

## The Radicalism of the American Revolution

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*The American Revolution has been critical to world history as it helped shape the standard for world most renown systems of governance. While it marked the end of the British rule in their former colonies, it also laid the foundations of a strong Republic. Despite the generally assumed homogeneity among the social forces that fought the American Revolution and their advocacy for a just and equalitarian society, we have remained skeptical about the changes it potentially brought. The purpose of this study is to investigate radicalism of the American Revolution. To conduct this research, we have used a three-dimensional approach combining descriptive and qualitative research methodologies along with a theoretical framework based on power, interest and the realist theory. This unbiased work, taking a contrasting and comparative approach to track the so-called changes between pre- and post-revolutionary America, shows that the Founding Fathers had more in common with British aristocrats than the common men they pretended to defend. It also shows that Revolutionary America was in a state of civil war as it was divided between pro and anti-revolution factions. Thus, the assumption according to which this was a People's Revolution is severely endangered. In contrast to orthodox knowledge, this study posits that the American Revolution was not radical as far as governance and the social make up are concerned. It approaches this uprising as part of a class struggle to change home rule for self-interest on the part of the Founding Fathers. It has never been People's Revolution.*

**Key Words:** Founding Fathers, American Revolution, Monarchy, democracy, elite, corruption, interest, power, realist theory, equality, justice, aristocracy.

### Introduction

The American Revolution remains, in world history, one of the most intriguing crises to say the least. There is a general assumption that it led to worldwide adherence to principles and values of liberty, freedom, equality and democracy. This change in feelings, in perception, molded by the revolutionary spirit, is what makes many scholars believe that this turmoil was radical; that it led to the establishment of a new social order and the betterment of the American character.

The purpose of this work is to investigate whether the American Revolution was an elitist affair—fought for class interest—and a real People's Revolution that gathered people from all social classes and races. It studies this revolt's potential impact on the American character and the political apparatus it led to. Did it lead to an end of monarchical practices? Were the Founding Fathers really concerned with common good?

Countless scholars have brilliantly addressed this episode of the American history in a pretty similar fashion. In *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, Gordon S. Wood portrayed this uprising as a radical departure from the English monarchical system. Being cohesive with his core argumentation, he believed this conflict laid the foundations of an equalitarian society immersed into strong democratic traditions. He posits that it created a society which political landscape was free of affiliation to social background, allegiances or family ties. Good's revolution had put an end to the patriarchal dependence which, for instance, linked the life of the slave their masters' will and fate.<sup>1</sup>

Gary B. Nash, in *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America*, claimed that this revolution was conceived from a multi-racial and multi-class convergence in such a way that it involved all classes (free people and slaves) and races (whites, Amerindians, and blacks) in the American society. According to him, it was a People's Revolution.<sup>2</sup>

In *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence*, Pauline Maier describes how the Declaration of Independence—based on opposition to injustice, monarchy, corruption—came to be the defining line and moral standard of the American society in the post-revolutionary era.<sup>3</sup>

In a nutshell, the major conclusions one comes across while analyzing the above literature are: the moral purity, the benevolent and disinterested attitude of the Founding Fathers, the homogeneity in vision of all the social forces during the revolution, the design of a new system based on social justice and equality. The revolution was then fought on two fronts: one political (change of the system of governance) and one social (the adherence of all races and social classes). Our paper assesses the veracity of the above claims from both political and social standpoints.

### **Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

This research is essentially qualitative and descriptive. The reason why we have used this dual research method is twofold. Given that the descriptive method states historical facts regardless of causal relationship, there was need to open our investigation's scope to a more

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 1-10.

<sup>2</sup> Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York : Viking, 2005), 1-100.

<sup>3</sup> Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York : FIRST VINTAGE BOOKS, 1998), 3-41.

exploratory perspective: qualitative. From this hybrid approach, we shall be able to determine to what extent the American Revolution was radical. To make our point, we compare and contrast two distinct periods of America's social evolution i.e., pre- and post-revolutionary America (early 1700 to early 1800). We shall map the different social classes at play in the American society during this timeframe.

