

# Aula 3

## THE INVENTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

### OBJETIVOS

- Ao final desta aula, o aluno deverá:
- Conhecer os principais personagens da Revolução Norte-Americana e sua importância em todo o processo;
  - Reconhecer e identificar os discursos que deram sustentação à invenção discursiva dos Estados Unidos como nação.

### PRÉ-REQUISITOS

- Familiaridade com os períodos formativos da literatura inglesa;
- Conceitos-chave da Teoria da Literatura e da história literária.
- Noções de história dos Estados Unidos.

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### INTRODUÇÃO

As everybody knows, all nations use to celebrate their origins. The United States are not different. However, in their myth of origin, it has the singularity of considering this founding moment the work of a single generation. This doesn't occur with the European nations. In the case of Britain, as we have seen in previous courses, it covers the Anglo-Saxon and Norman invasions, the Magna Carta (1215), the Glorious Revolution (1688) and the Act of Union (1707). According to Ray Raphael (2014, p. 1-2), China's founding includes the rise of ancient dynasties, the Nationalist Revolution in 1911 and the Communist Revolution in 1949. Mexico, in turn, has two founding moments, independence in 1821 and revolution in the early twentieth century, two events separated by ninety years. Canada's case is so uncommon that it hardly has a story to tell. In Brasil, we have 1500, the year of the coming of Cabral; 1822, the independence, the founding of Brazilian Republic, in 1889, and so on.

North-American colonists, in turn, resisted British oppression, fought a war, achieved independence and established their own government, marking once and for all a separate identity for the people of the United States. Nowadays, politicians always talk about "our founders" in support of some cause which generally has nothing to do with the North-American experience at the end of the eighteenth century. Like any politician around the world, they use the past in the service of a political present.

### DESENVOLVIMENTO

The many stories about the American Revolution were communicated, at first, by word of mouth, providing a fertile ground for the invention of history. For decades and then centuries, men and women told and retold the story, enriching their memories and removing what was too painful to recall, at the same time they were embellishing what could be seen as heroic. At funerals or Fourth of July celebrations, orators used tales of the Revolution in their rhetoric. As Ernest Renan used to say:

"Forgetting, I would even say historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation and it is for this reason that the progress of historical studies often poses a threat to nationality. Historical inquiry, in effect, throws light on the violent acts that have taken place at the origin of every political formation, even those that have been the most benevolent in their consequences. Unity is always brutally established. The reunion of northern and southern France was the result of a campaign of terror and extermination that

continued for nearly a century. The king of France was, if I dare say so, the ideal type of the secular crystallizer and produced the most perfect national unity there had ever been. However, having been seen from too close, the king of France lost his prestige; the nation that he had built damned him and, today, only cultivated minds know what he was worth and what he did” (RENAN, 2006, p. 11).

In the early nineteenth century, the eloquent Romantic paintings used to feed the popular imagination offering unforgettable images of battles and pompous political moments. The younger generations, viewing reproductions of these images in popular histories and textbooks, helped to create a collective “memory” of the Revolution. Nowadays, the two most famous pictorial representations of the American Revolution are John Trumbull’s 1818 painting *Declaration of Independence* and Emanuel Leutze’s 1851 *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, even though there was no ceremonial signing of the Declaration on July 4, 1776, the date mistakenly used to Trumbull’s painting.



John Trumbull's Declaration of Independence is a 12-by-18-foot (3.7 by 5.5 m) oil-on-canvas painting in the United States Capitol Rotunda that depicts the presentation of the draft of the Declaration of Independence to Congress. It was based on a much smaller version of the same scene, presently held by the Yale University Art Gallery. Trumbull painted many of the figures in the picture from life, and visited Independence Hall to depict the chamber where the Second Continental Congress met. The oil-on-canvas work was commissioned in 1817, purchased in 1819, and placed in the rotunda in 1826. Fonte: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Declaration\\_of\\_Independence\\_\(Trumbull\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Declaration_of_Independence_(Trumbull))



Washington Crossing the Delaware is an 1851 oil-on-canvas painting by the German American artist Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze. It commemorates General George Washington's crossing of the Delaware River on the night of December 25–26, 1776, during the American Revolutionary War. That action was the first move in a surprise attack against the Hessian forces at Trenton, New Jersey, in the Battle of Trenton on the morning of December 26. Fonte: <https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/content/washington-crossing-delaware-emanuel-leutze-1851>

