

# AMERICA'S BIRTHING PAINS: THE EUROPEAN DIMENSIONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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*On February 26, 2007, my father died. Death stole one of my life's inspirations and heroes. For 33 years, he served our country in the U.S. Navy, including service in Vietnam. He gave me his love of history, which is partially responsible for my pursuit of a Masters degree in Social Studies Education at Rivier. He is loved and missed beyond the capacity of words to describe. – Sean Purdy*

“The Shot Heard Round the World” started a world war. The minutemen assembled on Lexington Green on April 19, 1775, could not have known their actions would lead to bloodshed on four continents and across the world's oceans. By the time the conflict ended eight years later, France, Spain, Holland along with indigenous peoples from India to North America joined in what originally had been a British Civil War. The war was in some ways another European “Balance of Power” war. Yet, this conflict's outcome had unforeseeable, dramatic consequences for Europe and the world.

## Tensions in the Empire

Britain emerged from the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) victorious. This 18<sup>th</sup> century world war saw Great Britain and Prussia fighting France, Spain, Austria and Russia on four continents. While the British subsidized Prussia to tie France down fighting in Europe, the British attacked French holdings in North America, the Caribbean, Africa and India. They were immensely successful in most theaters, particularly India and North America. The British eliminated French power in India and dispossessed France of their holdings in Canada and the Ohio River valley. Once the French ceded the Louisiana territory to Spain (in compensation for lands Spain lost to Britain), French possessions on the North American mainland were reduced to two, small islands off the coast of Newfoundland. The British also gained West and East Florida from the Spanish. Britain became the dominant, European power in the world and ruled an empire unrivaled since Rome.

The causes and events leading up to the American Revolution are well known and require only a basic explanation. The root issue was governance of the empire and the two battlegrounds of struggle were financial and political. The British government had accumulated an enormous, £130<sup>i</sup> million war debt (about \$18.7 billion in year 2000 dollars<sup>ii</sup>). The war's finances had been primarily paid with borrowed money, mostly from Dutch bankers. The debt was so large that by the end of the Revolutionary War, it consumed 56% of tax revenues.<sup>iii</sup> In the interwar years, tax revenues and government expenditures were roughly equal however, the costs of the debt increased annually about £5 million (approximately, \$474 million dollars in year 2000).<sup>iv</sup>

The British Parliament decided to tax the colonists for the war from which the colonists had so obviously benefited. The government reasoned the colonists were better able to handle a tax increase than native Britons. The average Briton in 1763 paid about 26 shillings a year however the average colonist only paid about one.<sup>v</sup> But, it was not the amount that bothered the colonists as much as the

principle behind it. The rallying cry “No taxation without representation” has become immortalized in history. For twelve years, the British government sparred with the colonies on the taxation issue.

The larger ideological battle was over imperial reform. Prior to the 1760’s, the British government had not exerted much control over the colonies. Usually, it was too preoccupied with domestic or European affairs to worry about colonial development. However, after the Seven Years’ War, they decided to dramatically change how they governed the empire. In addition to the taxation issue, they sought to limit westward expansion of the colonies in order to keep peace with the Native Americans and thereby save money on defense. The government also sought to restrict colonial trading activities and clamp down on smuggling, a favorite colonial pastime.

The relationship between Britain and its colonies was analogous to parent-teenager relationship. The Americans, like teenagers, felt as though the British were restraining them too much. They had managed to govern themselves while Britain was busy elsewhere. But, the Americans took for granted the benefits they received from the lucrative British trading network. They also took for granted the large military that Britain had to maintain for their economic (protection from piracy, for example) and political defense.

Britain, like many parents, had a hard time seeing how much the colonies had developed, especially politically. The British did not treat any of their colonial subjects as equals. Neither the king nor any members of Parliaments had ever been to America. The aristocracy that dominated the government was not used to negotiating with people they considered inferiors. “Americans are the sons, not the bastards of England.”<sup>vi</sup> William Pitt reminded Parliament in 1765. A month before the war began, Whig (the political party that opposed the pro-king Tory party) leader Edmund Burke said, “An Englishman is the unfittest person on earth to argue another Englishman into slavery.”<sup>vii</sup> However, after the Boston Tea Party, it became clear to the Prime Minister, Lord North, that the government would either have to make the colonies recognize the supremacy of Parliament or give into them completely.

Many prominent British leaders and thinkers such as Charles James Fox, William Pitt the Elder, Edmund Burke, James Boswell, and economist Adam Smith deplored the heavy-handed tactics of North’s government. They proposed various solutions. Adam Smith suggested a federal union similar to the 1707 Union with Scotland. Scotland had control of its church and judiciary, had representation in Parliament and had benefited from the Union.<sup>viii</sup> This was an appropriate option because the thirteen colonies by 1770 already had a growing population that was larger than Scotland’s.<sup>ix</sup> Edmund Burke believed America should be given independence for Englishmen could “expect ten times more benefit to the affection of this kingdom from America, though under a separate establishment.”<sup>x</sup>

These men feared that if the Tory government was successful in its subjugation of colonies, it might try and repeat the process at home and reverse the Parliamentary victory in the Glorious Revolution. When the government hired German mercenaries to help fight the war, the Whigs were outraged. They felt if the government used foreign troops to suppress liberty in one part of the Empire, it was only a matter of time before liberty on the home island was threatened. America was striking a blow for English liberty, they reasoned, and therefore the American War was a proxy for their own struggle to maintain liberties within the Empire. These Whigs remained vocal opponents of the war to the point that they cheered American victories.

“It is next to infatuation and madness, for one moment, to suppose that we can have an American without a French or Spanish war...once the war is begun...you will then find yourselves engaged in a French war, in a Spanish war, I think,...wars are so catching, Sir, when they spread, in I know not how many other wars likewise.”<sup>xi</sup> David Hartley issued this warning to Parliament on May 22, 1775, before word of the war’s commencement had arrived.<sup>xii</sup> Nor was he the only one who could envision the

probable future. “It is the interest of all those powers in Europe, whom Britain rivals...that the colonies should become independent...we might have our hands so full at home, as to be able to give weak attention to the rebellion of several millions of subjects above a thousand leagues off,”<sup>xiii</sup> Arthur Young, an English writer, had forecast in 1772. Many feared that foreign intervention in what was essentially a British Civil War (Britain’s second and America’s first) might break apart the British Empire. And these fears were justified.

### European Rivals

French king Louis XVI ascended to the throne of a country preparing for revenge. After the Seven Years’ War, its empire was in ruins and its status in Europe was great diminished. They had fought the British for domination of the world and lost. They had been evicted from North America. In India, “All that remained to the French in that part of the world,” sneered Voltaire, “was their regret at having spent during more than forty years immense sums to maintain a Company...that never made any profits.”<sup>xiv</sup> They had won no great battles in Europe, lost colonies in Africa and the Caribbean and had their navy smashed at the battle of Quiberon Bay.<sup>xv</sup> France’s status was so diminished after the war that she could only look on helplessly as Prussia, Russia and Austria took land from her ally Poland in the First Polish Partition in 1772.<sup>xvi</sup> She also was unable to aid her allies, the Ottoman Empire, when Russia successfully attacked in 1774.<sup>xvii</sup>

But, France was not idle in the interwar years. The Duc de Choiseul, head of the French ministry, improved the state owned armament industry, reorganized the army and strengthened their alliance with Spain.<sup>xviii</sup> Realizing the naval defeats had cost France the last war, he set about rebuilding the navy with expectations of it being the decisive weapon in the next war.<sup>xix</sup> Even after Choiseul’s fall from power in 1770, his successor, Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes, in 1774 continued the rearmament.

Spain was another defeated empire. It was almost two centuries removed from its Golden Age of Charles V. Already a second-rate player in European politics, it was the junior partner in an alliance with France. Spain had unwisely entered the Seven Years’ War in 1761. The British seized Havana, Cuba and Manila, Philippines and blunted an invasion of their ally, Portugal.<sup>xx</sup> The British returned Havana and Manila in exchange for Florida and evacuation from Portugal.

This sequence of events threatened the Spanish Empire. By 1775, Spain controlled little, European territory outside its borders. Its immense empire lay overseas in North and South America, stretching from California to Argentina. The Gulf of Mexico was practically a Spanish lake. The loss of Florida threatened Spanish possessions in the Caribbean. The British were also making inroads in Central America. They had made small territorial acquisitions in the 1740’s and had developed sugar plantations, logging camps (that supplied their navy and the Caribbean islands) as well as a lucrative smuggling trade. Their presence threatened to split the Spanish Empire. Despite obtaining Louisiana from France as a buffer zone, the Spanish feared the expansionist American colonies. This was no hysterical fear for the American population had doubled between 1750 and 1770 and was relentlessly expanding westward and southward.<sup>xxi</sup> If the Americans reached the treasure mines of New Spain (Mexico), Spain was finished. Like the French, the Spaniards saw the American revolt as the best way to cripple the British Empire.

