Liberty's Impact: The World Views 1776

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The Colonies before 1776: The View from Continental Europe

Durand Echeverria
Professor of French

In the summer of 1776 a young French nobleman, the comte de Ségur, was enjoying the pleasures of a fashionable international watering place. There, mingling in the cosmopolitan salons with “accidental or voluntary deputies,” as he said, “from all the monarchies of the Continent,” he witnessed the tremendous impact of the American Revolution on European minds.

The “courageous audacity” of the American “insurgents,” he later recalled, “delighted everyone and excited a general admiration... I was particularly struck by the burst forth in everybody’s heart and universal sympathy for the revolt of a people against their king. The serious English card game was suddenly replaced in all the salons by a no less sober game which was christened ‘Boston.’”

This wave of Continental enthusiasm for American liberty centered in France, still the intellectual, political, and economic heart of Europe and the spawning ground of new ideas; it was even stronger in the Netherlands, and it extended into Germany, Scandinavia, Switzerland, Austria, and northern Italy and even leaped into Poland and across the Pyrenees into Spain. It was no mere fad for intellectuals and liberal nobles. When John Adams arrived in Paris in 1778 he found that Benjamin Franklin (who had become a living symbol of all that European men in the new United States and their revolution) bore a name known to every French chambermaid and scullion.

Americans engendered in the minds of many continental Europeans a strange, elaborate myth. These courageous rebels against monarchal despotism were seen as the world’s champions of liberty, wise and enlightened citizens leading unbridled lives in a Rousseauian rural utopia, and—as if all this were not enough—enjoying a miraculous prosperity that was no more than their due reward for practicing all the philosophic virtues.

This mirage, as it has been called, is not difficult to understand. The American Revolution occurred at just the right moment to provide what seemed to be an irresistible demonstration of the truth and practicality of all the liberal ideas and reforms the French philosophers and their European disciples had been preaching for nearly a century. It proved, or seemed to prove, that representative republicanism was the best form of government, that tolerance and civil liberty, the freedom of press and speech, the right to property, and all the other natural rights should and could be secured, that laissez-faire economics produced wealth and prosperity, that colonialism was morally, politically, and economically right, that men living simple lives close to the soil regained the “natural” virtues that reason taught, and that enlightenment and liberty were twin sisters who hand in hand would redeem the world. What Carl Becker was to call “the heavenly city of the eighteenth-century philosophers” seemed to be rising to shining towers across the Atlantic. To doubt its reality or its excellence was to deny the practicality of the philosophers’ design for a brave new world.

Modern historians have generally rejected the theory that the ideas of the philosophers, men like Voltaire and Rousseau, “caused” the French Revolution; and by the same evidence the American Revolution, as the supposed demonstration of these ideas, was not responsible for the cataclysm that swept across Europe after 1789. Yet, however distorted the European vision was, the Americans won their revolution and (after a shaky start) firmly established a new nation with a constitution embodying the principle of representative republicanism and a bill of rights. They thus provided a most persuasive model. The American Revolution did not cause the French Revolution, but it provided justification for it.

It would be misleading, however, to suggest that enthusiasm for the American Revolution was unanimous on the Continent. There were cynics who refused to be
swept off their feet. There were those who sincerely believed in monarchical absolutism, feared republicanism, and foresaw either that the new nation would become a despotism ruled by petty tyrants or that, if it did become rich and powerful, it would lack the "elevation of soul" of older states and by its immature energy would overwhelm and crush a weakened and impoverished Europe. Such negative reactions reflected a pessimism that had been an important element in previous eighteenth-century thought. Montesquieu, despite his idealism, had been a historical pessimist and had seen history as the story of the inevitable rise and fall of empires. Rousseau had said that man's so-called progress from the savage state to civilization had been in fact a long descent into political slavery and moral corruption. Voltaire in his darker moods of cosmic pessimism had brooded over the all-pervading evil that seemed to be inextricably woven into all human lives. Buffon, the great naturalist scientist, had believed that the successful development of all forms of life, including the human, was fated geographically to certain favorable environments. This latter idea developed into the theory that Americans, Indians and colonials alike, were degenerate branches of humanity. There was therefore a dark and negative image of America, the exact contradiction of the American dream. European attitudes toward the New World, from Celaire's discovery down to the present, have always been ambivalent.

It was indeed such geographic, historical, and moral pessimism that the idealized images of the American Revolution and the American republic were intended to refute. Man, the Americanists were saying, could achieve, permanently and irreversibly, a free, egalitarian, prosperous, virtuous, and just society, and he would do this first on the fresh and uncorrupted ground of the New World.

A prevalent impression has been that this American dream, or mirage, or myth flashed suddenly upon the Western mind immediately after the echo of "the shot heard round the world" reached Europe's shores. This seems to have been what the count de Sèvres thought. But ideas are never created from nothing, and recent studies have shown that the American mirage did not explode upon the world, but rather was an image that had been taking shape for at least a century.

The earliest sixteenth- and seventeenth-century French publications describing the region from Massachusetts to Georgia were virtually all geographies and voyages, and their authors thought of the first small settlements merely as outposts of European civilization. Indian society and customs were the subjects of human interest.

The reader familiar with the early accounts of the explorations of Spanish and Portuguese America is immediately struck by the sobriety of that early picture of
North America. The British colonies never presented to the European mind any quality of fancy; anything that might be considered as the house of the chemist, brains, for the early inhabitants of Latin America never was applied to these northern regions. The single exception might be the legendary Inca kingdom supposedly existing between the Ayacucho Mountains and the Cuzco-Mogote — the city of the Indians, the French Huguenot pastor Charles de Rochefort depicted in elaborate detail (see figure 1) — but even this was a work, Protestant sort of fact. The relative late dates of the English settlements may be one explanation, and another may be the intolerable nature of the northern coasts, which allowed no vision of an idyllic life in a tropical paradise. A third explanation may be the character of the settlers themselves. The conquerors of Mexico and Peru had been marvelous masters of medieval chivalric adventures in strange new worlds dazzled with incredible riches and bearing exotic names. The settlements at Plymouth and Jamestown turned out to be desperate struggles to establish precarious economic beachheads which could be held only at the price of hard work and physical suffering. They could symbolize only the realistic appearance of the northern European middle classes and of the late Reformation.

Yet by the 1760s observers in continental Europe were receiving intimations that though British North America held fabulous treasures of gold and silver it did contain colonial societies developing in significant new ways. The immediate occasion of this awareness was the need for French Protestant refugees, driven out by Louis XIV’s brutal repression, to find a haven. The British colonies, where loyalist prejudices were minimized by a majority in which refugees might find greater opportunities and broader freedom than in Europe. Pioneers on both sides of the Channel, impelled by various motives, were quick to point out three great attractions to the French Huguenots: religious freedom, economic opportunity, and self-government. As early as the 1620s a trickle of French Protestants had reached the colonies; but the first sizable migration, some eighty families, occurred in 1679, instigated partly by an English government tract, Description du Pays Nouvelle Colombie (Description of Carolina), which offered many economic inducements to “foreign Protestants,” promising free transportation, land grants on generous terms, and all the rights of free naturalized subjects, including, of course, the freedom to practice their own religion.

The groundwork for this successful venture had been prepared perhaps by the 1674 French translation of Richard Blank’s Description of the Island of Jamaica, which also contained accounts of Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, New York, and New England, undeniably directed at French Protestant readers. Of Maryland, Blame had reported to Louis XIV: “by the advice of the General Assembly of that Province” it had established laws under which was guaranteed “toleration of Religion, to all sorts that profess the Faith of Christ, which hath been a great signal of toleration of one and the same, and to set up that Government, rather than in another where liberty of Conscience was denied them.” And of New England, “The Inhabitants are Governed by Laws of their own making, which they have agreed upon among themselves, and have imposed on themselves as they pleased.”

Then in 1681 Charles de Rochefort, who had visited the colony, gave still greater encouragement by publishing a description of Virginia, Maryland, Carolina, New York, Pennsylvania, and New England, written, he said, “to satisfy the laudable and pious inclinations of various honest persons, who have told us they ardently desire to be informed of the colonies deemed most suitable to receive the (French) Protestant families scattered in diverse places in Europe, where, not having freedom to practice their religion, they lament their lot whilst wishing to have the wings of the dove to fly away to some place where they may worship and serve God in spirit and in truth.”

After Louis XIV stripped the Huguenots of all remaining civil rights by breaking in 1685 the Edict of Nantes, such publications increased. Several were by French Protestants who had journeyed to the colonies and were reporting back to their brethren in exile in the Netherlands.

PROBABLY those books and tracts reached the eyes of few besides the French refugees, but the Quaker movement in French, Dutch, and German literature to attract European Protestants to Pennsylvania seemed to have had a profound influence and to have reached a much wider audience, including a number of leading intellectuals. Among those was William Penn’s vision in Rotterdam, Benjamin Franklin, a friend of Leibniz. In 1684 he published in The Hague a French-language Recueil (Miscellany) of articles on Pennsylvania addressed to “poor French Protestants” which depicted Pennsylvania as a haven of peace and prosperity for the oppressed of Europe and a refuge for “streams of minds of low estate,” promising representative government by secret ballot, taxation by consent, the right of citizens to make their own laws, and, above all, religious freedom. The tract in the Recueil was used and plagiarized for a hundred years by European writers on Pennsylvania; Franklin’s popularity were remembered, and Penn was considered as a secular saint of the Enlightenment, “a modern Lysias,” for his wise legislation and humane treatment of the Indians (see figure 2). In 1712 his friend Jean Le Clerc wrote an enthusiastic piece on the freedom of Pennsylvania and its prosperity, freedom, and virtue of its inhabitants, and told a diverting anecdote of the Quaker settlements in New Jersey. “A man asked one of the proprietors of New Jersey there were any lawyers there. The other replied no. Then he asked him if there were any doctors. The other answered no. Finally he asked whether there were any theologians, and the other man said no again, and he added, ‘Happy state!’ exclaimed the man. ‘It should be called Paradise.’”

American independence was a French idea before it was an American one. The news of the rapid growth in numbers and economic self-sufficiency of the British North American colonies early suggested to French observers the attractive possibility that these settlements might rebel against the restrictions imposed on them by the British Navigation Acts and eventually achieve independence, thereby greatly weakening England’s power overseas. This prediction first appeared, so far as we know, in 1705 in a piece of political propaganda by one Abbe Doeho, Les Intérêts de l’Angleterre Maintenus (English interests maintained), which was printed in many editions in French and other languages. This hopeful expectation of American independence was picked up and repeated by the political philosopher Montesquieu, by Argens, and by the French prime minister Maurepas and Choiseul. The latter even sent copies to the British colonies after the French and Indian War to learn whether the Americans were ripe for revolution.

HURLY had concentrated on selling Pennsylvania as a land of opportunity and freedom. Voltaire, in his Letters Concerning the English Nation, gathered about the figure of the good Pennsylvania Quaker, a benign economic figure in his broadside, who, whose religion became (in French minds) almost indistinguishable from the philosophers’ desires and whose doctrines of pacifism, tolerance, and humanitarianism seemed to mirror those of European liberals. When the young Dr. Benjamin Rush, just out of medical school in Edinburgh, arrived in Paris in 1760, he told the Physicists (a group of liberal economists who were already beginning to campaign against slavery) that the Pennsylvania Quakers were freeing their blacks; this news was greeted with the assumption that soon all Americans would follow this inspiring example.

The most characteristic to be added to the broadening scene was the Enlightenment American, in large part typified — and propagated — by Benjamin Franklin. Franklin was to impress Franklin’s Experiments and Observations on Electricity, published in London in 1751, that he suggested a French translation. A group of French scientists successfully performed the first time the experiment Franklin had suggested of drawing lightning from the clouds by means of an iron rod, and even the king came to watch. The poor Abbe Nollet, who had said that he had never before been recognized authority on electricity, found his basic theories refuted; he furiously protested that the whole thing was a fraud, for such learning could not come out in the world of America. But Franklin of course triumphed, and soon progressive French physicists were proudly calling themselves Franklinistes.

To his reputation as a scientist soon was added Dr. Franklin as a diplomat and champion of liberty, particularly for his testimony before Parliament in 1766, widely published in Europe, in which he definitely declared that there was no power on earth which could force a man to change his opinions. His visit to the Continent in 1767 was a triumph, and he gained added renown as an economist, for the Physicists proudly announced that his writings, which they hastened to translate and publish, revealed that he had always been an adherent to their doctrine of laissez-faire economics.

Figure 2. Penn achete les Sauvages le Pays qu’il veut occuper et
Franklin was not, however, the only evidence that "a new, American" was rising across the Atlantic. Cotton Mather's "Exposition of the First Causes of Action to Mather" had been published in Paris before Franklin's Experiment. John Dickinson's letters from the American Philosophical Society received enthusiastic praise. Benjamin West's paintings were well received. William Shippen's Lives of the Philosophers was published by the royal botanic gardens in Paris and found that the French scientist was already in correspondence with the American botanist John Bartram. In 1771 the first volume of the Transactions of the American Philosophical Society was published, and Franklin, the founder of the society, sent copies to his learned friends throughout Europe. The practicality of American scientific thought, as displayed in this collection, appealed to the spirit of the age, and scholarly journals hailed its publication as evidence that the British colonies were extending and advancing the empirical rationalism and enlightenment of the century. Such an image had political value to Franklin, who was working hard to build support for the Continent for the colonies, and he reinforced the effort by electing European scientists like Buffon, Condorcet, and Lavoisier to his American Philosophical Society.

To the increasing reports of the colonists' prosperity Franklin gave statistical proof by announcing that the population was doubling every twenty-five years to the eighteenth-century mind, which had not yet any Malthusian fears, irreversible proof of economic and social health. The Physicists especially welcomed such figures, which confirmed their general theory of the possibility of an expanding economy. Moreover they exaggerated the accounts of American prosperity because they believed it resulted directly from the application of their primary principle that real wealth was created only by agriculture, and because Americans seemed to concern themselves less with the narrower economic doctrines of free trade, antidelusionism, abolitionism, and general education. This image of America as the bountiful, prolific another rousing the world's hungry and needy was to endure for decades ahead.

Arguing from the same economic principle, the Physicists also advocated rationalism and warned against urban growth. In this they were strongly supported on moral grounds by Rousseau and his disciples, who preached that cities bred vice and corruption and that life in the countryside was more natural, more effectively idealized in Rousseau's best-selling novel La Nouvelle Héloïse, which was the essential condition for virtue, simplicity, and true happiness. Here once more the British colonists appeared to be persuasive examples. One enthusiasm was that of Gaspard de Roumey, dedicated his book L'Éloge de la Nature (The Man of Nature) to the inhabitants of Virginia, writing, "In the land which you inhabit and cultivate we see no cities, no crimes, no sickness . . . you are as Nature would have us all to be. And he incorporated into his novel two correlative letters by the Physicien Du Pont de Nemours, who had written of Virginia, "In no country in the world are women more beautiful, even at an advanced age, or men handsomer or more robust, or minds more lofty, or characters more grave, or hearts more interceded."

T his was the Stamp Act crisis of 1765 that made the Americans appear as the champions of political and civil liberty. Franklin's defence of Parliament seemed to threaten the continental European mind not a challenge to aristocratic corruption but an attack upon the principle of monarchical absolutism, which was being given new life by the aging Louis XV in France, by Gustavus III in Sweden, by Catherine of Russia, and by Frederick the Great of Prussia. John Dickinson's Letters moved Delight to write, "I know no work more capable of instructing the people in their inalienable rights and of inspiring them in the love of liberty."

Yet it would have been surprising if this concept had stood unchallenged, for one of the lessons of history is that actions produce reactions, and these frequently generate other actions. As we have already seen, it is what happened. The positive mirage had a negative opposite: which served to express European fears in the face of an expanding and potentially competitive and minimal new European world. 'This image too was a mirage. It took many shapes, but the most striking and pervasive was the sociological theory of American degeneration.

