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# Enlightenment in Action

- Enlightenment in America
  - Enlightenment in France
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# Learning Objectives

Discuss and then explain how the Enlightenment impacted the American Revolution

Discuss and then explain how the Enlightenment impacted French society leading up to the French Revolution

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# Enlightenment in America

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# Key Players

“The American Enlightenment is generally discussed in terms of America's political evolution, the thinking that led to the fomenting of a revolution against Great Britain and the creation of a modern republic. Many figures associated with Enlightenment thought have been regarded as influences on American thinking between 1760 and 1800.

Among those commonly mentioned include John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Voltaire, Baron Montesquieu, Immanuel Kant, Adam Smith, Denis Diderot and others.

America had its own figures of the Enlightenment to be sure, most prominently among them being Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, to name a few.

Many American historians, however, have found the origins of the American Enlightenment in the thinking of Roger Williams.”

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# Roger Williams

“His differences with the Puritan leaders of Massachusetts led to his being banished from the colony. He was a deeply religious man, and discussions of his contributions to American culture have tended to lean toward the theological.

Williams, however, was most of all a political philosopher, and as such is thinking belongs in the discussion of American Enlightenment thought. He has been described as being the most Christian of Christians, a man who devoted his entire life to following the path of Jesus Christ.

His most important contribution to American thought is generally regarded as is advocating of the separation of church and state.

In his writings he carefully detailed the roles of the church and the state and how they occupied separate realms. Churches functioned within the state but were no more an integral part of the state than were corporations organized to conduct business.”

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# Roger Williams- Continued

“Whatever happened within the structure of a church should have nothing to do with the business of the state. Conversely, the state should have no right to interfere with the business of the church, or with the practices of individuals in their relationship to the divine.

He believed strongly that people of all faiths – Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or faiths practiced by Indians – should be allowed to follow their own consciences without any outside interference whatsoever.

Williams was also a student of Native American languages, an early advocate for fair dealings with Native Americans, and one of the first abolitionists in North America, having organized the first attempt to prohibit slavery in any of the British American colonies.”



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# Enlightenment in France

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# Leading to Revolution

“Enlightenment thinkers in Britain, in France and throughout Europe questioned traditional authority and embraced the notion that humanity could be improved through rational change. The Enlightenment produced numerous books, essays, inventions, scientific discoveries, laws, wars and revolutions. The American and French Revolutions were directly inspired by Enlightenment ideals and respectively marked the peak of its influence and the beginning of its decline.”

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# French Revolution

“The French Revolution of 1789 was the culmination of the Enlightenment vision of throwing out the old authorities to remake society along rational lines, but it devolved into bloody terror that showed the limits of its own ideas and led, a decade later, to the rise of Napoleon.

Still, its goal of egalitarianism attracted the admiration of the many and inspired both the Haitian war of independence and the radical changes worldwide.”

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# Review

How did the Enlightenment impact the American Revolution?

How did the Enlightenment impact French society leading up to the French Revolution?