

Chapter 8- America Secedes from the Empire

1775-1783

A. Introduction

1. Bloodshed at Lexington and Concord in April of 1775 was a clarion call to arms and about twenty thousand minutemen swarmed around Boston to coop up the British
2. The Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia the next month, on May 10, 1775, and this time the full slate of thirteen colonies was represented
 1. There was still no well-defined sentiment for independence—merely a desire to continue fighting in the hope that the king and Parliament would consent to a redress of grievances; Congress hopefully drafted new appeals to the British people and king
 2. Anticipating a possible rebuff, the delegates also adopted measures to raise money and to create an army and a navy (the appeals were, as they expected, spurned)

B. Congress Drafts George Washington

1. Perhaps the most important single action of the Congress was to select George Washington to head the hastily improvised army besieging Boston
 1. The tall, dignified Virginia planter had never risen above the rank of a colonel in the militia and his largest command had numbered only 1200 men (20 years earlier)
 2. Although he lost more pitched battles than he won, the distinguished Virginian was gifted with outstanding powers of leadership and immense strength of character
 3. He radiated patience, courage, self-discipline, and a sense of justice; he was a great moral force rather than a great military mind—he insisted on serving without pay, though he kept a careful expense account amounting to more than \$100,000
2. The Continental Congress, though dimly perceiving Washington's qualities of leadership, chose more widely than it knew—his selection, in truth, was largely political
3. Americans in other sections, already jealous, were beginning to distrust the large New England army being collected around Boston; prudence suggested a commander from Virginia, the largest and most populous of the colonies; as a man of wealth, both by inheritance and by marriage, Washington could not be accused of being a fortune seeker

C. Bunker Hill and Hessian Hirelings

1. On the one hand, the Americans were affirming their loyalty to the king and earnestly voicing their desire to patch up difficulties and on the other hand, they were raising armies and shooting down His Majesty's soldiers; this curious war of inconsistency was fought from April 1775 to July 1776 before they plunged into independence

2. Gradually the tempo of warfare increased; in May 1775 a tiny American force under Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold surprised and captured the British garrisons at Ticonderoga and Crown Point, on the scenic lakes of upper New York; a priceless store of gunpowder and artillery for the siege of Boston was thus secured
3. In June 1775 the colonists seized a hill, now known as Bunker Hill (actually Breed's Hill) from which they menaced the British soldiers that were in Boston at the time
 1. The British, instead of cutting off the retreat of their foes by flanking them, blundered bloodily when they launched a frontal attack with three thousand men
 2. Sharpshooting Americans, numbering fifteen hundred and strongly entrenched, mowed down the advancing redcoats with frightful slaughter; but the colonists' scanty store of gunpowder finally gave out and they were forced to retreat
4. Even at this late date, in July 1775, the Continental Congress adopted the "Olive Branch Petition," professing American loyalty to the crown and begging the king to prevent further hostilities; after Bunker Hill, King George III slammed the door on reconciliation
 1. In August 1775, he formally proclaimed the colonies in rebellion; the skirmished were now out and out treason, a hanging crime; the next month he widened the chasm when he sealed arrangements for hiring thousands of German troops to help crush his rebellious subjects (six German princes needed money and George II needed men)
 2. Because most of these soldiers-for-hire came from the German principality of Hesse, the Americans called all the European mercenaries Hessians
5. News of the Hessian deal shocked the colonists; they felt that the quarrel was within the family and why bring in outside mercenaries, especially foreigners who had reputations)
6. Hessian hirelings proved to be good soldiers in a mechanical sense, but many of them were more interested in booty than in duty; they were dubbed Hessian flies as they were seduced by American promises of land, hundreds of them finally deserted and remained in America to become respected citizens

D. The Abortive Conquest of Canada

1. In October 1775 before a cruel winter, the British burned Falmouth (Portland), Maine and in that same autumn, the rebels daringly undertook a two-pronged invasion of Canada
 1. American leaders believed, erroneously, that the conquered French were explosively restive under the British yoke and a successful assault on Canada would add a 14th colony, while depriving Britain of a valuable base for striking at the colonies in revolt
 2. But this large-scale attack, involving some two thousand American troops, contradicted the claim of the colonists that they were merely fighting defensively for a redress of grievances; invasion northward was undisguised offensive warfare

