The Revolution

Learning Outcomes

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

LO 1 Describe the long-term causes and more immediate events that led the colonists into a true revolution against Britain.

LO 2 Discuss the various phases of the American Revolution, and analyze the circumstances that eventually helped the colonists win a conflict that Britain, by rights, should never have lost.

LO 3 Assess the significance of the American Revolution to the following groups: colonists, slaves, native populations, and women.
“Ostensibly, the battle was between freedom and tyranny (if you were a patriot), or about the responsibilities of being an Englishman (if you were a Loyalist).”

After the “long train of abuses” leading up to the Declaration of Independence, from 1776 to 1783 American patriots fought a long and difficult war with Britain. Ostensibly, the battle was between freedom and tyranny (if you were a patriot), or about the responsibilities of being an Englishman (if you were a Loyalist). In reality, choosing sides was much more personal, depending, for instance, on whether your landlord was a Loyalist or a patriot, whether you thought political freedom would improve your business, or whether you felt the earnings you made from a slave-based economy were threatened. All colonists, of course, were forced to choose sides, although many remained ambivalent about each position. Loyalists were scorned, but revolutionaries would be punished brutally if their side lost the war. Choosing sides was no small matter, and the consequences could be deadly.

But the war and the political independence that followed made up only one of several revolutions that took place during these years. The revolutionary war brought with it fundamental questions about freedom and liberty, and about what kind of society Americans wanted. How far would the American Revolution go in promoting equality? Would economic and educational differences be eradicated by a leveling state? Would slavery be abolished? How different would the new society look compared with the old?

LO1 From Rebellion to Revolution

As in most revolutions, the American Revolution had long-term, underlying causes that finally came to a head because of short-term, precipitating events.

Underlying Causes

Between 1660 and 1763, the colonies had formed a unique society distinct from that of England. Perhaps most importantly, they had developed a dynamic economy in manufacturing and developing goods, as well as supplying raw materials to trading partners in both the Old and New Worlds. In other words, the colonies were not just a primary economic supplier (supplying raw materials to a mother country), but a well-rounded economic system unto themselves. Of course, many wealthy southerners owed their fortunes to slave-based cash crops that were then traded with England, so these colonists shied away from confrontation with the Crown. Nevertheless, large sectors of the North American economy were becoming increasingly independent of England.
Along similar lines, property ownership was more common in the colonies than in England. This meant that, with the notable exception of slaves, the people working the land owned it, which gave them something to fight for should their position be threatened. The colonies also had developed without the titled aristocracy or widespread poverty found in England, two further factors in making the colonies an entity unique from England. And, in fact, each colony had developed a self-elected government, something they were not willing to give up easily.

Precipitating Events

These long-term causes could not have detonated into a war without several precipitating sparks. Three were substantial: (1) increased local conflicts; (2) the uncompromising attitude of Britain; and (3) a shift in opinion among the colonists—toward revolution.

The Widening War

At the local level, the war’s scope was widening even before any official declaration of war. In 1775, for instance, Ethan Allen and his “Green Mountain Boys” attacked and captured Britain’s Fort Ticonderoga and Crown Point in backwoods New York. The Continental Army invaded Canada and captured Montreal but failed to capture Quebec. In Charleston, patriots beat back an attack by a British fleet. In Boston, patriots surrounded and laid “siege” on the city after the British had taken control after the Battle of Bunker Hill. Virginians meanwhile forced the royal governor, Lord Dunmore, to retreat from the mainland to a British warship in the harbor at Norfolk. These local conflicts, organized without the assistance of any unified colonial body, indicated a widening war between England and the colonies.

Lord Dunmore’s actions are significant, however, for another reason. After retreating to an offshore ship as he awaited British military support, Dunmore issued a proclamation offering freedom to any slave who agreed to fight for the British. His program, “Liberty to Slaves,” angered the colonists, who would later cite Dunmore’s actions in the Declaration of Independence. To many colonists, liberty was meant only for Europeans and Euro-Americans, and it stung that the governor was offering it to slaves. Within weeks of Dunmore’s call, between five hundred and six hundred slaves responded, and before the war was over, several thousand more fought for Britain and for their freedom. This is in contrast to the colonial army, whose commander George Washington refused to use black soldiers during the first years of the war. Indeed, only during the final months of the war were colonists forced to press slaves into service, delaying doing so mostly because they feared arming them as enemies.

Uncompromising Britain

As the war widened, King George III grew increasingly angry at the colonies for their continued insubordination. He rejected the “Olive Branch Petition” of the Second Continental Congress and in August 1775 denounced the colonists as rebels. He also hired mercenaries from Germany, called “Hessians,” to fight the colonists. And in December 1775 he closed all American ports. This last action was particularly significant because it made independence absolutely necessary to open trade with other countries. The king’s uncompromising attitude presented the colonists with few options other than revolution.
The Shift in American Opinion

Finally, popular opinion had gradually shifted toward independence. The decline of salutary neglect and the spread of local violence led many colonists to side with the revolutionaries. These economic and social events pushed the war of ideas about freedom and sovereignty into the lives of everyday Americans, and the more the Crown proved uncompromising, the more American opinion shifted toward revolution.

