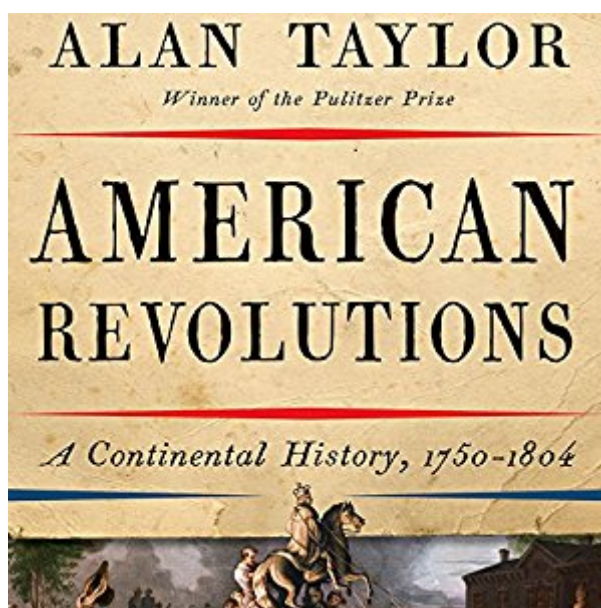


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American Revolutions: A Continental History, 1750-1804



Synopsis

The American Revolution is often portrayed as a high-minded, orderly event whose capstone, the Constitution, provided the ideal framework for a democratic, prosperous nation. Alan Taylor, two-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize, gives us a different creation story in this magisterial history of the nation's founding. Rising out of the continental rivalries of European empires and their native allies, Taylor's Revolution builds like a ground fire overspreading Britain's mainland colonies, fueled by local conditions, destructive, hard to quell. Conflict ignited on the frontier, where settlers clamored to push west into Indian lands against British restrictions, and in the seaboard cities, where commercial elites mobilized riots and boycotts to resist British tax policies. When war erupted, patriot crowds harassed loyalists and nonpartisans into compliance with their cause. Brutal guerrilla violence flared all along the frontier, from New York to the Carolinas, fed by internal divisions as well as the clash with Britain. Taylor skillfully draws France, Spain, and native powers into a comprehensive narrative of the war that delivers the major battles, generals, and common soldiers with insight and power. With discord smoldering in the fragile new nation through the 1780s, nationalist leaders such as James Madison and Alexander Hamilton sought to restrain unruly state democracies and consolidate power in a federal Constitution. Assuming the mantle of "we the people", the advocates of national power ratified the new frame of government. But their opponents prevailed in the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, whose vision of a Western "empire of liberty" aligned with the long-standing, expansive ambitions of frontier settlers. White settlement and black slavery spread west, setting the stage for a civil war that nearly destroyed the union created by the founders.

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Customer Reviews

Alan Taylor makes the point that the American Revolution was also a civil war, pitting colonists and families against one another. About two fifths of the population were active Patriots, two-fifths neutral or undecided, and one-fifth Loyalists. The latter years of the war became especially savage. The population and the troops were starving. A full third of Continental troops deserted. Troops and wandering hordes ravaged farms and killed indiscriminately. As the British developed an ambiguous policy about slavery, the Patriots were seen more as the protectors of property and freedom. The British offered freedom to slaves who joined their troops and were promised freedom in England. At the same time, they were cautious about stirring up slave revolts in the great plantations of the Carolinas and Georgia, which they saw as great assets for British investors. There is reason why southerners later saw slavery as a right they won in their struggle for independence. Another factor motivating the Patriots was the irritating British restrictions against colonizing Indian lands to the West. Many Indians saw the British as their protectors, and Patriots indiscriminately burned Indian villages suspecting them of colluding with the British. Both sides turned to atrocity as the standard MO. While the British tended to be dispirited by the atrocities inflicted upon them, the Patriots were the more enraged. Taylor writes that made a difference in who won the war. The winner was able to tolerate the most carnage. The War was fought not only for self-government and autonomy but also for the freedom to own slaves and expropriate the lands of Native Americans.

This is an accomplished and readable single volume history of the American Revolution. The various intertwining conflicts in North America are efficiently placed in the broader context of European Great Power rivalry. One does not have to agree with all of Taylor's conclusions, and he no doubt over-simplifies in places. However, he succeeds in providing broad and detailed history lessons that remind us that armed revolutions are always messy and murderous, that there is nothing inevitable about their outcomes, and that the founding fathers were all too human, buffeted by events as much as masters of them. A recommended read.

Strong recommended read. It can be a bit dense as a lot of information. This is one of those books a friend of mine best described as one you "bite and chew" through, but well worth it. Fascinating read! I thought I understood this time period but learned I was grossly under-informed prior to

reading this book. Take the time, read this, and learn even how much of today's civil and political environment can be traced back to this time period.

I read Alan Taylor perhaps differently than a couple of these reviewers. I've thoroughly enjoyed his earlier work, and yes, there does appear to be some re-cycling of information from earlier work. But this does not take away from what I read as the intent and focus of the work. I read this text as an extended essay - an attempt to explain some of the root factors that contribute to the nation we inhabit today. The book certainly disinfects the propaganda most of us were taught in high schools and to some extent in universities. The 2016 race for president makes ever so much more sense in light of some of the political forces unleashed in our early history and Taylor does a fine job of identifying the many ironies embedded in 'freedom.' One begins to see freedom less as the idealistic state of thoroughly autonomous persons and more as a set of laws designed to protect wealth - a theme that certainly defines much of contemporary policy debate. The characterization in this book of Republicans (not the contemporary party) and Federalists highlights why the American political landscape is still littered by utterly competing visions of the national good. I found this 'extended essay' a riveting read and those who find in it a mere 'trashing of America' had best stick with Fox News versions of America.

An extremely readable and well researched examination of the multiple causes and complex interaction of historical forces on the birth of the United States. Taylor's clear eyed study dissolves the long standing myths surrounding the causes and effects of the transformation of the Thirteen British Colonies into independence.

Some say this book just restates facts from the Revolution. I found it a good read. It refreshed me on many details I'd forgotten. Whether you know about the Revolution or not I suggest you read this one.

This book fills in the spaces that were neglected in our American History classes. Most Americans don't appreciate how close we came to not being an independent country.

An eye opener. When I learned about this period in American history it was too concentrated on battles and the two major documents with ver little context.

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