2. The bold stroke for Canada narrowly missed success; one invading column under the Irish-born General Richard Montgomery, formerly of the British army, pushed up the Lake Champlain route and captured Montreal and he was joined at Quebec by the army of General Benedict Arnold, whose men had suffered on the march through Maine woods
3. An assault on Quebec, launched on the last day of 1775, was beaten off; the able Montgomery was killed; the dashing Arnold was wounded in one leg and scattered remnants under his command retreated up the St. Lawrence River
4. French-Canadian leaders, who had been generously treated by the British in the Quebec Act of 1774, showed no real desire to welcome the plundering anti-Catholic invaders
5. Bitter fighting persisted in the colonies, though the Americans continued to disclaim all desire for independence; in January 1776 the British set fire to the Virginia town of Norfolk and in March they were finally forced to evacuate Boston (Evacuation Day)
6. In the south the rebellious colonists won two victories in 1776—one in February against some fifteen hundred Loyalists at Moore's Creek Bridge in North Carolina, and the other in June against an invading British fleet in Charleston harbor

E. Thomas Paine Preaches Common Sense

1. Why did Americans continue to deny any intention of independence?
 1. Loyalty to the empire was deeply ingrained; many Americans continued to consider themselves part of a transatlantic community in which the mother country of Britain played a leading role; colonial unity was poor; and open rebellion was dangerous
 2. Irish rebels of that day were customarily hanged, drawn, and quartered; American rebels might have fared no better—as late as January 1776, five months before independence was declared, the king's health was being toasted by officers
2. Gradually the Americans were shocked into an awareness of their inconsistency; their eyes were jolted open by harsh British acts like the burning of Falmouth and Norfolk, and especially by the hiring of the Hessians to help fight against the Americans
3. In 1776 came the publication of *Common Sense*, one of the most influential pamphlets ever written; its author was the radical Thomas Paine who had come over from Britain
4. Paine flatly branded the actions of the colonists as contrary to "common sense"; why not throw off the cloak of inconsistency—no where in the physical universe did the smaller heavenly body control the larger one—then why should the island of Britain control the vast continent of America? (King was nothing but the Royal Brute of Great Britain)

F. Paine and the Idea of "Republicanism"

1. Paine's passionate protest was as compelling as it was eloquent and radical

1. It called not simply for independence, but for the creation of a new kind of political society, a republic, where power flowed from the people themselves, not from a corrupt and despotic monarch (he used language familiar to common folk)
 2. He argued that all government officials—governors, senators, and judges—not just representative in a house of commons, should derive their authority from people
2. Paine was hardly the first person to champion a republican form of government
1. Political philosophers had advanced the idea since the days of Greece and Rome; revived in the Renaissance and 1600s in England, republican ideals had survived within the British “mixed government” with balance of king, nobility, and commons
 2. Republicanism particularly appealed to British politicians critical of excessive power in the hands of the king and his advisers; their writings found a responsive audience among the American colonists, who interpreted the vengeful royal acts of the previous decade as part of a monarchical conspiracy to strip them of their liberties
 3. Paine’s radical prescription for the colonies—to reject the monarchy and empire and embrace an independent republic—fell on receptive ears of Americans
3. Many settlers, particularly New Englanders, had practiced a kind of republicanism in their democratic town meetings and annual elections (popularly elected committees)
 4. The absence of a hereditary aristocracy and the relative equality of condition enjoyed by landowning farmers meshed well with the republican repudiation of a hierarchy of power
 5. Most Americans considered citizen “virtue” fundamental to any successful republican government; because political power no longer rested with the central, all-powerful authority of the king, individuals in the republic needed to sacrifice their personal self-interest to the public good (the collective good of “the people”)
 6. Yet not all Patriots agreed with Paine’s ultrademocratic approach to republicanism
 1. Some favored a republic ruled by a “natural aristocracy” of talent; republicanism for them meant an end to hereditary aristocracy, but not an end to all social hierarchy
 2. These more conservative republicans feared that the fervor for liberty would overwhelm the stability of the social order (feared radical “leveling”)

G. Jefferson’s Explanation of Independence

1. Members of the Philadelphia Congress, instructed by their respective colonies, gradually edged toward a clean break; on June 7, 1776, fiery Richard Henry Lee of Virginia moved that “these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states...” after considerable debate, the motion was adopted nearly a month later, on July 2, 1776
 1. The passing of Lee’s resolution was the formal “declaration” of independence by the American colonies and technically this was all that was needed to cut the British tie

