

# **CULTURE MATTERS**

## **The Origins of American Culture, Identity, and the American Revolution**

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**Sons of the American Revolution**  
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# 1

## PREFACE

“These are the times that try men’s souls,” wrote Thomas Paine. George Washington read it again to the Continental Army while at Valley Forge that winter of 1777-78. It was the lowest period of the Revolutionary War.

The men were dying like flies from hunger, cold, and disease. The Confederated Congress was gridlocked over colonial affairs: financing the war and quotas for new soldiers. And Congress was failing miserably in supplying the troops with food, clothing, and ammunition. No congressman even visited Valley Forge until Washington insisted upon it.

Meanwhile, 24 miles away, citizens were supplying the British army while they occupied and partied in Philadelphia with whatever they needed. Worse, the very people responsible for getting available supplies to Valley Forge were profiteering from the system while food rotted, and clothing remained in the warehouse.

Talk about a divided nation! Was it even a nation, which even Washington asked? And what did it mean in the first place to be an American? All these questions erupted at the same time the Revolutionary War was on the verge of implosion.

There are many parallels between now and then. A gridlocked Congress, a nation being trashed as fundamentally racist, homophobic, sexist, xenophobic, and for economic exploitation. The American flag, symbol of the nation, is seen by some as a symbol of hypocrisy and oppression. The memory of those who gave their lives that this nation might live seems all but forgotten.

This hardly makes for a strong nation or any sense of a common American identity. In fact, it makes for a cultural civil war. Can violence be not far behind?

An essay on the American culture and its origins is not only appropriate but necessary for our times. A historical amnesia seems to possess many minds. We have forgotten that no nation in the history of humanity was ever formed like America. But, can people with a multiplicity of races, ethnicities, religions, and a myriad of political beliefs where all live freely together really ever exist?

Yet that slowly emerged as an America's vision. First articulated by Jefferson and then clarified by Lincoln. But a vision isn't reality; it only initiates the making of reality.

It's the height of historical ignorance and naivete to think that all this should have materialized on July 4, 1776. The criticism of the Declaration: "They still had slavery," is supposed to illustrate its hypocrisy. Many like to refer to slavery as America's original sin. Slavery was a horrible condition practiced across the world since antiquity by every racial group. It was mankind's sin.

Furthermore, July Fourth produced no nation. It was a declaration that the colonies were "Free and Independent States." And that meant war.

This was the first giant step on the evolutionary and unforeseen path to nationhood. The immediate goal was to win the War so that the Independent States could run their former colonies like they always did.

The Declaration of Independence itself was pretty much ignored for several decades. But it did provide a blueprint vision of what kind of a nation America could be. For a start, five of the Independent States had abolish slavery several years before there was a Constitution of the United States: Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Vermont, a territory, abolished it first in 1777.

Remarkably, the Confederated Congress (1775-1787) in one of its last acts passed the Northwest Ordinance. These thirteen Independent States unanimously approved the prohibition of slavery in the Northwest Territory—the future states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. The "Spirit of 1776" was having some effect.

Nation making went into effect 4 March 1789 after the Independent States ratified the Constitution of the United States. Yet would the written words ever translate into effective action that also contained the spirit of the Declaration. This was America's great experiment. No nation had ever attempted anything like it.

In the middle of the Civil war, Lincoln asked: “Can this or any nation so conceived and so dedicated long endure?” That’s always a haunting question. For democracies generate centrifugal forces that can shred it apart. Is there anything that keep it together?

Only the virtue of the people. And a vision that can keep us on course.

This essay is the story of the origins of the American culture and American identity that underlies our nation. The foundation was laid down between 1630 and 1801—from the Puritans to Jefferson’s first inaugural address. There was no awareness of any of this until King George III came to the throne in 1761. The American Revolution had begun.

A distinct American culture began during the next 15 years. But it was fragile and contested. It almost shattered to bits during the Civil War (1861-1865).

The American vision has always been an ongoing enterprise and a hard slog. The torch of the Spirit of 1776 passes from one generation to another. Whether this heritage will endure depends upon us the living. That future remains to be written.

From the first British settlers in 1607 at Jamestown to 1776 in Philadelphia a cultural mindset and way of self-governing was being transformed. That July 4<sup>th</sup> was a historical turning point for humanity. It’s summed up in the American Creed.

## **THE SPIRIT OF 1776**

### **The American Creed**

We hold these truths to be self-evident,

- (1) that all men are created equal,
- (2) that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights,
- (3) that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.
- (4) That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.
- (5) That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government ...most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

## 2

# INTRODUCTION

The origins of the American culture and identity were rooted in self-government. This is the essay's central theme. Yet *caveat emptor*. Let the buyer beware. Self-government is not as simple as it sounds. It's fraught with complexity and often borders on chaos.

Why? Because it is a human institution and operation. And conflict lurks within.

Self-government is the foundational concept for understanding the origins of American culture. It's the poll around which the American Revolution took place. And it continues to be the nucleus of America's political, social, economic and cultural evolution.

Self-government was an inherited practice, a way of living, that the first British settlers brought to North America. It was part and parcel of their county cultures dating back to 1215 in the Magna Carta.

The idea and practice of self-government developed and expanded over the centuries and became embedded in the British Constitution. This is an unwritten constitution in the sense that there is no one book in which it is found.

It consists of common law, judicial judgements, acts of parliament, and agreements between the people and monarchy. The English Bill of Rights (1689) was its high-water mark.

Their constitution made the English, loyal subjects of the king, the freest people in the world. Ironically, that very constitution served as justification for the Americans' Declaration of Independence "to solemnly publish and declare...that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is and ought to be dissolved."

We know that story. But the American Creed within the Declaration is too often overlooked. Lincoln seized upon it. He praised Jefferson for introducing "into a merely revolutionary document, an abstract truth, applicable to all men and all times."

It's the core of American belief and the backbone of the American Identity, the soul of America. That Creed serves as our corrective force when the nation gets off track. The Fourth of July is a tradition and ritual that reminds us of this. In the end, it's what ultimately unites us as Americans.

The American Constitution completed 17 September 1787, and submitted for the people's approval, is in tune with the Spirit of 1776. Its preamble as was Jefferson's is exquisite in its articulation and conciseness of purpose. It reads:

We, the People of the United States, in order form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

This is America's fundamental law. That means no Congressional or state legislation or Presidential orders, or anyone's can violate the Constitution of the United States of America and the fundamental rights of the people. The Supreme Court serves as the ultimate judge in these matters.

Self-government sounds great. But as we experience, it's also a source of destructive political conflict and social tension.

