

American history critical essay

[History](#), [American History](#)



Within the pages of American History, there exists a most important foundation for the society that would eventually claim and win, their own independence from Britain. This nearly one hundred and seventy years history is many times, overlooked and its importance diminished by such ignorance. But it was during this time that the foundation of what was to come began to form within New England.

The Puritans and their religious fervor, work ethic as well as being credited with the invention of capitalism in America, did a great deal to help set in motion, the texture of the country even to this present day. Many Puritans emigrated to America between 1620-1640 because they believed that the Church of England was beyond reforming. Even though many Puritans professed their allegiance to the Church of England while residing in America, they wished for religious freedom which was not present during this time in English history.

With their religious ideas, the Puritans brought with them, what was coined in 1905 by German socialist, “ The Protestant Work Ethic. ” This is a Calvinist value of the necessity of constant labor in a person’s calling as a sign of personal salvation. ” With the Protestant Reformation, figures such as Martin Luther and later John Calvin, sought to redefine the concept of “ work” as not only necessary but one’s duty to himself but also to society as a whole. Diligent work was seen as a sign of one’s grace in Christ.

The idea of hard work and the capitalist form of America’s economy has its foundation here, during the Puritan’s reign of influence within the colonies. As a result, Americans are seen as hard workers. No matter what other countries in the world think about America, most agree that Americans are

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some of the hardest working people in the world. This hard worth ethic has been credited with the prosperity that America has enjoyed for centuries and is regarded as the cornerstone of national prosperity.

In this regard, countries such as France, Ireland and Spain, where there is a more relaxed notion of work and where the rich, successful and hard working are heavily taxed in order to support those who can't work or are able to work but chose not to, it is therefore seen as the responsibility of those to support those lazy members of society. In America, one is expected to work and even though there are millions in America who are allowed to stay on welfare, their stay has been greatly limited.

And it is not seen as the responsibility of the working class and the successful to support the rest of society and therefore, taxes are relatively low compared to taxes in Europe. In Ireland and England, gasoline is over \$6 a gallon and compact disks which sell for under \$20 in America, sell for 30-35 Euro or \$45 in Europe. And there are countless other examples of how a permanent welfare state has developed in certain countries in Europe while Americans are expected and encouraged to work for their prosperity, which helps to make America, by far, the most prosperous country in the history of the world.

The Protestant Work Ethic and capitalism, the ideas that one be allowed to rise as high as his own merits will elevate him, were all given to us by the Puritans. The Puritans, and to a more specific degree, Calvinists, gave to America, the idea of predestination. During this time, America was a very religious territory. Religion was able to touch many aspects of society to such

a degree than even the most devout Christian of today would find himself a heathen while in the presence of such devout Christians.

The idea of predestination is a complex one with many Bible scholars being unable to fully describe its full meaning. The Bible preaches that man has free will and that God cannot and does not force an individual to accept Jesus Christ as their lord and savior; the condition one must meet in order to obtain eternal salvation in heaven but that God already knows who will be saved and who will be lost and sent to hell upon their death. Predestination also believes that since man has been engulfed in original sin upon birth, man does not have freedom to choose but is rather enslaved in sin.

The individual is aware of what God's will is and knows that will is ultimately good, but is deprived of the ability to desire to do God's will and freely chooses what is desired, which is sin. " These ideas were introduced by St. Augustine in the 4th century but introduced to American by the Puritans. Also, the idea that one could never know if one was really saved or not, was a belief that was central to the Puritan belief system. This resulted in a very rigid form of behavior that was perpetrated by the Puritans and others were made to follow. This is where the term: Puritanical came from.

It is often meant to be an insult as one is put off by the rigid definitions to which one's code of moral behavior follows. The Second Great Awakening also was formed on the religious foundation that was first set by the Puritans. The Second Great Awakening, on the heels of the First Great Awakening, occurred during the first few decades of the 19th century. This was a religious revival in the United States. Many southern churches have

revivals of their own where parishioners are encouraged to reexamine their own spiritual relationship with Jesus.

This used to occur during all day and night preaching and sermons that could last one and off for a week at a time. The American Bible Society, which as formed in 1816, was responsible for the publications of millions of Bible, sermons and Bible tracts that were meant to spread the word of God to every corner of America and during the present day, has sent Christian literature to every corner of the globe. The Baptist and Methodist denominations gained members as well as the formation of other new denominations.