2. An important rupture of this kind called for some formal explanation and an inspirational appeal was also needed to enlist other British colonies in the Americas, to invite assistance from foreign nations, and to rally resistance at home
3. Shortly after Lee made his memorable motion on June 7, Congress appointed a committee to prepare an appropriate statement and the task of drafting it fell to Thomas Jefferson, a Virginia lawyer; despite his youth (33) he was already recognized as a brilliant writer and he measured up splendidly to the assignment
2. After some debate and amendment, the Declaration of Independence was formally approved by the Congress on July 4, 1776 (the “Explanation of Independence”)
 1. Jefferson’s pronouncement was magnificent in that he gave his appeal universality by invoking the “natural rights” of humankind—not just British rights
 2. He argued persuasively that because the king had flouted these rights, the colonists were justified in cutting their connection; he then set forth a long list of the presumably tyrannous misdeeds of George II of Britain
 3. The overdrawn bill of indictment included imposing taxes without consent, dispensing with trial by jury, abolishing valued laws, establishing a military dictatorship, maintaining standing armies in peace, cutting off trade, burning towns, hiring mercenaries, and inciting hostility among the Indians
3. The formal Declaration of Independence cleared the air; foreign aid could be solicited with greater hope of success; those patriots who defied the king were now rebels
4. Jefferson’s defiant Declaration of Independence had a universal impact unmatched by any other American document (“shout heard round the world” has been a source of inspiration to countless revolutionary movements against arbitrary authority)

H. Patriots and Loyalists

1. The War of Independence was a war within a war
 1. Colonials loyal to the king (Loyalists) fought the American rebels (Patriots), while the rebels also fought the British redcoats; Loyalists were derisively called “Tories,” after the dominant political faction in Britain, whereas Patriots were called “Whigs”
 2. A popular definition of a Tory among the bitter Patriots: “A Tory is a thing whose head is in England, and its body in America, and its neck ought to be stretched
2. Like many revolutions, the American Revolution was a minority movement; many colonists were apathetic or neutral; the opposing forces contended not only against each other but also for the allegiance and support of the civilian population
 1. The British military proved able to control only those areas where it could maintain a massive military presence; often lacking bayonets but loaded with political zeal, the ragtag militia units served as remarkably effective agents of Revolutionary ideas

2. They convinced many colonists, even those indifferent to independence, that the British army was an unreliable friend and that they had better help the Patriot cause
3. They also mercilessly harassed small British detachments and occupation forces
3. Loyalists, number perhaps 16 percent of the American people, remained true to their king; families often split over the issue of independence including Ben Franklin and son)
4. Loyalists were tragic figures; for generations the British in the New World had been taught fidelity to the crown; loyalty is ordinarily regarded as a major virtue—loyalty to one's family, one's friends, one's country (if the king had triumphed, the Loyalists would have been acclaimed patriots and defeated rebels would be disgraced and punished)
5. Many people of education and wealth, of culture and caution, remained loyal; these wary souls were satisfied with their lot and believed that any violent change would only be for the worse; Loyalists were also more numerous among the older generation
6. Young people make revolutions, and from the outset energetic, purposeful, and militant young people surged forward; loyalists also included the king's officers and other beneficiaries of the crown—people who knew which side their daily bread came from; the same was generally true of the Anglican clergy and a large portion of their congregations, all of whom had long been taught submission to the king
7. Usually the Loyalists were most numerous where the Anglican church was strongest; a notable exception was Virginia, where the debt-burdened Anglican aristocrats flocked
8. The king's followers were in aristocratic New York City, Charleston and Pennsylvania and New Jersey (Pennsylvania farmers didn't feed Washington's troops in winter)
9. Loyalists were least numerous in New England, where self-government was especially strong and mercantilism was especially weak; rebels were most numerous where Presbyterian and Congregationalism flourished, notably in New England

I. The Loyalist Exodus

1. Before the Declaration of Independence in 1776, persecution of the Loyalists was relatively mild yet they were subjected to some brutality, including tarring and feathering
2. After the Declaration of Independence, which sharply separated Loyalists from Patriots, harsher methods prevailed; the rebels naturally desired a united front
 1. Putting loyalty to the colonies first, they regarded their opponents as traitors
 2. Loyalists were roughly handled, hundreds were imprisoned, and a few hanged
 3. But there was no reign of terror comparable to that which later bloodied both France and Russia during their revolutions (the leading Loyalists fled to British lines)

