America Secedes from the Empire, 1775–1783

And if ever there was a just war since the world began, it is this in which America is now engaged.... We fight not to enslave, but to set a country free, and to make room upon the earth for honest men to live in.

_Thomas Paine, The Crisis, 1776_

**Prologue:** Following the bloodshed at Lexington, the colonists raised a nondescript army and put George Washington in command. The undisciplined and unreliable amateur soldiers exasperated their leader, and not until later in the war was a nucleus of several thousand trained veterans whipped into line. Meanwhile the colonists, goaded by harsh British acts, finally declared their independence in 1776. They kept their flickering cause alive with secret French aid until 1778, when France formed an alliance with them following the decisive American victory over General John Burgoyne at Saratoga in 1777. Spain and Holland ultimately entered the general conflict against the British. With much of the rest of Europe unfriendly, Britain found that the war had become too big to handle. Following a crushing defeat by a joint Franco-American force at Yorktown in 1781, the British decided to cut their losses and come to terms with their rebellious subjects. The final treaty was signed in 1783. Meanwhile, the emerging republic struggled to define the guiding principles of its foreign policy.

A. General Washington in Command

I. Washington Scorns Independence (1775)

Jonathan Boucher, a prominent Virginia clergyman who had married a wealthy woman, was so outspoken a Loyalist and an Anglican that he was ultimately burned in effigy by Patriots. He had tutored George Washington’s stepson and was on terms of dinner-table friendship with the future general. At the time of which he writes, the

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colonists were fighting near Boston for a redress of grievances, not for independence, and the newly appointed George Washington was about to join them as their commander. What does Boucher’s account of the following incident reveal about Washington’s character and the aims of the Patriots?

I happened to be going across the Potomac to Alexandria [Virginia] with my wife and some of our friends, exactly at the time that General Washington was crossing it on his way to the northward, whither he was going to take command of the Continental Army. There had been a great meeting of people, and great doings in Alexandria on the occasion; and everybody seemed to be on fire, either with rum, or patriotism, or both.

Some patriots in our boat huzzaed, and gave three cheers to the General as he passed us; whilst Mr. Addison and myself contented ourselves with pulling off our hats. The General (then only Colonel) Washington beckoned us to stop, as we did, just, as he said, to shake us by the hand. His behavior to me was now, as it had always been, polite and respectful, and I shall forever remember what passed in the few disturbed moments of conversation we then had.

From his going on the errand he was, I foresaw and apprised him of much that has since happened; in particular that there would certainly then be a civil war, and that the Americans would soon declare for independency. With more earnestness than was usual with his great reserve, he scouted my apprehensions, adding (and I believe with perfect sincerity) that if ever I heard of his joining in any such measures, I had his leave to set him down for everything wicked.

2. Washington’s Deep Discouragements (1775–1776)

General Washington’s homespun army of plowmen and artisans, gathered around Boston, was an ill-disciplined force. It may not have frightened the British, but it certainly worried its commander. Washington’s complaints, recorded in letters and repeated endlessly, are most revealing. Who and what were responsible for his chief difficulties?

[September 21, 1775, to the President of Congress] It gives me great pain to be obliged to solicit the attention of the honorable Congress to the state of this army. . . . But my situation is inexpressibly distressing, to see the winter fast approaching upon a naked army, the time of their service within a few weeks of expiring, and no provision yet made for such important events. Added to this, the military chest is totally exhausted; the paymaster has not a single dollar in hand; the commissary-general assures me he has strained his credit to the utmost for the subsistence of the army. The quartermaster-general is precisely in the same situation; and the greater part of the army are in a state not far from mutiny, upon the deduction from their stated allowance. I know not to whom I am to impute this failure; but

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I am of opinion, if the evil is not immediately remedied, and more punctually observed in future, the army must absolutely break up.

[November 28, 1775, to Joseph Reed] What an astonishing thing it is that those who are employed to sign the Continental bills should not be able, or inclined, to do it as fast as they are wanted. They will prove the destruction of the army, if they are not more attentive and diligent. Such a dearth of public spirit and want of virtue, such stock-jobbing and fertility in all the low arts to obtain advantages of one kind or another, in this great change of military arrangement, I never saw before, and pray God I may never be witness to again. What will be the ultimate end of these manoeuvres is beyond my scan. I tremble at the prospect.

We have been till this time enlisting about three thousand five hundred men. To engage these I have been obliged to allow furloughs as far as fifty men a regiment, and the officers, I am persuaded, indulge as many more. The Connecticut troops will not be prevailed upon to stay longer than their term (saving those who have enlisted for the next campaign, and mostly on furlough), and such a dirty, mercenary spirit pervades the whole that I should not be at all surprised at any disaster that may happen.

In short, after the last of this month our lines will be so weakened that the minute men and militia must be called in for their defense. These, being under no kind of government themselves, will destroy the little subordination I have been laboring to establish, and run me into one evil whilst I am endeavoring to avoid another. But the lesser must be chosen. Could I have foreseen what I have, and am likely to experience, no consideration upon earth should have induced me to accept this command. . . .

