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The War for Independence
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John Laurens wrote these letters to his father, Henry, at one of the low points of the American Revolution, when victory seemed most remote. The letters reveal much, not only about the course of the war but also about the aspirations and limitations of the Revolutionary generation. Henry, a wealthy slaveholder from South Carolina, was president of the Continental Congress; his son John was an aide to General George Washington.

John, 23 years old in 1778, had been born in South Carolina but educated for the most part in Geneva and London, where he had been exposed to some of the most progressive currents of the Enlightenment. Among these were compassion for the oppressed and the conviction that slavery should be abolished.

Laurens saw an opportunity to solve two problems at once when he returned to America in 1777. Enlisting slaves in the
army would provide blacks with a stepping stone to freedom and American forces with desperately needed troops. John, however, tried and failed repeatedly to convince legislatures in the deep south to enroll black troops in exchange for their freedom.

John’s idealistic quest for social justice ended on the banks of the Combahee River in South Carolina, where he died in one of the last skirmishes of the war. “Where liberty is,” he once wrote, “there is my country.” Americans won their independence, but eight long years of warfare strained and in some ways profoundly altered the fabric of American society, though not as much as Laurens had wished.

THE OUTBREAK OF WAR AND THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, 1774–1776

After the Boston Tea Party, both the British and the Americans knew that they were approaching a crisis. A British officer in Massachusetts commented in late 1774 that “it is thought by every body here” that British forces would soon have “to take the field.” Many Americans also expected a military confrontation but continued to hope that the king would not “reason with us only by the roar of his Cannon.”

Mounting Tensions

In May 1774, General Thomas Gage, the commander in chief of the British army in America, replaced Thomas Hutchinson as governor of Massachusetts. After Gage dissolved the Massachusetts legislature, the General Court, it defied him by assembling

### Chronology

**1775**
- April 19: Battles of Lexington and Concord.
- May 10: Second Continental Congress meets.
- June 17: Battle of Bunker Hill.
- December 31: American attack on Quebec.

**1776**
- July 4: Declaration of Independence.
- September 15: British take New York City.
- December 26: Battle of Trenton.

**1777**
- January 3: Battle of Princeton.
- September 11: Battle of Brandywine Creek.
- October 17: American victory at Saratoga.
- Continental Army winters at Valley Forge.

**1778**
- February 6: France and the United States sign an alliance.
- June 17: Congress refuses to negotiate with British peace commissioners.
- July 4: George Rogers Clark captures British post in the Mississippi Valley.
- December 29: British capture Savannah.
- Death of the great French Enlightenment writer, François-Marie Arouet Voltaire.
- November: First manned balloon flight, in France.

**1779**
- June 21: Spain declares war on Britain.
- Americans devastate the Iroquois country.
- September 23: John Paul Jones captures the British ship Serapis.

**1780**
- May 12: Fall of Charleston, South Carolina.
- October 7: Americans win Battle of Kings Mountain.
- December 3: Nathanael Greene takes command in the South.

**1781**
- January 17: Americans defeat British at Battle of Cowpens.
- March 15: Battle of Guilford Court House.
- October 19: Cornwallis surrenders at Yorktown.
- Influential German philosopher Immanuel Kant publishes his first major work, The Critique of Pure Reason.

**1783**
- March 15: Washington quells the Newburgh “Conspiracy.”
- September 3: Peace of Paris signed.
- November 21: British begin evacuating New York.
- First manned balloon flight, in France.
- Quakers present first anti-slavery petition to the British parliament.

**1784**
- United States vessel opens trade with Canton, China.

**1788**
- Britain transports convicts to Australia.

**WHY DID** tensions between the colonies and Britain escalate so rapidly between 1774 and 1776?

**5–6** Petition of “A Grate Number of Blakes of the Province” to Governor Thomas Gage and the Members of the Massachusetts General Court (1774)
anyway. Calling itself the Provincial Congress, the legislature in October 1774 appointed an emergency executive body, the Committee of Safety, headed by John Hancock, which began stockpiling weapons and organizing militia volunteers. Some localities had already provided for the formation of special companies of Minute Men, who were to be ready at “a minute’s warning in Case of an alarm.”

Enforcing the Continental Association’s boycott of British goods, local committees sometimes assaulted suspected loyalists and destroyed their property. The increasingly polarized atmosphere, combined with the drift toward military confrontation, drove a growing wedge between American loyalists and the patriot anti-British American Whigs.

**The Loyalists’ Dilemma**

Like other Americans, the loyalists were a mixed group. Most were farmers, though office-holders and professionals were overrepresented. Recent immigrants to the colonies, as well as locally unpopular minorities (Scots in the South, Anglicans in New England), often remained loyal because they believed the crown offered protection against more established Americans. During the War for Independence, about 19,000 American men would join British provincial units and fight to restore royal authority. (This compares with the perhaps 200,000 who served in some military capacity on the rebel side.) The loyalists numbered close to half a million men and women—some 20 percent of the colonies’ free population. Of these, up to 100,000 would leave with the British forces at the end of the war.

**British Coercion and Conciliation**

Britain held parliamentary elections in the fall of 1774 and North’s supporters won easily. Angry and alarmed at the colonists’ challenge to Parliament’s sovereignty, they took a hard line. Under North’s direction, in February 1775, Parliament resolved that Massachusetts was in rebellion and prohibited the New England colonies from trading outside the British Empire or sending their ships to the North Atlantic fishing grounds. Similar restrictions on most of the other colonies soon followed.

Meanwhile, in a gesture of appeasement, Parliament endorsed Lord North’s Conciliatory Proposition, which pledged not to tax the colonies if they would voluntarily contribute to the defense of the empire. British officials, however, would decide what was a sufficient contribution. Had the Conciliatory Proposition specified a maximum colonial contribution, and had it been offered ten years earlier, the colonists might have found it acceptable. Now it was too late. North’s government, in any case, had already sent orders to General Gage to take decisive action against the Massachusetts rebels. These orders triggered the first clash between British and American forces.

**The Battles of Lexington and Concord**

Gage received his orders on April 14, 1775. On the night of April 18, he assembled 700 men on the Boston Common and marched them toward the little towns of Lexington and Concord, some 20 miles away (see Map 6–1). Their mission was to arrest rebel leaders Samuel Adams and John Hancock (then staying in Lexington) and to destroy the military supplies the Committee of Safety had assembled at Concord. Learning of the troop movements, patriots sent riders—one of them the silversmith Paul Revere—to spread the alarm. Adams and Hancock escaped.

When the British soldiers reached Lexington at dawn, they found about seventy armed militiamen drawn up in formation on the village green. A British major ordered the militia to disperse. They were starting to obey when a shot from an unknown source shattered the stillness. The British responded with a volley that killed or wounded 18 Americans.
The British troops pressed on to Concord and burned what few supplies the Americans had not been able to hide. But when their rear guard came under fire at Concord’s North Bridge, the British panicked. As they retreated to Boston, patriot Minute Men and other militia harried them from both sides of the road. By the time the column reached safety, 273 British soldiers were dead, wounded, or missing.

News of the fighting at the Battles of Lexington and Concord spread quickly. The speed with which distant colonies heard about the outbreak of fighting suggests both the importance Americans attached to it and the extraordinary efforts patriots made to spread word of it. Everywhere, news of Lexington and Concord spurred Whigs into action.

**The Second Continental Congress, 1775–1776**

By the time the Second Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia on May 10, 1775, Gage’s troops had limped back into Boston from Lexington and Concord, and patriot militia had surrounded the city. American forces from Vermont and Massachusetts under, respectively, Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold overwhelmed the British garrison at Fort Ticonderoga at the southern end of Lake Champlain on the very day Congress met. Rebel forces elsewhere seized arms and ammunition from royal storehouses.

Assuming leadership of the rebellion, the Congress in the succeeding months became, in effect, a national government. It called for the patchwork of local forces to be organized into the Continental Army, authorized the formation of a navy, established a post office, and printed paper continental dollars to meet its expenses. Denying Parliament’s claim to govern the colonies but not yet ready to declare themselves independent, the delegates sought to preserve their ties to Britain by expressing loyalty to the crown. In the Olive Branch Petition, addressed to George III on July 5, they asked the king to protect his American subjects from the military actions ordered by Parliament. The following day, Congress approved the Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms, asserting the resolve of American patriots “to die freemen, rather than to live slaves.”

**Commander-in-Chief George Washington**

To take command of the patriot forces around Boston—the newly named Continental Army—Congress turned to George Washington who had been suggested by John Adams,
a Whig leader from Massachusetts. Selecting the Virginian, Adams and others realized, would help transform a local quarrel in New England into a continental conflict involving all of British North America.

Washington was the ideal person for the job. He was blessed with good judgment, a profound understanding of both the uses and the limitations of power, and the gift of command. He soon realized that the fate of the patriot cause depended on the survival of the army. Early in the war, he almost suffered catastrophic military defeat at least twice, but he learned from his mistakes and thereafter did not risk lives unnecessarily. The troops in turn revered him.

