AMERICA: THE LAST BEST HOPE



WILLIAM J. BENNETT

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INTRODUCTION

Those of us around in 1976 remember the Bicentennial that marked the two hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. It was a grand, joyous celebration of the country's birthday and founding principles, a year of parades, flags, tricornered hats, fifes, drums, tall ships, and fireworks.

It came at a somewhat uneasy time. The country had been through the Vietnam War, Watergate, race riots, high inflation, and an oil crisis. The Bicentennial helped pull Americans together. It helped us remember our great history, achievements, and finest aspirations. It made us proud and grateful to be Americans.

Nearly a half century has passed. As of this writing, we are four years away from the 250th anniversary of the Boston Tea Party. A little more than five years away from the 250th anniversary of those first shots heard 'round the world at Lexington and Concord. And somewhat more than six years away from the Semiquincentennial of the Declaration of Independence.

What kind of birthday celebration will it be?

Abraham Lincoln once warned that the further we get from the miracle of the American Revolution, the less likely we are to appreciate

it. "This state of feeling [patriotic pride] must fade, is fading, has faded, with the circumstances that produced it," he said. The scenes of the revolution, like everything else, "must fade upon the memory of the world, and grow more and more dim by the lapse of time."[1]

Our freedom will crumble, Lincoln said, unless we make efforts to sustain it, to "furnish all the materials for our future support and defence."[2] Those materials, Lincoln believed, included "general intelligence, sound morality, and in particular, a reverence for the constitution and laws." And, of course, an appreciation of our past.

Since 1976, we've reached a time when, I fear, patriotic pride isn't always as strong as it used to be, or as strong as Lincoln would like. Television reports and political websites are often full of cynicism. Many express doubts about American motives on the world stage. Some Americans seem ready to believe the worst about our leaders and our country, as well as their fellow Americans. The country is divided. The eminent historian Allen Guelzo even believes we are the most divided since one of the most epic events in this book, the Civil War.[3]

We've experienced an awful lot of running down of this country. Our national anthem asks, "O say does that Star-Spangled Banner yet wave o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?" It's a good question. Are we teaching our children to proudly hail that banner? Do we still laud our country as the land of the free and home of the brave?

One can imagine the commentaries from elites in the media and academia as 2026 approaches. The Boston Tea Party patriots who disguised themselves as Mohawk Indians were appropriating a culture they ravaged. That shot heard 'round the world was all about power and empire. The Founders were rich, white men greedy for their own liberty but intent on oppressing or enslaving everyone else.

When Thomas Nelson suggested that I edit the three volumes of my American history—*America: The Last Best Hope* volumes one and two, and *A Century Turns*—into a single, updated volume, I was delighted. It has given me a chance to think about those promises and principles of

1776, fulfilled and unfulfilled. As the United States reaches the quarter-millennium mark, I hope this book will help us stand up for those principles, cherish them, and be grateful for them. I also hope—and this is a hope that I've nurtured for many years—that this one-volume history might find its way into schools as well as homes, into the hands and before the eyes of young people. After all, national test scores tell us that history is our students' worst subject. They fair worse, perform worse, in American history than even math and reading.

I offer this book for many reasons. The first and most important is the need for hope. When President Lincoln wrote to Congress in December 1862, shortly after he issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, he wrote, "We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth."[4] For nearly a century before that message—and easily for a century afterward—Americans would not have doubted that this country was indeed that last, best hope. Democrat, Republican, Federalist, Antifederalist . . . it hardly mattered. An abiding sense of American greatness, of American purpose, of American exceptionalism has long characterized many of our leaders and tens of millions of the rest of us as well.

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I believe America still represents the world's best hope. But I also believe we have to make explicit efforts to nourish that hope and to keep our grasp of it from—in Lincoln's great word—fading. It is my humble wish that those who read this book will find reason to reclaim some hope when the national discourse seems full of division and distrust.

The second reason I wrote this book is to give Americans an opportunity to enjoy the story of their country, to take pleasure and pride in what we have done and become. Many books about America not only fail to counter cynicism and hopelessness but also don't encourage anything positive in their place. They do not engage, entertain, educate, or encourage. History textbooks are often the worst in this regard. National tests repeatedly show that many high school (and college) students know little about their country's past. Dull histories drive young people

away—from serious study, from reading history as adults, and from a reasoned, thoughtful, and heartfelt embrace of their country. Dumbed-down history, civics, and—worst of all—social studies textbooks may be one cause of voter and citizen apathy. An encouraging countertrend is the huge popularity of a few histories and biographies. David McCullough's *1776* and Ron Chernow's *Grant* come to mind. The success of these books is much deserved: they give pleasure, they educate, and they entertain. But few such books have attempted to tell the *whole* American story. I hope this will be one.

The third reason I wrote this book is to give thanks and to remind my fellow citizens of their obligation of gratitude to those who made it possible for us to lead free and happy lives. To Lincoln and the Founders before him, and to many historical figures afterward, much is due. Obscurity and oblivion are not what they deserve.

Americans can be grateful that time and again, our ancestors and our contemporaries have chosen wisely and have by their demeanors defined us as a people. Over and over again we have shown the almost uniquely American capacity for self-renewal. And over and over again in our story, intelligence and leadership have counted in the nick of time. Think of those Americans at Philadelphia in 1787 who devised the most miraculous political document in history just as the young nation seemed to be falling apart.

Or Americans coming together to rebuild this nation after the long and devastating Civil War.

Or Americans standing fast against totalitarianism during the Cold War.

At the same time, it is regrettable but true that any number of American choices were not wise. For example, we failed to eliminate slavery when this nation was founded. For too long we failed to uphold our stated principles in the face of Jim Crow segregation laws.

We can be grateful that leaders like Frederick Douglass and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. rose to prod our consciences and to force us to look into

the mirror of our own souls, however belatedly. We needed them to help us right those wrongs. It is important to note that when such leaders stepped forward, they acknowledged a debt of gratitude: both Frederick Douglass and Dr. King appealed to the ideals of America's Founding Fathers. They reminded Americans that this country, in order to be true to itself, had to attend to the business of establishing justice and respecting the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. To deny some people these universal rights because of the color of their skin, these reformers pointed out, was to deny the essence of what America was to the world. Those who would deny fundamental rights were, as Lincoln said, "blowing out the moral lights around us" and dishonoring our Fathers.[5] We need to remember the Fathers and the lights that showed them the way.

The fourth reason I wrote this book is to tell the truth, get the facts out, correct the record, and put forward a reasoned, balanced presentation of the American story. In this work, I will not try to cover up great wrongs. Injustices need sunlight—always, as Justice Brandeis said, the best disinfectant.[6] I will try to paint America as Oliver Cromwell asked to be painted: warts and all. But I will not follow the fashion of some today who see America as nothing *but* warts: "warts, that's all."

We must remember that America is still a great success story. When we criticize—as criticize we must—we should play the part of what James Madison called a "loving critic." Former Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan put it best: "Am I embarrassed to speak for a less than perfect democracy? Not one bit. Find me a better one. Do I suppose there are societies that are free of sin? No, I don't. Do I think ours is on balance incomparably the most hopeful set of human relations the world has? Yes, I do. Have we done obscene things? Yes, we have. How did our people learn about them? They learned about them on television and in the newspapers."[7]

The fifth reason I wrote this book is to encourage a new patriotism—a new reflective, reasoned form of patriotism. Ronald Reagan was especially

proud of the new patriotism he had helped to spark during his two terms. It was something even his opponent Fritz Mondale was gracious enough to praise him for. But Reagan recognized that this spirit would not last unless it was an *informed* patriotism. Interestingly, the Old Man who dreamed dreams—and lived to see those dreams become reality—looked backward in his Farewell Address to the American people. It was something he rarely did:

> [T]here is a great tradition of warnings in Presidential farewells, and I've got one that's been on my mind for some time. But oddly enough it starts with one of the things I'm proudest of in the past 8 years: the resurgence of national pride that I called the new patriotism. This national feeling is good, but it won't count for much and it won't last unless it's grounded in thoughtfulness and knowledge.
>
> An informed patriotism is what we want. And are we doing a good enough job teaching our children what America is and what she represents in the long history of the world? Those of us who are over thirty-five or so years of age grew up in a different America. We were taught, very directly, what it means to be an American. And we absorbed, almost in the air, a love of country and an appreciation of its institutions. If you didn't get these things from your family you got them from the neighborhood, from the father down the street who fought in Korea or the family who lost someone at Anzio. Or you could get a sense of patriotism from school. And if all else failed you could get a sense of patriotism from the popular culture. The movies celebrated democratic values and implicitly reinforced the idea that America was special. TV was like that, too, through the mid-sixties.
>
> But now, we're about to enter the nineties, and some things have changed. Younger parents aren't sure that an unambivalent appreciation of America is the right thing to teach modern children. And as for those who create the popular culture, well-grounded patriotism is no longer the style. Our spirit is back, but we haven't reinstitutionalized it.