[January 14, 1776, to Joseph Reed] . . . I have often thought how much happier I should have been if, instead of accepting of a command under such circumstances, I had taken my musket on my shoulder and entered the ranks; or, if I could have justified the measure to posterity and my own conscience, had retired to the back country, and lived in a wigwam. If I shall be able to rise superior to these and many other difficulties which might be enumerated, I shall most religiously believe that the finger of Providence is in it, to blind the eyes of our enemies. For surely, if we get well through this month, it must be for want of their knowing the disadvantages we labor under.

3. The Unreliable Militia (1776)

Washington's makeshift army, after finally forcing the British out of Boston in March 1776, was badly defeated later in the year while defending New York City. On one occasion Washington tried to beat the fleeing militia into line with the flat of his sword. From the discouraging letter that he wrote several weeks later to the president of Congress, determine why he regarded the militiamen as poor fighters, poor soldiers, and prone to desertion.

To place any dependence upon militia is assuredly resting upon a broken staff. Men just dragged from the tender scenes of domestic life, unaccustomed to the din

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*J. C. Fitzpatrick, ed., The Writings of George Washington (1931), vol. 6, pp. 110-112 (September 24, 1776).
of arms, totally unacquainted with every kind of military skill, which (being followed by want of confidence in themselves when opposed to troops regularly trained, disciplined, and appointed, superior in knowledge and superior in arms) makes them timid and ready to fly from their own shadows.

Besides, the sudden change in their manner of living (particularly in the lodging) brings on sickness in many, impatience in all, and such an unconquerable desire of returning to their respective homes that it not only produces shameful and scandalous desertions among themselves, but infuses the like spirit in others.

Again, men accustomed to unbounded freedom and no control cannot brook the restraint which is indispensably necessary to the good order and government of an army, without which licentiousness and every kind of disorder triumphantly reign.

The jealousies [suspicions] of a standing army, and the evils to be apprehended from one, are remote, and, in my judgment, situated and circumstanced as we are, not at all to be dreaded. But the consequence of wanting [lacking] one, according to my ideas formed from the present view of things, is certain and inevitable ruin. For, if I was called upon to declare upon oath whether the militia have been most serviceable or hurtful upon the whole, I should subscribe to the latter.

B. The Formal Break with Britain

1. Thomas Paine Talks Common Sense (1776)

Despite the shooting at Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill; despite the British burning of Falmouth (Maine) and Norfolk (Virginia); despite the king’s hiring of German (Hessian) mercenaries, the American colonists professed to be fighting merely for reconciliation. But killing redcoats with one hand and waving the olive branch with the other seemed ridiculous to Thomas Paine, a thirty-nine-year-old agitator from England who had arrived in Philadelphia about a year earlier. Of humble birth, impoverished, largely self-educated, and early apprenticed to a corset maker, he was a born rebel who had failed at various undertakings. But he rocketed to fame with a forty-seven-page pamphlet published in January 1776 under the title Common Sense. Selling the incredible total of 120,000 copies in three months, it sharply accelerated the drift toward independence. Paine urged an immediate break, not only to secure foreign assistance but also to fulfill America’s moral mandate from the world. Were his views on mercantilism, isolationism, and reconciliation reasonable? Did his arguments appeal more to passion or to logic?

In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense: . . .

I have heard it asserted by some that, as America has flourished under her former connection with Great Britain, the same connection is necessary towards her fu-

ture happiness, and will always have the same effect. Nothing can be more fallacious than this kind of argument. We may as well assert that, because a child has thrived upon milk, it is never to have meat, or that the first twenty years of our lives is to become a precedent for the next twenty. But even this is admitting more than is true. For I answer roundly that America would have flourished as much, and probably much more, had no European power taken any notice of her. The commerce by which she hath enriched herself are the necessaries of life, and will always have a market while eating is the custom of Europe.

But she [England] has protected us, say some. That she hath engrossed [monopolized] us is true, and defended the continent at our expense, as well as her own, is admitted; and she would have defended Turkey from the same motive, viz. for the sake of trade and dominion. . . .

But Britain is the parent country, say some. Then the more shame upon her conduct. Even brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families; wherefore the assertion, if true, turns to her reproach. But it happens not to be true, or only partly so. . . . Europe, and not England, is the parent country of America. This new world hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from every part of Europe. Hither have they fled, not from the tender embraces of the mother, but from the cruelty of the monster; and it is so far true of England that the same tyranny which drove the first emigrants from home pursues their descendants still. . . .

. . . Any submission to, or dependence on, Great Britain tends directly to involve this continent in European wars and quarrels, and set us at variance with nations who would otherwise seek our friendship, and against whom we have neither anger nor complaint. As Europe is our market for trade, we ought to form no partial [preferential] connection with any part of it. It is the true interest of America to steer clear of European contentions, which she never can do while, by her dependence on Britain, she is made the makeweight in the scale of British politics. . . .

Everything that is right or reasonable pleads for separation. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature, cries, 'tis time to part. Even the distance at which the Almighty hath placed England and America is a strong and natural proof that the authority of the one over the other was never the design of Heaven. . . .