**EARLY FIGHTING: MASSACHUSETTS, VIRGINIA, THE CAROLINAS, AND CANADA**

General Gage, finding himself besieged in Boston after the fighting at Lexington and Concord, decided to seize and fortify territory south of Boston, where his cannons could command the harbor. But the Americans seized the high ground first, entrenching themselves on Breed’s Hill north of town. On June 17, 1775, Gage sent 2,200 well-trained soldiers to drive the 1,700 patriot men and boys from their new position. The British succeeded, but at the cost of more than 1,000 casualties. Misnamed for another hill nearby, this encounter has gone down in history as the Battle of Bunker Hill (see Map 6–2).

Washington, who arrived in Boston after the battle, took command of the American forces there in early July. Months of standoff followed, with neither side able to dislodge the other. During the winter of 1775–1776, however, the Americans dragged some sixty cannons 300 miles through snow and over mountains from Fort Ticonderoga to Boston. In March 1776, Washington mounted the newly arrived guns to overlook Boston harbor, putting the British in an indefensible position. The British then evacuated Boston and moved their troops to Halifax, Nova Scotia. New England was for the moment secure for the patriots.

Fighting in the South also went well for the patriots. Virginia’s last royal governor, Lord Dunmore, fled the capital, Williamsburg, and set up a base in nearby Norfolk. Promising freedom to slaves who joined him, he succeeded in raising a small force of black and white loyalists and British marines. On December 9, 1775, most of these men died when they attacked a much larger force of 900 Virginia and North Carolina patriots at Great Bridge, near Norfolk. On February 27, a force of loyalist Scots suffered a similar defeat at Moore’s Creek Bridge in North Carolina. And in June 1776, patriot forces successfully repulsed a large British expedition sent to attack Charleston, South Carolina.

**INDEPENDENCE**

The American forces’ stunning early successes bolstered the patriots’ confidence as attempts to promote reconciliation failed. In August 1775, King George III rejected the Congress’s Olive Branch Petition, proclaimed the colonies to be in rebellion, and denied them his protection. In December, Parliament barred all exports from the American colonies. These actions prompted many Whigs to think seriously of declaring full independence from Britain.

Tactical considerations also influenced patriot leaders. Formal separation from Great Britain would make it easier for them to gain desperately needed aid from England’s rival France and other foreign countries. Declaring independence would also provide a better legal basis for American leaders’ newly claimed authority. Accordingly,
most of the states (as the rebellious colonies now called themselves) either instructed or permitted their delegates in the Congress to vote for independence.

On June 7, 1776, Virginian Richard Henry Lee introduced in the Congress a resolution stating that the united colonies "are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States." Postponing a vote on the issue, the Congress appointed a committee to draw up a declaration of independence. On June 28, after making revisions in Thomas Jefferson’s proposed text, the committee presented the document to Congress. In the debate that followed, the South Carolina, Pennsylvania, and New York delegations initially opposed independence. But when the Congress voted on the resolution for independence on July 2, 1776, all voting delegations approved it. After
This fine portrait of George Washington appears in multiple versions depicting the victorious general against different backgrounds, including the battles of Princeton and Yorktown. The painter, Charles Willson Peale, served under Washington at Princeton, and the French commander at Yorktown, the Count de Rochambeau, took an appropriate version home with him in 1783.

Further tinkering with the wording, the Congress officially adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.

Congress intended the declaration to be a justification for America’s secession from the British Empire and an invitation to potential allies. But Jefferson’s prose transformed a version of the contract theory of government into one of history’s great statements of human rights. Developed by the late-seventeenth-century English philosopher John Locke and others, the contract theory maintains that legitimate government rests on an agreement between the people and their rulers. The people are bound to obey their rulers only so long as the rulers offer them protection.

The Declaration of Independence consists of a magnificently stated opening assumption, two premises, and a powerful conclusion. The opening assumption is that all men are created equal, that they therefore have equal rights, and that they can neither give up these rights nor allow them to be taken away. The first premise—that people establish governments to protect their fundamental rights to life, liberty, and property—is a restatement of contract theory. The second premise is a long list of charges meant to prove that George III had failed to defend his American subjects’ rights. This indictment, the heart of the declaration, justified the Americans’ rejection of their hitherto legitimate ruler. Then followed the dramatic conclusion: that Americans could rightfully overthrow King George’s rule and replace it with something more satisfactory to them.

Historians have spilled oceans of ink debating Jefferson’s use of the expression “all men.” In practice, of course, many people were excluded from full participation in eighteenth-century American society. Women had no formal political rights and limited legal rights. Property-less white and free black men had similarly restricted rights, and slaves enjoyed no rights at all. But if the words “all men are created equal” had limited practical meaning in 1776, they have ever since confronted Americans with a moral challenge to make good on them.

Religion, Virtue, and Republicanism

Americans reacted to news of the Declaration of Independence with mixed emotions. There was rejoicing as orators read the declaration to large crowds. Soldiers fired salutes, and candles illuminated the windows of public buildings. But even many who favored independence worried about how Americans would govern themselves. Most Whigs, animated by the political ideology known as republicanism, thought a republican government was best suited to American society.

John Adams once complained that republicanism was too shadowy a concept to define, and indeed it was a complex, changing body of ideas, values, and assumptions. Closely related to country (New Whig) ideology, republicanism was derived from the political ideas of classical antiquity, Renaissance Europe, and early modern England. It held that self-government—either directly by the citizens of a country or indirectly by their elected representatives—provided a more reliable foundation for
the good society and individual freedom than did rule by kings. Thus, drawing on contract theory, as in the Declaration of Independence, republicanism called for government by consent of the governed. Drawing on country ideology, it was suspicious of excessively centralized government and insistent on the need for a virtuous, public-spirited citizenry. Republicanism therefore helped to give the American Revolution a moral dimension.

But other than a state that was not ruled by a hereditary king, what was a republic? And what were the chances that one would survive? Every educated person knew, of course, that ancient Rome and Athens had been republics. But Americans had at hand a more recent example of a republic than ancient Athens or Rome. During the English Civil War of the mid-seventeenth century, English Puritans had for a time replaced the monarchy with a republican “Commonwealth,” dedicated to advancing the “common weal,” or common good. Most eighteenth-century Americans thought of the Puritan Commonwealth as a misguided product of fanaticism that had ended in a military dictatorship. However, some New Englanders, spiritual descendants of the Puritans, considered the Commonwealth to have been a noble experiment. To them, the American Revolution offered another chance to establish a republic of the godly.

“When the mere Politician weighs the Danger or Safety of his Country,” warned one clergyman, “he computes them in Proportion to its Fortresses, Arms, Money, Provisions, Numbers of Fighting Men, and its Enemies.” But, he continued, the “Christian Patriot” calculates them “by its Numbers of Sinful or praying People, and its Degrees of Holiness or Vice.” Such language recalled the Great Awakening; it reached beyond the upper classes who had been directing the resistance to the British and mobilized ordinary people for what their ministers repeatedly assured them was a just war against sin and despotism. Out of this fusion of republican theory (with which only the educated were familiar) and the religious heritage that all Americans understood, a common belief developed that God was on their side and that Americans must have “resolution enough to forgo Self gratification” and be willing to stake their all “upon the prospect of Securing freedom and happiness to future Generations.”

In this painting of the Battle of Bunker Hill, the artist John Trumbull highlighted the death of Major General Joseph Warren of the Massachusetts militia. Like Trumbull, historians have traditionally emphasized prominent historical figures. More recently, however, they have focused on the common people, such as the militiamen, black and white, who appear at the margins of this picture but who composed the majority of the American forces fighting that day.

**Quick Review**

**Republicanism**
- Self-government: the best foundation for society and individual freedom.
- Called for consent of the governed.
- Suspicious of excessively centralized government.
CHAPTER 6  THE WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE 1774–1783

THE COMBATANTS

Republican theory mistrusted professional armies as the instruments of tyrants. A free people, republicans insisted, relied for defense on their own patriotism. But militiamen, as one American general observed, had trouble coping with “the shocking scenes of war” because they were not “steeld by habit or fortified by military pride.” In real battles, they often proved unreliable. Americans therefore faced a hard choice: Develop a professional army or lose the war. In the end, they did what they had to do.

Professional Soldiers

Drawing on their colonial experience and on republican theory, the new state governments first tried to meet their military needs by relying on the militia and by creating new units based on short-term enlistments. Discipline became a major problem in both the militia and the new state units, and often volunteers had barely received basic training before their term of duty ended and they returned home.

Washington tightened things up in the new Continental Army. Eventually, he prevailed on Congress to adopt stricter regulations and to require enlistments for three years or the duration of the war. Although he used militia effectively, his consistent aim was to turn the Continental Army into a disciplined force that could defeat the British.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

A MERICAN I NDEPENDENCE A BROAD

The main purpose of the Declaration of Independence was to announce to other nations that the United States had assumed a place among them and was therefore available as a trading partner and military ally. Most countries, however, at first took a wait-and-see approach. As one historian has observed, a “deafening diplomatic silence” greeted the American debut on the world stage.

