Master of Liberal Studies Research Papers   Graduate School

2007

The Problems and Major Consequences of the Revolutionary War

Aaron Hinton
Fort Hays State University

The Problems and Major Consequences of the Revolutionary War

Aaron Hinton

History 874

Dr. Raymond Wilson

Fall 2007

Throughout the tumultuous time period leading up to the Revolutionary War, an element of normalcy was clearly lacking in the American colonies. This lack of normalcy would eventually play a persuasive role in the development of individuals whose status in colonial America may have otherwise been less than extraordinary. Instead, these particular individuals as well as the events that each would help transpire, would become part of a miraculous feat that would not only change America, but would change the entire world, a world dominated by the tradition and influence of the British crown.

Previously unknown individuals such as Thomas Paine, a drifter by most known accounts, would lead the colonists towards revolution not by the musket, but by the pen. Paine, who authored the inspiring account entitled *Common Sense*, had a knack for timing, as well as the written word. Paine was far from an ordinary writer; instead of settling for the mundane, Paine wrote with a passion and fervor which continually renewed the hopes of the men, women, and children of the American colonies whose aspiration to gain independence from the British seemed to diminish with each passing month beginning in 1776. Paine's written words were both inspiring, as well as enabling to those colonists who read them, leading those colonists who lacked hope, to truly believe that the fate of America would rest upon a collective colonial determination to defeat the British.[1]

Paine's words would eventually inspire soldiers and politicians alike to believe that the colonists could overcome a foe who for too long had seemed far too formidable. Thomas Paine, along with other powerful colonial figures such as George Washington, whose torn and weary, yet seasoned and determined soldiers at Valley

Forge, would turn the tide of the Revolutionary War only through Washington's superb leadership skills, to Samuel Adams, who possessed a commitment to see American independence with such fervor and emotion that his political characteristics and practices were often confused with the attributes of an accomplished actor. Other prominent and influential individuals of the American Revolution included, but were clearly not limited to Thomas Jefferson, who brought a controlled, conservative approach to the Revolution, balancing the mostly radical ambitions of many colonial politicians, to James Madison, who would take the end result of the Revolution, and meticulously frame an order to the rights, duties, and responsibilities of American citizens, envied by the rest of the world for centuries to come. Each of these individuals would contribute their own vision of a newly independent America. This process would be arduous and far from normal but would entail events containing many problems, difficulties, and consequences beginning with the Seven Years War.[2]

The Seven Years War, which lasted from 1756-1763, was the first global war that the world had ever witnessed. This bloody and drawn out conflict involved several European countries fighting for rights and territories in the eastern portion of the North American continent. Along with the two super-powers of the world (Great Britain and France), the other countries involved in the fighting included Prussia, Austria, Sweden, Spain, and Russia. Among each nation's military goals and objectives, Great Britain's primary objective was to destroy the French navy and eliminate the possibility of France controlling any of the territories in the American colonies and north into the maritime islands in northeastern Canada. In the actual Treaty of Paris, ratified on February 10, 1763, the specific glories of membership in the British Empire are clearly outlined:

In order to re-establish peace on solid and durable foundations, and to remove forever all subject of dispute with regard to the limits of the British and French territories on the continent of America; it is agreed, that, for the future, the confines between the dominions of his Britannic Majesty and those of his Most Christian Majesty, in that part of the world, shall be fixed irrevocably by a line drawn along the middle of the River Mississippi, from its source to the river Iberville, and from thence, by a line drawn along the middle of this river...Everything which he possesses, or out to possess, on the left side of the river Mississippi, except the town of New Orleans and the island in which it is situated, which shall remain to France.[3]

France continued to have navigation rights to the Mississippi River, as well as the luxury of not having any of their own vessels "stopped, visited, or subjected to the payment of any duty whatsoever."[4] This was a critical stipulation given to the country of France, as the Mississippi River had long been an extremely important source of commerce for both the British and the French. The fact that the British had allowed the French access to the Mississippi River following the Treaty of Paris left a minute, yet meaningful window of opportunity open for the French to continue to control vital trade routes and contacts, especially with the Native Americans.

For seven years, the British and her colonists had fought side by side against the French. As the Seven Years War continued with increased British success, cost quickly became a topic of conversation and concern among American colonists. Eventually, many colonists were left feeling far more responsible for financing the war than the mother country of Great Britain. Following the Seven Years War, and just prior to initiating the original draft of the Treaty of Paris, British authorities in the

colonies were instructed not to initiate any further conflict with any Native American tribes, due to the fact that the British monarchy was nearly bankrupt; therefore, further conflict between the British colonies and the Native American tribes inhabiting the eastern colonies, most notably those Native American tribes who had been forced further west during the Seven Years War, was strongly discouraged, and in fact was against British law, as the potential financial expense of further Native American conflict would send Great Britain deeper into debt, a debt which quickly became almost insurmountable.