Choosing Sides

There was, however, never unanimity, and thus, in addition to this being a revolutionary war, it was also very much a civil war.

The Loyalists

Why remain loyal? In the end, somewhere between one-fifth and one-third of the colonists remained loyal to Britain throughout the war (see “The reasons why...” box). Most prominent in this group were wealthy landholders and slave owners, who had the most to lose in a revolution. Furthermore, a large percentage of colonists remained indifferent to both the British and the revolutionaries.

Although all the colonies had some pro-Crown families, geographically most Loyalists lived in the southern colonies and New York.

The Revolutionaries

Why revolt? Each rebelling colonist had a different motive for supporting a break with England, and these reasons were just as complicated as those for remaining loyal.

Personal and commercial considerations were vitally important. But perhaps most influential was the ideology of republicanism, the idea that government should be based on the consent of the governed and that the people had a duty to ensure that their government did not infringe on individual rights. The American Revolution was the first serious modern attempt to craft a government based on these principles.

Republicanism set down deep roots in England before it flowered on American soil. The British Radical Whigs of the 1600s, for example, harked back to the classical Roman ideal of a “republican society,” in which governmental power was curtailed by the actions of the people, who were presumed to be virtuous and willing to sacrifice for the public good. Drawing on these Roman ideals, republicanism

The reasons why...

Colonists were reluctant to withdraw from the British Empire for at least six reasons:

**Personal connections in Britain.** Many still felt a strong attachment to Britain and the king, and many still had family and friends there.

**Economic ties.** Many also had strong commercial ties with Britain (the slave-based economy of the southern colonies was particularly dependent on such trade). To rebel was to risk their present and future wealth.

**Geo-political concerns.** Some feared that France or Spain might take over if Britain were driven out of the colonies, and they preferred British rule to that of some other European nation.

**Fears of what American independence might mean.** Some of the smaller religious groups felt that Britain had protected them from more powerful denominations that could potentially flourish if the new American state adopted a national religion.

**Personal motives.** Economically, it was often a matter of settling small scores. If, for instance, your landlord was a revolutionary, you were likely to be a Loyalist; if your landlord was a Loyalist, you were likely to be a patriot.

**Uncertainty about American success.** Some colonists doubted the colonies’ ability to throw off British rule. After all, Britain was the most powerful nation in the world, with the mightiest army.
the Radical Whigs outlined a theory according to which a government was legitimate only when it was based on an agreement between the members of a society and government. In this formulation, the members of society would agree to sacrifice a degree of liberty and the government would maintain security and order, but otherwise avoid infringing on a person’s life, liberty, or property. Any ruler who transgressed natural laws was a tyrant, and under tyranny the rebellion of a people was justifiable. (Republicanism was different from liberalism, which viewed any government as an unwanted infringement on individual liberty.)

Republican ideas spread throughout the colonies in the 1700s, mainly by the work of two English authors—John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon—who wrote a short book called Cato’s Letters. In America, Cato’s Letters and other Radical Whig writings were quoted every time Britain attempted to raise taxes after the French and Indian War.

But the best-known expression of republican ideas in revolutionary America was corset maker Thomas Paine’s political pamphlet Common Sense, published in January 1776. Its simple wording of republican ideals nudged the colonists further toward independence. Paine asserted that the king never had the welfare of his subjects in mind and that he was entirely concerned with his own exercise of power. Paine also argued that independence was the only answer to this problem, using language so powerful that it made any other course of action seem absurd. He set forth a vision of America as a dynamic, independent nation, growing in population and prosperity, with a kindly government doing a substantial amount of economic and political leveling to ensure equality. Pointing to the tremendous growth of the American colonies in the eighteenth century, Paine argued that America was more than just capable of maintaining independence from Britain; America was so strong, he claimed, that independence was inevitable.

Paine’s pamphlet was enormously influential in changing the minds of those who had opposed independence. Emerging just as local conflicts spread, Common Sense was reprinted several times; in total, 150,000 copies were distributed throughout the colonies—a number equivalent to 15 million copies being distributed in the United States today.

The Declaration of Independence

The increase of local conflicts, Britain’s inflexibility, and the spreading of republican ideas made a break with Britain inevitable by 1776. But independence was expedited further by events on the ground. In March 1776, the Continental Army forced the British to evacuate Boston, ending the eleven-month siege of the city that had begun after Lexington and Concord and the Battle of Bunker Hill. Rather than sail for home, however, the British Army headed for New York, where more Loyalists resided than in any other colony. Choosing not to establish their base where the colonists were united in opposition (Boston), the British hoped to divide the colonies by setting their base of operations in an area less committed to independence.
The War for Independence

With this crisis at hand, Richard Henry Lee, a Virginia delegate to the Continental Congress, proposed, on June 7, 1776, that the colonies officially declare their independence. With regional balance in mind, the Congress created a committee to draft a declaration. The committee consisted of John Adams of Massachusetts, Roger Sherman of Connecticut, Robert R. Livingston of New York, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania, and Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, who was selected as the principal draftsman. After the committee made minor revisions to Jefferson's first draft, the committee presented the Declaration of Independence to the Congress on June 28, 1776.

