**Chapter Four**

**The American Revolution**

The actions of the First Continental Congress led the British authorities to force a showdown with their bumptious colonial offspring. "The New England governments are in a state of rebellion," George III announced. "Blows must decide whether they are to be subject to this country or independent." Already General Thomas Gage, commander in chief of all British forces in North America, had been appointed governor of Massachusetts. Some 4,000 Redcoats were concentrated in Boston, camped on the town common once peacefully reserved for the citizens I cows. Parliament echoed with demands for a show of strength in America.

**"The Shot Heard Round the World"**

The London government decided to use troops against Massachusetts in January 1775, but the order did not reach General Gage until April. In the interim, Parliament voted new troop levies and declared Massachusetts to be in a state of rebellion. The Massachusetts Patriots, as they were now calling themselves, formed an extralegal provincial assembly, reorganized the militia, and began training "Minute Men" and other fighters.

When Gage received his orders on April 14, he acted swiftly. The Patriots had been accumulating arms at Concord, some 20 miles west of Boston. On the night of April 18, Gage dispatched 700 crack troops to seize these supplies. The Patriots were forewarned. Paul Revere and other horsemen rode off to alert the countryside and to warn John Hancock and Sam Adams, leaders of the provincial assembly, whose arrest had been ordered. When the Redcoats reached Lexington early the next morning, they found the common occupied by about 70 Minute Men. After an argument, the Americans began to withdraw. Then someone fired a shot. There was a flurry of gunfire and the Minute Men fled, leaving eight dead.

The British then marched on to Concord, where they destroyed whatever supplies the Patriots had been unable to carry off But militiamen were pouring into the area from all sides. A hot skirmish at Concord's North Bridge forced the Redcoats to yield that position. Becoming alarmed, they began to march back to Boston. Soon they were being subjected to a withering fire from American irregulars along their line of march. A strange battle developed on a "field" 16 miles long and only a few hundred yards wide. Gage was obliged to send out an additional 1,500 soldiers to avoid total disaster. When the first day of the Revolutionary War ended, the British had sustained 273 casualties, the Americans less than 100. "The Rebels are not the despicable rabble too many have supposed them to be," General Gage admitted.

For a brief moment of history, tiny Massachusetts stood alone at arms against an empire that had humbled France and Spain. Yet Massachusetts assumed the offensive! The provincial government organized an expedition that captured Fort Ticonderoga and Crown Point on Lake Champlain. The other colonies rallied quickly to the cause, sending reinforcements to Cambridge. When the news reached Virginia, George Washington wrote sadly: "A brothers' sword has been sheathed in a brother's breast, and the once-happy and peaceful plains of America are either to be drenched in blood or inhabited by a race of slaves." And then Washington added: "Can a virtuous man hesitate in his choice?"

**The Second Continental Congress**

On May 10, the day Ticonderoga fell, the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia. It was a distinguished group, more radical than the First Congress. Besides John and Sam Adams, Patrick Henry and Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, and Christopher Gadsden of South Carolina, all holdovers from the First Congress, there was Thomas Jefferson, a quiet young planter from Virginia, who was an indifferent speaker but a brilliant writer. Jefferson had recently published A Summary View of the Rights of British America, an essay criticizing the institution of monarchy and warning George III that "Kings are the servants, not the proprietors of the people." The Virginia convention had also sent George Washington, who could neither write well nor make good speeches, but who knew more than any other colonist about commanding men. He wore his buff-and-blue colonel's uniform, a not-too-subtle indication of his willingness to place his skill at the disposal of the Congress. The renowned Benjamin Franklin was also a delegate. The Boston merchant John Hancock was chosen president of the Congress.

This Congress, like the first, had no legal authority, yet it had to make agonizing decisions under the pressure of rapidly unfolding military events, with the future of every American depending on its actions. It naturally dealt first with the military crisis. It organized the forces gathering around Boston into a Continental Army and appointed George Washington commander in chief. After Washington and his staff left for the front on June 23, the Congress turned to the task of requisitioning men and supplies.

**The Battle of Bunker Hill**

Meanwhile, in Massachusetts the first major battle of the war had been fought. The British position on the peninsula of Boston was impregnable to direct assault, but high ground north and south, at Charlestown and Dorchester Heights, could be used to pound the city with artillery. When the Patriots seized Bunker Hill and Breed's Hill at Charlestown, Gage determined at once to drive them off. This was accomplished on June 17. Twice the Redcoats marched up Breed's Hill, each time being thrown back. On the third assault they carried the position, for the defenders had run out of ammunition. However, more than 1,000 Redcoats fell in a couple of hours out of a force of 2,500. The Patriots lost only 400 men. The British had cleared the Charlestown peninsula, but the victory was really the Americans'. They had proved themselves against professional soldiers and exacted a terrible toll. "The day ended in glory," a British officer wrote, "but the loss was uncommon in officers for the number engaged."

The Battle of Bunker Hill, as it was called for no good reason, greatly reduced whatever hope remained for a negotiated settlement. The spilling of so much blood left each side determined to force the other's submission. The British recalled General Gage, replacing him with General William Howe, a veteran of the French and Indian War, and George III proclaimed the colonies to be "in open rebellion." The Continental Congress dispatched one last plea to the king (the Olive Branch Petition), but this was a sop to the moderates. Immediately thereafter it adopted the "Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms," which condemned everything the British had done since 1763. Americans were "a people attacked by unprovoked enemies"; the time had come to choose between "submission" and "resistance by force." The Congress then ordered an attack on Canada and created committees to seek foreign aid and buy munitions abroad. It authorized the outfitting of an American navy.

**The Declaration of Independence**

Congress (and the bulk of the people) still hung back from a break with the Crown. It was sobering to think of casting off everything that being English meant: love of king, the traditions of a great nation, pride in the power of a mighty empire. Then, too, rebellion might end in horrors worse than submission to British tyranny. The disturbances following the Stamp Act and the Tea Act had revealed an alarming fact about American society. The organizers of those protests, mostly persons of wealth and status, had thought in terms of "ordered resistance." They countenanced violence only as a means of forcing the British authorities to pay attention to their complaints. But protest meetings and mob actions had brought thousands of ordinary citizens into the struggle for self-government. Some upper-class Patriots resented the pretensions of these people. In addition, not all the property that had been destroyed belonged to Loyalists and British officials. Talk about "rights" and "liberties" might well give the poor (to say nothing of the slaves) an exaggerated impression of their importance. Finally, in a world where every country had some kind of monarch, could common people really govern themselves? The most ardent defender of American rights might well hesitate after considering all the implications of independence.