4. About eighty thousand loyal supporters of George III were driven out or fled, but several hundred thousand or so of the mild Loyalists were permitted to stay; the estates of many of the fugitives were confiscated and sold (financed the war)
5. Some fifty thousand Loyalist volunteers at one time or another bore arms for the British; they also helped the king's cause by serving as spies, by inciting the Indians, and by keeping Patriot soldiers at home to protect their families; ardent Loyalists had their hearts in their cause and a major blunder of the British was not to make full use

J. General Washington at Bay

1. With Boston evacuated in March 1776, the British concentrated on New York as a base of operations, which was a splendid seaport, centrally located, where the king could count on cooperation from the numerous Loyalists which called New York home
 1. An awe-inspiring British fleet appeared off New York in July 1776; it consisted of some five hundred ships and thirty-five thousand men—the largest armed force yet
 2. General Washington, dangerously outnumbered, could muster only eighteen thousand ill-trained troops with which to meet the crack army of the invader
 3. Disaster befell the Americans in the summer and fall of 1776; outgeneraled and out-manuevered, they were routed at the Battle of Long Island, where panic seized the raw recruits—but the narrowest of margins, Washington escaped to Manhattan Island
 4. Retreating northward, he crossed the Hudson River to New Jersey and finally reached the Delaware River with the British close at his heels; the Patriot cause was at low ebb when the rebel remnants fled across the river after collected all available boats
2. The wonder is that Washington's adversary, General William Howe, did not speedily crush the demoralized American forces; but he was no military genius and he well remembered the horrible slaughter at Bunker Hill, where he had commanded
3. Howe did not relish the rigors of winter campaigning and he evidently found more agreeable the bedtime company of his mistress, the wife of one of his subordinates
4. Washington, who was now almost counted out, stealthily recrossed the ice-clogged Delaware River and at Trenton, on December 26, 1776, he surprised and captured a thousand Hessians who were sleeping off the effects of their Christmas celebration
5. A week later, he slipped away and inflicted a sharp defeat on a smaller British detachment at Princeton; this brilliant New Jersey campaign, crowned by these two lifesaving victories, revealed "Old Fox" Washington at his military best

K. Burgoyne's Blundering Invasion

1. London officials adopted an intricate scheme for capturing the vital Hudson River valley in 1777; if successful, the British would sever New England from the rest of the states

1. The main invading force, under General Burgoyne, would push down the Lake Champlain route from Canada and General Howe's troops in New York, if needed, could advance up the Hudson River to meet Burgoyne near Albany
2. A third and much smaller British force, commanded by Colonel Barry St. Leger, would come in from the west by way of Lake Ontario and the Mohawk Valley
2. British planners did not reckon with General Benedict Arnold; after his repulse at Quebec in 1775, he had retreated slowly along the St. Lawrence River back to the Lake Champlain area, by heroic efforts keeping an army in the field
3. The British had pursued his tattered force to Lake Champlain in 1776 but they could not move farther south until they had won control of the lake (carrying supplies)
 1. While the British stopped to construct a sizeable fleet, tireless Arnold assembled and fitted out every floatable vessel; his tiny flotilla was finally destroyed after desperate fighting, but time, if not the battle, had been won (winter forced British to retire)
 2. General Burgoyne had to start anew from this base the following year; if Arnold had not contributed his daring and skill, the British invaders of 1776 almost certainly would have recaptured Fort Ticonderoga (instead, Burgoyne started from Montreal)
4. General Burgoyne began his fateful invasion with seven thousand regular troops; progress was painfully slow, for axmen had to chop a path through the forest while American militiamen began to gather like hornets around Burgoyne's flanks
5. General Howe was causing astonished eyebrows to rise because at a time when it seemed obvious that he should be starting up the Hudson River from New York to join his slowly advancing colleague, he deliberately embarked with the main British army for an attack on Philadelphia, the rebel capital (he wanted to force a general engagement with Washington's army, destroy it, and leave the path wide open for Burgoyne's thrust)
6. General Washington, keeping a wary eye on the British in New York, hastily transferred his army to the vicinity of Philadelphia; in late 1777, he was defeated in two pitched battles, at Brandywine Creek and Germantown—then General Howe settled down
 1. Benjamin Franklin, truthfully jested that Howe had not captured Philadelphia but that Philadelphia had captured Howe; Washington finally retired to winter quarters at Valley Forge and there his frostbitten and hungry men were short of everything
 2. Nevertheless, Washington's army was whipped into a professional army by Prussian drillmaster, the profane but patient Baron von Steuben during that winter and spring
7. Burgoyne meanwhile had begun to goy down north of Albany, while a host of American militiamen swarmed about him; in a series of engagements, General Arnold trapped the British army and the Americans had also driven back St. Leger's force at Oriskany