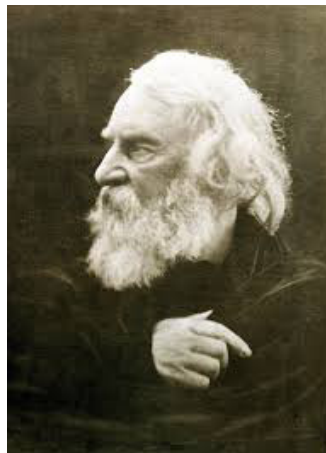
Fiction also played a very important part. Shortly after the Revolutionary War, **Charles Thomson**, secretary of the Continental Congress, wrote his own history about the conflict. So the “romance” began. Soon writers and orators transformed a bloody war into beautiful heroic tales. It is important to say that most of the stories were created one hundred years after the events they describe. **Paul Revere** was known only in local circles until 1861, when **Longfellow** made him immortal by distorting every detail of his famous ride. Patrick Henry's “liberty or death” speech, in turn, first appeared in print in 1817, forty-two years after he supposedly uttered those words. The “shot heard 'round the world” did not become known by that name until 1836, sixty-one years after it was “heard”. And there are many other cases: **Samuel Adams** was only revived as the mastermind of the Revolution three-quarters of a century after the fact. **Thomas Jefferson** was seen as the architect of American “equality” only when **Abraham Lincoln** assigned him that role, four score and seven years later.



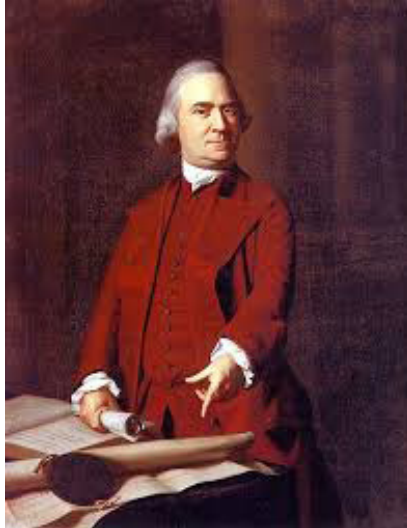
Charles Thomson (1729-1824) was an Irish-born Patriot leader in Philadelphia during the American Revolution and the secretary of the Continental Congress (1774-1789) throughout its existence. Fonte: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles\\_Thomson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Thomson)



Paul Revere (1734-1818) was an American silversmith, engraver, early industrialist, and a Patriot in the American Revolution. He is best known for his midnight ride to alert the colonial militia in April 1775 to the approach of British forces before the battles of Lexington and Concord, as dramatized in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, "Paul Revere's Ride" (1861). Fonte: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul\\_Revere](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Revere)



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) was an American poet and educator whose works include "Paul Revere's Ride", "The Song of Hiawatha" and "Evangeline". He was also the first American to translate Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, and was one of the five Fireside Poets from New England. Fonte: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry\\_Wadsworth\\_Longfellow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Wadsworth_Longfellow)



Samuel Adams (1722-1803) was an American statesman, political philosopher, and one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. He was a politician in colonial Massachusetts, a leader of the movement that became the American Revolution, and one of the architects of the principles of American republicanism that shaped the political culture of the United States. He was a second cousin to fellow Founding Father, President John Adams. Fonte: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel\\_Adams](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Adams)



Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) was an American Founding Father who was the principal author of the Declaration of Independence and later served as the third President of the United States from 1801 to 1809. Previously, he was elected the second Vice President of the United States, serving under John Adams from 1797 to 1801. A proponent of democracy, republicanism, and individual rights motivating American colonists to break from Great Britain and form a new nation, he produced formative documents and decisions at both the state and national level. He was a land owner and farmer. Fonte: <https://alexylispaces.wordpress.com/2013/02/18/%E2%80%A2thomas-jefferson-1743-1826/>

These stories still persist in textbooks and popular histories, despite the advances in recent historiography Ray Raphael says that there are three reasons for this survival: they give the people a collective identity, they make good stories and we think they are patriotic. That's because everybody likes to hear stories of any nation's beginnings. Few North-Americans read about the Revolutionary War or World War II without identifying with our

side. George Washington, we are told in many ways, is the father of our country, whether our forebears came from England, Poland, or Vietnam.

The revolutionary heroes then represent the ideal Americans. Of course this narrative follows the pattern of a romantic heroic story, “forgetting”, or re-inventing the past in order to create a new version of the facts. And one important fact is that the United States of America was created, as a nation, out of a work of hundreds of thousands of people, although these people are supplanted by the mythical tale of independence. In other words, the United States were founded by the revolutionary activities of people who had learned the power of working together, and not by isolated acts of an individual hero. Thus, its protagonists are too many and too real to be contained in simple morality tales.