Two events in January 1776 pushed the colonies a long step toward independence. First came the news that the British were sending hired Hessian soldiers to fight against them. Colonists associated mercenary soldiers with looting and rape and feared that the German-speaking Hessians would run amok among them. Such callousness on the part of Britain made reconciliation seem out of the question.

The second decisive event was the publication of Common Sense. This tract was written by Thomas Paine, a onetime English corsetmaker and civil servant turned pamphleteer, a man who had been in America scarcely a year. Common Sense called boldly for complete independence. It attacked not only George III but also the idea of monarchy itself. Paine called George the "sullen tempered Pharaoh of England" and a "Royal Brute." "A government of our own is our natural right," he insisted. "0! ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose not only tyranny but the tyrant, stand forth!" Virtually everyone in the colonies must have read Common Sense or heard it explained and discussed. About 150,000 copies were sold in the critical period between January and July of 1776.

The tone of the debate changed sharply as Paine's slashing attack had its effect. The Continental Congress unleashed privateers against British commerce, opened American ports to foreign shipping, and urged the extralegal provincial conventions that had been set up by the Patriots to frame constitutions and establish state governments.

On June 7, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia introduced a resolution of the Virginia Convention: 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.

This resolution was not passed at once; Congress first appointed Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Roger Sherman, and Robert Livingston to frame a suitable justification of independence. Jefferson wanted John Adams to prepare a draft, but Adams refused, saying: "You can write ten times better than I can." Jefferson's draft, with a few amendments made by Franklin and Adams and somewhat toned down by the whole Congress, was officially adopted by the delegates on July 4, 1776.

Jefferson's Declaration consisted of two parts. The first was by way of introduction: It justified the abstract right of any people to revolt and described the theory on which the Americans based their creation of a new, republican government. The second, much longer, section was a list of the "injuries and usurpations" of George 111, a bill of indictment explaining why the colonists felt driven to exercise the rights outlined in the first part of the document. Here Jefferson stressed George's interference with the functioning of representative government in America, his harsh administration of colonial affairs, his restrictions on civil rights, and his maintenance of troops in the colonies without their consent.

Jefferson sought to marshal every possible evidence of British perfidy and to make the king, rather than Parliament, the villain. He held George III responsible for Parliament's efforts to tax the colonies and restrict their trade, for many actions by subordinates that George had never deliberately authorized, and for some things that never happened. He even blamed the king for the existence of slavery in the colonies, a charge that Congress cut from the document, not entirely because it was untrue. The long bill of particulars reads more like a lawyer's brief than a careful analysis, but it was intended to convince the world that the Americans had good reasons for exercising their right to form a government of their own.

Jefferson's general statement of the right of revolution has inspired oppressed peoples all over the world for more than 200 years: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government....

The Declaration was intended to influence foreign opinion, but it had little effect outside Great Britain, and there it only made people determined to subdue the rebels. Why, then, has it had so much influence on modern history? As John Adams later pointed out-Adams viewed his great contemporary with a mixture of affection, respect, and jealousy-the basic idea was commonplace among 18th century liberals. But if the idea lacked originality, it had never before been put into practice on such a scale. Revolution was not new, but the spectacle of a people solemnly explaining and justifying their right, in an orderly manner, to throw off their oppressors and establish a new system on their own authority was almost without precedent. Soon the French would be drawing upon this example in their revolution, and rebels everywhere have since done likewise. And if Jefferson did not create the concept, he gave it a nearly perfect form.

**1776: The Balance of Forces**

A formal declaration of independence merely cleared the way for tackling the problems of founding a new nation and maintaining it in defiance of Great Britain. Lacking both traditions and authority based in law, the Congress had to create political institutions and a new national spirit-all in the midst of war.

The military situation took precedence over other tasks because one disastrous battle might make everything else meaningless. At the start, the Americans had what we might call the "home court advantage." They already possessed their lands except for the few square miles occupied by British troops. Although thousands of colonists fought for George 111, the British soon learned that to put down the American rebellion they would have to bring in men and supplies from bases on the other side of the Atlantic, a formidable task.

Certain long-run factors operated in America's favor. Although His Majesty's soldiers were brave and well disciplined, the army was as inefficient and ill directed as the rest of the British government. Whereas nearly everyone in Great Britain wanted to crack down on Boston after the Tea Party, many boggled at engaging in a fullscale war against all the colonies. Aside from a reluctance to spill so much blood, there was the question of expense. Finally, the idea of dispatching the cream of the British army to America while powerful European enemies still smarted from past defeats seemed dangerous. For all these reasons, the British approached gingerly the task of subduing the rebellion. When Washington fortified Dorchester Heights overlooking Boston, General Howe withdrew his troops to Halifax rather than risk another Bunker Hill. On March 17, 1776, Washington marched his troops into Boston. For the moment the 13 colony-states were clear of Redcoats.

Awareness of Britain's problems undoubtedly spurred the Continental Congress to the bold actions of the spring of 1776. However, on the very day that Congress voted for independence (July 2), General Howe was back on American soil, landing in force on Staten Island in New York harbor in preparation for an assault on the city. Soon Howe had at hand 32,000 well-equipped troops and a powerful fleet commanded by his brother, Richard, Lord Howe. As Washington realized, British control of New York City and the Hudson River would split the new nation in two.

The demonstration of British might accentuated American military and economic weaknesses: Both money and the tools of war were continually in short supply in a predominantly agricultural country. Many of Washington's soldiers were armed with weapons no more lethal than spears and tomahawks. Few had proper uniforms. Almost no one knew anything about such mundane but vital matters as how to construct and maintain proper sanitary facilities. when large numbers of soldiers were camped at one place for extended periods of time. What was inelegantly known as "the Itch" afflicted soldiers throughout the war.

