

Ben Franklin's Youth Movement: Making the American Revolution

by Nancy Spannaus

Introduction

The year 2006 marks the 300th anniversary of the birth of one of the greatest statesmen who ever lived, America's own Benjamin Franklin (1706-90). Lectures and exhibits have abounded in celebration of this great man's life during the course of the year, but there is only one location where he has been celebrated in truly appropriate fashion—and that is through the activity of the LaRouche Youth Movement, in pursuit of reviving the commitment to the improvement of mankind, scientifically and morally, which was represented by the American Revolution itself.

EIR has pioneered in publicizing the true story of Benjamin Franklin, which has been deliberately, and in some cases maliciously, suppressed over the centuries. Franklin himself contributed to this misinformation, in the interest of protecting his own activities and collaborators from the enemies of the Revolution, as historian H. Graham Lowry pointed out in his definitive 1987 book, *How the Nation Was Won, America's Untold Story*. But that is no excuse for historians. As it was, it was left to Lowry, a leader in LaRouche's political movement until his death in 2003, to unveil the continuity of the republican idea which led to the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1600s, with the movement which succeeded in forming the world's premier republic, the United States of America, almost 150 years later.

Lowry's discovery of the Leibnizian forebears and collaborators of Benjamin Franklin—including the great wit and thinker Jonathan Swift—gives an entirely new perspective to the American story. It becomes clear that there was indeed a trans-Atlantic conspiracy to outflank the European oligarchy by establishing a new nation on these shores, one that would be a continental republic in the interests of all mankind. In

pursuing the leads he found, Lowry uncovered a host of Franklin's American republican collaborators—such as Virginia Governor Alexander Spotswood, and others—who have been generally written out of history.

In December 1995, *EIR* published another breakthrough work on Benjamin Franklin, this time focussing on his scientific work. Author Phil Valenti, in his article "The Anti-Newtonian Roots of the American Revolution," elaborated on the conflict which leading American thinkers, such as William Penn's secretary James Logan, waged against the thinking of John Locke. Valenti then places Franklin's experimentation in electricity directly in this anti-Locke, Leibnizian tradition, in stark contrast to the interpretation which most public scholarship gives to Franklin's work.

The need for both Americans, and leading thinkers internationally, to understand the fact that Benjamin Franklin represented Leibnizian thought in all realms of endeavor, and thus undertake the job of creating our republic from that standpoint, is urgent indeed. Because it is only from that philosophical perspective, that one can understand the success of the United States of America in the past, and the unique hope which it represents for the future, even in its most debilitated state today. In July 1984, Lyndon LaRouche laid out the mission of his political movement, as following "In the Footsteps of Benjamin Franklin." Twenty-two years later, to the chagrin of his British Tory enemies, he has advanced far along that path, with the creation of a LaRouche Youth Movement which holds the best hope for saving our republic. The success of the LaRouche Youth in the Nov. 7 midterm elections, in creating a "mass-effect" that energized the youth movement, and created the conditions for the removal of the Bush-Cheney Administration, underscores that hope.

We dedicate the following discussion of Franklin and his youth movement, first written in April 2003 and only slightly edited, to the celebration of his 300th birthday—and to the hope we share with the ever-optimistic Ben, that we will be able to “keep” the republic which he played the pivotal role in creating, 230 years ago.

The Role of Youth Movements in History

The decision by the 80-year-old Lyndon LaRouche, the leading scientific and political figure of our age, to form an international youth movement, as an absolutely essential instrument for the success of his efforts to turn the United States, and the world, back from the abyss of a New Dark Age, has raised new, fascinating questions about the role of youth movements in history. Clearly, as LaRouche himself has said, like revolutions, not all youth movements have been positive forces for mankind. But there is one leading example of an indispensable youth movement which *did* play a positive role: That youth movement was that of the American Revolution itself.

