

USA – The settlement and the American Revolution

1: The Colonial Period

In 1492 an Italian adventurer named **Christopher Columbus** first sailed to America. His aim was to find a new shorter route for trade with India. He set sail from Spain westwards and landed in the islands of the Caribbean. He made four voyages in all, and on the last two (1498, 1502) he discovered the mainland of **the New World**. However, he refused to acknowledge the fact that what he discovered was not the Far East, which turned him, in his own eyes, into a man of failure, disappointed by the discovery that did not match his expectations.

But history estimated his exploit differently and still continues to reevaluate its importance. An article entitled ‘The Columbian Exposition and American Civilization’ published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in May 1893 points to Columbus’s discovery as one of the turning points in the history of mankind and presents him in an entirely positive light¹. One hundred years later in September 1992, the editorial of the same magazine entitled tellingly ‘Was America a Mistake?’ calls for penitence and remorse on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of Columbus’s landing in the New World. In the article Columbus is perceived not as a great European hero but as an agent of evil – Columbus ‘the great hero of the 19th century seems well on the way to becoming a great villain of the twenty first’.² He is the man who opened the world for European colonization and exploitation. Columbus, who was probably a converted Italian Jew in the service of Isabella the Cath-

¹ These turning points, according to the article were: the age of Pericles, the Italian Cinquecento, the defection of Luther and the court of Queen Elizabeth.

² Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., “Was America a Mistake?” *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 142, no. 9, September 1994, p. 573.

olic Queen of Spain, can be seen as an ethnically confused man who introduced ethnic confusion to the entire world.

Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris, two contemporary Native American writers, so commented on the significance of Columbus's historical act:

Columbus only discovered that he was in some new place. He didn't discover America. There were incredibly complex indigenous cultures [in America] – Europe compared to the rest of the world was a very homogenous place. Almost anybody spoke Indo-European related languages and shared the same cosmological worldview and the same general political system. Indians on the other hand, were used to enormous plurality – five hundred cultures, seven hundred languages spoken and many different religions.³ Within a day's walk of any place, you would encounter another group of people who looked differently, spoke differently and had a different view of men and women. When Europeans came to Indians at first, it was no big deal, you read an account after account of Indians saying 'Oh yeah, and they came to – and they [Europeans] don't bathe'. Whereas for Europeans it changed everything. Whose child were Indians in the Adam and Eve scheme? Were they human beings or not? These questions were argued in Spanish universities for 80 years until the Pope said Indians had souls. It changed the European worldview.⁴

The cultures that **Indians** evolved were varied and fascinating. None of them advanced to the use of iron or literacy and while their achievements in many respects were striking, generally the Old World outstripped the New World in culture, political and military organization. Indians still lived in tribes – some of them were hunters, some gatherers of food, and some farmers. **The Pueblo people** (territories of to-day's New Mexico and Arizona) were the best-organized communities. They lived in terraced buildings made of bricks (mud and straw dried in the sun). Some of these buildings contained up to eight hundred rooms. The Pueblo people were skillful agriculturists – they grew maize and beans and built irrigation – a network of canals that turned the desert into fields. **The Iroquois** in the Northeast part of America were also good agriculturalists, but they also hunted and caught fish; they used birch canoes to sail the rivers and lakes. Like the Pueblo Indians, they had a sedentary lifestyle – they lived in permanent villages, in huts made of wooden logs. The Indians in Northwest America also lived in houses, which they built of planks. Their houses were decorated with **totem poles** made of tree trunks on which there were carvings illustrating the history of the family who lived in the house. They were also good fishermen, depending on rivers and the Pacific Ocean for food. However, such tribes as **the Sioux** became the symbol of the Indian way of life. The Sioux lived on the grass plains stretching from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. They did not build any houses but lived in **tepees** – tents made of buffalo skins. They hunted for buffalos, which provided them with everything they needed – food and material for clothing and shelter. They followed the great herds of those magnificent animals, packing and unpacking as often as it was necessary. Indeed most Indians were nomads. Their lifestyle was based on constant moving from one place to another.

All lifestyles developed by Indians suited the natural environments in which they lived, but the arrival of Europeans obliterated them all. Even though Indians were formidable

³ The historians still cannot agree on the size of the Indian population: estimates vary from 2 million to 18 million inhabitants.

⁴ Allan Chavkin and Nancy Feyl Chavkin, eds. *Conversations with Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994, p. 43.

warriors, they were no match for the whites who were coming in increasingly large numbers with guns, diseases and hunger for land. Luckily for the white intruders the Indians were perpetually on the warpath against their neighbors, and war was their major occupation. Bravery in battle was the source of individual prestige for the warrior and of glory for the whole tribe. But constant feuds among the Indian tribes, which did not cease after the arrival of Europeans, made the European conquest plain sailing.

The first Europeans to reach the American continent were **the Vikings** who briefly settled in the territory of later Newfoundland and New England around **AD 1000**. But the Vikings were not able to stay there because the natives were hostile, and the Vikings were not numerous enough to protect themselves. The Spanish were the first Europeans who managed to establish a permanent occupation of the territories in central and Southern America: **Hernán Cortes** conquered **the Aztecs** in **1520s**; **Francisco Pizarro** killed **the Empire of Incas** in the **1530s**. The conquistadors were the first to explore the southern part of North America. **Ponce De León** claimed Florida for Spain. In **1565** the Spanish founded **St. Augustine** – the first permanent settlement in North America. **Hernando de Soto** travelled through Texas and Oklahoma to the Mississippi River, whereas **Francisco Coronado** was the first European who saw the Great Canyon of the Colorado River.

