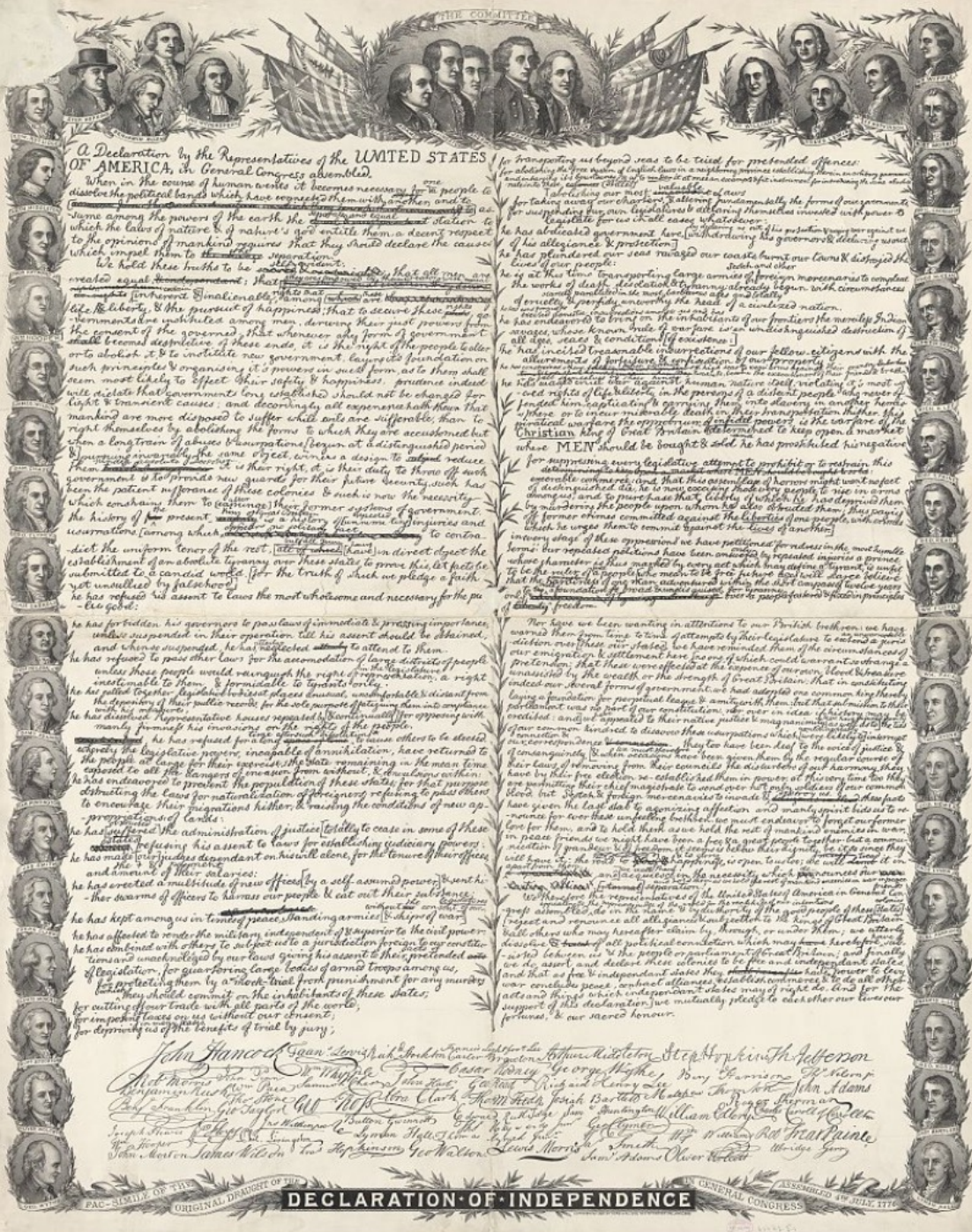


American Revolution
Muhammad Najm Akbar
Gentrain Fall 2025
makbar@mpc.edu



The Revolutions

- This week, we will take a comparative perspective to see what makes the American Revolution unique.
- In its ingredients, inspiration, organization, perseverance, and outcome, the American Revolution stands out as a unique event. We will make this statement, however, only after the French Revolution of 1789, the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804, the multiple early nineteenth-century Latin American Revolutions, and the European Revolutions of 1848 had occurred.
- In 1776, the American Revolution was unique because of the challenge and response paradigm, the triggers that pitted the settlers against the mother country, the sociopolitical and economic environment that the settlers created over two centuries of challenging life in the New World, the institutions they built, and the methods they chose to construct collective solutions.

The Revolutions

The American colonial system, until 1776, was unique as well, in terms of the exploration of new ways of approaching sociopolitical life. Political structures in the colonies fell under one of three main categories because of the charters that created them:

- Provincial (New Hampshire, New York, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia),
- Proprietary (Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, and Maryland), and
- Charter (Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut).

