

The Revolution and the Beginning of American Nationalism

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The Intellectual life in early America and especially in New England was deeply associated with the churches. The clergy was the only leisure class with time available to address subjects that were not primarily utilitarian. They would preach on Sunday and teach the rest of the week. They wrote prolifically including books and pamphlets, filled most chairs in the church established college system, and were the primary source of political opinion and commentary. (1 p. ch. 3)

While neither the Congregational (puritan) church in New England nor the Anglicans in Virginia could claim anything approaching popular support from the general population with religious participation levels only running somewhere from 10% to 20% of the population anywhere in the colonies, the Congregationalists had some distinct advantages. The Anglicans had a following of only the planters or ruling class in the Tidewater areas, not making significant inroads into the general population, and there appears to have been little enthusiasm even at that. The difficulty in reaching the masses lied in having a widely dispersed, low density population and high cost structure accompanied by relatively unmotivated clergy who were paid by the English government. In New England, the Congregationalists were also state supported but by the colonies and had a somewhat higher adherence level that, amongst the ruling class, had a much higher degree of enthusiasm. The population was less dispersed with some higher density areas and the economy was more diversified with shipping and manufacturing components and trade linking more people economically to collective political decisions. The college system they established, although tending to secularize rapidly from the beginning, was the gateway to the upper levels of society and remains so today. (1 p. ch. 3)

In New England, the unity of church and state was virtually complete. In each town separate congregations were formed that also functioned as a school. Town meetings were tied to the churches where secular matters were determined. Relative to the eventual separation from the mother country, the Congregational churches were fully opposed to the Anglican Church which was a branch of the English government making the churches a natural focal point to resistance to English rule. (1 p. ch. 3) The Anglicans, on the other hand, remained largely separate from political affairs and were increasing irrelevant to the developing American cultures even outside of New England. By the mid-18th century some Anglican leadership recognized the waning influence of the church in the colonies and made efforts to reverse this pattern, however, their efforts were too late to be effective. Perhaps, due to changing demographics and emerging American religious patterns, they were doomed from the beginning.

In New England the clergy became a dominant group through their academic learning and their proclamations of damnation on the faithless. They generated massive amounts of written material. Cotton Mather, for example authored 383 books and pamphlets. (1 p. ch. 3) In conjunction with government authorities, they enforced strict observance of the Sabbath, which included any sort of amusement or even worldly conversation, and implemented the American version of witch hunts. (1 p. ch. 3)

Turning to the chain of events that led to the separation from England, we see largely economic issues that were and are presented in a philosophical and religious context. The 7 Year War, or the French Indian War as it has been taught in American schools, was a turning point in colonial history so the first points to address are the general circumstances that prevailed in the colonies prior to this event starting with relations with the Indians and French and then looking at the British.

The colonist's interactions with the Indian populations presents differently at different places and times and didn't have any sort of coherent plan at any level with conflicts largely occurring on the expanding frontier. There were periodic atrocities committed on all sides and the Indians were capable adversaries who adopted new technology where available but ultimately the demographic tide would determine the outcome. In New York there were periodic wars with the Algonquins and Mohawks who were allied with French. In Virginia Nathaniel Bacon attempted to lead a revolt and expedition against Indians. Other colonies, due to their geographical locations, were spared Indian wars and others like Pennsylvania and Georgia by negotiation avoided problems throughout most of the colonial period. The French colonies of Quebec and Montreal were geographically separated from the English colonies by too great a distance to bring about natural conflict through most of the colonial period but the strategic global conflict between France and England led to several military encounters prior to the beginning of the Seven Year War. King William's War (1689-1697), Queen Anne's War (1701 – 1713), and King George's War (1744 – 1748) all involved American colonists. (1 p. ch. 4) The most significant lasting effect of these continual smaller wars was the gradual development of a military capability with the colonies that was not solely tied to England. A secondary effect was to create an ever increasing financial burden and debt for the mother country.