Britain had the untimely luck of having poor diplomatic relations all the major European powers on the eve of the Revolution, particularly with two, possible allies, Russia and Prussia. Czarina Catherine II “the Great”, although having high esteem for Great Britain as a nation, viewed and treated Lord North’s

government with contempt. Though indifferent to Americans generally, she foresaw the Americans would become independent “even in my life-time.”<sup>xxii</sup>

Catherine’s contempt was mild when compared to Frederick the Great, King of Prussia. “My unalterable determination is not to contract an alliance with a power which has deceived me so infamously as did England in the last war,”<sup>xxiii</sup> he wrote on January 20, 1778. The British government had abandoned the Prussians in the middle of the Seven Year’s War and signed a peace treaty with France. Moreover, Britain plotted to keep Prussia from acquiring the port city of Danzig during the First Polish Partition in 1772. Naturally, Britain’s colonial troubles amused him greatly. He felt the British would be unable to subdue the colonies and that Parliament would regret their heavy-handed actions.

## 18<sup>th</sup> Century Politics

It is necessary to take a moment to explain the nature of 18<sup>th</sup> century European politics. After the horrendous destruction of the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648), Europeans decided that a “Balance of Power” among the great nations was in order. When one European country became more powerful than the others, the others tried to weaken it. Frequently, this happened after the succession of a new monarch when a nation was vulnerable. Most of the fighting took place in Central Europe, at sea, and in overseas colonies; anywhere countries vied for control. When the fighting was over, the nations would swap conquered territories like game pieces. The American Revolution, or The American War as the British call it, was Britain’s turn to be humbled.

Because these wars bubbled over into overseas colonies, many balance of power wars became world wars. Modern Americans would be surprised to learn that blood was shed as far away as India or Africa as a result of their drive for liberty. Often, indigenous people like the Native Americans became embroiled in wars that originally had nothing to do with them. To the Iroquois Confederacy, for example, the Revolution was no different than the French and Indian Wars that had proceeded it. It was just another European power struggle and they had to choose a path that guaranteed their survival. In other places like India, pre-existing colonial wars between the British and the native Marathas and Mysoreans intermeshed with the Revolution when the French intervened there.

The root of these global colonial struggles was economic. Since Columbus, the Europeans had set up colonies on every continent except Australia. In Indonesia, they traded for spices. India provided calicos (textiles), muslins, silk and tea for an insatiable British market. All Europeans needed slaves for cheap labor in their American colonies so they traded manufactured goods with West African kings for human cargo. Latin America produced enormous mineral wealth for the Spanish. North America provided its European masters with profits from the fur trade, cod fishing and tobacco. Lumber from the Americas helped maintain European navies because Europe had become deforested by then. And navies were crucial to maintaining and protecting these trading empires. Naval warfare determined the outcome of most 18<sup>th</sup> century wars, including the American Revolution. But, the resource most fought over was sugar.

Europe had a sweet tooth. Sugar was to the 18<sup>th</sup> century what oil is to the 21<sup>st</sup>. The British especially indulged their love of sweets. They consumed it with tea and coffee as well as processed foods, candies and cakes. They annually imported two million gallons of rum, which is made from sugar.<sup>xxiv</sup> Britain imported 97, 000 lbs of sugar in 1775.<sup>xxv</sup> Sugar constituted 20% of British imports and was worth five times as much as tobacco imports.<sup>xxvi</sup> Unlike the French, the majority of these imports were for domestic consumption. The average Briton ate 18 pounds of sugar annually compared to the average Frenchman’s two pounds.<sup>xxvii</sup> Sugar was so profitable that the Caribbean island of St. Kitts was

the richest colony in the British Empire in 1776.<sup>xxviii</sup> And the British only produced about 40% of the sugar generated in the New World!<sup>xxix</sup>

In the British imperial view, the Caribbean was more valuable than North America. The thirteen colonies were subsidiaries to the islands. The sugar plantations in the British West Indies used all available land for sugar production and therefore imported foodstuffs and other materials from America.<sup>xxx</sup> As the Revolution progressed, the Caribbean's importance shaped Britain's war strategy and increased their imperial vulnerability.

### British Civil War

The British military was not prepared for this war. First, it had to wage war on an enemy three thousand miles across the Atlantic Ocean. Sending and provisioning an army to America was a logistical nightmare. Even worse, the Army was suffering manpower problems even during peacetime. The British army had about 34,000 men (though on paper it claimed to have 40,000).<sup>xxxi</sup> They had about 12,000 in Britain, 7000 in America, 7,000 in Ireland, 2000 in the Caribbean, 5000 in Gibraltar and Minorca and the rest were in scattered garrisons.<sup>xxxii</sup> The majority of soldiers protecting India were the East India Company Army, a Company-owned and funded army made up of Europeans and Indians.

The British public was divided on the war and the government was unable to recruit large numbers of troops between 1775 and 1778. At this stage of the war, the government refused to consider enlisting American Loyalists because it doubted their quality and considered them no better than the rebels they were fighting. Britain looked overseas for soldiers not only because of low, domestic recruitment but because non-English speaking troops would be unlikely to develop sympathies for the colonists. Prussia was not an option and Britain's Dutch and Portuguese allies rejected them. They next turned to Russia for 20,000 soldiers. Catherine not only turned them down but also wrote a humiliating letter to King George III.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Ultimately, the British government acquired approximately 30,000 soldiers from such petty German states as Hesse-Cassel and Brunswick.<sup>xxxiv</sup> These became the famous "Hessians" of American history (the most famous being the fictional Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow) though not all were from Hesse-Cassel. This was an immensely unpopular move. Edmund Burke decried "the liberal government of this free nation" using "the hireling sword of German boors and vassals."<sup>xxxv</sup> William Pitt declared "40,000 German boors can never conquer ten times the number of English freeman."<sup>xxxvi</sup> Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence accused the king of "transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation and tyranny."<sup>xxxvii</sup>

The American Revolution started as an Imperial British Civil War. There are many parallels between it and the 1860 American Civil War. It was contest between two, distinct geographical units. Also, support for the rebellion was not universal in the colonies. Loyalists have been estimated to constitute from one quarter to one third of the population.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Ultimately, the British would raise about 20,000 Loyalist soldiers and in spring, 1780, the British Army's Loyalist contingent was almost as large as Washington's army!<sup>xxxix</sup> Moreover, in Britain, many Whig politicians voiced support for the American rebellion and called for reconciliation (much in the same way that some Northern Democrats scathingly known as "Copperheads" would do in the American Civil War.).

Prior to European intervention in 1778, this British Civil War did not restrict its combat to the thirteen colonies. The colonists tried both verbal and military persuasion to convince other provinces to join them. The colonies attempted two unsuccessful invasions into Canada (Quebec in 1775 and Nova Scotia in 1776)<sup>xl</sup>. In Quebec, though the French inhabitants had no love for the British, their support for

the Americans was lukewarm and faded quickly as the American campaign failed. Nova Scotia was retained for the crown by the presence of a large military base, Halifax, and the huge, wartime migration of Loyalists. In May 1777, an American attack on Florida was ambushed and defeated.<sup>xli</sup> On March 3, 1776, American ships under Commodore Esek Hopkins raided Nassau, Bahamas.<sup>xlii</sup> Though the West Indies planters were sympathetic to their northern neighbors, they were too entrenched in the imperial economy to seriously consider leaving. Moreover, the Americans did not possess sufficient naval strength to coordinate operations with or against the Caribbean.

The Colonists did successfully invade the Ohio River valley in 1778-79, which was a part of Canada thanks to the Quebec Act of 1774.<sup>xliii</sup> This offensive contributed to America's eventual possession of the land between the Mississippi River and Appalachian mountains in the final peace treaty. Privateers like John Paul Jones took the war into British home waters. They raided merchant shipping and occasionally mounted raids on the British coast.

The war created hostilities with the Native Americans from the Iroquois in New York to the Creeks and Cherokees in the South. To see the Revolution as a British Civil War creates a tricky interpretation regarding Native Americans. All Europeans recognized them as subjects of whatever European empire they resided in. However, it is doubtful that the Native Americans chose that interpretation. They perceived themselves as sovereign nations who were allied with the European rulers, not as obedient subjects like the colonists. The war caused civil wars within native confederations. The Iroquois split over which side to join and ultimately different tribes chose opposing sides. The tribes allied with the British were so successful at attacking American settlements that Washington sent an expedition into Iroquois lands in 1779. This expedition destroyed numerous Iroquois towns and forever shattered the Confederacy.<sup>xliv</sup>

The course of the war between 1775 and 1777 failed to deliver a decisive victory for the British. In 1777, the British attempted an ambitious three-pronged strategy that would conquer New York State and fatally divide the colonies. The civilian government however botched the communication between the armies and the three armies failed to coordinate their attacks. The ultimate result was General John Burgoyne's army surrendered at Saratoga and changed the course of history.