> We've got to do a better job of getting across that America is freedom—freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of enterprise. And freedom is special and rare. It's fragile; it needs [protection].
>
> So we've got to teach history based not on what's in fashion but what's important—why the Pilgrims came here, who Jimmy Doolittle was, and what those thirty seconds over Tokyo meant. You know, four years ago on the fortieth anniversary of D-Day, I read a letter from a young woman writing to her late father, who'd fought on Omaha Beach. Her name was Lisa Zanatta Henn, and she said, "We will always remember, we will never forget what the boys of Normandy did." Well, let's help her keep her word.
>
> If we forget what we did, we won't know who we are. I'm warning of an eradication of the American memory that could result, ultimately, in an erosion of the American spirit. Let's start with some basics: more attention to American history and a greater emphasis on civic ritual.[8]

Finally, I write this story to kindle romance, to encourage Americans to fall in love with this country, again or for the first time. Not unreflectively, not blindly, but with eyes wide open.

The great writer, adventurer, and map enthusiast Bernard DeVoto once had good reason to write to his friend Catherine Drinker Bowen, the wonderful historian whose works *Miracle at Philadelphia* and *Yankee from Olympus* made history come to life to a wide audience. She was losing heart, getting discouraged in her history-writing craft. Were her stories of America important? Was her celebration of her country and its achievements right? Where was the romance? DeVoto wrote this to her:

> If the mad, impossible voyage of Columbus or Cartier or La Salle or Coronado or John Ledyard is not romantic, if the stars did not dance in the sky when the Constitutional Convention met, if Atlantis has any landscape stranger or the other side of the moon any lights or colors or shapes more unearthly than the customary homespun of Lincoln or

> the morning coat of Jackson, well, I don't know what romance is. Ours is a story mad with the impossible, it is by chaos out of dream, it began as dream and it has continued as dream down to the last headline you read in a newspaper. . . . The simplest truth you can ever write about our history will be charged and surcharged with romanticism.[9]

The dream of which DeVoto writes is, of course, the American dream, and as he reminds us, despite obstacles, setbacks, stupidities, and atrocities, there is an unparalleled and *documented* record of this dream being real. America was, is, and—we pray—will continue to be where, more than anyplace else, dreams actually do come true. And let us hope that dream and its reality, to recall Lincoln once more, never fades.

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ONE

THE GREATEST REVOLUTION

(1765–1783)

I. STAMPING OUT UNFAIR TAXES

Deborah Franklin had just begun to enjoy her new home on Philadelphia's Market Street. She missed her husband, who was in London as an agent for the colony's assembly. Her fear of sailing had prevented her from going to England to be with him. Fearing water, she by no means feared fire. In late September 1765, when some Philadelphians spread the rumor that Benjamin Franklin had consented to the hated Stamp Tax, a mob gathered to set fire to the Franklin home. Franklin's business partner, David Hall, had warned him in a letter. "The spirit of the people is so violently against anyone they think has the least concern with the Stamp Law," he wrote, telling his friend they had "imbibed the notion that you had a hand in framing it, which has occasioned you many enemies."[1]

Deborah reacted like a lioness to the threat of having her house torched. She sent her daughter to New Jersey but summoned her cousin and his friends to help defend the home. "Fetch a gun or two," she said defiantly.[2] Her wits and resolve saved the home.

Franklin had been in London as a colonial agent since 1759, and although he corresponded regularly with friends in Pennsylvania and other colonies, it took at least six weeks for a letter to go from America to England. Franklin was woefully behind on recent developments. While he sternly opposed the new tax, Franklin did not know just how hostile the colonists were toward it. When it passed in Parliament with neither representation nor consent, George Grenville, the British chancellor of the exchequer, sought to make the pill more palatable by having *Americans* do the tax collecting.[3] Franklin went along with the idea and nominated his friend John Hughes for the job in Pennsylvania.[4] Misreading the political pulse at home, neither man realized that the act was so hated that Hughes's appointment would destroy his political career.[5] It would not take long for everyone on both sides of the Atlantic to judge America's true feelings about the Stamp Act.

The tax was intended to raise revenue in the colonies to cover the huge debts Britain had incurred during the French and Indian War. Grenville believed that taxing the colonies for the expense of their defense was only right and just. After all, the costs of maintaining military defense and civilian administration in the colonies had jumped from £70,000 in 1748 to £350,000 in 1764.[6] Under his Stamp Act, colonists would pay a tax on almost anything written or printed. This would include licenses, contracts, commissions, mortgages, wills, deeds, newspapers, advertisements, calendars, and almanacs—even dice and playing cards.[7]

Passed in February 1765, the act was to go into effect in America on November 1. Details of the act began to appear in colonial newspapers—as yet untaxed—in May. Ominously, those accused of violating the act would not be tried in their own communities by juries of their peers, but taken to far-off Halifax, Nova Scotia, and tried before special Admiralty courts.[8] The reaction was immediate—and hostile.

The Virginia House of Burgesses was sitting in Williamsburg when word came. As young member Patrick Henry took his seat for the first time on 20 May 1765, older, more seasoned members waited for the fiery

orator to respond. They did not have to wait long. On May 29, Colonel George Washington was almost surely in his accustomed place.[9] Young Thomas Jefferson, not yet a member of the Burgesses but already a leading graduate of the College of William and Mary, stood in the assembly's doorway. Everyone listened intently as the new member from Louisa County rose to speak.

Henry introduced a series of five resolutions. He had hastily jotted them down on a blank page of an old law book.[10] The resolutions supported the idea that only the people's elected representatives could lawfully tax them. The resolutions were mildly phrased and offered little more than what John Locke, the philosopher of England's Glorious Revolution of 1688, had written—to general approval. But it was his speech, not his resolutions, that caused a stir. Henry's words stunned the crowded, hushed legislative hall.

"Caesar had his Brutus, Charles the First his Cromwell," he said, citing the two most famous cases of rulers whose actions had led to their own deaths, "and George the Third . . ." Members were shocked that a British colonist would name the ruling sovereign in such company. "Treason!" roared the Speaker. "*Treason!*" echoed some other members. But the famous courtroom advocate neatly avoided their charge by concluding cleverly: ". . . and George the Third may profit from their example." He then added cockily: "If *this* be treason, make the most of it!"[11] Jefferson would later say that Henry spoke as the Greek poet Homer wrote.[12]

The Burgesses quickly adopted the Virginia Resolves, denouncing the Stamp Act as unconstitutional. They knew their rights as Englishmen. They had studied the Magna Carta and the Petition of Right from the English civil war of the previous century.

Resistance flared up throughout the colonies. In Charleston, South Carolina, Christopher Gadsden led protests. There, a mob tore up the homes of two "stampmen."[13] Gadsden said, "There ought to be no New England man, no New Yorkers known on this continent, but all of us Americans."[14] Annapolis, Maryland, was a scene of destruction as a

crowd pulled down a warehouse owned by a tax collector.[15] In New York City, the royal governor's coach was attacked. Rhode Island stamp protesters hanged tax collectors in effigy. In Newport, their signs accused one collector of being an infamous *Jacobite*—a charge that meant he was a supporter of the deposed Stuart monarch James II, a Catholic.[16]

Following the lead of Massachusetts's brilliant James Otis, nine colonies agreed to send delegates to a *congress* in New York in October 1765. Virginia, whose royal governor had dismissed the House of Burgesses, could send no delegates. New Hampshire, Georgia, and South Carolina were also unrepresented, but Nova Scotia sent delegates.[17] The Stamp Act Congress met and issued a Declaration of Rights on October 19. Despite their professions of loyalty to the king and to his royal family, the delegates took a firm line *against* the claims of the Grenville government. They approved Patrick Henry's resolution that only the colonial legislatures had the right to tax colonists. Three of the key resolutions passed by the delegates were:

1st. That His Majesty's subjects in these colonies owe the same allegiance to the crown of Great Britain that is owing from his subjects born within the realm, and all due subordination to that august body, the Parliament of Great Britain.

2nd. That His Majesty's liege subjects in these colonies are entitled to all the inherent rights and privileges of his natural born subjects within the kingdom of Great Britain.