The Declaration

The document consisted of two parts: (1) a preamble justifying the revolution on the basis of natural rights, as espoused in the language of republicanism; and (2) a list of grievances accusing George III of tyranny and therefore justifying revolt.

The Signing

Once the Congress had read the Declaration, they debated it and made several major changes (the most important one was deleting Jefferson's tortured assertions that England had been responsible for implanting the evil institution of slavery in the New World and then, through Lord Dunmore, provoking slave rebellions). Then the Continental Congress unanimously approved the Declaration of Independence on July 2, 1776, by a vote of 12 to 0. (The delegation from New York abstained from voting because it had not received instructions from its colony legislature, but the delegates themselves stated that they were in favor of independence.)

Two days later, on July 4, John Hancock, as president of the Congress, may have signed the edited document; other delegates added their signatures to a clean copy of the Declaration in early August.

LO² The War for Independence

With the Congress's July 2, 1776, Declaration, the Revolution now had a goal—political independence
for the American colonies. What had begun as a struggle to secure the rights and liberties that the colonists felt they deserved as British subjects had become a war to secure American nationhood.

The Opposing Sides

The colonists had declared their independence, but now they would have to fight for it. But how could they? They had long been protected by the British, and, other than a few small colonial militias, they had no standing army.

The Continental Army

Efforts to build an army began in earnest even before the Declaration of Independence. It was an uphill battle. The army of the patriots, called the Continental Army, was often ill equipped, undermanned, and hungry. From the beginning, recruitment was a problem. Many colonists wanted freedom, but not many wanted to give their lives for it. The Continental Congress had to offer large bounties of land to induce men to enlist, and eventually it reduced the term of service to just three months. Although the Congress set enlistment quotas for all the new states, the states rarely met them. At any given time, there were usually 10,000 poorly trained troops in the Continental Army. They were usually hungry and unpaid, but the Continental Congress could not help because it did not have much money itself. As fighting progressed, the army had to live off the kindness of surrounding farmers (hoping they were patriots and not Loyalists).

The Continental Army acted under the orders of George Washington, a patrician Virginia tobacco farmer whose wealth came from his wife's family. He believed in the republican ideology to the very marrow of his bones. And he had a brilliant grasp of the war's military strategy. He recognized that, because of the ideological nature of the Revolution and the nature of his ragtag army, his chances would be better if he did not try to win every battle. Indeed, if he refused to engage the British at all and made them wear themselves out in pursuing him, he could win simply by surviving. This strategy, of course, also depended on nonmilitary colonists continuing to resist and harass the British governors and troops. Without this grassroots support in colonial cities and towns, the British might have simply starved the colonists into submission.

The Revolutionary Government and Finances

Washington received his orders from the Continental Congress, the only centralized authority in the colonies, although it had no legal standing or charter document. The Continental Congress could only request assistance from the various states, which had no obligation to grant those requests. Although the revolutionaries planned a national government in 1777, its founding charter (the Articles of Confederation) was not completed until 1781. Throughout the Revolutionary War, then, the revolutionaries had no official central authority.

This hindered them organizationally, and worse, it meant that the revolutionaries could not easily raise money. They had neither the power to levy taxes nor the infrastructure of a treasury. The main way they raised money was simply to print it and hope people would accept the bills. The Continental Congress issued these bills of credit throughout the war. The states issued their own money as well, almost all of which was generally more stable than the Continental dollars. Toward the end of the war, the phrase “not worth a Continental” became
common, suggesting the centralized currency’s lack of buying power and the widespread lack of faith in it. Only after 1781, when Robert Morris became superintendent of finance, did monetary conditions improve, mainly because he could borrow from friendly European nations. But throughout the war, the United States endured the highest inflation in its history. This took a tremendous toll on consumers, which is to say, all colonists.

The British Army

The British, on the other hand, had the most powerful army in the world, supremacy of the seas, and an organized hierarchy of authority that extended all the way to the king. But they also had the more difficult military task of trying to destroy Washington’s army, which was adept at running up hills and into forests to avoid being captured. The Crown sent seasoned British troops who were well armed and accustomed to large battles on vast battlefields. It also had hired German mercenaries, the Hessians, to fight the revolutionaries. Many times, the British outnumbered the revolutionaries and were better trained and better armed, but they confronted three insurmountable problems: (1) Britain could never supply its troops adequately, especially as Washington prolonged the war by constantly retreating inland, away from places where British ships could easily resupply British troops; (2) Washington avoided directly engaging the British troops, so the regimented British army was subjected to uncustomed guerrilla warfare as it chased him around the countryside; and (3) other European nations (notably France) eventually supported the revolutionaries. These other nations were only too glad to see mighty Britain humbled by upstart New World backwoodsmen.

