

The Influence of Cultural Diffusion and Religious Beliefs on The American War of Independence

Dianhui Xuan

HD Shanghai Bilingual School, Shanghai, China

heidixuan0626@gmail.com

Abstract. This paper examines the crucial role of cultural diffusion and religious beliefs in shaping the ideological foundations and revolutionary motivations of the American War of Independence. While economic factors, such as high tax acts and unfair trade policies, are often identified as the primary catalysts for rebellion, this paper underscores the equal role of cultural and religious dynamics as the impact. The author employs an analysis of the dissemination of Enlightenment ideals and the influence of religious revivals, such as the Great Awakening, to elucidate the way these factors contributed to the formation of a distinctly American identity and the stimulation of a revolutionary spirit. Therefore, by examining both economic, cultural, and religious aspects, this paper provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex history of the war and its far-reaching social impact. The fusion of religious fervor and Enlightenment principles, coupled with the mobilizing effect of shared cultural values, underscored the determination of the colonists in their quest for independence, leading to a unified revolutionary movement that crossed the boundaries of different social ideologies.

Keywords: Cultural diffusion; religious beliefs; the American War of Independence; colonialism.

1. Introduction

When examining the potential causes of the American Revolutionary War, economic issues are always been considered as a primary factor by scholars and historians. The imposition of high taxes and the implementation of inequitable trade policies towards the colonies constituted a significant contributing factor in the genesis of rebellious sentiments towards independence. Nevertheless, it is evident that a historical narrative that excludes cultural and religious influences is incomplete. The ideology, dissemination, and religious beliefs provided by culture undoubtedly played a pivotal role in the context of the War of Independence, and in some ways may even be as significant as economic factors.

An examination in this paper of the role of cultural dissemination and religious beliefs would illuminates not only the underlying motivations and outbreaks of colonial rebellion, but also the profound political and social impact of intellectual flow and religious change in the Atlantic world. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the historical context, it is essential to acknowledge the role played by economic influences.

However, while economic factors such as taxation and trade policies did play an important role in driving colonies towards revolution, cultural and religious influences were equally crucial in forming the ideological foundations and consolidating support for independence. Consequently, the essay would demonstrate how they played a pivotal role in revolutionary mobilization and provided a robust foundation for revolutionary ideas and organizations. The comprehensive understanding of these factors will facilitate a more nuanced interpretation of the intricate history of the American Revolutionary War and its far-reaching social consequences.

2. Economic Perspective

Speaking from the economy perspective, first, the disputes arose from economic concerns. After the Seven Year's War in 1763 that the British won but only at huge expanse of war debt, the British authorities looked to the American colonies to for alleviation of its own financial burdens. The tension

between the UK and the US was further heightened with the British authorities' tax acts. It is worth mentioning, these measures put end to the salutary neglect policies the British had adopted to manage the colonies affairs in the past, which was a policy that had ensured economic prosperity of the colonies in the past. Therefore, in 1765, the Sugar and Currency Acts were issued by Brits. 'Colonial boycotts of British goods transformed consumerism into an act of political defiance, where resisting taxation was synonymous with asserting independence' [1].

In later 1765, the Stamp Act was introduced, asking Americans to pay for taxes on anything on written or printed in the colonies. Without doubt, these acts, without the consent of colonies, hurt not only the economic interests of sugar merchants and put deflationary effects on American colonies, but also the publisher, and commoners. Economic dissatisfaction acted as a catalyst for the creation of an American revolutionary identity, linking financial concerns with changes in political ideology [2].

Although rooted in poor fiscal policy and governance, the American people have fostered their broader revolutionary and autonomous sentiments by constantly challenging the rights and governance of the colonies. Same, Economic pressures united various social classes in opposition to British policies. All found common cause in rejecting British economic domination, this unity across social classes was crucial in creating a broad-based revolutionary movement.

'No taxation without representation', Americans, by integrating scattered economic and political discontents into a unified revolutionary movement, laid the ideological groundwork for the War of Independence. Scores of pamphlets expressed similar views to the Tax Acts. For example, the Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved, published 1765 by a lawyer James Otis, written just a year after the passing of the Sugar Act, 'If these rights are taken from them without their consent, they are effectively no better than slaves...Every man in America is a free man and no parts of His majesty's Colonies can be taxed without their consent' (Otis,1765), where they represent to the colonists. The content of these pamphlets suggests that there is a perception among the American public that the government is inherently oppressive.

To mitigate this perceived threat, it is argued that individuals must remain vigilant and reinforce their sense of identity in order to safeguard their rights. The notion that the Stamp Act was evidence of a conspiracy to deprive the Americans of their liberties was thus widely disseminated. 'The economic imposition represented by British acts helped to unite disparate colonial entities into a common cause, not simply against taxation, but in pursuit of their own conception of liberty' [3]. The connection between economic pressure and revolutionary sentiment is reflected at this moment, as colonizers gradually advocate for the principles of "natural rights" and "no tax without representation", believing that a legitimate government should be established on the basis of the consent of the governed.