But if you say, you can still pass the violations over, then I ask, Hath your house been burnt? Hath your property been destroyed before your face? Are your wife and children destitute of a bed to lie on, or bread to live on? Have you lost a parent or a child by their hands, and yourself the ruined and wretched survivor? If you have not, then are you not a judge of those who have. But if you have, and can still shake hands with the murderers, then are you unworthy the name of husband, father, friend, or lover; and whatever may be your rank or title in life, you have the heart of a coward, and the spirit of a sycophant. . . .

Every quiet method for peace hath been ineffectual. Our prayers have been rejected with disdain. . . . Wherefore, since nothing but blows will do, for God's sake let us come to a final separation. . . .

Small islands, not capable of protecting themselves, are the proper objects for government to take under their care. But there is something absurd in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island. In no instance hath nature made the satellite larger than its primary planet; and as England and America, with respect
to each other, reverse the common order of nature, it is evident that they belong to
different systems. England to Europe: America to itself. . . .

No man was a warmer wisher for a reconciliation than myself before the fatal
nineteenth of April, 1775 [Lexington]. But the moment the event of that day was
made known, I rejected the hardened, sullen-tempered Pharaoh of England [George
III] for ever; and disdain the wretch that, with the pretended title of Father of his
People, can unfeelingly hear of their slaughter, and composedly sleep with their
blood upon his soul. . . .

And in order to show that reconciliation now is a dangerous doctrine, I affirm
that it would be policy in the King at this time to repeal the acts, for the sake of re­
instating himself in the government of the provinces; in order that he may accom­
plish by craft and subtlety in the long run what he cannot do by force and violence
in the short one. Reconciliation and ruin are nearly related. . . .

You that tell us of harmony and reconciliation, can you restore to us the time
that is past? Can you give to prostitution its former innocence? Neither can you re­
concile Britain and America. . . . There are injuries which nature cannot forgive; she
would cease to be nature if she did. As well can the lover forgive the ravisher of his
mistrress as the continent forgive the murders of Britain. The Almighty hath im­
planted in us these unextinguishable feelings for good and wise purposes. . . . They
distinguish us from the herd of common animals. . . .

O! you that love mankind! You that dare oppose not only the tyranny but the
tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression. Freedom
hath been hunted round the globe. Asia and Africa have long expelled her. Europe
regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! receive
the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind.

2. Richard Henry Lee’s Resolution
of Independence (1776)

Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, one of the earliest advocates of a complete break, pro­
posed the following three resolutions in the Continental Congress at Philadelphia on
June 7, 1776. After a spirited debate, the first one was approved on July 2 by the rep­
resentatives of twelve states. This was in fact the original “declaration” of indepen­
dence; and John Adams wrote his wife that the day would thereafter be observed by
future generations as the great anniversary festival, with fireworks and other mani­
festations of joy. But he miscalculated by two days. Why was this resolution for inde­
pendence less memorable than Jefferson’s historic document, which follows?

Resolved, That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and in­
dependent States; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown;
and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and
ought to be, totally dissolved.

That it is expedient forthwith to take the most effectual measures for forming
foreign alliances.

B. The Formal Break with Britain

That a plan of confederation be prepared and transmitted to the respective Colonies for their consideration and approbation.

3. Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence (1776)

Lee's immortal resolution of independence, passed on July 2, formally cut all ties with Britain. But so momentous a step could not be taken without a convincing explanation, partly in the hope of eliciting foreign sympathy and military aid. The Continental Congress had appointed a committee to prepare such an appeal, and the tall, sandy-haired Thomas Jefferson, then only thirty-three years old, was named chief draftsman. The Declaration of Independence, formally adopted on July 4, 1776, contained little new. It embodied the doctrine of natural rights and John Locke's ancient "compact theory" of government, as well as a formidable and partisan list of grievances, as though from a prosecuting attorney. But the language of the Declaration was so incisive and eloquent that this subversive document—designed primarily to subvert British rule—was magnificently successful. What persons or groups of persons are blamed, and which one is blamed the most? Does Jefferson offer any hint that the colonists themselves were partly at fault?

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, 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, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former systems of government.

The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his assent to laws the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his governors to pass laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained, and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of representation in the legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved representative houses repeatedly for opposing, with manly firmness, his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the legislative powers, incapable of annihilation, have returned to the people at large for their exercise; the state remaining in the mean time, exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without and convulsions within.

He has endeavored to prevent the population of these states; for that purpose obstructing the laws for naturalization of foreigners, refusing to pass others to encourage their migration hither, and raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands.

He has obstructed the administration of justice by refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers.

He has made judges dependent on his will alone for the tenure of their offices and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in time of peace, standing armies without the consent of our legislatures.

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He has affected to render the military independent of and superior to the civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation:

For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us;
For protecting them, by a mock trial, from punishment for any murders which they should commit on the inhabitants of these states;
For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world;
For imposing taxes on us without our consent;
For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury;
For transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pretended offenses;
B. The Formal Break with Britain

For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring province [Quebec], establishing therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging its boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these colonies [a reference to the Quebec Act of 1774];

For taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws, and altering fundamentally the forms of our governments;

For suspending our own legislatures and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

[IV]

He has abdicated government here by declaring us out of his protection and waging war against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny already begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow citizens, taken captive on the high seas, to bear arms against their country, to become the executioners of their friends and brethren, or to fall themselves by their hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions.

