

# Modern Historians Confront the American Revolution

by [Murray N. Rothbard](#)

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## I. Basic Causes of the Revolution

The historian must be more than a chronicler, a mere lister of events. For his real task is discovering and setting forth the causal connections between events in human history, the complex chain of human purposes, choices, and consequences over time that have shaped the fate of mankind. Investigating the causes of such a portentous event as the American Revolution is more, then, than a

mere listing of preceding occurrences; for the historian must weigh the causal significance of these factors, and select those of overriding importance.

### ***Constitutional Conflict Historians***

What, then, were the basic and overarching causes of the American Revolution? The older view, dominant in the first two or three decades of the twentieth century, laid greatest emphasis on the conflict of constitutional ideas, on the fact that the American colonists saw the actions of Great Britain after 1763 as interfering with their constitutional rights as *Englishmen*. Typical of these works were Charles H. McIlwain, *The American Revolution: A Constitutional Interpretation*. Randolph G. Adams, *Political Ideas of the American Revolution: Britannic-American Contributions to the Problem of Imperial Organization, 1765–1775*; and Claude H. Van Tyne, *The Causes of the War of Independence*. While constitutional interpretations and conflicts played a role, the entire emphasis came to seem to historians — and properly so — to be stodgy and unsatisfactory; for what event as wrenching and even cataclysmic as a revolution is ever launched on the basis of mere legalisms, and legalisms that were often dubious at that? The "Constitutionalists" and other early writers, were closer to the mark in noting the influence of John Locke's libertarian natural rights philosophy. Locke's influence was particularly stressed in Carl L. Becker's *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas* and at least mentioned by the other writers. But while the assertion of the natural rights of man could far better stir the passions than mere legal and constitutional differences, there was still a vital missing link: for how many colonists indeed sat down to read the abstract philosophy of John Locke?

### ***The Progressive Historians and the Economic Dimension***

The "Progressive" historians, dominant in the later 1920s and the 1930s, added another, and exciting dimension to the analysis of the causes of the American Revolution. For they added the important economic dimension — the struggles over the British attempt to impose taxes, mercantile restrictions, and a monopoly over the importation of tea into the colonies. But the Progressive historians did more. Inspired by the overall work on American history of Charles A. Beard, the Progressives also posed a contrast to the constitutional or philosophic American motivations asserted by the older historians: namely, economic motivation and class interests. In short, the American leaders, in particular the wealthy merchants, struggled on behalf of their economic interests, against British restrictions and tax levies.

Believing in the inevitability of class conflict, and seeing only the merchants as driven by their economic interests toward rebellion, the Progressives then had to explain two things: the continuing recourse to ideas and ideology by the American leaders, and the adoption of this ideology by the mass of the public. To explain this, the Progressives fell back on the theory of "propaganda" popular in the 1920s and 1930s: that the ideology propounded by the leaders was mere windy rhetoric which they never believed. The "propaganda," they claimed, was used to dupe the masses into going along with the revolutionary agitation.

The result was a curious "left-right" agreement between the Progressives and the minority of American historians of the "Imperial" school. The latter maintained that the American Revolution was the result of the unwarranted propaganda of sinister agitators who succeeded in duping the masses to break their beneficent ties with the British Empire. The major works of the "Imperial" school are Lawrence H. Gipson, *The British Empire Before the American Revolution*, and George L. Beer, *British Colonial Policy, 1754–1765*.

The writings of the Progressive historians are legion, ranging from such popular but poorly researched books as John C. Miller, *Origins of the American Revolution*, to Philip G. Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution, 1763–1783*, to the thorough and scholarly work by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763–1776*. The last gasp of the Progressive interpretation in diluted form is Merrill Jensen, *The Founding of a Nation: A History of the American Revolution, 1763–1776*.

But ideas *do* count in human motivation. It is impossible to read the letters, or the published writings of the leaders, as well as of the American public, and doubt the passionate sincerity with which they held their revolutionary ideas. Furthermore, the Progressives overlooked several other important points.

First, while the economic interpretation is often insightful in gauging the motivations for State action, particularly by small groups of pullers of the levers of State power, it is highly inadequate in explaining the motives of mass actions, especially revolutionary actions, *against* the State — whether by leaders or by the public. For a revolution is a passionate and radical, indeed a *revolutionary* act. It is difficult to believe that a people will wrench themselves out of their habitual lives to risk at a blow "their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor," from a mere chafing at a tax or at mercantile restrictions. There must be more to it than that.

And secondly, the economic interpretation overlooked the very nature of the libertarian ideology that moved the revolutionaries. This ideology integrated moral, political, *and* economic liberty. Therefore it integrated all of these revulsions against what these libertarians saw as British invasions of their rights. Neither the Constitutionalists, stressing the legal and philosophic, nor the Progressives, stressing the economic grievances, saw the nature of the integrated whole of American revolutionary ideology.