The First Phase of the War, 1775–1779

The first half of the war took place in the North (see Map 6.1 on page 109). The second half was fought in the South. Generally speaking, the Americans’ strategy was to run and survive. They attacked only when they were convinced of victory.

Early British Successes

After evacuating Massachusetts in March 1776, the British Army repositioned on Long Island and
pressed to drive patriot forces from New York City. Their goal was to isolate New England (which it saw as the center of resistance) by taking control of New York City and the Great Lakes, then subduing the South, leaving Massachusetts stranded in its revolutionary fervor.

In July 1776, 34,000 British troops delivered a crushing defeat to the patriots on Long Island and forced the revolutionary army of 18,000 to give up New York City. The patriots withdrew all the way to New Jersey, then to Pennsylvania. Fleeing was militarily embarrassing and bad for morale, but it was tactically sound: so long as the Continental Army remained intact, the colonies were still fighting for independence.

Crossing the Delaware

This loss at New York was a terrible blow to morale. Recruitment suffered, and Washington realized he needed a victory. Furthermore, most of Washington’s soldiers were enlisted only through the end of 1776, so Washington feared that without a victory before the end of the year, the majority of his soldiers would not reenlist. Washington decided on a bold, brilliant action. On Christmas night 1776, the army crossed the ice-filled Delaware River and captured Trenton, New Jersey, which at the time was held by 1,500 Hessian mercenaries working for the British Army. The American victory at Trenton had little strategic significance, but it boosted morale and energized the Revolution.

Reversal of Fortune

Because the loss at Trenton was of minor strategic importance, the British let it go, and, in 1777, British leaders planned a two-pronged invasion that they hoped would finish off the war. British general John Burgoyne was to lead his army south from Canada. At the same time, General William Howe was to capture Philadelphia, the seat of the colonial government, and then sail up the Hudson River to join Burgoyne, completely isolating New England and testing the revolutionaries’ unity.

At first, the plan was successful. Burgoyne’s army captured outposts in New York (Fort Ticonderoga) and began moving south. Meanwhile, Howe drove the patriots from Philadelphia on September 26, 1777 (forcing the Continental Congress to flee the capital), and headed north.

Then the British faced obstacles. General Burgoyne’s troops were slowed by assorted Loyalists seeking protection from the revolutionary fervor of the northern states, which allowed guerrilla fighters and an organized camp of the Continental Army to catch up and harass the British troops. By the time Burgoyne neared the Hudson River, the Americans had forced him to halt, and, while he waited for reinforcements, he found himself surrounded by 6,000 Continental soldiers. Recognizing their advantage, the Americans attacked.

At the end of the fighting, Burgoyne surrendered all 5,700 men who remained of his army. This was the Battle of Saratoga. The American victory there proved two things: (1) that the patriots could defeat sizeable regiments of the larger British Army and (2) that, if the British were to win this war, it was going to be a long, expensive affair.

The French Alliance

The Battle of Saratoga was also significant in that it convinced several European powers, including Spain and the Dutch, to fight against the British. Obtaining the support of France, how-
ever, was key. The French allied themselves with the Americans for two reasons: they wanted to help weaken the British Empire, and they wanted access to New World trading posts, which they had lost in the French and Indian War. Up until this point, the French had been reluctant to advocate a losing cause, however, and the Saratoga victory helped alleviate these concerns.

In addition to France’s backing, the Americans also received aid from an influential Frenchman. The Marquis de Lafayette, a nineteen-year-old nobleman committed to the Republican cause in France, volunteered for the American fight. Lafayette became an instrumental leader in the American Army and played a key role in several pivotal American victories. The youngest of all the generals in the war, he successfully lobbied the French to more fully support the patriots’ cause.

In the end, French support was vital. The French naval fleet battled Britain’s mighty navy in both the eastern (European) and western (American) Atlantic. The French also fought naval battles in the West Indies, the Mediterranean, and India, further diverting British efforts from the American Revolution.

With the French involved, the British now had to defend their entire empire. By 1780, French armies were actively fighting alongside Washington’s army, giving a considerable boost to the revolutionaries.

The War in the West

In the American West—in land west of the Appalachian Mountains, south of the Great Lakes, and east of the Mississippi River—the Revolutionary War was a brutal and violent “Indian War,” where the British and the revolutionaries vied for Indian allies and control of the various forts European settlers had built since first contact. Like the colonists, the Indians were greatly divided as to which side to support, and the stakes for them were incredibly high, considering their already plummeting fortunes in North America. If they picked the wrong side, they could easily be destroyed for their allegiance. Several major tribes, including the Iroquois, Cherokees, and Shawnees, divided into factions over which side to support. The Iroquois who sided with the British were eventually destroyed by the American military, and their lands were torched as a punitive lesson.