How can that be? We are, after all, said Lincoln: "A government of the people, by the people, and for the people," That seems pretty simple and straight forward.

But Lincoln also noted a very human factor, the fly in the ointment: "We all declare for liberty; but in using the same word we do not all mean the same thing."

The same can be said for the concept of self-government. It's fraught with misunderstandings and a perpetual source of tension and conflict. So, it's important to get a handle on some of that complexity to better understand ourselves.

Between 1630 and 1775 there were four waves of British settlements. Now known as the Thirteen Colonies. They were chartered by the kings at different times for different purposes. The settlers brought with them four different meanings of self-

government: Community Freedom; Hegemonic/Oligarchical; Reciprocal Freedom; and Individual Freedom. These interpretations of self-government reflected not only different but even opposite understandings about freedom itself. They would play out in American life through the election of Thomas Jefferson, the Civil War, and today.

From the first landings on the North American shores, the political house of America was divided in four major ways. Each way had its own variations, nuances and spins. That's how we got the colonies of Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire. The cultural seeds of sociopolitical disagreements, conflicts, discord, and violence were unwittingly sewn when British settlers first set foot on land.

The New England colonies understood self-government as a community's freedom to determine its own religion, political order, and codes of conduct. If you agreed, you could join that town. If not, life and limb would be safer in Rhode Island.

The Middle Atlantic colonies understood self-government in terms of reciprocal freedom. What you would grant to yourself ought to be granted to others. Freedom of conscience was sacred. There were serious penalties for anyone trying to impose their beliefs upon another. Elections were frequent, ranging from 3 to five times a year.

The Southern colonies, especially Virginia, had an oligarchical understanding of freedom. Some men were born to rule and the rest born to be ruled. Freedom came in degrees based in birth and socioeconomic class. Those in the upper class, the Cavaliers, ruled. Those in the lower class deferred. And this carried on well into the 1900s.

Finally, the Backcountry settlers were the last and greatest number of settlers from Great Britain. But they were the least wanted. Consequently, they were shuttled into the backcountry.

From their self-perception the backcountry folk were as good as anyone else who walked the earth. Challenge that and you might not live to see the end of day. Being highly individualistic, self-rule was about each man being free to do exactly what he willed. They were offered free land and scooted into the back country of PA, MD, VA, NC, SC, and GA.

The colonial and backcountry settlers inherited their cultures from distinct regions and counties of England, Scotland, and Ireland. They brought their cultures with them and adapted them to their new American environments.

These cultures were isolated, more divisive than unifying, and became a source of discord between the respective colonies. The only unifying force was the mother country, England, and their rights as British subjects under the British Constitution.

The essay focuses on the origins of American culture as the launching pad for the American Revolution (1761-1801) of which the Revolutionary War (1775-1783) is an integral part. If the War were not won, the American Revolution would have been still-born.

Since this is a historical cultural analysis, what's meant by culture and history is first explained. A brief historical 30,000 foot overview of the historical context is given.

A description of each of the four cultural zones follows. Self-government is a two sided coin: religion and freedom. It characterizes the four cultural zones of early America. But they had radically different interpretations. We still wrestle with them. The essay concludes with Thomas Jefferson's inaugural address of 1801. The passing of power from one factious party to another without violence.

It's a complex story. Sorting through it is like Ancestry.com. Yet it's the only way to discover our roots as Americans.

### 3 CULTURE

When people speak of the environment, they are generally referring to the physical environment. Is it beautiful or ugly, clean or filthy, healthy or toxic? When it comes to human communities, we generally use the term culture to describe it: good or bad, safe or dangerous, healthy or toxic. And we don't seem to need a dictionary definition of culture to do this.

Clean air and clean water are major environmental health concerns. The Flint, MI toxic lead-laced water crisis that began in 2014 still endures. Los Angeles' air quality suffers from smog, haze, soot, and acid rain. According to USA Today, it's America's most polluted city. The health consequences of these environments are well-known and tragic.

But social groups from families to nations also have a unique environment, which we call cultures. They can be just as healthy or toxic as any physical environment. In fact, the quality of our physical environment greatly depends upon a society's culture.

We observe and experience cultures wherever we travel. Italy, France, India, Egypt, and Thailand not only speak in different languages but have different customs, emotional attachments, and ways of doing things.

We avoid certain areas of our major cities in America for safety reasons. We also rank our neighborhoods according to how they look and are cared for. Some communities feel safer than others. In other words, we make cultural distinctions and judgements, often without ever using the word culture.

These judgments are like flash lightning. We act upon them just as fast. It's part of our biological nature rooted in survival mechanisms. Differences alert us to danger: a stranger, an unexpected sound, a growling dog, etc. We suddenly become more alert and guarded.

These are stress survival response. The majority of these are false alarms, false positives. On the other hand, a failure to respond could be deadly, a false negative.

Many of these are innate, biologically wired. But since few of us are hunter-gatherers, modern day responses have been culturally acquired. That is, they have been learned. They are the products of worldviews (zeitgeists), beliefs, attitudes, emotional attachments, manners, and ways of behaving that differentiate one social group from another: family, community, organization, institution, city, state or nation.

Humans have great learning and adaptive capacities. But context, the cultural and physical environments, modifies everything. No matter what genes we have, lead-laced water can inhibit gene expression and damage cognitive performance. But so can child abuse stemming from a dysfunctional and toxic family. Culture matters at the micro level of a family to the macro level of a nation.

Some may readily write all these off as biases. (Which, of course, is often just their bias.) But the greater point is that they overlook a fundamental fact of human nature. We all construct frames of reference to see and understand our world and act accordingly. Without a reference frame life becomes pure chaos.

Reference frames, zeitgeists or world views, aren't relative. Some are more helpful for human flourishing than others. Some cultures are simply better than others. It's why parents have a natural concern about where they live, the friends their children have, and the schools they attend. Culture matters. Not to see that is an act of intellectual blindness.

Culture is at the core of every social group, family or nation. It's the electromagnetic force, like protons, neutrons, and electrons, that keep groups intact or glued together. But they can decay as well.

Like the nucleus of an atom, culture consists of three parts. Instead of protons, neutrons and electrons there are beliefs, emotions, and behaviors:

- 1) Beliefs are shared convictions, worldviews/zeitgeists, attitudes, values, and ways of perceiving the world. But these are not just rationally and derived abstract concepts.
- 2) They are also marinated in emotions. We have strong feelings about our beliefs and convictions. We have mutual sympathies. It's part of human nature from which no one escapes. And

3) A culture's beliefs and emotions are expressed in common patterns of group behaviors. These behaviors forge a cultural unity, identity, and reflect a group's character.

