



Benedict Arnold – Hero or Traitor of the American Revolution?



Benedict Arnold believed himself to be a true Patriot to the end.

Was he lying, delusional, or just misunderstood?

Biography/Timeline

1741 January 14 - Benedict Arnold is born in Norwich Town, CT.

1757-1760 – Benedict Arnold serves in the militia during the French and Indian War.

1762 - Benedict Arnold establishes his own merchant business in New Haven, CT.

1765 - Benedict Arnold joins the Sons of Liberty.

1774 - Benedict Arnold travels with and supports the CT delegation to the 1st Continental Congress.

1775 May 10 - Benedict Arnold and Ethan Allen capture Fort Ticonderoga, send cannons to Boston.

1775 September 15 - Benedict Arnold leads doomed expedition to capture Canada/Quebec.

1776 October 11 - Benedict Arnold prevents British invasion from Canada at Battle of Valcour Island.

1777 October - Benedict Arnold is mainly responsible for the defeat of the British at Saratoga.

1778 March - Treaty of Alliance: France openly enters the war against the British.

1778 June – Britain offers the colonies self-rule without full independence. Rejected by Congress.

1778 June 18 - Benedict Arnold becomes Governor of the Philadelphia area after the British depart.

1779 April 8 - Benedict Arnold marries Peggy Shippen of Philadelphia.

1779 May - Benedict Arnold begins secret communications with the British.

1780 August - Benedict Arnold is given command of West Point, NY.

1780 September 23 - Benedict Arnold's plot to end the war fails. He joins the British in New York City.

1780 December - Benedict Arnold leads an invasion of Virginia, capturing Richmond on January 5th.

1781 September 4 - Benedict Arnold leads a raid on New London, CT.

1781 October – The British defeat at Yorktown leads to peace negotiations soon after.

1782 January - Benedict Arnold travels to London and discusses the war with King George and his officials.

1783 September – The war formally ends.

1801 June 14 - Benedict Arnold dies at age 60 from a variety of ailments.

Quotes from the time.

"I am sorry you did not get Arnold, for of all the Americans, he is the most enterprising and dangerous."
-*The British Secretary of State in response to the Governor of Quebec's report that he had removed the rebels from his province, 1776.*

"It is universally known that he [Arnold] has always distinguished himself as a judicious, brave officer of great activity, enterprise and perseverance." -*George Washington, 1777.*

-The Regulars say, "He fought like Julius Caesar." -*John Adams, 22 May 1777*

"No public or private injury or insult shall prevail on me to forsake the cause of my injured and oppressed country until I see peace and liberty restored or nobly die in the attempt."
-*Benedict Arnold in a letter to Horatio Gates, August 1777.*

"It was Arnold" -*British Major General Burgoyne in his report on his defeat at Saratoga in 1777.*

"The mass of the people are heartily tired of the war, and wish to be on their former footing."
-*Benedict Arnold to British Major General Clinton, 12 July 1780.*

Post Session - Discussion Questions and Activities

-Debate whether or not Congress should have accepted the peace offer from British, presented by the Carlisle Peace Commission in June of 1778.

-Debate who should have the most power - state governments or the federal government?

-Discuss the following: Did Benedict Arnold betray the American people or was he trying to help them by ending the war when he switched sides?

-Put Benedict Arnold on trial for treason.

Benedict Arnold's explanation of why he switched sides

(published 7 October 1780):

“To the Inhabitants of America,

I should forfeit, even in my own opinion, the place I have so long held in yours, if I could be indifferent to your approbation, and silent on the motives which have induced me to join the King's arms.

A very few words, however, shall suffice upon a subject so personal; for to the thousands who suffer under the tyranny of the usurpers in the revolted provinces, as well as to the great multitude who have long wished for its subversion, this instance of my conduct can want no vindication; and as to the class of men who are criminally protracting the war from sinister views at the expence of the public interest, I prefer their enmity to their applause. I am, therefore, only concerned in this address, to explain, myself to such of my countrymen, as want abilities, or opportunities, to detect the artifices by which they are duped.

Having fought by your side when the love of our country animated our arms, I shall expect, from your justice and candour, what your deceivers, with more art and less honesty, will find it inconsistent with their own views to admit.