This theory gave rise to a debate which occupied a large place in the annals of science and of the philosophes of history and geography. The basic assumption was environmental determinism, the idea that all forms of life are necessarily shaped by their physical environment. The special form of this hypothesis was that the climate of the Americas was more humid and cooler than that of Europe and therefore created an unfavorable habitat for animal and human life. The explanation usually given was that the Americas had been created by God as a low-humidity desert; it was no accident thatlater from the wold of the flood and were still, as the were, cold and dripping from their recent deluge past. The impact of this scheme and the effects of the phrase 'New World' shifted from 'newly discovered' to 'nearly created'.

This theory of climatic influence on human behavior went back to Plato and had been extensively applied by Montesquieu in his Spirit of Laws (1748), but it was Buffon who gave it the new application. In a volume of his Natural History (1762) he claimed that the climate of the Americas from all available evidence animal species in America were less varied, smaller, and less vigorous than those of the Old World. Buffon's scheme is subtly compelling. 'something contrary to the development of living nature in the New World' was equally evident in the native Indians, "a mere animal of the first rank." Buffon did not extend the theory to include the degeneration of Europeans in America, but a Dutch disciple of his, the Abbé de Cassis, did make this crucial step. In his Encyclopédie Philosophique sur les Amérindiens (Philosophique Inquiries of the Americans) (1768–69), he claimed that he had evidence of weak physical, moral, and especially intellectual development. He stated that if the white children born in America, he said, like the young Indians, lost all interest and tractability after an early precocious stage, so that they were "already blind when other men are just beginning to see." None of the American revolutionaries had produced a graduate of even mediocre talents. 'It
A Hope, a Refuge, and a Model

David Underdown
Professor of History

THE cause of America is as great a measure the cause of all mankind.” So wrote Tom Paine in Common Sense, the most dramatically effective of all the pamphlets of the American Revolution. Paine’s conception of the Revolution as a crusade for liberty was soon to become a commonplace of American rhetoric, cherished and immortalized in the Declaration of Independence and in countless sermons, patriotic speeches, and revolutionary tracts. And the American case, originally deduced from the specific legal rights they claimed and the general principles of self-government, came to rest increasingly on an appeal to the inalienable rights of all men.

The Revolution in its worldwide context, as an event of major importance extending far beyond America, is a major theme of this series. In this article we shall observe the particular ways in which many Englishmen came to understand America as an instance of widely reinforced desires to sweep away what appeared to them, with less than to Americans, in a corrupt and discredited monarchical establishment. The Revolution coincided with a crisis in England as well as American society, and to illustrate this point we need look no further than the career of Tom Paine. For Paine was after all an Englishman: he had arrived in America little more than a year before he published Common Sense in January 1776. The pamphleteer’s blaring invective reflected not so much American experience as the pent-up indignation of a frustrated English writer, a failed schoolmaster and hack writer; the bitterness of a dismissed excise officer who had seen the oppressive corruption of the monarchical system from the inside. While Paine called on the Americans to accept their own logic and to throw off all colonial shackles completely, he was generating from his English grievances and going only a stage further than other alienated Englishmen who were denouncing the injustices of their own society.

The connection between the American crisis and the cause of reform in England existed at several different levels. In the world of high politics Lord Stanhope, Lord Bute, and Edmund Burke were all for reconciliation with America, as part of their criticism of the North ministry. Both Burke and Chatham thought of the colonies primarily as transplanted Englishmen, with the same rights and liberties. Both considered the Americans’ struggle to that of their seventeenth-century English Forebears, who had resisted Charles I’s unconstituted taxation in the years before the revolution of the 1640s. The genius Horace Walpole, son of a famous prime minister, regarded the Americans as being “as much my countrymen as those born in the parish of St. Martin’s-in-the-Fields,” adding that in such domestic quarrels he was inclined “to wish better to the sufferers than to the oppressors.” When the fundamental principle of “no taxation without representation” was threatened in any part of the empire, no Englishman was safe. “If liberty be not countradicted in America,” Chatham declared, “it will sink, fail, and die in this country.” But although he and Burke might wish to reform both the governmental system and the colonial relationship in points of detail, they did not intend to sweep either away completely. That was for Paine and the radicals.

Just as the imperial system was breaking down in the 1760s, so was the comfortable stability of eighteenth-century England. Gone were the placid days when a Walpole or a Pelham could quietly rule by influence and patronage, while country gentlemen reflected on the perfection of their “glorious constitution” as they presided over lesser
paternally over their broad acres. By 1776 virtually every English institution, however sacred, was under attack. John Wesley had long since exposed the church’s failure to reach the underprivileged; now there were abortive attempts to modify the Thirty-Nine Articles and extend broader civil rights to dissenters. A flood of great books published in 1776—a vintage year for British authors—showed the wide range of discontent and the variety of proposals for reform. In The Wealth of Nations Adam Smith exposed the fallacies of trade regulation and proposed a new science of political economy. Jeremy Bentham’s Fragment on Government undermined the traditional foundations of English legal theory as taught by Blackstone and pointed the way to reform of the laws and the penal code on utilitarian principles. While within the system establishment Whigs like Burke and his allies in the group headed by Lord Rockingham attacked ministerial influence and corruption, from outside it came two notable arguments for more far-reaching change: Observations on Civil Liberty, by the dissenting cleric and economist Richard Price, and Take Your Choice, by the former naval officer John Cartwright. Virtually all critics of the national malaise agreed that a serious effort was needed to recover the lost virtue of the British people. The political radicals saw no hope unless Parliament itself—the sink of corruption, the nursery of the constitution—was reformed. Cartwright described it—was drastically reformed.

For radical critics like these, America was both a hope and a potential refuge. Like their Continental counterparts, enlightened Englishmen had their “island in the West,” their conception of a free society beyond the Atlantic. Burke was expressing the common view when he noted that “a love of freedom” was “the predominant feature” of the American character. The diary of Sylvia Neville, an English medical student of republican inclinations, abounds in more extreme statements of this belief. In April 1768 one of Neville’s friends remarks that “the people in America are much more virtuous and understand the nature of liberty better than the body of the people here.” Later in the same year another friend recommends emigration to America because “Liberty seems to be flying from this country and making a desirable progress there.” The thirteen colonies. Price wrote in his Observations, were in the happy intermedium stage between the barbarism of primitive societies and the corrupt degeneration now evident in Europe, and he instanced their rapid population growth, flourishing trade, and low crime rate as proofs of their virtue.

Price was not the only Englishman to contrast the moral superiority of the colonies with the corrupt frivolity prevailing in Britain.

English radicals welcomed the liberty they saw in America. They also did what they could to encourage its growth. In the generation before 1776 two in particular, Richard Baren and Thomas Hollis, busily collected and published reprints of seventeenth-century republican authors. Milton, James Harrington, and other defenders of the commonwealth that had followed the execution of Charles I in 1649. They were especially interested in sending books of this kind to America, seeing in the colonies the best hope of advancing the cherished cause of liberty. Samuel Johnson, indeed, blamed the whole American Revolution on Hollis’s subversive gifts to the Harvard Library. Harvard was important, no doubt, but not perhaps that important. Still, Hollis’s activities are a reminder of how much the intellectual leaders in America owed to their reading of the commonwealth. Such was Harrington’s popularity that it inspired a jocular proposal to rename Massachusetts the Commonwealth of Oceana, from the title of his famous utopian work. Hollis’s hopes of America were shared by many other English radicals who corresponded freely with the colonists.

America thus appeared, especially to radicals, as a more hopeful alternative society, and as a model for English reformers. But it was also seen as a potential refuge at a time when liberty seemed to be threatened in England, just as New England had been in the days of the Puritan migration. In 1767 a report that some forty thousand people were emigrating annually from Britain to North America inspired Sylvia Neville to comment: “May they flourish and set up in due time a glorious free government, which may serve as a retreat to those Free men who may survive the final ruin of Liberty in this Country.” One of his acquaintances looked forward to the independence of the colonies so that they could be “an asylum to those Englishmen who have spirit and virtue enough to leave their country.” The wife of another remarked that “if she was young she would fly from our oppressors and go to the banks of the Ohio.” And when Lord Shelburne offered a job to the scientist Joseph Priestley, buried in the provinces at Leeds, Priestley replied that if he left Leeds he would only be to go to America. Eventually he relocated and accepted Shelburne’s offer, but twenty years later he did take refuge in America, driven out of England by the historical climate of the 1780s.

For more than ten years before the American Revolution the cause of the English radicals was linked with that of the colonists; both recognized the connection. Just as some sort of change in the imperial relationship was inevitable in view of the great expansion of population and wealth in eighteenth-century America, so too was
pressure bound to build up in Britain itself for a more representative political system as accelerating commercial and industrial growth produced a larger and more literate urban middle class. The first stormy portent of the new age was the slightly disputable figure of John Wilkes. In the motion No. 45 of his paper 'The North Briton' (1763) Wilkes attacked the government so violently that he was arrested for sedition. He was released, but soon afterwards had to flee to Paris. In 1768 he returned and offered himself as a candidate for Parliament for the county of Middlesex. Skillfully marshalling the middle-class voters of the suburbs, and with the aid of London artisans rising on more strictly bread-and-butter issues, Wilkes threw the whole political system into turmoil. He was repeatedly elected by huge majorities and as regularly unseated, until at last the House of Commons declared his hopelessly outvoted opponent elected. Amid the resulting uproar Wilkes appeared as a symbolic victim of the same parliamentary opposition which the colonists had resisted in the Stamp Act and were again resisting in the Townshend Duties. The colonies occasionally adopted Wilkesite slogans: the '45 of the crossed North Briton, for instance (see figure 1). More important, they sent Wilkes both moral and material support: a gift of turtledoves from Boston, shown from Virginia, a donation of $1,200 from South Carolina, a sympathetic formal address from the Sons of Liberty. In Britain, even the elitist Rockingham threw themselves into organizing petitions and protest meetings, at which there was much raucous singing of "Britons Never Shall Be Slaves."

Throughout the 1770s the twin causes of men's English radicalism and support for American freedom proceeded side by side. Benjamin Franklin and other Americans in London continued regularly with "Honest Whigs" like Price, Priestley, and James Beattie (yet another prominent radical theorist) debating societies in London taverns and coffeehouses. Price in particular had a wide circle of American acquaintances, and his letters continued to encourage them to resist even after the outbreak of war. The colonists, as he saw the matter, were fighting for the freedoms of Englishmen as well as for their own. Price's ideas were widely and sympathetically read in America. In 1778 Congress gave him official recognition with an offer of honorary American citizenship. Price politely declined the offer in terms which reflected the dual conception of America typical of radical thinking: America, he said, was "now the hope, and likely soon to become the refuge of mankind."

But although America might be a hope and a refuge, the English radicals' interests in the struggle for independence naturally took second place to their preoccupation with the need for reform at home. Misgovernment of the colonies by a succession of administrations demonstrated the vicious incompetence of the existing system, but the Wilkes affair showed that reform had to begin in England. Cartright's first pamphlet, American Independence (1774), has been aptly described by his later biographer, J. W. Osbourne, as "a work of art for America, an urgent demand for reform in England." Two years later, Cartright's more famous Take Your Choice used the American issue as an excuse for advancing a full-scale radical program. His conception of the choice between a healthy "Natural and Civil Liberty" and the existing, corrupt "Regal Property" system is portrayed in the dual pyramid model of his frontispiece (see figure 2). The broad, democratic sweep of his proposals shows how far the American conflict, coupled with the stubborn resistance of North's government to any kind of change, had raised English reform ideology to an entirely new plane.

Earlier radical Whigs like Baron and aless had looked backward, back to the mythical freedom of the Anglo-Saxons, or to the virtues of the common man. But by the 1800s the middle class, the intelligentsia, was looking forward, to a new kind of society. The republican historian Catharine Macaulay, the first woman to play a significant role in the intellectual fringe of left-wing politics (and thus doubly disliked by Dr. Johnson), exemplified their marked suspicion of the common people. In the third volume of her History of England, published in 1767, she enthusiastically lauded the English revolutions of the 1640s who "had set up the banners of liberty." But the banner should be controlled by the people's leaders, not by the people themselves: it was useless "to attempt the explaining political truths to the vulgar and illiterate." So Mrs. Macaulay expounded the concept of a revolutionary elite, leading the people to freedom, against their wills if necessary. Even John Wilkes, who was not at home with the mob, had no interest in anything more than a very limited broadening of the franchise — if indeed he had any systematic ideas at all.

Compared with this historically oriented, elitist radicalism, Cartright's audacity is as breathtaking as Paine's. In Take Your Choice all the staple features of the campaign for democracy in the following century are anticipated: votes for all adult males instead of a franchise restricted to property owners; annual elections instead of the seven-year interval which then prevailed; electoral districts equal in population instead of the chaotic variety of English boroughs. It was a program remarkably similar to the one implemented in 1776 in the New Pennsylvania constitution, as Cartright was quick to note. Cartright's conception of an ideal society was the Jeffersonian one of a nation of small, independent farmers; but his program looked forward to the democratic demands of an industrial population, to the English Chartists of the 1840s. It was the American Revolution, not as has sometimes been argued, the French, in which the seeds of English democratic politics were sown.

The spirit of Wilkes's deeds as a radical leader, his stand did lead to the foundation of the most influential of the early reform organizations, the Society for the Supporters of the Bill of Rights (again the echoes of the seventeenth century) in 1769. Its leaders included such men as Mrs. Macaulay's brother, John Sawbridge, a London M.P. and alderman and thus an important link with the world of organized politics. But the society was heir to the usual differences over personalities and doctrine that tend to afflict radical minorities, and in its early days its main function seems to have been paying off Wilkes's debts. Yet its role extended to that of a London pressure group the society began experimenting with political methods hitherto unknown in England. In the 1774 election, pledges were demanded from parliament candidates as the price of the society's support, thus violating the venerable theory of the M.P.'s right of independent judgment. Among the policies which the society's candidates were urged to support were reform of the electoral system and recognition of the colonies' "essential right of taxation." Most of the winners in London and nearby Middlesex, including Wilkes and Sawbridge, subscribed, but the proposal made no headway outside the capital.

The radicals suffered from two serious handicaps: the absence of a large and organized base, and the lack to which they were able to transform an intellectual platform into a mass movement, and the impotence of a lack of patriotism that were naturally leveled against them from the other side. Wilkes suffered from the war, but not to the point of economic disaster; and wartime dislocation was offset by the beginnings of rapid industrial growth — which in turn had not yet gone far enough to produce the awful social tensions that were to propel Britain so soon to revolution early in the next century. The radicals denounced the war even more emphatically than the Rockinghams and Chartists; in Parliament and made some efforts to discourage men from enlistment (see figure 3), but they were unable
to reap much political benefit until military failure and war-weariness gave them a second chance at the end of the decade. In the meantime they could do little more than regret British victories and rejoice in American causes. "If the Government succeeds in making slaves of America," Neville reflected, "I would have none upon me here at home."

A second and more serious phase of the British political crisis emerged in 1799 and 1800. By this time the British government had become increasingly sensitive to the implications of North's government being too lenient towards the privileged political parties—the country gentry—into active critics of the system. The results were a resurgence of interest in the schemes of the reformers and the temporary radicalization of a large segment of the voting population, with county associations being formed to press for reform.

The association movement first spread in Yorkshire, a county that was both large and underrepresented in the House of Commons, as well as being a region of early industrialization. The leader was a progressive Anglican parson (as usual phenomenon) named Christopher Wyvill. The squires and women of the Yorkshire Association petitioned for controls over government spending (to eliminate corruption) elections every three years, and a sweeping reformation of constitutions. Control of spending ("economic reform" as it was called) was acceptable to the cautious Rockingham politicians, many of whose local supporters were prominent in the associations. But the other points, wild as they sound by comparison with Chartism's ideas, went much further. Behind them lay a denial of the theory of "virtual representation"—the idea that in some mysterious way all Englishmen were represented in Parliament whether they had votes or not—that was at the heart of the original argument with the Americans. The association movement spread quickly to other counties, and by the early months of 1800 both Lord North and the political order he stood for were seriously threatened.