The French shake hands while the Italians hug and kiss are simple and obvious examples. The more complex ones are related to beliefs, ways of perceiving, attitudes, values, emotional attachments, customs, and manners.

Observation tells us that India and China are culturally different from Europe and the USA. The USA is different from Europe. Both are different from Iran and Pakistan; and they from each other. The habits of the heart, mind, and action vary among nations as well as families. Few people are migrating to Somalia.

Likewise, historical observations tell us a great deal about American culture and American identity. The American Revolution was a 40 year period of transformation. From being loyal subjects of the king, Americans became citizens equal to one another. From being part of the British Empire, America became a republic and assumed "among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature God entitled them..."

It was an extraordinary cultural phenomenon. It had never happened in history. It was the experience and concept of self-government that drove this cultural transformation.

## 4 HISTORY

All history is about people and their relationships. It's what interests us and the stuff of life. Herodotus is the father of history. He set off to inquire, investigate, into the causes of the Persian Wars. The word inquiry comes from the Greek word *ἱστορία* (historía). It's an inquiry about events. What happened? When and by whom? And what were the consequences?

There's the old joke about the New York City detective who quipped: "If I have nine witnesses, I get nine stories." History like crime is a kind of detective work. There are facts. But there are always interpretations of the facts depending upon their context. Is it a murder or an act of self-defense?

But history is more than criminal detective work. For crimes are usually reduced to a simple cause and effect. Most history from Herodotus to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century followed that model.

But there has been a realization that historical events are far more complex and can't be reduced to simple causes and effects. For there are multiple factors interacting with one another out of which emerge surprising, unforeseen, and unpredictable events. Current historians try to capture this dynamic.

How is it that the American patriots won the Revolutionary War against the most powerful empire in the world? It's a complex story with many contingencies—luck—that could have gone the other way. Yet people and nations can make their own luck. Nevertheless, it was a narrow win for the American patriots.

And by 1786 the old self-government of the Confederated Congress was unraveling. So too in 1800 and the Civil War of 1861-65. The nation had its share of fractures well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Self-government has more of a history of being on the ropes than governing.

Forging a united nation with a common identity is a long and hard enterprise. We're still working on it because it's always breaking down, entropy. And as we approach 2020 many can still ask with Lincoln, whether this "nation, or any nation so

conceived and so dedicated, long endure.” The answer lies, as it always has, in the hearts and actions of We the People.

For historians, presentism is a mortal sin. Presentism is the act of interpreting and judging a past age in the light of present beliefs and morals. It fails to take account of the historical context and sociopolitical gravitational forces that existed yesteryear. It assumes that if we lived then, we would have known better and acted differently. There’s a high probability that we wouldn’t.

In fact, it is quite arrogant to think so. We, who have lived through the most murderous century in world history, should be quite leery about human nature. For we share in all its propensities. Whatever humans have done before we can readily do today.

The task here is to set aside judgements and try to see the world through the minds and experiences of those who lived several centuries ago. In this case, it will be the North American world of the 1600s and 1700s. And that history can teach us much about ourselves as it does them.

## 5

### COMING TO AMERICA

In the last decades of the 1500s, England was a second rate power. Spain and Portugal were yoking the globe with their ships of trade and commerce. [See Map 1] Portugal had traders, but Spain had conquistadors. Consequently, Spain gobbled up a good part of the Americas and Europe. France had the greatest chunk of North America. Left was a slice of land along the North American coast between Canada and Florida. [See Map 2]

MAP 1



**Spanish galleon routes (white): West Indies or trans-Atlantic route begun in 1492, Manila galleon or trans-pacific route begun in 1565. (Blue: Portuguese routes, operational from 1498 to 1640)**

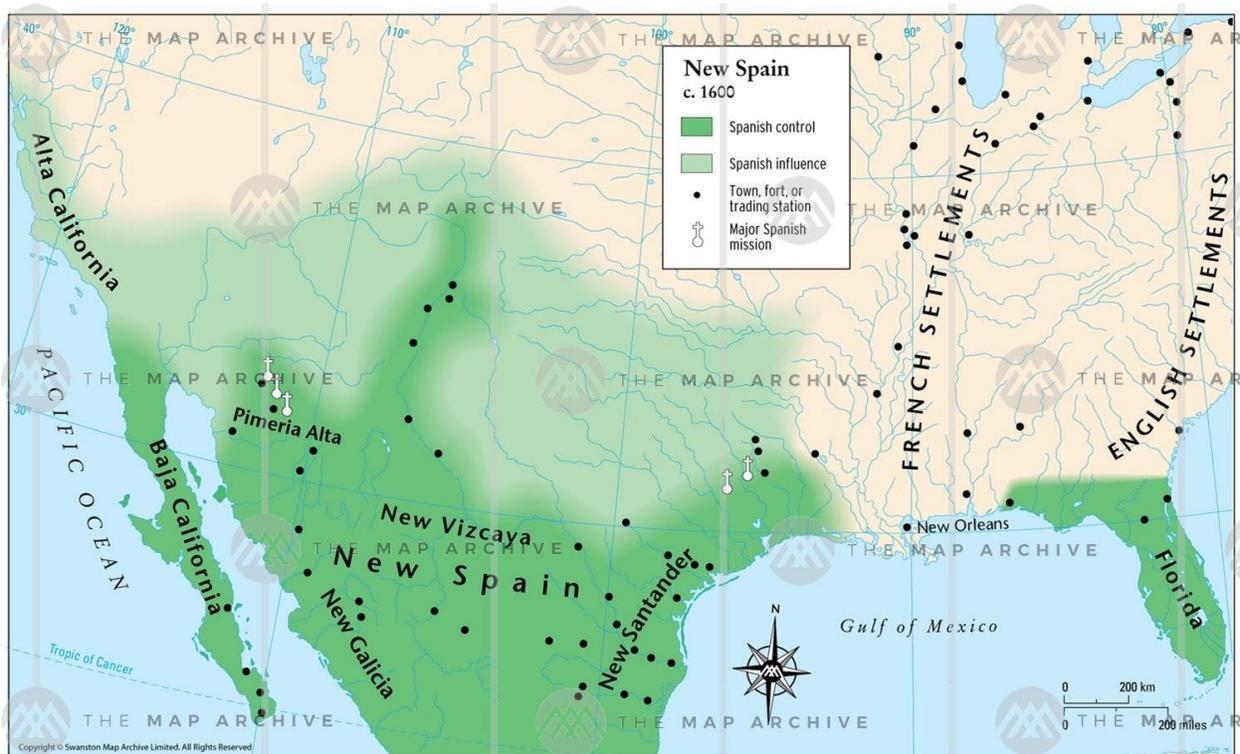
Queen Elizabeth I had Walter Raleigh, her chief of security and advisor, send out explorers (1580s) to get a stake in the American continent before it was all gone to her to chief rivals, Catholic nations. The Protestant Reformation was still in full bloom. The only land free of either Spanish or French inhabitants was, as is known today, between Maine and Georgia. Raleigh named the entire area Virginia. Elizabeth I was also well-known as the Virgin Queen.