### ***The Consensus Interpretation***

Neither did the "Consensus" school of historians, who became ascendant in the 1940s and 1950s. Just as the Progressives reflected the Marxian outlook of American intellectuals of the 1930s, so the Consensus school reflected the neo-Conservative "American celebration" that typified intellectuals in post-World War II America. The Consensus historians were anxious to see consensus rather than conflict in American history. And since both ideology and economic interests can cause conflicts, both were discarded as causal factors in the American past. Instead, the Consensus school saw American history as guided not by "doctrinaire" ideas nor by economic interests but rather by a flexible, pragmatic, ad hoc approach to problem-solving. Since a *revolution* can hardly be a flexible approach to consensus, the American Revolution had to be written off as a mere localized "conservative" resistance to the British government. Furthermore, by deprecating the revolutionary nature of the American Revolution, the Consensus school could isolate it from the indisputably radical French Revolution and other modern upheavals, and continue to denounce the latter as ideological and socially disruptive while seeming to embrace the founding heritage of America. The leading Consensus historians were Daniel J. Boorstin and Clinton Rossiter. On the American Revolution, their works include: Boorstin, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson and The Americans: The Colonial Experience*; and Rossiter, *Seedtime of the Republic: the Origins of the American Tradition of Political Liberty*. Also in this school, stressing in particular the alleged "democracy" of the American colonies, is Robert E. Brown, *Middle-Class Democracy and the Revolution in Massachusetts, 1691–1780*.

Thus, by the end of the 1950s, American historians were further away than ever from appreciating the fact that the American revolution was truly revolutionary. They did not perceive that it was largely animated by a passionately held and radical libertarian ideology that integrated the moral,

political, and economic reasons for rebelling against the

British imperial regime. But the Consensus historians did make one important contribution. They restored the older idea of the American Revolution as a movement of the great *majority* of the American people. It replaced the view held by Progressives and Imperialists alike that the revolution was a minority action imposed on a reluctant public. Particularly important in developing this position was the judicious work by John Richard Alden, *The American Revolution, 1775–1783*, still the best one-volume book on the revolutionary war period. On the left, the Marxian historian Herbert Aptheker also advanced this position. He chided the 1930s Progressives for their opposition to the revolution as a minority class movement in *The American Revolution, 1763–1783*.

In the stifling atmosphere of Consensus history, an important advance came with the publication of the first volume of the monumental two-volume work of Robert H. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800, Vol. I: The Challenge*. Weaving together a scintillating tapestry of trans-Atlantic history, Palmer vindicated the radicalism of the American Revolution. He pointed to its decisive inspirational effect on the succeeding European revolutions of the late eighteenth century, as well as to the similarity of goals and ideologies. Palmer thereby restored the older tradition of linking these revolutions on both sides of the Atlantic, as did Jacques Godechot in *France and the Atlantic Revolution of the 18th Century*. Palmer also showed that: by one important criterion, the American Revolution was *more* radical than the French, since proportionately far more Tories were driven out of America than aristocrats were to be exiled from France. As a "European" historian, however, Palmer was not read by the hermetically specialized guild of "American" historians.

### ***Bailyn's Crucial Breakthrough***

The crucial breakout from the miasma of American historiography of the Revolution came from one man. He was able by sheer force of scholarship to overthrow the Consensus and Progressive views and to establish a new interpretation of the causes of the American Revolution. This was Harvard Professor Bernard Bailyn, who, breaking through the hermetic separation of European and American historians, found his inspiration in the great work of Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth Century Commonwealthman*. For Bailyn realized that Professor Robbins had discovered the "missing link" in the transmission of radical libertarian thought after John Locke. She had found it in a group of dedicated writers, inspired by the English Revolution of the seventeenth century, who continued to reject the centrist Whig settlement of the eighteenth century. These writers carried forward the ideals of natural rights and individual liberty. In the course of editing a volume of Revolutionary pamphlets, Bailyn discovered that Americans were indeed influenced, on a massive scale, by these libertarian articles and pamphlets. Many of these publications were reprinted widely in the American colonies, and clearly influenced the revolutionary leaders. The most important shaper of this libertarian viewpoint was *Cato's Letters*, a series of newspaper articles in England in the early 1720s written by John Trenchard and his young disciple Thomas Gordon. The collected *Cato's Letters* were republished many times in eighteenth century England and America.

Trenchard and Gordon, and the other libertarian writers, transmuted John Locke's abstract and often guarded political philosophy into a trenchant, hard-hitting, and radical libertarian creed. Not only did men have natural rights of life, liberty, and property, which governments must not invade, but "Cato" and the other writers declared that government — power — was always and ever the great enemy of liberty, and stood ready to aggress against it. Hence, power must always be diminished as far as possible. Men must watch it continually with utmost hostility and vigilance, lest it break its bonds, and destroy the rights of the individual. "Cato" particularly denounced the propensity for tyranny of the British government of the day. This message found an eager reception in the American colonies.

Thus, Bernard Bailyn established the American Revolution as

at one and the same time genuinely radical and revolutionary. He showed that it was motivated largely by firmly and passionately held libertarian ideology, summed up in the phrase "the transforming libertarian radicalism" of the American Revolution. Bailyn's findings were first presented in the "General Introduction" to his edition of *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750–1776, Vol. 1, 1750–1765*. The only volume of pamphlets yet published in the series, it included the works of such revolutionary leaders as the Rev. Jonathan Mayhew, Thomas Fitch, James Otis, Oxenbridge Thacher, Daniel Dulany, and John Dickinson.

An expanded version was published as Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*. Also see the companion volume by Bailyn, *The Origins of American Politics*, which offered an excellent explanation for the British royal governors being weak in the eighteenth century at the same time that the King was dominant at home. A useful summary of the Bailyn thesis is provided by Bailyn's "The Central Themes of the American Revolution: An Interpretation" in S. Kurtz and J. Hutson, eds., *Essays on the American Revolution*. The scintillating writings of "Cato" have been collected in an excellently edited volume by David L. Jacobson, *The English Libertarian Heritage*.

