



# Stories of Independence: Identity, Ideology, and History in Eighteenth-Century America

*Peter C. Messer*

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*Peter C. Messer demonstrates that a strong sense of a shared past transformed British subjects into American citizens. He traces the emergence of distinctively American attitudes about society, politics, and government through the written history of the American experience. Stories of Independence argues that the way early Americans wrote about their own history—from colonial times, to the heady days of the Revolution, to the uneasy decades following independence—helped shape the future of this young nation.*

*Differences between American colonists and the British government became increasingly contentious over the course of the eighteenth century as distinctive American identities emerged among the colonists. Grounded in common values and the shared experiences of creating communities in a new world, these identities would eventually liberate Americans to declare their independence and experiment with new forms of government.*

*During the colonial period, provincial historians celebrated the autonomous origins and local institutions of their communities as a way of arguing for greater independence from Great Britain. Imperial historians, on the other hand, stressed allegiance to the mother country and the English institutions that continued to sustain them. When relations with Britain reached a crisis, these visions of provincial pride and imperial loyalty came into open and irreconcilable conflict. The resulting debate produced not only a declaration of independence but a new political order grounded on the provincial vision of the origins and progress of America.*

*When the political turmoil of the 1780s and 1790s threatened to fragment the new republic, historians turned to the provincial vision of history to fashion a past for their nation from which they could create a unifying national identity. Their stories of the drive for independence and the founding of the United States helped both cement and limit the innovations in political thought produced by their provincial and revolutionary predecessors.*

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