

## How thirteen colonies created a nation that no one quite foresaw

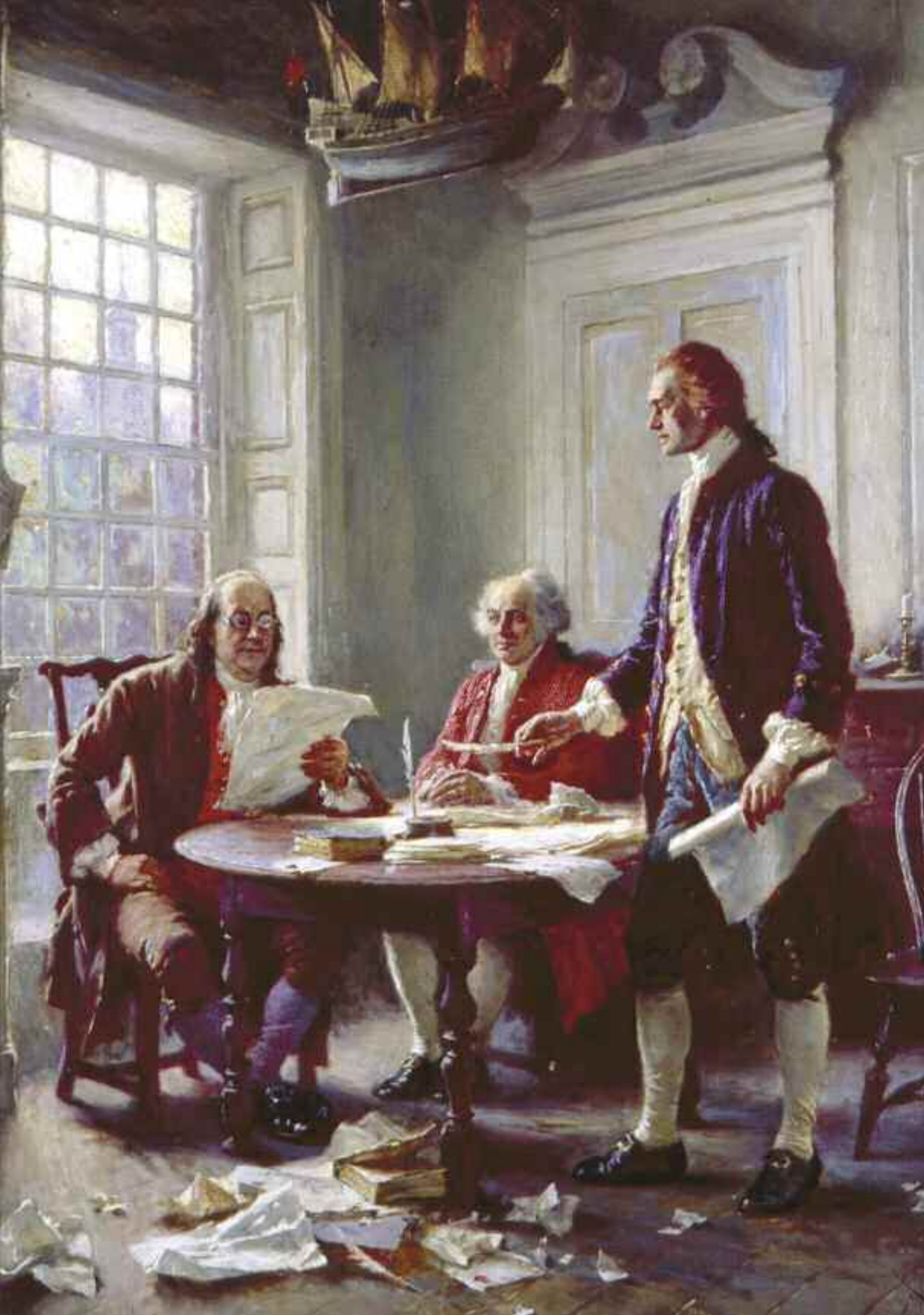
After winning a war they were expected to lose, and achieving a unity that seemed unachievable, they fashioned a constitution that still endures

**T**he United States of America, arguably the most extraordinary nation ever produced by the human race, has about it one rarely mentioned idiosyncrasy. Although it has in many respects more than fulfilled the soaring vision of the people who founded it, the twentieth-century result of their great labor would in all likelihood bewilder and even horrify the founders themselves.

What would the Puritans, fervently opposed to Catholicism, have thought had they known that in two hundred years Catholicism would be by far the numerically strongest Christian denomination in their new country? What would a pope like Pius IX, who condemned the whole concept of a separation between church and state, have said if had he known that the United States, a country whose courts had accepted and asserted it, would see Catholicism grow so spectacularly? How would many of the founders have reacted if informed that the clause they diligently strove to insert in the Constitution to protect freedom of religion as vital to republican democracy would be used by the courts some two centuries later to severely restrict the role of religion in public life?

In short, the country that emerged from the conflict of ideas, loyalties, and cannon fire in North America in the closing decades of the eighteenth century would confound all expectations. How this happened history can recount. Why it happened as it did, one could literally and without blasphemy say, God only knows—but most American Christians would probably agree that God must have had a hand in it somewhere.

*Opposite page: the Writing of the Declaration of Independence, by the early twentieth-century American painter Jean Leon Gerome Ferris, depicts (from left) Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson at Jefferson's lodgings in Philadelphia, reviewing a draft of the document that would lead to the creation of the United States. Although many of America's founders were Deists, Christian values underlay its principles, and Christianity would prevail in the new republic.*







King George III appears (above left) in his coronation portrait and with Queen Charlotte in a contemporary caricature by James Gillray that spoofs the legendary Hanoverian appetite. Stubborn and unimaginative, George generally takes the brunt of the blame for the American Revolution.



God seemingly had considerable help, however, from the intractable individual who in 1760 came to the throne of what was by then the world's most powerful empire. At the height of the Seven Years' War, George III was crowned by the grace of God king of Great Britain and Ireland upon the death of his grandfather George II. The first Hanoverian king born in England and raised in English, he had famously been taught by his widowed German mother to be faithful in marriage and firm in purpose. "George," she would admonish him in his youth, "be a king!"<sup>1</sup>

At any rate, George III was not afflicted by the inertia and promiscuity of the Hanoverians who preceded and followed him. He was a devout Christian—Anglican, of course, and the head of that church. He was the first British monarch to understand science, knowledgeably promoting the transformation of agriculture from medieval to modern methods (which incidentally released a mass migration of labor to England's industrializing cities). But otherwise, he was by all accounts stubborn and unimaginative, and Winston Churchill in his *History of the English-Speaking Peoples* blames him more than anyone for the American Revolution.

The dementia for which history chiefly remembers him, however, did not much affect the king's daily behavior until long after the American Revolution. Although active in his government, he was mainly interested in the breeding of livestock and crops (becoming known as the "Farmer King" because he dressed and in some ways acted the part), and also of children. In fact, George's German wife, Charlotte, gave birth to nine sons and six daughters. Thirteen of the fifteen survived childhood and were raised with a characteristically German combination of warm affection and parental sternness. George's sons, like his brothers and father, would become a source of moral regret to him. At any rate, for most of his sixty-year reign, King George III was popular in England. He was also beloved in his American colonies—at first. Later, as transatlantic discord escalated into conflict, the colonists went from blaming Parliament for their problems to blaming the king, and by the time the guns started firing, they were reviling him personally as the evil tyrant who drove them to revolution.

When the Seven Years' War ended in 1763, Britain's thirteen North Atlantic colonies, after more than a century of benign neglect punctuated by occasional military assistance, suddenly found themselves a subject of economic, strategic, and political importance to both king and Parliament. Having borrowed huge sums to defend her American possessions from the French and Spaniards, the motherland wanted to make financial sense of her empire. The colonists had meanwhile become expert in flouting customs duties. Now, as Britannia struggled to pay off her war debt, she wanted help with ongoing defense costs from her more mature colonial children.

To the government and people of the British Isles this seemed altogether reasonable. Britain's homeland population paid heavily for her foreign involvements, while the colonists paid almost nothing. Therefore Parliament passed three colonial finance acts between 1764 and 1766: the Sugar Act taxing molasses entering the country, the Stamp Act taxing paper, and the Currency Act to prevent colonial legislatures from unduly inflating their paper currency to less painfully pay their taxes and debt. These acts provoked such unprecedented New England riots, official protests, and organized boycotts of British goods that Parliament reconsidered and repealed them in 1767. Colonial tempers consequently cooled, but neither side understood or sympathized with the other, and the respite was brief.

Colonial leaders saw such measures as unreasonable, not because they wanted a free ride but because they had begun thinking like republicans and the British were thinking like imperialists. Republican ideas and attitudes, feeding on the deep religious consciousness of many colonists, had been quietly incubating for decades. What the British saw as fair and sensible, colonists saw as taxation without representation in Parliament. Long accustomed to governing themselves

1. It is impossible to assess the degree to which the strange behavior of George III was attributable to the disease porphyria (which causes overproduction of certain enzymes and results in skin or brain disorders) and how much simply to his intractable personality. Contemporary anecdotes have grown in the telling. One describes him laying his hostess flat on the floor so as to measure the width of her posterior with a handkerchief. In another he tosses a visiting French abbot headfirst into a fishpond. A third has him ending every sentence with the word "peacock" and on one especially painful occasion addressing Parliament as "My Lords and Peacocks."

*The Stamp Act riots of 1765 in Boston, shown in this contemporary engraving, were one of the reactions to English taxation imposed to pay off debts incurred by the Seven Years' War, fought in part to defend England's American possessions against France. To the British the imposition of taxes on the beneficiaries of the war seemed reasonable; to the colonists, increasingly republican in outlook, such measures spurred riots and eventually revolution.*





2. The general uprising known as the Pontiac Rebellion had neither a single leader nor a central strategy. In the eastern Ohio River country around Fort Pitt (later Pittsburgh), the Iroquoian Mingos and Algonkian Shawnees, both powerful groups, were reacting to an incursion of English settlers. For the Ojibway, Huron, Miamis, and other tribes in the fur trade areas of Michigan and Illinois further west, it was the refusal of the British occupation troops to continue the French practice of giving presents and gunpowder to their chiefs that sparked the violence.

*Daniel Boone escorts settlers in this mid-nineteenth-century oil painting by George Caleb Bingham. As the population of the colonies burgeoned, settlers sought new agricultural land to the west, with Boone blazing a trail through the Cumberland Gap in the Appalachian Mountains from North Carolina and Tennessee into Kentucky. Hostile reaction from the Indians to such expansion led to the creation of colonial militias that would soon also take on the British. Bingham (1811–1879), who began his working life as a school janitor, became the self-taught artist of the American frontier. His work, long left in obscurity, was rediscovered in the 1930s, and by the end of the twentieth century he was being hailed as one of early America's great artists.*



through their own elected legislatures, generally under indifferent British governors, and being largely ignored by a Parliament in which they had no voice, they saw this new assertiveness as subjugation.

As founder John Adams would later point out, “The revolution was effected before the war commenced . . . in the minds and hearts of the people.” The British people had been forged and tempered by a long and very particular history originating before the Roman Empire. The Americans (as they had increasingly begun to call themselves) did not identify with this history. Instead, they were being redefined from year to year by an earnest and educated elite immersed in the Enlightenment political ideals of Locke and Rousseau, and by a backcountry horde of illiterate, tough, land-hungry pioneers who followed hardened frontiersmen like Daniel Boone over the Appalachians into Indian country.

Further, from 1750 to 1770 the colonies’ white population doubled to two million, the number of African slaves surpassed a half million, and ninety-five percent of all these people were dependent upon agriculture. They needed abundant, productive land, and the soil of the American tidewater settlements was being severely strained. West of the mountains there was good soil in abundance, however, and the Treaty of Paris ceded to England the vast French-occupied fur-trading regions of the Mississippi and its tributary, the Ohio—lands that the Huron, Shawnee, Creeks, Cherokee, and a dozen others believed belonged to themselves. Within months of the 1763 Treaty of Paris, whether occasioned by American settlers or inflamed by the British army, war whoops echoed again through the western forests.