One problem with the generally correct Bailyn thesis is its exclusive emphasis on ideology, as it affected the minds and hearts of the Americans. Historians find it easy to slip into the view that the deep ideologically motivated hostility to Britain, while genuinely felt, was merely an expression of "paranoia." Indeed, Bailyn himself almost fell into this trap in his recent overly sympathetic biography of the leading Massachusetts Tory, *Thomas Hutchinson*. One of the best historians of this period, Edmund Morgan, in the *New York Review of Books* duly noted and warned against the trap in his review of this work.

An excellent corrective to this exclusive concentration on the subjective is the work of the most important political (as contrasted to ideological) historians of the pre-Revolutionary period. In the definitive history of the Stamp Act crisis of 1765–1766, Edmund and Helen Morgan demonstrated the majority nature of the revolutionary movement. They attacked, as well, the actual depredations of Great Britain on American political and economic rights. Edmund and Helen Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution*. Also see the companion source book of documents, Edmund S. Morgan, ed., *Prologue to Revolution: Sources and Documents on the Stamp Act Crisis, 1764–1766*. Particularly important is the monumental and definitive, though densely written, two volume political history of the coming of the American Revolution by Bernhard Knollenberg, *Origins of the American Revolution: 1759–1765*; and *Growth of the American Revolution, 1766–1775*. By examining British archives, Knollenberg shows that the supposed paranoia and "conspiracy theories" of the American colonists were all too accurate. The British officials were indeed conspiring to invade the liberties of the American colonies after the "salutary neglect" of the pre-1763 period.

## **II. The Pre-Revolutionary Period**

### ***Political and Economic Conflicts***

We are now fortunate in having the two-volume Knollenberg work, which supplies by far the best political history of the events leading up to the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. Historians had long set 1763 as the date for the beginning of conflict between Britain and the colonies. Knollenberg's

*Origins* pushes the date back to 1759, toward the end of the American phase of the Seven Years War between Britain and France.

Jack P. Greene has shown that the Board of Trade, headed by the imperialist Lord Halifax, had tried abortively to impose British restrictions on the colonies in the late 1740s and early 1750s. The Board's attempt was finally halted by the outbreak of war with France. See Jack P. Greene, "An Uneasy Connection: An Analysis of the Preconditions of the American Revolution," in Kurtz and Hutson, eds., *Essays on the American Revolution*.

John Shy's *Toward Lexington: The Role of the British Army in the Coming of the American Revolution* is a judicious discussion of British army policies and conflicts in this period, although favorable to the British position. Howard H. Peckham's *Pontiac and the Indian Uprising* now replaces the venerable classic by Francis Parkman, *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* as the best account of Pontiac's notable uprising.

The Western lands were highly important in the politics of this period. The best accounts of the intricate connection between government policy, land speculation, and Western conquest are still Clarence W. Alvord, *Mississippi Valley in British Politics: A Study of the Trade, Land Speculation, and Experiments in Imperialism Culminating in the American Revolution* and the later Thomas Perkins Abernathy, *Western Lands and the American Revolution*. A pro-British view is provided by Jack M. Sosin, *Whitehall and the Wilderness: The Middle West in British Colonial Policy, 1760–1775*. The important activities of the swindler, land speculator, and Indian trader George Croghan are covered in the definitive account by Nicholas B. Wainwright, *George Croghan: Wilderness Diplomat*. A lively and vivid account of Indian relations on the frontier appears in Dale Van Every, *Forth to the Wilderness: the First American Frontier, 1754–1774*.

As noted above, an excellent study of American resistance to the Stamp Act is Edmund and Helen Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, with supporting documents in Edmund Morgan, ed., *Prologue to Revolution*. The Boston Massacre has now been treated fully in Hiller B. Zobel, *The Boston Massacre*, and the Boston Tea Party in Benjamin W. Labaree, *The Boston Tea Party*. Labaree emphasizes the importance of the role of the monopoly East India Company, in administering the tea tax in America, in the final development of American fears of the loss of traditional liberty. The company's tax looting in Bengal had caused a disastrous famine which was widely reported in the American press. The English beneficiaries of the exploitation of Bengal returned to England with their loot and purchased seats in Parliament. A recent study of these "Nabobs" is P.J. Marshall's *East India Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century*.

Disgracefully, there has been very little work done on two vital revolutionary organizations and institutions in the pre-Revolutionary period: the committees of correspondence, and the Sons of Liberty. The only overall study of the committees of correspondence is the old and brief work by Edward D. Collins, *Committees of Correspondence of the American Revolution*. The role of the Boston Committee of Correspondence has been recently studied in Richard D. Brown, *Revolutionary Politics in Massachusetts: The Boston Committee of Correspondence and the Towns, 1772–1774*. There is no overall study of the Sons of Liberty, but there are some valuable sectional accounts. The best is Richard Walsh, *Charleston's Sons of Liberty: A Study of the Artisans, 1763–1789*. The New York Sons are studied in Roger J. Champagne, "The Military Association of the Sons of Liberty: *New York Historical Society Quarterly*, 41(1957); Champagne, "Liberty Boys and Mechanics of New York City, 1764–1774," *Labor History* 8 (1967); and, from a Marxian perspective, Herbert M. Morais, "The Sons of Liberty in New York" in Richard B. Morris, ed., *The Era of the American Revolution*. A realistic and thorough history of the use of mobs in the American resistance is now available,

however; in Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765–1776*.

Several excellent studies deal with various aspects of mercantilist restrictions and enforcement by Britain as causes of the American resistance. Oliver M. Dickerson's *The Navigation Acts and the American Revolution* deals with the Navigation Acts. Carl Ubbelohde treats the Admiralty courts in *The Vice-Admiralty Courts and the American Revolution*. And Joseph J. Malone covers the White Pines Acts in *Pine Trees and Politics: The Naval Stores and Forest Policy in Colonial New England, 1691–1775*. On the same subject is Robert G. Albion, *Forests and Sea Power: The Timber Problem of the Royal Navy, 1652–1862*.