As the looted gold started to sail to Spain making it a major European power, other countries, including England, tried to join the Spanish in this colonial enterprise. In **1498** **Henry VII** sent another Italian sailor **John Cabot** who landed in today's Newfoundland and discovered great cod-fisheries. England laid claim to Newfoundland but at that time was too weak to keep it. The French employed **Giovanni Verrazano**, also an Italian, who landed on Manhattan Island and discovered the estuary of the Hudson River,⁵ and **Jacque Cartier** discovered the St. Lawrence River for the French. Those who followed him founded **Quebec** in **1608** and **Montreal** in **1642**.

While the entire 16th century was devoted to exploration, the 17th century witnessed the beginning of the greatest population movement in the entire history of the mankind.⁶ The **first English immigrants** came long after the Spanish, and they attempted to colonize **Roanoke Island** off the coast of what is now North Carolina in **1585**. The first contingent of settlers did not like the island so much that the following year, at their own request, they were carried back home. The next attempt in **1587** was even less successful. England was engaged in a war with Spain (the attack of the Spanish Armada) and forgot about the colonists, and when **Sir Walter Raleigh** visited the island again, he found that all the colonists had vanished. In **1607** the first successful settlement took place. Raleigh established the **colony of Virginia** in honour of Elisabeth, the Virgin Queen. The first settlers came to Jamestown – first an outpost and later the capital of Virginia – as gold prospectors, but soon they realized that there was no gold in Virginia so they became farmers getting rich on the tobacco crop, which found a good market in England. The colony owed its success to **Captain John Smith**. He persuaded the colonists to work in order to survive. He had a knack of handling Indians and one of the most famous episodes of the early settlement has an Indian princess Pocahontas cast in the main role. When during one of his expeditions into the wilderness Smith was captured by the Indians, the chief's daughter, **Pocahontas**, saved his life by persuading her father to let him go. Pocahontas married a

⁵ The Verrazano Narrows Bridge commemorates this event.

⁶ Seventy five percent of people who left Europe settled in the American Continent.

tobacco planter and was even presented at the court of James I, but she contracted smallpox while she was waiting for the ship to take her back to Virginia and died.

By the 1620s great plantations had already risen along the James River and the population had increased to one thousand settlers. But founding great plantation dynasties, typical of the southern colonies, would not have been possible without women and therefore a peculiar business developed in Virginia. Women were recruited in England to come to Virginia as brides for sale. The would-be-husbands had to pay 120 pounds of tobacco to marry them and to make homes.

Coming to America was not an easy decision to make – the ships taking immigrants to America were small and overcrowded. The journey took from 6 to 12 weeks during which immigrants had to subsist on meager rations. Many of them died during the voyage due to diseases, inadequate food supplies and unsanitary conditions. Many ships were battered by storms; some were lost at sea.

Yet maintaining connection with the mother country was essential for the colonists' survival. From Europe they imported articles that they could not produce. The eastern coastline of North America had many inlets and harbours; great rivers connected the shore with the interior of the country. Only one river – the St. Lawrence – provided entrance into the interior of the continent, others offered access only to the coastal plains. There, on the coastal plains, with the Atlantic Ocean on one side and formidable Appalachian and Allegheny Mountains on the other, the colonist stayed for a hundred years. Only trappers and traders dared to cross the mountain ranges and reach the territories that lay beyond.

Although the colonists depended on trade with Europe, in many respects they were self-sufficient. The distinctive feature of the English colonies was that they were self-governing. Each colony was a separate entity with its own authorities; almost each had also a supervisor, a chartered company or a nobleman; most colonies had also governors. The British colonies in the 17th century were created not on the initiative of the Crown or Parliament but by private investors, whose chief aim was profit. And thus two colonies, **Virginia** and **Massachusetts**, were founded by two chartered companies, the Virginia Company and the Massachusetts Bay Company respectively. **New Haven** (later a part of **Connecticut**) was established by rich immigrants, who financed their passage themselves. **New Hampshire, Maine, Maryland, the Carolinas, New Jersey and Pennsylvania** originally belonged to the king who gave these lands to the English gentry. **Georgia** was a penal colony to which convicts and outlaws were sent; it served as a bulwark against the Spanish in Florida. Several colonies were simply off-springs of the old colonies. **Rhode Island and Connecticut** for example were established by Puritans who were ostracized in Massachusetts, or who had left Massachusetts in search of better lands. **New York** was at first a Dutch colony called **New Amsterdam** (founded in 1625) but it was captured by the English in 1664.

The chief objectives of colonizing America were dreams of quick profit – if not from gold mines then from agriculture and natural resources. America was covered with dense woods, abounding in food, fuel, raw materials for houses, furniture and ships and profitable cargo to export. Additionally, the New World was a God-given solution to the problem of the large vagrant population in England adrift due to enclosures, rises in prices and other economic difficulties, and to the problem of 'second' sons,⁷ prisoners and oth-

⁷ According to English Common Law only the oldest son could inherit property, other sons had to fend for themselves.

er reckless spirits whose energies could be released in America to the general advantage. Such were the considerations of the English upper-classes who saw in America a good place to plant all the undesirable elements uprooted from the native soil. ‘In Virginia land free and labor scarce; In England land scarce and labor plenty’, said one of the slogans whose aim was to persuade the poor, landless proletariat to leave overcrowded England and settle in America. A vast literature of propaganda and persuasion was issued to sway the mass opinion in favor of emigration. Gradually, as political and economic difficulties swept across England in the Stuart times, more and more people were compelled to go to America.

But not all European emigrants came in search for land and prosperity. Among the newcomers were **Puritans** for whom the main incentive was yearning for religious freedom combined with the desire to flee persecution. Puritans were the most orthodox Protestants. They followed the teaching of **John Calvin** and were against the Church hierarchy, which they believed to be the work of the Anti Christ. They worshipped God in small congregations, which had their own separate covenant⁸ with God. It is not surprising why in England they were perceived as a threat to the unity of the state, the church and the royal authority and why they were severely persecuted.