The French, interested only in the fur trade, had treated the tribes with friendly respect. The English, soldiery and settlers alike, treated them variously—as tenants or subjects or as sullen, savage animals. At any rate, in the spring of 1763 the frontier erupted from the Great Lakes to Virginia in the rebellion named for Chief Pontiac of the Ottawas. Chief Pontiac may have ignited it, but all the major tribes took part, though each (as ever) behaved independently.<sup>2</sup> It took two years, two thousand colonial dead, and two badly led British military expeditions to negotiate a tenuous peace.

The British then concluded, like the French, that the Indians should be seen solely as a source of fur and otherwise left alone. To the Americans, however,

they were chiefly a source of land, to be acquired either by purchase or by force. Founders Benjamin Franklin and George Washington, for example, were both investors in large land companies dealing with western Indians. Such schemes came to a temporary halt in 1763 when George III, by royal proclamation, prohibited any settlement west of the Appalachians—a hopelessly impractical edict that was widely ignored and later eased, but which headed the list of colonial grievances.

Colonists saw the issue of expansion and defense very differently. The disorganized tribes had at most thirty thousand warriors spread across thousands of square miles of wilderness, and Britain declined to defend western settlers in so vast an area. The Americans therefore wanted to deal with the Indians directly and in their own way—as, in any case, they had been doing all along. Many colonists, willing to establish and pay their own militias for frontier duty, resented sending scarce hard currency overseas to pay for British officers, whom they regarded as incompetent. They resented even more the Quartering Acts of 1765, which required them to billet British soldiers in their community halls and other facilities, providing them with food staples and beer.

Colonial fury largely brought repeal of these acts in 1766, but they were soon replaced by the Declaratory Act, which asserted the principle that Parliament could tax the colonies however it saw fit. This it did the following year by passing a series of acts restoring taxes and tightening collection of duties on imported consumer staples—especially tea. A revived colonial opposition soon led to riots and destruction of crown property. Judges had to be transferred from the colonial to the royal payroll. British troops were moved in from the western frontier, and later from Ireland, to keep order in the coastal settlements, particularly New England and above all Boston.

A 1770 confrontation between Bostonians and recently landed soldiers ended with three civilians shot dead and eight others wounded—the infamous “Boston Massacre.” Colonial Patriots, as they now called themselves, consequently burned the antismuggling patrol ship *Gaspée* off the coast of Rhode Island in 1772, and no citizen was willing to witness against the perpetrators. Finally, on a frigid December night in 1773, to enforce an American boycott protesting the tea tax, radical Patriot Samuel Adams led a silent, businesslike band of rebels dressed as Mohawk Indians aboard three London merchant ships. Chopping open cargo chests, they dumped £10,000 worth of East India Company tea into Boston Harbor.



*In this seventeenth-century illustration, Chief Pontiac of the Ottawa Indians incites other tribal chiefs to take on the British. In the spring of 1763 the frontier erupted from the Great Lakes to Virginia in the Pontiac Rebellion. It took two years and two thousand colonial dead before a tenuous peace was negotiated.*





*The Boston Massacre (above left in a contemporary lithograph) was the first armed confrontation between Boston militia and the American citizenry, which took place in March 1770, after a boy threw a rock at a British officer, who in turn struck him with his musket. A crowd assembled, and a riot broke out in which three civilians were shot dead and eight wounded, two of whom later died. Above right is their commemorative gravestone in Granary Burying Ground, Boston.*

As Britain's governors and judges lost the loyalty and command of their colonies to a broadening onslaught from exasperated legislators, furious pamphleteers, and increasingly organized radicals, London waffled between easing up and clamping down. Parliament's Whig majority favored indulgence; the Tories around King George favored retaliation. But the Whigs, after half a century of political dominance and increasingly flagrant corruption, had become more a fractious and discredited coalition than

a governing party, so the Tories had the upper hand.

The Boston Tea Party was the last straw, and the empire struck back by embargoing all colonial trade in gunpowder and weaponry. Patriots in Boston, Portsmouth, and Newport responded by breaking into army storehouses to carry off gunpowder, cannon, and small arms. In early 1774 came the Quebec Act, assigning to the jurisdiction of the British governor of Quebec all lands from Labrador to the Mississippi River. It also terminated all earlier colonial claims to western territories and granted



*On a frigid December night in 1773, Massachusetts settlers dressed as Mohawk Indians and led by radical Patriot Samuel Adams boarded three East India Company merchant ships in Boston Harbor to prevent their unloading their cargoes of valuable tea. At right, a color lithograph depicts the rebel attackers dumping the tea chests overboard.*



*From left to right, Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, John Adams of Massachusetts, and Benjamin Franklin of Philadelphia. Despairing of their browbeaten colonial legislatures, they led in the organization of intercolonial Continental Congresses. The first one mustered fifty-six delegates from twelve colonies. They met in Philadelphia in 1774 and, among other things, tried to develop a plan to establish a colonial parliament under the king.*

civil rights to Quebec's vanquished Roman Catholic French population—New England's century-long enemies. The Quebec Act was soon followed by what Americans called the other Coercive or Intolerable Acts—alteration of the Massachusetts Charter, suspension of public meetings, exemption of British soldiers from prosecution in colonial courts, closure of the port of Boston until all the purloined tea had been paid for, and forcible billeting of British troops in private homes.

Whether George III or Parliament was more to blame for the course things now took hardly matters. Everything the king wanted done had to be enacted by Parliament, and everything Parliament enacted had to be approved by the king. Under the British constitution, then and now, the King in Parliament is absolute master over life and death, and there exists no British statute or right that together they may not repeal or revoke. Americans, notwithstanding their frequent professions of loyalty to the British constitution, simply did not accept it.

An extraordinary spirit was spreading south from New England, energetically and persuasively articulated by men like Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, Benjamin Franklin of Philadelphia, and John and Samuel Adams of Massachusetts.<sup>3</sup> With their legislatures bullied and browbeaten, they replaced them with what they called Committees of Correspondence, which in turn began organizing intercolonial Continental Congresses. The first of these assembled in Carpenter's Hall in Philadelphia in 1774, with fifty-six delegates from twelve colonies—all but newly founded Georgia. Significantly, each colony had one vote, regardless of its population or number of delegates, a principle that would endure. The First Continental Congress dispatched to King George a protest against Parliament's Intolerable Acts, expressed support for Massachusetts (whose legislature the British governor had just dissolved), and discussed—but could not resolve—how the colonies could form a branch of Parliament under the king.

Meanwhile, the man who may have done more than anyone else to popularize the cause of colonial liberty had arrived in Philadelphia. Thomas Paine, an English corset-maker, presented the case for independence (hitherto seen by most colonists as unnecessary, unlikely, and unwise, if not downright foolish) in a forty-eight-page

<sup>3</sup> Samuel and John Adams were second cousins. Though both signed the Declaration of Independence on behalf of Massachusetts, they were altogether different in temperament. Samuel, thirteen years older, was a popular and outgoing rabble-rouser, a Harvard-educated Congregational (Puritan) Christian, and the iconic Boston revolutionary against whom other founders were measured. Cousin John, also a Harvard graduate but a Unitarian, was a self-conscious lawyer from the south of Boston. More conservative, elitist, and skeptical than Samuel about the inherent goodness of popular democracy, and later more pro-British than most Americans, John Adams ran a distant second behind George Washington in the first presidential election, and in 1797 became the country's second president.



4. At Benjamin Franklin's suggestion, Thomas Paine left a turbulent and troubled personal life behind him in England and emigrated to Philadelphia, where he became a successful magazine editor. Like several other founders, including Samuel Adams, he was a poor businessman but a farsighted and persuasive politician. As he explained in *Common Sense*, "When my country, into which I had just set my foot, was set on fire about my ears, it was time to stir. It was time for every man to stir."



William Pitt



Edmund Burke

tract entitled *Common Sense*. Paine's incendiary ideas and language enormously excited ordinary Americans, selling, it was said, five hundred thousand copies in the first year—that is, to one in every four white Americans.<sup>4</sup>

British leaders by now saw rebellion as already begun, spreading like a cancer from Massachusetts. "The die is now cast," King George wrote to his prime minister,

Frederick, Lord North. "The colonies must either submit or triumph." Disregarding the First Continental Congress, Parliament passed two bills, called the Restraining Acts, which so severely restricted the colonies' trade as to destroy their economy. But opinion was bitterly divided on both sides of the ocean. In England opposition Whigs led by William Pitt and Edmund Burke sided openly with the colonists, while the colonies contained at least as many British Loyalists as they did Patriots—and an equal or larger number of fence-sitters, or "mongrels."

At the Second Continental Congress, convened in Philadelphia in May 1775, all shades and degrees of opinion were represented, though initially the Loyalists held a clear majority. Consisting of substantially the same delegates as the first congress, this one would last six years and steer the revolution to its finish. Initially the pro-British conservatives, led by Philadelphia lawyer John Dickinson, wrested from the radicals an agreement to attempt a reconciliation, known as the

Olive Branch Petition. John Adams contemptuously described this almost maudlin appeal to past fraternal ties as "a measure of imbecility." Armed rebellion had already erupted in Massachusetts, while this same congress had designated Virginia representative George Washington to lead a new Continental Army and soon would officially justify support for any who took up arms against the crown.

King George refused to receive the Olive Branch Petition and in August issued a Proclamation for Suppressing Rebellion and Sedition. In December the Prohibitory Act imposed martial law on all belligerent colonies and declared American shipping open to seizure. But even so, contend co-authors O. T. Barck and H. T. Lefler in *Colonial America* (1968), sufficient longing for peace still existed, even in New England, to enable Americans to come to terms. Politically, economically, and militarily the odds of beating Britain appeared poor, and colonial legislatures in New Jersey, New York, Maryland, and Delaware were still opposing independence. But the congressional radicals prevailed in 1776, partly because they were better politicians and partly because, as the rebellion spread, events were proving them right. Britain had become an enemy, and the only realistic options left were freedom or subjugation. The Prohibitory Act had forever ended the old colonial order.

By spring 1776 Washington had driven the British out of Boston, Loyalists had been militarily routed by Patriots in North Carolina, and Congress had formulated a basis for Confederation. One by one the delegations accepted Virginia's resolution "declaring Independency." By July 4 the formal Declaration of Independence had been composed, mainly by Thomas Jefferson and mainly from resolutions, phrases, and tracts extant for years. All people have certain "self-evident" rights, natural and God-given, it asserted, and when these are denied by government, there is a duty to restore them. It accused King George—"a prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant"—of twenty-eight specific "repeated injuries and usurpations," and it concluded by declaring America a confederation of free and independent states by authority of the "good people of these colonies."

The power of this document, writes historian Benjamin Hart in *Faith and Freedom* (1988), was precisely *not* that its message was new but, rather, that it put into secular political language the moral, frequently biblical principles and concepts that most Americans had heard since childhood. The twentieth-century claim that the Declaration and those who endorsed it were opposed to religion is refuted by virtually all existing evidence.<sup>5</sup> The previous year, Congress had adopted the Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking up Arms, which included five references to God in such terms as "the divine Author of our existence" and "our great Creator." Now these same congressmen signed their names to four very similar passages in the Declaration of Independence. Its opening paragraph, for example, proclaims to the world that God

5. Thomas Jefferson himself laid no claim to originality in composing the Declaration of Independence, having deliberately chosen concepts and language he knew were acceptable to the delegates and to most Americans. It has often been claimed, notes historian Mark A. Noll in *Christians in the American Revolution* (1977), that Jefferson and other leading delegates were in fact Deists, but even if this was so (and the term resists precise definition), they lived in a society still firmly attached to Christian moral concepts, language, and literature.

At right is Tom Paine (1737–1809), English radical and pamphleteer. After participating in the early stages of the French Revolution, Paine helped launch revolution in America with his incendiary forty-eight-page tract *Common Sense* (below).



Below, John Trumbull's famous painting of Thomas Jefferson, flanked by his drafting committee, presenting the Declaration of Independence to John Hancock, president of the Continental Congress, July 4, 1776. Displayed in the Rotunda on Capitol Hill and on the American two-dollar bill, the group portrait includes forty-two of the fifty-six signers. At right, the Declaration itself.







