

Chapter 1

Beginnings: Pre-history to 1763

Contemporary Americans, immersed in the busy rhythms of twenty-first-century life, rarely pause to reflect that they dwell in a land that has been inhabited for millennia. Human settlement on the continent we call North America (after the Florentine cartographer Amerigo Vespucci) began at least 15,000 years ago, as bands of people in present-day Siberia came by water or across a now-vanished land bridge into today's Alaska. As migration continued and numbers increased, these first Americans spread southward and eastward, encountering regions of widely divergent climate and topography. Distinctive groups with differing languages, social organization, religious practices, and sources of livelihood gradually evolved.

In present-day New Mexico, one group, the Anasazi, built settlements called pueblos, crafted jewelry and decorated pottery, and wrested a living from the arid soil. Farther east, a major civilization arose at Cahokia (today's East St. Louis), where the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers converge. Along the Atlantic Coast, other groups, or tribes, engaged in hunting, farming, and fishing. They established diplomatic relations, occasionally fought wars, and maintained extensive trading networks. In today's upstate New York, leaders of five large tribes came together sometime after 1450 to form an alliance, the Iroquois Federation. On the western plains, around the

Great Lakes, and in today's upper Midwest other groups pursued agriculture, fishing, and buffalo hunting, depending on their region's ecology.

By 1500, the North American population comprised an estimated seven to ten million people. Millions more lived in Mesoamerica and South America, where a series of civilizations—Mayan, Aztec, and the still-expanding Incan empire—had flourished for more than a millennium.

These civilizations remained unknown in Europe. Leif Erikson and other Norse voyagers had reached the northeastern tip of North America as early as 1000, and even established a short-lived settlement in Newfoundland. But apart from such isolated contacts, the peoples of the Americas and Europe knew nothing of each other's existence. This would soon change, however, with momentous implications for both.



1. Cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado. Built by ancient pre-Columbian settlers of North America, these complex settlements were abandoned in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as rainfall failed.

The age of European exploration

Late fifteenth-century Europe seethed with intellectual ferment, technological innovations, and economic changes. Seeking faster trading routes to Asia, Portuguese navigators ventured around the tip of Africa and on eastward to India. Others contemplated an even more daring route—westward across the Atlantic. One of these, the Italian Christopher Columbus, persuaded the Spanish monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella to finance a voyage. Miscalculating the size of the earth and blissfully unaware that vast continents lay in the way, Columbus—on August 3, 1492—set out from Palos, Spain, with a three-ship flotilla, bound for Asia. Instead, he made landfall on October 12 on an island he called San Salvador. Still convinced that he had found “the Indies,” he called the local islanders “Indians”—and the name stuck.

A tangle of economic, political, and religious motives drove this exploratory fever. Columbus himself (who made three subsequent voyages) was gripped by ambitions for wealth and honors, and zeal to convert the Indians to Christianity. He also saw his voyages as fulfillments of biblical prophecies—an early instance of a persistent tendency to view America as the object of God’s special interest. The monarchs who financed these probes into the unknown sought to extend their domains, outshine their rivals, and acquire the fabulous riches that many believed abounded in what Shakespeare in *The Tempest* called this “brave new world.”

The spread of European settlements

The watery trail blazed by Columbus soon became heavily traveled as Europe’s seagoing powers staked their claims. Spanish settlements in present-day Florida (St. Augustine, 1565) and New Mexico (Santa Fe, 1609), as well as in the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central and South America, brought a tide of Spanish-speaking soldiers, adventurers, colonial administrators, and Catholic missionaries.

The Dutch soon followed. In 1609 Henry Hudson, an English navigator employed by the Dutch East India Company, sailed up the river that now bears his name. In 1625 the Dutch East India Company established Nieuw Amsterdam on Manhattan Island, purchased from the local Lenape Indians. The company granted lands along the Hudson to proprietors, called patroons, who extracted taxes and fees from the tenant farmers who settled the region.

The English came late to this race for empire but soon made up for lost time. The Protestant Reformation that reached England in the 1530s gave England's American colonies, except for Maryland, a strongly Protestant cast. (Maryland, established in 1632 by Cecilius Calvert, a Catholic, on a grant from Charles I, sheltered English Catholics fleeing persecution at home.)

England's first permanent foothold in North America lay in a region that the English called Virginia, after Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen. In 1607 a motley group of some six hundred settlers, financed by a company of investors called "adventurers," reached Virginia and built a fort, Jamestown, named for Elizabeth's successor, James I. The adventurers' hopes for riches from gold and silver faded fast, and disease, starvation, and Indian attacks soon carried off most of the initial settlers. However, tobacco, first cultivated in Virginia in 1611, became a profitable export as a pipe-smoking vogue swept Europe. In a 1604 pamphlet James I had denounced tobacco as "loathsome to the eye, hateful to the Nose, harmfull to the braine, [and] dangerous to the Lungs," but to little effect.

More English colonies spread southward—from North and South Carolina to Georgia—eventually encountering Spain's outpost in Florida. Tobacco reigned supreme in these southern colonies, supplemented by rice and indigo. The Protestant Church of England drew the most adherents, but the region's religious mosaic also included Scottish Presbyterians who favored more

decentralized church governance; Quakers espousing simple living and Christ's guidance, or "inner light," within each individual; and Methodists and Baptists preaching personal conversation and heartfelt religion over forms and rituals.