The evidence is surprising, but undeniable. You must start from understanding that Benjamin Franklin, born in 1706, was the chief organizer of the American Revolutionary movement. He epitomized the quality of scientific and political thinking, as well as organizing skills, which had come out of the Italian Renaissance conception of man and society, and which understood the fact that human progress demand the creation of a community of republics, based on the conception of man as a creative, thinking individual. From his teens on, Franklin effectively became an agent for those international networks who understood that it was in the American colonies that a breakthrough could be made, in achieving a society based on those ideas.

Franklin worked for decades—but he did not quickly succeed in unifying the American colonies around that idea. That unification didn’t come until the 1770s to 1790s, and it came from the generation of his grandchildren, a youth movement par excellence.

There were intermediaries, of course: crucial collaborators of Franklin and organizers of the nation, such as George Washington (born 1732), John Adams (born 1735), and Tom Paine (born 1737), among others. But the “movers and shakers” within the American Revolutionary movement of 1776, and its progression into the establishment of the U.S. Constitution, came overwhelmingly from that generation which was born in the 1750s and ’60s, a full two generations after Frank-



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EIRNS/Stuart Lewis

Two old philosophers—Benjamin Franklin and Lyndon LaRouche—knew they had to create youth movements, in order to make a revolution around republican ideas. Here, Franklin as portrayed in the U.S. Capitol, and LaRouche being interviewed in 2001.

lin. And it was an international grouping at that.

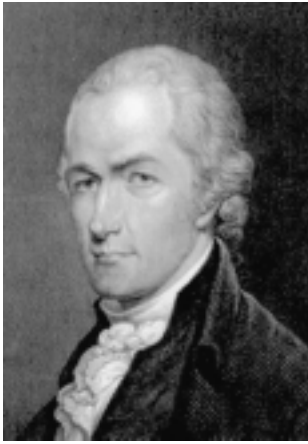
Start with the following list (which is by no means exhaustive):

- Alexander Hamilton, born 1755
- Marquis de Lafayette, born 1757
- Mathew Carey, born 1760
- John Quincy Adams, born 1767
- James Monroe, born 1758
- John Marshall, born 1755
- James Madison, born 1751.

Thus, at the time the American Revolution was declared, in 1776, this generation of leaders was anywhere from 9 to 25 years old!

Surprised? You shouldn’t be. The American Revolution, and the framing of the U.S. Constitution, represent the quality of devotion to fundamental principles, which is characteristic of a movement of young people who have not given up their ideals, and are determined to fight through the encrusted “way things are done” which traditionally holds back progress. It is such youth who, realizing that the current course of events will give them no future, historically have been able to remoralize, and motivate, their elders, to make revolutions for human progress.

Even more provocative, should be the idea of the 80-year-old Benjamin Franklin, surrounded by these revolutionary youth, during the Revolutionary War and through the Constitutional Convention. They were fulfilling his life’s work, just as LaRouche’s Youth Movement today promises to fulfill LaRouche’s.



National Archives

Alexander Hamilton



National Archive

Marquis de Lafayette



Library of Congress

John Quincy Adams



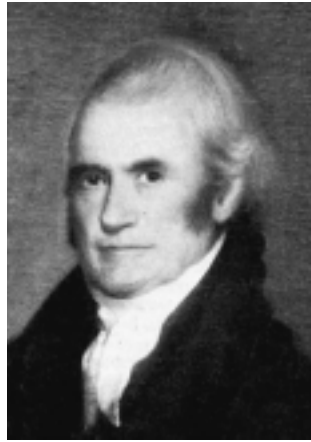
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James Monroe



Library of Congress

James Madison



clipart.com

John Marshall



Mathew Carey

Ben Franklin's Youth Movement was the driving force behind the revolution. Those seen here were between the ages of 9 and 25 when the Declaration of Independence was issued in 1776.

Before I turn more directly to the more general lesson to be taken from this reality, let me introduce you to “the youth.”