The British, in general, had more success finding allies and establishing forts near the Great Lakes, and they often used those forts as staging grounds for raids into western New York and Pennsylvania. Again, as they advanced, they encountered a variety of Indian tribes and settlers, and they never could be quite sure whose side these people were on. This uncertainty made the war in the west a violent and unstable concoction.

In Ohio country, the Virginian George Rogers Clark sought to end British control in Detroit and in other vital throughways to the west. In 1779, Clark captured some key British and Indian troops and controlled parts of Ohio territory. Despite this advantage, a decisive victory proved ephemeral, and uncertainty reigned.

In perhaps the most horrific example of the brutality of the war in the west, in 1782, more than 150 Pennsylvania militiamen were on the hunt for enemy warriors. Instead, they came across nearly 100 Delaware Indians who had converted to Christianity and were noncombatants. The Indians were starving and were in an unexpected location searching for food. Uncertain of the veracity of the Delaware Indians’ story, the militiamen held a council and voted to massacre the whole lot, leading to the execution (they were scalped) of 28 men, 29 women, and 39 children. Two boys escaped the vicious execution, telling the story of what has come to be called the Gnadenhutten Massacre, named after
the Pennsylvania town in which it occurred. Several militiamen refused to participate in the slaughter, but the violence and uncertainty that surround it suggest the frightful and violent nature of the war in the west.

The Winter of 1777–1778

Aside from the victory at Saratoga and the French commitment to enter the conflict, the Americans were slowly losing the war. General Howe’s forces were continually besting George Washington’s troops, enabling the British to capture Philadelphia and other locations. And Washington, keeping with his chief tactic, kept on running. As a result, while Howe’s army wintered in the comforts of Philadelphia, Washington and his army stayed 20 miles away in the wilderness of Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. It was a harsh winter, and Washington’s men were close to starvation. They were poorly equipped, and, although the country had enjoyed one of its best harvests ever, the Congress had allowed the military supply system to deteriorate into chaos. The men’s clothes were threadbare and the troops were losing heart. From the perspective of the winter at Valley Forge, the Revolutionary War would not last long.

The Second Phase of the War, 1778–1781

But the victory at Saratoga reemerged to stimulate the revolutionary fervor once again. When the snow finally melted, the colonists realized the British had changed tactics. The patriots’ victory at Saratoga meant that Britain had to commit more troops to America, and to do this it needed to raise money, most plausibly by raising taxes in England. This was unpopular in England, and the people’s resistance to increased taxes forced Parliament to make a peace offering to the revolutionaries. Parliament’s offering would have maintained the colonial status of America but abandoned British attempts to tax the colonists—returning things to the way they had been in 1763. To the patriots, this offer was unacceptable; they now wanted freedom.

Giving Up on New England

So instead of attempting the costly venture of replacing Burgoyne’s troops in an effort to capture New England, the British planned to contain New England by holding New York while harassing the coastline and the South (see Map 6.2, page 110). They also aimed to demoralize the patriots and break the will of the fighters. For example, the British recognized that the American treasury had little to offer its generals, so they tried to “buy” major American leaders, hoping that the defection of prominent patriots would spread disaffection. The purchase of General Benedict Arnold in 1779 (for more than £10,000) was their chief victory on this front. Arnold had been a revolutionary hero, serving in many of the war’s major battles, including Ticonderoga and Saratoga, where he had been badly injured. After having invested his personal fortune in the war effort, he was then somewhat suddenly charged with corruption by political adversaries and was investigated by the Congress. He thus was a ready, bitter target for bribing. But aside from Arnold, Britain’s bribery policy proved unsuccessful.

Britain’s Southern Plan

Meanwhile, the British prepared to invade the southern colonies. Understanding that the South possessed more abundant natural resources than the North, they sought to preserve their claim to at least that region. They also believed that Loyalists were abundant in the South, so they hoped to exacerbate divisions along Loyalist–patriot lines. They had several reasons to believe this, the main one being that, in the South, the Revolutionary War really was a civil war between frontiersmen, who generally favored independence, and landholders, who usually sided with the British to protect their assets. These two factions had battled among themselves during the early years of the war in countless backwoods battles.

The British miscalculated in their estimation of Loyalist support in the South, however. For one thing, Loyalists lacked the fervor and militancy of the patriots. For another, Loyalists were not as prev-

“...I saw several of the men roast their old shoes and eat them, and I was afterwards informed by one of the officers’ waiters, that some of the officers killed and ate a favorite little dog that belonged to one of them.”

—Joseph Plumb Martin, Continental soldier, on northern campaigns of the winter of 1780
alent as British leaders had hoped. The British plan was doomed from the beginning.

In 1779, the British landed a large army at Charleston. Commanded by General Sir Charles Cornwallis, the army speedily captured Savannah, Georgia, and Charleston, South Carolina. Through 1780, Cornwallis continued to capture southern towns, and he planned to march north to subdue the rest of the colonies, particularly Virginia, which he viewed as crucial to holding the South.

