

The Influence of Revolutionary Ideals

Theme: Social Structures & America in the World

Learning Objective 3.F: Explain the various ways the American Revolution affected society.

Debates on Equality

KC-3.2.I.C: During and after the American Revolution, an increased awareness of inequalities in society motivated some individuals and groups to call for the abolition of slavery and greater political democracy in the new state and national governments.

- Slavery
 - Northern states begin to _____ slavery, set to end in most northern state by 1820
 - Southern states seeing less profit in tobacco
 - Invention of _____ in 1793 would reinvigorate institution
 - Despite contributions of Black Americans to the Revolution there was no path to equality for them
- Greater level of democracy
 - Voting rights expanded across the states - near _____ for white males
 - _____ allowed women to vote from 1776-1807

Republican Motherhood

KC-3.2.I.D: In response to women's participation in the American Revolution, Enlightenment ideas, and women's appeals for expanded roles, an ideal of "republican motherhood" gained popularity. It called on women to teach republican values within the family and granted women a new importance in American political culture.

- Women's participation in Revolution
 - Boycotts, _____, soldiers, maintaining colonial economy
- _____
 - Expanded accepted level of education for women
 - Still a largely _____ role, no equality guaranteed in new governments
 - _____'s request "remember the ladies"
- Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) widely read and debated
 - Judith Sargent Murray's _____ (1790)

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Learning Objective 3.G: Describe the global impact of the American Revolution.

Inspiration for Other Revolutions

KC-3.2.1.E: The American Revolution and the ideals set forth in the Declaration of Independence reverberated in France, Haiti, and Latin America, inspiring future independence movements.

- American Revolution started _____ in western hemisphere
- France started a revolution in _____ over discontent with taxes, war, and economy
- Haiti, led by _____ second republican revolution in western hemisphere
 - America fears Haitian revolution despite based on same ideology
- Mexico overthrows Spain in 1821
- _____ leads a Revolution across Latin America in 19th century

Recap

- Slavery continued to be practiced despite revolutionary ideals of equality
- Voting rights expanded in the new republic, each state had different requirements
- Women's roles in Republican Motherhood were still largely domestic
- The American Revolution was the first of many, France and Latin America followed

Part II

Short Answer Questions

Answer each prompt using at least THREE sentences.

1. Explain the various ways the American Revolution affected society.

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2. Describe the global impact of the American Revolution

Phillis Wheatley's poem on tyranny and slavery, 1772

Retrieved from: <http://ap.gilderlehrman.org/resource/phillis-wheatley%27s-poem-tyranny-and-slavery-1772?period=3>

Born in Africa, Phillis Wheatley was captured and sold into slavery as a child. She was purchased by John Wheatley of Boston in 1761. The Wheatleys soon recognized Phillis's intelligence and taught her to read and write. She became well known locally for her poetry. Through the Wheatley family, Phillis came into contact with many prominent figures.

Excerpt

... No more, America, in mournful strain
 Of wrongs, and grievance unredress'd complain,
 No longer shall thou dread the iron chain,
 Which wanton Tyranny with lawless hand
 Had made, and with it meant t'enslave the land.
 Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,
 Wonder from whence my love of Freedom sprung,
 Whence flow these wishes for the common good,
 By feeling hearts alone best understood,
 I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
 Was snatch'd from Afric's fancy'd happy seat:
 What pangs excruciating must molest,
 What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?
 Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd
 That from a father seiz'd his babe belov'd:
 Such, such my case. And can I then but pray
 Others may never feel tyrannic sway?