**Loyalists**

Whereas nearly all colonists had objected to British policies, many still hesitated to take up arms against the mother country. Even Massachusetts harbored many Loyalists, or Tories, as they were called; about 1,000 Americans fled Boston with General Howe, abandoning their homes rather than submitting to the rebel army.

No one knows exactly how the colonists divided on the question of independence. John Adams's off-the-cuff estimate was that a third of the people were prorevolution, a third loyal to Britain, the rest more or less neutral, but most historians today think about two-fifths of the people supported the war, only one-fifth the king. The divisions cut across geographic, social, and economic lines. Many, in Tom Paine's famous phrase, were summer soldiers and sunshine patriots-they supported the Revolution when all was going well and lost their enthusiasm in difficult hours.

A high proportion of those holding royal appointments and many Anglican clergymen remained loyal to King George, as did numbers of merchants with close connections in Britain. There were pockets of Tory strength among persons of non-English origin and other minority groups who tended to count on London for protection against the local majority.

Many became Tories because they were pessimistic about the condition of society and the possibility of improving it. "What is the whole history of human life," wrote Jonathan Boucher of Virginia, "but a series of disappointments?" Still others, knowing that they already possessed a remarkably free system of government, could not stomach shedding blood merely to avoid paying more taxes or to escape from what they considered minor restrictions on their activities.

The Tories lacked organization. Whereas Patriot leaders worked closely together, many Tory "leaders" did not even know one another. They had no central committee to lay plans or coordinate their efforts. When the revolutionaries took over a colony, some Tories fled; others sought the protection of the British army; others took up arms; others accommodated themselves silently to the new regime.

If the differences separating Patriot from Loyalist arc unclear, feelings were nonetheless bitter. Individual Loyalists were often tarred and feathered and otherwise abused. Some were thrown into jail, others exiled, their property confiscated. Battles between Tory units and the Continental Army were often exceptionally bloody. "Neighbor was against neighbor, father against son and son against father," one Connecticut Tory reported. "He that would not thrust his own blade through his brother's heart was called an infamous villain."

**Early British Victories**

General Howe's campaign against New York brought to light another American weakness-the lack of military experience. Washington, expecting Howe to attack New York, had moved south to meet the threat, but both he and his men failed badly in this first major test. Late in August Howe crossed from Staten Island to Long Island, where he easily outflanked and defeated Washington's army. Had he then acted decisively, he could probably have ended the war on the spot, but Howe could not make up his mind whether. to be a peacemaker or a conqueror. When he hesitated, Washington managed to withdraw his troops to Manhattan Island.

Howe could still have trapped Washington simply by using his fleet to land troops on the northern end of Manhattan; instead he attacked New York City directly, leaving the Americans an escape route to the north. Again Patriot troops proved no match for British regulars. Though Washington, in a rage, threatened to shoot cowardly Connecticut soldiers as they fled the battlefield, he had to fall back on Harlem Heights in upper Manhattan.

Still Washington refused to see the peril in remaining on an island while the enemy commanded the surrounding waters. Only when Howe shifted a powerful force to Westchester, directly threatening his rear, did Washington move north to the mainland. Finally, after several narrow escapes, he crossed the Hudson River to New Jersey, where the British could not use their naval superiority against him.

The battles in and around New York City seemed to presage an easy British triumph. Yet somehow Washington salvaged a moral victory from these ignominious defeats. He learned rapidly; seldom thereafter did he place his troops in such vulnerable positions. And his men, in spite of repeated failure, had become an army. In November and December 1776 they retreated across New Jersey and into Pennsylvania. General Howe then abandoned the campaign, going into winter quarters in New York, but posting garrisons at Trenton, Princeton, and other strategic points.

The troops at Trenton were hated Hessian mercenaries. Washington decided to attack them. He crossed the ice-clogged Delaware River with 2,400 men on Christmas night during a wild storm. This force reached Trenton at daybreak in the midst of a sleet storm. The Hessians were taken completely by surprise. A few escaped in disorder; the rest-900 men-surrendered. The victory gave a boost to American morale. A few days later Washington won another battle at Princeton. These engagements had little strategic importance. Without them, however, there might not have been an American army to resume the war in the spring.

**Saratoga and the French Alliance**

When spring came to New Jersey in April 1777, Washington had fewer than 5,000 men under arms. Great plans-far too many and too complicated, as it turned out were afoot in the British camp. The strategy called for General John Burgoyne to lead a large army from Canada down Lake Champlain toward Albany, while a smaller force under Lieutenant Colonel Barry St. Leger pushed eastward toward Albany from Fort Oswego on Lake Ontario. General Howe was to lead a third force north up the Hudson. Patriot resistance would be smashed between these three armies and the New England states isolated from the rest.

As a venture in coordinated military tactics the British campaign of 1777 was a fiasco. "Gentleman Johnny" Burgoyne-a charming character, part politician, part poet, part gambler, part ladies' man, yet also a brave soldier-had begun his march from Canada in mid-June. By early July his army, which consisted of about 7,000 men, had captured Fort Ticonderoga at the southern end of Lake Champlain. He quickly pushed beyond Lake George, but then bogged down. Burdened by a huge baggage train that included 138 pieces of generally useless artillery, more than 30 carts laden with his personal wardrobe and supply of champagne, and his mistress, he could advance at but a snail's pace through the dense woods north of Saratoga. Patriot forces, mainly militia, impeded his way by felling trees across the forest trails. St. Leger was also slow in carrying out his part of the grand design. He did not leave Fort Oswego until July 26, and when he stopped to besiege a Patriot force at Fort Stanwix, General Benedict Arnold had time to march west from the army resisting Burgoyne with 1,000 men and drive him back to Oswego.

Meanwhile, Howe wasted time trying to trap Washington into exposing his army in New Jersey. This enabled Washington to send some of his regulars to buttress the militia units opposing Burgoyne. Then, just as St. Leger was setting out for Albany, Howe took the bulk of his army off by sea to attack Philadelphia, leaving only a small force commanded by General Sir Henry Clinton to aid Burgoyne.

