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*231 years of Independence*

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## Freemasonry and the American Revolution



Thomas Jefferson was not a Freemason  
nor was he part of any *Illuminati* Conspiracy

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One of the core delusions of American Freemasons is that Freemasonry played a pivotal role in the American Revolution. Masonic efforts to promote this notion have successfully created a mythology that has seeped into mainstream historical texts. Gordon S. Wood reiterates the essential features of American Freemasonry's revolutionary mythology in a 'Pulitzer Prize' winning book, "*The Radicalism of the American Revolution*". Mr. Wood sets the stage for his story by discussing the cosmopolitan nature of the American Revolution.

The truth was, said Thomas Paine in *Common Sense*, that Americans were the most cosmopolitan people in the world. They surmounted all local prejudices. They regarded everyone from different nations as their countryman and ignored neighborhoods, towns, and countries as "distinctions too limited for continental minds."... America, by uniting the different kindred of the earth, had a duty to eradicate national prejudices and to make all humanity members of one extensive family.[1]

Mr. Wood then goes on to assert '*the importance of Masonry for the American Revolution*':

The institution that best embodied these ideals of sociability and cosmopolitanism was Freemasonry. It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of Masonry for the American Revolution. It not only created national icons that are still with us; it brought people together in new ways and helped fulfill the republican dream of reorganizing social relationships. For thousands of Americans, it was a major means by which they participated directly in the Enlightenment.

Freemasonry took on its modern role in Great Britain at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The first Grand Lodge was formed in London in 1717. By mid-century, English Masonry was strong enough to provide inspiration and example to a worldwide movement. Although Masonry first appeared in the North American colonies in the 1730s, it grew slowly until mid-century, when membership suddenly picked up. By the eve of the Revolution there were dozens of lodges up and down the continent. Many of the revolutionary leaders, including Washington, Franklin, Samuel Adams, Otis, Richard Henry Lee, Madison, and Hamilton, were members of the fraternity. The Revolution disrupted the organization but revitalized the movement; in the following decades Masonry exploded in numbers, fed by hosts of new recruits from deeper levels of the society. There were twenty-one lodges in Massachusetts by 1779; in the next twenty years fifty new ones were created, reaching out to embrace even small isolated communities on the frontiers of the state. Everywhere the same expansion took place. Masonry transformed the social landscape of the early Republic.

While Mr. Wood's story is does a great job promoting Freemasonry, it plays fast and loose with the truth. Mr. Wood doesn't get his basic facts straight when he lists Richard Henry Lee, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton as Masons. In the book "*Freemasonry in American History*" the Masonic Scholar Allen E. Roberts specifically states that Hamilton and Lee were not Masons and that there is 'no proof' Madison was a Mason. Mr. Roberts mentions Samuel Adams in his book but does not cite him as a Mason. This omission suggests there is no evidence to support claims for Samuel Adams' membership in the Masonic fraternity. The errors made by Mr. Wood suggest he has fallen under the influence of Masonic mythologists and, like many Masons, grossly exaggerated '*the importance of Masonry for the American Revolution*' by misleading people about the Masonic affiliations of some important American Revolutionaries.[3]

While some Freemasons joined the Revolutionary cause, the vast majorities of American Revolutionaries were not members of the Masonic fraternity. Important Revolutionary leaders like Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, John Adams, and Patrick Henry were not Freemasons. Of the fifty-six signers Declaration of Independence only eight or nine can be shown to have been Freemasons.

While Masons promote George Washington's membership and sometimes allege his persevering zeal for the Masonic fraternity, his commitment to the organization is unclear. In 1798 Washington wrote to a Reverend Synder , "*to correct an error you have run into, of my presiding over the English Lodges in this country. The fact is I preside over none, nor have I been in one more than once or twice in the last thirty years.*"

Benjamin Franklin was a Freemason whose unique socializing skills included attending gatherings of the English Hell Fire Club, a secret society focused on sex, pornography and politics.[6] When a relation asked about becoming a Mason, Franklin replied with his characteristic humor and candor, "*one fool in any family is enough.*" General Lafayette, another Mason, does not appear to have joined (been recruited into?) a French Masonic lodge until the Revolutionary war was virtually over. After the war Masons lavished General Lafayette with higher Masonic degrees. General Lafayette once remarked with irony, as he was pulled around New York, "*To-morrow, I am to visit the schools; I am to dine with the Mayor; and in the evening, I suppose, I am to be made VERY WISE by the Masons.*"[7] Another notable revolutionary Freemason was the traitor Benedict Arnold.[8]

Freemasonry was a surrogate religion for an Enlightenment suspicious of traditional Christianity. It offered ritual, mystery, and congregativeness without the enthusiasm and sectarian bigotry of organized religion. But Masonry was not only an enlightened institution; it was a republican one as well. It repudiated the monarchical hierarchy of family and favoritism and created a new hierarchical order that rested on "real Worth and personal Merit" and "brotherly affection and sincerity. " The Masonic lodges, declared Charles Brockwell in 1750, were a means by which men who differed in everyday affairs, even in occupation, social rank, and religion, could "all meet amicably, and converse sociably together." There in the lodges "we all discover no estrangement of behavior, nor

alienation of affection. " Masonry was looking for the lowest common denominator of unity and harmony in a society increasingly diverse and fragmented. It became "the Center of Union and the means of conciliating friendship among men that might otherwise have remained at perpetual distance." That strangers, removed from their families and neighbors, could come together in such brotherly love seemed a vindication of the enlightened hope that the force of love might indeed be made to flow outward from the self. A Mason found himself "belonging, not to one particular place only, but to places without number, and in almost every quarter of the globe; to whom, by a kind of universal language, he can make himself known?and from whom we can, if in distress, be sure to receive relief and protection." This was the enlightened cosmopolitan dream.

After stripping away the spin, one finds, Mr. Wood has identified some key features of post-Revolutionary War Freemasonry. In particular:

- Freemasonry worked to create '*a new hierarchical order*'
- Freemasonry afforded *members* an extended support network
- Freemasonry was a '*surrogate religion*'
- Freemasonry promoted itself as '*enlightened*', while characterizing Christian belief as '*sectarian bigotry*'

While Mr. Wood describes Freemasonry as a '*surrogate religion*', an acknowledged Mason once described the organization as an all-encompassing '*Universal Religion*'.<sup>[10]</sup> The Masons regularly raise charges of bigotry and hate mongering for any person or organization that might question the beliefs and mythology of their '*surrogate religion*'. To characterize organized religion as '*sectarian bigotry*' is hypocrisy when discussing American Masonic lodges that have served as a bulwark of institutionalized sexism and racial segregation with their separate Prince Hall Lodges for African Americans.<sup>[11]</sup> It also works to position organized Christian religion as an ethical inferior to Freemasonry. Positioning Freemasonry as ethically superior to organized Christian religion and any other religious system of belief is consistent with the objective of Masons to position themselves at the top of a social hierarchy. It has nothing to do with the vision of religious freedom espoused by revolutionaries, like Thomas Jefferson.