University

American Revolution

Subject

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American Revolution

**Introduction**

The roots of the American Revolution are multifaceted and nuanced; besides, it began as an argument over taxes. The British wanted the colonists to help pay some of the cost for the previous war in the continent — the “French and Indian War” — was not an altogether an unreasonable demand. The problem was that the colonists would’ve felt better if they could have at least been consulted on which taxes were imposed and how they were imposed. In short, they wanted to be treated as English gentlemen, they wanted to be treated as “men of respect.” The upper-middle-class in England had real power in the Parliament at that time — and that was how the more affluent colonists hoped to be treated. They wanted to have some kind of voice in the decisions that affected them. Many of the more eminent colonists met in the Continental Congress and sent a petition of grievances. The response of the British government was, “Shut up and cease all complaining”, otherwise, the British would hunt down the members of Congress and hang them for treason. Most of the political scholars are of the view that a series of taxes and trade limitations were imposed on Colonial goods and businesses to keep them competitively limited compared to British imports. The generic problem was that the British were trying to get blood out of a turnip. They set up trade restrictions on the colonies such that there was very little “money” (then understood as specifically gold and silver coins) in the colonies, and then tried to raise revenue (of gold and silver coins) in those same colonies. This essay will discuss all economic, social and political events that led to the American Revolution.

**Causes**

Economic Causes

Economics explains almost all. The colonies had matured to the point where they could live free of Britain and for the most part, they were living free. Until the French and Indian War, when they needed help fighting off the French and their Indian allies who were both scalping people on the frontier. After the war was won and over, Britain was breaking from fighting American Revolutionary war and wanted to regain some of its cost. With every attempt to do so, there were protests emanating from New England and the southern colonies. Southern planters lived on credit; they shipped their cotton and tobacco to England and put orders for luxury goods. These were land-rich, cash-poor people, who overall, as a group, were always in the red to the British middlemen. Such people sold their cotton and tobacco and ordered them their luxury goods and shipped them over to the colonies. Getting rid of Great Britain meant getting rid of their enormous debts to their British 'factors' [[1]](#footnote-1).

New England merchants, particularly those engaged in shipping and New England, were the center for shipping in the colonies. No one wanted to pay the British anything for the protection of their army now that the war was over. Nor did they want to be told they could not move west. The British could not extend their army farther west; they were already bankrupt and the colonists didn't want to pay anything for protection so the Britain said, “No more westward movement”. Britain reacted poorly and very heavy-handedly, and that did nothing to improve the situation. Basically, the colonies had outgrown their colonial status. New Zealand and Australia eventually gained as much independence as they wanted without fighting a war but they were younger. It was time for Britain to give it up but a stubborn Prime Minister ignored good advice and bore down rather than giving up. However, for the French and Indian War, the U.S. might well still be part of the family of nations that comprise the Commonwealth rather than just be really good friends with them.

England’s King George, spent a large amount of money in support of British troops in this campaign and needed a new revenue source to help that considerable debt, so he imposed very high taxes on the colonies. Actions took by the British Parliament, such as The Sugar Act and The Stamp Act, led to the rallying cry of “Taxation without Representation” being sounded in America, because the early colonies were not allowed to have a seat in Parliament, and this was against the British Bill of Rights of 1689 [[2]](#footnote-2). However, perhaps the final straw was the passage of the so-called Intolerable Acts, a series of laws imposed to squash American resolve and keep the colonists in line. Americans, while previously loyal to the crown, had had enough. Our ancestors began to hoard weapons and ammunition, which eventually led to movements in Lexington and Concorde. The Seven Years War, also known as, The French and Indian War, bankrupted the UK[[3]](#footnote-3). The Parliament then convinced them that they fought the war on behalf of American colonists, so Americans themselves should foot the bill. The rich political class in America objected to that, exacerbated by the fact that they had no representation in Parliament, so they couldn’t even say “Hell Naw” to their government legitimately. So, they said it by destroying British property instead, ignoring Parliament’s draconian rules and taxes, and eventually using guns and violence.

