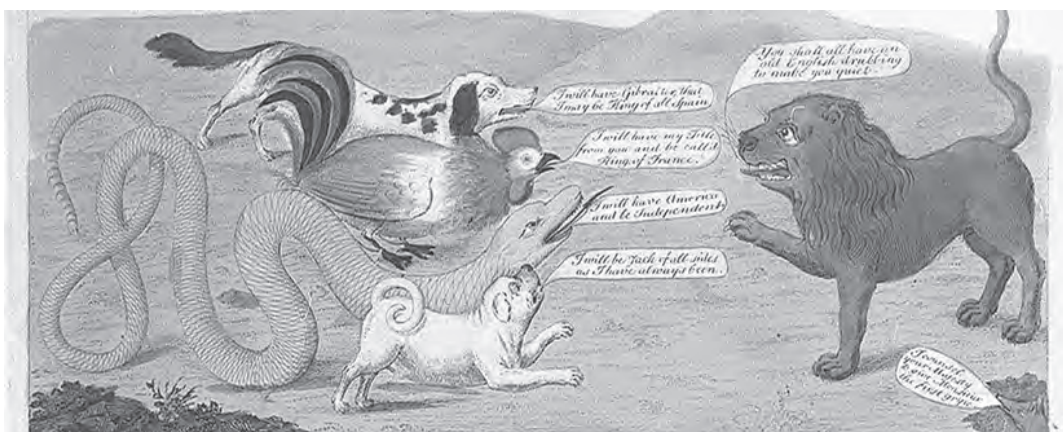


proved a major turning point in the war. Benjamin Franklin had been in Paris trying to secure a treaty of alliance with the French. However, the French were reluctant to back what seemed like an unlikely cause. News of the victory at Saratoga convinced the French that the cause might not have been as unlikely as they had thought. A Treaty of Amity and Commerce was signed on February 6, 1778. The treaty effectively turned a colonial rebellion into a global war as fighting between the British and French soon broke out in Europe and India.⁴²

Howe had taken Philadelphia in 1777 but returned to New York once winter ended. He slowly realized that European military tactics would not work in North America. In Europe, armies fought head-on battles in attempt to seize major cities. However, in 1777, the British had held Philadelphia and New York and yet still weakened their position. Meanwhile, Washington realized after New York that the largely untrained Continental Army could not win head-on battles with the professional British army. So he developed his own logic of warfare that involved smaller, more frequent skirmishes and avoided major engagements that would risk his entire army. As long as he kept the army intact, the war would continue, no matter how many cities the British captured.

In 1778, the British shifted their attentions to the South, where they believed they enjoyed more popular support. Campaigns from Virginia to South Carolina and Georgia captured major cities, but the British simply did not have the manpower to retain military control. And upon their departures, severe fighting ensued between local patriots and loyalists,



In this 1782 cartoon, the British lion faces a spaniel (Spain), a rooster (France), a rattlesnake (America), and a pug dog (Netherlands). Though the caption predicts Britain's success, it illustrates that Britain faced challenges—and therefore drains on their military and treasury—from more than just the American rebels. J. Barrow, *The British Lion Engaging Four Powers*, 1782. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

often pitting family members against one another. The War in the South was truly a civil war.⁴³

By 1781, the British were also fighting France, Spain, and Holland. The British public's support for the costly war in North America was quickly waning. The Americans took advantage of the British southern strategy with significant aid from the French army and navy. In October, Washington marched his troops from New York to Virginia in an effort to trap the British southern army under the command of General Charles Cornwallis. Cornwallis had dug his men in at Yorktown awaiting supplies and reinforcements from New York. However, the Continental and French armies arrived first, quickly followed by a French navy contingent, encircling Cornwallis's forces and, after laying siege to the city, forcing his surrender. The capture of another army left the British without a new strategy and without public support to continue the war. Peace negotiations took place in France, and the war came to an official end on September 3, 1783.⁴⁴

Americans celebrated their victory, but it came at great cost. Soldiers suffered through brutal winters with inadequate resources. During the