When Washington moved south to oppose Howe, the Britisher taught him a series of lessons in tactics, defeating him at the Battle of Brandywine, then feinting him out of position, and moving unopposed into Philadelphia. But by that time it was late September, and disaster was about to befall General Burgoyne.

The American forces under Philip Schuyler and later under Horatio Gates and Benedict Arnold had erected formidable defenses immediately south of Saratoga. Burgoyne struck at this position twice and was thrown back each time with heavy losses. Each day more local militia swelled the American forces. Soon Burgoyne was under siege, his troops pinned down by withering fire from every direction, unable even to bury their dead. Their only hope was General Clinton, who had finally started up the Hudson from New York. Clinton got as far as Kingston, about 80 miles below Saratoga, but on October 16 he decided to return to New York for reinforcements. The next day, at Saratoga, Burgoyne surrendered. Some 5,700 British prisoners were marched off to Virginia.

This overwhelming triumph changed the course and character of the war, for when news of the victory reached France, Louis XVI immediately recognized the United States. The French were eager to weaken Great Britain and helping the rebellious Americans was an obvious way to do so. In May 1776 the Comte de Vergennes, France's foreign minister, had persuaded Louis XVI to authorize the expenditure of one million livres for munitions for America, and more was added the next year. Spain also contributed, not out of sympathy for the revolution but because of its desire to injure Great Britain. By February 1778 Vergennes and three American commissioners in Paris-Benjamin Franklin, Arthur Lee, and Silas Deane-had drafted a commercial treaty and a formal treaty of alliance. The help of Spain and France, Washington declared when he heard the news, "will not fail of establishing the Independence of America in a short time."

When the news of Saratoga reached England, Lord North realized that a Franco-American alliance would probably follow. To forestall it he was ready to give in on all the issues that had agitated the colonies before 1775. Both the Coercive Acts and the Tea Act would be repealed.. Parliament would promise never to tax the colonies. But instead of implementing this proposal promptly, Parliament delayed until March 1778. Royal peace commissioners did not reach Philadelphia until June, a month after Congress had ratified the French treaty. The British proposals were icily rejected, and while the peace commissioners were still in Philadelphia war broke out between France and Great Britain.

The Revolution, however, was far from won. After the loss of Philadelphia, Washington had settled his army for the winter at Valley Forge, 20 miles to the northwest. The army's supply system collapsed. Often the men had nothing to eat but "Fire Cake," a mixture of ground grain and water baked in the campfire. According to the Marquis de Lafayette, one of the Europeans who volunteered to fight on the American side, "the unfortunate soldiers . . . had neither coats, nor hats, nor shirts, nor shoes; their feet and legs froze till they grew black, and it was often necessary to amputate them." To make matters worse, there was grumbling in Congress over Washington's failure to win victories and talk of replacing him as commander in chief with Horatio Gates, the "hero" of Saratoga.

As the winter dragged on, so many officers resigned that Washington was heard to say that he was afraid of "being left Alone with the Soldiers only." Because enlisted men could not legally resign, they deserted by the hundreds. Yet the army survived. Gradually the soldiers who remained became a tough, professional fighting force. Their spirit has been described by the historian Charles Royster as "a mixture of patriotism, resentment, and fatalism."

**The War Moves South**

Spring brought a revival of American hopes in the form of more supplies, new recruits, and, above all, word of the French alliance. In May the British replaced General Howe with General Clinton, who decided to transfer his base back to New York. Thereafter British strategy changed. Fighting in the northern states degenerated into skirmishing and other small-unit clashes. Instead, relying on sea power and the supposed presence of many Tories in the south, the British concentrated their efforts in South Carolina and Georgia. Savannah fell late to them in 1778, and most of the settled parts of Georgia were overrun during 1779. In 1780 Clinton led a massive naval expedition against Charleston. When the city surrendered in May, more than 3,000 soldiers were captured, the most overwhelming American defeat of the war. Leaving General Cornwallis and some 8,000 men to carry on the campaign, Clinton then sailed back to New York.

In June 1780 Congress placed the highly regarded Gates in charge of southern resistance. Gates encountered Cornwallis at Camden, South Carolina. Foolishly, he entrusted a key sector of his line to untrained militiamen, who panicked when the British charged with fixed bayonets. Gates suffered heavy losses and had to fall back. Congress then recalled him, sensibly permitting Washington to replace him with General Nathanael Greene, a first-rate officer.

Greene, avoiding a major engagement with Cornwallis' superior numbers, divided his troops and staged raids on scattered points. In January 1781, at the Battle of Cowpens in northwestern South Carolina, General Daniel Morgan inflicted a costly defeat on Colonel Banastre Tarleton, one of Cornwallis' best officers. Cornwallis pursued Morgan hotly, but the American rejoined Greene, and at Guilford Court House they again inflicted heavy losses on the British. Then Cornwallis withdrew to Wilmington, North Carolina, where he could rely on the fleet for support and reinforcements. Greene's Patriots quickly regained control of the Carolina back country.

**Victory at Yorktown**

Seeing no future in the Carolinas and unwilling to vegetate at Wilmington, Cornwallis marched north into Virginia, where he joined forces with troops under Benedict Arnold. (Disaffected by what he considered unjust criticism of his generalship, Arnold had sold out to the British in 1780. He intended to betray the bastion of West Point on the Hudson River. The scheme was foiled when incriminating papers were found on the person of a British spy, Major John Andre Arnold fled to the British and Andre was hanged.) As in the Carolina campaign, the British had numerical superiority at first but lost it rapidly when local militia and Continental forces concentrated against them. Cornwallis soon discovered that Virginia Tories were of little help in such a situation. "When a Storm threatens, our friends disappear," he grumbled.

General Clinton ordered Cornwallis to establish a base at Yorktown, where he could be supplied by sea. It was a terrible mistake. The British navy in American waters far outnumbered American and French vessels, but the Atlantic is wide, and in those days communication was slow. The French had a fleet in the West Indies under Admiral De Grasse and another squadron at Newport, Rhode Island, where a French army was stationed. In the summer of 1781, Washington, De Grasse, and the Comte de Rochambeau, commander of the French land forces, designed and carried out with an efficiency unparalleled in eighteenth- century warfare a complex plan to bottle up Cornwallis.

