists, the latter being strongest in the middle colonies of New York and Pennsylvania. In Virginia because of the lack of a serious lower class challenge the non-expansionists were more tolerant and bipartisan cooperation was achieved. The scale of popular mobilization particularly in the rural areas was greater than ever before. While small farmers in Massachusetts Pennsylvania and Virginia supported the patriots those in New York and South Carolina became loyalists. On the whole the lower classes in cities backed the American revolution against Britain.

3.3.2 Ideology And Class

Joseph Ernst has made an attempt to link economic and ideological explanations of the American Revolution. He draws a distinction between a revolutionary movement between 1762-1772 and an independence movement between 1772 and 1776. The credit and commercial crises during the decade after 1762 witnessed not only strong movements to force Britain to change its revenue policy but also discussion of economic reforms, the position of the colonies "within the imperial tradition-system and the need for greater economic sovereignty". The experience of the decade 1762-1772 led the colonial elite to question the British mercantilist system but the crisis of 1772 even destroyed "this illusion of the possibility of reform. It became evident that the real problem was empire itself." Not only did the independence movement after 1772 raise new issues it also involved a substantial involvement of farmers in the struggle after 1774. The restraints on artisanal production by colonial imports, on money supply by restrictions on paper money and the attack on American autonomy by Crown and Parliament altered the ideology and perceptions of the American colonial elite.

The urban lower classes - the artisans, mechanics and day labourers - who were active in the non-consumption and non-importation agitation - acquired some form of class consciousness. Although the American elite disliked the pressures favouring democratization by mechanics and artisans and the labouring classes "they did not fear the ideology of class interest.... what the elite feared was social disorder of a propertyless rabble". The protests of the poor, the hungry and the unemployed were considered a threat to stability whereas political alliances were feasible with artisans and farmers. It was after the collapse of the economy in 1772 that the movement for practical reform within the imperial system was transformed into a revolutionary demand for American independence.

In the most radical colony - Pennsylvania - artisans had been mobilized during the 1760s and in 1772 the master craftsmen formed their own organisation candidates and policies. Far more radical, however, was the mobilization of poorer artisans, journeymen, apprentices and labourers into the militia drawn mostly from poorer artisans and labourers. It was for many in Philadelphia's lower classes says Eric Foner "the first step in the transition from the crowd to organised politics". Like the New Model Army of the English Civil War the militia was "a school of political democracy". The militia privates demanded during 1775-1776 the right to elect all their officers sometimes even suggesting that all officers should be elected by an annual ballot. They demanded the right of every associator to vote regardless of property qualifications that militia service be made universal with substantial fines for non-associators which should be used to support the families of associators. The emergence of the Philadelphia militia represented the politicization of lower class communities and what Gouverneur Morris said about a New York mass meeting also applied to Philadelphia : "The mob begin to think and reason".

Some of the radicalism of the lower orders of Philadelphia could be attributed to the revivalism of the Great Awakening which effected the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, a majority of whom were artisans labourers or servants. Both evangelical or rationist republicans had strong links to the artisan community of Philadelphia and both used the language of millennialism and spoke of an internal transformation of American society.

In the 1760s Boston, a town of 15,000 inhabitants, was an important centre of revolutionary activity, though the presence of 2000 British soldiers from 1768 onwards probably limited lower class participation and crowd action. In the course of the struggle against the Stamp Act during 1765-66 the movement initiated by the elite leadership soon resulted in spontaneous riots over local social and economic grievances. The "rudimentary class feeling" expressed in the action against wealthy officials in August 1765 "threatened to escalate to a more generalized attack on the upper classes". The dominant elite feared lower class action could culminate in a "war of plunder" or of "general levelling" and they reimposed their authority with the use of armed patrols and arrests. Though reluctant to deal with potentially dangerous lower class allies, merchant opponents of the Townshend duties turned to crowd support to enforce non-importation. In 1768 some merchants were willing to risk social unrest and riots to rescue their goods from customs officials. Lower class Bostonians acted swiftly on their own initiative when imperial policies had a direct impact on their lives. The crowds were however unable to articulate their 5 grievances adequately in the more formal setting of the townhouse. Lower class citizens had several grievances - unemployment, competition with the labour of soldiers during their off hours, affrays with soldiers, etc. A conflict between sailors, dock-workers and mechanics with soldiers led to the Boston Massacre in March 1770. The Whig leaders soon reestablished control over the crowds, partly by giving permission for shipbuilding which relieved hundreds of mechanics from unemployment. By the time the agitation against the Tea Act started the Boston Committee of Correspondence, established in November, 1772, had developed contacts all over the province and the Boston crowds largely acted within the anti-British framework favoured by the Whig leadership. By 1773 the Boston elite had managed to link the local effects of British regulations on the lower classes to constitutional theories about imperial problems and prevented the proper articulation of class consciousness which had emerged in August 1765.