*In the revolution's first major battle, in June 1775, British troops defeated the Massachusetts and New Hampshire militia at Bunker Hill, on Boston Harbor—but suffered a thousand casualties.*

6. Some Christians in the later twentieth century would criticize the formulators of the Declaration of Independence for including the pursuit of happiness as a basic right. But as American political scientist Charles Murray observes in his 1988 book of that name, the founders—like all previous Christians—saw happiness as dependent upon virtue. The meaning of a word can alter over time, however, and the passage of two centuries would reduce “happiness” to a kind of feel-good self-fulfillment. Nevertheless, as British essayist G. K. Chesterton would observe, the United States is the only nation in history to have been founded on a creed.

7. Despite General Howe’s orders enjoining leniency toward defeated colonials, in one noted incident British dragoons led by Colonel Banastre Tarleton allegedly slaughtered one hundred and three soldiers of a surrendering Virginia regiment at Waxhaw, South Carolina. There are contradictory accounts of this episode, but this and other ugly incidents made Tarleton’s Raiders notorious for capricious sadism. After the war, incidentally, the colonel back in England became a Whig MP.

in June, when militia from Massachusetts and New Hampshire seized and fortified Bunker Hill, overlooking Boston Harbor from the northeast. The British dislodged them on June 17 but only after suffering over a thousand casualties, including many officers, more than twice the American losses. Nevertheless, although technically a British victory, Bunker Hill reassured the Americans that they could fight bravely and well. It also revealed two flaws that would plague the British to the end: a tendency to underestimate the enemy and negligence in following up victories. Winston Churchill, a great admirer of the Americans, writes scathingly that their revolution triumphed in significant part due to the most inept British generalship in modern history.

Not all historians are so harsh. In *The American Revolution* (2002), Gordon Wood notes that Prime Minister North had ordered the two brothers who commanded the British land and naval forces, Sir William Howe and Admiral Richard Howe, to conduct the war in such a way that political reunion would remain possible—to be peacemakers, not just conquerors. In the middle colonies this strategy did indeed bring many Americans back to crown allegiance, but it required dispersal of British forces to protect local Loyalists from their Patriot neighbors. It also meant forbidding any plunder of towns and countryside, or atrocities of any sort—although some did occur notwithstanding.<sup>7</sup>



*Admiral Richard Howe*



*General William Howe*

The British understood quite well their strategic advantages but underestimated their three serious disadvantages. One was time, the second was General George Washington, and the third was the difficulty of destroying a small and elusive army at home in its own vast territory. Nor did the British ever quite comprehend that ultimately they were fighting against an idea—namely liberty—that, given time,

created the laws of nature and cites the “unalienable Rights” of “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”<sup>6</sup>

They also appealed to the “Supreme Judge of the World” as justifying their separation from Britain and invoked the “Protection of Divine Providence.” Freedom would require more than pious words, however. The revolution was well under way by the time John Hancock and the rest signed their names to the Declaration, and though it had started well enough for the Americans, it now turned against them.

The first shots had been fired at Concord and Lexington in April 1775, before the Second Congress opened, and the first major battle was fought

would win over the people. George Washington, who did understand this, knew that as long as his famished, ragtag army survived, so would the revolution. And both Howes could be faulted for complacency, for they failed on several notable opportunities to move in for a decisive kill.

Washington, heavily outgunned and overmatched, chose his battles with great care. Taking command at age forty-three, he was not a fire-brand like Thomas Paine, a flamboyant wit like Benjamin Franklin, or a brilliant essayist like Jefferson—or even at the outset much of a soldier. What caused the Second Congress to name him commander was his immense and towering presence: tallness of stature combined with a pervading calm and a commanding air of principled common sense, consideration, and selfless commitment. “Sober, steady, and calm,” was one delegate’s description, and when Washington tried to refuse the job, they considered him all the more qualified to be trusted with it.

Born into the middle echelon of Virginia’s emergent tobacco plantation aristocracy, Washington had served bravely and brilliantly two decades earlier as a militia commander in the French and Indian War in the Ohio Valley. He had since married well, invested wisely, and risen to prominence in the Virginia legislature. He seemingly had perfected the dual virtues of enterprise and patience, both essential to defeating—with no allies, little money, few weapons, and an untrained rabble of headstrong volunteers—thirty thousand of the best trained and best equipped professional troops in the world.

Enterprise, however, was a distinctly American trait. In May 1775 New England militiamen under the American colonel Benedict Arnold had captured strategic Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain without firing a shot. However, this and subsequent American forays into Canada would make it clear that the Catholic French Canadians did not sympathize with the American cause, and their bishop Jean-Olivier Briand would instruct his clergy to refuse the sacraments to Canadians who supported the Americans.

But for Arnold, the seizure of Ticonderoga would prove a strategic bonanza. With it they acquired fifty-nine artillery pieces, mostly cannon, which that winter by Washington’s orders were floated and skidded through three hundred miles of bush, bog, and mountains on forty sleds pulled by eighty oxen.<sup>8</sup> With this artillery, the six-month-old Continental Army subsequently captured Dorchester Heights, overlooking Boston from the south, and forced the British to evacuate by ship to Nova Scotia along with some thousand Boston Loyalists.

The Boston victory emboldened Congress to declare independence in July, but the fledgling republic now met with reverses. The British returned, landing troops on Staten Island, below the town of New York. By late August these numbered thirty-two thousand British regulars and German mercenaries, against Washington’s twenty thousand, many of whom were poorly trained recent recruits. He stationed eight thousand men on Long Island, and on August 27 they were attacked and driven back to Brooklyn Heights. With their backs to the East River, they were facing an equal number of Howe’s best. But the British, having command of the water and considering their enemy neatly trapped, dug in rather than attacking. That night Washington conscripted



*In March 1776 Washington fortified Dorchester Heights above Boston, using cannon captured by Benedict Arnold at Ticonderoga. In this painting by Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze, the general appears more wistful than triumphant.*



*Benedict Arnold*

8. Benedict Arnold, unquestionably one of the most resourceful American officers, arguably was also the most swollen headed. A Connecticut-born trader, in 1775 he was permanently crippled by a musket ball while leading an unsuccessful Continental Army attack on Canada. In 1780, when commander of the key Hudson River fort of West Point, he was accused of selling information on its defenses to the British Army. Arnold fled to the British and ultimately retired in England, where he died in 1801. He is said to have requested burial in his American uniform, but in America his name had become a synonym for traitor.





*This monument marks the spot, then called Brookland Ferry Landing, where Washington managed to evacuate eight thousand Continental soldiers from Long Island under cover of darkness, on an August night in 1776. Today the Brooklyn Bridge is just five hundred feet from it.*

*In this renowned oil painting by Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze, Washington leads a column of the Continental Army across the ice-filled Delaware River to attack British forces in Trenton, New Jersey. A much copied painting, the original hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. The painting which hangs in the West Wing of the White House is a copy.*

every flat-bottomed scow available and ferried his army off Long Island, and when morning caught the American evacuation only half-finished, they still were saved by a dense fog. Washington himself was the last man to board the last boat. When the fog lifted, the entrenched British saw in astonishment that the entire Continental Army—men, baggage, cannon, and all—was gone.

But Howe proceeded to clear the rebels from New York on Manhattan Island, chasing them first north into the future New York State and then south into New Jersey, an area thick with British Loyalists. So Washington crossed the Delaware River into the safer, more republican shelter of Pennsylvania, while Howe, considering the war almost won, recalled most of his scattered contingents to New York. It is hard to blame him. By Christmas, Washington’s army was reduced to some six thousand men. In this hapless but not hopeless situation, however, he brought two thousand soldiers back across the Delaware on

Christmas Day 1776, and in a surprise attack the next morning overwhelmed a garrison of hungover Hessian mercenaries at Trenton, New Jersey. Furious, Howe dispatched General Charles Cornwallis from New York with seven thousand men, and on January 3, 1777, they attacked Washington at Trenton.

That night he evaded them, again slipping away in darkness while a few men stayed behind to keep token fires burning and make entrenching noises. Instead of heading back west across the Delaware, as Cornwallis might expect, however, Washington looped around to the north and took Princeton, New Jersey, twelve miles away. Then, calculating that he had bearded the lion long enough, Washington slipped away to finish the winter miserably but safely at Morristown, New Jersey, guarding the road from New York to Philadelphia. Though the victories of the Continental Army excited the admiration of Europeans and many British Whigs, the misery and privation of its winter camp discouraged new recruits, and desertion and disease became common. “These are the times,” Paine wrote that winter, “that try men’s souls.”

Between Lexington in 1775 and the final signing of peace with Britain, the revolution lasted eight years, making it technically the longest war in American history until Vietnam two centuries later.

In practical fact, however, it consisted of two short



wars, one in the north, the other in the south, each lasting about two years.

General Howe had arrived in New York in 1776 with a strategic plan, namely to isolate the volatile New England states from the more pliable middle colonies by capturing and holding the Hudson-Lake Champlain-Richelieu corridor between New York and Montreal. Into this storied route, where European regiments and Indian war parties had battled for a century, the British would now send three converging forces, from Montreal, Lake Ontario, and New York, respectively.

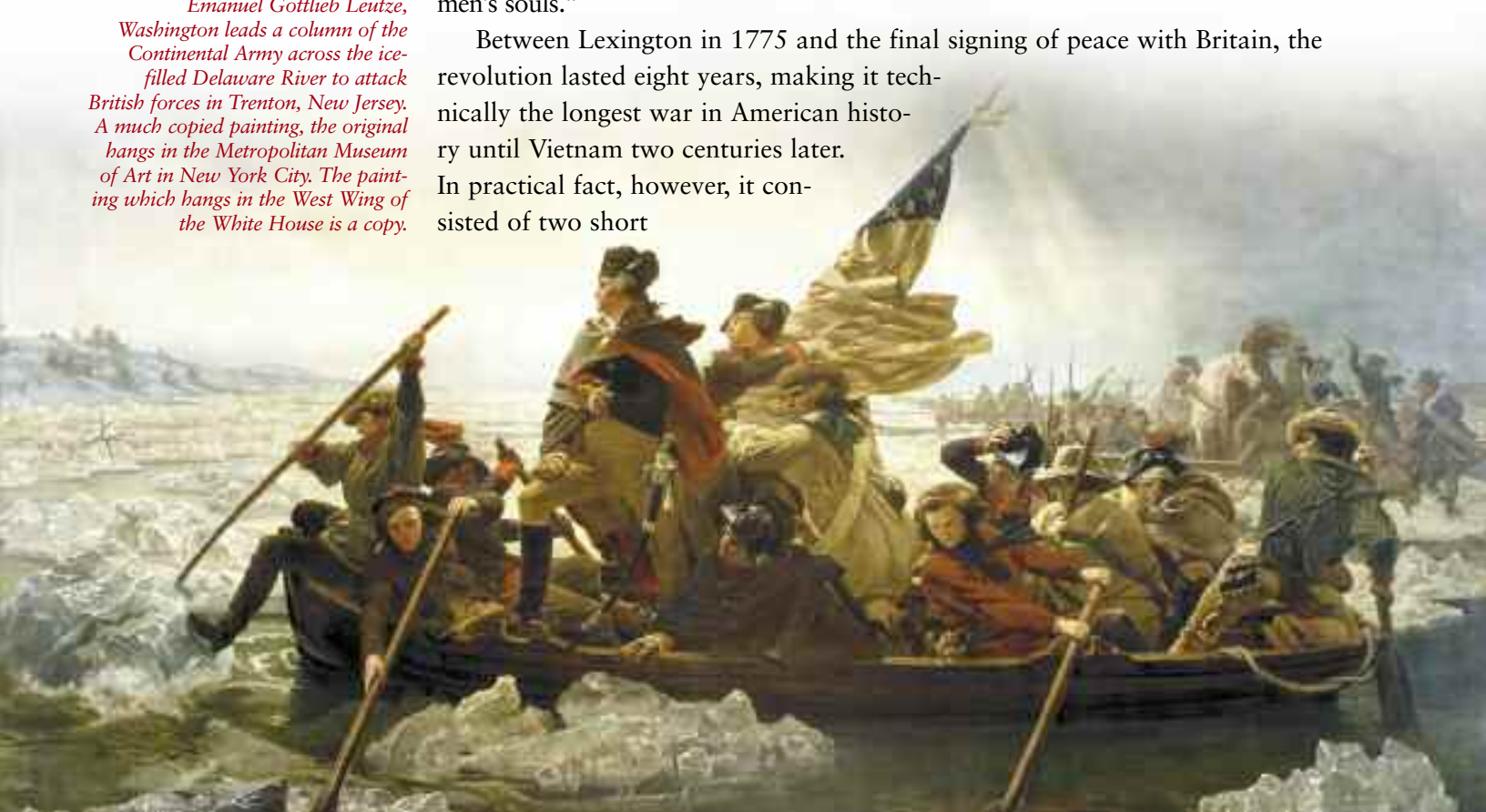
Properly executed, the plan might have succeeded. In June General John Burgoyne led seven thousand regulars, Loyalists, Canadian militia, and Indians south from Montreal. A little later, Colonel Barry St. Leger started eastward from Oswego on Lake Ontario with eight hundred soldiers and militia, and a thousand Indians, to follow the Mohawk River to its confluence with the Hudson near Albany. Later that summer, General Henry Clinton sent armed boats up the Hudson from New York, to be followed under the plan by British regulars.