By signing the Treaty of Paris following Great Britain's victory over the French, the British monarchy seized a great deal of North American territory from the French, thus solidifying the British monarchy as the world's most dominant empire. The Treaty of Paris, as signed in 1763, began a landmark expansion of territory by the British, an inflation of territory and power that was never anticipated by even the most optimistic British aristocrat. Never before in the history of the North American continent had a European nation gained control of such an extensive stretch of land. This territory included most of present-day Canada, as well as most of the territory east of the Mississippi River. However, this newly acquired territory did little to ease boiling tensions between the British and the Native Americans, as the eastern tribes were methodically forced further west by the British following the colonization of the eastern portion of North America.[5]

As one of many consequences the Treaty of Paris would generate, Colonial America was beginning to thrive at a feverish pace. The prospect of broadening America into the unsettled lands west of the Mississippi, as well as a lingering sense of relief from fighting against the French, could not have been more evident following

the conclusion of the Seven Years War and the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763.

It could be argued that the aftermath of the Treaty of Paris had created a false sense of optimism and security in Great Britain, which, ideally, should have been felt by the colonists as well. Great Britain, and specifically, King George III, with the ever-present support of Parliament, had orchestrated a military presence and dominance in North America which should have solidified the British Empire as one of the most dominant in the history of the Western world and specifically as North America's foundation. The newly formed American colonies should have been dominated by the British Crown without any possibility of French influence; however, this sense of power and euphoria felt by the British after the defeat of the French would not last as long as it should have. In his documentary history of colonial America, Jack Greene argues,

> Never had British nationalism been at a higher pitch in the colonies. Largely unaware that there was strong sentiment among imperial authorities to tighten up the administration of the colonies in ways that could only arouse serious protests in the colonies, colonial Americans looked forward to a bright new era of peace, prosperity, and expansion.[6]

The monumental victory of the Seven Years War by the British, which allowed the British to govern and maintain such a vast amount of territory in North America, would slowly begin to erode the British Crown's ability to maintain control of its colonies, and more importantly, the citizens who inhabited these colonies. Word slowly spread among the colonists that harsh, and many would deem "unfair" levies and taxes, would be imposed upon the colonists in order to assist Great Britain's recovery from the massive debt it had incurred during the Seven Years

War.[7] In this instance, individual colonists such as Samuel Adams, Benjamin

Franklin, Paul Revere, and John Hancock would begin to emerge as those who would

no longer sit idly and watch the British hierarchy intimidate the colonies from across

the Atlantic. Conversely, King George III would counter this colonial "chatter" in

several ways. Immediately following the defeat of the French and the forcing of the

Native Americans further west, the Treaty of Paris should have created a deeper sense

of colonial loyalty to the British crown.   Instead, the sense of unity which should

have originated between the American colonists and the British Crown following the

Seven Years War would become permanently impaired by means of a series of taxes

and acts "fairly" levied upon the colonists by Parliament. The term "fairly" is used in

this context, as both King George III and Parliament felt the colonists owed the entire

nation of Great Britain a debt of gratitude for the expansion of North America and for

future protection from both the French and the Native Americans.

Ideally, these taxes and acts levied on the colonists by the British Crown

would have served a twofold purpose: First, had the colonists accepted the provisions

without protest, it would have shown a deep sense of appreciation for King George III

and Parliament for British efforts in the protection and expansion of the colonies with

the defeat of the French and the ratification of the Treaty of Paris. Secondly, the taxes

collected from the colonists would have enabled the British Crown to rid themselves

of the massive debt it had incurred during the Seven Years War by allowing a

stronger military presence in the colonies to provide protection from the French, as

well as the Native Americans, while allowing the colonists the opportunity for

increased economic success directly within the colonies. Consequently, the potential

prosperity of this twofold purpose would never come to pass, as the vocal and ever-

increasing demand for colonial representation in Parliament would serve as the sole reasoning for peacefully accepting even the slightest taxation placed upon the colonies by the British Throne.

By the beginning of 1763 and within the span of thirteen short years, the Treaty of Paris brought many favorable characteristics to the nation of Great Britain, most notably the potential for economic success within the colonies. It would seem as though Great Britain had finally solidified their dominance over their prolonged antagonist France, with the takeover of such an expansive area of North American land; however, Great Britain's arrogance, as well as its insistence on overseeing each and every aspect of colonial life (including the political, economic, and social features), would eventually lead to a series of significant problems with the colonists. These critical problems in turn, would continue to steer the colonists and their mother nation, Great Britain, towards a major conflict.

King George III, with the consent of Parliament, would begin to permanently sever the ties with the colonists by levying of a series of taxes and acts upon the colonists. To the colonists, these taxes were deemed unfair and oppressive to say the least, but to the British Crown, the taxes and acts were essential. In economic terms and from a British perspective, the taxes and acts imposed upon the colonists by Parliament were far from unfair; in fact, the taxes and acts, specifically the Sugar Act of 1764 and the Stamp Act of 1765, were placed upon the colonists in order to alleviate the enormous debt incurred during the Seven Years War. The British were among the highest taxed citizens in the world, and very few British citizens felt any sympathy for the colonists who were paying these required taxes.