The revolutionary war led to heavy demands on ordinary people, and produced popular resentment. The revolution encouraged more radical ideas and compelled the revolutionary elite to adopt more accommodative and conciliatory approaches towards the people.

3.3.3 Revolution and its Effects

The American Revolution was in part a reaction against the manipulation of offices and patronage by the Crown. Local officials like sheriffs, judges, militia offices and justices of the peace were dependent on royal favour in all the royal colonies except Virginia, more so than similar functionaries in Britain. Hostility to patronage at this local level constituted an important element in the hostility to the imperial system. In the new revolutionary state constitutions of 1776 the power of appointment was one of the evils which the American sought to check and eradicate. In the monarchical and traditional world view of the 18th century rulers needed to be both socially and morally respectable. According to Gordon Wood "the American Revolution was partly fought over differing interpretations of who in America were the proper social leaders who ought naturally to accede to positions of public authority". In the 18th century colonial politics was basically a struggle between prominent families for the control of the state. Rather than legal curbs on suffrage it was personal structure of politics - based on the power of the gentry - which restricted popular participation in politics. In the paternalistic and face to face relations of the 18th century politics recurrent rioting and mobbing based on belief in customary rights and moral economy was accepted by the local community and often even by the gentry. In the course of the American resistance against British oppression popular participation, initially encouraged and instigated by the gentry and merchants, acquired substantial proportions. In the course of the resistance and the War of American Independence 1776-1783 the patronage networks and familial influence of the late 18th century ancient regime were swept aside. The American Revolution represented an attack on aristocratic privileges, monarchical society and virtually all forms of dependence including slavery. In the final analysis, however, the main achievements of the American Revolution were the growth of mass participation in politics and the emergence of the free market based on the ideals of economic development and political equality.

The Revolution in America dealt a big blow to monarchical society and aristocratic privilege. Those who supported Britain during the American war of Independence - the loyalists - constituted half a million people or 20% of white Americans. About 80,000 loyalists left the United States during the course of the Revolution and their departure weakened the old colonial patrimonial power structure. The exit of several leading members of the old colonial society no doubt created space for what Jefferson called "the aristocracy of virtue and talent". After the Revolution all the states abolished legal devices of primogeniture and entail which had tended to protect large estates and important families, although these practices had declined over time. The equal rights of widows and daughters were recognized in matters concerning inheritance and possession of property. After the Revolution the patriarchal control of men over their wives declined, the latter gaining the right to hold property separately and to make contracts and do business in the absence of their husbands. All the states except South Carolina introduced liberal laws on divorce. Widows got outright ownership of one-third of the estate rather than just the lifetime use which had been the customary practice earlier. The American Revolution not only ended feudal forms of land tenure but supported more enlightened attitude towards the family.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Analyse the important factors which contributed to the American Revolution. Answer in 100 words.

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- 2) Point out some of the important changes brought by the American Revolution.

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3.4 MAKING OF THE CONSTITUTION

The American War of Independence helped to unite all the thirteen American colonies but they were reluctant to abandon their distinctive economic interest and political independence. Under the Articles of Confederation 1781-1787 the central government was extremely weak, most of the power lay with the states which retained their sovereignty and the Congress did not have the right to tax or regulate commerce. Some of the weaknesses of the period of the Confederation were exaggerated by the votaries of a strong government and a national constitution but the financial position of the Central government was very weak under the Articles. A single state could veto any attempt to alter the Articles of Confederation.

