Chapter 7: Creating a New Nation, 1775-1788

Overview

By the end of 1774 conflict between the colonies and Great Britain seemed inevitable but no one anticipated the war would take eight years to conclude. During that time the British government plunged deeper into debt and the colonies were forged in a single nation under a centralized government. Great Britain’s military forces were superior to the colonists’ but Britain had a flawed premise about how the war would be won. Britain assumed the colonists could be made to submit by swift and effective application of force and that Americans loyal to the crown would rally around the British troops. Having defeated the British and won independence, the Americans faced a more daunting challenge: living up to its revolutionary rhetoric of liberty and equality. Even though the revolution had forced an alliance between American political radicals and moderates there was no guarantee the alliance would continue after the war and peace brought out their philosophical and practical differences. Could Americans fashion a political structure that could contain these differences and what would they do with the notion of human equality? The first significant challenge to the new republic came in the west because it was unwilling to create a colonial status for its western lands. As there was no model to follow, American leaders struggled to integrate the western frontier into the democratic tradition. Following the war the compromises of radicals and moderates began to crumble. Moderates became nationalists while many radicals retained a local perspective. The divisions which had existed all along became permanent in the battle over the Constitution. Nationalists wanted a strong central or national government; the localists feared that a strong central government would do nothing but steal their liberty. The division reflected a difference of opinion about the future of America’s political economy. As the first nation created by revolution, the United States was entering uncharted territory. The revolutionaries, despite some philosophical differences of opinion, were united in their vision of what they did not want. As they matured, they began to envision the kind of society and nation they hoped to create.

Key Topics

The information in chapter 7 introduces your students to the following key topics:

- How Revolutionary ardor and early victories led Americans to think that the war would be short and relatively easy
- Revolutionary thought as an amalgam of republican, evangelical, and Enlightenment liberal ideas
- The politics of declaring independence and establishing new state governments
- American and British military strategies; the struggle to win the allegiance of the civilian population; why the British could have won the war, but not the peace; the role played by France and Spain
- The challenges presented to the economy and social order by the war itself and by revolutionary ideology
- The movement for a Constitution: the problems with the Articles of Confederation, and which groups were most affected by them
- Why the Antifederalists opposed ratification of the Constitution, and how their objections were overcome

Chapter Outline

James Madison Helps Make a Nation

The War Begins

- The First Battles
- Congress Takes the Lead
- Military Ardor
- Declaring Independence
- Creating a National Government
- Creating State Governments

Winning the Revolution

- Competing Strategies
- The British on the offensive: 1776
- A Slow War: 1777-1781

Feature: How They Lived and How They Worked The Winter at Jockey Hollow
- Securing a Place in the World
Annotated chapter outline with review questions

James Madison Helps Make a Nation: Perhaps more than any other person of his time, James Madison understood the political economy of the new nation. He devoted himself to establishing a government that would assure liberty and order. He was a genius at managing conflict. As a political thinker and leader, Madison came to advocate the great liberal principles of his age: the rights of conscience, consent, and property. Others, perhaps, more fully understood the contradictions presented by slavery. Others better grasped the economy. But Madison understood Americans’ twin commitment to liberty and property, and he saw how they fit together in a system that rested on the principle of consent.

The War Begins: By the end of 1774 conflict between the colonies and Great Britain seemed inevitable but no one anticipated the war would take eight years to conclude. During that time the British government plunged deeper into debt and the colonies were forged in a single nation under a centralized government.

- By the fall of 1774, it was generally believed that conflict would begin in Massachusetts. In September 1775, Massachusetts Governor Thomas Gage received orders to take action against the colonists. The result of Gage’s actions brought about the first battles of the Revolutionary War. Meanwhile, the Second Continental Congress was called into session on May 10, 1775, at Philadelphia. As the assembly reconvened, the colonial assemblies slowly transferred their allegiance from Great Britain to Congress. They voted to create a continental army; Jefferson drafted the “Declaration of Causes and Necessities of Taking Up Arms,” the Congress addressed an “Olive Branch Petition” to George III and Parliament, and George III responded by declaring the colonies to be in open rebellion.