During the reign of **James I** a small group of Protestant dissenters set sail to Holland and later to America. *Mayflower*, the ship that carried them, had one hundred and five persons aboard. Only thirty-five of them were Puritans; the others were ‘strangers’ (that is non-Puritans). They all became known as **the Pilgrims**. In the middle of winter in **1620** they landed in North America and established the first Puritan colony called **the Plymouth Plantation**. The name of the ship was used as the title for the first important document in the history of American nation, *The Mayflower Compact*, which was an agreement to work together and for the good of all to increase the colonists’ chances of survival. Still before spring came, half of the colonists died from scurvy and similar complaints. But the Pilgrims were a hardy population, and when in 1622 a ship came to their harbor offering to take them back to England they refused.

Charles I’s despotism and **William Laud’s** efforts to eradicate all Puritan sects, combined with an economic depression, resulted in **the Great Migration**⁹ of thousands of **Puritans to New England**.¹⁰ This second wave of Puritan emigration founded in **1630 the Massachusetts Bay Colony**. Unlike the Pilgrims, this second group of Puritan separatists consisted of people of considerable wealth and position. The most prominent man among them was **John Winthrop**, a Justice of the Peace, whose estate had been hard hit by the decline of the cloth trade. Winthrop, as the leader of the Puritans, can be credited with the invention of the New World mythology, presenting the voyage to America as a divine work or a sacred pilgrimage whose aim was to build a new Christian society. ‘We must consider that we shall be a city upon a hill’, said Winthrop aboard *Arabella*, the ship that took him and his followers to Massachusetts, ‘the eyes of all people are upon us’. In other words, Winthrop envisaged the isolated outpost of civilization in the New World as a great experiment scrutinized by the whole of Europe. This assertion of course was

⁸ Covenant – agreement, pact.

⁹ During “Eleven Years tyranny” 20.000 Puritans sailed cross the Atlantic and settled in Massachusetts.

¹⁰ New England is a name given to all Puritan colonies.

a sheer exaggeration, but nevertheless Winthrop, as governor of Massachusetts, built his 'city upon hill' that put a Puritan stamp upon six colonies of New England.

Other non-conformists and other nations followed the Puritan's suit: **Quakers** settled in Pennsylvania, **Catholics** in Maryland. **The German** and **the Irish** poured into Pennsylvania and **North Carolina**.¹¹ Their motives were always the same – the quest for political and religious freedom as well as economic opportunity. Few people were actually able to pay for the passage; therefore, many of them came as so-called 'indentured servants' – the cost of the voyage was covered by a company, but in return the newcomers had to work for a set period of time as servants or tenants before they could buy their own farms or estates. It is estimated that a half of the settlers in Virginia and New England started their new life in such semi-bondage.

In **Massachusetts** there was no pretence of religious toleration. Heresy and sedition were treated as civil offences and were punished by the civil court. Though in theory the state and church were separate, in practice the stiff enforcement of church laws by the civil administration made Massachusetts a **theocracy** – a colony run by preachers and orthodox laymen. Right liberty, explained Winthrop, was to do God's will. All other forms of liberty were sinful.

But the authorities of the colony were not absolutely successful in maintaining conformity and binding people's minds. The first serious challenge came from **Roger Williams**, who argued for complete separation between the institutions of the church and the state. He was banished for sedition and settled in **Rhode Island** where he founded a new colony based on religious toleration where everyone could worship God as they pleased, and no church interfered in secular affairs.

Roger Williams was one of many Puritans to leave Massachusetts. Not all of them were banished – some left to look for better farming lands. Wherever they went they mixed with the non-Puritan colonists, and consequently their militant Puritanism gradually lost its edge. Contrary to Massachusetts run autocratically by Winthrop, known for his dislike for democracy, other Puritan colonies were far more democratic. In Massachusetts only the full members the Church 'the saints' were eligible to vote, and therefore the number of enfranchised people was relatively small. But in other Puritan colonies public conversion and church membership were eliminated as a prerequisite to vote.

But still Massachusetts was the most powerful colony, which within a few decades from its establishment grew into a fully self-governing little republic, far outside the power of Whitehall.¹² **Boston** became one of the biggest ports in America – soon it was to challenge the British in shipbuilding.¹³

Fishing proved to be as lucrative as shipbuilding. New Englanders continually improved the construction of their ships to sail further into the sea. The result was that in 1641 300.000 of barrels of fish were exported to Europe. The fishermen from New England sold their catches also to the farmers of the American backcountry and the West Indian

¹¹ Most of the settlers who came to America in the 17th century were English; 10% were the Dutch, Swedes, Germans, Spaniards, Italians and Portuguese.

¹² Whitehall – a street in London where British government offices are situated.

¹³ By the end of colonial period 1/3 of all ships under the British flag were built in America.

plantations, where the fish were used to feed the slaves. New England's ships sailed to ports all over the world and the trade flourished, bringing prosperity to all Puritans.

Geography played an important role in shaping the character of each colony. **New England** was situated in the northeast of the country, where winters were very harsh and soil thin and stony. The land was covered with thick forests and the work of deforestation was slow and strenuous. Under such circumstances the colonists had to find other means of sustenance than agriculture and they found it in shipbuilding, cod fishing, and trade.

They settled in compact townships that imitated the traditional English manor-village – the village was a nucleus around which there were fields formed in strips. The compactness of their settlement made possible the village school,¹⁴ church, town hall, and in the course of time made New England an urbanized and industrial area.

