

American Revolution

In 1578 Humphrey Gilbert, the author of a treatise on the search for the Northwest Passage, received a patent from Queen Elizabeth to colonize the “heathen and barbarous landes” in the New World which other European nations had not yet claimed. It would be five years before his efforts could begin. When he was lost at sea, his half-brother, Walter Raleigh, took up the mission.

In 1585 Raleigh established the first British colony in North America with a group of colonists (91 men, 17 women and nine children) on Roanoke Island off the coast of North Carolina. The first act was to restore to their friends the two Indians who had been previously taken to England.

The colony was later abandoned. Sir Walter Raleigh fitted out another colony, which sailed in the spring of 1587; the second effort also proved a failure. Mysteriously, by 1590 the Roanoke colony had vanished entirely. Historians still do not know what became of its inhabitants.

The failure that attended all these efforts of the hopeful and energetic Raleigh was probably due, if not wholly, to the fact that he did not himself accompany and command any of his expeditions. And, the main reason that he did not go with the ships was, that he was a great favorite with Queen Elizabeth, and she was not willing to let him risk himself in such adventures. (Johnson)

British First Colonial Success at Jamestown, Then the Pilgrims

It would be 20 years before the British would try again. This time - at Jamestown in 1607 - the colony would succeed, and North America would enter a new era. (Alonzo L Hamby)

The early 1600s saw the beginning of a great tide of emigration from Europe to North America. Spanning more than three centuries, this movement grew from a trickle of a few hundred English colonists to a flood of millions of newcomers. Impelled by powerful and diverse motivations, they built a new civilization on the northern part of the continent.

Most European emigrants left their homelands to escape political oppression, to seek the freedom to practice their religion, or for adventure and opportunities denied them at home.

Just a few months after James I issued its charter, the London Company sent 144 men to Virginia on three ships: the Godspeed, the Discovery and the Susan Constant. They reached the Chesapeake Bay in the spring of 1607 and headed about 60 miles up the James River, where they built a settlement they called Jamestown.

Then, the first English emigrants to what would become the New England colonies were a small group of religious separatists, later called the Pilgrims, who arrived in Plymouth in 1620 on the Mayflower to found Plymouth Colony.



The Early Colonists Wanted to Remain English, Even Though They Were Persecuted and Arrested

According to William Bradford,

“But after these things they could not long continue in any peaceable condition, but were hunted & persecuted on every side, so as their former afflictions were but as flea-bitings in comparison of these which now came upon them.

For some were taken & clapt up in prison, others had their houses besett & watcht night and day, & hardly escaped their hands; and ye most were faine to flie & leave their howses & habitations, and the means of their livelihood.

Yet these & many other sharper things which afterward befell them, were no other then they looked for, and therefore were ye better prepared to bear them by ye assistance of Gods grace & sprite.

Yet seeing them selves thus molested, and that ther was no hope of their continuance ther, by a joynte consente they resloved to goe into ye low-countries, wher they heard was freedoms of religion for all men ...”

Between 1607-1618 CE, the congregation lived freely in Leiden. Bradford and Edward Winslow both wrote glowingly of their experience. In Leiden, God had allowed them, in Bradford’s estimation, “to come as near the primitive pattern of the first churches as any other church of these later times.” God had blessed them with “much peace and liberty,” Winslow echoed. (Joshua Mark, 2021)

However, after several years of living the Netherlands they cherished the freedom of conscience they enjoyed in Leiden, but the Pilgrims had two major complaints:

- they found it a hard place to maintain their English identity (their children wanted to speak Dutch instead of English and they missed other things about English life) and
- it was an even harder place to make a living.