In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress in the most humble terms; our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

[V]

Nor have we been wanting in attention to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them, by the ties of our common kindred, to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity which denounces [announces] our separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends.

[VI]

We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do in the name and by the authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare, 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 connection between them and the state of
Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved; and that as free and independent states they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

4. The Abortive Slave Trade Indictment (1776)

Farsighted colonists had repeatedly attempted in their local assemblies to restrict or stop the odious African slave trade. But the London government, responding to the anguished cries of British (and New England) slave traders, had killed all such laws with the royal veto—five times in the case of Virginia alone. Jefferson added this grievance to the original indictment, but Congress threw it out, largely because of opposition from those parts of the South heavily dependent on the slave trade. Would this clause have added to the effectiveness of the Declaration of Independence? How, if at all, might its inclusion have changed the subsequent course of human history?

He [George III] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian King of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where men should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative [royal veto] for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce. And that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished dye [might lack no flagrant crime], he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them by murdering the people upon whom he also obstructed them: thus paying off former crimes committed against the liberties of one people with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another.

C. Voices of Dissent

1. Lord Chatham Assails the War (1777)

Partisan clamor in England between the ruling Tories and the out-of-office Whigs aided the Patriot cause in America. Many British Whigs, partly to embarrass the Tory government, proclaimed that the Americans were merely fighting for British liberties. After the bloodshed at Lexington and Concord, some British Whigs wore mourning out of respect for the colonists who had died. William Pitt, the great organ-


izer of victory in the Seven Years' War, had become a peer (Lord Chatham) in 1766. Suffering acutely from gout and other afflictions, he pulled himself together for the following superlative oratorical effort six months before his death at the age of sixty-nine. The shocking news of General Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga had not yet reached Britain. Was Pitt's speech treasonable? Did he favor independence? Was he justified in criticizing Britain's military policies?

My lords, this ruinous and ignominious situation, where we cannot act with success, nor suffer with honor, calls upon us to remonstrate in the strongest and loudest language of truth, to rescue the ear of majesty from the delusions which surround it.

The desperate state of our arms abroad is in part known: no man thinks more highly of them than I do. I love and honor the English troops. I know their virtues and their valor. I know they can achieve anything except impossibilities; and I know that the conquest of English America is an impossibility.

You cannot, I venture to say it, you cannot conquer America. Your armies in the last [Seven Years'] war effected everything that could be effected; and what was it? It cost a numerous army, under the command of a most able general [Amherst], now a noble lord in this house, a long and laborious campaign, to expel five thousand Frenchmen from French America. My lords, you cannot conquer America. What is your present situation there? We do not know the worst; but we know that in three campaigns we have done nothing and suffered much.

As to conquest, therefore, my lords, I repeat, it is impossible. You may swell every expense and every effort still more extravagantly; pile and accumulate every assistance you can buy or borrow; traffic and barter with every little pitiful German prince that sells and sends his subjects to the shambles of a foreign prince. Your efforts are forever vain and impotent; doubly so from this mercenary aid on which you rely. For it irritates, to an incurable resentment, the minds of your enemies—to overrun them with the mercenary sons of rapine and plunder; devoting them and their possessions to the rapacity of hireling cruelty! If I were an American, as I am an Englishman, while a foreign troop was landed in my country, I never would lay down my arms—never—never—never!

Your own army is infected with the contagion of these illiberal allies. The spirit of plunder and of rapine is gone forth among them. . . . I know from authentic information, and the most experienced officers, that our discipline is deeply wounded. Whilst this is notoriously our sinking situation, America grows and flourishes; whilst our strength and discipline are lowered, hers are rising and improving.

But, my lords, who is the man that, in addition to these disgraces and mischiefs of our army, has dared to authorize and associate to our arms the tomahawk and scalping knife of the savage? To call into civilized alliance the wild and inhuman savage of the woods; to delegate to the merciless Indian the defense of disputed rights; and to wage the horrors of his barbarous war against our brethren? My lords, these enormities cry aloud for redress and punishment. Unless thoroughly done away, it will be a stain on the national character. It is a violation of the constitution. I believe it is against law. It is not the least of our national misfortunes that the strength and character of our army are thus impaired. Infected with the mercenary spirit of robbery and rapine, familiarized to the horrid scenes of savage cruelty,
it can no longer boast of the noble and generous principles which dignify a soldier. . . .

My lords, no man wishes for the due dependence of America on this country more than I do. To preserve it, and not confirm that state of independence into which your measures hitherto have driven them, is the object which we ought to unite in attaining. The Americans, contending for their rights against arbitrary exactions, I love and admire. It is the struggle of free and virtuous patriots. But contending for independency and total disconnection from England, as an Englishman, I cannot wish them success. For, in a due constitutional dependency, including the ancient supremacy of this country in regulating their commerce and navigation, consists the mutual happiness and prosperity both of England and America. She derived assistance and protection from us; and we reaped from her the most important advantages. She was, indeed, the fountain of our wealth, the nerve of our strength, the nursery and basis of our naval power.

