

3

PART

CHAPTER 5
The Problem of
Empire, 1763–1776

CHAPTER 6
Making War
and Republican
Governments,
1776–1789

CHAPTER 7
Hammering Out a
Federal Republic,
1787–1820

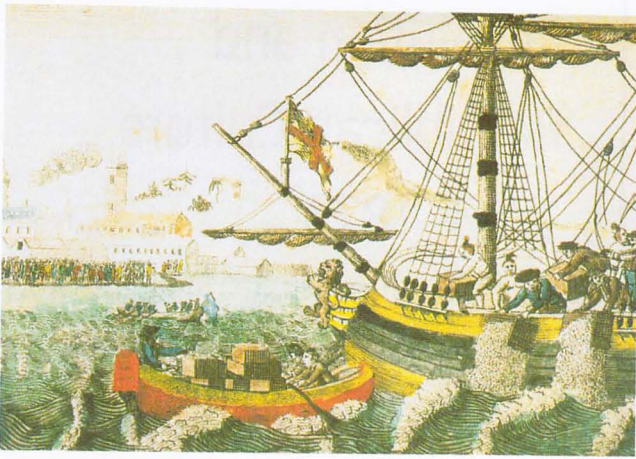
CHAPTER 8
Creating a Republican
Culture, 1790–1820

Revolution and Republican Culture

1763–1820

“The American war is over,” Philadelphia Patriot Benjamin Rush declared in 1787, “but this is far from being the case with the American Revolution. On the contrary, nothing but the first act of the great drama is closed. It remains yet to establish and perfect our new forms of government.” The changes that had already unfolded since 1763 were revolutionary in themselves: Britain had triumphed in the Great War for Empire, only to see its American empire unravel and descend into war. Against all odds, the thirteen rebelling colonies had pulled together and won their independence; now they were forming a federal republic that would take its place among the nations of the world.

The republican revolution extended far beyond politics. It challenged many of the values and institutions that had prevailed for centuries in Europe and the Atlantic World. After 1776, Americans reconsidered basic assumptions that structured their societies, cultures, families, and communities. Here, in summary, are the three principal developments discussed in Part 3:



From British North America to the United States of America

After violently rejecting attempts to reform the British Empire, the Patriots won independence and began constructing republican governments. Their experiments extended across an entire generation, and it took still longer to decide how much power the federal republic should wield over the states. The political culture spawned by the Revolution was similarly unformed and slow to develop. Political parties, for example, were unanticipated by the founders and, at first, widely regarded as illegitimate. However, by 1820, they had become central to the adjudication of political conflict, heightening some forms of competition while blunting others. The United States also fought wars with Native Americans in the trans-Appalachian west to gain new territory, and with Great Britain to ensure its independence. Across three generations, American political culture was transformed, national borders were secured, and republican national and state governments commanded the allegiance of their citizens.



Challenges to the Social Order

As Patriots articulated values they associated with independence, they aligned their movement with currents of reform eddying through the Atlantic World: antislavery; women's rights; religious liberty; social equality. Each of these ideas was controversial, and the American Revolution endorsed none of them in an unqualified way. But its idealism—the sense that the Revolution marked “a memorable epoch in the annals of the human race,” as John Adams put it—made the era malleable and full of possibility.

Legislatures abolished slavery in the North, broadened religious liberty by allowing freedom of conscience, and, except in New England, ended the system of legally established churches. Postwar evangelicalism gave enormous energy to a new wave of innovative religious developments. However, Americans continued to argue over social equality, in part because their republican creed placed family authority in the hands of men and political power in the hands of propertied individuals: this arrangement denied power and status not only to slaves but also to free blacks, women, and middling and poor white men. Though the Revolution's legacy was mixed, its meaning would be debated for decades in American public life.