## Supplying the Rebellion

The only provision the Continental Army possessed in a sufficient quality was revolutionary zeal. They were deficient in everything from uniforms to gunpowder. Even after confiscating munitions and weapons from royal arsenals in the colonies, the army still found itself deficiently equipped. Fortunately, the colonies had somewhere to turn.

The American Revolution provided many Europeans the chance to profit economically as well as politically, France foremost among them. Comte de Vergennes instructed French merchants to secretly provision the Americans. He authorized a playwright and secret agent, Caron de Beaumarchais, to set up a bogus company called Rodrigue Hortalez et. Cie on May 2, 1776.<sup>xlv</sup> This company took loans and other secret assistance in the form of munitions to the colonies. Much of the munitions came directly from royal arsenals. Even though the French government funded this "front" company, the government had what modern terminology would call "plausible deniability." By war's end, it provided the colonists with about 45.5 million livres in the form of loans and subsidies (approximately \$109 million in year 2002).<sup>xlvi</sup> The French also opened their ports to American merchants and privateers although formal commercial relations would have to wait until the 1778 treaty of amity and commerce.

Other countries joined in the lucrative trade. Spain too opened its ports to American privateers. Eventually, Spain contributed about 650,000 livres (approximately \$8.5 million in year 2002).<sup>xlvii</sup> The Spanish governor of Louisiana, Bernardo de Gálvez, was authorized to covertly supply the Americans with munitions directly from royal depots in New Orleans.<sup>xlviii</sup> Some supplies originating in New Orleans would even eventually reach Washington's army.<sup>xlix</sup> Some Dutch and even British merchants independently and covertly engaged in the arms trade.

The majority of arms shipments did not go directly to the colonies. Merchants chose a safer route. Shipments generally went to Caribbean destinations and were loaded there onto American ships. The Americans used swift vessels such as Baltimore clippers, which were designed to outrun British warships. Colonists brought exports such as indigo, tobacco and lumber and exchanged them for the munitions. Trade took place in French ports in Haiti and Martinique and Spanish trade went on in Havana.

The Dutch island of Saint Eustatius would gain particular notoriety. This island had been declared a free port in 1756 and allowed all nations to trade there.<sup>l</sup> Holland's neutrality gave its merchants great profits. It was called the "Golden Rock" because it was the richest island of its size at the time.<sup>li</sup> In the years 1778-79, over three thousand ships would depart here for the colonies.<sup>lii</sup> When Britain declared war on the Netherlands in 1780, they made sure they captured St. Eustatius. Admiral George Rodney took the island on February 3, 1781 and confiscated 150 merchant ships and £3 million worth of supplies<sup>liii</sup> (roughly \$372 million dollars)<sup>liv</sup>. Rodney later said, "This rock of only six miles in length and three in breadth has done England more harm than all the arms of her most potent enemies..."<sup>lv</sup>

Had the British navy been better prepared for this war, they might have disrupted this trade and thereby cripple the rebellion. As will be shown later, the British did not have an adequate navy for the conflict on hand nor did it develop an effective naval strategy. Instead, they chose an unsuccessful, land-based strategy to crush the rebellion.

### European Volcanoes

Despite its aid to the rebellion, Spain's primary attention was focused elsewhere in 1776. The Portuguese in Brazil had attacked Spanish outposts in the Rio de La Plata region (in the area around modern-day Uruguay and Argentina).<sup>lvi</sup> Also, Portuguese smugglers in the area were undermining Spain's trading monopoly with its colonies. The Portuguese foreign minister, Marquis de Pombal, faced with a possible invasion from Spain, tried enlisting British aid. He requested that the British demand explanations from the French and Spanish regarding their rearming efforts. If they did not give a sufficient response, Pombal recommended a naval blockade of both countries. Aware of Britain's colonial difficulties, he told the British this blockade, "would tend to the pacification of the Americans, whose great dependence at this time is on those two nations and who upon their defeats be deprived of the resources they at present rely on."<sup>lvii</sup>

These tensions alarmed both the UK and France. The British were too heavily engaged in their colonial war to render much assistance to their Portuguese allies. British naval strength was on the other end of the Atlantic. In addition, the French were afraid an Iberian war could escalate into a general European war that would draw in other major powers. France wanted to concentrate its energies in fueling the American rebellion, not fighting a major war in Europe to support their Spanish allies. The Americans, by contrast, were delighted. They had no affection for Portugal because that nation had closed its ports to American shipping.<sup>lviii</sup> The colonists offered the Spanish an alliance and offered to attack Portuguese shipping in return for Spanish military support.

The Spanish decided to address the situation themselves. They sent an armada of nine thousand men and seven ships of the line (the largest vessels of the time) to South America in November, 1776.<sup>lix</sup> It was one of the largest military forces they ever sent to the Americas.<sup>lx</sup> They also anchored a naval squadron off the coast of Lisbon, the Portuguese capital, for intimidation. The invasion force destroyed the smugglers and defeated the Portuguese in modern-day Uruguay.<sup>lxi</sup> The next year both nations signed a treaty ending their decades-long animosity.<sup>lxii</sup> This move successfully eliminated Portugal as a British ally.

The victory at Saratoga convinced the French to join the war. On Feb 6, 1778, the French signed two treaties with the Americans, one of amity and commerce and another of alliance.<sup>lxiii</sup> First and foremost, France recognized the independence of the United States. The treaty guaranteed America's current borders and any land it could conquer in mainland Canada or Bermuda. Significantly, it did not mention possession of islands like Cape Breton or Newfoundland (important for its lucrative fishing grounds) nor did it commit France to protecting or guaranteeing American fishing rights in the Grand Banks. Vergennes wanted to keep French options in that area open. The treaty gave France a free hand to conquer whatever Caribbean islands it could wrest from Britain. The treaty also stated that neither party would make a separate peace.

It was a generous treaty and it is amazing that the weak, founding United States, uncertain of ultimate victory, could receive such an advantageous agreement from a nation with whom they had a centuries-old enmity. The forfeiture of any claims on Canada by the French went a long way in assuaging American fears though the treaty said nothing about a possibility of French reoccupation of Louisiana.

The French strategy had two aims. One, by giving up claims to Canada, not only did it comfort the Americans but it showed other European powers that France was not using the war to enhance its own empire. Because the Americans were committed to free trade (the British restricted most trade between her colonies and other nations), the French effort appeared advantageous to neutral, European maritime nations like the Netherlands who could profit from future trade with America.

Second, France's priority was weakening Britain. Britain shorn of its colonies would decline into a second rate power that could not effectively interfere with France on the European continent. Vergennes believed freedom of commerce and a resurgence of naval power would assure French prosperity.<sup>lxiv</sup> In other words, he wanted the commercial benefits of empire with none of the headaches. Although he like other Frenchman had reservations about the possibility of an expanding U.S., he hoped that American gratitude for French support would tie them to their French benefactor politically and economically. However, as the French were preparing to join the Americans, another European crisis arose.

The War of Bavarian Succession is barely a footnote in 18<sup>th</sup> century history. Little fighting actually occurred in this "war" and soldiers spent most of their time trying to find food. However, in the opening months of 1778, this dispute threatened to erupt into a European war. For the second time during the American Revolution, the French were faced with the distraction of a possible Continental war.

The Elector of Bavaria died on December 30, 1777.<sup>lxv</sup> This childless regent left the throne to Charles Theodore, the cash-strapped Elector of Palatine who had many illegitimate children but none legitimate. Emperor Joseph II of neighboring Austria offered Charles money and recognition of his heirs in exchange for land in Bavaria. Charles agreed and Austria sent troops into Bavaria. This move threatened to overturn the balance of power in Germany. Frederick II, the Prussian king, could not let this go unchallenged. However, he was unsure if he could rely on his Russian allies because they were on the verge of going to war with the Turks again. He offered the French the Austrian Netherlands (modern day Belgium) if they would join him. He even sent subtle feelers to Britain who owned the

northern German state of Hanover (the British ruling family was originally from there) to sound out their opinions on the crisis.

The Austrians had made two miscalculations. One, they assumed Frederick's advanced age (he was 65)<sup>lxvi</sup> had made him so weak-willed that he would not challenge them. Second, they believed they could rely on their Seven Years' War allies, the French, whose queen Marie Antoinette was Austrian, to support them. France wanted Europe quiet and had no desire to see Austrian power in Germany increase. France chose the role of mediator. It stood by as Prussia sent two armies into Austrian territory in the summer of 1778. Although there was little fighting, the Austrian Emperor lost his nerve and looked for ways out of the crisis. As a final nail in the coffin, the French helped the Russians mediate their dispute with the Turks thereby freeing Russia to help pressure Austria.<sup>lxvii</sup> In the treaty of Teschen signed on May 13, 1779, the Austrians backed down and evacuated the majority of territory they had sought.<sup>lxviii</sup>

This episode had two ramifications. One, it restored France to the role of power broker in Europe. Two, by solving the crisis diplomatically, France avoided wasting resources on an unwanted European war. One can only imagine how this event might have changed the outcome of the American Revolution. The French were just signing the treaties of alliance with America. A Continental war would have made France unable to fulfill its treaty obligations with the military strength necessary to win the American war. America might not have gained its independence as the result of a disputed succession in a minor German state.