**Washington and Greene’s Strategy for Victory**

In 1780, the Continental Army in the South, now led by Nathanael Greene, attempted to counter Cornwallis's successes by fleeing inland and thus sucking the British Army farther into the continent, away from the coast and easily accessible British support. This approach served two purposes: it stretched British supply lines, and it countered British attempts to rally Loyalist opposition. By
drawing the British away from their supplies, Greene hoped to force them to “live off the land,” a military euphemism for stealing food from the populace. Greene and Washington expected that any support for the British would evaporate as hungry British soldiers began to raid farms.

Their plan succeeded. For several months, Cornwallis pursued the Continental Army across the Carolinas (note Cornwallis’s movements in Map 6.2). British supplies gradually ran low and, just as Washington and Greene had predicted, the troops began stealing from once-sympathetic farmers. On top of this, when the two armies actually fought, the Continental soldiers inflicted major casualties on the British. Although the British won most of the engagements, meaning that they took control of the territory being fought over, the Continental strategies made British victories costly.

In early 1781, Cornwallis was forced to cease his pursuit and take his army north, into Virginia, to
await reinforcements. Faced with mounting casualties, he planned to reunite with his naval fleet at Chesapeake Bay.

**Yorktown and Victory**

The problem with Cornwallis's plan was positioning: while Cornwallis waited for the British fleet (which the French had forced to retreat to New York), his army was stranded at the tip of the Yorktown peninsula in Virginia. Seizing the opportunity to attack, Washington moved a combined force of American and French troops across the lower peninsula; the American victory was complete when the French naval fleet arrived just before the British fleet could rescue Cornwallis's 27,000-man army.

After a night of bombardment, on October 19, 1781, Cornwallis turned his sword over to Washington. More accurately, an emissary for Cornwallis handed it to American general Benjamin Lincoln, whom Washington appointed to accept the surrender when he learned that the British commander had refused to offer his sword personally. When news of Cornwallis's surrender reached England, King George III grudgingly accepted defeat. The surrender ended six long years of battle.

**Newburgh Conspiracy**

It took more than a year after the last major battle before a peace treaty was crafted, however, and while negotiations were ongoing, the armies remained mobilized. Unpaid and undersupplied, several American military leaders proposed a coup, seeking to take control from the relatively impotent Continental Congress in order to implement a tax to pay for unpaid expenses, including their own salaries. The Continental Army was at the time positioned in Newburgh, New York, about 60 miles north of New York City, which was still occupied by the British, and thus the plan became called the Newburgh Conspiracy.

With the British in close striking range, any hint of turmoil within the Continental Army might have provoked Britain to resume hostilities. But Washington rapidly quashed the proposed conspiracy, principally by demonstrating the costs of the war on him personally. The generals were not the only ones who had suffered during the war, he said, reminding them that independence was more consequential than worldly gain. Washington’s words derailed the revolt, but the unrest demonstrated the significance of the peace treaty that was to come.

**Peace Negotiations, 1782–1783**

With battle over, the American team of negotiators—Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, and John Adams—found themselves in a difficult situation. They traveled to Paris for the talks in 1782, with instructions to consult with the French. However, the Americans knew that both France and its ally, Spain, had territorial goals of their own in the New World, goals that the Americans did not want to encourage. As a result, Franklin, Jay, and Adams determined that it was in their best interest to negotiate with the British separately and deal with the French later.

**The Treaty of Paris**

The treaty that Franklin, Jay, and Adams fashioned in 1782 included so many provisions favorable to the Americans that it has frequently been called the greatest triumph in the history of American diplomacy. To guarantee that France did not have the best trading rights to the New World, Britain offered generous terms to the Americans in terms of land and trading rights. America and Britain signed a treaty in November 1782. In doing so, Franklin, Adams, and Jay violated one of the provisions of the Franco-American Alliance of 1778: namely, that neither France nor America would negotiate a separate peace with the British. Nevertheless, the French were eager to end the war, and on January 2, 1783, preliminary treaties were signed between Britain and France and Britain and Spain, and on February 4 hostilities formally ceased. All parties signed the Treaty of Paris in September 1783.

There were five major parts to the Treaty of Paris of 1783: (1) American independence; (2) American expansion west to the Mississippi River and north to the Great Lakes (a much greater area than Americans had thus far settled); (3) freedom of all parties to travel the Mississippi River; (4) Spanish control of Florida; and (5) “no lawful impediment” placed on British merchants seeking to recoup debts from America.

**Significance of the War**

The six long years of the Revolutionary War were filled with suffering. A doctor in the Continental Army suggested that American losses totaled 70,000, but the number of war-related deaths was more likely 25,000, with perhaps another 25,000 injured. Disease and infection killed off many more. Indeed,
the war took place in the midst of a widespread smallpox epidemic, which may have killed as many as 130,000 colonists. (Washington wisely had his troops inoculated, perhaps his smartest move in the entire campaign.) But it was nevertheless a long war, longer than the Civil War, World War I, or World War II.