3rd. That it is inseparably essential to the freedom of a people, and the undoubted rights of Englishmen, that no taxes should be imposed on them, but with their own consent, given personally, or by their representatives.[18]

In the face of such united opposition, the Stamp Tax simply could not be collected. By autumn of 1765, no Americans could be found to serve as stampmen. They all had been co-opted or scared away.[19] The

crisis had made thousands of Americans acutely aware of their rights. As John Adams wrote, the people were "more attentive to their liberties, more inquisitive about them, and more determined to defend them."[20] They were still loyal to the king, however. Even at the height of the crisis, children would dance around Boston's Liberty Tree with a flag that read, "King, Pitt, and Liberty." Thus, colonists showed their continued allegiance to the Crown, while openly favoring the return to power of William Pitt, the respected wartime prime minister.[21] Groups such as the Sons of Liberty, organized in Massachusetts, were not willing to break with all royal authority. By adopting that name, colonists showed themselves aware of having been "born free," and willing to stand up for their rights as Americans *and as Englishmen*.[22]

Reflecting on the Stamp Act crisis that December, Adams would say 1765 was "the most remarkable year of my life. The enormous engine fabricated by the British Parliament for battering down all the rights and liberties of America . . . has raised through the whole continent a spirit that will be recorded to our honor with all future generations."[23]

Prior to this, America was governed at only the cost of paper and ink; Americans were "led by a thread," as Franklin said.[24] Afterward, the stubbornness and stupidity of the British Crown and Parliament made America increasingly *ungovernable*.[25] John Adams later wrote that "the child independence was born" during the colonists' legal challenge to the unconstitutional Writs of Assistance. But we might say that was premature. The resistance to the Stamp Tax was continent-wide. It was then that Americans from Maine to Georgia first came together to resist British tyranny.[26]

When, in the spring of 1766, Parliament repealed the Stamp Act, the colonies exploded with joy. There were bonfires and fireworks—*illuminations* in the language of the day. Americans credited the king with this turnabout (even though his dismissal of Grenville hinged on totally different issues). In New York City, the people put up a statue of King George III mounted on a horse. It was happily paid for by public

subscription.[27] They did not protest, either, when Parliament passed the Declaratory Act that reasserted its right to legislate for Americans on all matters whatsoever.

For a brief season, Americans seemed content to live under what they readily acknowledged was the freest government on earth. They were overjoyed when their friend William Pitt returned to power as the king's first minister in 1766. But their celebrations proved to be premature. Pitt was ailing, and the dominant personality in his government was Charles Townshend. Townshend understood that Americans objected only to "internal taxes" like the Stamp Tax. Internal taxes were levied on items produced and sold *within* the colonies. So he decided to lay "external" duties on items imported to America, such as glass, paint, lead, paper, and tea. The Townshend Acts went into effect 1 January 1767.[28] They were supposed to raise as much as £400,000 a year to contribute to the cost of administering the colonies.

Parliament had also passed the Quartering Act of 1766 that required colonists to provide British soldiers—*redcoats* as they were soon called—with barracks, bedding, fuel, candles, and even beer, cider, and rum.[29] Americans saw that the great increase in the number of British troops in the colonies—greater than they had seen in wartime—was not being directed to the frontier, where they might have been expected to defend against such dangers as Pontiac had posed. Instead, the redcoats were seen in growing numbers in major colonial cities—especially Boston.

Americans began to suspect that the redcoats were being sent to control *them*. This suspicion grew when the royal authorities began to issue "Writs of Assistance" to customs officials. These writs were generalized search warrants. They did not have to specify a specific good to be searched for. They allowed the customs officers to *break into* ships, warehouses, even private homes! The heavy import taxes had encouraged smuggling by colonial merchants; the writs were an attempt to stop their tax evasion. Anytime any royal official merely suspected smuggled goods, he had the power to search.[30] What's more, Admiralty courts and Boards

of Customs commissioners had the power to try those who sought to evade the king's duties.[31] Americans soon saw that their cherished right to trial by jury was in jeopardy.

John Dickinson spoke for many Americans when he wrote a series of articles in 1767–68, *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania*. Dickinson attacked the "excesses and outrages" of the British ministry. He urged his fellow colonists to resist. But he was careful to assert his loyalty to the king and to channel the opposition into "constitutional methods of seeking redress," such as continued petitions to the government and even resuming the costly *nonimportation* policy that had proved so successful against the Stamp Tax.[32] Dickinson, who had been an opponent of Franklin in Philadelphia politics, completely *rejected* the use of force "as much out of the way."[33]

For now, colonists were inclined to follow Dickinson's lead. But some leaders, such as Washington, were beginning to think that force might be necessary for Americans to preserve their freedom.[34] As early as 1769, Washington was telling his neighbor George Mason that America must arm to resist British tyranny.[35] In saying this, Washington had many reasons, some high-minded; some less so. He was particularly upset about the financial drain he was suffering because of the duties levied on his expensive tastes. But luxury and concern for liberty are not mutually exclusive, and Washington was fully in the tradition of John Locke, who had laid down the philosophical basis for the English constitution. Locke had specified the resort to force—"The appeal to heaven," as he called it—as the final *but legitimate* course of action when a ruler refused to listen to reason.

Boston soon became the center of unrest. In June 1768, the royal governor disbanded the Massachusetts Assembly. Almost at the same time, the sailing sloop called *Liberty*—owned by the rich and popular merchant John Hancock—was seized by customs officials. They charged Hancock with smuggling Madeira wine and imposed a fine. A city mob soon spilled into the town's narrow streets and chased the customs officials.

They escaped with their lives, but their houses were trashed.[36] Sam Adams made sure that colonists up and down the eastern seaboard were fully informed of the Boston outrages. Adams was able to make excellent use of the efficient colonial postal system that Benjamin Franklin had established. Franklin's efforts had cut the time for a letter to travel up and down the coast from six weeks to three.[37*]

By 1770, tensions were rising between the people of Boston and the British troops whom they saw as occupiers. In March, following a winter of sporadic incidents, a mob of boys and young men began to taunt British soldiers, calling them *lobsters* and pelting them with trash, oyster shells, and snowballs. With their backs to the royal Customs House, and feeling hemmed in, the frightened soldiers opened fire on the mob. Crispus Attucks, a free black man and a whaler, was one of the first to fall. In all, five colonists were killed in what instantly became known as "the Boston Massacre."[38]

Realizing the explosive situation he had on hand, Governor Thomas Hutchinson had the Customs House guards arrested on a charge of murder and ordered the rest of the British garrison to return to Castle William, a fort in the harbor.[39] Quickly, the colonists had taken up the cry of murder. Boston's Paul Revere, a silversmith, soon engraved a powerful—but *exaggerated*—depiction of the killings. In Revere's rendering, the number of fallen is greater and the redcoats fire a volley on the order of their officer. The truth was much more complicated than that.

Surprisingly, or perhaps not so surprisingly, young John Adams, Samuel's cousin, and *his* cousin Josiah Quincy, took responsibility for the legal defense of the accused British soldiers. Determined to prove that British soldiers could be fairly tried in an American courtroom, John Adams demonstrated that most of the soldiers fired in self-defense, that no order to fire on the crowd had ever been given, and that the unruly

* For example, Franklin published in his and other newspapers the names of those with letters in the post office. This sped up delivery.

colonials had provoked the soldiers. Adams argued persuasively that hanging the redcoats for murder would disgrace Massachusetts's name in history. It would be worse than the blot of the Salem witch trials and the hanging of the Quakers.[40] John Adams made a name for himself when the jury found all but two of the accused not guilty and convicted those two of lesser charges. Their punishment, an odd one, was the branding of their thumbs.

Cousin Sam, however, was not dismayed. For the next five years, he and the Sons of Liberty organized mass demonstrations on the anniversary of the Boston Massacre.[41]

II. A TOTAL SEPARATION

After a decade of political upheaval in London and in the colonies, a new ministry was finally installed in Parliament. King George found in Lord North a man after his own mind. In an attempt to reconcile with the colonies, the North administration persuaded Parliament to repeal all of the objectionable Townshend duties *except* the tax on tea.[42]

While they attempted to bring the colonists to order, Parliament was determined *not* to recognize Americans' rights to rule themselves in a union of equals under the same crown. In the spring of 1772, Rhode Islanders had a chance to take out their resentments of British high-handedness. The HMS ("His Majesty's Ship") *Gaspée* had been particularly active as a customs ship in the Narragansett Bay, roughly handling fishermen and small boats. The officers of the *Gaspée* applied the laws strictly in a region that previously had seen little or no enforcement. When the ship ran aground chasing smugglers, boatloads of Patriots rowed out, surrounded the ship, and forced the crew ashore. Then they gleefully burned to the waterline this symbol of British misrule.[43]

The entire conduct of the royal authorities in America smacked of a lordly disdain for the colonists. All Americans became aware of how they

were looked down upon by the English. *Yankee* was a well-known term of contempt for all Americans. For a time, Americans lived in the hope that it was only certain British *ministers* who were responsible for tormenting them. They held on to the belief that the king and the British people were in sympathy with them. But Franklin knew better. As early as 1769, he was writing that the British people were "in full cry against America."[44]

Despite Samuel Adams's continual agitation, the period of 1771–73 saw a lessening of tensions between colonial subjects and the mother country. Then, without explanation, Lord North committed "a fatal blunder." He passed through Parliament a Tea Act that would have allowed the nearly bankrupt East India Company to claim a monopoly on tea in the colonies.[45]

Americans instantly recognized that if Britain could monopolize the importation of this important staple, there was no place they might stop. They could strangle American commerce and industry. Once again, resistance to British taxation was *continental*. It flamed up from Maine and Georgia. In Charleston, ship owners were allowed to unload their tea, but it was kept under guard in a warehouse. Philadelphia and New York refused to allow the tea to be off-loaded at all. Everyone waited for Boston's reaction.