While marred by its consistently Progressive interpretation, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution 1763–1776* is an important, thorough, and still-definitive account of the merchants and the various movements and struggles for nonimportation boycotts of England. Beverly W. Bond, Jr., *The Quit Rent System in the American Colonies*, stands as the only work on the feudal quitrents which provided a continuing source of irritation in the colonies.

### ***The Role of Ideas in the Revolution***

The best works on the influence of libertarian ideology on the budding American revolutionaries are the Bailyn and other works mentioned earlier. George Rudé studies the radical libertarian Wilkite movement in England in *Wilkes and Liberty: A Social Study of 1763 to 1774*. And Pauline Maier examines the relations between the English Wilkites and the American radical libertarians in "John Wilkes and American Disillusionment with Britain," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 20 (1963); as does Jack P. Greene in "Bridge to Revolution: the Wilkes Fund Controversy in South Carolina, 1769–1775," *Journal of Southern History*, 29 (1963).

Thomas Hollis was an English libertarian who dedicated his life to reprinting and disseminating libertarian works throughout the world, and particularly in the American colonies, and in corresponding with like-minded people. He has been studied in Caroline Robbins, "The Strenuous Whig: Thomas Hollis of Lincoln's Inn," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 7 (1950). The impact of American revolutionary thought upon English radicalism has received thorough examination in Cohn Bonwick's *English Radicals and the American Revolution*.

The influence of French libertarian thought can be found in Howard Mumford Jones, *American and French Culture, 1750–1848*. Also see Jones, *O Strange New World: American Culture, The Formative Years*. The most recent study of the impact of French eighteenth century thought on American revolutionary developments is Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America*.

Religion played an important role in the development of revolutionary and libertarian ideas. The great radical Massachusetts minister Jonathan Mayhew has found his biographer in Charles W. Akers, *Called unto Liberty: A Life of Jonathan Mayhew, 1720–1766*. The best work on the "black regiment" of Congregationalist ministers in New England is Alice M. Baldwin, *The New England Clergy and the American Revolution*. While scarcely definitive, Herbert M. Morals, *Deism in Eighteenth Century America* has produced the only work on the significant role of deism.

Part of religion's role in generating a revolutionary spirit resulted from the general American fear of England's placing Anglican bishops in the American colonies. Arthur L. Cross has produced the

classic work on this subject in *The Anglican Episcopate and the American Colonies*. It is now partially superseded by Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre: Transatlantic Faiths, ideas, Personalities, and Politics, 1689–1775*.

An admirable treatment of the role of the American press in revolutionary agitation is Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., *Prelude to Independence: The Newspaper War on Britain, 1764–1776*. It happily supersedes the volume by Philip G. Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution, 1763–1783*, which was fatally marred by the Progressive view that all ideology is mere "propaganda" rhetoric.

Michael G. Kammen studies the vital role of American colonial agents to London in *A Rope of Sand: The Colonial Agents, British Policies, and the American Revolution*. See also: Jack Sosin, *Agents and Merchants: British Colonial Policy and the Origins of the American Revolution, 1763–1875*. The letters of the most important of these agents, and a leading pro-American British Whig, are included in Ross J.S. Hoffman, ed., *Edmund Burke, New York Agent, with his Letters to the New York Assembly and Intimate Correspondence with Charles O'Hara, 1761–1776*.

The best treatment of British politics in relation to the developing American resistance is Charles R. Ritcheson, *British Politics and the American Revolution*. Rudé discusses the Whig and radical opposition to British imperial designs and to Tory government at home in *Wilkes and Liberty*, mentioned earlier. Also see Eugene C. Black, *The Association: British Extraparliamentary Political Organization, 1769–1793*; Archibald S. Foord, *His Majesty's Opposition, 1714–1830*; George H. Guttridge, *English Whiggism and the American Revolution*; Lucy S. Sutherland, *The City of London and the Opposition to Government: 1768–1774: A Study in the Rise of Metropolitan Radicalism*; and Maurice R. O'Connell, *Irish Politics and Social Conflict in the Age of American Revolution*.

Several recent works examine the great English Whig, the Duke of Newcastle, and his policy of "salutary neglect." But none are satisfactory. The definitive political biography of his successor, the Marquis of Rockingham, is difficult reading. It assumes a detailed knowledge of English politics of the period; it is Ross J.S. Hoffman, *The Marquis: A Study of Lord Rockingham, 1730–1782*.

The most relevant discussion of Edmund Burke's views and activities in this period is Carl B. Cone's *Burke and the Nature of Politics, Vol. I. The Age of the American Revolution*. Several works detail the Tory, or "Namierite" point of view on English politics in this period, the most famous being Sir Lewis Bernstein Namier, *England in the Age of the American Revolution*.

### ***Revolutionary Accounts of Cities and States***

Boston was the heartland of the revolutionary movement, but there is no history of the Boston or even Massachusetts movement per se. Robert E. Brown, *Middle-Class Democracy and the Revolution in Massachusetts, 1691–1780* is a basic work on Massachusetts in the eighteenth century. But the author's naive consensus view of colonial "democracy" badly mars the book. The Boston Massacre and Tea Party have been covered in the books cited above.