Colonial Society—Political Structures

Foundational charters impacted colonial political structures.

- Provincial colonies were the most tightly controlled by the Crown. The British king appointed all provincial governors, and these Crown governors could veto any decision made by their colony's legislative assemblies.
- Proprietary colonies had a similar structure, with one important difference: governors were appointed by a lord proprietor, an individual who had purchased or received the rights to the colony from the Crown.

Colonial Society—Political Structures

- Charter colonies, the last category, had the most complex system of government: they were formed by political corporations or interest groups that drew up a charter delineating powers between the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches of government.
- Rather than having appointed governors, charter colonies elected their own from among property-owning men in the colony.
- Colonies were thus engaged with decisions affecting them from the beginning through elected Assemblies.
- Colonies are not states, and hence the two are not technically comparable, but we will strive to see how they resemble or differ in their capacity and resolve to negotiate change.

References

- Reinhard Bendix, *Kings or People: Power and the Mandate to Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
- Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600–1947* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
- Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).
- [THE AMERICAN YAWP](#) (A Massively Collaborative Open U.S. History Stanford University Textbook).
- Michael W. Spicer, “Frederick the Great’s Administrative Practice,” *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 20, no. 1 (March 1998): 23–31.
- Georg Cavallar, “Kant’s Judgment on Frederick’s Enlightened Absolutism,” *History of Political Thought* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 103–32, published by Imprint Academic Ltd, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26214423>.
- [Brittanica Academic](#).

The Change: Top Down

- Change is a recurring phenomenon in life and nature. Revolutions change life phenomenally. The American Revolution pioneered a political system rooted largely in popular will and opted to subject authority to three-pronged checks and balances.
- In Europe, change essentially remained tied to the will of the divinely ordained monarchy. In the eighteenth century, while the US experienced a seismic change, we see three monarchs undertaking efforts to change their societies top down, which makes it interesting to see what change meant to them.

The Revolutions

- These monarchs belonged to two kingdoms: Russia and Prussia, and offer three dynamic examples of enlightened despots. The two Russians, Peter I, or the Great (1672-1725), and Catherine II, or the Great (1762-1796), ruled with about four decades of distance from each other. Frederick II, or the Great, reigned in Prussia between 1740-1786. Catherine and Frederick witnessed American Revolution as well.
- All three of them disregarded the church's resistance to their plans for change, as they perceived and implemented them in their realms. Without going through Reformation, Catherine began to confiscate the Church and monastic lands in 1764. Frederick II was blasphemous in his views on Christianity, encouraged skepticism about religion and secured tolerance for Christian denominations and Judaism in his realms.

The Revolutions

- Both Russian sovereigns had enormous admiration for the West. For the Russian elite, however, this fascination was nothing new. Peter's Russia of the late seventeenth century already bustled with the Western presence. One of the reasons Peter knew the West was due to the presence in Russia of approximately eighteen thousand Western professionals, traders, soldiers, and experts, many living in the foreigners' district of Muscovite Russia.
- Catherine the Great sought the foreign presence in Russia more vigorously. The incentives that she offered through a manifesto in 1763 attracted a positive response, particularly, from her fellow Germans, who thrived for decades in what later became the Volga Germans Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic before facing the calamitous conditions because of the Second World War.

The Revolutions

- Peter's fascination took a functional form in his 1697-1698, nominally incognito "pilgrimage" to Europe. He began it with the Netherlands, to see the operational side of the Western technology, foremost in the shipbuilding industry. The visit was also an introduction to the dynamic political, educational, and economic Western institutions.
- One major sign of his enchantment was that Peter required Western dress at various levels of the Court and clean-shaven courtiers beginning in 1700.
- The building of new capital St. Petersburg became the most visible manifestation of his desire to steer Russia West.

The Revolutions

- Catherine the Great's relationship with her native West was a story of continuing commitment to her German roots, balancing it with a nationalistic role in the vast empire of her in-laws. She had nurtured this hybrid devotion since her arrival there at the age of fifteen. It persisted as she rose to the pinnacle of the Russian monarchical pyramid.
- Both Catherine and her fellow German, Prussian counterpart, Frederick II, relished in the Western literature and the era of contemporary enlightenment. Both shared a personal relationship with Voltaire.

The Revolutions

- Last week, we learned about the Russian state strengthening its chokehold over the serfs, some 23 million by 1861. An essential question we can ask, therefore, is how the infatuation with the Enlightenment and the Western systems translates into the governance profile of monarchical absolutism.
- All three of our “enlightened despots” emphasized education. Peter established an Academy of Science in 1725, fully staffed with foreigners. Initially, there were no Russian students there as none had the linguistic ability to benefit from the institution. Berlin had its own Academy of Science.
- Peter opened some of the first Elementary “Ciphering” Schools aimed at teaching physical sciences and math.

