

As of December 31, 2014, I retired from full-time teaching in [Humboldt State University's Department of History](#). While this website will remain online, it is no longer maintained.

History 110- Dr. Gayle Olson-Raymer
Evolution or Revolution?



Our story in Units I and II has moved from the early founding of the British North American colonies to the rising social, political, and economic discontent that had arisen within the colonies by the middle of the 18th Century. Today, we are moving into yet another chapter of our story - how and why the colonists revolted against England. So let's begin with [the story of the American Revolution that most Americans know and love](#).

- Our birth myth, like most nations, is typical in that it celebrates what people like to think happened.
- However, I will argue today, that the reality of the birth of the United States is far more interesting and far more powerful than the mythological birth.

Discussion Goals

"Evolution versus Revolution?"

1. To understand how the French and Indian War pushed the colonists toward independence.
2. To understand the road to the American Revolution.

3. To examine the myths of the American Revolution.
4. To explore the actions that accompanied the colonists' transition from resistance to revolution.
5. To review two documents that greatly influenced the course of the Revolutionary War: *Common Sense* and *The Wealth of Nations*.
6. To discuss two important questions that historians continue to ask about the Revolutionary War:
 - Was the Revolutionary War also a civil war?
 - Was the American Revolution a radical, revolutionary event that truly revolutionized American society, or a conservative, evolutionary event that did not significantly change American society?

Goal #1: To understand how the French and Indian War pushed the colonists toward independence

The French and Indian War was the colonial portion of the Seven Years War fought in Europe from 1756 to 1763. It was bloodiest and most widely-fought American war in the



18th century, taking more lives than the American Revolution and involving people on three continents, including the Caribbean. The war was but one of many imperial struggles between the French and English over colonial territory and wealth both in North America and in Europe, as well as a product of the local rivalry between British and French colonists.

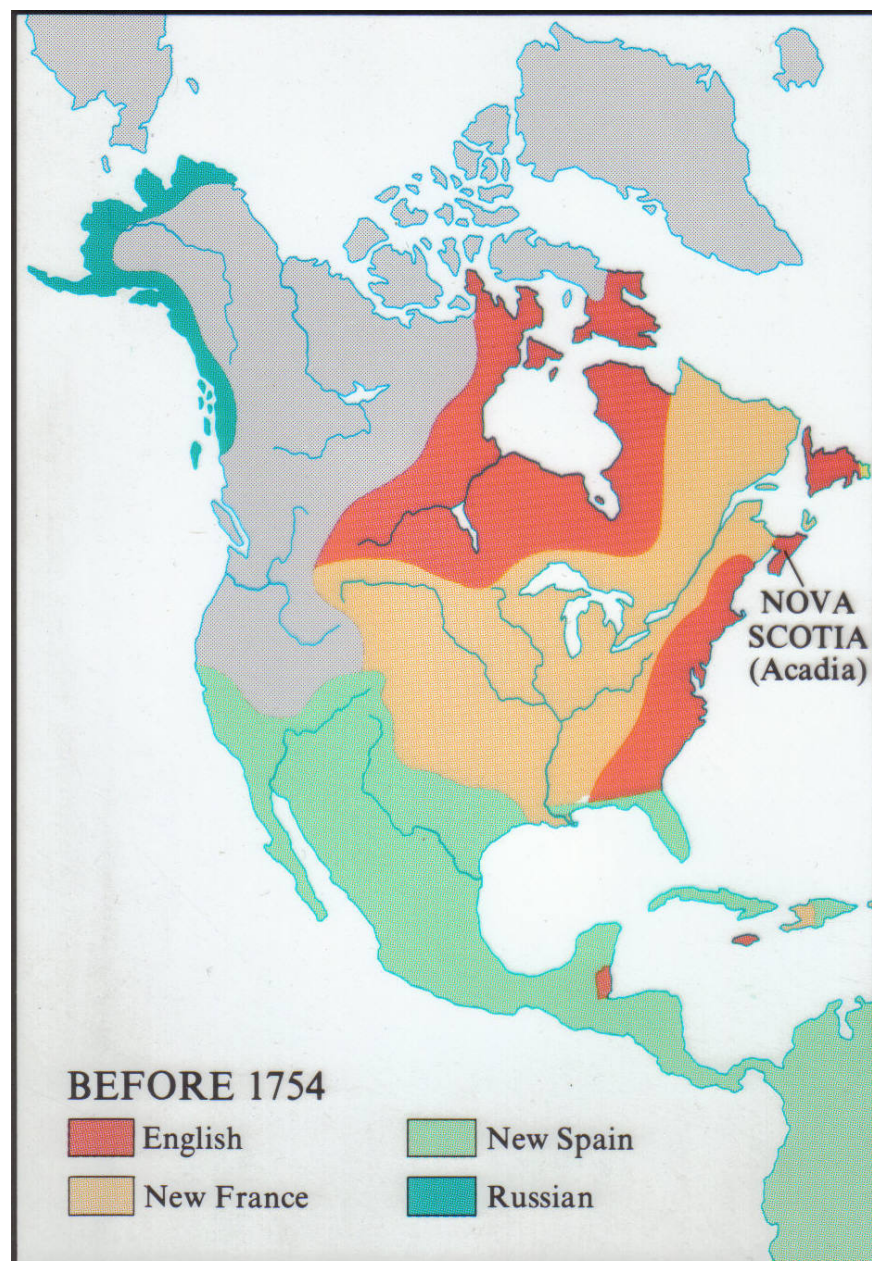
So, what led us into this war? For years, the French had been building a strong of forts from Lake Erie towards the forks of the Ohio River (present-day Pittsburgh) to limit British influence along their frontier. However, the colony of Virginia also claimed the same region.

- Thus, in November 1753, the governor or Virginia sent Major George Washington with a small expedition to order the

removal of the French forts. The commander of the fort politely received Washington and his men, but denied the validity of English claims to the region.

