

CHARACTER TRIAL OF BENEDICT ARNOLD: HISTORICAL MEMORY AND THE CHANGING OF THE PAST



GRADES 7-8

DOCUMENTS

Letter to the Inhabitants of America

Benedict Arnold
October 07, 1780

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, as to that class of Men who are Criminally protracting the War from Sinister Views, at the expense of the Public Interest, I prefer their Enmity to their applause. I am only, therefore, 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 Candor, what your deceivers, with more Art and less honesty, will find it inconsistent with their own Views to admit.

When I quitted Domestick happiness for the Perils of the Field, I conceived the rights of my Country in Danger, and that Duty and Honor 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 the 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 Foes? You have felt the torture in which we raised our arms against a Brother-God Incline the Guilty protractors of these unnatural Dissentions, 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 compleat? 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.



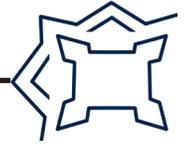
I lamented therefore the Impolicy, tyranny, and Injustice, which with a Sovereign Contempt of the People of America, studiously neglected to take their Collective Sentiments of the British proposals of Peace, and to negotiate under a suspension of Arms, for an adjustment of differences, as a dangerous Sacrifice of the great Interest of this Country to the Partial Views of a Proud, Antient, 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 Publick Eye), I continued to be guided in the negligent Confidence of a soldier. But the whole world saw, and all America confessed, the Overtures of the Second Commission exceeded our wishes and expectations. 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! and thus they have been duped by a virtuous Credulity, in the incautious moments of intemperate passion, to give up their fidelity to serve a Nation counting 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 authorized its ratification-the Articles of Confederation remain still unsigned.

In the firm persuasion, therefore, that the private Judgment of any 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 vowing 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 have 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 those 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 favorable a situation to look from, and that to one 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 Ranks 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 kind 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 Reunion 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.

NEW YORK, Oct. 7th, 1780

Benedict Arnold, Letter to the Inhabitants of America, October 7, 1780, New York.

Benedict Arnold to the Committee of Safety in Massachusetts, Ticonderoga, May 11, 1775

Gentlemen: I wrote you yesterday that arriving in the vicinity of this place, I found one hundred and fifty men collected at the instance of some gentlemen from Connecticut (designed on the same errand on which I came) headed by Colonel Ethan Allen, and that I had joined them, not thinking proper to wait the arrival of the Troops I had engaged on the road, but to attempt the Fort by surprise; that we had taken the Fort at four o'clock yesterday morning without opposition, and made prisoners, one Captain, one Lieutenant, and forty odd privates and subalterns, and that we found the Fort in a most ruinous condition and not worth repairing. . . . On and before our taking possession here, I had agreed with Colonel Allen to issue further orders jointly, until I could raise a sufficient number of men to relieve his people, on which plan we proceeded . . . since which, Colonel Allen, finding he had the ascendancy over his people, positively insisted I should have no command, as I had forbid the soldiers plundering and destroying private property. The power is now taken out of my hands and I am no longer consulted, nor have I a voice in any matters. There is here at present near one hundred men, who are in the greatest confusion and anarchy, destroying and plundering private property, committing every enormity, and paying no attention to publick service. . . . Colonel Allen is a proper man to head his own wild people, but entirely unacquainted with military service; and as I am the only person who has been legally authorized to take possession of this place, I am determined to insist on my right, and I think it my duty to remain here against all opposition, until I have further orders. I have the honour to be, gentlemen, your most obedient humble servant,
BENEDICT ARNOLD

Benedict Arnold to the Committee of Safety in Massachusetts, May 11, 1775, *American Archives* (1840): 557 edited by Peter Force, Fine Books Company.



Benedict Arnold: A Name Synonymous With Traitor

by Tim George

For some people accused of treason, history has left at least some questions. Aaron Burr and the Rosenbergs were found guilty, but there are still questions as to whether their guilt was proven beyond a reasonable doubt. The same cannot be said for Benedict Arnold, a name that has become synonymous in American history with traitor since the birth of this nation.