1. Provide an Attribution to this document.

2. Provide 2 sentences of analysis from one category of HAPP for this document

Thomas Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia, 1781

Excerpt

They seem to require less sleep. A black, after hard labour through the day, will be induced by the slightest amusements to sit up till midnight, or later, though knowing he must be out with the first dawn of the morning. They are at least as brave, and more adventuresome. But this may perhaps proceed from a want of forethought, which prevents their seeing a danger till it be present. When present, they do not go through it with more coolness or steadiness than the whites. They are more ardent after their female: but love seems with them to be more an eager desire, than a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation. Their griefs are transient. Those numberless afflictions, which render it doubtful whether heaven has given life to us in mercy or in wrath, are less felt, and sooner forgotten with them. In general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection. To this must be ascribed their disposition to sleep when abstracted from their diversions, and unemployed in labour. An animal whose body is at rest, and who does not reflect, must be disposed to sleep of course. Comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous. It would be unfair to follow them to Africa for this investigation. We will consider them here, on the same stage with the whites, and where the facts are not apocryphal on which a judgment is to be formed. It will be right to make great allowances for the difference of condition, of education, of conversation, of the sphere in which they move.

Many millions of them have been brought to, and born in America. Most of them indeed have been confined to tillage, to their own homes, and their own society: yet many have been so situated, that they might have availed themselves of the conversation of their masters: many have been brought up to the handicraft arts, and from that circumstance have always been associated with the whites. Some have been liberally educated, and all have lived in countries where the arts and sciences are cultivated to a considerable degree, and have had before their eyes samples of the best works from abroad. The Indians, with no advantages of this kind, will often carve figures on their pipes not destitute of design and merit. They will crayon out an animal, a plant, or a country, so as to prove the existence of a germ in their minds which only wants cultivation. They astonish you with strokes of the most sublime oratory; such as prove their reason and sentiment strong, their imagination glowing and elevated. But never yet could I find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration; never see even an elementary trait of painting or sculpture. In music they are more generally gifted than the whites with accurate ears for tune and time, and they have been found capable of imagining a small catch. ³¹ Whether they will be equal to the composition of a more extensive run of melody, or of complicated harmony, is yet to be proved.

Misery is often the parent of the most affecting touches in poetry. -- Among the blacks is misery enough, God knows, but no poetry. Love is the peculiar oestrum of the poet. Their love is ardent, but it kindles the senses only, not the imagination. Religion indeed has produced a Phyllis Whately; but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism.

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An Address to the Public from Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage

Excerpt

Slavery is such an atrocious debasement of human nature, that its very extirpation, if not performed with solicitous care, may sometimes open a source of serious evils.

The unhappy man, who has long been treated as a brute animal, too frequently sinks beneath the common standard of the human species. The galling chains, that bind his body, do also fetter his intellectual faculties, and impair the social affections of his heart. Accustomed to move like a mere machine, by the will of a master, reflection is suspended; he has not the power of choice; and reason and conscience have but little influence over his conduct, because he is chiefly governed by the passion of fear. He is poor and friendless; perhaps worn out by extreme labor, age, and disease.

Under such circumstances, freedom may often prove a misfortune to himself, and prejudicial to society.

Attention to emancipated black people, it is therefore to be hoped, will become a branch of our national policy; but, as far as we contribute to promote this emancipation, so far that attention is evidently a serious duty incumbent on us, and which we mean to discharge to the best of our judgement and abilities.

To instruct, to advise, to qualify those, who have been restored to freedom, for the exercise and enjoyment of civil liberty, to promote in them habits of industry, to furnish them with employment suited to their age, sex, talents, and other circumstances, and to procure their children an education calculated for their future situation in life; these are the great outlines of the annexed plan, which we have adopted, and which we conceive will essentially promote the public good, and the happiness of these our hitherto too much neglected fellow-creatures.

Signed by order of the Society

B. Franklin, President

Philadelphia, 9th of November, 1789

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Secondary Source Document Analysis

Read the essay and fill in the chart below. Identify one claim for each subsection of the essay and provide a piece of evidence that corresponds to the claim.

Title:	
Author:	
Historical Period and Topic:	
Thesis:	
Claims	Evidence
Identify an alternative viewpoint to the author's thesis.	
Does the author address this viewpoint by refuting or conceding to it?	