- Washington returned to Virginia and soon thereafter, the legislature determined that French rejection of British demands constituted a hostile act, and that the French must be driven from their frontier forts on British-claimed land.
- Washington received permission to build a fort near the present site of Pittsburgh. In May, after Washington's troops clashed with local French forces the English colonists surrendered the meager fort they had built. The incident set off a string of small battles. but it was not until May 1756 that the French and the English formally declared war.

By September 1760, the British controlled all of the North American frontier; the war between the two countries was effectively over. The 1763 Treaty of Paris, which also ended the European Seven Years War, forced the French to surrender all of her American possessions to the British and the Spanish. The results of the war effectively ended French political and cultural influence in North America. England gained massive amounts of land and vastly strengthened its hold on the continent. The war, however, also had other results.



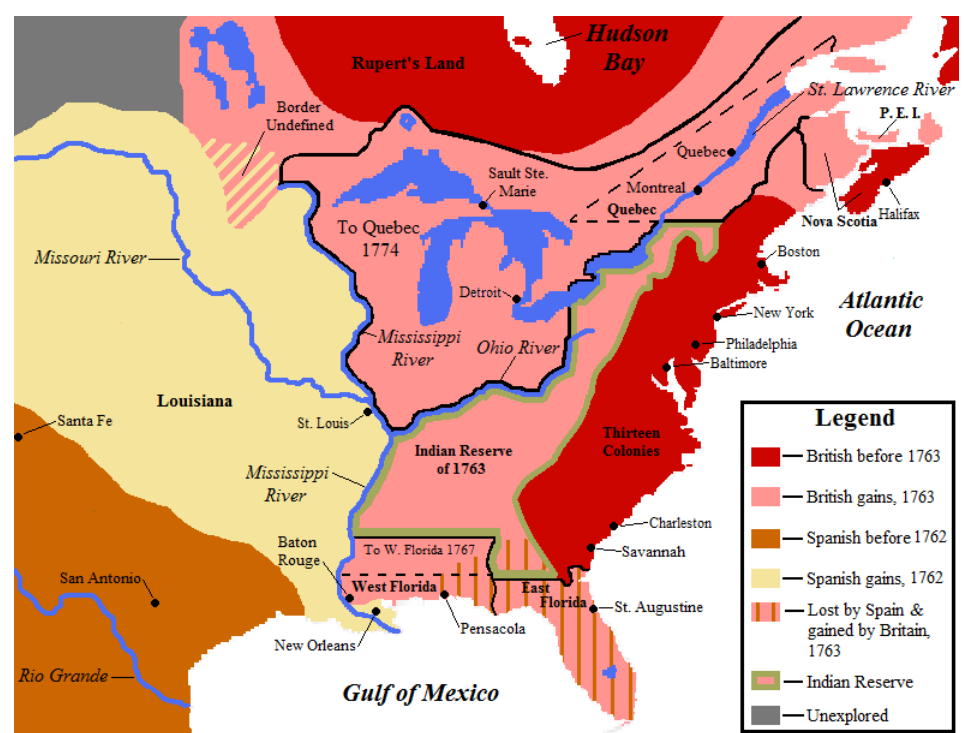


- It badly eroded the relationship between England and Native Americans.
- It left England in a great deal of debt.

To handle their debt, the British enacted a series of policies that became the first steps along the road to revolution. After the War, the British were essentially broke and desperately in need of income and goods to bolster their economy - income and goods that they believed were readily available from the American colonies. Thus, Parliament took two steps that were unprecedented and conflicted greatly with the colonial tradition of representative government:

- They sent a peacetime army of 10,000 men to the colonies. While official reasons for the army were to protect Florida which Spain wanted back and to keep Indian rebellions from occurring, the reality was that Britain was now willing to use force to preserve its authority in the colonies.
- They passed a series of laws which increased taxes to pay for the war expenses and, at the same time, enacted economic reforms that favored England at the expense of the colonies.

- **Proclamation of 1763** set aside the region west of crest of the Appalachians as "Indian Country." The colonists - who had been expecting that the newly won territory would be open to western settlement - were furious. The new lands were protected and could only be purchased with special permission of the King.



- **Sugar Act of 1764** lowered duty to 3 pence on foreign molasses. (The tax had been based upon the 1733 Navigation Acts requiring 6 pence. But bribes of 1-1/2 pence had been paid for years. Parliament incorrectly reasoned colonists would rather pay a 3 pence "honest" tax than a 1-1/2 pence bribe.)
- **Quartering Act of 1764** forced the colonial assemblies to tax themselves in order to provide 10,000 new British troops with lodging. Colonists felt troops were not there to protect them, but to keep them quiet while England robbed them of their liberties.
- **Stamp Act of 1765**, the first direct taxation, required that many formally written or printed materials carry a tax stamp that would help pay for troops stationed in North America. The British government felt that the colonies were the primary beneficiaries of this military presence, and should pay at least a portion of the expense. But the colonists saw this as a dangerous precedent. The Stamp Act was repealed by Parliament in 1766.
- **Townshend Acts of 1767** taxed all lead, paint, paper, glass, and tea - items that were not produced in North America and that the colonists were only allowed to buy from Great Britain. The Townshend Acts were repealed in 1770.
- **Suspension of Trial by Jury in 1768** occurred when the British decided to try those caught under the Sugar and Stamp Acts under Admiralty Courts without juries rather than in a jury trial of colonial peers. Trial by colonial jury was also suspended after the Boston Massacre of March 5, 1770.
- **Tea Act of 1773** was designed to prop up the East India Company which was floundering financially and burdened with eighteen million pounds of unsold tea. This tea was to be shipped directly to the colonies, and sold at a bargain price. The direct sale of tea via British agents would undercut the business of

local North American merchants. Profits now went into the East India Company, not American hands.

- **The Coercive/Intolerable Acts of 1774**

- **Boston Port Act** - Ships could not load or unload in any Boston port until Boston fully compensated the East India Company and the customs service for tea damaged at the Boston Tea Party in 1773.



Massachusetts Government Act - Annulled Massachusetts' colonial charter and gave the King power - previously held by the Governor - to appoint the Governor's Council. Town meeting activities were severely limited. The colonists outside Massachusetts feared that their governments could now also be changed by the legislative fiat of Parliament.