Farther north, in present-day Massachusetts, a small company of English religious dissenters who had wholly separated from the Church of England planted a settlement, called Plymouth, in 1620. These "Pilgrims," as they became known, arrived from Holland, where they had been living in exile. In 1621 they held a harvest feast, shared with local Wampanoag Indians, which evolved into a major American holiday, Thanksgiving. A history of the settlement by the first governor, William Bradford, written in simple, unadorned prose, ranks as an early classic of American literature.

The larger, more historically significant Massachusetts Bay colony was established at Boston in 1630. The founders were not Separatists, but "Puritans," so called because they desired to purify the Church of England of surviving popish practices. Later caricatured as joyless prudes, the Puritans were mainly distinguished by a set of ecclesiastical beliefs: worship should be austere and Bible based, church and civil authority wholly distinct, each congregation autonomous and self-governing, and church membership restricted to persons who could attest to a personal conversion experience.

After initial struggles, New Englanders prospered, achieving high levels of health and longevity. Settlements spread south to Rhode Island and Connecticut and north to New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine. Along with farming, fisheries, and urban occupations, they conducted oceangoing trade. Carrying timber, grain, naval stores, and dried codfish to England and England's island colonies in the West Indies, these New England ships brought sugar and molasses (mainly for distilling into rum) from the West Indies and tea, furniture, dishware, and other manufactured goods from England itself.

In the Middle Atlantic region, Pennsylvania, New York, Delaware, and New Jersey rounded out England's North American colonies. In 1681 Charles II granted a charter to William Penn, the son of a naval admiral who in 1660 had helped restore the English monarchy after years of civil war. This charter granted young Penn sweeping powers to establish and govern a new colony. A Quaker convert, Penn considered his namesake province a "Holy Experiment." Under his leadership, Pennsylvania welcomed persecuted English Quakers as well as European religious dissenters, including Swiss and German Mennonites.

In 1664, amid a broader imperial conflict between England and the Netherlands, Nieuw Amsterdam's governor surrendered to an occupying English force. Renamed New York (after the Duke of York, the future King James II), the colony became a thriving, ethnically diverse commercial center with a fertile agricultural hinterland in the Hudson Valley. As the Dutch patroons gradually lost power, individual farm ownership on the New England model became the rule.

Delaware, originally a Swedish fur-trading post, passed to New Netherlands and then to the English. New Jersey, carved out of New York by James II and granted to a contentious group of proprietors, became a royal province in 1702.

Natives and newcomers: a fateful encounter

American historians once self-servingly mythologized pre-Columbian America as a "virgin land," a virtually empty wilderness. In fact, the European colonizers confronted extensive, complex, and long-established native societies. With profound implications for both newcomers and natives, this encounter took varied forms, from negotiations, trade, and strategic alliances to bloody conflict, new diseases (smallpox devastated Indian communities, which had no immunity), and misunderstandings arising from differing cosmologies and social systems.

In the Spanish colonies, missionaries and secular administrators viewed the natives as laborers, potential converts, and, sometimes, deadly foes. A 1680 Pueblo and Apache uprising left some four hundred Spanish officials and priests dead. Twelve years later, the Spanish reasserted control. Christopher Columbus himself established the template for the newcomers' view of the aboriginal population. "They ought to make good and skilled servants," he wrote; "I think they can very easily be made Christians. . . . I could conquer the whole of them with 50 men, and govern them as I please."

In English settlements, relations were at times reasonably harmonious. Sometimes colonists and Indians joined forces against a common enemy. In Connecticut in 1637, for example, the colonists allied with local Mohegans and Narragansetts against the Pequots. During this operation, Connecticut militiamen burned a Pequot village and slaughtered several hundred men, women, and children who were desperately trying to escape.

Relations often turned exploitive and violent, a situation exacerbated by differing views of property rights. To native peoples, the land was for use and could be shared. Europeans viewed land ownership as contractual and exclusive. From these differences, and the colonists' inexorable expansion onto native lands, sprang bitter conflicts. In Jamestown, a 1622 uprising by the local Powhatan Indians decimated the settlement. In 1763 Scots Irish settlers along the Susquehanna River, accusing Pennsylvania's Quaker leaders of neglecting frontier security, slaughtered and scalped peaceful Conestoga Indians in nearby villages.

In New England, simmering tensions exploded in 1675–76 as the Wampanoag sachem Metacom declared war against the ever-encroaching newcomers. Indians struck across the frontier, killing some 2,500 settlers. The colonists retaliated with equal ferocity, killing many Indians and selling prisoners into slavery.

When Metacom was captured, colonists displayed his severed head as a grim trophy of war.

The colonial period, in short, began a tragically persistent pattern of native peoples decimated by conflict, new diseases, and the relentless advance of white settlements. By 1800 the U.S. Indian population stood at about 600,000, a pathetic remnant of the estimated 2.2 million on the eve of European colonization.

Slavery takes root in America

This era also saw the introduction of slavery, planting the seeds of civil war and a noxious harvest of racism. Prevalent in ancient civilizations, slavery had long flourished in Africa and the Arab world. Now, like a spreading virus, it crossed the Atlantic.