Conquest, Competition, and Consolidation

One uncontested value of the Revolutionary era was a commitment to economic opportunity. To achieve this, people migrated in large numbers, and the United States dramatically expanded its boundaries: first, by conquest, pushing west to the Mississippi River; then, by purchase, all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Northern merchants created a banking system and organized rural manufacturing. State governments used charters and other privileges to assist businesses and to improve infrastructure. Southern planters used slaves to grow a new staple crop—cotton. Many yeomen farm families moved west to farm; and Eastern laborers worked in burgeoning manufacturing enterprises. By 1820, the young American republic was on the verge of achieving economic as well as political independence.

Even as the borders of the United States expanded, its diversity inhibited the effort to define an American culture and identity. Native Americans still lived in their own clans and nations; black Americans were developing a distinct African American culture; and white Americans were enmeshed in vigorous regional ethnic communities. Over time, political institutions began to unite Americans of diverse backgrounds, as did increasing participation in the market economy and in evangelical Protestant churches. By 1820, to be an American meant, for many members of the dominant white population, to be a republican, a Protestant, and an enterprising individual.

Revolution and Republican Culture 1763–1820

Thematic Understanding

This timeline arranges some of the important events of this period into themes. Consider the items listed under the theme “Culture and Society.” How did the American Revolution challenge existing social arrangements?

Consider the role of religion in American life, the status of women, and the institution of slavery. What tensions developed as a result of those challenges? >

	WORK, EXCHANGE, & TECHNOLOGY	MIGRATION & SETTLEMENT	POLITICS & POWER	CULTURE & SOCIETY	AMERICAN & NATIONAL IDENTITY
1763	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merchants defy Sugar and Stamp Acts • Patriots mount three boycotts of British goods, in 1765, 1767, and 1774 • Boycotts spur Patriot women to make textiles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration into the Ohio Valley after Pontiac's Rebellion • Quebec Act (1774) allows Catholicism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stamp Act Congress (1765) • First Continental Congress (1774) • Second Continental Congress (1775) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patriots call for American unity • The idea of natural rights poses a challenge to the institution of chattel slavery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concept of popular sovereignty gains force in the colonies • Colonists lay claim to rights of Englishmen
1776	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manufacturing expands during the war • Cutoff of trade and severe inflation threaten economy • War debt grows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declining immigration from Europe (1775–1820) enhances American identity • African American slaves seek freedom through military service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Declaration of Independence (1776) • States adopt republican constitutions (1776 on) • Articles of Confederation ratified (1781) • Treaty of Paris (1783) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judith Sargent Murray publishes "On the Equality of the Sexes" (1779) • Emancipation of slaves begins in the North • Virginia enacts religious freedom (1786) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas Paine's <i>Common Sense</i> (1776) causes colonists to rethink political loyalties • States rely on property qualifications to define citizenship rights in their new constitutions
1787	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bank of North America founded (1781) • Land speculation increases in the West 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State cessions, land ordinances, and Indian wars create national domain in the West • The Alien Act makes it harder for immigrants to become citizens and allows for deporting aliens (1798) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. Constitution drafted (1787) • Conflict over Alexander Hamilton's economic policies • First national parties: Federalists and Republicans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politicians and ministers deny vote to women; praise republican motherhood • Bill of Rights ratified (1791) • Sedition Act limits freedom of the press (1798) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indians form Western Confederacy (1790) • Second Great Awakening (1790–1860) • Emerging political divide between South and North
1800	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cotton output and demand for African labor expands • Farm productivity improves • Embargo encourages U.S. manufacturing • Second Bank of the United States chartered (1816–1836) • Supreme Court guards property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suffrage for white men expands; New Jersey retracts suffrage for propertied women (1807) • Atlantic slave trade ends (1808) • American Colonization Society founded (1817) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jefferson reduces activism of national government • Chief Justice Marshall asserts federal judicial powers • Triumph of Republican Party and end of Federalist Party 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free blacks enhance sense of African American identity • Religious benevolence engenders social reform movements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh revive Western Indian Confederacy • War of 1812 tests national unity • State constitutions democratized