The Sugar Act, which candidly acknowledged in its preamble that its

intent was to raise revenue, reduced duties on heavily consumed

products imported from the foreign islands in the Caribbean . . . Hoping

to eliminate the smuggling of French and Spanish sugar, parliament

envisioned a plentiful trade and bountiful financial returns.[8]

From a colonial perspective, these taxes were met with harsh criticism and

eventually a complete boycott of all British goods. Economically speaking, it seemed

unfair for Parliament to expect that the colonists should be responsible for relieving

any British debt (whether the debt itself was incurred during war or not) without

colonial representation in Parliament. The British had long been required to pay some

of the steepest taxes in the world, and Parliament felt that as British citizens, colonists

should be subject to the same taxes as those who resided across the Atlantic. T.H.

Breen, in his essay entitled *Boycotts Made the Revolution Radical* argues,

On the eve of independence, . . . Parliament aggressively asserted its

sovereignty by taxing the colonists at about the same time that a flood

of British manufactured items transformed the American

marketplace . . . How a boycott movement organized to counter British

policy allowed scattered colonists to reach out to each other and to

reimagine themselves within an independent commercial empire.[9]

The economic impact of both the taxation, as well as the boycotts that

followed, would thrust many colonial individuals into an unexpected role of

greatness. Those who organized and participated in these boycotts (most of which

were centered in and around the city of Boston, Massachusetts) would later become

known as some of the first "revolutionaries" to directly challenge the British. In

normal times and under different circumstances leading up to the American

Revolution, these particular individuals still would have had a significant impact on

those ordinary colonists around them who would seek leadership during such

tumultuous times. No one, most notably those living in colonial America at the time,

as well as the hierarchy of Great Britain, could ever imagine the impact that a select

group of colonial individuals would have upon the history of the American colonies,

as well as the entire world itself. Not even the most renowned pessimist within the

hierarchy of the British throne could ever imagine that the decision to tax the colonists

without colonial representation would nullify each and every portentous phase

brought forth for Great Britain by the Treaty of Paris.

Politically, the absence of colonial representation in Parliament appeared to be

reason enough for the colonists to demand change in the years leading up to the first

skirmishes in Massachusetts. Coincidentally, the economics of taxation were directly

intertwined with the vast political problems born in the colonies after taxation, due in

large part to the taxation ordered upon the colonists by Parliament. For example, the

Stamp Act of 1765 directly taxed colonists who used items of daily necessity,

including dice, cards, pamphlets, newspapers, advertisements, almanacs, legal and

commercial papers, liquor licenses and land instruments.[10] In Colonial times, it

would have been impossible for each individual or family not to have a need for the

items that Parliament taxed via the Stamp Act. It was no accident that Parliament and

King George III collectively and specifically targeted each and every item of daily use

in the colonies in an attempt to maximize the funds "sacrificed" by the colonists in

order to rid Great Britain of its massive debt.[11] One of the colonists' most critical

objections to taxation was not necessarily the lack of representation in Parliament.

Most colonists in positions of local leadership fully understood that colonial

representation in Parliament was not practical, nor was it expected. Instead, the

majority of colonists felt that the more they were taxed, the less the citizens of Great

Britain would be taxed, with representation being nothing more than a spoken catalyst

for protests and boycotts.

Socially, many colonists felt a deep sense of loyalty to Great Britain, and

refused to participate in any type of protest or boycott of British goods and policies.

Following the Sugar, Stamp, and Quartering Acts, many colonists were slowly

beginning to understand that although technically they were British citizens, socially

they were becoming Americans by the mere notion of protest.

One of the many arguments the colonists made against the British was the fact

that the colonists wished to expand further west, a wish that Great Britain fervently

denied to the colonists at the end of the Seven Years War. Many colonists who had

sacrificed family, time, and health fighting against the French and the Native

Americans during the Seven Years War, felt moving further west would allow the

colonists to move upward socially, abandoning the stagnant "coastal" way of life

known throughout the colonies. However, the Proclamation of 1763, made official by

King George III on October 7, 1763, stated that no colonist could legally settle west

of the Appalachian Mountains.[12] The objective of the Proclamation of 1763 was to

keep the British, French, and Native Americans apart, in effect, preventing any

conflicts between the three groups which Great Britain would have been forced to

finance. This decree handed down to the colonists by the British further outraged the

colonists, as many colonists had already been living west of the Appalachian

Mountains. These colonists had taken a liking to a different way of life, a way of life

free from any British interference and meddling. The colonists who had relocated west were doing quite fine making a living for themselves via inexpensive land, agriculture, and the utilization of slave labor. Colonists who had illegally settled west of the Appalachians did not have to pay indentured servants to work the land, and although slavery had not yet become as prevalent as it would some fifty years later, colonial Americans were beginning to utilize African slaves. Consequently, a simple proclamation given by the British monarchy thousands of miles across the Atlantic Ocean was not about to alter the social changes that had already come about as one of the many consequences of the Seven Years War.