It is our duty, therefore, my lords, if we wish to save our country, most seriously to endeavor the recovery of these most beneficial subjects. And in this perilous crisis, perhaps the present moment may be the only one in which we can hope for success. For in their negotiations with France they have, or think they have, reason to complain: though it be notorious that they have received from that power important supplies and assistance of various kinds, yet it is certain they expected it in a more decisive and immediate degree. America is in ill humor with France on some points that have not entirely answered her expectations. Let us wisely take advantage of every possible moment of reconciliation. . . .

You cannot conciliate America by your present measures. You cannot subdue her by your present, or by any, measures. What, then, can you do? You cannot conquer; you cannot gain; but you can address. . . . In a just and necessary war, to maintain the rights or honor of my country, I would strip the shirt from my back to support it. But in such a war as this, unjust in its principle, impracticable in its means, and ruinous in its consequences, would not contribute a single effort, nor a single shilling.

2. Tories Fear French Catholics (1779)

The French, thirsting for revenge after the Seven Years' War, were eager to break up Britain's empire. After the hope-inspiring American victory at Saratoga, they concluded a treaty of alliance with the rebels in 1778. But France had been the traditional enemy of the colonists in four bitter wars, and was a Catholic monarchy besides. American Loyalists attempted to weaken the alliance by arousing anti-Catholic fears, notably in this fictitious diary prophesying horrible events ten years distant. It appeared in Rivington’s New York Royal Gazette (sometimes referred to as ‘Rivington’s Lying Gazette’). Rivington (see p. 142) had fled New York in 1776 but had returned in 1777 to publish his new Loyalist journal under the protection of British bayonets. In the following satire, what are the most fundamental of the liberties allegedly lost, and what items would be most alarming to Protestant Patriots?

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Boston, November 10, 1789.—His Excellency Count Tyran has this day published, by authority from His [French] Majesty, a proclamation for the suppression of heresy and establishment of the Inquisition in this town, which has already begun its functions in many other places of the continent under His Majesty's dominion.

The use of the Bible in the vulgar tongue [English vernacular] is strictly prohibited, on pain of being punished by discretion of the Inquisition.

November 11.—The Catholic religion is not only outwardly professed, but has made the utmost progress among all ranks of people here, owing in a great measure to the unwearied labors of the Dominican and Franciscan friars, who omit no opportunity of scattering the seeds of religion, and converting the wives and daughters of heretics. We hear that the building formerly called the Old South Meeting is fitted up for a cathedral, and that several other old meeting-houses are soon to be repaired for convents.

Philadelphia, November 16.—On Tuesday last arrived here the St. Esprit, from Bordeaux, with a most valuable cargo of rosaries, mass books, and indulgences, which have been long expected.

... Father Le Cruel, president of the Inquisition in this city, out of a tender regard for the salvation of mankind, has thought proper that an example should be made of an old fellow of the age of ninety, convicted of Quakerism, and of reading the Bible, a copy of which, in the English language, was found in his possession. He was hardened and obstinate beyond measure, and could not be prevailed on to retract his errors.

November 21.—Obadiah Standfast, the Quaker, was this day burnt, pursuant to his sentence.

November 23.—His Majesty has directed his viceroy to send five hundred sons of the principal inhabitants of America to be educated in France, where the utmost care will be taken to imbue them with a just regard for the Catholic faith and a due sense of subordination to government.

Such is the glorious specimen of happiness to be enjoyed by America, in case the interposition of France shall enable her to shake off her dependence on Great Britain.

D. A Civil War Within a Civil War

I. Pistols on the Pulpit (1775)

Jonathan Boucher, the slaveowning Anglican clergyman who knew Washington (see pp. 147–148), was so disdainfully Loyalist that he provoked violence. Once he felled with one punch a blacksmith armed with a stick and gun. Boucher was finally forced to abandon his valuable plantation property in Maryland and sail for Britain in September 1775, nine months before independence was declared. How does his account display Christian values?

... In the usual and regular course of preaching, I happened one Sunday to recommend peaceableness; on which a Mr. Lee and sundry others, supposing my sermon to be what they called a stroke at the times, rose up and left the church. This was a signal to the people to consider every sermon of mine as hostile to the views and interests of America; and accordingly I never after went into a pulpit without something very disagreeable happening. I received sundry messages and letters threatening me with the most fatal consequences if I did not (not desist from preaching at all, but) preach what should be agreeable to the friends of America.

All the answer I gave to these threats was in my sermons, in which I uniformly and resolutely declared that I never could suffer any merely human authority to intimidate me from performing what in my conscience I believed and knew to be my duty to God and his Church. And for more than six months I preached, when I did preach, with a pair of loaded pistols lying on the cushion; having given notice that if any man, or body of men, could possibly be so lost to all sense of decency and propriety as to attempt really to do what had been long threatened, that is, to drag me out of my own pulpit, I should think myself justified before God and man in repelling violence by violence.

2. Vengeance on the Tories (1779)

The Loyalists, remaining true to their king, fought back against their Patriot neighbors with all the weapons at their command, including well-armed Indian allies. This was a civil war, and civil wars are inevitably bitter. Even the judicious Washington called the Loyalists “pests of society,” many of whom, he thought, ought to commit suicide or be hanged. All told, about eighty thousand of these unfortunates were expelled; some of them later received partial compensation for their losses from the London government. The following outcry by “A Whig” summarizes the chief Patriot grievances, many of which were soundly based. What were the chief economic complaints? What practices would most hinder reconciliation between the Patriots and Loyalists after the war?

