

**AMERICA GROWS UP**

***Books by  
Gerald W. Johnson***

***A HISTORY FOR PETER***

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***GOVERNMENT***

***The Presidency***

***The Congress***

***The Supreme Court***

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# AMERICA GROWS UP

by

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# *America Grows Up*



## CHAPTER ONE

# *The Thirteen Quarrel*

IN THE YEAR 1776 on the first day of July nobody denied that the man who was king of England was also king of all the British colonies on the continent of North America. In fact, no one had thought of denying it in all the years since the first British settlement had been established at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. But on the fourth day of July, 1776, it was denied, loudly and publicly. On that day delegates sent by thirteen colonies to a meeting in Philadelphia signed a Declaration of Independence, stating that, "These colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states."

It took five years of hard fighting, and two years more of arguing and disputing, to make this statement true, even in part; and it never has been entirely true. Seven years later, in 1783, the British signed a treaty admitting that their king had no more authority over the thirteen colonies. That

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did make them free and independent of the British Empire, but it did not make them independent of each other.

Wise men knew it, but there never has been a country in which everyone was wise. In 1783 most of the people, if they had been asked about it, would have said that Virginia was no more dependent upon Massachusetts, or Pennsylvania upon North Carolina, than France was upon Spain. The thirteen colonies had fought together against the king, but France and Spain had also fought against him, yet they still remained independent of each other.

To us who are living today the idea that the thirteen colonies could become thirteen independent nations is so silly that we wonder why sane men ever believed such nonsense. But some people did. Most wise men, however, said, "Certainly the thirteen United States are one country." But when it came to acting like one country, nothing was done.

Up to 1776, the people of the different colonies had little contact with each other. If you wanted to go from one colony to another (except for the four small ones in New England) you usually went by ship on the Atlantic Ocean; and once aboard at Charleston or Annapolis, for example, it was

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about as easy to go east to London as to go north to Boston. Actually it was less dangerous, because sailing along the Atlantic coast through fogs and storms was tricky work.

However, when the Revolutionary War began, the colonies knew they had to stand together, or be beaten one at a time. As far back as 1774, the various colonies had sent men to represent them at a meeting in Philadelphia. Since this congress spoke not for one colony but for all, they called it the Continental Congress. Later the name was changed to the United States in Congress Assembled.

This congress had drawn up a set of rules that every state finally agreed to, although it was 1781 and the war was practically over before the last one, Maryland, came in. These rules were called the Articles of Confederation, and they set up a kind of government for the whole country, but not a very good one. When the peace treaty was signed in 1783, the Americans suddenly discovered that they didn't know what to do next.

It was not so much that nobody had any ideas as that everybody had too many ideas. Some people wanted to make George Washington, who had been Commander in Chief of the American Army, the king of America, but he put a stop to that very

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quickly. Then some thought we should choose a French or German prince—nobody wanted an English prince—and make him king. Others were against having a king, but didn't know exactly what they did want. So many people had so many different ideas of what should be done that nothing was done for several years.

In England and other countries of Europe the kings and lords and officers of state looked on at this quarreling and said, "We told you so. The common people can't manage a country. This thing they call the United States of America will soon fall apart and then we can move in and bring them under a king again; if not the king of England, then the king of France, or some other. No country can manage for long without a king."

A great many Americans thought they were right. No country ever had managed without a king. Some had tried it, in times past, but they had always gone back to a king.

There had always been a few people, not only in this country but in Europe before America was discovered, who would not admit that anything had to be so just because it had always been so. These people asked why one man should have the right to give orders that all the others were bound

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to obey; and they found that the main reason was that the others were afraid not to obey. If they lost their fear, then there would no longer be any reason for a king.

However, it was not true and never had been true that Americans had obeyed the king only because they were afraid not to. That was part of it, but not all. In England for a great many years, for hundreds of years, the people had been growing less and less afraid of the king's soldiers, but more and more afraid of the king's authority. They had been taught to believe that it was very wrong, indeed the worst of crimes, to defy the king. That was what was known as high treason and it was considered worse than the murder of an ordinary man.

Naturally it suited the king to have them believe this, and he did everything he could to persuade the people that it was so. This suited the king's friends, the barons and other lords who shared his power, so they helped him as much as they could. They said that God had chosen one particular man to be king, so to refuse to obey him was to refuse to obey God.

They said all this, and they had been saying it so often and so long that most people believed it. Perhaps it is better to say that they supposed it was

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so because they never really thought about it. When they did stop to think, they realized that there had been many kings so bad that the people simply couldn't stand them, and either killed them or drove them out of the country. And nothing dreadful had happened to that country.

