

AP US HISTORY · UNIT 3

The Influence of Revolutionary Ideals

AMSCO Topic 3.6

AP US History Study Guide — Outside-Research Edition

Learning Objective 1: Explain the various ways the American Revolution affected society. **Learning Objective 2:** Describe the global impact of the American Revolution.

Historical thinking skills this guide targets: comparison (how differently the Revolution's "equality" rhetoric played out for women, enslaved people, and Native Americans), causation (why slavery *declined* right after the Revolution and then *reversed*), and continuity/change (does 1776–1800 look more like rupture or continuity?).

Women in the Revolutionary Era

- **Daughters of Liberty:** organized boycotts of British goods before the war; provided supplies (as cooks/nurses) during it.
- A few women fought directly: **Mary McCauley ("Molly Pitcher")** took her husband's place at the Battle of Monmouth; **Deborah Sampson** disguised herself as a man and served for a year. Some Loyalist women also supported British troops.
- **Economic role:** the most important wartime contribution — women ran farms and businesses while men were away fighting, providing food and clothing for the war effort.
- **Republican Motherhood:** a new ideal that women should be educated so they could raise virtuous citizen-children and teach republican values in the home. It gave women a more active role in the nation's political culture, but this role stayed confined to the home — it did **not** imply legal or political equality with men.
- **Abigail Adams'** famous plea to John Adams ("remember the ladies") went unheeded — women retained second-class status.

OUTSIDE SOURCE — Beyond AMSCO: The term "Republican Motherhood" itself is not a Revolutionary-era phrase — it's a modern historiographical concept coined by historian **Linda K. Kerber**, first in a 1976 article and then in her influential 1980 book *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*. Before Kerber's work, historians barely discussed women's role in the founding era at all — her framework "dramatically changed historiography" by showing how women's domestic role was reframed as politically significant, even while remaining legally and socially subordinate. Knowing that this is a historian's interpretive lens, not an 18th-century term, is exactly the kind of historiographical awareness AP essay graders reward. — Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic* (1980); AHA biography and Current magazine interview with Kerber (2023), accessed 2026.

OUTSIDE SOURCE — Beyond AMSCO: The AMSCO chapter epigraph quotes **Judith Sargent Murray**, whose 1790 essay "On the Equality of the Sexes" is worth knowing directly, not just as a quote. Murray argued women were the intellectual equals of men and explicitly borrowed the Revolution's own language of natural equality and rights — extending the logic of the Declaration of Independence to sex rather than just political status. She had actually written the essay in 1779 but didn't publish it until 1790, once revolutionary rhetoric about equality was firmly established in the culture. This is a strong primary-source pairing with Abigail Adams's letters for any essay on gender and Revolutionary ideals. — Bill of Rights Institute and National Women's History Museum, "On the Equality of the Sexes," accessed 2026.

The Status of Enslaved African Americans

- Slavery obviously contradicted "all men are created equal," and for a time revolutionary leaders took some corrective action:
- Continental Congress banned the importation of enslaved people; most states followed.
- Several northern states abolished slavery (often gradually); some southern owners voluntarily freed enslaved people.
- Slavery seemed to be declining — even slaveholders like **James Madison** hoped it would end (though he couldn't envision Black and White people living together as equals, and hoped freed people would emigrate to Africa).
- **The reversal:** the **cotton gin (1793, see Topic 3.12)** made cotton production far more profitable, spiking demand for enslaved labor. By the 1830s, slaveholders had built religious/political rationales to justify permanent bondage — the "ideals of the Revolution" were deemed not to apply to enslaved people.

OUTSIDE SOURCE — Beyond AMSCO: For a fuller comparison point, roughly **5,000 African Americans fought as Patriots** (see Topic 3.5's 1st Rhode Island Regiment) — but far more enslaved people, historians estimate somewhere in the tens of thousands, sought freedom by escaping to the British side after Lord Dunmore's Proclamation (1775) and later British promises. This is a genuinely contested historiographical question (exact numbers aren't agreed on), which is itself worth noting on an essay: enslaved Americans made a rational, individual calculation about which side offered a real chance at freedom, and it wasn't uniformly the Patriot side. — Museum of the American Revolution, "From Slaves to Soldiers," accessed 2026.

