

In the year before those famous shots were fired, farmers in Western Massachusetts had driven the British government out without firing a single shot. They had assembled by the thousands and thousands around courthouses and colonial offices and they had just taken over and they said goodbye to the British officials. It was a nonviolent revolution that took place. But then came Lexington and Concord, and the revolution became violent, and it was run not by the farmers but by the Founding Fathers. The farmers were rather poor; the Founding Fathers were rather rich.

Who actually gained from that victory over England? It's very important to ask about any policy, and especially about war: Who gained what? And it's very important to notice differences among the various parts of the population. That's one thing we were not accustomed to in this country because we don't think in class terms. We think, "Oh, we all have the same interests." For instance, we think that we all had the same interests in independence from England. We did not have all the same interests.

Do you think the Indians cared about independence from England? No, in fact, the Indians were unhappy that we won independence from England, because England had set a line—in the Proclamation of 1763—that said you couldn't go westward into Indian territory. They didn't do it because they loved the Indians. They didn't want trouble. When Britain was defeated in the Revolutionary War, that line was eliminated, and now the way was open for the colonists to move westward across the continent, which they did for the next 100 years, committing massacres and making sure that they destroyed Indian civilization.

So when you look at the American Revolution, there's a fact that you have to take into consideration. Indians—no, they didn't benefit.

Did blacks benefit from the American Revolution?

Slavery was there before. Slavery was there after. Not only that, we wrote slavery into the Constitution. We legitimized it.

What about class divisions?

Did ordinary white farmers have the same interest in the revolution as a John Hancock or Morris or Madison or Jefferson or the slaveholders or the bondholders? Not really.

It was not all the common people getting together to fight against England. They had a very hard time assembling an army. They took poor guys and promised them land. They browbeat people and, oh yes, they inspired people with the Declaration of Independence. It's always good, if you want people to go to war, to give them a good document and have good words: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Of course, when they wrote the Constitution, they were more concerned with property than life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. You should take notice of these little things.

There were class divisions. When you assess and evaluate a war, when you assess and evaluate any policy, you have to ask: Who gets what?

We were a class society from the beginning. America started off as a society of rich and poor, people with enormous grants of land and people with no land. And there were riots, there were bread riots in Boston, and riots and rebellions all over the colonies, of poor against rich, of tenants breaking into jails to release people who were in prison for nonpayment of debt. There was class conflict. We try to pretend in this country that we're all one happy family. We're not.

And so when you look at the American Revolution, you have to look at it in terms of class.

Do you know that there were mutinies in the American Revolutionary Army by the privates against the officers? The officers were getting fine clothes and good food and high pay and the privates had no shoes and bad clothes and they weren't getting paid. They mutinied. Thousands of them. So many in the Pennsylvania line that George Washington got worried, so he made compromises with them. But later when there was a smaller mutiny in the New Jersey line, not with thousands but with hundreds, Washington said execute the leaders, and they were executed by fellow mutineers on the order of their officers.

The American Revolution was not a simple affair of all of us against all of them. And not everyone thought they would benefit from the Revolution.

What then, do you believe the war was about?

1. Please post an *initial* response to these questions of *at least* 150 words
2. Reply (2 or 3 sentences) to *at least* 3 other students' initial postings.

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