Among the many errors America has been guilty of during her contest with Great Britain, few have been greater, or attended with more fatal consequences to these States, than her lenity to the Tories. ... We are all crying out against the depreciation of our money, and entering into measures to restore it to its value; while the Tories, who are one principal cause of the depreciation, are taken no notice of, but suffered to live quietly among us.

We can no longer be silent on this subject, and see the independence of the country, after standing every shock from without, endangered by internal enemies. Rouse, America! your danger is great—great from a quarter where you least expect it. The Tories, the Tories will yet be the ruin of you! ’Tis high time they were separated from among you. They are now busy engaged in undermining your liberties. They have a thousand ways of doing it, and they make use of them all.

Who were the occasion of this war? The Tories! Who persuaded the tyrant of Britain to prosecute it in a manner before unknown to civilized nations, and shocking even to barbarians? The Tories! Who prevailed on the savages of the wilderness to join the standard of the enemy? The Tories! Who have assisted the Indians in taking the scalp from the aged matron, the blooming fair one, the helpless infant, and the dying hero? The Tories! Who advised and who assisted in burning your towns, ravaging your country, and violating the chastity of your women? The Tories! Who are the occasion that thousands of you now mourn the loss of your dearest connections? The Tories! Who have always counteracted the endeavors of Congress to secure the liberties of this country? The Tories!

Who refused their money when as good as specie, though stamped with the image of his most sacred Majesty? The Tories! Who continue to refuse it? The Tories! Who do all in their power to depreciate it? The Tories! Who propagate lies among us to discourage the Whigs? The Tories! Who corrupt the minds of the good people of these States by every species of insidious counsel? The Tories! Who hold a traitorous correspondence with the enemy? The Tories! Who daily send them intelligence? The Tories! Who take the oaths of allegiance to the States one day, and break them the next? The Tories! Who prevent your battalions from being filled? The Tories! Who dissuade men from entering the army? The Tories! Who persuade those who have enlisted to desert? The Tories! Who harbor those who do desert? The Tories! In short, who wish to see us conquered, to see us slaves, to see us hewers of wood and drawers of water? The Tories!...

Awake, Americans, to a sense of your danger. No time to be lost. Instantly banish every Tory from among you. Let America be sacred alone to freemen.

Drive far from you every baneful wretch who wishes to see you fettered with the chains of tyranny. Send them where they may enjoy their beloved slavery to perfection—send them to the island of Britain; there let them drink the cup of slavery and eat the bread of bitterness all the days of their existence—there let them drag out a painful life, despised and accursed by those very men whose cause they have had the wickedness to espouse. Never let them return to this happy land—never let them taste the sweets of that independence which they strove to prevent. Banishment, perpetual banishment, should be their lot.

3. The Hanging of a Loyalist (c. 1778)

The untroubled existence of the French émigré Crèvecoeur (see pages 88 and 102) ended with the Revolution. His aristocratic breeding caused him to recoil from the excesses of the Patriots, who forced him off his New York farm to the British sanctuary of New York City. Impoverished, he finally fled to France in 1780. Returning after the war, he learned that his home was in ashes, his wife was dead, and his two children had disappeared during an Indian raid. He ultimately found his offspring, and served for a number of years as French consul in New York City. In the following sketch he describes an incident that presumably occurred following a Tory-Indian raid on the Pennsylvania frontier. A Loyalist by the name of Joseph Wilson, accused of having sheltered three of the Tory attackers, is being hung by his toes and

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thumbs to extort a confession. What light does this episode cast on the nature of frontier warfare and on the difficulties of remaining mildly Loyalist or even neutral? Could this man Wilson be regarded as a genuine Loyalist?

Whilst in this painful suspension he [Wilson] attested his innocence with all the energy he was master of. By this time his wife, who had been informed of the tragical scene, came from her house, with tears gushing in streams, and with a countenance of terror. In the most supplicating posture she implored their mercy, but they rejected her request. They accused her of having participated also in her husband's abominable crime. She repeated her entreaties, and at last prevailed on them to relieve her husband. They took him down after a suspension of six minutes, which will appear a long interval to whoever considers it anatomically.

The bitter cries of the poor woman, the solemn asseverations of her husband, seemed for a few moments to lull the violence of their rage, as in a violent gale of wind nature admits of some kind intermission which enables the seaman to bring his vessel to. But all of a sudden one of the company arose, more vindictive than the rest. He painted to them their conflagrated houses and barns, the murder of their relations and friends. The sudden recollection of these dreadful images wrought them up to a pitch of fury fiercer than before. Conscious as they were that he was the person who had harbored the destroyers of their country, they resolved finally to hang him by the neck.

Hard was this poor man's fate. He had been already suspended in a most excruciating situation for not having confessed what was required of him. Had he confessed the crime laid to his charge, he must have been hung according to the principle of self-preservation which filled the breasts of these people. What was he then to do? Behold here innocence pregnant with as much danger as guilt itself, a situation which is very common and is characteristic of these times. You may be punished tomorrow for thoughts and sentiments for which you were highly commended the preceding day and alternately.