The aims of Wyvill and the Yorkshiremen were basically conservative: to restore the independence of the rural gentry and freeholders in a still agrarian society. But in London they threatened allies with more far-reaching aims. While Wyvill was organizing in Yorkshire, a Middlesex county meeting discussed similar proposals, and a Westminster Committee was formed to elaborate them. Among its members was a Unitarian physician, Dr. John Jebb, who made the revolutionary proposal of a national convention of association delegates. Legitimized by popular election, the convention would in effect assert the right to legislate (as a sort of English Constitutional Congress) if Parliament refused to cooperate. In the spring of 1799 the Westminster Committee adopted a platform drawn up by Jebb and Chartists, calling for much the same reforms as outlined in Take Your Choice!

North survived for two years; the unfree parliamentary system lasted for another half-century. Radicals like Jebb and Chartists reentered into the constitutional争论, using their newly founded Society for Constitutional Information to keep alive the cause of democracy by educational and propaganda means rather than by organized political action. In the short run, a more important legacy of the radical ferment was provided by Lord Shelburne. In the 1770s at Bowood, his Wiltshire home, Shelburne had surrounded himself with many of the leading Whig intellectuals: Adam Smith, Price, Priestley, and Bentham were all there at one time or another. In the brief spell as prime minister after North's downfall, Shelburne set about implementing some of their proposals. The true heir of Chatham, Shelburne offered generous terms to the United States (not that he had much alternative), to ease the path of British commerce in America, a development of far greater consequence than hanging on to territory. In the peace treaty he abandoned the American Loyalists to their fate, as his critics were quick to point out (see figure 4). Schemes for more national taxation and the focusing of economy from restrictive regulation of foreign trade—offered by Shelburne's successor, the younger William Pitt, who greatly admired Adam Smith—show Shelburne's importance as the link between the philosophical reformers and public policy making. Later in the 1780s Pitt also promoted measures, similar to Wyvill's, for limited electoral reform, though he was unable to get them through Parliament. More successful was his quiet continuation of "economic reform" by the gradual elimination of sinecures and the insistence on higher standards of public service. So an important stage in the modernization of English government also owes a good deal to the upheaval of the American Revolution.

The Revolution was thus a crucial event in British as well as American history. From Hills to Jebb, English reformers had close relations with leading Americans, and the American and British reform causes constantly interacted with each other. After the war was over, many Americans had admired the idealized model and potential haven of Eng- lish libertarians. "Next to the introduction of Christianity among mankind," wrote Price in 1786, "the American Revolution may prove the most important step in the progressive course of human improvement." The United States would be "a place of refuge for oppressed men in every region of the world...a seat of liberty, science and virtue," a nation whose influence would spread until "kings and priests have no more power to oppress." Price hoped that his countrymen would be the greatest gainer from the loss of an empire, provided they were "wise enough to improve properly the check that has been given to the despotic of their masters, and to catch the flame of liberty which has saved their American brethren." Distillation came in the end, but even sixty years later the Chartist leader, William Lovett, could still see America as "a beacon to cheer and animate the friends of human rights and equal laws."
Maps and the Revolution

Jeanette D. Black

Throughout history wars have been a stimulus to the making of maps. In the twentieth century, we have seen how the tremendous demand for maps in the Second World War resulted in a revolution in the methods and techniques of modern map making. Similarly, in the wars of the eighteenth century, maps of many kinds were essential for the armies, and the fleets required charts of the coasts and waterways. The response to these needs in the Revolutionary War was successful by all contemporary standards, and the cartographic record is nearly complete: plans have survived for almost every battle, for many minor skirmishes, and occasionally even for strategic maneuvers in which there was no confrontation. There are also plans of fortifications and encampments, city plans, road maps, and maps on a smaller scale showing entire campaigns or theaters of action. Examples of several of these types of maps are among the illustrations (see figures 2 through 6); others, however, cannot be shown because reduction from the large size of the originals would eliminate much of their meaning.

Most maps of the Revolution were made by a small group of men with professional training—British officers in the Corps of Engineers or attached to various regiments that served in the war. At that time there was no governmental agency for publishing maps, but the need was met by such commercial publishers in London as William Faden, Sayer and Bennett, Andrew Dury, and a few others. Apparently the public interest made it worth their while to publish anything relating to the American war that came into their hands. Dates of publication were often only a few weeks after the battles recorded in the maps, and sometimes the plates were revised and printed again to show information received later. It is not uncommon, therefore, for two maps with identical titles to show different situations in the development of the same campaign. Sometimes, too, the engraver of the revision left the original date unchanged so that occasionally a map is found containing information about an incident that had not taken place at the date engraved on it.

The British were fairly well prepared with maps at the outbreak of hostilities, but they would have been much better prepared if the war could have been delayed for a few years. Ever since 1763, when the French surrendered their American territories, an ambitious project had been under way to map all the coastal

Figure 1. An engraved sketch showing a marine surveyor on the coast of Nova Scotia using his instrument for measuring angles. From J.F.W. Des Barres, The Atlantic Neptune, 1789.
areas of the British colonies. Promoted originally by military officers whose experience in the French and Indian War had shown them the vital need for maps, a survey was begun, with the civilian Board of Trade acting in cooperation with the navy. Beginning at the north with Newfoundland, the St. Lawrence, and Nova Scotia, the work continued along the coast of New England, resulting in fine, detailed charts, most of them on a larger scale than anything that had been available before. When hostilities broke out in 1775, the surveying ceased abruptly just west of Narragansett Bay. In the South also the period between the wars saw a great deal of government-sponsored making of maps and charts, although few of them found their way into print before the war began. Manuscript materials, however, existed for large sections of the coast, and a special effort, subsidized by the British government, was made to have the charts engraved, or at least copied, for the use of naval and military officers. By 1780 atlases containing selections of the northern surveys were being published under
The engineer officer of this imperfect draft was diligent and diligent for it. Considering that he had not paper, pen, ruler, neither compass, and being disturbed by good many shells or cannon’s balls flying in the fort.

After France became officially allied with the United States, numerous maps were produced by engineers connected with the campaigns in which the French armies and fleets participated. A few of these were published in Paris during the war, although many more remained in manuscript. Rochambeau’s officers made numerous maps of the area around Newport, and the route of the march to Yorktown was surveyed in minute detail.

Knowledge of the course of the war and understanding of its incidents by the general public while it was going on depended to some extent on the availability of maps, and of course only the publication of maps through engraving could provide cartographic materials for general information. In this respect the Americans again were at a disadvantage. Facilities for copper engraving, thus the only means of printing maps, were confined to the larger cities, and with the successive occupation of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia by the British, even the small amount of publication that took place in the early stages of the war was reduced to almost nothing.

On the other hand, the interested Englishman had the opportunity of being better informed concerning

![Figure 4. Sketch of Part of the Island of St. Louis Computed at about 1200 feet to a inch. London, published by James Wyld. The extensive military and naval activity of the British and French in the West Indies is a phase of the Revolution little known than the battles on the mainland of North America. This map was published some years after the event to illustrate a letter of General James Grant, dated 21 December 1778, recounting the struggle for one of the British Caribbean islands.](image-url)
incidents of the war through the constant stream of relevant maps that came from the presses of London. In France, interest in the American war also occasioned the printing of numerous maps. At first the publishers brought out new editions of maps showing the areas of conflict. Many had long been out of date, and, although sometimes a few revisions gave them the look of currency, most of them had been compiled in the period of the French and Indian War. So, however, French publishers were eagerly republishing English maps and atlases, and French versions of English maps were easy to come by in Paris. Later the progress of the war could be followed in French maps, although these did not approach in quantity the reprinted English maps.

In other countries of Europe also, many maps were published to show the areas involved in the war as well as individual battles, and this suggests that considerable interest and curiosity led publishers to bring out maps for the public. For example, in 1776, an Italian publisher in Leghorn brought out a world atlas of relatively small size for general use. None of the maps in it were new or up to date, and only a few showed the North American continent, but in his introduction the publisher claimed that he was providing maps to show the scene of the conflict in the British colonies. Sometimes also maps were published to accompany news sheets which contained information on individual battles. Usually they were copied from English or French maps, but occasionally a publisher would make up his own map to illustrate a news story, with a result that added little or nothing to the reader’s knowledge of a distant and unfamiliar scene. (See figure 5.)

The impetus given to map making by the Revolution resulted in new knowledge of many sections of the United States, but this information was not incorporated into general maps of the country, or of the North American continent, until after the war was over. When the peace negotiations met in Paris in 1783, they placed reliance on a large map published more than twenty-five years earlier by Dr. John Mitchell, a remarkable production for its time but necessarily inaccurate in many areas. When the treaty was drawn up, the northeastern boundary based on this map was so ambiguous that it became a subject for diplomatic controversy that lasted into the nineteenth century. Eventually, however, the maps of the Revolution had their influence on the improved mapping of the new United States in the generation following its establishment as an independent country.

Figure 5. Plan du Siège d’York en Virginie par l’Armée alliée d’Amérique et de France... en Octobre 1781. The upper half of a manuscript map of the siege of Yorktown, by an anonymous French military engineer. The map was cut into sections to be mounted on linen and folded so that it could be carried conveniently in an officer’s pocket.
“Trifling Patriots and a Freeborn Pelé”  
Revolutionary Ideology and Afro-Americans

Rhett S. Jones

While most Euro-Americans are celebrating the two-hundredth birthday of the United States enthusiastically but commercially—stews containing unidentified substances colored red, white, and blue are being ball-hoed as "Liberty Pies," and cheap plastic were spangled with even cheaper stars is being sold—a fierce debate rages among Afro-Americans whether they should participate in the celebration. Some feel the birthday invitation should be returned marked "Will not attend."

Dr. Joseph H. Jackson, president of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., urges his fellow blacks to join wholeheartedly in the celebration; but the distinguished black historian Lerone Bennett hotly disagrees and insists that African-Americans ought not to be involved in the celebration because "playing with freedom in America's original sin, the curse of a country that came into the world hocked on the most dangerous of all drugs, hypocrisy. Since Thomas Jefferson said good-bye to his slaves and went off to Philadelphia to write the Declaration of Independence, playing with freedom has become a national passion in America."

Maroonage and the Rise of Racism

Blacks were the first American revolutionaries. The initial battle for freedom in the New World took place not in British North America in April 1775 but in Spanish Santo Domingo in December 1522, where a number of African-born slaves sought liberty. Yet today even well-read persons are unfamiliar with the term Maroon—a fact that tells much about the racist biases of most North American historians. Maroons were slaves who challenged the authority of white colonizers, reared, ran away, and established separate communities. (For an eighteenth-century depiction of a Maroon, see figure 1.) That blacks should have been the first American rebels should not, for those able to tear themselves away from racist perspectives, prove surprising, because, as the historian Benjamin Quarles has noted, they had not much property to lose, and they had no blood ties to their European oppressors. Moreover, they had been torn from the West African polities to which they owed allegiance and therefore, unlike most Euro-Americans, did not have to agonize over whether their loyalties belonged on this or the further side of the Atlantic. John Stedman, whose Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam tells much about eighteenth-century Maroon societies, thought that the cruelty inflicted on the slaves (see figure 2) were the primary reason for the phenomenon of maroonage. Maroon societies existed throughout the New World and were formally recognized by colonists in Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Venezuela, Ecuador, Santo Domingo, Mexico, Surinam, and Jamaica. DeCaires Price, "In a remarkable number of cases throughout the Americas, the whites were forced to bring themselves to use their former slaves for peace." (See figure 3, "Old Codpiece Making Peace.") In Brazil and Venezuela some historian frankly declare that the Maroon rebellions were the forerunners of their nation's struggles for independence, but the term Maroon remains unknown to most Americans celebrating the Bicentennial.

The black rebels were every bit as determined to fight for their freedom as the North American colonists were, and they used similar strategies. In 1740 one observer of the Jamaican Maroons asked, "Is it not natural to observe how strongly the Love of Liberty prevails in the Breasts of Men, notwithstanding the most wetted of Circumstances? These Runaways en-
**Figure 1.** "A Rebel Negro arrested on his guard." From John G. Staniford's Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam (London, 1796). This depiction of a typical Maroon is based on a sketch made by Staniford, who led troops against the Surinam black rebels from 1712 to 1717. Engraving by Batschard.

The Maroon war in Jamaica was a late 17th-century guerrilla conflict between the inhabitants of Jamaica and the British authorities. The Maroons were runaway slaves who had lived in the wilderness for years. When the British took over Jamaica in 1655, they faced a powerful enemy in the Maroons. The war lasted for several years, with both sides suffering heavy losses. The war ended in 1739 with the Treaty of Ryswick, which recognized the existence of the Maroons and their right to live in peace.

The Maroons were led by several notable figures, including the leader of the Black Jacobins, who was known for his clever tactics and military prowess. The war was marked by brutal fighting, with both sides committing atrocities against each other. The conflict ended with the establishment of a truce, and the Maroons were allowed to live in peace.

The war had a profound impact on the history of Jamaica. It marked the end of the Maroon war and the beginning of a new era of peace and stability. It also helped to establish the power of the British authorities in the region, and set the stage for the development of a new political system in Jamaica.

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**John Carter Brown Library**

**Proven that blacks were not men...** And proven it was, in one of the most remarkable systems of thought in the annals of mankind.

"An inconsistency not to be excused"

Americans since the Revolutionary era have largely accepted the idea that blacks are subordinate and degraded, for they have inherited this idea with the rest of their culture. But among the revolutionary generation and the one that succeeded it there was a consciousness — among both black and white — of the terrible things being done to Afro-Americans and to the principles of the American Revolution.

Winthrop Jordan, in his study of early American attitudes toward blacks, says that "slavery mocked the ideals upon which the new republic was founded." And this was recognized by some whites at the time in their opposition to slavery and the slave trade. In 1774 Rhode Islanders restricted the trade, declaring that "those who are desirous of enjoying all the advantages of liberty themselves, should be willing to extend personal liberty to others." In the same year John Allen, a Baptist minister in Massachusetts, angrily attacked the slave trade, saying, "If the blacks suffered themselves determined to win natural rights: 'Blush ye pretended votaries of freedom' ye trifling patriots' who are making a vain parade of being advocates for the liberties of mankind" while making men in chains. The Executive Council of Pennsylvania, if only a shade less idealistic than Allen, was more practical. It urged that the importation of slaves be prohibited because Europeans "are accustomed to see a people eager for liberty holding Negroes in Bondage."

Indeed, as Bernard Bailis has observed, the contrast between what the Americans sought for themselves and their treatment of blacks "became too glaring to be ignored." There could be no justification for slavery, asserted Richard Penn, a revolutionary pamphleteer of Philadelphia, for it rested simply on "force and power." He wondered what arguments in favor of slavery could be advanced "which will not militate against ourselves." And Samuel Hopkins noted in 1776 that blacks had "never forfeited their liberty or given anyone the right to enslave or sell them." Other Americans, too, were impressed by slavery, racist arguments: "I have yet to learn that the color of a man's skin," declared Oliver M. Perry, an American military commander in the War of 1812, "can affect a man's qualifications or forfeits his humanity."

The colonists were not blind to the inconsistency between liberty and slavery, as can be seen in an early draft of the Declaration of Independence. Among George III's many crimes listed there was that he had "waged cruel war against human nature itself violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery." But — an ominous portent for the future — the clause was stricken from the document signed in Philadelphia.

If blacks had not previously offended George III they now hastened to do so by flogging to the standard of the rebels. Inhabitants of the anti-slavery colonies were chary of naturalizing them: remembering maroons, they disliked the idea of armed slaves, and because they thought they would be held themselves in Europe by using slaves to fight for the liberty of white men. The reluctance of the commanders did not, however, prevent black men from enlisting for their services.

