

“North Carolina and the American Founding”

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- North Carolina played a crucial role in the drive towards independence
- Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence/Resolves
- Halifax Resolves



- Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence/Resolves
 - Claimed as first declaration of independence in the colonies
 - Committee of citizen militia, response to news of Battle of Lexington
 - First formally published in 1819
 - Resolved, That we the citizens of Mecklenburg County, do hereby dissolve the political bands which have connected us to the Mother Country, and hereby absolve ourselves from all allegiance to the British Crown
 - Resolved, That we do hereby declare ourselves a free and independent people, are, and of right ought to be, a sovereign and self-governing Association, under the control of no power other than that of our God and the General Government of the Congress
- Disputed—e.g. claim Jefferson replicated much, Jefferson said he'd never heard of it
- Possibly conflated and elaborated from “Resolves” discovered in 1838
 - Produced in May 1775 and reprinted in a SC newspaper, king and parliament had no authority in Mecklenburg County, but stopped short of formal declaration, left the door open for reconciliation

- Halifax Resolves

- Adopted by Fourth Provincial Congress of North Carolina when it met in Halifax County, April 1776
- Unanimously adopted a call for independence
- North Carolina became the first colony to permit delegates to vote in favor of independence
- The resolution for independence adopted by the Continental Congress was proposed by Virginia in June 1776

- The practical act of American independence was initially political
 - Pressure built over several years as a result of numerous confrontations—particularly in Massachusetts, e.g. Boston Massacre, Lexington & Concord, Bunker Hill—and British policy regarding taxation (Stamp Act, Sugar Act) and restriction of political liberty (Townshend Act, Intolerable Acts)
 - Declared July 2, 1776—when Continental Congress voted 12-0-1 (NY abstained lacking instructions) to adopt Lee Resolution (Richard Henry Lee of Virginia)
 - Commemorated upon the Continental Congress's unanimous adoption of the Committee of Five's document on July 4, 1776 (signed by NC's William Hooper, Joseph Hewes, John Penn)
 - British recognized, Treaty of Paris 1783
- Realized militarily
 - Through lengthy Northern and Southern campaigns, ultimate victory at Yorktown, October 1781
 - Southern campaign included important battles in the Carolinas
 - Cowpens, January 1781 (victory for Americans)
 - Guilford Courthouse, March 1781 (ostensibly victory for British, but costly)

- Independence founded largely upon ideas
 - Lockean Liberalism
 - Enlightenment influences
 - Importance of Institutions
 - English republicanism
 - Virtuous Citizenry
 - Classical republicanism

- Lockean Liberalism

- Much attributed to John Locke (1632-1704)

- North Carolina connection—assistant to Lord Shaftesbury and Secretary to the Lord Proprietors of Carolina; probably contributed to the Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina in 1669, a document considered more aristocratic than Locke’s later liberalism
- Wrote English Bill of Rights in 1689, following Glorious Revolution and ascension of William and Mary—much is echoed later in our Constitution
 - I Amendment—Right to petition, freedom of speech (here really for Parliament, like “speech and debate” clause)
 - Elections to Parliament should be “free”
 - Prevents a standing army, allows “Protestants” to keep and bear arms
 - VIII Amendment—“excessive bail ought not to be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted”

- Contribution of Locke and other Enlightenment thinkers
 - Social Equality
 - “...that all men are created equal”
 - Thomas Paine’s “Common Sense”, sold 250k copies, egalitarian fever, denouncing aristocracy and royalty of Britain
 - Constitution’s prohibition on titles of nobility (Art. 1 Sect. 10)
 - Natural Rights of the individual
 - “...that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”
 - Echoed later in Bill of Rights
 - Right to property critical; Locke’s theory; echoed in the Constitution’s “Contract Clause” (Art. 1 Sect. 10)
 - State of Nature and the Social Contract
 - “..that to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed”
 - Experimental nature of America, frontier—the Mayflower Compact through to the Constitution

- This embrace of liberalism distinguishes the American Revolution from the radical French Revolution
 - Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*
 - Reaction to the status quo lacked violent energy
 - No feudalism—mass land ownership and no aristocracy or titles of nobility
 - No religious dimension
 - many came for religious reasons, Puritan nonconformists rejecting the “popery” of Anglicanism
 - But this was very much a broadly Protestant Revolution

- English Republicanism and Institutions

- Much attributed to individuals like Henry St. John Viscount Bolingbroke (1678-1751), James Harrington (1611-77), Algernon Sidney (1623-83) & other English Whigs—argument made by Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*
- All three were concerned with corruption and the concentration of power
 - Bolingbroke—best checks were true political competition, hold elected officials accountable, his “Court” and “Country” parties
 - Sidney—“Discourses Concerning Government”, attacks monarchy (for which he was executed), “God leaves to man the choice of forms in government ... He who institutes, may also abrogate”
 - Harrington—“Oceana” a system he wrote about, legislative supremacy, elaborate design to decentralize power
- Edward Coke (1552-1634)
 - Idea of the common law—as a check on government power and radical change
- Montesquieu (1689-1755)
 - “The Spirit of the Laws”—despotism occurs without a separation of powers even under democracy

- **Virtuous Citizenry**

- Much attributed to classical antiquity, Renaissance political thought
- Idea that a true republic can only survive with a virtuous citizenry, that not self-interested and prone to corruption
 - J.G.A. Pocock's, *The Machiavellian Moment*, talks of this, these were ideas important in early republican thought of the Renaissance
 - Gordon Wood's, *The Creation of the American Republic*
 - Americans were rustic, provincial, sturdy, wise, self-disciplined; uncorrupted by cosmopolitanism, modernity, luxury, self-indulgence
- Greatly influenced Benjamin Franklin
 - Believed best reflected in the merchants, yeomen, shopkeepers of America—provided the civic virtue key to America's commercial republic
 - Sovereign individuals free to work in commercial enterprise, generating social value through reciprocity, frugality, and hard work

- Together these make America an “exceptional nation”
- Reflected in
 - The desire for separation from Britain, increasingly characterized by
 - Corruption in government
 - Centralized authority
 - Material luxury
 - Disregard for liberty
 - The Declaration of Independence

- Principles muffled somewhat by the Constitution, a more political and expedient document than visceral expression of nation's values
 - Constitution has its political compromises
 - Great/Connecticut Compromise between large and small states over national power and make-up of Congress
 - The design of government incorporating national (the expression of popular opinion) and state interests—e.g. House, Senate, Electoral College
 - 3/5ths Compromise mainly between southern and northern states on how slaves should be counted for the purposes of apportionment and taxation
 - The promise of the Bill of Rights between Federalists and Anti-federalists over the powers of the national government—here necessitated by ratification
 - North Carolina's reluctant support
 - 12th state to ratify, November 1789

- No coincidence that in the Gettysburg Address, Lincoln refers to the Declaration as the best description of America's true meaning
 - First line: "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal"
 - Last line: "We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth"

- How should North Carolina commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Founding?
 - Raise awareness of the state's important role, events that highlight:
 - Mecklenburg Declaration/Resolves and Halifax Resolves
 - Important battles, e.g. Greene and Cornwallis chase through North Carolina; Guilford Courthouse; Kings Mountain & Cowpens (although national monuments in South Carolina)
 - Key individuals with North Carolina connections—e.g. John Locke; important military and political figures Nathanael Greene, William Lenoir, John Ashe; Founders like William Blount, William Richardson Davie, Hugh Williamson
 - Emphasize the importance of the Founding and its values
 - Liberty and equality
 - Civic virtue—active participation in civic life, reciprocity through social connectedness, honesty
 - Respect for institutions