The Revolutions

- Catherine enlarged the educational reforms and began a two-tier system: minor schools of two years in each district and major schools in provincial capitals. The number of schools in Russia kept rising: forty schools, 136 teachers, 4400 pupils in 1786; 316 schools, 744 teachers, and 17340 pupils in 1796.
- Catherine also established the first-ever women-only institute for the nobility's girls.
- Frederick II mandated universal primary education throughout the Prussian monarchy in 1763 although lack of resources hampered the reform.

The Revolutions

- Catherine had been aware of Blackstone's 1774 Treatise on Law, like the work of Montesquieu, and had it translated into Russian in 1780-82. She considered, however, that Russia was not ready for such laws and introduced her 1775 Ordonnance on Governments. Her Charter of 1785 "emancipated" the nobility, freeing them from corporal punishment, allowed them free disposal of estates and reinforced their role.
- Historian Bendix delivers a harsh judgment on both Russian despots, saying they failed to bring any change in the social order. He says that Peter wanted to develop a Russia as a great European power: "In the process, the peasants were decimated by war, forced labor, famine, and repression" (506).

The Revolutions

- We can see, however, that education was a bright spot while the Russian absolutism remained intact. It thrived on the subservience of the nobles and the hard work of the serfs. In 1917, it experienced a rude shock when Lenin's revolutionaries and Soviets demolished all the pillars of an antiquated system.
- In terms of fascination for enlightenment literature or literature itself, Frederick II excelled many. Historian Christopher Clark describes his passion for reading in about a page full of who's who of world literature. He was a Francophile who not only read but wrote extensively about issues of historical and governance issues in French.

The Revolutions

- Frederick II was also a flute player, paying more to his flute teacher than Bach, who also served the court.
- Frederick II, like his father, anchored greatness in the militarization of the state. He inherited a standing army of 83,000 men and increased it to 190,000, including 110,000 non-Prussians. The army remained his principal focus in pursuit of aggrandizement of the Prussian state at the cost of neighboring Austrian and German states, including Silesia, as well as Poland which Russia, Prussia, and Austria began to partition and annex in 1772. The enlightened Frederick believed that state must reform to ensure that resources from functional and productive estates keep funding the nobility-dominated army (Christopher Clark).

The Revolutions

- Frederick II enforced a criminal Code (1747–1749), which standardized the criminal procedures. The reform, however, kept intact *Patrimonialgericht*, landlords' private courts, exercising judicial authority within an estate. This system existed alongside the royal courts in Prussia.
- The enlightened part was that he restricted judicial torture, enforced greater evidentiary standards and lowered the censorship. His contemporary intellectual, however, pointed to serious flaws in his judicial reforms and limits of no censor (Cavallar, 113).

The Revolutions

- Contemporary philosophers judged him in different ways. Voltaire called him simultaneously 'roi philosophe, philosopher king' and the 'philosophe Guerrier, warring philosopher.'
- Rousseau was more insightful, saying, "*Il pense en philosophe et se conduit en roi. La gloire, l'intérêt, voilà son Dieu, sa loi!*" Essentially, "He thinks like a philosopher but acts like a king. Glory and interest are his God, and his law." His soul, Cavallar surmises, was devoid of moral principles. Kant, he affirms, shared Rousseau's assessment of Frederick II although he justified several of his actions and views(121).

The Revolutions

- The Americans had a philosopher of their own. His name was Thomas Paine. By January 1776, his widely circulated “[Common Sense](#)” told them: “...But there is another and great distinction for which no truly natural or religious reason can be assigned, and that is the distinction of men into **KINGS** and **SUBJECTS**. Male and female are the distinctions of nature, good and bad the distinctions of Heaven; but how a race of men came into the world so exalted above the rest, and distinguished like some new species, is worth inquiring into, and whether they are the means of happiness or of misery to mankind...”

The Revolutions

- “... In the early ages of the world, according to the scripture chronology, there were no kings; ... Government by kings was first introduced into the world by the Heathens, from whom the children of Israel copied the custom. It was the most prosperous invention the Devil ever set on foot for the promotion of idolatry. The Heathens paid divine honors to their deceased kings, and the Christian World hath improved on the plan by doing the same to their living ones. How impious is the title of sacred Majesty applied to a worm, who in the midst of his splendor is crumbling into dust!...”

Succession Crisis: What is it?