Though the Constitution of 1787 which was produced by the Philadelphia Convention has been regarded as a series of compromises - between free and slave states, large and small states, between Federalists and Anti Federalists - at one level it was a victory for a strong national government. The Anti-Federalists had an ambivalent attitude towards the idea of a national government which led to the victory of the Federalist group.

The Anti-Federalist were afraid that the Federalists like Madison would produce a constitution which would strengthen aristocracy at the expense of the "middling class", the President had been given too many powers which could produce a despotic government. Though some of the Anti-Federalists were willing to grant Congress the right to levy specific taxes they did not favour federal internal or direct taxes since the collection of these would effect individuals and lead to competition with the states. For the purpose of meeting the needs of the federal government the income from import duties would suffice since the federal debt could be discharged by each state separately. The Anti-Federalists tried to retain partial control over the power of direct taxation and hoped that the people would be "safe from the union of purse and sword". The president as commander of the Armed forces and the Congress as a body authorised to raise an army even in peacetime could collect unjust taxes with the help of the army which in turn would be supported by those oppressive taxes. The anti federalist also feared that the undefined clauses in the Constitution which referred to "general welfare" and "necessary and proper" would lead to the centralization of power based on a theory of implied powers as propounded by Madison. It was during the ratification of the Constitution by the states that it became clear that at least nine out of ten anti-federalists wanted a Bill of Rights. Freedom of religion or conscience, the right to trial by a jury and freedom of the press were three of the rights which were repeatedly demanded. Though the Philadelphia Convention produced the first elaborate and written democratic constitution of the world it was only the dissent and debate during the process of ratification of the constitution that led to the framing of the Bill of Rights in 1791, these being the first ten amendments to the US Constitution. Of these rights only one dealt with the rights of the states, the rest being concerned with individual freedoms.

Charles Beard offered an economic interpretation of the American Constitution which stated that merchants, moneylenders, security holders, financiers and manufacturers were supporters of the Constitution because they expected to benefit from it. They were opposed by those who owned landed property specially debtors and small farmers who feared a strong national government would impose taxes and adopt policies to improve the credit-worthiness of the US government which would hurt the debtors and supporters of cheap money.

The American Constitution was based on the doctrine of the separation of powers in order to prevent any one branch of government - the executive, legislature or judiciary - from becoming dominant. It also combined a federal principle - with equal representation to each state in the Senate - with the principle of a national government and a democratically elected House of Representatives. The Supreme Court was given the power to interpret the Constitution. In the 18th century the Constitution established the basis for a strong national government which proved capable of dealing with the problems of a rapidly modernising society in the early 19th century. As the United States developed into a market-oriented society which was witnessing the emergence of an industrial civilization the nationalist orientation and values of the federalists seemed more appropriate to the requirements of the new age. The constitution which the Federalists like Madison helped to create was the basis for the programme of national development by Alexander Hamilton in the 1790s. Hamilton strongly believed in the need for "a common directing power" and did not share the Jeffersonian Republican view that the least government was the best government. As Secretary of the Treasury in the 1790s he tried to create a great fiscal military state but the waves of the rising commercial capitalism were ultimately irresistible. The Federalist position of disintegrated enlightened leadership proved difficult to maintain both because the majority

of Federalists found it hard to live up to that ideal and because of the growth of a vibrant market oriented commercial economy in America by the early 19th century. In fact in America the assault on the aristocracy was so successful as an ideal that idleness became a disgrace and industry an honour.

One of the most important elements in America which emerged in the 1820s was the enthusiastic support for the idea of self interest and money making which were linked to American beliefs in the ideals of freedom and the pursuit of happiness. For many Americans the ability to make money was the only proper democratic method of assessing human beings not their family background or education. It was in the first decade of the 19th century that the image of Benjamin Franklin as a 'self made man' gained currency with the publication of several editions of his Autobiography. By the 1830s Tocqueville concluded, it was private interest which was holding the restless and diverse American people together, "the private interest that breaks through at each moment, the interest that, moreover, appears openly and even proclaims itself as a social theory". The pursuit of self interest, money making and happiness in America actually resulted in a far greater inequality in wealth by the 1820s and 1830s than at the time of the American Revolution in the 1770s but most Americans felt they had become more equal and democratic since then. In 1776 Adam Smith "advocated the release of human self-interest as a means of introducing reason, and through reason prosperity into the economic relations among men". Though Bailyn made this observation about the ideas of the *Wealth of Nations* for its impact on the American Revolution it applies with even greater force to the America which emerged in the first quarter of the 19th century.

