BACKGROUND AND ORIGINS OF THE REVOLUTION. The War of American Independence, waged between 1775 and 1783 by the inhabitants of thirteen of Britain’s North American colonies to secure their political independence from the mother country, was the military phase of a larger movement called the American Revolution. The origins of the beliefs, attitudes, and values that eventually coalesced into resistance, rebellion, and revolution are found in three general areas: (1) the circumstances in which the colonies were founded, from 1607 (Virginia) through 1734 (Georgia); (2) the initial diversity and subsequent growth of those settlements into established societies; and (3) the ways in which Britain attempted to exercise control over its colonies, which alternated between neglect and scrutiny, and culminated in an attempt to assert its supremacy over what were, by the middle of the eighteenth century, mature and self-possessed societies.

Although the first colonies were intended to be money-making ventures for investors back in England, the lack of readily exploitable mineral or agricultural resources ensured that the men and women who immigrated to North America had to scramble to wrest a livelihood from an always daunting and often dangerous natural environment. Only in the Chesapeake (tobacco), and later in low-country South Carolina (indigo and rice), did the North American colonies produce commodities that could even approach the significance to the British economy of the sugar grown on islands in the Caribbean. But the exploitation of natural resources (forests, offshore fisheries, animals, and even members of its resident human population), held the promise of greater wealth for the average person than he or she could hope to obtain elsewhere. This quest for individual aggrandizement in a land where resources were abundant and labor was scarce was a fundamental part of an emerging American identity.

The diversity of human inhabitants in the colonies far surpassed anything in Britain. The most numerous newcomers were English in culture, language, and political ideas, but the colonies also incorporated others of European heritage, including Dutch (in what became New York), Swedes (in the Delaware), Germans (mostly in Quaker Pennsylvania), and Scots-Irish (mostly in the frontier backcountry from Pennsylvania south). The native Americans who encountered these Europeans pressing inland from the coast were pushed aside or conquered; but the clash of cultures added new dimensions to American identity, as did the presence of enormous numbers of enslaved Africans, imported by the Europeans largely to meet the demand for agricultural labor in the Chesapeake and lower South.

Englishmen and -women dominated this unique mixing of cultures an ocean away from the mother country. The colonies were places of religious refuge and economic opportunity that, in large part because of their geographic isolation from England, developed their own ways of organizing their social and political relations and of governing themselves. The fact that colonization began during decades when ideas about the role and power of central government were in flux in England helped to make the colonists wary of strict supervision by the imperial government, and more receptive to seeing sinister motives in every attempt to bind the colonies more closely to the mother country.

Englishmen in England believed they had a right to regulate economic activity in the colonies for the benefit
of the mother country—a view known as mercantilism. Their primary goal was to make sure that the products of the colonial economies were carried to England in English ships, even if those products were intended for re-export to other places in Europe. Doing so would provide employment for English sailors, profits for English merchants, and customs revenue for the English king, all the while keeping these benefits out of the hands of England’s European competitors. Beginning in 1651 various acts of Parliament, known as the Navigation Acts, sought to keep trade flowing in these channels, an effort that did not unduly restrict the natural currents of trade in the nascent colonial economies. The Board of Trade and the vice-admiralty courts were created in 1696, between two colonial wars, to ensure the supervision of trade, but their regulatory intrusiveness was minimal. Although there were some sharp differences about particular acts, and especially how they were being enforced, the period from 1721 to the middle of the eighteenth century has been called a period of “salutary neglect” in relations between the colonies and the mother country. By 1750 imperial officials began to lay plans for a stronger central administration of colonial affairs, a reasonable course of action for those who believed that the increasingly prosperous colonies existed for the benefit of the mother country, but one that ignored the growing awareness among the colonists that being English now meant something different for them than it did for Englishmen in England. The final two colonial wars dampened centrifugal pressure, but the extent and scope of the victory over France in North America, evident by 1763, opened the gates for a flood of postponed ideas and mutual miscalculations.