Unofficial admiration and emulation were quicker and more widespread. As early as 1777, a German newspaper noted that American success would give “new life to the spirit of liberty,” and by 1790 at least 26 works on America had been published in three or more European languages. Elsewhere, slaves took direct action. In the West Indies, they celebrated Americans for meriting “Immortal Honour” for “encountering death in every form rather than submit to slavery.” Jamaican bondsmen unsuccessfully revolted in 1776, and on islands off the southeastern coast of Africa, rebelling slaves explained their actions by observing that “America is free. Could not we be?”

The success of the American Revolution also had profound repercussions in the two most powerful nations of Europe. In France the American example and the depletion of the treasury during the war contributed to a revolution that overthrew the monarchy. In Britain the results were less dramatic but important. The loss of the North American colonies accelerated an eastward shift in British attention that would make India the crown jewel in the nineteenth-century empire. Whites also began settling Australia in 1788 when Britain started sending convicts there because, unlike the colonies, an independent United States could—and did—refuse to accept them.

Even the abolition of slavery in the British Empire occurred when it did partly as a result of American independence. By tarnishing England’s reputation as the model of freedom, the American Revolution prompted a reaction in Britain that helped to stimulate a popular antislavery movement. In addition, the independence of the United States weakened the political influence of the West Indian planters by dividing them from their fellow slaveholders on the mainland. Thus, ironically, Great Britain was able to emancipate its slaves during the 1830s—a full generation before the United States took the same step in a bloody civil war.
in the large engagements of massed troops characteristic of eighteenth-century European warfare, for only such victories could impress the other European powers and establish the legitimacy of the United States.

The enemy British soldiers—and the nearly 30,000 German mercenaries (Americans called them “Hessians”) whom the British government employed—offered Americans the clearest model of a professional army. British regulars were not (as Americans, then and later, assumed) the “dregs of society.” Although most of the enlisted men came from the lower classes and from economically depressed areas, many also had skills. British officers usually came from wealthy families and had simply purchased their commissions. Only rarely could a man rise from the enlisted ranks to commissioned-officer status.

The life of a British soldier was tough. They were frequently undernourished, and many more died of disease than of injury in battle. Medical care was, by modern standards, primitive. Severe discipline held soldiers in line. Striking an officer or deserting could bring death; lesser offenses usually incurred a beating.

Soldiers amused themselves with gambling (despite regulations against it) and drinking. As one officer lamented, America was a terrible country where one drank “to get warm, or to get cool, or ... because you get no letters.” Perhaps two-thirds of the Redcoats were illiterate, and all suffered from loneliness and boredom. Camaraderie and a legendary loyalty to their regiments sustained them.

After the winter of 1777–1778, conditions in the Continental Army came to resemble those in the British army. Like British regulars, American recruits tended to be low on the social scale. They included young men without land, indentured servants, some criminals and vagrants—in short, men who lacked better prospects. The chances for talented enlisted men to win an officer’s commission were greater than in the British army. But Continental soldiers frequently had little more than “their ragged shirt flaps to cover their nakedness,” and their bare marching feet occasionally left bloody tracks in the snow.

The British and the Americans both had trouble supplying their troops. The British had plenty of sound money, which many American merchants and farmers were happy to take in payment for supplies. But they had to rely mostly on supplies shipped to them from the British Isles. The Continental Army, by contrast, had to pay for supplies in depreciating paper money. After 1780, the burden of provisioning the Continental Army fell on the states, which did little better than Congress had done. Unable to obtain sufficient supplies, the army sometimes threatened to seize them by force. This, in turn, increased the public’s republican distrust of its own professional army.

Feeling themselves outcasts from an uncaring society, the professional soldiers of the Continental Army developed a community of their own. They groused, to be sure—sometimes alarmingly. In May 1780, Connecticut troops at Washington’s camp in Morristown, New Jersey, staged a brief mutiny. On January 1, 1781, armed units from Pennsylvania stationed in New Jersey marched to Philadelphia demanding their back pay. The Pennsylvania Executive Council met part of the soldiers’ demands, but some of the men left the service. Washington ordered subsequent mutinies by New Jersey and Pennsylvania troops suppressed by force.
Dr. Albigence Waldo was a surgeon in the First Connecticut Infantry Regiment of the Continental Army while it was encamped at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. His diary, from which the following excerpts are taken, reveals much about the attitudes of the soldiers as well as the conditions they faced. Waldo resigned from the service in 1779 because of illness but lived until 1794.

- How serious was Waldo in describing the reasons for the location of the soldiers’ winter quarters?
- Did his griping reflect a serious morale problem?
- What do his remarks about the Indian soldier’s death reveal about Waldo’s values?

[December 13, 1777.—] It cannot be that our Superiors are about to hold consultation with Spirits infinitely beneath their Order, by bringing us into these [remote] regions. ... No, it is, upon consideration for many good purposes since we are to Winter here—I’st There is plenty of Wood & Water. 2dly There are but few families for the soldiery to Steal from—tho’ far be it from a Soldier to Steal. 4ly [sic] There are warm sides of Hills to erect huts on. 5ly They will be heavenly Minded like Jonah when in the Belly of a Great Fish. 6ly They will not become home Sick as is sometimes the case when Men live in the Open World—since the reflections which will naturally arise from their present habitation, will lead them to the more noble thoughts of employing their leisure hours in filling their knapsacks with such materials as may be necessary on the Journey to another Home.

December 14.—Prisoners & Deserters are continually coming in. The Army which has been surprisingly healthy hitherto, now begins to grow sickly from the continued fatigues they have suffered this Campaign. Yet they still show a spirit of Alacrity & Contentment not to be expected from so young Troops. I am Sick—discontented—and out of humour. Poor food—hard lodging—Cold Weather—fatigue—Nasty Cloaths—nasty Cookery—Vomit half my time—smoak’d out of my senses—the Devil’s in’t—I can’t Endure it—Why are we sent here to starve and Freeze—What sweet Felicities have I left at home; A charming Wife—pretty Children—Good Beds—good food—good Cookery—all agreeable—all harmonious. Here all Confusion—smoke & Cold—hunger & filthyness—A pox on my bad luck. There comes a bowl of beef soup—full of burnt leaves and dirt, sickish enough to make a Hector spue—away with it Boys—I’ll live like the Chameleon upon Air. Poh! Poh! Crys Patience within me—you talk like a fool. Your being sick Covers your mind with a Melanchollic Gloom, which makes everything about you appear gloomy. See the poor Soldier, when in

What was perhaps the most serious expression of army discontent—one that might have threatened the future of republican institutions and civilian government in the United States—occurred in March 1783, after the fighting was over. Washington’s troops were then stationed near Newburgh, New York, waiting for their pay before disbanding. When the Congress failed to grant real assurances that any pay would be forthcoming, hotheaded young officers called a meeting that could have led to an armed coup. General Washington, who had scrupulously deferred to civilian authority throughout the war, asked permission to address the gathering and, in a dramatic speech, subtly warned the men of all that they might lose by insubordination. A military coup would “open the flood Gates of Civil discord” and “deluge” the nation in blood; loyalty now, he said, would be “one more distinguished proof” of their patriotism. With the fate of the Revolution apparently hanging in the balance, the movement collapsed.

**Women in the Contending Armies**

Women accompanied many units on both sides, as was common in eighteenth-century warfare. A few were prostitutes. Some were officers’ wives or mistresses, but most were
health—with what cheerfulness he meets his foes and
encounters every hardship—if barefoot, he labours thro’ the
Mud & Cold with a Song in his mouth extolling War &
Washington—if his food be bad, he eats it notwithstanding
with seeming content—blesses God for a good Stomach
and Whistles it into digestion. But harkee Patience, a
moment—There comes a Soldier, his bare feet are seen thro’
his worn out Shoes, his legs nearly naked from the tatter’d
remains of an only pair of stockings, his Breeches not suffi-
cient to cover his nakedness, his Shirt hanging in Strings,
his hair dishevell’d, his face meager; his whole appearance
pictures a person forsaken & discouraged. He comes, and
crys with an air of wretchedness & despair, I am Sick,
my feet lame, my legs are sore, my body cover’d with this tor-
menting Itch—my Cloaths are worn out, my Constitution
is broken, my former Activity is exhausted by fatigue, hunger
& Cold, I fail fast. I shall soon be no more! And all the
reward I shall get will be—”Poor Will is dead.”

December 21.—[Valley Forge.] Heartily wish myself
at home, my Skin & eyes are almost spoil’d with continual
smoke. A general cry thro’ the Camp this evening among
the Soldiers, “No Meat! No Meat!”—the Distant vales
Echo’d back the melancholy sound—“No Meat! No Meat!”
Immitating the noise of Crows & Owls, also, made a part
of the confused Musick.

What have you for your Dinners Boys? “Nothing but
Fire Cake & Water, Sir.” At night, “Gentlemen the Sup-
per is ready.” What is your Supper Lads? “Fire Cake &
Water, Sir.”

December 30.—Eleven Deserters came in to-day—
some Hessians & some English—one of the Hesns took an
Ax in his hand & cut away the Ice of the Schuylkill which
was 1 1/2 inches thick & 40 Rod wide and waded through
to our Camp—he was 1/2 hour in the Water. They had a
promise when they engag’d that the war would be ended in
one year—they were now tired of the Service.

