

# TAHPDX: Great Decisions in U.S. History

Teaching American History: A partnership between Portland State University and the Beaverton, Hillsboro and Forest Grove School Districts (funded by the U.S. Department of Education)

## HISTORICAL TOPIC: 1776: The Revolutionary War (Year of Decision)



***Attention:** This is one of twenty-four topic summaries included in the TAH program and is designed to orient readers to the breadth and depth of the subject. These summaries are by no means exhaustive. Each one is a brief overview of a complex historical topic. Because of the informal nature of a summary, they are not necessarily based on primary sources nor do they employ the full range of scholarly techniques, such as foot- or endnotes. This style of presentation is merely one of the varieties of historical writing that readers will encounter as they explore history.*

**Abstract:** Historians have long noted that the American Revolution was a process as much as an event, that its roots and causes were buried deep in the colonial past and that its political facets could not be separated from powerful social, religious, and intellectual developments. But those broad, long-standing developments seemed extraneous to the wide array of North Americans who confronted the fact of revolution in 1776. People from diverse ethnic backgrounds, classes, regions, and walks of life faced a choice that many of them did not wish to make: whether to remain loyal subjects of Great Britain or to cast their lot with the gathering momentum of a movement for independence from and war with the most powerful nation in the world at the time.

Innumerable considerations bore on this decision. Native Americans and southern African Americans tended to distrust the patriots, though many ended up fighting for independence. The established elite and the working class tended to be politically conservative and radical, respectively, but there were plenty of exceptions and colonists often chose sides based on long-standing regional or local loyalties, divisions and resentments. Ideology and temperament commonly played a major role in whether one became a patriot or a loyalist -- or simply tried to stay neutral for as long as possible. However, local political pressures or military developments sometimes prompted patriots and loyalists to change sides. The American Revolution seems inevitable and beneficent only in retrospect. At the time it constituted a radical act without precedent that seemed unlikely to succeed, an act that forced North America's diverse populace to make very difficult decisions.

**Support Material:** *The 1776: Revolutionary War topic contains the subtopics listed below. Each subtopic includes a narrative with highlighted text [resources] and notations indicating that additional support material is available for viewing and/or downloading including primary documents, maps, spreadsheet data, images and informative websites.*

*To access and download the material go to the TAHPDX: Great Decisions in U.S. History Website and use the links available on the HISTORY TOPICS [1776: Revolutionary War] page or the QUICK NAVIGATION [Alpha List] pages.*

URL: <http://www.upa.pdx.edu/IMS/currentprojects/TAHv3/Home.html> or search "TAHPDX" on the internet.

## **SUBTOPICS:**

1. Context
2. Revolutionaries
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  - Women
  - Sam Adams
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  - Abigail Adams
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3. Loyalists
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Curricula developed for this topic:

- Scheduled for completion in June 2010.

## 1. Context

The great majority of people in the thirteen colonies did not anticipate the American Revolution, a conflict that owed a great deal to both longstanding historical developments and a series of more recent political events. The roots of American independence ultimately resided in the independent and peculiar nature of the thirteen British colonies [**Thirteen Colonies (1775): map resource**]. Many early settlers had come in search of economic opportunity and religious freedom, and most of the colonies had become habituated to controlling their own affairs, affairs that Great Britain routinely neglected. The spread of religious revivals (which stressed conversion through a direct experience of God rather than through the mediation of educated clergy) and of Enlightenment ideas (which emphasized the use of individual reason rather than established authority) among more educated colonists undercut traditional patterns of deference in the eighteenth century. At the same time, northern colonies in particular developed economies that competed with rather than complemented England's. They built ships, harbored large numbers of merchants who often traded or smuggled goods outside of approved channels, and processed as well as produced wheat, timber, and iron. Southern colonies were more apt to export raw goods and import finished products, but they, too, had grown accustomed to running their own affairs. In sum, the colonies that would become the United States did not act as imperial colonies were expected to act.

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**Web Resource:** [Social Studies for Kids: The 13 American Colonies](#), provides a good narrative for younger students and includes information about the social life and economies of the 13 colonies prior to the American Revolution.

Great Britain's leaders at last turned their full attention to the thirteen colonies after the costly Seven Years' (French and Indian) War that lasted from 1754 to 1763 [[Seven Years' War: web resource contains links to articles, period music and videos](#)]. The war had brought a crippling level of debt, and the British believed that the colonies should begin to shoulder their share of the burdens of war and empire. In an unpopular move, Great Britain tried to curb westward expansion (and the often expensive Indian wars this expansion ignited) by issuing the *Proclamation of 1763* [**pdf resource**], that prohibited settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains. They also began trying to extract tax revenue from the colonies, lightly taxed up to this point. *The Stamp Act of 1765* [**pdf resource**] imposed a tax on all paper and documents used by colonists, from playing cards to newspapers to legal documents. The taxes, though slight, affected just about everyone and groups of patriots calling themselves the Sons of Liberty [[Sons of Liberty: Patriots or Terrorists?: web resource](#)] formed in at least fifteen places across the colonies and helped to organize mobs who made implementation and enforcement of the Stamp Act virtually impossible. Nine colonies contributed representatives to a Stamp Act Congress that accepted the right of Parliament to make laws for the colonies, but denied their right to tax them [**Resolutions of the Stamp Act Congress: pdf resource**]. The British backed down in this instance but continued to propose new taxes on the colonies. Conflict flared in Boston in 1770 when a group of British soldiers fired on a mob of patriots who had been harassing a sentry [**The Boston Massacre: see resources below**] and again in 1773 and 1774, when a large group of Bostonians expressed their resistance to the Tea Act by throwing East India Company tea into the harbor [**The Boston Tea Party: see resources below**]. This brazen destruction of property enraged even British leaders who had so far defended the colonies and prompted the [Intolerable](#)

[Acts](#) [web resource - images, essays, links to primary sources] which closed the port of Boston and deposed the colonial government of Massachusetts. Additional acts by the British that increased tension included the Quartering Act, which empowered British soldiers to use private homes as barracks, and the Administration of Justice Act, which asserted that British soldiers and officials who suppressed riots would not be subject to trial by jury [**Quartering Act & Administration of Justice Act: pdf resource**].

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**The Boston Massacre and Trial:**

Because the incident in Boston on March 5, 1770 has been exaggerated and propagandized over time, many today do not know accurate details of the event, that a British officer and eight soldiers were accused of murder and sent to trial and, most interestingly, that John Adams (who later became the 2nd president of the United States) defended the British military men -- the officer was found not guilty and 6 of the 8 soldiers were acquitted.

**Web Resources:**

[The Boston Massacre Historical Society](#). An excellent website on the Boston incident with pictures, narrative, first-hand accounts of the events and the trial.

The Boston Massacre Trial (from Famous Trials). Contains links to testimony, summations and excerpts from John Adams' diary.

**PDF Resource:** *An Account of the Boston Massacre*, Boston, March 12, 1770 (primary source from the Library of Congress: An American Time Capsule).

**Video Resource:** HBO Films "John Adams." A 7-part miniseries based on David McCullough's Pulitzer Prize winning biography of John Adams (available at Amazon.com). The first disk in this series depicts the events surrounding the Boston Massacre and the subsequent trial. There is a teacher and student guide helpful for using the video in your classroom (available as a pdf download from the HBO John Adams website).

**The Boston Tea Party:**

Contrary to many legends and iconic lithographs depicting the incident in a Boston harbor on December 16, 1773, most of the participants in the Boston Tea Party were not disguised as American Indians. Unfortunately, Griffin's Wharf, where the ships were said to be located, has since been filled in by the expanding Boston metropolis (estimated by the 1880s).

**Map Resource:** The Town of Boston and its Harbors (1775) from the Library of Congress (shows the layout of Boston at the time of the Boston Tea Party and the location of Griffin's Wharf).

**Web Resource:** [Boston Tea Party Historical Society](#). An excellent website that has links to essays, analysis, historical accounts, facts & figures, a timeline, images and video.

These imperial acts, in turn, outraged colonists inside and outside of Massachusetts and lent credence to the growing belief that the British were determined to crush American liberties. Committees of correspondence throughout the colonies kept patriots informed of events and communities sent relief shipments to the "poor of Boston." In September, 1774 the first Continental Congress met in Philadelphia and called upon the local committees of correspondence to oversee a boycott of British trade [**Declaration and Resolves of the First Continental Congress: pdf resource**]. The following spring, the British General Gage met resistance when he set out to seize arms cached at Concord -- the shooting war had begun.

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**Web Resource:** [Journals of the Continental Congress](#), from the Library of Congress Collection.

**Map Resource:** The Battles of Lexington and Concord (19 April 1775).

But were the colonies ready for independence? The Continental Congress hedged their bets by both authorizing the creation of an army [see **pdf resource**] and sending the king an *Olive Branch Petition* [**pdf resource**] that called for negotiation rather than war. But the King, who had been convinced that the colonies were in “an open and avowed rebellion,” turned the petition aside, an action that in turn hardened public opinion in the colonies, particularly once people learned that Hessian mercenaries and additional British troops were making their way to North America. The conflict seemed bound to escalate, and people from all walks of life were faced with the difficult task of making up their minds on how to respond to it.

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**PDF Resource:** George Washington's speech accepting the position of commander-in-chief of the Continental Army on June 15, 1775 (from the Library of Congress: A Century of Lawmaking).