The British navy in the West Indies and at New York might have forestalled this scheme had it moved promptly and in force. But Admiral Sir George Rodney sent only part of his Indies fleet. As a result, De Grasse, after a battle with a British fleet commanded by Admiral Thomas Graves, won control of the Chesapeake and cut Cornwallis off from the sea.

The next move was up to Washington, and this was his finest hour as a commander. Acting in conjunction with Rochambeau, he tricked Clinton into thinking he was going to strike at New York and then pushed boldly south. In early September he reached Yorktown and joined up with French troops. He soon had nearly 17,000 French and American veterans in position. Cornwallis was helpless. He held out until October 17 and then asked for terms. Two days later more than 7,000 British soldiers marched out of their lines and laid down their arms.

**The Peace of Paris**

The British gave up trying to suppress the rebellion after Yorktown, but the event that confirmed the existence of the United States was the signing of a peace treaty with Great Britain. The negotiations were complicated. The United States and France had solemnly pledged not to make a separate peace. Spain, at war with Great Britain since 1779, was allied with France but not with America. Although eager to profit at British expense, the Spanish hoped to limit American expansion beyond the Appalachians, for they had ambitions of their own in the Mississippi Valley. France, although ready enough to see America independent, did not want the new country to become too powerful. In a conflict of interest between America and Spain, France tended to support Spain.

The Continental Congress appointed John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, Thomas Jefferson, and Henry Laurens as a commission to conduct peace talks in Paris. Franklin and Jay did most of the negotiating. Congress had instructed the commissioners to rely on the advice of France's foreign minister, the Comte de Vergennes, subject only to the limitation that they must hold out at all costs for independence.

The commissioners soon discovered that Vergennes was not the perfect friend that Congress had assumed. He was, after all, a French official, and France had interests far more important than its concern for its American ally. Vergennes "means to keep his hand under our chin to prevent us from drowning," Adams complained, "but not to lift our head out of the water." They therefore hinted to the British representative, Richard Oswald, that they would consider making a separate peace. They suggested that Great Britain would be far better off with America, a nation that favored free trade, in control of the trans-Appalachian region than with a mercantilist power like Spain. Soon the Americans were deep in negotiations with Oswald. They told Vergennes what they were doing but did not discuss details. Oswald was friendly and cooperative, and the Americans drove a hard bargain.

By the end of November 1782 a preliminary treaty had been signed. "His Britannic Majesty," Article I began, "acknowledges the said United States ... to be free, sovereign and independent States." Other terms were equally in line with American objectives. The boundaries of the nation were set at the Great Lakes, the Mississippi River, and 31 degrees north latitude (roughly the northern boundary of Florida, which the British turned over to Spain). Britain recognized the right of Americans to fish on the Grand Banks off Newfoundland and-far more important-to dry and cure their catch on unsettled beaches in Labrador and Nova Scotia. The British agreed to withdraw their troops from American soil "with all convenient speed."

Where the touchy problem of Tory property seized during the Revolution was concerned, the Americans agreed only that Congress would "earnestly recommend" that the states "provide for the restitution of all estates, rights and properties." They promised to prevent further property confiscation and prosecutions of Tories-certainly a wise as well as a humane policy-and they agreed not to impede the collection of debts owed British subjects. Vergennes was flabbergasted by the success of the Americans. "The English buy the peace more than they make it," he wrote. "Their concessions ... exceed all that I should have thought possible,"

The American commissioners obtained such favorable terms because they were shrewd diplomats and because of the rivalries that existed among the European powers. In the last analysis, Britain preferred to have a weak nation of English-speaking people in command of the Mississippi Valley rather than France or Spain. From their experience at the peace talks, the Americans learned the importance of playing one power against another without committing themselves completely to any. This policy demanded constant contact with European affairs and skill at adjusting policies to changes in the European balance of power. And it enabled the United States, a young and relatively feeble country, to grow and prosper.

**Forming a National Government**

Independence was won on the battlefield and at the Paris Peace Conference, but it could not have been achieved without the work of the Continental Congress and the new state governments. Congress was essentially a legislative body rather than a complete government and from the start its members struggled to create a workable central authority. But they were handicapped by much confusion and bickering. In July 1776, John Dickinson prepared a draft of a national constitution, but it could not command much support. The larger states objected to equal representation of all the states, and the states with large western land claims were reluctant to cede them to the central government. It was not until November 1777 that the Articles of Confederation were submitted to the states for ratification.

The Articles merely provided a legal basis for authority that the Continental Congress had already been exercising. Each state, regardless of size, was to have but one vote; the union was only a "league of friendship." Article 11 defined the limit of national power: "Each state retains its sovereignty, freedom, and independence, and every Power, Jurisdiction, and right, which is not by this confederation expressly delegated to the United States, in Congress assembled." Time would prove this an inadequate arrangement, chiefly because the central government lacked the authority to impose taxes and had no way of enforcing the powers that it did possess.

**Financing the War**

In practice, Congress and the states carried on the war cooperatively. General officers were appointed by Congress, lesser ones locally. The Continental Army, small but increasingly effective, was the backbone of Washington's force. The states raised militia chiefly for short-term service.

The fact that Congress's requisitions of money often went unhonored by the states does not mean that the states failed to contribute heavily to the war effort. Altogether they spent about $5.8 million in hard money, and they met Congress's demands for beef, corn, rum, fodder, and other military supplies. In addition, Congress raised large sums by borrowing. Americans bought bonds worth between $7 and $8 million during the war. Foreign governments lent another $8 million, most of this furnished by France. Congress issued more than $240 million in paper money, the states over $200 million more. This currency fell rapidly in value, resulting in an inflation that caused hardship and grumbling. The people, in effect, paid much of the cost of the war through the depreciation of their savings, but it is hard to see how else the war could have been financed, given the prejudice of the populace against paying taxes to fight a war against British taxation.