- **Administration of Justice Act** - The Massachusetts governor could move trials of accused royal officials to another colony or even to Great Britain if he believed the official could not get a fair trial in Massachusetts. Although the act stipulated that witnesses would be paid for their travel expenses, in practice few colonists could afford to leave their work and cross the ocean to testify in a trial.
- **Quartering Act** - Troops would continue to be quartered in all colonies at public expense - not only in public and unoccupied buildings, but in private homes as well.

Goal #2: To understand the road to the American Revolution

After the first steps toward war - the placement of British troops and the Intolerable Acts -

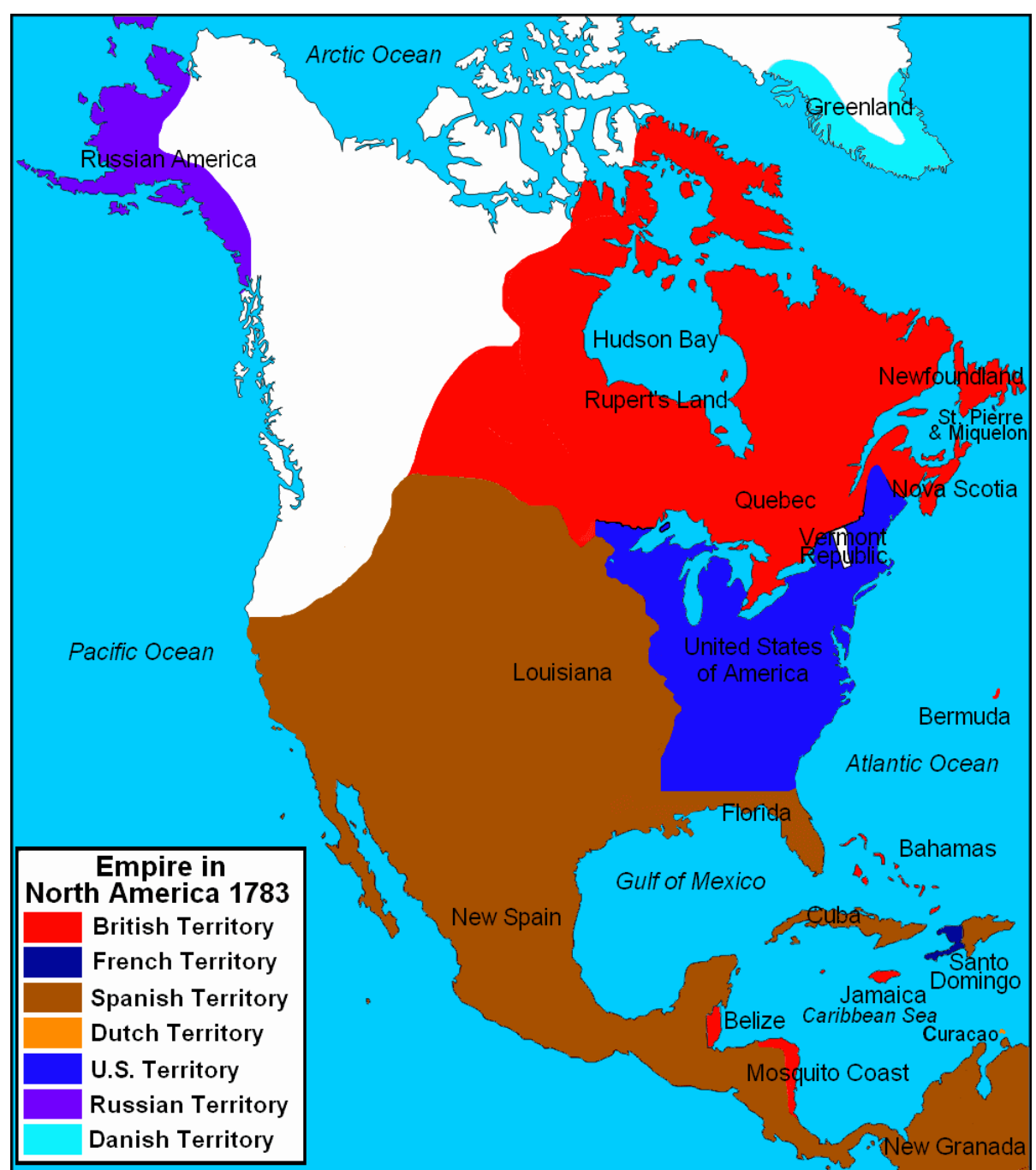
the road to revolution still moved slowly:

- **1774 - First Continental Congress established.** The Congressmen sent a [Declaration of Rights and Grievances](#) to the King which established colonial standards for acceptable legislation by Parliament: colonists would accept acts meant to regulate "external commerce" but would not allow any "taxation, internal or external, for raising a revenue on the subjects of America, without their consent." The King's reply: "Blows must decide whether they are to be subject to this country or independent."
 - In September 1774, representatives from 12 colonies (all but Georgia) began deliberating for 7 weeks about the best possible way to express their grievances and demand that such injustices be corrected **without severing ties with England**. The delegates came from many backgrounds and with many different agendas. Thus, when they came together, they were immediately confronted with the things that divided rather than united them. They finally agreed on four common principles:
 - The colonies had the right to tax and legislate themselves.
 - The colonies should stop all trade with Britain until the Intolerable Acts were repealed.
 - The delegates formed a "community of leadership" that could unite the colonies by convincing the people that they shared unique interests that were distinct from those of England - that they were no longer English, but distinctly and uniquely American.
 - The colonies had the right to mobilize a colonial militia to safeguard military supplies and depots. They raised a "defensive" force of 20,000 **Minutemen** to be ready in minutes in "case of alarm.
- **1775 - Colonies began the transition from royal to patriot control.** Throughout the colonies, patriots enforced boycotts of British goods, exposed those who refused, and used political pressure to force allegiance to the American patriot cause.
 - **April** - British colonial secretary proclaimed **Massachusetts was in a state of "open rebellion"** and ordered General Gage to send his troops against the "rude rabble." On April 18, Gage sent 700 soldiers to capture the colonial leaders and military supplies at Concord. Paul Revere and two other Bostonians warned the Patriots and at dawn on April 19, the Minutemen met the British first at Lexington and then at Concord. British casualties: 73 dead, 174 wounded, 26 missing. It was 14 more months before the colonies formally broke with Britain.

