

Weekly Feedback

Until the 1960s, Americans abided by the concept of exceptionalism. This concept expressed the idea that Americans were always moving and progressing. In “Recovering America’s Historic Diversity,” Joyce Appleby explains that this notion was challenged by historians, who in the 1960s with the grumbling of the civil rights era, began to focus on social history as a way to revise and correct America’s story so as to include the stories of women, African-Americans, Amerindians, and non-English-speaking Europeans who settled in the Americas, but who had been excluded from the pages of history. After the inclusion of these histories into America’s story, there seemed to be a need for a more international approach to history with all of the new cultures it encompassed. Since Amerindians, European colonists, and African Americans were all a part of the “New World,” the movement for an “Atlantic history,” began to grow.

This Atlantic history has altered the image of the American republic from the colonial era to the present day. In his article “Exploding Colonial American History,” Ian Steel argues that this integration model which incorporates and extends Colonial America beyond the British Atlantic...promises to compare the separate, connected, and blended histories of Europeans, Africans, and AmerIndians.” Before this new history came to be, American history only reflected England’s thirteen colonies as being the story of Colonial America. In “Recovering America’s Historic Diversity,” Joyce Appleby explains that before the 1960s, Amerindians and African Americans were depicted as beasts and savages without any culture and who could, therefore, not be a part of American exceptionalism or its history.

This notion of exceptionalism, the feeling that white Americans were special people destined for greatness was one concept that helped America to form a national identity. In “An Empire of Goods,” T.H. Breen expresses his belief that material possessions and merchandising also played a large role in uniting the colonists. Breen explains, “Consumption [of British goods] drew the colonists together even when they themselves were unaware of what was happening.” This culture that tied America to England began to unravel, though, after taxes were unfairly levied on American purchases without proper representation in the British parliament. As we know, the result was America’s call for a revolution, which resulted in its independence. After this point, British history looks at America as an extraterritorial country with no domestic link to be found.

In “Greater Britain,” David Armitage expresses the need for this situation to be changed. He feels that since the founding of the “New British History” of the 1970s, which recognizes England as “one among three kingdoms and at least four nations” that objectivity and the mutual recognition of America and Great Britain’s common history can be found. With the New British History and Atlantic History, Armitage believes that an unbiased, international, and multicultural history of America’s relationship to Great Britain can be obtained. Armitage points out that the bond between America and England was broken because of politics, not because of ethnic, linguistic, or any other difference. Therefore, he feels that British and American historiographies on Colonial America and the America Revolution should be intertwined.