**State Republican Governments**

However crucial the role of Congress, in an important sense the real revolution occurred when the individual colonies broke their ties with Great Britain. Using their colonial charters as a basis, the states began framing new constitutions even before the Declaration of Independence. By early 1777 all but Connecticut and Rhode Island had taken this decisive step.

On the surface, the new governments were not drastically different from those they replaced. The most significant change was the removal of outside control. Gone were the times when a governor could be maintained in office by orders from London. The new constitutions varied in details, but all provided for an elected legislature, an executive, and a system of courts. In general, the powers of the governor and of judges were limited-a natural result of past experience, if somewhat illogical now that these officials were no longer appointed by an outside authority. The theory appeared to be that elected rulers no less than those appointed by kings were subject to the temptations of authority, that, as one Patriot put it, all men are "tyrants enough at heart." The typical governor had no voice in legislation and little in appointments. Pennsylvania went so far as to eliminate the office of governor, replacing it with an elected council of 12.

Power was concentrated in the legislature, which the people had come to count on to defend their interests. In addition to the lawmaking authority exercised by the colonial assemblies, the state constitutions gave the legislatures the power to declare war, conduct foreign relations, control the courts, and perform many other essentially executive functions. While continuing to require that voters be property owners or taxpayers, the constitution makers remained suspicious even of the legislature. They saw legislators as representatives, that is, agents carrying out the wishes of the voters of a particular district rather than superior persons chosen to decide public issues according to their own best judgment. Most of the constitutions contained bills of rights protecting the people's civil liberties against all branches of the government. In Britain such checks were imposed only on the Crown; the Americans invoked them against their elected representatives as well.

The state governments combined the best of the British system, including its respect for fairness and due process, with the uniquely American stress on individualism and a healthy dislike of too much authority. The idea of drafting written frames of government-contracts between the people and their representatives that carefully spelled out the powers and duties of the latter-grew out of the experience of the colonists after 1763, when the vagueness of the unwritten British Constitution had caused so much controversy, and from the compact principle, the heart of republican government, as described so eloquently in the Declaration of Independence. This constitutionalism represented one of the most important innovations of the Revolutionary era: a peaceful method for altering the political system. In the midst of violence the states changed their frames of government in an orderly, legal manner-a truly remarkable achievement that became a beacon of hope to future reformers everywhere.

**Social Reform**

Back in 1909 the historian Carl Becker wrote that the American Revolution was not merely a fight for "home rule," that is, for independence from Great Britain. It was also, Becker insisted, a fight to determine "who should rule at home."

Many states seized the occasion of constitution making to introduce important reforms. In Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, and other states the seats in the legislature were reapportioned in order to give the western districts their fair share. Primogeniture, entail (the right of an owner of property to prevent his heirs from ever disposing of it), and quitrents were abolished wherever they had existed. Steps toward greater freedom of religion were taken, especially in states where the Anglican church had enjoyed a privileged position. "Our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions," Jefferson's Virginia Statute of Religious Liberty (1786) stated. "Truth is great and will prevail if left to herself." Therefore "no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship ... nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions."

Many of the states continued to support religion after independence was won, but they usually distributed the money roughly in accordance with the numerical strength of the various Protestant denominations.

A number of states moved tentatively against slavery. In attacking British policy after 1763, colonists had frequently claimed that Parliament was trying to make slaves of them. No less a personage than George Washington wrote in 1774: "We must assert our rights, or submit to every imposition, that can be heaped upon us, till custom and use shall make us tame and abject slaves." However exaggerated the language, such reasoning led to denunciations of slavery, often vague but significant in their effects on public opinion. Then, too, the forthright statements in the Declaration of Independence about liberty and equality seemed impossible to reconcile with slaveholding. Gradually some Americans began to realize that blacks were not inherently inferior to whites and that the degrading environment of slavery was responsible for their condition.

The war opened direct paths to freedom for some slaves. In November 1775, Lord Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia, proclaimed that all slaves "able and willing to bear arms" for the British would be liberated. But the British treated most slaves in territories they controlled as captured property. Probably more of them who became free achieved their independence by running away during the confusion that accompanied the British invasion of the South. Still, about 5,000 blacks served in the Patriot army and navy. Most of them were assigned noncombat duties, but some fought in every major battle from Lexington to Yorktown.

Beginning with Pennsylvania in 1780, the northern states all did away with slavery. In most cases, slaves born after a certain date were to become free on reaching maturity. Because New York did not pass a gradual emancipation law until 1799 and New Jersey until 1804, there were numbers of slaves in the so-called free states well into the nineteenth century-more than 3,500 as late as 1830. But the institution as such was on its way toward extinction. Except for Georgia and South Carolina, the southern states removed restrictions on the right of individual owners to free their slaves. The greatest success of voluntary emancipation came in Virginia, where 10,000 blacks were freed between 1782 and 1790.

These advances encouraged foes of slavery to hope that the institution would soon disappear. But slavery died only where it was not economically important. Except for owners whose slaves were "carried off" by the British, only a few owners in Massachusetts, where the state supreme court ruled slavery unconstitutional in 1783, were deprived of existing slaves against their will.

Despite the continuing subordination of blacks, the Revolution changed the tone of American society. Most people paid at least lip service to the idea of equality in the way they dressed, in their manner of speech, and in how they dealt with one another in public places. After the publication of Common Sense and the Declaration of Independence, it became fashionable to denounce "aristocrats" and any privilege based on birth. In 1783 a group of army officers founded a fraternal organization, the Society of Cincinnati. Although the revered George Washington was its president, many citizens found the mere existence of a club restricted to officers alarming; the fact that membership was to be hereditary, passing on death to the deceased's oldest son, caused a furor.

Nevertheless, little of the social and economic upheaval usually associated with revolutions occurred. At least some of the urban violence of the period had no social objective. America had its share of criminals and people unable to resist the temptation to break the law when it could be done without much risk of punishment.

The property of Tories was frequently seized by the state governments, but almost never with the idea of redistributing wealth or providing the poor with land. The war disrupted many traditional business relationships. Some merchants were unable to cope with the changes. Others adapted well and grew rich. But the changes occurred without regard for the political beliefs or social values of either those who profited or those who lost.

