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

**[[BIG IDEA:** How revolutionary was the American Revolution? What political, social, and economic changes did it produce, and what stayed the same?]]

How revolutionary was the American Revolution?

In the United States, it is commonly believed that the Revolution brought fundamental change. The British Empire, we have been conditioned to believe, was unresponsive and tyrannical; in its place, we got a republic that met people’s needs and reflected their collective desires.

But it was never that simple. Any government must impose its will on the population at large, whether they agree with it or not. To fight a war, it has to mobilize resources, orchestrate actions, and—in the end—coerce obedience. The decision to revolt against Great Britain was controversial and contested, and the war sorely tested Americans’ commitment to independence. But Patriots, as the war’s supporters were called, decided it was worth the risk, because they believed the war would secure individual liberties and make their states independent.

Once the war was won, they discovered that the states could not function independently, so nationalists designed a system of government that could unite the states in a single federal system. This, too, was controversial. To many Americans, a powerful national government presented all the same problems that the British empire had. How could they ensure that the union of the states would not become as tyrannical and unresponsive as the British empire had been? But on the other hand, without a strong national government to secure the borders, mediate conflicts, and enforce shared principles, how could the states survive and prosper? These were hard questions in the 1780s, questions that have been revisited again and again in American history. And they still resonate in our politics today.