3. Cultural Factors

Cultural factors were also instrumental in influencing the colony's perception and attitude towards Britain during the initial stages of its establishment. The Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s had a democratic impact on colonial societies [4]. Moreover, the Enlightenment ideas that originated in Europe were disseminated across the North American continent, including John Locke's theory of natural rights. The Enlightenment's principles of liberty, equality, and justice fostered a revolutionary spirit among the colonists, emphasizes personal faith and direct emotional connection to God, encouraging them to challenge established authority and envision a society based on democratic principles [5]. These ideas placed emphasis on individual freedom and self-governance, bypassing the traditional church hierarchy. This allows individuals to question religious authority and, by extension, other forms of authority thereby inspiring the aspirations of the colonial residents for freedom and autonomy, which would eventually lead to the majority of the later independence movements.

To illustrate, the book *Common Sense*, written by Thomas Paine, a political thinker and ideologue in 1776, advanced a number of arguments that reflected Enlightenment ideology. These arguments presented a critique of the concepts of monarchy and hereditary succession, particularly in the context of the formation of American independence and the establishment of a democratic republic. “Society is constituted by our desires, and government by our immorality; the former fosters our collective well-being by uniting our affections, the latter restrains our immoral behaviors [6].”

The discourse surrounding British colonial policies in books, newspapers, and markets fostered a critical approach to these policies and contributed to the formation of a distinctive American identity. Those who had been colonized began to perceive themselves not as subjects of the British Empire, but rather as bearers of a distinctive hybrid culture. This cultural hybridization has given rise to a sense of American exceptionalism, facilitated colonizers’ comprehension of their own rights, and precipitated an increase in discontent with British rule [4]. The concept of identity has become a significant element in the ideological foundation of the revolutionary movement, indicating that Americans have the potential to challenge the British tradition of hereditary rule and establish a more equitable and just governance system.

4. Religious Factors

In addition, religious factors had a significant impact on the development of colonial independence consciousness. A large number of early immigrants came to the United States in pursuit of religious freedom. This tradition of seeking independent spiritual expression has led to increasing dissatisfaction with British religious policies. For example, a considerable number of colonial residents opposed the religion practiced by the British Imperial Court on the grounds that it violated their right to freedom of belief.

In 1990, Mark A. Noll pointed out how covenant theology influenced revolutionary ideology, with a large portion of colonizers, especially Puritan descendants, viewing their political and social responsibilities through a covenant with God [7]. The concept that obeying tyranny would violate this inviolable contract constitutes a key principle of revolutionary ideology. At the same time, religious revival emphasized the primary position of individual faith and equality before God, which is in line with democratic and anti-monarchy tendencies.

Therefore, religious discourse began to integrate the Enlightenment era’s argument about autonomy, which is no longer just a matter of personal beliefs. It is intricately linked to political freedom and has become the moral foundation for resisting oppression both inside and outside of Britain. The interaction between cultural and religious influences has created a strong framework for revolutionary sentiment. The influx of Enlightenment ideas into a society already saturated with religious revivalism has created a powerful ideological fusion. “This convergence unquestionably fortified the colonists’ resolve, uniting diverse social and religious groups in the quest for independence” [8].

In addition to personal beliefs, religious networks also play a crucial role. Nathan Hatch believed in 1989 that the organizational structure of different denominations facilitated communication and coordination among colonizers [9]. Churches are forums for political discussions and the dissemination of revolutionary ideas. Religious leaders often play the role of revolutionary leaders, further intertwining faith with the struggle for independence. Alan Taylor further analyzed Jasanoff’s argument, claiming that cultural and religious cohesion provided a united front against British hegemony [10]. Colonies are characterized by significant diversity, but the shared values collected from cultural dissemination and religious reform provide a common foothold – revolutionaries successfully establish collective identities in different colonies, which clearly demonstrates the power of these intertwined forces.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, by examining these disparate perspectives and employing a multitude of analytical frameworks, this paper permits a more intricate and exhaustive examination of the cultural and religious dimensions of the American War of Independence. Cultural diffusion and religious exchange fundamentally reshaped colonial American society, challenging established authority and promoting individualism, egalitarianism, and community networks. These changes reflected and reinforced the emerging political philosophy that no ruler should rule without the consent of the ruled.

Religion, in particular, played a pivotal role in mobilizing public sentiment, not only as a source of spiritual guidance but also as a vehicle for political resistance. Cultural and intellectual exchanges also contributed significantly to this ideological transformation. Consequently, these cultural and religious transformation not only set the stage for widespread cultural change but also established an indisputable ideological foundation for the revolutionary movement. Ultimately, the American War of Independence took place and culminated in the birth of the United States.

References

- [1] T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence*. Oxford University Press, 2004.
- [2] Edmund S. Morgan, *The Birth of the Republic, 1763-89*. University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- [3] Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America*. Viking Penguin, 2005.
- [4] Gordon S. Wood, *The American Revolution: A History*. Modern Library, 2002.
- [5] Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*. Published in 1776.
- [6] Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America*. Oxford University Press, 2003.
- [7] Mark A. Noll, *The Work We Have to Do: A History of Protestants in America*. Oxford University Press, 1990.
- [8] Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World*. Knopf Publishing, 2011.
- [9] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*. Yale University Press, 1989.
- [10] Alan Taylor, *American Revolutions: A Continental History, 1750-1804*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2016.