With an older revolutionary tradition of their own, and having fought for the American cause, Afro-Americans had little patience with attempts to maneuver revolutionary rhetoric. In 1777 the Boston blacks petitioned the General Court to abolish slavery and restore "the nature Right of all men." But in 1779 nineteen black folk in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, petitioned for their freedom and urged that "the name of slave may not more be heard in a land gloriously contending for the owners of freedom." In 1781, Benjamin Banneker, the noted black astronomer and mathematician who helped plan the town of Washington, D.C., pointed out that the American Revolution was to be "sacrosanct, that every individual of whatsoever rank or distinction, might with you equally enjoy the blessings of liberty." Between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, Afro-Americans never ceased to demand their freedoms in the language of the Founding Fathers, but most Euro-Americans never ceased to believe in natural rights theory, continuing to celebrate the United States as a land of the free. To maintain this hypocrisy they depended first one man and then another, but Afro-Americans patiently rapped each one away.

Some blacks tired of the game and decided that a revolution within the revolution was necessary to return the nation to its principles and to secure liberty for black women and men. One of the slaves taken in the 1800 slave rebellions led by Gabriel spoke to his white captors in the language of the Revolution, insisting that he had nothing more to offer than what General Washington would have had to offer, had he been taken by the British and put to trial by them. I have abdicated my life in endeavoring to obtain the liberty of my countrymen, and I am willing to offer my life; I beg, as a favour, that I may be immediately led to execution. I know that you have professed to shed my blood, why then all this mockery of a trial?"

David Walker, a free black living in Boston, was particularly adept at using revolutionary rhetoric against early American racists — so much so that he was pursued by proponents of slavery. Walker said the patriots themselves had written that when a people were confronted with the despotic government of the British, it was their duty to throw off such government, and to provide new guard for their future security. Now, Americans! I ask you, consider, was your suffering under Great Britain, one hundred times as cruel and grievous as that to which they have been reduced by you! You have not yet been reduced to slavery.

To emphasize the whites' hypocrisy, those involved in the Nat Turner rebellion settled on July 4 to strike for their freedom.

The actions of black folk and the useless efforts of abolitionists of both races caused the reactionary opposition of the Revolution to put aside their masks and settle down to the work of destroying a social order in which white skin was to carry a special privilege. To do so they had to consciously reject certain revolutionary principles and the theory that slavery is a natural institution in the tradition and that of the majority of their descendants — the continued enslavement and brutalization of black folk.

In 1800 the Virginian Herald analyzed the Gabriel plot: "Liberty and equality have become a byword. The phraseology, however, is often insipid and unimaginable, in a land of freedom, it is not only unpalatable and unpalatable, but dangerous and unspeakably wicked in this country, where every black man is a master, and every black slave a slave."
"You ain’t free if somebody lets you be free!"

David Walker would have stood in amazement at the debates of white men over whether black folk should be free. He had written, "Should tenants take it into their heads to emancipate any of you, remember that your freedom is your natural right." African Americans were aware of the deterioration of their position while the American government mattered and pressed itself on the international stage as the "land of the free." For blacks, the United States was a "hell upon earth," wrote Walker.

Most of his fellow blacks agreed. Venture Smith, an ex-slave, said of his attempts to obtain justice in Connecticut after being cheated by Captain Elisha Hart that in Africa Hart’s actions would have been branded a crime equal to highway robbery. But Captain Hart was a white gentleman, and I a poor African, therefore it was all right, and good enough for the black dog." Blacks were concerned not only for their own rights, but for those of their children, and in 1779 a group of Connecticut slaves petitioned for their liberty, lamenting "the miserable condition of our children, who are training up, and kept in preparation, for a like state of bondage and servitude." Free blacks were concerned with the condition of their slave brethren, and in 1797 petitioned to the United States government to establish the "unconstitutional bondage in which multitudes of our fellows in complexion are held." In 1799, seventy-six free blacks petitioned the kidnapping of free northern blacks, who were afterwards sold south into slavery. "If the Bill of Rights or the Declaration is, they wrote, "of any validity, we beseech, that as we are men, we may be admitted to partake of the liberties and unalienable rights herein held forth."

Slaves were equally aware of the rise of racism and of increased black misery. A secret communication among slaves coordinating a two-state revolt was uncovered in March 1816. One bondman had written another, "for freedom we want and will have, for we have served in this cruel land long enough." And when informed of a planned rebellion in 1812 one slave declared "they could not rise too soon for her, as she had rather be in hell than where she was." David Walker wrote in 1830, "We, the Blacks or Coloured People, are treated more cruelly by the white Christians of America, than devils themselves ever treated a set of men, women, and children on this earth." Nat Turner asked a new recruit for his planned rebellion how he came to be there: "He answered, his life was worth no more than others, and his liberty as dear to him. I asked him if he means to obtain it? He said he would, or lose his life."

While free blacks in the North petitioned legislators, entered the courts, and published tracts, none in the
South, for whom such actions meant torture or death, sought their liberty in the tradition of the Maroons as common in the region. In 1801, slaves in Virginia were planning a rebellion because, they said, "if the white people were destroyed they would be free." DeMarkea Vosey calmly observed, "We are free but the white people here won't let us be so, and the only way to be is to fight the whites." And David Walker wrote, "We shall be free and we will be free or die for it."

They [the whites] know well if we are men — and there is a secret rumor in their hearts which tells them we are — they know, I say if we are men, and see them treating us in the manner they do, that there can be nothing in our hearts but death alone, for them.

The respected black historian and poet, W. E. Burgh, has argued that there were two distinct freedoms movements among blacks in the early part of the nineteenth century, one involving slaves in rebellion, the other free blacks who worked to liberate their enslaved brethren. The results of both activities were increased black solidarity and heightened consciousness of the separate Afro-American identity. Solitude and consciousness were not limited to the United States, as Pedro Arcaya has observed in his history of the black rebellion in Venezuela in 1795. There slowly developed among the slaves, says Arcaya, the idea that they were the victims of a great injustice and that the color of their skin should be no barrier to the enjoyment of liberty. In Haiti, the liberator Toussaint L'Ouverture charged those who had rebelled against the black government of the island with having "dashed him and the Negro race and enslaved the liberty of the blacks." In the Americas, the common experience of enslavement and the struggle for freedom had created, in the words of Richard Price, "distinguishedly, Afro-American ways of dealing with life from the very beginning." Most slaves transported to the New World come from West Africa, and as some anthropologists believe, despite superficial differences between the many ethnic groups in the region, a certain cultural unity characterized the entire area. Some West Africans themselves seemed like, as much as they were disposed to focus on their differences than their similarities; but with the transportation of millions of them to the New World they discovered how much they had in common and began to act on this commonality.

One common action was maroonage. Maroon societies could not have existed without West Africans not already been in agreement on basic matters of family, economy, property, and religion. The similar beliefs that made possible the organization of Maroon societies and black rebellion also united blacks in other efforts. Quakers observe that blacks sometimes pooled their "own meager funds" so that one of their number might meet a fine and legal fees in a suit for freedom. From the Vida de J. J. Desalines, Goel de los Negros de Santo Domingo (México, 1898).

Figure 8. This typical Euro-American interpretation of the Haitian revolt against Desalines, one of the leaders, about his beloved, From the Vida de J. J. Desalines, Goel de los Negros de Santo Domingo (México, 1898).

Afro-Americans began deliberately to recognize and celebrate their African heritage. In Newport in 1789 a number of blacks met to establish the African Union Society, which, among other things, was to assist its members in time of distress and help young African-Americans find apprenticeships. In 1787 the Free African Society was founded by Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, who thought blacks should have an organization outside the churches that would crosscut denominational differences. The most important recognition of their African heritage was the unity of free blacks and slaves. Absalom Jones in 1787 wrote on behalf of free blacks, "Yet, while we feel impressed with grateful sensations for the presidential favours we ourselves enjoy, We cannot be insensible to the conditions of our afflicted Brethren." The slaves, Paul Gaffe, a successful black merchant in Massachusetts, observed in 1817 that "the massonment of 1,000,000 slaves depends on the faithfulness of the few who have obtained their freedom." In the same year free blacks in Philadelphia evolved: "That we never will separate ourselves voluntarily from the slave population of this country; we are their brethren by the ties of community, of suffering, and of writing. Free blacks did more than acknowledge their ties with slaves, create abolitionist societies, and petition federal and state governments. David Walker was free, as was Denmark Vossey, leader of an 1822 South Carolina slave conspiracy, who refused to return to Africa because he wished "to stay and see what God could do for his fellow blacks." By the 1790s, free blacks had probably been involved in instigators of slave rebellions in British North America for more than a century. One Virginia legislator expected them to "furnish the officers and soldiers around whom the slaves will rally." The struggle for liberty against a reign of terror and oppression during the conservative reaction to the Declaration of Independence strengthened ties among a people who already were bound together by their West African heritage and the tradition of maroonage. As the eighteenth century drew to a close, African-Americans saw themselves fighting against reactionary forces to preserve the principles of the Revolution, and it is not surprising that feelings of race pride should have resulted. Whites "shook because they held us in their infernal chains of slavery," wrote David Walker, "that we wish to be white of their color — by they are dreadfully afraid of us! — we wish to be as just it pleased our Creator to have made us." Black solidarity was further increased, slaves demanded thrown into a panther by their African American conviction of the rights of man encouraged with the successful Haitian battle for independence. The defeat by black rebels of British, French, and Spanish armies electrified all African-Americans because it represented an exciting fusion of maroonage and the ideology of the Revolution. As a result, black rebels broke out throughout the hemisphere. Jefferson feared the Haitian example would influence the slaves of the United States, and Napoleon regarded Haiti as an outpost of American republicanism and a challenge to the imperial domination. Whites on both sides of the Atlantic were frightened by the ferocity with which the Haitian rebels fought, and they feared that the atrocities inflicted on white folk, though to be sure, were no graver than to require little embellishment (see figure 4). The Haitians fought a heroic battle for freedom. A Haitian rebel declared to her daughter shortly before both were executed, "Be glad you will not be the mother of slaves." Afro-Americans caught between the rising tide of race and reaction in the United States, and the hostility of powerful European governments to democratic ideals found solace in the successful Haitian revolt, the encouragement of a small band of white abolitionists, the ringing statements of Spanish American revolutions (almost all of whom declared against slavery in a forthright manner that should have shamed the United States but did not), and themselves. Black Americans never abandoned the principles of the Revolution or its determination to win freedom for themselves and their children. In 1774 "a Grate Number of Blacks" affirmed: We are in common with all men a natural right to our freedom without being deprived of it by the Dungeon and everlasting Torment in a fire eternally burning. We have never been Manumitted in the freedom of a nation they helped create and have always fought to defend. Black Americans remain confined, torn between love of country and knowledge of what their country has done to them and to their loved ones. They debate among themselves whether or not they ought to celebrate, and their debates, although charged with emotion, have a certain weary familiarity. Moreover, one can tell that the antagonists have already chosen sides — as well they should, for black Americans have had to come to grips with white American hypocrisy at least once a year on the Fourth of July. In 1852, Frederick Douglass charged in an Independence Day speech that from the perspective of the Slave, your celebration is a sham of your boasted liberty, an empty boast, your national greatness swelling vanity, your watch of rejecting or reaping empty and barren, a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages.

Douglass and other blacks insisted that the Revolution would remain unfinished until Americans dedicated themselves to mending its fatal, racist flaw. W. E. Burgh, devoted much of his long life to winning for black Americans whites took for granted, and for the Martin Jordan and Josiah Jackson pursue the goals of the first Euro-American revolution peacefully.

Some Afro-Americans, however, have rejected this peaceful approach — blacks seeking to bring about a revolution by any means necessary. Harry R. Brown, who himself was cut down by a assassin — in favor of the older Afro-American tradition of maroonage, "Volunteers" gathered together at the Black Eagle Inn and the Green Apple pub." Eldridge Cleaver, writing about Malcolm X and Huey P. Newton, said:

Malcolm now all the way to national liberation, and he showed us the rainbow and the golden pot at its end. Inside the golden pot, Malcolm told us, was the test of liberation. Huey P. Newton, one of the millions of black people who listened to Malcolm, lifted the golden lid off the pot and declared, "We are black people, we know the inside and grasped the tool. When he withdrew his hand and looked to see what he hold, he saw the gun.
Malcolm X, like Martin King, was murdered; Huey Newton, significantly, has chosen to live in various countries which adhere to different and newer revolutionary philosophy. In the middle nates recently threatened by Henry Kissinger on behalf of all Americans — white and black — revolutionary slogans are echoed not in the phrases of 1776, nor even those of 1789, but in those of 1977. The specter that once haunted only Europe now bedevils the entire white world, and many Afro-Americans have resurrected the spirit of struggle to join with the specter in spreading terror. Dubois, after spending a lifetime working within the framework of the American Revolution, described in the twilight of his years of its ever being extended to nonwhites. He renounced his American citizenship, joined the Communist party, and took up residence in Ghana.

Still back Americans continue to broaden over whether the first Euro-American revolution — which came more than two centuries after the first Afro-American revolution — is their revolution, and they argue over whether or not they ought to attend a birthday party. But while some black folk quarreled over the meaning of the Biomental for African-Americans, others split on “Liberty Pan” and quietlyplot another revolution, this one to be color-blind.

**Suggested Readings**


The American people moved toward independence with slight experience in international politics. For over a hundred and fifty years the colonies had been part of the British Empire, and colonial leaders, who had had few political contacts with the outside world, had engaged in little systematic thought about it. With the outbreak of the Revolution, they suddenly had to assume functions long provided by the British government and deal with the European powers as an independent nation. The statement of the American Revolution led to the guidance toward a new national consciousness and a revolutionary role in world affairs.

In defining America’s relationship to the great states of Europe, American leaders reacted against traditional European practice and drew on the thought of the Enlightenment. The eighteenth century was a classical age of balanced diplomacy, one in which nations sought to increase their wealth and status at the expense of other states. It was an era dominated by the ruthless pursuit of national interest, by ephemeral alliances and constant wars, and by attempts to organize relations among states into some kind of rational, manageable system. Along with Enlightenment thinkers, Americans rejected the idea of a balance of power and of inherent conflicts among nations. The eighteenth-century wars, they believed, were caused by the blind passions of princes and by their obsession with power and their pursuit of false ideals. Americans were not willing to fit into this world. They were convinced that the events of 1775 and 1776 had begun an era of momentous change that would revolutionize the relations between peoples and their rulers and among governments as well. They foresaw an age of reason and of liberation from oppressive monarchial rule and the incessant ways that it spawned. Governments based on the consent of the governed would recognize their mutual interdependence and understand that peace and prosperity rested on the unrestricted exchange of goods.

Prior to the Revolution, America’s contact with the outside world had been chiefly through trade, and it was easy for revolutionary leaders to conclude that the primary ties among nations should be commercial and that the dominance of mercantile empire would lead to a peaceful and stable world. Their reforms would sweep away all the trappings of traditional diplomacy — its cynicism, artificial formality, and secrecy — and put in its place simple, unadorned, and straightforward dealings among states. John Adams told the French foreign minister, the count de Vergennes, that “the dignity of North America does not consist in diplomatic ceremonies or any of the subtleties of etiquette; it consists simply in reason, justice, truth, the rights of mankind, and the interest of the nation of Europe.” Thomas Jefferson considered diplomacy “the jest of the peace of the world, as the workshop in which nearly all the wars of Europe are manufactured”, he wanted few if any diplomats abroad and believed that relations among nations would, in the future, take forms radically different from those of the past.

Revolutionary leaders recognized the might of Great Britain, however, and they reasoned that unless they could exploit the tensions of the Old World, the prospect for success was dim. This realization of the need for foreign assistance impelled the Continental Congress toward the Declaration of Independence; once that Declaration was proclaimed, the terms on which such assistance could be won became a pressing issue.
The initial expectations of American leaders were optimistic and idealistic. Believing their nation was poised for greatness, the framers of the Constitution anticipated a country that would lead the world in commerce and diplomacy. With the successful conclusion of the Revolutionary War, the newly independent United States sought to establish itself as a major player on the international stage. The United States, through its foreign policy, aimed to create a system of alliances that would provide a buffer against foreign threats and promote trade with Europe. The establishment of the United States as a neutral power in the early 19th century was a strategic move to assert its influence in the global economy and protect its interests abroad.