Franklin's Revolutionary Youth

Of all the youth who waged and led the American Revolution, none was more influential than Alexander Hamilton. Born out of wedlock on the West Indian island of St. Nevis, Hamilton had a poor and unstable childhood, to say the least, but was “picked up” by a network of New Jersey Presbyterian revolutionaries, and brought to the American colonies in 1772, to be given an education. The circles who sponsored Hamilton were centered on the revolutionary hotbed at the College of New Jersey which became Princeton University in 1896, then headed by the Scottish emigré Rev. John Witherspoon, who had, among other things, introduced the teaching of Benjamin Franklin's experiments at Princeton. Ironically, the nemesis of this New Jersey grouping was the Royalist Governor, Benjamin Franklin's illegitimate son, William.

After spending one year studying in preparation for entering the university—mastering Greek, Latin, mathematics, and other prerequisites—Hamilton intended to go on to

Princeton. But when he was denied the right to advance at his own pace, he turned instead to King's College (today's Columbia University) in New York City, and matriculated in 1773. By the fall of 1774, when revolutionary fervor spread through the colonies in the wake of the confrontations between the British and the Boston Sons of Liberty, young Hamilton began writing and speaking in favor of the revolutionary movement. His first full pamphlet, written under a pseudonym, appeared in December 1774. It was entitled “A Full Vindication of the Measures of Congress,” and was comprised of the defense of the Non-Importation measures that had been adopted by Congress against British goods, until the blockade of the Boston port were to be lifted.

Hamilton brought to his early pamphlets, both a philosophical and a revolutionary passion, and the first signs of the understanding of statecraft and economy that would inform his later work in fighting for the U.S. Constitution, and the American System economic policies of the new nation. The 19-year-old mobilized the arguments of natural law, of freedom and government by the consent of the governed, in opposition to the British imperial policy, which was determined to maintain the American colonies as backward lands to be

looted. The issue, Hamilton argued, was one of freedom versus slavery. If the colonists were to have a future, they had to throw off the British yoke.

The young Hamilton never finished college. From January 1776 on, he was mustered into the militia, and fought throughout the next year's battles, including playing a leading role in the Battle of Trenton, at Christmastime 1776. In January 1777, he became a leading aide-de-camp to General Washington. The rest of his history, including the decisive role he played in bringing about the Constitutional Convention, winning the ratification fight, and establishing the nation's economic system as its first Treasury Secretary, is well known.

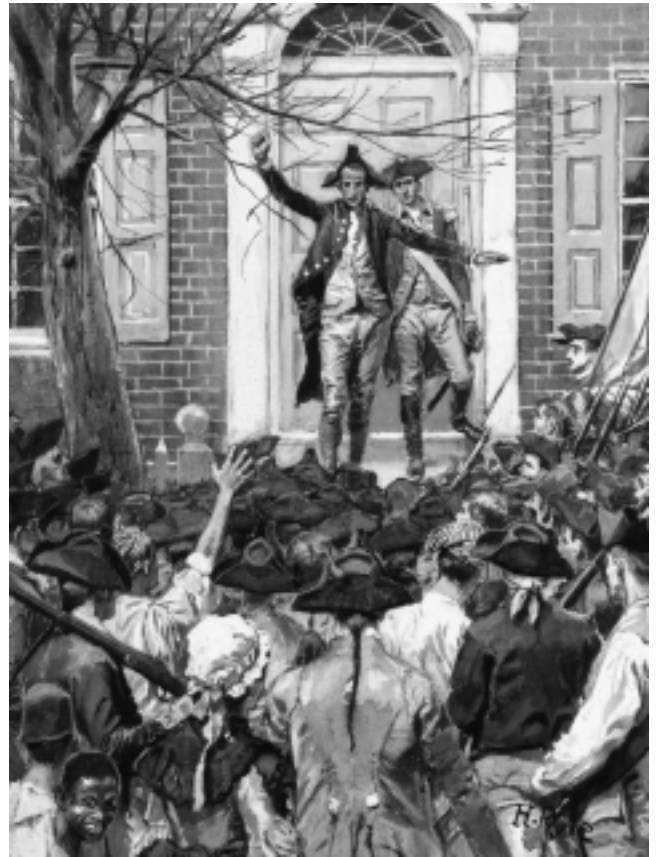
We come next to two young men among those directly recruited by Franklin from abroad—the Irish revolutionary Mathew Carey, and the French nobleman and revolutionary, the Marquis de Lafayette. Carey, who had been kicked out of Ireland for “defaming the British” when he resurrected Jonathan Swift's proposal for Irish manufactures, met Franklin and Lafayette in France in the 1780s, and acted as a propagandist for the American Revolution in Europe, until he was forced to emigrate to America. That he did with a recommendation from Franklin. Carey established himself in Philadelphia, and went into publishing, particularly in support of the nationalist economic ideas of Alexander Hamilton.

