

# The American Revolution and American Peoples: A Comparative Inquiry

## Some Thought Provoking Questions (aka pre-test) 1/5/02

### Response

#### 1. Name as many different groups of people as you can who made up the population of the thirteen colonies.

- Pilgrims, Quakers, and various other religious groups. People who were “serving sentences” for various crimes in their home country. People who were looking for adventure or a chance to start over. Dutch, French, English, Irish, Scots, etc. Men women and children. Just about “everyone” except Lords, nobles, royalty, or people with money.
- French, Dutch, German, Scots, English, Irish, Norwegians, Native Americans, Blacks, Spanish.
- English, French, Dutch, Scots, Irish, Blacks, Native Americans.
- Indian: Iroquois, Pocumtuk, Creek, Cherokee, Shawnee, Metis; African: Congo, Angola, Senegambia, Madajasian, East Coast, West Coast, free, indentured servants, slaves, mulatto; White: English, French, Cajun, German, Dutch, Quaker, Puritan, Catholic, Jewish.
- Native American & variations of tribes-Iroquois, Mohawks, Cherokee. African American, indentures servants, religious groups- Puritans, Quakers, Catholics, Jewish, Anglo. Ethnic groups- Eng., Scots, Irish, German, French, Huguenots. Occupations- merchants, lawyers, farmers, trappers, land speculators.
- Europeans male/female; Native Americans, African slaves, free blacks.
- English, Dutch, Scots, Irish, blacks, Indians, French.
- Indian Tribes, Blacks (free & slave), Indentured people, European Immigrants, landed (landowners), merchants, tradesmen, trappers, Seamen, Caribbean.
- Puritans, Pilgrims, frontiersmen & women, Quakers, Catholics, merchants, Africans, Loyalists, Patriots, Germans, Dutch, Irish?, southern Planters.
- British, French, Spanish, Irish, Huguenots, Germans, Dutch, Portuguese, African, Native Americans (Indians), Caribbean groups, Jews, Scots.
- English, Natives, Dutch, Slaves (blacks), Irish.

#### 2. What is sovereignty and how is this concept relevant to the study of the American Revolution?

- As I understand it- Sovereignty is one \*\*\*\*\* rule/law which may have been what the colonists were fighting against. This didn't allow for differences-individual choices and participation. The colonists wanted to have a “vote”, voice in their government.
- The colonies determined that they were an entity separate from England & determined as such that they should be making decisions about themselves for themselves.
- Sovereignty refers to power and control over a group of people (country or nation). The question of England's sovereignty over the 13 colonies is a central issue during the American Revolution.
- Sovereignty: control over your territory, ability and capacity to make decisions re: justice, executive decisions within these boundaries without competing forces claiming that \*\*\*. British claimed sovereignty but in fact colonists and Indians were the challenge that, and later even though US claimed land they didn't have actual working authority over much of this territory. Native Americans expectations of sovereignty for their lands were denied frequently by whites both Am. and British.
- Sovereignty is an ambiguous term, which refers to the power and right to govern an area. A) Sovereignty meant power of the crown through parliament, B) for the colonies sovereignty was based on the concept of the people. C) Conflict between a +b= revolt.
- The power to control ones own government, who is going to govern once the colonies are independent- what groups are going to have sovereignty?
- A) Sovereignty = the ability to accomplish goals apart from (separate from) another (former) power. B) Depending on the area, colonists wanted to make decisions/were affected by things, away from the theoretically dominant power.
- Sovereignty is the extension of control by a monarch over a geographical area. It includes subjects, laws and economy. At the time of the Revolution the 13 colonies were under the sovereignty of the British Crown. Lands to the west were under the French Crown and to the soul the Spanish Crown.
- Divine authority given to a select group to control another group. England had sovereignty over the colonies, both had sovereignty over the Native Americans and slaves. Revolution was the change or was fought over sovereignty.
- Free and independent. Sovereignty was a dividing point for the colonists who found themselves transitioning from an empire to an autonomous group.
- Sovereignty is defined as the right to rule. The concept is relevant as the revolution was in part based on the colonists no longer accepting the right to rule of Parliament over the colonies for a variety of reasons. In fact the concept of popular sovereignty (the people rule) is one of the founding principals of both the Declaration and Constitution.

### **3. What did the term and concept, "liberty," mean to different groups of Americans during the era of the Revolution?**