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On 16 December 1773, under cover of darkness, some two thousand Boston men went down to Griffin's Wharf. There, a smaller party of thirty men disguised as Mohawk Indians boarded three vessels and dumped their cargoes of tea into the harbor. "Boston harbor a tea-pot tonight!" cried one of the supporters. Samuel Adams had planned the whole raid with great care.[46] The damage to property was extensive. In today's terms, the losses to the East India Company would be valued at $1 million.[47] A British admiral, who had watched the entire episode from a house near the wharf, called out good-naturedly to the "Mohawks": "Well, boys, you have had a fine pleasant evening for your Indian caper, haven't you? But mind, you have got to pay the fiddler yet."[48]

By now, John Adams had cast his lot with his cousin, Sam, and the Patriots. He wrote in his diary: "This destruction of the tea is so bold, so

daring, so firm, intrepid and inflexible, and it must have so important consequences . . . that I cannot but consider it as an epoch in history."[49]

Indeed, Boston would be made to pay the fiddler. Outraged by this act of colonial defiance, King George III appeared the following spring in person before Parliament, demanding harsh reprisal. "We must master them or totally leave them alone," he said.[50] Lord North was in full accord with his royal master. He was determined to show the colonies who was boss.

Parliament's answer in 1774 to floating tea was the speedy passage of five *coercive* acts. Patriots in America quickly dubbed them the "Intolerable Acts."[51] The first of these closed the Port of Boston and removed the Customs House. Another act changed Massachusetts's revered charter, stripping colonists of the right to elect members of the Upper House of their assembly. The Quartering Act allowed royal officials to place soldiers in colonists' homes at the colonists' expense. Still another act provided that royal officers indicted for murder while suppressing riots should be tried in London rather than where the offense occurred. This act, despite John Adams's proof that British soldiers could get a fair trial in America, was a calculated insult. Finally, Parliament passed the Quebec Act. The new law extended the southern border of Quebec to the Ohio River, thus effectively closing off the Ohio Country to American expansion.

George Washington reacted sharply to Parliament's Intolerable Acts. The North ministry was setting up "the most despotic system of tyranny that was ever practiced in a free government," he charged.[52] He rallied to the plight of his Massachusetts countrymen: "The cause of Boston . . . is the cause of America," he said.[53]

Unwilling to take the Intolerable Acts lying down, Patriot leaders in the colonies elected delegates to attend the first Continental Congress in Philadelphia in the fall of 1774. As they assembled, Philadelphia merchants were determined not to get burned again. If there was to be a renewal of the nonimportation, nonexport pledges that had proved so successful at the time of the Stamp Act crisis, Philadelphia's men of commerce demanded that this time the entire continent must take part. They

had lost precious business when Baltimore merchants failed to support previous embargoes. This time, it must be all or nothing.

In this way, a continental *union* was being forged. The first Continental Congress quickly adopted the radical "Suffolk Resolves" that rider Paul Revere had brought to them from Massachusetts. Those resolves, drafted by the Patriot leader Dr. Joseph Warren, declared the Intolerable Acts null and void. Congress urged Massachusetts to form a free government and, ominously, advised Massachusetts's citizens to arm themselves.[54] When Congress adjourned in October 1774, delegates pledged to reassemble the following May if Parliament failed to repeal the Intolerable Acts.

In England, when the brilliant Edmund Burke rose in the House of Commons on 22 March 1775 to plead for *conciliation*, the eloquent Irishman warned that America could never be subdued by force. He urged Britons to change their course, to adopt mild measures for dealing with the colonies. For more than a century, American high school students were required to memorize portions of Burke's magnificent speech. "Great empires and little minds," he cried, "go ill together." Burke went unheeded. Thus did the British Parliament arrogantly and stupidly throw away the lifeline that alone could have tied them to their empire in America.

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Burke's eloquence found an answer in Virginia the very next day, 23 March 1775. Patrick Henry appealed to his fellow Virginians to take up arms and stand with imperiled Boston. "I know not what course others may take," Henry cried, "but as for me, *give me liberty or give me death*!"

III. "THE SHOT HEARD 'ROUND THE WORLD"

In Boston, the British general Thomas Gage had been named royal governor. He was determined not to let colonists arm. On the night of 18 April 1775, he ordered his troops to seize the militia's military stores at Concord and to arrest Patriot leaders Samuel Adams and John Hancock.

Hoping to catch the colonists unaware, Gage's troops moved out of their barracks by night, by boat. But there was a spy under Gage's roof. The general's American wife, Margaret, got word to Dr. Warren who passed it on to Paul Revere.[55]

Revere had arranged a signal—two lanterns—to be placed in the tower of Old North Church to let the Patriots know the regulars were moving out. Revere himself was rowed past HMS *Somerset,* a British warship. The low-hanging moon behind Boston's buildings cast a shadow that concealed Revere's movements.[56] Once mounted on horseback, Revere and William Dawes managed to evade British patrols and brought the warning to Lexington. There at the home of Reverend Jonas Clarke, where the Patriot leaders were sleeping, Revere was challenged by Sergeant William Munroe. Munroe shushed him for making too much noise. "Noise!" Revere shouted. "You'll have noise enough before long. The regulars are coming out!" (Revere would only have confused colonists if he had yelled, "The British are coming," since Massachusetts people still thought of themselves as British.)[57]

At five o'clock the next morning, the Minutemen (so called because they could be ready for military duty in a minute) were drawn up on the village green in Lexington as the British regulars came marching up. Captain Jonas Parker ordered the Minutemen to stand their ground. "Don't fire unless fired upon," he said, "but if they mean to have a war, let it begin here!"[58] British Major of Marines John Pitcairn ordered the Americans to lay down their arms. "You damned rebels, disperse!" he cried.[59] The Americans were beginning to disperse when a shot rang out. In a flash, there were competing volleys that left eight Americans dead in the spring sunlight. Three British soldiers were wounded.[60] In vain, Major Pitcairn had tried to stop his men from shooting.

The British column marched on to Concord, where another force of colonials met them. There the British destroyed militia stores and turned back toward Boston, mission accomplished. The road back became a highway of death, with Minutemen firing from behind walls and trees. Many

of the regulars, who had been marching for more than twenty-four hours carrying heavy packs on their backs, fell out, exhausted. By the time they got back to Boston, they had 73 dead, 174 wounded, and 26 missing. The Americans suffered 49 dead, 39 wounded, and 5 taken prisoner.[61] These were little more than skirmishes as the world measures warfare, but the American farmers had indeed "fired the shot heard 'round the world."*

Less than a month later, the second Continental Congress assembled in Philadelphia. One of its first acts was to authorize a Continental Army. This army pledged its loyalty to Congress, and not to the individual colonies, as was the practice in the militia.[62] John Adams and other Massachusetts men worried that Boston might be abandoned by other colonies. To prevent this from ever happening, Adams nominated Colonel George Washington of Virginia to command all American forces, with the rank of general. Congress knew it needed a leader it could trust. The delegates recalled Oliver Cromwell, who had fought King Charles I in the name of Parliament only to wind up using the force he had been given to purge Parliament itself.[63] George Washington not only had more military

* In 1836, New Englander Ralph Waldo Emerson would immortalize the "embattled farmers" of the Revolution with his poem "Concord Hymn":

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood,
And fired the shot heard round the world,

The foe long since in silence slept,
Alike the Conqueror silent sleeps,
And Time the ruined bridge has swept
Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

On this bank green, by this soft stream,
We set to-day a votive stone,
That memory may their deed redeem,
When like our sires our sons are gone.

Spirit! who made those freemen dare
To die, or leave their children free,
Bid time and nature gently spare
The shaft we raise to them and Thee.

experience than any other colonist, he had been a reliable member of the House of Burgesses since 1759. Washington, resplendent in his full dress military uniform, humbly accepted Congress's call and left immediately for embattled Boston. Congress also named as postmaster general Benjamin Franklin, recently returned from London.[64]

En route to Boston, Washington received word of a battle that was no skirmish. Stung by his earlier losses to ragtag colonials, General Gage was determined to overawe the rebels by a show of military force in clear view of all of Boston. He ordered General William Howe to take Bunker Hill.* On 17 June 1775, Howe led his disciplined regulars up the slope, vowing never to order them to go where he was unwilling to lead. When they neared the American lines, they were cut down by a fierce musket volley. "Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes," was the order given all along the line of determined American defenders.

In his blood-spattered white silk breeches, General Howe rallied his men and finally drove the Americans off the hill. British losses, including Major Pitcairn, were tremendous—nearly 1,000 out of 2,000 in action.[65] American losses were far fewer—about 440 out of 3,200 defenders. Among the Patriot dead, though, was the revered Dr. Joseph Warren. Although the Americans were driven back, they had inflicted major casualties on the most professional and well-trained army in the world, an impossible accomplishment that imbued them with a swelling sense of confidence and pride.