Burgoyne easily recaptured Ticonderoga and other forts on Lake Champlain, greatly distressing the Americans. But their resistance stiffened as Burgoyne moved south. Settlers banded together to protect their farms and families from the native auxiliaries—described in the Declaration of Independence as “the merciless Indian Savages whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions.” Also arriving in large numbers were colonial volunteers from farther away, who knew that defeat in this campaign would finish the cause of independence.

In the end, St. Leger retreated to Oswego after he was confronted by an American column and his Iroquois allies deserted. Clinton’s troops from the south failed to arrive because Howe had reassigned them to Pennsylvania. Burgoyne, now too far from Canada to feed his men, became increasingly desperate. That fall his troops were beaten to a standstill at Saratoga by Benedict Arnold’s Continentals, backed by a new corps of sharpshooters assembled by frontiersman Daniel Morgan, who selectively picked off almost every British officer.<sup>9</sup>

*In the last major clash of the 1776–1777 winter campaign, Washington looped back after defeating the British at Trenton to best them again in a ferocious battle at Princeton (above), effectively driving them from New Jersey.*

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Morgan was a true-to-type western Virginia frontiersman. A native of New Jersey, he was a hard-drinking brawler and Shawnee Indian fighter. In the Revolutionary War he led Morgan’s Riflemen, a troop one hundred strong that he recruited in ten days and marched six hundred miles north in twenty-one days. After Saratoga, Morgan’s most famous exploit was his total destruction of the dreaded Tarleton’s Raiders at Cowpens, South Carolina, in 1781.





# The clause invoked to silence faith

The founding fathers' First Amendment sought to keep the government out of religion, but 150 years later the courts used it to sharply restrict a Christian role in shaping the law

What America's founders had to say formally about religious freedom was a miracle of brevity. The sole reference in the Constitution appears in the First Amendment and states simply, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This reflected no hostility to religion, as many now suppose but, rather, a profound distrust of federal authority.

For well over a century American courts took this at face value: Congress (the national lawmaker) will not establish (legislate) any official religion, nor interfere with religious activities. That changed in 1947 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that it also applies to the states, producing a long sequence of precedents banning state contracting of religious organizations for secular purposes such as education, health care and welfare, and of public prayer on state property. This has raised the question of what the founders intended, based in part on what they believed about God.

It is often asserted that most founders were Deists. According to the authoritative *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Deism emerged in the late seventeenth century and comprised four distinct versions: (1) that a Creator made nature and then took no further interest in it, or (2) that a Divine Providence purposively operates material nature but does not interject itself into nature morally and spiritually, or (3) that the Creator instituted moral laws but there is no spiritual reality, or (4) that there are moral and spiritual aspects to life but these cannot be known. All that Deists held in com-

mon was their belief that the Christian confession of One God in Three Persons, of the Virgin birth, of the Resurrection, and of Jesus as Judge and Savior defies rational proof.

It is known that many who signed the Declaration of Independence and later wrote the Constitution were skeptical of revelation. However, even the most skeptical were also very strongly in favor of Christianity. Fair-minded and factual treatments of this subject—by David L. Holmes (*The Faiths of the Founding Fathers*), Mark A. Noll (*Christians in the American Revolution*), and Steven Waldman (*Founding Faith*), among others—suggest a complexity that cannot be easily summarized.

George Washington and his wife Martha attended Virginia's established Anglican Church frequently but not weekly. More often than not, Sunday found Washington visiting, reading, or even fox hunting. But there was more to this than mere social convention. He prayed openly in times of trial, read the Anglican service to his campaigning soldiers in the absence of a chaplain, kept Anglican fast days, and said grace before meals. He had an odd insistence of standing in church when others knelt. Like many of his contemporaries he did not receive Communion, which at that time in colonial America occurred on only four Sundays each year. Washington was never confirmed, but that's hardly remarkable, writes Mark Noll in *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (1992), since no Anglican bishop was consecrated in the colonies until 1784. Washington would then have been fifty-two years old.

In official and personal correspondence, he used the

name of God fairly often but more frequently opted for Deist equivalents—the Deity, Providence, Supreme Ruler of the Universe, and Great Ruler of Events. He was a serious Mason, a robust secret society professing Deist beliefs. He almost never wrote or spoke of Christ. Like all his congressional colleagues, he was morally focused, theologically ambiguous, and pro-church.

Thomas Jefferson was fascinated by religion but was more inclined to excoriate what he did not believe than to profess what he did. Trained in scripture, he detested Judaism and actually cut-and-pasted his own version of the Gospels, eliminating all references to revelation, miraculous occurrences, and eternal damnation, and retaining only Christ's more comforting and inspiring moral admonitions. Like many contemporary Deists he looked for the moral common ground of all religions and ignored the rest. He despised the clergy of all churches as a class, though he remained the close lifelong friend of one with whom he often discussed religion.

Yet at the same time, he spoke highly of churches, served faithfully as an Episcopal (Church of England) vestryman, attended regularly wherever he could, and made a point of enrolling his daughters in a Catholic convent school while posted to Paris. Politically he was a passionate advocate of religious freedom and is credited with coining the phrase "wall of separation between church and state." The origin of that phrase is better ascribed to James Madison, author of the First Amendment. True, Jefferson founded the University of Virginia as a bastion of freethinking, but that he would have denied any role for religion in public debate, as has since been implied, is very dubious.

Did Jefferson believe in a personal, just, and loving God? In a famous 1781 statement on slavery (an institution he loathed but was himself complicit in) he declared, "Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever . . . The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest." And in an 1823 letter to a friend, three years before he died, he wrote, "The doctrines of Jesus are simple, and tend all to the happiness of man. 1. That there is one only God, and he all perfect. 2. That there is a future state of rewards and punishments. 3. That to love God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself is the sum of religion." By any of *Oxford's* four versions, Jefferson was more than a Deist but definitely not a Christian.

Benjamin Franklin was another Deist with distinctly Christian leanings. Five weeks before his death in 1790 he wrote to the president of Yale, a minister of the Congregational (Puritan) Church he had left behind in his youth, "I believe in one God, Creator of the Universe: That he governs the world by his providence. That he ought to be worshipped. That the most acceptable Service we can render to him, is doing good to his other Children. That the Soul of Man is immortal and will be treated with Justice in another life, respecting its Conduct in this."



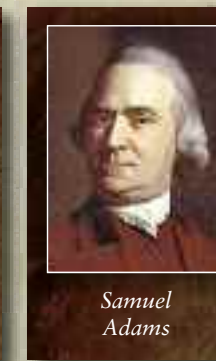
John Hancock



John Witherspoon



John Jay



Samuel Adams

Franklin's ambivalence about theological doctrine and his emphasis on virtue and self-sacrifice were shared by founders James Madison and John Adams.

These most central figures of the revolution were not Christians, publicly or privately, but many and perhaps most of their fellow founders were. Most prominently among them were Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry, John Hancock, John Witherspoon (also a Presbyterian minister), and John Jay. Among all the founders, the only openly anti-theist was Thomas Paine, and the tendency either grew on him over time, or he was hiding it during the war.

In his very balanced account, Steven Waldman points out that over the past two centuries, both secular liberals and Christian conservatives have been guilty of serious misrepresentation. The former often say or imply that the founders were antireligious. The latter sometimes state or imply that the separation doctrine was invented by twentieth-century courts. Neither is true. The use of the word "separation" in regard to religion and the state was not invented by courts. However, the present-day separation doctrine was indeed invented by them in the twentieth century, even though it would appear diametrically opposed to the "freedom of expression clause" of the First Amendment.

Certainly, one founding father was a firm and believing Christian. Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the only Catholic who signed the Declaration of Independence, was a cousin of John Carroll, the first American to become a Catholic bishop. In the revolution Carroll played a key role in bringing Maryland in on the colonists' side, and he was a delegate to the Continental Congress. He also had a great deal at risk. When the revolution broke out, he was believed to be the wealthiest man in the colonies.

In the 1800s most American public figures returned very noticeably to orthodox Christianity. David L. Holmes speculates that the Deism of the founders was sufficient for men of intellect and social station who, when their children died in infancy—as so often happened—could find consolation at Masonic meetings contemplating the design of the Great Architect. Their wives and daughters, meanwhile, tended to remain Christian and in many cases strikingly devout. Women endured far more pain from the ordinary processes and vicissitudes of life, and many found in Christ a constant personal friend, not just an awesome and almighty Planner. Moreover, church was their only regular place of social contact, and its lessons and routines put order in their lives and communities. And it was they more than men who raised the next generation of Americans. ■

*George Washington prays at Valley Forge in the hard winter of 1777–1778 (lithograph after a painting by Henry Brueckner). Morally focused and theologically ambiguous, the first president was nevertheless a consistent supporter of the Anglican Church.*







*Riflemen from Maryland and Virginia are shown here attacking the flank of the British infantry at the crucial Battle of Saratoga in 1777. Rifle units were dispersed among the musket-bearing troops of the Continental Army. Since the rifle was a new and much more lethal weapon, riflemen could pick off frontline officers. This twentieth-century painting is by H. Charles McBarron, Jr., a celebrated war artist noted for detailed accuracy on historic military operations. The colonial victory at Saratoga not only destroyed the British plan of dividing the southern colonies from the northern by taking control of the Hudson-Lake Champlain corridor; it also enabled Benjamin Franklin, American ambassador in Paris, to persuade the French to enter the war on the colonial side.*

Burgoyne formally surrendered on October 17, 1777.

Saratoga saved the American Revolution. In Pennsylvania Washington's main army had just lost two key engagements, Brandywine Creek and Germantown, and the British had taken Philadelphia. American troops were holed up west of the city at Valley Forge. Congress had evacuated to York in Pennsylvania, a hundred miles farther west. What made Valley Forge a byword for privation that dismal winter of 1777 to 1778 was not so much the cold as Congress's incompetent provisioning. Fortunately, however, General Howe was too comfortable gambling and partying in Philadelphia, then North America's most cosmopolitan city, to bother confronting Washington's battered army a mere twenty-five miles away.

In some important respects the congressmen had done well, having sent Benjamin Franklin as ambassador to France in late 1776. Antagonism between Britain and France still ran deep, and a steady, surreptitious flow of French gunpowder and arms soon reached the desperate colonists through Portugal. But Franklin did far more. At the royal palace of Versailles and in aristocratic salons, the plainly dressed New World republican was a fascinating and acceptably outrageous figure. When the British were beaten at Saratoga, nobody cheered louder than the French, and in February 1778 America announced its first foreign alliance, with none other than France, the Catholic monarchy that fifteen years earlier had been its mortal enemy. Alliance with Spain followed in 1779 and in 1780 with the Netherlands.