In America, they hoped to live by themselves, enjoy the same degree of religious liberty and earn a “better and easier” living. (Robert Tracy McKenzie)

Their leaders, William Bradford, Reverend John Robinson and several others worked out a plan to move the entire Pilgrim church group to America. That way they could still be English. (NPS, Cape Cod National Seashore)

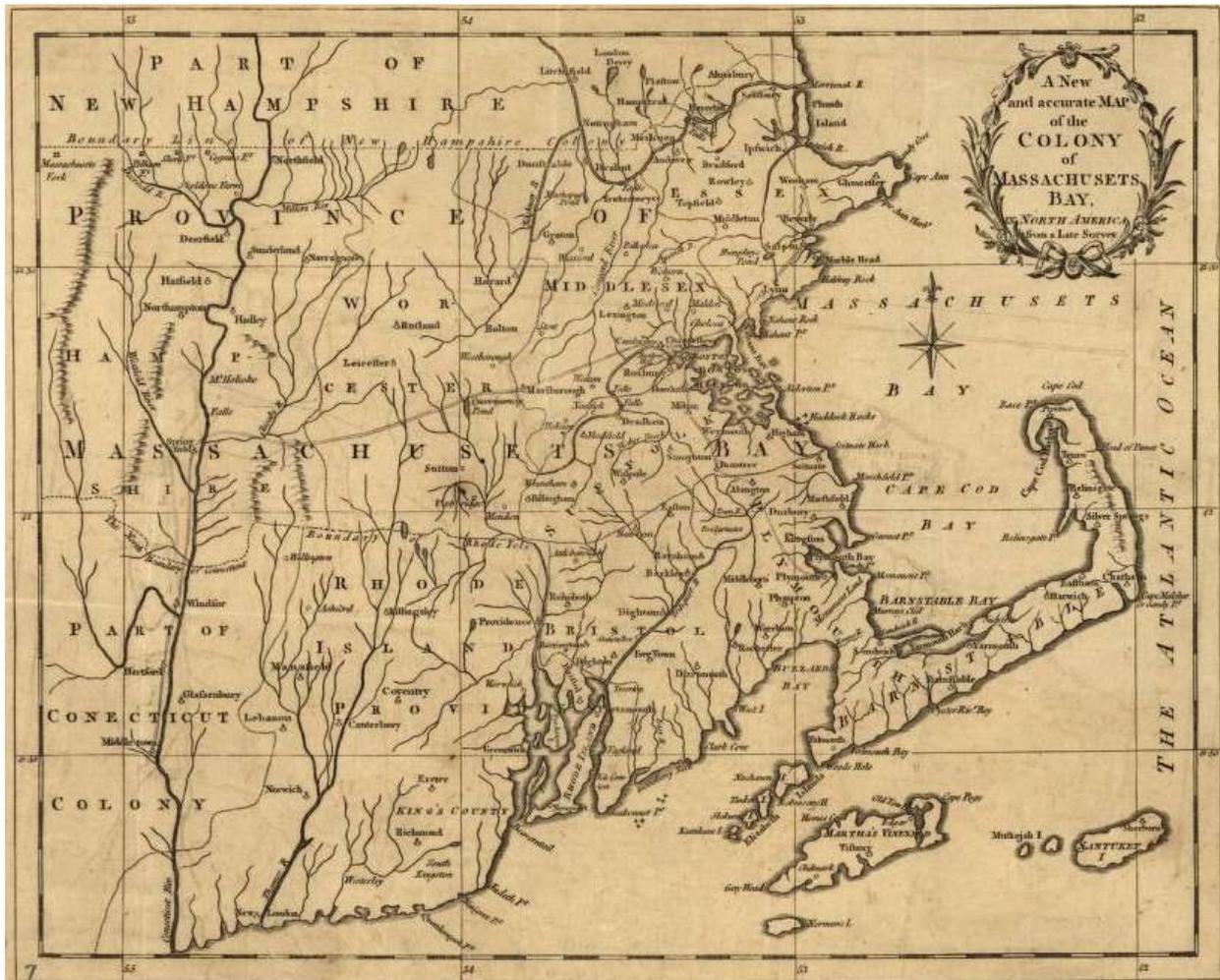
After deciding to leave, they settled on the New World as their destination due to its remoteness, according to Bradford:

“The place they had thoughts on was some of the those vast & unpeopled countries of America, which are frutfull & fitt for habitation, being devoyd of all civill inhabitants, wher there are only savage & brutish men, which range up and downe, little otherwise then ye wild beasts of the same.”