[January 3, 1778.—] I was call’d to reliefe a Soldier
tho’t to be dying—he expir’d before I Reach’d the Hutt.
He was an Indian—an excellent Soldier—and an obedi-
ent good natur’d fellow. He engaged for money doubtless
as others do;—but he has serv’d his country faithfully—
he has fought for those very people who disinherited his
forefathers—having finished his pilgrimage, he was dis-
charged from the War of Life & Death. His memory ought
to be respected, more than those rich ones who supply the
world with nothing better than Money and Vice.

Source: “Valley Forge, 1777–1778. Diary of Surgeon Albigence
Waldo, of the Connecticut Line,” Pennsylvania Magazine of History

the married or common-law consorts of ordinary soldiers. These “camp followers” cooked
and washed for the troops, occasionally helped load artillery, and provided most of the
nursing care. A certain number in a company were subject to military orders and were
authorized to draw rations and pay.

African American Participation in the War
Early in the war, as we have seen, some royal officials like Lord Dunmore recruited slaves
with promises of freedom. But these efforts often proved counterproductive, frightening
potentially loyalist slaveowners and driving them to the Whig side. Thus it was not until
June 30, 1779, that the British commander in chief, Sir Henry Clinton, promised to allow
slaves who fled from rebel owners to join the royal troops to “follow ... any Occupation”
they wished. Hedged as this promise of freedom was, news of it spread quickly among the
slave communities, and late in the war, African Americans flocked to the British army
in South Carolina and Georgia.

Sharing prevailing racial prejudices, the British were often reluctant to arm blacks.
Instead, they put most of the ex-slaves to work as agricultural or construction workers

Quick Review:
African Americans and the Revolutionary War
- June 30, 1779: British promise freedom to
  slaves who will join the British army.
- Both sides reluctant to use African
  Americans in combat roles.
- Approximately 5,000 African Americans
  fought against the British.
George Washington viewing troops at Valley Forge during the winter of 1777–78. This modern depiction is somewhat romanticized. While making a similar tour on foot, Washington once saw a soldier who was literally clothed in nothing but a blanket.

John Laurens, who hoped to raise black troops in South Carolina as a prelude to the general abolition of slavery, was the only member of George Washington’s staff to be killed in battle. This commemorative portrait by Charles Willson Peale bears the Latin inscription “Sweet and proper it is to die for one’s country.”

(many of the free and enslaved blacks accompanying American troops were similarly employed). However, a few relatively well-equipped black British dragoons (mounted troops) did see combat in South Carolina.

On the other hand, approximately 5,000 African Americans fought against the British and for American independence, hundreds of them in the Continental Army. Many were freemen from Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

But farther south, as discussed above, John Laurens, a young Carolina patriot, repeatedly but vainly tried to convince the South Carolina assembly to raise and arm black troops. It is therefore scarcely surprising that, as one Whig put it, many African Americans were “a little Toryfied,” especially in the South.

**Native Americans and the War**

At first, most of the approximately 200,000 Native Americans east of the Mississippi River would probably have preferred to remain neutral, and both sides initially took them at their word. But Indians’ skills and manpower were valuable, and by 1776 both the British and Americans sought their assistance. Forced to choose, many Native Americans favored the British, hoping thereby to safeguard their lands.

Prewar experience convinced Native Americans that British officials would be more apt to protect them against white settlers, and the British could provide more trade goods and arms. Thus the British had more Indian allies, but they seldom made unrestricted use of them. Because Native Americans pursued their own purposes, British control of them was frequently tenuous, and the result could sometimes be counterproductive.
In one such incident, an Indian attack in the Hudson River Valley resulted in the mistaken scalping of Jane McCrae, the fiancée of a British officer. Whig propagandists exploited this tragedy to the fullest. Neither side, however, had a monopoly on atrocities; both the Americans and the British committed more than their share.

**THE WAR IN THE NORTH, 1776–1777**

The Revolutionary War can be divided into three phases. In the first, from the outbreak of fighting in 1775 through 1777, most of the important battles took place in New England, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, while the Americans faced the British alone. But in 1778, France entered the war on the American side, opening the second phase of the war in which fighting would rage from 1778 to 1781, mainly in the South, at sea, and on the western frontier. The third phase of the war, from late 1781 to 1783, saw little actual fighting. With American victory assured, attention shifted to the diplomatic maneuvering leading up to the Peace of Paris (1783).

**BRITAIN HESITATES: CRUCIAL BATTLES IN NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY**

During the first phase of the war, the British concentrated on subduing New England. Replacing General Gage, the government appointed Sir William Howe as commander in chief of British forces and his brother, Richard Howe, as admiral of the naval forces in North American waters. New York City had been the headquarters of the British army during the late colonial period, and the Howes made it their base of operations. To counter this move, Washington moved his forces to New York in the spring of 1776. In August 1776, the Howes landed troops on Long Island and, in the Battle of Brooklyn Heights, quickly drove the American forces deployed there back to Manhattan Island.

Following instructions to negotiate peace as well as wage war, Richard Howe then met with three envoys from Congress on Staten Island on September 11, 1776. The British commanders were prepared to offer fairly generous terms but could not grant independence. The Americans would accept nothing less. So the meeting produced no substantive negotiations.

In the ensuing weeks, British forces overwhelmed Washington’s troops, driving them out of Manhattan and then, moving north, clearing them from the area around the city at the Battle of White Plains. But the Howes were hesitant to deal a crushing blow, and the Americans were able to retreat across New Jersey into Pennsylvania. The American cause seemed lost, however, and the Continental Army almost melted away. Realizing that without a success he would soon be without troops, Washington led his forces back across the icy Delaware and launched a successful surprise attack on a garrison of Hessian mercenaries at Trenton, New Jersey, on the morning of December 26. A week later, Washington overwhelmed a British force at Princeton, New Jersey. By raising morale, the victories at Trenton and Princeton probably saved the American cause.

**THE YEAR OF THE HANGMAN: VICTORY AT SARATOGA AND WINTER AT VALLEY FORGE**

Contemporaries called 1777 the Year of the Hangman because the triple sevens suggested a row of gallows; and it was in fact a critical year for the American cause.

Mounting a major effort to end the rebellion, the British planned to send an army down the Hudson River from Canada. It would then link up with the Howes in New York City, isolate New England, and defeat the rebellion there. But there was little effort to coordinate strategy between the forces advancing from Canada and those in New York. Thus, the poorly planned and poorly executed campaign ended in disaster for the British.
Some 5,000 Redcoats and 3,000 German mercenaries assembled in Canada during the winter of 1776–1777. Under the command of the high-living and popular “Gentleman Johnny” Burgoyne, the army finally set off in June with 1,500 horses hauling its heavy artillery and ponderous supply train. A second, smaller column, supported by an Indian force under Thayendanegea (Joseph Brant) moved to the west to capture an American fort near Oriskany, New York, and then join up with Burgoyne’s main force. On July 5, Burgoyne’s army recaptured Fort Ticonderoga, but success eluded him after that.

Trouble began as the troops started overland through the woods at the southern end of the lake. Huge trees felled by American axmen blocked their way, and the army crawled along at only two or three miles a day. Early in August, the column sent to capture the American fort near Oriskany turned back to Canada. Burgoyne’s Indian allies under Joseph Brant likewise went home. Promised reinforcements never arrived. Ten days later, a Whig militia force wiped out a force of 800 men trying to gather supplies in Vermont.

By October 1777, Burgoyne’s army was down to less than 6,000 men and facing disaster. Nearly 3,000 Continentals and 9,000 American militia, commanded by General Horatio Gates, exerted relentless pressure on the increasingly dispirited invaders. Unable to break through the American lines, Burgoyne surrendered to Gates following the Battle of Saratoga on October 17, 1777.

Burgoyne’s defeat was a stunning reversal for the British. It would prove an important factor in convincing the French, eager for a way to strike back at their old enemy, the British, to join the fighting on the American side.

Meanwhile, General William Howe, rather than moving north to support Burgoyne, made plans to destroy Washington’s army and capture Philadelphia. In July 1777, Howe’s troops sailed from New York to Chesapeake Bay and from there marched on Philadelphia from the south. They met Washington’s army on the banks of Brandywine Creek, near the Pennsylvania–Delaware border. The Americans put up a good fight before giving way with a loss of 1,200 killed or captured (twice as many as the British).

Howe occupied Philadelphia, and his men settled down in comfortable winter quarters. The Congress fled to York, Pennsylvania, and the Continental Army established its own winter camp outside Philadelphia at Valley Forge. The Continental Army’s miserable winter at Valley Forge has become famous for its hardships. Suffering from cold, disease, and starvation, as many as 2,500 soldiers died. Yet despite the difficulties, the Continental Army completed its transformation into a disciplined professional force. Under the watchful eye of General von Steuben, the soldiers drilled endlessly. And by spring, pleased observers felt that Washington at last had an army capable of meeting the British on equal terms.

