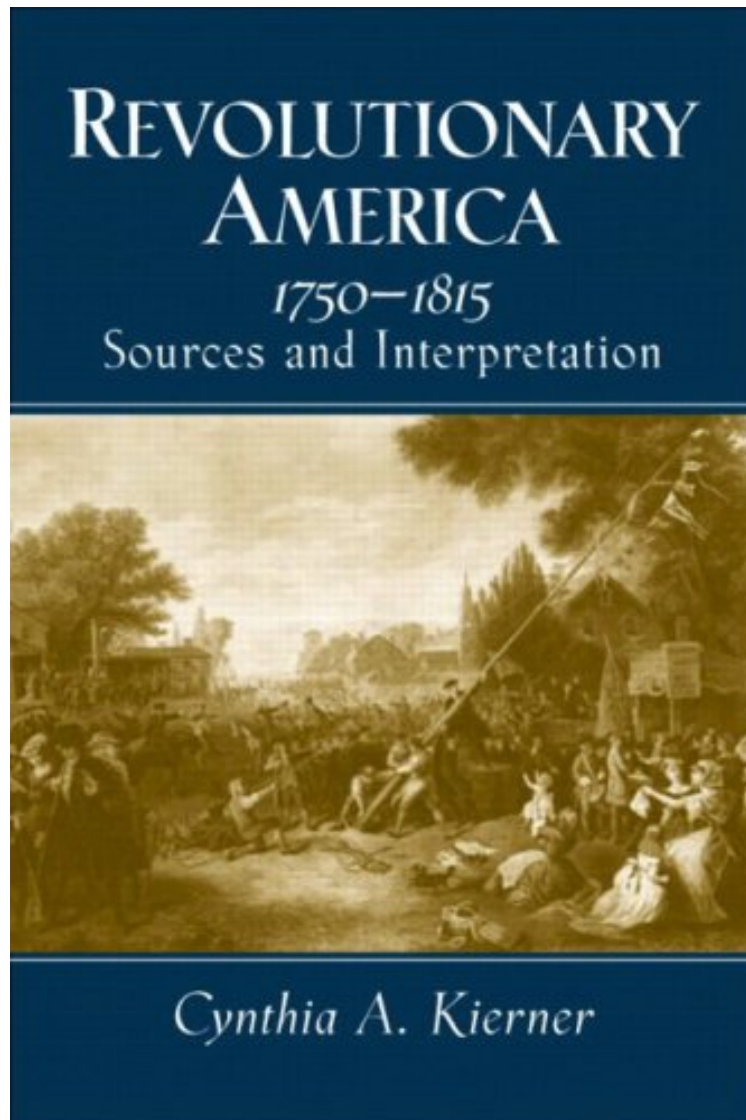


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Revolutionary America, 1750-1815: Sources and Interpretation