When Washington arrived a week later to take command of American forces surrounding Boston, he had another advantage. He had amassed considerable artillery. These cannon had been captured from the British at Fort Ticonderoga in upper New York. Colonel Ethan Allen, supported by his Vermont "Green Mountain Boys" and ably aided by the courageous Benedict Arnold, had taken the defenders by surprise. Allen demanded surrender from the startled British commander "in the name of the great

* A historical misnomer, the battle was actually fought on nearby Breed's Hill.

Jehovah and the Continental Congress." A young Boston bookseller—the energetic, three-hundred-pound Henry Knox—was put in charge of the cannon, dragging them across mountains and valleys to the aid of Boston Patriots. His patriotism and zeal impressed General Washington.[66] With the addition of the captured artillery, Washington was able to force the evacuation of the British from Boston. This was another great boost to American morale.* And it helped establish the Continental Army as an effective force.

Congress sent General Richard Montgomery and Benedict Arnold to take on the British in Canada in the summer of 1775. Montgomery succeeded in taking Montreal but was stopped in Quebec City at year's end, where he lost his life. The ragged American force soon bogged down and was driven out. Arnold was wounded, but he won praise for bringing order to the retreat.

Against this background, Washington's actions in camp have special significance. In November 1775, he learned that New England soldiers were preparing their annual celebration of Pope's Day, during which effigies of the pope were burned to the amusement of their Protestant neighbors. New England had been celebrating this holiday for more than a century. Washington issued an order sternly forbidding this "ridiculous and childish" display. He explained that the aid of French Catholics in Canada and across the sea was important to the American cause. He also wanted help from Catholics throughout the colonies. Washington's firmness ended a New England tradition and marked a major step forward in religious tolerance and national unity.

Events were moving quickly. Thomas Paine, whom Franklin had met in London and given letters of recommendation just two years previously, came out with the most influential pamphlet of all: *Common Sense*. Published in January 1776, and selling for a mere eighteen pence,

* Evacuation Day, 17 March 1776, is commemorated in Boston to this day. And it does not hurt that Beantown revelers can mix their celebrations with St. Patrick's Day festivities!

Common Sense sold more than 150,000 copies. Americans had heard the case for their rights put with great legal expertise and scholarship from men such as John Adams and John Dickinson, but Paine had a flair for colorful writing, and he surely had the common touch. As a recent immigrant from England, his fierce writing against this king—*and against all kings*—struck a responsive chord. As soon as it came off the presses, New Hampshire delegate Josiah Bartlett noted, *Common Sense* was "greedily bought up and read by all ranks of people."[67] John Adams was probably more influential than any other American in moving Congress, but it was Paine who moved the people.[68] Of all the arguments Paine made, his charges against the king were most devastating. He attacked the pretended "FATHER OF HIS PEOPLE [who] can unfeelingly hear of their slaughter, and composedly sleep with their blood upon his soul."[69]

Paine knew the religious beliefs of his readers. He used the Bible to hammer home his points: "[T]he children of Israel in their request for a king urged this plea, 'that he may judge us, and go out before us and fight our battles.' But in countries where he is neither a judge nor a general, as in England, a man would be puzzled to know what *is* his business."[70] This was amazingly bold. Paine might have been making a personal appeal with this powerful and emotional plea: "O! ye that love mankind! Ye 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 haunted round the globe. Asia, and Africa, have long expelled her. Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. [America] receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind."[71*]

The Americans, recalling how grasping Parliament had been for their taxes, were shocked to see Lord North's ministry hiring German and Scottish mercenaries to make war on the colonies (although the *need* to do so betrayed the war's deep unpopularity in Britain). News that the king would send twelve thousand *Hessian* troops (hired from the German state

* What better example of "American exceptionalism" can we find?

of Hesse) reached America in May.[72] Every American coffin seemed to bring death, as well, to the idea of reconciliation with England.

In addition to their increasing bitterness caused by British warfare against their colonies, Americans were facing the practical problem that no European state would support them while they were still formally members of the British Empire. They were still rebels. And there was a danger to the French, the Dutch, and the Spanish that the Americans might make peace with the mother country and leave them to fight a vengeful England by themselves. Independence would help Americans gain European recognition and practical help.

Finally, on 7 June 1776, Virginia's Richard Henry Lee introduced before Congress his motion "that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, Free and Independent States."[73] Congress then named a committee to draft a declaration of causes for independence: John Adams (Massachusetts), Benjamin Franklin (Pennsylvania), Thomas Jefferson (Virginia), Robert Livingston (New York), and Roger Sherman (Connecticut). Adams was keenly aware that there were four Northerners and only one Southerner on the drafting committee. During the debate in Congress, one reluctant member (probably Pennsylvania's John Dickinson) argued that the colonies were not yet "ripe" for Independence. He was answered by a Scottish-born member from New Jersey. The colonies were not only ripe, he said with his rich burr, but "in danger-r-r of becoming r-r-rotten for the want of it!" The Reverend John Witherspoon, who was also president of the college we know today as Princeton, spoke for the majority of delegates. The motion for Independence soon carried.[74]

Once again, Adams made a fateful decision. He was desperate to have Virginia's support. He knew that Virginia led the South. And with Virginia's help, Massachusetts would never have to stand alone. Again, he opted for a Virginian to take the lead for the sake of national unity. He nominated Jefferson to draft the Declaration of Independence. Later, Adams would recall the reasons why he did so:

> 1. That [Jefferson] was a Virginian and I a Massachusettensian. 2. That he was a southern Man and I a northern one. 3. That I had become so obnoxious for my early and constant Zeal in promoting [Independence] that any [draft] of mine would undergo more severe Scrutiny and Criticism in Congress than one of his composition. 4thly and lastly that would be reason enough if there were no other, I had a great Opinion of the Elegance of his pen and none at all of my own. . . . He accordingly took the Minutes and in a day or two produced to me his [draft].[75]

In this passage—wordy, stuffy, but brutally honest—we see the best of John Adams. He was acutely conscious of his own role, undeniably ambitious to make his mark, but he constantly put his country first. Seldom could such a world-changing event be described in such spare terms—"In a day or two produced to me his draft."

And what a draft! Jefferson's "peculiar felicity of expression" (another Adams phrase) gave America a founding document that surpasses any other in the world for beauty, logic, and inspirational power. About the *philosophy* of the Declaration of Independence, there was no debate in Congress. It was what the Founders believed. Jefferson's immortal words were conventional wisdom of the time.[76] And the words of the Declaration became the greatest, most consequential statement of political philosophy of all time:

> 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. . . .[77]

This is America's political creed in a nutshell. Yes, they meant *all* men, regardless of race, religion, sex, or riches. They imposed no religious test

for adherence to these ideals except belief in a creator God who *endows* us with our inalienable rights. They defined the purpose of all government. And they laid down the requirement that governments must rule by consent if they were to rule with justice at all. We will return to the philosophy of this Declaration in future chapters. Suffice for now, the Founders did not immediately free the slaves, give votes to their wives, or invite the Indian tribes to sign the Declaration with them. But we must realize that *all* the greatest advocates for human equality in America—Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Suffragettes, Martin Luther King Jr.—pointed to this passage in the Declaration to give force to their demands for justice.

The philosophical sentiment was near universal, but the practical matter of voting for independence was less so. The final tally was close. Congress had to wait for uninstructed delegates to return to Philadelphia. Caesar Rodney, suffering from asthma and cancer, rode eighty miles from his Delaware home to the sweltering capital on the night of 1 July 1776 in order to break a tie in his state's delegation and carry the motion for independence.

The men who signed the Declaration knew this was no casual debating society resolution. They acknowledged this as they pledged "our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor" to support independence. When John Hancock summoned the delegates to sign the parchment "fair" copy of the Declaration, he wrote his own signature in large, bold strokes so that King George (legend has it) could read his name without his glasses.

He urged them to make it unanimous. "There must be no pulling different ways," he said. "We must all hang together." To that, Franklin, ever the wit, reportedly responded: "Yes, we must indeed all hang together, or most assuredly, we shall all hang separately."[78] Though none of the signers was hanged, seventeen served in the military, and five were captured by the British during the war. Richard Stockton, a New Jersey signer, never recovered from slow torture during captivity and died in 1781.[79]

IV. A CONTINENTAL WAR

While Congress made its fateful move, General Washington was facing the danger of entrapment by the British army in New York. It was there that he had the Declaration of Independence read to his troops. There, the famous statue of George III was pulled down and its lead melted into bullets. Washington had been widely acclaimed when the British withdrew from Boston in March, but a string of defeats followed. Boston was to be his last victory for almost a year. Washington knew that no one who did not control the sea could hold waterborne Manhattan Island. Congress did not want to abandon the new nation's second largest city to the enemy.

Colonel John Glover's Marblehead men from Massachusetts were sailors and fishermen, more at home on the water than on dry land.[80] The night of 29 August 1776, their seagoing ways would prove vital to the Patriot cause.

The Continental Army had initially held firm under murderous British fire on Long Island, but the redcoats marched through the night, in perfect military order, to take the Americans by surprise.[81] Hessian soldiers took no prisoners. They stabbed the surrendering Americans with their bayonets, the blades of which were seventeen inches long.