The British declared war on France a month after its American alliance, confronting both nations with the danger of another world struggle like the Seven Years' War, from which neither of them had yet fully recovered. Over the next three years France would send ten thousand troops and twenty-nine warships to America's aid. Moreover, to protect its Caribbean plantation islands from French attack, Britain had to withdraw troops from the American mainland. The result was a two-year lull in which Howe resigned and returned to England to heavy criticism. His subordinate, General Henry Clinton, succeeding him as commander-in-chief, abandoned Philadelphia and returned his army to New York.

The northern theater remained stalemated, with neither side strong enough to win. Though fewer and fewer Britons by now supported the war, King George and

his government pressed on. They had decided on a new strategy, namely to recapture Georgia and the Carolinas, where populations were smaller than in the north, more recently established, and more loyal to the mother country. In May 1780 Clinton sailed from New York with fourteen thousand men and seized the port of Charleston, South Carolina, and most of the army defending it. He then returned to New York while Cornwallis beat the Americans again at the inland southern towns of Camden and Fishing Creek. Only in January 1781 were the British finally stopped, with an American victory at the Battle of Cowpens, a village in upstate South Carolina.

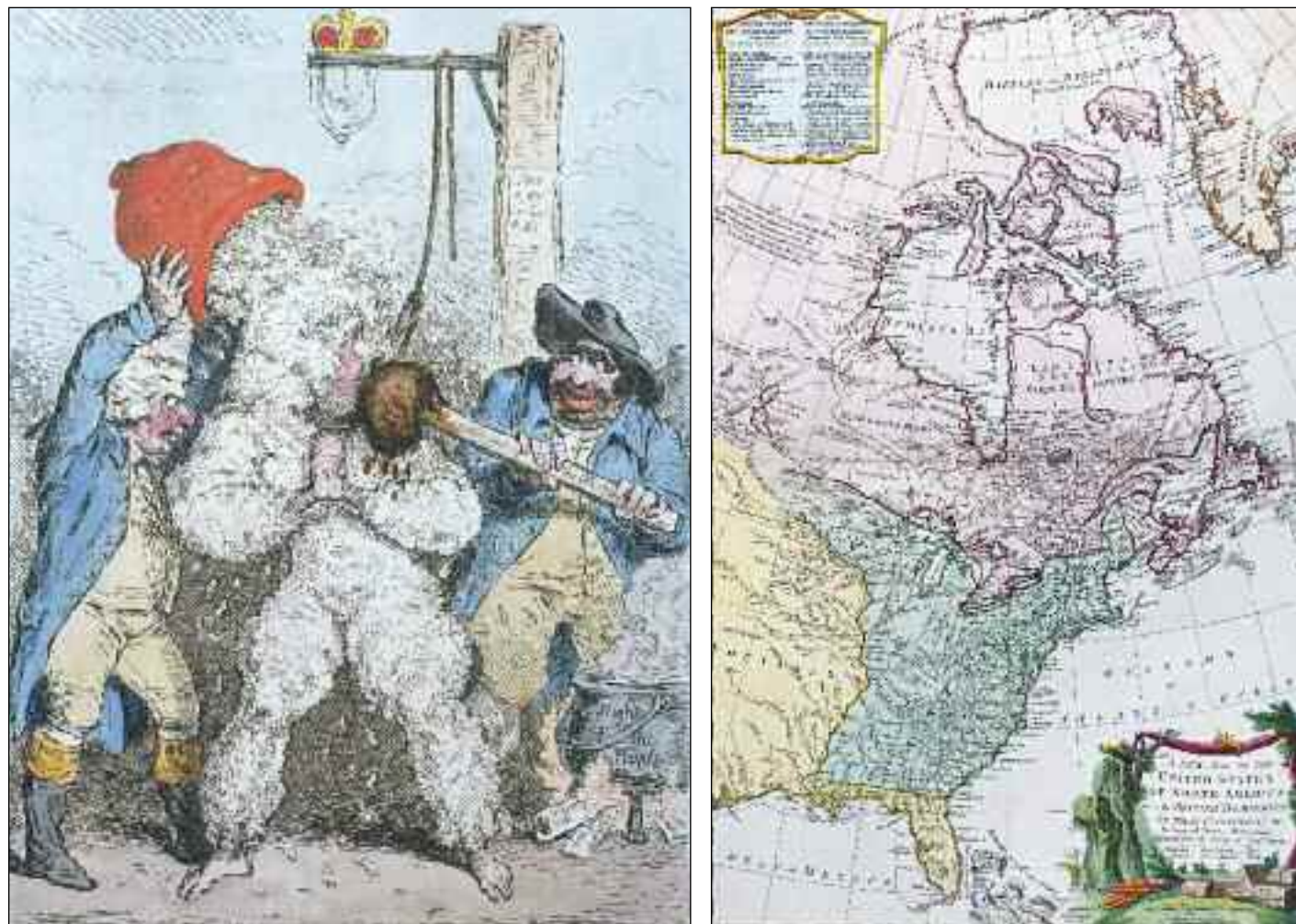


*(Above) John Paul Jones, American naval hero, stands before King Louis XVI in Paris while adoring ladies of the French court flank American ambassador Benjamin Franklin. French women had an unusual attraction to the balding and aging Franklin. The painting is by Jean Leon Gerome Ferris (1863–1930). (Below) In the famous 1820 work by John Trumbull, Cornwallis surrenders to Washington at Yorktown, Virginia, effectively ending the war.*

But by now the Continental Army had better officers and better trained recruits, and more southern militias were prepared to fight for the republic than for the British. That winter the Continentals forced Cornwallis back to the Carolina coast. Undeterred, in the spring of 1781 he marched northwest into Virginia, which he believed to be the heartland of the revolution. He moved so fast, in fact, that in June his cavalry column almost captured Jefferson and other members of the Virginia assembly. But such imposingly large numbers of Continental soldiers and newly landed French regulars were marching south that Cornwallis subsequently retreated to Yorktown on the Virginia coast to await naval rescue from New York. The ships that shortly sailed up Chesapeake Bay were not British, however, but a







(Left) An early eighteenth-century cartoon by the London satirist James Gillray, titled “The Patriot’s Revenge,” depicts the fate of many colonists who fought on, or sympathized with the British side. The figure on the left was taken at the time to be William Pitt, famed parliamentarian who sided with the colonists. The victim is not identified. (Right) One of the first maps of the United States and adjoining British dominions, produced as a colored engraving by James Dunn in 1788, five years after the Treaty of Paris ended the war and recognized the sovereignty of the United States of America.

10. Some of the defeated United Empire Loyalists went to Britain. Most of them preferred to migrate, however, either to the British West Indies or—in much larger numbers—to Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Ontario in what is now Canada, where they began a two-century constitutional adventure trying to live and work with French Quebec.

French fleet that had just beaten the English off the coast. By October Cornwallis had no choice but to surrender, effectively ending the war.

Heady times followed. As the euphoria of victory faded, Americans began the difficult business of restoring the rule of law—their own laws, that is—in what, amazingly enough, was now their own country. One early problem was what to do with the Loyalists. Some twenty thousand had fought for the British, and others had spied for them. There had been bitter civil war between Royalist and Republican civilian militias, especially in the Carolinas. Elsewhere, thousands had been tarred and feathered and run out of town by local committees of safety and screaming Patriot mobs and their property seized under state laws. Some Loyalists were now returning, asking for their property back. Surprisingly, some got it, assisted by a peace provision with Britain, whereby Congress urged the states to rescind anti-Loyalist laws and restore forfeited property. But most were long gone and did not even try.<sup>10</sup>

Confronting the new republic, however, were problems of far greater moment, for threats and uncertainties abounded. Britain, still smarting from defeat, was poised in Canada on America’s northern doorstep. To the south lay Spanish America. Questions abounded. Who might occupy the Indian territories to the west? How would the various states pay their war debts? How could America safeguard private commerce between competing state jurisdictions? How could Congress restrain acts of state legislatures that were manifestly unjust? Answers were urgently needed.

Underlying it all was the great riddle of federalism. The Americans were creating not just a republic but a federal republic—something with few precedents,

and those neither comparable nor encouraging. If the several states were to be, as the Declaration of Independence proclaimed, “free and independent,” precisely how was America a “union”? Just as ordinary laws limit the powers of individuals, a constitution limits the power of governments. And a federation, as British constitutional scholar A. V. Dicey authoritatively defined it, is a country where people identify more closely with their local state or province than with the country as a whole.

This was certainly true of America. The delegates who formed the First and Second Congresses were initially strangers to each other. They came from vastly different places, with different accents and attitudes, different religious histories and temperaments, different climates, and often conflicting economic interests. They frequently had little reason to trust each other. For only a generation or two had there been much trade between these colonies, or many roads connecting them. Most commerce hitherto had been directly with Britain—tobacco, rice, and indigo from the south, and lumber, fish, and fur from the north.

The last thing those state representatives in Philadelphia wanted was to replace British tyranny with congressional tyranny. Their original Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union assigned sovereignty to the states, which now had all established written constitutions of their own. The Articles allowed the national government only a minimalist role: foreign affairs, national defense, currency, citizenship, and the mails—and in all of these it must somehow satisfy often contradictory state demands. The national legislature had only one chamber, in which each state cast just one vote, regardless of population. The executive branch was a “committee of the states” with a revolving presidency. A rudimentary Supreme Court made up of state judges was to decide jurisdictional questions. All else fell to the states, particularly trade and tariffs, taxation, and civil rights. Finally, the explosive question of which states would expand westward was left largely unresolved.

This rudimentary structure had got America through the war. Afterward, voices decrying its imperfections grew in number and volume—those of Alexander Hamilton, George Washington, and James Madison among the best known. Without greater central authority, Washington warned, the union would dissolve in “anarchy and confusion.” Calling themselves Federalists (though “centralists” would have been a more accurate term), he and many others pressured state legislatures to send delegates to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787 to amend the Articles.<sup>11</sup>

The delegates met from June through September, in closed sessions to allow frank discussion and avoid



A thirteen-cent stamp (for the thirteen colonies) issued in 1977 commemorates the two hundredth anniversary of the drafting of the Articles of Confederation at Yorktown, Pennsylvania.



11. Conspicuously absent from the Constitutional Convention in 1787 were many dissenting founders, who considered it a repudiation of the revolution. The most notable absentees were Jefferson, who was in France, whence he sarcastically dismissed the convention as a “congress of demigods.” But arguments for states’ rights by convention delegates John Hancock, Samuel Adams, and Patrick Henry would persist long after their deaths and become a major cause of the American Civil War seventy-four years later.





*George Washington lifts his hat to other delegates assembled for the Constitutional Convention at Philadelphia in 1787. The delegates met for the whole summer and resolved that there must be a strong central government, able to hold the somewhat disparate colonies together. The key question, however, was: Who would control it? The painting is one of a series on the formation of the United States by Jean Leon Gerome Ferris.*

public alarm. Despite contrary instructions from Congress and many state legislatures, they decided to recommend replacing the Articles with an entirely new Constitution. Two basic models were proposed, one by Virginia that favored the larger states, and one by New Jersey that favored smaller ones. Both plans called for a stronger national government. The debate was over who would control it.

After much haggling and compromise, the convention sent to Congress a design that has governed the United States ever since: a bicameral Congress in which initiative for financial matters lies in a popularly elected lower house, and foreign and executive affairs are overseen primarily by a Senate with equal representation from each sovereign state; a separately elected president, whose cabinet is approved by the Senate; and a permanent and independent Supreme Court, with power to overrule Congress where it identifies constitutional errors, whose members are appointed by the executive and vetted by the Senate. The system was to be replete with effective checks and balances. As Madison, its chief architect, would soon argue in its defense, power must check power, ambition must check ambition.

The Confederation Congress swallowed hard, approved this radical departure from the Articles, and submitted it to the states. It was initially well received, but then anti-Federalist opposition began to build, led by states' rights advocates like Patrick Henry, the Virginia radical who in 1775 had ringingly declared to the Colonial Assembly, "Give me liberty or give me death!" Now that the war was won, Henry sensed in the new Constitution a menace to liberty as deadly as the monarchy they had defeated, starting with the Constitution's opening words: "We the people . . ." The American people, he argued, did not fight the war. The American people did not exist; there were only Virginians and Carolinians and New Yorkers and such. The United States was a confederation of states, and this Constitution would turn them into a single consolidated nation. As

his outrage built, Henry harangued the constitutional convention with a rhetorical power that few if anyone could equal, decrying the proposed system of representation, the taxation power proposed for Congress, and the provision of a standing army in peacetime.