The first settlements under Raleigh were at Roanoke off the banks of North Carolina—for him, of course, it was Virginia. But they were abysmal failures. Roanoke was a death trap. The 120 men women and children who arrived would never be heard from again. The mystery of their disappearance continues.

The only good news for Elizabeth I was in 1588 when the Spanish Armada was destroyed in an attack on England. It was a tragic loss for Spain. They were out maneuvered defensively by the English and crushed by a major storm destroying their fleet and losing 55,000 men in the process.

That planned attack was the largest joint navy-army formation in history. It was only exceeded, and successfully so, on 6 June 1944 (D-day).

**MAP 2**



**New Spain, New France, and Virginia**

The loss of the Spanish Armada was the turning point of Spain's global dominance. Yet she remained a powerhouse in Europe and Latin America for another century; living off the huge quantities of gold and silvers extracted from the Americas.

France was Spain's major competition. But they would eventually join forces in the mid-1700s against England. The outcome of that war, The Seven Years War, aka the French and Indian War, made Great Britain the British Empire. The sun never

set on it until the end of WWI. Spain's influence as a global power ended earlier, 1898, as the result of the Spanish American War.

The important point here is that England, France, and Spain played major roles in the early formation of America.

Upon the death of Queen Elizabeth, a remote cousin, King James I of England and IV of Scotland replaced her in 1603. But the state of North America had not changed one iota. New Spain and New France had the continent in their pocket as illustrated above in **Map 2**.

James was hardly a beloved king. He claimed a divine right to rule. This didn't go over very well with the members of Parliament. Since the Magna Carta of 1215, Parliament had increasingly placed limits on kings' and queens' ruling authority. Furthermore, over the centuries English counties had developed their own local ruling municipalities.

But colonial settlements and authority always went with the monarchs. Like foreign policy resides in the U.S. president.

Raleigh had fallen out of favor, locked in the Tower of London. King James I transferred Raleigh's charter for Virginia to a joint-stock corporation, the Virginia Company. This was a venture capital organization betting on gold and silver in Virginia. Spain was getting it while the French were trapping furs. Why not England?

The king risked nothing. Everyone expected that gold and silver would pour into London as it did for Spain in Seville. Maybe they could even capture a corner of the fur markets. The investors would profit immensely, and the tax receipts would enhance the king's wealth without risking a penny of his own.

The expedition sent by the Virginia Company landed almost dead center in the land of Virginia. In honor of the king they named the town Jamestown and the river they sailed up as the James River.

The entire venture was a horrible disaster. The Powhatan Indians already knew about the English character from their native brothers' experiences in Roanoke.

Trust between Native Americans and the English started off badly and only got worse.

The Jamestown history is well known. A business venture quickly turned into deadly exploitation and tit for tat violent acts of vengeance. The lesser angels of mankind were let loose on a rampage.

By the time it was all over, the Native American population of 24,000 in 1607 had dwindled to 2,000 by 1670. Meanwhile the Virginia population mushroomed to 41,000.

Violence and pathogens were the instruments of death. Columbus is the bullseye target of opprobrium today. Yet we overlook that the British settlers were just as ruthless, exploitive, merciless, and murderous as the Spanish.

Criticism is easy from 2019. The conditions, mindsets, and wielding the sword of vengeance as a problem solver are not ours. If we lived then, we probably would have done the same thing.

But there are two points here that run through all the English settlements till 1775.

First, not all British settlements were primarily for religious reasons like the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay plantations. Of course, the majority of settlers were people of Christian faith although of different church beliefs.

This was not yet an age of disbelief, but more one of church animosities. Remember, the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) was raging in Europe before the Puritans landed in New England. Religious animosities were culturally contagious and would spread like pathogens among the colonies. America's antidote would be the First Amendment: well written, but not fool proof in application.

Second, the contrast between the absolutist rule of European kings claiming divine rights to rule and England's monarchies were like night and day. Parliament never put much faith in a divine right to rule. Power struggles between it and the monarchy endured for centuries.

The Magna Carta was just the beginning. The resolution for the violent conflicts would come in a nonviolent revolution called the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

William and Mary assumed the throne as king and queen. (Think William and Mary College in Williamsburg, VA.)

Before this peaceful transition to a new King and Queen, there was a the very bloody English Civil War (1642-1652). It pitted the king and his loyalists—many would settle in Virginia, against Parliamentarians and their supporters under the command of Oliver Cromwell. It ended with King Charles I's execution, son of James I.

The next form of government was several years of chaotic democratic rule. This was quickly followed by Oliver Cromwell's dictatorship. After that, Charles I's son, Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660. These dramatic changes had profound affects upon the mindsets of British settlers and their emigration patterns.

## FOUR WAVES OF CULTURAL IMMIGRATION

### The British Context:

England exercised the greatest influence on the cultural foundations of America. The English Constitution, language, and Protestantism became the cultural mold for pre 1776 America.

The peaks of the Allegheny Mountains were the operational boundaries between the eastern British American colonies and western lands claimed by the French. [Map 3] These were always contested lands by white settlers moving into Indian lands and by the royal governors of the Virginia colony.

Map 3



In the beginning, however, these were hardly issues. Territories discovered by English explorers were always the king's land. Parliament had little or no say in these decisions.

And the kings could arbitrarily define its borders, give the land away as a gift, or offer a commercial patent funded by a joint-stock company to exploit the land for profit, and grant a patent for any group seeking to settle in a new land like the Plymouth and MA Bay plantations.

Wherever the English landed, they were still considered British subjects. Those living in the 13 colonies would be called British Americans. They considered themselves loyal subjects of the king.

Here's a key point. For approximately 150 years, benign neglect of the colonies was the practice of the kings. It was not until 1761 when a radical change occurred after the French and Indian War, which turned out to be the launching pad for the American Revolution. A new sheriff had arrived in town, King George III.

