

THE COLONIAL AND REVOLUTIONARY EXPERIENCE

Primary Sources

Christopher Columbus, Letter to Luis de Sant' Angel (1493)

http://occawlonline.pearsoned.com/bookbind/pubbooks/martinawl/medialib/timeline/docs/sources/theme_primarysources_Native_Americans_1.html

In this letter to one of his leading supporters in the Spanish court, Christopher Columbus describes his reaction to the sights of the New World. He is describing the island of Hispaniola, present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Bartolomé de Las Casas, "Of the Island of Hispaniola" (1542)

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This extract from Las Casas's *Very Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies* describes the island of Hispaniola (present-day Dominican Republic and Haiti), the island Columbus described in his letter to Luis de Sant' Angel. Las Casas wrote this gory and explosive account in 1542 to be read at a forum on Spanish colonization called by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Widely translated, this account gave rise to a flood of anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic propaganda throughout Europe deriding the Spanish settlement of the Americas.

The Laws of Virginia (1610-1611)

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Virginia was the first English colony in America, settled in 1607 by representatives of London joint stock companies. Its early years were filled with death and disaster—malaria, starvation, and threat of Indian attack all took a toll on the settlers. The colony's laws strictly controlled the behavior of colonists, emphasizing activities needed to maintain order and to survive. Note the variety of activities deemed capital offenses—and punishable by death.

John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity" (1630)

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John Winthrop, a Cambridge-trained lawyer, was the leader of the group of about a thousand Puritans who settled Massachusetts Bay in 1630. Unlike the Virginians, or perhaps learning from their experience, the Massachusetts settlers arrived with structures of government and social order already established. They founded what became a successful and growing colony. This famous document is a sermon written on board the *Arabella* and delivered to the Puritans on the eve of their settlement of Massachusetts Bay.

Jonathan Edwards, from "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (1741)

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Jonathan Edwards was the greatest American-born revivalist preacher. "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," delivered first at Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1741, was his most famous sermon. No record was kept of the sermon's impact the first time Edwards delivered it, but Reverend Stephen Williams of Longmeadow noted in his diary that when Edwards preached later in Enfield, Connecticut, "the shrieks and cries were piercing and amazing." The emotionalism of the sermon and its description of the moment of tension as man dangles over the fire produced the sermon's impact. In Edwards's sermon, God finally tires of protecting unworthy man from the flames; revealing its most disturbing part: its message of the insecurity of temporary protection by an all-powerful and infinitely angry God.

Gottlieb Mittelberger, The Passage of Indentured Servants (1750)

http://occawlonline.pearsoned.com/bookbind/pubbooks/martinawl/medialib/timeline/docs/sources/theme_primarysources_Slavery_3.html

Gottlieb Mittelberger was an indentured servant from Germany who worked in Pennsylvania, where he served as a schoolmaster and organist. After only four years, he returned to Germany. The following is a detailed and graphic account of the trans-Atlantic journey and the fate that awaited indentured servants upon arrival in North America.

Benjamin Franklin, "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, &c." (1751)

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While analyzing the explosive growth of the American population, Franklin came to appreciate the colonists' extraordinary

appetite for British manufactured goods. The Americans were not self-sufficient, nor, at mid-century, did they desire to be so. They purchased great quantities of imported goods, especially cloth. Franklin insisted that trade of this sort promoted general prosperity throughout the empire. No reasonable ruler, he argued, would disturb the commercial harmony existing between the colonies and Great Britain; indeed, he envisioned America's full participation in an ever-stronger imperial union, not rebellion. Franklin advocated a society peopled almost exclusively by Anglo-Saxons, and in his "Observations," he disparaged blacks, Indians, and Germans— indeed, anyone who did not come from Britain.

James Otis, The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved (1763)

http://occawlonline.pearsoned.com/bookbind/pubbooks/martinawl/medialib/timeline/docs/sources/theme_primarysources_Politics_3.html

James Otis (1725–1783) was one of the more radical political figures of his generation. Otis came from a distinguished Massachusetts family, and, after graduating from Harvard College in 1743, he trained as a lawyer. His talents took him in many different directions. Otis was a respected Latin scholar, a popular Boston politician, and a forceful advocate for colonial rights within the British empire. Drawing on the political philosophy of John Locke, a late-seventeenth-century philosopher, and his own religious beliefs, Otis developed a powerful case for equality. He insisted that women and blacks enjoyed the same natural rights as white males. Mental illness undermined a seemingly promising career, and by the 1770s Otis had lost effective contact with the patriot cause.

Petition of “A Grate Number of Blackes of the Province” to Governor Thomas Gage and the Members of the Massachusetts General Court (1774)

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The rhetoric of natural rights appealed directly to African American slaves. White patriots regularly protested that “taxation without representation” transformed free men into the “slaves” of Parliament. With the exception of James Otis and a few articulate Quakers from the Middle Colonies, they rarely connected their own passionate defence of “rights” with the enslavement of colonial blacks. The slaves knew better, of course, and, using the language of rights and liberty, they petitioned for freedom. On the eve of independence, a group of Boston slaves eloquently reminded white colonists that “we have in common with all other men a natural right to our freedoms.”

Address of the Inhabitants of Anson County to Governor Martin (1774)

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Many Americans remained loyal to England before, during, and after the Revolutionary War. Loyalists were particularly strong where British government was stable (like around New York City) and where colonists relied on the British for protection (like on the Carolina frontiers). This is a letter sent by colonial Loyalists from Anson County, North Carolina, to their governor, pledging their loyalty and asking, in part, for protection.

Patrick Henry, "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death" (1775)

http://occawlonline.pearsoned.com/bookbind/pubbooks/martinawl/medialib/timeline/docs/sources/theme_primarysources_Politics_5.html

There are few Americans who are not familiar with Patrick Henry's cry "give me liberty or give me death." This fiery speech is popular not only as a document of the revolutionary struggle but as one of the great speeches of all time. Patrick Henry served in the French and Indian Wars and first attracted attention as the leader of the objections to the Stamp Act in the Virginia House of Burgesses. In this speech, he argues that the colonists have no other choice after exhausting all the avenues for reconciliation with Britain.

Rights of Women in an Independent Republic (1776)

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While a delegate to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, John Adams regularly corresponded with his wife, Abigail, who remained in Braintree, Massachusetts overseeing the family farm and business. Their extraordinary letters spanned an impressive range of political and personal concerns, from wrongs suffered by colonials under the yoke of Parliament to the daily management of a small New England farm. Like the African Americans who petitioned for freedom in 1774, Abigail sensed that the creation of a new republic held unusual opportunities for women. They too had rights; they too were members of civil society. Her thoughtful appeal to her husband and his condescending response reveal the blindness of male founders to the claims of gender. In a letter addressed a few weeks later to provincial lawyer James Sullivan, Adams argued that since it was neither possible nor desirable for everyone to have the right to vote, some—including women—had to be excluded for the common good.