



Independence: The Tangled Roots of the American Revolution

Thomas P. Slaughter

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An important new interpretation of the American colonists' 150-year struggle to achieve independence

"What do we mean by the Revolution?" John Adams asked Thomas Jefferson in 1815. "The war? That was no part of the Revolution. It was only an effect and consequence of it." As the distinguished historian Thomas P. Slaughter shows in this landmark book, the long process of revolution reached back more than a century before 1776, and it touched on virtually every aspect of the colonies' laws, commerce, social structures, religious sentiments, family ties, and political interests. And Slaughter's comprehensive work makes clear that the British who chose to go to North America chafed under imperial rule from the start, vigorously disputing many of the colonies' founding charters.

When the British said the Americans were typically "independent," they meant to disparage them as lawless and disloyal. But the Americans insisted on their moral courage and political principles, and regarded their independence as a great virtue, as they regarded their love of freedom and their loyalty to local institutions. Over the years, their struggles to define this independence took many forms, and Slaughter's compelling narrative takes us from New England and Nova Scotia to New York and Pennsylvania, and south to the Carolinas, as colonists resisted unsympathetic royal governors, smuggled to evade British duties on imported goods (tea was only one of many), and, eventually, began to organize for armed uprisings.

Britain, especially after its victories over France in the 1750s, was eager to crush these rebellions, but the Americans' opposition only intensified, as did dark conspiracy theories about their enemies—whether British, Native American, or French. In *Independence*, Slaughter resets and clarifies the terms in which we may understand this remarkable evolution, showing how and why a critical mass of colonists determined that they could not be both independent and subject to the British Crown. By 1775–76, they had become revolutionaries—going to war only reluctantly, as a last-ditch means to preserve the independence that they cherished as a birthright.

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