For example, the International Church of Christ as well as the Latter Day Saints within Mormonism had their start at this time. But one of the most important aspects of The Second Great Awakening was the formation of the abolitionist movement. Before the Second Great Awakening, there were attempts to end slavery or at least the spread of it but not until the abolitionists and their religious fervor against slavery, which was seen as a direct sin against God, was such an organized and powerful attempt made to stop the institution of slavery.

One of the reasons that so many in the North were against slavery was because of the Second Great Awakening but also the Protestant Work Ethic that the Puritans had given this country almost two centuries earlier. When one man directly profits off of the unpaid labor of others, this is not only an example of exploitation of the slave, but it was seen that such idleness and laziness as contrary to what would later be defined as the Protestant Work

Ethic. One needs to work and many of the slave holders, were simply able but not willing to do the work themselves.

Slavery was seen as immoral for many reasons but in relation to the Protestant Work Ethic, when a man does not live by the sweat of his brow but through the exploitation of someone else' sweat, this is seen as contrary to the laws of God and the Protestant work ethic, which saw work and especially hard labor as not only necessary but evidence of one's grace in the Lord. Success in the American Revolution, at the time of its outbreak, seemed to many to be an uphill battle.

Only 1/3 of the American colonists were patriots, or individuals who sought independence from Britain and to obtain that status by fighting. Another 1/3 was considered loyalists, or individuals who were loyal to the British crown and wished to remain as subjects within the British Empire. This is not to say that the loyalists were in favor of the numerous legislative bills passed in Parliament which curtailed the freedoms of the colonists, just that seeking independence was unnecessary and achieving such an unnecessary goal through armed conflict was unlikely and costly as well.

But there were a number of events which were perpetuated upon the colonists by the British, which made it necessary in the minds of the colonists to seek independence from Britain. The most important of these events were the 1764 Sugar Act, the 1765 Stamp Act, 1766 Declaratory Act, the 1770 Boston Massacre and the 1773 Boston Tea Party. All of there were actions taken by the British or actions in response to British attempts to subjugate the colonists in a way that was not a proper example of representative government.

From the start of the American Revolution in 1775 at the Battle of Lexington and Concord until General Cornwallis' defeat at the Battle of Yorktown in 1781, the colonists, with the help of the French in 1777, dragged out the war through unconventional warfare and a rigid determination until the British, tired by the efforts exerted in a war of attrition, surrendered and left the colonists to form what is now known as the United States of America.

But from the start of the war until even years after the surrender at Yorktown, the success of the colonists' efforts within their fight for independence, as well as this experiment in democracy in the years following the defeat at Yorktown, was never a foregone conclusion. But despite a guaranteed death sentence for the members of both Continental Congresses and despite long and overwhelming odds, the American patriots, fought for and earned their right of self government.

The revolutionary era began in 1763 with the ending of the French and Indian War in which both France and Britain battled for control of North America. The war lasted from 1754 until 1763 with Britain being left the victor. However, the victory came at a huge cost to the British treasury. Britain held the view that the colonists should be held financially responsible for the efforts exerted defending them from the French. A highly unpopular sugar and stamp tax was levied against the colonists in 1764 and 1765.

The Stamp Act declared; " An act for granting and applying certain stamp duties, and other duties, in the British colonies and plantations in America, towards further defraying the expenses of defending, protecting and securing the same... " These acts placed taxes on almost all paper items that required a stamp or some other type of official certification by the state.

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Postage stamps, in addition to marriage licenses The main problem that came with these taxes, was not the cost of paying these taxes but that the colonists were not consulted when Parliament passed these taxes.

This was when the phrase: “ no taxation without representation” became a battle cry for all those that were dissatisfied with their representation in England. England responded to say that the colonists were virtually represented in Parliament but it was also known that a high percentage of the members of Parliament had never been to New England and most did not know the issues that concerned them the most. Parliament was out of touch with the colonists and this helped to lead to more trouble and strife between the two sides.

In response to the Stamp Act, New England saw widespread opposition as well as the quickly formed Stamp Act Congress in 1765 as well. The Stamp Act, which as passed with little knowledge on the part of the British, that such a strong response would come from the colonists, quickly sought to regulate the behavior of the colonists by passing the 1766 Declaratory Act. It stated that: “ colonies and plantations in America have been, are, and of right ought to be, subordinate unto, and dependent upon the imperial crown and Parliament of Great Britain...