8. Unable to advance or retreat, Burgoyne was forced to surrender his entire command at Saratoga on October 17, 1777, to the American general Horatio Gates
9. Saratoga ranks high among the decisive battles of both American and world history; the victory immensely revived the faltering colonial cause and it made possible the urgently needed foreign aid from France, which in turn helped ensure American independence

L. Strange French Bedfellows

1. thirsting for revenge against Britain, was eager to inflame the quarrel that had broken out in America; the New World colonies were Britain's most valuable overseas possession and if they could be taken from them, it would cease to be a front-rank power
2. might then regain its former position and prestige (lost of the Seven Years' War)
3. cause rapidly became something of a fad in France
 1. The bored aristocracy, which had developed some interest in the writings of liberal French thinkers like Rousseau, was rather intrigued by the ideal of American liberty
 2. French officials were prompted by a realistic concern for France's interests
 3. French agents secretly provided the Americans with lifesaving supplies of firearms and gunpowder, chiefly through a sham company rigged up for that purpose
 4. About 90 percent of all the gunpowder used by the Americans in the first two and a half years of the war came from the French arsenals and companies
4. Secrecy enshrouded all these French schemes; open aid to the American rebels might provoke Britain into a declaration of war, and France was not ready to fight war
 1. France feared that the American rebellion might fade out, for the colonies were proclaiming their desire to patch up differences but the Declaration of Independence in 1776 showed that the Americans really meant business (victory at Saratoga)
 2. After the humiliation at Saratoga in 1777, the British Parliament belatedly passed a measure that in effect offered the Americans home rule within the empire
 3. If the French were going to break up the British Empire, they would have to bestir themselves and Benjamin Franklin played skillfully on French fears of reconciliation
5. The French king, Louis XVI, was reluctant to intervene; he was alert enough to see grave dangers in aiding the Americans openly and incurring war with Britain
 1. But his ministers at length won him over by arguing that hostilities were inevitable to undo the victor's peace of 1763 and if Britain should regain its colonies, it might join with them to seize the sugar-rich French West Indies to compensate for rebellion
 2. The French had better fight while they could have an American ally rather than wait and fight both Britain and its reunited colonies in the future

6. So France, in 1778, offered the Americans a treaty of alliance, which promised every-thing that Britain was offering—plus independence; both allies bound themselves to wage war until the United States had won its freedom and until both agreed with the foe
7. This was the first entangling military alliance in the experience of the Republic and one that later caused prolonged trouble; they were painfully aware that it bound them to a hereditary foe that was also a Roman Catholic power (accepted with distaste)

M. The Colonial War Becomes a World War

1. England and France thus came to blows in 1778 and Spain entered the fray against Britain in 1779, as did Holland; combined Spanish and French fleets outnumbered British
2. The weak maritime neutrals of Europe, who had suffered from Britain's dominance over the seas, now began to demand more respect for their rights
 1. In 1780 Catherine the Great of Russia took the lead in organizing the Armed Neutrality, which she later sneeringly called the "Armed Nullity"
 2. It lined up almost all the remaining European neutrals in an attitude of passive hostility toward Britain; the war was now being fought not only in Europe and North America, but also in South America, the Caribbean, and Asia
3. To Britain, struggling for its very life, the scuffle in the New World became secondary; Americans deserve credit for having kept the war going until 1778, with secret French aid
 1. From 1778 to 1783, France provided the rebels with guns, money, immense amounts of equipment, about one-half of America's regular forces, and naval strength
 2. France's entrance into the conflict forced the British to change their basic strategy in America; before they could count on blockading ports but not anymore now that the French had powerful fleets in American waters to protect their own West Indies
 3. The British decided to evacuate Philadelphia and concentrate forces in NY City
4. In June 1778 the withdrawing redcoats were attacked by General Washington at Monmouth, New Jersey but the battle was indecisive and the British escaped to New York, although about one-third of their Hessians deserted (Washington remained in NY)