The episode also caused the Spanish minister of state, José Moñino y Redondo, conde de Floridablanca, a moment of pause. The French had signed alliances with the Americans without waiting for Spain's commitment to do the same. The Spanish were reluctant to join the French in an American war if France was suddenly going to change its priorities back to Europe. The Spanish did not want to jump into the hostilities only to find the French leaving them stranded in order to fight in Germany.

The Spanish had reservations about helping the Americans. Support for colonial independence was a double-edged sword. Although it weakened Britain, a war of liberation could inspire Spain's colonies to do the same. They also saw an independent America as a threat to their empire. Specifically, they worried about American ambitions towards the Mississippi River. Two of America's war goals were possession of all land east of the Mississippi River and free navigation of the river. The latter was important because in the 18<sup>th</sup> century world where most transportation was done on water, the river would be an essential lifeline for the growing nation. Spain not only did not want navigational freedom but also had their own claims to lands east of the river.

Spain attempted to use its neutral status to gain territory. The British possessed Gibraltar, a key peninsula in southern Spain, and the Balearic island of Minorca. Both were strategic naval bases and had been won in earlier wars. The Spanish considered their loss a national humiliation and a threat. In 1778, they offered the British their services as mediators. In exchange for Gibraltar and possibly Minorca, they would help the British resolve the conflict. The British refused.

Spain guaranteed France's commitment to the war before it entered. The agreement between the two nations, the Aranjuez Convention, was signed on April 12, 1779.<sup>lxix</sup> The French, desperate for Spanish involvement, met Spain's demands. Both agreed not to seek a separate peace with Britain and to continue the war until Spain took Gibraltar. Also, Spain would receive Florida and Minorca. France would receive Newfoundland, and territory in the Caribbean and Africa. Most importantly, the Spanish were not obligated to fight for or even recognize the independence of the thirteen colonies. In fact, Spain would not recognize American independence until after the war.<sup>lxx</sup> With the rare exception of combined,

small attacks on British targets in the Ohio River valley, the Spanish fought the war without any type of coordination with American forces.<sup>lxxi</sup>

## Irish Domino

Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga was a catastrophe for Britain. Not only was Britain proving unable to subjugate the rebels but now found itself at war with France. The British sent a peace commission to America headed by the Earl of Carlisle.<sup>lxxii</sup> But, the mission was doomed to fail. The Americans, jubilant with the news of Saratoga and the French alliance, were convinced more than ever that success was assured. Moreover, the North government did not fully grasp how dedicated the colonists had become to the cause of independence. The commission might have succeeded if it had been sent three years earlier. The British now felt as though their empire was crumbling around their heads. If America broke free, it would be followed by Canada, the West Indies and then Ireland.

"Ireland is too great to be unconnected to us and too near to be dependent on a foreign state and too little to be independent," C.T. Grenville said in 1784.<sup>lxxiii</sup> Ireland was a tinderbox. It shared the same grievances as America. The Irish considered themselves a sister kingdom within the empire and thereby equals to the English and Scots. London considered them a colony. Ireland, like the colonies, had its own legislature, but the Declaratory Act of 1720 had made it subordinate to London.

Britain handicapped the Irish economy in order to make it dependent. They decreed that all Irish exports would have to go to Britain first for re-exportation thereby reducing Irish profits. Its primary trade was linen but also included meat and dairy products. 90% of Irish linen and 50% of Irish farm products normally went to America.<sup>lxxiv</sup> The Revolution intensified Irish economic hardships for it denied them their primary customer.

Ireland also had some grievances that America did not. The majority of the Irish population was Catholic and faced severe discrimination. They could not vote or hold political office. They could not own land and were not allowed to practice their religion openly (even their priests could be arrested).<sup>lxxv</sup> They could serve in the Army, but could not become officers.<sup>lxxvi</sup>

Many of the Protestants were angry as well. In the 1600's, many Scottish Presbyterians had settled in Ireland particularly in the North. Because England was an Anglican country, Anglicans treated the Presbyterians as second-class citizens. Moreover, Irish-born Protestants, like their American counterparts, consisted themselves Britons worthy of the same political rights of Britons in the home island. Irish Protestants also had a sympathetic connection to America because many Irish Protestants had immigrated there throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In the first months of the war, Benjamin Franklin suggested creating a confederation of British colonies that included Ireland.<sup>lxxvii</sup>

The Tory government was at first reluctant to compromise with Ireland because it felt compromises with the Americans had led to the war. They believed they should be firm. However, they did not have the military presence necessary to support those sentiments. The government had siphoned off most of the regular soldiers from Ireland to serve overseas. When the French declared war, many militia units were raised called Volunteer Associations to protect the island from invasion. While at first these were patriotic units, as the threat of invasion waned, they realized they could use their newfound military strength to their advantage.

Faced with the possibility of an "Irish Revolution" (John Adams predicted Ireland would achieve independence before America)<sup>lxxviii</sup>, the government granted both trade and religious concessions. It gave Ireland direct access to colonial trade i.e. all trade did not have to pass through Britain first and it

gave the Irish parliament more control over trade regulation.<sup>lxxxix</sup> It also made steps toward religious liberty with the Roman Catholic Relief Bill in 1778.<sup>lxxx</sup> It made small changes in land ownership and education laws and reduced restrictions on priests.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

London was the only capital city to suffer major damage during the war. However, its own people created the devastation, not a foreign army. Many Britons were outraged at compromises offered to Catholics. Religious bigotry was still alive in parts of Britain. A British lord, named George Gordon, formed an organization called the Protestant Association and threatened to march his thousands-strong mob to London if the laws were not repealed. When Parliament ignored him, his mob marched into the capital in June 1780<sup>lxxxiii</sup> and besieged Parliament. Parliament was forced to barricade themselves in its chambers for hours.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Lord Sandwich, Lord of the Admiralty, was dragged from his carriage and narrowly escaped death. Edmund Burke was chased through the streets. The city's poor joined the rioters and the drunken looting went on for almost a week.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> The government had to call in troops from outside the city to subdue the mobs. When the riots were halted, over a million pounds worth of damage (roughly \$129 million in year 2000)<sup>lxxxv</sup> had been done and 450 people had been killed and hundreds wounded.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Horace Walpole commented that the French or Americans could not have done more damage.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Ironically, Lord Gordon was never convicted for the riots that bear his name. These riots convinced Europe that Britain was on the verge of collapse.

The Volunteers in Ireland won more victories in 1782. After many Volunteer demonstrations throughout the country, the British government offered more concessions. The Declaratory Act was repealed and Ireland was given the "Constitution of 1782".<sup>lxxxviii</sup> This constitution was similar to the British one and gave Ireland "Dominion" status i.e. some legislative independence. This move gave Ireland peace for another 16 years. However, the Volunteers had introduced the gun into Irish politics and it would not be easily removed.

### Britain and the Caribbean in Danger

The intervention of the French changed British's overall military strategy. The British were on the defensive now. The Caribbean commanded Britain's attention. 65% of British land forces were stationed in North America in Feb 1778.<sup>lxxxix</sup> By September, 1780, only 29% would be.<sup>xc</sup> When the British began offensives in the Southern colonies of Georgia and South Carolina in 1779, it was with the intention of operating closer to the Caribbean and shifting resources between the two theaters as necessary. Also, the entry of two other maritime nations meant that Britain had to keep a larger percentage of her navy at home for protection.

The American Revolution was the only time in the 18<sup>th</sup> century where Britain did not possess naval superiority. France and Spain had a 20% advantage in terms of naval tonnage and parity in terms of ships-of-the-line.<sup>xcii</sup> The British did not begin to mobilize their full navy or expand the fleet until after the French declared war.

The Revolution was won on the ocean. Because the British had to keep most of their fleet close to home and their usual weapon of blockade was impossible given naval deficiencies, the allies could devote their fleets to attacks on vulnerable British colonies. Also, British allocation of resources effected the outcome. Naval resources sent to Gibraltar might have better served British strategic goals if they had been sent to the Caribbean. While many naval battles, such as the inconclusive Battle of the Ushant that commenced hostilities between the two nations, were not decisive, some were pivotal. The Battle of the Chesapeake doomed Cornwallis' army. The Battle of the Saintes preserved British power in the

Caribbean and accelerated peace negotiations. However, poor planning undermined possibly decisive offensives.

