

## The American Revolution via 6 Authors (Slides 23 & 24)

Carl N. Degler, "A New Kind of Revolution," from *Out of Our Past*, (1959).

"[F]or two decades or more before the revolutionary crisis of the late 1760's, Americans were expressing the feeling that they were different from Europeans, that they had a destiny of their own..."<sup>1</sup>

"The shattering victory of the Anglo-American forces over the French in...the French and Indian War, suddenly revealed how wide the gulf between colonists and mother country had become.<sup>2</sup> The very fact that the feared French were once and for all expelled from the colonial backdoor meant that another cohesive, if negative, force was gone.... Great Britain emerged from the war as the supreme power in European affairs... But the cost and continuing responsibilities of that victory were staggering for the little island kingdom... [T]he peace found Britain saddled with a debt of £130 million... [T]o London officialdom...the colonies should share in the costs as well as the benefits to be derived from the defeat of the ancient enemy. At no time...were the colonies asked to contribute more than a portion of the price of their own frontier defense... Nor were the Americans heavily taxed; it was well known that their fiscal burden was unique in its lightness... It was not injustice or the economic incidence of the taxes which prompted the colonial protests, it was rather the novelty of the British demands.... The new imperial policies...caught the Americans off guard."

"Those who advance an economic explanation for the Revolution argue that the series of economic measures enacted by Britain in the century before 1750 actually operated to confine, if not stifle, the colonial economy. Therefore, it is said, the colonies revolted against Britain in an effort to break through these artificial and externally imposed limits... [T]he mercantilist system appears severe and crippling and worthy of strong colonial opposition.... Yet...modern historians do not find much merit in the argument... No better argument can be made for taxation as a cause for the Revolution.<sup>3</sup> Despite the tradition of oppressive taxation which the myth of the Revolution has spawned, the actual tax burden of the colonies was much heavier in the seventeenth century than in the years immediately before the conflict.... From the unconvincing character of the economic explanations for the coming of the Revolution, it would appear, therefore, that the underlying force impelling the break was the growing self-consciousness of the Americans."

"At no time during the ten-year crisis, however, were most Americans spoiling with a rupture with England merely for the sake of a break.... This was no heedless, impetuous overthrow of an oppressor; rather it was a slowly germinating determination on the part of Americans to counter and thwart a change in their hitherto established and accepted ways of governing.<sup>4</sup> Except for the long-deferred assertion of independence, the whole corpus of Revolutionary rhetoric—and nothing lends itself more to radicalism than words—was conservative, expressive of the wish to retain old ways as they understood them. The demands made upon Britain were actually pleas to return to the old relationship... One needs only to run through that famous list of grievances in the Declaration of Independence<sup>5</sup> to be forcefully reminded that what these revolutionaries wanted was nothing but the *status quo ante bellum*.... These men had been satisfied with their existence, they were not disgruntled agitators or frustrated politicians; they were a strange new breed – contented revolutionaries."

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<sup>1</sup> 3.2.IA

<sup>2</sup> 3.1.IIA

<sup>3</sup> 3.1.IIA

<sup>4</sup> 3.1.IIB

<sup>5</sup> 3.2.IB

### The American Revolution via 6 Authors (Slides 23 & 24)

Linebaugh and Rediker, "Sailors and Slaves in the Revolution," from *Many Headed Hydra*, (2001)

"[A] revolutionary subject often described by contemporaries as a 'motley crew'...has rarely been discussed in histories of the American Revolution.... Britain confirmed its primacy as the world's greatest capitalist power by defeating France in the Seven Years' War in 1763, protecting and enlarging its lucrative colonial empire ... [A]t the very moment of imperial triumph, slaves and sailors began a ...cycle of rebellion<sup>1</sup>.... Operations on sea and land, from mutiny to insurrection, made the motley crew the driving force of a revolutionary crisis in the 1760s and 1770s. Such actions helped to destabilize imperial civil society and pushed America toward the world's first modern colonial war for liberation. By energizing and leading the movement from below, the motley crew shaped the social, organizational, and intellectual histories of the era and demonstrated that the American Revolution was neither an elite nor a national event, since its genesis, process, outcome, and influence all depended on the circulation of proletarian experience around the Atlantic... The motley crew would help to break apart the first British empire and to inaugurate the Atlantic's age of revolution."<sup>2</sup>