For a better understanding of our subject matter, we shall apply to our argumentation the notion of ideology. To grasp the essence of ideology, one has to contextualize inter-human relations within the scope of class struggles.<sup>4</sup> By implication, any society is made of two or several groups cooperating or competing against one another. This interaction is regulated by power dynamics within a dominant-subordinate framework.<sup>5</sup> Such an interpretation of social life, as condoned by the realist theory, considers inter-human interactions from an interest-based point. In any circumstances, the class struggle involves continuous social clashes for power.<sup>6</sup> This group interest is what is, for the most part, mistaken as true consciousness. It derives from both the party's material and psychological conditions within the society. In short, ideology, according to the realist theory, is motivated by interest and remains a strategy competing groups used to achieve their goals.

Such an approach displays the persuasive, manipulative and cognitive dimension of ideology. From this viewpoint, it becomes, in itself, the manifestation of power. Power, in this specific context, translates into one group's control over the other(s). It is a commodity in intergroup struggles. In this vein, we convene that power is the ability of a very determined group of persons to control—having the ability to give or withhold action<sup>7</sup>—others either coercively or consensually into doing what they wouldn't have done otherwise. It is a mechanism destined to tarnish resistance and manipulate the multitude in supporting a cause.<sup>8</sup> The concept of power relates to the existence of two or more distinct groups with different agendas. It also pertains to either group's control over the other(s). Therefore, equality is a notion one can't connect with power as the latter, by principle, denies the former.

## **1 Pre-Revolutionary America: Autopsy of a Monarchial System**

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<sup>4</sup>Domenico Losurdo, *Class Struggle: A Political and Philosophical History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1-5.

<sup>5</sup> Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3-30.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Tajfel and J.C. Turner, "The Social Identity Theory and Intergroup Behavior," in *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. Stephen Worchel, and William G. Austin (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1986), 13.

<sup>7</sup> Thus E. C. Banfield, *Political Influence* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), 34.

<sup>8</sup> Sarah Joseph, *Political Theory and Power*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2004), 24-25.

Before measuring the potential brunt the revolution had on former British North America, we shall first consider how this society was structured. Pre-revolutionary America suffocated under the weight of an overwhelming monarchy and a hierarchized social order.

What is a monarchy? It is “a long train of dependence”<sup>9</sup> made of degrees of “freedom and servility”<sup>10</sup> linking everyone from the King, at the top, “to the bonded laborers and the black slave at the bottom.”<sup>11</sup> It is a society within which subordination is replicated throughout social classes. It is based on inequality between men in relation to their ranks. The monarchical government is topped by the King, the aristocracy and the gentry. At the bottom, lie the laboring class and the slaves. This system denies social mobility as everyone fills a specific role and purpose which continuity should not be compromised. It provides the few, the rich, aristocracy, authority over the majority, the poor—common men. Social stability, in a monarchy, depends on the strict respect of this vertical hierarchy.

We can perceive, from now, that the American society was made of different classes of people whose interaction was regulated by a top-bottom based power. This system of governance, brought from the mother country, was rooted, from a cultural and religious standpoint, in British customs as God’s own design.<sup>12</sup> The almighty had made people different so that, individually, they might need one another.<sup>13</sup> Inequality was then a necessary condition to the notion of a just and stable society.

This system created an elite class which established dynasties of statesmen inaccessible to common folks. Being an elite depended more on one’s ancestors’ social status than on merit. This claim is well evidenced in the fact that before the revolution, “70 percent of the representatives elected to the New Jersey Assembly were related to previously elected legislators.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, powerful families monopolized “political offices and passed them among themselves even through successive generations.”<sup>15</sup> This system ignored the limits between the private and the public. Access to public offices and influences required private ties within the elite, not talent.