*The Whig Enlightenment elite leading the revolution were not afraid of religion per se, but feared what Samuel Adams scornfully called 'King Mob'—the unreasoning passions of an inflamed majority.*

So fierce was the attack of these Antis, as they came to be known, that they briefly seemed to have won, until the Federalists fired back with vehement counterarguments in broadsheets and essays. The most enduring of these was *The Federalist* (known today as *The Federalist Papers*), eighty-five essays by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, written under the pseudonym Publius (a founder of the Roman republic). This debate in 1787 and 1788 generated some of the most lucid and lasting literature on law and politics in modern annals. The most strongly opposed states vowed to consent only if a bill protecting the rights of individual Americans were incorporated as a subsequent amendment. Fearing the proposed power of Congress and president, they insisted that if they were to lose the ability to protect their rights, then it must be entrusted to the courts. Even with a promised amendment to this effect, and with General Washington and almost the whole leadership elite of the new United States stren-

*In this Ferris painting, Washington arrives for his inauguration at Independence Hall at Philadelphia in 1793 as the first president of the United States under the Constitution adopted in 1791. It was not adopted without rancor, however, but only after a bitter battle in which Patrick Henry, a leader of the revolutionary cause, launched a furious attack, portraying the Constitution as betraying the rights of the states that had conducted the war. But with the assent finally of reluctant North Carolina and Rhode Island, the Constitution became law and Washington, who had championed it, took the senior office.*





uously supporting the Constitution, the vote was close in many state conventions, and large numbers of Americans remained opposed. It nevertheless passed in eleven states and took effect (for them) in September, 1788. North Carolina ratified it fourteen months later, and two months after that Rhode Island decided, reluctantly, that it was too small to hold out alone.

Therefore, one of the first bills presented to the new Congress was James Madison's Bill of Rights, calling for ten amendments to the Constitution. Topping the list was freedom of religion, which was simply worded: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." It said nothing whatever about a "wall of separation" between church and state, a term that originated in a letter sent by Jefferson to a Virginia Baptist association. This bill also vouchsafed freedom of speech, the press, peaceful assembly, and the right of petition to government to redress grievances, and nine more basic freedoms. Its final proviso was that any power not explicitly granted to the national government must reside with the several states.

The First Amendment clearly marked an evolution in the American idea of religious freedom since the founding of Virginia and Massachusetts as bastions of state-mandated (that is, "established") Anglicanism and Puritanism respectively, where deviation was initially punishable by censure, flogging or expulsion. Over time, as zeal waned, populations expanded, and newcomers arrived, both of these colonies grudgingly countenanced other faiths (except Catholicism and Judaism). By 1788, in fact, most Americans concurred, although they still clearly identified with Protestant Christianity, and the popular rhetoric of the revolution was heavily, almost shockingly, biblical.

Moreover, a majority of clergy in all states and most denominations were enthusiastic Patriots, with the exception of Quakers, Methodists, and some Anglican and Baptist ministers who felt especially compelled to distinguish between the temporal and spiritual spheres. Most Christians readily agreed with what the Congregational, Presbyterian, and New Light clergy in New England were proclaiming from the pulpit—namely that America was destined to be the New Jerusalem, that King George was the Antichrist, and that Britain would suffer the same fate as godless Babylon. As historian Mark Noll observes, religion was not so much the root of the American revolution as the fertile soil from which it blossomed.

The Whig Enlightenment elite who led the revolution tended not to mix religion with politics. Not that the new nation's founders feared religion as such; indeed, to the extent that it encouraged virtue in the republic (and they emphatically believed that it did) they greatly favored it. They feared rather what Samuel Adams later would scornfully describe as "King Mob"—the unreasoning passions and prejudice

of an inflamed majority. They had assumed in the 1770s that democracy would produce representatives like themselves: men of high principle and self-restraint, of patrician indifference to personal interest, of education and reason, committed to the national welfare. They were shocked at the sort of first-generation representatives the revolution did produce in the 1790s: men of slight education or none, of parochial loyalties and small-minded priorities, pursuing unabashedly self-interested allegiances.

Gordon Wood ends *The American Revolution* with a declaration attributed to Pennsylvania assemblyman William Findley. Though not wealthy, Findley declared, he had as much right to run for public office as anyone who went to Harvard or Princeton, and since everyone now had political interests to promote, "middling men" like himself had every right to compete for their votes. Competitive electioneering, previously unknown, began to flourish, dramatically changing the character of government and in some ways of Americans themselves. This strenuous egalitarianism became the civic religion to which all true Americans adhered, Wood writes, reaching a pinnacle in 1828 with the election of westerner Andrew Jackson as seventh president.

In the estimation of Madison and most other founders, the nation's best defense against King Mob was the entrenchment of rights to protect minorities: those who believed differently or spoke in dissent, those who were variously accused, and those who were very rich (always a minority). All such individuals would be vulnerable to the kind of boisterous majoritarian democracy that emerged from revolutionary movements. There was genuine and widespread fear that unless its temper cooled, the American Revolution could continue degenerating into the appalling and mindless bloodbath experienced in France after 1789.<sup>12</sup>

As for God, they seemingly avoided specific mention of religion in the Constitution as both unnecessary and a possible invitation to the kind of division and resentment they saw afflicting every country that had an "established" one. Instead, they simply declared that no future Congress might impose such a burden on the uniting states, nor interfere with the free exercise of any religion. Because the Constitution bound only the federal government—and not the states—the issue of religious establishment would nonetheless continue to be fought at the state level for years to come.

But the founders were by no means against Christianity either in private or in public life. Quite the contrary—they considered it essential. Thomas Jefferson probably said it best when commenting on the evils of slavery in a private letter that was later published (*Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1781):

"And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure, when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with his wrath? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever; that considering numbers, nature, and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation is among possible events; that it may become probable by supernatural interference!" ■



This gold coin, known as the "turban head quarter eagle" was issued by the United States Mint in 1796. It was to have a spectacular history. Shortly after it appeared, the international price of gold shot up due to the French Revolution and consequent wars in Europe. So the gold in the coin was soon worth far more than its \$2.50 face value. Most of them were shipped to Europe and melted into bullion, making those that survived a major possession for any coin collector. The quarter eagle was the lowest denomination of three coins: the eagle worth ten dollars, the half eagle worth five, and the quarter eagle. The female figure represents Liberty. The turban-style hat was popular with women at that time.

Howard Chandler Christy (1873–1952), a foremost American illustrator, reached the zenith of his career in the Second World War when scores of his posters, urging Americans to fight for liberty, appeared in public buildings all over the United States. Always the "purity" of American democracy was symbolized by a beautiful young woman, known as the "Christy girl." This one, issued in 1942, celebrates the Bill of Rights.



12. When French aristocrat and political historian Alexis de Tocqueville toured the United States in 1835, seeking to understand why the American republic was so much more peaceful and productive than postrevolutionary France, he concluded that the religious activity of the Christian churches, omnipresent throughout American society, was curbing the competitive excesses that generally accompany free-market individualism and political egalitarianism.



# The transatlantic trade in people

Slavery was older than history, but the whole North American agricultural economy came to depend on a brutal business Christians had often deplored and routinely practiced

Alexander Falconbridge, an English surgeon, made four voyages on transatlantic slaving ships. These stinking hells were crammed with lower decks, half decks, and platforms. Light was minimal, headroom five feet or less. Each adult male squeezed into a space eighteen inches wide and less than three feet high. Hundreds of captives lay wedged on their sides, shackled together, wooden planks slimed with diarrhea and vomit beneath their nakedness. Falconbridge, to avoid crushing limbs while attending to the slaves, would take off his boots before crawling over them. In 1788 the surgeon told a British parliamentary inquiry that his feet bore scars from their bites.

Perhaps eleven million Africans survived these conditions and worse, with millions more perishing before, during, and immediately after they made what was called the

Middle Passage to the New World (i.e., roughly along the line between the South Atlantic and the North). This transoceanic slave trade endured from the late 1400s to the mid-1800s. During that period, Brazil absorbed nearly five million slaves, British Caribbean islands took in two million three hundred thousand, Spanish America one million three hundred thousand, and the French Caribbean islands one million two hundred thousand. The English-speaking North American mainland purchased close to four hundred thousand Africans. The Dutch shipped an estimated four hundred and fifty thousand slaves, although many were immediately resold to the Spanish.<sup>1</sup>

In western and central Europe, slavery had diminished to minimal proportions long before the transatlantic trade arose. Jesus Christ placed neighborly love at the core of all social behavior, the first religious leader ever to do so. His followers sensed that enslaving a neighbor sat uneasily with loving him and hence discouraged that practice in their homelands. So how did Christians (with a sprinkling of Jews) find themselves operating the most intensive international slave trade of all time?

Spiritually, Paul of Tarsus provides an answer: “for the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith” (1 Timothy 6:10 RSV). Economically, the explanation is also straightforward: early capitalism, exploiting the rich opportunities offered by the Americas, enabled slavery to metastasize in scale. The rising merchant class in western Europe transformed the Atlantic basin into one vast commercial hub where human beings were bought and sold like any other commodity.

Until its demise, the slave trade embodied the largest movement of workers to the Americas. Its organization required expensively armed forts along the West African coast, a fleet of several hundred ships each year, the global movement of cargoes, plus complex credit and investment arrangements. To cope with the high cost of entry into this commerce, European nations created state-licensed monopoly



Slavery spanned the centuries and the world. The bronze statue of a bound black youth (below right), dating from 200 to 100 BC, was found near Memphis, Egypt. Above, a color lithograph depicts captives in the hold of an Atlantic slaver circa 1830. By no means were all slaves black, of course. In earlier times, pagan Vikings trafficked heavily in Slavic people to Muslim customers, and European prisoners of war typically became slaves—domestic ones (in effect “servants”) if they were lucky.

*A Negro Hung Alive by His Ribs to a Gallows was the title provided by the English poet and artist William Blake for this illustration in Captain John Gabriel Stedman’s account of his five years’ service (1772–1777) in Suriname, then controlled by the Dutch West India Company. Stedman, a Dutch-Scottish career soldier, joined a force engaged in putting down slave rebellions there. He was shocked at the casual brutality with which slaves were treated for the slightest infraction—cutting out of tongues, burning alive, whipping to death.*



1. Due to sketchy records, estimates regarding African enslavement vary considerably between historians. These statistics were drawn from the Estimate series of the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database: Voyages, Wilson Library, Emory University, 2009.

trading companies. The Portuguese led the way, followed by the Dutch, French, British, even Swedish and Danish. Free traders, including a strong contingent of New Englanders, later predominated, taking advantage of the infrastructure established under government sanction.

Atlantic development depended on continually improving tools, notably in the realm of sea power: sails, navigational instruments, weapons, optics, mapping, and more. Agriculture advanced with crops from the New World (corn, potato, cacao, cassava, and tobacco) in alliance with larger scale farming of Eurasian plants (sugar cane, indigo, and later cotton). European merchants also harnessed innovative accounting and financing methods, enabling them to amass capital and distribute investment risk more effectively than ever before.

Lacking any form of combustion engine, these creators of the modern world reverted to an ancient source of energy. Slavery predates capitalism by millennia—in fact, it predates history. Among the wealthy of China, India, and all other early civilizations, human chattels were most commonly employed for cooking, cleaning, gardening, and handicrafts, the equivalent of modern appliances. In classical Greece and Rome, household usage evolved to industrial scale. The Athenians employed as many as thirty

thousand slaves in mining, the Romans hundreds of thousands. The Roman historian Diodorus Siculus reported that mine slaves worked in chains under the lash without the slightest break until “death is welcomed as a thing more desirable than life.” Slave gangs also manned Rome’s construction projects, commercial farms (*latifundia*), and workshops, producing for the integrated market that emerged around the Mediterranean Sea.

