***America’s History* Author Video: Chapter Five**

**[[BIG IDEA:** Consider whether the collapse of British authority in the thirteen rebellious colonies might have been avoided through compromise measures and more astute leadership. Was colonial independence inevitable, and was war the only way to achieve it?]]

The third part of *America’s History* explains and contextualizes the American Revolution. In Chapter Five, we ask why Great Britain—the most powerful empire in the world at the time—couldn’t manage its affairs in North America more effectively than it did.

It’s tempting to say that British political leaders were largely at fault. Britain had just defeated France and Spain in the Seven Years’ War and gained control of all of North America east of the Mississippi River. Britain was now the most powerful nation in Europe. Having risen so far, you might expect that Britain could have retained its dominance.

But in fact, the outcome of the Seven Years’ War placed enormous new burdens on Great Britain, and as a result it forced fundamental changes on the empire—changes that North American colonists did not like, no matter who was in charge or how the policies were designed. When imperial reform threatened the autonomy of the colonies, it triggered a powerful reaction. Colonists steeped in the British constitutional tradition had a very potent set of ideas to draw on when they wanted to defend their liberties. Just as important, ordinary colonists were willing to protest, and ultimately to fight, to protect their interests. No one wanted war, but in the end no one could discover an alternative to it.

So colonial leaders decided to fight for their liberty. In the process, they discovered that liberty is a very broad and potent idea. It empowered the poor and disenfranchised to challenge the wealthy and powerful, slaves to challenge their masters, women to challenge men. Once it was unleashed, the idea of liberty became a powerful new force in American culture.