On hearing of his doom, he flung himself at the feet of the first man. He solemnly appealed to God, the searcher of hearts, for the truth of his assertions. He frankly owned that he was attached to the King's cause from ancient respect and by the force of custom; that he had no idea of any other government, but that at the same time he had never forcibly opposed the measures of the country; that his opinions had never gone beyond his house; that in peace and silence he had submitted to the will of heaven without ever intending to take part with either side; that he detested from the bottom of his heart this mode of war which desolated and ruined so many harmless and passive inhabitants who had committed no other crime than that of living on the frontiers. He earnestly begged and entreated them that they would give him an opportunity of proving his innocence: "Will none of you hear me with patience? I am no stranger, no unknown person; you well know that I am a home-staying man, laborious and peaceable. Would you destroy me on a hearsay? For the sake of that God which knows and sees and judges all men, permit me to have a judicial hearing."

The passive character of this man, though otherwise perfectly inoffensive, had long before been the cause of his having been suspected. Their hearts were hardened and their minds prepossessed; they refused his request and justified the sen-
tence of death they had passed. They, however, promised him his life if he would confess who were those traitors that came to his house, and who guided them through the woods to _______. With a louder voice than usual, the poor culprit denied his having the least knowledge whatever of these persons, but, seeing that it was all in vain, he peaceably submitted to his fate, and gave himself up to those who were preparing the fatal cord. It was soon tied round the limb of a tree to which they hanged him.

[Some of the executioners, Crèvecœur relates, experienced a change of heart and cut Wilson down in time to revive him with water. He was subsequently given an impartial trial and acquitted.]

E. Revolutionary Diplomacy

1. John Adams Contemplates a Model Treaty (1776)

Even before the Continental Congress had declared independence, it recognized that friendship with France would be vital to any hope for American success in the conflict with Britain. Yet a close relationship with such a powerful imperial state came with its own dangers. It fell principally to John Adams to figure out how the colonies could maintain a beneficial connection to great nations without drowning in the treacherous swamp of European power politics. Adams jotted down his thoughts on the issue in the spare notes reprinted here and would shortly develop them more fully in what came to be known as “The Model Treaty.” How might such a treaty as Adams proposed be seen as a reflection both of a new diplomatic idealism and of the diplomatic realities faced by the fledgling American government?

Is any assistance attainable from France?
What connection may we safely form with her?
1. No political connection. Submit to none of her authority; receive no governors or officers from her.
2. No military connection. Receive no troops from her.
3. Only a commercial connection; that is, make a treaty to receive her ships into our ports; let her engage to receive our ships into her ports; furnish us with arms, cannon, saltpetre, powder, duck, steel.

2. Silas Deane Works to Convince France (1776)

While John Adams theorized about treaties, Congress dispatched Silas Deane to Paris to begin the practical process of winning French support. Eventually the work of Deane and fellow diplomats led to a wartime alliance that proved instrumental to the colonists’ victory. In this selection, Deane tries to convince his French hosts of the

advantages to be gained from a relationship with the American states. Why, according to Deane, should France care about the success of the Revolution? What role does “commerce” play in Deane’s argument?

With whatever European States the Trade of the United Colonies may be carried on, it must of Necessity prove highly beneficial & advantageous to them, as this Commerce will consist principally of an exchange of the most Valuable raw or unmanufactured Commodities, for those which are already manufactured. The Colonies, therefore, in offering their Commerce to France, do really offer her that from which the Wealth of Great Brittain has been principally derived, and which will afford every benefit that could result even from the Sovereignty of those Colonies, without any of the Burthens necessarily attending Sovereignty. No power in Europe can have ought to apprehend from the independancy of the Colonies. In Conjunction with Great Brittain they would enable her to conquer the possessions of other States in America, but separated from her, both interest and Inclination will lead them to observe a just and peaceable conduct toward the rest of the World for many, very many ages to come; happy in having been able to secure and enjoy their own Rights, they will not think of invading those of other People, and from their Local situation, the Circumstances by which they are surrounded, their habits, Interests, & Dispositions, & above all from the immense extent of uncultivated Territory which they possess, their attention must for a Multitude of Years necessarily be fixed upon Agriculture, the most natural, beneficial and inoffensive of all human Employments. By this they will constantly produce abundant Quantities of those productions & Materials which are suited for European Consumption and European Manufactures. And to obtain suitable markets for these articles, as well as suitable supplies of European Manufactures & Commodities for their own Wants, it must ever be their Interest to pursue an inviolable Peace with the States of Europe, more especially with France; they can therefore never resolve, even were they to become sufficiently powerful, to embroil themselves with those European States who have possessions in America, by attempting the Conquest of such possessions.

3. Ségur Recalls the Arrival of Franklin and the Departure of Lafayette (1824)

Louis-Philippe Ségur was a young and rising officer within the French military when he heard of the American colonies’ decision to declare independence. Though a member of the French aristocracy, he deeply sympathized with the colonists’ historic struggle to throw off their monarchical burden. In the following passage from his memoirs, Ségur recalls the effect the arrival of American diplomats had on him and other young nobles. Among Ségur’s close friends was the famed Marquis de Lafayette, who would let nothing stand in the way of his participation in the colonists’ cause. How might we account for the astonishing resolve of men like Lafayette to risk everything to help the Americans? Why did the physical appearance and diplomatic practices of the American representatives seem so important to Ségur and his colleagues?