The United States entered into several alliances and treaties in the early 19th century, beginning with the Jay Treaty in 1794, which ended the War of 1812 with Britain. This treaty established friendly relations and opened the way for further diplomatic efforts. The Webster-Ashburton Treaty in 1842 resolved the boundary dispute between the United States and Britain, thereby creating a peaceful relationship. These treaties, along with the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, helped to shape the American foreign policy in the early 19th century and set the stage for the rise of the United States as a global power.

The United States sought to establish a system of alliances with the European powers in order to protect its economic interests, secure its territorial expansion, and promote democracy and freedom. The United States aimed to create a balance of power in Europe to prevent any one country from becoming too powerful, thereby ensuring stability and peace. The United States' foreign policy during the early 19th century was characterized by a balance of power approach, which sought to prevent any one country from gaining too much influence and becoming a threat to the United States.

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Britain, while about 90 percent of American imports—mostly manufactured goods—came from there. The hopes of some American leaders, such as Thomas Jefferson, that France would replace England as America’s major economic partner were never realized. Despite some French efforts, Americans preferred British manufactured goods and business methods and found that only the British could provide the long-term credit that they needed.

THE trial of the Confederation period convinced American leaders that if the republic was to endure, they must alter its form of government and create a firm union that could surmount domestic and foreign difficulties. By 1788 they had done so, and the new federal government set out to redefine the American policy. Its efforts coincided with and were greatly complicated by the French Revolution, an event that shook the foundations of European civilization and soon overshadowed the American Revolution itself. France now became the center of the new republican order, and the radiance of the revolutionary ideology, combined with the expansionism of the French Republic, touched off another European war in 1792. From 1792 to 1814 Europe was engulfed in a world war as Britain and the other European powers struggled to prevent French suzerainty of the established order and dominance of the Continent. Of all the powers, however, only Great Britain was continually at war with France, except for a brief period from 1802 to 1803. Austria, Prussia, and Russia had other goals than the containment of France, and in pursuing them, they delayed the formation of an effective anti-French coalition until Napoleon’s relentless imperialism finally left them no choice.

The United States existed on the periphery of these events, a secondary factor in the calculations of the European powers, whose energies were consumed in the titanic contest with France. Initially all Americans enthusiastically welcomed the French Revolution, which seemed to confirm the fact that republicanism was the wave of the future and that the example of the American Revolution was affecting even the most conservative nations of Europe. As the revolutionary process reached deeper layers of French society and became more extreme, however, it created intense ideological divisions in the United States as well as in Europe. Particularly after the beheading of Louis XVI in 1793, Federalists were appalled by the violence of the French Revolution and by the upheaval of the lower elements of society that seemed to threaten the very foundations of civilization. They came to feel revolution toward France and looked more and more to Great Britain as the bulwark of Western civilization. They feared that the French frenzy would spread to the United States, igniting the passions of the masses and endangering the stability of
The revolution in the New World. America's First Revolution was not a revolution to create a free and independent nation but a revolution to preserve a free and independent nation in European affairs and endeavor the financial system set up by Alexander Hamilton, which was based on the economic dominance of Great Britain.

Most Americans, however, did not share these Federalist fears; they believed, as Thomas Jefferson put it, "that the liberty of the world depended on the existence of a government between monarchism and republicanism." For years men such as Jefferson and James Madison had hoped that America could escape British dominance and oppression and forge closer ties with France. This hope intensified as they became convinced that the French Revolution was the logical sequel to the American Revolution. A French victory in Europe would hasten the liberation of America and create a French defeat would strengthen the forces of reaction, create American dependence on Britain, and perhaps undermine republican institutions in America.

While the French Revolution profoundly influenced American political thought and conduct, both Federalists and Republicans wished to avoid any direct American involvement in the war stemming from it. All American leaders realized that the United States was too weak, with too many vital national issues unresolved, to participate in the European struggle. War in Europe, however, raised certain pressing questions that could not be avoided. The French Republic expected a mercantilist neutrality from its ally, and it seemed that the United States wished to end the alliance and draw closer to Great Britain. In contrast, Republicans sympathized with France and claimed that religion against the British government for all the humiliations and economic discrimination it had inflicted on the United States. In the 1790s, the Federalists, who controlled the government, found it extraordinarily difficult to deal with the crises created by the war. The British exploited their domestic weaknesses and evenations and achieved (their concepts of neutral rights) through which the United States had become committed since its inception as a nation. In 1792, the Federalists decided that commerce prohibited in time of peace for the purpose of the Federal government was "merely as much considered than Genoa or Genoa" (other French satellites), and insisted on a treaty and a joint occupation of the British port, which the Federalists feared was a violation of the system. Talleyrand's demands brought the famous response from Thomas Jefferson: "It is not now, not a sixpence, but millions for the defense of the nation from the British fleet. The conflict with France was led to a naval war between the two nations that lasted from 1798 to 1800.

By the close of the eighteenth century the United States had, to be sure, taken long strides toward independence, but it still needed the protection of the French Revolution had dominated both America and Europe, deepening internal divisions and overwhelming them with worldwide significance. The United States had become embroiled in the quarrels of Europe and had almost been torn apart by them. It had not been able to establish the new principles of international relations with which it had begun the Revolution. The European state system had been convulsed but not transformed, and many Federalist leaders had come to have a new respect and understanding for the forms and the substance of traditional American diplomacy and had concluded that the United States, rather than changing the changing the short run could only hope to survive within it. In the end, Thomas Jefferson, however, was determined to reclaim the spirit of republicanism in domestic and foreign policy, to inaugurate a new age that would embody the ideals of the Revolution. Unlike Federalists in the 1790s, Jefferson and his supporters, James Madison, had not assimilated European notions of statecraft. They continued to believe that commerce was the key to international relations and that the United States, because of its favored position, could defend its interests through the manipulation of commercial relations. In 1803, Jefferson wrote that "our commerce is so valuable to them (Europe) that they will never purchase it until we have in our own hands the means of protecting it; and that the moment they see we are determined not as they can make use of it, they will force for their own interest be disposed of as we judge." The United States did not need the trappings of conventional national power—large armies or navies or central government establishments; it could protect its vital interests in a way that did not incite the corruption of traditional European institutions.

Jefferson had no occasion to act on these beliefs for peace came to Europe in 1802, and within the United States, many of the passions of the 1790s faded away. The excitement generated by the French Revolution had passed as Americans moved toward a more conventional foreign policy. Jefferson and other Republican leaders, who had once admired Napoleon, found his dispatches distasteful and believed that the French Revolution had gone astray. The defeat of the revolutionary process in France reemphasized the importance of the American experiment as the best hope of the world, and in the end, Jefferson's vision of the United States as a beacon of liberty. The Federalists believed that Great Britain's heavy economic dependence on America would soon bring about a change of hearts and minds.

The embargo represented a reassertion of the original American idealism about world affairs that had been embodied in the model treaty of 1783. The embargo failed, for the American economy was too vulnerable and the nation's economy too fragile to endure the sacrifice imposed. The impact on Great Britain, though remarkable, was counterbalanced by the emergence of Jefferson's domestic policies. The embargo, the federal government's gradual retreat from a complex measure that Napoleon manipulated with great skill. The result, by 1812, was a military disaster in which the American army was soundly defeated, and the nation's economy was too vulnerable. Jefferson's vision of the United States as a beacon of liberty was not realized.

The British, with Napoleon's smothering of the Third Coalition at Austerlitz, Now Britain's control of the seas was undeterred, while France's empire spanned the continent of Europe. Each nation sought to use dominance within its sphere to weaken the other. In 1803, Britain prohibited the neutral trade between France, Spain, and their colonies, and began to implement a series of decrees that would force all commerce with Europe to pass through British hands. The United States controlled enough of Europe to institute a Continental system aimed at destroying the economy of the remainder. The United States could not trade with either belligerent without violating the regulations of the other; it was caught in the middle of sweeping blockades, both of which, according to American naval concepts, were illegal.
that tested the nation's will and integrity. For American leaders, the national honor was at stake and, with it, the survival of republican institutions at home and in the world. If the American government failed to defend the national honor on the high seas, its international standing might suffer. The preservation of American neutrality was threatened, and if foreign powers were to challenge the American right to regulate its foreign commerce, it might be necessary to consider the possibility of war. Thus, when the British fleet attacked American merchant vessels, the war was not about whether to support or oppose the British, but about the principles and the morality of neutrality. The war was about the American right to regulate its own commerce and to determine its own destiny.

Suggested Readings

Benjamin Franklin, The Diary of Benjamin Franklin: Jun 1776-March 1777, 1777. A complete edition of Franklin's diaries, which provide insight into the American Revolution and the statesman's thoughts on the war. A must-have for anyone interested in American history.

Thomas Paine, Common Sense, 1776. This pamphlet was a key text in the American Revolution, inspiring the colonists to seek independence from Great Britain.

John Adams, Jefferson's Address to the Inhabitants of France, 1778. A copy of the address that Thomas Jefferson wrote to the French government, which was a key moment in the American Revolution.


The American Revolution was a war of ideas as well as a war of arms. It was fought not just on the battlefield, but in the minds and hearts of the American people. The war was about the future of the nation, and the fate of liberty. It was about the right of all people to be free, and to have a say in their own government. It was about the opportunity to live in a country where all men were created equal, and where the rule of law was upheld. The war was about the future of the world, and the future of humanity. It was about the power of ideas, and the power of the people to shape their own destiny.
Figure 2: The American Rattle Snake (London, 1782). First used in North America as a symbol of democracy, the snake came to stand for united revolutionary power in England by the end of the war. Here a large snake coiled in three circles boasts: "Two British armies have I thus beggared! And room for more I see yet behind." Inside the circles are soldiers representing the captured armies of generals Burgoyne and Cornwallis. The last coil is vacant, but a sign advertises "An Apartment to Let."
(December 1773) was a symbolic protest against the monopoly in the tea trade recently granted to the East India Company, and tea itself soon became a symbol of oppression. In June 1774 General Gage showed the power of the British government by closing Boston harbor in accordance with the Boston Port Bill. Figure 3 illustrates the coercive might of the government with the relative powerlessness of the colonies. Still, in the act of spitting the tea back into the oppressor’s face, the colonists manage some resistance. In an English view of the affair (figure 4), the positions are reversed, and the Americans are forced to the.shaft of a British official. This cartoon shows the treatment of John Malcolm, a commissioner of customs in Boston, who had defied colonial attempts to impede the collection of duties. Other collectors throughout the colonies had been prevented from carrying out their instructions. In January 1774 Malcolm was barbed and feathered, led to the gallows, and compelled to drink large amounts of tea—
an obvious humiliation for an officer of the crown after the Boston Tea Party. (For another depiction of the treat-
ment of John Malcolm, see A New Method of Macaroni Making, figure 1 in David Underwood’s essay “A Hope, a Refuge, and a Model” in this series.) Incidents such as these increased the tensions between England and the colonies and helped to sway the undecided in favor of the revolutionary cause.

By the 1770s, the ministers of the crown had become symbols of English oppression and of the decay of England’s commitment to the maintenance of liberty. The colonists saw in the attempts to raise revenue without their consent a deeper conspiracy against their constitutional rights as subjects of the crown, and they began to wonder if Englishmen still possessed the virtue, the sense of self-sacrifice, and the moral power that were essential
for the preservation of freedom from governmental tyranny. They justified their revolution by claiming that only as the New World could liberty and virtue survive, unainted by the avarice and greed of the ministers. The English were critical of their ministers' treatment of the colonies; too, figure 5 shows the ministers killing the goose that laid the golden egg: They not content with their more

Wool merchants expose and strange purpose

to make the Harsneid Bird lay Two.

This Grotious purpose to obtain

About her neck they put a chain

And more their Folly to complete

They swept upon her Wings and Feet.

But this had no Effect at all,

Yet made her struggle, faster, squall,

And do what every Goose would do

That had her Liberty to view.

When one of more distinguished Note

Cry'd: 'Oh, Lord, let us Curb her Throat,

They did, but not one Egg was found

But Blood came pouring from ye Wound.

The cartoonist's sympathies are with the colonists, whom he represents as providing one golden egg a day—a fair portion of the costs of administration. As in figure 3, the colonies are portrayed as victims of British greed and power.

The Revolution was both a war for independence and

Figure 6. A Picturque View of the State of the Nation for February 1778 (London, 1778). British commerce is represented as a milk cow that stands peacefully by while other European nations acquire goods by profit from the impending dissolution of the empire. America (in feathered headdress) nurses off the cow's horns while the Continental powers share the spoils. A Dutchman gleefully sells the cow while a French fop and a gallantly dressed Spanish fop hold theirYOUR TEXT SEEMS TO CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE. STAY WITH US AS WE PORTION IT OUT.

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A part of a larger power struggle among the European nations. By 1778 England was isolated in the diplomatic community, the Continental powers were attempting to profit from England's difficulties, and the war was going badly in America. In one British view of the situation (figure 6), England was a docile cow being milked of its commerce by its European rivals while its defenders were asleep or in disorder.

Figure 7, which appeared in London in 1778 after the colonies had rejected British peace offers, shows a retrospective view of events since the passage of the Stamp Act (1765). As he places the saddle on the zebra, George Grenville says, "I say saddle the beast, she will be able to bear great burdens for place—[placemen] and Pens—[pensions]." Colonial leaders were criti-
Ireland and America in the Age of Revolution

L. P. Curtis, Jr.

GIVEN the momentous issues involved in the disputes between the British government and the American colonies during the 1760s and 1770s, the relations of colonial governments in America were bound to have repercussions in other parts of the world. But nowhere within the old British Empire did the result of American patriotism have more immediate and far-reaching implications upon the "political matrix" than in the Irish quarter. Ireland in the mid-eighteenth century was something of an anomaly within the British imperial system. Second only to England in economic value to the empire, and vital to the security of the British Isles, this island to the west was both a kingdom and a colony. Although Ireland had its own parliament and privy council as well as judiciary, in all important respects the country was subordinate to the imperial authority of King, Lords, and Commons at Westminster. English sovereignty in Ireland was vested in a viceroy, who acted as both the chief political agent of the ministry in London and the king's official representative in Dublin. Ireland was then less than a self-governing nation but more than a minor satellite of a great power.

When those shots were fired in Lexington and Concord in April 1775, the property-owning Protestants of Ireland—Anglican and Dissenter alike—were the first to hear the echoes and to utter words of warm encouragement to their colonial cousins. And when, seven years later, the thirteen colonies won their independence from Britain, three Irishmen extracted a much more limited form of independence from a government worried lest the "American disease" cross the Atlantic and infect a population close to home and notorious for its rebellious instincts. Irish demands for freedom from imperial constraints contained many of the same motives and objectives as those in America, and in both countries the colonial patriots managed to combine—with the utmost skill and passion—the lofty aim of national honor and the so-called national interest with a hearty appetite for partisan policies and an abiding concern for matters of custom, culture, patronage, and income.

In a literal sense Ireland lay at the heart of the British Empire, separated from England, Wales, and Scotland by the narrow, if choppy, Irish Sea. As an island endowed with many natural harbors, Ireland had made a convenient entrepot and way station for merchants and adventurers anxious to tap the fabulously rich resources of the Americas. By the 1760s Irish merchants were making handsome profits from their strategic location along the transatlantic trade routes, enhancing their social position at home and their financial position abroad. The estimated value of Irish imports and exports, moreover, had quadrupled in value between 1700 and 1770, and the scale of this mercantile activity stimulated the Irish economy well beyond the colonial era. England needed Ireland's natural harbors and fertile plains to enhance her own commercial and maritime strength and to feed a burgeoning population. According to the mercantilist orthodoxy of the day, Ireland was supposed to produce the raw materials, especially the grains and livestock, required by the advanced metropolitan economy; and Irish finished goods were not allowed to compete against those made in England. English manufacturers and merchants were highly jealous of competition, and throughout the century they lobbied ministers and members of parliament with the object of keeping certain Irish manufactures out of their territory. English commercial restrictions thus gave rise to much the same resentments and animosities that had led to protest in the thirteen colonies.