- **May - Second Continental Congress** was called to prepare colonies for war. It authorized printing American paper money, created the Continental Army led by Washington (which was voted in "by bare majorities" according to John Adams), and wrote the Olive Branch Petition that offered to end armed resistance if the King would withdraw troops and revoke the Intolerable Acts. In July, the King rejected the Petition and persuaded Parliament to pass the Prohibition Act outlawing British trade with the colonies and instructing the Royal Navy to seize American ships engaged in any form of trade.
- **1776 - Thomas Paine published *Common Sense* in January.** The pamphlet which reached hundreds of thousands of homes, stated in clear language that Americans should reject the "monarchical tyranny" of the King and the "aristocratical tyranny" of Parliament and create independent republican states.
 - **April - Congress opened American trade to all nations**, except Britain, and instructed colonies to create official state governments.
 - **June - The staunch Loyalists and anti-independence moderates withdrew from the Continental Congress**, leaving the Patriots completely in charge and unchallenged. Congress then appointed a committee, led by Jefferson, which drafted the *Declaration of Independence*, stating that the King had "a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having a direct object of the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states." "Injuries" included dissolving colonial government, controlling judges by limiting trial by jury, sending armies of occupation, cutting off colonial trade with other parts of the world, and taxing without colonial consent. The Declaration was adopted July 4th and war began!
- **1778 - The Patriots' prospects for victory improved.** The U.S. formed a military alliance with France, the most powerful nation on the European continent, and with Spain. The alliance brought the Americans money, troops, and supplies, as well as changed the nature of the conflict from a colonial rebellion to an international war. Thereafter, British forces not only confronted troops in North America, but also had to defend the West Indies and India against France and Gibraltar against Spain.
- **1781 - The British Army surrendered at Yorktown in October** - but it took diplomats two more years to end the war. Peace talks began in 1782, but the French stalled for time, hoping for a naval victory or territorial conquest.
- **1783, The Treaty of Paris was signed on September 3.** It formally recognized the independence of the U.S. Britain retained Canada north and west of the Great Lakes. All land between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River was ceded to the new American republic - and the British promised to withdraw its garrisons throughout the territory.

In the Treaty of Versailles, signed at the same time, Britain made peace with France and Spain.

- The only French territorial gain was the Caribbean island of Tobago,
- The Spanish reacquired Florida from Britain.
- Both treaties were vague in defining the boundaries



between the United States and its British and Spanish neighbors. Thus, territorial disputes would mar relations for the next 30 years

Goal #3: To examine the myths of the American Revolution.

The Myths of the American Revolution:

- The colonists had suffered over a hundred years of unfair taxes.
- The rule of King George III was tyrannical.
- All Americans united in a patriotic defense of independence.
- Americans won the war single handedly.
- The victorious Americans immediately created a democracy.

Myth #1: The colonists had suffered over a hundred years of unfair taxes.

- The British - like the French, Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish - were empire builders and created imperial policy (taxation included) designed to enrich and empower the

hub of their empire - what Americans would call the Mother Country, England. From the beginning of colonization, then, the English colonies existed for the sake of England; this was the logic of the era of imperialism.

- In order to ensure that the colonies served the Mother Country, England had several rules - rules that were typical of other imperial powers.

- Colonies were forbidden to trade with the enemy - or they had to pay heavy import taxes if

SOME GUY WITH A WEBSITE BY AUGUST J. POLLAK

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"It Was Just Like The Boston Tea Party!"

1773- KING GEORGE OF ENGLAND ORDERS TAXES BE CUT FOR 95% OF PEOPLE IN THE AMERICAN COLONIES.



OUTRAGED, COLONISTS IMMEDIATELY SECURE PERMITS FROM THE LOCAL MAGISTRATE TO HOLD AN ORGANIZED RALLY OUTSIDE PUBLIC VENUES. EARLY PLANS TO DUMP TEA IN BOSTON HARBOR ARE SCRAPPED AFTER RALLY ORGANIZERS ARE DENIED PERMISSION.



WITH SPONSORSHIP FROM LOCAL MEDIA, ATTENDEES AT THE PROTEST GIVE IMPASSIONED SPEECHES. SOME PROPOSE SECEDING FROM ENGLAND. THEY DON'T. SOME PROPOSE TAKING ARMS AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. THEY DON'T.



COLONISTS COMMEND THE RALLY AS A STARTLING WAKE-UP CALL TO THE OPPRESSION OF KING GEORGE. THEY ALL THEN GO HOME AND PAY THEIR TAXES.



they did. For instance, the Navigation Act of 1660 gave England and English colonial merchants a monopoly on the shipping and marketing of all colonial goods and listed "enumerated commodities" that colonies could only send to England or English ports - tobacco, sugar, cotton, ginger, and indigo. And the Staple Act of 1663 gave Britain a monopoly on the sale of European manufactured goods by stipulating that most imports going to the American colonies had to pass through England.

- Colonies were forbidden to ship goods or produce in enemy ships
- Colonies were forbidden to engage in manufacturing activities that competed with English citizens.
- Colonies were forbidden to create laws or institutions that ran counter to those of England.
- England built its North American empire on the cheap, leaving the daily costs of the colonies to the colonists themselves.
 - The King did not finance the settlement or operating costs of the colonies; instead, he left this to corporations, wealthy patrons, and dissident religious groups.

- The British treasury did not pay the daily costs of the colonies; instead, these costs were paid by colonial taxes levied by local colonial governments.
- **King George III** ruled with a type of **benign neglect**. In essence, he ignored the growing independence of the colonies and failed to enforce its own trade regulations. As long as colonial North America was bringing in a profit for the empire, the British allowed the growth of strong colonial assemblies that taxed their citizens according to need.