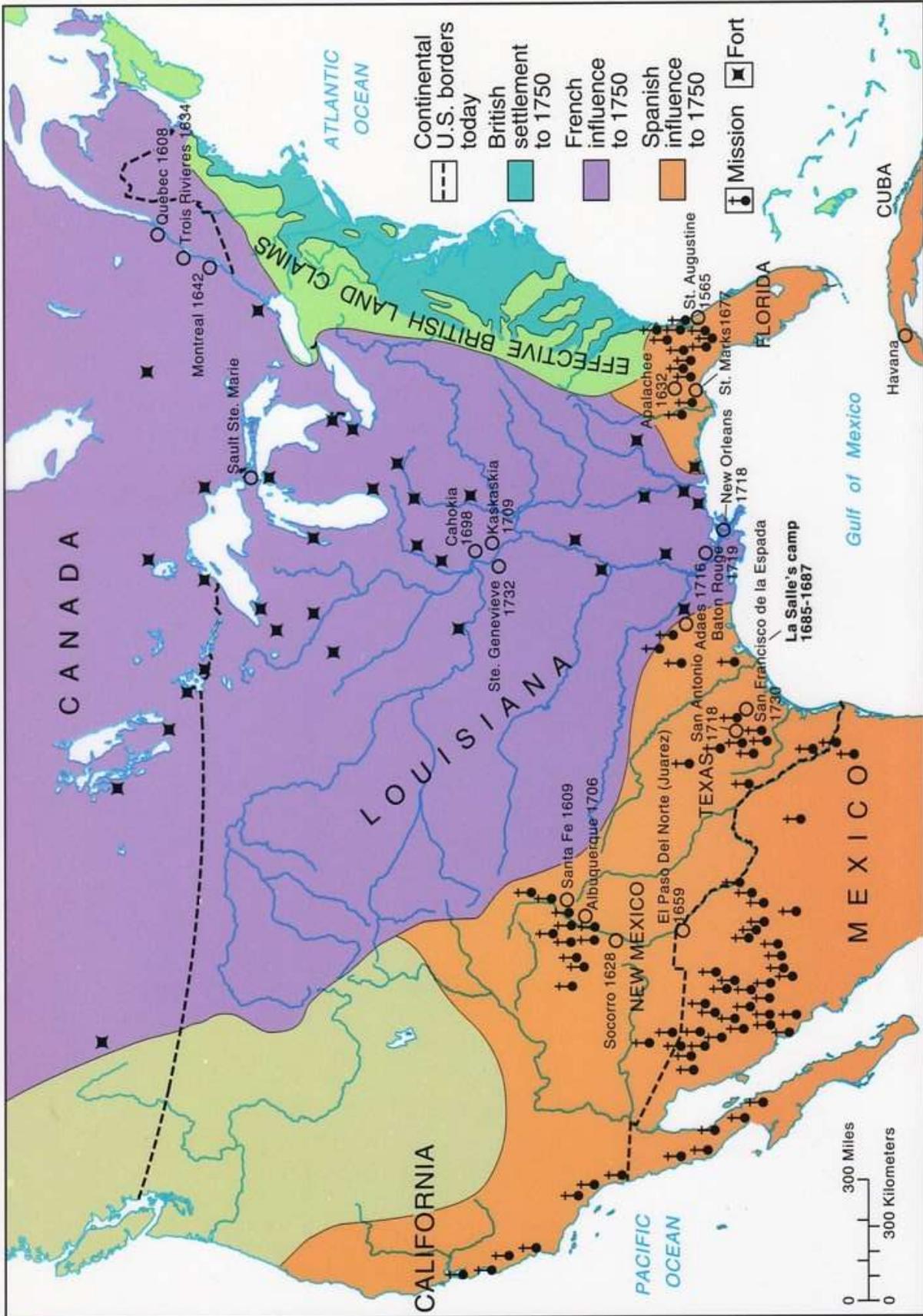
Bradford went to the Virginia Company and asked them for permission to establish a new colony in Virginia.