South of New England, where the climate was warm and the soil fertile, a predominantly agrarian society developed. **The middle colonies** were the second great division. They were more cosmopolitan and more tolerant than New England. **Pennsylvania** had a large population of Quakers who had a talent for business comparable to that of the Puritans'. They also had equally gifted leaders such as **William Penn** who established the principle of fair dealings with all religions and nationalities, including Indians. Philadelphia was the heart of the colony. New York had a very large Dutch population, which, even through it was under English rule, continued to exert social and economic influence. This colony owed its success to the British governor **Richard Nichols**, who effected the transfer from Dutch to the English authority. Nichols respected Dutch customs and laws and put the Dutch on par with the English colonists. In New York, as in Pennsylvania, agriculture and trade were the chief business of the people.

The third division consisted of five **southern colonies**: Virginia, Maryland, two Carolinas and Georgia. **Virginia**, as it was mentioned earlier, made money on tobacco crops, but the cultivation of tobacco quickly exhausted the soil and forced the settlers to move into the backcountry. **Maryland** had a predominantly Catholic population but was not adverse of the settlement of non-Catholic colonists. Both Virginia and Maryland had aristocracy made of plantation owners, whose estates were taken care of by slaves. These planters had the best land and most of the political power and were opposed to establishing elective governments or respecting personal liberties established by Common Law. The slave labor on which their power was based made competition impossible for small farmers. Therefore small farmers frequently moved into the wilderness to set up farms there. Finally the exodus to the West became such a commonplace phenomenon that the authorities had to yield to the democratic impulses of the people for fear that hardly anybody would stay. Thus the existence of **the Frontier** – the wilderness into which the white man had just penetrated –made the authorities more liberal.

South Carolina and **North Carolina** specialized in the production and export of rice and indigo. The main port was **Charleston**, which was also a center of shipbuilding. It is interesting that none of the southern colonies had a trading class, as the planters themselves sold and dispatched their products.

Therefore from the very beginning of colonization there were profound differences between various parts of the country. The North was growing urban; the South was agricul-

¹⁴ Harvard was the first university in America, established in 1636 – just 6 years after the arrival of Puritans to Massachusetts. It was modeled on Cambridge.

tural and profoundly affected by slavery. Additionally, there was an antagonism between the new communities forming on the Frontier and old, more conservative and prosperous Easterners contemptuously called city slickers. The frontiersmen were self-reliant and independent people, a truly democratic force in this nation just shaping itself. Even though the majority of them spoke English and lived under English laws and customs, the culture they finally evolved was unique. It was an amalgamation of different cultures, modified by the environment and the conditions of the New World.

Whereas the frontiersmen were illiterate, uncultured and uncouth, the Easterners did their utmost to uphold their cultural refinement. All New England colonies except Rhode Island provided for compulsory elementary education. Quakers in Pennsylvania offered education to the poor. Besides **Harvard University**, established in Massachusetts in 1636, two other schools of higher education were established in the colonial period; these were **The College of William and Mary** (Virginia) and **Yale** (Connecticut). Other colleges: **The College of New Jersey at Princeton**, **Columbia University** (NY) and **Rutgers** (New Brunswick, New Jersey) were established in the middle of the 18th century.

The colonies' first world citizen was **Benjamin Franklin**, who lived in Pennsylvania. Franklin was a very versatile and talented person who inspired Americans with his from-rags-to-riches success. He started his career as a printer in Philadelphia, but soon he became an important authority in politics and science. He did not finish any school and was a self-educated man, who said, 'I do not remember when I could not read'. He mastered French, Italian, Spanish and Latin and carried out many scientific experiments, for example on heat, electricity or lightening. He invented many practical things: a lightening rod, a more efficient stove, bi-focal glasses, the harmonica and many others. He was the only American colonist besides Cotton Mather¹⁵ to be honored by a membership in the Prestigious Royal Society of England. In America his reputation was founded on his journalism – his yearly contributions to *Poor Richard's Almanac*.¹⁶ Finally Franklin established an academy, which soon grew into **the College of Philadelphia** and later on the **University of Pennsylvania**. Therefore it is unjust to see Franklin as a benevolent materialist encouraging his compatriots to work hard and get rich, as first and foremost, he was a person devoted to doing public good.

Besides Pennsylvania several regions had printing presses producing large numbers of books¹⁷ and magazines. Even in the colonial period the authors and editors enjoyed freedom of the press, far greater than that the English were permitted.

Such liberty was only possible due to the negligence with which the British government treated the American colonies. As it has already been said, the English government did not take part in founding the American colonies (except Georgia), and only gradually did it assume an authority over these overseas possessions. The colonies were not represented in the British Parliament, but they had their own assemblies, which had to cooperate with governors appointed by the crown. These legislative bodies gradually acquired more and more power in financial matters – no taxes could be levied without their consent,

¹⁵ A Puritan minister and writer whose forefathers were founders of New England's State and Church. With his writing he contributed to sentencing to death women accused of witchcraft in **Salem trials of 1692**.

¹⁶ Almanac – a calendar containing both frivolous and serious information, curiosities, recipes, etc.

¹⁷ Books of English authors were published without paying royalties – therefore they were very cheap.

no revenue could be spent without their approval. Therefore clashes between Governors, whose salaries depended on these councils, and the colonists were not infrequent. The Governors' interference was grudgingly born by the colonists, for whom the governors represented interests of foreign manufactures and tradesmen. Very few Americans wholeheartedly identified with the Empire; the process of forging a distinctive American identity had already begun. The British were unaware of the danger that the situation posed. They did not formulate any consistent colonial policy, except that the colonies should supply GB with raw materials and buy from 'the mother country' finished goods. But even that principle was poorly enforced. Therefore political independence and self-government resulted in the colonies becoming increasingly American rather than English.