**PDF Resource:** King George III's *Proclamation of Rebellion* (23 August 1775).

## 2. Revolutionaries

### *General*

Public sentiment for the war of course varied widely across and often within the thirteen colonies. In Concord, Massachusetts, on the doorstep of where the war's first shots had been fired, enthusiasm ran high. Concord absorbed Harvard College's students and faculty during 1775-1776 so that the campus in Cambridge could house American troops, and by July 4, 1776, Concord had contributed half of its adult male population to military service far from home. Many of the remainder helped to push the British "Redcoats" out of Boston that year. Pastor William Emerson (Ralph Waldo Emerson's grandfather) joined sixty of his townsmen in a journey to fight the British at Fort Ticonderoga and assured his wife, who had just given birth to their fifth child, that the “parting with my Family and Flock” was harder “than perhaps you are aware of.” He became ill during the party's treks through the rain and swamps and died on his way home.

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**Web Resource:** [First Shots of War, 1775](#) (The American Revolution, Library of Congress Learning Page). Contains links to transcripts of letters and other primary source documents.

**PDF Resource:** Broadside from New York, April 23, 1775 regarding the battle at Lexington and Concord. Represents an interesting account (and propagandizement) of this key battle (from the Library of Congress, American Time Capsule).

**Video/Audio Resource:** Longfellow's "Midnight Ride of Paul Revere" (YouTube audio).

**PDF Resource:** Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Paul Revere's Ride* (text).

**Web Resource:** [Emerson, the Bridge & the British](#) (an account of Pastor Emerson's involvement in the battle at the North Bridge).

In light of the growing revolutionary movement, Concord residents who opposed independence or who wished to remain neutral were either few in number or apt to keep their opinions to themselves. In fact, many people who initially pursued neutrality drifted into the patriot camp across the colonies. The local [committees of correspondence](#) [**web resource**] and [revolutionary militia](#) [**web resource**] played a crucial role in this transformation, as failure to support and serve in the militia invited censure or worse. The rebels had the great advantage of being an integral part of most communities. Their power of course receded when the British Army occupied a

given area, such as New Jersey in the closing months of 1776. But the British Army occupied only a small part of the colonies at any given time. Furthermore, the British and their Hessian troops often abused and alienated even those colonists who had wished to be their friends and Washington's daring and successful raid on Trenton late in the year [[Battle of Trenton: web resource](#)] proved that British hegemony was much more tenuous than it had seemed.

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**Graphic Resource:** Emanuel Luetz's (1851) depiction of Washington Crossing the Delaware, December 25, 1776.

**PDF Resources:**

*What's Wrong With This Painting?* An interesting look at Leutz's depiction of General Washington's crossing of the Delaware River from the Washington Crossing Historic Park.

*The Crossing: More Artistic Representations.* Examples of Peter Fiore's depiction of the Crossing and an image of replicas of the Durham boats used (unlike the ones depicted in the Luetz painting).

**Web Resources:**

[George Washington to the Continental Congress, Dec. 12, 1776](#) describing the plans to cross the Delaware River and attack British forces at Trenton (transcript from the Library of Congress, also includes a link to the source document).

[The First Broadside Printing of the News of Washington Crossing the Delaware, 1776](#) (transcript from the Library of Congress, also includes a link to the source document).

**Map Resource:** The Battle of Trenton (December 26, 1776). From Wikipedia Commons.

A substantial minority of the colonial population was eager to fight the British, particularly at the war's outset, when hope of a short, decisive conflict ran high. Indeed, the very independent spirit that motivated so many men to volunteer in the militias also undermined the early war effort. Outside of its officers, the Continental Army that would persevere and eventually triumph was largely made up of marginal men. The militias and the early continental army were notorious for their lack of order, neglect of cleanliness (which led to many deaths from disease), drunkenness and general revelry. General Washington, by way of contrast, found in 1776 that his troops were often both eager to fight and quick to flee, and that they lacked the drill and the discipline necessary to keep their heads and their formation when under fire. By the end of 1776 his army was down to 3,000 men. European armies fared little better for at the time they were largely composed of those who chose military service over prison or poverty, and officers often had to resort to the use of the fear of whippings or worse to keep them in line.

## **Women**

Women played a significant role in the political events and agitation leading up to the Revolution. The various non-importation movements that began in the 1760s deeply implicated women, as these movements entailed the boycotting of goods such as tea that women commonly purchased and the substitution of products such as homespun that women commonly produced [[Non-Importation Movement Lesson Plan: pdf resource](#)]. Fifty-one women organized the *Edenton ladies' Patriotic Guild* [[pdf resource](#)] organized in North Carolina late in 1774 and concluded that it was their "duty" to support their provincial congress and the "publick good."

Patriot women continued to serve their young nation during the war. They donated clothing, collected money and supplies for the soldiers by going door to door, nursed the wounded, and as camp followers cooked, laundered, sewed, and occasionally even spied and fought for the continental army. General Washington admitted that driving away the wives and mothers who

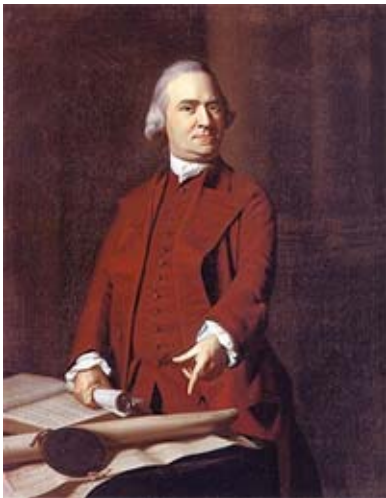
followed their husbands and sons would prompt the desertion of “some of the oldest and best soldiers in the Service” [[Female Camp Followers](#): **web resource**].

Many more patriot women stayed at home, where the war brought both independence and vulnerability. In men’s absence, women by necessity assumed more control over farms and other businesses. They also risked poverty and often worse, as Hessian and British troops and camp followers not infrequently looted the farms and homes and raped the women of areas they controlled.

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**PDF Resource:** *Betsy Ross and the Making of the First American Flag* (explores the life -- and myth -- surrounding the story of Betsy Ross and the creation of the first flag).

**Web Resource:** [Women of the American Revolution](#) (from americanrevolution.org a partner in the History Channel Network). Contains links to detailed narrative about 60 prominent women.

### *Samuel Adams*



Though highly educated and born into a prosperous family, Adams struggled in business and as a tax collector before becoming a leading Boston opponent to British taxation in the mid-1760s. He led attempts to boycott British goods and was an effective writer of newspaper articles who argued eloquently for the cause of freedom. He believed in the necessity of independence long before many others seriously considered it. Thomas Hutchinson, governor of Massachusetts, warned officials in London early in the 1770s that Adams doubtlessly “would push the colonies into a rebellion tomorrow, if it was in his power” (Wells, 1865, p. 438). Adams was a key player in initiating and maintaining the committees of correspondence, a network of patriot groups across the colonies who shared information about and encouraged the independence movement

[see resource below]. The committees were critical to creating a national consciousness where only regional sensibilities and identities had existed. Early in 1773 he became the first to call for a national congress, and he was instrumental in organizing the Boston Tea Party.

Adams was a great supporter of Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* [[pdf resource](#)], and in 1776 he worked hard in Congress to get the Declaration of Independence approved—though his reputation as a leading radical prompted him to keep a low profile in congressional debates. But by pressing for a vote on independence in early July, he again played a critical role in the nation’s independence, for if congress had waited just a few months, an early string of dispiriting military defeats might have caused them to set aside the bold declaration. Adams’s health and influence, however, declined during and after the Revolution, for he was more successful as an agitator than a consolidator.

Note: Although they are often referred to as the Adams Brothers, Samuel Adams and John Adams were actually cousins, not brothers.

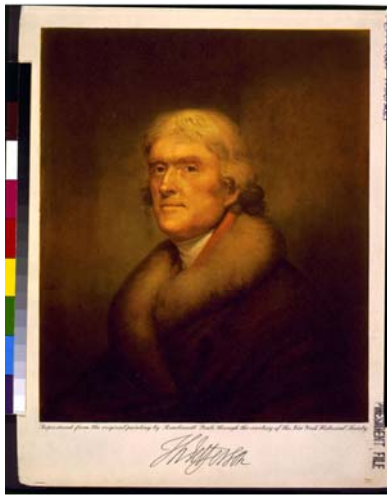
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**Image Citation:** Samuel Adams, oil painting by John Singleton Copley, 1772. Adams is pointing at the Massachusetts Charter which he viewed as a constitution that protected the people's rights (public domain).

**Book Resource:** Wells, William Vincent. *The Life and Public Services of Samuel Adams: being a narrative of his acts and opinions and of his agency in producing and forwarding the American Revolution with extracts from his correspondence, state papers and political essays, Volume 1* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1865, reprinted by HardPress, 2008).

**PDF Resource:** Adams, Samuel. The Rights of the Colonists (1772) and On American Independence (1776).

**Web Resource:** [The Writings of Samuel Adams](#) (downloadable ebooks from the Gutenberg Project).

## *Thomas Jefferson*



Citation: Th. Jefferson, photomechanical print, created/published [between 1840 and 1840?]. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Presidential File. Reproduction No. LC-USZC4-2474. This print is a reproduction of the 1805 Rembrandt Peale painting of Thomas Jefferson held by the New York Historical Society.