- American Revolution links directly to a succession crisis in Europe and thus also allows us a glimpse into European monarchies at work.
- A succession crisis occurs when a royal dynasty runs out of heirs. The crisis emerges out of the preferred solution to fill the void. It is based on the degree of legitimacy of the choice and the calculations about who else could be an heir and motives of the decision maker's preferred option A over B. All such choices enhance or diminish the relative power of eligible dynasties and their allies.
- We have already seen a crisis of this nature as the Spanish Succession (1701-14). In this case, the Spanish Habsburg dynasty failed to produce an heir. Charles II of Spain then designated a French prince, Duke of Anjou, future Philip V, a grandson nephew of Louis XIV, as his successor. The Austrian branch of Habsburgs viewed it as illegitimate bid to deprive them of their rightful inheritance.
- We learned how Britain, the Dutch, and Austria formed a coalition in 1701 to challenge possible Bourbon supremacy.

Succession Crisis: American Revolution

- The Austrian Succession Crisis of 1740 relates directly to the American Revolution and continued in two parts, until 1763, with a break in 1748.
- This time the dispute emerged despite an heir taking over the Austrian Habsburg throne. The challenge centered on the person of the successor to Charles VI, his daughter, Maria Theresa, the sole female ruler of the Habsburg dynasty.
- During his life, Charles VI had sought recognition from fellow monarchs under Pragmatic Sanction of 1713 for recognition of his daughter as his successor in the absence of a male heir. When she assumed the throne, several rulers threatened her lands, rejecting her rights to kingship.

Succession Crisis: American Revolution

- Prussia of “enlightened Frederick II” invaded Austrian Silesia and retained it through and after different phases of the long conflict.
- France and Bavaria supported the claims of Charles Albert of Bavaria to be the emperor instead of Maria Theresa.
- Austria allied with Britain and others, including Hanover, the Dutch Republic, and Russia, to reclaim its lost territories and defend Maria Theresa’s throne.
- The war ended with the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748), which largely restored the status quo ante bellum, with Austria retaining most of its territories and Silesia remaining with Prussia.