**The American Revolution (1)** against Britain (1775-1783) was the first modern war against a colonial power. The triumph of American independence seemed to many – during that time and nowadays – a sign that the United States were destined for greatness. American books then became reviewed in England. As the North-Americans writers were very conscious of their dependence on English literary models, the search for a native and then national literature became an obsession.

Ver glossário no final da Aula

Colonial writers of the revolutionary generation had been born English, had grown to maturity as English citizens, and had cultivated English modes of thought and English fashions in dress and behavior. They had to invent their Americanness. Fifty years after their fame in England, English neoclassic writers – such as Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, Oliver Goldsmith, and Samuel Johnson – were still imitated everywhere in America. Until 1825, most American authors paid printers to publish their work. **Charles Brockden Brown** is a good example. Author of several gothic romances, he was the first author to attempt to live from his writing. But he ended up in poverty.





Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810) was an American novelist, historian, and editor of the Early National period. He is generally regarded by scholars as the most important American novelist before James Fenimore Cooper. He is the most frequently studied and republished practitioner of the “early American novel”, or the US novel between 1789 and roughly 1820. Although Brown was not the first American novelist, as some early criticism claimed, the breadth and complexity of his achievement as a writer in multiple genres (novels, short stories, essays and periodical writings of every sort, poetry, historiography, reviews) makes him a crucial figure in US literature and culture of the 1790s and first decade of the 19th century, and a significant public intellectual in the wider Atlantic print culture and public sphere of the era of the French Revolution. Fonte: <http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo/charles-brockden-brown-1771-1810-american.html>

The lack of an audience was another problem. The reading public preferred English works. Only journalism offered financial remuneration, but the mass audience wanted light, undemanding verse and short topical essays. The absence of copyright laws was the main cause of literary stagnation. Thus, the unauthorized reprinting of foreign books was seen as a service to the colonies, as well as a source of profit for printers like Franklin, who reprinted works of the European classics.

### THE AMERICAN ENLIGHTENMENT

The 18th-century North-American Enlightenment was a movement marked by an emphasis on rationality – instead of tradition –, scientific inquiry – instead of unquestioning religious dogma – and representative government – instead of monarchy. The most important Enlightenment thinkers and writers of the period are: Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) and **Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur** (1735-1813).





Michel Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur (1735-1813), naturalized in New York as John Hector St. John, was a French-American writer. He was born in Caen, Normandy, France, to the Comte and Comtesse de Crèvecoeur (Count and Countess of Crèvecoeur). Fonte: <https://www.granger.com/popuppreview.asp?image=0065909>

It is not a surprise, then, that the “literary” writing was supplanted by political writing. In poetry, **Neoclassicism (2)** was at its height. The epic, in particular, exerted a fatal attraction. That is why the North-American literary patriots felt that the great American Revolution they dreamed about was better represented in a long, dramatic narrative poem in elevated language, celebrating the great deeds of a legendary hero. As was the case in England, satirical poetry was better than serious verse, something that encouraged American poets to use their natural voices instead of trying to imitate Homer and and Virgil. The first important fiction writers, widely recognized today, were **Charles Brockden Brown, Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper.**

Ver glossário no final da Aula



Washington Irving (1783-1859) was an American short story writer, essayist, biographer, historian, and diplomat of the early 19th century. He is best known for his short stories “Rip Van Winkle” (1819) and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (1820), both of which appear in his book *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* His historical works include biographies of George Washington, Oliver Goldsmith, and Muhammad, and several histories of 15th-century Spain dealing with subjects such as Christopher Columbus, the Moors and the Alhambra. Irving served as the U.S. ambassador to Spain from 1842 to 1846. Fonte: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washington\\_Irving](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washington_Irving)



James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) was a prolific and popular American writer of the early 19th century. His historical romances of frontier and Indian life in the early American days created a unique form of American literature. He lived most of his life in Cooperstown, New York, which was founded by his father William on property that he owned. Cooper was a lifelong member of the Episcopal Church and, in his later years, contributed generously to it. He attended Yale University for three years, where he was a member of the Linonian Society, but was expelled for misbehavior. Fonte: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Fenimore\\_Cooper](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Fenimore_Cooper)