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<sup>9</sup> Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 18.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Daniel T. Rodgers, *As a City on a Hill: The Story of America's Most Famous Lay Sermon* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018), 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 89.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

### 1.1 Were the Founding Fathers Commoners?

In colonial America, the Founding Fathers belonged to the “landed gentry.” Above them stood the aristocracy. And below them lived the common man, the poor. The aristocracy, topped by the King, the well-born, the ruling class, held power and owed their position to heredity.

In contrast to aristocrats, the landed gentry were not well born i.e., they didn’t come from aristocracy. They were, in general fashion, lawyers, merchants and doctors. They rose above the common man’s material condition and had the privilege to mingle with aristocrats. They were rich, literate but limited in their social progression because they were not of high blood. Below stood commoners, the middle class and the poor. From now, one can understand that aristocracy denied the gentry social mobility. According to the realist theory, this would undoubtedly lead to clash as opposing groups and diverging interests. Power remains groups’ medium to reach their goals (interests). In that sense, it is also an end in itself.

It is of paramount importance that one understands that the gentry, before the revolution, had never been motivated by moral purity or integrity. They took full advantage of the privileges the monarchical system granted them. They took part into the very corruption they supposedly rebelled against later. For instance, Benjamin Franklin, while deputy postmaster general of British North America in 1753, used his authority to put relatives in positions of power. His son became postmaster in Philadelphia and his brother occupied the same position in Boston. When the latter died, the office was given to his brother’s stepson.<sup>16</sup> The web Franklin had created earned him the support and loyalty of those he had helped. As a result, he comforted his own power and influence. Through such connections, a “great chain of political Self-Interest was at length formed; and extended from the lowest Cocker in a Borough, to the King’s first Minister.”<sup>17</sup> It was common to see fathers—office holder—resigning their positions to their sons. To some extent, office holding became hereditary.

In a monarchy, there was little consideration for the capabilities of common people. From birth, they were doomed to subordination and lacked the intellectual dimension to lead. After all, being an elite was a position granted by providence. Accordingly, transcending the

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<sup>16</sup> Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 90.

<sup>17</sup> E. Neville Williams, *The Eighteenth-century Constitution, 1688-1815: Documents and Commentary* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 140.

realm of common people to the gentry, for anyone outside aristocracy, required the patronage of an aristocrat or another gentleman (people belonging to the gentry).

However, such favors didn't come cheap. They were meant to be returned in various forms such as political support. Anytime a gentleman or an aristocrat used his influence—lending money, doing favors or supplying jobs—to help out another person, he created “dependencies or obligations” that could be turned into political power. The whole social life was built on these bonds of allegiances. The more allegiance or loyalties one has, the more influential he gets. In such a society, pure talent without connections, within the higher sphere of the socio-political life, would mean nothing and would lead nowhere.

In America, monarchy, because of the socio-economic landscape, failed to establish the sort of control over subordinates as it was the case in Great Britain. In England, aristocrats' strength relied on land ownership. In contrast, in America, land was not scarce and even peasants owned it. Therefore, in the long run, the gentry had become, in the American context, a sort of aristocracy in terms of power and authority. However, this class, within the British political stratification, would be contained within their intermediary position—unfit to rule state apparatus. In short, people like Franklin, because of their bloodline, would have not been allowed to rule America.<sup>18</sup> They were denied social mobility which, in itself, stands as a source of clash and conflict.

So far, we did the autopsy of a system regulated by connections and corruption in which allegiance and influence are bought; in which the rich dominated social life. Considering all these facts, how could a revolution against the King be possible given that he rested at the top of the monarchical system?

The answer to that question lies in the fact that the King's political influence in the colonies had decreased by the 1760s-70s. By the time the revolution took place, most royal officials, who had colonial influence, had fled the country because of the social unrest generated by the initiators of the American Revolution.