The premier leader of the revolutionary movement, Samuel Adams, has been ill-served by historians; no satisfactory biography has been published. John C. Miller's *Sam Adams: Pioneer in Propaganda* is hostile and vituperative, under the influence of the Progressive "propaganda" theory. Of the numerous biographies and studies of John Adams, best for this period, though not always reliable, is Catherine Drinker Bowen, *John Adams and the American Revolution*. Though mired in detail, Page Smith's *John Adams, 1735–1826* handles Adams's political and economic thought weakly.



The heroic and often neglected Dr. Joseph Warren is in John Cary, *Joseph Warren: Physician, Politician, Patriot*. William T. Baxter studies the Hancock family, as well as the life of Boston merchants of the period, in *The House of Hancock, Business in Boston, 1724–1774*. For non-Boston merchants; see Benjamin W. Labaree, *Patriots and Partisans: the Merchants of Newburyport, 1764–1815*.

Robert J. Taylor has written an important work on rural Massachusetts: *Western Massachusetts in the Revolution*. Also see Lee N. Newcomer's *The Embattled Farmers: A Massachusetts Countryside in the American Revolution*. A major revolutionary leader in Western Massachusetts receives a biography in E. Francis Brown, *Joseph Hawley: Colonial Radical*.

The outstanding work on Connecticut in this period is Oscar Zeichner, *Connecticut's Years of Controversy, 1750–1776*. A sensible work on Rhode Island politics, placing the Ward and Hopkins camps as sectional factions rather than embodiments of a class struggle, is David S. Lovejoy, *Rhode Island Politics and the American Revolution, 1760–1776*. On the same theme, see also Mack F. Thompson, "The Ward-Hopkins Controversy and the American Revolution in Rhode Island: An Interpretation," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 16 (1959).

The classic work on New Hampshire, Richard E Upton, *Revolutionary New Hampshire*, has now been supplemented by Jere R. Daniel, *Experiment in Republicanism: New Hampshire Politics and the American Revolution, 1741–1794*.

Vermont was unique in that its own guerrilla rebellion against New York rule and land grants merged easily into the Revolutionary War. Frederic Van de Water, *The Reluctant Republic: Vermont, 1724–1791* contains a lively account of the Green Mountain Boys and of the Vermont rebellion. John Pell's *Ethan Allen*, a biography of the Green Mountain Boys' great leader, has now been supplemented by Charles A. Jellison's *Ethan Allen*. Darlene Shapiro's "Ethan Allen: Philosopher-Theologian to a Generation of American Revolutionaries," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 21 (1964), is a particularly good account of the influence of the libertarian and Deist thought of the guerrilla leader.

Despite its age and its Beardian interpretation, Carl Lotus Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York 1760–1776* is still the best work on the political struggles in New York in the pre-Revolutionary era. Alternative interpretations can be found in Bernard Mason, *The Road to Independence: The Revolutionary Movement in New York, 1773–1777*, and in the later chapters of Patricia Updegraff Bonomi, *A Factious People: Politics and Society in Colonial New York*. However, the neo-Beardian approach to New York politics, especially in the correct stress on the continuity of the major conflicting groups in the pre- and post-Revolutionary periods, is found in the splendid work of Alfred F. Young, *The Democratic Republicans of New York: The Origins, 1763–1797*.

The tenant risings in the Hudson Valley of New York are treated in the only full-scale work on the subject: Irving Mark, *Agrarian Conflicts in Colonial New York, 1711–1775*. This should be supplemented by the accounts in the early chapter of Bonomi, *A Factious People*, and in Chapter III of Staughton Lynd, *Anti-Federalism in Dutchess County, New York: A Study of Democracy and Class Conflict in the Revolutionary Era*. Dorothy Dillon looks at *The New York Triumvirate: A Study of the Legal and Political Careers of William Livingston, John Morin Scott, William Smith, Jr.*

No works are devoted to New Jersey for this period. Donald L. Kemmerer offers the best approach in *Path to Freedom: The Struggles for Self-Government in Colonial New Jersey, 1703–1776*. Although missing the dimension of political and constitutional ideology, the political conflict in New Jersey

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after 1763 is detailed in Larry R. Gerlach, *Prologue to Independence: New Jersey in the Coming of the American Revolution*.

The best work on Pennsylvania politics in this period is Theodore Thayer, *Pennsylvania Politics and the Growth of Democracy, 1740–1776*. No book fully replaces Charles H. Lincoln, *The Revolutionary Movement in Pennsylvania, 1760–1776*. Carl and Jessica Bridenbaugh have written a valuable social history in *Rebels and Gentlemen: Philadelphia in the Age of Franklin*. Frederick B. Tolles offers an excellent account of the leading Philadelphia merchants of the period in *Meetinghouse and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia*.

Most of the rebel leaders of Pennsylvania remain unknown and untreated by historians. An early liberal leader, John Dickinson, now has a good biography, in David L. Jacobson, *John Dickinson and the Revolution in Pennsylvania, 1764–1776*. The only radical leader to be the subject of a biography is an old one by Burton A. Konkle, *George Bryan and the Constitution of Pennsylvania, 1731–1791*. There is a good article on the vitally important Charles Thomson, John J. Zimmerman, "Charles Thomson, The Sam Adams of Philadelphia"; *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 45 (1958).

Of the innumerable works on the opportunistic Tory Benjamin Franklin, most are adulatory and uncritical. This includes the standard account by Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*. There is some good material, nevertheless, in Verner W. Crane, *Benjamin Franklin and a Rising People*. Most objective and illuminating on Franklin's machinations in colonial politics, is William S. Hanna, *Benjamin Franklin and Pennsylvania Politics*.