The social changes taking place in the colonies by 1766 were inevitable, as protest and a colonial hatred towards the British was beginning to emerge in the colonies. Although each individual colony was different in its approach, the sentiment was consistent: It was time for colonial America to separate themselves from Great Britain, and there would surely be critical consequences for the colonists who would rebel against the British Monarchy.[13] The most dominant kingdom in the history of the modern age by the 18th century, a kingdom who had recently taken over nearly the entire North American continent, was now faced with the colossal challenge of fighting its own colonists to quell the quest for an independence that Great Britain had previously fought so hard against the French and the Native Americans to achieve.

A deep sense of friction quickly eroded the relationship between the colonists and Great Britain, as individuals such as Benjamin Franklin, James Otis, and Samuel Adams perpetuated the feeling that it was finally time for the American colonies to become independent of Great Britain, as well as protesting the unfair taxes and acts

imposed on the colonists. Tax collectors became public enemies to the colonists, and although these tax collectors were merely doing their duty for the Crown, many fell victim to acts of violence. Metaphorically, tax collectors were perceived by the colonists as nothing more than the British Crown's "flexing its ability to tax" within the colonies.

The "Sons of Liberty" was the term used to describe the colonists by more than one member of Parliament, as protest became more prevalent among the colonies by 1766. Pamphlets, posters, speeches, boycotts, and patriotic singing combined with mob action were the primary methods of protest leading up to the American Revolution. British authorities scrambled in vain to fight these methods of colonial protest numerically by increasing the number of British troops within the colonies.[14] Initially, King George III and Parliament were reluctant to victimize the colonists, as those colonists who were killed while protesting only furthered the cause via martyrdom. Great Britain had put themselves into a quagmire by taxing the colonists without the option for Parliamentary representation; therefore, when protests became boisterous, and many times violent, the British Crown could only wait for the inevitable incident that would propel the colonists against them in war.

British soldiers sent to the colonies, most notably the city of Boston, Massachusetts, were not paid well by the British Crown. The deep financial burden the British had imposed upon themselves during the Seven Years War did not allow for British soldiers in the colonies to earn any significant income. Therefore, it was not uncommon for British soldiers to compete with the colonists for work, a custom that was not acceptable to the colonists. Bostonians had established themselves as a hard-working, insolent group of colonists who were not easily intimidated by British

troops. "Fistfights between British soldiers and locals were not uncommon, and neither were instances of British soldiers being mugged while straying into the wrong neighborhood."[15] The men of Boston orchestrated many protests against the British, as they feared no repercussions from the British Crown. On March 5, 1770, a mob of Bostonians, many of whom were rumored to be drinking, or drunk, began to insult and throw rocks and snowballs towards a small British sentry near the customs house. An alarm sounded, and a group of approximately twenty British soldiers and one hundred colonial men came face-to-face, with the British soldiers tense, nervous, and ready for combat. A shot was fired, and minutes later, eleven Bostonians were dead or wounded, with the first colonial casualty being one Crispus Attucks, an escaped slave.[16]

The fact that Attucks was an escaped slave emboldened not only white colonists but also African-Americans to continue to rebel against the British. African-Americans would later memorialize this particular individual, Attucks, as a pioneer for freedom, as well as identifying Attucks as a true patriot who abandoned his own life as a freeman to further the colonial cause of independence. Radicals and propagandists alike took this incident, which days later would become known as the "Boston Massacre," and publicly revered the dead, furthering the colonial quest for independence from the oppressive British Crown. The Boston Massacre would substantiate further colonial protest, while positioning the colonists to be models for international sympathy due to the fact that the victims of this particular tragedy had served a higher purpose dead than they had alive.

Yet another prime example of colonial protest happened to take place in the city of Boston, Massachusetts. Although not nearly as violent, and with no colonial

casualties for the colonists to view as martyrs, the Boston Tea Party served as a critical economic protest to Great Britain's excessive economic sanctions levied upon the colonists. In 1773, Parliament had chosen the East India Company as the only company legally authorized to sell tea in the colonies. This was considered a legal monopoly instituted by Parliament in order to further weaken colonial merchants who also sold tea. To make matters worse, the East India Company funneled the majority of their tea through loyalist merchants, an act that further enraged the colonists. Richard Brown states,

> When Parliament passed the Tea Act on May 10, 1773, it unwittingly supplied the catalyst that would revive united colonial resistance to British rule . . . By giving the East India Company a monopoly on the importation of tea into the colonies, Parliament was pushing out untaxed tea from Dutch sources that enterprising colonists previously had smuggled in.[17]

Colonists knew all too well that tea would only be the beginning of the monopolies that Parliament would impose upon the colonists in the near future. Tea itself was not the source of the problem, as tea was a staple in the colonies; instead, it was the method by which Parliament undercut colonial merchants by channeling tea into the colonies with a company chosen solely and exclusively by Parliament. On December 16, 1773, a month after three British cargo ships full of tea from the East India Company had reached the harbor in Boston, several individual colonists decided to take matters into their own hands. Samuel Adams, one of the most outspoken critics of British authority and policies, along with John Hancock, one of the wealthiest individuals in the American colonies, led a group of colonists who had spent a long night at a local pub, to the harbor where the ships were located. Dressed

in poor disguises as Mohawk Indians, Adams and Hancock led 150 men onto the

ships and for three hours axed open hundreds of cases of tea, then dumping it into the

harbor. This incident would soon become known as the Boston Tea Party, and

although the monetary loss of tea by the East India Company was not as severe as the

act itself, the Boston Tea Party set a precedent for more bold and daring methods of

revolt. Consequently, colonial loyalists became even more loyal, and Parliament

solidified its own resistance towards the colonists. John Adams, in his personal

reflection of the Boston Tea Party stated:

> Last night 3 cargoes of Bohea Tea were emptied into the Sea. This Morning a
>
> Man of War Sails . . . This is the most magnificent Movement of all. There is
>
> a Dignity, a Majesty, a Sublimity, in this last Effort of the Patriots, that I
>
> greatly admire . . . This Destruction of the Tea is so bold, so daring, so firm,
>
> intrepid and inflexible, and it must have so important Consequences, and so
>
> lasting, that I cant but consider it as an Epocha in History.[18]

As Adams so valiantly stated, the Boston Tea Party was the culmination of

years of colonial frustration, resulting in one of the most daring acts of hatred and

spite ever directed towards Great Britain in the brief history of colonial America.

Both Samuel Adams and John Hancock, under normal circumstances and in normal

times, would have possessed extraordinary leadership skills invaluable for the

stability of the colonies; however, the heroic act known as the Boston Tea Party

would elevate both Adams and Hancock into permanent notoriety.

By the time Samuel Adams and John Hancock had orchestrated and carried

out the Boston Tea Party, daily life was getting increasingly difficult for the colonists.

Instead of having to choose between the simple staples of everyday living, the

colonists were forced to decide whether or not to bear loyalty to King George III and

Parliament, or the increasingly imminent revolution that was about to take place due

to the fallout from the Boston Tea Party. From September 5, until October 26, 1774,

leaders from each of the colonies, with the exception of Georgia, formed the First

Continental Congress. The participating politicians gathered in Philadelphia,

Pennsylvania, to devise a collective plan of attack against Great Britain, which had

imposed yet another sequence of harsh economic sanctions upon the colonists. The

"Intolerable Acts" had been imposed upon the colonies by Great Britain immediately

following the Boston Tea Party, and, as a result, the British cut off Boston Harbor

from any further imports.[19] These imports included food and medical supplies that

were critical for continued existence in the colonies, as the acts were to continue until

the damage the colonists had wrought was paid back in full. By the end of 1774, the

colonies were growing increasingly close in their collective struggle against the

British despite any previous dissimilarity between the colonies.

The First Continental Congress resolved that if one colony was attacked by

Great Britain, other colonies would defend each other. Similarly, colonists no longer

considered themselves citizens of each state, but instead were unified against Great

Britain as Americans. There was no middle ground in this conflict, as the allegiance

of many colonists was called into question by loyalists, as well as those who favored

the call for independence. Though they proceeded with extreme caution, the First

Continental Congress had taken the first step in solidifying the colonial quest towards

independence from Great Britain by officially repealing any and all acts and measures

levied upon the colonists by King George III and Parliament, particularly the

Intolerable or Coercive Acts, as known by the colonists. The First Continental

Congress had also determined that a boycott of all British goods would solidify their significance, as well as unifying the colonies against any future oppressive measures the British might take to punish the colonists.

One of the most critical results of the First Continental Congress was the impending necessity by the British to suppress the colonial rebellion prior to it essentially taking place. Consequently, the arrogance and overconfidence of the British hierarchy would ultimately prove to be its downfall. Led by Thomas Gage, who had been appointed Governor of Massachusetts, the British would attempt to arrest traitors and intimidate the colonists of Massachusetts, therefore preventing any organized colonial rebellion before it ever came to pass. The city of Boston had become an increasingly treacherous place for British regulars; therefore, Boston and its surrounding countryside became the primary target for a British attack. Suspecting that the predictable British regulars would attempt to invade the shores of Massachusetts before the Sons of Liberty could organize an army, Samuel Adams, John Hancock, and Paul Revere, the ringleaders of the Boston Tea Party, had already taken matters into their own hands. Providing townspeople with access to hidden muskets and powder, the Sons of Liberty had already begun to prepare for a British invasion by organizing seemingly ordinary citizens into efficient units of militia who would affectionately become known as "Minutemen." These "Minutemen" would become some of the most critical assets to the rebellion, as they were prepared and responsible for tracking British movements and strategy.[20]