- The publication in January 1776 of Thomas Paine’s Common Sense told American readers that the period of debate is closed. Richard Henry Lee’s resolution of independence was incorporated into the Declaration of Independence and approved by all delegates on July 2. The most important concept, however, was the articulation of the idea of human equality, that all people were born possessing certain fundamental rights. Closely related was the belief in a universal, common human nature. His third point was that government should represent the people, and because the people created the government to protect their natural rights, the people could abolish any government that became despotic.

- The Americans now had to create a permanent national government. They created a national government made up of a confederation of states. The Articles of Confederation sketched out a remarkably weak central government whose powers were lessened because the state governments feared they might otherwise loose power. All attention was focused on state governments and it was in state governments that the ideas of liberty, equality, and government were implemented.

Why was Revolutionary ardor highest at the beginning of the war? What were American and British expectations in 1775? Why was independence not declared for another year?
Winning the Revolution: Great Britain’s military forces were superior to the colonists’ forces but Britain had a flawed premise about how the war would be won. Britain assumed the colonists could be made to submit by swift and effective application of force and that Americans loyal to the crown would rally around the British troops.

- At first the British assumed that colonial resistance was limited to New England and that if it isolated and punished Boston the war would be over. Victory was seven years in coming. By the end of 1776, the British forces in New York and New Jersey had just about routed the American forces in the area but Britain’s successes on the battlefield were always checked by an insurmountable problem: Britain could control the American countryside only by maintaining troops in place, but once troops were withdrawn, civil warfare would break out. The only way Britain could win the war was with an army of occupation but she had no intention of imposing martial law.

- American commanders mostly led British forces on chases across the countryside. Only after the Americans defeated the British at Saratoga did the American situation change: France entered the war on the American’s side and loaned her $8 million in aid. In the fall of 1781, the war of attrition was finally over when Cornwallis surrendered on October 19.

The Challenge of the Revolution: Having defeated the British and won independence, the Americans faced a more daunting challenge: living up to its revolutionary rhetoric of liberty and equality. Even though the revolution had forced an alliance between American political radicals and moderates there was no guarantee the alliance would continue after the war and peace brought out their philosophical and practical differences. Could Americans fashion a political structure that could contain these differences and what would they do with the notion of human equality?

- Perhaps as many as 80,000 of almost 500,000 loyalists left the U.S. for life in a British colony. Loyalist exiles came predominantly from the social and economic elite and their departure left a void that Americans scrambled to fill. Their abandoned property along with their status was redistributed to those Americans just below. The war disrupted the American economy in two ways: it interfered with normal processes of production and exchange and it required some combination of taxation and deficit spending to finance it. Those most involved in the market economy either suffered the greatest economic hardship or enjoyed the greatest opportunities. The weak national government was powerless to address the economic upheavals or maintain civil order.

- Economic upheavals and civil disorder forced Americans to reconsider what kind of government they wanted and what kind of economy and society it would sustain. Government weaknesses magnified philosophical differences. Nationalist and radicals presented two distinct and differing views of what kind of government should prevail in the United States. The revolution changed the American social order in some instances and questioned others -- especially those dealing with women. Women had actively participated in many aspects of the revolution, but there remained some question whether their political participation should be expanded. Despite some hesitation, women’s rights expanded.

- No one institution challenged and contradicted the revolutionary ideal of equality more than slavery. The contradiction was recognized by the revolutionaries, which in itself was a significant and revolutionary advance, but at the moment action on it was not forthcoming. Following the end of the war, every state north of Delaware eliminated slavery. Some states abolished it in their state constitutions, others passed gradual emancipation laws. In the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, slavery was prohibited and in the upper south state legislatures erased the restrictions on emancipation. The revolutionaries did not try to eliminate slavery and in time they developed justifications for it. Following the war, African Americans made up 22 percent of the nation’s population and few questioned that the south’s economy depended on slave labor.

What was the effect of the war on American society? What challenges did the war present, and how were these challenges met?
New Policy in the West: The first significant challenge to the new republic came in the west because it was unwilling to create a colonial status for its western lands. As there was no model to follow, American leaders struggled to integrate the western frontier into the democratic tradition.

- During the war between Britain and the U.S. most of the Indian nations chose to watch the conflict from their perimeter. Those that were drawn into the war were on Britain’s side.
- Following the war, the U.S. soon abandoned its notion of the “middle ground” and the Indians found themselves with little or no leverage with the new government. Indian land claims were ignored in a new conflict between the states which claimed all the lands west of the Appalachian Mountains and the national government which wanted control of the land and its distribution.
- Some sort of national policy was needed if the western frontier was to be organized and integrated into the new republic. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 was a compromise among these competing interests.