Suggested Readings


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Who were the “Irish” to whom publicists and politicians habitually referred in this period? If this term is applied only to those who counted politically, men who were considered to have a stake or interest in the country, then no more than 10 percent of a population of 3.5 million people ought to be included. These were the Anglicans or communicants in the established Church of Ireland who enjoyed a near monopoly of the landed property, the higher education, and the principal offices of church and state. This social and political elite descended from the Anglo-Norman, English, and Welsh conquerors who had acquired land after their military campaigns against the “Wild Lobby” during the preceding five centuries. Known collectively as the Protestant Ascendancy, these landed families dominated the country. Some of the wealthiest landed magnates were absentee landlords who spent most of the year in England; others lived in Irish country houses and castles which ranged from sumptuous to magnificent. While the Irish parliament was in session, the grandees of the Ascendancy occupied elegant town houses in Dublin, which was then known as “the second city of the empire,” and they dined in many of the docks of Dublin society as their incomes or their creditors would permit. Standing at the summit of a deferential society and wielding enormous power in the counties, the Irish aristocracy and gentry, whom the Victorians would call Anglo-Irish, regarded the parliament as their private political arena or preserve. Accustomed to marrying their own kind, which usually meant their cousins or the sons and daughters of the neighboring Big House, these landed families became an inbred caste and acquired a reputation for lavish spending, heavy drinking, lethal duelling, and fortune hunting.

In economic importance and political potential, the Protestant Dissenters were the second most significant element in eighteenth-century Ireland. Among the various sects found within Irish Dissent were Baptists, Quakers, and Methodists. But religious nonconformity was composed mainly of Presbyterians, most of whose forebears had come to Ulster from Scotland during the reign of James I. Given to hard work, fervent prayer, and frugal living, these Presbyterians, otherwise known as Scotch-Irish, made up the bulk of the small farmers, weavers, and linen manufacturers in the north. Dissenters also loomed large among merchants, shopkeepers, superior artisans, and skilled workers. Like the Catholics, Dissenters also suffered under the Penal Laws—discriminatory measures enacted in the 1690s and early 1700s to promote religious uniformity and political loyalty as well as to prevent “seditious” from ascending the ladder of social and economic mobility. The penal code may not have been enforced with efficiency or rigor, but it did perpetuate the Ascendancy while frustrating the political ambitions of Presbyterian leaders in Belfast and Londonderry. Discouraged by overt discrimination and periodic depredations in trade, many Scotch-Irish emigrated to America, where they not only tamed the land but lent their energies and skills to the struggle against some of the freedoms they had known in Ireland. Politically volatile, devoted to intimidation in politics as in religion, the Presbyterians who stayed behind in Ulster clung upon George III and his ministers as the wicked defenders of an Anglican and aristocratic monopoly in an empire supposedly based on religious toleration and liberty for all its members.

The third and by far the largest category of Irishmen contained the “submerged majority” of indigenous Roman Catholics. Called by a variety of names in an age of unblushable epithets, the “more Irish” or “papists” numbered close to three millions in 1760, and most of them were crowded onto the lower and hoi polloi rungs of Irish society. Proud of their descent from ancient Gaelic kings, warriors, and bards, these “native Irish” were the hewers of wood and drawers of water for the Ascendancy. Having lost their ancestral lands to invaders and colonists, most of these people ended up in abject circumstances as slavish tenants or agricultural laborers dependent upon the goodwill and the whims of landlords and middlemen. In their poverty, subject in their deracination, the Catholic masses lacked virtually all the prerogatives of political consciousness. With the exception of a small merchantable and money-earning elite in the larger cities, the Catholic population had very few avenues of escape—other than emigration and death—from prolonged misery. In the long run the penal laws sowed the seeds of revolt not so much in Ireland, but during the eighteenth century the giant of Catholic nationality shimmered, and not even the din raised by American patriots during the 1770s awakened its collective action.

Religious, cultural, social, and ethnic divisions thus cut deep into Irish society, creating vertical barriers between those who were and those who were not Irish. In the Ulster counties, the Ascendancy and Protestant and Catholic and Protestant as well as landlord and tenant alike, the Patriots attacked the penal policies at a time when everyone wanted a virtuous society. If the occupation of those country gentlemen contained a large measure of self-interest, the Patriots hoped to achieve something less selfish and more benevolent than the Baconian advancement or enrichment. They saw themselves as the natural leaders of Irish society and as the only trustworthy guardians of the national interest. Regarding imperial constraints on Ireland as a blight, but quite prepared to accept the protective screen of the Royal Navy as well as other benefits deriving from proximity to so rich and powerful a neighbor, the Patriots began their struggle at the base of English control over the Irish parliament.
By attacking the right of the English privilege council to approve or disapprove all bills prior to their introduction into the Irish parliament, they hoped to win eventually not only the power of the initiative but also control of the Irish government itself.

During the 1770s the brilliant if wayward politician Henry Flood had led a series of Patriot assaults on English interference in Ireland’s internal affairs. In the autumn of 1774, the Encyclopaedia Britannica declared the proposed augmentation of the army in Ireland to challenge the enactment of government measures which had not originated in the Irish House of Commons. This confrontation raised the old and sensitive issue of Poyning’s Law, passed by the Irish parliament in 1494, according to which any new bills introduced into parliament had first to be approved by the crown. Court officials, ministers, spokesmen, and constitutional lawyers in England all based their claim to imperial authority over Ireland on Poyning’s Law and the Declaratory Act of 1719 (which served as the model for the American Declaratory Act of 1766). The victory, Lord Townshend, won this round of the controversy by denying several prominent Patriots of their offices; but this was a short-lived victory. Although the Patriot cause suffered a severe blow in October 1775, when Flood decided to “defect” by accepting the post of vice-chancellor in the Irish administration, the outbreak of war in America gave to the opposition an opportunity to press Ireland’s claims against Westminster. For American soldiers in the American struggle swept across the Atlantic like a great tidal wave and broke with a resounding roar on the shores of British Ireland.

While the Irish patriots committed the country to support of the war in America, the Patriots pleaded in parliament for conciliation of the colonists and soon began to enlist middle-class sympathizers in opposition to British imperial policy. In many a dining room and tavern across Dublin, supporters of the thirteen colonies raised the banner of the radical Society of the United Irishmen. A society called the Free Citizens of Dublin drank hearty toasts to “our fellow subjects in America now suffering under the oppressive methods of the English Parliament.”

The society adopted as its symbol the flag of the American Republic. The society began to circulate among friends of liberty in America to call attention to their rights and liberties. The toasts in more radical circles suggested that their drinkers should be fighting for Irish and American independence. In Belfast the three Dissenters with friends or family in America took up the cause of the revolution as their own. William Drennan, a son of a northern Presbyterian minister and later a founder of the radical Society of United Irishmen, vowed to emigrate to America if he failed his medical exams in Edinburgh, and he suggested to his father that America should adopt an official seal depicting “the infant heroes struggling the serpents of Taxation and Despotism.”

In July 1775 the Continental Congress sent a formal address or appeal to the “People of Ireland,” warning that if the British were the cause of the conflict in America, Ireland would suffer. But if the cause of the rebellion in America was the independence of the thirteen colonies who had grown into a full-scale land and sea war in which Great Britain faced the combined forces of her European enemies and the thirteen American republics, the Patriots argued that the moment had arrived to present their own demands to a beleaguered government in London.

The man who emerged to take Flood’s place as the chief spokesman for the Patriots was a young barrister named Henry Grattan. The son of a Dublin official and the protegé of the wealthy earl of Charlemont, Grattan entered the Irish parliament in 1775. In an age when oratorical skills were highly esteemed, Grattan’s talent as a speaker soon won him the respect of men who were connoisseurs of eloquence. Although he lacked the physical presence and sonorous voice of such orators as Chatham, Fox, and Burke, he had an unrivalled flair for language. Epigrams, aphorisms, and metaphors flowed from him in rich profusion. By sheer force of oratory he became the supreme advocate of Irish or Anglo-Irish nationalism. Grattan was the orator who observed so persistently: “If we were selected by the people of Europe, the whole of Europe would be our country. But the grave and pride of your ancestors! and do you not see in her range of power, of commerce, of variety of climate, and simplicity of life, the hope of Europe? Whenever in history is a British nation a necessary and powerful people; and we are the only, all to that point will prosecute; and what you transpire on in Europe will sting you in America” (22 January 1782).

Grattan encouraged the Patriots to use the American war as a lever with which to pry out of the imperial government concessions that would give Ireland effective control of her own affairs.

To be sure, not all Irishmen rushed to the defense of Liberty and the American Revolution. By 1774, about 20 percent of all regulars and volunteers of the Irish army were Patriots. The troops in the British army were Irish. Irish-born Americans reinforced the rebel lines on Bunker Hill, but the British army did not adopt a policy of recruiting Irish soldiers. They would not recruit Irish loyalists under his command in America. The War Office was so desperate for soldiers that it suspended the official transfer of troops; however, some Irish Catholics volunteered for service in Ireland. Many of whom were eager to fight— for money — against the king’s “disloyal subjects” in the thirteen colonies, but the enlistment of Irish Catholics to kill or wound Americans was a real military force to many Irish Patriots. And Theobald Wolfe Tone, although he became the “godfather” of Irish revolutionary movements in Ireland, opposed the idea of a volunteer force composed of companies paid for and drilled by men of property and the consequences of not granting some of the Patriots’ demands.

Under this kind of pressure the resistance of Lord North and his colleagues to concessions slowly collapsed. The English government had already responded to the lobbying efforts of the Catholic Committee, which represented influential merchants and professionals in Ireland, by approving the Catholic Relief Act of 1778. This important measure enabled Catholics to take long leases and inherit land as Protestants were allowed to do. It was designed as a relatively new class of mired Catholics, especially conspicuous in the Dublin area, some of whom were also the members of the Irish Protestant church. The act also required the Irish Catholics to be declared non-residents for the purpose of voting in elections. In the meantime, the Irish Catholic movement had put the Patriots to their task of rewriting the charter of British government, and the Irish Parliament to their task of drafting a new constitution for Ireland.

The Patriots’ bid for political power entered a new phase in 1778, when more than three thousand soldiers were withdrawn from the army in America. This was a great surprise and a sign that the government was weakening its control of Ireland. The Patriots supported a movement in the counties and towns to create a home-guard or paramilitary force to protect Ireland from invasion. The army in Ireland was small and poorly equipped, and the Patriots believed that their movement could prevent an invasion by the Irish Catholics who were living in the countryside and were more likely to support the patriot cause. As a result, the Patriots began to organize a new force of volunteers, known as the Home Guard, to protect the country from invasion.

The Volunteers were formed with the consent of the governments of the United States and the Irish Parliament. They were to be composed of men who were willing to serve in the volunteer force, and they were to be led by men who were qualified to command them. The Volunteers were to be organized on a county basis, and each county was to have a volunteer commander who would be appointed by the provincial parliament. The Volunteer force was to be trained and equipped by the government, and it was to be paid for by the government as well.

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raw wool and wooden cloth and to import goods directly from the colonies in the empire. The remaining restrictions on Irish trade were soon removed. For the Patriots one final concession remained, one last pillar of the imperial edifice had to be pulled down. This was the prospect of independence, or the repeal of those statutes that gave the English executive control over the Irish parliament. Inspired by the triumph over the Tories at home, Grattan moved for a resolution in the Irish Commons in April 1780 that the Irish parliament should henceforth be the only power “competent to make laws to bind this Kingdom.” The Patriots set their sights on the kind of colonial self-government associated with dominion status in the next century. Grattan’s speech raised the fundamental question about the limits of imperial authority that had driven American patriots into war in the name of colonial liberty. In 1780 the North ministry had no intention of altering the constitutional ties between England and Ireland; and the Irish vice-regal court was told to resist this demand at all costs.

Not until military defeat in America married British commanders in the face did the North ministry reconsider its constitutional relations with Ireland. When Lord Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown in October 1781, Grattan actually hesitated to press for repeal of the Declaration Act for fear of adding to the humiliation of the government. The more politically advanced Volunteers had no such scruples, however, and they arranged a series of conventions designed to rally support for the cause of legislative independence. Grattan soon joined Lord Charlemont and several close friends in drafting the official Volunteer resolutions for a mass gathering of Volunteers at Dublin town, county Tyrone, in February 1782. Accidental to this convention amid tumultuous cheering, these resolutions amounted to a formal declaration of Irish independence but fell far short of action from the tenants. The virtual unanimity of Protestants in Ireland in this matter left Lord North with little choice, especially since confidence in his ministry was crumbling. Before any final decision could be made, however, the North regime fell from power. Lord Rockingham, long an advocate of colonial conciliation, then formed a ministry with the king’s backing and approved, and the way was paved for concession to Ireland. In April the king gave his consent to ministerial plans for Irish legislative independence. When Grattan received this news, he uttered those memorable words: “Spirit of Swift! spirit of Molyneux! your genius has prevailed! Ireland is now a nation! In that new character I hail her and bowing to her august presence, I say, Zelo perpetuus!”

What the Grattanites hailed as the Irish Constitution of 1782 amounted to repeal of the Declaration Act of 1778 and the guarantee of tenure to judges. Poyning’s Law was not repealed but was amended to allow the Irish parliament to introduce and carry legislation without the prior approval of the English executive; the crown had conceded the forms but not the substance of equality between the two parliaments. The Irish vice-regal court still controlled the machinery of government in Dublin Castle, and the new executive council did not relinquish its power to veto Irish measures. If Irish autonomy or “nationhood” had a rather hollow ring, the Patriots did not at first notice the sound. The year 1782 symbolized the triumph of the country over the “counters”; it did not represent the defeat of British imperialism by the Irish people.

The inherent tensions and disagreements within the Patriot camp now turned into acrimonious disputes as the victors quarreled with one another over the spoils of the so-called Irish Constitution. The more advanced politicians followed Flood, who had decided to make his bid for the leadership of the “popular party” and found it convenient to accede to Grattan, who had retired as leader of the Patriots, of having settled with the British government for a token form of independence. Flood forced the Patriot coalition between Grattan’s “simple repeal” of the Declaration Act and his own plan for complete repeal of Poyning’s Law. Within a few months of its creation, “Grattan’s Parliament,” as it was dubbed, subdivided into factions. The formidable alliance of Poyning and Volunteers gradually broke apart on the reefs of parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation. Flood’s campaigns for “remonstrance” by Belton of all claims to control the Irish parliament culminated in January 1783, when the British parliament officially affirmed “the complete legislative and judicial independence of Ireland.” The Patriots may have won a constitutional battle, but they lost the “political war.” The old personal and political rivalry between Flood and Grattan flared anew (see figure 2), and the disputes between moderates and radicals in parliament made it all the easier for the English government, working through the viceregal establishment in Dublin Castle, to preserve the essentials of its power within and over Ireland.

The campaign for Irish legislative independence marked the beginning of a struggle for freedoms that went far beyond the goals of the Grattanites. After 1780, Americans could no longer claim exclusive credit for sustaining the cause of colonial liberty in Ireland, because the overthrow of the Stuart regime in France precipitated similar regimes in many countries. By 1791 Belfast had become the center of radical thought and activity in Ireland, and in that year Drennan, Tonne, and other admirers of the Jacobins founded the Society of United Irishmen to bring about the real revolution in Irish society and politics from which the Patriots had recoiled in horror a decade before. What the American patriots had inadvertently begun in Ireland, the Jacobins and their successors in France tried to complete by igniting the Catholic uprising with the flame of a French invasion force. Committed to the ideal of social and religious equality, the United Irishmen exposed themselves to harsh measures from Dublin Castle. Government repression not only forced the United Irishmen underground, but drove Wolfe Tone into the waiting arms of the French Directory. Napoleon’s generals were so impressed by Tone’s assurances about the republicanism of Ireland for a popular rising that they agreed to launch several military expeditions to the southwest coast of Ireland between 1795 and 1798. Although these small-scale armies ended in disaster or futility for the invaders, the threat of invasion drove the property classes of Ireland and England into a frenzy of counterrevolutionary activity. Out of the polarizing effect of the “mediocrate revolution” that broke out in the 1790s there emerged in Ireland the violent extremes of revolutionary republicanism and Protestant loyalism otherwise known as the Orange Order. These Irishmen forced a head-on battle in the rebellion of 1798, where sectarian fears and partisan hatreds resulted in atrocities on both sides. The rising of ’98, played out in the bitter civil war against the background of another European war, set back the cause of reform in Ireland for generations.
its powers of persuasion to those politicians whose personal ambitions went deeper than their patriotism. By way of compensation for this loss of a legislature and the convention of 1782, Ireland received one hundred seats in the House of Commons at Westminster.