He intended to make his mark as king. He viewed his predecessors as weak. They had lost their power, honor, and tarnished the royal image. George III would change all that.

He was coronated just as the English had defeated France in North America, our French and Indian War. But it was a global war better characterized as the Seven Years War. [See Map 4] Many historians consider it the first world war.

After the Treaty of Paris (1763), England was in the catbird's seat. She was an Empire. George III intended to make the most of it.

And the first thing he needed to do was resolve England's horrendous debt from three wars with France. Related to that were the 13 British colonies in North America. They seemed to be running their own shows and not bearing their fair share of the cost for being in the Empire.

George III would not only start enforcing the laws on the books that colonies had ignored for decades. This was followed by a series of acts by parliament that he had engineered. Boston's James Otis and John Adams noticed that immediately in 1761 when Otis went to court to challenge George III's Writs of Assistance.

1761 begins the forty year American Revolution. It's time now to look at the major English settlements and the cultures they brought to America. George III never had the foggiest idea of the culture clashes he was about to deal with.

## MAP 4



### THE SEVEN YEARS' WAR: A First World War

Cultures don't materialize out of thin air. We inherit them much like genes. And that's exactly what happened with the English settlers. They came in four waves between 1630 and 1775. And they brought with them their county cultures and identities a loyal subjects of the king. [Map 5]

And they can be combined into four cultural zones that were laid down by the Puritans from 1630 to the Backcountry settlers concluding in 1775. There were, of course, cultural overlaps during the colonial settlements.

The following is based on the extraordinary detailed research of the cultural historian David Hackett Fischer. He identified 24 ways in which these English counties radically distinguished themselves from one another. And they formed four cultural regions in North American colonies. These cultures still play out in America.

These distinct migrations highlight the cultural factors that have contributed to the origins of the American Culture and Identity. The outcome is a plurality of vibrant sub-cultures that characterized America today.

Those who claim America is a divided nation oversimplify. To group Americans into two political and opposing parties misses the deeper complexity of American life. For at the cultural level, Americans live out their lives in a myriad of cultures: family, neighborhoods, clubs, associations, religions, schools, cities, workplaces, states, nation, and civilization.

Like a Russian nesting doll, matryoshka, one culture is always embedded in another. Unfortunately, human cultures don't fit nicely into one another like those wooden dolls. Cultures by their very nature breed conflict. They reflect different world views, ideas, attitudes, emotional attachments, and manners.

America has a plurality of cultures like no nation in the world. So it's amazing that we can ever take joint action for the common good. Yet Americans do collaborate for the common good. It's what has built our nation; a cultural trait that has become part of the American identity.

It's never been done perfectly, which agitates many. For utopian perfectionists the good is always be the enemy of the perfect. But this is part and parcel of the human condition.

This is a factor too often overlooked. But the designers of the United States Constitution didn't. They built it not upon some abstract theories, but upon the very propensities of human nature. It's all contained within *The Federalist* papers.

As mentioned above, America's four cultural zones were the product of four waves of settlements from England between 1630 and 1775. There were, of course, other immigrants from other countries: Dutch, German, Swedish, Danish, etc., but the majority of settlers were from England. And they came from English counties with century old distinct cultures.

They brought their cultures with them and planted them in a New World. That world had a very different physical and human environment. Cultural adjustments had to be made. Adapting would become another American trait albeit never perfect. Sometimes it was just reactive violence. It's what people did then.

Relating with different races, ethnicities, religions, languages/dialects, customs, and beliefs has been stormy and too often violent. This speaks to the propensities of human nature.

Over the decades Americans have greatly improved their ability to live better with the plurality of cultures that form a macro culture called American. And that should not be overlooked. Americans have come a long way in their enterprise of building a nation according to its founding vision.

But that's getting way ahead of ourselves. For that's another chapter of America's transformations over the centuries. We must go back to the beginning, to the origins of the American culture.

## FOUR CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS

### Historical Contexts:

Every culture, like the matryoshka doll, is embedded in a larger culture. That's the larger context in which a culture must adjust, adapt, or react to. Sometimes it's a mix of all three.

Like kids in a family, they will adjust and adapt to the home environment. As teenagers, that transition between late childhood and early adulthood, they usually react. It's a preparation period for living in a larger world culture, that usually needs some change.

When it comes to history, the present always embodies the past. For most of human history, the past just repeated itself. There was little change for millennia in how the masses lived. The biggest change was in political leadership: king, pharaoh, czar, or warlord. That could have major effects on whether people lived or died.

If there was one common belief across the globe, it was in supernatural powers. These could be gods, angels, demons, witches, faith healers, witch doctors, priests, and prophets. This covers the largest part of human history. Charles Taylor, the noted Canadian historian, makes a distinction between two major historical periods. The first and longest he labels as the Enchanted Age.

Supernatural powers were just accepted as an obvious part of the natural world. The forests were filled with spirits. The explanations of events from the forces of nature, diseases, wars, etc. were readily assigned to a supernatural force. Religion took on a multiplicity of forms. But the underlying zeitgeist of the world was the existence of supernatural forces.

This zeitgeist prevailed until the last 500 years of human history when a disenchanting transition began. It was slow and incremental. Today, Taylor argues, we live in a Disenchanted Age.

This doesn't mean that there aren't any believers in God or a higher power. But that the period of arguments about the existence of God, belief and disbelief, is over.

The new default position is unbelief. It's a waste of intellectual energy to think about something that you can never know for certain. Many modern physicists attribute the universe's existence to a random quantum fluctuation.

This worldview was hardly in the air for British Americans during the 1600s. Religion was central in every American colony even if it wasn't the main reason for its settlement.

The early religious zeal in New England had certainly waned by 1700. But this was followed by the first religious Great Awakening, 1730s to '40s, and swept across the colonies. Other Great Awakenings followed.

Evangelical religion and other religions are part of the American fabric. Albeit faded in spots, it's political death to ignore it.

### **The Geopolitical Context:**

Shortly after Columbus's landing in 1492, New Spain was founded. At the time, Spain was the most powerful nation on the European continent and many others as well. By the early 1500s they owned, or at least claimed ownership of the land, from the entire southwest of North America, Mexico, and South America. [See Map 2 above]

France was nipping at its heels as well as picking off Spain's treasure fleets along with the English c1550s. New France was well established by that time. [See Map 2 and 4] Its land would eventually be contested by Great Britain in 1755 (the French and Indian War).

Other than poaching off Spanish treasure ships, England had yet to claim nothing more than fishing territory in the North Atlantic and around the Hudson Bay. The turning point came, as previously mentioned, with the 1588 destruction of the Spanish Armada.