Descended from prominent planter families, Jefferson was one of the young nation's most accomplished and prominent statesman—in addition to being a leading naturalist and agriculturalist, a man who both relied for his living on the endeavors of his many slaves and tirelessly experimented with new seeds and crops.

Jefferson was an ardent supporter of independence by 1776. His wide readings in political theory had convinced him that the colonies had the right to political self-determination. In *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* [[pdf resource](#)], published as a pamphlet in 1774, he both charged Great Britain with a “systematical plan of reducing us to slavery” and claimed that Parliament “has no right to exercise authority over us.” The king, rather than appointed by divine providence, was merely “the chief officer of the people, appointed by the laws, and

circumscribed with definite powers, to assist in working the great machine of government erected for their use, and consequently subject to their superintendence.”

Jefferson's bold and clear prose made him the logical choice to draft the Declaration of Independence two years later. In it he laid out his twin case for independence: neglect and abuse by Great Britain on the one hand and the natural rights of the colonists to seek independence on the other. After the war Jefferson would play a key role in the growth of political parties (Federalists and Jeffersonian Republicans) and served as the third President of the United States.

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**Image Citation:** Thomas Jefferson (Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division).

**Web Resource:** [Thomas Jefferson's Rough Draft of the Declaration of Independence](#) (with transcription). This is the "Rough Draft" text of the Declaration as Jefferson probably presented it to Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, for correction, prior to committee.

**Web Resources for Thomas Jefferson:**

[Thomas Jefferson](#) (Library of Congress). This exhibition focuses on the extraordinary legacy of Thomas Jefferson—founding father, farmer, architect, inventor, slaveholder, book collector, scholar, diplomat, and the third president of the United States.

[Thomas Jefferson Digital Archive](#) (University of Virginia Electronic Library). Digital texts, scholarship, quotations, bibliographies. The University of Virginia's Miller Center for Public Affairs also has an online reference source on Thomas Jefferson with links to Jefferson's speeches, and other scholarship, essays and lectures.

[Thomas Jefferson](#) (a film by Ken Burns). From PBS, this site includes many classroom activities.

## *George Washington*



Though Washington was the young nation's "indispensable man" in war and peace, he was the least literary and philosophical of the founders. Washington grew up in a moderately prosperous home but rose due to family connections, marriage to a wealthy woman, and his considerable ambition and talent. He became active in the Virginia militia at an early age and campaigned in the backcountry before and during the French and Indian War, where he displayed great courage as well as questionable judgment in some of his military and economic endeavors.

Back at Mt. Vernon after the French and Indian War, Washington, like many Virginia planters, accrued heavy debts despite his extensive land holdings (he was a tireless speculator in western lands) and slaves. He also shared with other planters alarm over Britain's closing of the port of

Boston in 1774, which he found "repugnant to natural right" and "subversive of the law and constitution of Great Britain itself" [**Letter from Washington to Bryan Fairfax, 24 Aug. 1774: pdf resource**]. Washington served in the first Continental Congress and was much respected. A year later, when the Continental Congress chose him to head its army, he was humble, but prepared to lead [**Washington Accepts Command of the Continental Army: pdf resource**].

The year 1776 brought great defeats and victories to Washington and his fledgling army. They pushed the British out of Boston, but Washington's inexperienced army was roundly defeated in and around New York City and was lucky to escape annihilation. His daring attack across the Delaware River late in the year revived the army's spirits and the young nation's hopes, for it was an attack in horrible weather over treacherous ground that required both boldness and discipline to carry off. But many years of fighting lay ahead for General Washington and his plucky army [[The First Broadside Printing of the News of Washington Crossing the Delaware: web resource](#)].

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**Web Resource:** [George Washington: The Commander-in-Chief](#) (from USHistory.org). An excellent synopsis of the challenges Washington faced during his tenure as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army.

John Adams once remarked that Washington won so many posts simply because he was always "the tallest man in the room." Washington's 6'4" frame indeed had a regal bearing that inspired respect, but he also believed strongly in the nation's republican experiment. He laid down his sword after the Revolution rather than seizing power as was the case with many historical

military leaders [**Washington Resigns Commission: graphic resource**]. This unprecedented act prompted King George III to remark that he must be “the greatest man in the world.” [see **citation below**]. After a short stay at his estate at Mount Vernon, Washington was compelled to return to public service to preside over the Constitutional Convention of 1787 and was the logical choice for the nation’s first president. After two terms he again surrendered power, setting a political precedent among presidents broken only by Franklin D. Roosevelt's election to a third term in office (the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution in 1947 ultimately set term limits for the presidency at no more than 10 years).

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**Image Citation:** General George Washington (Independence National Historical Park Collection).  
**Book/Quote Citation:** Johnson, Paul (2005). *George Washington: The Founding Father*. HarperCollins. p. 78. "In London, George III questioned the American-born painter Benjamin West what Washington would do now he had won the war. 'Oh,' said West, 'they say he will return to his farm.' 'If he does that,' said the king, 'he will be the greatest man in the world.'"  
**Web Resources for George Washington:**  
[George Washington: A Resource Guide](#) (from the Library of Congress). Includes numerous links to key primary source documents from Washington's life.  
[George Washington Papers](#) (from the Library of Congress). An excellent timeline of Washington's Revolutionary War Campaigns with links to many primary source documents.  
[The George Washington Papers](#) (from the University of Virginia online resources).

### *Abigail Adams*



Married to John Adams, one of the leading founding fathers, Abigail Adams was a highly intelligent and independent person in her own right. Her willingness to run the family farm and business and to care for her children enabled John to serve in the Continental Congress at the war’s outset. Her famous letters to John made it clear that she had her own ideas about what that Congressional body and her husband should do. She praised *Common Sense* early in 1776 and wrote John of her hope that “it could gain credit enough in your assembly to be carried speedily into execution” [**Letter to John Adams, 21 Feb. 1776: pdf resource**]. Though she had grown up in a family that owned slaves, she opposed the institution by 1776, and she advised John to “remember the ladies” in their deliberations, for “all Men would be tyrants if they could” [**Letter to John Adams, 31 March 1776: pdf resource**]. John dismissed her concerns, but Abigail’s letters revealed her hopes that the Revolution would bring greater legal and educational rights for women. Abigail was not advocating for women’s full political equality. But her pessimistic view of human nature coupled with the movement toward independence prompted her to hope for laws that would limit husbands' dominance over their wives and enlarge women’s influence [see **web resource below for links to all of Abigail and John's letters**].

Running the family business and household brought both autonomy and stress to Abigail. She had the family inoculated for smallpox, a process that consumed two months and nearly killed

one of their children. She endured a difficult pregnancy and a stillbirth during John's absence and coped with regular food shortages. John returned home in 1776 but the state legislature again appointed him to Congress. Abigail "had it in my Heart to dissuade him from going and I know I could have prevailed, but our publick affairs at that time were so gloomy an aspect that I thought if ever his assistance was wanted, it must be at such a time. I therefore resigned myself to suffer much anxiety and many Melancholy hours for this year to come" [see citation below]. Abigail's descendants included a son who became the sixth president (John Quincy Adams) and some of the nation's leading intellectuals (Henry and Brooks Adams).

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**Quotation Citation:** Abigail Adams Letter to Mercy Otis Warren (1777). Typically, Abigail wrote to Mercy Otis Warren after John returned to Philadelphia in 1777, "I had it in my heart to dissuade him from going and I know I could have prevailed, but our publick affairs at that time were so gloomy an aspect that I thought if ever his assistance was wanted it must be at such a time. I therefore resigned myself to suffer much anxiety and many Melancholy hours for this year to come." She was at this time pregnant. Only much later, when John dalled in France in 1783, after the signing of the peace treaty, did she urge him to come home. When he did not, she joined him in Europe. See L. H. Butterfield et al., eds., *The Adams Family Correspondence*, 6 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962-), 1:150, January 1777.

**Image Citation:** Abigail Adams (1766). An oil painting by Benjamin Blythe showing Abigail during the years immediately preceding the American Revolution.

**Web Resource:** [The Adams Family Papers](#) (online access to numerous diaries, manuscripts and letters from the Massachusetts Historical Society). Includes papers from John Adams, John Quincy Adams and letters from Abigail Adams.

### *Thomas Paine*



Thomas Paine came to America at age thirty-nine, late in 1774, and seemed an unlikely candidate for influencing the course of the American Revolution. The son of a corset maker, he had failed at a variety of callings when he encountered and impressed Benjamin Franklin. Franklin, then serving as a diplomat in England, steered the gifted writer and political agitator to Philadelphia, where Paine was soon writing for the city's newspapers. Early in 1776 he published *Common Sense* [pdf resource], an extended essay in pamphlet form that spread across the colonies and played a crucial role in mobilizing support for independence.

Paine possessed two great strengths. He was an engaging and effective writer, and he understood the American Revolution not simply as a necessary and regrettable reaction to Great Britain's abuses. Rather, Paine heaped scorn upon the entire notion of divinely appointed kings and dusty constitutions. William the Conqueror, the hallowed founder of the cherished British monarchy, was nothing more than "a French Bastard landing with an armed Banditti and establishing himself king of England against the consent of the nation." Reverence for such tyrants simply served to obscure relations of power and self interest, and American rights and self interest were inherently at odds with the entire British system of governance. "England consults the good of this country, no farther than

it answers for her own purpose,” he asserted. The pursuit of independence was a matter of simple “common sense”—though an act that would “begin the world over again” by freeing humankind from the superstitions of the past to instead pursue the promotion of “the public good.” Paine’s bold statement of the case for political independence rallied thousands of Americans to the patriot cause.