By 1776, few Americans believed that George III was king by the will of God, or, as people said, by divine right. He was king because the English people were willing to have him, and for no other reason. When the Americans became unwilling to have him any longer, that was the end of it, as far as his rights in America were concerned.

Many Americans had been thinking about this and other problems of government for years and telling other people what they thought. For example, in Massachusetts a man named James Otis and a younger one named John Adams had been making speeches and writing articles, pamphlets, and books about what government is and what it ought to be. In every other colony there were some men doing the same thing, and in Virginia, especially, there were many. People still remember three Virginian Georges — George Mason, George Wythe, and George Washington; three Lees — Richard, Arthur, and Francis; two Randolphs — Edmund, who was

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for independence, and Peyton, who stuck to the king; and, above all, Thomas Jefferson. All of these men had studied government long and carefully, and could tell other people what they had learned. Then there was a younger man, not yet famous when the war ended, who was the greatest student in the group. He was James Madison, the best teacher in all Virginia, indeed in all America, of what government ought to be, except for a still younger man in New York, named Alexander Hamilton.

When Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence he put a statement in it that referred to the old notion of the divine right of kings. He said that governments “derive their just powers” not from any divine right but from “the consent of the governed.” Yet a government of some kind is necessary when people live together, for no one person can do everything that must be done, and someone must say who is to do what. The problem was how to choose the person who was to have the authority.

Americans already had a pattern to follow. Every one of the thirteen colonies had been founded according to some kind of written rules, given by the king and usually called a charter. The charters were quite different, but it was agreed that whatever was

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the charter was law, not only for the colonists but for the king, too. Neither could change the charter without the consent of the other. More than once the king or the royal governor, who was the king's man in the colony, tried to change or take away a charter, and always there was a tremendous uproar. In Connecticut once, the governor demanded that the colonists produce the charter, and when it was laid on the table at a meeting it seemed that the governor was about to tear it up or take it away. Suddenly the candles were put out and when they were lighted again the charter was gone. There is a story — nobody knows how true it is—that some colonist snatched up the charter, ran out with it, and hid it in a hollow tree, known from that time on as the Charter Oak. At any rate, Connecticut kept its charter.

Thus when the peace treaty was signed in 1783, Americans were used to the idea that while somebody must be boss, there ought to be limits to what the boss can do, and those limits ought to be written down so that everybody could know what they were. The rules by which a nation is supposed to be run are called a constitution. The charter of each colony had been the constitution of that colony; and when they became independent

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states most of them simply took the old charter, made a few changes such as striking out all mention of the king of England, and used the rest as the constitution of the state.

The United States in Congress Assembled also had a kind of constitution in the Articles of Confederation, but it was no longer useful. It had been written during the war and its main purpose was to keep the colonies together while they fought Great Britain. Under the Articles all agreed to make war and peace together, to supply money and men to the army, to share the expenses of the central government, and to send men to Congress to make all necessary laws.

The trouble with this agreement was that it didn't bind anybody. If a state decided it did not like a law passed by Congress, it simply refused to enforce that law, and Congress had no power to make the people of that state obey.

The result was a mix-up that very nearly ended all government, and made it hard to do business across a state line. New York and New Jersey fell out over the control of New York harbor, which touched both states. By the terms of its old charter, Maryland owned the Potomac River and refused to let Virginians fish in it, although the south bank of

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the river was in Virginia. But Virginia owned the capes at the mouth of Chesapeake Bay, which was the only way by which ocean-going ships could come up to Annapolis and Baltimore; so Virginia refused to allow Maryland ships to pass the capes without paying toll. Various states levied special taxes on goods coming in from another state.

Worst of all was the question of money. There never had been gold and silver enough in the colonies to pay for all the goods that were being bought and sold, so people used credit, that is, a promise to pay, instead of gold and silver. Credit has many forms, one of which is paper money.

Now while the war was going on, all the states had issued paper money, and so had Congress. This paper was simply a promise by the state, or by Congress, to pay. But some of the states didn't pay. As for Congress, it had no property it could tax, and no money except what the states agreed to give it. If they went back on their agreement, which some of them did, then Congress had no way of making its paper promises good. So people became less and less inclined to sell their goods for paper money, and the money issued by Congress and some of the states had come pretty close to being worth nothing at all. When people can't buy

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and sell, business stops; and when they can't buy and sell for anything but silver and gold money, business almost stops, simply because there has never been enough silver and gold to keep trade moving rapidly.