We mentioned earlier that political influence or power, in this society, was determined by allegiances or dependencies. This means that, to dispose of the King one had to generate a stronger influence in the colonies, which the Founding Fathers did. Were they rich enough to create the necessary chains of dependencies and allegiance to dispose of the King? The

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Olwell, *Masters, Slaves, & Subjects: The Culture of Power in the South Carolina Low Country 1740-1790* (London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 193.

answer to this question is affirmative. This fact is epitomized in John Adams' quote as he stated that "not less than a thousand families were, every day in the year, dependent on Mr. Hancock for their daily bread."<sup>19</sup> Such a dependence on his resources, would undeniably give Hancock a soft and persuasive power over the poor who depended on him for living. In fact, All the Founding Fathers were literate, had a network to support them and were entrepreneurs, planters, merchants, slave-owners or real estate speculators. In sum, they all had created chains of allegiance, power and control over the poor, out of their resources. Let's recall that the poor's allegiance, to the Founding Fathers, was not commanded by conviction. It was rather dictated by material conditions as they depended on them for living.

The Founding Fathers represented the elite in the colonies as the "Continental Congress, which governed the colonies throughout the war, was dominated by rich men, linked together in faction and compacts by business and family connections."<sup>20</sup> This analogy echoes in the fact that Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe—the "Virginia Dynasty of the first presidents of the independent Federal State"—belonged to the Virginian planter aristocracy. These are the people who orchestrated the American Revolution.<sup>21</sup>

Why is the Founding Fathers' social status important for a contextual understanding of our subject matter? Generally, radical uprisings, such as the French Revolution, follow a bottom-top itinerary. They tend to disturb the social order in favor of the poor. Such a factor is missing in the American context. This crisis had a top-down itinerary. It came from the rich who, seeking to establish themselves, designed a reality suiting the poor's aspirations to justify the revolution i.e., ideology. As would suggest the realist theory, groups cooperate or fight based on their own interest or its illusion.

From a Founding Father's perspective, it was a revolution meant to protect the interest of lawyers, merchants and planters in the colonies against the interest of those who were tightened to England. The many taxes imposed by the Crown and the control the British empire had on their lives didn't work in favor of merchants nor planters' interests.

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<sup>19</sup> Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 102.

<sup>20</sup> Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (New York: Routledge, 2013), 81.

<sup>21</sup> Herbert von Borch, *The Unfinished Society*, trans (New York: The Bobbs Merrill company, 1963), 216.

## 1.2 An Already Progressive System in Place in the Colonies

Advocates of the radicalism of the American Revolution back their position with the creation of a new nation under republican values—a disinterested approach to public affairs that rejects notions of dependencies, obligation and patronage. This new form of governance was based on the ideology of the enlightenment promoting democracy, liberty and freedom. It supposedly led to adoption new social norms in relation to dominant-subject relationships at every level of the social life. The Founding Fathers argued that subordination had to be deliberate, consensual, free of pressure, and not coercive; that fear and intimidation could no longer command obedience.<sup>22</sup>

Despite its progressive nature, were all the components of this ideology new or radical? Most of the principles the Founding Fathers advocated were rights British subjects already enjoyed. Monarchy owed “all its perfection to the republican”<sup>23</sup> because to sustain itself, it had to “borrow its laws and methods, and institutions, and consequently its stability and order from free governments. These advantages are the sole growth of republics.”<sup>24</sup> Republicanism was an integral part of the dominant monarchical culture. For instance, the constitution, as a result of the 1688 Glorious Revolution, restricted the King’s finances and ability to act independently. Magna Carta also embodies the crux of civil liberties in Great Britain and worldwide. Even the “taxation without representation slogan” had its origins in British constitution. The Founding Fathers didn’t create a new society. They just gave more prominence to some positive aspects of the old system and kept some of its deficiencies.

The portrayal of a new society with new values resulting from the revolution is groundless. Societies have always been the battlefield of cultures; some dominant and some peripheral but all coexisting. The preeminence of one doesn’t necessarily mean the denial of the other. Before the revolution, as we once mentioned, the dominant culture, monarchy, had in its midst the seeds of republicanism. Hence, post-revolutionary America, which consecrated the advent of the so-called republicanism, also had the vestiges of monarchy upon which it erected its foundations.