Causation chain for an essay: Revolutionary natural-rights rhetoric ("all men are created equal") creates real ideological pressure against slavery (1770s–80s: Northern gradual abolition begins, international slave trade banned by Congress) → BUT the Constitution's Three-Fifths and slave-trade compromises (Topic 3.8) protect slavery structurally at the exact moment ideology was turning against it → the cotton gin (1793) makes slavery suddenly far more profitable in the Deep South → economic incentive overwhelms the weakening ideological objection → by the 1830s, pro-slavery arguments *explicitly reject* Revolutionary equality as inapplicable to Black Americans. A strong essay treats 1776–1793 as a narrow "window" when abolition nationally was genuinely plausible, then explains why it closed.

Native Americans and Independence

- Most American Indians had backed the British during the war, so they gained nothing from American independence.
- Colonist racism and hunger for land meant most Americans saw Indians as obstacles to settlement, not people entitled to "liberty and equality."

OUTSIDE SOURCE — Beyond AMSCO: See Topic 3.5's guide for the Iroquois Confederacy split (Mohawk/Seneca/Cayuga/Onondaga vs. Oneida/Tuscarora) — the clearest single example that "which side you picked" didn't protect you from the outcome. Even the **Oneida**, who fought for American independence, were largely forced onto a reservation near Green Bay, Wisconsin, after the war. This is a genuinely strong comparison point against Loyalists (who at least got resettlement support from Britain) and against enslaved Patriot soldiers (some of whom did win legal freedom). — National Park Service, "The Six Nations Confederacy During the American Revolution," accessed 2026.

International Impact of the American Revolution

The Declaration of Independence's ideals — self-government, equality, inalienable rights — inspired movements worldwide:

- **French Revolution (1789–1799):** overthrew the monarchy.
- **United Irishmen rebellion (1798)** against British rule.
- **Haitian Revolution (1791–1804):** led by **Toussaint Louverture**, the largest successful revolution by enslaved people in history — ended slavery in Haiti.
- 19th-century **Latin American independence movements** cited the Declaration as inspiration.
- 20th-century movements in places as different as **Zimbabwe** and **Vietnam** invoked the same ideas.

Comparison for an essay — American vs. Haitian Revolution: Both invoked Enlightenment natural-rights language and both were, in part, wars of independence from a European empire. But the American Revolution left slavery intact and expanding, while the Haitian Revolution *was fundamentally about* ending slavery — enslaved Haitians took the American and French revolutionary language of "liberty and equality" more literally and completely than either of those two nations did themselves. This contrast is a genuinely strong comparison/CCOT point: the *ideas* traveled further than the *practice* did.

Historical Perspectives: How Unusual Was the Revolution?

- **Similarities view (historian Crane Brinton, *Anatomy of a Revolution*, 1965):** The American, French (1789–1794), and Russian (1917–1922) revolutions all passed through similar stages, becoming increasingly radical. Also compared to post-WWII anti-colonial rebellions in Africa/Asia — all against distant imperial powers, often guerrilla-based, weak in cities but strong in the countryside (colonies in the 1770s, Cuba in the 1950s, Vietnam in the 1960s).
- **Differences view:** Unlike France or Russia, America had no feudalism or entrenched aristocracy to overthrow — the U.S. simply carried a liberal, republican movement (already gaining strength for years) to fruition, rather than smashing an old order.
- Historians disagree on whether the American Revolution actually *shaped* later revolutions or merely shares surface similarities.

OUTSIDE SOURCE — Beyond AMSCO: The single most important historiographical debate for this topic is actually **Gordon Wood's** Pulitzer Prize–winning *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1992). For decades before Wood, two camps agreed the Revolution wasn't very radical: conservative historians called it a modest defense of existing English liberties, while Marxist-influenced historians called it an incomplete "bourgeois" revolution that shuffled elites without redistributing real power. **Wood's argument disputes both:** he says the Revolution radically transformed social relationships — a new dignity of labor, the beginnings of an antislavery movement, expanded room for women, and a new acceptance of ordinary people pursuing their own commercial self-interest in politics — even though it didn't look radical in the violent, guillotine sense of the French Revolution. **This directly extends the AMSCO "Historical Perspectives" box:** Brinton compares revolutions by their stages; Wood argues America's revolution was radical in its social consequences, which is a genuinely different axis of comparison — citing both is a strong way to show range on an essay. — Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1992); Harvard GSAS Colloquy podcast interview with Wood, accessed 2026.