The first slave ship arrived in Jamestown in 1619, and many more followed. Initially, Africans blended into a larger population of unfree laborers, including white indentured servants, who worked for a contracted period of time for employers who paid their passage to America. But as indentured servants fulfilled their obligations, they and their descendants entered the free labor force. Africans, by contrast, cultural and ethnic outsiders, their dark skin signifying their unfree status, became a permanently enslaved class. A 1705 Virginia law defined slavery as a perpetual condition, transmitted through the mother (thereby including the offspring of white masters and female slaves).

From small beginnings, slavery spread into the Spanish and Portuguese colonies, and England's colonies in the West Indies and North America. British slave ships dominated this human traffic, but New England ship owners participated as well. By 1790 the number of enslaved persons in North America—concentrated in the tobacco and rice colonies of Virginia, Maryland, and farther south but present throughout the colonies—stood at some 700,000.

Periodic slave uprisings—in New York in 1712, South Carolina in 1739—were brutally suppressed. Isolated moral protests by some New Englanders and Pennsylvania Quakers and Mennonites accomplished little. Woven into colonial society and economic life, slavery would survive into the 1860s, and its aftereffects far beyond.

A new society takes shape

In popular memory, and in the textbooks of earlier times, the nearly three hundred years of American history from 1492 to 1776 flicker randomly in disjointed, semi-mythic images: a beautiful Indian princess saving John Smith's life in Jamestown, resolute Pilgrims stepping ashore onto Plymouth Rock, the Dutch buying Manhattan Island for a few trinkets, accused witches hanged in Salem, romantic Spanish missions in California.

Yet this era gave rise to social patterns and modes of perception that would long endure. In addition to the fraught interactions of European settlers, native peoples, and enslaved Africans, other colonial-era realities had crucial long-term implications.

Long before the Declaration of Independence, England's American colonies experienced *de facto* independence, enjoying a measure of self-governance and economic autonomy. While the British government claimed ultimate power, in actual practice the colonies increasingly managed their own affairs. As they did, many colonists scarcely thought of themselves as British subjects, and chafed under the authority and deference claimed by officials dispatched from London.

Similarly, colonists increasingly saw their economic interests in local terms rather than through the lens of England's imperial system. To be sure, English authorities resisted this process. Following a theory called mercantilism, which viewed England and its colonies as a single economic unit controlled from London,

Parliament enacted a series of Navigation Acts from 1651 through 1733 to integrate the North American and West Indian trade into the larger imperial economy. In this view, the colonies would supply raw materials while importing manufactured products and consumer goods from England. In some ways mercantilism did stimulate colonial economic activity (encouraging shipbuilding, fisheries, tobacco cultivation, and the production of naval stores, for example). But in the economic as in the political realm, colonists increasingly looked to their own interests rather than those of distant England. Achieving independence, in short, was a process, not a single event.

Religion loomed large in colonial America, and ministers exerted intellectual and social leadership. Yet this was a diverse religious culture. No single denomination held sway throughout the colonies. Anglicans, numerous in Virginia, constituted a minority elsewhere. Puritan congregationalism was mostly confined to New England. Quakers, powerful in Pennsylvania, had little influence elsewhere. Even within each colony, enforcing religious conformity proved difficult. When Roger Williams, pastor of the Salem, Massachusetts, church, was banished in 1635 for his heterodox views, he and his followers simply migrated to nearby Rhode Island. In western Pennsylvania, Scots-Irish Presbyterians challenged the Quaker leadership in Philadelphia. In Virginia, Baptists and Methodists resisted the authority of the Church of England. By the late eighteenth century, Deists in Virginia and proto-Unitarians in New England rejected orthodox Christian dogma altogether. Some lamented this diversity, but in fact it stimulated religious vitality. In a free market of competing religious groups, with no established church, religion's overall influence thrived.

This diversity, coupled with the core Protestant belief in individual responsibility for one's own salvation, stimulated surges of religious enthusiasm that further undermined ecclesiastical hierarchies. A wave of revivalism in the 1740s, the so-called Great

Awakening, swept the colonies under the preaching of a touring English evangelist, George Whitefield, and a host of homegrown itinerants.

Jonathan Edwards of Massachusetts, an early proponent of the revival, terrified the unsaved with his sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” (1741). A learned theologian as well as pastor and revivalist, Edwards drew upon current theories of the will in order to defend emotional preaching. While mastering the works of John Locke and other Enlightenment thinkers, Edwards reasserted orthodox Christian doctrine, including a Calvinist view of God’s omnipotence and human sinfulness. His collected works extend to twenty-six volumes—an output cut short by his premature death in 1758 as he prepared to assume the presidency of Princeton College in New Jersey.

Preaching in welcoming churches or in the open air, revivalists called on sinners to repent; mere baptism or church membership would not suffice. Spawning missionary enterprises and new denominations, popular piety is another of the colonial era’s enduring legacies. The means have changed—from open-air exhortation to televangelism and suburban megachurches—but evangelical faith and missionary zeal remain alive and well in twenty-first-century America.

The New England Puritans, with a strong sense of divine purpose, were confident of their special destiny. In a shipboard lecture en route to America, John Winthrop, Massachusetts’ first governor, called the soon-to-be-founded settlement “a city on a hill,” a model of God’s ultimate plan for humanity. Elaborated by a succession of ministers, this sense of divine purpose arose from a particular reading of sacred history: God had chosen the Puritans to create in America a New Zion, as He had once chosen the Jews in ancient times. Sometimes reformulated in secular language, this deep-seated belief in America’s unique role in history would long survive.