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The Legal Status of Women, 1776–1830

Retrieved from: <http://ap.gilderlehrman.org/essay/legal-status-women-1776-1830?period=3>



“The Life and Age of Woman,” by A. Alden, Barre, MA, ca. 1835. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division)

State law rather than federal law governed women’s rights in the early republic. The authority of state law meant that much depended upon where a woman lived and the particular social circumstances in her region of the country. The disparity in standards can perhaps be seen most dramatically in the experiences of African American women. In the North, where states abolished slavery after the Revolution, black women gained rights to marry, to have custody of their children, and to own property. On paper at least, their rights were identical to those of white women. In the slaveholding South, lawmakers continued to deny enslaved workers these

basic human rights. But even in the South, a rising number of freed black women theoretically enjoyed the same privileges under the law as white women. However, racial prejudice against both black and Native American women made it difficult to ensure these rights in practice.

In every state, the legal status of free women depended upon marital status. Unmarried women, including widows, were called “femes soles,” or “women alone.” They had the legal right to live where they pleased and to support themselves in any occupation that did not require a license or a college degree restricted to males. Single women could enter into contracts, buy and sell real estate, or accumulate personal property, which was called personalty. It consisted of everything that could be moved—cash, stocks and bonds, livestock, and, in the South, slaves. So long as they remained unmarried, women could sue and be sued, write wills, serve as guardians, and act as executors of estates. These rights were a continuation of the colonial legal tradition. But the revolutionary emphasis on equality brought some important changes in women’s inheritance rights. State lawmakers everywhere abolished primogeniture and the tradition of double shares of a parent’s estate, inheritance customs that favored the eldest son. Instead, equal inheritance for all children became the rule—a big gain for daughters.

Marriage changed women’s legal status dramatically. When women married, as the vast majority did, they still had legal rights but no longer had autonomy. Instead, they found themselves in positions of almost total dependency on their husbands which the law called coverture. As the English jurist William Blackstone famously put it in his *Commentaries on English Law* (1765–1769):

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in the law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs every thing.

Coverture was based on the assumption that a family functioned best if the male head of a household controlled all of its assets. As a result, a married woman could not own property independently of her husband unless they had signed a special contract called a marriage settlement. Such contracts were rare and even illegal in some parts of the country. In the absence of a separate estate, all personalty a woman brought to her marriage or earned during marriage, including wages, became her husband’s. He could manage it or give it away, as he chose, without consulting her.

This sounds bad, and it was. But one rule worked to mitigate some of the worst effects of coverture. A married woman had the right to be maintained in a manner commensurate with her husband’s social status. If he refused to provide for her appropriately, she could sue and win support from the courts. While waiting for the court’s judgment, she was permitted to run up charges at local stores and taverns—and her husband had to pay for them. Judges consistently applied this rule, called the doctrine of necessities, in order to prevent men from neglecting their wives. But the courts could not stop husbands from gambling or making bad investments. Women had no protection when their husbands

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proved irresponsible. If creditors pursued a husband for debts, his wife was entitled to keep only the bare necessities of life. This was usually defined as two dresses (so she would have one to wear while the other was being washed), cooking utensils, and a bed.

Women's rights to real property—the lands and buildings that constituted most wealth in the early national period—were more extensive than their rights to personalty. A husband could not sell or mortgage the realty his wife brought to their marriage without her consent. He could use it, but he could not convey it because a woman's real estate, generally inherited from her father, was meant to stay in the family and descend through her to her children. A wife also had important rights to the real property that her husband brought to the marriage or purchased afterwards. He could not sell or mortgage it unless she signed a statement signifying her free consent, which was recorded with the deed. Few mortgagors or buyers would enter into an agreement without the wife's consent. They knew that she retained her right to be maintained by the property in the event of her husband's death, even if he died insolvent. Courts were careful to ensure that a wife signed a conveyance of her own free will and not because of pressure from her husband. A court officer questioned her apart from him to confirm that she actually agreed to the sale or mortgage.