N. Blow and Counterblow

1. In the summer of 1780, a powerful French army of six thousand regular troops, commanded by Comte de Rochambeau, arrived in Newport, Rhode Island; no real military advantage came immediately from this French reinforcement, although preparations were made for a Franco-American attack on New York (distrust)
2. Improving American morale was staggered later in 1780, when General Benedict Arnold turned traitor; a leader of dash and brilliance, he was suffering from a well-grounded but petulant feeling that his valuable services were not fully appreciated

3. Arnold plotted with the British to sell out the key stronghold of West Point, which commanded the Hudson River for money and an officer's commission but the plot was detected in the nick of time and Arnold fled to the British side
4. The British meanwhile had devised a plan to roll up the colonies, begging with the South, where the Loyalists were numerous; Georgia was overrun in 1778-1779; Charleston, South Carolina, fell in 1780 (capture of five thousand men and four hundred cannons)
5. Warfare now intensified in the Carolinas, where Patriots bitterly fought their Loyalists neighbors; the tide turned later in 1780 and 1781 when American riflemen wiped out a British detachment at King's Mountain and then defeated a smaller force at Cowpens
6. In the Carolina campaign of 1781, General Nathanael Greene, a Quaker-reared tactician, distinguished himself by his strategy of delay; standing and then retreating, he exhausted his foe, General Charles Cornwallis—by losing battles but winning campaigns, the "Fighting Quaker" succeeded in clearing Georgia and South Carolina of British troops

O. The Land Frontier and the Sea Frontier

1. The West was ablaze during much of the war; Indian allies of George III, hoping to protect their land, were busy with torch and tomahawk
 1. Fateful 1777 was known as "the bloody year" on the frontier; although two nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, the Oneidas and the Tuscaroras, sided with the Americans, the Senecas, Mohawks, Cayugas, and Onondagas joined the British
 2. Mohawk chief Joseph Brant, a convert to Anglicanism who believed, not with reason, that a victorious Britain would restrain American expansion into the West
 3. Brant and the British ravaged large areas of backcountry Pennsylvania and New York until checked by an American force in 1779; in 1784 the pro-British Iroquois were forced to sign the Treaty of Fort Stanwix, the first treaty between the United States and an Indian nation—under its terms the Indians ceded most of their land
2. Yet even in wartime, the human tide of westward-moving pioneers did not halt its flow
3. In the wild Illinois country, the British were especially vulnerable to attack, for they held only scattered posts they had captured from the French previously
 1. An audacious frontiersman, George Rogers Clark, conceived the idea of seizing these forts by surprise; in 1778-1779 he floated down the Ohio River with about 175 men and captured in quick succession the forts Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes
 2. Clark's admirers have argued that his success forced the British to cede the region north of the Ohio River to the United States at the peace table in Paris
4. America's infant navy had been laying the foundations of a brilliant tradition

1. The naval establishment consisted of only a handful of nondescript ships, commanded by daring officers, the most famous of whom was a hard-fighting young Scotsman, John Paul Jones (its chief contribution was destroying British merchant shipping)
2. More numerous and damaging than ships of the regular American navy were swift privateers; these craft were privately owned armed ships specially authorized by Congress to prey on enemy shipping; altogether over a thousand American privateers responding to the call of patriotism sallied forth with seventy thousand men
3. They captured some six hundred British prizes, while the British warships captured about as many American merchantmen and privateers
5. Privateering was not an unalloyed asset; it had the unfortunate effect of diverting manpower from the main war effort and involving Americans in speculation and graft
6. British shipping was so badly riddled by privateers and by the regular American navy that insurance rates skyrocketed; merchant ships were compelled to sail in convoy, and British shippers/manufacturers pressured Parliament to end the war on honorable terms