"The trajectories of rebellion among sailors and slaves intersected in seaport mobs, those rowdy gangs of thousands of men and women that created the crisis in the North American colonies... They had been gathering together in Boston's northside and southside mobs since the 1740s. Indeed, perhaps the single most common description of the mob in revolutionary America was as a 'Rabble of boys, sailors, and negroes.' Moreover, on almost every occasion when a crowd went beyond the planned objectives of the moderate leaders of the patriotic movement, sailors and often slaves led the way. Motley mobs were central to protests against the Stamp Act (1765), the Quartering Acts (1765, 1774), the Townsend Revenue Act (1767), the increased power of the British customs service (1764-74), the Tea Act (1773), and the Intolerable Acts (1774).... Multiracial mobs helped to win numerous victories for the revolutionary movement, especially... against impressment.... Sailors, laborers, slaves, and other poor workingmen provided much of the spark, volatility, momentum, and sustained militancy for the attack on British policy after 1765...."<sup>3</sup>

"The motley crew... provided an image of revolution from below that proved terrifying to the Tories and moderate patriots alike.... The motley crew had helped to make the revolution, but the vanguard struck back in the 1770s and 1780s<sup>4</sup>, against mobs, slaves, and sailors... Patriot landowners, merchants, and artisans increasingly condemned revolutionary crowds, seeking to move politics from 'out of doors' into legislative chambers, in which the propertyless would have no vote and no voice.... Sailors and slaves, once necessary parts of the revolutionary coalition, were thus read out of the settlement at revolution's end... [H]ad Crispus Attucks—slave, sailor, mob leader—survived the fire of British muskets, he would not have been allowed to join the...new nation he helped to create. The exclusion of people like Attucks epitomized the sudden, reactionary retreat from the universalistic revolutionary language that had been forged in the heat of the 1760s and 1770s and permanently emblazoned in the Declaration of Independence.<sup>5</sup> The reaction was canonized in the U.S. Constitution, which gave the new federal government the power to suppress domestic insurrections...[and] strengthened the institution of slavery by extending the slave trade, providing for the return of fugitive slaves, and giving national political power to the plantation master class... The new American ruling class redefined 'race' and 'citizenship' to divide and marginalize the motley crew, legislating in the 1780s and early 1790s a unified law of slavery based on white supremacy. The actions of the motley crew, and the reactions against it, help to illuminate the clashing, ambiguous nature of the American Revolution—its militant origins, radical momentum, and conservative political conclusion."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 3.1.II.A & B  
<sup>2</sup> 3.1.II.A & B  
<sup>3</sup> 3.1.II.B; 3.2.IA & B  
<sup>4</sup> 3.2.II.A  
<sup>5</sup> 3.2.III.A & B; 3.3.III.B  
<sup>6</sup> 3.2.II.B & 3.3.III.B

## The American Revolution via 6 Authors (Slides 23 & 24)

Bernard Bailyn, "The Central Themes of the American Revolution," (1990).

"The noble ideas of the Enlightenment and the abstracted principles of constitutional law were present in the responses of the colonists, but they do not...explain the triggering of insurrection. That is explicable only in terms of that elaborate pattern of middle-level ideas and beliefs...originally formed within early-seventeenth-century English libertarianism, fundamentally reshaped during and just after the Exclusion Crisis, modernized for the eighteenth century by the political opposition...and diffused by an intricate process of cultural dissemination through the political culture of the American colonies. No simpler genealogy can explain the derivation of America's Revolutionary ideology.... [I]deas...may be understood to have lain at the heart of the Revolutionary outbreak."<sup>1</sup>