Creating a National Government: Following the war the compromises of radicals and moderates began to crumble. Moderates became nationalists while many radicals retained a local perspective. The divisions which had existed all along became permanent in the battle over the Constitution. Nationalists wanted a strong central or national government; the localists feared that a strong central government would do nothing but steal their liberty. The division reflected a difference of opinion about the future of America’s political economy. Nationalists were deeply involved in the market economy; localists less so.

- The nationalists believed the Congress was powerless to address the nation’s most pressing problems, almost all of which concerned the economy. Nationalists decided that reforming the Articles of Confederation was not only impossible but undesirable -- a new and stronger government needed to be created. A convention to address the inadequacies of the Articles of Confederation was convened in Philadelphia. Despite areas of real differences of opinion the fifty-five delegates were united in many instances. With compromises on such issues as representation and the representation of the states to the national government the convention was adjourned on September 17, 1787. The nationalists, now calling themselves Federalists, went to work on the ratification process.
- The true meaning of the new government came about as the Federalists worked for ratification and to set aside the fears of the localists who were now called Antifederalists. The ratification process and arguments reflected the profound differences between Federalists and Antifederalists. Their philosophical differences, as they emerged during the ratification process, constitute the legacy of the American revolution.

Which Americans believed a stronger central government was necessary, and what did they do to create it? What were the compromises they made in writing the Constitution? How did they secure its ratification? What political strategies did they use, and how did they attempt to persuade other Americans? Why did the Antifederalists oppose the Constitution, and why were they defeated?

Feature: How They Lived and How They Worked The Winter at Jockey Hollow: Jockey Hollow is about four miles outside of Morristown, New Jersey. General George Washington and the Continental Army wintered here in 1779-1780. It snowed twenty-eight times that winter, with snow drifts as high as fences. Washington chose Jockey Hollow because of its location near low mountains and swamps protected it from attack. Setting up camp was difficult. Cabins were not completed until February. Food and shelter were in short supply. Some soldiers foraged for food. Morale was low and some soldiers considered mutiny. However, patriotism prevailed. “We were unwilling,” one soldier said, “to desert the cause of our country, when in distress.”

Conclusion: As the first nation created by revolution, the United States was entering uncharted territory. The revolutionaries, despite some philosophical differences of opinion, were united in their vision of what they did not want. As they matured, they began to envision the kind of society and nation they hoped to create.

Making links to other ideas Using the maps and websites, in addition to your prepared lectures and other assignments, can give you more resources to enable your students to see that history is much more than memorizing names and dates. You will find that the websites are even more comprehensive and adaptable than described and because they have been collected here in one volume you have a world of information no further away
than the click of your mouse. If you are new to the web’s opportunities, you will be pleasantly surprised at the breadth and depth of the information available in these sites.

Map 01: What information does this map convey? When did these events depicted in this map happen?
Map 02: What information does this map convey? What were the objectives of the leaders of the two opposing sides? When did these events depicted in this map happen?
Map 03: What information does this map convey? What were the objectives of the leaders of the two opposing sides? What role, if any, did the Indians play in these maneuvers and battles?
Map 04: What information does this map convey? What were the objectives of the leaders of the two opposing sides?
Map 05: Describe using physical features the land claimed by England, Spain, Russia, and the United States. Why did England keep her forts in the upper Ohio River Valley? Why did the United States allow this? Is there any disputed territory? If so, where, and who were the contestants?
Map 06: What information does this map convey? Is there a relationship between Indian battles and the location of forts? If so, what is the relationship?
Map 07: What is a “cession”? Who is ceding what to whom? Why? How were the overlapping boundaries resolved?

Web connections and resources Consider using these websites to supplement your students’ reading and analytical skills. The sites were chosen because of their relevance to the material in the chapter--not just to mirror it but to provide additional materials and perspectives. Questions from the student study guide have been included so that you can use or amend them to your own needs. Your students may find it insightful for you to guide them through the site as you help them develop research strategies.