One of the most important rights of a married woman was dower, which was designed to provide her with support during widowhood. It consisted of a life estate in one-third of the husband's real property if there were children and one half if there were not. A "life estate" did not mean actual ownership of the property. It was meant only to provide for the wife as her husband would have done had he lived, under a legal system that recognized her position of dependency within the family. When a widow died, her dower lands descended automatically to her husband's heirs or to his creditors. A solvent husband could leave his widow more than dower if he chose to. He could even leave her his entire estate in fee simple (absolute ownership). But he could not leave her less. Most couples relied on dower as their standard for how much to leave.

Dower was a legal tradition carried over from colonial days. This and other rules about married women's property rights were meant to support the family as a unit. They worked reasonably well in an economic system based on landed wealth, under which families typically stayed in one place and rarely sold or mortgaged their farms. They did not work as well, however, in a society like the rapidly expanding and industrializing nineteenth-century United States, where lands changed hands frequently and where there was growth in personal property as well as land.

Under these new circumstances, the old system of property law faltered. It failed to give adequate protection to women and, at the same time, denied them the ability to safeguard their own interests. In recognition of this dilemma, states began to pass married women's property acts in the antebellum decades. These acts gave wives the same legal rights as single women with regard to their estates and wages. It was piecemeal legislation, enacted reluctantly by male lawmakers who would have preferred to keep women dependent within the family. Yet the lawmakers recognized that these reforms were essential in a capitalist economy based on movable wealth.

Political rights were a function of control over property for men in the republic, but gender alone was the basis for women's exclusion from voting or holding office. Simply put, men with property had the right to vote in the early national period but women, no matter how wealthy, did not, even though women paid the same taxes as men. The reasoning behind this discrimination rested on the assumption that married women were liable to coercion by their husbands; if a wife voted, legislators argued, it meant that a man cast two ballots. As one man put it, "How can a fair one refuse her lover?" Yet single women were also denied suffrage, a clear sign that more was at stake than the power of a husband to influence his wife's choices at the polls.

Blatantly discriminatory attitudes kept lawmakers from giving women the vote. They did not want to share their political power with daughters, mothers, and wives, just as they did not want to share it with freed black men or immigrants. This pattern can be seen clearly in New Jersey, the one state where women with property were allowed to vote after the Revolution. In 1807 legislators took this right away—not only from women but from black men and aliens as well. As it turned out, discrimination against women in the area of the franchise lasted the longest of any disadvantaged group, at least on paper.

American independence brought women greater freedom from husbands who were abusive, neglectful, or adulterous. In colonial society, divorce was virtually impossible under English precedent, but all of the new states recognized the need to end unhappy marriages. The choice of appropriate remedies varied considerably, however. Some states, particularly in the South, only allowed separate residence with alimony (called

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divorce from bed and board). Other states granted absolute divorce with the right of the innocent party to remarry. In matters of divorce, social and religious values affected the laws in different parts of the country. The conservatism of divorce laws in the southern states, for example, was probably related to slavery: it was difficult for lawmakers to grant women absolute divorces because of their husbands' adulterous relationships with slaves. Liberal New England laws, in contrast, stemmed from a longstanding Puritan belief that it was better for unhappy couples to separate and remarry than to be joined forever in a state of discord and temptation to sin.

Child-custody rights also changed after the Revolution. The courts were increasingly willing to bypass colonial precedents that favored men in custody disputes. Instead, they placed young children and daughters (although not sons) under the care of mothers. These reforms reflect the rising importance of the gender-based ideology of separate spheres, which gave women moral preeminence in the private sphere of the home and men supremacy in the marketplace and politics. Women would use the concept of moral motherhood to great advantage in their struggle for social justice over the next century.

Marylynn Salmon is the author of *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* (1989) and *The Limits of Independence: American Women, 1760–1800* (1998).