Political Causes

The biggest freedom fought for in the revolutionary war was economic freedom. It was a tax revolt by wealthy colonists. The patriotic way to frame it is to say it was for self-determination and self-governance. Another issue was expanding settlement beyond the Appalachian Mountains. The King and Parliament in Britain were hesitant to let the colonists do this due to the cost associated with protecting these settlers. There were international issues that were not as important to the colonists. In addition, the ability of the colony to raise and retain their own tax monies, as determined domestically, was overpowered by the British crown. British, instead of allowing colonies to collect tax money, introduced new taxes that added more fuel to the clout. This was framed as a push for more self-government by the colonies. Expansion Westwards was also a factor as the English were strongly opposed to such a move by the American colonists even though it would have benefitted the colonists but would have brought them into conflict with France who claimed the territory [[4]](#footnote-4). England and France were already facing each other in a battle for control of territory from India to the Far East as well as in North America. They were spread pretty thin and this may have led to a harsher clampdown on American expansion ambitions which would provoke more clashes with France. Such a clampdown on American ambitions may well have fueled the insurgency.

After the cessation of the French and Indian War, the British and French demarcated a barrier in North America between the respective empires and began to enforce existing taxes and levy new ones on merchants. Colonists viewed both as problematic as they had become accustomed to self-governance and not having to “pay their share” to the Empire. The growing population of poor whites and small farmers saw the West as their opportunity for upward mobility, but they were blocked by the Native population and their French Allies. Again, the Empire's agreement with the French was viewed as problematic. The rhetoric of the American Revolution was very “English” in that it resembled many of the arguments made during the Glorious Revolution, which established the parliament as the supreme governing body. The colonists also incorporated enlightenment ideals and Lockean political thought to justify their revolution. This contributed to internal upheaval in the colonies. The democratizing impetus helped to build support among the average farmer and worker, who might otherwise not support the revolution, but also led to substantial changes in the newly formed American Republic. Increased pressure for universal suffrage, more emphasis on representative government, and a greater emphasis on individual rights and freedoms (at least for white guys) were outcomes of the process of fighting the revolution. Ironically, or perhaps not so, slavery also became more deeply entrenched in the Southern US, requiring a second revolution.

Social Causes

The democratic principle of the right of self-government, vs. the traditional aristocratic rule of Divine Right of Kings; however, it doesn’t affect us much, except in name only, since we live under the fraudulent claim of “limited consent—” which is, of course, an oxymoron. Specifically, the Constitution was adopted by the democratic will of the *People* of each state, and they did not abolish that supreme authority by subordinating wholly to the whims of the 540+ sitting officials of a national republic, who were somehow mysteriously “limited” by some mere printed words on a piece of paper, over whose meaning they likewise had final discretion. No; unlike today, the Peoples of the states were not that imprudent [[5]](#footnote-5). On the contrary, the Constitutional republic was strictly federal*,* among thirteen national republics - each of which was democratically subordinate to its respective People.

Thus, in order to claim the right to mount a revolution against their official nation, the Founders stood on the principle of individual equality— and with it, the right of a People of land to govern themselves, rather than be subject to unlimited submission to a supreme ruler in another land [[6]](#footnote-6). Accordingly, this act successfully secured democratic national sovereignty to each state individually — not collectively; and they had no intention of escaping from one empire, only to form another contrary to the claims of the current occupying regime in Washington DC.

**Conclusion**

The English system had a flaw: it couldn’t be changed. Districts were distributed political power (literally in the form of seats at the table) based on conditions as they were in the twelve hundred. Things changed over the next 500 years. Places like India and America “didn’t exist” in the twelve hundred, so that means they have no representation in parliament. Rich people in those places could buy land in England to obtain a seat (google “rotten boroughs”) but the poor - and the colonists of North America we’re relatively poor compared to the tea and sugar interests of India and the Caribbean - were left out, but still subject to the legal and financial will of a parliament controlled by these powerful interests. For example, to prevent buying “illegal” sugar (illegal defined as sugar grown on a French or Spanish island) it must obtain an official stamp before sugar could be sold. So, sugar grown on an island 100 miles of Florida, had to be shipped across the ocean, stamped, then shipped back to Boston or New York. The cost of all that shipping, of course, was built into the price of the sugar. And there was nothing they could do about it.

# Bibliography

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2. John Franklin Jameson, *The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement* (Princeton University Press, 1967). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “An Inquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies,” Teaching American History, accessed October 16, 2019, https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/an-inquiry-into-the-rights-of-the-british-colonies/. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Gordon S. Wood, *Rhetoric and Reality in the American Revolution*, vol. 23 (Bobbs-Merrill, 1966). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Jameson, *The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Wood, *Rhetoric and Reality in the American Revolution*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)