There is also no question about the depth of his treachery. Arnold commanded the American forces at West Point, and his plan was to turn over the fort there to the British. Had he done so, the British might easily have captured George Washington. Even if the future first president had escaped, the British would have controlled the Hudson crossings. Supplies would have been cut off to Washington's army, and the Revolution would have abruptly ended in disaster for the colonists.

While it is clear what Benedict Arnold did, it isn't as clear as to why. Shortly after he switched sides, Arnold said the war had been "a defensive one until the French joined the combination." Because of that, he said his eyes were opened and he saw how dangerous were the "insidious offers of the French ... the enemy of the Protestant faith."

Almost no one believed that explanation then, and less do now. Arnold had never had problems with the French. His statements oddly mimicked the words of Loyalist propaganda writer, William Smith.

In fact, the events that led him to betrayal reflect a true patriot rather than conspirator. Along with Ethan Allen, he captured Fort Ticonderoga in 1775. In September of that year, he led 1,000 men on a wilderness expedition to Quebec City. Though he lost 40 percent of his troops to death or desertion, he persisted in the siege until driven back by 100,000 British troops.

In the summer of 1776, Arnold supervised the construction of a fleet on Lake Champlain and organized a navy. A year later, when the British swept down from Canada, he led the crucial charge at the Battle of Saratoga, leading to the surrender of the British. Washington honored his trusted major for bravery and leadership afterwards.

One element that may have affected Arnold was the string of disappointments that followed these victories. He and Ethan Allen sharply disagreed on a number of occasions. Allen suggested Arnold had overstepped his orders in failing to capture Quebec. His detractors then accused him of confiscating provisions from Montreal merchants for his own profit.

They pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor so that we could be free!

This and other incidents left Benedict Arnold bitter, only to be made worse when he was passed over for a promotion to major general. Because his injuries left him unfit for combat, Washington appointed him military governor of Philadelphia. In that role, he was also accused of actions to fill his own pockets. In May 1779, he wrote Washington, saying that he had "little expected to meet the ungrateful returns I have received from own countrymen."



Charges against him culminated in a court martial in December 1779. The court found insufficient evidence to convict Arnold of anything but two minor misdemeanors. The court did, however, recommend that Washington reprimand him, which he did.

For many years, historians assumed it was the court martial that pushed America's most infamous traitor over the edge. Then in 1941, historian Carl Van Doren found letters from Arnold to British headquarters written months before the court martial. In that correspondence, Arnold asked for 20,000 pounds to surrender West Point to the British.

In the end, Arnold seems to have been motivated by the most basic of reasons - money. His new nineteen-year-old wife had expensive tastes, and her Tory friends influenced him greatly. There was no chivalry for Arnold when his plot was discovered, as he immediately ditched his teenage bride in an effort to protect himself.

The greed for money didn't end after he changed sides. Arnold's first action in a British uniform was to present a note for 10,000 pounds and demand immediate payment. Ten years after the war and living in England, Arnold was still writing, demanding payment he claimed to have never gotten.

Over 200 years later, our country still finds itself with leaders of great potential willing to sell out America in pursuit of wealth and popularity. It is unfortunate that this aspect of our history is the one that our government seems to feel the most compelled to repeat.

Tim George, "Benedict Arnold: A Name Synonymous With Traitor," *Off the Grid News*, 2012
<https://www.offthegridnews.com/misc/benedict-arnold-a-name-synonymous-with-traitor/>

An examination of the role of Benedict Arnold during the Battle of Saratoga on September 19, 1777 (excerpt)

by Mark Nichipor

The early morning of September 19th was cold and foggy. As the morning mist lifted, scouts brought word to Gates that Burgoyne was moving forward toward the American works in three columns. General Fraser's column of elite British and Brunswick soldiers was moving to the west to outflank the American works. General Hamilton's column of four British regiments supported Fraser but marched toward the center of the American works. General Riedesel's Brunswick column was to advance along the river road and pin down Gate's right flank. Burgoyne appeared to have been hoping to either outflank the American works (as Gates' scouts and local guides had warned him) or draw the Americans into battle in the open where he felt his regulars could beat them. "On the 19th, just when advice was received that the enemy were approaching," wrote Arnold to Gates on September 22, "I took the liberty to give you as my opinion that we ought to march out and attack them, (*italics mine*) you desired me to send Colonel Morgan and the Light Infantry, and support them, I obeyed your orders, and before the action was over I found it necessary to send out the whole of my division to support the attack no other troops were engaged that day except Colonel Marshall's regiment of General Patterson's brigade (18)."