## 2 Revolutionary America: Patriots vs. Loyalists (Tories)

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<sup>22</sup> Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 172.

<sup>23</sup> David Hume, *Essays, Literary, Moral, and Political* (London: Alex. Murray and Son, 1870), 72.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*



## 2.1 Shutting Down Local Opposition

As we have noticed in the introduction, many scholars label the American Revolution a People's Revolution. They posit that all the social forces (social classes and races), in the colonies, deliberately, consensually, and without fear, intimidation or coercion, supported the revolutionary movement.

However, this tendency to immerse the nature of such a complex experience within generalizations blurs our perception of the bigger picture. By 1775, the colonies counted a total population of about two and half million people. We had an estimate half a million blacks (all but 50, 000 were in bondage). Blacks largely joined the Crown against Patriots (rebels). In addition, about one third of the white population became loyalists (Tories), people who supported the Crown—this latter estimation is surely higher due many circumstances we will discuss later. Giving the large number of black and white loyalists, one can argue that about nearly half of the total colonial population supported the Crown and opposed the revolution.<sup>25</sup> The principle of the revolution, in itself, led to a civil war among colonies. This strong opposition of nearly half of the population speaks volumes about people's adherence to the ideals the Founding Fathers served. In addition, it is well-timed to recall that the Founding Fathers had control over the poor white majority that supported them. As the latter were bound to them by allegiance—they relied on them for living—one can question their support to the revolutionary cause as animated by conviction.

The revolution teared down many families whose members sided in opposing fractions. Benjamin Franklin, had his own son, William, siding and fighting for the Crown.<sup>26</sup> The Patriots (revolutionaries) threatened or banished anyone unwilling to swear allegiance to the cause. Therefore, the fear of reprisal compelled many loyalists to side with them which makes the total number of loyalists difficult to measure.<sup>27</sup> Loyalists were oppressed—harassed, fired, subjects to double or triple taxes, banished—without any regard for their dignity and liberties. This practice stands in contradiction with the principles the Founding Fathers defended and accused the British of doing i.e., getting people's subordination by fear or intimidation.

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<sup>25</sup> Alan Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 95-116.

<sup>26</sup> Chaim M. Rosenberg, *The Loyalist Conscience : Principled Opposition to the American Revolution* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2018), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Rosenberg, *The Loyalist Conscience*, 1.

Consequently, to live quietly, most loyalists hid their allegiance to the Crown as a strategy to avoid persecution especially after the 1781 Battle of Yorktown prophesizing British fall.<sup>28</sup> It is convincible that the same pattern applied to some blacks. In short, it is very difficult to estimate the true number of loyalists.

## 2.2 The Black Question

The American Revolution, while overstatedly fought for liberation and freedom, was also fought against the liberation of blacks. The widespread coalition between the thirteen colonies found also its origins in the question of slavery. Pre-revolutionary America was haunted by the fear of widespread black insurrections throughout the South and the North, at some extent.<sup>29</sup> This fear was generated by countless aborted slave rebellions the South had contained in the wake of the rebellion.<sup>30</sup> Many colonies, such as South Carolina, had remained loyal to the Crown since the emergence of the prospect of a potential freedom for blacks. Lord Dunmore's (royal governor of Virginia) Proclamation<sup>31</sup>—granting freedom to all slaves joining the Crown—and the previously heated debate over the Somerset<sup>32</sup>—a famous case that spoke to the unconstitutionality of chattel slavery in England and Wales—decision in Great Britain had helped many southern colonies in believing that emancipation was a royal policy in the making. It is important to recall that many southern colonies joined the rebellion right after the Dunmore Proclamation. The slave question had led to a social fracture. If it convinced southern colonies to join the rebellion, it also convinced a large majority of blacks to join the Crown in their fight for liberation. By principle, blacks perceived virtue in the British King who they, for the most part, considered an ally to the black cause.