” The Declaratory Act also said that Parliament had the “ full power and authority to make laws and statues of sufficient force and validity to bind the colonies and people of America. “ It was seen as implied in the view of England that the Stamp Act was included in this but many of the colonists did not and the Declaratory Act was not successful in helping to control the unruly behavior of the American colonists. Another turning point in the <https://assignbuster.com/american-history-critical-essay/>

relations between the colonists and Britain was the Boston Massacre which took place on March 5, 1770.

Even though the number of casualties were low (less than 10) these actions exerted by the British troops on the American colonists, were seen as a rallying cry for the cause of independence. The incident occurred when there was a scuffle between a couple of British soldiers and Boston merchants concerning an unpaid bill. It was reported that the British troops assaulted the merchants which only incited the crowd of Bostonians to throw snowballs as well as litter at the troops. Reinforcements were called and shots were fired on a unruly Boston mob.

Five were killed and some of the soldiers were put on trial, defended by John Adams, the 2nd President of the United States and one who would argue fervently for independence from Britain during the 2nd Continental Congress. To keep the peace, royal authorities agreed to remove the soldiers from the center of town but the damage had already been done. Paul Revere engraved a famous depiction of the shooting and Two privates were found guilty of manslaughter and branded on the thumb but the jury's decision made it seem as though it was the mob and not the soldiers that served as the true instigators in the event.

In any event, the Boston Massacre was one in a long list of troubles between the colonists and the British authority. And there was more to come. The Boston Tea Party of December 16, 1773 was one of the last and most brazened form of insubordination on behalf of the colonists in their journey from loyal and content subjects of the British crown, to full fledged rebellion

while on the road to independence. In 1773, Britain passed the Tea Act which allowed the East India Company to sell tea to the colonies directly.

This allowed consumers to bypass the merchants as the East India Company had eliminated a middle man and therefore, could offer their goods at a much cheaper price than what the merchants could offer. The Tea Act was seen by the colonists as just another in a long list of attempts made by the British in order to keep the colonists subordinate. Samuel Adams and a crew of colonists who were dressed like Indians and calling themselves the Sons of Liberty, sneaked onto the HMS Dartmouth, Beaver and Eleanour, dumped more than forty five tons of tea, worth more than 10, 000 pounds sterling, over the side of the ships.

Even though some colonists including Benjamin Franklin were against these actions and ordered that the value of the tea be paid back, The Boston Tea Party eventually proved to be one of the many causes that led to the American Revolution as it helped to rally support for the cause of independence from Britain. The inability of the two sides to get along became more and more likely as a widening gulf between the colonists and the British authority existed.

After a decade of verbal threats and demonstrations, fighting erupted on April 18, 1775 with the Battle of Lexington and Concord. Even though casualties were low, the American Revolution had begun. The Continental Congress convened in 1775 and created the Continental Army. At this time, there was however, an estimated 20% of the population that was loyal to the king as well as another large and vocal percentage that thought war with the number one power in the world to be a sign of madness.

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One of these members was John Dickinson, who at the Second Continental Congress stated that declaring war with Britain “ was like burning down your house before you have another. ” But men like John Adams, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson who was always in favor of a revolution, and John Hancock were all hot for independence and on July 4, 1776, the formal Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson, was signed and agreed upon.

The fighting went badly for the colonists at first but with the eventually help of France, who had been brought in at the request of Benjamin Franklin and other ambassadors, eventually helped turn the tide of the war. Without French intervention, it would be impossible for the American colonists, even with their unconventional fighting tactics which confused and frustrated the British soldiers, as well as their willingness to stretch out the fighting for as long as necessary, their efforts still would have proved insufficient to defend and eventually beat, the number one world power at that time in history.

The face of America was formed at this most important time: the years before and directly after, the American Revolution. A true meritocracy was formed for white men, later to be expanded to all aspects of society which said that one must be allowed to rise as high in society and to experience a level of success that is directly based upon one’s own skills and hard work. No entitlement mentality, sloth or welfare state must be allowed to form with America and that hard work is not a curse but a blessing.

A modern form of capitalism was given to this country by the Puritans and a “ can-do” spirit of independence as well as a self representative government was the gift to contemporary society by the Patriots of the American

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Revolution. Both are appreciated. WORKS CITED Commanger, Henry Steele. Documents of American History. New York: Century Press 1947. Kuralt, Charles On the Road: American Heritage. New York: CBS Productions. 1989