### WOMEN AND MINORITIES

The colonial period produced several women writers of note, although the revolutionary era had nothing to do with the work of women and minorities. Colonial women such as **Anne Bradstreet**, **Anne Hutchinson** and **Sarah Kemble Knight** exerted considerable social and literary influence. But as cultural institutions became formalized in the new republic, women and minorities gradually were excluded from them. Nonetheless, a woman like Susanna Rowson (c. 1762- 1824) could appear. She was one of America's first professional novelists. Another long-forgotten novelist was Hannah Foster (1758- 1840), whose best-selling novel, *The Coquette* (1797), was about a young woman torn between virtue and temptation, an old recipe already in use in France and England. Judith Sargent Murray (1751-1820) published under a man's name to secure serious attention for her works. Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814) was a poet, historian, dramatist, satirist and patriot. All at the same time.



Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672), was the most prominent of early English poets of North America and first writer in England's North American colonies to be published. She is the first Puritan figure in American Literature and notable for her large corpus of poetry, as well as personal writings published posthumously. Fonte: <https://bjws.blogspot.com.br/2015/11/puritan-poet-anne-bradstreet-c1612-1672.html>



Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643) was a Puritan spiritual adviser, mother of 15, and an important participant in the Antinomian Controversy which shook the infant Massachusetts Bay Colony from 1636 to 1638. Her strong religious convictions were at odds with the established Puritan clergy in the Boston area, and her popularity and charisma helped create a theological schism that threatened to destroy the Puritans' religious community in New England. She was eventually tried and convicted, then banished from the colony with many of her supporters. Fonte: <https://www.geni.com/people/Anne-Hutchinson/6000000005751454048>



Sarah Kemble Knight (1666-1727) was a teacher and businesswoman, who is remembered for a brief diary of a journey from Boston, Massachusetts Bay Colony, to New York City, Province of New York, in 1704–1705, which provides us with one of the few first-hand-accounts of travel conditions in Connecticut during colonial times. Fonte: <http://litblogger.org/kathryn50973/2014/09/29/snakes-whyd-it-have-to-be-snakes/>

## CONCLUSÃO

The American Enlightenment, in the eighteenth century, can be considered a period of intellectual ferment in what was coming to be the United States of America which led to the North-American Revolution and the creation of the North-American Republic. It was, of course, influenced by the 18th-century European Enlightenment. It applied scientific reasoning to politics, science, and religion and promoted religious tolerance. Besides, it restored literature, arts, and music as important disciplines of study in the new founded colleges. A kind of non-denominational moral philosophy replaced theology in many colleges. Puritan colleges, such as the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) and Harvard University, reformed their curricula to include natural philosophy (science), modern astronomy, and mathematics. We can say that the country, from this time on, was up to date in relation to what was happening in Europe and other parts of the world.



## RESUMO

The American Revolution emphasized differences that had been growing between American and British political concepts. As the colonists moved to the belief that rebellion was inevitable, fought the bitter war and worked to found the new nation's government, they were influenced by a number of very effective political writers, such as Samuel Adams, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine. Thus, this was a period of political writing, rather than literary production, although some poets and novelists helped to create the atmosphere of the period, being at the same time a reflection and a cause of the revolutionary moment.



## ATIVIDADES

In a political revolution, the discourses and stories about it are as important as military battles. How can you explain that?

## COMENTÁRIO SOBRE AS ATIVIDADES

Esta atividade tem por finalidade principal fazer você construir uma síntese dos principais conteúdos desta nossa terceira Aula, de modo a compreender criticamente o processo de constituição dos Estados Unidos como nação.



## PRÓXIMA AULA

O Romantismo e a narrativa das nações

## GLOSSÁRIO

**(1) American Revolution:** The American Revolution was a colonial revolt that took place between 1765 and 1783. The American Patriots in the Thirteen Colonies won independence from Great Britain, becoming the United States of America. In alliance with France and others it defeated the British in the American Revolutionary War.

**(2) Neoclassicism:** Neoclassicism is the name given to Western movements in the decorative and visual arts, literature, theatre, music, and architecture that draw inspiration from the “classical” art and culture of Ancient Greece or Ancient Rome. Neoclassicism was born in Rome in the mid-18th century, but its popularity spread all over Europe, as a generation of European art students finished their Grand Tour and returned from Italy to their home countries with newly rediscovered Greco-Roman ideals. The main Neoclassical movement coincided with the 18th-century Age of Enlightenment, and continued into the early 19th century, laterally competing with Romanticism. In architecture, the style continued throughout the 19th, 20th and up to the 21st century.

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