P. Yorktown and the Final Curtain

1. One of the darkest periods of the war was 1780-1781, before the last decisive victory
 1. Inflation of the currency continued at full gallop and the government, virtually bankrupt, declared that it would repay many of its debts at the rate of only 2.5 cents to the dollar; the sense of unity withered and mutinous sentiments infected the army
 2. Meanwhile the British general Cornwallis was blundering into a trap; after futile operations in Virginia, he had fallen back to Chesapeake Bay at Yorktown to await seaborne supplies/reinforcements (assumed British would continue control of seas)
 3. The French were now prepared to cooperate energetically in a brilliant stroke
2. Admiral de Grasse, operating with a powerful fleet in the West Indies, advised the Americans that he was free to join with them in an assault on Cornwallis at Yorktown
3. Quick to seize this opportunity, General Washington made a swift march of more than three hundred miles to the Chesapeake from the New York area accompanied by Rochambeau's French army; Washington beset the British by land, while de Grasse blockaded them by sea after beating off the British fleet from reaching Cornwallis
4. Completely cornered, Cornwallis surrendered his entire force of seven thousand men on October 19, 1781; the triumph was no less French than America (sea and land)
5. George III stubbornly planned to continue the struggle, for the Britain was far from being crushed; it still had 55,000 troops in North America including 32,000 in the United States

6. Fighting actually continued for more than a year after Yorktown with Patriot-Loyalist warfare in the South especially savage; one of Washington's most valuable contributions was to keep the languishing cause alive, the army in the field, and the states together

Q. Peace at Paris

1. After Yorktown, despite George III's obstinate eagerness to continue fighting, many Britons were weary of war and increasingly ready to come to terms
 1. They had suffered heavy reverse in India and in the West Indies; the island of Minorca in the Mediterranean had fallen; the Rock of Gibraltar was tottering
 2. Lord North's ministry collapsed in March 1782 temporarily ending the personal rule of George III and a Whig ministry, rather favorable to the Americans, replaced them
2. Three American peace negotiators had meanwhile gathered at Paris: the aging but astute Benjamin Franklin; the flinty John Adams, vigilant for New England interests; and the impulsive John Jay of New York, deeply suspicious of Old World intrigue
 1. The three envoys had explicit instructions from Congress to make no separate peace and to consult with their French allies at all stages of negotiations
 2. France was in a painful position; it had induced Spain to enter the war on its side, in part by promising to deliver British-held Gibraltar but the rock was not falling to French and Spanish troops and Spain also coveted the immense trans-Allegheny area
3. France, ever eager to smash Britain's empire, desired an independent United States and therefore schemed to keep the new republic cooped up east of the Allegheny Mountains
4. France as paying a heavy price in men and treasure to win America's independence and it wanted to get its money's worth (promote French interests and policies)
5. But John Jay was unwilling to play France's game and he perceived that the French could not satisfy the conflicting ambitions of both Americans and Spaniards
 1. He saw signs indicating that the Paris Foreign Office was about to betray America's trans-Allegheny interests to satisfy those of Spain and therefore secretly made separate overtures to London, contrary to his instructions from Congress
 2. The hard-pressed British, eager to entice one of their enemies from the alliance, speedily came to terms with the Americans; a preliminary treaty of peace was signed in 1782 and the final peace treaty was signed the next year in 1783
6. By the Treaty of Paris of 1783, the British formally recognized the independence of the United States; in addition, they granted generous boundaries, stretching majestically to the Mississippi on the west, to the Great Lakes on the north, and to Spanish Florida
7. In Americans, on their part, had to yield important concessions; loyalists were not to be further persecuted, and Congress was to recommend to the state legislatures that

confiscated Loyalists property be restored; as for the debts long owed to British creditors, the states vowed to put no lawful obstacles in the way of their collection

8. Unhappily for the future harmony, the assurances regarding both Loyalists and debts were not carried out in the manner hoped for by London

R. A New Nation Legitimized

1. Britain's terms were liberal almost beyond belief; the enormous trans-Allegheny area was thrown in as a virtual gift but the key to the riddle could be found in the Old World
 1. Britain was trying to seduce America from its French alliance, so it made terms as alluring as possible; the shaky Whig ministry was determined, by a policy of liberality, to slave recent wounds, reopen old trade channels, and prevent future wars over the coveted trans-Allegheny region (not followed by successors of the Whigs)
 2. In spirit, the Americans made a separate peace; the Paris Foreign Office formally approved the terms of peace and France was immensely relieved by the prospect of bringing the costly conflict to an end and of freeing itself from its embarrassing promises to the Spanish crown (America alone gained from the "world" war)
2. Snatching their independence from the furnace of world conflict, they began their national career with a splendid territorial birthright and a priceless heritage of freedom