“Creating a New Nation” www.prenhall.com/boydston/federalists
“If men were angels,” Madison famously observed in Federalist #51, there would be no need for government. We need government to control human weaknesses, but government is composed of ordinary and unsanctified people. How, Madison asked, can a government strong enough to restrain its citizens be obliged to restrain itself? Doubts that it could animated the opposition to the new Constitution. How did federalists win the contest over ratification?

This web site provides a chronology of the American Revolution that links to copies of full text documents such as the Articles of Confederation, the Declaration of Independence, and Thomas Paine’s Common Sense. It also contains a portrait gallery featuring paintings of Revolutionary actors.

1. Find the text of the Treaty of Paris 1783 and list the provisions of the treaty between the United States and Great Britain.
2. Read George Washington’s resignation address. The authors of this web site refer to his resignation as an important event “unprecedented in history.” Why is Washington’s resignation so revolutionary?

“Essays on the Revolution” http://revolution.h-net.msu.edu
Under the icon “essays,” discover numerous scholarly articles that discuss the negotiation and controversy over the U.S. Constitution.

2. See also “Supply Problems Plagued the Continental Army from the Start” by Frank E. Grizzard, Jr. After reading that article, read the article by Barbara Tuchman entitled “The Miraculous Convergence” (at this address: www.pbs.org/ktca/liberty/chronicle/related-topics.html -- see question number 1 below).

“Chronicling the Revolution” www.pbs.org/ktca/liberty/chronicle/related-topics.html

47
This site addresses a wide range of topics concerning the American Revolution, including songs of the Revolutionaries, details of women’s and Native American’s involvement, and revolutionary events that took place in the urban landscape.

1. Read the site entitled “The Miraculous Convergence.” What is the miracle that historian Barbara Tuchman is referring to? Why would she call this a miracle?
2. Click on the “chronicle” icon. Read the newspaper accounts of the revolution. Why would a newspaper account of a battle or the progress of the war be so important to Americans?

Analytical reading

Your students may need more experience analyzing a short reading passage so that he or she can determine its component parts. They may need help identifying primary and supporting information as well as the author’s analysis. The analytical reading passages and the questions from the student study guide have been duplicated in the instructor’s manual for your use. Your students may need direction and encouragement in using them.

Although American Revolutionaries were not prepared to let women vote except in New Jersey, they began to expand their views about women's intellectual and political capabilities in other ways. The state laws that confiscated Loyalists' property, for example, often presumed that married women were capable of making their own political choices. This notion, was a radical break with the past, which had always asserted that married women in particular had no political will separate from their husbands.

It was this idea that the Revolution challenged, that women had no independent minds and could not be expected to think for themselves. The Enlightenment belief that all human beings were endowed with the capacity to reason and that all differences were the product of environment led to significant improvements in women's education in the decades just after the war. Reformers, many of them women, argued that if women appeared ignorant or incapable, it was only because of their inferior education. Massachusetts writer Judith Sargent Murray asked, “Will it be said that the judgment of a male of two years old, is more sage than that of a female's of the same age?”

Enlightenment ideas about women's intellectual abilities meshed neatly with republican ideas about the need for virtue and liberal ideas about the necessity of consent. If the fate of the nation depended upon the character of its citizens, then both men and women should choose as their partners intelligent, upright patriots. Likewise, the revolution's rejection of arbitrary power accelerated a trend that had begun before the war, a belief that people should choose their own marriage partners and marry for love rather than crass material interest. If women were to be able to make such choices wisely, then they must be educated well.

Yet once again the revolutionary impulse had its limits. Discussions about women's citizenship and intellectual capacities implicitly applied only to prosperous white women. Moreover, almost no one advocated professional education for women or even knowledge for its own sake. And overly intellectual women were ridiculed as “women of masculine minds.” The family was still the bedrock of the nation, and women's education was supposed to make them better wives and better mothers, to enable them to perform their domestic roles better, not to challenge them.

The ideas of the Revolution presented a powerful challenge to the subordination of women, one that the revolutionary generation was only partially prepared to meet. Women were recognized as intelligent beings who could make important choices in the market, about their families, and even about their political loyalties. They were partial citizens, but not full ones, and in their half-way citizenship they revealed the limits of revolutionary doctrines of equality.