If the people proved unfaithful, however, these Puritan divines warned, retribution would follow—just as Jehovah had punished the Jews for their wickedness. Earthquakes, storms, Indian attacks, and even the 1692 witchcraft trials were interpreted as signs of God’s displeasure. This guilt-ridden sense of decline from the higher standards of earlier times would also have a long afterlife in American religion and public life.

Although the contrast was sometimes overstated, colonial American society was characterized by less-rigid social hierarchies and gender roles than those generally found in Europe at the time. To be sure, even apart from slavery, colonial America was hardly the classless utopia some Enlightenment thinkers imagined. Every colony had its elite—ministers, lawyers, merchants; Virginia’s great planters; New York’s landed proprietors; Philadelphia’s Quaker establishment; New England’s shipmasters. Nine colleges founded in the colonial era, from Harvard in 1636 to Dartmouth in 1769, perpetuated these elites. And each colony had its middling ranks of independent farmers and urban craftsmen; and—lower still on the pecking order—day laborers, farm hands, and indentured servants.

Compared to much of Europe, however, the white population was less rigidly stratified, had higher literacy rates, and enjoyed greater opportunities for social mobility. The image of America as a more open, less hierarchical society, which would survive into an industrial age of great fortunes and grinding poverty, had its origin in partly mythic but also partly accurate memories of colonial society.

In terms of gender roles, the colonies replicated the patriarchal patterns of the era. Voting and public office were restricted to property-owning white males. Married women were barred from holding property or earning wages. A separation of spheres generally prevailed, with women performing domestic and child-rearing duties. In Boston in 1637, Anne Hutchinson was expelled from the

church and banished from the colony for criticizing the minister's sermons at gatherings in her home. "You have stepped out of your place," one minister admonished her; "you [would] have rather been a husband than a wife, a preacher than a hearer."

Yet in actual practice, gender boundaries were not typically patrolled so rigidly, and women played respected social roles in their communities. Some pursued "male" occupations, particularly widows after the death of a male breadwinner. Further, in this pre-industrial age, women's "domestic" activities, from gardening and tending farm animals to baking, candle making, and sewing, were centrally important to their family's economic well-being. Some young women worked as domestic servants. Older women served the community as midwives or—particularly in New England—conducted "dame schools" in their homes for local children. In the gender realm, too, the relative openness of colonial life created opportunities for women to move beyond traditional roles, laying the groundwork for further changes in the nineteenth century and beyond.

A clash of empires: France versus England

Despite restive stirrings, the English colonists down to the 1760s had a compelling reason to welcome Britain's sheltering protection: a hostile French presence to the north and west. Following Jacques Cartier's explorations in the 1530s and the establishment of French fishing camps and trading posts along the St. Lawrence River, Samuel de Champlain founded Quebec in 1608. While French Catholic priests started missions, intrepid French fur traders, called *voyageurs* and *coureurs de bois* (wood runners), operated across present-day Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Forts, missions, and trading posts from the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes down the Mississippi to New Orleans (founded 1718) underscored France's imperial ambitions.

The English settlers viewed these developments with alarm. As early as 1654, Massachusetts militiamen drove the French from

Cape Breton Island. Over the next century, as France and England waged several wars, skirmishes between English colonists and French settlements persisted. In an unsuccessful 1755 raid on Fort Duquesne, a French outpost on the site of today's Pittsburgh, the twenty-three-year old George Washington served as aide-de-camp to British general Edward Braddock, who died in the fighting.

In the Seven Years' War (1756–63), France and Great Britain, with other European powers, battled for supremacy. The war's North American phase involved French and British troops, colonial militias, and each side's Indian allies. (Underscoring this latter aspect, the English colonists called the conflict the French and Indian War.) Fighting raged across the Ohio Valley, the Great Lakes, northern New York, and the heart of French power along the St. Lawrence. Twenty thousand colonial volunteers supplemented England's troops and naval forces. The British fared poorly at first, but under a vigorous new parliamentary leader, William Pitt, the tide turned. In 1759 an Anglo-American force defeated the French at Quebec. Montreal surrendered in 1760, ending the war's American phase. The Treaty of Paris (1763) confirmed England's imperial dominance in North America westward to the Mississippi River.

But this outcome only increased tensions in the restive American colonies. With the French threat removed, British rule seemed increasingly onerous. Relations worsened as the British government, by the Proclamation of 1763, restricted colonists' westward expansion, reserving the lands between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi to the Indian inhabitants. Religious fears exacerbated the colonists' anger, since Britain granted full religious freedom to the thousands of French Catholics in its newly acquired territories. Further, Parliament sought to pay off its heavy war debt by increasing colonial taxes. The stage was set for a showdown.

Chapter 2

1763–1789: Revolution, Constitution, a new nation

Each day in Washington, DC, vacationing families and tourists from around the globe line up patiently at the National Archives to see the Declaration of Independence the Constitution. In respectful silence, visitors reverently filed past the vault-like display cases in the vast rotunda.

These faded parchments so solemnly enshrined today—“American Scriptures,” in the words of one historian—date from a hectic era of imperial struggle, mob violence, bloody warfare, and political crisis. They reflect fierce debates, hard-headed compromises, and the intellectual creativity of statesmen who built the case for independence and then crafted a new nation’s governing framework.