Seeking the right to worship as they wished, the Pilgrims had signed a contract with the Virginia Company to settle on land near the Hudson River, which was then part of northern Virginia. The Virginia Company was a trading company chartered by King James I with the goal of colonizing parts of the eastern coast of the New World. London stockholders financed the Pilgrim's voyage with the understanding they would be repaid in profits from the new settlement.

Ten years later, a wealthy syndicate known as the Massachusetts Bay Company sent a much larger (and more liberal) group of Puritans to establish another Massachusetts settlement. With the help of local natives, the colonists soon got the hang of farming, fishing and hunting, and Massachusetts prospered. As the Massachusetts settlements expanded, they generated new colonies in New England.



Between 1620 and 1635, economic difficulties swept England. Many people could not find work. Even skilled artisans could earn little more than a bare living. Poor crop yields added to the distress. In addition, the Industrial Revolution had created a burgeoning textile industry, which demanded an ever-increasing supply of wool to keep the looms running. Landlords enclosed farmlands and evicted the peasants in favor of sheep cultivation. Colonial expansion became an outlet for this displaced peasant population.



In 1632, the English crown granted about 12 million acres of land at the top of the Chesapeake Bay to Cecilius Calvert, the second Lord Baltimore. This colony, named Maryland, was similar to Virginia in many ways. Its landowners produced tobacco on large plantations that depended on the labor of indentured servants and (later) enslaved workers.

In 1664, King Charles II gave the territory between New England and Virginia, much of which was already occupied by Dutch traders and landowners called patroons, to his brother James, the Duke of York. The English soon absorbed Dutch New Netherland and renamed it New York, but most of the Dutch people (as well as the Belgian Flemings and Walloons, French Huguenots, Scandinavians and Germans who were living there) stayed. This made New York one of the most diverse and prosperous colonies.

In 1680, the king granted 45,000 square miles of land west of the Delaware River to William Penn, a Quaker who owned large swaths of land in Ireland. Lured by the fertile soil and the religious toleration that Penn promised, people migrated there from all over Europe. Like their Puritan counterparts in New England, most of these emigrants paid their own way to the colonies and had enough money to establish themselves when they arrived. As a result, Pennsylvania soon became a prosperous place.

By contrast, the Carolina colony, a territory that stretched south from Virginia to Florida and west to the Pacific Ocean, was much less cosmopolitan. In its northern half, hardscrabble farmers eked out a living. In its southern half, planters presided over vast estates that produced corn, lumber, beef and pork, and, starting in the 1690s, rice.

These Carolinians had close ties to the English planter colony on the Caribbean island of Barbados, which relied heavily on African slave labor, and many were involved in the slave trade themselves. As a result, slavery played an important role in the development of the Carolina colony. (It split into North Carolina and South Carolina in 1729.)

In 1732, inspired by the need to build a buffer between South Carolina and the Spanish settlements in Florida, the Englishman James Oglethorpe established the Georgia colony. In many ways, Georgia's development mirrored South Carolina's.

By 1750, some 80 per cent of the North American continent was controlled or influenced by France or Spain. Their presence was a source of tension and paranoia among those in the 13 British colonies, who feared encirclement, invasion and the influence of Catholicism.

In 1700, there were about 250,000 European settlers and enslaved Africans in North America's English colonies.

How Did the Colonists View Britain Before 1763?

When asked what the 'temper of America towards Great Britain' was before the year 1763, Benjamin Franklin responded,

The best in the world.