1. What positive changes did the Revolutionary War bring to American women?
2. What is the relationship of the Enlightenment and republican values to changes in the lives of American women?
3. The authors write that the revolutionary impulse had its limits. For women, what were those limits?
Writing  The questions or writing prompts from the student study guide have been duplicated here for your use. These writing topics make good lecture topics especially if you help your students see the development of the idea in lecture format before they refine the idea in their writing assignments.

1. Between 1776, when they declared independence and 1787, when the new Constitution was ratified, the new nation faced many social and political problems. Identify and explain them.

2. The disagreements between the political factions known as the Federalists and Antifederalists could have resulted in armed conflict, as many in Europe predicted and hoped. How did the Federalists and Antifederalists manage their differences? Why was this revolutionary?

3. When the loyalists abandoned the United States it became easier for the Americans to fashion a new workable government. Why?

4. Was the Revolutionary War inevitable? Could it have been prevented? If yes, how could it have been prevented? If no, why not?

Lecture Strategies  Ultimately the lecture is where you impart, or profess, your knowledge for the benefit of your students. These strategies were designed around the textbook and if your classroom strategy is to use the organization of the text to organize your course content, these lecture ideas may prove helpful. However, if you lecture around themes please see the section entitled “Thematic Lecture Topics.” You may find that you are more comfortable with and your students are more responsive to a combination of the two. Consider, too, the projects suggested in the student study guide. If your students complete these before your lecture, their comprehension will surely be enhanced.

Chapter seven takes the story of America’s past to the next level. Revolution and independence are intriguing topics, especially if you prepare your students for appreciating the complexity of the issues. You may want to start with the classic argument about whether the revolution was indeed a revolution. Ask them to consider what was revolutionary about the American war? If the war was not revolutionary, was the abandonment of the Articles of Confederation and the adoption of a new Constitution revolutionary? Did the American society change in any way abandon its British roots?

With independence, the new nation is beset with problems: Discuss diplomatic relations between the fledgling United States and France, Spain, and Holland. What were the Europeans’ interests in an independent nation? Were they more favorably disposed to the notion of an independent republic or were they looking at Britain’s loss as their potential gain?

Consider, too the following topics for classroom discussion:

Diplomatic relations with Great Britain: How is the Treaty of Paris 1783 negotiated; what are the provisions; why did Great Britain offer land all the way to the Mississippi River instead of limiting the United States to land between the Atlantic and Proclamation Line of 1763?

Declaration of Independence: explore John Locke’s theories of natural rights and the social contract to examine the philosophical ideals in the Declaration of Independence. Help your students see that this was a document with several purposes: a document of propaganda, an explanation of the causes for Americans to declare independence, and a philosophical definition of liberty and equality.

Articles of Confederation, U. S. Constitution, states and national governments, and the creation of political parties: If the purpose of government is to protect and preserve the peoples’ natural rights, ask your students to examine both documents to determine what the creators of the Articles and the Constitution wanted protected and the kinds of things they wanted from their government. The other big issue to discuss is the question of power -- should state governments be more powerful than the national government or vice versa. This fundamental question generates as much debate today as then. The answers to these questions, as well as world view, contribute to the creation of the nation’s first political parties. Your students should come to understand that not everyone believed political factions were desirable or could coexist and that the contests between Federalists and Anti-Federalists were serious and the stakes high. Your students have several projects related to Federalist and Anti-federalist philosophical differences and these may help in the development of your lectures. Your students also have projects comparing the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution that will facilitate your lectures on this topic.

Economy: Discuss the financial problems facing the new nation during the war and after the war. How does the new government under the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution reflect our economic needs?
Ask your students to argue the question that has plagued historians writing about the Constitution: Does the Constitution reflect the personal interests of an aristocratic or elite group of wealthy men interested in perpetuating their own economic concerns or were the framers true patriots committed to the republican values of freedom and equality?

**Penguin Classics**


For colonial slavery see Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and other Writings*, edited with an introduction and notes by Vincent Carretta, New York: Penguin Books, 1995. Published in 1789, Equiano's account is among the earliest autobiographical accounts of the colonial slave trade and the effects on its victims. Equiano's slavery spans the period from about 1755 to 1766 but it is also his life story that is interesting. For slave narratives see Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *The Classic Slave Narratives*, edited with an introduction by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: A Mentor Book, 1987. The first-hand stories of Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Jacobs introduce the reader to slavery from the inside (and over the period of American slavery) and more importantly what it means to be free.