The path to independence

Saddled with debt from the Seven Years’ War, Parliament set out to extract more revenue from the colonies. From London’s perspective this seemed fair, since British troops had defeated the colonists’ French foes. These postwar taxes and other measures angered many colonists, however, since the colonies lacked representation in Parliament.

In the Sugar Act (1764), the first of these measures, Parliament lowered duties on molasses the colonists imported from the

French West Indies but increased duties on other imported goods. To thwart smuggling, the act tightened inspection of colonial merchant ships and shifted smuggling cases from lenient local magistrates to Admiralty Courts headed by British judges.

Next came the Stamp Act (1765), requiring colonists to purchase special stamped paper for newspapers, diplomas, and legal documents, and even taxing dice and playing cards! While the Sugar Act served the dual purpose of raising revenue and regulating trade, the Stamp Act's sole aim was to increase taxes. As a further irritant, the 1765 Quartering Act required colonial taxpayers to house and feed British troops stationed in America.

British authorities pointed out that the colonists, while enjoying military protection and trading privileges, paid lower taxes than did Britons at home. But without representation, colonists protested, any tax violated their rights. In Virginia's House of Burgesses, Patrick Henry introduced resolutions denouncing the Act. Protests turned violent in Boston, where a mob hanged the tax collector in effigy and trashed the residence of Chief Justice Thomas Hutchinson, a Stamp Act defender. In October 1765, delegates from nine colonies met in New York City. Affirming colonial solidarity, this "Stamp Act Congress" passed resolutions denying Parliament's right to tax the colonies. Amid mounting protests, Parliament in 1766 repealed the Stamp Act but passed a "Declaratory Act" affirming its authority over the colonies.

Tensions eased with the Stamp Act's repeal and the advent of a new prime minister, William Pitt, who was popular in the colonies. But parliamentary leadership soon passed from the ailing Pitt to a hard-nosed Chancellor of the Exchequer, Charles Townshend. In a 1767 act dubbed the Townshend Duties, Parliament slapped duties on various products imported by the colonies and created a new revenue-collection bureaucracy, the American Board of Customs Commissioners. Attempting to appease colonists' sensitivities, Townshend differentiated these "external taxes" from "internal

taxes” such as the Stamp Act. But in an influential 1767 pamphlet misleadingly titled *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania*, the Philadelphia lawyer John Dickinson rejected this distinction.

As the dispute deepened, Boston’s Samuel Adams distributed the Massachusetts Circular Letter to all the colonies denouncing Parliament’s action. When several colonial legislatures endorsed Adams’s letter, the royal governors dissolved them. The Sons of Liberty, a loose-knit organization originally formed to oppose the Stamp Act, revived, urging a boycott of British imports. In June 1768, a Boston mob attacked customs officials who had seized a ship (appropriately called *Liberty*) owned by merchant John Hancock. Partially relenting, Parliament repealed most of the Townshend Duties in 1770 but again asserted its authority by retaining the tax on tea the colonists imported. Ominously, London also ordered four thousand troops to Boston.

On March 5, 1770, British troops guarding the Boston customs house fired on stone-throwing protesters, killing five, including Crispus Attucks, an African American seaman. Outrage over the “Boston Massacre” quickly spread, fed by an inflammatory engraving of the incident by Boston silversmith Paul Revere.

In 1772, prodded by Samuel Adams, Massachusetts towns set up Committees of Correspondence to coordinate resistance and publicize colonial grievances “to the World.” Other colonies followed suit. Ignoring the warning signals, Parliament in 1773 passed the Tea Act to help the struggling East India Company dispose of its surplus tea. While lowering (but not removing) the import duty, the act gave the East India Company monopolistic authority to sell its tea in America through special agents, undercutting local merchants.

Boston again became the flashpoint of opposition. On the night of December 16, 1773, after a tumultuous town meeting, some fifty men disguised as Indians boarded a British ship and dumped

342 chests of tea into the harbor. The “Boston Tea Party” outraged British authorities. Parliament passed a series of Coercive Acts (called the “Intolerable Acts” in America) closing Boston harbor and subjecting the colony to direct royal rule. Further alarming Protestant colonists, Parliament extended the boundaries of Catholic Quebec to include the trans-Appalachian west.

In September 1774, delegates from all thirteen colonies except Georgia gathered in Philadelphia. This first Continental Congress denounced the Coercive Acts, approved a boycott of British imports, and authorized military preparations. But the delegates also professed loyalty to George III and urged him to resist Parliament’s oppressive measures.

Building a case for independence

As colonial politicians, pamphleteers, and preachers furiously produced pamphlets, newspaper essays, and sermons; some favored independence, others negotiation and compromise. Massachusetts’s Thomas Hutchinson, now governor, argued that the economic and military benefits of being part of the British Empire surely outweighed “what are called English liberties.” Most, however, denounced Parliament’s taxes and regulatory measures. Tellingly, they drew their arguments from England’s own history, especially the Glorious Revolution of 1689, which had repudiated the absolutist claims of James II and established a limited monarchy. Echoing some English radicals, they argued that the now-landed aristocrats in Parliament were conspiring with the Crown to trample individual rights. Just as Parliament had resisted the Crown in 1689, now Parliament must be resisted. They especially admired John Wilkes, a London journalist and member of Parliament who favored reforming that body to make it more representative.