*"Of the innumerable works on the opportunistic Tory Benjamin Franklin, most are adulatory and uncritical."*

There is nothing good on Delaware in this period. Here we must still fall back on the old and unsatisfactory John T. Scharf et al., *History of Delaware, 1609–1888*.

For an overall account of the South in this period, John R. Alden, *The South in the Revolution, 1763–1789* is excellent. Charles A. Barker covers Maryland's unique political and social structure in *The Background of the Revolution in Maryland*. This should be supplemented with James Haw, "Maryland Politics on the Eve of Revolution: The Provincial Controversy, 1770–1773," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 65 (1970).

The best and most thorough history of colonial Virginia is Richard L. Morton, *Colonial Virginia*; and the latter chapters of Volume II deal with the Parsons' Cause and other Virginia grievances down to 1763. No one has made a specific study of Virginia in the pre-Revolutionary period. But Charles S. Syndors' *Gentlemen Freeholders: Political Practices in Washington's Virginia*, is an excellent study of Virginia's political and social structure in the colonial period. Robert E. and B. Katherine Brown's *Virginia, 1705–1786: Democracy or Aristocracy?* is an absurd attempt to apply the Browns' "democratic" model, designed for Massachusetts, to a colony where it can scarcely be relevant. Two important revisionist articles demolish the myth that Virginia's planters were exploited by being indebted to British merchants. They find this grievance was not of critical importance in the Virginia revolutionary movement. See James H. Soltow, "Scottish Traders in Virginia, 1750–1775," *Economic History Review*, 21 (1959); and Emory G. Evans, "Planter Indebtedness and the Coming of the Revolution in Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 19 (1962).

On Patrick Henry see Robert D. Meade's *Patrick Henry, Vol. 1*. Though old, Moses Coit Tyler's *Patrick Henry* contains long excerpts from Henry's famous speeches. On that other great radical leader, Richard Henry Lee, see Oliver P. Chitwood's *Richard Henry Lee, Statesman of the Revolution*.

As in the case of Franklin, the historiography of the conservative rebel leader George Washington suffers from uncritical adulation. Among these, the definitive biography is Douglas Southall

Freeman's *George Washington: A Biography*. While a disorganized collection of essays, Bernhard Knollenberg's *George Washington: The Virginia Period, 1732–1775* contains valuable revisionist insights.

The literature on North Carolina is sparse, old and unsatisfactory. Robert D.W Connor, *History of North Carolina, Vol. I* deals with the entire colonial and revolutionary period. Hugh T. Lefler and Albert R. Newsome, *North Carolina*, is a rehash.

For South Carolina the venerable general history is Edward McCrady's *The History of South Carolina Under the Royal Government, 1719–1776*. The standard modern work is David D. Wallace, *History of South Carolina, Vol.I*. Richard Maxwell Brown has written an excellent history of the South Carolina Regulators in *The South Carolina Regulators*. The advance to revolution in South Carolina has now been covered in Robert M. Weir, "*Most Important Epoch*": *The Coming of the Revolution in South Carolina*.

The only thorough history of the Sons of Liberty in any area is Richard Walsh, *Charleston's Sons of Liberty: A Study of the Artisans, 1763–1789*. Unfortunately no biographer has chronicled the great radical rebel leader, Christopher Gadsden. But Richard Walsh has collected his writings: Christopher Gadsden, *Writings, 1746–1805*.

*"The historiography of the conservative rebel leader George*

*Washington suffers from uncritical adulation."*

On the coming of the Revolution in Georgia, see Kenneth Coleman, *The American Revolution in Georgia, 1763–1789*. On the royal government of Georgia in this period, William W. Abbot's *The Royal Governors of Georgia, 1754–1775*, is particularly valuable.

### III. 1775 and After

#### *Revolutionary Warfare*

A concise, judicious, overall summary of the military, political, social, and economic history of the American Revolution is fortunately available in John it. Alden, *The American Revolution, 1775–1783*.

The most important and dramatic change in interpreting the history of the American Revolutionary War has come about very recently: the realization that the Americans won because, and insofar as, they were conducting a massive guerrilla war. They fought a "people's war" against the superior firepower and orthodox military strategy and tactics of the British imperial power. With modern guerrilla war coming into focus since the late 1960s, recent historians have begun to apply its lessons to the American Revolution, not only to the tactics of individual battles but also in basic strategic insights. For example, they realize that guerrilla war can only succeed if the great majority of the populace back the guerrillas. This was the condition during the American Revolution. The valuable military histories of the Revolution, therefore, can be grouped into two categories: those which antedated and those which have incorporated modern insights into the nature and potential of guerrilla warfare.

Thus, the best detailed history of the military conflict, devoting keen analysis to each battle, is Christopher Ward's *The War of the Revolution*. Willard M. Wallace has prepared a useful and relatively brief one-volume military history: *Appeal to Arms: A Military History of the American Revolution*. More specifically for the standard military history of the first year of the war, see Allen French, *The First Year of the American Revolution*. And Arthur B. Tourtellot describes the initial battle of Lexington and Concord in *William Diamond's Drum*.

None of these books, however, was written recently enough to incorporate modern insights on the importance of guerrilla as opposed to conventional war. But an important one-volume military history does so: Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practices, 1763–1789*. Two books edited by George Athan Billias are particularly important, both for guerrilla insights and for penetrating "revisionist" studies of particular generals and their strategies and tactics: *George Washington's Generals* and *George Washington's Opponents: British Generals and Admirals in the American Revolution*.

