
A Selected Cultural Chronology of the United States of America (1771–1806)

- 1771** Philip Freneau and Hugh Henry Brackenridge deliver “The Rising Glory of America” at the College of New Jersey’s commencement in September.
- 1775** The Continental Congress passes a resolution against plays and “other expensive diversions and entertainments.”
- 1776** Abigail Adams asks her husband, John, to “Remember the Ladies” in America’s new code of laws in March; John Adams responds in April with a seriocomic warning about social revolution.
- 1779** The Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania commissions Charles Willson Peale to paint *George Washington at the Battle of Princeton*.
- 1783** Noah Webster publishes his speller, the first American textbook, as part of his *Grammatical Institute of the English Language*.
- 1785** Timothy Dwight publishes *The Conquest of Canaan; A Poem, in Eleven Books*. The Common Council of New York City closes the John Street Theater as a “fruitful source of dissipation, immorality, and vice.”
- 1786** Noah Webster and Benjamin Franklin correspond about orthographic reform and the creation of an American language. Benjamin Rush calls for the creation of “republican machines” in his *Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools and the Diffusion of Knowledge in Pennsylvania; to Which are Added, Thoughts Upon the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic*. From Paris, Thomas Jefferson urges passage of a bill to fund public education in Virginia. John Trumbull completes *The Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker’s Hill* in London.
- 1787** Charles Willson Peale’s museum of art, natural history, and technology opens in Philadelphia. Joel Barlow publishes *The Vision of Columbus; A Poem in Nine Books*. Benjamin Rush argues for “female education” in an address to the Young Ladies’ Academy

of Philadelphia. John Trumbull completes *The Declaration of Independence, Philadelphia, 4 July 1776*. Royall Tyler's play *The Contrast* is performed at the John Street Theater in New York in April. Thomas Jefferson publishes his *Notes on the State of Virginia* in London.

- 1789** Noah Webster publishes his *Dissertations on the English Language: with Notes, Historical and Critical*, dedicated to Benjamin Franklin. David Ramsay publishes his *History of the American Revolution*.
- 1790** Noah Webster's *Collection of Essays and Fugitiv Writings* demonstrates his proposed orthographic reforms. President George Washington asks Congress to establish a national university. Judith Sargent Murray publishes "On the Equality of the Sexes" in the *Massachusetts Magazine, or, Monthly Museum of Knowledge and Rational Entertainment*.
- 1791** Robert Coram publishes his *Political Inquiries: to which is Added, a Plan for the General Establishment of Schools throughout the United States*. William Bartram publishes his *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the Extensive Territories of the Muscogulges or Creek Confederacy, and the Country of the Chactaws*.
- 1792** Hugh Henry Brackenridge publishes the first two volumes of *Modern Chivalry: Containing the Adventures of Captain John Farrago, and Teague O'Regan, His Servant*.
- 1793** Boston lifts a ban of more than forty years on theaters and the production of plays.
- 1794** Susanna Haswell Rowson publishes *Charlotte. A Tale of Truth* and performs in her *Slaves in Algiers; or, a Struggle for Freedom: A Play, interspersed with songs, in three acts* in Philadelphia. William Cobbett attacks Rowson and predicts social revolution in *A Kick for a Bite*. Timothy Dwight publishes *Greenfield Hill: A Poem in Seven Parts*.
- 1795–1797** Gilbert Stuart paints two busts and a full-length portrait of George Washington.
- 1797** Samuel Harrison Smith and Samuel Knox share the prize in a contest to design an American public school system, sponsored by the American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia. "Novel Reading, a Cause of Female Depravity" is published and widely printed in magazines and journals.
- 1798** Samuel Harrison Smith publishes his *Remarks on Education: Illustrating the Close Connection between Virtue and Wisdom*. Judith Sargent Murray publishes *The Gleaner* in three volumes.

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- 1799** George Washington's Last Will and Testament bequeaths funds to found a national university. Samuel Knox publishes *An Essay on the Best System of Liberal Education, Adapted to the Genius of the Government of the United States*.
- 1800** Mason Locke Weems publishes his *Life of George Washington; with Curious Anecdotes, Equally Honourable to Himself and Exemplary to his Young Countrymen*. The U.S. government purchases Gilbert Stuart's portrait *George Washington* to display in the White House.
- 1803** President Thomas Jefferson invites William Bartram to serve as naturalist on a government-sponsored expedition up the Red River; Bartram declines due to poor health.
- 1804** John Vanderlyn paints *The Death of Jane McCrea*.
- 1805** Mercy Otis Warren publishes her *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution*.
- 1806** Noah Webster publishes his *Compendious Dictionary*. President Thomas Jefferson repeats George Washington's request to Congress to establish a national university, with identical results.

Questions for Consideration

1. Why did the intellectuals of the Revolutionary generation view political divisions and cultural diversity as such a grave problem? Would an American language have solved the problem? Why or why not?
2. How would you characterize the republican reformers' educational vision? If you had been young in the 1790s, would you have wanted to attend a school of their design, or would you have preferred to learn at home with Margaretta? Would you have found the republican concept of moral education liberating or limiting? Is moral education for citizenship a legitimate goal of public schools?
3. Why did George Washington figure so prominently in the narratives of nationhood constructed by Revolutionary historians and artists? How did his image take shape in different hands and narratives? Did it serve different purposes for different audiences?
4. Why did the Revolutionary intellectuals so fear American popular culture? What meanings might early American sentimental novels and plays have held for their many readers and viewers?
5. Why couldn't intellectuals of the Revolutionary generation define American identity without also constructing an ethnic or racial Other? Can we do so today?
6. If the intellectuals of the Revolutionary generation had succeeded in creating a strong, unified, republican American culture between 1775 and 1800, how might the course of American history have been altered? Was this ever a real possibility? Why is their dream of American cultural unity and identity still alive today?

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