"The outbreak of the Revolution was not the result of social discontent, or of economic disturbances in the colonies, or of rising misery. Nor was there a transformation of mob behavior or of the lives of the inarticulate in the pre-Revolutionary years that accounts for the disruption of Anglo-American politics. The rebellion took place in a basically prosperous, if temporarily disordered economy and in communities whose effective social distances, for freemen, remained narrow enough and whose mobility, social and spatial, however it may have slowed from earlier days, was still high enough to absorb most group discontents... American resistance in the 1760s and 1770s was a response to acts of imperial power deemed arbitrary, degrading, and uncontrollable—a response that was inflamed to the point of explosion by ideological currents generating fears everywhere in America that irresponsible and self-seeking adventurers...had gained the power of the British government."<sup>2</sup>

"The Revolution made changes in [social organization], but not gross changes and not even immediately visible changes. There was no 'leveling' of the social order and no outright destruction of familiar social institutions. 'Democracy,' in its modern form, was not created...though the essential groundwork was laid.<sup>3</sup> While the war...transformed the economy and sped up mobility in significant ways...no sweeping egalitarianism—in status, in wealth, or in power—was imposed... [S]ocial distances remained much as before: narrow perhaps and rather easily bridgeable by European standards, but in local terms highly visible and palpable. And while the creation of new governments multiplied the available public offices and new men were everywhere seen in seats of power, and while the people as a whole were constitutionally involved in the process of government as never before, socio-political elites whose origins went back a century persisted, apparently unaffected, in local communities, north and south."<sup>4</sup>

"The [Constitution]...was neither a repudiation of '76, nor an instrument devised to protect aristocracies threatened in the states, nor an effort to preserve patrician rule, nor the product of a slaveholders' plot. It is a second-generation expression of the original ideological impulses of the Revolution applied to the everyday, practical problems of the late 1780s<sup>5</sup>... [T]he Constitution of 1787 was a typical creation of the age: hopeful, boldly experimental, realistic, and faithful to the urges and beliefs that had led to revolution."

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<sup>1</sup> 3.III.B

<sup>2</sup> 3.1.II.A & B

<sup>3</sup> 3.2.I.A

<sup>4</sup> 3.2.I.C

<sup>5</sup> 3.2.II.A

## The American Revolution via 6 Authors (Slides 23 & 24)

Gordon S. Wood, "Revolution and the Political Integration of the Enslaved and Disenfranchised," (1974).

"The radical character of the American Revolution is a subject of some historical controversy. Yet in one important respect there can be no denying its radicalism. The Revolution transformed the American colonies into republics, which meant that ordinary people were no longer to be considered 'subjects' to be ruled as they were under a monarchy. They were thereafter to be citizens—participants themselves in the ruling process. That is what democracy has come to mean to us.... The profoundest revolution of the past 200 years has been the introduction of ordinary people into the political process."<sup>1</sup>

"Even before the revolutionary turmoil had settled, some Americans were arguing that mere voting by ordinary men was not a sufficient protection of ordinary men's interests, if only members of the elite were being elected. The logic of the actuality of representation expressed in the Revolution required that ordinary men be represented by ordinary men. It was not enough for elected officials to be simply *for* the people; they now had to be *of* the people as well.... Such an idea constituted an extraordinary transformation in the way people looked at the relation between government and society; it lay at the heart of the radicalism of the American Revolution."<sup>2</sup>

Gary Nash, "Social Change and the Growth of Prerevolutionary Urban Radicalism," (1976).

"Understanding that the cities were becoming centers of frustrated ambition, propertylessness, genuine distress for those in the lower strata, and stagnating fortunes for many in the middle class makes comprehensible much of the violence, protest, and impassioned rhetoric that occurred in the half-generation before the colonial challenge to British regulations began in 1764... Cutting across class lines, and often unified by economic conditions that struck at the welfare of both the lower and middle classes, these crowds began to play a larger role in a political process that grew more heated... This developing consciousness and political sophistication of ordinary city dwellers came rapidly to fruition in the early 1760s and thereafter played a major role in the advent of the Revolution."<sup>3</sup>