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**Web Resource:** Thomas Paine's [Common Sense](#) (1776). Images of the original published pamphlets with transcription.

**Image Citation:** Thomas Paine. An oil painting by Auguste Millière (1880) modeled after a portrait by George Romney (1772).

**Web Resource:** [The Life of Thomas Paine](#) (from the Thomas Paine National Historical Association)

### 3. Loyalists

#### *General*

The Loyalist impulse was a complex one. For some, loyalty to Great Britain was a simple, reflexive choice. Royal officials and many recent immigrants were very loyal to Great Britain and suspicious of the rebels. Others simply had a conservative cast of mind and were appalled at the notion of colonies forming themselves into a nation simply because they objected to some aspects of royal rule. Human nature required and history and scripture revealed that human welfare demanded subordination to established authority. Others had strong economic or political interests that predisposed them to Loyalism. For example, tenant farmers in New York State tended to be Loyalists because their exploitive landlords were patriots.

Many Loyalists changed their minds in the course of the war. New Jersey offered Great Britain nearly 2,500 volunteers when the British occupied it in 1776. But many of these men put down their arms or became patriots when it quickly became clear that the British could hold only small portions of the countryside. Maintaining loyalty to Great Britain became, in general, more difficult as the war progressed and as patriots asserted themselves in areas not directly controlled by British armies.

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**PDF Resources:**

*Loyalists in the Thirteen Colonies* (includes a list of prominent loyalists).

*A Short History of the Loyalists* (from the Canadian perspective, where many loyalists ended up after the war).

*Denunciation and Pardon of the American Loyalists by the Continental Congress, 1778* from the Papers of the Continental Congress, Library of Congress (provides an interesting mix of denunciation of loyalist sentiment and a resolution for pardoning former loyalists).

#### *Women*

Tory women tended to have a lower profile than their patriot counterparts. After all, loyalty to Great Britain implied traditionalism, and women traditionally had little role in politics.

Loyalist women often experienced a great deal of stress during the Revolution. Pressure began mounting in 1775, when some 1,000 New England Loyalists fled to Canada. Most Loyalists fared relatively well during 1776, when the young United States made little headway outside of Boston. But Loyalist women would be increasingly vulnerable to losing their property and otherwise being harassed by local patriot organizations (such as the committees of safety) during the course of the Revolution.

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**Web Resource:** [Loyalist Women](#) (by the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada). A short narrative about the role of loyalist women in the revolutionary war (from the loyalist perspective).  
**PDF Resource:** *Legendary Loyalist Women*. Prepared by the North Carolina Museum of History, it contains a short synopsis of a few of the more famous loyalist women and their role in the Revolutionary War.

### *William Franklin*



Born in 1730 or 1731 as the illegitimate son of his famous father, Benjamin Franklin, William grew up in his father's household and at age thirty, with his influential father's support, became the governor of New Jersey. He was for several years an effective mediator between the colony and Great Britain, though by the early 1770s this had become more difficult due to the increasing tension.

As the patriots moved toward independence, William did not. The Provincial Congress of New Jersey, an entity that William refused to recognize, placed him under house arrest in late 1776, and shortly after Congress determined that William had been writing letters to England offering intelligence on the patriots and should therefore be imprisoned. William was freed in a prisoner exchange two years later and spent the remainder of the war in British-occupied New York City trying to organize guerilla resistance to the young nation. He left North America in 1782, eventually marrying and settling in England.

In a letter dated 16 August 1784, William tried to reconcile with his father: "I can with confidence appeal not only to you but to my God that I have uniformly acted from a strong sense of what I conceived my duty to my King and regard to my country required. If I have been mistaken I cannot help it." But there is no historical evidence to show that his celebrated father ever truly forgave or reconciled with him.

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**Image Citation:** William Franklin. Detail of 1790 portrait by Mather Brown (public domain).  
**PDF Resource:** George Germain's Letter to William Franklin Congratulating Him on His Release from Confinement, January 1779. Germain was the British Secretary of State during the American Revolution. The letter contains suggestive references to the alleged "information" that William was supplying to the British Government.  
**Quotation Citation:** Details of William Franklin's letter to his father, Benjamin, in an attempt to reconcile are found in Farquhar, Michael. *A Treasury of Great American Scandals: Tantalizing True Tales of Historic Misbehavior by the Founding Fathers and Others Who Let Freedom Swing* (Penguin Books, 2003). The passage reads as follows:

*Nine months after the Revolutionary War ended, and nearly a decade since they last had contact, William got word that his father, then in Paris, would be willing to receive a letter from him. On July 22, 1784, he wrote, "Dear and Honoured Father: Ever since the termination of the unhappy contest between Great Britain and America, I have been anxious to write to you and to endeavor to revive that affectionate intercourse and connection which, till commencement of the late troubles, had been the pride and happiness of my life." William wrote that he was not sure his father wanted to hear from him because of "the decided and active part I took in opposition to the measures you thought proper." But he was making no apologies, and in fact made reference to "the cruel sufferings, scandalous neglects, and ill treatment which we poor Loyalists have in general experienced" -- though he did not lay any blame for this on his dad. Regarding his activities during the war, William wrote "I can with confidence appeal not only to you but to my God that I have uniformly acted from a strong sense of what I conceived my duty to my king and regard to my country required. If I have been mistaken, I cannot help it. It is an error of judgment that the maturest reflection I am capable of cannot rectify, and I verily believe, were the same circumstances to occur again tomorrow, my conduct would be exactly similar to what it was."*

Three weeks later, William received a reply from his father. It wasn't exactly conciliatory. Benjamin wrote that he was "glad to find you desire to revive the affectionate intercourse that formerly existed between us. It would be very agreeable to me. Indeed, nothing has ever hurt me so much and affected me with such keen sensibilities as to find myself deserted in my old age by my only son; and not only deserted, but to find him taking up arms against me in a cause wherein my good fame, fortune and life were all at stake." As for William's principles, the father was unmoved. "You conceived, you say, that your duty to your King and your regard to your country required this. I ought not to blame you for differing in sentiments with me in public affairs. We are men, all subject to errors. Our opinions are not in our power. They are formed and governed much by circumstances that are often as inexplicable as they are irresistible. Your situation was such that few would have censured your remaining neuter, though there are natural duties which precede political ones, and cannot be extinguished by them. This is a disagreeable subject: I drop it." (pp. 5-6)

### ***William Smith, Jr.***



**William Smith, Jr.**

Smith was a well-educated and wealthy New York attorney when the American Revolution began. A political leader with strong ties to both the patriots and Great Britain, he had played a leading and mediating role in the Stamp Act Crisis of the 1760s by both halting the stamps' distribution and violent reaction to them. Smith criticized Great Britain for not granting more liberty to the colonies. Congress should show Britain "her folly in contending for what she does not really want and cannot execute," without seeking independence. A sort of American parliament could bring the colonies together and represent their interests to Great Britain—and offer an annual "gift" to the mother country that would at least defray the costs of administering and defending the colonies. But he found very little company on this middle ground. "The clouds grow very

dark,” he confided to his diary in June, 1776. “My hopes for conciliatory negotiation almost fail me” [see **book resource below**].

The patriots paroled Smith to a manor later that year, and until 1778 he continued to adopt a position of neutrality. He then traveled to New York City, where he advised the British on how to defeat the revolutionaries. He left for England at the war’s close before serving as the Chief Justice of Canada.

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**Web Resource:** [Gilbert Doré. \*Why the Loyalists Lost: Imperial Unity and Parliamentary Sovereignty\*](#) (the Loyalist Alternative to the American Revolution, the Political and Ideological Perceptions of William Smith, Jr., Joseph Galloway and Thomas Hutchinson). This article explores the ideology of prominent Loyalists such as William Smith, Jr. and how it shaped political discourse and tensions during the Revolutionary War period.

**Article Resource:** Calhoun, Robert M. 1965. "William Smith Jr.'s Alternative to the American Revolution." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 22(1): 105-118.

**Book Resource:** Jensen, Merrill. *The Founding of a Nation: A History of the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (Oxford University Press, 1968). Quotations from William Smith Jr.'s diary can be found on page 670.

### *Samuel Seabury*



Seabury followed his father into the Anglican ministry and in 1766 settled in the parish of Westchester, New York. A defender of religious orthodoxy, he was greatly alarmed by the appearance of the First Continental Congress and their attempts to halt imports from Great Britain. In *Letters of a Westchester Farmer* and other writings, Seabury charged Congress with producing “a venomous brood of scorpions to sting us to death.” Seabury had a religious explanation for the patriots’ rash words and actions: “Preposterous pride! It defeats the end it aims at” and cheated people from the capacity “to learn prudence from our own misconduct.” He attributed the urge for independence to emotionalism, a lack of reason: “The words independency and colony convey contradictory meanings.” Colonies, by definition, were dependent, not free.