They have submitted willingly to the government of the Crown, and paid, in all their courts, obedience to acts of parliament.

Numerous as the people are in the several old provinces, they cost you nothing in forts, citadels, garrisons or armies, to keep them in subjection.

They were governed by this country at the expence only of a little pen, ink and paper. They were led by a thread. They had not only a respect, but an affection, for Great Britain, for its laws, its customs and manners, and even a fondness for its fashions, that greatly increased the commerce.

Natives of Britain were always treated with particular regard ; to be an Old England-man, was, of itself, a character of some respect, and gave a kind of rank among us.

(Franklin in Examination related to repeal of the Stamp Act)

In the 1600s and 1700s, Europeans came to North America looking for religious freedom, economic opportunities, and political liberty.

They created 13 colonies on the East Coast of the continent. Each colony had its own government, but the British king controlled these governments.

The settlers who migrated to and/or resettled in the colonies of Plymouth, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Connecticut paid little to nothing in taxes during the first few decades of their establishment. The English government imposed almost no taxes.

For example, the charter for the Massachusetts Bay Colony granted an exemption from all royal taxes, subsidies, and customs for seven years and from all taxes for 21 years, except a 5 percent duty on imports into England.

The chartered companies that established the colonies initially collected only quitrents, a land tax originally paid by freemen to the Crown or to the company that held a charter from the Crown. The quitrent, an annual payment of a fixed rate of several shillings for each hundred acres of land, secured a freeman's title to his land; it was paid in lieu of the services traditionally required by feudal custom.

The early colonies were sparsely settled and even more sparsely administered. The few officials who served did not receive official salaries until sometime in the 1640s. Their compensation came from fees for services rendered. These included issuing court papers, keeping records, arresting and punishing criminals, and issuing licenses.

In the early years, voluntary contributions supported spending on civic activities and church ministers. Too many free riders induced leaders to make contributions compulsory.

Taxpayers were recognized for their contributions; in Dedham, for example, the largest taxpayers received the best seats in church. The small sums collected by colonial governments were spent largely on roads, churches, and schools.

Reflecting the values of the day, a prominent nineteenth-century historian, Richard T. Ely, wrote that "one of the things against which our forefathers in England and in the American colonies contended was not against oppressive taxation, but against the payment of any taxes at all" (emphasis added).

Those who braved the hardship of travel across the Atlantic and who tamed a wilderness on their own did not relish paying taxes to any government.

But taxes were not long in coming.

Growing populations in the colonies necessitated defensive measures against Indians and other European intruders, along with the need to build and maintain roads, schools, prisons, public buildings, and ports and to support poor relief. A variety of direct and indirect taxes was gradually imposed on the colonists.

The corporate colonies in New England enjoyed the legal right to levy direct taxes on their residents, which stemmed from the right of trading corporations to levy assessments on their stockholders.