2: The War of Independence

In 1782 J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur published in England his sketches about America, entitled *Letters from an American Farmer*. In the book, which became very popular upon its publication, Crèvecoeur enumerates many characteristics of the American people. In one of the most famous letters he poses the question: 'what is then the American, this new man?' to which he answers:

He is either a European or a descendant of a European, hence so strange mixture of blood you will find in no other country [...] I could point to you a family whose grandfather was an English man, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. He is an American, who leaving behind his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new governments he obeys, and the new rank he holds.¹⁸

In many respects Crèvecoeur was more perceptive than the colonists who frequently were very conservative people attached to the laws and customs they had imported from the Old World. Yet all their old practices, such as representative government or Common Law with all their guarantees of personal liberty, were becoming increasingly American rather than English. It was the result of the influx of other nations with their laws, customs and traditions, which started the process of the colonies growing away from Britain.

This process was speeded up by **the Seven Years' War (1756–1763)** (known in America as **the French and Indian War**) that brought about sweeping changes not only in America but also in the entire world. The French were expelled from India and North America,

¹⁸ Crèvecoeur, 'Letter III, What is an American?' *Anthology of American Literature, Third Edition*, ed. by George McMichael, Macmillian Publishing Company, New York and London, 1985. p. 394–395.

Prussia's power in Europe was confirmed, and Russia emerged next to Great Britain as a major European power. The war had also serious economic consequences as all former belligerents had to grapple with monstrous deficits left by the struggle.

England as well bore the brunt of the war which she waged all over the world. When the French were ousted from the American continent the colonies were less eager than ever to cooperate with the English government, which wanted to reform the administration of the colonies and to put into effect a new system of defense. For the British it was clear that the colonies must contribute money and manpower for their own defense. But for the American colonists, the government's attempt to raise some money was a blatant violation of their civic liberties. First of all, the colonists did not wish to see any British army on their territories, They were aware of the fact that such an army might be used not only to quiet an Indian uprising¹⁹ but also to deter squatters on the Indian land,²⁰ to put down smuggling, or to keep the colonies in check. Secondly they objected to being burdened with the cost of maintenance of the army, which clearly posed a threat to their own interests.

When Great Britain started to implement a new financial policy and new modest **duties** were levied on certain articles (luxury items such as wine, silk, coffee, etc.), this was an entirely new development in the relations of England and her American colonies. The colonists, after decades of indulgence, were deeply shocked that such 'radical' measures were taken against them. But the worst was still to come. A colonial stamp duty was introduced in all thirteen American colonies. Legal documents but also commercial documents and transactions (liquor licenses, mortgages, insurance policies, custom clearances, almanacs, newspapers and other things) had to carry a stamp in order to be valid. On 22 March 1765, the **Stamp Act** became a law and **the American Revolution** virtually started.

The new duties were small and evenly distributed among the population, but since the Stamp Act bore equally on all sections of the society, the hostility it aroused cut across all classes. 'No taxation without representation' was a popular outcry in all thirteen colonies, a catchword that rallied many people against England and in fact inspired organized resistance. **Samuel Adams**, an American lawyer who was the leader of the discontent, organized the agitators into '**the Sons of Liberty**', whose political activities fanned the colonies into overt rebellion. Virginia's assembly denounced taxation and on Massachusetts's initiative the first **inter-colonial Congress** was summoned with a view to solving the conflict. But soon it became clear that the real problem was not how taxes should be levied and in what amount, but whether they should be levied at all. Whereas most British officials believed that Parliament was an imperial body that could legislate for Great Britain and all her colonies, American colonies held a contrary opinion – they argued that there was no imperial Parliament and that they were beyond the British Parliament's jurisdiction. The colonists regarded themselves as still retaining and enjoying the rights secured by the Glorious Revolution (1688) according to which the right to be taxed only with the consent of themselves or their representatives was the most fundamental one. The colo-

¹⁹ In May 1763 the North Western Indians went on the warpath under the leadership of Chief Pontiac, the whole Frontier was in flames. From 1759 to 61 there was a war with the Cherokees.

²⁰ The Crown attempted to put a limit to the westward expansion to protect the rights of Indians and some western territories were proclaimed Indian. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 drew a line from North to South, and stated that thus far may the colonist go and no further.

nies did not have their MPs in Westminster, so they believed Parliament could not lawfully tax them. Only their own assemblies could represent them and tax them and these legislative bodies had not been consulted. It was obvious that the Stamp Act encroached on their powers. The colonies accepted, at least in theory, the power of Westminster Parliament to tax colonial commodities to regulate trade, but The Stamp Act introduced direct taxation whose aim was to improve the revenue of the British Empire. The colonist feared that it was the first step on the way to transferring the tax burden of the Empire from British shoulders to their own, and such an assumption was a heavy blow to American confidence in British wisdom, and it undermined the loyalty of many moderate citizens.

The opposition to the Stamp Act made Parliament repeal it (1766). This was an obvious humiliation for Parliament, and the discovery, on the colonists' part, that an organized resistance could prevent enforcement of any act gave the colonists a heady sense of their own strength. The colonies thus rejoiced, and the trade with GB so far boycotted was resumed. Peace seemed at hand, but it was only a respite. The year 1767 brought another attempt to tax American colonists; some new measures were taken to enforce the new and the old laws in order to tighten the control over American trade. This challenge to the colonists' liberties stirred a new discord that affected all thirteen colonies.

Massachusetts, as might be expected, led the way. Samuel Adams was again the leader of the discontent, brandishing all formidable ramifications of the new so-called **Townshend Acts**. Here was another case of taxation without representation; here was a plot to make governors independent of assemblies.²¹ He did not have any scruples to frighten Americans with the consequences of having a standing army or even with a prospect of having a bishop to supervise the New England congregations. That was added to commonplace fears that new regulations would put an end to profitable smuggling, which in the long run would result in the rise of prices. Such speculations swayed some of the unconvinced to the banner of the Sons of Liberty. The boycott of English imports began anew; there were occasional acts of violence directed at the commissioners. To bolster the commissioners the British government sent two regiments of regular soldiers to Boston, where most of the mobbing took place. This move had a very bad impact on public opinion in America. Samuel Adams used it to argue that the standing army had been sent not for the purpose of defense but to force Massachusetts to obedience to the British Parliament. It was, to his mind, a clear sign of impending British tyranny.