Washington knew he had to withdraw from Brooklyn on Long Island and escape with his army to Manhattan. Five British warships were prepared to sail up the East River to block Washington's retreat, but the wind "miraculously" shifted and the British squadron was unable to come upriver.[82] Then, when Washington ordered Glover's Marblehead men to man the boats, he evacuated the bulk of the army from Brooklyn. Only a portion of the army was able to escape under the cover of darkness the night of August 29, but then a thick fog rolled in to hide the action as the remainder of the army entered the boats. One Connecticut officer claimed he made eleven crossings of the East River that night.[83] Author David McCullough called that covering fog

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incredible—an unlikely turn of fate. Believers in Providence called it the Hand of God.[84*]

Washington felt the disappointment personally when his men ran before the advancing Hessians and Scots Highlanders. In anguish, he threw his hat to the ground and cried out: "Are *these* the men with whom I am to defend America?"[85] But he could also point with pride at troops who stood their ground and did their duty, as when 250 Marylanders attacked General Cornwallis's forces to cover the army's retreat, risking death or capture. "Good God, what brave fellows I must lose this day," Washington said. He then gave Maryland troops the name by which the state is known to this day—The Old Line.

The city could not be held. In September, as Washington withdrew to Harlem Heights, the city of New York caught fire. No one knows how it started. Loyalists—called Tories—who supported the Crown naturally blamed the rebels. Angered, British General William Howe seized a young American officer whom he accused of spying for Washington. Nathan Hale of Connecticut was about twenty-four. Howe gave him no trial. Hale was in civilian clothes, so he was treated as a spy. Shocking Americans, Howe denied the young man's last request for a pastor, or even a Bible. As Howe prepared to hang him, the fearless Patriot recited words from the popular play *Cato:*

> How beautiful is death, when earned by virtue!
> Who would not be that youth? What pity is it
> That we can die but once to serve our country.[86]

The quote has come down to us, in paraphrase, as "I regret I have but one life to give for my country." The Revolution had its first martyr.

Benjamin Franklin agreed to go to France in the fall of 1776 to plead

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* When the British Expeditionary Force was similarly evacuated from Dunkirk in 1940, thus saving England and the cause of freedom from the Nazi menace, Winston Churchill called it "a miracle of deliverance."

the American cause. Franklin embarked on a ship named *Reprisal*. It was a very rough crossing, with many seasick. It was also dangerous as Franklin was the most recognizable of all the rebels and the British still held mastery of the seas. Even when he disembarked in France, he found himself on a country road where a gang of thieves had only recently murdered a party of twelve travelers. Happily, Franklin entered Paris safely in December 1776.[87]

Throughout that fall, General Howe and his lieutenant, Lord Cornwallis, pushed Washington south through New Jersey. The military position was helped when Benedict Arnold delayed a British thrust down from Canada, and Patriots defending Charleston, South Carolina, repelled a British assault. Although Washington had kept his army together and with it the Revolution, retreat was still dispiriting. Throughout New Jersey, farmers were tacking red ribbons to their doors to show sympathy with the king. By December 1776, with enlistments running out for many militia forces, Washington's Continental Army was dwindling.

At Christmastime, most armies went into winter quarters. Washington had retreated across the Delaware River into Pennsylvania, chopping down bridges and taking boats with him. Washington knew that as soon as the river froze solid, Lord Cornwallis's superior numbers could cross over on the ice. Washington was running out of money and supplies. He appealed to Pennsylvania's master of finance, Robert Morris, to raise hard cash to pay bonuses to his soldiers. Only when they had been paid did some of his ragged, starving soldiers agree to extend their enlistments into the new year.

So, on Christmas night, in foul weather, General Washington prepared a sudden assault on Trenton, New Jersey. Once again, Washington relied on Colonel John Glover's seasoned Marblehead, Massachusetts troops. They were all excellent sailors and boat handlers. They had already saved the Continental Army by ferrying it from Brooklyn to Manhattan. Now, Glover's men carried the entire army—with horses and cannon—across the ice-choked Delaware. The little band of ragged

men took the Hessian defenders by surprise. In a short, sharp action, Washington's men killed the Hessian commander, Colonel Johann Rall, and took nearly a thousand prisoners. Only two Americans were wounded, one of them Lieutenant James Monroe, the future president. Captain Alexander Hamilton's cannon, whose touch holes had been kept dry on the boat trip over, were used to devastating effect. Another in the boats that night was young John Marshall, the future chief justice of the United States. America in 1776 could have fielded an army of 280,000 men, but that Christmas night, just 2,400 held the fate of a continent in their hands.[88]

Washington's attack had been a great success. He quickly put into practice the "policy of humanity" that John Adams and others in Congress had urged upon him. Instead of bayoneting the surrendering Hessians—as the Hessians had done to Americans who gave up on Long Island—Washington treated them with compassion. As a result of this enlightened policy, thousands of Hessian Germans would later settle in the backcountry of Pennsylvania and Virginia.

American Patriots rejoiced with the retaking of Trenton and were overjoyed when, just two weeks later, Washington followed up his victory with another successful attack on Princeton. In this battle, Washington galloped directly into the smoke of British cannon fire. One of his young aides, Colonel John Fitzgerald, covered his eyes with his hat, certain the commander in chief would be killed. Washington came riding out of the smoke, eyes ablaze with victory. "Thank God your Excellency is safe," Fitzgerald cried out, offering his hand. Washington grasped it with enthusiasm, perhaps realizing how close to death he had come. "It's a fine fox chase, my boys," Washington cried, as his men sent the British defenders of Princeton into headlong retreat.[89]

Independence did not bring French help immediately, at least not openly. But one man was to be a harbinger of things to come. In July 1777, a tall, nineteen-year-old French aristocrat named Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, better known to history as the Marquis

de Lafayette, arrived in Philadelphia. Congress was embarrassed when the eager young nobleman—who had already seen plenty of military action—showed up to present his credentials from the American minister in Paris, Silas Deane. They had no money to pay him, members explained, and Deane had exceeded his authority in promising commissions. Lafayette could not return home. He had defied King Louis XVI in sailing to America. Instead, he offered to serve *without pay* as a volunteer in the ranks.[90] By August, he was riding by Washington's side as a major general—at age twenty! Lafayette would soon see action in September 1777, at the Battle of Brandywine in Pennsylvania. There, he was wounded as he gallantly led American troops. Although Washington's forces fought bravely, they lost and the road to Philadelphia lay open to the British.

Washington was hundreds of miles away when America's greatest military victory was achieved. Americans waited expectantly as Patriot forces faced British General John Burgoyne at Saratoga, New York, in October 1777. Burgoyne, "Gentleman Johnny" to London society, was a member of Parliament, a playwright, and flamboyant figure. He had bet parliamentary leader Charles James Fox a substantial wager that he would come home from America victorious by Christmas Day 1777. His task was to come down from Canada and link up with General Howe, leading a British force north from New York. But Howe was headed for Philadelphia—trying to catch Washington. Burgoyne let it be known his Indian soldiers had permission to scalp any British deserters. Initially crowned with success, Burgoyne had retaken Fort Ticonderoga and had burned the fine Albany home of American General Philip Schuyler.[91]

But Burgoyne's army moved too slowly—burdened by a huge baggage train—and he was trapped by the Americans. The sound of turkey gobble calls—Americans signaling each other before the attack—spooked the British troops. Gunfire erupted, and Dan Morgan's riflemen, who, according to legend, could drop a redcoat a mile away, quickly cut down Burgoyne's men.[92]

Surrendering his entire force of more than six thousand at Saratoga on 17 October 1777, Burgoyne was amazed by the merciful response he received from General Schuyler. "Is it to *me*, who have done you so much injury, that you show so much kindness?"[93]

Gentleman Johnny had lost his big wager. Fox, who predicted his friend would return a prisoner on parole, had won.[94] Saratoga was America's greatest victory to this point. American General Horatio Gates was quick to claim the victor's laurels, but as before, much of the credit for victory goes to General Benedict Arnold. Although seriously wounded, Arnold had nonetheless rallied American soldiers for action. The French foreign minister, Charles Gravier, the Comte de Vergennes, would see in Saratoga evidence of the Americans' ability to outlast the English.

General Washington's position was not improved as he moved into winter quarters at Valley Forge. With General Howe's British forces firmly in control of Philadelphia, Washington could only watch and wait. This was the worst winter of the war. Once again, he desperately appealed to Congress for aid. He wrote that you could trace his men's tracks by the bloody footprints in the snow. When he said his men were naked and starving, that was not an exaggeration. Some Continental soldiers had to borrow pants just to go out to stand watch.[95]

Fortunately, another foreign addition to America's army arrived on the scene at this moment. A Prussian officer, Baron von Steuben, had met Benjamin Franklin in Paris and was recommended to Congress. Von Steuben, who spoke no English, was a colorful figure who had inflated his credentials—an eighteenth-century résumé-padder. Still, he knew the art of drill, and he knew the importance of discipline and training to turn a rabble into a fighting force. Von Steuben began whipping the ragged, dispirited men of Valley Forge into shape. He comically employed an interpreter to translate his French and German curses into English the men could understand. (Every drill instructor in the American military since is a spiritual descendant of the outlandish Prussian.)