During the British siege of Virginia, 1781, around some 30,000 slaves fled to join the British forces. Such slave movements, in the North and the South, occurred anytime the British army was at reaching distance. During the southern campaign (1779-1781) about a similar proportion of blacks, in South Carolina, joined the British.<sup>33</sup> Independence, for Patriots, was only about white liberty. The black salvation and freedom, ironically, came from British imperialism not the American freedom fighters.

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<sup>28</sup> Rosenberg, *The Loyalist Conscience*, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 36.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Michael A. McDonnell, *The Politics of War: Race, Class, and Conflict in Revolutionary Virginia* (Virginia: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 155.

<sup>32</sup> Simon Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (New Jersey : Princeton University, 2011), 92.

<sup>33</sup> Gary B. Nash, *Race and Revolution* (Maryland: ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD, 1990), 60.

The introduction of slaves into the Patriots' Continental Army, despite being severely opposed by many southern states, was first a strategy to counter the effect of Lord Dunmore's proclamation i.e., the urgent need to stop the flow of blacks joining the British. In addition, the introduction of blacks occurred as the consequence of the incapacity to raise an army of whites in some regions—the salary didn't inspire many whites to die for the cause.<sup>34</sup> For the most part, blacks were promised freedom for joining the Patriots. In many colonies, states purchased their freedom, from their masters, so that they could join the Continental Army.<sup>35</sup> Some slave holders, not so keen to die for their own freedom, offered the army their slaves to serve and die in their place.<sup>36</sup> The same process was done with native Americans who, like blacks, were offered freedom in exchange of their lives for a cause they didn't belong to. These people fought against the Crown under pressure and not out of sheer conviction. This fact, in itself, puts in jeopardy the label People's Revolution historians genuinely attribute to the American Revolution.

### **3 Post-Revolutionary-America: The Illusion of a New Social Order**

Despite the emergence of a so-called new social order, post-revolutionary America conserved many monarchical practices. More, it even perpetuated, at some extent, the pre-existing social order and social hierarchy. An investigation on who controlled the economy before and after the revolution can help us demonstrate our claim. After the revolution, the South had remained highly illiterate as its economy rested on the peculiar institution of slavery. The southern aristocracy, who initiated the revolution, were all planters and slave holders. In the North, merchants and patroons controlled economic life. For instance, in New York, Patroons<sup>37</sup> had a quasi-exclusive control over land ownership. They lived off tenant farmers exactly as in monarchical England. Along with merchants, they constituted the economic pillars in the North: the owners of wealth and political power.<sup>38</sup>

Monarchy relegated the illiterate mass of common men to a second-class citizenship, unfit for politics while republicanism, theoretically, promoted the latter it approached from a

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<sup>34</sup> Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence*, 95-116.

<sup>35</sup> Benjamin Quarles, *Negro in the American Revolution* (Virginia: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 59.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> By 1629, the Dutch West India Company granted to all its members—the patroons of New Netherland—establishing a colony of 50 persons, within a four period, outside the Manhattan Island, full authority over the land they had chosen. The patroon system survived even after the revolution abolished feudal tenure. Patroons perceived rent from tenants for using their lands.

<sup>38</sup> Edward T. Price, *Dividing the Land: Early American Beginnings of Our Private Property Mosaic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 213.

magnanimous view. Did the Founding Fathers praise the common men? George Washington called them the “Grazing multitude.”<sup>39</sup> John Adams argued that “common persons have no idea [of] learning, Eloquence, and Genius.”<sup>40</sup> Nathanael Greene believed that “the great body of people” were “contracted selfish, and illiberal” different from the “noble” natures of gentlemen.<sup>41</sup> Thomas Jefferson concluded that common people were “the hackneyed rascals of every country” who “must never be considered when we calculate the national character.”<sup>42</sup>