That the new governments were liberal but moderate reflected the spirit of the times, a spirit typified by a man like Thomas Jefferson, who had great faith in the democratic process, yet owned a large estate and many slaves and had never suggested a drastic social revolution. More individuals of middling wealth were elected to the legislatures because the Revolution stimulated popular interest in politics. But high property qualifications for office holding remained the general rule. Few "ordinary" people wanted radical changes.

During the war, conflicts erupted over economic issues, yet no single class or interest triumphed in all the states or in the national government. In Pennsylvania, where the western radical element was strong, the constitution was extremely democratic; in Maryland and South Carolina the conservatives maintained control handily. Throughout the country, many great landowners were ardent Patriots, but others became Tories-and so did many small farmers.

In some instances the state legislatures wrote the new constitutions. In others the legislatures ordered special elections to choose delegates to conventions empowered to draft the charters. The convention method was an additional illustration of the idea that constitutions are contracts between the people and their leaders.

All the new governments became more responsive to public opinion, principally because the experience of participating in a revolution had made people conscious of their rights in a republic and of their power to enforce those rights. Conservatives swiftly discovered that state constitutions designed to insulate legislators and officials from popular pressures were ineffective when the populace felt strongly about any issue.

**The Effects of the Revolution on Women**

In the late eighteenth century there was a trend in the Western world toward increasing the legal rights of married women. For example, it became somewhat easier for women to obtain divorces. In Massachusetts, before the 1770s no woman is known to have obtained a divorce on the ground of her husband's adultery. In 1791 a South Carolina judge went so far as to say that the law protecting "the absolute dominion" of husbands was "the offspring of a rude and barbarous age." The "progress of civilization," he continued, "has tended to ameliorate the condition of women, and to allow even to wives, something like personal identity." As the tone of this "liberal" opinion indicates, the change in male attitudes that took place was small. Some state courts refused to take action against Tory women whose husbands were Tories on the ground that it was the duty of women to obey their husbands, and when John Adams's wife Abigail warned him in 1776 that if he and his fellow rebels did not "Remember the Ladies" when reforming society, the women would "foment a Rebellion" of their own, he treated her remarks as a joke. He insisted that voting was "not the Province of the ladies."

However, the war effort did increase the influence of women. With so many men in uniform, women took over the management of countless farms, shops, and businesses. Furthermore, the rhetoric of the Revolution, with its stress on liberty and equality, affected women in the same way that it caused many whites of both sexes to question the morality of slavery.

Attitudes toward the education of women also changed. At least half the white women in America could not read or write as late as the 1780s. In a land of opportunity like the United States, women seemed particularly important, not only because they themselves were citizens, but also because of their role in training the next generation, "You distribute mental nourishment along with physical," one orator told the women of America in 1795. Therefore, the idea of female education began to catch on. Schools for girls were founded and the level of female literacy gradually rose.

**Growth of a National Spirit**

American independence and control of a wide and rich domain were the most obvious results of the Revolution. Changes in the structure of society, as we have seen, were relatively minor. Economic developments, such as the growth of new trade connections and the expansion of manufacturing in an effort to replace British goods, were of only modest significance. By far the most important social and economic changes involved the Tories and were thus by-products of the political revolution rather than a determined reorganization of a people's way of life.

There was another important result of the Revolution: the growth of American nationalism. Most modern revolutions have been caused by nationalism and have resulted in independence. In the case of the American Revolution the desire to be free antedated any very intense national feeling. The colonies entered into a political union not because they felt an overwhelming desire to bring all Americans under one rule, but because unity offered the only hope of winning a war against Great Britain. That they remained united after throwing off British rule reflects the degree to which nationalism had developed during the conflict.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the colonists had begun to think of themselves as a separate society distinct from Europe and even from Britain. To cite one small example, in 1750 a Boston newspaper urged its readers to drink "American" beer in order to free themselves from being "beholden to Foreigners" for their alcoholic beverages. But little political nationalism existed before the Revolution, in part because most people knew little about life outside their own colony. When a delegate to the First Continental Congress mentioned "Colonel Washington" to John Adams, Adams had to ask him who this "Colonel Washington" was. He had never heard the name before. Local ties remained predominant. People who really put America first were rare indeed before the final break with Great Britain.

The new nationalism rose from a number of sources and expressed itself in different ways. Common sacrifices in war certainly played a part; the soldiers of the Continental Army fought in the summer heat of the Carolinas for the same cause that had led them to brave the ice floes of the Delaware in order to surprise the Hessians. Such men lost interest in state boundary lines; they became Americans.

John Marshall of Fauquier County, Virginia, for example, was a 20-year-old militiaman in 1775. The next year he joined the Continental Army. He served in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York and endured the winter of 1777-1778 at Valley Forge. "I found myself associated with brave men from different states who were risking life and everything valuable in a common cause," he later wrote. "I was confirmed in the habit of considering America as my country and Congress as my government."

Andrew Jackson, child of the Carolina frontier, was only nine when the Revolution broke out. One brother was killed in battle, another died as a result of untreated wounds. Young Andrew took up arms and was captured by the Redcoats. A British officer ordered Jackson to black his boots and, when the boy refused, struck him across the face with the flat of his sword. Jackson bore the scar to his grave-and became an ardent nationalist on the spot. He and Marshall had very different ideas and came to be bitter enemies in later life. Nevertheless, they were both American nationalists, and for the same reason.

With its 13 stars and 13 stripes representing the states, the American flag symbolized national unity and reflected the common feeling that such a symbol was necessary. Yet the flag had separate stars and stripes; local loyalties remained strong, and they could be divisive when conflicts of interest arose.

Certain practical problems that demanded common solutions also drew the states together. No one seriously considered having 13 postal systems or 13 sets of diplomatic representatives abroad. Every new diplomatic appointment, every treaty of friendship or commerce signed, committed all to a common policy and thus bound them more closely together. And economic developments had a unifying effect. Cutting off English goods encouraged local manufacturing, making America more nearly self-sufficient and stimulating both interstate trade and national pride.

**The Great Land Ordinances**

The western lands, which had divided the states in the beginning, became a force for unity once they had been ceded to the national government. Everyone realized what a priceless national asset they were, and although many greedily sought to possess them by fair means or foul, all now understood that no one state could determine the future of the West.

