

## READING #5

### **Victory**

Faced with a larger war, Britain decided to consolidate its forces in America. British troops were pulled out of Philadelphia, and New York became the chief base of British operations. In a campaign through 1778–1779, the Patriots, led by George Rogers Clark, captured a series of British forts in the Illinois country to gain control of parts of the vast Ohio territory. In 1780, the British army adopted a southern strategy, concentrating its military campaigns in Virginia and the Carolinas where Loyalists were especially numerous and active.

**Yorktown** In 1781, the last major battle of the Revolutionary War was fought near Yorktown, Virginia, on the shores of Chesapeake Bay. Strongly supported by French naval and military forces, Washington's army forced the surrender of a large British army commanded by General Charles Cornwallis.

**Treaty of Paris** News of Cornwallis's defeat at Yorktown was a heavy blow to the Tory party in Parliament that was conducting the war. The war had become unpopular in Britain, partly because it placed a heavy strain on the economy and the government's finances. Lord North and other Tory ministers resigned and were replaced by Whig leaders who wanted to end the war.

In Paris, in 1783, a treaty of peace was finally signed by the various belligerents. The Treaty of Paris provided for the following: (1) Britain would recognize the existence of the United States as an independent nation. (2) The Mississippi River would be the western boundary of that nation. (3) Americans would have fishing rights off the coast of Canada. (4) Americans would pay debts owed to British merchants and honor Loyalist claims for property confiscated during the war.

### **Organization of New Governments**

While the Revolutionary War was being fought, leaders of the 13 colonies worked to change them into independently governed states, each with its own constitution (written plan of government). At the same time, the revolutionary Congress that originally met in Philadelphia tried to define the powers of a new central government for the nation that was coming into being.

### **State Governments**

By 1777, ten of the former colonies had written new constitutions. Most of these documents were both written and adopted by the states' legislatures. In a few of the states (Maryland, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina), a proposed constitution was submitted to a vote of the people for ratification (approval).

Each state constitution was the subject of heated debate between conservatives, who stressed the need for law and order, and liberals, who were most concerned about protecting individual rights and preventing future tyrannies. Although the various constitutions differed on specific points, they had the following features in common:

**List of Rights** Each state constitution began with a “bill” or “declaration” listing the basic rights and freedoms, such as a jury trial and freedom of religion, that belonged to all citizens by right and that state officials could not infringe (encroach on).

**Separation of Powers** With a few exceptions, the powers of state government were given to three separate branches: (1) legislative powers to an elected two-house legislature, (2) executive powers to an elected governor, and (3) judicial powers to a system of courts. The principle of separation of powers was intended to be a safeguard against tyranny—especially against the tyranny of a too-powerful executive.

**Voting** The right to vote was extended to all white males who owned some property. The property requirement, usually for a minimal amount of land or money, was based on the assumption that property owners had a larger stake in government than did the poor and propertyless.

**Office-Holding** Those seeking elected office were usually held to a higher property qualification than the voters.

## Social Change

In addition to revolutionizing the politics of the 13 states, the War for Independence also profoundly changed American society. Some changes occurred immediately before the war ended, while others evolved gradually as the ideas of the Revolution began to filter into the attitudes of the common people.

### *Abolition of Aristocratic Titles*

State constitutions and laws abolished old institutions that had originated in medieval Europe. No legislature could grant titles of nobility, nor could any court recognize the feudal practice of primogeniture (the first born son's right to inherit his family's property). Whatever aristocracy existed in colonial America was further weakened by the confiscation of large estates owned by Loyalists. Many such estates were subdivided and sold to raise money for the war.

### *Separation of Church and State*

Most states adopted the principle of separation of church and state; in other words, they refused to give financial support to any religious group. The Anglican Church, which formerly had been closely tied to the king's government, was disestablished (lost state support) in the South. Only in three New England states—New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Massachusetts—did the Congregational Church continue to receive state support in the form of a religious tax. This practice was finally discontinued in New England early in the 1830s.

## **Women**

During the war, both the Patriots and Loyalists depended on the active support of women. Some women followed their men into the armed camps and worked as cooks and nurses. In a few instances, women actually fought in battle, either taking their husband's place, as Mary McCauley (Molly Pitcher) did at the Battle of Monmouth, or passing as a man and serving as a soldier, as Deborah Sampson did for a year.

The most important contribution of women during the war was in maintaining the colonial economy. While fathers, husbands, and sons were away fighting, women ran the family farms and businesses. They provided much of the food and clothing necessary for the war effort.

Despite their contributions, women remained in a second-class status. Unanswered went pleas such of those of Abigail Adams to her husband, John Adams: "I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors."

## **Slavery**

The institution of slavery contradicted the spirit of the Revolution and the idea that "all men are created equal." For a time, the leaders of the Revolution recognized this and took some corrective steps. The Continental Congress abolished the importation of enslaved people, and most states went along with the prohibition. Most northern states ended slavery, while in the South, some owners voluntarily freed their slaves.

However, in the decades following the Revolutionary War, more and more slaveowners came to believe that enslaved labor was essential to their economy. As explained in later chapters, they developed a rationale for slavery that found religious and political justification for continuing to hold human beings in lifelong bondage.

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<sup>i</sup> *United States History: Preparing for the Advanced Placement Examination* (Des Moines, Iowa: AMSCO Publishing, 2016).