Seabury was arrested late in 1775 and held prisoner in New Haven, Connecticut, for six weeks, refusing to admit authorship of his Loyalists tracts. He then returned to British-controlled New York City, where he remained during the war. Late in 1776 he recalled that he had responded to the “present unnatural rebellion” by endeavoring “to stem the torrent of popular clamor, to recall the people to the use of their reason, and to retain them in their loyalty and allegiance.” He remained in the United States after the war and eventually became a loyal citizen.

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**Image Citation:** Samuel Seabury (Project Canterbury).

**Web Resource:** [Letters of a Westchester Farmer \(1774-1775\)](#). A complete transcription of Seabury's tracts (referenced above) from Project Canterbury (an organization that archives out-of-print texts from the Anglican Church).

## 4. African Americans

### *Upper South*

Many white patriot leaders in Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware believed that slavery was an immoral institution, including more than a few planters who themselves held substantial numbers of slaves. Indeed, Virginia's state constitution of 1776 banned further slave importations in the hopes that this would lead to its eventual end. Revolutionary leaders such as Thomas Jefferson on the one hand did not believe in racial equality, and they hotly resented and resisted attempts by outsiders to end slavery. But, on the other hand, many of them joined Jefferson in ultimately asserting that slavery was at odds with the principals of the Revolution -- primarily that of throwing off the "shackles" of imperial dominance. The number of manumitted [formally freed] slaves in the Upper South swelled in the last decades of the eighteenth century.

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**Web Resource:** David Barton. [George Washington and Thomas Jefferson: Slavery in Virginia](#). An excellent and well-referenced article -- with numerous excerpts from primary sources -- discusses the moral and political debate in Virginia regarding slavery and its relationship to the goals of the Revolution.



But the great majority of slave owners did not free their slaves. Indeed, slaves were much more likely to be freed by joining the purported enemies of liberty, Great Britain. Virginia Governor Lord Dunmore in 1775, from the British warship he had fled to in Chesapeake Bay, offered freedom to slaves who would join him in fighting the rebels [**Dunmore Proclamation: pdf resource**]. Of the 800 or so who did, about 300 left with him a year later for England. Smallpox probably killed as many more. In the coming years, as the British war efforts shifted to the Lower South, thousands of slaves would join the British, seeking potential freedom in the alliance. Cornwallis's army had perhaps 5,000 escaped slaves by the time it reached Yorktown in 1781. Most of these former slaves had a difficult time. The men commonly worked as

laborers, under awful conditions, and some were re-enslaved to entice or reward white Loyalists. But, a substantial minority survived and many settled in Canada after the war.

### *Lower South*

Few patriot slave owners in the Carolinas or Georgia felt much guilt over owning slaves. This was partially a product of the different scale and nature of slavery in the Deep South such as in

South Carolina, where coastal plantations tended to be large and owners absent. Here, too, slavery seemed more profitable than, for example, in the Chesapeake.

The bulk of the British army moved into the Lower South later in the war, though Florida's royal governor had already commissioned four black militia companies by 1776. But slaves throughout the South had detected the change in the political climate much earlier. In 1766, when disagreement over the Stamp Act was raging, slaves shouted "Liberty" while parading through Charles Town, South Carolina, an act that greatly alarmed the city's white populace.<sup>[1]</sup> Late in 1774 or early in 1775, a black Methodist preacher named David Margate, trained in England, had to be spirited out of Charles Town to avoid a white lynch mob after preaching to slaves that "the Children of Israel were delivered out of the hands of Pharo and he and all his Host were drowned in the Red Sea and God will deliver his own People from Slavery."<sup>[2]</sup> The revolutionary theme of freedom from oppression resonated most strongly where oppression was most acute. A slave named Limus informed his master before fleeing him in 1775 that "he will be free, that he will serve no Man, and that he will be conquered or governed by no man."<sup>[3]</sup> Such actions prompted severe counter measures. During this period, slave owners stepped up their surveillance and punishment of slaves, including floggings and hangings.

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**Web Resource:** [Liberty to Slaves: The Black Response](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-revolution/1917) (http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-revolution/1917). A detailed account (with personal stories) of slave participation -- mostly on the loyalist side -- in the Revolutionary War campaigns in North Carolina.

**Citations:**

[1] Green, Jack P. and J.R. Pole (eds). *A Companion to the American Revolution* (Blackwell Publishers, 2000), Chapter 23: Social Protest and the Revolutionary Movement, 1765-76.

[2] Morgan, Philip D. *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 649-50.

[3] An ad in the *South Carolina Gazette* (November 7, 1775) which reads:

Absented himself from the subscriber, the 4th of this Instant, a NEGRO Man, named LIMUS; he is of yellow Complexion, and has the Ends of three of his Fingers cut off his left Hand; he is well known in Charles-Town from his saucy and impudent Tongue, of which I have had many Complaints; therefore, I hereby give free Liberty, and will be also much obliged to any Person to flog him (so as not to take his Life) in such Manner as they shall think proper, whenever he is found out of my Habitation without a Ticket; for though he is my Property, he has the audacity to tell me, he will be free, that he will serve no Man, and that he will be conquered or governed by no Man. I forwarn Masters of Vessels from carrying him off the Province, and all Persons from harbouring him in their Houses or Plantations.  
JOSHUA EDEN.

### *Northern Colonies*

Slavery existed throughout the northern colonies, though on a much smaller scale than in the South, and the proportion of blacks who were free was much higher in the North. Not a few northern whites expressed opposition to slavery before and during the Revolution. Reverend Samuel Hopkins of Rhode Island addressed a pamphlet in 1776 to the Continental Congress calling for the emancipation of slaves. Freedom "is of more worth to them than every thing else they can have in the world." [see citation below] How could Americans "complain so loudly of attempts to enslave them," wondered Thomas Paine, "while they hold so many hundreds of

thousands in slavery?" [[Paine's African Slavery in America: pdf resource](#)] Indeed, the Revolution set in motion the gradual abolition of slavery in the North, though it would take a half century to complete. Massachusetts began the process of emancipation during the Revolution. A 1783 judicial decision, interpreting the "equality" wording of the 1780 constitution, brought slavery to an end in the state [[Emancipation in Massachusetts: web resource](#)].

Many slaves did not wait. New York City had the largest concentration of slaves in the North, and British occupation of that city in 1776 offered many of them the opportunity to pursue liberty by deserting their masters. The slave population of Philadelphia fell by a quarter between 1775 and 1780, as many fled to the British or simply melted into the North's free population during the chaos of the war. Cuff Dix ran away from his Pennsylvania master in the summer of 1776, apparently to join Dunmore's "own black regiment," as his master believed that Dunmore was "contending for" the "liberty" of slaves [[Cuff Dix, "Ran Away" Notices: pdf resource](#)].



But free blacks also often backed the patriot call as well. [Crispus Attucks](#) [[web resource](#)] took a leadership role and died in the Boston Massacre of 1770. Boston's Phillis Wheatley [[see image](#)] became the first African American woman poet to be published. Partially emancipated in 1773, her poems and other writings concentrated mainly on moral and Christian themes. One in particular celebrated the Revolution -- titled "To His Excellency Benjamin Franklin" it was written in 1775. Washington invited Wheatley to his home as thanks for the poem and Thomas Jefferson republished the poem in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* as a result of Wheatley's audience with Washington [[see resources below](#)].

Boston's African-Americans several times petitioned for their freedom in the first half of the 1770s with varying levels of success [[see resource below](#)]. Slaves and free blacks alike entered the military, some with the promise of freedom. Many slave owners, despite their political leanings, opposed this practice (particularly in the South). Though the American Revolution presented slaves with unprecedented opportunities, even these opportunities were replete with challenges and dangers.

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**Citation for Reverend Samuel Hopkins:**

Hopkins, Reverend Samuel. *A Dialogue Concerning Slavery for the Africans*, shewing it to be the duty and interest of the American states to emancipate all their African slaves: With an addres to the owners of such slaves: Dedicated to the Honourable Continental Congress: To which is prefixed, the institution of the society, in New-York, for promoting the manumission of slaves, and protecting such of them as have been, or may be, liberated [four lines of scripture text]. Published in 1785, Norwich: Printd by Judah P. Spooner, 1776, New York. Reprinted in Nash, Gary B. *Race and Revolution* (Roman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001).

**Web Resources for Phillis Wheatley (from Documenting the South:**

Two books of Wheatley's writings were published posthumously: [The Memoirs and Poems of Phillis Wheatley](#) (Boston, 1834) and [The Letters of Phillis Wheatley](#) (1864). Electronic Edition.

**Web Resource:** PBS ["Africans in America": Felix's Petition](#) (1773). Describes the cases of enslaved blacks seeking freedom through the Massachusetts state courts including links to transcripts of the petitions.

**Image Citations:**

*Portrait of an unidentified Revolutionary War sailor.* Painted in oil by an unknown artist, circa 1780. Prior to the war, many blacks were already experienced seamen, having served in the British navy and in the colonies' state navies, as well as on merchant vessels in the North and the South. This sailor's dress uniform suggests that he served in the navy, rather than with a privateer. The Newport Historical Society. Phillis Wheatley. America's First Black Woman Poet. (Archiving Early America).

**General Web Resources for African Americans in the Revolutionary War:**

[Recruiting African Americans into the Continental Army](#) (Library of Congress: Revolutionary War, The Home Front). Contains transcription and links to original documents detailing various letters and notices about recruitment of free blacks and slaves into the Continental Army (<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/timeline/amrev/homefrnt/recruit.html>).