## **Cultural Foundations:**

Between 1629 and 1775, there were four consecutive waves of British settlers. They were the largest minority group that established itself in America. And their cultural influence outweighed yet did not exclude all others. Two key points:

First, British immigrants brought their own cultures with them. For England had a diverse set of counties with century old cultures of governing, thinking, and living. That made all the difference of exactly who settled where. The counties of origin can be seen below. [**Map 5**]

Second, the English were the largest minority of the minorities. Others had come too: Scots, Scots-Irish, Irish, Swedes, Dutch, Finns, Swiss, Welch, Germans, French Huguenots, Africans (mostly slaves), and Native Americans. And they were of every religious denomination and sect that could be named. A myriad of languages were spoken. Native Americans had near 200.

# MAP 5



The eventual American motto: E Pluribus Unum (Out of many, One) fit perfectly.



### **E Pluribus Unum—Out of many, One**

This motto was adopted by the Confederated Congress in 1782 as the given motto of the United States until 1958. But it was never codified in law under the new (1787) Constitution of the United States. In 1958, the U.S. Congress adopted “In God We Trust” as the official motto for the United States.

This can first be seen as but is not a trivial historical point. The Revolutionary War was not yet completed but on the verge of victory. E Pluribus Unum recognized that this was the result of Americans from a diversity of races, ethnicities, nationalities, languages, and religions.

The evidence of that is in the ancestors of the Sons of the American Revolution present here today. They risked and lost their lives so that we could become a government of, by, and for the people.

Second, and easily lost in memory, is the stark fact that America was not yet a nation. The Declaration declared only that the colonies were “Free and Independent States.” With the British off their backs, these new states with their new constitutions were now free to govern their former colonies as they always did.

If there were to be a united nation, it was, at best, in an early formative period. All social groups pass through stages: Forming, Norming, Storming, and Performing. These were the Forming decades.

Back to the origins.

These were British colonies. They had more in common with England than they did with one another. The Atlantic Ocean was like a bridge. Of course, it had toll booths on both ends. Commerce, trade, and communication went directly from the major colonial ports: Boston to London, New York to London, Philadelphia to London, Jamestown/Norfolk to London, and Charlestown to London. Smugglers did the work of sailing between the colonies.

By 1750, the British Americans, now a mosaic of cultures, were very comfortable in their political and economic relationship with England. They were proud to be the loyal subjects of the King. Some said that the Anglo-Americans were becoming more English than the English.

On the surface it certainly did look like that. But unseen was a deeply rooted and common practice of self-government that had grown to the point where it could never be uprooted.

It happened because the English kings had taken a benign neglect of its colonies. They rarely intervened. And the colonies governed themselves as they willed. There were trade tariffs, which the colonies accepted as the price of being part of an international trading system.

Anglo-Americans accepted the principle but avoided the practice. Custom House officials were paid to look the other way. Smuggling, so visible, didn't even look like smuggling. Yes, all were quite comfortable with the system.

But what would happen if the trade regulations were vigorously enforced? And what would happen if their autonomous ways of self-rule were verboten by a king who wanted to govern his loyal subjects?

That time would come. His name was King George III. And he would be on a command and control mission to bring order to his wayward colonies.

He would never succeed. For he had absolutely no understanding of how the Anglo-Americans understood their freedoms nor how habituated they were to their forms of self-government. This was the hill on which they would be willing to die.

Let's see how that which was never planned came to pass. The effects of which still rear their heads.

### **The Cultural Settlements: [Map 5 above]**

Cultures don't materialize in thin air. To emphasize again, the English immigrants brought their local county cultures with them. Emigration was self-initiated from four distinct sections of Great Britain. And that's exactly corresponds with four colonial regions: New England, Middle Colonies, Southern Colonies and the Backcountry (the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains, to its peaks and over, from Pennsylvania, through Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia).

Here's a summary of these origins that shaped their unique modes of self-government. Two cultural drivers are emphasized: freedom and religion. They are the two sides of the golden coins of four regional forms of self-government.

But they were understood differently, radically so, in America's cultural zones. In different forms, they persist in our current sociopolitical and economic conflicts.

#### **1. New England Colonies: 1629-1641**

The Puritans arrived during this period, 21,000 strong, in Massachusetts Bay. The majority came from three counties in east England, known as Anglia, which consisted of Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex counties.

It was a plantation authorized by King Charles I. Charlestown and the Charles River was named after him. A savvy move on the part of John Winthrop, who obtained the charter from the king for the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Those who traveled with him across the sea elected him as their governor.

Self-government is reflected in elections. And the Puritans elected their own ministers and public officials in every new town that they created. The towns started off like Biblical commonwealths. The Puritans understood freedom as community and not individual freedom. Communities should be free to form themselves as in the way they believed would best serve God.

Rhode Island became a refuge for those in a town who disagreed. Roger Williams, a Puritan minister founded Rhode Island because his life was on the line. He believed that the state should be separated from the church. He established a freedom of religion in his colony. And this violated the dogmas of the Congregationalist towns in Massachusetts.

Community freedom had little to do with individual freedom and rights. Only God had rights and people should be free to live according to God's will. These communities were well regulated and enforced. They were utopian Christian communities. Over time the religious fervor waned. But it would be revived again in the 1730s as the Great Awakening. Where else? but Massachusetts.

While all this was transpiring, the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) was raging across Europe. It was a bloodlust orgy for power and territorial control under the guise of religion. Religious hatreds between Protestants and Catholics were used to justify and inspire the opposing armies.

Yet Catholic armies of France ended up fighting Catholic armies of Spain under a Holy Roman Emperor. A lesson: when it comes to matters of state, the state always wins.

Religious passions were turning murderous. It's why many thought America might be a safe harbor. But like the Ebola virus antireligious sentiments came with them.

## **2. Southern Colonies: 1642-1675**

This second settlement was not primarily for religious reasons. It consisted of a small group of elite royalists—supporters of King Charles I, and a much larger group of indentured servants. Most came from the southwest counties of England.

This was the period of the English Civil War, 1642-1651. William Berkeley was a loyal supporter of Charles I, who appointed him the royal governor of Virginia at Jamestown. Berkeley then recruited and enlisted royalists from those southwest counties that supported the king.

They were the second sons whose only chance of having their own estates was in Virginia. And they became the ruling elite in Virginia well into the 1800s and

beyond. The vast majority, however, were indentured servants. This created a very different socioeconomic and political structure than New England.