According to Hull's memoirs:

"...General Arnold rode to the ground which was occupied by the guard of Major Hull. He called the officers around him, and inquired what number of men was at that post. He was informed that it consisted of the guard of two hundred and fifty men, and two regiments. General Arnold then said, that three hundred volunteers, to be commanded by a field officer, must immediately reinforce the troops which were engaged....As none of the field officers offered their services, Major Hull observed to him, that he commanded the guard on that day... but if he could be excused from duty, he would be happy to command the detachment. General Arnold replied, that he would excuse him, and directed the colonels of the two regiments to call for three hundred volunteers and a suitable number of captains and subalterns to command them. In a few moments, the number required was paraded and formed into four companies, with officers assigned to them. We at once commenced our march to the center of the engagement. Major Hull was directed to receive his orders from General Poor of the New Hampshire, who commanded the troops then closely engaged with the enemy (25)." As darkness descended on the battlefield, Hamilton's brigade of four British regiments appeared to be almost overwhelmed by the superior American numbers. General Reidesel, commanding the Brunswick troops on the left flank detached part of his force that now arrived to take the Americans in the flank. In addition, Fraser's grenadiers had stopped Learned's brigade (who were committed very late in the day) before they could deploy into action (26). Both sides had had enough by now and disengaged. Although Burgoyne claimed a victory, his forces had suffered twice the losses the Americans had. And Gates' army still barred the way towards Albany.

Verick, although muster master of the army considered his higher duty to Schuyler. In this he once went so far as to steal a letter from Gates, copy it and sent it to Schuyler. In another letter dated September 22, 1777 to Schuyler (27), Verick would write about Arnold's role in the battle: "This I am certain of, that Arnold has all the credit of the action on the 19th, for he was ordering out troops to it, while the other was in Doctor Potts tent backbiting his neighbors for which words had like to ensure between him and me and this I further know, that he asked where the troops were going, when Scammell's battalion marched and upon being answered, he declared no more should go, he would not suffer the camp to be exposed. -Had Gates complied with Arnold's repeated desired (sic), he would have gained a general and complete victory over the enemy. -But it is evident to me, he never intended to fight Burgoyne, till Arnold, urged, begged and entreated him to do it...."

Mark Nichipor, Excerpt from "An examination of the role of Benedict Arnold during the Battle of Saratoga on September 19, 1777", *Varsity Tutors*. <https://www.varsitytutors.com/earlyamerica/lives-early-america/benedict-arnold-battle-saratoga>.



Ethan Allen to the Massachusetts Congress Ticonderoga, May 11, 1775

Gentlemen: I have to inform you with pleasure unfelt before, that on break of day of the tenth of May, 1775, by the order of the General Assembly of the Colony of Connecticut, took the Fortress of Ticonderoga by storm. The soldiery was composed of about one hundred Green Mountain Boys, and near fifty veteran soldiers from the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay. The latter was under the command of Colonel James Easton, who behaved with great zeal and fortitude, not only in council, but in the assault. The soldiery behaved with such resistless fury, that they so terrified the King's Troops that they durst not fire on their assailants, and our soldiery was agreeably disappointed. The soldiery behaved with uncommon rancour when they leaped into the Fort; and it must be confessed that the Colonel has greatly contributed to the taking of the Fortress, as well as John Brown, Esq., Attorney at Law, who was also an able counsellor, and was personally in the attack. From, gentleman, your most obedient humble servant, ETHAN ALLEN

Ethan Allen to the Massachusetts Congress, May 11, 1775, *American Archives* (1840): 556 edited by Peter Force, Fine Books Company.