The British troops did not have an easy life in Boston. They were harassed regularly by the mob, usually made of young boys who considered the work their patriotic duty. Then on **5 March 1770** a tragedy took place. Goaded beyond endurance, the soldiers fired in self-defense killing five Bostonians. The dead became martyrs; the event was elevated into a legend and dramatically called '**The Boston Massacre**'. It was used by Samuel Adams as evidence that the standing army was a threat to civil liberties. All colonies expressed their deepest sympathies for Massachusetts after the grossly exaggerated accounts of the incident reached them.

The British Parliament retreated again, repealing the hateful acts and moving the regiments to different headquarters outside Boston. George III only insisted on keeping on

²¹ Part of the money raised through the new taxes was to be the governors' salary, which was a novelty because so far the governors received their pay from the assemblies and thus were dependent on these elective bodies.

principle the tea tax. Therefore an embargo on British tea continued, but for a while the emotions in the colonies subsided. Only Samuel Adams relentlessly strove to keep up the hostilities, using every possible pretext to bully English authorities. He made speeches and published numerous articulate pamphlets and articles, and finally in 1773 he induced the authorities of Massachusetts to establish a **Committee of Correspondence to State the Rights and Grievances** and to ‘communicate with other states on the grievances’. Quickly these inter-colonial committees mushroomed, and by 1774 three hundred towns had been drawn into the network. Each committee reported to the Boston Committee that provided connection with all the other colonies. These committees became the basis of revolutionary organizations which eventually usurped the power in all colonies.

In 1773 Britain supplied Samuel Adams with another pretext for carrying out the anti-British agitation. The powerful East India Company had found itself in a state of bankruptcy and the government had to intervene. To save the company the government not only granted it a monopoly on all tea exported to the colonies, but also removed the tax on it to make the price of the company’s tea well under the customary one. In this way the company’s tea could compete effectively with the smuggled tea. The colonies drank enormous quantities of contraband tea, whose import now became much less profitable. To make matters worse the East India Company could sell their tea directly to consumers – without any middlemen – and thus many small colonial merchants could be put out of business. The tradesmen joined **the patriots**, as Samuel Adams’ adherents were now called, and together they did their best to intimidate the agents who were to sell the Company’s tea. The shipments were warehoused or returned, and only in Boston the agents refused to give up. On the night of December 16, 1773 Adams organized a new outrage. A band of men roughly disguised as Indians dumped the cargo of three British tea-ships into the murky waters of the Boston harbor nearly choking them. ‘The Indians’ were doubtlessly Adams’s followers summoned from different Massachusetts’s towns through his committees of correspondence. The event was dubbed ‘**The Boston Tea Party**’ and it inspired in some colonies an organized resistance to shipments of the East India Company’s Tea.

The news of the Tea Party and similar incidents elsewhere made British public opinion and Parliament unanimous. The Party was condemned as an act of vandalism and everybody expected Parliament to chastise Massachusetts – the unquestionable leader of the revolt. To bring that unruly province to heel Parliament passed the so-called **Coercive Acts**, whose aim was to crush Boston. The first closed the port of Boston until the tea was paid for. The other act passed certain powers of the assemblies to the governor and empowered the governor to quarter troops wherever he saw fit. Finally the king also signed **the Quebec Act**, which extended the authority of Quebec into Ohio and Illinois regions. Through the last act was not intended as a punitive measure; the colonists considered it an obstacle to their westward expansion. This act and four other acts that preceded it became known as ‘**Five Intolerable Acts**’. General Gage, an advocate of firm measures towards the colonies, was appointed a new governor; his task was to enforce the Intolerable Acts.

In the meantime, other colonies fearing the same repercussions turned against Britain and supported Massachusetts. Farmers from the colonies sent provisions to Boston to help Bostonians to survive without their harbor. In all colonies governors and assemblies clashed and there was more and more talk about the necessity of organizing a general inter-colonial congress to discuss the crisis. Finally on September 5, 1774, among vast en-

thusiasm, the delegates met in Philadelphia defying Gage and his soldiers. Only Georgia did not send her delegates, other colonies sent their brightest politicians. The delegates from Massachusetts were the most radical ones and they were regarded with certain distrust, as not all delegates held such advanced views. What this so-called **First Continental Congress** boiled down to was the question of Parliamentary Supremacy – the delegates repudiated the authority of the British Parliament and the Five Intolerable Acts, once again stating that their union was with the Crown not with the British Parliament, that it had no more rights to pass laws for Massachusetts or any other colony, and that colonial assemblies had to pass laws for Great Britain. The Congress decided also to set up a **Continental Association** to enforce the policy of embargo on British goods. The Association finished off the work of the Committees of Correspondence in putting an end to what remained of royal authority in the colonies. Indeed one might say that the Committees were the first step towards political union, whereas the Association was the second.

The British Parliament's answer was **the Restraining Act** also banning all trade between America and other British colonies. By that time Gage was virtually besieged in Boston. As Lord Camden, who tried to warn his fellow MPs against such a radical anti-American course of action, remarked 'the 10.000 men sent to Boston could only save general Gage from the disgrace (...) of being sacked in his entrenchments'. It was beyond the general's power to subdue the countryside, where American militia had already been drilling, and stores of munitions had been piling up. Gage did not even dare to arrest the most radical leaders, who aired their revolutionary opinions with impunity and went about their business right under his nose. Soon most of the governors fled from the colonies and the loyalists, appalled by these overt preparations for war, tried as best as they could to prepare for self-defense. It was clear that they would have to fend for themselves after George III had poured scorn on a petition sent to him by Philadelphia Quakers begging the King to embark on a conciliatory course of action. The King's answer was 'the die is now cast, the colonies must either submit or triumph'. From then on things drifted from bad to worse.