[African Americans in the Revolutionary Period](#) (National Park Service).

[Slavery and Liberty in the American Revolution: John Laurens' Black Regiment Proposal](#) (Archiving Early America).

[Africans in America: The Revolutionary War](#) (PBS Series). In particular, see the section on Colonel Tye -- one of the many enslaved Africans who escaped and fought for the British and the most feared and respected guerrilla commander of the Revolution.

[The Revolution's Black Soldiers](#) (Robert A. Selig, 1997).

[The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution.](#) An electronic edition of the classic 1855 history of Black Americans by William Cooper Nell.

## 5. Native Americans

### *Molly and Joseph Brant*

The Iroquois Confederacy (comprised of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora) had historically sought to balance European powers, to maintain an area of sovereignty between competing white governments. By the mid-eighteenth century this meant forming a ["Covenant Chain"](#) [web resource] with the British colonists of New York, with the king identified as the lead patron. But by the 1770s it was clear that the interests of the king and many of his white colonists in North America had diverged.



Members of the Mohawk tribe, Molly and Joseph Brant were all for backing the crown. Molly was the mistress of [Sir William Johnson](#) [web resource], an Irish immigrant who had settled near the Mohawk in the 1730s and cultivated close ties with both Mohawk chiefs and New York's governors. In 1756 Johnson became the king's superintendent of Indian affairs for the northern colonies. Molly and Johnson had their first child in 1759, and Johnson treated her as a wife through a common-law marriage. Johnson gained more than companionship and children from this liaison. A white colonist observed that Molly "is descended from and connected with the most noble families of the Indians, she was of great use to Sir William in his Treaties with those people."<sup>[1]</sup> Johnson

became an enthusiastic sponsor of Joseph; he sent Joseph to Eleazar Wheelock's Connecticut school for Indians in 1761. Joseph also fought with Johnson against the French in the French and Indian War. The Brants sought a synthesis between British and Indian cultures that would both enhance Mohawk wealth and maintain their autonomy.

The Brants believed that the Revolution offered the Mohawk an opportunity to expand their land and power. Early in 1776 Joseph told British officials in London that “it is very hard when we have let the King’s subjects have so much of our lands for so little value,” and he recalled that “our late, great friend Sir William Johnson” (who died in 1774) had “often assured” them “that the King and wise men here would do us justice.”<sup>[2]</sup> Brant landed in New York City in July where he helped General Howe drive the patriots out of the city before heading north, where he labored to convince others in the Iroquois Confederacy to join him in fighting for the British. The powerful western Iroquois viewed Joseph as an upstart who had perhaps become too white, and they preferred to bide their time rather than spill Iroquois blood.

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**PDF Resource:** Paxton, James. *The Myth of the Loyalist Iroquois: Joseph Brant and the Invention of a Canadian Tradition*. An excellent and well-referenced article describing the complexities of the Iroquois Confederacy's motivations for supporting (or not supporting) the British war effort. Includes an in-depth discussion of Joseph Brant's involvement.



Brant reacted by forming “Brant’s Volunteers,” initially composed of a force of 100 men comprised of about twenty Mohawks and eighty white settlers who dressed as Indian warriors and raided patriot settlements. Despite his bloody reputation among patriots, Brant won acclaim among the British for his restraint and effectiveness in battle. Molly, meanwhile, used her status as a prominent Mohawk woman to influence Iroquois diplomacy. One British officer judged her influence “far superior to that of all their Chiefs put together.”<sup>[3]</sup> The British showed their gratitude by constructing mansions for her and her family and awarding her an annual pension of 100 pounds.

But the war brought division and defeat to the Iroquois. Some, particularly the Oneida and the Tuscarora, sided with the patriots, with the Oneida raiding the homes of Molly and Joseph Brant. In 1779 a Patriot army unleashed a series of crippling attacks on the Mohawk and their allies. One general claimed to have destroyed 40 villages. By the war’s end, the population of the Iroquois had fallen from 9,000 to 6,000, and land-hungry Americans who viewed them as defeated enemies of the United States were poised to settle on their lands. Brant was enraged by news of the British surrender, but found it difficult to continue his raids without British support. The British offered him and Molly sanctuary in Canada, where they continued to be influential leaders [[Iroquois Tribal History: web resource](#)].

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**Narrative Citations:**

[1] Memoir of Lieut. Col. Tench Tilghman, revolutionary war letters and journals hitherto unpublished (Boston, 1876), pp. 83.

[2] Letter from Joseph Brant to Lord George Germaine, British Secretary of State (1776).

[3] Wilson, Ian. 1976. "Molly Brant: A Tribute." Historic Kingston. Vol. 2, p. 56.

**Image Citations:**

[Molly Brant](#) "Tekonwatoni"(from ThousandIslandsLife.com). Shows an artist's rendition of Molly Brant (no portraits or photographs are known to exist) on the commemorative Canadian stamp issued in 1985.

[Joseph Brant](#) "Thayendanega" (from ThousandIslandsLife.com). Portrait by Gilbert Stewart, 1786.

**Web Resources:**

[Who Was Molly Brant?](#) An excellent biography of Molly Brant from the Cataraqui Archeological Research Foundation.

[Molly and Joseph Brant](#) (a short biography from Thousand Islands -- a historical preservation society).

### *Stockbridge*

The Indian community of Stockbridge, in western Massachusetts, consisted of fragments of Indian nations from that region and the Hudson Valley. The village had been laid out in 1736 as an Indian mission, the last "praying town" of the colony. Ninety Indians lived there at the town's founding, where missionaries taught English and Christianity. Stockbridge Indians served in the French and Indian and Pontiac's War. Yet by 1773 the town's Indians had lost all of their common land and complained to the General Court of Massachusetts that they were in "the Utmost Difficulty & Distress by Reason of the Traders who have settled Among & Near us as well as other Designing People who aim at Getting Away All that The Indians are possessed of."<sup>[1]</sup> In 1776 they asked for two years of relief from being sued for debt "and that Tavern-Keepers may be restrained from selling them spirituous Liquors."<sup>[2]</sup> By this point the Indian population of Stockbridge was about 300, far less than the nearly 1,000 non-Indians who lived there.

The Stockbridge Indians eagerly volunteered for the patriot cause. In May, a resident of Stockbridge proclaimed that they would "be of great Service should the King's Troops march out of Boston."<sup>[3]</sup> One leader expressed the hope that "if we are victorious we hope you help us to recover our just Rights."<sup>[4]</sup> The Stockbridge Indians hoped to be rewarded with land for their loyalty to the patriot cause.

In the summer of 1776, Congress authorized General Washington to use the Stockbridge Indians as he wished. Later that year two Stockbridge Mahicans traveled to a treaty council of the Delaware and Shawnee at Fort Pitt to invite those nations to join the United States. Stockbridge Indians began fighting for the young nation in 1776 and suffered very large losses in a 1778 ambush on the outskirts of New York City, at Kingsbridge [[Death in the Bronx, The Stockbridge Indian Massacre, August 1778](#) (a rediscovery of the lost battlefield and burial place of the Stockbridge Indians): **web resource**].

The Stockbridge Indians continued to suffer from poverty and to lose land during the Revolution, and many who survived joined the Oneida in New York soon after the war ended. Washington declared that the Indians had "remained firmly attached to us and have fought and bled by our

side; That we consider them as friends and Brothers.”<sup>[5]</sup> But soon after the war the Stockbridge Indian community had essentially ceased to exist.

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**Web Resource:** [Mahican History](#). A comprehensive compilation of information about the Mahicans (a.k.a. Mohicans) with an extensive section on their history).

**Narrative Citations:**

[1] Massachusetts Archives, Vol. 33: 574, 591-2; Miles "Indian Landownership."

[2] Petition of the Indian Inhabitants of the Town of Stockbridge, praying they may not be sued for debts for two years, and that Tavernkeepers may restrained from selling them Spirituous Liquors. [1776-01-29] Massachusetts, House of Representatives. [S4-V4-p1424]

[3] Thomas Allen to Gen. Seth Pomeroy, May 9, 1775. Boston Public Library, Ms. Ch. E. 7.32. Remembrancer, 1775: 66.

[4] Deloria, Vine and Raymond J. DeMallie (eds). *Documents of American Indian Diplomacy: Treaties, Agreements and Conventions, 1775-1979, Vol. 2* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), pg. 43. The text reads as follows:

*Albany, Friday, September 1, 1775:*

*Captain Solomon, the Chief of the Stockbridge Indians, then addressed the Commissioners as follows:*

*"Brothers, appointed by the Twelve United Colonies: We thank you for taking care of us and supplying us with provisions since we have been at Albany. Depend upon it, we are true to you, and mean to join you. Wherever you go, we will be by your sides. Our bones shall lie with yours. We are determined never to be at peace with the red coats, while they are at variance with you. We have one favour to beg. We should be glad if you would help us to establish a Minister among us, that when our men are gone to war, our women and children may have the advantage of being instructed by him. If we are conquered, our lands go with yours, but if we are victorious, we hope you will help us to recover our just rights." -- (a bell)*

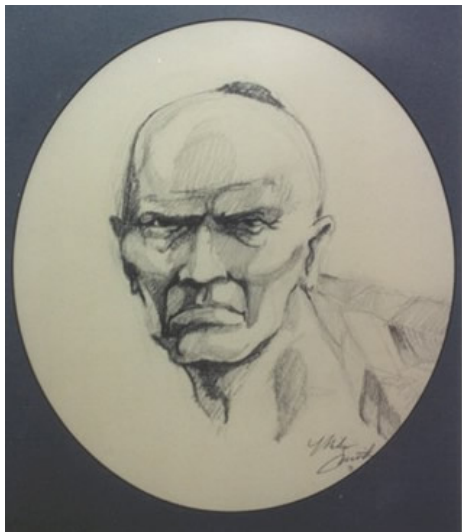
*To which the Commissioners replied:*

*"Brothers of Stockbridge: We have heard what you have said, and thank you. It is not in our power to answer the two questions you have put to us -- the first respecting a Minister, the second concerning your lands. We say it is not in our power to give you an answer just now, but we will represent your case to the Continental Congress, and we dare say they will re-establish you in all your just rights."*

[5] "Proclamation by George Washington, July 1783," Connecticut Historical Society (Hartford, CT). In Galloway, Colin C. *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), pg. 102.

