

From Ripples to Waves: The American Revolution's Profound

Impact on our Nation and the World

Culture is shaped by diverse beliefs and ideas that ripple into larger waves of hopes, dreams, and aspirations for what could be. The American dream began as a small ripple when the first English settlers at Plymouth and Jamestown found that, to survive in this challenging new land, they had to adopt a whole new way of life. Whether seeking religious freedom or opportunities free of Britain's class divisions, those early settlers developed a whole new set of ideas and attitudes. (Boorstin and National Geographic Society (U.S) 49).

The American Revolution set in motion a wave of change that reached the very foundations of its people, with effects felt across the globe and over time. Even groups not fully included in that initial equality, such as women and enslaved people, would later draw inspiration from the same revolutionary American spirit. Future democracies would look to our government for guidance in structuring their own. Freedom would become a worldwide aspiration. Very few times in history have the world's ideologies been shaken to their core as they were by those early American patriots (Palmer).

Before the American Revolution, the colonies were under British control and, for a time, lacked a strong sense of unity because of limited intercolonial interaction. Colonists gained firsthand experience of intercolonial collaboration during the French and Indian War, a nine-year conflict between the French and the British in North America. This conflict sparked the Seven Years' War, fought in America, Europe, the West Indies, the Philippines, and Africa over land

claims in North America. The colonists supported Britain but were angered when Britain imposed stricter taxation on the colonies to finance the war. (Kennedy).

From the colonists' perspective, Britain had imposed unfair taxation without representation. Examples included the Sugar Act of 1764, which taxed molasses and other sugar products; the Stamp Act, which taxed paper goods; and the Quartering Act, which required colonists to provide food and housing for British soldiers. The British enactment of the "Intolerable Acts" as punishment for the Boston Tea Party protests was a tipping point. It included the closure of Boston Harbor until the tea was paid for in full and the reinstatement and stricter enforcement of taxes previously protested, further prompting colonists to fear a tyrannical, overly powerful government. (Pruitt).

Literature began to reflect these viewpoints. Ripples were evident in "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania" by John Dickinson, in which he expressed respect for the common man while arguing for just taxation, and in reports in colonial newspapers detailing British abuses ("Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania"). However, in an era before television or the internet could rapidly disseminate news and ideas, Thomas Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense* quickly spread throughout the colonies. One could say this pamphlet was our country's first "viral" post, provoking widespread debate. The document by this early "influencer" supported democracy, independence, and self-governance, igniting a call to revolution (Berton). When the American Revolution began on April 19, 1775, the colonists became brothers-in-arms, defending their families, a shared desire for freedom, and government by consent. Many Loyalists united with their Patriot brothers through shared bloodshed and hardship. The battles of Saratoga in 1777 and Yorktown in 1781, which marked a shift in momentum toward an American victory and

persuaded the French to provide foreign aid, were among the most unifying victories because they were turning points in the war that bolstered colonial morale. Furthermore, interstate communication throughout the war, including the Committees of Correspondence established in 1772 and thereafter, provided opportunities for states to share experiences and connect cultures, blending unique perspectives into a more cohesive American identity. (Kennedy).

The Founding Fathers sought to protect our freedoms and values through documents such as the Articles of Confederation. Drafted in 1777 and ratified in 1781, the Articles had no executive branch; the judicial branch was left entirely to the states, and the weak Congress had no authority to regulate commerce or to tax. They furthered this effort with the Declaration of Independence and, later, the Constitution of the United States. The Declaration of Independence articulated the colonies' grievances against Great Britain, their separation from it, and their rights, including the right to self-governance. (Kostyal).

Finally, despite extensive debate over the scope of central authority, the Constitution embodied the principles of freedom that America sought in the previous Articles of Confederation. It signaled a united front in favor of strengthening the central government to preserve the Union. Still, there was near-unanimous agreement that the Articles were insufficient and that the Confederation needed strengthening. The deal was sealed, and the Constitution was agreed upon, with the understanding that a Bill of Rights would be added immediately after ratification to specify the "inalienable rights" the American people deemed necessary, such as freedom of religion, speech, and the right to bear arms. These diverse yet unified beliefs regarding human rights and government, derived from the Revolution, were uniquely American. (Kennedy).

The principles enshrined in 1776 provided the moral and legal framework that subsequent movements used to challenge injustice, including the American Civil War (1861-1865), which reshaped the United States by addressing issues of states' rights and slavery. Abraham Lincoln became a unifying leader, ultimately preserving the nation and advancing the Founding Fathers' commitment to equality through the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. The Emancipation Proclamation was a further ripple that shifted American values, declaring all enslaved people in Confederate states to be free. This pivotal act laid the groundwork for future civil rights advances. (Boorstin and National Geographic Society (U.S.)).

The founding documents remained a 'standard maxim' or roadmap for future generations to expand the definition of liberty, as women gained the right to vote in 1920 through the 19th Amendment. Granting women the right to vote fundamentally transformed modern democracy and paved the way for expanded liberties, including workplace equality and reproductive rights. (Boorstin and National Geographic Society (U.S.); Grunwald and Adler).

The Declaration of Independence's radical blueprint continued to hold America accountable to its own creed, culminating in the 1950s and 1960s, when further action against racial segregation and discrimination was taken through the Civil Rights Act. Key champions such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks employed nonviolent protests and influential speeches to highlight the need for equal rights. (Boorstin and National Geographic Society (U.S.)).

Our American values, which began as small ripples of ideas and beliefs, grew into the mighty waves of freedom, democracy, and change we know today because brave men and women of the American Revolution risked their fortunes and lives for principles greater than

themselves. They enabled Americans to establish a government accountable to its citizens and prompted the world to consider the possibilities for all people. Those founding ‘Charters of Freedom’—the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights—set the ideological foundation for the ongoing struggle to achieve equality. The 250th anniversary of our founding documents is a testament to their lasting power. They ensure individual liberty remains the cornerstone of American society, challenging every generation to rededicate itself to those principles and to spread the currents of peace, prosperity, and freedom to the world. (Palmer).