The "bottom line" - Colonists had always paid taxes, most of which were imposed by their own colonial legislature. But the new British taxes following the French and Indian War were different as they were levied directly by the King and/or Parliament. The colonists felt the new taxation laws favored England at the expense of the colonies.

Myth #2: The rule of King George III was tyrannical

So, just how did the King and the British government respond to various colonial actions? The colonists claimed King George was a tyrant - an absolute ruler who governed without restrictions and who exercises power in a harsh, cruel manner. But was the King really a tyrant?

- Consider the Sugar Act which not only slashed the tax on foreign molasses in half but also made clear that the British planned to enforce the import tax and to prosecute smugglers. However, the British government allowed local juries of their peers to try them - and those peers promptly declared them all innocent.
 - John Hancock, caught red handed, was not only found innocent but celebrated as a hero after the trial.
 - But did the British government retaliate? Only mildly. Frustrated after multiple trials of this sort, it created Vice Admiralty courts to try the offenders in a less friendly environment.
- Now let's look at the British response to colonial disapproval of the Stamp Act and the Townsend Acts. The Stamp Act was an innovation that was already underway in England. When Americans protested - by attacking stamp officials, physically attacking customs men, and destroying stamps - the British responded by repealing the hated act. They chose the same path with the Townshend Acts, which were also an innovation because they laid import taxes on British goods. Almost no revenue was collected from these taxes.
- And how did the British handle the protests, the violence, the organized resistance led by colonial legislators?
 - Did they arrest the ringleaders of resistance? No.

- Did they close down the newspapers that carried diatribes and learned discourses against British policies? No.
- Did they restructure the colonial governments? No.
- Did they arrest the men who met in illegal political bodies such as the Stamp Act Congress and the Continental Congress, or declare them ineligible to serve in local offices? No.
- Instead, the British government ignored petitions and refused to engage in negotiations or discussions. In general, they displayed bewilderment at the colonists' failure to understand how an empire worked.



The "bottom line" - Not until thousands of dollars worth of property was destroyed in Boston harbor did the British government - many of whose members were investors in the East India Tea Company- retaliate. For the British, as it would be for the founding fathers of the United States, the sanctity of private property was worth protecting.

- Indeed, with our 21st Century minds, it is amazing to reflect upon how patient and tolerant British officials remained over the

turbulent 1760s and 70s.

- Some historians have even suggested that the real tyrants were the colonists themselves!
- In reality, thinking about King George as an imperial ruler who was struggling to hold his empire together does not detract from the story or make it less patriotic. In fact, it can enrich the story by emphasizing that the colonists, despite having strong social, economic, and political ties with the Mother Country, fervently desired independence and did not need the excuse of combating tyranny to do so.

Myth #3: All Americans united in a patriotic defense of independence

Did all Americans - north and south, white, Indian, slave, female and male, rich and poor - greet the Declaration of Independence with uniform enthusiasm? After the divisive experiences of the Vietnam war and the current divisions over the war in Afghanistan, it is appealing to think that there was an overwhelming consensus for Independence. But it was not so.

- John Adams famously said that "one third supported the war, one third opposed it, and one third had no opinion."
- But it is far more likely - according to Revolutionary War historian Carol Berkin - that at the beginning of the struggle, more than one third of the colonists hoped desperately to remain neutral in a battle between England and rebellious Americans. Their assumption was that, no matter who was in power, they would have to pay taxes - why risk their lives over who would be the tax collector?

We do know that during the war, about one-third of all Americans continued their opposition. In fact, in 1779, there were more Americans fighting with the British than with Washington: 21 regiments of Loyalists consisting of between 6500-8000 men, compared with Washington's field army of 3488.

- About 100,000 Loyalists fled America when the war broke out. The vast majority lost all their property and were not able to return after the war.
- In fact, many a farmer equipped his home with two flags, the British and the American, and prepared to raise the appropriate one as an army marched by.
- Some loyalists were subjected to horrendous punishment, including tar and feathering. This painting shows the tar and feathering of Bostonian John Malcolm who was a staunch supporter of royal authority. In November 1773, sailors in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, tarred and feathered him. Malcolm got off relatively easy in this attack, since the tar and feathers were applied while he was still fully clothed.



As the war progressed many of these neutral colonists did join the American cause, but several historians have shown that this was not an ideological or political choice: the British army behaved so badly everywhere it went, looting, raping, destroying, that it literally drove many colonists into the revolutionary camp.

The "bottom line" - Understanding that the Revolutionary War was not a unified effort - that people both supported and opposed the war - does not detract from the story. In fact, it makes it a more real, more exciting, and even more patriotic story by illustrating yet

again the diversity of the people who made up the nation that would soon become the United States.

Myth #4: Americans won the war single handedly

In reality, Americans armed themselves and outfitted their troops with money borrowed from France, Holland and Spain.

- The recognition of the United States by France transformed a rebellion into a war of national liberation and the entrance of France into the war forced the English to fight on two fronts rather than one.
- The French navy provided the vital strategic and tactical support for the American effort. At Yorktown, Frenchmen outnumbered Americans almost three to one. Washington had 11,000 men engaged in the battle, while the French had at least 29,000 soldiers and sailors. The 37 French ships-of-the-line played a crucial role in trapping the 8700-strong British army and winning the fight.

The "bottom line" - French forces were crucial to helping the Americans win the Revolutionary War. But this reliance on France and other European allies does not diminish the American victory. Rather it adds a global dimension to the struggle and it requires us to remember that winning wars usually requires the help of allies.

Myth #5: The victorious Americans immediately created a democracy

A democracy would have appalled all but the most radical of the revolutionary leaders. To men like John Adams, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, democracy simply meant "mob rule." They joined a revolution to create a republic whose laws were made by an elected representative legislature.

- These were men of the 18th century not the 21st. They believed that an active political voice was a privilege not a right; it belonged only to adult white males who had "a stake in society" and that stake was property.
- The logic of their restriction made perfect sense to them: only a citizen who had something to lose could be counted on to vote for candidates, make or administer laws, or solve disputes responsibly and without destructive whim or passions.