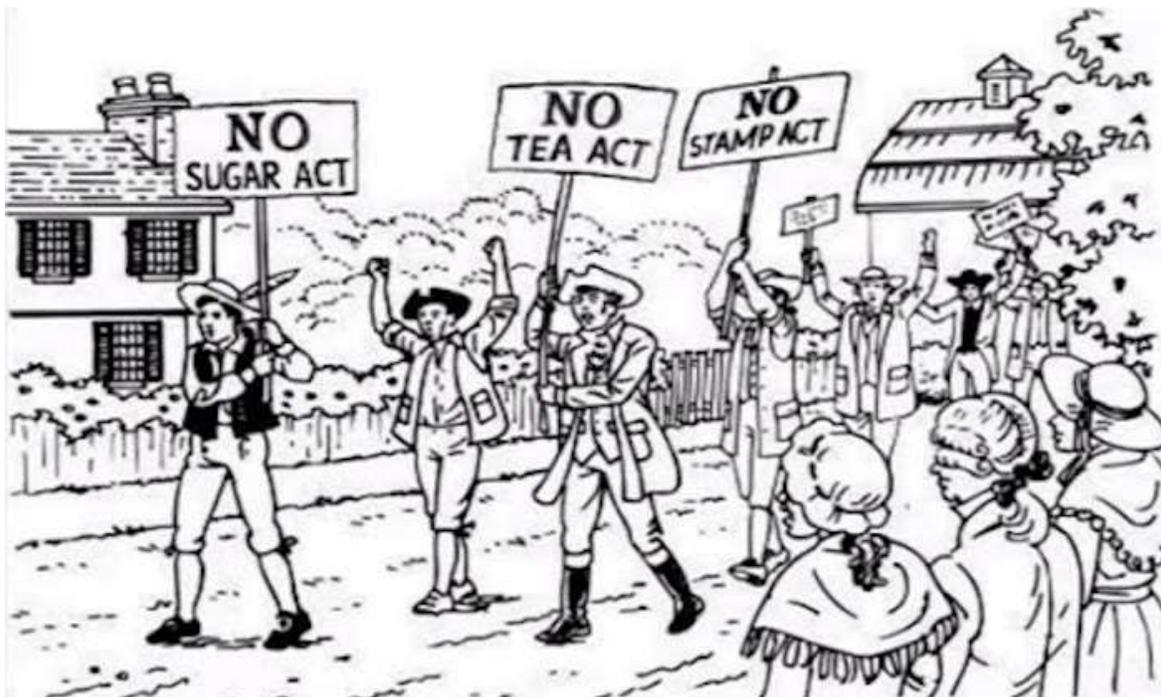
In 1638, the General Court in Massachusetts required all freemen and non-freemen to support both the commonwealth and the church. Direct taxes took two forms: (1) a wealth tax and (2) a poll, or head tax, which in some instances evolved into or included an income tax.

Direct taxes were supplemented by several import and export duties in the New England colonies (save in Rhode Island). For several brief periods, Massachusetts imposed a “tonnage duty” of 1s. per ton on vessels trading, but not owned, in the colony, which was earmarked to maintain fortifications.

Taxation Without Representation in the British Parliament Led to War

John Adams wrote a letter to Otis’s biographer William Tudor, Jr., in 1818. After quoting that letter at length Tudor wrote in his book:

From the navigation act the advocate [Otis] passed to the Acts of Trade, and these, he contended, imposed taxes, enormous, burthensome, intolerable taxes; and on this topic he gave full scope to his talent, for powerful declamation and invective, against the tyranny of taxation without representation. (Emphasis added)



This was followed up by declarations at the Stamp Tax Congress in New York in October 1765. The Stamp Act Congress passed a 'Declaration of Rights and Grievances.' This claimed that American colonists were equal to all other British citizens, protested taxation without representation, and stated that, without colonial representation in Parliament, Parliament could not tax colonists. In addition, the colonists increased their nonimportation efforts.

By 1775, on the eve of revolutionary war, there were an estimated 2.5 million people in the colonies.

The American Revolutionary War (1775-1783) was sparked after American colonists chafed over issues like taxation without representation, embodied by laws like The Stamp Act and The Townshend Acts. Mounting tensions came to a head during the Battles of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775, when the "shot heard round the world" was fired.

It was not without warning; the Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770 and the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773 showed the colonists' increasing dissatisfaction with British rule in the colonies.

The Declaration of Independence, issued on July 4, 1776, enumerated the reasons the Founding Fathers felt compelled to break from the rule of King George III and parliament to start a new nation. In September of that year, the Continental Congress declared the "United Colonies" of America to be the "United States of America."

France joined the war on the side of the colonists in 1778, helping the Continental Army.

But, was the 'Revolution' really the 'War?'

George Washington, Commander in Chief of all Virginia forces (and later First President of the United States) wrote to Robert Dinwiddie on March 10, 1757 expressed some thoughts about the changing conditions,

We cant conceive, that being Americans shoud deprive us of the benefits of British Subjects; nor lessen our claim to preferment ...