### ***Dragging Canoe***

Long a powerful Indian nation in the Southeast, the Cherokee had lost much of their power by 1776, as disease and involvement in European wars and trade—including the slave trade that supplied Indians to colonists—had reduced them to around 12,000 people. The Cherokee also suffered from colonial traders who used debt as leverage to seize land. The Sycamore Shoals Treaty of 1776 (also known as the Transylvania Purchase) exchanged a cabin full of trade goods valued at around 10,000 British Pounds for 27,000 square miles of land (encompassing a large percentage of what is now the state of Kentucky) [**The Transylvania Purchase/Sycamore Shoals Treaty: map resource**], a deal that violated British law forbidding the sale of Indian land east of the Appalachians and angered many Cherokee. Tsi'yugunsi'ny, also known as Dragging Canoe, a Cherokee chief, reportedly pledged to render the land "dark and bloody."<sup>[1]</sup>



The Revolution seemed like an ideal opportunity for Dragging Canoe and his young followers to make good their recent losses. In 1776, Dragging Canoe told a British envoy that “he had a great many young fellows that would support him and that were determined to have their Land,”<sup>[2]</sup> and he blamed the recent land cession on old men who were too old to hunt, and therefore desperate for money. The arrival at Chota, a key Cherokee town, of delegates from the Mohawks and several other northern Indian nations urging war emboldened Dragging Canoe’s young warriors, even as the British and many Cherokee women and older men urged patience.

After some initial success, the Cherokee raiders were repulsed by opposing forces and then punished. Many colonists welcomed the Cherokee attacks as justification for seizing even more of their land. Jefferson hoped that “the Cherokees will now be driven beyond the Mississippi.”<sup>[3]</sup> That would not happen until the 1830s, but the Cherokee lost a great deal in the Revolution. Big Island Town, which Dragging Canoe had been the leader of, was one of many villages destroyed by the patriots, and the Cherokee were soon compelled to surrender an additional five million acres. Dragging Canoe and his followers fled to the South, where they continued to fight against the United States throughout the Revolutionary War and beyond. Divisions within the Cherokee grew, yet Dragging Canoe referred to his followers as “the Real people.” He died in 1792.

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#### Resources for Dragging Canoe:

**Web Resource:** Smith, D. Ray. [Dragging Canoe: Cherokee Warrior](#). An excellent website from Discover Kingsport that provides much detail about the Cherokees during the Revolutionary War (with transcripts of Dragging Canoe's statements).

**Book Resource:** Alderman, Pat. *Dragging Canoe: Cherokee-Chickamauga War Chief*. (Johnson City: Overmountain Press, 1978)

**Article Resource:** Evans, E. Raymond. "Notable Persons in Cherokee History: Dragging Canoe". *Journal of Cherokee Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 176–189.

**Image Citation:** [Dragging Canoe](#). A pencil drawing by Mike Smith. This is a very popular image of Dragging Canoe, clips of which are used by many public and private websites on Cherokee history, which reflects the fierce reputation of this Cherokee warrior.

#### Narrative Citations:

[1] D. Ray Smith. Dragging Canoe: Cherokee Warriar (full text available at the Discover Kingsport website).

[2] W.L. Saunders, ed, Colonial Records of North Carolina, 10 vols. (Raleigh: State Printers, 1886-1890), Vol. X, 763-70 (full text may be retrieved at <http://appalachiansummit.tripod.com/chapt15.htm>).

[3] James H. O'Donnell III. Southern Indians in the American Revolution (Knoxville, 1973), quoted in Preface, ix.

#### Cherokee history during the Revolutionary War:

[Appalachian Summit: A Documentary History](#) (an excellent synopsis of the historical figures and events in the Appalachian Region, which encompassed Cherokee lands, during the Revolutionary War).

## General Resources on Native Americans during the Revolutionary War:

**PDF Resource:** Washburn, Wilcomb E. *Indians and the American Revolution*. The text of a presentation made in Riverside, CA during his time as Director of American Studies at the Smithsonian (1975).

**Book Resource:** Galloway, Colin C. *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (Cambridge University Press, 1995)

## 6. City and Countryside

### *New York City*

War came to New York City in the summer of 1775, after a British warship shelled the city when some patriots removed British cannons from a fortification. Some residents responded with anger and committed themselves to independence. Others fled, including William Tryon, the Royal Governor, who sought shelter with a British warship. Later in 1775 Congress advised local committees of safety to arrest people “whose going at large may . . . endanger the safety of the colony, or the liberties of America.”<sup>[1]</sup> But many patriots fled New York City when the British left Boston, as New York City seemed to be their likely destination. “We are in daily expectation of having our city knocked down and burned by the Men of Warr,”<sup>[2]</sup> wrote a resident in February 1776.

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**PDF Resource:** Letter from Robt. Ray (1775) in Bonney, Catharina V.R. *Legacy of Historical Gleanings* (e-book from Google Books). Full text of the letter referenced above (from e-books at Google Books).

Patriot soldiers moved into the homes that had been deserted. They built breastworks and batteries, and Congress ordered all the city’s men to assist in this work. Tories (Loyalists) who lingered in the city faced mob violence orchestrated by the patriot committees, such as being tarred and feathered or ridden on rails through the streets. But the shoe was soon on the other foot, as the British easily swept away Washington’s army and patriot militias. By mid-September, 1776, the British had begun their seven-year occupation of New York City.

Tory refugees from areas controlled by the Patriots flooded into the city. But, like their patriot and neutral counterparts, they were often frustrated by life there. British and Hessian soldiers often seized what they wanted from the city’s residents. The British expressed little interest in enforcing the Prohibitory Act of late 1775 that suspended trade between the colonies and other parts of the empire, even for Loyalist merchants. Enterprising merchants living outside the city—usually in areas controlled by Patriots—often came to trade with the British, as this illegal trade offered high profits that General Washington denounced as an “extravagant passion for gain.”<sup>[3]</sup> In sum, the travails and opportunities of war often blurred the line between Patriot and Loyalist in and around New York City during the war.

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**Narrative Citations:**

[1] Report of Committee of both Houses on the Resolve of Congress relative to Persons whose going at large may endanger the safety of the Colony, or the liberties of America, considered and recommitted. [1776-01-27] Massachusetts, House of Representatives. [S4-V4-p1423]

[2] Bonney, Catharina V.R. *A Legacy of Historical Gleanings* (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1875), pg. 51. Available as an e-book download from Google Books.

[3] Van Buskirk, Judith L. *Generous Enemies: Patriots and Loyalists in Revolutionary New York* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), pp. 119.

**Graphic Resource:** British Fleet in the Battle of Long Island (Harper's Weekly, 1876).

**Map Resource:** City of New York (Manhattan Island), 1775.

**PDF Resource:** The Occupation of New York City by the British (1776), Excerpts from the Diary of the Moravian Congregation. *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1877), pp. 250-262. Published by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

## *Philadelphia*

Large numbers of pacifist Quakers complicated the response to the American Revolution in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania more generally. Quakers were perfectionists who believed that humans—and human institutions—could live as Jesus had lived. Many of them were also prosperous merchants with a reflexive fear of political radicalism. By the end of 1775 the Quaker church had disowned sixty-five members for engaging in political and military activity. Many young Quakers, especially, responded by leaving the church. Many Quakers were passive loyalists who supported, but who would not fight, for British rule. Well-to-do Philadelphians who were not pacifists worried that the Revolution would bring social and political upheaval. Many of them eventually chose independence without having actively pushed for it.

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**Web Resource:** Wetherill, Charles. [History of The Religious Society of Friends Called by Some The Free Quakers, in the City of Philadelphia](#) (Philadelphia: Printed for the Society, 1894). An excellent synopsis of the reaction of Quakers to the impending war with Great Britain and an affirmation of their pacifist leanings (available at <http://www.qhpress.org/quakerpages/qwhp/freequakers02.htm>).

After the Intolerable Acts, Philadelphia's leaders decided on a boycott of imports to express their solidarity with Boston. Meanwhile, ordinary Philadelphians who had lacked much of a political voice—such as laborers and craftsmen and Scotch-Irish and Germans immigrants—were both embracing the Revolution and flexing their political muscle. For these men, independence meant both freedom from Great Britain and the local elite. By June, 1776 Philadelphia and Pennsylvania were arguably the most radical city and colony, respectively, in North America. Their [1776 Constitution](#) [**web resource**] strove to keep the legislature tied closely to the electorate's wishes by making that body very large and instituting annual elections. Proposed legislation had to be "printed for the consideration of the people" before they could be debated or voted on. No other state constitution would be as democratic.