**THE WAR WIDENS, 1778–1781**

Since late 1776, Benjamin Franklin and a team of American diplomats had been in Paris negotiating French support for the patriot cause. In the winter of 1777–1778, aware that a Franco-American alliance was close, Parliament belatedly tried to end the rebellion by giving the Americans everything they wanted except independence itself. But France and the United States concluded an alliance on February 6, 1778, and Congress refused to negotiate with the British.

Foreign intervention transformed the American Revolution into a virtual world war, engaging British forces in heavy fighting not only in North America but also in the West Indies and India. In the end, had it not been for French assistance, the American side probably would not have won the clear-cut victory it did.
THE UNITED STATES GAINS AN ALLY

If the American victory at Saratoga had persuaded the French that the United States had a viable future, Washington’s defeat at Brandywine Creek suggested it was a fragile one. Hoping to get even with their old enemy, Britain, the French had already been secretly supplying some aid to the United States. They now became convinced that they needed to act quickly lest further reverses force the Americans to agree to reconciliation with Britain. France accordingly signed a commercial treaty and a military alliance with the United States. Both sides promised to fight together until Britain recognized the independence of the United States, and France pledged not to seek the return of lands in North America.

French entry into the war was the first step in the consolidation of a formidable alliance of European powers eager to see Britain humbled and to gain trading rights in the former British colonies. France then persuaded Spain to declare war on Britain in June 1779. Much of the salt used to preserve American soldiers’ provisions came from Spanish territories, and New Orleans became a base for American privateers. More important, the Spanish fleet increased the naval power of the countries arrayed against Great Britain.

Meanwhile, Catherine the Great of Russia suggested that the European powers form a League of Armed Neutrality to protect their trade with the United States and other warring countries against British interference. Denmark and Sweden soon joined; Austria, Portugal, Prussia, and Sicily eventually followed. Britain, which wanted to cut off Dutch trade with the United States, used a pretext to declare war on the Netherlands before it could join. Great Britain thus found itself isolated and even, briefly, threatened with invasion. These threats did not frighten the British leaders into suing for peace, but they forced them to make important changes in strategy.

Accordingly, in the spring of 1778, the British replaced the Howes with a new commander, Sir Henry Clinton, and instructed him to send troops to attack the French West Indies. Knowing that he now faced a serious French threat, Clinton began consolidating his forces by evacuating Philadelphia and pulling his troops slowly back across New Jersey to New York.

On June 28, 1778, Washington caught up with the British at Monmouth Court House. This inconclusive battle proved to be the last major engagement in the North. Clinton withdrew to New York, and Continental troops occupied the hills along the Hudson Valley north of the city. The war shifted to other fronts.

FIGHTING ON THE FRONTIER AND AT SEA

Known as “a dark and bloody ground” to Native Americans, Kentucky became even bloodier after the British instructed their Indian allies to raid the area in 1777. Because the British post at Detroit coordinated these attacks, the Americans tried to take it in 1778. Three expeditions failed for various reasons, but the last, under a Virginian, George Rogers Clark, did capture three key British settlements in the Mississippi Valley: Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes (see Map 6–3). These successes may have strengthened American claims to the West at the end of the war.

In 1778 bloody fighting also occurred on the eastern frontiers. During the summer, a British force of 100 loyalists and 500 Indians struck the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania. Four months later, a similar group of attackers burned farmsteads and slaughtered civilians at Cherry Valley, New York. Both raids became the stuff of legend and stimulated equally savage reprisals against the Indians.

The Americans and British also clashed at sea throughout the war. Great Britain was the preeminent sea power of the age, and the United States never came close to

QUICK REVIEW

Britain Isolated

- League of Armed Neutrality: formed to protect trade with United States free from British interference.
- Members: Russia, Denmark, Sweden, Austria, the Netherlands, Portugal, Prussia, and Sicily.
- Britain declares war on the Dutch to cut off trade with United States.
The War on the Frontier, 1778–1779

Significant battles in the Mississippi Valley and the frontiers of the seaboard states added to the ferocity of the fighting and strengthened some American claims to western lands.

Were the British at more of a disadvantage the farther from the coast they fought?

Matching it. But in 1775 Congress authorized the construction of 13 frigates—medium-sized, relatively fast ships, mounting 32 guns—as well as the purchase of several merchant vessels for conversion to warships. By contrast, the Royal Navy in 1779 had more than a hundred large, heavily armed “ships of the line.” The Americans therefore engaged in what was essentially a guerrilla war at sea.

The Congress and the individual states also supplemented America’s naval forces by commissioning privateers. In effect legalized pirates, privateers preyed on British shipping. Captured goods were divided among the crew according to rank; captured sailors became prisoners of war. Some 2,000 American privateers took more than 600 British ships and forced the British navy to spread itself thin doing convoy duty.

The Land War Moves South

During the first three years of the war, the British made little effort to mobilize what they believed to be considerable loyalist strength in the South. But in 1778, the enlarged threat from France prompted a change in strategy: Redcoats would sweep through a large area and then leave behind a Tory militia to reestablish loyalty to the crown and
suppress local Whigs. The British hoped thereby to recapture everything from Georgia to Virginia; they would deal with New England later.

The British southern strategy began to unfold in November 1778, when General Clinton dispatched 3,500 troops to take control of Georgia. Meeting only light resistance, they quickly seized Savannah and Augusta and restored the old colonial government under civilian control. After their initial success, however, the British suffered some serious setbacks. Spain entered the war and seized British outposts on the Mississippi and Mobile rivers while Whig militia decimated a loyalist militia at Kettle Creek, Georgia.

But the Americans could not beat the British army. In late September and early October 1779, a combined force of 5,500 American and French troops, supported by French warships, laid siege to Savannah. The assault failed, and the French sailed off.

The way was now open for the British to attack Charleston, the military key to the Lower South. In December 1779, Clinton sailed through stormy seas from New York to the Carolina coast with about 9,000 troops. In the Battle of Charleston, he encircled the city, trapping the patriot forces inside. On May 12, 1780, more than 5,000 Continentals and militia laid down their arms in the worst American defeat of the war.

The British were now poised to sweep the entire South. Most local Whigs, thinking the Revolution over, at first offered little resistance to the Redcoats striking into the Carolina backcountry. The British success seemed so complete that Clinton tried to force American prisoners to resume their duties as British subjects and join the loyalist militia. Thinking that matters were now well in hand, Clinton sailed back to New York, leaving the southern troops under the command of Lord Cornwallis. Clinton’s confidence that the South had returned securely to the loyalist camp was premature.

**AMERICAN COUNTERATTACKS**

In the summer of 1780, Congress dispatched a substantial Continental force to the South under General Horatio Gates, the hero of Saratoga. Local patriots flocked to join him. But Gates was reckless. Pushing through North Carolina, his men tried to subsist on green corn. Weakened by diarrhea, they blundered into Cornwallis’s British army near Camden, South Carolina, on August 16, and suffered a complete rout. More than 1,000 Americans were killed or wounded and many captured. Gates—transformed from the hero of Saratoga into the goat of Camden—fled to Hillsborough, North Carolina.

American morale revived on October 7, 1780, when “over mountain men” (militia) from Virginia, western North Carolina, and South Carolina defeated the British at Kings Mountain, South Carolina. And in December 1780, Nathanael Greene replaced the discredited Gates, bringing competent leadership to the Continentals in the South.

Ever resourceful, Greene divided his small forces, keeping roughly half with him in northeastern South Carolina and sending the other half westward under General Daniel Morgan. Cornwallis ordered Colonel Banastre Tarleton to pursue Morgan, who retreated northward until he reached Cowpens, South Carolina. There, on January 17, 1781, Morgan cleverly posted his least reliable troops, the militia, in the front line and ordered them to retreat after firing two volleys. When they did as told, the British thought the Americans were fleeing and charged after them—straight into devastating fire from Morgan’s Continentals.

Cornwallis now badly needed a battlefield victory. Burning his army’s excess baggage, he set off in hot pursuit of Greene and Morgan, whose rejoined forces retreated northward ahead of the British. On February 13, 1781, Greene’s tired men crossed the Dan River into Virginia, and Cornwallis gave up the chase, marching his equally exhausted Redcoats southward. To his surprise, Cornwallis now found himself pursued—though cautiously—by Greene. On March 15, the opposing forces met at Guilford Court

**QUICK REVIEW**

**The Southern Strategy**
- Little effort before 1778 by British to mobilize southern loyalists.
- Threat from France forced a new strategy.
- Early successes were followed by setbacks.
- American victory at Yorktown effectively ended the war.
House, North Carolina, in one of the war’s bloodiest battles. Although the British held the field at the end of the day, an Englishman accurately observed, “another such victory would destroy the British Army.” Cornwallis retreated to the coastal town of Wilmington, North Carolina, to rest and regroup.

By the late summer of 1781, British fortunes were waning in the Lower South. The Redcoats held only the larger towns and the immediately surrounding countryside. With their superior staying power, they won most major engagements, but these victories brought them no lasting gain. When the enemy pressed him too hard, Greene retreated out of reach, advancing again as the British withdrew.

Disappointed and frustrated, Cornwallis decided to conquer Virginia to cut off Greene’s supplies and destroy Whig resolve. British forces were already raiding the state. Cornwallis marched north to join them, reaching Yorktown, Virginia, during the summer of 1781.

