

## **The American Revolution and American Peoples: A Comparative Inquiry**

### **Some Thought Provoking Questions (aka post-test) 7-10-02**

- 1. Name as many different groups of people as you can who made up the population of the thirteen colonies.**
  - Whites (English, Irish, Scottish,...), Blacks (slaves), Natives (various Indian nations/tribes)
  - Englishmen/women, various immigrant groups men + women, indentured servants men/women, other European groups (French, Dutch), slave men/women, freedmen/women, Native Americans/various tribes men + women.
  - Dutch, English, German, Native American, Jewish, Scottish, African American, French, Colonists.
  - Europeans, Native Americans, slaves, Indentured servants.
  - English, Spanish, African slaves, American born slaves, French, German, Native Tribal Nations, Scotch, Irish
  - White male landowners, white males, white females w/or w/out property, indentured servants (European), Native Americans, black slaves, free blacks (few), children.
  - This could be expressed in so many ways. Different races, classes, backgrounds, goals, etc. A variety of Indian tribes, settlers, traders, merchants, etc. and not to mention slaves and women. Many make up this story.
  - Loyalists, patriots, men/women/children, slaves/African, Indians, Europeans “visitors”, delegates, officials, etc., traders in and out of ports. British soldiers stationed, indentured servants.
  - Creeks, Chickasaws, Abnaki, Iroquois, Mohawk, Pocumtucks, Narragansett, Lenape, Cherokees, Freed and enslaved blacks, French, English, Spanish, Irish, Scots, Germans, Italians, Europeans, Chinese, women, men, children.
  - White man, indentured servants, black slaves, a few free blacks, Native American.
  - Scotch, Irish, Africans, Native Americans, German, Dutch, Catholics, Puritans, Quakers, Pilgrims, English, men, women.
  - White men and women, African slaves & freed men, Indians, Scottish, Irish, English, Huguenots, religious groups- Puritans, Quakers, Catholics, Baptists.
  
- 2. What is sovereignty and how is this concept relevant to the study of the American Revolution?**
  - Sovereignty is the right to rule. The concept is relevant to the study of the American Revolution as the issue/question of who did/should/could hold sovereignty surfaced often (Eng. vs. Colonies, states vs. states, colonies vs. colonies, white man vs. others, wealthy + propertied vs. not...).
  - Sovereignty in its simplistic definition is self-rule. The obvious goal of the American Revolution was gaining freedom and self-rule from England—however, the idea of sovereignty did not mean self-rule for everyone since not everyone was treated equally.
  - Sovereignty is a complex term with numerous interpretations or presumptions. In short sovereignty could be a free group of people who self rule.
  - Sovereignty refers to being independent and free to determine your fate. Americans challenged the sovereignty of Great Britain during the American Revolution.
  - In an environment of perpetual conflict, sovereignty can be used as benchmark to evaluate the strength of one group’s argument for separation from another’s.
  - Sovereignty is power. Who has it and how the one with power will control those under their power.
  - Sovereignty is the ability to make decisions independently. The group mentioned above (question 1), each sought it, some successfully and others with very little success.
  - In most instances it seemed sovereignty referred to a “status” of independence/freedom/ self-governing, which was mostly the goal of the colonists at this time. The word is cumbersome as are many words carried over from England.
  - Sovereignty is a central concept of the American Rev. and its aftermath. It is a question to ponder when considering the goals of the Patriots in terms of their decision to revolt and later in deciding how to establish a new nation-and who would be part of that new nation.
  - Who is ruling and making decisions.
  - Sovereignty-the understood authority one (or a group) has over another. Plays out in British “Sovereignty over colonies, Whites “sovereignty” over Natives and slaves.
  - Sovereignty is the power an right of a people to govern themselves independently of other nations. The American Revolution came up with a new \*\*\* concept of sovereignty. One in which the people are sovereign and decide own fate.
  
- 3. What did the term and concept, “liberty,” mean to different groups of Americans during the era of the Revolution?**
  - The term liberty different things to different groups. To (unfortunately) most textbooks, liberty mean the freedom of an educated, propertied elite to carve out for themselves a new world politically, economically, and socially—and most identify that with freedom for all. That however was not the case. Liberty to a black or native or woman or poorer person had very different, seldom identified with connotation.
  - Liberty meant many things to different people. To a white Englishman who was a property owner it could have meant freedom from colonial rule by England, as well as economic freedom. For slaves and women and Native Americans who fought the idea of liberty was seen as freedom and perhaps even equality in society...the end of oppression.