Lord Cornwallis's surrender signaled the victory of the American revolutionaries over what they considered to be the despotic rule of Britain. This moment would live on in American memory as a pivotal one in the nation's origin story, prompting the U.S. government to commission artist John Trumbull to create this painting of the event in 1817. John Trumbull, *Surrender of Lord Cornwallis*, 1820. Wikimedia.

single winter at Valley Forge in 1777–1778, over 2,500 Americans died from disease and exposure. Life was not easy on the home front either. Women on both sides of the conflict were frequently left alone to care for their households. In addition to their existing duties, women took on roles usually assigned to men on farms and in shops and taverns. Abigail Adams addressed the difficulties she encountered while “minding family affairs” on their farm in Braintree, Massachusetts. Abigail managed the planting and harvesting of crops, in the midst of severe labor shortages and inflation, while dealing with several tenants on the Adams property, raising her children, and making clothing and other household goods. In order to support the family economically during John’s frequent absences and the uncertainties of war, Abigail also invested in several speculative schemes and sold imported goods.⁴⁵

While Abigail remained safely out of the fray, other women were not so fortunate. The Revolution was not only fought on distant battlefields. It was fought on women’s very doorsteps, in the fields next to their homes. There was no way for women to avoid the conflict or the disruptions and devastations it caused. As the leader of the state militia during the Revolution, Mary Silliman’s husband, Gold, was absent from their home for much of the conflict. On the morning of July 7, 1779, when a British fleet attacked nearby Fairfield, Connecticut, it was Mary who calmly evacuated her household, including her children and servants, to North Stratford. When Gold was captured by loyalists and held prisoner,



American soldiers came from a variety of backgrounds and had numerous reasons for fighting with the American army. Jean-Baptiste-Antoine DeVerger, a French sublieutenant at the Battle of Yorktown, painted this watercolor soon after that battle and chose to depict four men in military dress: an African American soldier from the 2nd Rhode Island Regiment, a man in the homespun of the militia, another wearing the common “hunting shirt” of the frontier, and the French soldier on the end. Jean-Baptiste-Antoine DeVerger, *American Soldiers at the Siege of Yorktown*, 1781. Wikimedia.

Mary, six months pregnant with their second child, wrote letters to try to secure his release. When such appeals were ineffectual, Mary spearheaded an effort, along with Connecticut Governor, John Trumbull, to capture a prominent Tory leader to exchange for her husband's freedom.⁴⁶

Slaves and free black Americans also impacted (and were impacted by) the Revolution. The British were the first to recruit black (or "Ethiopian") regiments, as early as Dunmore's Proclamation of 1775 in Virginia, which promised freedom to any slaves who would escape their masters and join the British cause. At first, Washington, a slaveholder himself, resisted allowing black men to join the Continental Army, but he eventually relented. In 1775, Peter Salem's master freed him to fight with the militia. Salem faced British Regulars in the battles at Lexington and Bunker Hill, where he fought valiantly with around three dozen other black Americans. Salem not only contributed to the cause, he earned the ability to determine his own life after his enlistment ended. Salem was not alone, but many more slaves seized on the tumult of war to run away



Another John Trumbull piece commissioned for the Capitol in 1817, this painting depicts what would be remembered as the moment the new United States became a republic. On December 23, 1783, George Washington, widely considered the hero of the Revolution, resigned his position as the most powerful man in the former thirteen colonies. Giving up his role as commander-in-chief of the army insured that civilian rule would define the new nation, and that a republic would be set in place rather than a dictatorship. John Trumbull, *General George Washington Resigning His Commission*, c. 1817–1824. From the Architect of the Capitol.

and secure their own freedom directly. Historians estimate that between thirty thousand and one hundred thousand slaves deserted their masters during the war.⁴⁷

Men and women together struggled through years of war and hardship. For patriots (and those who remained neutral), victory brought new political, social, and economic opportunities, but it also brought new uncertainties. The war decimated entire communities, particularly in the South. Thousands of women throughout the nation had been widowed. The American economy, weighed down by war debt and depreciated currencies, would have to be rebuilt following the war. State constitutions had created governments, but now men would have to figure out how to govern. The opportunities created by the Revolution had come at great cost, in both lives and fortune, and it was left to the survivors to seize those opportunities and help forge and define the new nation-state.