What did they think about democracy, governance and common men in post-revolutionary America? John Adams believed aristocracy to be a product of nature. Consequently, the latter should exclusively head the political apparatus.<sup>43</sup> While agreeing with Adams, Jefferson conceded that virtue and talents are the characteristics of statemen—aristocracy.<sup>44</sup> Hamilton couldn’t agree more with his peers as he claimed that all communities are divided in two groups: the few and the many. While the first are rich and well-born, the second are constitute the poor majority of the society. Therefore, given the turbulent and changing nature of the “mass of people,” the rich should be given the reign of state apparatus.<sup>45</sup>

In considering that virtue and talents reside with people coming from the aristocracy, the Founding Fathers automatically disqualified the common men from politics—a rich man business. By so doing, they recreated the very social hierarchy they had fought against during the British era i.e., the denial of social mobility in the society as social roles are pre-determined and immutable. The rich should remain rich and lead; the poor should obey. Even in republican America, office holding was determined by social class and status. Such a situation would do little to prevent the rise of dynasties of politicians who would acquire their positions based on their social status, blood line, connections and networks of support i.e.; a monarchical practice.

As far as their class interest was concerned, the Founding Fathers created legislations that would help them sustain their authority and privileges through a continuous assault on the “multitude’s” liberty. A large series of these strikes were on voting rights, —the manifestation

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<sup>39</sup> Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 28.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2008), 377.

<sup>44</sup> M. Andrew Holowchak, *Thomas Jefferson's Philosophy of Education: A utopian dream* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 31.

<sup>45</sup> David M. Kennedy, Thomas Bailey, *The American Spirit: United States History as Seen by Contemporaries* (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009), 207.

of power—governance and representation. The U.S. constitution gave the common man, the illusion of being part of decision-making process while it was not the case. The Founding Fathers argued that no one has the right to an office unless elected by those over whom they rule. A federal position, in that sense, should not be hereditary. Accordingly, in electing the federal president and his vice president, the constitution stipulated that this prerogative should reside in the multitude for the sake of legitimacy in representation.

However, the constitution made sure that during presidential elections, popular vote earns no one the White House. This prerogative stays with the electoral college. People, at state levels, vote to elect their delegates to the electoral college, an elitist group coming from the aristocracy.<sup>46</sup> In return, these delegates vote on behalf of the people allegedly based on the latter's choice. They may pick the candidate who won the popular vote in their respective states but they may also decide to ignore this provision based on their own interest. The electoral college can put anyone in the White House regardless of the support he has among "the people." The voice of the people is muted in an attempt to establish the rich control on power. The truth is inheriting an office or being elected leads to the same result if an elitist group of people decides for everyone. This is still monarchy.

The Founding Fathers restricted further the common man's liberty in granting states the right to set requirements to vote for citizens. In, unanimously, every state, voting right was given only to white male property owning citizens who, in essence, constituted the well-born and rich minority. The Founding Fathers believed that extending the right to vote to all would endanger the right of property owners.<sup>47</sup> This was a way to ensure that the power rests in the hands of the few, the rich.<sup>48</sup> This way, they made sure to perpetuate the tradition of political dynasties. We can notably mention the Adams,<sup>49</sup> the Harrison,<sup>50</sup> or Frelinghuysen.<sup>51</sup> This tradition survived modern time through the Bush,<sup>52</sup> the Kennedy,<sup>53</sup> the Clinton, the Rockefeller, the Roosevelt,<sup>54</sup> the Cuomo and the Tatf families. This practice is undemocratic and the Founding Fathers remained unapologetic about it. For the most part, they argued that democratic governments were devilish. They create a certain lack of virtue in human

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<sup>46</sup> Michael Burgan, *The Electoral College* (Minnesota: Compass Point Books, 2007), 4-35.

<sup>47</sup> David A. Copeland, *The Antebellum Era: Primary Documents on Events from 1820 to 1860* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2003), 223.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Both John Adams and his son John Quincy Adams took charge of America as presidents

<sup>50</sup> William Henry Harrison and grandson Benjamin Harrison became both presidents of the United States.