The "bottom line" - The Founding Fathers distrusted democracy and instead, created a republic. In so doing, they created the most free nation in the modern world. By accepting the revolutionary leaders and the framers of the constitution as revolutionary men of their time we can lay the groundwork for the ongoing, evolutionary struggle to create

democracy that was the business of ordinary men and women - not simply the extraordinary men who were our founding fathers.

- To see a quick video on facts you never knew about the American Revolution, go to <http://www.history.com/videos/bet-you-didnt-know-revolutionary-war#bet-you-didnt-know-revolutionary-war>
- Watch local historian Ray Raphael discuss the 1774 Massachusetts Revolution on Ted Talks at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFekGGggMlw&list=PLsRNoUx8w3rP9zmv8ldM-576Zpr9QEAy7&index=3>

Goal #4: To explore the actions that accompanied the colonists' transition from resistance to revolution

The early actions of the colonists to British reform can be described, at the very least, as acts of resistance and at the very worst, acts of rebellion. But they were not acts of revolution - indeed, not until 1775 did Americans seek to overthrow British rule and create an independent new nation. *What is the difference between these actions - resistance, rebellion, revolution?*

- Only when it became clear to the colonists that the British were not going to pass laws that economically favored American planters and merchants did revolution - overthrowing the monarchy - become a goal. Such actions were evolutionary rather than revolutionary in nature.
- It is important to remember that the war actually began in April 1775. In the 14 months before the Continental Congress declared war, Americans had died at Lexington and Concord and at Bunker Hill during the siege of Boston. Additionally, the Royal Navy had bombarded and burned American towns.
- However, the Continental Congress had not declared independence. Why? Because the Congress remained divided between those who felt actions at Lexington and Concord demanded immediate independence - a minority of colonists largely from

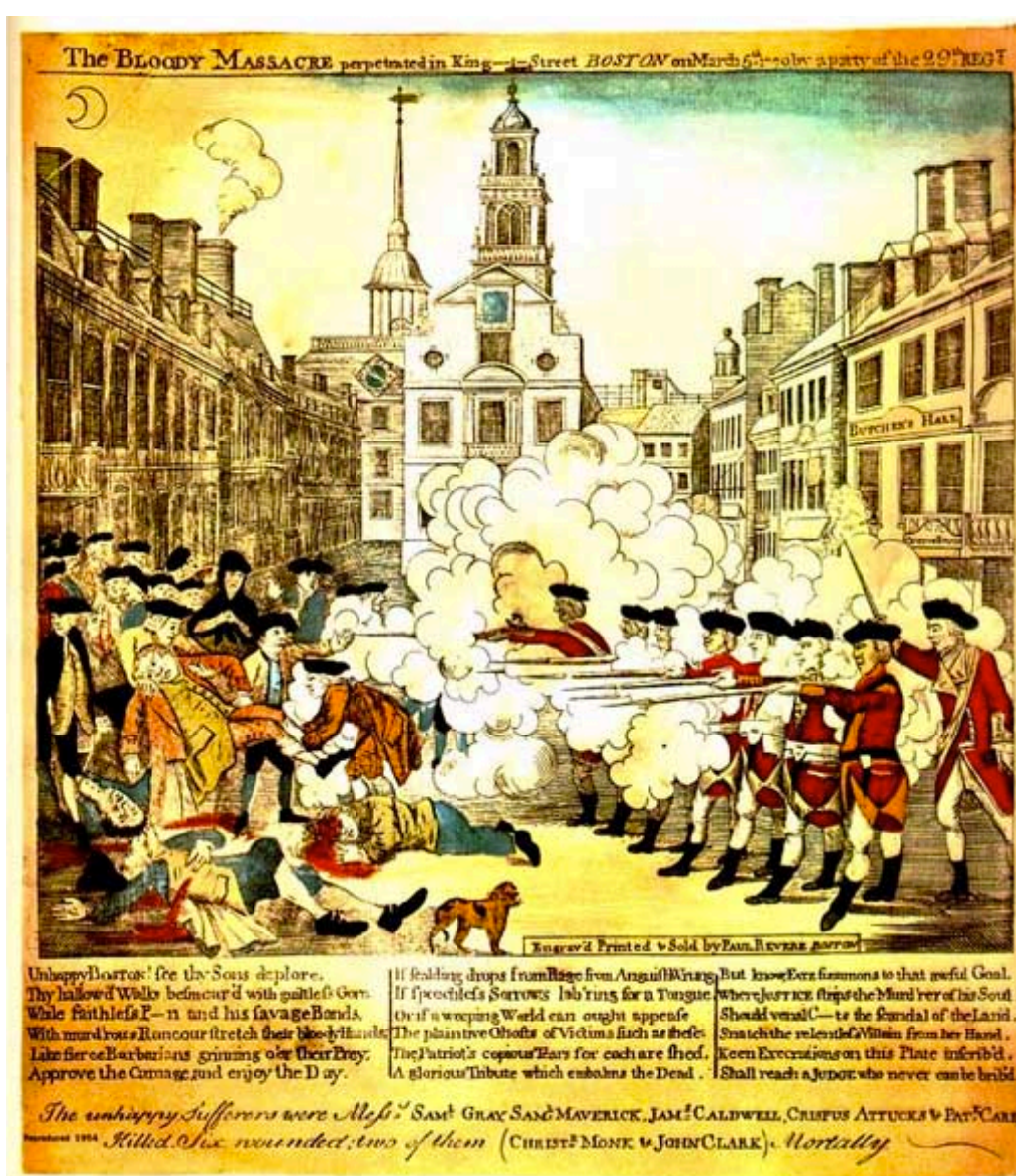


the New England region and Virginia - and those who wanted to reconcile with Britain, the reconciliationists - the majority of colonists with strongest support in the Middle Colonies, Maryland, and South Carolina. They had huge ports with a strong Trans-Atlantic trade business and they relied heavily on British credit.

- It took 14 months for these two sides to reconcile their differences before the Revolution could officially begin.