Particularly important in the former volume is George A. Billias, "Horatio Gates: Professional Soldier," about a general who used guerrilla strategy and tactics against Burgoyne, culminating at Saratoga. In the same volume, Don Higginbotham's "Daniel Morgan: Guerrilla Fighter" apologizes for the fact that his valuable biography of the war's greatest guerrilla tactician had been written before the advent of his own and general interest in guerrilla warfare (Higginbotham, *Daniel Morgan: Revolutionary Rifleman*.) Particularly see John W. Shy, "Charles Lee: the Soldier as Radical," in which Shy looks with favor at the outstanding military libertarian and guerrilla theorist, as well as strategist and general, of the American Revolution. Lee, who had been drummed out of his number two post of command and court-martialled unfairly by George Washington, is favorably reassessed in a biography by John R. Alden, *Charles Lee: Traitor or Patriot?*

Professor Shy, who of all historians has the best grasp on the importance of guerrilla warfare in this period, brilliantly interprets the various phases of British strategy during the war (from police action to conventional war to counter-guerrilla attempts at "pacification" in the South) in his "The American Revolution: The Military Conflict Considered as A Revolutionary War," in Kurtz and Hutson, *Essays on the American Revolution*. John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* is a collection of Shy's essays on military history, some of which contribute to a positive reevaluation of the importance of the militia in defensive warfare. R. Arthur Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure Of the British Army in America, 1775–1783* shows that the hostility of the local populations contributed to the failure of food supplies. This hostility was compounded by British attempts to seize the food they could not purchase.

*"Guerrilla war can only succeed if the great majority of the populace back the guerrillas. This was the condition during the American Revolution."*

For the political direction of the war, see Gerald S. Brown, *American Secretary: Colonial Policy of Lord George Germain*. An important volume on militia and guerrilla warfare as against the orthodox deployment of the Continental army in a local area is Adrian C. Leiby, *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley: The Jersey Dutch and the Neutral Ground, 1775–1783*.

On the fierce guerrilla vs. counter-guerrilla conflicts in South Carolina during the last phase of the war, see Russell F. Weigley, *The Partisan War: The South Carolina Campaign of 1780–1782*.

The essay by Ira D. Gruber, "Richard Lord Howe: Admiral as Peacemaker," in Billias, *George Washington's Opponents* indicates clearly that one of the major reasons for the British failure to crush Washington's army in the first two years of the war was the Howe brothers' treasonous opposition (as dedicated Whigs) to the British war effort against the Americans. On the British view of the war, see Piers Mackesy, *The War for America, 1775–1783*; and William B. Willcox, *Portrait of a General: Sir Henry Clinton in the War of Independence* on the best British general, who suffered from an inability to work well with his colleagues.

The most recent general history of the American Revolution, Page Smith, *A New Age Begins: A People's History of the American Revolution* incorporates many detailed insights about guerrilla warfare from primary sources.

## ***Political History of the Revolution***

On the political history of the American Revolution, Edmund C. Burnett, *The Continental Congress* remains a thorough and definitive history of that national political institution. Merrill Jensen, *The Articles of Confederation: An Interpretation of the Social Constitutional History of the American Revolution, 1774–1781* is an excellent study of the struggles around the Articles and the attempt to carry Nationalism even further. Despite its age, Allan Nevins, *The American States During and After the Revolution, 1775–1789* remains by far the best, indeed the only satisfactory, state-by-state political history of the revolutionary period. In an unfortunate attempt to replace Nevins, Jackson Turner Main, *The Sovereign States, 1775–1783* is sketchy and overly schematic, while Main's *Political Parties Before the Constitution* is a tangled statistical web based on a fallacious and unenlightening division between alleged "localists" and "cosmopolitans."

Carl Lotus Becker's *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas* is a well-written and valuable study of the Declaration. Curtis P. Nettels, *George Washington and American Independence* demonstrates Washington's early devotion to independence. Eric Foner's *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* is an excellent and sympathetic study of the great sparkplug of independence as a libertarian and laissez-faire radical. None of the full-scale biographies of Paine do him justice. Best is David Freeman Hawke's *Paine*.

For a valuable Beardian study of state politics during the Revolution see Elisha P. Douglass, *Rebels and Democrats: The Struggle for Equal Political Rights and Majority Rule During the American Revolution*. A thorough documentary history of the struggle over a Massachusetts state constitution during the war is presented in Robert J. Taylor, ed., *Massachusetts, Colony to Commonwealth: Documents on the Formation of its Constitution, 1775–1789*. The older view that confiscated Tory land in New York did not devolve upon the tenants of the feudal landlords is set forth in Harry B. Yoshpe's *The Disposition of Loyalist Estates in the Southern District of the State of New York*. Staughton Lynd refutes this view in *Anti-Federalism in Dutchess County* as does Beatrice G. Reubens, "Pre-Emptive Rights in the Disposition of a Confiscated Estate: Philipsburgh Manor, New York," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 22 (1965).

*"Tom Paine was the great sparkplug of independence — a libertarian and laissez-faire radical. None of the full-scale biographies of Paine do him justice."*

Pennsylvania, the most radically libertarian state during the war, is examined in Robert L. Brunhouse, *The Counter-Revolution in Pennsylvania, 1776–1790*. John P. Selsam deals with its radical constitution specifically in *The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776*. A valuable general work on Western Pennsylvania politics in the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods is Russell Ferguson, *Early Western Pennsylvania Politics*. Maryland is studied in Philip A. Crowl, *Maryland During and After the Revolution*.