The American Revolution thus began the slow, often painful process, accelerated by the French Revolution, of educating Irelandmen about their right as well as obligation to seek redress for the social, economic, and political injustices in their midst. The American War of Independence not only upset the delicate balance of power in Europe but also gave heart to these advocates of equality and practitioners of “common sense” who wished to tear down the artificial structure of the old regime and build in its place a new, democratic society designed by that radical Anglo-American architect, Thomas Paine. By the early 1790s many Irishmen, especially tradesmen, small farmers, and tenant farmers in the eastern provinces, had come to realize that Grattan’s parliament had done little or nothing to improve their lives or livelihoods. These people were tired of waiting for the crumbs of concession from the Assembly’s table, and the prospect of armed rebellion appeared to them increasingly because it seemed to have worked wonders in America and France. These were the men and women of United Ireland, some of whom celebrated the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille wearing Phrygian caps of liberty and shouting their defiance in the streets of Belfast. These Irish Jacobins paid a steep price for their political enthusiasm, however, for they faced the prospect of imprisonment, torture, or death on the battlefield during the insurrection of 1798.

The American Revolution thus furnished Irishmen with a new and demanding ideal, and a splendid opportunity to protest against imperial constraints. The new republic across the Atlantic provided a refuge and an allegiance to the Irish in search of opportunities and dignity that they had never known in their own villages or towns. Between 1813 and 1816 almost two-and-a-half million emigrants took passage to America, and they were among the first of their kind to arrive at the port of New York. Those who remained in Ireland emerged from the Revolution enthused and more determined in their quest for independence.

Suggested Readings

Suggested Readings
good part of which was contraband. Apparently, the Anglo-Americans were too preoccupied with getting on in the New World to take time for the drawing of nice distinctions between what was lawful trade and what was not. When they traded directly with Spanish colonies they adhered to Spanish law. When they traded to Spain commodities turned by the Navigation Acts, like pitch, tar, lumber, sugar, indigo, and tobacco, they violated English law. When they cut loopholes in Central America and carried it to continental Europe they flouted both Spanish and English laws.

The heart of the matter was that, in the English view, mercantilism could not be fully productive if the colonies enjoyed free access to Spanish American and European markets. At the same time, England's mainland colonies required more complementary trading partners for maximal development of their economies than could be had within the prevailing practice of British mercantilism. Even though they were collaborators in the larger enterprise of combating Spain, they were also competitors: English imperialism and Anglo-Americans were following inimical self-interests, and they were consequently embroiled on a collision course. Their transits intersected in 1766.

HAVING declared their independence, the American rebels confronted a war that had to be won, together with the urgent necessity of fashioning a workable system of government and its defense. As if that were not enough, they were under extreme pressure to progress at once from colonialism to internationalism. At the center of the challenge lay the undisciplined fate of Spain's American empire—undisciplined in part because the rebels themselves had upset the timetable and clouded the nature of the resolution by their rebellion. For most of the seventeenth century, according to one Spanish observer, Spain had kept her American colonies because it was in the best interests of England, France, and Holland to allow her to do so. "If that empire were to fall into the hands of one of these three powers," he reasoned, "the other two would lose the advantage; and it would win, and of course, the benefits: that is why they remained neutral and content with the robberies they made and the fruits of their fraudulent or illicit trade with galleons and felts." A generation later Montesquieu agreed, suspecting that God had created the Spaniards and Turks to hold vast empires for the benefit of others. But England's rising power in the second half of the eighteenth century changed all this, and her Continental rivals, especially the Bourbon, began to be haunted by the specter of the Union Jack flying over all of America. The American revolution of 1776 was almost as irresistible: Spain and France made the rebel cause their own, thinking to lift the balance of power in their favor. Increasingly, New World was to be used to redress the balance of power in the Old; and the American revolu-
tionaries were ever mindful of the opportunities and perils involved.

Late in the summer of 1776 committees of the Continental Congress dispatched agents to all of Spain's Caribbean colonies and to northern South America to increase trade and representation of American interests. Almost invariably these agents were merchants who already enjoyed the benefits of widespread, often intimate, personal contacts throughout Spanish America. Congress refused them salaries, and so they themselves repaired their personal fortunes by acting as commission brokers. It amounted to informal consular service, one based upon private enterprise with governmental sanction. The diplomacy, intelligence, and propaganda of the yet-to-be-united states largely rested in the hands of men of business and commerce.

With Spain backing the rebellious Anglo-Americans, increased trade with her American colonies was temporarily approved; but, as conservative monarchs, the Spaniards were hardly worried about their aid to a republican cause, even as they extended it. There would be no general opening of the Spanish colonies to the enterprise of the Anglo-Americans and no special treatment extended to their agents, who had been invited, uninvited, to the colonies. Since, on the other hand, the crown had not ordered their expulsion, colonial administrators allowed the American agents to conduct their affairs, not unfriendly but not mutually beneficial.

The Revolution in this period thus offered the rebels an opportunity to penetrate Spanish America more deeply and extensively than ever before. Yankee profits multiplied in search of prizes and were followed by whalers, who usually carried trade goods on the side. Whaling was good in the South Atlantic, and in 1786 New England whalers established a settlement on the Falkland Islands, off the coast of Argentina. The following year Captain Paul Wost, master of the Beaver, sailed through the Strait of Magellan and initiated a whale fishery in the Pacific. As part-time traders, the whalers ranged all the way to the Pacific Northwest, laying the foundation for a contraband trade in Chile, Peru, Mexico, and California. At this time William Cose, a merchant of Philadelphia, shipped a cargo of other skins to China and made a fortune. Another enterprising Yankee, stuck with a cargo of wolff pelts described as otter and consigned to Calcutta, sold them for five dollars a pelt in Canton. Another fortune was made, this time more by the sellers than buyers, from the furs of the new-taken islands of the Pacific. This explosive entry into the Far Eastern trade was feasible only because Spanish Chile provided a strategic entrepot on the Pacific. Valparaiso and Conquistador were favored harbors, and when Spanish port officials made it difficult from time to time, the Yankee moved to islands off the coast, where they established settlements of their own.

From the English perspective, the re-introduction of France's role in the successful American revolution was initiated in 1780. "England shall be avenged of your actions," an Englishman had written to Louis XVI in 1778, "when your own government is judged and condemned in accordance with the principles being emancipated in Philadelphia, and which are being adopted in your capital." Recalling in shock from the French Revolution, Spain's government stationed consuls on her border posts to intercept revolutionary literature and forbade the then fashionable wearing of wigs on which the word liberté was embroidered. Spain's involvement in the coalition against republican France and her subsequent re-entry into the war in 1789, this time as Napoleon's ally, effectively isolated her from her colonies. She could neither supply nor defend them, and in 1797 reluctantly opened the American colonies to neutral trade. In view of England's increasing preoccupation with the Napoleonic menace, the United States was free to move. Within months the Yankees had captured most of the Caribbean trade, and the Spanish-American trade was preadolescent. Spanish-American trade was national, and hundreds of armadillo merchants plied the trade routes of the New World. In February 1789, the United States had 1380 foreign vessels anchored at Veracruz, Mexico; out of 528 ships then riding at anchor in Havana, 451 were American. In Chile, Yankee cutters outnumbered other foreigners by three to four to one. This United States was rapidly taking over nearly the whole of trade with Spanish America: from a base of approximately $1.5 million, United States exports to the Spanish West Indies alone would grow to nearly $11 million by 1805.

Commerce was the key to the Revolution and to the struggling republic (see figure 1). Alexander Hamilton employed his ample talents in the formulation of fiscal policies, around which political factions and parties tended to form. At his time about 80 percent of the goods sold abroad by the United States represented native production; the balance was acquired foreign stock. Conversely, about 77 percent of the goods traded to

Figure 1. Since 1776 the Cuban trade had been vital to the financial support of the American Revolution and to the developing economy of the United States. In addition to its regular imports from the United States, Havana received large quantities of sugar and molasses, coffee, tobacco, and other manufactured goods. In 1802 American sugar planters supplied 25% of all the sugar consumed in the United States; by 1830 the figure was 50%. In 1801, American manufactured goods were estimated to be worth $20 million—about 40% of all the manufactured goods imported into the United States; by 1830 the figure was $50 million—about 50% of all the manufactured goods imported into the United States. In 1802, American ships carried 1,500,000 tons of Cuban sugar; by 1830 the figure was 2,000,000 tons. In 1802, American ships carried 1,500,000 tons of Cuban sugar; by 1830 the figure was 2,000,000 tons.
Spain was a source of profit: it contributed substantially to the development of the domestic economy. The implications of this fact raised new questions concerning the interests of the United States and the continued dependency of Spain upon the crown of Spain.

Hamilton favored expanded trade with Spanish America; he simultaneously emerged as the leader of powerful Federalists—in and out of public office—who advocated a policy of geographical expansion at the expense of Spain. There was talk in the newspapers and in the Congress of filibustering, of border clashes, even of war against the Spaniards. The Philadelphia Gazette put the expansionist case neatly in 1796: "A war with Spain is absolutely necessary to the salvation of this country if a war with France takes place, or if the Spaniards have crossed Louisiana to France. They must both be driven into the Gulf of Mexico, or we shall never sleep in peace. Besides, a war with Spain would be so convenient. There is nothing but dry blows to be gotten from the penniless sans-culottes; but the wealth of Spanish America would be a sure and easy one. This would be the cream of the war." Expansionist sentiment in the United States had been furthered by Francisco de Miranda, a Venezuelan whose lifelong revolutionary activities earned him the title of "the American independence." During a visit to the United States began in 1783 he met all the leading political and commercial figures and sought their support for a plan to reclaim Spanish America. Hamilton was much impressed by Miranda and his ideas, as were many others, Colonel W. S. Smith (Washington's aide in the Revolutionary War), Secretary of War Henry Knox, Rufus King, and Washington. Sargent, Ezra Bibles president of Yale, wrote about him in 1798 as a "learned man and a father of liberty." Most impressed was Miranda's eloquence and commanding presence—perhaps, was James Lloyd of Boston, who later confided to John Adams: "With his whole face and body he resembles a giant from which all America [Michaux] presented to my juvenile imagination a new and apparently more elevated sample of the human character, and seemed capable of leading a People impatient of their Government, and ripe for its subversion to any deeds of daring to which his ambitions might direct them."

Although Hamilton and his party appeared ready to march on Spanish America, Thomas Jefferson was not. As early as 1786 he had cautioned, "Our confederacy must be viewed as the rest, from which all America, north and south, is to be produced. We should take care too, not to think it for the interest of that great continent to press too soon on the Spaniards. These countries cannot be in better hands. My fear is that they are too fertile to hold them till our population can be sufficiently advanced to gain it from them piece by piece. The navigation of the Mississippi we must have. This is all we are as yet ready for. We might be right. Without impressing sea power, and until the nation had achieved greater military potential, American gains would most likely be made diplomatically, by playing France's ambition and desire for repatriation of its American empire against England's dread of such restoration and her fear of continental expansion on the part of the United States, with both to be played off against Spain. There must be skillful diplomacy, but no war. Such proved to be the essence of Jefferson's strategy after he became president.

Napoleon's scheme for restoring the French empire on the North American mainland was already afoot when Jefferson assumed the presidency in 1801. Two steps were involved: the retrenchment to France of Louisiana, which Napoleon had already won from Spain in a secret treaty the year before, and organization of a Caribbean base. Everything thus turned on the second step, the recovery of French San Domingue, which had fallen under the hostile rule of black revolutionaries. In November 1800, Napoleon dispatched his brother-in-law, General Leclerc, and ten thousand troops to San Domingue. Convinced that the French would follow up victory in San Domingue with a military occupation of Louisiana, Jefferson feared, by threatening Napoleon with a new and binding alliance between the United States and England that would forever exclude France from the Western Hemisphere. Meanwhile, five hundred thousand blacks and a scoundrel of yellow fever wiped out Leclerc and his army. Napoleon, seeing his strategy irrevocably lost, did an about-face and sold La Louisiana to Jefferson's emissaries for 80 million francs. On the face of it, it was an exceptional bargain for a French occupation of Louisiana (that, in Napoleon's words, "will not last longer than a day.")

Jefferson was followed by a paralyzing international embarrassment. Francisco de Miranda returned to the United States in November 1809, this time with a group of carassac. American expansionists made available to him lands, arms, and munitions. Colonel Smith, who was now surveyor of the port of New York, acted as liaison and also recruited about two hundred men for the venture. Samuel Ogden, a merchant and ship owner, with log experience in the Caribbean, supplied the ships. The entire affair was leaked to the Spanish minister, who undertook a vehement and lengthy protest that the president and secretary of state refused to acknowledge. Meanwhile, the Miranda expedition—its leader claiming the "tall approbation and good wishes" of the administration—sailed from New York in early 1809. When the would-be revolutionaries attempted a landing at Porto Cabelo, waiting Spanish forces put a speedy end to their enterprise. Miranda fled, leaving their men, who were captured. Some were executed (see figure 2); those who survived experienced terrible privation and suffering.

In the United States, Jefferson's political foes made the most of the debate; the administration was assailed in its denials by a public suspicion that the president and secretary of state had conspired with Miranda from the beginning, and by student demands of the Spanish and French ministers for satisfaction. Smith and Ogden were therefore indicted and tried on a charge of criminal conspiracy. Their sensational trial was, according to the New York Evening Post, "the most wicked, pernicious, and detestable prosecution that ever disgraced a civilized country." Smith and Ogden were acquitted in what the U.S. Gazette termed "Jefferson and Madison's trial."

In acquiring Louisiana, Jefferson had won the key to imperial expansion on the continent, a reality that Spain both appreciated and feared. In the course of bitter disputes over the boundaries of Louisiana and the

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Florida question, Jefferson warned his minister in Paris that Napoleon must either "compel Spain to do us justice, or abandon her to us. We ask last one month to be in possession of the city of Mexico." He also expressed interest in the acquisition of Cuba and coveted the Panama Canal site, the latter being "a vast desideratum for reasons political and philosophical." Never, in his negotiations with Spain, did he give assurances against further expansion by the United States in the south and west.

By the end of his second term President Jefferson had formulated a fundamental position with respect to Spain's American empire. In his view, the United States could not permit the Spanish American colonies to become part of either French or English colonial empires; European political systems were to be excluded from the Western Hemisphere; finally, there must be no limit to the possible expansion of the United States. For the world's diplomats these points would later be formalized in the Monroe Doctrine. Most Americans, however,
simply found themselves in possession of an expansive imperialist myth which in time would appear so self-evident and manifest that it could be ascribed to destiny.

After 1776 the Yankee mission in Spanish America was twofold: to spread the political gospel of national liberty and to get rich, and in the orders, Spanish officers, superiors, and commercial and diplomatic agents, all were proud representatives of their country and its revolution. To explain the American Revolution in a monarchic society was to propagate it, but they went far beyond that because they commonly distributed translated copies of the Declaration of Independence and presented their hosts with watches and fobs and other trinkets engraved with the image and drapery of Liberty. The recipients were usually Creoles aristocrats, native Spanish Americans, who controlled most of the commerce and dominated urban politics. As a class they were well educated, and many had traveled. The colonial universities had been teaching Descartes, Newton, and Lellinvo since 1756, and had done it well. When the Enlightenment came the Creoles were prepared to use it and to make original contributions to it. For the most part they shunned the luminous philosophical foundations so popular in Europe, concentrating instead on science and its applications. Bernardo de Mencia, a Creole revolutionary of Baruch styling, revealed their methodology perfectly: "Enlightenment gives man the power to dominate himself and in a certain measure to dominate nature; it causes to disappear the awful phantom of chance, to which the thoughtful attribute the greater part of their misfortunes."