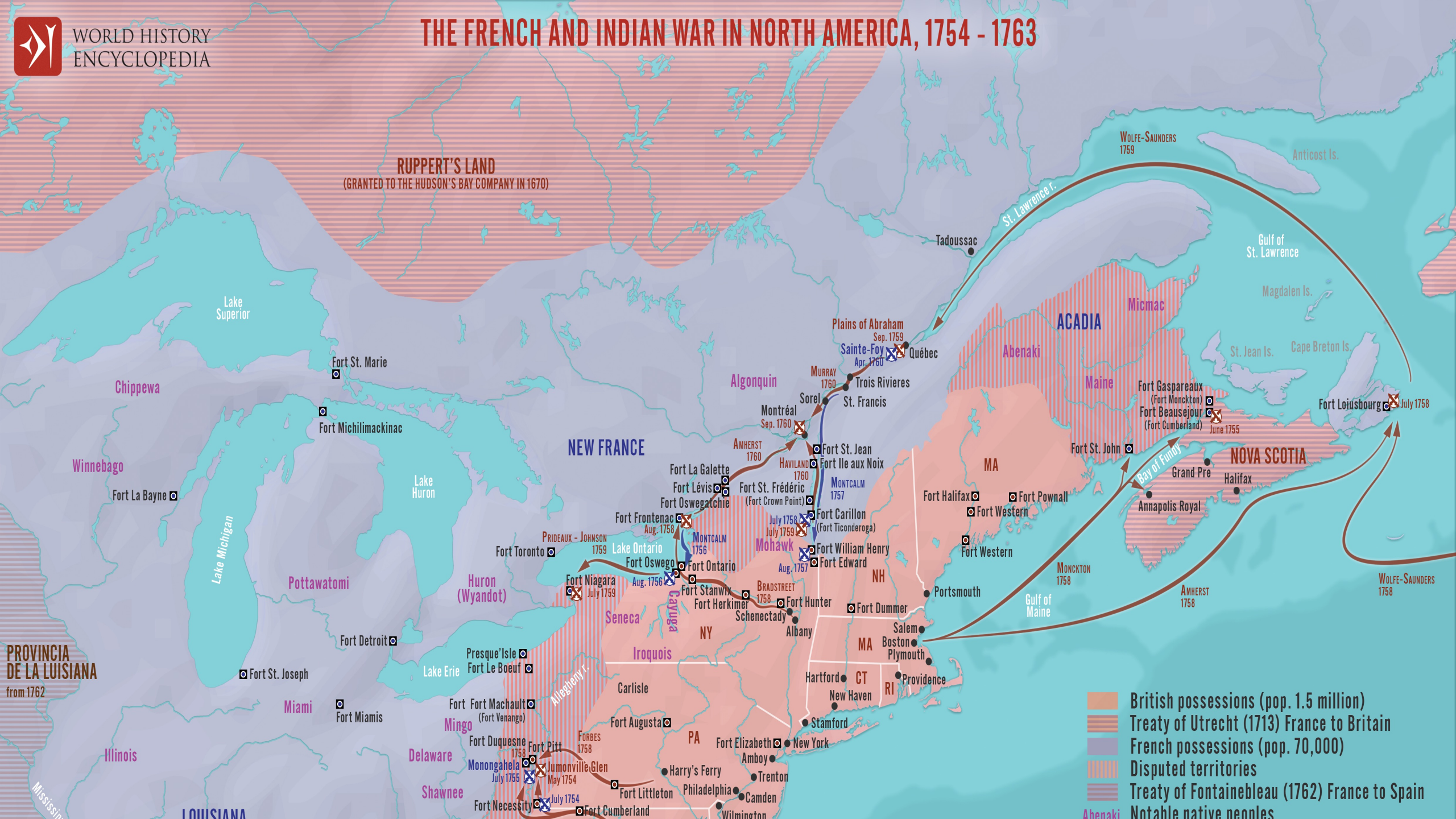
Succession Crisis: American Revolution

- Residue of the Austrian War of Succession and continuing Anglo-French tensions provoked a second round of wars, beginning in 1756.
- In a Diplomatic Revolution, Austria sided with France (unlike the first round), while Britain supported Prussia. The coalitions were: France, Austria, Russia, Saxony, and Sweden against Britain, Prussia, and Hanover.
- The war spread to Anglo-French colonies as well. In North America, the conflict is known as the French and Indian War. England had an advantage in all battles with France. In India and other colonies, Britain expanded its empire by defeating the French and allied forces.

Succession Crisis: American Revolution

- The Seven Years' War ended with the peace treaties of Paris and Hubertusburg (Saxony, Germany) in 1763, which ended hostilities between Austria, Prussia, and Saxony, restoring the territorial status quo except for the loss of Silesia to Prussia.
- The British wiped out the French from India and received much of Canada and North America, including Louisiana and the French territories east of the Mississippi (Kennedy, 108-115).

THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR IN NORTH AMERICA, 1754 - 1763



Relations with Mother Country— Consequences of the Seven Years' War and Pontiac's War

- Native Americans had sided with France during the war and waged a war that spread from 1761 to 1766.
- The Native Americans fought valiantly and scored several victories against the British. By 1766, they had killed as many as four hundred soldiers and two thousand settlers.
- Finally, in July 1766, their leader Pontiac met with British officials at Fort Ontario and settled for peace.

Relations with Mother Country— Consequences of the Seven Years' War and Pontiac's War

- Pontiac's War made British officials recognize that peace in the West would require royal protection of Native American lands and heavy-handed regulation of Anglo-American trade activity in territory controlled by Native Americans.
- During the war, the British Crown issued the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which marked the Appalachian Mountains as the boundary between the British colonies and land held by Native Americans.

Relations with Mother Country— Consequences of the Seven Years' War and Pontiac's War

- The prohibition of Anglo-American settlement in Native American territory, especially the Ohio River Valley, sparked discontent.
- Tens of thousands of colonials fought during the Seven Years' War. At the French surrender in 1760, 11,000 British soldiers joined 6,500 militia members drawn from every colony north of Pennsylvania.
- After nearly seven decades of warfare, the colonists looked to the newly acquired lands west of the Appalachian Mountains as their reward.
- Britain spent over £140 million, and the expenses kept coming as new territory required new security obligations.

Relations with Mother Country— Consequences of the Seven Years' War and Pontiac's War

- A Mercantilist colonial power wanted its North American offshoot to share the cost of over £140 million of a victory in the Seven Years' War. It began legislation to extract some return from their prospering economy.
- The colonists resented both these consequences of the wars, but were unaware of the fact then that their resistance would stage a Revolution, one of many manifestations in history of the future being unpredictable. In retrospect, we know that they were on the anvil of the American Revolution and their independence.

Economics of Colonialism: Immediate Causes of the American Revolution

- 1764: The Sugar Act sought to combat the widespread smuggling of molasses in New England by cutting the duty in half but increasing enforcement.
- Also, it stipulated that the smugglers would be tried by vice-admiralty courts and not the juries.
- Besides the Proclamation of 1763, the Currency Act, and the Sugar Act increased colonists' fear of a pattern of increased taxation and restricted liberties.

Economics of Colonialism: Immediate Causes of the American Revolution

- 1764: The Currency Act restricted colonies from producing paper money.
- Hard money, such as gold and silver coins, was scarce in the colonies.
- The lack of currency impeded the colonies' increasingly sophisticated transatlantic economies, but it was especially damaging in 1764 because a postwar recession had already begun.