The young Lafayette, aged 20, arrived in America in July of 1777, where he volunteered to serve, without pay, with the American Army, which he did up through the Battle of Yorktown. He returned to France with the idea of replicating the American republican experiment there, only to find himself and his allies, such as Jean Sylvain Bailly, outmaneuvered by British agents.

Among the revolutionary youth directly inspired by Franklin, we must also number John Quincy Adams, son of the older revolutionary, and later President, John Adams. While too young to take part in the Revolutionary War, John Quincy was already participating in the intellectual battle by age 20. In 1787, he wrote a major defense of the Constitution.

More than any other member of this American Revolutionary Youth Movement, John Quincy Adams had applied himself to mastering the philosophical principles required for governing a republic dedicated to the improvement of the individual. Taken by his father to France in the late 1770s, Quincy Adams had the benefit of an education strongly influenced by his father's fellow diplomat, Benjamin Franklin. He had a working mastery of French, German, Latin, and Greek—and later learned Dutch and Russian, in the context of his diplomatic postings to the Netherlands and Russia. He translated great poetry, such as that of Friedrich Schiller. His first diplomatic post came when he served as secretary to America's representative in Russia in 1781—when he was only 14 years old!

Later in his political career, in which he served in the Senate and House of Representatives, and as Secretary of State, and President, John Quincy used his intellectual gifts



New York Historical Society

The most energetic of Franklin's youth organizers was, beyond doubt, Alexander Hamilton, who began writing pro-revolutionary articles at the age of 19, and never stopped until his death. Here, he addresses a mob in New York City.

and vision to define a republican foreign policy, based on the principles of the sovereign nation-state. It was also under his Presidency that the United States made major strides in promoting infrastructure development, and science.

The Virginians

The other set of leaders in the Revolutionary Youth Movement that gave us the United States of America, came from Virginia, and also played significant roles in shaping the key institutions of our nation.

James Madison, of course, teamed up with Hamilton in order to frame the Constitution, and made an essential contribution to the ratification fight in Virginia, where there was significant opposition. Madison was well known as an articulate advocate for the new Federal government. Despite his opposition to Hamilton later on, the youthful James Madison made a crucial contribution to the founding of the republic.

Then there was James Monroe, a young Virginian who played an important part in the Revolutionary War, as a member of Gen. George Washington's staff. Monroe was at Valley Forge, and went on, after the war, to become a Congressman. Although he opposed the Federal Constitution at first, he ulti-

mately became a U.S. Senator, then a diplomat, then a Virginia Governor, and finally, President of the United States for two terms (1817-25). During Monroe's time as President, he reinstated Hamilton's National Bank and American System domestic policies. On foreign policy, of course, the "community of principle" foreign policy advocated by John Quincy Adams, was endorsed and promulgated in his name (the Monroe Doctrine).

Lastly, there was John Marshall, also a part of George Washington's wartime military staff.

A few weeks after the Battle of Lexington, 19-year-old John Marshall took the leadership of the first meeting of the militia for Fauquier County, Virginia, teaching them the manual of arms, and organizing them politically for the coming war. In September 1775, the Fauquier militiamen, 100 strong, joined with those from two other counties to form the Culpeper Minutemen, who were soon ordered to Williamsburg. They decisively defeated the British in the Battle of Great Bridge on Dec. 9, 1775, the first battle of the Revolution fought in Virginia.

