

### American Revolution

- Background:
  - Individual rights/liberties violated by English Empire; thought to be guaranteed by English Constitution;
  - Violations include: new taxes, stamps, quartering of British troops (without compensation)
  - Colonists convene to begin legitimating rebellion, arguments based on:
    - o Enlightenment ideals
    - o Civic republicanism
    - o Religious, ethnic, and racial claims
  
- Abigail and John Adams exchange:
  - Women did not have legal personhood (e.g., could not vote, hold property, participate in contracts);
  - Need to be careful about interpreting whether Abigail is really pushing women's rights; she also notes women's special attributes and unique roles ("female protective arguments")
  
- Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*:
  - First writing to denounce all but republican part of British Constitution
  - Some colonists sought to replicate mixed Constitution, based on the notion of a balanced government:
    - o Monarch – represents order and power;
    - o Lords – represents independence guaranteed by inherited wealth
    - o Commons – represents liberty and individual rights
  - English Constitution too complex; Paine challenges need to balance social system.
  - Calls for unmediated, direct democracy – representatives elected by all electors (unicameral)
  - Adams rejected country-wide election – need mediation; functions of government should be divided
  - But, most agreed that government should be majoritarian
  - Concerns that republics cannot be too big (from Montesquieu) and that homogeneity (i.e., a common sentiment) is necessary
  - Requires knowledgeable, civic-minded citizens.
  
- John Locke:

- Most influential thinker underpinning American Revolution, writing in 17<sup>th</sup> century in opposition to Sir Robert Filmer who was a defender of the monarchy.
  - Argues that men have natural rights
    - o Freedom and property rights are independent and prior to form of government.
  - Consent to follow laws; express and tacit consent
  - Government is a trust; there is no real vertical contract b/w government and the people. The people can withdraw their consent when rights are violated; people have right to rebel. Even after successful rebellion, society or community of people still exists.
- Republicanism:
- Some argue American Revolution was primarily about republicanism, not liberal ideas; principle of republicanism was central to most American revolutionaries.
  - Other themes behind revolution:
    - o Emphasis on common good
    - o Virtues of citizens
    - o Resistance to concentrated power; power yields corruption and complacency; importance of participation of people in politics
- Problem of slavery:
- Contradiction: revolutionaries used language of being “enslaved” to England.
  - Some simultaneous calls to abolish slavery.
  - Bernard Bailyn argues that people were conscious of slavery, while others suggest that it was separable.