On the fateful night of April 18, 1775, Paul Revere, who had painstakingly taken all conceivable measures to counter a British invasion by means of an organized system of signals, lit two lanterns. These two lanterns indicated that British troops

had begun a land invasion near Boston. Revere and two other riders left Boston to alert the Minutemen in Lexington and warn the people of the forthcoming danger; ironically, Revere found both John Hancock and Samuel Adams in Lexington and he urged them both to leave before they were captured by British troops. After Revere and the other riders had reached the township of Lexington, warning the people and the Minutemen of the British advance (an advance that Revere felt was moving faster than it actually was), the militia quickly prepared to protect their township. Following the warning of Lexington, and as he was riding towards Concord, Revere was arrested and briefly jailed by a British patrol. Nevertheless, word reached Concord of an impending British advance. The next morning in Lexington, a group of tired and frightened Minutemen were confronted by an advancing group of British regulars led by Captain John Parker, a veteran with combat experience during the Seven Years War. Similar to the events leading up to the Boston Massacre, a random shot was fired, and forty seconds later, eight colonists were dead, with nine wounded.[21] Continuing on to Concord, the weary British regulars began to destroy everything that stood in their way, including food, supplies, and ammunition. Soon, hundreds of the Concord militia gathered to defend their livelihood from any further British aggression. Once again, a random shot rang out, and a battle between British regulars and the inexperienced militia of Concord ensued, the dead from both sides numbering fifty for the colonists and sixty-five for the British, with hundreds more on both sides wounded. The relationship between Great Britain and her colonies would never be the same, as blood had officially been shed on both sides. The events taking place at Lexington and Concord were of such a colossal magnitude that the world would be permanently changed. Reconciliation was out of the question, as America and its

mother country, Great Britain, were officially at war.

As the fighting continued between Great Britain and the colonists, even more substantial events took place in America. Early on, colonial victories at Lexington and Concord, along with an easy victory at Fort Ticonderoga, coupled with massive British casualties at Breed's Hill, led colonists to believe that their efforts were momentous. However, even after the fighting had begun, Congress had not yet declared independence from Great Britain. Colonial morale slowly decreased, and public sentiment led most to believe that it would only be a matter of time before the British would gain total control over the colonies. While significant events and battles of the Revolutionary War continued to materialize, several significant individuals fighting for the colonial cause would rapidly emerge as the fight against the British proceeded with an evident sense of cynicism.

Among the many individuals who played a critical role in the fight against Great Britain, few were more important than Thomas Paine, who in January 1776 authored the infamous pamphlet entitled *Common Sense*. *Common Sense* was a plea for the colonies and individuals alike, to authoritatively and permanently sever all political and economic ties with Great Britain. In his pamphlet, Paine pleaded with the colonists not to submit to British intimidation, and that Great Britain's dominance was nothing more than perception. In his heartfelt appeal for continued colonial perseverance, Paine argued:

> Britain is the parent country, say some. Then the more shame upon her conduct. Even brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families . . . Every thing that is right or natural pleads for separation. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries, 'TIS TIME TO PART.[22]

Many would argue that the year 1776 was the most critical year of the rebellion as many critical events took place that would determine the fate of the American colonies. Following the distribution of Paine's *Common Sense*, British troops evacuated the city of Boston on June 7, 1776. After weeks of congressional debate, Richard Henry Lee, a member of Virginia's most renowned family, as well as one of the most trusted and authoritative voices in the House of Burgesses, introduced a resolution requesting a formal vote on the issue of independence:

> Resolved, That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.[23]

And finally, America was now officially her own. On July 2, 1776, the colonists officially ended their rocky relationship with Great Britain after Thomas Jefferson had so valiantly drafted the initial version of the Declaration of Independence. The colonists desired and had finally attained their official freedom from the perils of state-sponsored religion and the tyrannical traits of the British throne. Americans were now afforded equal opportunity to achieve economic independence and fair taxation practices established by individual state governments, not an empire thousands of miles away. In other words, colonial independence was long overdue by the time the first skirmishes in Lexington and Concord took place. In a letter to his wife Abigail, John Adams (who had been serving in the Massachusetts legislature) wrote on July 3, 1776, "I can see the rays of ravishing light and glory. I can see that the end is more than worth all the means, and that prosperity will triumph."[24] The Declaration of Independence, which was an official confirmation

that the relationship between the colonies and the British government had
ceremoniously ended, reads, "That whenever any form of government becomes
destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it."[25]

By December, 1776, yet another individual would help shape the most critical
year of the American Revolution. George Washington, who many would argue was
the most decisive individual involved in the quest for American independence and
military triumph, had taken a group of inexperienced, weary, and beaten civilians, and
transformed them into a lethal militia. It is critical to note, that by no means were
Washington's men considered soldiers. These men were farmers, businessmen,
merchants, and the like, and possessed little military training. Washington was
unequivocally committed to the American cause, and David McCullough, in his novel
entitled *1776*, describes Washington's character:

> Washington's wealth and way of life, like his physique and horsemanship,
> were of great importance to large numbers of the men he led and among many
> in Congress. The feeling was that if he, George Washington, who had so
> much, was willing to risk 'his all,' however daunting the odds, then who were
> they to equivocate. That he was also serving without pay was widely taken as
> further evidence of the genuineness of his commitment.[26]

Washington possessed remarkable leadership skills both on the battlefield, as
well in office. As remarkable as his leadership skills were, Washington was the first
to authorize the enlistment of free blacks wanting to fight for the Continental Army.
Though Washington himself owned slaves that allowed him to live a "comfortable"
life by Virginian standards, Washington had become desperate for recruits towards
the end of 1776. Congress was persuaded by Washington to enlist free blacks before

the British did, as the issue of slavery was growing more divisive between the

northern and southern states during the midst of the American Revolution. Among

Washington's many heroic feats during the American Revolution, his surprise attack

on December 25, 1776, at Trenton, New Jersey, and later at Princeton, may have been

his best. Washington caught the British unprepared and prevailed at both battles,

boosting the morale of the Continental Army and turning the tide of the American

Revolution in favor of the Americans.