Immediately after the Declaration of Independence was issued. Marshall spent four years in the Continental Army, including the Winter at Valley Forge, which profoundly shaped his nationalist outlook leading him to agree with Hamilton on the need for a strong national government.

Later, Marshall served in Congress, and as Secretary of State, but his lasting contributions were made during his 35-year tenure as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, which post he assumed in 1801. Marshall's crucial decisions often reinforced, if not established, the powers of the Federal government in promoting the general welfare of the nation.

Overall, the quality of the intellectual contributions of the Virginians were not of the same order as those revolutionary youth recruited by Franklin, but they had crucial roles to play. For example, one finds the core of the American Revolutionary youth movement serving as a general staff to Gen. George Washington—including Hamilton, Monroe, Lafayette, and Marshall. Without their input and energy, Washington's task would have been impossible.

Why a Youth Movement?

Why did Benjamin Franklin, and his younger collaborators, recruit a youth movement in order to win the American republic? Did he have to do so?

The answer is yes, he did have to,—for reasons very similar to those which require Lyndon LaRouche to do the same today. The older generation which had protested (a hint of today's '68ers?) was not prepared to dedicate themselves to building a new republic, which meant mastering the ideas necessary to do so.

When Franklin came of political age, and embarked upon the path on which his intellectual sponsors, such as Cotton Mather, had sent him, he found himself in a situation of increasing isolation. The international network of Leibnizians who had been working in Europe and the United States, had

been significantly weakened by the death of their benefactress, England's Queen Anne, and the increasing degeneracy of the monarchies of Europe. Nor was it safe for him to simply confine his organizing to the American continent, because the colonies were not going to be left alone by the British, or the French, or the Spanish Empires. Indeed, with each passing decade of the 18th Century, the British imposed harsher and harsher restrictions on the American colonists, as epitomized by the Iron Act of 1750, which made it clear that industrialization would not be allowed on the Western side of the Atlantic Ocean.

Then, following the French and Indian War—really the French-British war on American soil—in 1763, the British decreed that the colonists were barred from any colonization beyond the Appalachian Mountains. They were to be continually dependent upon the Mother Country, and be satisfied with the role of raw materials producers for the hub of the Empire.

Early on, Franklin began to build a cadre of youth who would be dedicated to the idea of *doing good*, and building institutions to that end. At the age of 22, in Philadelphia, he established his *Junto*, a small club of young men, committed to discussion of how to improve themselves and the country. This circle grew enormously over the next years, both through personal contact, letters, and Franklin's printing efforts, creating a broad-ranging discussion process among thinking elements of the population that prepared the intellectual ground for the revolution to succeed. From his standpoint, it took an inordinate amount of time to succeed.

Franklin had tried, in 1753, with his Albany Plan of Union, to pull the colonies together, but this effort was sabotaged by those royalist elements who were convinced that such unity, even if it were nominally under the British Crown, would lead to the Americans getting the idea of national existence, and independence. Franklin's conception of development—involving the fostering of inventions and manufactures, population growth, and scientific knowledge—was already well known to the imperialists, and they were determined that it would not go ahead.

But Franklin's problem was obviously not simply with the British. He was unable to mobilize sufficient forces within his own nascent country, to present a united, powerful front to London. While many of his countrymen were angered by the British measures of control, including increased taxation, they figured that they were "getting along" well enough, not to raise a fuss. After all, challenging the royal prerogative carried the potential penalty of a capital charge of *treason*. You had to really believe that what you were fighting for, was worth dying for, if you were going to wage a serious fight.

The forces who would take the battle against British imperial control that seriously, would have to be a new generation, the youth.