V. THE FRENCH ALLIANCE AND A TRAITOR

"These are the times that try men's souls," Thomas Paine wrote before Washington crossed the Delaware in December 1776. Now, a year later, things were little better. New York and Philadelphia were occupied by the British. Washington and his starving, freezing army watched warily from winter quarters outside Philadelphia at Valley Forge. In the spring of 1778, however, came news that changed everything. Benjamin Franklin had succeeded in securing the French Alliance. After years of secret aid, France now would openly recognize the United States and take her side in the war with England. The Dutch and Spaniards would also now begin to help. This meant, among other things, that Britain would have to bring ships back to its home waters to guard against French raids and would also have to reinforce the garrison at Gibraltar in case of Spanish attack.

Meanwhile, the American frontier was ablaze. In the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania, Sir John Butler and his Indian allies struck on 4 July 1778, killing hundreds. Farmers were burned at the stake, thrown on beds of burning coals, and held down with pitchforks as their horrified families watched.[96] Virginia sent native son George Rogers Clark to reestablish her claims to the old Northwest Territory across the Ohio River. British Colonel Henry Hamilton, known as "Hair Buyer" because he paid Indians to bring in American scalps, holed up at a fort at Vincennes (in present-day Indiana). According to legend, Clark marched his small force of 130 Americans and French for days through chest-deep waters in midwinter to get at his enemy.[97] Surrounding "Hair Buyer" and marching his men back and forth outside the British encampment, Clark gave the illusion of thousands. Most of Henry Hamilton's Indians took flight. Then, when Clark captured five Indians with scalps on their belts, he had them tomahawked to death in front of the British fort. Henry Hamilton immediately surrendered. He would later describe the big Virginian, speaking "with rapture of his late achievements while he washed the

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blood from his hands."[98] With this victory and his success at Kaskaskia (near present-day East Saint Louis, Illinois), George Rogers Clark laid the basis for America's claim to the entire Northwest Territory (Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, and part of Minnesota).*

The news from France lifted American spirits, but several months later came news that shocked American patriots everywhere. General Benedict Arnold, the hero of many battles, felt he had been unjustly treated by Congress. As lesser men like Horatio Gates received promotions and credit that rightly belonged to Arnold, he became embittered. His young wife, Peggy Shippen, came from a rich Tory family. When Washington named Arnold as military commander of Philadelphia, Arnold clashed with the radical political leader, Joseph Reed. Because Arnold refused to hang five hundred Tories and seize their property, as Reed demanded, the Pennsylvanian spread rumors that Arnold was disloyal.[99] It became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Arnold pleaded with Washington to make him commander of the American fortress at West Point, New York. Overlooking the Hudson River, sixty miles north of New York City, West Point was essential to preventing the British from cutting the United States in two. Arnold began to conspire with Sir Henry Clinton, General Howe's replacement in Manhattan. For £10,000, Arnold promised he would turn over West Point to the British. Arnold even plotted with Clinton's dashing young aide-de-camp, Major John André, how they might capture General Washington and turn him over to the British, but they soon dropped the idea as impractical.[100]

To capture or kill Washington had long been a British war aim.[101] Arnold and André met at a farmstead now known as Treason House. Sending the young man back to Clinton, Arnold persuaded André to change into civilian clothes. André carried papers in his boot that incriminated both Arnold

* George Rogers Clark richly deserves his title: Conqueror of the Northwest. His exploits would significantly add to America's territory—an area twice the size of Great Britain and larger than France. And his record would spur on his younger brother, William Clark of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, to match his deeds.

and himself. When André was taken prisoner, Arnold escaped to a British warship anchored in the Hudson—the aptly named HMS *Vulture*.[102]

Washington had been meeting in Hartford, Connecticut, with General Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau, the commander of the newly arrived army of five thousand French regulars. When he arrived at West Point on 25 September 1780, a seemingly insane Peggy Shippen Arnold confronted General Washington. Only partially clothed, she ranted that the general wanted to kill her baby. Washington, Henry Knox, Lafayette, Alexander Hamilton, and the other American officers felt pity for the beautiful young woman, who had seemingly been driven to madness by her husband's treachery. It was all an act. When Washington chivalrously allowed Peggy to rejoin her treasonous husband, it became clear that she had been plotting with Arnold from the outset. She would have richly merited hanging for treason.

Instead, that sad fate befell the talented, brave, young Major André. Court-martialed and sentenced to die, André did not plead for his life but asked only to be shot as an officer and gentleman. Washington's officers recommended granting this plea. Stout-hearted Nathanael Greene, who had presided at the trial, dissented. André was either a spy or an innocent man, Greene reasoned. If innocent, he should be released, but if a spy, then the penalty for spying was death by hanging.[103] Perhaps remembering young Nathan Hale, Washington sternly sided with General Greene. With Americans weeping openly, Major John André, resplendent in his scarlet uniform, was hanged on 2 October 1780.[104]

Arnold escaped but died in poverty and disgrace in London twenty years later.[105] Benedict Arnold's name has ever after been a synonym for betrayal.

VI. "THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN"

The British had shifted their major combat operations to the American South in 1780. Following the loss of Charleston, South Carolina, on 12

May 1780, Congress placed General Horatio Gates, the victor of Saratoga, in command of the Southern army. They rejected Washington's recommendation of General Nathanael Greene. (Gates still had support in Congress, despite the failure of a move two years prior to remove Washington and put Gates in his place.) Soon, however, Gates proved his unfitness to command.

In a battle at Camden, South Carolina, on 16 August 1780, General Cornwallis's troops scattered the Virginia and North Carolina militiamen. The rout was shameful, the worst American defeat of the war.[106] General Gates managed to arrive in Charlotte, North Carolina, sixty miles away, well *ahead* of his fleeing army. Alexander Hamilton expressed the views of most Americans when he asked: "Was there ever such an instance of a general running away . . . from his whole army?"[107] Behind him, Gates left the mortally wounded Baron de Kalb, another of the brave foreigners who had come to fight for America. By October, Congress agreed with Washington. Gates was out; Greene was in.

Lord Cornwallis had the help of Colonel Banastre Tarleton, a twenty-six-year-old dashing cavalry officer who specialized in raiding the coasts. Tarleton came within minutes of capturing Virginia's governor, Thomas Jefferson, as well as leaders of the Old Dominion's legislature, in June of 1781. Fortunately, Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and other Virginia Patriot leaders were warned in time. Jack Jouett rode all night, fifty miles through dense woodlands along Indian trails, to carry the warning to Jefferson's home at Monticello. Captain Jouett is justly known as "the Paul Revere of the South."*

The South experienced the full rigors of war—actually civil war—as Loyalists clashed with Patriot forces for two years. Francis Marion, renowned as the "Swamp Fox," harassed the British and Tory forces in South Carolina.

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* Hearken good people: awhile abide
And hear of stout Jack Jouett's ride;
How he rushed his steed, nor stopped nor stayed
Till he warned the people of Tarleton's raid.
—Charlottesville Daily Progress, 1909

General Marion's fearless raids saved South Carolina from being overrun by the British.[108] Neglected by a distracted Congress, Marion's contribution to the war effort was generously recognized by Virginia's "Lighthorse Harry" Lee.[109*] Cornwallis found he could win battles and take towns, but he could not get supplies or information from the people.

Nathanael Greene was the son of a Rhode Island farmer, a Quaker. His appointment to head the Southern army was very popular with the soldiers.

General Greene encouraged Patriots in the South to operate independently. They won a signal victory over British Major Patrick Ferguson and his American Loyalists at Kings Mountain, South Carolina, in October 1780. The intrepid Ferguson made a point of listening to his American Loyalists and not treating them with disdain, as so many regular British officers did. Major Ferguson had brought his troop to this high point, saying he could defend it against "God almighty and all the rebels out of hell." When Ferguson fell, at the head of his forces, he had taken seven rifle balls, and his hat and clothing were shot through.[110] Ferguson's defeated forces cried for "Quarter!"—a plea for mercy. But the Patriot soldiers answered back, "Tarleton's Quarter!" as they killed the desperate Tories. Tarleton had slaughtered surrendering Patriots at the Battle of Waxhaws the previous May.[111]

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General Daniel Morgan, affectionately called the "Old Wagoner" by his men because he had been a wagon driver in the French and Indian War, won another great victory at Cowpens, South Carolina, on 17 January 1781. There, Morgan decisively defeated Tarleton's British regulars and sent Tarleton himself scurrying back to Cornwallis.[112]

Greene fought Cornwallis's force at Guilford Court House, near Greensboro, North Carolina, on 15 March 1781. Greene was defeated in the fierce battle, but his forces maintained order and so mauled Cornwallis's army that the British had no choice but to regroup and fall

* South Carolinians long remembered General Lighthorse Harry Lee's enthusiasm for their hero, the Swamp Fox. They later rallied around General Lee's even more famous son—General Robert E. Lee.

back for supplies. Greene had won no major battles, but he had forced Cornwallis to exhaust himself and his army, marching more than five hundred miles through the Virginia and North Carolina countryside.[113]

Greene's success is shown by Cornwallis's letter to Sir Henry Clinton in New York: "I am quite tired of marching about the country. . . . If we mean an offensive war in America, we must abandon New York and bring our whole force into Virginia."[114] The wearing down of the British forces in the South is what led them to Yorktown. Nathanael Greene, Dan Morgan, and the guerilla leaders Swamp Fox Francis Marion and Thomas Sumter achieved this result.