America was now on the brink of official independence and out of

desperation, Great Britain had begun relying on one of America's own military

masterminds in order to swing the momentum back in favor of the British. Benedict

Arnold had been secretly communicating Washington's movements and plans to the

British while serving as commander of West Point.[27] Despite this treachery, British

casualties continued to mount; additionally, the French were secretly arming the

colonists. Neither boded well for the British, and it would only be a matter of time

before the most powerful nation in the world would suffer its most devastating loss.

On October 19, 1781, an ashamed General Charles Cornwallis, with 8,000

demoralized British troops, surrendered at Yorktown, Virginia. With the assistance of

the French, the American colonists had persevered through disease, casualties,

traitors, mismanagement, and virtually no experience to defeat the world's most

formidable superpower. As McCullough would later argue, "The Continental Army –

not the Hudson River or the possession of New York or Philadelphia – was the key to

victory. And it was Washington who held the army together and gave it 'spirit'

through the most desperate of times."[28] Throughout the Revolutionary War, it was

one individual, George Washington, who made mistakes in judgment, military tactics,

and suffered bouts of indecisiveness; yet, throughout the tumultuous ordeal known as the American Revolution, it was Washington's experience and his solid resolve, whether writing letters to Congress, or to his officers pleading for one more month of service, which propelled the Continental Army and, consequently, the American colonies to victory over the British.

Although sporadic fighting and battles would continue between the colonists and the British for the next six years, the Treaty of Paris (1783) essentially ended the Revolutionary War, thus changing the landscape of the world for the second time in twenty years. The Treaty of Paris stipulated that the American colonies be officially recognized by Great Britain, as opposed to Great Britain's original proposal of merely acknowledging America as an autonomous state within the British empire.[29] Following the defeat of the British and after years of negotiation between the American faction (composed of Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, and John Adams), along with France, and Great Britain, the actual treaty was signed and put into effect on September 3, 1783. British troops were required to begin leaving the colonies immediately, as one the provisions of the treaty called for the permanent withdrawal of all British troops from all American colonies.

The signing of the Treaty of Paris was merely a formal acknowledgement of the American victory over the British, as the most critical year of the American Revolution, 1776, would drive the Continental Army led by George Washington and Nathanael Greene to victory over the British. In the years that followed 1776 leading up to the British surrender at Yorktown, the momentum clearly swung towards the Americans, as the British suffered continual defeats on the battlefields of America. It is critical to note that the Continental Army had not only defeated the British at such

crucial battle sites as Trenton and Princeton in December, 1776, but also a supplemental unit of Hessian mercenaries recruited by the British to help overwhelm the inexperienced Continental Army. The Hessians proved to be highly ineffective in their efforts to aid the British in the defeat of the colonial rebellion.

The defeated and demoralized British army, many wounded and others in a perpetual state of shock, slowly filtered back to Great Britain by the shipload. As a nation, Great Britain had gone from the superpower of the western world in its remarkable defeat of the French in the Seven Years War, to a bankrupt, defeated empire, now void of its own colonies, with nothing to show for its victory twenty years prior.

The most impossible feat on the American continent since the conclusion of the Seven Years War had been accomplished, and America was now its own nation, free of the tyrannical restraints the colonists had been under for so long. America had been the economic, religious, social, and political understudy of Great Britain for so long that the establishment of America's own identity was long overdue.

Consequently, America had a great many internal issues to settle when the Treaty of 1783 officially recognized America as a free and sovereign nation. America had yet to form an official government, and similarly, had not chosen a formal leader. When the Continental Congress met in 1787 to resolve these issues cooperatively, George Washington had clearly earned the overwhelming respect and admiration of his peers and was chosen to lead the grueling task of configuring the nation's political roots. The Articles of Confederation, which had provided a temporary sense of unification during the Revolutionary War, were no longer adequate, as states' rights and interests came to the forefront of designing a unified nation that also met the

unique ideals of each individual state. Larger states with large slave populations such as Virginia, argued for more representation, whereas smaller states with a minimal slave population, such as New Jersey, contended that regardless of the size of each state, representation should always be equal. As a result, the Great Compromise was the consensus reached by the Convention, as the two-house legislature of the Senate (comprised of an equal amount of representation from each state regardless of population) and the House of Representatives (each state allotted one representative for every 30,000 individuals) made up one of America's fundamental compromises.[30] George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Patrick Henry, James Madison, and Thomas Jefferson, along with an impressive collection of politicians representing both northern and southern interests, braved wet weather, nearly impossible travel conditions, and a secretive format before finally validating the Constitution of the United States of America in September, 1787.[31] America had finally broken the chains of oppression with Great Britain; however, America itself would become the oppressor, as one of the most critical and emotional issues of debate following the conclusion of the American Revolution was that of slavery.