<sup>51</sup> Since 1779 seven generations of this family represented New Jersey at state and federal levels

<sup>52</sup> George Bush and son George W Bush became both presidents of the USA

<sup>53</sup> John became president and his brother, Robert, was equally influential a senator

<sup>54</sup> Theodore became President, 1901-1909, and was followed by his cousin Franklin Delano in 1930s.

character.<sup>55</sup> In that sense, it is not a viable system as, according to John Adams, “there is never a democracy that did not commit suicide.”<sup>56</sup>

The resurrection of monarchical proceedings led to the same social unrest pre-revolutionary America witnessed i.e.; the widening gap between the rich minority and the poor majority; the concentration of wealth within the hands of the few; an unfair distribution of wealth and pro-aristocracy policies. As a result, successive popular revolts broke out against the establishment and they were all suppressed in blood as did the British during the days of the American Revolution. We notably refer to the Shay’s,<sup>57</sup> the Whisky<sup>58</sup> and the Bacon’s rebellions.<sup>59</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In many respects, this paper unapologetically assumes that the American Revolution was not radical. First, it was fought for home rule—an elitist and class enterprise to get rid of competition—and was motivated by power. As we have seen throughout this work, slave-owners’ interests account a lot in the creation of front against the British administration, which progressively took stand against slavery. Post-revolutionary America witnessed the emergence of monarchical practices which relegated the voice and the weight of the common men into second position; thus, establishing a new sort of system of governance based on class affiliation and social background. Monarchy was still alive. Once in power, this elite, as the British did before them, established their control over the other group(s) i.e.; the poor, the common man. They replicated and perpetuated the very system they rebelled against.

Second, this revolution violated all its core ideologies and beliefs such as the respect of people’s conviction and a consensual ruling of the state apparatus. In the case of loyalists, we saw the exercise of a coercive, intimidating and oppressive power in forming the so-called coalition against British rule. This practice was all but consensual. Similarly, blacks’

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<sup>55</sup> “Madison Debates, August 7,” *Op. Cit.*

<sup>56</sup> John Adams, *The Political Writings of John Adams: Representative Selections*, ed. George A. Peek, Jr. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1954), 1-10.

<sup>57</sup> In the 1780s, in western Massachusetts, many farmers, crushed by debts, high government taxes and an unresponsive government to popular discontent and concerns about passing Pro-debtors laws gathered around the leadership of Daniel Shays and launched the first ever armed rebellion in post-war America. However, they met with a merchant funded army which, by force, put an end to this poor’s movement.

<sup>58</sup> In 1794, in western Pennsylvania, farmers and distillers rebelled against a tax, the Whisky tax, imposed by the federal government. The rebels accused the government of favoring rich and powerful producers at the expense of small ones. Powerful producers paid less per gallon (six cents per gallon vs nine for small producers) and “the more they produced the further the tax breaks” in response President Washington sent in federal troops to end the uprising by using violence.

<sup>59</sup> James D. Rice, *Tales from a Revolution: Bacon's Rebellion and the Transformation of Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.

introduction was based on a strategy to counter the Dunmore plan along with the need to raise an army fit for combat. These facts inform us a lot about the supposed convergence of all social forces to fight the British. The American Revolution was far from being a People's Revolution as loyalists and blacks were compelled to fight for the Patriot cause if they sought to live peacefully.

Finally, this revolution has never been a standard for the American people as the application of the principles it advocated never materialized in real life i.e., the equality between men in any fashion. The unfair distribution of wealth (one percent of the population detains ninety percent of the country's assets); the existence of political dynasties; the prominence of social movements such as Black Lives Matters, even today, illustrate the controversial legacy of this revolution.

Post-revolutionary America, indeed, was another monarchy in disguise. The Founding Fathers erected legislations that would protect their privileges and class concerns even with the use of violence. What made this revolution homogeneous, in terms of adherence to its principles, was the ideology the Founding Fathers created around it. Let us remember that interest shapes ideology. In return, ideology conceals, legitimates and justifies interests.

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