## *Virginia*

Virginia's white population was one of the most unified of the colonies, for both the majority of its great planters and its ordinary citizens embraced independence. Of course the elite gathered the most acclaim, particularly George Washington, who became the nation's military leader in 1775, and Thomas Jefferson, who penned the Declaration of Independence a year later.

The hierarchy and deference that had governed relations between white Virginians became less extreme during the war. Backwoods' hunting shirts rather than plantation finery became the emblems of independence, a trend that the Revolution's emphasis on homespun virtue underscored. But less lofty ideals also nudged white Virginians toward patriotism. British

Governor Dunmore's threat to free loyalist slaves and his proclamation that did so in April and November, respectively, of 1775 [**pdf resource: Dunmore's Proclamation**] enraged and alarmed poorer and slaveholding whites alike. A patriot observed that the proclamation "has had a most extensive good consequence" for "Men of all ranks resent the pointing of a dagger to their Throats, through the hands of their slaves."<sup>[1]</sup>

As elsewhere, many well-to-do Virginians chose revolution in part to put themselves at the head of a movement that might otherwise become radical and inimical to their interests. Poorer patriots resented unequal access to scarce commodities, such as salt, and the fact that military service fell more heavily on themselves than on wealthy planters. For many, the surest route to easing social resentments and forestalling radical acts was to secure independence as soon as possible.

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**Narrative Citations:**

[1] Archibald Cary to R.H. Lee, Williamsburg, 24th Dec. 1775. Southern Literary Messenger, Vol. 6, pp. 186 (Selections and Excerpts from the Lee Papers).

**Web Resource:** [Virginia Declaration of Rights, June 12, 1776](#). Compare the language in this document with the more well-known Declaration of Independence.

**Map Resource:** *Map of the Plan of Investment and Attack of York in Virginia* (Oct. 1781). This historic map shows the positions of the American and French battlements in their siege of the British forces at Yorktown (from Archiving Early America). See notes below:

The successful outcome of the Yorktown campaign, led by Gen. Washington and French Gen. Rochambeau, marked the end of the Revolutionary War, thus winning independence for the 13 colonies. It also established Yorktown's place in history as the site of Gen. Cornwallis' surrender of his troops to the Patriot forces. It shows the field where the British laid down their arms. To the north on the York River you see the town of York and the British fortifications. Across the Bay lies Gloucester, also occupied by the British. Notice the Allied forces deployed in a semi-circle about 6 miles long and the encampments of Gen. Washington, Gen. Knox, Baron Stuben, Count Rochambeau and Gen. LaFayette. The map also shows various forces from Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania and New York. Also indicated are French and American artillery positions. In August of 1781 Cornwallis occupied York and Gloucester, on the opposite shore (shown on the map), with 7500 troops and several hundred Loyalists. Not until the first week of September was it clear to the British Commander that Washington and Rochambeau were marching toward York to attack his position. The Allied forces numbered 5700 Continentals, 3100 militia and 7000 French troops. It is clear that without the support of the French land and sea forces the victory at Yorktown would not have been possible. Unbeknownst to the British commander, French Admiral Count de Grasse was sailing in force from Haiti with a powerful fleet of 28 heavy warships. When de Grasse arrived he imposed a blockade on Chesapeake Bay and the mouths of the James and York Rivers. The action prevented the British land forces from escaping and regrouping. The conflict was the last major battle of the war.

### ***South Carolina Backcountry***

South Carolina was strongly divided before the Revolution, and those divisions very much shaped how its white residents, especially, reacted to the Revolution. The backcountry, despite having roughly three quarters of the colony's white population, had just three seats in its colonial assembly. The more respectable elements of the backcountry also resented the coastal elites' lack of concern over law and order, a problem that had prompted "Regulators" to form their own, extra-legal means of punishing rowdies who stole from and otherwise harassed them and

sheltered their runaway slaves. The Regulators dispersed at the end of the 1760s, but these tensions (both within the backcountry and between the backcountry and eastern part of the colony) remained.

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**Map Resource:** South Carolina Geographic Regions during the Revolutionary War. Shows the backcountry, coastal region and Cherokee territory.

Local concerns tended to trump national or international ones early in the Revolution. Coastal patriots gained the allegiance of former Regulators not so much through ideology as by offering them political and military posts. In 1776 the state constitution set aside 76 assembly seats for them. Backcountry loyalists countered such measures by attempting to, in the words of one patriot, “blind the people and fill them with bitterness against the gentlemen [the coastal patriots] as they are called.”<sup>[1]</sup> The fact that some of the most vocal backcountry loyalists were themselves wealthy complicated this attempt.

The Cherokee unwittingly tipped the balance in the South Carolina backcountry by attacking in the spring of 1776. The patriots quickly raised 1,000 militiamen and countered, one of their leaders urging the force to “cut up every Indian corn-field and burn every Indian town.”<sup>[2]</sup> Defeat of the Cherokee promised both to secure the safety of western settlers and to make available to them fertile Cherokee lands. Backcountry bandits whom the Regulators had organized against before the war often joined the loyalists and sometimes these “white Indians,” as their enemies termed them, joined forces with the Cherokee. Well before British armies marched into the South, then, the Revolution had fueled renewed clashes in South Carolina’s backcountry.

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**Narrative Citations:**

[1] Rev. William Tennant letter to Council of Safety (Aug. 20, 1775). Landrum, John Belton O’Neill. Colonial and Revolutionary History of Upper South Carolina (Greenville, SC: Shannon & Co., 1897), pg. 49.

[2] William Drayton letter to Francis Salvador (July 24, 1776). Documentary History of the American Revolution Consisting of Letters and Papers Relating to the Contest for Liberty, Chiefly in South Carolina, from Originals in the Possession of the Editor, and Other Sources, 1776 (<http://www.familytales.org/>).

**Map Resource:** The Battle of Charleston (1780). See notes below:

In 1778, the British Commander-in-Chief in America Lt. General Henry Clinton turned his attention to the South, where partisan fighting between Patriot militia and Tories had been heavy. General Clinton believed that if the British controlled the South, Tories would flock to support the British and Clinton would be able to overwhelm Washington in Virginia. During the winter of 1778-1779, the British took control of Georgia including the cities of Savannah and Augusta. They soon began planning the capture of the important port city of Charleston, South Carolina. In December 1779, General Clinton sailed south bound for Charleston from New York City. The British fleet included ninety troopships and fourteen warships with more than 8,500 soldiers and 5,000 sailors. By April 1st, 1780, the British had moved down into position to begin their siege works. At three o’clock in the morning on April 14th, the British reached the American post, catching them completely by surprise and quickly routing them. Following the skirmish, the British fanned out across the countryside and effectively cut off Charleston from outside support. On May 12th, Charleston surrendered. Some senior officers were exchanged for British officers in American hands. For all others in the Continental army, a long stay on prison boats in Charleston Harbor was the result, where sickness and disease would ravage them. The defeat left no Continental

Army in the South and the country wide open for British taking. This was a severe blow to the colonies. It was the greatest loss of manpower and equipment of the war for the Americans and gave the British nearly complete control of the Southern colonies.

**Recommended readings:** Bristow, Gwen. *Celia Garth: A Story of Charleston in the Revolution* (Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1959, reprinted 2000). This is a fictionalized account about the American Revolution in the South from a woman's perspective. It provides historic insight and emphasizes the role this woman, and many like her, played in the war. Many rate this one of the best all time fictional books regarding the period.

## 7. Conclusion

The American Revolution was a tidy war only in retrospect. The fighting lasted for seven long years and brought a great deal of death, destruction and strife to the young nation. The protracted conflict forced most inhabitants to choose sides, but the side one chose owed at least as much to local pressures and perceived self interest as to ideology. Ethnic and economic divisions drove many people's decisions, as did simple expediency and calculations of self-interest that shifted as local and national conditions fluctuated.

The year 1776 did mark a radical departure in the history of the world, and radicals well into the twentieth century would identify with and cite the stirring words of the Declaration of Independence that all men were "created equal and endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights." But the short and long term implications of those words and of the young nation were far from settled at that date, as the colonies' diverse peoples struggled with much more immediate concerns.

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### General Web Resources for 1776: Revolutionary War (Year of Decision)

[Yankee Doodle](#) (a short history of the song with tune and lyrics). This site also contains links to many other historical songs.

[The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, Revolutionary War Module](#). Excellent website with an overview, links to primary source documents and learning tools.

[Liberty! The American Revolution](#) (PBS). The companion website to the video production with excellent narrative, numerous links to interesting source documents and a teacher's guide.

[Have Fun with History](#). Contains links to numerous video files for various American Revolution subjects from various perspectives (done by amateurs).

[Spy Letters of the American Revolution](#) (from the Collections of the University of Michigan Clements Library). A fascinating website that offers a set of primary source letters written by spies on both sides of the conflict, plus the stories surrounding them.

[The American Revolution and the New Nation, 1763-1815](#) (from the Library of Congress: Primary Documents in American History). Many links to the key documents from this period.

### General Map and GIS Project Resources:

Map of the Major Campaigns of the Revolutionary War (from footnotes.com).

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