Following the Seven Year War, which was global in scope and initiated in the America in large part by the actions of British Officer George Washington, the British government sought additional revenue to deal with government debt and increasing costs of government. The Leader in the Commons was George Greenville who was a fiscal conservative that sought to reduce debt and the cost of government. Another key player was Charles Townsend who was well familiar with the challenges of colonial government and no friend of the colonies. William Pitt, who was a friend and supporter of the colonies, was turned out of office and King George III had just come into office in 1760. While English Kings of this time period were in most respects largely Germanic, George III portrayed himself as an English nationalist. These factors led to a number of taxes being imposed on the colonies to increase revenue along with restrictions on the printing of paper money by the colonies which had been a common practice. The cheap money was used to pay taxes and debts to British creditors and is why Ben Franklin had referred to the revolution as a banking war. Estimates of the tax burden on the American colonist during the colonial period range from 1% of GDP to 2.5% varying with the area and the time period. (2 p. 729) Taxation was heavier in the Southern agricultural colonies. . They also benefitted from British military protection and investment and, in terms of taxation, were net beneficiaries. The Americans owed a great deal of their general prosperity to England. (1 p. ch. 4)

Of probably greater importance were restrictions on the colonist trade related to the Navigation Acts. Those favoring a largely philosophical treatment of the revolution will minimize this but the opportunity cost (revenue and return not realized) was immense and was born on by the shipping, maritime, and

finance sectors of the economy which was centered in the Northeastern coastal cities of Boston, Philadelphia, and New York and was political influential. These acts, which had been generally in place since the late 1600's, significantly restricted colonial trade and specifically blocked access to the increasingly lucrative Asian trade routes protecting a monopoly for the British East India Company. Looked at broadly, these restrictions are seen as being moderate and it is generally concluded that colonists gained more than they lost by British trade and industrial restrictions as they were supplemented by other measures that were favorable to the colonies and were often not rigidly enforced. The impact was severe, however, for specific sectors and areas and the lost opportunities were expanding. (1 p. ch. 4)

The back and forth actions escalated leading to the Five Intolerable Acts that went through parliament in March and April of 1774 with little opposition. The fourth act legalized the quartering of troops in Massachusetts towns and the fifth, referred to as the Quebec Act, granted religious tolerance to Catholics in Canada and extended the boundaries of Quebec southward to the Ohio River along with viceroys government in the western region. The Quebec Act was the most offensive to Protestant churches as the British government did not observe religious tolerance for Catholics either at home or in Ireland making this appear to be an attempt to enlist French Canadians on the side of Great Britain. Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Virginia also had large claims to territory annexed to Quebec.

Throughout the course of the war the clergy, especially the New England clergy, played a key role in supporting the war through sermons and a vast amount of writings. This was closely associated with the Congress that gave patriotic clergy abundant opportunities to speak. Abigail Adams wrote her husband, *"The clergy of every denomination, not excepting the Episcopalian, thunder and lightning every Sabbath. They pray for Boston and Massachusetts, They thank God most explicitly and fervently for our remarkable success. They pray for the American Army."* (1 p. ch. 4) While teachings and beliefs regarding end time prophecies were not nearly as sophisticated as they would start to become in the ensuing decades, both new light and northern evangelical preachers adapted prophetic interpretation to political events. In Protestant thought, in order for the millennium to come, Christ must defeat the Antichrist. The Antichrist, from shortly after the time of the reformation, in Protestant interpretation referred to the papacy. Therefore it was reasoned by American dissenters, that any political or military defeat of Catholic countries (or in this case Anglican which was not far enough removed) was a step toward the dawning of the millennium which raised the cause of political liberty to that of a sacred mission (3 pp. 45-46). As an example of this, Samuel West of Dartmouth in an annual election sermon before the legislature in 1776 stated that the minions of the Antichrist *"better be understood as political rather than ecclesiastical tyrants"* and then went on to say that the *"horrible wild beast"* ascending from the bottomless pit in Revelation could refer to the British army. West concluded by saying, *"We must beat our plowshares into swords, and our pruning hooks into spears."* (3 pp. 45-46)

While the British had a strong advantage at Sea, embargo and blockades were largely ineffective during this war which is a major contrast from most wars before and since. The American population, outside of the coastal cities and some large plantations, consisted largely of subsistence farmers who produced what they consumed and were not highly dependent on trade to survive. Related to that point, those

who most supported the revolution were those most impacted by British measures effecting trade and banking but heavy handed British policies throughout the colonies increased support for the Revolution.

A final question affecting the demographics of the new nation going forward is the treatment and numbers of the Torres or loyalists. Patriot groups were fairly ruthless in dealing with Torres. They commonly called on men to sign a loyalty or association test. If they didn't do this, they were jailed or became outlaws. The prison camp in Connecticut at one time held the former governor of New Jersey and mayor of New York. In Pennsylvania the "*black list*" contained the names of 500 prominent people. Torres who were bold enough to write or speak were forcefully suppressed. In New England their property was confiscated and applied to fund the revolution. The Episcopalian or Anglican Church was loyal to England, not surprising as it was England's state church, and saw their numbers and stature diminished coming out of the revolution and Torres had little or no access to the church pulpits. In addition to political suppression, there was also mob violence. Some were hung without trial and many others were tarred and feathered. Whole families would make their ways through British lines and to Canada which created the seed for much of the British Canadian population. In total, about 46,000 Torres fled to Canada or other locations. (4) Many Torres joined the British Army. Through one means or another, the two groups were eventually separated.