- Freedom from oppression. The freedom to make your own decisions.
- I think that the term liberty meant opportunity change and economic advancement for most Americans during the era of the Revolution. Slaves were excluded unless they were able to become free men.
- To those of a higher point on the proverbial food chain of life it meant the ability to pursue more lucrative business ventures without subordinate tax obligation (trade restrictions) to those at the opposite end it meant obtaining and maintaining a simple measure of control over their individual daily existence.
- Liberty meant freedom from England to the white colonial landowners. To kidnapped Africans, Liberty meant not to be enslaved. Liberty to Native Americans meant freedom from white suppression and land theft.
- Liberty was an evolving term. It seems at this time. Liberty from G.B> Liberty from outsiders. Liberty implies freedom- some got it, but more lost it. An irony that is still explored and debated today.
- Colonists thought in terms of laws and government making their own- decide other political issues. Many Africans thought of their own “personal” freedom-not belonging to another man.
- Liberty meant (and means) different things to all people then and now. It has philosophical, economic and moral meanings. It is a word that describes individual and collective freedoms.
- To slaves it meant \*\*\*\*, to Native Americans the \*\*\*\*\* of conquest and to women the opportunities that their husbands might have.
- Mostly applied to white male landowners sometimes protestants only, freedom and ability to control effect change of laws that govern them ex. taxes. Some folks such as women and slaves possibly Natives hoped someday that liberty would be extended to them.
- Liberty to white property owners meant freedom from England and freedom to pursue ones economic goals. ie freedom to acquire worth. Liberty for African Americans meant freedom of slavery and from the arbitrary rule of their masters. Liberty for the Indians meant to be left alone.

#### 4. How did the American Revolution redefine citizenship and nationality and who qualified as citizens?

- With revolution, Americans came to be citizens of the colonies/states first, a change from the past for many. This citizenship, and especially the privileges it carried, were enjoyed again by only an elite core of the new population. Other minority groups had to spend great time and effort to gain citizenship rights given to other earlier on.
- As with liberty, other hoped that the American Revolution would involve rights for them—all living in America would be granted citizenship—the honor and privileges associated with belonging to a nation a democratic nation such as voting rights—equal and fair treatment.
- White male property owners qualified. A citizen was a member of society, who had certain rights and privileges. Women were not considered citizens even when declaring a woman a non citizen was detrimental to the society at large.
- Citizens were white, male and property owners. However, the class structures were not as rigid as in England and there was opportunity for economic (social) advancement. During the political upheaval of the Revolutionary War era, people began to think of themselves as Americans (Patriots) while others continued to view themselves as British (loyalists).
- It perhaps forces a more open discussion about freedoms for a broader scope of groups. It also enables participants to use citizenship and nationality as a requirement to restrict other non-participants from participating in the new country.
- The American Rev. narrowed the qualifications of citizenship to white, male, property owners.
- The American nation formed as a result of the revolution. As a nation a place must define itself and that is exactly what America’s early leaders tried to do. Unfortunately, they created a nation that neglected to represent some of its population. Given the nature of the time it may have been difficult for them to find any alternative debatable course.
- At this time there were various stipulations that seemed to change frequently. Male white land owners had access to citizenship—after the war no changes automatically occurred for slaves and women.
- The American Revolution redefined citizenship and nationality in geographical and allegiance terms. The Revolution and its aftermath saw a group of founders define who and who was not considered a citizen.
- Citizens were \*\*\* any man who owned property regardless of their past circumstances. That was certainly an improvement although more than 50% of the population was excluded.
- White male landowners of certain age were citizens. Women basically citizens due to marriage, slaves were property. Natives, not sure exactly how they were defined.
- Citizenship was based on race, sex, age and ownership of property. It was confined to white males over 21 who met slave property requirements to vote. Women not given rights of citizenship and took the nationality of their husbands if married \*\*\*\*\* (Not legible)

#### 5. “All men are created equal” is one of the most cited phrases of the American Revolution. What does this phrase mean to you?

