

A Paranoid's Guide to History
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The American Revolution?

The historical construct has been invoked time and again to justify and support policies and decisions. This is the case with American history and especially our intimate relationship with war. The American Revolution, our founding moment, is an event that most Americans would seemingly be familiar with. Yet this is not the case, most Americans have been poorly educated about their own history. Many have heard of Washington and Franklin but are not sure which was the president. The ramifications of this are graver than is commonly acknowledged.

Alternative views of the events of the American Revolution put current ideas and actions in a different light. The birth of the United States helped establish principles of power based on military victory and social revolution. The French, Haitians, Chinese, Indians, South Americans, and Africans all feel themselves legitimate inheritors of sovereign political power as the result of their various revolutions.

It is important to recount some of the history to set the stage. By 1763 the English had just waged the Seven Years War against the French in Europe, North America, and on the high seas incurring millions of pounds of debt and direct costs. They needed to find someone to finance the apparatus of state and empire. Who better than the direct beneficiaries of the policies and actions of the English government, the colonists. The resistance to taxes levied by the British grew until it became violent rebellion. At which point the Colonial and Royal Governments attempted to use their police, military and judicial powers to enforce the will of the British parliament.

By 1770 the colonists had effectively sought the elimination of the Townshend and Quartering Acts, as well as prosecuted eight English soldiers implicated in the Boston Massacre, where three rioters were shot in a scuffle with British military police.

At this point, the Sons of Liberty had become active. This secret terrorist organization was filled with colonists who sought to obstruct and overthrow the legitimate functioning of the English government's system of laws and taxation. Led by "godless blasphemers" like Samuel Adams people were incited to resist Royal authority. In a widely circulated pamphlet Adams questioned the basic

legitimacy of English representative government and the constitution.

John Hancock, a prominent supporter of cession, was seen as nothing more than a rebellious smuggler, covering his crimes with the veil of traitorous empty political rhetoric. In one instance while the owner of the ship *Liberty*, a customs official was confined on board while wine was smuggled off to avoid taxes. In response local officials seized his ship, but they were attacked and needed the intervention of two British warships. The taxes being levied were used for the maintenance, protection and well being of the colonies. The quartering of troops was necessary to keep the peace and protect citizens, as well as insure the prosperity of the Empire.

The Boston Tea Party, so called, was initiated in response to the continuation of a longstanding import duty. Groups of masqueraded colonists attacked British ships in Boston Harbor, dumping over three hundred barrels of tea into the water.

The responses (the Coercive Acts) to the actions of civil insurrection taken by "revolutionaries and traitors" were met with further acts of violence. On April 19, 1775 the English Military Governor of Massachusetts ordered troops to seize an illegal cache of weapons in a town

outside Boston. A tense stand-off turned into a military incident when rebels fired on and were shot by British troops on Lexington Green. After collecting the weapons in Concord the English troops were forced to retreat back to Boston while under fire. The English suffered over two hundred casualties in this operation. Understandably the British now feared this act of insurrection would turn into general rebellion so they applied pressure throughout the colonies. Fighting broke out again in June 1775 at Bunker Hill in Boston. By August of that year King George III declared the colonies officially in "Open Rebellion."

In January 1776 the pamphlet *Common Sense* was published by former Englishman Tom Paine. His radical idea of American independence was made even more outlandish by his political treason and religious idolatry. In May the Americans made an illegal treaty in furtherance of their crimes. As if to boast to the "candid world" on July 4, 1776 the colonists issued the *Declaration of Independence*. After their acts of insurrection and disloyalty these traitors had the temerity to write to the English government with a list of complaints and accusations of mistreatment.

Notwithstanding all of that the British government made two offers of peace that are dismissed by the rebels. The war was begun with many failings on the part of the

Americans. In October 1776 the Americans are overpowered and suffer two navel defeats at the hands of the British, 83 American ships are destroyed or otherwise disabled. That same month General Washington was forced to evacuate Long Island and New York barely one step ahead of the British army.

November 1776 only brings more grief for the rebel army and its' commanders. The Americans' lose major engagements at Fort Washington NY and Fort Lee NJ. One hundred cannon and thousands of rifles and cartridges are seized by general Howe's troops. Washington loses over 3000 soldiers and limps toward the Delaware river valley pursued by General Cornwallis in serious danger of immediate defeat.

In many ways it is difficult to understand why this rebellion broke out. For the most part its main players were wealthy land owners or members of the rising merchant class. These men had done well through the English empire and its government. The laws and taxes they so violently reacted against were far less demanding than in other colonies and better than some in England.

A quick look at two other main antagonists in the colonies gives a sense who some of these rebels were.

To the English, Benjamin Franklin was an uppity printer who confused knowledge with wisdom and wealth for status. When unable to get his way politically he rejected the authority of the crown and made war on the British Empire which had served him so well. Thomas Jefferson, was an apostate slave owner who wrote that, "All men are created equal." While in Paris this "democrat" was wooed by the aristocratic allure of the haughty court of Louis XVI. By examining these events from an unexpected angle the lines of moral clarity so easily established in many history texts begin to blur. History is not so much about the past as it is our construction and manipulation of it.

The simple unfolding of events and history in purely chronological terms holds no drama. It is only interpretation and perceived interconnections that creates an aura of meaning. Things happen and we imbue them with significance or not. It is this creation of significance and relevance that is used to direct current and future policies. This is part of the instructive nature of history.

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