VI. The Consequences of the American Revolution

Like the earlier distinction between “origins” and “causes,” the Revolution also had short- and long-term consequences. Perhaps the most important immediate consequence of declaring independence was the creation of state constitutions in 1776 and 1777. The Revolution also unleashed powerful political, social, and economic forces that would transform the new nation’s politics and society, including increased participation in politics and governance, the legal institutionalization of religious toleration, and the growth and diffusion of the population, particularly westward. The Revolution affected Native Americans by opening up western settlement and creating governments hostile to their territorial claims. Even more broadly, the Revolution ended the mercantilist economy, opening new opportunities in trade and manufacturing.

The new states drafted written constitutions, which, at the time, was an important innovation from the traditionally unwritten British Constitution. These new state constitutions were based on the idea of “popular sovereignty,” that is, that the power and authority of the government derived from the people.⁴⁸ Most created weak governors and strong legislatures with more regular elections and moderately increased the size of the electorate. A number of states followed the example of Virginia and included a declaration or “bill” of rights in their constitution designed to protect the rights of individuals and circumscribe the prerogative of the government. Pennsylvania’s first state constitution was the most radical and democratic. They created a unicameral legislature and an Executive Council but no



genuine executive. All free men could vote, including those who did not own property. Massachusetts's constitution, passed in 1780, was less democratic in structure but underwent a more popular process of ratification. In the fall of 1779, each town sent delegates—312 in all—to a constitutional convention in Cambridge. Town meetings debated the constitution draft and offered suggestions. Anticipating the later federal constitution, Massachusetts established a three-branch government based on checks and balances between the branches. Independence came in 1776, and so did an unprecedented period of constitution making and state building.

The Continental Congress ratified the Articles of Confederation in 1781. The articles allowed each state one vote in the Continental Congress. But the articles are perhaps most notable for what they did not allow. Congress was given no power to levy or collect taxes, regulate foreign or interstate commerce, or establish a federal judiciary. These shortcomings rendered the postwar Congress weak and largely ineffectual.

Political and social life changed drastically after independence. Political participation grew as more people gained the right to vote, leading to greater importance being placed on representation within government.⁴⁹ In addition, more common citizens (or “new men”) played increasingly important roles in local and state governance. Hierarchy within the states underwent significant changes. Society became less deferential and more egalitarian, less aristocratic and more meritocratic.

The Revolution's most important long-term economic consequence was the end of mercantilism. The British Empire had imposed various restrictions on the colonial economies including limiting trade, settlement, and manufacturing. The Revolution opened new markets and new trade relationships. The Americans' victory also opened the western territories for invasion and settlement, which created new domestic markets. Americans began to create their own manufactures, no longer content to rely on those in Britain.

Despite these important changes, the American Revolution had its limits. Following their unprecedented expansion into political affairs during the imperial resistance, women also served the patriot cause during the war. However, the Revolution did not result in civic equality for women. Instead, during the immediate postwar period, women became incorporated into the polity to some degree as “republican mothers.” Republican societies required virtuous citizens, and it became mothers' responsibility to raise and educate future citizens. This opened opportunity for women regarding education, but they still remained largely on the peripheries of the new American polity.





In the thirteen colonies, boycotting women were seen as patriots. In British prints such as this, they were mocked as as immoral harlots sticking their noses in the business of men. Philip Dawe, *A Society of Patriotic Ladies at Edenton in North Carolina*, March 1775. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Approximately sixty thousand loyalists ended up leaving America because of the Revolution. Loyalists came from all ranks of American society, and many lived the rest of their lives in exile from their homeland. A clause in the Treaty of Paris was supposed to protect their property and require the Americans to compensate Loyalists who had lost property during the war because of their allegiance. The Americans, however, reneged on this promise and, throughout the 1780s, states continued seizing property held by Loyalists. Some colonists went to England, where they were strangers and outsiders in what they had thought of as their mother country. Many more, however, settled on the peripheries of the British Empire throughout the world, especially Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Quebec. The Loyalists had come out on the losing side of a Revolution, and many lost everything they had and were forced to create new lives far from the land of their birth.⁵⁰