... Soon we witnessed the arrival in Paris of the American deputys, Silas Deane and Arthur Lee. Shortly after, they were joined by the celebrated American, Benjamin Franklin. Words fail to describe with what eagerness and favour these envoys of a people in rebellion against its monarch were received in France in the bosom of an ancient monarchy.

Nothing was more surprising than the contrast between the luxury of our capital, the elegance of our fashions, the magnificence of Versailles, all the living traces of the monarchical pride of Louis XIV, the polished but proud haughtiness of our grand persons ... and the Americans' almost rustic dress, simple but proud bearing, free and candid language, unadorned, powderless hair and their general antique appearance, which seemed to transport of a sudden within our walls, in the midst of the flabby, servile civilisation of the eighteenth century, some of the wise contemporaries of Plato or the republicans of Cato and Fabius.

Young French officers eager for war flocked to visit the American commissioners, questioning them on the state of their affairs, the forces at the disposal of Congress, their means of defence, and on the various scraps of news which were incessantly arriving from America, where they saw liberty fighting so bravely against British tyranny.

Our admiration was increased by the good faith and simplicity with which these envoys told us of the frequent defeats sustained by their inexperienced forces, for at that time the number of tactics of the English gave them several passing triumphs over the brave American planters, who were novices in warfare. Silas Deane and Arthur Lee did not conceal from us that the help of some trained officers would be as agreeable to them as it would be useful.... [T]hree first Frenchmen of rank to offer the help of their swords to the Americans were the Marquis de La Fayette, Vicomte de Noailles and myself....

We all three swore secrecy concerning our arrangements with the American commissioners in order that we might have time to fathom the dispositions of our Court and to get together the necessary means for the execution of our projects. Unfortunately there was no conformity between our hopes, desires and opinions and our fortunes. Vicomte de Noailles and I depended on our parents, and had no more than the allowance they gave us. La Fayette, on the other hand, though younger and less advanced in rank than ourselves, was at the age of nineteen master of his property and person and the owner of an income of one hundred thousand pounds.

Our eagerness was too great to be discreet for long. We confided our plan to some young men we hoped to get to join our enterprise. The Court got to hear of it and the ministry ordered us to abandon it, fearing that the departure of volunteers of rank for America, which would be considered impossible without its authorisation, might open the eyes of the English to the designs it still wished to conceal from them.

Our parents, who had known nothing till then, grew alarmed and reproached us for our adventurous levity. I was struck by the surprise shown by the family of La Fayette. It pleased me all the more because it showed how badly his grandparents had known and judged his character till then....

The prohibition to set out on this great adventure naturally affected us in different ways. Vicomte de Noailles and myself were bewildered, as it deprived us of all
freedom and means of action. It irritated La Fayette, who decided to go his own way, being assured of all the necessary means for the success of his design.

Nevertheless he made a pretence of obeying at first. Two months later he rushed all of a sudden into my room, closed the door tightly, and sat down near my bed.

"I'm off to America," he said. "Nobody knows about it. But I love you too much to go away without telling you my secret."

"What have you done to make sure of your sailing?" I asked.

He told me that he had made a journey abroad on some plausible pretext and had bought a vessel, which was to wait for him in a Spanish port. He had fitted it out, got a good crew and filled it not only with arms and ammunition but also with a good number of officers who had agreed to share his lot. . . .

. . . His departure caused much affliction to his family, who could hardly bear to see him run so many dangers and, furthermore, sacrifice a great part of his fortune for the sake of a country so far away. . . .

Informed immediately of his disobedience, the Court gave orders for his arrest, which were carried out. So after all these sacrifices my unfortunate friend was deprived of his liberty at the very moment he was setting out to defend that of another hemisphere.

Happily he managed to deceive his warders and escaped a few days later. He crossed the Pyrenees and found his vessel on the Spanish coast together with his comrades in arms, who had almost given up hope of seeing him again. He set sail, arrived without mishap in America and was received in a manner befitting his noble and generous audacity.

**Thought Provokers**

1. Why were many Patriot soldiers who had volunteered to defend their liberties so untrustworthy and even cowardly?
2. Paine’s *Common Sense* and the Declaration of Independence have both been referred to as the most potent propaganda documents in American history. Comment. Prepare a British rejoinder to the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration was designed primarily to achieve American independence, but it was much more than that. Assess its worldwide, long-range significance.
3. It has been said that the Whigs in England and the Tories (Loyalists) in America were both traitors to a cause. Explain. Seneca wrote, “Loyalty is the holiest good in the human breast.” If this is true, why were the American Loyalists regarded as despicable creatures?
4. The War of Independence has been called a civil war within a civil war. Comment. Were the Patriots justified in abusing the Loyalists and expelling them? Argue both sides, and then come to a conclusion.
5. In what ways did America’s earliest diplomatic efforts foreshadow the later course of American foreign policy?