On the night of **18 April 1775**, spurred by the British Government, Gage reluctantly set out to seize and destroy a military store at Concord. This expedition was to be secret, but miles away people warned by the nightriders knew that 'the British are coming'. Seventy-five volunteers made an attempt to stop the British at **Lexington**. The attempt failed, eight Americans were killed, ten wounded. Then the British pushed on to Concord but their mission was also abortive – the stores of munitions had been removed or hidden. The long march back to Boston was a nightmare. The bright red coats of the British Infantry were a good target for American marksmen, and British casualties were heavy. The first blood of the war was shed and so began **the American Revolution (1775–1783)**.

At that time the **Second Continental Congress** met in Philadelphia. It had hardly opened when it was faced with the news of the open warfare with the British. The Congress passed a declaration entitled '**Causes and Necessity of Taking up Arms**' in which it stated that the British were the enemy against which the American colonies presently would arm to preserve their liberties 'resolved to die free men rather than live slaves'. The Congress proceeded swiftly to organize the war effort and entrusted the command of the army to a Southerner – **George Washington** from Virginia. It was important that all colonies should have a stake in the conflict, so, to offset the leadership of Massachusetts, the representative of the largest southern colony was appointed the commander-in-chief. He himself saw his choice as injudicious. He confessed to his friend: 'From the day I enter upon the

command of the American armies, I date my fall, and the ruin of my reputation'.²² Of course he was wrong. In retrospect he was one of the greatest American leaders, next to Abraham Lincoln, who led Americans through another ordeal – the Civil War almost a century later. Both the American Revolution and the Civil War were two last chapters in the history of the birth of a new nation that had been started by the settlers of Jamestown, Plymouth and Massachusetts.

Still at that time, at the beginning of the Revolution, there were many people who doubted the wisdom of complete separation with England. But even to them it was obvious that the colonies must make their choice, that they could no longer stay half in and half out of the British Empire. Now that it was for Americans an all-out war, it was either victory or total submission. Nobody made it clearer than **Thomas Paine** the author of the little fifty-page pamphlet *Common Sense*. He persuasively presented two alternatives – the continued submission to a tyrannical king and his anachronistic government or a free, happy and self-sufficient republic based on the new Enlightenment ideas of Montesquieu and Locke. This pamphlet was immensely popular (120.000 copies sold) and did more than anything else to rally colonists to the cause of American independence.

It was Thomas Paine's suggestion to draft a declaration of independence. Even though officially a committee was summoned to produce such a document, in practice **the Declaration of Independence** was the work of one person – **Thomas Jefferson** from Virginia, the most populous and important state. Jefferson was a child of the European Enlightenment, and his political talents were matched with an equally great gift for writing lucid and convincing prose. On the 4th of **July 1776** Congress voted the approval of the Declaration and the 4th of July became a great American holiday – **Independence Day**.

The most famous passage of the document embraces the most important tenets of the political philosophy of the Age of Reason:

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 abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundations on such principles, and organizing its power in such form, as to them shall seem more likely to effect their safety and Happiness...²³

Thus, as it can be seen from the above fragment, the declaration not only rested upon particular grievances, which were later enumerated. First and foremost, it appealed to the common people, explaining to them in clear and logical language what they were fighting for – which was a dignified place in a democratic society, whose governments would be responsive to that society's problems and needs.

The revolutionary war, which was in fact, a civil war because Americans fought on both sides, lasted for six years. General Howe, now in command of the British army, drove the American rebels out of New York City, but then at Christmas 1776 Washington struck

²² Quoted in Hugh Brogan, *The Penguin History of the USA*, Second Edition, Penguin Books, London, 2001. p. 166.

²³ Ibid. p. 175–176.

back and saved Pennsylvania from falling into British hands. The next year 1777 saw the greatest American victory of the war at **Saratoga** (northern NY) (**17 October 1777**), where Americans penned in six thousand British soldiers who had marched from Canada to subdue them.

This change of luck was used by Benjamin Franklin, now an American ambassador in France, to convince Louise XVI that the American Revolution was a war at which GB could indeed be beaten. The French, eager for reprisal against England ever since the loss of Quebec, had been covertly sending munitions to the rebels almost from the first day of the rebellion. Now the French declared war on the British, and soon the Spanish, the French ally, did the same. In this way the whole British Empire became vulnerable – its extent gave the initiative to the French who could attack at any time and any place they wished. But George III was willing to go on fighting forever, firmly believing that the British would outlast the French and once the French were beaten, Washington's army could be caught and dispatched.

These hopes were dumbled by another incompetent British General, **General Cornwallis**, who let himself and his soldiers be lured out of the South, where from 1778 most of the fighting took place. Cornwallis set out North losing men and supplies on the way until he realized that he could neither go forward nor retreat because the resistance he encountered was beyond his means. He bogged down in **Yorktown** in Virginia and waited to be rescued by the Royal Navy. The Navy did not come in time and on **17 October 1781** he had to surrender to Washington leading the combined American and French forces.

Yorktown was a decisive victory, which settled the question of American independence. Lord North, the British Prime Minister, was convinced that it was 'all over' and the House of Commons shared his views.

In the **Treaty of Paris (September 3, 1783)** the British recognized American independence, made concessions to American fishermen in Canadian waters, agreed to most generous boundaries of the new republic – the territory west of the Mississippi was the United States' greatest gain. The American Empire was how Americans liked to call their new state.