The Allies sought to invade Britain in 1779. The French embarked 30,000 troops on transports and waited for the arrival of a Spanish fleet that would accompany their own to England.<sup>xcii</sup> The plan was to capture the Isle of Wight off the coast along with the major naval base at Spithead near Portsmouth. However, the Spanish arrived six weeks late. The fleets lost more time when the destination of the mission was changed to Plymouth. They slipped past the British fleet in the Channel and in August, they sat outside the harbor prepared to land. Then, they received orders to move back to Spithead. By the first week of September, not only had the British fleet beaten them back to Spithead but also, scurvy and disease had taken a terrible toll among the soldiers who had been on the ships since June. The mission was cancelled and Britain had been preserved from invasion by good fortune rather than their navy.

The war was also damaging the British West Indies economically and they were militarily vulnerable. The sugar profits in most islands saw a two-thirds to three-fourth drop.<sup>xciii</sup> Expenses were driven up by the loss of trade with the mainland (especially in foodstuffs and lumber) and by shipping insurance rate increases as a result of privateering. Worse still, because the war had siphoned off British troops, the French enjoyed an 8 to 1 superiority in troop strength when they entered the conflict.<sup>xciv</sup> The plantations were not only vulnerable to French attack but also slave revolts and raids from Carib Indians on other islands.

The French drew first blood in the Caribbean in September, 1778 and captured the island of Dominica.<sup>xcv</sup> Two months later, the British landed troops on Saint Lucia. The French soon after unsuccessfully attacked the British fleet. The French then landed soldiers on the island but they were unable to dislodge the British from their strategic position. The French withdrew and the island's garrison surrendered.

The following year the French captured St. Vincent and Grenada. They were able to hold on to the latter island by fending off a British naval counterattack. Tropical diseases and hurricanes dictated warfare in this theater. The former, for example, wrecked a Spanish invasion force in 1780 sent to help the French.<sup>xcvi</sup> Also, the hurricane season from August to October usually meant that fleets left the area to aid operations in other theaters like the thirteen colonies (Note the Yorktown surrender took place in October.). In fact, the worst hurricane known to us happened in October, 1780. A tempest swept from Barbados to Puerto Rico, killing 22,000 people and smashing all fleets, naval and merchant.<sup>xcvii</sup> Winds were so severe that raindrops stripped the bark from the trees!

No decisive engagements happened in 1780 but in 1781, the British went on the offensive and captured the Dutch islands in the area, particularly the lucrative island of St. Eustatius. The French Admiral unsuccessfully attacked Saint Lucia in April but was able a month later to seize the island of Tobago off the coast of South America.<sup>xcviii</sup> It is significant to note that the British Admiral Rodney in charge of the area made at this time a war-altering decision. Fearing an attack on Barbados, he moved his fleet there and the French fleet was able to travel unmolested to Virginia where they bottled up Cornwallis and forced his surrender.

The French resumed the offensive in January, 1782 by assaulting St. Kitts and taking Nevis.<sup>xcix</sup> The British counterattacked St. Kitts and fought such a ferocious sea battle that on-shore witnesses could not see anything through the battle smoke except the flags on the ships.<sup>c</sup> But, the British failed and the island surrendered. However, this battle gave the British time to bring in reinforcements that would play a large role in the Battle the Saintes described later.

### War in India

The British did not intentionally set up an empire in India. It is probably one of the few instances in history where a stock company, The East India Company, created both a political and economic empire. The Company set up “factories”, fortified trading posts, in the 1600’s.

India in the 1700’s was a collection of various warring states. The Europeans became players in this power vacuum. The East India Company used its revenues to create a private army. In 1757, they defeated the ruler of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daula, at the battle of Plassey and took control of Bengal. This province along with territory around Bombay and Madras became the foundation of British control in India. The Company also coordinated operations with the British military. They successfully evicted the French in 1763 because India was not a priority of the French war effort. The French were allowed to retained small, unfortified factories.

In the 1770’s and 1780’s, the British fought a three-way battle for power in Southern India with a confederation of Hindu states known as the Marathas (sometimes called the Mahrattas) and with the state of Mysore. Frequently, two of the powers ganged up on the third. During the Revolution, it was Britain’s turn. The 1773 Regulating Act established a Governor General for India in order to bring the Company under Parliament control.<sup>ci</sup> However, the Act had the governor coordinate power with a governing Council. To further complicate things, each of the Company’s Presidencies (the lands like Bengal or Bombay which were ruled like corporate departments) had a degree of autonomy. This arrangement produced a situation where the Governor General often clashed with subordinates. In addition, the individual Presidencies could drag the whole company into an unwanted war. This is exactly what happened in the 1775 Maratha War. The Madras Presidency backed the losing side in a dynastic squabble among the Marathas. This dragged the whole company into a seven-year inconclusive, resource-draining war, which eventually drew in others.

Haidar Ali, the Ruler of Mysore, saw an opportunity for revenge. The British had abandoned him during a Maratha War in 1769.<sup>cii</sup> In 1780, Ali swept into the Carnatic Plain like a dust storm with a 100,000 strong army. Wars in India at this time involved huge cavalry armies as well as British armies that featured huge native contingents centered on a European core. Ali destroyed small detachments and garrisons and got as far as taking the suburbs, but not the city of Madras. The British governor, Warren Hastings, dispatched General Sir Eyre Coote to deal with this threat. At Porto Novo on June 1, 1781, Coote decisively defeated but not destroyed Ali’s army. The significance of this battle is that Ali’s army was considerably weaker by the time the French arrived.

The arrival of the French brought a naval threat that the British had not had to face in India since 1763. The French Admiral Pierre Suffren arrived in the theater in February, 1782.<sup>ciii</sup> Although he had a larger fleet than the British, his subordinates stymied his capacity to deal decisive blows. Plus, because India was a minor theater in the French strategic vision, he never had the resources that might have completely crippled the British. By contrast, the British admiral Sir Edward Hughes had a cooperative subordinates. These attributes were crucial to limiting the damage.

Hughes knew Suffren was coming so Hughes captured the Dutch port of Trincomalee in January, 1782, to deny Suffren an adequate naval base (The British seized the few French trading factories early in the war). Suffren fought several inconclusive battles with Hughes throughout the year. He also assisted Haidar Ali’s capture of the city of Cuddalore on April 4.<sup>civ</sup> In addition to providing French troops to Ali, Suffren’s fleet prevented Cuddalore receiving any sea borne rescue from Bengal. On September 3, Suffren captured Trincomalee because Hughes was unable to leave a large enough garrison there and lacked the naval strength to stop Suffren.

While the American Revolution was petering out in most theaters, the Indian theater was still alive. One reason why is that Indian wars (like Native American wars on the other side of the world) took on a life of their own, independent of European affairs. Also, because of the huge distances, it took six months on average to travel from London to Calcutta whereas it only took four to five weeks to go from London to Boston.<sup>cv</sup> Naturally, communication was limited.

Haidar Ali died in December of 1782 but his son, Tipu Sahib continued the fight. Although the British had come to terms with the Marathas and now attacked Sahib from the northeast, most of Carnatic was under Sahib's control. Hughes made an attempt to recapture Cuddalore. On June 20, 1783, the last battle of the American Revolution was fought at sea near Cuddalore and Hughes was driven off.<sup>cvi</sup> A few days later, word arrived that the war had ended. Abandoned by his French allies, Sahib made peace the following year though the British-Mysore-Maratha struggle continued for three more decades. Thus, the first shots of the American Revolution had been fired at a sleepy town in Massachusetts and the last were fired on the opposite side of the world during a French raid outside of a dusty town in southern India.<sup>cvi</sup>

## Spanish Campaigns

Spain encountered great success in its military endeavors. Many Americans today would be surprised to know the Spanish collected taxes and donations from places like California, New Mexico, Texas, and Mexico (including a tax on liquor) to fund the war.<sup>cvi</sup> Bernardo de Gálvez raised a mixed black, Indian and Spanish army (drawn from Louisiana and the Caribbean) and captured Natchez, Baton Rouge, Mobile and Pensacola in West Florida during the years 1779.<sup>cix</sup> Only St. Augustine remained in British hands.