Furthermore, the war had divided the colonists between Loyalists, rebels, and those who were indifferent to either side. It had also greatly disrupted daily life, as soldiers were recruited to join the army and leave their families for extended periods of time, women were asked to shoulder a heavier burden in their household and in civic life, and slaves contemplated their future in a new American republic, one that showed little sign of granting them freedom. Beyond this tremendous disruption of daily life, the American war for independence had six major results.

The Impact on Politics

Politically, the American Revolution was the first world conflict whose winners embraced the promise of the Enlightenment. In promising the “natural rights” of life, liberty, and property, the American Revolution served as an ideological model for later revolutions in France and in Central and South America, among others.

But the Revolution was a bellwether of not only liberty but also of republican democracy. The American revolutionaries hoped that their struggles would curb the system of Old World aristocracy. They no longer wanted to be ruled by a few powerful people with long-entrenched methods of perpetuating their wealth and status. Many also did not want an established church that denied the freedom of belief. No one was sure what would arise in the place of Old World aristocracy, but they knew that, after the revolution, the old system was dead.

Eventually, this awareness would lead to the formal separation of church and state and limited (but growing) access to the ballot. During the revolutionary era, access to the ballot was still dependent on owning property, which usually excluded women and African Americans, but the Revolution geared up the machinery for a more expansive democracy in the future.

The Impact on Slavery

The Revolutionary War also illustrated the contradiction between slavery and liberty, and it triggered the abolition of slavery in the North. During the

The Impact on American Nationalism

Before the American Revolution, the colonists living in what became the United States did not think of themselves as having a national culture fundamentally unique from England’s. In terms of nationality, most colonists considered themselves as their great-grandfathers were, English. But the French and Indian War and the American Revolution unified the colonists under a new, ideological definition of what it meant to be an American. A nation is composed of people who recognize that they share certain qualities that set them apart from other nations, whether those qualities are ideological, political, linguistic, religious, cultural, racial, or historical. For Americans, in the revolutionary era and after, a strong belief in democracy and the experience of fighting for their political independence were the impetus for the mounting tide of patriotism that followed the Revolutionary War.
Significance of the War

War, slaves participated in the fight on both sides, although the British welcomed them more willingly than the revolutionaries. Cornwallis himself employed 5,000 slaves, promising to free them after the war. Many slaves simply fled their masters during the confusion of battle. In all, there were about 50,000 fewer slaves after the war than before it. Some former slaves went to New England, some went to Canada, and many stayed in the South to live free.

After the war, the progress of formal abolition was slow and gradual, but it was progress nonetheless. Some advances were even made in the South, where the vast majority of slaves lived (see Map 6.3). Virginia and Maryland made it easier for owners to manumit (or willingly free) their slaves, and many revolutionaries chose to do so. By 1800, one in ten African Americans in the Chesapeake region was free. This meant there were large communities where escaped slaves could hide in the growing cities of the Chesapeake. Nevertheless, slavery had not been abolished in the South, and leaders like Thomas Jefferson, who were well aware of the contradiction between the practice of slavery and the rhetoric of independence, never freed their slaves.

The most dramatic changes occurred in the North when abolition was set in motion legally. Vermont outlawed slavery in its first constitution in 1777. In Massachusetts and New Hampshire, slaves sued for their freedom—and won. In the Middle States, where the slave population was larger, progress was slower, but both Pennsylvania and New York favored gradual emancipation, which, in Pennsylvania’s case, meant that all slaves born in 1780 or later were free when they turned twenty-one. Throughout the North, five states allowed African Americans to vote, and in total, by 1810, three-quarters of the 30,000 African Americans living in the North were free. By 1840, there were only 1,000 slaves in the North, and the freed slaves and their children had developed large social institutions, including various sects of historically black churches and numerous fraternal organizations, such as the African American Masons.

Perhaps most importantly, however, by 1790, all states except Georgia and South Carolina had outlawed the importation of slaves from abroad. As Americans began to consider the political meanings of liberty and freedom, they were confronted by the obvious contradiction of having freed themselves of the Crown while others lived in slavery. After the Revolution, only compromise would keep the issue of slavery at bay, as the North and South took different tactics in handling the contentious issue.

The Impact on Native America

The war also greatly affected the fate of Native Americans, who were generally worse off after the war than before it. By the time of the Revolution, there were few tribes still living on the Atlantic coast, as disease and violence had decimated the tribes of that region. The most powerful tribes in contact with the colonists lived between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River, where the Iroquois dominated in the North and the Choctaw, Seminole, Creek, and Cherokee dominated in the South. The battles throughout Native America were unspeakably harsh, as the war often served as a pretext to remove Indian tribes and empty Indian land for land-hungry colonists. Anyone could become a casualty on the frontier. By the end of the war, nearly one-third of the Iroquois nation was dead. Their supremacy in the land between the Appalachians...
and the Great Lakes did not survive the war.

