

PART VIII REASON, REVOLUTION, ROMANTICISM: THE EIGHTEENTH AND EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURIES

Chapter 25 The Enlightenment in the United States

1. The political development in North America in the last four decades of the eighteenth century fascinated Europeans.
2. English-speaking North America presented the situation of a new people untrammelled by the weight of past institutions.
3. Once the colonists had gained independence, the possibilities seemed limitless.

I. American Religion

1. Christianity was the most important cultural and intellectual force in pre-Revolutionary America.
2. The colonies were overwhelmingly Protestant.
3. While the success of Christian missionaries was lackluster among Native Americans, African Americans converted in great numbers while retaining elements of their African heritage.
4. The beginning of the conversion of blacks was only one aspect of a great religious revival that swept the colonies called *The Great Awakening*.
5. Americans were responding to a sense that the churches were becoming too institutionalized and concerned with doctrine to the exclusion of the spiritual feelings of their congregations.

A. Effect of the Great Awakening

1. The Great Awakening disrupted established religion in the colonies.
2. Charismatic itinerant preachers undermined the authority of traditional clergy.
3. They also undermined the notion of state-supported church.
4. By the time of the Revolution, Christian churches were decentralized and voluntary as a result of the great awakening.

II. The American Revolution

1. The revolution arose out of a resistance to taxes levied following the end of the Seven Years' War (1756–1763)
2. The Seven Years' War was between the British and American colonists on one side and the French and their Indian allies on the other and it left Britain with an enormous war debt.
3. The British believed that the colonists should contribute to the cost of the war, which was waged in their defense.
4. After the Boston Tea Party, the taxation issue was seen as just one facet of an effort by the British to centralize power and assert control over the colonial economy.
5. A boycott of British goods in 1774 led to an armed confrontation in 1775 when British troops tried to seize colonial munitions in Concord, Massachusetts.
6. The colonies declared independence in 1776 and were assisted in their war with the British by Spain, Holland, and principally France.

III. European Influences

1. The American Revolution and its aftermath reflected the impact of English ideas on a pioneer society.
2. The *empiricism* of Bacon and Newton were influential.
3. Locke's doctrine of the natural rights of man seemed borne out by their experience.

4. The colonists' temperament was generally critical of any curtailment on their freedom of action.
5. French philosophes supported the American Revolution and were influential in getting support for it from the monarchy.
6. Montesquieu had a significant influence on American political thought.

#### IV. American Federalism

1. Federalism was one of the United States' most original contributions to the theory and practice of constitutional government.
2. The separation of powers provisions of the Constitution fostered the unification of large areas of land while allowing for local autonomy.

##### A. The Heritage of Ancient Rome

1. The revolutionaries considered themselves heirs to the republican tradition of ancient Rome.
2. Since the Renaissance, the educated classes of the West had been deeply imbued with classical culture.
3. The architects of the Constitution drew on Latin-derived words like "President" and "Senate;" the Great Seal and coinage were marked with Latin phrases.

##### B. Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826)

1. Of all the figures from the Revolutionary period, Jefferson best represents the spirit of the American Enlightenment.
2. He combined the Old World tradition of scholarship and philosophy with the New World's practicality and readiness to experiment.
3. He was widely read in the classics with a lively interest in science.
4. Jefferson was a writer, educator, farmer, and architect.
5. One masterpiece is his home, Monticello, which he designed himself.
6. The house itself is symbolic of the nature of the American Enlightenment.

#### V. From European Classicism to an "American Style"

1. An interest in science and nature became a major subject of the new American art.
2. American artists included some of great accomplishment—Benjamin West, John Singleton Copley, and Gilbert Stuart.
3. American artists owed much to European painting, but the radically different nature of the American life was soon reflected in its art.

#### VI. African American Voices in the Enlightenment

##### A. Phyllis Wheatley (1753?–1784)

1. The paradox of slavery in a society founded on liberty was not lost on African Americans, among them Phyllis Wheatley.
2. Wheatley is considered the founder of African-American written literature.
3. She was educated by the couple who purchased her as a domestic servant and then freed her at an early age.
4. Her poetry includes classical references and is in the style of eighteenth-century English poetry.
5. Some of her work addresses the injustice of slavery and discrimination.

##### B. David Walker (1785–1830)

1. Walker was a much more militant and political writer than was Wheatley.
2. He was a leader of the antislavery movement in Boston's black community.
3. In his most famous work, modeled on the structure of the U.S. Constitution, Walker confronts the contradictions between America's ideals and the institution of slavery.