A seesaw, jungle war took place in Central America. Both sides enlisted Native Americans (like the Mosquito and Mosco) and slaves to fight in their armies. The British had to retake the settlement of St. George's Key (San Jorge), in Honduras, in September 15, 1779.<sup>cx</sup> Bernardo de Gálvez's father, Matias, was captain general in the area. He called the Spanish fort at Omoa, "the key and outer wall of the kingdom".<sup>cx</sup> The British captured it on October 20 but abandoned it after yellow fever decimated their forces.<sup>cxii</sup> The British captured Fort San Juan on the shores of Lake Nicaragua in April 28, 1780.<sup>cxiii</sup> Their goal was to gain control over Nicaragua in order to split the Spanish Empire and also because they had hopes one day of building a canal through the land. The defense of San Juan had bought Gálvez time to build an impregnable fort named San Carlos.<sup>cxiv</sup> Yellow fever decimated the invading British forces and they withdrew.<sup>cxv</sup> Gálvez mounted a successful amphibious assault on the fort on Rattan (Roatán), the last major British garrison, on March 17, 1782.<sup>cxvi</sup> By war's end, the Spanish effectively cleared the British settlers and loggers from Central America. In May, 1782, they also captured the Bahamas.<sup>cxvii</sup>

However, the one campaign they lost was the one that mattered the most to them. The three-year siege of Gibraltar was one of Britain's few moments of triumph. The Spanish blockaded it in June, 1779 so British General George Elliot ordered the garrison on half-rations. The British were able three times to break through the blockade and resupply the garrison. The besiegers planned a massive assault for November 27, 1781, but Elliot led a pre-emptive assault that surprised the Spanish. They abandoned their earthworks and Elliot's men were able to cripple the abandoned artillery and blow up the main powder magazine.<sup>cxviii</sup> On September 13, 1782, a combined Franco-Spanish naval fleet assaulted the town. However, the British used red-hot shot that pulverized and incinerated ships. The wind spread the flames throughout the attacking fleet and forced its withdrawal.<sup>cxix</sup> Once another British re-supply

convoy arrived a month later, the siege was all but abandoned. Eliot was awarded the Order of Bath for his efforts.<sup>cxx</sup> The Spanish had to be content with the capture of Minorca in February, 1782.<sup>cxxi</sup>

### Armed Neutrality

The war's impact on European trade was important and risked spreading the conflict. The contraband trade with the colonies was very lucrative. The colonists offered their commerce in exchange for recognition and support. For example, they offered Prussia a commercial treaty only to have Frederick II turn it down because he had no navy to protect it.<sup>cxxii</sup> Baltic nations like Sweden, Denmark and Russia were also worried. They were huge suppliers of naval supplies to all sides and they worried about shipping their cargoes through the war zones of the North Sea and English Channel. These nations tried to find a solution that would protect their shipping.

Although it was British seizures of neutral shipping that was most bothersome, Spanish actions drove the neutrals into action. Early in 1780, Spain seized two Russian ships. The British saw an opportunity to bring the Russians into the war on their side. Britain had been unsuccessful in attracting allies. Russia had been focused on Turkey, Austria was allied with France, and Prussia seethed with hatred for Britain. It was a rare moment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when many nations were solving their disputes diplomatically (like the Bavarian crisis). The British hoped their luck would change. It did not.

The League of Armed Neutrality was announced on March 10, 1780 in St. Petersburg.<sup>cxxiii</sup> Its signatories agreed to pool their navies together to protect their commerce. Armed convoys escorted shipping through the war zones. The League also adopted the broader, French definition of neutral rights because it was more profitable for them. Its members were Russia, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Prussia, Austria and even Portugal, though this former British ally signed while peace negotiations were already underway.<sup>cxxiv</sup> This League emphasized Britain's alienation from Europe. Charles James Fox said, "No power in Europe is blind; none stupid enough to ally itself with weakness."<sup>cxxv</sup>

The League also had another purpose. Some of its members like Russia and Austria wanted roles as mediators. They saw mediation was a way to gain territory and enhance prestige. For example, during October, 1780, the British offered Minorca to Russia as a bribe hoping Russia would use its influence in Britain's favor. (It failed.)<sup>cxxvi</sup> But, the League would be disappointed. The combatants handled the negotiations on their own.

### The Netherlands and the War

The Dutch did not want war. This republic was ironically indifferent to the republican struggle occurring in America. The Dutch were militarily weak and during 1775-80, they walked a cautious path. They appeased the British by refusing to recognize American independence. When the British pressured them, they turned away American privateers from their ports. Like Portugal, they were a British ally and had both a defensive alliance and a maritime treaty. But, political divisions in the country were moving it away from Britain.

The Netherlands was a republic with a hereditary prince, the Stadhouder. Its prince, Willem V, was George III's cousin and he and his supporters were pro-British. Their opponents, called the Patriots, were strong in the cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague. The Patriots held the upper hand because they controlled most of the tax base (Amsterdam paid 57.7% of the whole country's taxes).<sup>cxxvii</sup> Also, the Dutch legislature, the States General, could override the Stadhouder. In 1775, faced with troop shortages, Britain requested the services of one of Dutch army's mercenary brigades, the Scottish

brigade. The Estates General refused.<sup>cxxviii</sup> The Dutch merchants also enraged the British by trading with the Americans.

Further alienation arose when the French joined the war. The maritime treaty between the two nations allowed the Dutch to trade anything with the French except military supplies. However, the treaty did not exempt naval supplies. The British, engaged in a life or death naval battle, naturally wanted the Dutch to stop this trade. But, the Dutch were reluctant to do this particularly when it was guaranteed by treaty. Moreover, the French diplomatically outmaneuvered the British. They imposed an import tax on Dutch shipping into France but gave exemptions to key provinces like Holland (which contained Amsterdam) that provided naval supplies and who insisted on a strict reading of the maritime treaty.<sup>cxxix</sup>

The British were furious. The Dutch wanted to have it both ways, they claimed. The Dutch were holding to the letter of the maritime treaty but ignoring the defense treaty because they claimed it only applied to wars originating in Europe.<sup>cxxx</sup> The British began to confiscate some Dutch shipping engaged in the contraband trade. But, matters came to a head in spring, 1780. On March 21, the British gave the Dutch a three-week deadline to live up to their treaty obligations.<sup>cxxxi</sup> After getting no response from the States General, the British government declared all previous treaties void and ordered British ships to seize all contraband on Dutch ships.<sup>cxxxii</sup> The final blow came when the British captured Henry Laurens, an American diplomat, with a draft of a commercial treaty made with some Dutch politicians. Though it was not binding or even sanctioned by the Dutch government, the British used it as an opportunity to declare war. They specifically timed the declaration on December 20, 1780, before the Dutch could sign the treaty of Armed Neutrality.<sup>cxxxiii</sup>

The Dutch role in the war was minor. Though they fought ferociously in places like the naval battle of Dogger Bank, their key colonies like St. Eustatius and Trincomalee were captured. The French retook them and held on to them to prevent the Dutch from signing a separate peace. The Dutch colonies were restored but overall, the Dutch gained nothing for their reluctant participation in the conflict.

### **“Oh God! It is all Over.”**

Early Franco-American military coordination did not fare well. To the frustration of the Americans, the French navy refused to fight the British in New York Harbor because they were unsure of the harbor's depths. Allied attacks failed to dislodge the British from Newport, Rhode Island and Savannah, Georgia. By fall 1781, the alliance needed a decisive victory. The American economy was in shambles and there were several mutinies in Washington's army over lack of pay. The French finances were not much better. Vergennes told the Americans that there would be no further troops, ships or money after 1781.<sup>cxxxiv</sup> There was a sense among all the participants that one big battle would decide the contest. “A successful battle may give us America,” claimed British General Cornwallis.<sup>cxxxv</sup>

The timing of the battle of Yorktown therefore could not have been more fortuitous. Cornwallis had been campaigning in Virginia in summer, 1781, in hopes of finally breaking the back of the rebellion. When he realized that this was not going to happen, he marched his army to Yorktown on the York River where he expected the British fleet in Chesapeake Bay to evacuate his army. On September 5, a French fleet under Admiral DeGrasse defeated the numerically inferior British fleet in the bay and forced it to withdraw to New York.<sup>cxxxvi</sup> Stranded, Cornwallis fortified Yorktown. Washington marched his army to Virginia and besieged Yorktown along with a newly arrived French army. On October 10, the Allies captured two redoubts crucial to the British position.<sup>cxxxvii</sup> Six days later, the British mounted an unsuccessful sortie to regain them. Then they tried a nighttime evacuation across the river but a storm

hit their armada in mid-crossing and they were forced to return.<sup>cxxxviii</sup> Realizing the futility of further resistance, Cornwallis surrendered on October 19.<sup>cxxxix</sup>

“Oh God! It is all over.” Cried Lord North when he received the news.<sup>cxl</sup> It was now clear to Britain that the colonies were lost. The Whigs exclaimed that Lord North had “in seven years, dismembered the most powerful state in the modern world.”<sup>cxli</sup> The North government fell in March, 1782 and Lord Shelburne would eventually become Prime Minister.<sup>cxlii</sup> “An army without the hope of getting back America should not stay in it.”<sup>cxliii</sup> General Robertson advised his colleagues. The British government realized it would have to cut its losses in the colonies and focus on protecting the rest of its empire.

The future looked very dark for the British, especially in the Caribbean. By 1782, most of the British West Indies had fallen except for the major islands of Barbados and Jamaica. In April, the French under DeGrasse amassed a fleet and an army of 10,000 men to capture Jamaica. However, on April 12, British Admiral Rodney caught up to him in the Les Saintes strait between Dominica and Guadalupe.<sup>cxliv</sup> In the middle of the battle, the wind suddenly died off and the French fleet became divided. The British then smashed the scattered fleet piecemeal and captured DeGrasse.<sup>cxlv</sup> The offensive against Jamaica was cancelled and the British public went hysterical with joy at the news of the first major victory in years.<sup>cxlvi</sup> Although there had been peace negotiations between the combatants before this battle, the victory accelerated negotiations because it became clear that Britain had fought the Allies to a standstill.