In addition to these violent encounters, with the war over, the tribes of Native America had to contend with an expanding nation of settlers who respected no practical western boundary and answered to no governmental authority preventing them from moving farther west. This portended a grim outlook for American Indians.

The Impact on Women

Women played key roles during the Revolution. They enforced boycotts, sewed clothing made of nonimported fibers, raised impressive funds for the Continental Army, and sometimes even engaged in battle. This was a significant shift from the colonial era, when women only rarely protested their total exclusion from politics. New Jersey’s constitution of 1776 opened the franchise to “all free inhabitants” who were worth at least fifty pounds, thus allowing many New Jersey women to vote for the first time.

But immediately after the war, women generally lost out politically as the new nation decided how far it would extend the rewards of citizenship. In many states, women were not eligible to own property. And, in every other state besides New Jersey, there is no evidence that women were ever offered the vote. In 1807, even New Jersey rescinded its offer of the franchise.

Men confined women’s role to that of “Republican motherhood,” which historians now describe as a double-edged identity—one that put women in charge of raising young male republicans through a demanding path of education, religious adherence, and political engagement but that also confined women’s role to familial relations outside the realm of direct intervention in the public sphere.

The Impact on Religious Minorities

Many historians have pointed to the Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s as laying part of the foundation for the revolutionary events of the 1760s and 1770s. With its emphasis on personal religious experience rather than the authority of the ministers, and as one of the first events to create a shared experience for people from New England to the southern colonies, the Great Awakening has been viewed as an early form of revolutionary activity. Colonists were also afraid that, around 1763, Parliament was planning to establish a bishop of the Anglican Church for America. They feared that any such appointment would extend England’s official church to the colonies.

Two American actions after the war reflected their concerns about an established church: (1) Most of the new state constitutions included some guarantee of religious toleration, although a few of the states that already had an official church (like Massachusetts) moved more slowly toward disestablishment; and (2) the democratic ideals of the Revolution called into question public financial support of churches that were not attended by everyone.

The best-known representation of these ideas came in 1786, when the Virginia legislature passed a Thomas Jefferson-drafted bill that called for the disestablishment of the Episcopal Church. Jefferson’s Virginia Statute on Religious Freedom was one of the accomplishments that Jefferson himself was most proud of. The statute said that no Virginian...
The war generated a bewildering mix of emotions and warnings. It set the patriots free from English control, but it also drew boundaries that the future nation would have to observe when it created its new government and society. It set in motion the ideals of the Enlightenment, but it also provoked the question of how far republican democracy would extend—not just politically, but socially and economically as well. Many revolutionary leaders feared that too much freedom might lead to chaos: if everyone were free, who would ensure order? On the other hand, too little freedom might trigger a second revolution.

With the war over, the leaders of the new nation confronted yet another daunting task: forming a new nation that embodied the revolutionary spirit without letting that spirit extend to anarchy.

### Chronology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1763</td>
<td>End of salutary neglect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td>Local conflicts escalate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1776</td>
<td>Tom Paine’s Common Sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1776</td>
<td>Declaration of Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 25, 1776</td>
<td>Crossing the Delaware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept.–Oct. 1777</td>
<td>Battle of Saratoga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1778</td>
<td>France enters war on the side of the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1779</td>
<td>Britain invades the South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1780</td>
<td>Inland battles force British away from supply lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 1781</td>
<td>Yorktown and American victory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### What else was happening...

**July 4, 1777**
The United States celebrates its first birthday. Ships lined up on the Delaware River discharge thirteen cannon shots in honor of the thirteen states.

**1778**
New Orleans businessman Oliver Pollock creates the $ symbol.

**1784**
A new trade route opens for Americans when the Empress of China sails from New Jersey around Cape Horn in South America to China.

**1787**
The first U.S. penny, designed by Benjamin Franklin, is minted.

**1789**
The French Revolution begins, initiating a long battle in France over “liberty, equality, and fraternity.”

**1790**
The cornerstone of the mansion known as the White House is laid.

Would be “compelled” to go to any church or form of religious worship against their will, and that all Virginians were free to profess their own opinion “in matters of religion.” It immediately influenced several state constitutions, and several states made their ratification of the United States Constitution in 1787 contingent on an amendment promising that the federal government would not infringe on religious liberties.

At the same time, the Revolution led to the creation of several divisions of American churches, such as the Methodist Episcopal Church of America and the Presbyterian Church of the United States. Two “freedom churches” also opened, both of which stressed the brotherhood of man and the freedom of conscience: the Universalist Church (1779) and the Unitarian Church (1785). Thus, not only did the Revolution inspire laws mandating the separation of church and state, but it also encouraged the creation of two major antidogmatic sects.

Visit the CourseMate website at www.cengagebrain.com for additional study tools and review materials for this chapter.