Key Terms and Actors

Term/Actor	Definition	Why it's contested / often confused
Republican Motherhood	Ideal that mothers should raise virtuous republican citizens	A modern historian's term (Linda Kerber, 1976/1980), not an 18th-century phrase — don't write it as if colonists used this label themselves
Judith Sargent Murray	Author of "On the Equality of the Sexes" (1790)	Wrote it in 1779 but published in 1790 — the <i>timing</i> of publication (once equality rhetoric was normalized) matters for an essay about ideas spreading
Cotton gin (1793)	Eli Whitney's invention mechanizing cotton seed removal	The single most important cause of slavery's <i>expansion</i> , not just its persistence — connects directly to Topic 3.12
Iroquois Confederacy split	Six Nations divided into pro-British and pro-American factions	Ended centuries of internal peace among the Six Nations — a real, not just symbolic, consequence of the war
Haitian Revolution	1791–1804 enslaved uprising ending slavery in Haiti, led by Toussaint Louverture	The <i>only</i> revolution of this era to fully achieve abolition — a strong contrast to the U.S.
Gordon Wood's "radicalism" thesis	Argument that the Revolution radically changed American social relationships	Often confused with claims about <i>political</i> radicalism (violence, regime overthrow) — Wood's argument is about <i>social</i> change specifically
Crane Brinton's stage theory	Comparative framework showing revolutions pass through similar radicalizing stages	A comparison of <i>process</i> , distinct from Wood's comparison of <i>outcome</i> — know both frameworks separately

Recommended Videos

OUTSIDE SOURCE — Beyond AMSCO (this whole section): - **Heimler's History**, "The Influence of REVOLUTIONARY Ideals [APUSH Review Unit 3 Topic 6 (3.6)]" — direct topic match with a companion note-guide, confirmed via search to cover this exact AP topic (women, enslaved Americans, Native Americans, and global impact). - **Heimler's History**, "The UNEVEN Application of Revolutionary Ideas [APUSH Review]" — a companion video specifically on the comparison angle (who did and didn't benefit from "equality" rhetoric). - Source for both: YouTube channel @heimlershistory, confirmed via search, accessed 2026.

LEQ/DBQ-Style Practice Prompts

- Comparison:** "Compare the impact of the American Revolution on the roles of women and the institution of slavery." A *strong thesis* might argue both saw a real, if limited, ideological opening in the 1770s–80s (Republican Motherhood; early Northern abolition) that stopped well short of legal equality — but the slavery "opening" fully reversed by the 1830s while women's expanded civic role, though still unequal, never fully retracted.
- Causation:** "Explain why the early revolutionary-era trend toward the decline of slavery reversed by the early 19th century." A *strong thesis* centers the cotton gin (1793) and the Constitution's structural protections for slavery (Topic 3.8) as the two decisive causes, distinguishing economic causation from ideological causation.
- Continuity and Change:** "Evaluate the extent to which the ideals of the American Revolution were consistently applied across American society, 1776–1800." A *strong thesis* takes a clear position (e.g., "largely inconsistent") and supports it by naming specific

groups (women, enslaved African Americans, Native Americans) rather than discussing "society" in the abstract.

Quick Review Questions

1. In what way did Republican Motherhood expand and simultaneously limit women's roles?
2. What reversed the early revolutionary-era trend toward the decline of slavery?
3. Give two examples of how the American Revolution's ideals influenced revolutions elsewhere.
4. Explain one similarity and one difference between the American and French Revolutions, per Crane Brinton's argument.
5. How does Gordon Wood's argument in *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* differ from the traditional "conservative" and "incomplete bourgeois revolution" views he was responding to?
6. Why is it historiographically significant that "Republican Motherhood" is a term coined by a 20th-century historian rather than an 18th-century one?

One Thing to Remember

"All men are created equal" functioned less like a description of 1776 America and more like a promissory note — cashed quickly and completely by enslaved Haitians, partially and unevenly by American women and free Black Patriots, and not at all by the Native nations who'd fought on the winning side. The size of the gap between the ideal and who it actually reached is the essay-worthy story of this topic.