### The Treaty of Paris and the European Aftermath

Britain succeeded in diplomatically dividing the Allies. War weariness and financial strain were taking their toll by the early 1780's. All the allies negotiated with the British (somewhat secretly despite treaty obligations not to) but they did not share the same priorities. The Americans were suspicious that the European powers were prolonging the conflict to gain additional British colonies. The two European nations were not enthusiastic about America's claim on Canada, because America had been unable to take it by force of arms. Considering the British still occupied New York, Charleston, and Savannah (the first two cities were the second and fourth largest in the colonies),<sup>cxlvii</sup> the Europeans were unwilling to risk further loss to satiate American ambitions. Moreover, both nations were apathetic on American fishing rights in the Grand Banks, preferring to establish French control in the area. Spain, like the Americans, had designs on the lands between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi.

The British skillfully separated the Americans from their allies with a generous treaty. The British were generous because they hoped to permanently separate America from the French. They hoped the weak, new country would be drawn under Britain's wing by their ties of blood and kindred culture.

The treaty recognized the independence of the thirteen colonies. The treaty granted the Americans the land south of the Great Lakes and west of the Mississippi but said nothing about the Native Americans living there. Ultimately, America would subjugate the tribes in its expansion west. The treaty offered free navigation of the Mississippi though the Spanish would not acknowledge this until the 1795 Pinckney Treaty. The Americans also retained their traditional fishing rights in the Grand Banks thanks to the tireless efforts of New Englander John Adams. The colonists surrendered their claims to Canada, agreed to pay all pre-war debts owed to British merchants by American consumers and promised to compensate the Loyalists for all confiscated property. It is interesting to note that after independence, roughly 100,000 Loyalists left the colonies. Most settled in Canada and contributed significantly to that country's development.<sup>cxlviii</sup> The treaty was signed on November 30, 1782, but not formalized until April.<sup>cxlix</sup> Once again, a generous treaty had persuaded America to embrace a former enemy.

Britain in 1783 looked like an empire tottering on the edge of ruin. The thirteen colonies were gone, Ireland was restive, the West Indies were vulnerable, the East India Company's debt had skyrocketed and its control over India was shaky. The British national debt was £240 million (approximately \$27 billion in year 2000)<sup>cl</sup>, almost double the size of the debt that instigated the war. Yet, the empire would survive for almost a century and a half in contrast to Spain who never recovered from the loss of her American colonies. Britain could rebuild its empire around other colonies. After the revolution, the British increasingly made India the centerpiece of their empire.

The Revolution showed the British Empire its limits. It had survived the war because of compromise (Ireland), military skill (Gibraltar and the Saintes), diplomacy (splitting the allies at the peace table), and luck. Militarily, she learned the consequences of "going it alone." She did not possess absolute naval superiority so having allies or the ability to divide her enemies became important foreign policy goals. Though it did not become a kinder or gentler Empire, the Empire did try to incorporate indigenous political institutions into imperial governance (One need only think of India Rajahs or Canada's legislature for an illustration). The British were haunted by the specter of the American Revolution and learned there were limits to how far colonies could be pushed. Politically, the aristocrats who dominated the government and military slowly gave way to the middle class. Political enfranchisement spread slowly. In the 1800's, two Prime Ministers, Sir Robert Peel and Sir William Gladstone, would be from the middle class and the House of Commons, not the House of Lords, became the dominant house in Parliament.

For all their efforts, the French did not gain much territory. The treaty awarded them Senegal in Africa (which they had captured in the war), and the island of Tobago. It restored St. Lucia, and guaranteed their Grand Banks' fishing rights. The most important result for the French was the weakening of Britain. But, in that success, the French sowed seeds for a disruptive future. Their national debt, huge even before the war, skyrocketed. The French government's attempt to fix it would contribute to the French Revolution.

Spain fared well in the peace treaty. It regained West and East Florida and Minorca. It had reestablished the Gulf of Mexico as a Spanish lake and it halted British ambitions in Central America. However, its long-term fears came to fruition. Within fifty years, their enormous American empire would disintegrate. Inspired by America, its colonies broke free. Also, America helped evict Spain from the New World. In 1819, it pressured the Spanish to sell East Florida six years after it seized West Florida. Finally, in 1898, in the Spanish-American War, the U.S. expelled the Spanish from their last colonial holdings in the Caribbean and the Philippines. Although the Revolution gave birth to the U.S., it accelerated the decline of Spain.

### **Conclusion: Ruled by Democratic Fanaticism**

As Paul Revere rode throughout the Massachusetts countryside warning the colonists on April 18, 1775 that "The Regulars (British soldiers) are out!", he lived in a hemisphere dominated by European colonial empires. Within 50 years of the American victory, the Europeans had been evicted from most of the hemisphere. The enormous Spanish empire would disintegrate and the other Europeans would be regulated to weak holdings (like Canada), toeholds (like French Guyana) or Caribbean islands. The Revolution set the U.S. on the path to Western Hemisphere domination. It inspired the Haitian Revolution that destroyed Napoleon's dreams of an American empire and eventually led to the Louisiana Purchase. After Latin American independence, the U.S. declared the Monroe Doctrine, a policy stating opposition to European re-colonization of the Americas. As a result, European Powers

expanded into Asia and Africa. American power radiated outward first dominating Latin America and the Caribbean, and then into Europe and Asia after World War II, finally culminating in the present hegemony of the U.S. as the lone superpower.

“If America should grow into a separate empire, it must cause a revolution in the political system of the world, and if Europe did not support Britain now, it would one day find itself ruled by America imbued with democratic fanaticism.” Lord North predicted.<sup>cli</sup> Most of his contemporaries only saw this war as another balance of power war and never grasped the seeds they were sowing. The global context and impact of the American Revolution is often overlooked. Yet, 1776 was a turning point in world history. 1492 began the rise of Europe and the birth of globalization. 1776 gave birth to the nation that would eclipse Europe eventually and become the center of globalization.

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Notes:

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- <sup>i</sup>Morrissey, Brendan. *The American Revolution: The Global Struggle for National Independence*. San Diego, CA: Thunder Bay Press, 2001, pg 12.
- <sup>ii</sup>This calculation was made using the Economic History Services website at <http://www.eh.net/>. A British pound in 1763 was worth roughly £94.7 pounds in 2000. The exchange rate for the dollar was approximately \$1.52 per pound in 2000.
- <sup>iii</sup> Marshall, P.J. ed.. *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Eighteenth Century*. Oxford, Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 1998, pg 67.
- <sup>iv</sup> Langford, Paul. *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783*. Oxford, Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 1989, pg. 641. Calculation involved same process as in footnote 2.
- <sup>v</sup>Ferguson, Niall. *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lesson for Global Power*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2001, pg. 89.
- <sup>vi</sup>Hofstadter, Richard ed. *Great Issues in American History Vol. II 1765-1865*. "William Pitt's Speech on the Stamp Act." New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1958, pg. 18.
- <sup>vii</sup>Lancaster, Bruce. *The American Heritage Book of the Revolution*. New York, NY: Laurel Leaf Publishing, 1958, pg. 11.
- <sup>viii</sup>Fagerstrom, Dalphy I.. "Scottish Opinion and the American Revolution." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., Vol. 11, No. 2, Scotland and America (Apr. 1954): pg. 259.
- <sup>ix</sup>Ferguson, pg. 89.
- <sup>x</sup>Miller, John C.. *Triumph of Freedom: 1775-1783*. Boston, MA: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1948, pg.31.
- <sup>xi</sup>Van Alstyne, Richard W. *Empire and Independence: The International History of the American Revolution*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1965, pg. 65.
- <sup>xii</sup>*Ibid*, pg. 65.
- <sup>xiii</sup>*Ibid*, pg. 45.
- <sup>xiv</sup>Lyall, Alfred. *The Rise and Expansion of British Dominion in India*. New York, NY: Howard Fertig, Inc., 1968, pg. 115.
- <sup>xv</sup>Marston, Daniel. *The Seven Years' War*. Oxford, Great Britain, Osprey Publishing, 2001, pg.32.
- <sup>xvi</sup>Bemis, Samuel Flagg. *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1935, pg. 9.
- <sup>xvii</sup>*Ibid*, pg. 9.
- <sup>xviii</sup>Miller, John C.. *Triumph of Freedom: 1775-1783*. Boston, MA: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1948, pg.263.
- <sup>xix</sup>*Ibid*, pg. 263.
- <sup>xx</sup>Marston, pg.75-76.
- <sup>xxi</sup>Ferguson, pg. 89.
- <sup>xxii</sup>Golder, Frank A.. "Catherine II and the American Revolution." *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Oct. 1915), pg. 92.
- <sup>xxiii</sup>Haworth, Paul Leland. "Frederick the Great and the American Revolution." *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Apr. 1904), pg. 461.
- <sup>xxiv</sup>O'Shaughnessy, Andrew Jackson. *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000, pg. 72.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Marshall, pg 81.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Ferguson, pg. 77.
- <sup>xxvii</sup>Rogozinski, Jan. *A Brief History of the Caribbean*. New York, NY: Plume Publishing, 2000, pg. 110.
- <sup>xxviii</sup>*Ibid*, pg 115.
- <sup>xxix</sup> O'Shaughnessy, pg. 58.
- <sup>xxx</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 58.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Mackesy, Piers. *The War for America 1775-1783*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1993, pg. 524.