The American Constitution was a definite improvement on the Articles of Confederation but in fact the Virginia Plan of the nationalists was an aristocratic remedy to the problems posed by an excess of democracy which alarmed men like George Washington and James Madison.

The Constitution of America actually represented a "middle ground" between a national and a federal government. James Madison had been seeking "the practicable sphere of a republic" which would be able to avoid the tyranny of unrestrained majorities and excessive localism as well as the concentration of power in the hands of unresponsive rulers.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Mention some significant features of the American constitution. Answer in 60 words.

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- 2) What are the differences between the federalists and the anti-federalists on the question of the American Constitution? Answer in 50 words.

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3.5 DEMOCRACY BASED ON SLAVERY

Observers of American democracy have always considered it paradoxical or embarrassing that Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and one of the great spokesmen of Republicanism in America was a slave owner. Some 50 bondsmen had to be sold to support Jefferson's lifestyle and several others to pay for his debts upon his death so that his last will and testament ended up giving freedom to just about 10% of his over 100 slaves. The American Constitution of 1787 also recognised slavery and was in fact based on a compromise between the slave-owning states of the south and the free states of the north.

In America slavery came to be called a "peculiar institution", produced some disputes about the proper ways of restricting its geographical spread in America and led to the legal ban on the African slave trade in 1808 but the use of slaves was widespread in the New World. Slavery was an institution based on the economic exploitation of the social control over the lives of slaves. By standards of the 20th century there is hardly anything to be said in favour of slavery but recent historians have tried to understand the system of slavery not just to condemn it. Though slavery was exploitative the slave owners had to take care of the caloric intake and medical needs of the slaves to ensure their productive capacity.

An important factor influencing the constitution of 1787 was the issue of slavery. The Founding Fathers of the American Republic were influenced by democratic ideas of the Enlightenment as well as economic and class interests. Slavery was an issue which divided the Northern free states from the Southern Slave states, the latter unwilling to abandon their economic self-interest in the perpetuation of slavery. It has frequently been argued that the deep rooted distrust of a national or central government based on the economic and political divisions in the American colonies was an impediment to closer union even after the weakness of the Articles of Confederation (1781-1787) had been clearly established. If slavery had not been recognised by the Constitution of 1787 there was a risk that the slave owning states might have refused to join the Union or might have come under the influence of Spanish territories to the South of the slave states. Legal and constitutional recognition of slavery was deemed a necessary condition for creating and preserving the American Union. John Rutledge and other representatives of the south agreed to vote against a provision which required a two-thirds majority of the national legislature to make laws regarding trade in order to get support from Robert Sherman and other New England delegates for an extension on the limitations of slave imports.

Although the Founding Fathers of America were not die-hard slave owners they were reluctant to confront the problem of ending slavery. Americans attached great importance to the sanctity of property and since slaves were a form of property it was impossible to emancipate slaves without proper compensation to their owners. This was one constraint in any plan for emancipation. The most important measure to restrict slavery was the provision which allowed the Congress to ban the import of slaves twenty years after the Constitution was adopted. After the USA banned the import of slaves the Cubans and Brazilians put together imported over a million and a half Africans for their sugar and coffee plantations.

The North-West Ordinance of 1787 barred slavery from the mid western area. A more radical ordinance which had proposed in 1784 that slavery would not be allowed to spread to all new American territory after 1800. North and South had been unable to gain acceptance by the Continental Congress. The 1787 Ordinance which barred slavery in the future states of Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin was accepted by the Southern slave states to reduce competition in the production of staples like tobacco and indigo by northern slave holders.

Thus Republican sentiments and legislation to control the spread of slavery in 1787 and 1807 helped to weaken the southern slave states and to trap slavery in the Deep South in one generation after the American Revolution. If the threat of disunion could be avoided moderate reformers were willing to end slavery where the financial liability was low and where low black population ratios made abolition easier to achieve.