- These words of Jefferson from the Declaration are misleading as at the time they applied to a select segment of the population (white, land-owning males). They were landmark however, in that they took a giant step forward in breaking away from the inequalities of the past and ultimately paved the way for greater, more widespread equality in the future.
- I guess in the viewpoint of the American Revolution and following this phrase through to current day—this phrase means to me that we all begin life on an equal plane however it is what we make of ourselves through our experience that separates us from

others. However the problem with rationale is that we don't always begin life on an equal plane. Some have advantages that others do not. Because this phrase has become so over-used in our society, I don't think it has the same meaning to be today as it used to.

- It is a statement declaring “a white property owning male as created equal” at the time the statement was not misinterpreted because of the rhetoric shared by the elite. It was an insult to think anything less.
- All white, male, property owners are created equal. I think that this was the first step in creating a country where eventually women, blacks, etc. would also be “created equal”.
- All humans are entities to a set of basic rights to evolve to their fullest capacity. It does not imply that all have equal abilities or that society must accommodate those who can achieve certain “???” on their own.
- To me, all men are created equal means all beings are born equal. This was the Ho Chi Min's interpretation also.
- Creation really is the key word. The implicit meaning is that at creation/birth (another debate) one is equal to another. My definition of “men” includes women. “All” includes every human being.
- To me it means that living people should have the same rights/opportunities available to them. No one person should be “more” equal because of race, religion, economic status or position. But the declaration writers used the phrase as a political tool- it looked and sounded good.
- As a term used frequently in our government and in everyday usage-this phrase (to me) means that our government recognizes that all its citizens are started off on equal footing- what you make of life is your decision, but you are free to choose your own path in life.
- All people have equal opportunity and the means to achieve success and happiness.
- To me it means that mankind (men) was created equal by God and are of equal worth to him. That we strive to be like Christ ought to hold all of mankind with the same worth as ourselves. In the end no one is better or more valuable than another.
- To me it means all humans are created equally and are equal under the law. The law intern should ensure equal opportunity for all.

#### **6. Was the new American republic an “empire” in any sense?**

- In simply declaring the 13 colonies a nation with the presented boundaries—we took various native lands over with full intent to eliminate, subjugate or assimilate the natives. That alone is an act of empire building. Issues over westward expansion and further encroachment of said Indian lands for the empire further the path of empire that will carry on for centuries.
- I think once the federal government became established the country grew to become an empire. A strong centralized government enabled the country to grow and in some ways become like the monstrous English and tyrants they sought to eradicate in the American Revolution. Land was taken, life was taken, people were forced to become like others (assimilate)—The power that the U.S. gained on the world scene after the nation established itself had become so great and happened so quickly that anything less might have been viewed as failure to the men of this time...it was like a competition with the rest of the world and set the stage for the current status of the U.S. in international affairs.
- It certainly could be characterized as such. A strong centralized government, who made decisions on land confiscation. The new republic could also be considered an anomaly based on its internal dialogue and instituting amendments to the constitution (ie Bill of Rights).
- The new American republic was an “empire” with regard to seizing Native American's lands. Most white men regarded their greed for land and opportunity to be more important than the Native American's original claim. Again this relates back to the power structure within the country; white males had the power.
- It was but in a new \*\*\* definition of the word. I believe it to be the seeds for individual empires that evolve later into corporate/robber baron/ vast personal empires during the 19 & 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- Yes, because the Native Americans were pushed off their lands to make way for the white Empire.
- In my mind, no. It was a collection of colonies that formed into a collection of states that formed a nation. The colonies/states had a common history-tribes lived in each and a common “enemy” G.B. I suppose that today, the states are in someway controlled by the Federal Gov., but in others they are not. The USA is truly a unique form of government w/ a very unique history.
- Perhaps in some ways it was. There were people in positions of power, trade was good, economics were good, growth was strong and steady and once the Revolution was underway it became even more clearly defined as a country possessing the qualifications to become strong and independent.
- Yes, in one sense, that it was inevitable that we would out grow our sea-clung colonies and expand (geographically) westward into lands occupied by other tribes and nations. Our reasons being the pursuit of land for agriculture, and because the ownership of land was a basis of citizenship. That this policy drew us into land acquisition by all means shows that we were an empire right from the start.
- Certainly it ruled over many Native American nations and its effort to achieve manifest destiny conquered the territories of the nation.
- Yes, It extended its power and control over land and people who were unwilling receptionists, except Natives and slaves.
- Yes, because it sought to expand its control and its culture over Indians who have no voice in the matter. It was hardly an empire for “liberty.”