The final military showdown of the war was at hand. By now, French soldiers were in America ready to fight alongside the Continentals, and a large French fleet in the West Indies had orders to support an attack on the British in North America. Faking preparations for an assault on British-occupied New York, the Continentals (commanded by Washington) and the French headed for the Chesapeake. Cornwallis and his 6,000 Redcoats soon found themselves besieged behind their fortifications at Yorktown by 8,800 Americans and 7,800 French. A French naval victory gave the allies temporary command of the waters around Yorktown. Cornwallis had nowhere to go, and Clinton—still in New York—could not reinforce him quickly enough. On October 19, 1781, the British army surrendered.

THE AMERICAN VICTORY, 1782–1783

The British surrender at Yorktown marked the end of major fighting in North America, though skirmishes continued for another year. French fleet in the Caribbean, strengthening the British bargaining position. Although George III insisted on continuing the war because he feared that defeat would threaten British rule in Canada and the West Indies, the majority in Parliament now felt that enough men and money had been wasted trying to keep the Americans within the empire. In March 1782, the king accepted Lord North’s resignation and appointed a new prime minister, with a mandate to make peace.

The Peace of Paris

The peace negotiations, which took place in Paris, were lengthy. The Americans demanded independence, handsome territorial concessions, and access to the rich British-controlled fishing grounds in the North Atlantic. The current British prime minister, Lord Shelburne, was inclined to be conciliatory to help British merchants recover their lost colonial trade. The French had achieved their objective of weakening the British and now wanted out of an increasingly costly worldwide war. Spain had not won its most important goal, the recovery of British-held Gibraltar, and thus gave the Americans no support at all.
The American negotiators, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and John Jay, skillfully threaded their way among these conflicting interests. With good reason, they feared that the French and Spanish might strike a bargain with the British at the expense of the United States. As a result, the Americans disregarded Congress's instructions to avoid making peace unilaterally and secretly worked out their own arrangements with the British. On November 30, 1782, the negotiators signed a preliminary Anglo-American treaty of peace whose terms were embodied in the final Peace of Paris, signed by all the belligerents on September 3, 1783.

The Peace of Paris gave the United States nearly everything it sought. Great Britain acknowledged that the United States was “free, sovereign and independent.” The northern boundary of the new nation extended west from the St. Croix River (which separated Maine from Nova Scotia) past the Great Lakes to what were thought to be the headwaters of the Mississippi River (see Map 6–4). The Mississippi itself—down to just north of New Orleans—formed the western border. Spain acquired the

MAP 6–4  **North America after the Peace of Paris, 1783** The results of the American Revolution redrew the map of North America, confining Britain to Canada and giving the United States most of the area east of the Mississippi River, though Spain controlled its mouth for most of the next 20 years.

**What factors** helped determine the territorial settlement reached in the Peace of Paris?
provinces of East and West Florida from Britain. This territory included parts of present-day Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia.

Several provisions of the treaty addressed important economic issues. Adams, on behalf of New Englanders, insisted on a provision granting American fishermen access to the waters off eastern Canada. The treaty also required that British forces, on quitting American soil, were to leave behind all American-owned property, including slaves. Another provision declared existing debts between citizens of Britain and the United States still valid, giving British merchants hope of collecting on their American accounts. Congress was to “recommend” that the states restore rights and property taken from loyalists during the war. Nothing was said about the slave trade, which Jay had hoped to ban.

THE COMPONENTS OF SUCCESS

The War for Independence was over. In December 1783, the last British troops left New York. The Continental Army had already disbanded during the summer of 1783. On December 4, Washington said farewell to his officers at New York City’s Fraunces Tavern and later that month resigned his commission to the Congress and went home to Mount Vernon. By now he had won the respect of friend and foe alike.

Washington’s leadership was just one of the reasons why the Americans won the Revolutionary War. French assistance played a crucial role. Indeed, some historians contend that without the massive infusion of French men and money in 1781, the Revolution would have failed. The British also contributed heavily to their own downfall with mistakes that included bureaucratic inefficiency, hesitant command, and overconfidence. Finally, Great Britain had tried to solve a political problem by military means, but an occupying army is far more likely to alienate people than to secure their goodwill.

Yet it took 175,000 to 200,000 soldiers—Continents and militia troops—to prevent Great Britain from recovering the colonies. Of these, some 7,000 died in battle. Perhaps 10,000 more succumbed to disease while on active duty, another 8,500 died while prisoners of war, and nearly 1,500 were reported missing in action. More than 8,000 were wounded and survived. Those who served in the Continental Army, probably more than half of all who fought, served the longest and saw the most action. Their casualty rate—30 to 40 percent—may have been the highest of any war in which the United States has been engaged. In proportion to the population, these losses would be the equivalent of more than 2 million people in the United States today.

WAR AND SOCIETY, 1775–1783

Regular combatants were not the only ones to suffer during the struggle for independence. Eight years of warfare also produced profound dislocations throughout American society. Military service wrenched families apart, sporadic raids brought the war home to vast numbers of people, and everyone endured economic disruptions. As a forge of nationhood, the Revolution tested all Americans, whatever their standing as citizens.

THE WOMEN’S WAR

Women everywhere had to see their loved ones go off to fight and die. Such circumstances elevated women’s domestic status. Couples began referring to “our”—not “my”
or “your”—property. Wives frequently became more knowledgeable about the family’s financial condition than their long-absent husbands.

Women also assumed new public roles during the conflict. Some nursed the wounded. More wove cloth for uniforms. The Ladies’ Association of Philadelphia was established in 1780 to demonstrate women’s patriotism and raise money to buy shirts for the army. Similar associations formed in other states.

Despite their increasing private responsibilities and new public activities, it did not occur to most women to encroach on traditional male prerogatives. When John Adams’s wife, Abigail, urged him and the Second Continental Congress to “Remember the Ladies,” she was not expecting equal political rights. What she wanted, rather, was some legal protections for women and recognition of their value and need for autonomy in the domestic sphere. “Remember,” she cautioned, “all Men would be Tyrants if they could.” Why not, then, make it impossible for “the vicious and lawless” to abuse women with impunity?

Republican ideology, responding to the changing status of women, assigned them a role that was at once exalted and subordinate. Their job was to nurture wise, virtuous, and public-spirited men. It was this view of women that would prevail in the post-Revolutionary era.

**Effect of the War on African Americans**

In the northern states, where slavery was already economically marginal and where black men were welcome as volunteers in the Continental Army, the Revolutionary War helped to bring an end to slavery, although it remained legal there for some time (see Chapter 7). In the South, however, slavery was integral to the economy, and white planters viewed it as crucial to their postwar recovery. Thus, although British efforts to recruit black soldiers brought freedom to thousands and temporarily undermined slavery in the South, the war ultimately strengthened the institution, especially in the Carolinas and Georgia. Of the African Americans who left with the British at the end of the war, many, both slave and free, went to the West Indies. Others settled in Canada, and some eventually reached Africa, where Britain established the colony of Sierra Leone for them.

**The War’s Impact on Native Americans**

Survivors among the approximately 13,000 Native Americans who fought for the British did not have the option of leaving with them at the end of the war. How many died during the conflict is not known, but certainly many did. Not only the Iroquois but other groups lost much. The Americans repeatedly invaded the Cherokees’ homeland in the surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown on October 19, 1781, led to the British decision to withdraw from the war. Cornwallis, who claimed to be ill, absented himself from the ceremony and is not in the picture. Washington, who is astride the horse under the American flag, designated General Benjamin Lincoln (on the white horse in the center) as the one to accept the submission of a subordinate British officer. John Trumbull, who painted The Battle of Bunker Hill and some 300 other scenes from the Revolutionary War, finished this painting while he was in London about 15 years after the events depicted. A large copy of the work now hangs in the rotunda of the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C.

John Trumbull (American 1756–1843), Surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, October 1781, oil on canvas, 20 7/8 x 30 3/8 inches. Yale University Art Gallery, Trumbull Collection.
the southern Appalachian Mountains. “There was no withstanding them,” recalled a Cherokee chief of the many frontiersmen who assaulted his people. “They dyed their hands in the blood of many of our Women and children, burnt seventeen towns, destroyed all our provisions,” and spread famine across the land. Americans also attacked the Shawnees of Ohio. In one notorious incident, militiamen massacred peaceful Christian Indians at Gnadenhutten, Ohio.

In the peace treaty of 1783, Britain surrendered its territory east of the Mississippi, shocking and infuriating the Native Americans living there. They had not surrendered, and none of them had been at the negotiations in Paris. Because it enabled Americans to claim Indian territory by conquest, the Revolutionary War was a disaster for many Native Americans that opened the floodgates to a torrent of white settlers.

**Economic Disruption**

The British and American armies both needed enormous quantities of supplies. This heavy demand disrupted the normal distribution of goods and drove up real prices seven- or eightfold; in addition, widespread use of depreciating paper money by the American side amplified the rise in prices and triggered severe inflation.

When the British did not simply seize what they needed, they paid for it in hard currency—gold and silver. American commanders, by contrast, had to rely on paper money because the Congress and the states had almost no hard currency at their disposal. The Continental dollar, however, steadily declined in value, and by March 1780, the Congress was forced to admit officially that it was worthless.