General Washington, with the help of Rochambeau and seven thousand French soldiers, was preparing to lay siege to the British in New York City in the summer of 1781. Then stunning news came. On August 14, Washington received a message informing him that French Admiral Francois Joseph Paul, the comte de Grasse, was bringing twenty-eight warships to the Chesapeake Bay.[115] Leaving a portion of his army behind to deceive General Clinton, Washington and Rochambeau quickly departed for Virginia. His swift, bold move, taking the bulk of his forces away from their positions around British-occupied New York City and striking out for the South, may have been his greatest achievement of the war.[116]

Local command of the sea—critical to American success—was established thanks to the French. On September 5, Admiral de Grasse defeated a smaller British squadron in the Battle of the Capes.[117] The battle was fought between Virginia's Cape Henry and Cape Charles, and it prevented Cornwallis's force from being evacuated by sea—or even resupplied.

By 26 September 1781, Washington's combined American-French force of seventeen thousand—including Rochambeau's regulars, Lafayette's and Anthony Wayne's Virginians, and reinforcements from de Grasse—had Cornwallis's seven thousand British troops trapped on the York Peninsula, a spit of land that juts into the Chesapeake Bay.[118]

Lafayette had assured Washington that Cornwallis could not escape. When he and Washington met again, the enthusiastic young Frenchman

grabbed Washington and smothered him with kisses. Washington, who had begun to look upon Lafayette as a son, did not object.[119] He quickly ordered a siege. Following the tactics taught by the great French military engineer Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban, the allied force soon began to squeeze the life out of the encircled British. Lord Cornwallis used the Yorktown home of Virginia's Governor Thomas Nelson as his headquarters—and the governor urged Washington to cannonade his own house.[120]

Within weeks, Cornwallis's men were reduced to eating their horses. Their attempts at answering the daily battering from Washington's artillery were feeble. Once, when a British cannonball landed in the American trenches, Colonel Alexander Hamilton jumped back and took shelter behind the ample Henry Knox. The normally genial Knox scolded Hamilton, warning him "not to make a breastwork of me again!"[121]

Finally, on 19 October 1781, Lord Cornwallis bowed to the inevitable and surrendered unconditionally. As his men marched out to lay down their weapons, they were surrounded by French hussars; Cornwallis was nowhere to be seen.[122] Claiming illness, he had sent his second-in-command, General Charles O'Hara, to offer his sword. First, the embarrassed O'Hara tried to give it to General Rochambeau, who nodded in the direction of General Washington. But Washington, standing on ceremony, indicated that only *his* second-in-command, General Benjamin Lincoln, could properly take the surrender.[123]

The common redcoat soldiers wept in frustration and smashed their muskets. British drummer boys bashed in their drumheads.[124] They were all headed for a prisoner-of-war camp. The British band played "The World Turned Upside Down." Indeed, it was.

VII. A DANGEROUS PEACE

Washington returned to New York to keep General Clinton hemmed in. As long as the British controlled the seas, however, he had little hope of

starving the British out. King George III, who had cried out, "Oh, God, it's all over!" when he received the news of Yorktown, faced the defeat in Parliament of Lord North's government in March 1782. The new British government determined to make peace.

Congress dispatched John Jay, the head of its committee on foreign affairs, to join Benjamin Franklin, Henry Laurens, and John Adams for peace talks in Paris. While the negotiations dragged on and on, Congress was sinking further into debt, and its inability to pay the army was creating a very dangerous situation. Washington knew this. In May 1782, he received a shocking letter from Colonel Lewis Nicola, an Irish immigrant and former commander of Fort Mifflin. Nicola, citing the rising disorder in the army and the country, urged Washington to *use* the army to set himself up as a king. Washington's response was short and sharp:

> No occurrence in the course of the war has given me more painful sensations than your information of there being such ideas existing in the army. . . . I must view with abhorrence and reprehend with severity [an idea that was] big with the greatest mischiefs that can befall my country.[125]

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Always aware, painfully aware, of the impression he was making, Washington demanded to know what in his conduct could ever have given rise to such a notion. In forcefully putting down Nicola's suggestion, Washington drove a stake through the heart of monarchy in America: if he would not be king, *nobody* could be king. And that was the end of kingship in America *forever*. America has had forty-five presidents—including some liars, "lemons," and losers—but we have never had a tyrant. For that we can thank George Washington.

An unpaid army that is unable to disband but not fully engaged against the enemy is a very dangerous instrument. Early in the next year, 1783, there were more rumblings of discontent. Anonymous pamphlets began to circulate in the camp around Newburgh, New York, urging

the army to march on Congress to enforce its legitimate demands *at the point of a bayonet*. Washington summoned his officers to a meeting for March 15. He planned his address carefully. Appearing before a large, sullen gathering, Washington made a dramatic entrance. He urgently pleaded with his men to understand the slowness of deliberative bodies, to have patience. Do not, he pleaded, "open the flood gates of civil discord, and deluge our rising empire in blood."[126]

The officers' response to this powerful appeal was an angry silence. They remained unconvinced. They had heard all that before. Their families were hungry, and the Congress was doing nothing to honor its promises to those who had bled and died for independence.

Then Washington remembered a letter he'd received from a congressman. He rummaged through his pockets for an embarrassing few seconds. Opening the envelope, he realized he could not read the small handwriting. Slowly, deliberately, he went through his pockets again, this time bringing out his spectacles. Few of the officers present had ever seen their fifty-one-year-old commander in chief wearing eyeglasses. "Gentlemen," said Washington as he carefully put them on, "you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray but almost blind in the service of my country."[127] His soft words turned away wrath. Many of the battle-hardened veterans wept openly. The movement toward a military coup d'état collapsed at that moment.

When word came of the final ratification of the Treaty of Paris, a treaty in which American independence was fully recognized, the British agreed to evacuate New York and Charleston. In November 1783, the redcoats boarded their ships and sailed away from Manhattan. Washington invited his officers to dine with him at Fraunces Tavern, near Wall Street, in what is now the city's financial district. There, on 4 December 1783, another emotional scene occurred. Washington was no marble man, as his grim visage on the dollar bill would suggest. At the conclusion of the evening, when he invited his officers to come and take him by the hand, all of those present, including Washington, dissolved in tears.

"With a heart full of love and gratitude, I now take leave of you," he told the assembled officers. "I most devoutly wish that your latter days will be as prosperous and happy as your former ones have been glorious and honorable."[128]

It remained for Washington to return to Congress—the source of all his authority—to close out his service in the war. Meeting in Annapolis, Maryland, Congress was eager to welcome him back. At noon, on 23 December 1783, Washington appeared in the Senate Chamber of the Old Maryland State House. The chamber was packed with members, visiting dignitaries, and ladies. Washington rose to congratulate Congress on the successful achievement of independence and peace. When he came to that part of his text that contained a tribute to his fellow officers, his hands shook, and he struggled to maintain his composure. Then he closed with these words: "And of presenting myself before them [Congress] to surrender into their hands the trust committed to me and to claim the indulgence of retiring from the service of my country."[129]

King George III had said if Washington voluntarily gave up power, then he truly *would* be the greatest man on earth. Cromwell hadn't done it. Napoleon would not do it. But Washington did it.

How great a general was Washington? Winners *always* seem like great generals. He lost more battles than any general in modern history, indeed. But he won some very big ones.

Washington had many superior qualities—bravery, self-control, administrative skill, strategic sense, tactical boldness—and an ability to learn from his mistakes. But most of all, he had *judgment*. He refused to burn American towns and refused to take hostages or shoot collaborators. He kept the army under firm control. He *always* subordinated himself and his restive army to the authority of Congress. So despite shortcomings and defeats, he was greater than any other American general of the Revolution.

Congress's official response was delivered by its president, Thomas Mifflin. In an earlier day, Mifflin had conspired to replace Washington

with Horatio Gates. Fortunately for Mifflin and for us, his text was prepared for him by Thomas Jefferson:

> You have conducted the great military contest with wisdom and fortitude, invariably regarding the rights of the civil power, through all the disasters and changes. . . . You have persevered until these United States have been enabled, under a just Providence, to close the war in freedom, safety and independence. . . . And for you, we address to Him our earnest prayers that a life so beloved may be fostered with all His care.[130]

Freedom, safety, independence, and peace. By 1783, that was already George Washington's legacy to his country. Soon, he would give more.

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