## ***The Revolutionary Leaders***

In addition to the biographies of American revolutionary leaders mentioned above, one of the numerous Jefferson biographies stands out: the magisterial study by Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and His Time*, of which see here Volume I: *Jefferson the Virginian*. There is no wholly satisfactory biography of the great George Mason, whose Virginia Declaration of Rights inspired both the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. But Robert A. Rutland, *George Mason: Reluctant Statesman* provides a brief but useful account. Also see Robert A. Rutland, ed., *George Mason, Papers, 1725–1792* and Helen Hill Miller, *George Mason: Gentleman Revolutionary*. The radical

Pennsylvania leader, the astronomer David Rittenhouse, is studied in Brooke Hindle's *David Rittenhouse*. And two leading New York conservative rebels receive biographies in Frank Monaghan's *John Jay*, and George Dangerfield's excellent *Chancellor Robert R. Livingston of New York, 1746–1831*. For a biography of General Nathanael Greene, see Theodore Thayer's *Nathanael Greene, Strategist of the American Revolution*. A moderate Pennsylvania leader receives an important biography in Kenneth K. Roseman, *Thomas Mifflin and the Politics of the American Revolution*. New York's great wartime governor is studied in Ernest W. Spaulding, *His Excellency George Clinton (1739–1812): Critic of the Constitution*.

### ***Economic and Social Aspects***

On the economic and financial history of the war, E. James Ferguson, *The Power of the Purse: A History of American Public Finance, 1776–1790* is a superb account of the machinations of Robert Morris and the Nationalists during and after the war, including the expropriation of public funds for private purposes by Morris and his associates, and the drive for a strong central government to consolidate and extend those and similar privileges. This should be supplemented by Ferguson's study of the first Nationalist drive, which, though failing, prefigured the later push for the Constitution: E. James Ferguson, "The Nationalists of 1781–1783 and the Economic Interpretation of the Constitution," *Journal of American History*, 56 (1969). For a useful biography of Morris see Clarence L. Ver Steeg's *Robert Morris; Revolutionary Financier: With an Analysis of His Earlier Career*. There is no overall study of inflation during the war, but Anne Bezanson, "Inflation and Controls, Pennsylvania, 1774–1779," *Journal of Economic History Supplement*, 8 (1948) is a careful statistical study.

Special groups in relation to the American Revolution are treated in Charles H. Metzger, *Catholics and the American Revolution: A Study in Religious Climate* and in the excellent work by Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution*. Jesse Lemisch's rather quixotic program for writing history "from the bottom up" works in a particular case where data are fortunately available. See his article, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 25 (1968). Scholars have shown increased interest in recent years in the fate of Tories during the Revolution. Among the best works are William H. Nelson, *The American Tory* and Paul H. Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats: A Study in British Revolutionary Policy*. Also see Mary Beth Norton, *The British-Americans: The Loyalist Exiles in England 1774–1789*; Carol Berkin, *Jonathan Sewall: Odyssey of An American Loyalist*; and Robert M. Calhoun, *The Loyalists in Revolutionary America, 1760–1781*.

*"There is no wholly satisfactory biography of the great George Mason, whose Virginia Declaration of Rights inspired both the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights."*

### ***Foreign Policy***

The classic work on the foreign policy of the American revolutionaries is Samuel Flagg Bemis's *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution*. A far more revisionist work, treating the origins of the American Empire and focusing on internal and external policies of European states rather than on strictly diplomatic history, is Richard W. Van Alstyne's *Empire and Independence; The International History of the American Revolution*. The detailed work on the negotiations of the Peace of Paris is Richard B. Morris's *The Peacemakers: The Great Powers and American Independence*, But Cecil B. Currey, *Code Number 72/ Ben Franklin: Patriot or Spy?* provides a fascinating corrective. Currey not only demonstrates Franklin's participation in Robert Morris's peculations during his ministry in Paris;

he also offers newly discovered evidence of Franklin's probable role as a double agent on behalf of Great Britain. Currey describes Franklin's shift to a pro-French role during the peace negotiations, as well as the well-founded distrust of Franklin by Arthur Lee, John Adams, and John Jay.

### ***Meaning and Consequences of the Revolution***

There is no space here to deal with the numerous works on the nature and consequences of the American Revolution, or on the vitally important topic of the relationship between the Revolution and the Constitution. Here we will mention Gordon S. Wood's careful and important study of the way in which libertarian ideology was conservatized during and especially after the Revolution: *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787*. Richard B. Morris has many judicious insights in his *The American Revolution Reconsidered*. He treats the American Revolution more fully as the first war of national liberation and independence from European colonialism in his *The Emerging Nations and the American Revolution*. Also see Richard L. Park and Richard D. Lambert, eds., *The American Revolution Abroad*.

Perhaps the most important controversy was on how radical and how revolutionary were the nature and consequences of the American Revolution. We have seen Robert R. Palmer's challenge to the consensus view in his monumental *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*. J. Franklin Jameson produced the classic Beardian view on the social radicalism of the American Revolution in *The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement*. This thesis was attacked and seemingly refuted during the Consensus period of American historiography, particularly by Frederick B. Tolles, "The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement: A Reevaluation," *American Historical Review*, 55 (1954–1955); and by Clarence Ver Steeg, "The American Revolution Considered as an Economic Movement," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 20 (1957).

But Robert A. Nisbet, in a brilliant article, has now rehabilitated the thesis of the American Revolution as having radical consequences, not in a Beardian, but in a libertarian direction. In his *The Social Impact of the Revolution*, Nisbet shows that the Revolution had a radical libertarian impact on American society: in abolishing feudal land tenure, in establishing religious freedom, and in beginning the process of the abolition of slavery. Thus, to Bailyn's insight on the libertarian sources of the Revolution, Nisbet adds his conclusion on its libertarian consequences.

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