Although no ancient sage preached against forced labor, Jewish slavery law was noticeably more humane than its Greco-Roman counterparts. According to the Torah, an owner who killed his slave should be executed, a slave should be freed if wounded by his master, slave families should not be broken up, and an escaped slave should be harbored rather than returned to his owner. Given the lack of detailed records, it’s uncertain how consistently these laws were respected in practice. In principle, though, their merciful intent could scarcely be clearer.

In the scriptural record, Jesus does not comment directly on slavery. His references to slaves (“servants”) in parables reflect neither approval nor disapproval. In his epistles, Paul reinforces the Jewish humane tradition, enjoining owner and owned to treat each other with respect and affection. The early church baptized slaves in the belief





2. Like morphine, cocaine, and quinine, sugar is a potent white powder extracted from a plant. India learned to transform sugar cane juice into virtually imperishable crystals through milling and refining. The Arabs encountered sugar when Muslim armies overran Persia in the seventh century, and the “sweet salt” was imported into Europe by Italian merchants. In 1319 sugar fetched two shillings per pound in London, about the same price as a pig. By 1750 there were 120 cane sugar refineries operating in Britain, and the luxury item was sometimes called “white gold.” By the Treaty of Paris, 1763, France chose to recover the sugar producing Caribbean islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique at the price of forfeiting Canada (“a few acres of snow,” gibed Voltaire) to the British.

*Likely the first Europeans to arrive on the west coast of Africa, as depicted below in an engraving by Nicolas Colibert (1794), were the Portuguese and Spanish in the fifteenth century. Soon they were buying or seizing workers for the sugar farms of the Canary Islands and the Azores.*

that Jesus sacrificed himself for all people regardless of status. The first Christians considered themselves equally enslaved by sin, equally qualified for redemption to an unimaginable glory in heaven.

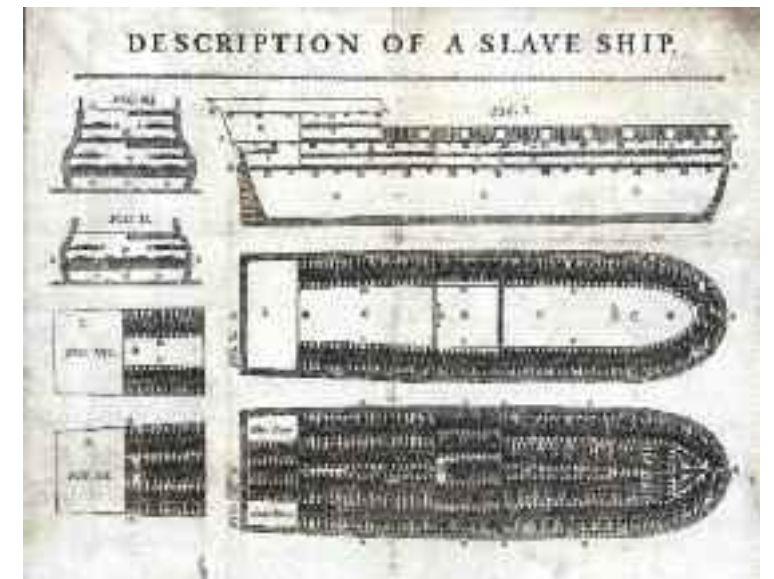
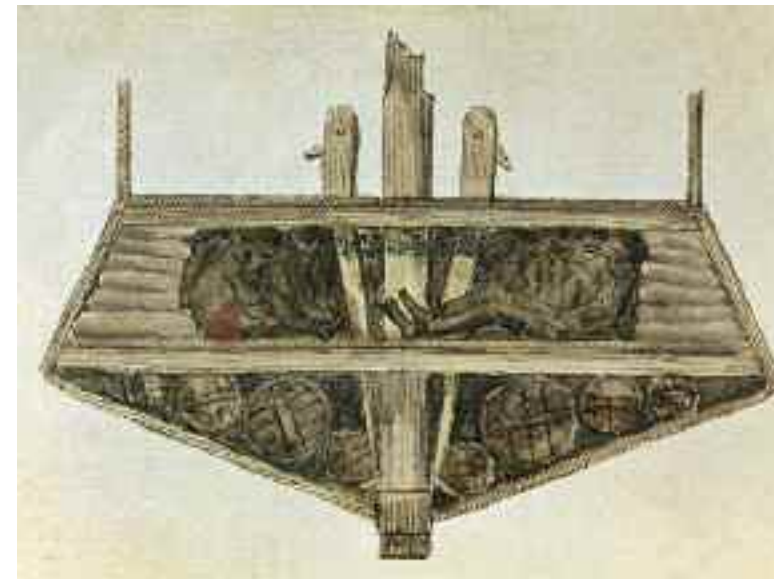
Rome fell, its commerce evaporated, and slavery gradually mutated into agricultural serfdom across its former imperial territories. A European medieval serf was attached to the land, his immobility being a feudal right as well as an obligation. Slaves, in contrast, could be moved at the will of the owner, but there was little domestic demand. When William the Conqueror compiled the Domesday Book in 1086, less than ten percent of the English were legally slaves. In 1102 a London council outlawed slave trading within the kingdom altogether. The same trend spread across most of western and central Europe. Despite spotty records, slavery appears to have diminished to negligible numbers in most regions. Although bishops and theologians had not uniformly condemned slavery in the early church, the medieval papacy enthusiastically applauded its elimination between Christians. After all, Jesus taught that anyone who helped the weak and poor had spiritually provided comfort to God himself, and who was weaker or poorer than a slave?

Medieval Islamic civilizations—typically more prosperous and populous than their

Christian counterparts—absorbed millions of slaves, including the routine culling of children from Christian captive communities in the Near East. Pagan Vikings trafficked heavily in Slavic people to Muslim customers, as did Christian Venice. (The word “slave” in western European languages and Arabic derives from Slav.) Islamic enslavement of black Africans occurred before, during, and after the transatlantic slave trade.

Citing research from eight historians, American sociologist Rodney Stark concludes that Muslim captors “carried at least as many Africans into bondage, and probably more, as were shipped across the Atlantic” (*For the Glory of God*, 2003). Muslim historians argue that slaves within Islam were humanely treated, with most slaves being part of households rather than industrial workers.

Muhammad personally freed slaves, and the Koran repeatedly recommends manumitting a slave as expiation for sin. Stark notes that Muhammad did buy and sell slaves, making it more difficult for his followers to conclude even in modern times that the condition itself is evil. Further, he observes that African ancestry is relatively rare in the Middle East compared to the New World because Muslim slaveholders castrated males (by removing the penis and testicles) and because “infanticide was routinely practiced



on infants having any black ancestry.”

During the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas reasoned that slavery is an outright sin. Rational creatures, in his view, are entitled to justice in natural law, thus “removing any possible justification for slavery based on race or religion.” (Serfdom, according to this foremost theologian of his period, ranks as merely repugnant.) His conclusion was

rigorously endorsed in a series of papal bulls, with a particular focus on eliminating enslavement of Christians by Christians.

Powerful as the medieval church undoubtedly was, kings and other secular rulers might ignore its dictates. Ancient Roman law, still regarded as magisterial, condoned slavery. During the eleventh century, following the First Crusade, Christian estate holders began producing sugar as a cash crop in Palestine, in part with slave labor.<sup>2</sup> Its cultivation and milling is labor intensive but well suited to gang labor. After Muslim armies again captured the Holy Land, sugar farming shifted to Cyprus, Crete, and Sicily.

From there, the Spanish and Portuguese transferred sugar slavery to the Canaries, Azores, and other Atlantic islands. As a young man Christopher Columbus trained on Madeira, the largest source of sugar in the western world at that time, and he would later carry the plant to the Caribbean. For labor, the Iberians initially enslaved the native Canary Islanders, prompting Pope Eugene IV to condemn that practice in 1435 as an outrage against an innocent people. Throughout the centuries of transatlantic slaving, the papal spirit would often seem passionate in its condemnation of this

“unjust” business.<sup>3</sup>

When the Canaries’ aboriginal population died out, sugar plantation owners turned to Africa, where human chattels were readily available. “In Africa people rather than land were taxed, and as a result, slavery and slave trading were widespread and pivotal in producing secure wealth for the African political and economic elites,” states the University of Calgary’s Applied History Group in its tutorial *The European Voyages of Exploration*. “Thus a complex, indigenous institution of slavery was already in place long before the Europeans arrived.”

The first sugar cane crop recorded in the New World was grown in 1505 on Santo Domingo (now the Dominican Republic and Haiti). In 1509 Columbus’s son Diego became the governor of New Spain and was soon complaining that the Indians made an inadequate labor force. In 1510 King Ferdinand of Spain authorized a shipment of fifty African slaves for Santo Domingo. This tragic pattern would be repeated throughout the Americas. Iberians enslaved American aboriginals to launch cash-generating plantations and other works. After the native population succumbed to European plagues and mistreatment, the colonists consistently turned to Africans as a biologically sturdier labor force.

The transatlantic slave business ranked among the most complex operations of its day. European goods moved to Africa, black slaves were carried to the Americas, American minerals and other commodities went back to Europe. Ships were designed for the trade; slave ships were typically only half the size of the vessels designed to transport sugar and other bulk goods.

*Helping the poor and weak was helping God himself, Jesus said; and who could be weaker than a slave?*

*Above left is a cross-section of a slave ship as imagined by a French artist; above right is a more detailed plan showing a much larger slaver, by an English engraver. Both date from the late eighteenth century, and both emphasize the horrendous overcrowding typical of these vessels. Between 1797 and 1811 as many as twenty-four percent of the slaves would not survive the voyage.*

3. The papacy distinguished between “just” and “unjust” slavery. Christian criminals and Muslims captured in war could legitimately be put to forced labor, and popes used such slaves to row their war fleets. On the Iberian peninsula, then a war zone, Muslim and Christian warriors routinely sold each other into slavery upon capture. William the Conqueror shipped displaced Anglo-Saxon gentry to Spain for sale. In 1452 Pope Nicholas V issued a bull urging Portugal’s Alfonso V to convert Africans but also granting him the right to reduce any “Saracens, pagans, and any other unbelievers” to slavery during his campaigning against powerful Muslim enemies in North Africa. That bull would become a handy pretext for Roman Catholics who slave-traded throughout Africa.







*A slave raid near Bain-mu, on the coast of Guinea (English engraving, 1789). Slavery was big business. Desire for trade goods like metal tools and cotton cloth ensured the participation of African tribes and traders. At first, writes Herbert Klein in *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (2010), those enslaved were mostly impoverished farmers, criminals, or prisoners of war. When this supply proved insufficient, however, raids by African tribes into neighboring territories resulted in scenes like this one.*

4. Forced migration patterns tracked the market value of slaves. Through the 1500s, African captives arriving in the New World had numbered at most six thousand per year. The annual flow surged to the range of eighty thousand when human trafficking across the Atlantic peaked in the 1780s. By the 1860s, when the transatlantic trade finally ended, volume was still close to nine thousand per year.

The commerce also extended to India, which supplied the durable, vividly colored cotton textiles that long made up the largest single item exchanged for West African slaves.

Gold was the primary desire of the Portuguese, who were familiar with West Africa's three major goldfields well before 1500. The first of their coastal posts, known as factories, was São Jorge de Mina, located on the Gulf of Guinea's Gold Coast (now Ghana). Until about 1700 gold and ivory remained Africa's most valuable exports. In exchange, Portuguese caravels brought copper and dyed cloth from North Africa at better prices than Muslim traders could offer via the trans-Saharan routes. Other European naval powers broke the Portuguese monopoly during the sixteenth century.

Trading posts did not evolve into European-populated colonies, with the partial exception of the Portuguese. European attempts to conquer or convert Africans proved largely fruitless for centuries. Though for some years there was considerable success in the Congo and Angola,

Christian evangelism was defeated primarily by tropical diseases. Perforce the traders relied on African power brokers as slave suppliers. "Despite their best efforts to satisfy local African markets with the goods they desired, whether of Asian, European, American, or African origin, it was impossible [for Europeans] to develop a major supply of slaves if the local groups or the interior states and trading communities did not wish to participate," writes Herbert Klein (*The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 2010).

