



Written by [Becky Akers](#) on January 7, 2010

Times That Try Men's Souls

Leviathan's lackeys grope passengers at airports while their bosses salivate to virtually strip-search travelers. Former bureaucrats suggest that we crack down on "homegrown terrorists" (sic for "dissidents") rather than that the Feds should refrain from meddling overseas. Our rulers are nationalizing industries — first the banks, now medical insurance. The two political gangs subjugating us compete to see which can impose the more merciless police-state.

These are dark days for liberty. Indeed, they may be the darkest the so-called land of the free has ever faced. Government by its nature is overweening, and plenty of dictators have reigned over us: had Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, or almost any other politician from this or the last century been born in Germany, Russia, or China, their thievery and bloodlust would have splashed across the headlines as vividly as Hitler's, Stalin's, and Mao's. Tyrants require a statist *zeitgeist* and national tolerance of their wickedness as much as they do armed brutality.



Still, our rulers grow increasingly brazen as they herd us towards totalitarianism. Their surveillance, Tasers, and haughtiness have turned citizens into serfs — and [those few Americans who notice and care into "domestic terrorists."](#) It's easy to despair, tempting to give up. But what would have happened had other "domestic terrorists" marched home 233 years ago this month?

Let's be clear: the Founding Fathers neither confronted nor could have conceived of the threats now throttling liberty. No bureaucrat would have presumed to rifle a lady's baggage as she boarded a ferry, let alone molest her with a ["pat down" that "include\[s\]"](#) the breast area of women and the groin area of both men and women," a la federal airport screeners. And unless it wanted instant revolution, the British Empire would never dare compel colonists to surrender their children for daily indoctrination, prohibit them from driving their carriages without a license, or [decree the size of their buckets](#) lest they waste water.

That makes the war our ancestors fought all the more remarkable: they would die rather than accept the government's "right" to tax them on a few items most colonists bought infrequently, to restrict them from settling past the Appalachian mountains (which enticed few families anyway, given the grisly fate awaiting invaders of Indian country), and occasionally cut constitutional corners in Parliament.

That war had raged for nineteen months by the time the snowstorms of December 1776 did. And the



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first year had been a glorious one, proof enough for any Patriot that his Cause was just. Rebels took arms against the Empire's bullies at Lexington and Concord — and killed or wounded a staggering 20 percent of them. Two months later, they inflicted half again as many casualties at Bunker Hill. Technically, the colonists lost the battle, but who cared? "I wish we could sell them another hill at the same price," gloated Nathanael Greene, an officer from Rhode Island who later sold the South so dearly it cost the Redcoats the war.

The colonists found a hero befitting their courage when General George Washington took command just after Bunker Hill. He and the militia he meant to mold into an army prevented the enemy from pillaging the countryside by besieging them in Boston until the next spring. Then they gleefully watched them sail away. Temporarily, at least, American soil sheltered not a single Redcoat.

[A Declaration in July gloriously defined the Cause](#): "All men...are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights....To secure these rights, governments are instituted among men....Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends...it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government..."

And then things imploded.

Typhus devastated Washington's Continentals that summer, and the Redcoats easily defeated the weakened, amateur army in Brooklyn the last week of August. That began a game of "Bo-Peep," in the words of [British Captain William Bamford](#): "As we go forward into the country the rebels fly before us, and when we come back they always follow us ... They will neither fight nor totally run away ..."

But it was a game only to the properly outfitted, better-fed and -paid British officer as throngs of Redcoats chased the rebels through New York and New Jersey into Pennsylvania. To the shivering, hungry, outnumbered Continental fearing a noose or the forfeiture of his farm or shop if he lost that race, the fall and winter of 1776 were "the times that try men's souls." Both the year and their enlistments were expiring: many of those tried souls shaved a few weeks off their term by deserting, until a scant 3000 American troops remained against 12,000 Redcoats. Washington vainly pleaded for re-enlistments or replacements, until even he was demoralized. Surveying the enemy's occupation of New Jersey, and the "disaffection and want of spirit and fortitude" of "the inhabitants," who, "instead of resistance, are offering submission" to the British government, he wrote a cousin, "I think the game will be pretty well up."

Then came his impossible and essential victory at Trenton. Washington had little choice: if the Delaware River froze, the Redcoats would cross and conquer. So he attacked before they could. Overnight, with rain, sleet, and snow pelting them, 2400 Continentals converged on 1000 German mercenaries snoring off their Christmas punch. Barefoot soldiers killed and wounded about 100 Hessians and captured the rest.

The victory electrified Patriots. "This affair has given such amazing spirit to our people," one wrote, "that you might do anything or go anywhere with them. We have vast numbers of fine militia coming in momentarily."

But Washington still had too few rebels to hold a town in a state the government owned. So the Continentals fled back across the river, and the General renewed his requests for more men. He must regain Trenton and then attack Princeton and New Brunswick, where sat British pay-chests containing £70,000, to secure Pennsylvania: the road running through those villages led to Philadelphia.

But despite Trenton's stellar victory and those "vast numbers of fine militia," Washington's pleas for



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more service initially fell on deaf ears: "General Washington," a sergeant recalled, "having now but a handful of men and many of them new recruits in which he could place but little confidence, ordered our regiment to be paraded and personally addressed us, urging that we should stay a month longer.

"... in the most affectionate manner [he] entreated us... The drums beat for volunteers, but not a man turned out. The soldiers, worn down with fatigue and privations, had their hearts fixed on home...

"The General ... address[ed] us again...'My brave fellows, you have done all I asked you to do, and more than could be reasonably expected. But your country is at stake, your wives, your houses, and all that you hold dear.

'You have worn yourselves out with fatigues and hardships, but we know not how to spare you. If you will consent to stay only one month longer, you will render that service to the cause of liberty and to your country which you probably never can do under any other circumstances....'

"The drums beat a second time...

"A few stepped forth, and their example was immediately followed by nearly all who were fit for duty...

"An officer inquired of the General if these men should be enrolled. He replied, 'No! Men who will volunteer in such a case as this need no enrollment to keep them to their duty.'"

We shouldn't either. Continue to hope. Daily pray the Almighty to smash our evil empire while firing American hearts and minds for liberty. And never allow discouragement to silence your enthusiasm for freedom. You may be the only "book" your family and friends ever read on the subject: don't underestimate your influence.

Retreating with the rebels across New Jersey that desperate autumn, a British-corset-maker-turned-American-soldier named Tom Paine wrote, "Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph...Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods, and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated."

Amen, and amen.



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