In 1783, thousands of Loyalist former slaves fled with the British army. They hoped that the British government would uphold the promise of freedom and help them establish new homes elsewhere in the Empire. The Treaty of Paris, which ended the war, demanded that British troops leave runaway slaves behind, but the British military commanders upheld earlier promises



Joseph Brandt as painted by George Romney. Brandt was a Mohawk leader who led Mohawk and British forces in western New York. Wikimedia.

and evacuated thousands of freedmen, transporting them to Canada, the Caribbean, or Great Britain. They would eventually play a role in settling Nova Scotia, and through the subsequent efforts of David George, a black loyalist and Baptist preacher, some settled in Sierra Leone in Africa. Black loyalists, however, continued to face social and economic marginalization, including restrictions on land ownership within the British Empire.⁵¹

The fight for liberty led some Americans to manumit their slaves, and most of the new northern states soon passed gradual emancipation laws. Some manumissions also occurred in the Upper South, but in the Lower South, some masters revoked their offers of freedom for service, and other freedmen were forced back into bondage. The Revolution's rhetoric of equality created a "revolutionary generation" of slaves and free black Americans that would eventually encourage the antislavery movement. Slave revolts began to incorporate claims for freedom based

on revolutionary ideals. In the long term, the Revolution failed to reconcile slavery with these new egalitarian republican societies, a tension that eventually boiled over in the 1830s and 1840s and effectively tore the nation in two in the 1850s and 1860s.⁵²

Native Americans, too, participated in and were affected by the Revolution. Many Native American groups, such as the Shawnee, Creek, Cherokee, and Iroquois, had sided with the British. They had hoped for a British victory that would continue to restrain the land-hungry colonial settlers from moving west beyond the Appalachian Mountains. Unfortunately, the Americans' victory and Native Americans' support for the British created a pretense for justifying rapid and often brutal expansion into the western territories. Native American peoples would continue to be displaced and pushed farther west throughout the nineteenth century. Ultimately, American independence marked the beginning of the end of what had remained of Native American independence.

VII. Conclusion

The American Revolution freed colonists from British rule and offered the first blow in what historians have called “the age of democratic revolutions.” The American Revolution was a global event.⁵³ Revolutions followed in France, then Haiti, and then South America. The American Revolution meanwhile wrought significant changes to the British Empire. Many British historians even use the Revolution as a dividing point between a “first British Empire” and a “second British Empire.” At home, however, the Revolution created a new nation-state, the United States of America. By September 1783, independence had been won. What the new nation would look like, however, was still very much up for grabs. In the 1780s, Americans would shape and then reshape that nation-state, first with the Articles of Confederation, ratified in 1781, and then with the Constitution in 1787 and 1788.

Historians have long argued over the causes and character of the American Revolution. Was the Revolution caused by British imperial policy or by internal tensions within the colonies? Were colonists primarily motivated by constitutional principles, ideals of equality, or economic self-interest? Was the Revolution radical or conservative? But such questions are hardly limited to historians. From Abraham Lincoln's use of the Declaration of Independence in the Gettysburg Address to twenty-first-century Tea Party members wearing knee breeches, the Revolution has remained at the center of American political culture. Indeed, how one



understands the Revolution often dictates how one defines what it means to be American.

The Revolution was not won by a few founding fathers. Men and women of all ranks contributed to the colonies' most improbable victory, from the commoners who protested the Stamp Act to the women who helped organize boycotts against the Townshend duties; from the men, black and white, who fought in the army to the women who contributed to its support. The Revolution, however, did not aim to end all social and civic inequalities in the new nation, and, in the case of Native Americans, it created new inequalities. But over time, the Revolution's rhetoric of equality, as encapsulated in the Declaration of Independence, helped highlight some of those inequalities and became a shared aspiration for future social and political movements, including, among others, the abolitionist and women's rights movements of the nineteenth century, the suffragist and civil rights movements of the twentieth century, and the gay rights movement of the twenty-first century.

VIII. Reference Material

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NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

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