During the Jeffersonian era, as the interests of the United States and the Spanish American were gradually defined, there were correlated shifts in the attitudes and actions of American representatives there. The subversion of Spain's sovereignty became increasingly explicit in their attempts to undermine the Creoles' loyalty and to adjust them to aristocratic and commercial interests of the United States. This was notable in Chile, where American interest had risen sharply; the Santa Maria Islands, off the Chilean coast, were being used as strategic bases in the growing trade of the United States with South America. Commercial interests in Chile were greater in volume than legal trade and was dominated by the United States. American whaling continued, but with few of the Chinese elements, and to some extent the Chinese were absorbed. As a harbinger of empire, Chile was always one of the first to suffer material shortages in Spain's imperial system of supply and one of the last to be served; the colony consumed more than it produced and subsisted with the aid of an annual subsidy from the mines of Peru, which relegated Chile to the lowly status of a drain on the imperial economy. Chilean Creoles, therefore, were especially vulnerable to American propaganda that exploited the Creoles' backcountry and undeveloped presence in the absence of natural abundance. The exchange of William Shaler and Richard J. Cleveland, two seaworn Yankee traders in Chile in 1802, are revealing. Cleveland wrote:

During our sojourn at Valparaiso, we had become acquainted and were in the habit of visiting on familiar terms. It was the practice of General de la Plata, the governor, to receive all the American representatives here, and the Creoles were not behind in proper social duties. We never failed to receive the personal attention of the governor in his palace and in his private residence. This attention was as important to us as it was to the Creoles. During our stay, we were frequently entertained at the governor's table, and we also attended the balls, concerts, and picnics given by him in his park and in his palace. We were always welcomed and entertained with great hospitality.

The influence of the United States on the Spanish colonies was evaluated in 1815 by an informed Spanish writer, Luis de Soria, and when nearly all of Spanish America was in open revolt:

The Bourbon Republic, isolated and surrounded by so many enemies, was a government without prestige, without a visible nucleus, and it was the last straw that broke the camel's back. The American Revolution, considered and feared at the same time as the weakness of Spain and for that reason assumed in greater efforts to relieve its small size and extend its system as its only means of achieving stability and subsistence. To this end it pays in vain all imaginable means, without hesitation at the most injurious and ruinous, in order tobac the Spanish American in its depopulated island.

Chemical trade was essential for fish, while American trade with the United States between these two countries, and the difficulty of communication with the United States, caused the Spanish American to be entirely dependent on the United States for its supplies. Spain's ability to sustain the war against the United States was entirely dependent on the United States for its supplies. Spain's ability to sustain the war against the United States was entirely dependent on the United States for its supplies.

The interest of the United States in Spanish America independence was gratuitously furthered by the empire of France. To the French, the Spanish colonies of Chile and his brother, Joseph, on the Spanish throne in 1807. This act precipitated a constitutional crisis of first magnitude; the Spanish government in Chile sent an embassy to the French republic and the Creoles of Santiago over darkened, and of course, were vengeful in their determination to maintain their position and preserve their property at any cost. This would be no ordinary war, with battles of the whites and destruction of their property. The Creoles of Spanish America, therefore, were vengeful in their determination to maintain their position and preserve their property.

Francisco de Miranda made the point in a letter to Alexander Hamilton, written in 1796. Referring to the development of the United States in Spanish America, he wrote: "The only danger I can see in this is the introduction of French principles, which would poison liberty in its cradle and would ultimately put an end to us and the United States. To his own people, he said: "Two great examples lie before our eyes: the American Revolution and the French Revolution. Let us emulate both, for there is no other way to win our freedom." The key word was "example," and that is where the United States derived its influence with Spanish America, rather than from any shared ideology.

The newly established federal system of the United States enjoyed enormous prestige among educated Spanish Americans, and many of their hardly drawn constit...
tutions and political philosophies were inspired by our example. The Liberator, Simon Bolívar, acknowledging the vast differences in culture and historical experience that separated Spanish Americans from Anglo-American, warned his countrymen that "it would be better for South Americans to adopt the Kornor than the United States form of government, although the latter is the best on earth." He was also deeply concerned for his peasant soldiers who had fought and suffered and won the victory, but who, in the nature of things, would find they had won nothing at all for themselves. "We are over an abyss," he brooded, "or, rather, over a volcano that is about to erupt. I fear price more than war." The upheaval he dreaded would have taken place, but few of the postwar political structures, federal or monarchical, survived long enough to be tested; there was instead a universal outbreak of partisan conflict in which plunder repaid the debts of the past. Almost everywhere in Spanish America, anarchy prevailed as local and urban oligarchs manipulated militarized bands and fought for the preservation of their own interests. Observers in the United States were astonished and dismayed. From our vantage point we know that they had been victimized by the malas del fiel: all the Spanish colonists had needed to realize their innate virtues was to be free. There was much generalized reflection on both the anarchy in Spanish America and on the policies of the United States. Rufus King, one of the champions of Spanish American liberation, urged a pace or two.

Whether we will and when we will acknowledge the independence of any of these Colonies are questions to be determined by a reference not to their interests but to our own... You will not suppose that I have changed any of my former views, in favor of the proprietorship in this Country that will arise out of the Independence of the Spanish Colonies, but it is a serious Question, and I hope you will consider it as an unfortunate discretion of it, that we should place our Principle's at the mercy of Foreign Powers for the World of the Federation of these Colonies, whose incapacity to manage their own affairs may be a cause of great Confusion and Disorder.

John Quincy Adams took a different, more perspicacious tack: he argued that the Spanish American revolution was not at all like that of the United States. The latter had sought independence in order to secure civil rights. In Spanish America, he charged, civil rights were being trampled by all parties and factions: "As to an American system," he declared, "we have it; we constitute the whole of it; there is no community of interests or of principles between North and South America." Many Americans would share that opinion, believing it to have been the tragedy of Spanish American independence that the Greats spurred American ideology and risked everything in an uncompromising imitation of the American Revolution.

In the United States the tide of Manifest Destiny was running and would come full. The failure of Spanish America to resolve its political problems, whatever the reason, was sufficient to bring down upon it the full contempt in which the Anglo-Americans had always held Spain. In neglecting the ethno-geographic limit of its nearest Latin neighbor in 1827, the American Quarterly Review remarked:

In civilization and intellectual improvement far behind the rest of the world, set with the most diluted ideas of their own capacity and general intelligence, the Mexican, while in a state of dependency and debility, imagined himself gifted with superior energy and really possessed the objects of universal envy and admiration.

Bolivar interpreted the signs perfectly and warned his contemporaries that "a very rich and powerful nation, extremely warlike and capable of anything is at the head of this continent." He particularly feared its readiness to meddle and interfere, if self-centeredness, and in 1829 departed that the United States seemed destined by providence to plague America with torrents in the name of freedom.

Thomas Jefferson once said of the United States and Spanish America, "The worm of time is long with events to take place between us and them." We could be worse in the interregnum year than ponder this cryptic prophecy.

Suggested Readings

Gordon S. Wood is a professor of history.
American Revolution.

Few students of the Revolution believe that any more — not after the studies of the past decades. It now seems clear that the Revolution was not a mere ideological movement, involving a set of ideas promoting a fundamental transformation of values, not only for Americans, but, it is hoped, eventually for the entire world. We have been led to see the American Revolution as a response to the new ideas of modern Western history, and as a consequence we have all come to see what Americans have been as ideologically minded as any people in the Western world.

The uncertainty of the revolutions of 1776 in claiming that their limited revolutionary period possessed universal significance is astounding. After all, those thirteen colonies made up a tiny part of the Western world, containing perhaps two and a half million people bulging along a narrow strip of the Atlantic coast, living on the fringes of Christianity. To think that anything they did would matter to the rest of the world was the height of arrogance. Yet the revolutions sincerely believed that they were leading the world to a new libertarian future. What made this proposition possible, what made their revolution something more than a simple colonial rebellion, what transformed an incident of history into an epoch-making great full of meaning for the whole world, was the Revolution's idea of republicanism.

TODAY, in the first quarter of the twenty-first century, when republicanism are so much taken for granted and what monarchy remains seems so benign, it is difficult to appreciate the power republicanism have come to have on the modern mind. The idea of republicanism and the republicanism that had originated in the American Revolution has been the dominant ideology in Western European thought and culture. The idea of republicanism and the republicanism that had originated in the American Revolution has been the dominant ideology in Western European thought and culture. The idea of republicanism and the republicanism that had originated in the American Revolution has been the dominant ideology in Western European thought and culture. The idea of republicanism and the republicanism that had originated in the American Revolution has been the dominant ideology in Western European thought and culture.

One of the first things that the revolutionaries pieced together the immense significance of what they were involved in. They could not help believing — all evidence and all reason went through everything confirmed it — that liberty was the ultimate purpose of the Old World and seeking an authentic westward in this virtuous new country. From the origins of the Revolution the Americans concluded that the traditional ideas of liberty were particularly dedicated to popular government and the principles of liberty. The importance of these republican ideas cannot be overstated. They were linked with Christian and evangelical millennialism by the early nineteenth century, this republican idea became an overwhelming moral force. It gave Americans a sense that they were the chosen people of God, possessing peculiar qualities of virtue and having a special responsibility for leading the world toward freedom and Christian righteousness. Even at the beginning of the revolution when we were a raw and "underdeveloped" society, we promised to be the leader of the free world.

We presume that this free world would grow, as other peoples invited us in to new and untapped frontiers, our theocracy and decadent luxury of Europe and therefore must be eliminated. Americans were led to be the chosen people of God, possessing peculiar qualities of virtue and having a special responsibility for leading the world toward freedom and Christian righteousness. This was true at the beginning of the revolution when we were a raw and "underdeveloped" society, we promised to be the leader of the free world.

Thus, it was natural for a French artist to show us being received into the Eliza field by an Americanist, Benjamin Franklin (see Figure 1). By 1776 the traditional republicanism had come to lend a new significance to the discrepancies between the Old World and the New. In the eyes of the colonists, what had formerly been regarded as deficiencies and cruelties in American life — the inability of their representative body to gather with the aristocracy, the presence of a religiousFast speed reading: American Revolution.

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Figure 1. Mirabeau arrives aux Champs-Élysées (Paris, 1790). For Europeans everywhere, America came to stand for republicanism and liberty. Here Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Buffon, Fréron, Diderot, and Cicero await Mirabeau in the Elysian fields, but the honor of presenting the laurel crown to the French revolutionary and political thinker is reserved for Benjamin Franklin. Executed by Meunier after a drawing by Jean Michel Moreau.
CAMP: Together With The ROSE TREE.

A farmer and his son's return from a visit to Camp.

The ROSIE TREE.

A rose tree in full bearing.

The leaves were marked London, They looked so nice with little chaps, And called the flax together.

And then was Captain Mainwaring, And Griffiths up on his arm, He said to his horse in secret word, He will not ride without me.

He sat him on his meeting-chair, Upon a bowling green, He sat in the world in gowns, In hundreds and in millions.

The barons bowed to his hat, They looked in today for she, I should have liked to see, To get to my own.

I saw another head of men, A droning of bees, they told me, So many head, so many deep, They should have been held up.

I want to half it off, I want to half it off, Nor would had it, If it had not been in my Mother's chamber.

I want to half it off, I want to half it off, I want to half it off, I want to half it off, I want to half it off.

The farmer and his son's return from a visit to Camp.

Figure 2. The Farmer and his Son's Return from a Visit to Camp (Broadside, ca. 1786). The American—Yankee Doodle—was criticized as an ignorant polyglot by the English before the war. But by the end of the war, Americans embraced Yankee Doodle as a hero and made him a symbol of American patriotism. This broadside version of the song incorporated national songs written by Edward Bunting before 1789 and was an adaptation of earlier versions written during the war.

CONSTITUCION FEDERAL, PARA LOS ESTADOS DE VENEZUELA,

HECHOS POR LOS REPRESENTANTES DE MARGARITA, DE NICOLO, DE CUMANÁ, DE BARONIO, DE BARACOA, DE TRINIDAD, DE CAYENNE, Y DE LORÉN, REUNIDOS EN CONGRESO GENERAL.

IN EL NOMBRE DE DIOS TODO PODER.

Nos el pueblo de los Estados de Venezuela, unido en nuestra federación, y deseando establecer entre nosotros la mejor administración de justicia, procurando el bien general, asegurar la tranquilidad interior, prevenir en común a la defensa exterior, sostener nuestra libertad, e independencia política, conservar para sí mismo la sagrada religión de nuestras antepasadas.

FEDERAL CONSTITUTION, FOR THE STATES OF VENEZUELA,

Made by the Representatives for Margarita, Niquero, Cumaná, Barónio, Barano, Trinidad, and Caracas, in General Congress Assembled.

IN THE NAME OF THE ALL POWERFUL GOD.

We the people of the State of Venezuela, setting out our own sovereignty, and desiring to establish among ourselves the best possible administration of justice, to provide for the general good, to secure the tranquility of our interior, to prevent common to the defense of the exterior, to maintain our freedom and independence, to preserve...
important, on the competitiveness of two very different revolutionary traditions. The Soviet Union threatened nothing less than the displacement of the United States from the vanguard of history. The Russians, not the Americans, now claimed to be painting the way toward the future (and more alarming still, there were some Americans in the 1920s and 1930s who agreed with that claim). For the first time since 1776, Americans were faced with an alternative revolutionary ideology with universalist aspirations. This ideological threat was far more serious to us than anything the Russians did technologically, either in developing the H-bomb or in launching Sputnik. For it seemed to make all of America’s heritage irrelevant. If we were not leading the world toward liberty and free government, what was our history all about?

WITH this dramatic emergence of an opposing revolutionary ideology we Americans have grown more and more confused about ourselves and our place in history. With the deaths of all the states of the world now republics in form, we have steadily come to believe that our republican revolutionary tradition no longer has much relevance to most of the world, particularly to the Third World and its "wars of liberation." We cannot very well stand against the idea of revolution, but at the same time we can no longer be enthusiastic about revolution. With the excommunication of the Truman Doctrine in 1967 the United States for the first time in its history committed itself to supporting established governments of "free peoples" against the threat from subversion from "armed minorities" — presumably Communist — within the state. This radical departure from history left American attitudes eventually culminated in our disastrous intervention in Southeast Asia. This fundamental threat to the meaning of our history posed by a rival revolutionary ideology blinded us to the nationalist and other ethnocultural forces at work in the world. In such an atmosphere it became difficult for us not to believe that every revolution was in some way Communitarian, and consequently our definition of "free" governments was stretched to extraneous categories to cover eventually any government that was not Communard. It would be a mistake, however, to see our support of corrupt or reactionary regimes simply as the direct response of American capitalism or of some deep-seated assistance of revolutions. Many of our Cold War actions, shrewd and misguided as they often may have been, represented our confused and sometimes desperate efforts to maintain our universalist revolutionary aspirations in the world. Our Point Four Program accompanied the Truman Doctrine; the Peace Corps coincided with our involvement in Vietnam. All were linked; all were cut from the same ideological cloth; all were expressions of what is by now an increasingly dimly perceived sense of our revolutionary mission in the world.

Our experience in Vietnam seems to have tempered our desire to make the world over. Perhaps we are witnessing the emergence of a new maturity in American foreign policy, a lowering of the excessive moralism of our attitude toward the world, and the beginnings of a more realistic appraisal of the possibilities and limitations of American power. Some might even say that our present defense with Communism marks a crucial turning point in the historical development of our revolutionary tradition; not that we will abandon that tradition but that we will remember that our mission, as a very ordinary president, Millard Fillmore, declared in the mid-nineteenth century, was not to impose upon other countries our form of government by armed force, but to teach by example and show by our success. No doubt we are part of the world and cannot evade that responsibility which our power gives us. Yet we should continue to believe in history will in the end come not from the number of troops we can muster around the world, but from the way we ourselves in our own society realize the libertarian and egalitarian ideals of the Revolution. This aspect of our revolutionary heritage we have not lost; it still remains a potent experimental worth demonstrating to the rest of the world.

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Suggested Readings