In the meantime, the colonists themselves took several actions that helped accompany the transition from resistance to revolution:

- **Urban Patriot Groups** arose to mobilize workers in colonial cities to protest against the customs laws and rising taxes, especially by boycotting British goods. The Sons of Liberty were the first; their activities began in Boston, spread throughout colonial cities, and sent a message to Britain - the King could no longer rely upon the deferential behavior of the colonists that had ensured political stability for 150 years.
- **Stamp Act Congress** was held in New York in October 1765. Nine colonies sent delegates to formally support a set of resolutions and petitions that denied the authority of Parliament to tax them. The Congress declared that only the assemblies had such authority. After lengthy debate, Parliament repealed the Stamp Act.
- **Boycotting English goods.** The Massachusetts House of Representatives sent a letter to the other colonial assemblies condemning the Townshend Acts as unconstitutional. Then Boston and New York merchants began a boycott of British imports; Philadelphian and Virginian merchants followed suit in 1769. Colonial women were key to the success of these boycotts.
- **Rioting.** The colonists were increasingly disgruntled with the British soldiers who lived amongst them. In Boston, where the soldiers competed with townsmen for the favor of local women and part-time jobs, the feelings were especially tense. This resulted in [***The Boston Massacre in March 1770.***](#) For reasons that remain unclear, a mob of laborers and seamen attacked a group of soldiers. In turn, the soldiers fired into the crowd and killed five men and wounded six others. Patriot leaders, led by John Adams in a Boston court, blamed the incident not on the soldiers - but on the "motley rabble of saucy boys, negroes, and mulattoes, Irish teagues, and outlandish jack tarrs." The soldiers were acquitted.
- **Organizing.** A growing group of American colonists who called themselves the Patriots organized on behalf of independence.
- **Boston Tea Party.** In some cities, colonists prevented East India Company ships from landing and delivering their tea, thus forcing captains to return it to Britain or store it in public warehouses. In Boston, several Patriots boarded a ship and threw



342 chests of tea
overboard - valued at
10,000 pounds or \$800,000
by today's standards.

- **First Committee of Correspondence.** In 1772, Patriots in Boston created the first Committee "to state the Rights of the Colonists of this Province." Other committees were set up by the legislative assemblies in all the colonies. Its members drew up a statement of colonial rights and grievances, distributed them in towns, and asked for responses.

• **First Continental**

Congress. In September 1774, representatives from 12 colonies (all but Georgia) began deliberating for 7 weeks about the best possible way to express their grievances and demand that such injustices be corrected **without severing ties with England.**

Goal #5: To review two documents that greatly influenced the course of the Revolutionary War: Common Sense and The Wealth of Nations

Common Sense. It is ironic that it took an emigrant from the lower classes of England, who only arrived in America in 1774, to fully grasp that America could mean a "sanctuary of freedom for humanity." Of all pamphlets and documents written during the crucial years of 1775 - 1776, *Common Sense* stands as the most widely read and most influential.

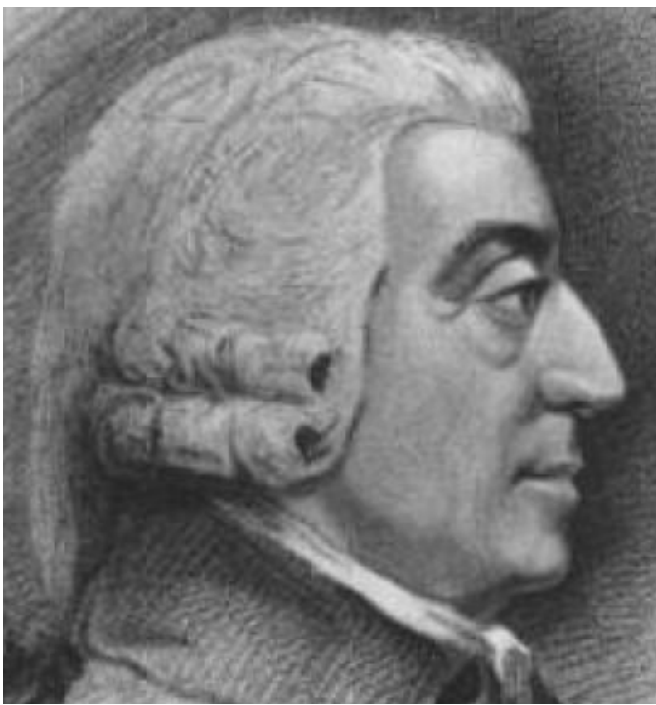


- This 47-page pamphlet sold 120,000 copies within three months, and during the pivotal year of 1776, some 500,000 colonists bought copies.
- *Common Sense* reflects the free thinking and revolutionary idealism of a person who decided to seek something better than the monotonous life of a poor working class Englishman. Though neither well-educated nor a particularly a profound thinker, Paine was intelligent and had read the philosophers of the Enlightenment.
- Reportedly, George Washington was so persuaded by Paine's words that he decided to stop supporting the King of England.

The Wealth of Nations. *The Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776, was probably the most influential book ever written on market economics. In 1766, Smith began research for his book, beginning with a study of the French and Indian war and how the British government had decided that the colonists must help pay down the war debt through tax measures.

In his almost 1000-page book, Smith attacked the 18th Century European economic system of **mercantalism** in which each nation's goal was to increase exports to its colonies and other nations, limit imports from them, and then end up with a "favorable balance of trade."

- Mercantilists believed that the more gold and silver they acquired, the more wealth they possessed.
- Smith felt this was foolish, believing that it limited the potential for "real wealth" which he defined as "the annual produce of the land and labor of the society."
- He further insisted that the British colonial empire and the mercantile trade restrictions it placed on its colonies - especially in North America - was "hurtful to the general interest of society." It only helped British special interests, not society as a whole



His solution:

- The British should institute a **free market system** - "an obvious and simple system of natural liberty" - that would produce true national wealth. A free market economy - one based on supply and demand with little or no government control - occurs when buyers and sellers are allowed to freely buy, sell, and trade goods based on a mutual agreement on price without state intervention in the form of taxes, subsidies or regulation. This, free market economy, Smith

argued, would benefit all social classes, not just the privileged few who benefited from mercantilism.