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- <sup>xxxii</sup> Macksey, pg. 524.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Golder, pg. 93.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Miller, pg. 12.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Ibid, pg. 13.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Ibid, pg. 13.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Hofstadter, pg. 73.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Hibbert, Christopher. *Redcoats and Rebels: The American Revolution through British Eyes*. New York, NY: Avon Books, 1991, pg. 79.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Ibid, pg. 79.
- <sup>xl</sup> Karapides, Harry J. *Dates of the American Revolution*. Shippensburg, PA: Burd Publishing, 1998, pg. 227.
- <sup>xli</sup> Ibid, pg. 228.
- <sup>xlii</sup> Ibid, pg. 237
- <sup>xliiii</sup> Ibid, pg. 228.
- <sup>xliv</sup> Barnes Ian. *The Historical Atlas of the American Revolution*. New York, NY: Rutledge, 2000, pg. 146-7.
- <sup>xl</sup> Bemis, pg. 27.
- <sup>xli</sup> This calculation was made using the Economic History Services website at <http://www.eh.net/>. In Bemis' book, pg. 93 gives a dollar figure for aid in 1935 dollars. I used this website to adjust the figure based on changes in dollar values from 1935 to 2002.
- <sup>xlvii</sup> Ibid, pg. 93.
- <sup>xlviii</sup> Chàvez, pg. 11.
- <sup>xlix</sup> Ibid, pg. 11.
- <sup>l</sup> Ricklin, Saul. "Island Allies of a Revolution." *Americas*, Vol. 51 Issue 6, Nov/Dec 99, pg. 15.
- <sup>li</sup> Ibid, pg. 15.
- <sup>lii</sup> Ibid, pg. 15.
- <sup>liii</sup> Morrissey, pg.197.
- <sup>liv</sup> This calculation was made using the Economic History Services website at <http://www.eh.net/>. A British pound in 1781 was worth roughly £81.6 pounds in 2000. The exchange rate for the dollar was approximately \$1.52 per pound in 2000.
- <sup>lv</sup> Ricklin, pg. 16.
- <sup>lvi</sup> Chàvez, pg. 42.
- <sup>lvii</sup> Van Alstyne, pg. 93-94.
- <sup>lviii</sup> Ibid, pg. 95.
- <sup>lix</sup> Chàvez, pg. 42.
- <sup>lx</sup> Ibid, pg. 42.
- <sup>lxi</sup> Ibid, pg. 42.
- <sup>lxii</sup> Ibid, pg. 65.
- <sup>lxiii</sup> Bemis, pg. 61.
- <sup>lxiv</sup> Miller, pg. 267.
- <sup>lxv</sup> Bemis, pg. 71
- <sup>lxvi</sup> Reiner, pg. 11.
- <sup>lxvii</sup> Bemis, pg. 74.
- <sup>lxviii</sup> Ibid, pg. 74.
- <sup>lxix</sup> Ibid, pg. 133.
- <sup>lxx</sup> Ibid, pg. 87.
- <sup>lxxi</sup> Barnes, pg. 148.
- <sup>lxxii</sup> Miller, pg. 314.
- <sup>lxxiii</sup> Marshall, pg. 253.
- <sup>lxxiv</sup> Ibid, pg. 256.

- lxxv Miller, pg. 413.  
 lxxvi Ibid, pg. 413.  
 lxxvii Miller, pg. 17.  
 lxxviii Ibid, pg. 412.  
 lxxix Marshall, pg. 267.  
 lxxx Langford, pg. 550.  
 lxxxi Ibid, pg. 550.  
 lxxxii Ibid, pg. 551.  
 lxxxiii Miller, pg. 414.  
 lxxxiv Ibid, pg. 415.  
 lxxxv This calculation was made using the Economic History Services website at <http://www.eh.net/>. A British pound in 1780 was worth roughly £84.9 pounds in 2000. The exchange rate for the dollar was approximately \$1.52 per pound in 2000.  
 lxxxvi Ibid, pg. 415.  
 lxxxvii Ibid, pg. 415.  
 lxxxviii Marshall, pg. 267.  
 lxxxix Ibid, pg. 340.  
 xc Ibid, pg. 340.  
 xci Ibid, pg. 185.  
 xcii Morrissey, pg. 149.  
 xciii O'Shaughnessy, pg. 162.  
 xciv Ibid, pg. 169.  
 xcv Ibid, pg. 169.  
 xcvi Morrissey, pg. 174.  
 xcvi Rogozinski, pg. 11.  
 xcvi Morrissey, pg. 197.  
 xcix Morrissey, pg. 206.  
 c Ibid, pg. 207.  
 ci Ferguson, pg. 44.  
 cii Morrissey, pg. 135.  
 ciii Ibid, pg. 212.  
 civ Ibid, pg. 213.  
 cv Ferguson, pg. 26.  
 cvi Morrissey, pg. 217.  
 cvii Mackesy, pg. 500.  
 cviii Chàvez, pg. 213.  
 cix Barnes, pg. 150.  
 cx Chàvez, pg. 152.  
 cxi Ibid, pg. 151.  
 cxii Ibid, pg. 153.  
 cxiii Ibid, pg. 155.  
 cxiv Ibid, pg. 157.  
 cxv Ibid, pg. 155.  
 cxvi Ibid, pg. 163.  
 cxvii Barnes, pg. 150.  
 cxviii Morrissey, pg. 200.  
 cxix Ibid, pg. 210.  
 cxx Mackesy, pg. 516.

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- cxxi Chàvez, pg. 206.  
cxxii Haworth, pg. 476.  
cxxiii Morrissey, pg. 176.  
cxxiv Bemis, pg. 163.  
cxxv Miller, pg. 586.  
cxxvi Golder, pg. 95.  
cxxvii Bemis, pg. 118.  
cxxviii Ibid, pg. 124.  
cxxix Ibid, pg. 143.  
cxxx Ibid, pg. 146.  
cxxxi Ibid, pg. 146.  
cxxxii Ibid, pg. 146.  
cxxxiii Ibid, pg. 160.  
cxxxiv Tuchman, Barbara W. *The First Salute*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988, pg. 241.  
cxxxv Ibid, pg. 193.  
cxxxvi Morrissey, pg. 190.  
cxxxvii Ibid, pg. 191.  
cxxxviii Ibid, pg. 191.  
cxxxix Ibid, pg. 191.  
cxl Ibid, pg. 181.  
cxli Miller, pg. 617.  
cxlii Macksey, pg. Xxviii.  
cxliii Morrissey, pg. 203.  
cxliv Rogozinski, pg. 152.  
cxlv Ibid, pg. 153.  
cxlvi Ibid, pg. 153.  
cxlvii Morrissey, pg. 9.  
cxlviii Barnes, pg. 159.  
cxlix Ibid, pg. 156.  
cl The £240 million debt figure comes from Langford, pg. 641. The 1783 pound was worth £74.1 in 2000 money.  
The pound was worth \$1.52 in 2000.  
cli Tuchman, pg. 187.

American history in Special English. <sup>TM</sup> Steve Ember. This week in our series, we look at the start of the American Revolution. The road to revolution in the late seventeenth century took several years. There were protests against the British policy of taxing the colonies without giving them representation in Parliament. To prevent trouble, the British sent thousands of soldiers to Boston, the largest city in Massachusetts. The colonists were dressed as American Indians so the British would not recognize them. But the people of Boston knew who they were. A crowd gathered to cheer them. Americans resented what they saw as an indirect tax subsidising a British company. 16 December: Boston Tea Party Angered by the Tea Acts, American patriots disguised as Mohawk Indians dump \$9,000 of East India Company tea into the Boston harbour. 1774. May to June: Intolerable Acts Four measures which stripped Massachusetts of self-government and judicial independence following the Boston Tea Party. 5 July: Olive-Branch Petition Congress endorses a proposal asking for recognition of American rights, the ending of the Intolerable Acts in exchange for a cease fire. George III rejected the proposal and on 23 August 1775 declared the colonies to be in open rebellion. 1775-1776.