

Edmund Morgan, *The Birth of the Republic, 1763-1789* ©1956

“The theme of this book . . . [is] the search by Americans of the Revolutionary period for principles on which they could take a common stand. The discovery of their willingness to coalesce around the principle of human equality still seems to me the most exciting thing about the Revolution.”

Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* ©1967

“This book has developed from a study that was first undertaken a number of years ago . . . to prepare a collection of pamphlets of the American Revolution for publication The pamphlets include all sorts of writings — treatises on political theory, essays on history, political arguments, sermons, correspondence, poems —and they display all sorts of literary devices. But for all their variety they have in common one distinctive characteristic: they are, to an unusual degree, *explanatory*. They reveal not merely positions taken but the reasons why positions were taken; they reveal motive and understanding: the assumptions, beliefs, and ideas — the articulated worldview — that lay behind the manifest events of the time. As a result I found myself . . . studying . . . through these documents, nothing less than the ideological origins of the American Revolution.”

“Study of the pamphlets confirmed my rather old-fashioned view that the American Revolution was above all else an ideological, constitutional, political struggle and not primarily a controversy between social groups undertaken to force changes in the organization of the society or the economy. It confirmed too my belief that intellectual developments in the decade before Independence led to a radical idealization and conceptualization of the previous century and a half of American experience, and that it was this intimate relationship between Revolutionary thought and the circumstances of life in eighteenth-century America that endowed the Revolution with its peculiar force and made it so profoundly a transforming event.”

“The pamphlets do reveal the influence of Enlightenment thought, and they do show the effective force of certain religious ideas, of the common law, and also of classical literature; but they reveal most significantly the close integration of these elements in a pattern of, to me at least, surprising design . . . This distinctive influence had been transmitted most directly to the colonist by a group of eighteenth-century radical publicists and opposition politicians in England who carried forward into the eighteenth century and applied to the politics of the age of Walpole the peculiar strain of antiauthoritarianism bred in the upheaval of the English Civil War. “

“In was in the context of these sources and patterns of ideas . . . that I began to see a new meaning in phrases that I, like most historians, had readily dismissed as mere rhetoric and propaganda: “slavery,” “corruption,” “conspiracy.” . . . In the end, I was convinced that the fear of a comprehensive conspiracy against liberty throughout the English-speaking world — a conspiracy believed to have been nourished in corruption, and of which, it was felt, oppression in

America was only the most immediately visible part — lay at the heart of the Revolutionary movement.”

Tomorrow in class you will need to present the answers to these questions in class. Be prepared to write them on the board and to take questions from your peers on this document. You are the expert!

Reading Questions

- 1) According to Edmund Morgan, what caused the American Revolution?
- 2) According to Bernard Bailyn, what caused the American Revolution?
- 3) What sources did Bernard Baylin use to understand what caused the American Revolution?