When I quitted domestic happiness for the perils of the field, I conceived the rights of my country in danger, and that duty and honour called me to her defence. A redress of grievances was my only object and aim; however, I acquiesced in a step which I thought precipitate, the declaration of independence: to justify this measure, many plausible reasons were urged, which could no longer exist, when Great Britain, with the open arms of a parent, offered to embrace us as children, and grant the wished-for redress.

And now that her worst enemies are in her own bosom, I should change my principles, if I conspired with their designs; yourselves being judges, was the war the less just, because fellow subjects were considered as our foe? You have felt the torture in which we raised our arms against a brother. God incline the guilty protectors of these unnatural dissensions to resign their ambition, and cease from their delusions, in compassion to kindred blood!

I anticipate your question, Was not the war a defensive one, until the French joined in the combination? I answer, that I thought so. You will add, Was it not afterwards necessary, till the separation of the British empire was complete? By no means; in contending for the welfare of my country, I am free to declare my opinion, that this end attained, all strife should have ceased.

I lamented, therefore, the impolicy, tyranny, and injustice, which, with a sovereign contempt of the people of America, studiously neglected to take their collective sentiments of the British proposals of peace, and to negotiate, under a suspension of arms, for an adjustment of differences; I lamented it as a dangerous sacrifice of the great interests of this country to the partial views of a proud, ancient, and crafty foe. I had my suspicions of some imperfections in our councils, on proposals prior to the Parliamentary Commission of 1778; but having then less to do in the Cabinet than the field (I will not pronounce peremptorily, as some may, and perhaps justly, that Congress have veiled them from the public eye), I continued to be guided in the negligent confidence of a Soldier. But the whole world saw, and all America confessed, that the overtures of the second Commission exceeded our wishes and expectations; and if there was any suspicion of the national liberality, it arose from its excess.

Do any believe we were at that time really entangled by an alliance with France? Unfortunate deception! they have been duped, by a virtuous credulity, in the incautious moments of intemperate passion, to give up their felicity to serve a nation wanting both the will and the power to protect us, and aiming at the destruction both of the mother country and the provinces. In the plainness of common sense, for I pretend to no casuistry, did the pretended treaty with the Court of Versailles, amount to more than an overture to America? Certainly not, because no authority had been given by the people to conclude it, nor to this very hour have they authorised its ratification. The articles of confederation remain still unsigned.

In the firm persuasion, therefore, that the private judgement of an individual citizen of this country is as free from all conventional restraints, since as before the insidious offers of France, I preferred those from Great Britain; thinking it infinitely wiser and safer to cast my confidence upon her justice and generosity, than to trust a monarchy too feeble to establish your independency, so perilous to her distant dominions; the enemy of the Protestant faith, and fraudulently avowing an affection for the liberties of mankind, while she holds her native sons in vassalage and chains.

I affect no disguise, and therefore frankly declare, that in these principles I had determined to retain my arms and command for an opportunity to surrender them to Great Britain; and in concerting the measures for a purpose, in my opinion, as grateful as it would have been beneficial to my country; I was only solicitous to accomplish an event of decisive importance, and to prevent as much as possible, in the execution of it, the effusion of blood.

With the highest satisfaction I bear testimony to my old fellow soldiers and citizens, that I find solid ground to rely upon the clemency of our Sovereign, and abundant conviction that it is the generous intention of Great Britain not only to leave the rights and privileges of the colonies unimpaired, together with their perpetual exemption from taxation, but to superadd such further benefits as may consist with the common prosperity of the empire. In short, I fought for much less than the parent country is as willing to grant to her colonies as they can be to receive or enjoy.

Some may think I continued in the struggle of these unhappy days too long, and others that I quitted it too soon.-- To the first I reply, that I did not see with their eyes, nor perhaps had so favourable a situation to look from, and that to our common master I am willing to stand or fall. In behalf of the candid among the latter, some of whom I believe serve blindly but honestly--in the bands I have left, I pray God to give them all the lights requisite to their own safety before it is too late; and with respect to that herd of censurers, whose enmity to me originates in their hatred to the principles by which I am now led to devote my life to the re-union of the British empire, as the best and only means to dry up the streams of misery that have deluged this country, they may be assured, that, conscious of the rectitude of my intentions, I shall treat their malice and calumnies with contempt and neglect."