In the short span of five years (1760–1765), relations soured between the imperial government and many members of the colonial oligarchy. The euphoria over the fall of New France (1760) and the capture of Havana (1762) gave way to colonial astonishment and perplexity at the imperial government’s seemingly comprehensive and sinister tightening of the rules of empire. The Treaty of Paris (1763) left Britain the undisputed victor over a humiliated France and an impotent Spain, but British leaders were left to face several serious problems. They had to manage a national debt that had doubled owing to war-time expenditures (interest payments had increased tenfold) and integrate a new set of far-flung colonies into the existing empire. They lacked allies, since other nations resented Britain’s ascendency and were waiting for the opportunity to restore a balance of power in Europe and overseas. At home, government leaders were so consumed by local and parliamentary politics that formulating a consistent imperial policy proved to be difficult to achieve. George III, who had acceded to the throne in 1760 with the determination to “be a King,” was a thoroughgoing Englishman who wanted to make Britain’s mixed government of king, lords, and commons work more effectively for the benefit of the nation. He played a more active role in parliamentary politics than had either his grandfather or great-grandfather, a circumstance that contributed to sharpening the contest for interest and influence. Far from being a well-organized conspiracy against the rights of the colonists, British colonial policy after 1763 was whipsawed among the more urgent needs of domestic political competition with an unpredictability that fatally decreased the ability of British politicians and American oligarchs to understand and appreciate each other’s points of view.

The deterioration of relations was precipitated by a convergence of several factors. The downturn in the British economy in 1763 made critical the need to raise a revenue to pay the cost of running the expanded and more closely regulated empire. The Americans, however, were in a particularly unsympathetic mood. Economically, they had their own troubles in the form of a postwar depression. Militarily, elimination of the traditional French and Indian threat made them feel less dependent on British troops for protection, a dependence that had been one of the firmest ties between the colonies and the mother country. Politically, the colonial assemblies had expanded their authority and self-importance at the expense of royal government and imperial officials during the final French and Indian War (1755–1763). Most royal governors were political appointees, dominated by the colonial assemblies. Even if the governor was a capable politician, he faced the impossible task of trying to execute royal instructions through an elected colonial assembly that appointed many of the administrative officers, initiated all laws, made appropriations, and controlled the colonial purse strings, including payment of his own salary. The existence of these representative assemblies in all the colonies by 1775 was the institutional prerequisite for the formulation and concerted expression of political resistance to increased imperial control. Even if opposition was originally organized outside the assembly, the assembly was the recognized forum for the expression of the popular will.

Opponents of imperial regulation argued that the king’s corrupt ministers were conspiring against colonial rights, in an effort to increase their power and profit. All the colonists had to do was to alert the king to the problem, the king would dismiss the evil ministers, and the system of mixed government would right itself. A significant number of colonists clung to the belief that, even if the ministers were corrupt and Parliament would not redress their complaints, the king would help them. When their cries fell on deaf ears, and the king supported his ministers and the notion of parliamentary supremacy, Americans realized that they had exhausted the resources of accepted legal and political arguments in their quarrel with the British government. They invoked “natural law”
to sustain their resistance and developed new political theories, the most important of which was to shift the locus of sovereignty in a state from the monarch to the people. The Declaration of Independence was the end product of that process, a statement of a revolution that had already taken place in the hearts and minds of a significant number of politically active Americans.

**SEE ALSO** Colonial Wars; Mercantilism; Paris, Treaty of (10 February 1763); Royal Government in America; Salutary Neglect; Trade, The Board of; Vice-Admiralty Courts.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


**BAHAMAS.** New Providence (later Nassau) was twice captured by American naval forces. Spanish forces captured the defenseless islands in the summer of 1782

**SEE ALSO** Nassau; Nassau Raid of Rathbun.

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**BAILEY, ANN HENNIS TROTTER.** (1742–1825). Scout. Born in Liverpool, England, in 1742, Ann Hennis immigrated to Staunton, Virginia, in 1761, marrying Richard Trotter in 1765. In 1774 Trotter volunteered for service in Dunmore’s War and was killed in the battle of Point Pleasant on 10 October 1774. Hennis then stepped into her husband’s place, gaining a reputation as a tough scout. She served during the Revolution as a spy on the frontier, primarily in the Shenandoah Valley, reporting on the activities of Indians allied with or suspected of being sympathetic to the British. She also gained praise for recruiting men living on the frontier to join the American side of the conflict, if only by forming together in local militia companies. With the war’s end, Hennis continued her service as a frontier scout. In 1785 she married John Bailey, who served at Fort Lee (later Charleston, West Virginia). They both continued to serve as scouts from that base. Ann Bailey, as she was now called, became widely known during the Indian siege of Fort Lee in 1791, when she rode through the Indian lines on her horse Liverpool and traveled one hundred miles to Fort Union for gunpowder, returning with the powder just three days after she left. Credited