

Was the American Revolution Really Over After Yorktown?

Topic: The Battle of Yorktown and the end of the Revolutionary War

Theme: The Battle of Yorktown didn't end the Revolutionary War.

Bottom line message: The Battle of Yorktown didn't end the Revolutionary War—in fact the fighting lasted almost two more years and more men died in the fighting after Yorktown than in the first year of the war. So why do we place such emphasis on Yorktown and almost universally believe that after Yorktown, in the words of Joy Hakim in her **A History of US**, “David had licked Goliath. ... A superpower had been defeated by an upstart colony”? The answer, Ray Raphael argues, is threefold:

- First, we want our stories to have neat beginnings and endings, and we are willing to bend the evidence to make this happen.
- Second, we prefer to view the war as a bipolar struggle between Americans and their foreign oppressors, without acknowledging that the brutal civil war in the South and the fighting against Indians in the West continued unabated after Yorktown.
- Third, we remain blind to the global nature of the conflict. With no interest in the broader picture, we fail to comprehend why the war went on, long after we think that it did. (See appendix 4 for details.)

Whatever the reason, our collective historical consciousness views Yorktown as the end of the Revolutionary War. The truth, as it so often is, is much more complex.

Bottom line message in one sentence: The Battle of Yorktown didn't end the Revolutionary War—in fact the fighting lasted almost two more years and more men died in the fighting after Yorktown than in the first year of the war.

Standards Addressed:

The Revolutionary War and the Battle of Yorktown US History Standards Alignment

STANDARD 1: The causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in forging the revolutionary movement, and the reasons for the American victory.

Standard 1A—The student understands the causes of the American Revolution.

1A—The student can explain the consequences of the Seven Years War

Rationale: France's desire to help the American rebels and France's open involvement in the American Revolutionary War are both direct consequences of France's desire to gain revenge on Britain for the humiliating defeat France suffered during the Seven Years War.

Standard 1C—The student understands the factors affecting the course of the war and contributing to the American victory.

1C—The student will explain how the Americans won the war against superior British resources.