Colonial pamphleteers also drew on English political writers, especially John Locke, who in *Two Treatises on Civil Government*

(1690) argued that all persons possess a natural right to life, liberty, and property; that governments exist to protect these rights; and that the consent of the governed represents the sole basis of political legitimacy. Setting a model for present-day America, colonial religious leaders plunged into the political fray. While some, especially Anglican priests, urged loyalty to Britain, others joined the denunciations. The Bible and the Protestant faith, they insisted, upheld the colonists' righteous cause. Some even identified George III and his ministers with the Antichrist, the demonic ruler foretold in Revelation.

At the popular level, protesters erected liberty poles on town squares and sang ballads supporting the colonists' cause. A poem in the *Boston Gazette* began:

Come join in hand, brave Americans all
And rouse your bold hearts at fair Liberty's call.

As protests mounted, war drew closer. Ignoring conciliatory proposals by William Pitt (now Lord Chatham) and Edmund Burke's eloquent speeches defending the colonists, Parliament on February 7, 1775, declared Massachusetts in rebellion. General Thomas Gage, commander of the British troops in Boston, was authorized to crush the uprising.

On April 19, seven hundred Redcoats marched from Boston toward nearby Concord, to seize a cache of hidden weapons. Racing ahead on horseback, Paul Revere and William Dawes warned of the British approach. In Lexington, armed townsmen confronted the troops. As shooting erupted, eight colonists died. Finding no weapons, the Redcoats returned to Boston under a hail of gunfire. By nightfall, the British had endured more than 270 casualties and the colonists nearly 100. On June 17, the Redcoats attacked armed colonists occupying Bunker Hill and Breeds Hill overlooking Boston. The colonists suffered more than 300 casualties, the British more than 1,000.

In Philadelphia, the Continental Congress sent a final appeal to George III, the so-called Olive Branch Petition, again expressing loyalty but urging a ceasefire in Boston, repeal of the Coercive Acts, and negotiations over disputed issues. King and Parliament rejected this gesture, aware that Congress had also authorized a Continental army under George Washington.

In revolutionary situations, a single event can sometimes trigger the final leap from hesitation to irrevocable action. Such a moment came in January 1776 when a recent British immigrant, Thomas Paine, published an incendiary pamphlet, *Common Sense*, eloquently calling for independence. “Everything that is right or reasonable pleads for separation,” Paine declared. “The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries, ’tis time to part.” Appealing to the American sense of destiny, he proclaimed: “The cause of America is in great measure the cause of all mankind. . . . We have it in our power to begin the world over.” As for George III, Paine denounced the British monarch as the “royal brute.” *Common Sense* spread like wildfire through the colonies, electrifying the Patriot cause.

The war for independence

“[T]hese United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, *free* and *Independent States*.” So proclaimed a declaration drafted in spring 1776 by a Continental Congress committee, with Thomas Jefferson, a Virginia planter and political leader, as principal author. It listed the “abuses and usurpations” by which George III had tried to impose an “absolute tyranny,” denying the colonists’ natural right to “life, liberty, and property.” In the revision process, Congress changed “property” (John Locke’s formulation) to the more resonant “pursuit of happiness.” On July 4 Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, now enshrined at the National Archives. In its first official act of diplomacy, Congress dispatched Benjamin Franklin as emissary to Paris. A respected Philadelphia politician, civic leader, and statesman, Franklin secured vital French loans and, ultimately, military support for the infant nation.

COMMON SENSE;

ADDRESSED TO THE

INHABITANTS

O F

A M E R I C A,

On the following interesting

S U B J E C T S.

- I. Of the Origin and Design of Government in general, with concise Remarks on the English Constitution.
- II. Of Monarchy and Hereditary Succession.
- III. Thoughts on the present State of American Affairs.
- IV. Of the present Ability of America, with some miscellaneous Reflections.

Man knows no Master save creating HEAVEN,
Or those whom choice and common good ordain.

THOMSON.

PHILADELPHIA;

Printed, and Sold, by R. BELL, in Third-Street.

MDCC LXX VI.

2. Thomas Paine's incendiary pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776) swept the colonies, hastening the break with Great Britain and helping bring on the American Revolution.

The drive for independence divided Britain's American colonies. Canadians rejected Congress's plea to join the cause. The sugar planters in Britain's Caribbean colonies showed no interest. Even in the thirteen mainland colonies, around 20 percent of the white population, called Loyalists, opposed independence for economic, career, or personal reasons, including lingering attachment to England or fear of revolutionary chaos. Facing ostracism and even violence, many Loyalists fled to England or Canada.

As hostilities began, each side had strengths and weaknesses. The British possessed a powerful navy and a disciplined army, both commanded by seasoned officers and buttressed by hired German mercenaries. But despite some Loyalist support, the British were fighting in enemy territory, with dangerously long supply lines, under conditions unsuited to conventional military tactics or set-piece battles.

The Continental army relied on poorly paid citizen-soldiers prone to drift away when their enlistment ended or farm duties called. But the colonists had crucial advantages. They were fighting on their home turf, and in George Washington they had a commander whose tactical skills steadily improved. Above all, Britain's European rivals, France, Spain, and the Netherlands, provided critical strategic support. Foreign volunteers were important as well. The twenty-year-old Marquis de Lafayette, arriving from France, joined Washington as aide-de-camp. The Prussian general Friedrich von Steuben played a vital role in training Washington's undisciplined soldiers and preparing a standard manual of arms and maneuvers.