Necessity, not folly, drove Congress and the states to rely on the printing press. Rather than alienate citizens by immediately raising taxes to pay for the war, the states printed paper money supposedly redeemable through future tax revenues. But because the quantity of this paper money rose faster than the supply of goods and services, prices skyrocketed, and the value of the money plunged. Those who had paper money tried to spend it before its value could drop further; whereas those who had salable commodities such as grain tended to hoard them in the hope that the price would go even higher. Prices also climbed faster than wages, leaving many working people impoverished.

The rampant inflation was demoralizing and divisive. Lucky speculators and unscrupulous profiteers could grow rich, while ordinary and patriotic people suffered. As usual, war and its deprivations brought out both the best and the worst in human nature.

Nevertheless, the successful outcome of the war and the stable peace that followed suggest that most Americans somehow managed to cope. But during the last years of the conflict, their economic and psychological reserves ran low. The total real wealth of private individuals declined by an average of 0.5 percent annually from 1774 to 1805, even with the returning prosperity of the 1790s. Such statistics suggest the true economic cost of the War for Independence. And the atrocities committed on both sides provide a comparable measure of the conflict’s psychological cost.

**The Price of Victory**

Most American and British commanders tried to keep hostilities “civilized”—if such a characterization can ever be applied to a war—but discipline sometimes broke down among regular troops. Controlling militias or civilians acting on their own was even more difficult. Although the British were probably the worse offenders, both sides burned, plundered, and murdered. One can see the results in a returning refugee’s description of the area around Beaufort, South Carolina, in the early 1780s: “All was
# Important Battles of the Revolutionary War

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Battle and Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<td><strong>Early Fighting</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts</td>
<td>April 19, 1775</td>
<td>Contested</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fort Ticonderoga, New York</td>
<td>May 10, 1775</td>
<td>American victory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Breed’s Hill (“Bunker Hill”), Boston, Massachusetts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Great Bridge, Virginia</td>
<td>December 9, 1775</td>
<td>American victory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quebec, Canada</td>
<td>December 31, 1775</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moore’s Creek Bridge, North Carolina</td>
<td>February 27, 1776</td>
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<td><strong>The War in the North</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Brooklyn Heights, New York</td>
<td>August 27, 1776</td>
<td>British victory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Plains, New York</td>
<td>October 28, 1776</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trenton, New Jersey</td>
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<td>American victory</td>
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<td>Princeton, New Jersey</td>
<td>January 3, 1777</td>
<td>American victory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brandywine Creek, Pennsylvania</td>
<td>September 11, 1777</td>
<td>British victory (opened way for British to take Philadelphia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saratoga, New York</td>
<td>September 19 and October 17, 1777</td>
<td>American victory (helped persuade France to form an alliance with United States)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monmouth Court House, New Jersey</td>
<td>June 28, 1778</td>
<td>Contested</td>
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<td><strong>The War on the Frontier</strong></td>
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<td>Wyoming Valley, Pennsylvania</td>
<td>June and July 1778</td>
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<td>Kaskaskia and Cahokia, Illinois; Vincennes, Indiana</td>
<td>July 4, 1778–February 23, 1779</td>
<td>American victories strengthen claims to Mississippi Valley</td>
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<td>Cherry Valley, New York</td>
<td>November 11, 1778</td>
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<td><strong>The War in the South</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Savannah, Georgia</td>
<td>December 29, 1778</td>
<td>British victory (took control of Georgia)</td>
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<td>Kettle Creek, Georgia</td>
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<td>American victory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Savannah, Georgia</td>
<td>September 3–October 28, 1779</td>
<td>British victory (opened way for British to take Charleston)</td>
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<td>Charleston, South Carolina</td>
<td>February 11–May 12, 1780</td>
<td>British victory</td>
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<td>Camden, South Carolina</td>
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<td>Kings Mountain, South Carolina</td>
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<td>American victory</td>
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<td>Cowpens, South Carolina</td>
<td>January 17, 1781</td>
<td>American victory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilford Court House, North Carolina</td>
<td>March 15, 1781</td>
<td>Contested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorktown, Virginia</td>
<td>August 30–October 19, 1781</td>
<td>American victory (persuaded Britain to end war)</td>
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desolation. . . Robberies and murders are often committed on the public roads. The people that remain have been peeled, pillaged, and plundered. Poverty, want, and hardship appear in almost every countenance ..., and the morals of the people are almost entirely extirpated.”

CONCLUSION

Despite the devastation and divisiveness of the war, many people in Europe and the United States were convinced that it represented something momentous. The Annual Register, a popular and influential British magazine, commented accurately in 1783 that the American Revolution “has already overturned those favourite systems of policy and commerce, both in the old and in the new world, which the wisdom of the ages, and the power of the greatest nations, had in vain endeavored to render permanent; and it seems to have laid the seeds of still greater revolutions in the history and mutual relations of mankind.”

Americans, indeed, had fired a shot heard round the world. Thanks in part to its heavy investment in the American Revolution, France suffered a financial crisis in the late 1780s. This, in turn, ushered in the political crisis that culminated in the French Revolution of 1789. The American Revolution helped to inspire among French people (including soldiers returning from service in America) an intense yearning for an end to arbitrary government and undeserved social inequalities. Liberty also proved infectious to thousands of German troops who had come to America as mercenaries but stayed as free citizens after the war was over. Once prosperous but distant provinces of a far-flung empire, the North American states had become an independent confedera-
tion, a grand experiment in republicanism whose fate mattered to enlightened men and women throughout the Western world. In his written farewell to the rank and file of his troops at the end of October 1783, Washington maintained that “the enlarged prospects of happiness, opened by the confirmation of our independence and sovereignty, almost exceed the power of description.” He urged those who had fought with him to maintain their “strong attachments to the union” and “prove themselves not less virtuous and useful as citizens, than they have been persevering and victorious as soldiers.” The work of securing the promise of the American Revolution, Washington knew, would now shift from the battlefield to the political arena.
**SUMMARY**

**WHY DID** tensions between the colonies and Britain escalate so rapidly between 1774 and 1776?

The Outbreak of War and the Declaration of Independence, 1774–1776 After the Boston Tea Party, both the British and the Americans knew they were heading for a crisis. In a gesture of appeasement, Parliament endorsed the Conciliatory Proposition, pledging not to tax the colonies if they would contribute to the defense of the empire. But, it was too late. General Gage received orders to march to Lexington and Concord to arrest rebels. What ensued were to be the first battles of the Revolutionary War. On July 4, 1776, Congress officially approved the Declaration of Independence.

**WHAT WERE** the key differences between the British and American forces?

The Combatants The American forces were composed of a regular Continental Army and militiamen. British soldiers were, for the most part, better trained and organized. For both, military life was tough. And, often only severe discipline would hold soldiers in line. Women accompanied many units on both sides. Approximately 5,000 African Americans fought against the British and for American independence. Many Indians, however, decided it was in their best interest to join British forces in the war.

**HOW DID** the American forces survive the military setbacks of 1776?

The War in the North, 1776–1777 During the first phase of the war, the British concentrated on subduing New England. As fighting moved down into New York and New Jersey, Washington won two key battles at Trenton and Princeton. The colonials continued on with a win at the Battle of Saratoga, only to suffer a costly defeat at Brandywine Creek. In the winter of 1777, a large number of colonial fighters camped at Valley Forge. Here, the hard winter and disease set in, but constant training improved their battle-readiness by spring.

**WHY DID** the French enter the war on the American side?

The War Widens, 1778–1781 Foreign intervention was to transform the American Revolution into a virtual world war. France allied with America and, Spain with France. Russia, Denmark, Sweden, Austria, the Netherlands, Portugal, Prussia, and Sicily joined a league to protect their trade with the combatants. The expansion of the war prompted the British to attack the southern states in the hope of gaining additional loyalist support. This strategy failed and in the last major battle of the war at Yorktown, Virginia, on October 19, 1781, the British army surrendered.

**WHAT WERE** the key factors in the American victory in the Revolutionary War?

The American Victory, 1782–1783 The American victory accelerated peace talks, and the Peace of Paris was signed in 1783. Several provisions of the treaty addressed important economic issues such as access to fishing waters in Canada. The War for Independence was over, and British troops began their evacuation of America.

**WHAT WERE** the true economic costs of the War for Independence?

The War and Society, 1775–1783 The war had a great effect on many different aspects of American society. Women everywhere lost husbands, sons, and fathers. Women also assumed new public roles and increased responsibilities at home. In the Northern states, the war helped bring an end to slavery. In the South, however, slavery was integral to the economy. The successful outcome of the war and the stable peace that followed suggest that most Americans somehow managed to cope with the new world in which they found themselves.
WHERE TO LEARN MORE


Kings Mountain National Military Park and Cowpens National Battlefield, South Carolina. Situated approximately 20 miles apart, these were the sites of two battles in October 1780 and January 1781 that turned the tide of the war in the South. Both have museums and exhibits. The official site is accessible through Links to the Past: National Park Service Cultural Resources, www.cr.nps.gov. But see also Battles of the American Revolutionary War, www.ilt.columbia.edu/k12/history/aha/battles.html, for a brief description of the battles and their contexts.