At first, enslaved individuals were usually condemned criminals, impoverished victims of droughts, and, above all, prisoners of war. African kings could profitably consolidate a conquest by peddling adult males to European slave traders. In most cases, Klein says, local political, economic, and religious factors triggered these wars, like the Asante expansions on the Gold Coast in the 1680s. The Kongo kingdom, in contrast, developed local raiding south of the Congo River into a deliberate slaving commerce for long periods. That exception became much more the rule after

*Men went naked in clement weather; women received rudimentary clothing but were prey to sailors.*

the mid-eighteenth century, when transatlantic demand drove up slave prices.<sup>4</sup>

Responding to that opportunity, African aggressors used large-scale warfare to ensure a flow of valuable captives along sprawling inland networks. Guyanese scholar Walter Rodney points out that warfare kills and maims more people than it enslaves, meaning tens of millions of lives were disrupted by slaving violence. Rodney also argues that the massive removal of young men, always the most valued slaves in the New World, inflicted demographic and socioeconomic damage that affected African societies into modern times (*How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 1972). The high value of captives also prompted Europeans to extend their trading range as far as Africa's east coast, long a source of slaves for Arab dealers.

African leaders fostered competition, refusing to allow any European power to establish an exclusive trading zone. Besides price, Africans were also quality-conscious customers, aware that Europeans would cheat and adulterate at every opportunity. Trade goods included textiles, knives, axes, swords, jewelry, gunpowder, bar iron, alcohol, and tobacco. Purchasing these manufactured products typically accounted for half to two-thirds of a slaving expedition's full cost.

Among free traders, an expedition partnership usually involved two to five merchants. Another share went to the ship's captain, who could hope to retire after three or four successful voyages. Christian abolitionists

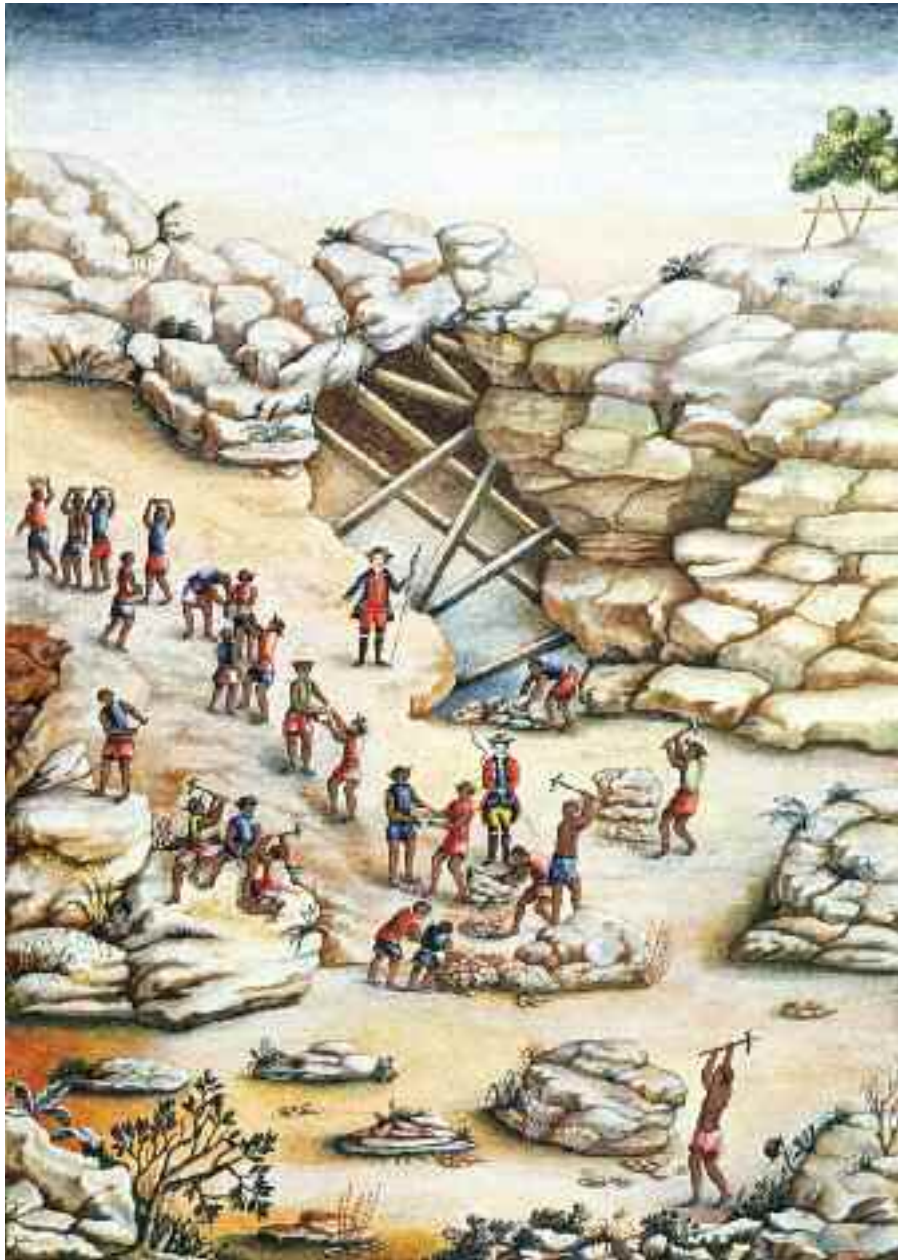


claimed that slaving profits were fabulous, and certainly there was no shortage of investors. However, determining expenses and revenue is difficult, involving various currencies and goods from multiple countries, credit arrangements for slave buyers that routinely took several years for full collection, and the

*Above, this sketch illustrating a Danish account, 1695–1697, is entitled "How the Portuguese whip their slaves when they run away." Below is a newly released cargo of slaves, grouped for a photograph on the deck of the rescue vessel HMS London, 1880.*







An eighteenth-century diamond mine in Brazil (above), where slave labor was used in almost every sector of the economy from urban services of every kind to farming and whale blubber factories. But mining may have been among the toughest, from earliest times, even in climates healthier than Brazil's. For thousands of slaves working under the lash in Roman mines, wrote the historian Diodorus Siculus, death soon became more desirable than continued life.

danger of losing a vessel at sea. According to Klein, modern research into hundreds of slaving expeditions indicates that the financial returns on slavery were normal for risky ventures of any kind during the period, averaging about ten percent.

Ship sizes varied. John Newton, an English slaving captain between 1747 and 1754, later repented and composed the hymn "Amazing Grace." In his memoir *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade*, he wrote: "The cargo of a vessel of a hundred tons, or little more, is calculated to purchase from 220 to 250 slaves." One vessel, *The Brookes*, also English, was rated at 320 tons and reportedly hauled as many as six hundred slaves. Crews on slave ships were about double the complement of a merchantman, a precaution against insurrection. Even so, slave rebellions were frequent and occasionally successful, especially before the ship

sailed away from the African coast. A slaving captain usually needed three or four months to assemble a full complement of slaves, sometimes longer.

Aboard, the slaves' housing and daily routine almost always followed the same pattern. The decks were divided into segregated sleeping quarters for men, older boys, and women with young children, plus a separate sick bay. During the day slaves were brought on deck while the crew cleaned their quarters with water and perhaps vinegar. Men went naked in fair weather; women received rudimentary clothing but were usually prey to sailors. For exercise the slaves were forced to dance every day, sometimes to drums. Personal hygiene consisted of a daily dousing with seawater.

Captains recognized the need for clean water and African foodstuffs, providing twice-daily gruel. Prudent operators stocked twice the supplies required for the thirty- to fifty-day Middle Passage, aware that bad weather and other setbacks could easily extend the voyage. Although a doctor was normally present, medical science at the time was all but useless in the face of gastroenteritis, smallpox, yellow fever, malaria, and other deadly diseases. Lime juice was used to ward off scurvy, a killer in the early period. Suicide was common. And although captains were loath to damage their own goods, disciplining of rebellious captives could be crippling or deadly.

In *A Journal of a Voyage* (1746), slave ship captain Thomas Phillips, wrote: "I have been informed that some commanders have cut off the legs or arms of the most willful slaves, to terrify the rest, for they believe that, if they lose a member, they cannot return home again: I was advised by some of my officers to do the same, but I could not be persuaded to entertain the least thought of it, much less to put in practice such barbarity and cruelty to poor creatures who, excepting their want of Christianity and true religion (their misfortune more than fault), are as much the works of God's hands, and no doubt as dear to him as ourselves."

The mortality rate diminished over time as Europeans became more proficient in protecting their profits. Between 1797 and 1811, Klein reports, slave deaths on the long voyage from Mozambique (on the East African coast) and Rio de Janeiro averaged twenty-four percent, reminiscent of the trade's appalling earliest days, versus nine percent for ships arriving from West Africa. Later in the nineteenth century, the death rate came down to five percent, still five times higher than mortality among free immigrants in the same period. (Klein also

notes that slave ship sailors, less resistant to tropical microorganisms, apparently died at a higher rate than slaves.) Nor was survival assured upon arrival, with perhaps five percent of the weakened Africans dying within a few months.

American conditions varied greatly for the forced migrants. In Brazil, slaves worked in virtually every sector of the economy, including gold and diamond mining, raising crops and cattle, boiling whale blubber in factories, and urban services of all descriptions. Brazilian slave ships often had black slaves in their crews. Manumission, although far from being the rule, was not rare. Church pressure prompted the Iberian and French monarchs to establish slave codes that attempted to restrain the worst excesses of slave owners.

On the other hand, papal bulls could not be published in the Spanish and Portuguese empires without royal consent. When Pope Urban VIII issued a categorical condemnation of African bondage in 1639, publication was banned. Defiant Jesuits read it aloud in public in Rio de Janeiro. In retaliation, rioters attacked a Jesuit college, injuring a number of priests. The same issue prompted another mob to trample the Jesuit vicar-general in Santos, and the militant order was expelled from São Paulo.<sup>5</sup>

Rodney Stark argues that slaves suffered most severely in the English-speaking Caribbean. There the British government allowed sugar planters to impose unrelentingly brutal practices, without audible protest from the Church of England. Jamaica was typical. Barry W. Higman, a historian at Australian National University, estimates that Jamaica imported seven hundred and fifty thousand Africans between 1600 and 1808 (*Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807–1834*, 1976). At that point, the black and mulatto population of the island numbered less than three hundred seventy-five thousand, and one quarter of those had come from Africa.

In the English-speaking mainland colonies of North America, slaves benefited from a fairly temperate climate, fewer tropical diseases, relatively plentiful food, and the near absence of sugar cultivation and large-scale mining. Typical occupations were tobacco and general farming, with cotton taking hold after 1800. Stark states that "American slave owners probably punished their slaves more severely than the Spanish or the French." Even so, eighty-five percent of slaves in the United States were native born before 1820 due to naturally benign conditions. In 1860, the United States Census enumerated almost four million slaves, and nearly half a million free African-Americans totaling at least ten times the



number originally imported.

The Roman Catholic establishment did not uniformly eschew human bondage. For instance, even Jesuits owned slaves in Maryland. Nor did popes usually carry out their threats to excommunicate slavers, choosing instead to extend baptism to slaves and ameliorate their conditions wherever possible. In principle, though, Rome honored the precedent of the seventh-century Frankish queen Bathilde (wife of Clovis II), who campaigned to wipe out slavery in that dominion. Pope Paul III (1534–1549) condemned slavers as satanic allies inspired by avarice. Protestant denominations, in contrast, long remained silent toward an exceptionally unloving barbarism. Yet those same complicit churches in the nineteenth century would give birth to the mass movements that legally eradicated human slavery on a global scale, as will be described in the next volume. ■

A Jesuit priest baptizing a slave (above). Unable to halt the trade, the popes pressured Catholic nations to establish codes to ensure that slaves were better treated, while the Jesuits did their best to look after their souls.

5. Sociologist Rodney Stark suggests that Jesuit opposition to Indian and black slavery, notably in their Paraguayan Indian domain, triggered powerful political enmities that ultimately led to the order being expelled from Portugal, Spain, German lands, and Italy then dominated by the Spanish Bourbons.