Though slavery was recognised by the Constitution the word itself was used only once in the Thirteenth Amendment which abolished it. In the constitution itself the slaves are mentioned only as "other persons" or "person held to service or labour". There were five constitutional provisions which recognised slavery explicitly. Contrary to the view of traditional historians the three-fifths clause during the convention was not a compromise over taxation and

representation. In fact it began as a compromise between those who wanted to count slaves fully for purposes of representation and other who did not want to count slaves at all.

In the compromise between the Northern and Southern states which created the American Union and the constitution of 1787 each slave was to constitute three-fifths of a person for purposes of both representation and taxation. In 1790 on the basis of this three-fifths clause the southern states controlled 47% of the House of Representatives and the Electoral College although they constituted about 40% of the nation's white population. The leverage provided by 14 extra electors enabled Thomas Jefferson to become President of the USA by defeating John Adams 73-65. If there had been no three-fifths clause the Federalist Adams might have won the election of 1800 by a narrow margin of 63-61. The Age of Jefferson would not have been possible without this undemocratic three-fifths clause.

When elitist republicanism of the 18th century was replaced by the more egalitarian republicanism of the Age of Jackson in the early 19th century this clause favouring slave owners was resented by northern politicians and public opinion. Moreover in the 19th century since congress was able to raise resources through sale of public lands and tariffs on foreign trade the slave power no longer had to pay more direct taxes for greater representation.

The existence of slavery has been regarded as not merely a blot on American democracy but a hindrance in the path of capitalist development in the USA. Several American historians like Charles Beard and sociologists like Barrington Moore regarded the American Civil War of 1861-65 as a capitalist revolution which speeded up the economic development of the USA. The inability of the American Revolution to resolve the issue of slavery was finally overcome by the triumph of the free states of the industrial North over the slave states of the agricultural south. By ending plantation slavery and emancipating the slaves the Northern free states completed the task of the American Revolution of the late 18th century. Eugene Genovese argued that slavery retarded the economic development of the South because the subsistence earnings of the slaves limited the size of the internal market for the industrial products of the south. Slavery might have been incompatible with the ideals of American individualism and egalitarianism but slavery was not a declining institution just before the Civil War and was not unprofitable to the individual slave holder. An older view of the economics of slavery was that it was becoming increasingly unprofitable and would have declined even without a civil war. Slavery was also supposed to have led to excessive dependence on agricultural production in the south which put it increasingly in a position of financial dependence on northern merchants and capitalists.

3.6 DEVELOPMENT OF MASS POLITICS AND JACKSONIAN DEMOCRACY

Jefferson, the leading spokesman of Republican ideology, believed in a form of Agrarian democracy, with small yeoman farmers forming the backbone of democratic society. There was emphasis on small political units, close interaction between the people and their representatives and the need for man with independent means to sustain a viable democracy. Jefferson did not have a high opinion of trade and commerce and he also had a measure of hostility towards the financiers and bankers whose pernicious influence - or money power - was a threat to democracy. Although Jefferson was a staunch believer in the freedom of the press and in the sanctity of civil liberties and the American Constitution he did not always live up to his ideals. Although he had opposed Adams administration's assault on the freedom of the press and civil liberties by the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 as President during the Embargo years 1807-1809 he actively suppressed both civil liberties and the press. Even in 1798 when Jefferson had introduced the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions against the unjust laws he did so on the grounds that they violated states rights. Jefferson however, consistently supported the separation of church and state. The changes in the American economy compelled Jefferson to promote trade and commerce, particularly international trade and during his Presidential years there developed commercial wing of the Republican party. Though the Embargo on all external trade was imposed to avoid conflict and was a policy of peaceful coercion it actually produced ill effects in America and Jefferson had to abandon civil liberties to enforce his embargo policy. The gap between the theory and practice of Jeffersonian democracy arose not merely from the inconsistency or lack of firmness in Jefferson himself or the difference in the political compulsions of an opposition leader and a President but also from the changes taking place in the economy and society of America.