After the Concord and Bunker Hill debacles, the British left Boston and, under General William Howe, shifted to Long Island, intent on driving a wedge between Virginia and Massachusetts. A naval fleet under Admiral Richard Howe (William's brother) hovered off shore. Besting Washington's army in several skirmishes, Howe in September 1776 occupied New York City, a Loyalist stronghold.

Retreating across New Jersey, Washington's army crossed the Delaware River into Pennsylvania. Successful counterattacks on British garrisons in New Jersey boosted Patriot morale, but in September 1777 Howe defeated the Continental army at Brandywine Creek and occupied Philadelphia. As Congress retreated, Washington's ragged troops spent a miserable winter at nearby Valley Forge. "These are times that try men's souls," wrote Thomas Paine in a new pamphlet, *The Crisis*.

Meanwhile, British troops under General John Burgoyne marched from Quebec southward along Lake Champlain and the Hudson River, hoping to join Howe, moving up the Hudson from New York, and a British-Iroquois force advancing from the west, cutting off New England. But Burgoyne's invasion faltered under attack by local militias and a Patriot army commanded by General Horatio Gates. On October 17, 1777, at Saratoga, New York, Burgoyne surrendered. With this defeat, the French (already secretly providing funds) recognized American independence and pledged direct military aid. The Netherlands and Spain backed the American cause as well.

Abandoning their northern strategy, the British looked southward. In 1778–79 they gained control of Georgia, and in May 1780 captured Charleston. At the Battle of Camden, South Carolina (August 1780), General George Cornwallis's army defeated an American force. But Patriot troops under General Nathanael Greene turned the tide in brutal fighting in the Carolina backcountry that included torture and civilian massacres.

In spring 1781, Cornwallis marched his weakened army to Virginia's Yorktown peninsula to await reinforcements and supplies. Here they were trapped by Washington's Continental army, redeployed from Pennsylvania. A French fleet brought fresh troops and blocked a British escape by sea. On October 19, 1781, as a military band played "A World Turned Upside Down," Cornwallis surrendered.

The peace commission, meeting the British negotiators in Paris, included an odd couple, dour, moralistic John Adams of Massachusetts and the worldly Benjamin Franklin. But negotiations went forward, and in the Treaty of Paris (1783), the British recognized American independence.

The peoples of America in a revolutionary age

Though excluded from formal political participation, many American women supported the Patriot cause by boycotting British imports, including tea. (The national preference for coffee dates from this era.) Substituting homespun for British textiles signaled one's resistance to Parliamentary taxation.

During the war, women gained managerial experience running farms and businesses for absent husbands and fathers. Elite women of Philadelphia, styling themselves Daughters of Liberty, raised funds for the Continental army. Some women found gender implications in revolutionary ideology. If the framers of the new government failed to "remember the Ladies," John Adams's wife, Abigail, warned him in 1776, only half in jest, "we . . . will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation."

Native Americans maneuvered precariously amid the imperial struggles. In 1763, Indians along the Great Lakes attacked British forts in an uprising known as Pontiac's Rebellion. The Proclamation of 1763 promised to respect Indian rights, but clashes continued as settlers pushed westward. During the Revolutionary War, economic ties, land conflicts, and other considerations influenced each tribe's loyalties and alliances. In the North Carolina backcountry, the Cherokee allied with the British and attacked colonialists' encroaching settlements. In the Northwest Territory, local militia under a young Virginian, George Rogers Clark, brutally attacked Shawnee, Delaware, Wyandot, and Mingo settlements. In upstate New York, pro-British Iroquois

battled Continental troops allied with Tuscarora and Oneida warriors. Overall, England's defeat hastened white settlers' expansion into Indian lands. "Victory" for the colonists had very different meaning for Native Americans.

For the colonies' more than half-million African Americans, most of them enslaved, the imperial conflict brought opportunities and hazards. When a London court in 1772 freed James Somersett, a Massachusetts slave whose master had brought him to England, other American slaves looked to England as a beacon of freedom. In 1775 when Lord Dunmore, Virginia's royal governor, offered freedom to all able-bodied male slaves who would support the British, about a thousand responded. Eventually some 20,000 southern slaves flocked to the British side. Only a few gained freedom, however; most succumbed to illness or were recaptured.

In the North, by contrast, many slaves and free blacks embraced the Patriot cause. Some even joined local militias or the Continental army. George Washington (himself a slave owner) rejected proposals to free slaves who served in the military, laconically warning that this would "render slavery more irksome for those still in it." Nevertheless, talk of natural rights highlighted the paradox of slavery and stirred antislavery sentiments across the North. As a Rhode Island slave who escaped from his master later recalled: "[W]hen I saw liberty poles and people all engaged for the support of freedom, I could not but . . . be pleased." Abolition lay decades in the future, but the American Revolution laid the groundwork.

Creating a nation

Having proclaimed their independence, Americans confronted the challenge of self-government. In 1777, with the war still raging, Congress adopted the Articles of Confederation. Under this framework, Congress recorded some notable

achievements, including the Treaty of Paris, securing American independence, and the Northwest Ordinance (1787), providing for the surveying, settlement, and formation of states in the territory bounded by the Appalachians, the Great Lakes, and the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. One notable provision funded public education through land sales. The ordinance prohibited slavery in the region and pledged to honor Indian treaties—the latter provision soon violated.