- To achieve economic growth and social betterment, the British should get rid of its network of government economic privileges and restrictions and let the "free market mechanism" operate on its own without government interference – **laissez faire**.
- Because the colonies had cost the British more than they gained for the sake of maintaining a monopoly of trade, Parliament should let the American colonies peacefully go their own way

These thoughts of a **free market economy** greatly influenced the thinking of the American colonial leaders as they moved toward war with England.

Goal #6: To discuss two important questions that historians continue to ask about the Revolutionary War

Was the Revolutionary War also a civil war? The war between Patriots vs. Loyalists was real and not surprising given the divisive nature of American society.

- In New England, mobs of patriot farmers beat suspected Loyalists and sometimes destroyed their property.
- In June 1775, the First Continental Congress passed a resolution declaring all Loyalists to be traitors. Most colonies passed laws making joining the British army or providing it with food an act of treason.
- Throughout the colonies Patriots fled their homes to escape arrest, property



destruction or worse from the British army and the Loyalists fled to avoid arrest, destruction or worse from the Patriots. And wherever both armies went, drunk and disorderly troops harassed or raped women and girls. (Henretta, Brody, Dumenil, America: A Concise History: 153)

- Typical of the punishment doled out to colonists who openly identified with Britain was burning an effigy of the victim's body, conducting a mock funeral of the victim, intimidating family members, boycotting loyalist businesses, tarring and feathering (which

was only rarely used - with only about 3 dozen cases recorded in all the colonies during the Revolutionary War. Its purpose was a new variation on the historical punishment goal - public shame and humiliation in the hopes of deterring further criminal behavior. Thus, the person was rendered into an animal - a chicken - and paraded around town.)

- A Boston loyalist, Mather Byles, made this telling comment about patriot virtue: "They call me a brainless Tory, but tell me ... which is better - to be ruled by one tyrant 3,000 miles away, or by 3,000 tyrants not a mile away?" Shortly after making this statement, Byles - who was a minister - was deported for his support of the King.
- George Washington noted another kind of division within American society when he talked about the "dearth of public spirit and want of public virtue." When he and his 12,000 soldiers camped at Valley Forge, he found that Loyalists, some pacifists, and even Patriots refused to lodge or feed his army. Some were opposed to the war, but others wanted to hoard their supplies in hopes of higher prices. Consequently, 3,000 of his soldiers died from malnutrition and disease; another 1,000 defected.

Was the American Revolution a revolution - a radical event that truly revolutionized

American society, or an evolution - a conservative event that did not significantly change American society?

The best way to address this question is through the lens of two noted historians: Gordon Wood and Carl Degler. The following was excerpted from "Was the American Revolution a Conservative Movement?" by Gordon Wood and Carl Degler in *Taking Sides*, Larry Madaras and James M SoRelle (eds.), 1995.

Revolution - Gordon Wood's strict interpretation - that the Revolution was a radical event that truly changed American society.

- Colonial America did not have the social conditions generally believed to be the cause of all revolutions - colonists were not an oppressed people and knew they were "freer, more equal, more prosperous" than any other people of their time.
- The Revolution was truly revolutionary because it transformed a society that had been bound by English hierarchy of ranks into a society that was egalitarian, democratic, and commercial.
- Created the first nation built upon democratic values.
- By focusing upon what the Revolution did not accomplish - abolition of slavery, equality for women, greater voting privileges for WASP men - "is to miss the great significance of what it did accomplish." The Revolution paved the way for the abolition of slavery, for women's rights movements, and for the broadening of democracy.



Evolution - Carl Degler 's loose interpretation - Revolution was a conservative event that did not significantly change American society

- Colonial society had already developed a society of equality only for white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant males (WASP); assigned governmental rule to men of wealth and privilege; and distributed property in a way that wealthy men and

speculators, not small landholders or the landless, owned the vast amount of land.

- The Revolution did not change the "fundamental outlines" of American society: WASP men still relatively equal in terms of ability to gain wealth, but women and persons of color had no equality; men in power before the Revolution were still in power afterwards; most land remained in the hands of the wealthy.
- Even when "one has added together the new constitutions, the enlightened religious innovations, and the stimulus to equality, it is quickly apparent that the social consequences of the Revolution were meager indeed. In both purpose and implementation, they were not to be equated with the massive social changes which shook France and Russia in later years. For the most part, society of post-Revolutionary America was but the working out of social forces which were already evident in the colonial period."

Conclusions

Evolution or Revolution?

1. The traditional telling of the American Revolution is filled with mythology: The colonists had suffered over a hundred years of unfair taxes; the rule of King George III was tyrannical; all Americans united in a patriotic defense of independence; Americans won the war single handedly; and the victorious Americans immediately created a democracy.
2. The real story of the American Revolution is more interesting and is one that acknowledges the way in which socio-economic status, race, and patriotic allegiances complicated colonial society much as they complicate American society today.
3. Neither the actions of the British government nor those of the American colonists **prior** to the Revolutionary War were revolutionary. Rather, British actions were consistent with and predictable of a colonial power; while colonial actions were primarily acts of resistance both against British policies and those of colonial legislatures.
4. The **actions** of declaring, fighting, and winning the Revolutionary War were **revolutionary**: the American colonists revolted against the British government and that revolution resulted in American independence. However, the **consequences** of the War were **evolutionary**: the War did not dramatically change the structure or content of American society.
 - It did not establish a truly democratic government - but remember, there were no truly democratic nations in the late 18th century.

- It did not create a new economic structure; rather, it kept capitalism in place while also speeding up the process of industrialization.
 - It did not significantly change the structure of American society; rather, it reinforced the political, economic, and social *status quo*.
 - It did not abolish slavery; rather, it continued to allow slavery to flourish in the South.
5. The Revolutionary War was a **war of independence** from colonial domination, a **civil war** between the various forces within American society, and a **world war** fought both in North America and on the European continent.
 6. The Revolutionary War placed Americans on an evolutionary road to creating a more democratic nation.