Minute Man National Historical Park, Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts. There are visitors’ centers at both Lexington and Concord with explanatory displays. Visitors may also follow the self-guided Battle Road Automobile Tour. The official website is accessible through Links to the Past: National Park Service Cultural Resources, www.cr.nps.gov.

Yorktown Battlefield, Colonial National Historical Park, Yorktown, Virginia. The park commemorates the great American victory here. Innovative exhibits enable visitors to follow the course of the war from a multicultural perspective. The official website is accessible through Links to the Past: National Park Service Cultural Resources, www.cr.nps.gov.

STUDY RESOURCES

For study resources for this chapter, go to www.myhistorylab.com and choose The American Journey. You will find a wealth of study and review material for this chapter, including pre- and post-tests, customized study plan, key term review flash cards, interactive map and document activities, and documents for analysis.

KEY TERMS

| Battles of Lexington and Concord (p. 000) | Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms (p. 000) |
| Committee of Safety (p. 000) | Minute Men (p. 000) |
| Conciliatory Proposition (p. 000) | Olive Branch Petition (p. 000) |
| Continental Army (p. 000) | Peace of Paris (p. 000) |
| Contract theory of government (p. 000) | Republicanism (p. 000) |
| Declaration of Independence (p. 000) | Second Continental Congress (p. 000) |
| | Valley Forge (p. 000) |

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who were the loyalists, and how many of them were there? What attempts did the British and Americans make in 1775 to avert war? Why did these steps fail?

2. What actions did the Second Continental Congress take in 1775 and 1776? Why did it choose George Washington as the commander of its army? Why was he a good choice?

3. Why did Congress declare independence in July 1776? How did Americans justify their claim to independence?

4. What was republicanism, and why was the enthusiasm that it inspired insufficient to win the war?

5. Why were most of the early battles fought in the northern states? What effect did French entry into the war have on British strategy?

6. Why did the initial British victories in the South not win the war for them? Why did the United States ultimately win? What did it obtain by winning?

7. What were the effects of the war on Native Americans, African Americans, women, and American society in general?

8. What were some of the global effects of American independence?
**WHY COULD** New England society move from a firm condemnation of democracy to embracing the basic ideals that would lead to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of 1787?

The Puritans of New England were less than democratic in both beliefs and goals. Contrary to popular myth, Puritans did not migrate to the New World for the purpose of establishing religious freedom. They were seeking to establish a religious utopia to serve as what Governor John Winthrop called a “light upon a hill” for the world to copy. Once they created their utopia, Puritans wanted to keep it pristine, so they forbid the establishment of other religious doctrine, especially the Quakers and Roman Catholic faith. Puritan communities nonconformist behavior was looked upon with deep suspicion, especially if it was religious in nature. The trials of Quaker evangelists, their public whippings and even execution provide evidence of Puritan intolerance.

However, the Puritans unknowingly planted the seeds for the very democracy that they hated as an abomination of the purity of God’s social order. In the Mayflower Compact, Puritan separatists agreed to a governmental covenant that allowed for majority rule and later established the idea of the town meeting. In the charter of the Massachusetts Bay Colony annual election of governors was provided for as were the election of the colonial legislature, and the General Court. Puritan customs forbid church ministers from serving in public office, an early version of separation of Church and State although the Puritans would not see it in that way. Most important of all, the Puritans required that all church members be sufficiently literate to read and interpret the Bible. Puritan laws directed all families to educate their children sufficiently to this purpose and towns were encouraged to establish free public schools. This emphasis upon the individual and his right to interpret the Bible, within certain doctrinal limits, without the intercession of a priest or minister would lead to political consequences.

A hundred years after the heyday of the Puritans, the political seeds that they planted would bear democratic fruit.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed....”

John Adams, Co-author of the Declaration of Independence, 1776

### Democratic Roots in New England Soil

**The Signing of the Mayflower Compact**

A painting by E. Percy Moran shows the historic ceremonial signing on November 21, 1620 below the deck of the Mayflower.

### Democracy I do not conceyve...

**Mayflower Compact, 1620**

*IN THE NAME OF GOD, AMEN.* We, whose names are underwritten, the Loyal Subjects of our dread Sovereign Lord King James, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, &c. Having undertaken for the Glory of God, and Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the Honour of our King and Country, a Voyage to plant the first Colony in the northern Parts of Virginia; Do by these Presents, solemnly and mutually, in the Presence of God and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil Body Politick, for our better Ordering and Preservation, and Furtherance of the Ends aforesaid: And by Virtue hereof do enact, constitute, and frame, such just and equal Laws, Ordinances, Acts, Constitutions, and Officers, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general Good of the Colony; unto which we promise all due Submission and Obedience. IN WITNESS whereof we have hereunto subscribed our names at Cape-Cod the eleventh of November, in the Reign of our Sovereign Lord King James, of England, France, and Ireland, the eighteenth, and of Scotland the fifty-fourth, Anno Domini; 1620.

**Fundamental Orders of Connecticut (1639)**

It is Ordered, sentenced, and decreed, that there shall be yearly two General Assemblies or Courts, the one the second Thursday in April, the other the second Thursday in September...
following: the first shall be called the Court of Election, wherein shall be yearly chosen from time to time, so many Magistrates and other public Officers as shall be found requisite: Whereof one to be chosen Governor for the year ensuing and until another be chosen, and no other Magistrate to be chosen for more than one year: provided always there be six chosen besides the Governor, which being chosen and sworn according to an Oath recorded for that purpose, shall have the power to administer justice according to the Laws here established.

It is Ordered, sentenced, and decreed, that the election of the aforesaid Magistrates shall be in this manner: every person present and qualified for choice shall bring in (to the person deputed to receive them) one single paper with the name of him written in it whom he desires to have Governor, and that he that hath the greatest number of papers shall be Governor for that year. And the rest of the Magistrates or public officers to be chosen in this manner: the Secretary for the time being shall first read the names of all that are to be put to choice and then shall severally nominate them distinctly, and every one that would have the person nominated to be chosen shall bring in one single paper written upon, and he that would not have him chosen shall bring in a blank; and every one that hath more written papers than blanks shall be a Magistrate for that year.

It is Ordered, sentenced, and decreed, that the Secretary shall not nominate any person, nor shall any person be chosen newly into the Magistracy which was not propounded in some General Court before, to be nominated the next election; and to that end it shall be lawful for each of the Towns aforesaid by their deputies to nominate any two whom they conceive fit to be put to election.

It is Ordered, sentenced, and decreed, that no person be chosen Governor above once in two years, and that the Governor be always a member of some approved Congregation, and formerly of the Magistracy within this Jurisdiction.

Fundamental Agreement, or Original Constitution of the Colony of New Haven (June 4, 1639)

Query I. WHETHER the scriptures do hold forth a perfect rule for the direction and government of all men in all duties which they are to perform to GOD and men, as well in families and commonwealth, as in matters of the church? This was assented unto by all, no man dissenting, as was expressed by holding up of hands. Afterwards it was read over to them, that they might see in what words their vote was expressed. They again expressed their consent by holding up their hands, no man dissenting.

Query II. WHEREAS there was a covenant solemnly made by the whole assembly of free planters of this plantation, the first day of extraordinary humiliation, which we had after we came together, that as in matters that concern the gathering and ordering of a church, so likewise in all public officers which concern civil order, as choice of magistrates and officers, making and repealing laws, dividing allotments of inheritance, and all things of like nature, we would all of us be ordered by those rules which the scripture holds forth to US; this covenant was called a plantation covenant, to distinguish it from a church covenant, which could not at that time be made a church not being then gathered, but was deferred till a church might be gathered, according to GOD. It was demanded whether all the free planters do hold themselves bound by that covenant, in all businesses of that nature which are expressed in the covenant, to submit themselves to be ordered by the rules held forth in the scripture.

THIS also was assented unto by all, and no man gainsayed it; and they did testify the same by holding up their hands, both when it was first propounded, and confirmed the same by holding up their hands when it was read unto them in public. John Clark being absent, when the covenant was made, doth now manifest his consent to it. Also Richard Beach, Andrew Law, Goodman Banister, Arthur Halbridge, John Potter, Robert Hill, John Brocket, and John Johnson, these persons, being not admitted planters when the covenant was made, do now express their consent to it.

Query III. THOSE who have desired to be received as free planters, and are settled in the plantation, with a purpose, resolution and desire, that they may be admitted into church fellowship, according to CHRIST, as soon as GOD shall fit them “hereunto, were desired to express it by holding up hands. According all did express this to be their desire and purpose by holding up their hands twice (viz.) at the proposal of it, and after when these written words were read unto them.

Query IV. All the free planters were called upon to express, whether they held themselves bound to establish such civil order as might best conduce to the securing of the purity and peace of the ordinance to themselves and their posterity according to GOD. In answer hereunto they expressed by holding up their hands twice as before, that they held themselves bound to establish such civil order as might best conduce to the ends aforesaid.

We hold these truths to be self-evident...
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