"The crescendo of urban protest and extralegal activity in the pre-revolutionary decades cannot be separated from the condition of people's lives.... A rising tide of class antagonism and political consciousness, paralleling important economic changes, was a distinguishing feature of the cities at the end of the colonial period.... It is this organic link between the circumstances of people's lives and their political thought and action that has been overlooked by historians who concentrate on Whig ideology, which had its strongest appeal among the rich and well-to-do... [The link] became transparently clear in the late colonial period, even before England began demanding greater obedience and greater sacrifices in the colonies for the cause of the British Empire."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 3.2.IA & C

<sup>2</sup> 3.2.IA & C

<sup>3</sup> 3.1.II.B

<sup>4</sup> 3.1.II.B

## The American Revolution via 6 Authors (Slides 23 & 24)

Cecelia M. Kenyon, "Republicanism and Radicalism in the American Revolution: An Old-Fashioned Interpretation," (1962).

"The Americans were not republicans in either a formal or an ideological sense before 1776. Within a few months, they were, and have remained so ever since... Almost from the beginning... monarchy rested lightly on the colonists... Above all there had been long years of salutary neglect... [T]hey had long been accustomed to governing themselves with relatively little interference or assistance<sup>1</sup>... The transition from monarchy to republic did not therefore bring with it pervasive and fundamental changes... In this sense, the establishment of republican governments was not a radical change, and it is not remarkable that it took place so quickly and easily.... What is more remarkable is the rapid shift in attitude and belief. Within a very short period of time, Americans developed an ideological attachment to republicanism, and this change was a radical one... Before 1776, the prevailing opinion in America had been that the ends of government—liberty, justice, happiness, and the public good—could be secured within the framework of monarchy. After 1776, they tended to associate all the characteristics of good government with republicanism, and with republicanism only.... [T]he concept of republicanism, linked with modified Lockeian ideals of the Declaration of Independence, provided a truly revolutionary doctrine with universal significance.<sup>2</sup> The Revolution in its origins was a conservative movement to resist what were believed to be the pernicious innovations of George III and his Parliament. After 1776 it was, and was believed to be by its makers, truly radical."<sup>3</sup>

"[The Spirit of 1776] was not a particularly radical one... It had a profoundly conservative aspect, and the radicalism it involved was of a very sober variety... [T]here are excellent reasons for regarding the American Revolution as conservative—at least in some respects.... It was a limited revolution and it was primarily a political movement. There were some social and economic repercussions, but there was no concerted, deliberate attempt at wholesale reconstruction of society or of the habits and everyday lives of the people. The American leaders, even while initiating radical changes, acted with sobriety.... Most important of all, the Revolution began as a movement of conservative protest, and none of its results represented a total break with the colonial past...<sup>4</sup> The one thing which was most truly radical was the new federalism of the Constitution of 1787. Even it had been preceded by the lesser authority of the Empire and the experience of intercolonial cooperation preceding the war and under the Articles of Confederation...<sup>5</sup> So it seems to me that we must conclude that the American Revolution was partly radical and partly conservative... [The Founders] were quite self-conscious about the newness of their enterprise and referred to it frequently as an experiment, but they never had the slightest inclination to repudiate the whole of their British heritage or of the colonial past. They had some fine old bricks to start with, and they knew it. Nevertheless, what they designed and partly built from these bricks was not Georgian. It was American, and they knew that too."

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<sup>1</sup> 3.1.II.B

<sup>2</sup> 3.2.I.B

<sup>3</sup> 3.2.I.A & B

<sup>4</sup> 3.2.I.A-C

<sup>5</sup> 3.2.II.B

	Causes of the American Revolution?	Was the American Revolution Radical or Conservative?	Does this historian support, modify, or refute the CCOT Prompt? (explain)
Degler			
Linebaugh and Rediker			
Bailyn			

— “The Era of the American Revolution from 1763 to 1787 passed through distinct stages of greater or lesser radicalism.” Support, modify, or refute this statement using the excerpts and your knowledge of U.S. History.

	Causes of the American Revolution?	Was the American Revolution Radical or Conservative?	Does this historian support, modify, or refute the CCOT Prompt? (explain)
Wood			
Nash			
Kenyon			

— The Era of the American Revolution from 1763 to 1787 passed through distinct stages of greater or lesser radicalism." Support, modify, or refute this statement using the excerpts and your knowledge of U.S. History.