Revolutionary America: Change and Transformation, 1764-1783

Chapter 4
The Radicalism of the American Revolution

Section 4
Constitutional Experiments: Testing the Limits of Democracy

• State Constitutions set up during the revolution experimented with different forms of democratic systems that helped form models for the framers of America’s future government.
  • Pennsylvania granted broad democratic rights.
  • Virginia established a Declaration of Rights.

• The Articles of Confederation established the first national government of the United States.
  • Fear of a strong central government and the prioritization of the war effort made the government under the articles a weak, ineffective system.

• The framers of these new governmental systems had to balance address the radical ideas of the Declaration of Independence with tradition. The question about how much power the people should have became central.
ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION AND PERPETUAL UNION BETWEEN THE STATES
Popular Politics in the Revolutionary Era

• The radical ideals of the Declaration of Independence caused many disadvantaged members of society to agitate for greater rights in the new republic.
  • Lower Class
    • Calls for democracy and the ending of property requirements.
  • African Americans
    • While the Revolution did not end slavery entirely, it did set its demise in motion.
  • Native Americans
    • Natives fought on both sides of the revolution. At the Paris Peace conference all natives, regardless of their loyalties were excluded. Native rights deteriorated sharply after the war.
  • Women
    • Women served in many capacities during the war. This work, and the words of the Declaration inspired many women to call for greater equality and rights in the new nation. While political life did not change for women, relationships within the family did evolve to become more egalitarian.
Questions

• Did the Revolution’s ideals of liberty and equality significantly affect the lives of blacks, women, and American Indians?

• Why did the traditional Whig view of representation oppose democracy?