As to those Idle Arguments which are often times us'd—namely, You are Defending your own properties; I look upon to be whimsical & absurd; We are Defending the Kings Dominions

and althô the Inhabitants of Gt Britain are removd from (this) Danger, they are yet, equally with Us, concernd and Interested in the Fate of the Country

and there can be no Sufficient reason given why we, who spend our blood and Treasure in Defence of the Country are not entitled to equal prefermt.

Some boast of long Service as a claim to Promotion - meaning I suppose, the length of time they have pocketed a Commission –

I apprehend it is the service done, not the Service engag'd in, that merits reward; and that their is, as equitable a right to expect something for three years hard & bloody Service, as for 10 spent at St James's &ca where real Service, or a field of Battle never was seen

John Adams, Second President of the United States also spoke of the Revolution; in a letter to Thomas Jefferson (August 24, 1815) Adams stated,

What do We mean by the Revolution? The War?

That was no part of the Revolution. It was only an Effect and Consequence of it. The Revolution was in the Minds of the People, and this was effected, from 1760 to 1775, in the course of fifteen Years before a drop of blood was drawn at Lexington.

The Records of thirteen Legislatures, the Pamphlets, Newspapers in all the Colonies ought be consulted, during that Period, to ascertain the Steps by which the public opinion was enlightened and informed concerning the Authority of Parliament over the Colonies.

The Congress of 1774, resembled in Some respects, tho' I hope not in many, the Counsell of Nice in Ecclesiastical History. It assembled the Priests from the East and the West the North and the South, who compared Notes, engaged in discussions and debates and formed Results, by one Vote and by two Votes, which went out to the World as unanimous.

Thomas Jefferson, Third President of the United States, noted,

Societies exist under three forms sufficiently distinguishable. 1. Without government ... 2. Under governments wherein the will of every one has a just influence ... 3. Under governments of force To have an idea of the curse of existence under these last, they must be seen.

It is a government of wolves over sheep. It is a problem, not clear in my mind, that the 1st. condition is not the best. But I believe it to be inconsistent with any great degree of population.

The second state has a great deal of good in it. The mass of mankind under that enjoys a precious degree of liberty and happiness. It has it's evils too: the principal of which is the turbulence to which it is subject. But weigh this against the oppressions of monarchy, and it becomes nothing. ... Even this evil is productive of good. It prevents the degeneracy of government, and nourishes a general attention to the public affairs.

I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical. It is a medicine necessary for the sound health of government.

These leaders help us understand that there is a difference between the 'Revolution' and the 'War.' The Second Continental Congress declared American independence on July 2, 1776.

The Lee Resolution, also known as the resolution of independence, was an act of the Second Continental Congress declaring the United Colonies to be independent of the British Empire. Richard Henry Lee of Virginia first proposed it on June 7, 1776; it was formally approved on July 2, 1776.

The document justifying the act of Congress - Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence - was adopted on the fourth of July, as is indicated on the document itself. In it we learn more about the difference between the 'Revolution' and the 'War.'

Jefferson's document (as edited by the Congress) states, in part,

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political

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, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.

But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.

Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world. ...

By the time the Declaration of Independence was adopted on July 4, 1776, the Thirteen Colonies (New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia) and Great Britain had been at war for more than a year.

That war lasted from April 19, 1775 (with the Battles of Lexington and Concord) to September 3, 1783 (with the signing of the Treaty of Paris.) It lasted 8 years, 4 months, 2 weeks and 1 day; then, the sovereignty of the United States was recognized over the territory bounded roughly by what is now Canada to the north, Florida to the south, and the Mississippi River to the west.

Information here is from Bradford; National Archives; Robert Tracy McKenzie, Washington Post; Joshua Mark; Declaration of Independence, National Archives; Mayflower Compact; Caleb Johnson, Mayflower History; Library of Congress; Hoover Institute, History-com

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the American Revolution, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young