

### The Colonist's Cause: The Framework of American Society

Although no battle was fought at Valley Forge, the low morale and the fight against the elements were among the biggest struggles of the continental army. The army was undernourished, poorly clothed and ravaged by disease. Many lacked proper footwear, and left bloody footprints in the snow.<sup>1</sup> George Washington said: "naked and starving as they are, we cannot enough admire the incomparable patience and fidelity of the soldiery."<sup>2</sup> Surely, the colonists had a worthy cause to endure such suffering. Later, in Washington's Farewell Address, he warned Americans not to get involved in European affairs, make "permanent alliances," or form political parties.<sup>3</sup> Seeing that America today is a global power, divided by political parties, it seems that America has disregarded Washington's message. But the continental army did not suffer in vain, as their underlying cause is the framework for American society-- embedded in everything from the Declaration of Independence to the Constitution itself.

Prior to the Seven Years' War, the British crown largely ignored the colonies. In this period of "salutary neglect," colonies exercised independence as if they were their own sovereign nation. Each colony had their own representative assembly, was self-governed, and practiced some degree of religious toleration.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the social extremes of Europe were not as prevalent in the colonies. The lack of a hereditary aristocracy or a nobility with special privileges gave way to a narrower class system, and greater social mobility (with the notable exception of

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<sup>1</sup> "Historic Valley Forge." *UShistory.org*. Independence Hall Association, June-July 1995. Web. 27 Dec. 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Freedman, Russell. *Washington at Valley Forge*. New York: Holiday House, 2008. Print

<sup>3</sup> Newman, John J., and John M. Schmalbach. *United States History*. 3rd ed. N.p.: Amsco School Publications, inc., 2014. Print

<sup>4</sup> Newman, John J., and John M. Schmalbach. *United States History*. 3rd ed. N.p.: Amsco School Publications, inc., 2014. Print

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African-Americans)<sup>5</sup>. According to historian John Newman, “the colonists’ motivations for leaving Europe, the political heritage of the English majority, and the influence of the American natural environment combined to bring about a distinctly American viewpoint and way of life.”<sup>6</sup>

After 1763, however, with the end of the French and Indian War, the British Empire abandoned their previous policy of salutary neglect, and more forcefully controlled the colonies. In an effort to pay for the war and support the increased military presence, the British implemented the infamous Stamp Act, Sugar Act and Quartering Act.<sup>7</sup> But what angered the colonists was far more than the tax itself. Much of the colonists’ anger came from the fact they lacked representation in the British parliament, but one must also consider that for almost 100 years the colonies were accustomed to self-government, and greatly valued their independence. For example, in response to the colonists’ boycott of British goods, the British parliament issued the Tea Act of 1773, which made tea from the British East India Company *cheaper* than smuggled Dutch tea. The colonists responded by dumping 342 chests of tea into the Boston Harbor-- the Boston Tea Party.<sup>8</sup> The colonists refused to buy the cheaper tea because by doing so, they would recognize the British parliament’s power over them, in a time when they had become accustomed to their independence. In the era of salutary neglect, the colonists had developed a new national character-- one with democratic values unique to any other country at that time. When the British restated their authority in the colonies, they threatened the colonists’

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<sup>5</sup> Andrews, Charles McLean. *The Colonial Period of American History*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1961. Print

<sup>6</sup> Newman, John J., and John M. Schmalbach. *United States History*. 3rd ed. N.p.: Amsco School Publications, inc., 2014. Print

<sup>7</sup> "Milestones: 1750–1775 - Office of the Historian." *U.S. Department of State*. U.S. Department of State, n.d. Web. 27 Dec. 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Labaree, Benjamin Woods. *The Boston Tea Party*. Originally published 1964. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1979. Print.

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way of life, and the revolution that followed was ultimately an attempt to defend this new national identity.

While the America today looks drastically different from the one Washington envisioned, the national character that the colonists fought for lives on. Today we enjoy the freedom of speech, religion, press, peaceful assembly, and a representative government, which are all the democratic ideals the colonists fought for. These democratic values are rooted in American society and even today, the colonists' spirit inspires us to defend and protect our great nation's freedoms. 499 words.