Cynthia A. Kierner

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"Cynthia Kierner's excellent new collection of primary sources on the American Revolution fills a great gap in the literature. Expertly introduced by short interpretative essays that reflect the latest historiographical developments, Kierner's chapters provide rich source material for advanced courses on revolutionary America and for teachers and scholars looking for a convenient compendium of the key texts. A fine achievement." Peter Onuf, University of Virginia "Kierner has created well-conceptualized chapters that synthesize an enormous amount of material, and she has done so in more engaging ways than one typically finds in comparable treatments of the Revolution." Jean B. Lee, University of Wisconsin From the Back Cover Revolutionary America combines primary documents and original interpretive essays to provide a balanced introduction to the revolutionary and early republican periods. Covering traditional political and military subjects, along with the social and cultural history of the era, documentary selections range from classic texts like Common Sense and The Federalist to excerpts from contemporary travelers' accounts, diaries, and novels. Complemented by a rich assortment of maps and illustrations, Revolutionary America offers flexibility and insight for students and teachers alike. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. The American Revolution is the single most important event in the history of the United States. It occasioned the world's first colonial war of liberation and resulted in the creation of its most stable and enduring republic. The Revolution transformed American politics, uniting thirteen disparate colonies, first in war and then in peace, and leading loyal subjects of George III to reject first their king and then monarchy itself. Revolutionary notions of liberty and equality informed a wide range of political and social reforms, from the liberalization of suffrage requirements to the abolition of slavery in the northern states. The ideals and achievements of the Revolution also justified the westward expansion of the United States and encouraged Americans to undertake a second war against Britain in 1812. Revolutionary Americans engaged in a process of nation-building in both the institutional and cultural senses. They established political institutions that represented and empowered a republican union of states a process that culminated with the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. Although most Americans today regard the drafting and adoption of the Constitution as the logical, even inevitable, result of American independence, many contemporaries opposed ratification because they saw the document's strongly national orientation as antithetical to the ideals of revolutionary republicanism. Members of the revolutionary generation also attempted to construct and define an American national identity. Seeking to promote national self-consciousness among citizens of the republic, they encouraged those citizens to imagine themselves as a purposefully united political and cultural community. A protracted and far from conclusive project, defining what it meant to be an American was nonetheless a central part of the revolutionary phenomenon for both contemporaries and subsequent generations. Although fighting and winning the War of Independence was an essential aspect of Americans' revolutionary experience, the Revolution proved to be much more than a military conflict. Because the Revolution was also a political event, this book examines the ideas, interests, and actions that contributed to changes in how people thought about politics. In turn, these changes in political thought brought about the destruction of the old colonial order and the creation of new state and national governments. Because the Revolution was a social and cultural phenomenon, this book also explores how social rank, religion, gender, and race affected and were affected by the revolutionary experience, and how Americans used education, civic ritual, and

material culture to respond to the challenges of their times. A broad understanding of the Revolution as both a war for independence and an occasion for political, social, and cultural conflict and transformation requires an equally expansive chronology. Even if the War of Independence ended officially in 1783, and the implementation of the Constitution in 1789 formally resolved the most pressing political problems arising from independence, it took years—sometimes even decades—for Americans to sort out some of the most important ramifications of the Revolution. At the same time, while the Declaration of Independence marked the formal beginning of the Revolution at least from the perspective of its supporters, the causes of that declaration reach back to the imperial crisis of the mid-1760s and sometimes even farther. In order to examine the sources of both instability and strength in the British Empire, my narrative begins in the mid-eighteenth century; it ends with the more or less successful conclusion of the War of 1812, which secured the ideals and objectives of the Revolution in the minds of many Americans. This book includes both contemporary documents and an interpretive narrative. Although the latter can tell students what historians have said about the revolutionary era and supply background and context for the uninitiated, my main purpose in writing this book was to allow a representative cross section of people from the revolutionary era to speak for themselves. I have benefited from the assistance and insights of many individuals and institutions in the course of preparing this text. The Interlibrary Loan staff at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte flawlessly processed my countless requests for obscure books and documents. The Graduate School at UNC-Charlotte provided funding for some of this book's illustrations. Students in my seminar on Revolutionary America tested documents for the final chapter on historical memory. Professor Jean B. Lee, University of Wisconsin, Madison, offered valuable input. At the New-York Historical Society, Mariam Touba reproduced a particularly rare newspaper that was not available on microfilm, for which I am most grateful. At Prentice Hall, Charles Cavaliere was patient, knowledgeable, and supportive—in short, an ideal editor. Jean Lapidus ably saw the project through production, and Stephen C. Hopkins was an excellent copy editor. At home, Tom, Zachary, and Anders let me work, and then went to the beach with me when I was done. The author also thanks the following reviewers for their valuable input: Professor Sheila Skemp, University of Mississippi; Professor Scott Casper, University of Nevada, Reno; Professor Stanley Harrold, South Carolina State University; Professor Joseph C. Morton, Northeastern Illinois University; and Professor Virginia DeJohn Anderson, University of Colorado. Cynthia A. Kierner Charlotte, North Carolina