Freedom was understood as hierarchical and oligarchical. There was a natural top down order. Just as there was God at the top, archangels, then angels, then men who were born to rule, followed by those born to be ruled, and women were on the rung below.

It was the worldview of those who settled in Virginia. Oligarchical rule continued well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As for religion, it was Anglican. No office could be held unless you believed in the Trinity. Quakers, Baptists, Presbyterians were driven out, some hanged.

Virginia like Massachusetts set the sociopolitical model of governing for its neighboring colonies, the Carolinas and greater part of Maryland. Rule by a wealthy oligarchic elite over an indentured and enslaved population was simply understood as part of the natural order of the universe.

The majority of white freemen were on the lower rung of the economic ladder. Deferring to the elites above them was in their economic interests and so they easily acquiesced. Anglican religious life supported and nurtured the entire political, social, and economic structures.

The exact opposite worldview would be found in the Backcountry and Middle Atlantic colonies.

### **3. Middle Atlantic Colonies: 1675-1715**

It was the most unique of all colonial settlements and its culture flew directly in the face of nine other colonies. Philadelphia was British America's major port of entry and largest city.

It had the most diverse social structure among all the colonies. Visitors would be struck by the mix of races, ethnicities, and religions that existed under the sun. And, remarkably, peaceful living among them was one of its chief cultural characteristics.

People were not bludgeoning one another's heads. But maybe they would if it were not for the Quakers.

This also gave the King an opportunity to offload Quakers who were being viciously attacked. They came from the Midlands of England, located between Scotland and the English Channel.

King Charles II had made William Penn the sole proprietor of Pennsylvania. It was a gift in honor of Penn's father who helped restore the king to his throne in 1651. Penn named this enormous track of land Sylvania (a land of forests), which the king renamed Pennsylvania.

As owner and master of his own property, Penn could do whatever he willed. And he did. As a converted Quaker, he was guided by its fundamental beliefs. Each person has an inner light to guide them. "Conscience was God's throne in man." Hence, this would be a chief feature of self-government in his colony.

Intrusion upon a person's spiritual and physical life was strictly forbidden and enforced. People could gather in any kind of religious community they wished. Public offices were decided by the vote of the people. Male suffrage, which meant any freeman, was greater in Penn's colony than any other. A freeman was a freeman regardless of race, ethnicity, color of skin, or religion. Elections were frequent, sometimes up to five times a year depending upon the county wishes of the people.

Since the Quakers were a persecuted religion in England and the other British colonies, Pennsylvania became a natural home. Twenty-one thousand arrived during this settlement. Here, freedom was understood as reciprocal.

What you would grant for yourself should be granted to your fellow man. Slavery was obnoxious for Quakers. Any slave owner could not hold an office in a Quaker community. By 1775, a slaveholder couldn't even be a member of its church. And Pennsylvania was one of the first of the "Independent States" to abolish slavery.

Self-government prevailed in every town, county, and the entire Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. All office holders were selected by the people. Ironically, it would be this very freedom granted to non-Quaker immigrants that would ultimately undermine its own culture.

#### **4. The Backcountry: 1717-1775**

This was the largest settlement of all. A quarter of a million came from the borderlands of Scotland and Northern Ireland, approximately 150,000. One-third of these Backcountry immigrants arrived a few years before the Revolutionary War.

The best image of a Backcountry settler is of one holding a gun in one hand and a Bible in the other. They were a warrior people having lived for centuries on the border lands of Great Britain of disputes and revengeful violence.

Individual freedom was not just a concept but a deeply ingrained way of living. Each man was sheriff of his own property. There was no need for appointed or elected sheriffs to patrol the roads between properties. In necessities of protection, a group of voluntary regulators would be assembled to swiftly institute justice.

They hated religious institutions. Church ministers were hardly welcomed. They had their own Bibles to determine what God wanted them to do and how to impose justice.

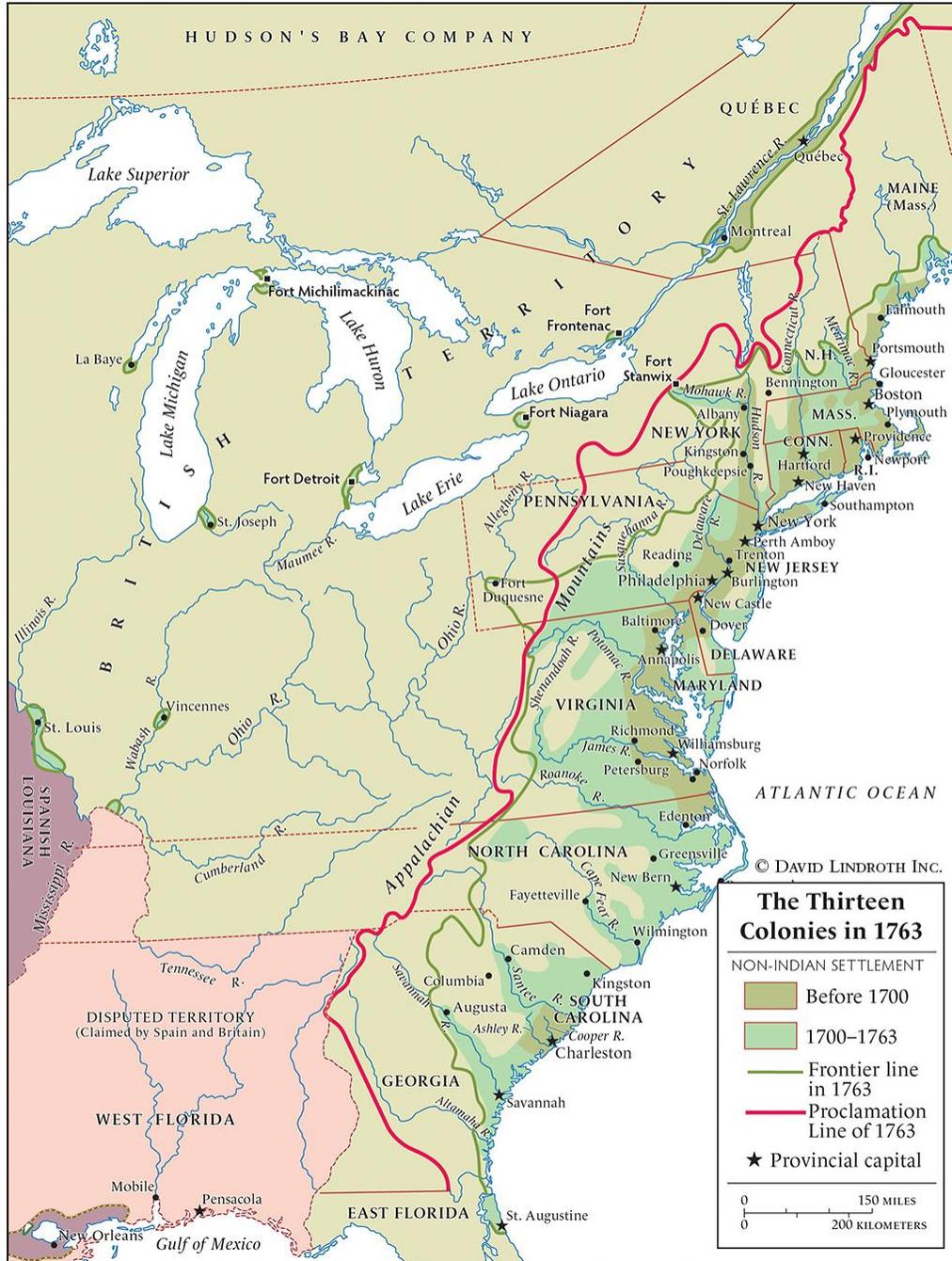
But independent Evangelical camp meetings were popular. Evangelical preachers were welcome. The Great Awakening of the 1730s and 40's took them by storm.

