

The story of the American Colonies break from the British Empire with an emphasis on it's leaders and causes from Lexington to Yorktown

Conclusion

In the latter part of the eighteenth century, traditional governments in Europe were challenged by a wave of political revolutions, the most significant of which were the American and the French. These movements resulted from dynamic economies and drastically changing societies, but they were also products of the Enlightenment. In addition, they owed much to the English limited monarchy, with its cabinet system, which was initiated by the Glorious Revolution of the seventeenth century.

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The American and French revolutions were similar to the earlier Dutch and English upheavals but they were conditioned more directly by an expanding capitalistic economy which gave them more of a middle-class orientation. They were also more secular in tone. Their impacts upon other societies were naturally more forceful; indeed, they nearly completely destroyed the credibility of absolutism and aristocracy by popularizing and applying the principles of the Enlightenment.

Despite their obvious similarities, the two revolutions also were significantly different. The American movement was more limited in scope and in direct political effects. It was unique in its own time as a demonstrable proof of the "return to nature" and the practicality of the "social contract." Its foreign influence was primarily indirect, through the emotional and intellectual appeal of its example. The French Revolution, on the other hand, was much broader in its economic, social, religious, and political results. It brought the violent overthrow of a social order that had lasted for centuries. Moreover, it launched military conquests that brought the same general upheaval to the whole of western Europe.

Both revolutions merit serious study today. They left a legacy of liberal and constitutional ideas for all peoples, as evidenced by the Latin American movements of the early nineteenth century and by many more recent ones in Asia and Africa. This heritage of the French Revolution has been partially obscured by another legacy of nationalism and war. In contrast, the American liberal heritage has been maintained, almost completely intact, into the twentieth century. Rural people in a vast land which continually beckoned the pioneer, stayed closer to the simple individualistic assumptions of the eighteenth century. That is why American individualism is dying so hard and with such contortions in our time.

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