The debate over the issue of slavery lay somewhat dormant until the latter stages of the Revolutionary War, as breaking free from British tyranny was the most pressing issue in America between 1763 and 1783. Northern merchants and southern plantation owners immediately renewed the transcontinental slave trade following the American Revolution, a practice that each state (with the exception of Georgia), had agreed to suspend during the fight for independence. The economic, political, and social fallout from slavery began to divide American citizens and politicians prior to the Constitutional Convention, as states such as Virginia lobbied fervently for

increased representation in Congress. Virginia's population had been largely

supplemented by slaves for hundreds of years, although socially and legally slaves

were considered property and not citizens; therefore, slave-holding states wanted to

count slaves as part of their population, drawing the ire of states lacking a significant

slave population.

Many would argue that the slave issue became the most fiercely debated topic

during the four-month span of the Constitutional Convention, as each slave's

particular value as either property or citizens, was critical to Congressional

representation. Slavery was far too valuable and was absolutely critical for the

economic sustenance of southern states, and prohibiting slavery was clearly out of the

question when the Constitution was ratified. Tobacco and cotton were the staple

crops for such states as North and South Carolina, and Virginia, with slave labor the

most critical aspect of economic success. Politically, slavery was reprehensible to

northern policymakers and abolitionists alike, who wanted to rid America of slavery

in order to reduce the amount of Congressional representation by southern states,

although integration was never a realistic solution either. The issue of slavery would

eventually divide a young America to the point of civil war; in view of this civil war,

the consequences and ramifications of slavery, its abolishment, and the citizenship of

African-Americans would be felt for the next hundred years.[32]

In conclusion, it was the collective efforts of seemingly normal colonial

individuals that impelled America to make the colonies her own following the fight

against the British for independence. At different times throughout the Revolutionary

War, individuals such as Thomas Paine, George Washington, Paul Revere, Samuel

Adams, Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, and Thomas Jefferson collectively made

the vision for American independence a reality. More often than not, most Americans

failed to truly believe that America would ever be free, seeking leadership from

individuals who would heighten patriotic fervor throughout the colonies. At the

expense of Great Britain, the world had officially changed, and although slavery

would later divide America into the North and South, America would never be under

another oppressor other than itself.

Notes

1. Richard D. Brown, *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution, 1760 1791: Documents and Essays* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 155-170.

2. John Ferling, *A Leap in the Dark: The Struggle to Create the American Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 150-154.

3. Jack P. Greene, *Settlements to Society: 1607-1763, A Documentary History of Colonial America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 383.

4. Ibid.

5. Ferling, *A Leap in the Dark*, 30.

6. Greene, *Settlements to Society: 1607-1763*, 381.

7. Ibid., 385.

8. Ferling, *A Leap in the Dark*, 30-31.

9. Brown, *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution*, 13.

10. Jack P. Greene, *Colonies to Nation: 1763-1789, A Documentary History of the American Revolution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 42-43.

11. Brown, *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution*, 102.

12. Greene, *Colonies to Nation*, 16-18.

13. Ferling, *A Leap in the Dark*, 23-29.

14. Brown, *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution*, 79-87.

15. Ferling, *A Leap in the Dark*, 73.

16. Ibid., 76.

17. Brown, *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution*, 138.

18. Ibid., 140.

19. Ibid., 154.

20. Ferling, *A Leap in the Dark*, 128.

21. Ibid., 133.

22. Brown, *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution*, 163.

23. Ferling, *A Leap in the Dark*, 169.

24. Greene, *Colonies to Nation*, 297.

25. Brown, *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution*, 170.

26. David McCullough, *1776* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 48.

27. Ferling, *A Leap in the Dark*, 226-228.

28. McCullough, *1776*, 293.

29. Greene, *Colonies to Nation*, 444.

30. Winton Solberg, *The Constitutional Convention and the Formation of the Union* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 252.

31. Ferling, *A Leap in the Dark*, 308.

32. John P. Kaminski, *A Necessary Evil? Slavery and the Debate Over the Constitution* (Madison: Madison House Publishers, 1995), 1-40.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Brown, Richard D., ed. *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution, 1760 1791: Documents and Essays*. 2nd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

Greene, Jack P., ed. *Colonies to Nation: 1763-1789, A Documentary History of the American Revolution*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975.

---. *Settlements to Society: 1607-1763, A Documentary History of Colonial America*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975.

Solberg, Winton, ed. *The Constitutional Convention and the Formation of the Union*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990.

Storing, Herbert, ed. *The Anti-Federalist*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Secondary Sources

Ellis, Joseph. *Founding Brothers, The Revolutionary Generation*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.

Ferling, John. *A Leap in the Dark: The Struggle to Create the American Republic*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Kaminski, John P. *A Necessary Evil? Slavery and the Debate Over the Constitution*. Madison: Madison House Publishers, 1995.

McCullough, David. *1776*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005.

McPherson, James. *Battle Cry of Freedom*: *The Civil War Era*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.