It's not really possible to determine which side had popular support in the colonies as there was no election and no polls and there is conflicting evidence and claims. John Adams asserted that two thirds were for the American cause and one third for the British (that would probably reflect New England and maybe New York). Torre John Galloway, who had been in the First Continental Congress but later left for England, claimed that only about 20% of the colonial population supported the revolution. A committee of American loyalists stated in an address to the king that "*the number of Americans in his majesty's Army exceeded the number of troops enlisted by Congress to oppose them.*" In the end, the involvement of the French and, to a lesser extent, the Spanish, on the American side determined the outcome of the conflict as it was simply too expensive and problematic for the British to continue. The Americans won by not losing long enough. (1 p. ch. 4)

The rallying cry of "*Taxation without Representation*" from Virginian Patrick Henry has resounded through the centuries and stems from what is probably the most foundational concept of the revolution, which is that government comes from the consent of the governed. Yet, this was not understood at the time in the same manner it is presented and interpreted today. In his book, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the Founding Fathers*, Brion McClanahan addresses a number of foundational myths that most now hold regarding the founders intent. Some are related to individuals and events but others to very foundational concepts. The idea that government comes from the consent of the governed and that the governed should play a role in the government was not a radical new concept as it's now frequently portrayed and was actually based on the Magna Carta with a long history in British common law (5 p. 32). While the economic motivations for secession overwhelmingly benefitted the New England states and New York, there was a good deal of Southern sympathy because many felt that the Northern colonies were getting their rights violated as Englishmen. Secondly the founders overwhelming saw the new nation as a Republic and not a Democracy. They were generally well acquainted with classical history and saw that democracies ended in societal collapse. Alexander Hamilton, who would be one of

the most liberal founders and is held in high esteem by the modern left said of pure democracy, *"Experience has proved that no position in politics is more false than this. The ancient democracies.. never possessed one feature of good government. Their very character was tyranny; their figure, deformity."* (5 pp. 10-11) Others echoed this understanding:

"The evils we experience flow from an excess of democracy. The people do not want virtue but are dupes of pretend patriots" Elbridge Gerry, Massachusetts (5 pp. 10-11)

"A democracy is the only pure Republic but is impracticable beyond a small town" Thomas Jefferson (5 pp. 10-11)

"Give all the power to the many, they will oppress the few. Give all the power to the few, they will oppress the many. Both, therefore, ought to have the power, that each may defend against the other. Alexander Hamilton. (5 pp. 10-11)

When modern politicians worship at the altar of democracy and use this as justification for foreign intervention, they are appealing to a false history. The founders saw government as something that was potentially very dangerous and needed to be constrained through a system of checks and balances.

As to equality and universal suffrage, this also is broadly misunderstood. Voting rights were highly limited in early America very similar to what they were in England. While certain rights may be conveyed by God to all men, participation in government was bestowed only on freemen. This was not hypocritical as it would be seen today but was exactly how it would have been understood in the time period. The founders believed in a natural hierarchy of talents and abilities which reflects a sort of natural self-organization that has always been present in history (5 pp. 13-14). Ignorance is always an available personal choice but was seen as something that should not be spread through the forces of government. Jefferson wrote of this, *"If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization. It expects what never was and will never be"*.

On the subject of slavery and the founders, in modern times this is generally seen as a regional tug of war between the Northern and Southern founders but this too is far from reality. As was previously addressed, the North and specifically the New England states, benefitted greatly from the transport of slaves across the New World, were economically dependent on slave produced crops and raw materials, and produced the ships but slave owning was also wide spread in the North during the colonial period. William Penn and John Winthrop owned slaves. John Hancock and Benjamin Franklin owned slaves as did many other Northern signers of the declaration and delegates to the constitutional convention. (5 pp. 14-17)

Beyond investing heavily in slavery as a business, the institution was widely spread in New England at this time. Half of all ministers, lawyers, and public officials in Connecticut owned slaves. Most principal families in Norwich, Hartford, and New Haven owned slaves. Ministers like Cotton Mather supported slavery and supported this position with Biblical arguments. Laws restricting the movements and freedoms of free blacks in the North were also taking shape and were fairly extensive by the time of the revolution. (6 pp. 6-7)

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