Despite these achievements, the confederation proved weak. With no executive or judicial branches, it had only a unicameral Congress, elected annually, with one vote per state, whatever its population. Congress could issue currency, deliver mail, and negotiate treaties but could not impose taxes, regulate trade, or raise an army. With memories of parliamentary excesses still raw, the Articles of Confederation deliberately created a feeble central government, preserving full sovereignty to the states. A postwar depression highlighted these weaknesses. Social unrest and demands for debt relief, culminating in Shays's Rebellion, a 1786 uprising by Massachusetts farmers, alarmed conservatives and the wealthy, increasing pressures for a stronger central government.

In February 1787, Congress invited the states to send delegates to Philadelphia to revise the articles. All responded except Rhode Island, fearful of losing the power to impose import duties. Convening in May, the delegates abandoned the articles entirely and set about crafting a new Constitution. Through the hot summer they debated, defending their states' interests, trading political and social views, and drawing upon the colonies' long experience of self-government. They resolved differences between large and small states by creating a bicameral Congress: a Senate with two senators from each state, and a House of Representatives with each state's delegation determined by its population.

The debates, recorded by Virginia's James Madison, revealed the delegates' knowledge of political theory and of actual governments

from antiquity to the present. Many cited Lockean natural-rights theory (also identified with the Scottish philosopher David Hume), upholding popular consent as the source of governmental legitimacy. They also invoked republican theorists, including the statesman Niccolò Machiavelli of Renaissance Florence, who saw civic virtue and concern for the public good as anchors of stability. Influenced by Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651) and Calvinist theology, conservative delegates stressed the need for a strong government to prevent social chaos and civil war—what Hobbes called “the war of all against all.” *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) by the French theorist Baron de Montesquieu, arguing for the separation of powers as a safeguard against despotism, also proved influential.

The document that emerged reflected the delegates' fear of tyranny—the danger they had just fought a war to resist. Dividing power between the federal government and the states, it also carefully parceled out the federal government's own powers among three branches: the bicameral legislature; an executive branch headed by a president; and a judiciary with a Supreme Court chosen by presidential nomination with Senate approval. Counterbalancing restraints limited each branch's power. The president could veto a congressional bill, for example, but Congress could overturn a veto by a two-thirds vote. In an age of monarchies and hereditary aristocracies, the Constitution, beginning “We the people of the United States,” established a republic, answerable to the people through elections. But it also revealed the delegates' suspicions of “democracy”—a term generally associated with mob rule. Senators would be elected by state legislatures, not by popular vote. Citizens would not vote for presidents or vice presidents directly, but for “electors” who would make that decision. Only male property owners would vote in federal elections. (The Constitution granted federal voting rights to everyone qualified to vote for the lower house of their state legislature. At this time, every state imposed property requirements for voting.) At slaveholders' insistence, slavery was embedded into the nation's founding charter. (Embarrassed about

mentioning slavery in a document establishing a republic, the delegates referred euphemistically to “all other Persons” [Art. I, Sec. 2] and “Persons held to service or labor” [Art. IV, Sec. 2].) The Constitution required that slaves escaping from one state to another be returned to their masters; counted three-fifths of the slave population in apportioning representation in the House of Representatives; and even permitted the slave trade to continue for twenty years.

In September, when Congress submitted the Constitution to the state legislatures for ratification, suspicions ran high. Small farmers feared urban commercial and banking interests. Vocal opponents, including Virginia’s Patrick Henry, charged that the Constitution failed to safeguard individual or states’ rights, raising the specter of despotism. But the Constitution’s supporters, known as Federalists, included the most prominent Revolutionary leaders. Addressing the opponents’ fears, they pledged to support a Bill of Rights, which in fact was added to the Constitution in 1791 in the form of ten amendments, including one reserving to the states or to the people all powers not specifically granted to the federal government.

The most notable contribution to the ratification debate, and to the vast literature of political theory, was *The Federalist*—eighty-five essays published in New York City newspapers under the pseudonym “Publius” and written mostly by Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, with a few by John Jay. While Hamilton made the case for a strong federal government, Madison explained the Constitution’s checks and balances. Addressing fears that a republican government could not succeed in a large nation, Madison in “Federalist 10” argued just the reverse. America’s diverse economic, geographic, and other interests would counterbalance each other, he contended, assuring overall stability.

Opinion gradually turned favorable, and by summer 1788 the required nine states had ratified, including Massachusetts, Virginia, and even doubtful New York. In the first federal elections

that November, George Washington emerged as the unanimous choice for president. On April 30 in New York City, wearing a plain brown suit rather than his military uniform, Washington took the oath of office. Various honorific titles were proposed, but Washington made his preference clear: “Mr. President.”

In a remarkable thirteen years, thirteen British colonies had won independence and established a new nation. The 1787 Constitution, though a document of its time, and stained by references to slavery, stands as a remarkable achievement, creating the first modern republican government. In coming centuries it would prove adaptable to changed circumstances, yet faithful to the founders’ vision.

How would the United States fare as it addressed urgent domestic problems and made its debut on the world stage? That remained to be seen.