A shabby looking and violent people were not much welcomed in Philadelphia, even by the Quakers. They were quickly shuttled to the backcountry of America. This was the frontier land along the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains and across the Eastern Continental Divide into Native American land.

It ran from Maine to Georgia. The bulk of their settlements, however, began in Pennsylvania and migrated southward. The greatest representative of this culture would be Andrew Jackson.

# THE AMERICAN QUEST A Summary

MAP 6 “used by permission of David Lindroth Inc.



In summary, an amazing thing happened between 1761 and 1776. A major cultural transformation occurred during those 15 years. British Americans were happier than rabbits in a cabbage patch. They were not only loyal subjects of the king but part of the budding British Empire. They considered themselves to be the freest people in the world. [Map 6]

But by 1776 they were no longer British subjects of the king. They were now citizens equal to one another.

We know a good deal of what happened. The French and Indian War (1754-63), won of course, but left a bad taste for the Anglo-American militias toward the British military. King George III immediately prohibited the Anglo-American from crossing the Proclamation Line into the former French and Indian territory. They thought they fought to have that land for future settlements. This was followed by a set of tax laws that violated their consent to them because Americans had no representative in Parliament and never did. They had their own local colonial system of representation.

Furthermore, there were those four original cultural yet incompatible ways of understanding self-government and freedom along with passionate religious differences. Out of that could a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal” be realized? That was the great question that faced the founders and Americans ever since.

America was settled as British colonies not as a nation. Nor did the Declaration of Independence make a nation. And it took a Civil War (1861-1865) to determine whether the Constitution of the United States of America actually had made a nation.

The colonies organized themselves according to English customs dating back to the Magna Carta of 1215. Common law and the rights of private property, more so than life itself, were central to English Law and its Constitution. The English Bill of Rights (1679) had a profound influence on British Americans. And so did the 1770’s Commentaries on English law by the famous British jurist William Blackstone.

The violation of those rights and liberties of the people contained within —24 plus were listed in the Declaration of Independence—were the grounds and justification for Anglo-Americans to declare themselves “Free and Independent States.”

This did not make a nation, nor did it make for a workable Confederation of Independent States. For two reasons:

First, the primary goal for all the colonies was to preserve their ways of life and self-governing. They wanted first and foremost to get the monkey off their back—the British Empire. But war had to be won first before they obtained that goal.

There was no intent of creating a nation as we know it today. The last thing they wanted was another ruling entity above them. “This is not what we fought for” was the Anti-Federalists chief argument against the U.S. Constitution. It passed only on the condition that it would incorporate a Bill of Rights. Which to the early 1900s was understood primarily to the States.

This, to us, seems rather odd. What about individual rights?

Second, this brings us back to the Second Continental Congress of 1776. Its delegates were authorized to vote for independence with one clear prohibition. Nothing decided in Congress could interfere with a colony’s right to govern their “internal affairs.” In other words, colonies would govern themselves as they always did.

“Internal affairs” was a sine qua non for a common declaration of independence. No interference in how any colony governed itself is a critical fact often overlooked. There was no nation born on the Fourth of July. Seeds by some were planted, would they take root?

The conditions of 1776 were that the colonies didn’t like one another. There was no history of collaboration among the cultural zones discussed above. But there was a history of mutual jealousies, conflicts, discords, and antagonisms. In fact, it would flare up during the war and more so afterwards.

Even though there were 90 declarations of independence proclaimed and written within some colonies; it took the Continental Congress an inordinate amount of time to make the decision.

It frustrated John Adams no end. But they needed a consensus. For as Benjamin Franklin said: “We must hang together or surely we shall hang separately.” Whether he actually said that or someone else, it captures the decision crisis faced by the Congress.

Events can foment cultural transformations, for better or worse. If there was any movement toward nation building, it was the Continental Army. Those who joined it came from all the colonies. But given the autonomous powers of the Free and Independent States, Washington had to compete with provincial and county militias as he waged war.

The most he could do was persuade them to cooperate in military strategies. More often they did exactly what they wanted to do, which was to limit their action to local immediate needs of their towns. Counties, and states. It was practically impossible to count on them.

The Free and Independent States agreed to fulfill quotas of enlisted men to the Continental Army along with supplies and money. Most dithered on this if not outright reneged. It explains the tragedies that occurred at Valley Forge—men dying from hunger, hyperthermia, and disease. And officers resigning their commissions and returning to their former colonies.

At Valley Forge, out of exasperation Washington uttered: “I thought we were a nation. Meanwhile some of his generals were engineering with Congress to replace his with General Gates.

The Creed in the preamble of the Declaration of Independence is certainly the Soul of America. But as Madison said: “If men were angels, no government would be necessary.” And so a new Constitution was formed in 1787 and submitted to the American people for ratification. The preamble to it is its statement of purpose:

We, the People, of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and to secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

It’s been written that Franklin, when asked if the people had a new Constitution, responded: “Yes, but do you have the virtue to keep it?” Whether he said it or not the point is au point.

Does the body politic of America have the self-discipline to make and keep a government of the people, by the people, and for the people? It takes self-discipline to treat our fellow citizens with respect, courtesy, good will, and tolerance. Without it, a government of the people, by the people, and for the people will not endure.

This is the American Quest and enterprise for every generation. And it is up to us to see that it endures.