Economics of Colonialism: Immediate Causes of the American Revolution

- 1765-1766: The Stamp Act. The act required that many documents, including newspapers, pamphlets, diplomas, legal documents, and even playing cards, should be printed on paper that had been stamped to show the duty had been paid.
- This was the first-ever direct/internal tax on the Colonists. For colonists, this was an example of taxation without representation. Previously, colonies had paid only indirect “external” taxes, such as customs duties. Unlike the Sugar Act, which primarily affected merchants, the Stamp Act triggered more popular resistance because it affected printers, lawyers, college graduates, and even sailors who played cards.

Economics of Colonialism: Immediate Causes of the American Revolution

- 1766: The Declaratory Act, asserting that Parliament had the “full power and authority to make laws . . . to bind the colonies and people of America . . . in all cases whatsoever.”
- The Act accompanied the repeal of the Stamp Act of 1766.
- Colonists resisted the legislation that resumed the Mercantilist trend later, but in 1766, they celebrated the repeal.

Economics of Colonialism:

Immediate Causes of the American Revolution

Between 1767 and 1770, the Townshend Acts created new customs duties on common items, like lead, glass, paint, and tea, instead of direct taxes.

The acts also created and strengthened formal mechanisms to enforce compliance, including a new American Board of Customs Commissioners and more vice-admiralty courts to try smugglers.

Revenues from customs seizures would be used to pay customs officers and other royal officials, including the governors, thereby incentivizing them to convict offenders.

- Colonials resented losing control over the salaries of royal officials, including the governors, the increased presence of the British government in the colonies, and the limits imposed on the authority of the colonial assemblies.
- They defined these “duties” as “taxes,” aimed at extracting revenues from the colonies.

How to Stage a Revolution

John Dickinson's "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania," argued that the Townshend Acts were another form of the Stamp Act.

Resistance emerged in the elite, middling, and working-class colonists.

Merchants reinstituted nonimportation agreements. Common colonists agreed not to consume British products.

How to Stage a Revolution

- In response to the Townshend Acts, the colonies formed Committees of Correspondence to keep each other informed of the resistance efforts throughout the colonies.
- Newspapers reprinted exploits of resistance, giving colonists a sense that they were part of a broader political community.
- 1768-1770: Boston Massacre exacerbated tensions between the Colonials and the British regiments deployed in Boston. A popular form of protest on March 5, 1770, resulted in soldiers firing into the crowd and killing five Bostonians, including one of the ringleaders, Crispus Attucks, a formerly enslaved man. John Adams represented the soldiers in the ensuing trial and secured their acquittal.

How to Stage a Revolution.

- An engraving of the Boston Massacre initially circulated by Paul Revere mobilized public outrage, anyway, reinforcing the portrayal of the redcoats as brutal slaughterers.
- Methods of resistance against the Townshend Acts became more inclusive and more coordinated.
- March 1770: Parliament repealed all the new duties except the one on tea.

How to Stage a Revolution: The British Keep Making Mistakes

- In 1773, Parliament passed two acts to aid the failing East India Company, which had fallen behind in the annual payments it owed Britain. The company was also drowning in tea, with almost fifteen million pounds of it stored in warehouses from India to England.
- The Regulating Act effectively put the troubled company under government control.
- Colonists understood that by buying tea, they would be paying the duty and thereby implicitly acknowledging Parliament's right to tax them, and use it as a precedent for other impositions.
- In November 1773, the Boston Sons of Liberty, led by Samuel Adams and John Hancock, resolved to "prevent the landing and sale of the [tea], and the payment of any duty thereon" and to do so "at the risk of their lives and property."

How to Stage a Revolution: The British Keep Making Mistakes

- The Tea Act allowed the East India Company to sell its tea in the colonies directly and without the company having to pay the usual export tax in London.
- The Tea Act stipulated that the duty had to be paid when the ship was unloaded.
- After another town meeting at the Old South Meeting House, dozens of men disguised as Mohawks made their way to the wharf and emptied into the sea every chest of tea on board the three ships . . . amounting to 342 chests.
- Tea was either dumped or seized in Charleston, Philadelphia, and New York, with numerous other smaller “tea parties” taking place throughout 1774.

How to Stage a Revolution: The Crown Strikes Back

- 1774: Parliament passed the Coercive/Intolerable Acts.
- First, the Boston Port Act shut down the harbor and cut off all trade to and from the city.
- Second, the Massachusetts Government Act put the colonial government entirely under British control, dissolving the assembly and restricting town meetings.
- The Crown intended to end the Bostonian rebellion. They did not anticipate the other colonies coming to the aid of Massachusetts.
- Colonists collected food for the Bostonians.
- Virginia's House of Burgesses called for a day of prayer and fasting to show their support.

How to Stage a Revolution: The Crown Strikes Back

- Third, the Administration of Justice Act allowed any royal official accused of a crime to be tried in Britain rather than by Massachusetts courts and juries.
- Fourth, the Quartering Act, passed for all colonies, allowed the British army to quarter newly arrived soldiers in colonists' homes.
- In Massachusetts, patriots created the Provincial Congress, and, throughout 1774, they seized control of local and county governments and courts.
- In New York, citizens elected committees to direct the colonies' response to the Coercive Acts, including a Mechanics' Committee of middling colonists.