- To each group present it meant something different. Even from North to South... Mostly each group was fighting to serve their own "need". The concept of freedom for a black slave was different from a "minuteman", but yet these differing concepts worked together to bring about change.
- I suppose that it theoretically allowed for or was supposed to, living life without some larger body telling you what you could or could not do that you had some say in what constraints you did work within. There were significant differences in how this played out, however, and unless you were a white male with \$ the reality was your power was minimal if existing at all.
- 1. Tories-keep "elitist" rights properties and connection to England. 2. Puritans, Quakers, Catholics-Practice religion within their community. 3. Lower and middle classes-Right to improve lifestyle and increase their land-holdings, money, social standing, etc. 4. White, male, landowner qualified as citizens.
- "Liberty" for some meant right to exercise political and economic options \*\*\* by enlightenment ideals (John Locke etc.) Liberty for blacks wasn't even considered by many whites. I didn't think whites gave much if any consideration to the application to that concept to Indians although I think some groups were probably quite conscience of wanting to exercise control over their own lands. Blacks saw opportunity for liberty but was denied generally.
- To white males it meant political and economic freedom. To women it meant freedom from male legal restraints. For Afro-Americans it meant an end to slavery and racial equality. For Indians it meant isolation from Europeans.
- Liberty meant having control over their own destinies that they were not going to be dictated to by some other group of Americans or Europeans.
- Ex: Blacks vs. Whites- slaves & freemen were struck by the lack of liberty in their world. Ex: wealthy v middle class v. poor- the middle class demanded more liberty. Ex: frontier settlers- the right to an empty land-Indian claims to land did not qualify.
- Freedom to change a livelihood, a means of sustenance and freedom to exercise the rights of an ordinary Englishman.
- To white men it meant land ownership and a voice to be heard by the controlling authority. To women it meant a hope of a better life because of liberty granted to men? To slaves a dream and a long shot. To Native Americans life as it once was.
- Liberty was an escape from the Tyranny of Great Britain to many colonists. The African colonists had a "purer" understanding of liberty, but few found that important.
- Liberty or freedom meant different things to different people. The "Liberty" we hear so often in reference to the Declaration and revolution was freedom for the type of men who forged the document and war (white, wealthy, educated, men). Along for the "ride" was other white men who enjoyed the new political freedom of the new nation.

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

- When the colonists set about the task of redefining themselves it became quite apparent that everyone would've to participate at some level. "Citizenship" became important to the success of the colonies working together, making and upholding laws.
- The Americans were an incredibly diverse collection of peoples a necessarily culminated in a kind of assimilation of many different customs. Initially it was a generalization of all of these. Nevertheless as the initial population with the power was men and English men of that this was the predominant model of a citizen. A white male, landowner. This is who voted, this is who called the shots.
- Shifting association for community to colony (Mass Bay, Virginia) to region (New England) to country (USA) in contrast to being English with rights of Englishmen. Shift from being English to creating identity as American citizens: by voting rights landed white men, by citizenship free occupants of 13 states.
- There wasn't any real change in citizenship it remained confined to white male, property owners. Concept of unalienable right. Concept of British colonies as Americans distinct from Britain began to appear but sectionalism was still strong.
- Citizens were going to be all these who participated in civic affairs -government.- that pretty much confined it to white males and to those who had property-limiting it even more.
- Change to American- ideological more than ethnic in terms of nationality. Citizens -those whose rights mattered.
- All citizens, who met certain criteria, were allowed to vote, run for office and support their governments as they saw fit. Nationality was clearly seen as American or at least not English anymore.
- Now people or whit men and women were citizens of the United States not just of their own local. However, Natives and slaves were not citizens but subjects of citizens.
- The Revolution allowed for "all" to be citizens with the exceptions of numerous ethnic groups and slaves.
- With revolution came the Articles of Confederation, a loose "league of friendship" among the states who bonded together for the purpose of war. In the sense of the war, nationality was redefined among the patriots as "us vs. them" (GB). In the larger sense, Americans most likely identified themselves as citizens of other respective states first \*\*\* and then larger nations second.

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

- It means women are men! Actually it means that those colonists who forged this country and wrote those first documents, which we still use today were good men, with a good vision, although a bit idealistic.

- For me today, all of us are equal, under the law this does not necessarily mean we are operating from a level playing field economically which in this country today is fundamental to an understanding of equality.
- The emphasis is on “white”, “landowning” men. Blacks, women, Native Americans, and poor whites were less than equal according to our Founding Fathers.
- The contrast between the lofty ideals expressed and the realities for people who weren’t whit landowning males. How the story is still incomplete and we still in the process (as we will be for a long time) of achieving equality in an American society.
- That all adult, humans are equal before the law and enjoy equal economic opportunity. At the time of the American Rev. the phrase applied only to white male property owners.
- It should mean that all people being treated equally before the law and having the same opportunities to achieve success and happiness.
- Then: all Englishmen created equal- males willing to become Americans also qualify. Now: all people equal.
- We are all endowed with the power to our own destinies.
- Today it means to me that mankind was created equal by its creator.
- All white males are created equal.
- This phrase, written by Jefferson as paraphrased from Locke, means different things today than when written. At the time, it really meant all white, educated, landowning men were created equal. However, this was a start- the beginning of one evolution of freedom in this nation that has come to eventually mean the freedom of all men and women, people of color...

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

- Yes- it was initially an extension of the English Empire.
- The new American republic had expansionistic intentions towards the land to the west. In this sense, America wanted to increase its size and build a country (or empire).
- Yes- it was expansive by its very nature.
- Yes- because it rested on the conquest of Indian land. About  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the land was conquered territory.
- In the sense that it ruled over groups of people like Native Americans. Slaves, those who had no say in the writing and implementation of laws and government.
- Yes. Manifest destiny, wars-Spanish American. But it was quick to call itself a democratic republic. The Indian population was pushed back first premeditating the beginning of a republic and no longer describing actually an empire.
- Not really, it was a weak confederation of individual states.
- Kind of. It took control and spread out and took control over the continent and made Native Americans and slaves subject.
- Yes it was an empire in its early stages, but the republic itself was not.
- The new republic was an empire in the sense that 13 different states (former colonies), with different geographic climate and economic and social lifestyles, came together under the rule of one, centralized all but very weak government. From here the nation is \*\*\* and our future imperialistic tendencies get their starts as America’s power, influence and identity begin to expand.

**NOTE: \*\*\* denotes a word that was illegible.**