The politicians argued hotly about how these lands should be developed. Some advocated selling the land in township units in the traditional New England manner to groups or companies; others favored letting individual pioneers stake out farms in the helter-skelter manner common in the colonial South. The decision was a compromise. The Land Ordinance of 1785 provided for surveying western territories into six-mile-square townships before sale. Every other township was to be further subdivided into 36 sections of 640 acres (one square mile) each. The land was sold at auction at a minimum price of one dollar an acre. The law favored speculative land development companies, for even the 640-acre units were far too large and expensive for the typical frontier family. But the fact that the land was to be surveyed and sold by the central government was a nationalizing force. It ensured orderly development of the West and simplified the task of defending the frontier in the event of Indian attack. Congress set aside one section of every township for the maintenance of schools, another farsighted decision.

Still more significant was the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which established governments for the West. As early as 1775 settlers on the frontier were petitioning Congress to allow them to enter the union as independent states, and in 1780 Congress had resolved that all lands ceded to the nation by the existing states should be "formed into distinct republican States" with "the same rights of sovereignty, freedom and independence" as the original 13. In 1784 a committee headed by Jefferson worked out a plan for doing this, and in 1787 it was enacted into law. The area bounded by the Ohio, the Mississippi, and the Great Lakes was to be carved into not less than three or more than five territories. Until the adult male population of each reached 5,000, it was to be ruled by a governor and three judges, all appointed by Congress. Acting together, these officials would make and enforce the necessary laws. When 5,000 men of voting age had settled in the territory, the ordinance authorized them to elect a legislature, which could send a nonvoting delegate to Congress. Finally, when 60,000 persons had settled in any one of the political subdivisions, it was to become a state. It could draft a constitution and operate in any way it wished, save that the government had to be "republican" and that slavery was prohibited.

Seldom has a legislative body acted more wisely. That the western districts must become states everyone conceded from the start. The people had had their fill of colonialism under British rule. On the other hand, it would have been unfair to turn the territories over to the first comers, who would have been unable to manage such large domains and who would surely have taken advantage of their priority to dictate to later arrivals. A period of tutelage was necessary, a period when the "mother country" must guide and nourish its offspring.

Thus the intermediate territorial governments corresponded almost exactly to the governments of British royal colonies. The appointed governors could veto acts of the assemblies and could "convene, prorogue, and dissolve" them at their discretion. The territorial delegates to Congress were not unlike colonial agents. Yet it was vital that this intermediate stage end and that its end be determined in advance so that no argument could develop over when the territory was ready for statehood. The system worked well and was applied to nearly all the regions absorbed by the nation as it advanced westward.

**A National Hero: Washington**

The Revolution further fostered nationalism by giving the people their first commonly revered heroes. Benjamin Franklin was widely known before the break with Great Britain through his experiments with electricity, his immensely successful Poor Richard's Almanack, and his invention of the Franklin stove. His staunch support of the Patriot cause, his work in the Continental Congress, and his diplomatic successes in France, where he was extravagantly admired, added to his fame. Franklin demonstrated to Europeans and to Americans themselves that all Americans need not be ignorant rustics.

Washington, however, was "the chief human symbol of a common Americanism." Stern, cold, a man of few words, the great Virginian did not seem a likely candidate for hero worship. "My countenance never yet revealed my feelings," he himself admitted. Yet he had qualities that made people name babies after him and call him "the Father of his Country" long before the war was won: His personal sacrifices in the cause of independence, his unyielding integrity, and above all, his obvious desire to retire to his Mount Vernon estate (for many Americans feared any powerful leader and worried lest Washington seek to become a dictator).

People of all sections, from every walk of life, looked upon Washington as the embodiment of American virtues: a man of deeds rather than words; a man of substance accustomed to luxury, yet capable of enduring great hardships stoically and as much at home in the wilderness as an Indian; and a bold Patriot, quick to take arms against British tyranny, yet eminently respectable. The Revolution might have been won without Washington, but it is unlikely that the free United States would have become so easily a true nation had he not been at its call.

**A National Culture**

Breaking away from Great Britain accentuated certain trends toward social and intellectual independence and strengthened the national desire to create an American culture. The Anglican Church in America had to form a new organization once the connection with the Crown was severed; in 1786 it became the Protestant Episcopal church. The Dutch and German reformed churches also became independent of their European connections. Roman Catholics in America had been under the administration of the vicar apostolic of England; after the Revolution Father John Carroll of Baltimore assumed these duties, and in 1789 he became the first American Roman Catholic bishop.

The impact of post- Revolutionary nationalism on American education was best reflected in the immense success of the textbooks of Noah Webster, later famous for his American dictionary. The first of these, the Spelling Book, which appeared in 1783, emphasized American forms and usage and contained a patriotic preface urging Americans to pay proper respect to their own literature. Webster's Reader, published shortly thereafter, included selections from the speeches of Revolutionary leaders who, according to Webster, were the equals of Cicero and Demosthenes as orators. Some 15 million copies of the Speller were sold in the next five decades, several times that number by 1900. The Reader was also a continuing best-seller.

Nationalism affected the arts and sciences in the years after the Revolution. Jedidiah Morse's popular American Geography (1789) was a paean in praise of the "astonishing" progress of the country, all the result of the "natural genius of Americans." The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, founded at Boston during the Revolution, was created "to advance the interest, honor, dignity and happiness of a free, independent and virtuous people."

American painters and writers of the period usually employed patriotic themes. Joel Barlow intended his Vision of Columbus, to prove that America was "the noblest and most elevated part of the earth." The poems of Philip Freneau dealt with the horrors of British prison camps and the naval triumphs of John Paul Jones and predicted a great future for the United States.

The United States in the 1780s was far from being the powerful centralized nation it has since become. Probably most citizens still gave their first loyalty to their own states. In certain important respects the Confederation was pitifully ineffectual. However, people were increasingly aware of their common interests and increasingly proud of their common heritage. The motto of the new nation, "E pluribus unum from many, one," perfectly describes a process that was gradually gathering strength in the years after Yorktown.

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