How to Stage a Revolution

- Resistance to the Stamp Act 1765-66 took three forms: legislative resistance by elites, economic resistance by merchants, and popular protest by common colonists.
- An example was the widely printed anti-Stamp Act Virginia Resolves, passed by the House of Burgesses on May 30, 1765.
- The Stamp Act Congress was held in New York City in October 1765. Nine colonies sent delegates, who included Benjamin Franklin, John Dickinson, Thomas Hutchinson, Philip Livingston, and James Otis.

How to Stage a Revolution

- The Stamp Act Congress issued a “Declaration of Rights and Grievances,” which reaffirmed their right to trial by jury and to be taxed only by their own elected representatives.
- The colonists rejected the Parliament and the Crown's argument that the colonists were “virtually represented.”

How to Stage a Revolution: Building Success

Economic Resistance: Merchants resolved nonimportation in New York and Philadelphia.

By January 1766, they found an ally in London merchants who sent a letter to Parliament arguing that they had been “reduced to the necessity of pending ruin” by the Stamp Act and the subsequent boycotts.

Popular Protest: Riots broke out in Boston. Crowds burned the effigy of the appointed stamp distributor for Massachusetts, Andrew Oliver, and pulled a building he owned “down to the Ground.” Later, they also destroyed the home of his brother-in-law, Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson.

How to Stage a Revolution: Building Success

- By November 16, 1775, all original twelve stamp distributors had resigned. With no one to distribute the stamps, the act became unenforceable.
- 1766: Groups calling themselves the Sons of Liberty were formed in most colonies to direct and organize further resistance.
- In February 1766, the Parliament repealed the Stamp Act.

How to Stage a Revolution: The Continental Congress

- A Legal and Institutional Revolution: The American Revolution was a model for political change, an antidote to Mobocracy. The leaders of the Revolution ensured the building a replacement for each institution that they demolished, never allowing institutional uncertainty or vacuum to set in.
- By early 1774, Committees of Correspondence and/or extralegal assemblies were established in all the colonies except Georgia. And throughout the year, they followed Massachusetts's example of seizing the powers of the royal governments and taking over those responsibilities.
- These Committees of Correspondence agreed to send delegates to a Continental Congress to coordinate an intercolonial response. The First Continental Congress convened on September 5, 1774.
- Over the next six weeks, elite delegates from every colony but Georgia issued several documents, including a "Declaration of Rights and Grievances" and the "Continental Association."

How to Stage a Revolution:

The Continental Congress-- the “Continental Association.”

- While Congress dealt with the response to the colonial power, through the Continental Association, it designed the future United States. It recommended “that a committee be chosen in every county, city, and town . . . whose business it shall be attentively to observe the conduct of all persons touching this Association.”
- These Committees of Inspection would consist largely of common colonists. They were effectively deputized to police their communities and instructed to publish the names of anyone who violated the Association so they “may be publicly known and universally condemned as the enemies of American liberty.”
- The delegates also agreed to a continental nonimportation, nonconsumption, and nonexportation agreement and to “wholly discontinue the slave trade.”

How to Stage a Revolution: The Continental Congress

- The Continental Congress met again in May 1775, while war had already broken out in Massachusetts since April 19, 1775, at Lexington and Concord.
- Militia members, known as minutemen, responded quickly and inflicted significant casualties on the British regiments as they chased them back to Boston. Approximately twenty thousand colonial militiamen laid siege to Boston, effectively trapping the British.

How to Stage a Revolution: The Continental Congress

- The Continental Congress adopted the Massachusetts militia and formed a Continental Army, naming Virginia delegate George Washington commander-in-chief.
- They also issued a “Declaration of the Causes of Necessity of Taking Up Arms” to justify the decision.
- Loyalists had been expecting a peaceful conciliation with Britain. In an October speech to Parliament, the King disappointed the loyalists when he dismissed the colonists’ petition. Approximately sixty thousand loyalists ended up leaving America because of the Revolution.

How to Stage a Revolution: The Continental Congress

- Briefly, the war began at Lexington and Concord, more than a year before Congress declared independence. The British mobilized the largest expeditionary force in their history.
- While facing enormous challenges, the Continental Army won a crucial battle at Saratoga, New York, in September-October 1777. This victory proved a major turning point in the war.
- Benjamin Franklin secured French support and signed a Treaty of Amity and Commerce on February 6, 1778.