But on the other hand, Spain acquired Florida and Louisiana with the port of New Orleans, thus becoming the major obstacle in American westward expansion. A full-scale war broke out on the frontier where the Spanish were able to stir up powerful southern Indian tribes. It seemed at that time that the king of Spain had more authority there than the new American state or Congress, helpless in the face of these adverse developments. The new republic was very weak and dependent on French protection.

The internal situation in America was as bad as her international position. It seemed that once the British were defeated all reasons to stay in the Union ceased to exist. Each state had its own government, its own constitution, its own policies and interests clearly divergent from the interests of the others. The war was followed by an economic crisis compounded by a great national debt. Each state had its own currency that was quickly losing its value. Higher taxes were indispensable to pay old debts and to create a national government, but Americans were allergic to taxes, and besides there were many people who could not pay higher taxes – American farmers and tradesmen lost their markets in the West Indies with the effect that they could not even sell their produce.

All these problems could not be solved by **the Articles of Confederation**, the document that had loosely bound the colonies. It was felt that only a strong central government

could address properly all those issues. Under the Articles of Confederation the American government secured American possession between the Appalachians and the Mississippi, between the Great Lakes and the borders of Florida,²⁴ which was no mean political feat. What is more the same government managed to induce the States to adopt a new territorial policy, according to which the new territory was the common possession of all States that was to be divided into new States with their own government and representation in Congress. The West was thus not treated as a colony but as an extension of the nation to be incorporated to the federation on terms of absolute equality. This wise policy made it possible for the United States to expand easily from thirteen to fifty States. But still in spite of all these successes, the central government could not cope with the States' dogged quasi-independence. It did not have the power to regulate trade, and the States frequently set tax-barriers against one another, which led some politicians to believe that an interstate war would take place in the nearest future.

In May 1787 the representatives of all States, except Rhode Island, met at **the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia** and among them were the brightest people in the new nation (called by Jefferson demigods). They were summoned to re-draft the Articles of Confederation, but the delegates threw them away and proceeded to build a new form of government in a new document called **the Constitution of the US**. Their major task was to reconcile two different powers, the power of local authorities in the States that had already been in operation with the power of the central government that was to be framed according to Montesquieu's proposals, dividing government into three coordinate and equal branches: legislative, executive and judiciary. The delegates agreed that the legislative branch would consist of two houses: the Senate and the House of Representatives, but they could not agree on the principles of election. The small States objected to basing representation on population because they feared that their representatives would be outnumbered and out argued. Large States like Virginia felt that representation in which each State would have an equal vote regardless of its population was unfair. Finally a compromise was reached – the lower house was to be elected on a population basis (with at least one representative from a State) whereas senators were to be elected by the local assemblies – two from each State. This was an essential decision without which the conference would have ended in fiasco. The delegates also agreed that the Constitution was the supreme law of the land, and they introduced the procedure of **impeachment** of the government members accused of crimes and misdemeanors. The President, an elected national leader, was to submit the most important of his decisions (appointments and treaties) to the Senate for confirmation. He might be impeached and removed by Congress. Congress made the laws for the country while the Supreme Court judges interpreted the laws. They were appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate; they could also be impeached by Congress. Finally the decision was made that the government should not act upon the States' governments but upon all American citizens. That meant that the laws made by the legislative branch were binding in every State. The system of national courts was added to State courts where citizens could sue those decisions of local governments' that they considered illegal or unconstitutional. From then on the State identity became secondary to the national identity.

Before this new system could operate the Constitution had to be ratified by at least 9 States. In 1788 the assembly of the State of New Hampshire was the 9th State to do so. But in each State there had been hot debates prior to the ratification, which brought into

²⁴ The document regulating westward expansion was called **The North West Ordinance**.

existence two political parties **Federalists** and **Anti-federalists**, that is respectively supporters and opponents of the new form of government.

The constitution was not perfect but it was flexible and worked well. One of the earliest additions was **the Bill of Rights**, which was later incorporated to the supreme law. The Bill protects citizens against encroachments of the federal government on their personal liberties, guarantees all Americans the freedom of religion, press and speech; the right to carry arms and to a fair trial by jury; protection against ‘cruel and unusual punishments’.

3: Forming of the New Nation; Westward Expansion and Regional Differences

After the American Revolution the United States entered a long lasting economic boom. When **George Washington** became the first president of the United States, many of the problems that Americans had to tackle after the Revolution had already been on their way to solution. The population and the volume of trade increased, as well as the price of farm products, which was a very satisfactory development for a country whose main source of revenue was agriculture. The industries, though second to agriculture, also grew steadily. Massachusetts and Rhode Island were beginning to lay foundations for textile manufacture; Connecticut was starting to produce tin ware and clocks; New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania were producing paper, glass and iron. All these achievements led **Thomas Jefferson**, the Secretary of State in President Washington’s cabinet, to exult that ‘[American] affairs [were] proceeding in a train of unparalleled prosperity’, and ‘that the there [was] not a nation under the sun enjoying more present prosperity, nor with more in prospect’.²⁵

Jefferson was of course right, but still there were some problems that pressed for solution. Even though the Constitution provided a safe compass for the future it seemed to have settled some of these problems only in theory. A whole machinery of state had to be created, and this task was conferred on George Washington. Under Washington’s leadership Congress created the **Department of State** (presided over by Jefferson) and of the **Treasury** (presided over by **Alexander Hamilton**). At the same time the Supreme Court was set up to enforce the Constitution.

Between Jefferson and Hamilton there existed a deep personal and ideological antipathy. Hamilton understood the economic forces at work in America and in the world, and he used that understanding to build the polity of the United States. He believed in a close

²⁵ Quoted in *The Penguin History of the USA*, p. 247.