Developments in transportation industrialisation, westward expansion and growing hostility towards monopoly privileges and corruption enabled Andrew Jackson to play an important catalytic role in the transformation of republicanism into democracy. The republican emphasis on states rights *vis-a-vis* the central government was replaced by the need to assert the principle of majority rule within a strong national government. Jackson sensed that the American electorate demanded a greater say in the conduct of government. By "asserting his role as the tribune of the people" Jackson was able to strengthen the position of the President *vis-a-vis* the Congress. This subverted the equal but separate doctrine of the Founding Fathers by strengthening the executive at the expense of the legislative wing of the government. The dismissal of Secretary of the Treasury Duane established the power of the President to appoint and remove all cabinet officers without notifying Congress. The "stolen election" of 1825 by which a "corrupt bargain" between John Adams and Henry Clay elevated the former to the President's position was the ultimate corruption in a general Era of Corruption. Thereafter Jackson always asserted that "the majority is to govern". It has been argued that the "constant celebration" of the people was basic to Jacksonian Democracy - a celebration which the people enjoyed and acknowledged. The issue of constitutionality of specific measures was to be decided by the people through the ballot box. As far as Jackson was concerned the people were farmers, mechanics and labourers, not businessmen and capitalists not even small businessmen.

Jackson supported the idea of democratising American government. Appointed offices should be rotated every four years and elected offices ought to be filled directly by the people. Jackson wanted to abolish the College of Electors in the Election of the President, limiting his tenure to a single term of four to six years, to shield him from corrupting influences. Senators, federal judges and presumably even Supreme Court judges ought to be elected properly to uphold the democratic principles of office holding. Despite these advanced political views Jackson's reforms could not prevent corruption in his own government. Jacksonians were not upholders of slavery though they hated the abolitionists because they regarded abolitionists, Nullifiers and Whigs as the scheming opponents of majority rule and democracy. While the Whigs blamed Jackson for the rise in urban violence and rioting in America the Jacksonians regarded it as evidence of the opponents efforts to restore elitist rule by provoking violence.

Jackson both as a General and a President aggressively pursued his goal of westward expansion and he achieved it by ruthlessly expelling the American Indians further to the west. Over 45,690 Indians were relocated beyond the Mississippi River during the eight year Presidency of Jackson.

Jackson had an abiding hatred for monopoly and privilege but even more so for bankers who manipulated public institutions for private gain. Therefore he trained his guns on the Second Bank of the United States which had become a "monster" institution. Webster and Clay campaigned against the reelection of Jackson when the Bank War began in earnest in 1832. Jackson not only won the election of 1832, he vetoed the bill to recharter the Bank of the United States and declared it unconstitutional. Hard money democrats believed that small businessmen, farmers and workers should not be cheated by speculators and manipulators of currency. Jackson redistributed federal funds among chosen state chartered banks called 'pet banks' after withdrawing federal funds from the Bank of the United States. Biddle's attempt to create financial panic failed and Jackson had won his victory by 1834. The deposit of federal funds in pet banks however produced a speculative boom. Federal government surpluses also contributed to inflation and speculation whether they were distributed to states for aiding internal economic development or deposited in the state chartered pet banks where they swelled the reserves of these banks. Hard money policies - specially the Specie Order of 1836 which demanded payment in specie for public land - gained the upper hand. An economic depression followed the Banking Panic of 1839. In 1840 the government finally opted for a practice of locking up federal funds in sub-treasuries of the US government. The scheme separated bank from state but it also restricted the reserves of banks and slowed down the process of economic recovery in America.

According to Jackson panic conditions in 1837 were created by the greed of a new class of millionaires which had emerged in America. He was particularly upset by rumours that English bankers would soon join Biddle in a "conspiracy to control the finances of both Britain and the United States. Warning his successor Van Buren against this conspiracy Jackson observed, "the attempt by Biddle and the Barings to take into their keeping the management of the currency, both in England and America, is too alarming to every true republican". He compared the Panic to "cholera" which would destroy those who were dissipated and help to restore "good morals" in America. Once the government had ended the pernicious paper money system the economy would recover and "the democracy of numbers

will never have another contest with the aristocracy of the few". The solutions of Jackson were rather simplistic and naive but the hostility of the "labouring people" towards the bankers and their money power provided an important element of Jacksonian politics, indeed subsequent democratic politics.