How to Stage a Revolution: The Continental Congress

- The treaty effectively turned a colonial rebellion into a global war as fighting between the British and French soon broke out in Europe and India.
- Washington strategized for more frequent skirmishes and avoided major engagements.
- In 1781, the Continental and French armies, as well as a French navy contingent, encircled General Charles Cornwallis at Yorktown, forcing his surrender.
- Peace negotiations took place in France, and the war came to an official end on September 3, 1783.

How to Stage a Revolution: The Continental Congress

- In the opening months of 1776, independence, for the first time, became part of the popular debate. In another seven months, the Continental Congress officially passed the Independence Resolution.
- On May 10, 1776, nearly two months before the Declaration of Independence, Congress voted on a resolution calling on all colonies that had not already established revolutionary governments to do so and to wrest control from royal officials.
- The Congress also recommended that the colonies should begin preparing new written constitutions. In many ways, this was the Congress's first declaration of independence.

How to Stage a Revolution: The Continental Congress

- On June 7, Richard Henry Lee offered the following resolution: “Resolved, That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, Free and Independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connexion between them and the state of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.”
- On July 2, 1776, the resolution finally came to a vote. It passed 12–0, with New York, under imminent threat of British invasion, abstaining.

How to Stage a Revolution: The Continental Congress

- On July 4, Congress adopted the [Declaration of Independence](#),

“...Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government....”

How to Stage a Revolution: The Continental Congress

- On December 23, 1783, George Washington, widely considered the hero of the Revolution, resigned his position as the most powerful man in the former thirteen colonies.
- Giving up his role as Commander-in-Chief of the Army ensured that civilian rule would define the new nation and that a republic would be set in place rather than a dictatorship.

How to Stage a Revolution: The Continental Congress

- The creation of state constitutions in 1776 and 1777 was an important innovation from the traditionally unwritten British Constitution, based on the idea of “popular sovereignty,” that is, that the power and authority of the government derived from the people.
- Pennsylvania’s first state constitution allowed all free men to vote, including those who did not own property.
- Massachusetts’s constitution underwent a popular process of ratification. In the fall of 1779, each town sent delegates—312 in all—to a constitutional convention in Cambridge. Town meetings debated the constitution draft and offered suggestions.

How to Stage a Revolution: The Continental Congress

- State Constitutions increased participation in politics and governance.
- They legally institutionalized religious toleration.
- The Revolution ended the mercantilist economy, opening new opportunities in trade and manufacturing. The Revolution opened new markets and new trade relationships.

How to Stage a Revolution: The Continental Congress

- The Continental Congress ratified the Articles of Confederation in 1781. The articles allowed each state one vote in the Continental Congress.
- The articles, however, gave Congress no power to levy or collect taxes, regulate foreign or interstate commerce, or establish a federal judiciary.
- These shortcomings rendered the postwar Congress weak and largely ineffectual.

The Revolution and the Enslaved Persons

- The Revolution held no promise to the enslaved persons.
- Facing rebellion, the royal governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore, proclaimed martial law in 1775 and freedom to “all indentured servants, Negroes, and others” if they would leave their enslavers and join the British.
- The Dunmore Proclamation was the first mass emancipation of enslaved people in American history. Dunmore’s proclamation unnerved white southerners already suspicious of rising antislavery sentiments in the mother country.
- In 1783, thousands of formerly enslaved Loyalists fled with the British army. They hoped that the British government would uphold the promise of freedom and help them establish new homes elsewhere in the Empire.

The Revolution and the Women

- The Revolution did not result in civic equality for women.
- Women had actively engaged in the Revolutionary struggle. They supported boycotts as consumers and producers, and some participated in grain riots, raids on the offices of royal officials, and demonstrations against the impressment of men into naval service.
- The Revolution did not translate into political rights for them.

Native Americans and the American Revolution

- Many Native American groups, such as the Shawnee, Creek, Cherokee, and Iroquois, had sided with the British. They had hoped for a British victory that would continue to restrain the land-hungry colonial settlers from moving west beyond the Appalachian Mountains.
- Native Americans had no role in the peace negotiations at Paris.
- The Americans' victory and Native Americans' support for the British created a pretense to justify rapid and often brutal expansion into the western territories.
- Native American peoples would continue to be displaced and pushed farther west throughout the nineteenth century. Ultimately, American independence marked the beginning of the end of what had remained of Native American independence.

Conclusion

- The American Revolution models how revolutionary struggle must coordinate, articulate, organize, and execute its way to positive achievement. While organizing at the grassroots level, the American Revolution explained, justified, and legislated change through consultations at multiple levels, ensuring that no tier of governance was left in a void as they crafted a new state structure. The Congress maintained an upper hand in civil-military relations, and the Commander of the Continental Army did not retain the office after accomplishing his goal. Successful revolutions need this kind of playbook.
- The struggle for the rights of women, enslaved persons, and Native Americans continued.

EMAIL
QUESTIONS/COMMENTS
makbar@mpc.edu