Victory for Unalienable Rights

Two apparently contradictory evaluations of the American colonial population in the period of 1774-87 have been



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Franklin's 1754 cartoon, "Join, or Die," was issued in support of the Albany Plan of Union, but was not actually effective until approximately 20 years later, when a new generation came on the scene.

reported by observers at the time. On the one hand, leaders such as John Adams reported that the Revolution against the British monarchy, and the system of arbitrary rule which it represented, had already been made in the hearts and minds of the population, before the first shot was ever fired. On the other hand, it was also clear that a very small proportion of the population was of a mind to upset their lives, and those of their families, by joining an openly revolutionary movement. It has been estimated that only *one-third* of Americans actually actively supported the revolution against the "mother" country.

Yet, a unique republican Revolution did occur, and it was consolidated in the formation of a national government with a commitment to the general welfare, through the adoption of the Constitution of the United States. How did it happen?

A movement led by the youth provided an indefatigable impetus for the battle. In no case is this clearer than in the work of Alexander Hamilton, who, in collaboration with other young people and revolutionaries in New York City, was in a state of constant mobilization, from 1774 forward. When the royalists put out propaganda against the actions of the Continental Congress, it was Hamilton who wrote the pamphlets and articles to refute them. When Washington's Revolution was threatened with decimation by the desertion of the weak-minded, it was not only the older revolutionary Thomas Paine (born 1737) who rallied the population in support of a continuing fight, but also the likes of Hamilton, who engaged in continuous correspondence, and article-writing, in order to ensure that demoralization did not set in, and defeat the revolutionary forces. One of Hamilton's major targets was the Congress itself, which was constantly failing to provide the necessary support for the Army.

Many of Hamilton's proposals were not accepted, of course. One was that which he cooked up with another young

man, John Laurens, the son of the President of Continental Congress. In 1777, the two got together to discuss the idea of setting up a regiment of slaves, who would be given their freedom at the conclusion of the war. Laurens, a South Carolinian, proposed that he lead the regiment.

Unfortunately, this proposal was rejected, and instead, it was the British who mobilized the huge slave population of the South to join the British Army in exchange for their freedom. One can only imagine how different the history of this nation might have been, if youth with the anti-slavery ideas of Hamilton and Laurens, had succeeded in their early plans, and brought them into the Constitutional Convention, with an enhanced ability to back the pro-slavery forces into a corner.

But, for all the failures Hamilton suffered, he and other young revolutionaries scored many more successes—keeping the Army together, winning crucial battles (Hamilton and Lafayette were leaders in at least two important ones), and then carrying out the political battles to pull the nation together under the Constitution.

It should be noted, for example, that Virginia and New York were the two most divided states, when it came to ratifying the Constitution. The authors of the Federalist Papers—primarily Hamilton and Madison, the self-appointed standard-bearers—had determined that, even if two-thirds of the states ratified, without the two largest—New York and Virginia—the Union would be fatally weak. Thus, each personally waged the battle for ratification in his state, and Madison arranged to send a special courier to Poughkeepsie, New York, where the state convention was being held, to tilt the balance with the news that Virginia had approved the Constitution. Although forced to add an amendment, appending a Bill of Rights, the New York convention passed the Constitution, by a vote of 30 to 27.

Who else could have mustered this energy, the depth of argument, the breadth of strategy, but a core of young people who realized that, without a Constitution providing institutions that would defend the general welfare of the nation as a whole, the sacrifice of the Revolution would have been in vain?

There is no question but that LaRouche's Youth Movement has more intellectual depth than that of the original American Revolution. Standing on their shoulders, and those of later great American leaders, like Lincoln and FDR, who followed them, LaRouche has made more fundamental breakthroughs in science and statecraft than even Franklin, and worked to educate his youth movement with a rigor Franklin did not employ.

But every American, yes, every citizen on this planet, owes an immeasurable debt to the youth movement which made the American Revolution, based on its commitment to proving, as Alexander Hamilton said, that governments can be formed on the basis of reason, not force, and that a republican form of government can prevail, as a model for all mankind.