Jackson was a President who emerged as the guardian of a "threatened republican tradition". Jackson did not set America upon a democratic course. According to Marvin Meyers, "political democracy was the medium more than the achievement of the Jacksonian party". By the time the Jacksonian movement was formed in the late 1820s the Federalist conservatism of Hamilton or John Adams was "stone dead". Although Jacksonian spokesmen drew upon "an exhaustive repertory of moral plots" it was in the war against the Monster Bank that the Democratic party "formed, or found, its character". Without the dominating presence of Jackson the Bank question would not have escalated into a major struggle to preserve the values of the Old Republic. For the Jacksonians the Bank and its influence had promoted plutocratic corruption and aristocratic privilege as well as perpetual debt and taxes and economic instability. Only four specific occupational groups - planters and farmers, mechanics and labourers - were the "real people" who formed "the bone and sinew of the country". Those whose activities were primarily promotional, financial or commercial were excluded from the real people. The division was based not so much on the economic as the moral distinction between occupational groups - between those engaged in honest labour and the production of goods and those engaged in monetary manipulation seeking wealth through speculation monopoly or privilege. It was by engaging in a war with the Bank that Jacksonian Democracy acquired its distinctive character and appeal.

In Meyers opinion Jacksonian democracy sought to dismantle the corrupt banking and paper money system created by the Bank party. By restoring hard money the Jacksonians were also trying to bring back the Old Republican order based on a strict construction of Constitution, a government which supported equal rights of its citizens and the separation of economic issues from political power. Jackson sought to dismantle the Bank not to transfer its powers to some central agency to avoid creating a large and meddlesome government.

Although the Jacksonians were successful in ending the monopoly of the Bank and had tried to dissociate state and corporation by laws permitting general incorporation in manufacturing and the Crucial Banking law of 1838 they found it difficult to return to the Old Republican values. The Jacksonian struggle against pre-republican aristocracy and post-republican speculative capitalism was intended to strengthen the republican tradition. As Tocqueville observed about Jacksonian Americans: "They love change, but they dread revolutions". In the late 19th century the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian ideas would be revived by the critics of monopolies, banks and the gold standard harking back to a great tradition of republicanism and democracy.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Why was slavery recognized in the American Constitution? Answer in 100 words.

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- 2) How did Jackson try to solve the Bank issue? Answer in 100 words.

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3.7 LET US SUM UP

Pre-revolutionary America witnessed the growth of a strong democratic tradition based on the absence of feudalism. Possibility of acquiring land by westward movement and the relative weakness of the aristocracy in the American society had a strong influence in the emergence of democratic politics in America. Their concern for liberal and egalitarian rights made the Americans vocal to resist the British imperial assertiveness. The American Revolution not only challenged the imperial system but also dealt a big blow to monarchical society and aristocratic privilege. Revolution was followed by the framing of a constitution in order to preserve liberty, democracy and union of American colonies. The institution of slavery and its relationship with American sectional conflict and democracy have been explained. Lastly we have discussed the features of Jacksonian democracy and how the Jacksonian struggle intended to strengthen the republican tradition in America.

3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Absence of feudalism, no rigid class boundary, scope of upward mobility, etc. See Sec. 3.2.
- 2) Affluence in American Society, availability of vast lands, equality existing in American Society, etc.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Mercantilist policy adopted by the British government, economic hardship caused by the British Colonial rule, etc. See Sec. 3.3.
- 2) See Sub-sec. 3.3.3.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See Sec. 3.4.
- 2) See Sec. 3.5.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Slaves were treated as property, a large section of Americans regarded the continuation of slavery necessary for the sake of unity, etc.
- 2) See Sec. 3.6.

SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS BLOCK

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| E.J. Hobsbawm | : | The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848 |
| John Cannon (ed.) | : | The Oxford Companion to British History |
| Mare Egnal | : | A Mighty Empire, The Origins of the American Revolution |
| Richard Beeman, Stephan Botein and Edward C. Carter II(ed.) | : | Beyond Confederation, Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity |