

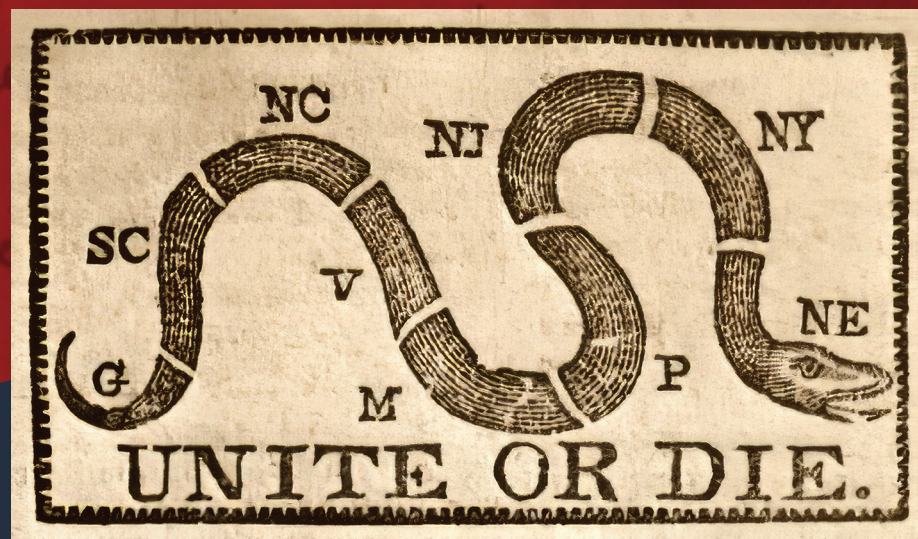


Revolutionary
NEW YORK

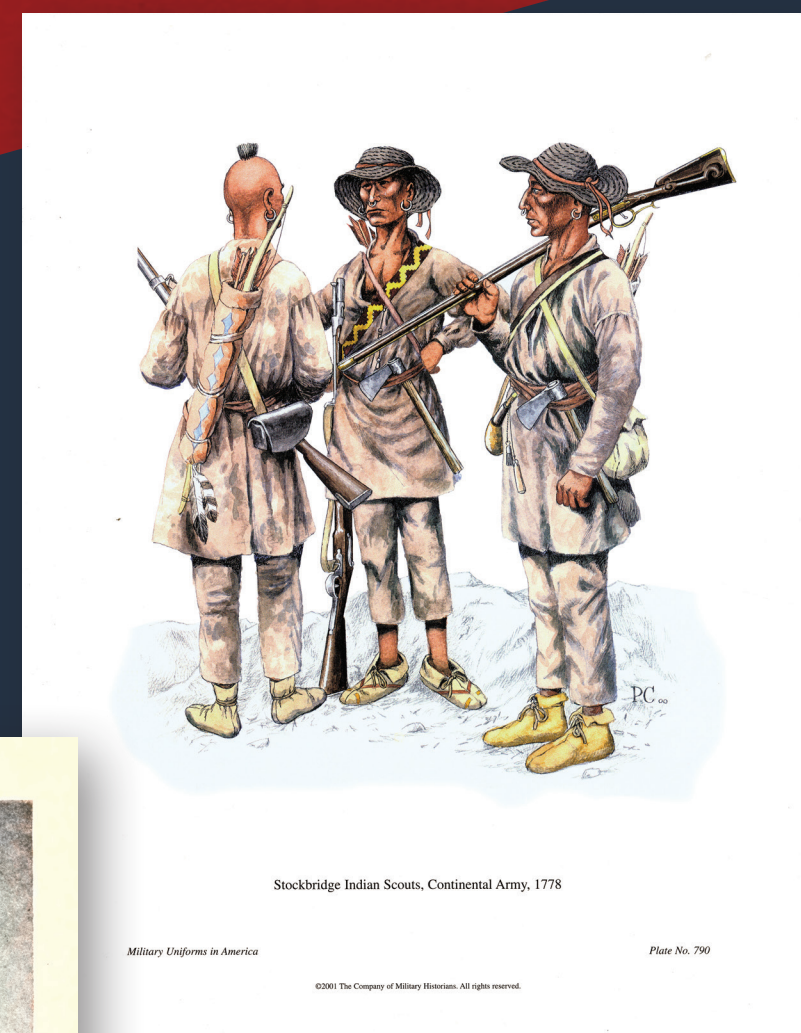


A Declaration by the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA in General Congress assembled.

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“Unite or Die”, detail from Pennsylvania Journal Newspaper, c. 1775
Museum of the American Revolution



Stockbridge Indian Scouts, Continental Army, 1778

Military Uniforms in America

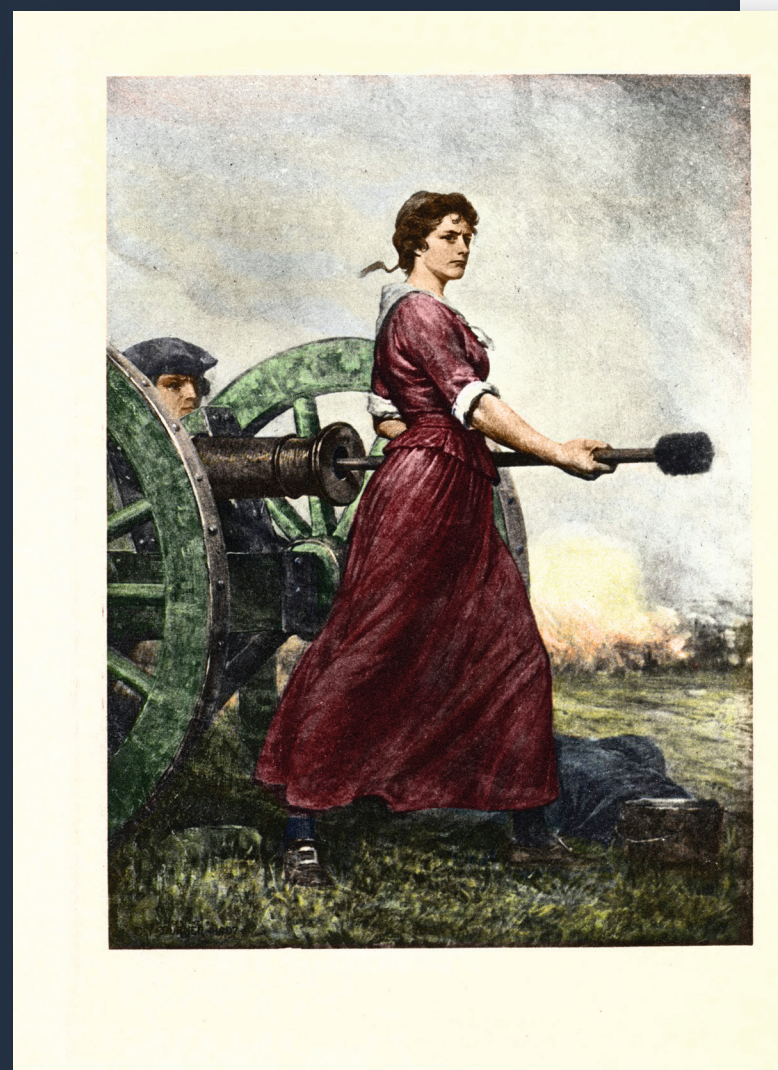
Plate No. 700

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The American War for Independence raged from 1775 to 1783, but the ideas of American Revolution did not end there. From the Battles of Saratoga to the birth of the Women’s Suffrage Movement at Seneca Falls to the Stonewall Uprising in 1969, New York has remained at the heart of this continuing Revolution.

The American experiment is built on shared ideals—liberty, equality, justice, and democracy. Though imperfect and often marked by struggle, it endures through civic action, protest, and reform.

On the 250th anniversary of our nation, this exhibition honors the New Yorkers who launched the great American experiment in 1776—and the bold leaders who, through social revolutions, have fought to make its promises real. This is Revolutionary New York.



American Independence required the participation of everyone in colonial society—men, women, Black, white, and Indigenous.

- “Stockbridge Scouts” by Peter Copleland, American Philosophical Society
- “Margaret Cochran Corbin,” University of California Libraries
- “A Black Continental Army Soldier” by T. Payton, Guilford Courthouse National Military Park



We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE,
THOMAS JEFFERSON, JULY 4, 1776



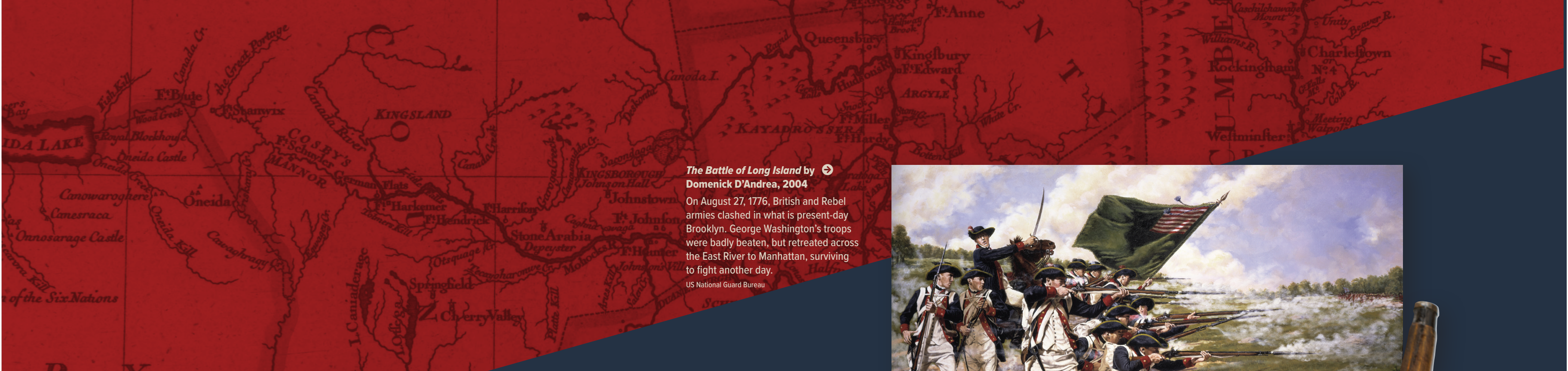
“200 Years without equality,” printing proof, Creative Women’s Collective, 1986
New York State Museum, H-1991.99.85



Suffrage Wagon, c. 1840

Suffragists often equated their cause with that of the nation’s founders, using symbols of the Revolution to rally support. Nassau County suffragists Edna Kearns and Irene Davidson painted “Spirit of 1776” on this horse-drawn wagon and used it as both a prop and a speaker’s platform.

New York State Museum, H-2007.211



BATTLEGROUND NEW YORK

New York stood at the center of the American Revolution with one-third of the military engagements taking place there. With its deep harbor, navigable rivers, and strategic location between New England and the Mid-Atlantic, the colony became the war's primary battleground. In 1776, British forces captured New York City after the Battle of Long Island—one of the largest battles of the war—and held it for seven years. Yet control of the state remained fiercely contested.

The Hudson River was strategically important because whoever controlled it could divide the colonies in two. In 1777, American victory at the Battles of Saratoga marked a turning point. The surrender of British General John Burgoyne convinced France to formally ally with the United States, transforming a colonial rebellion into an international war.

The Battle of Long Island by Domenick D'Andrea, 2004
On August 27, 1776, British and Rebel armies clashed in what is present-day Brooklyn. George Washington's troops were badly beaten, but retreated across the East River to Manhattan, surviving to fight another day.
US National Guard Bureau



Powderhorn, c. 1777
Sited at a vital Six Nations portage on the Mohawk River, Fort Schuyler, also called Fort Stanwix, was a key British fort during the French and Indian War (1756–1763). Rebuilt by Rebel forces at the start of the American Revolution, it was besieged by British forces in August 1777 during the Saratoga Campaigns but was never captured.
New York State Museum, H-1974.291

Fortifications at West Point guarded the Hudson River, while frontier communities faced brutal fighting in places like Oriskany and the Mohawk Valley. Enslaved and free Black New Yorkers, Native nations, Rebels, and Loyalists all shaped the conflict's outcome. In 1783, the war ended with the British evacuation of New York City.

From its battlefields to its diplomacy, New York played a nationally decisive role in securing American independence.

Flight from Little Beard's Town, by Ernest Smith (Gaan Yah), Tonawanda Seneca, c. 1936

This watercolor image depicts Seneca families fleeing from their burning homes during a Rebel attack in the 1779 Sullivan Campaign, the goal of which was to destroy Seneca and Cayuga settlements in upstate New York during the American Revolution.



Rochester Museum & Science Center



Isaac Van Wart Fidelity Medallion, silver, 1782

The Fidelity Medallion was the first military medal authorized and presented by the Continental Congress. It was created for the three enlisted militiamen who captured British Major John André, who had conspired with General Benedict Arnold to betray the Rebel cause and turn over West Point to the British.

New York State Museum, H-2023.41

BY HIS EXCELLENCY
Sir Henry Clinton, K. B.
General and Commander in Chief of all his Majesty's Forces, within the Colonies lying on the Atlantic Ocean, from Nova Scotia to West-Florida, inclusive, &c. &c. &c.

PROCLAMATION.

WHEREAS the Enemy have adopted a practice of enrolling

NEGROES

among their Troops: I do hereby give Notice, That all NEGROES taken in Arms, or upon any military Duty, shall be purchased for a stated Price; the Money to be paid to the Captors.

But I do most strictly forbid any Person to sell or claim Right over any NEGROE, the Property of a Rebel, who may take Refuge with any Part of this Army: And I do promise to every

NEGROE

Who shall desert the Rebel Standard, full Security to follow within these Lines, any Occupation which he shall think proper.

Given under my Hand at Head-Quarters, PHILIPSBURGH, the 30th Day of JUNE, 1779.

H. CLINTON.
By his Excellency's Command,
JOHN SMITH, Secretary.



Philipsburg Proclamation, 1779

In 1779, British General Sir Henry Clinton issued a proclamation at Philipsburg in Westchester County offering freedom to any enslaved African of Rebel owners who escaped to British lines.

American Antiquarian Society

The Surrender of General Burgoyne by John Trumbull, 1821

The surrender of British General Burgoyne's entire army at Saratoga marked a major turning point in the war in 1777.

United States Capitol



Lady Harriet Fox-Strangways, Mrs. Acland crossing the River Hudson to the American lines, presenting her safe conduct by Robert Pollard, 1784

Women on all sides of the conflict frequently joined their husbands in the field as camp followers. Lady Harriet Acland (1750–1815) accompanied her husband, British Major John Dyke Acland, an officer in Burgoyne's Army. When her husband was wounded and taken prisoner during the Battle of Bemis Heights, Acland requested permission to cross American lines to tend to him shortly before Burgoyne's surrender on October 17, 1777. Lady Acland's journal of her experience during the Revolutionary War remains an important primary account of the conflict.

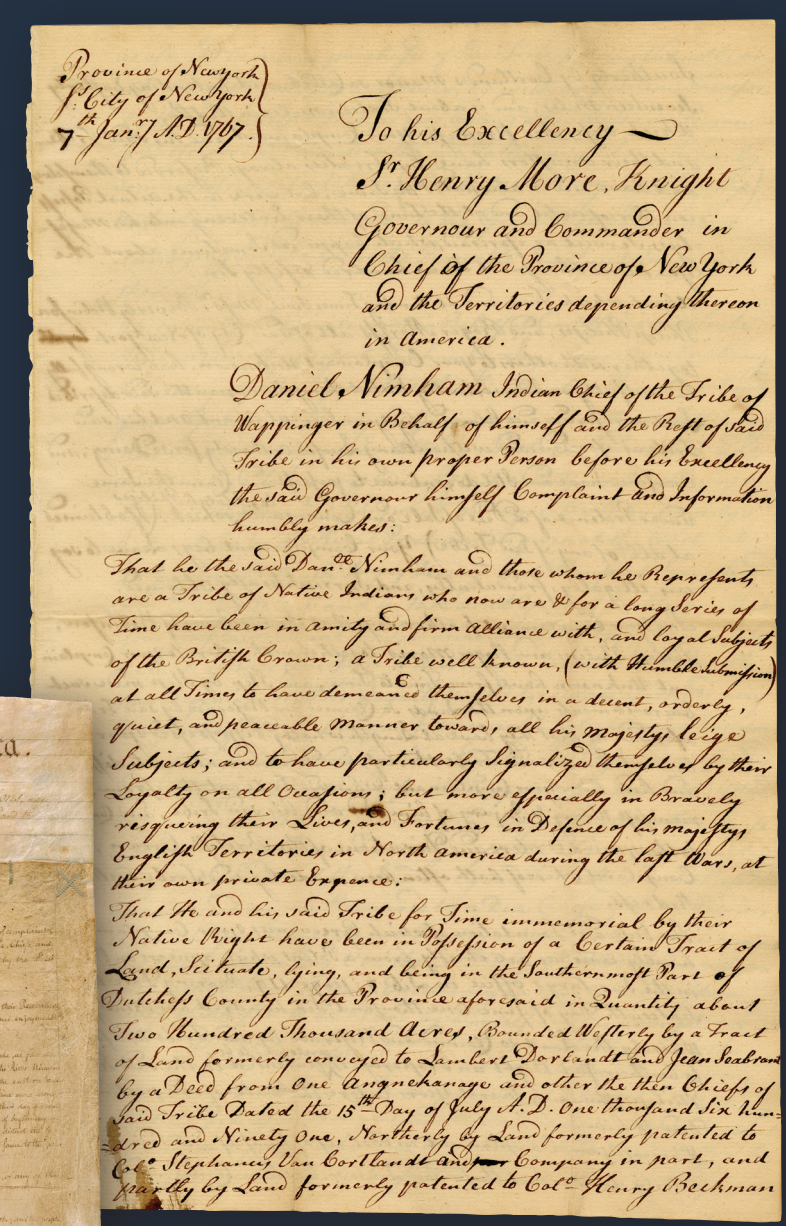
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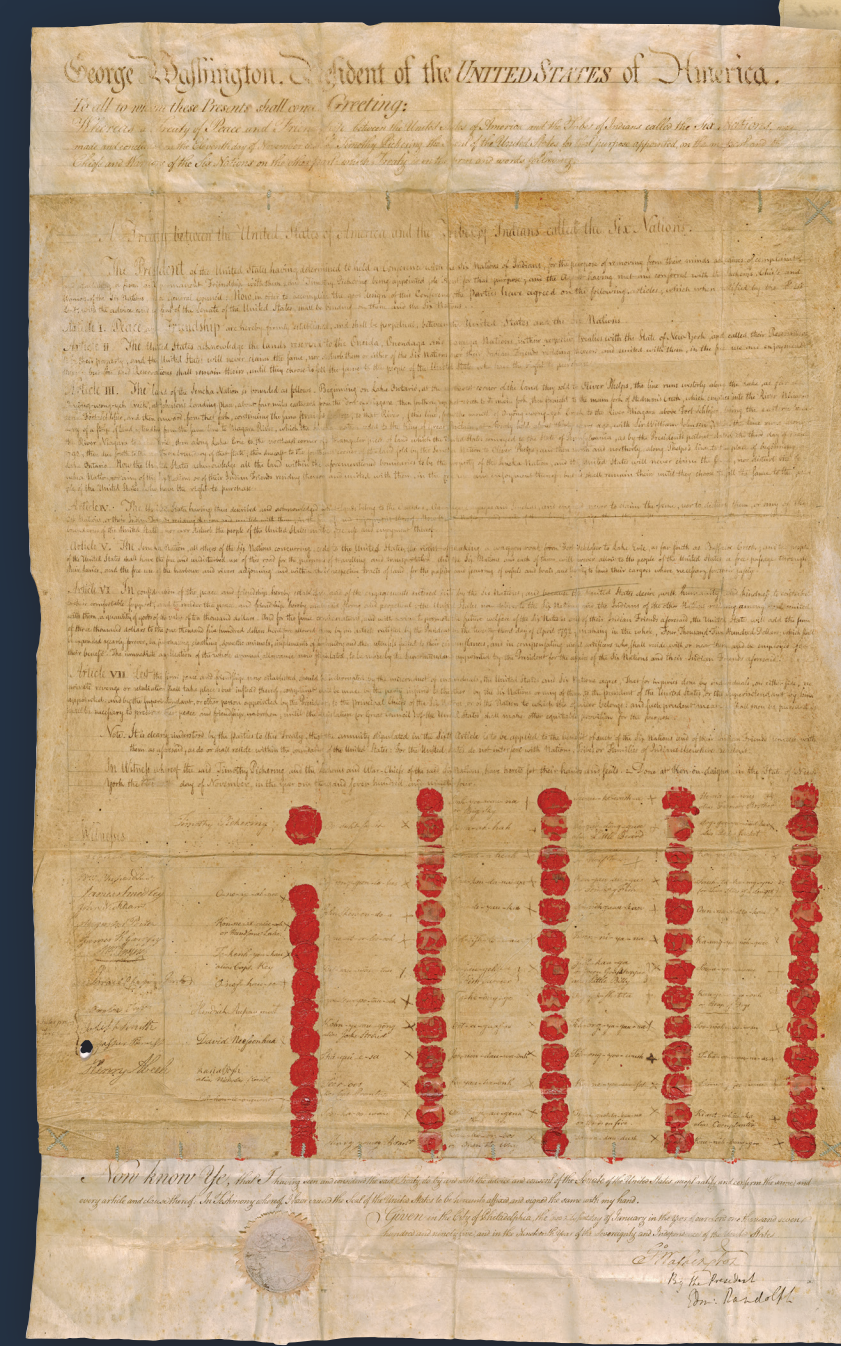
🕒 Pipe Tomahawk (replica), 2025
 At all colonial meetings with Indigenous people, gift giving played a prominent part of diplomatic protocol. In 1792 it is believed George Washington presented Cornplanter with a pipe tomahawk. The silver inlay on this replica of Cornplanter's pipe tomahawk was made by a descendant of Peter Crouse, a Dutch German immigrant taken captive by Seneca as a young boy, around 1778. He lived on Seneca territory for the rest of his life.
 Glenn Zweygardt and Mike Crouse (Seneca Nation), New York State Museum, E-2025.14

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Indigenous nations in what is now New York State played decisive—and often devastating—roles during the American Revolution. The Six Nations (Haudenosaunee) was divided in its alliances, with some nations supporting the British and others, including the Oneida and Tuscarora, siding with the Americans—turning their homelands into a central theater of war. In 1779, the Continental Army's Clinton-Sullivan campaign through Haudenosaunee territory destroyed dozens of towns, crops, and winter stores, accelerating displacement, hunger, and long-term hardship.



🕒 Petition of Daniel Nimham, January 7, 1767; Hearing on the Claim of the Wappingers, March 6, 1767
 Daniel Nimham (c. 1724–1778) was a prominent Wappinger warrior and leader in the Hudson Highlands. Daniel Nimham challenged the theft of Wappinger lands by the wealthy Philipse family in the New York Colonial Council. When Philipse produced an almost certainly forged deed of purchase, the New York Council—composed of other wealthy landowners—ruled in their favor. Anger over the lack of British support for their land claims contributed to Nimham's decision to ally with the Rebels in the American Revolution.
 New York State Archives



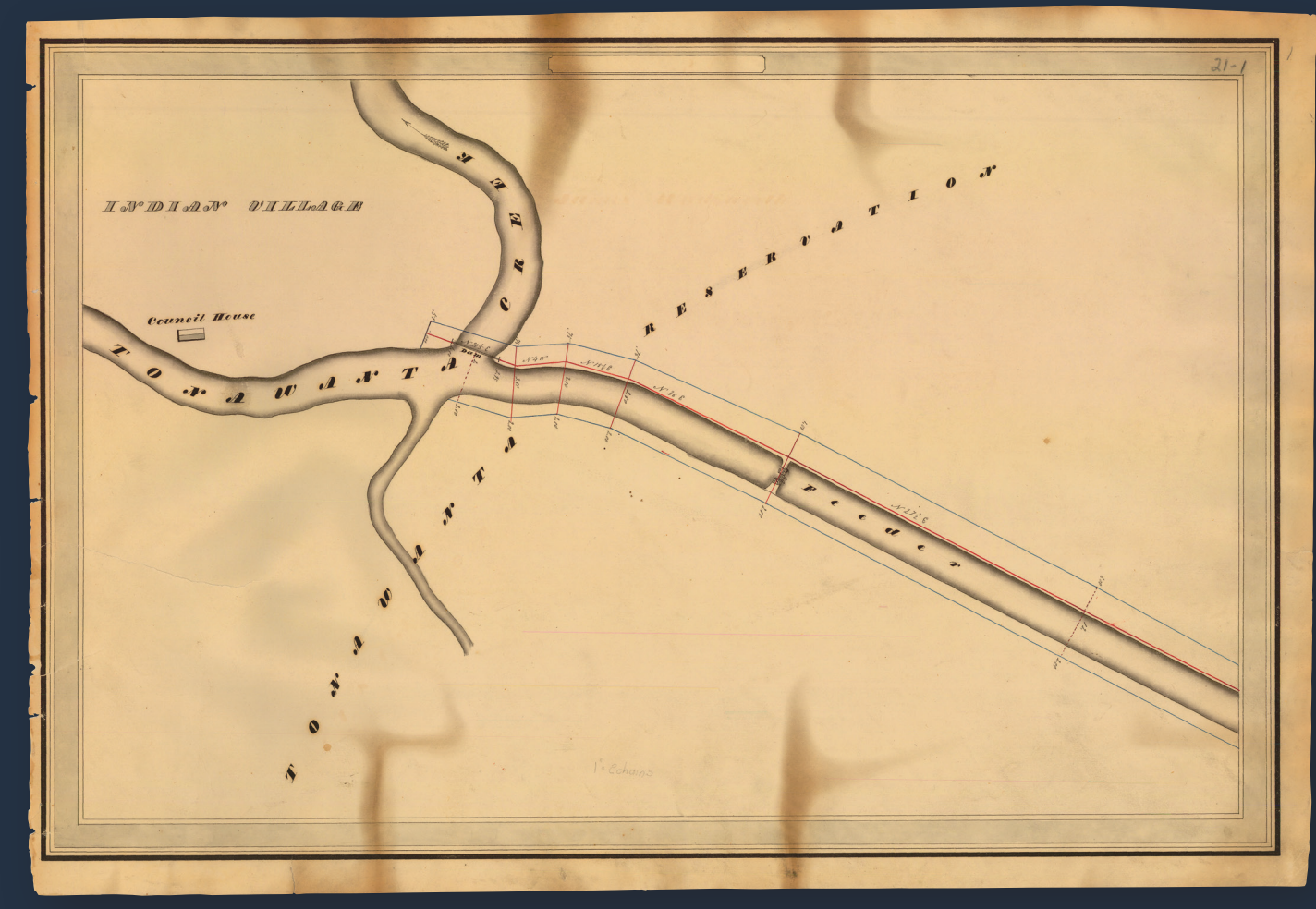
🕒 The Great Canandaigua Treaty—1794 by Robert Griffing, 2010
 Haudenosaunee philosophies recognize stability and holding truth as inherent qualities of the Oak Tree. Likely, it was a deliberate choice to negotiate the Treaty of Canandaigua under an Oak Tree.
 New York State Museum, H-2022.66.1

🕒 Treaty of Canandaigua, 1794
 The Treaty of Canandaigua is one of the earliest treaties between the new US Government and a Native Nation. The treaty established peace between the United States and the Six Nations (Haudenosaunee) as sovereign entities. The treaty also recognized Six Nations (Haudenosaunee) land rights and established processes by which future disputes would be settled.
 National Archives and Records Administration

🗺 Map, "Erie and Champlain Canal Feeders, Tonawanta showing Tonawanta Reservation and Tonawanta Creek," 1834
 One of numerous maps in the New York State Archives depicting the dispossession of Indigenous lands in New York State after the American Revolution.
 New York State Archives



Between 1774 and 1832, 377 treaties were negotiated between the United States and sovereign Indigenous nations and approved by Congress, while states—including New York—also pursued their own agreements. Although the 1784 Treaty of Fort Stanwix recognized the land rights of America's wartime Six Nations (Haudenosaunee) allies, New York State quickly disregarded its terms, pressuring the Oneida, Tuscarora, and other Haudenosaunee nations to cede vast homelands. Within a year, state treaties opened western New York to white settlement. The Revolution thus intensified a longer history of dispossession, profoundly reshaping Indigenous sovereignty, landholding, and presence in New York State.



FOUNDING THE NATION

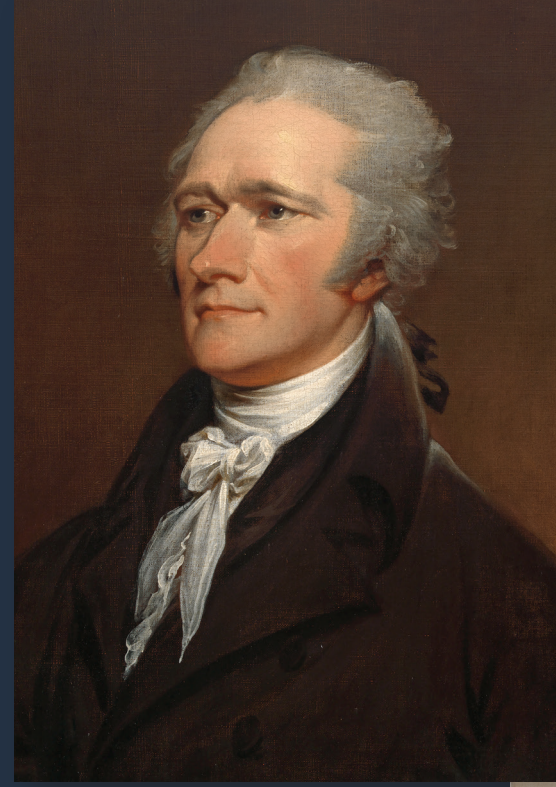
After the American Revolution, 13 independent states were loosely united under the Articles of Confederation in 1777—a “League of Friendship” that gave Congress limited authority and one vote per state. For many New Yorkers, the system proved too weak. As New York City rapidly reemerged as a major commercial center, merchants, artisans, and shipowners felt the strain of economic instability, trade barriers, and war debt.

Debate over the nation’s future played out vividly in New York. Federalists, including Alexander Hamilton and John Jay, argued that a stronger central government was essential to secure credit, regulate commerce, and unify the states. Anti-Federalists feared concentrated power and demanded protections for individual liberties. Newspapers across the state published essays—including the influential Federalist Papers—shaping public opinion and national debate.

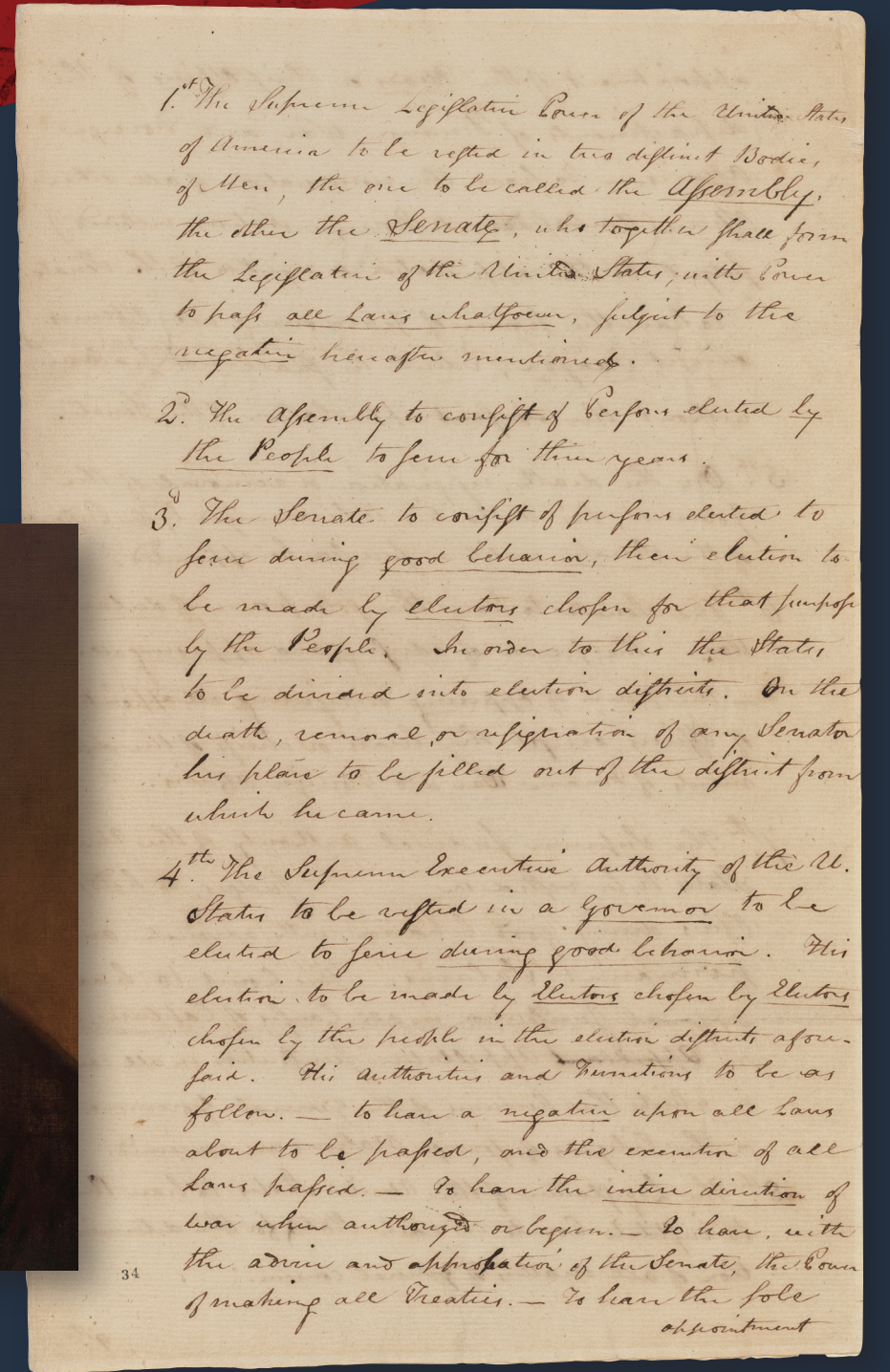
After intense deliberation, New York narrowly ratified the US Constitution in 1788, becoming the 11th state to join the new union. The following year, New York City served as the nation’s first capital under the Constitution, where George Washington took the oath of office.



Inauguration of George Washington, painting by Ramon Elorriaga, 1898
This painting depicts George Washington taking the oath of office at Federal Hall. Chancellor of New York Robert Livingston administered the oath.
National Park Service



Alexander Hamilton by John Trumbull, 1806
National Portrait Gallery

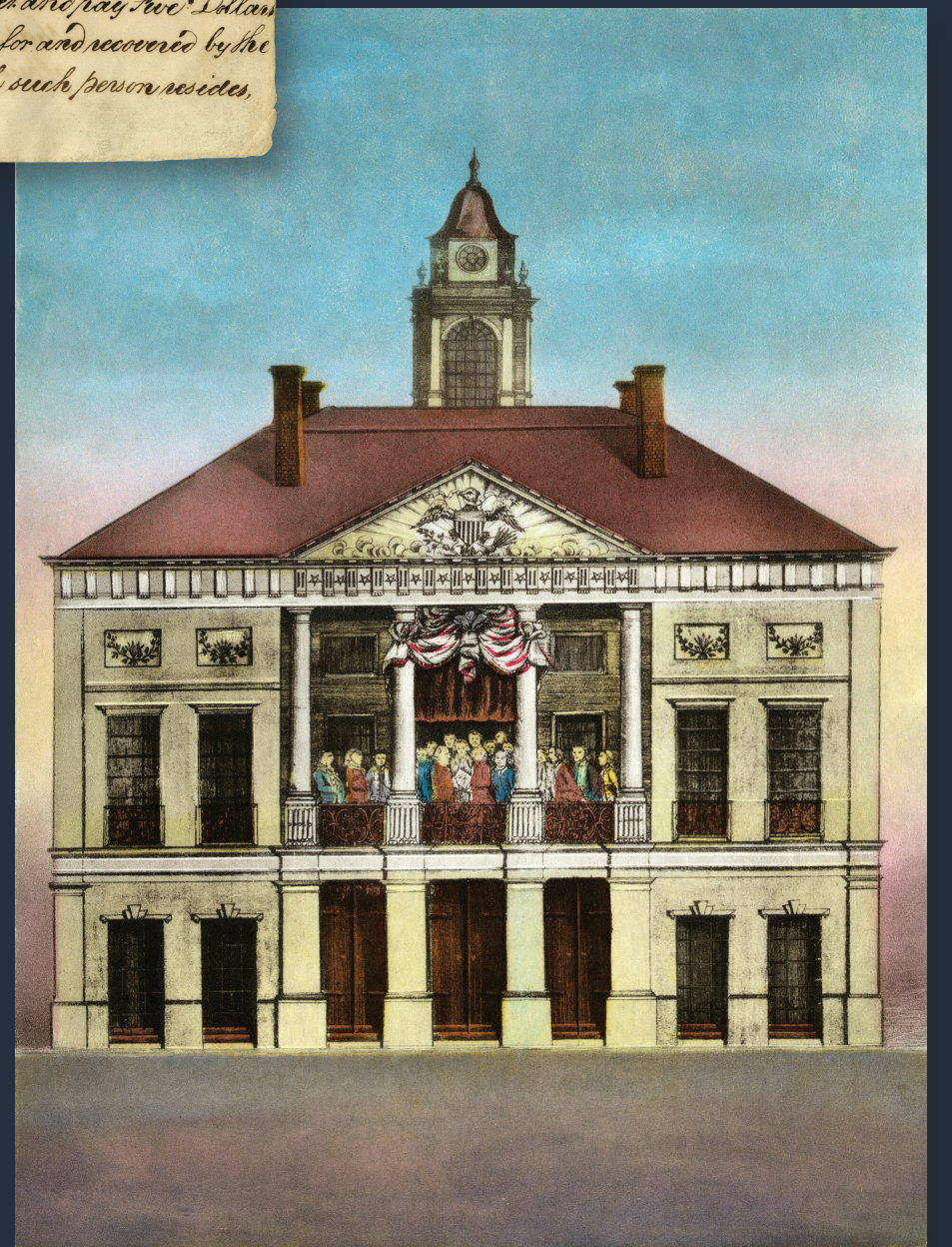
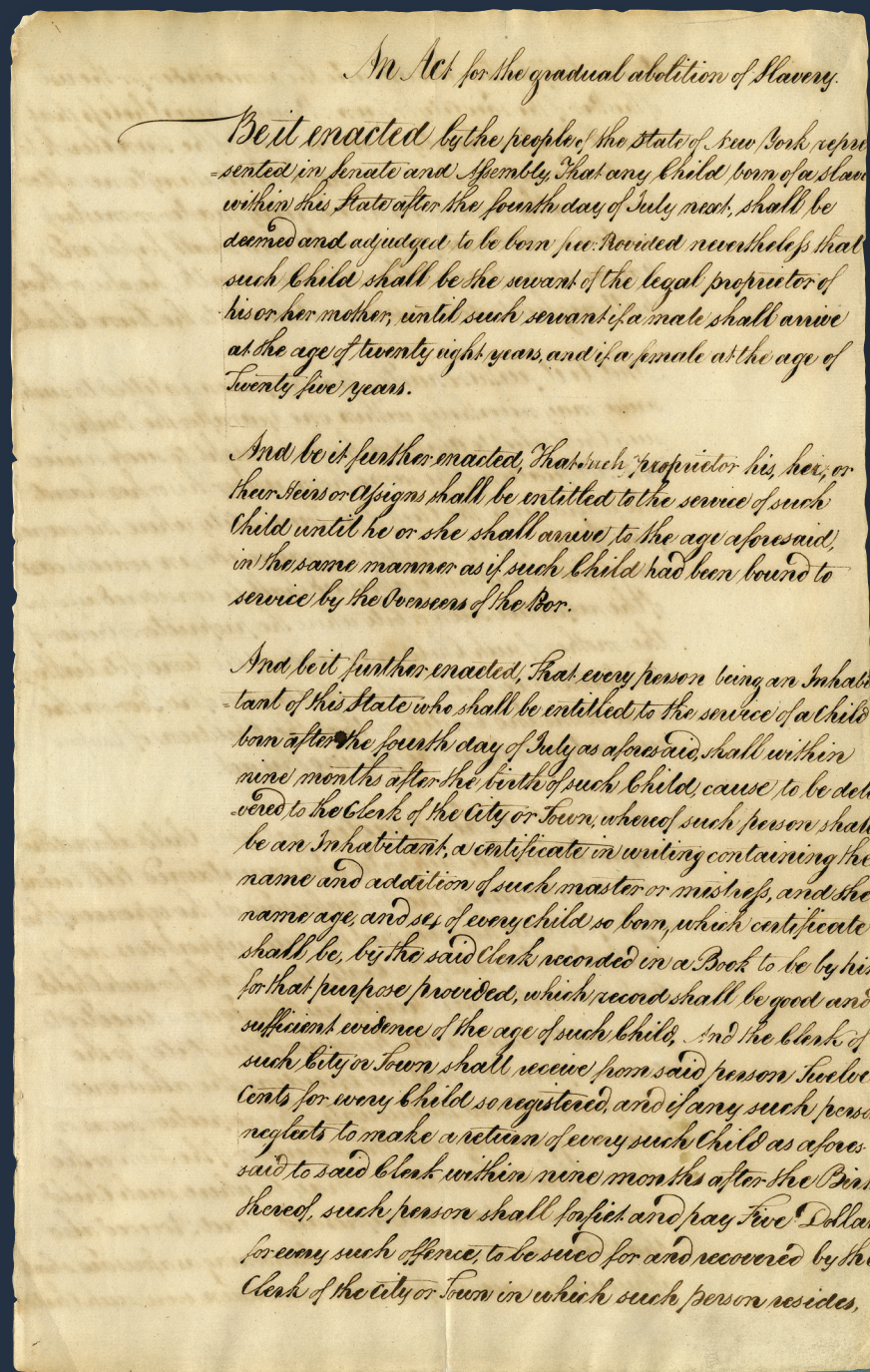


Alexander Hamilton's Plan of Government, 1787

Alexander Hamilton arrived at the Constitutional Convention with an 11-point plan calling for a strong central government.
National Archives and Records Administration

An Act for the Gradual Emancipation of Slavery in New York, 1799

The Revolutionary War did not bring freedom to all. In New York, over 21,000 enslaved men, women, and children remained in bondage. While some seized opportunities created by the war, independence in 1783 did not mean emancipation for most. The state passed a bill for the gradual abolition law in 1799, ending slavery by 1827.
New York State Archives



Federal Hall, Seat of Congress, 1790, hand-colored engraving by Amos Doolittle
This image depicts George Washington's inauguration on April 30, 1789.
Library of Congress

A Declaration by the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA in General Congress assembled.

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another people, among the

REVOLUTIONARY LEGACY

When the Founders declared that “all men are created equal,” they proclaimed ideals that reshaped the world. Yet in practice, the new nation protected political rights mainly for landowning white men. Women, enslaved people, free Blacks, Indigenous people, immigrants, and the poor were excluded from full participation—and New York itself remained a slave state until 1827.

Because the Constitution could be amended, it became a powerful vehicle for change. For 250 years, New York State has stood at the center of the nation’s unfinished struggle to align its laws with its ideals. From abolition and the Underground Railroad to the women’s rights movement at Seneca Falls, from labor activism in New York City to the Civil Rights Movement, environmental justice, and LGBTQ+ equality, New Yorkers have repeatedly invoked the Revolution’s promises of liberty and equality.

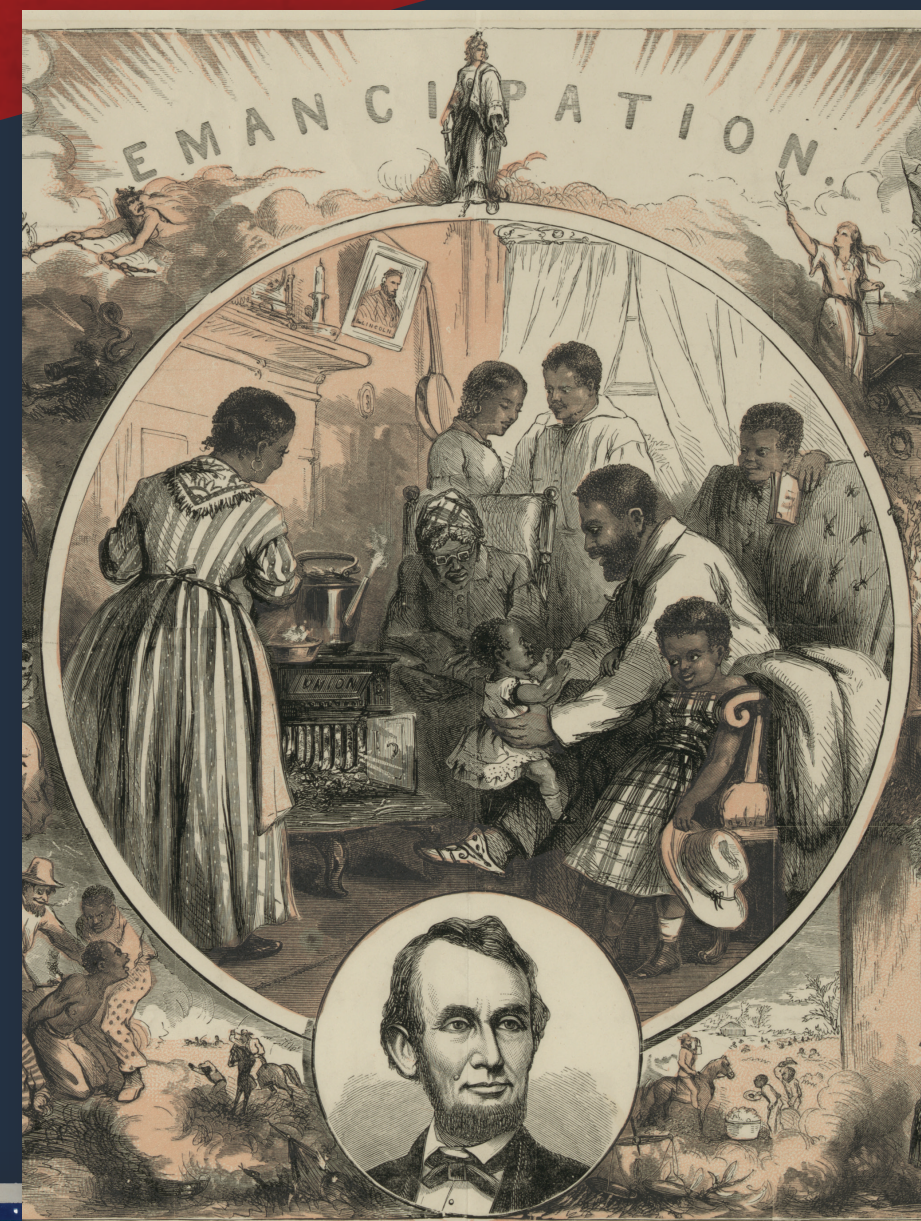
The American Revolution did not end in 1783. In New York, generations of ordinary people have continued it—expanding freedom and redefining democracy for the nation.



Shirley Chisholm, October 3, 1983
Shirley Chisholm (1924–2005), born in Brooklyn, was the first African American woman elected to Congress, the first Black woman to run for a major party’s presidential nomination, and an outspoken champion for the rights of women.
Library of Congress

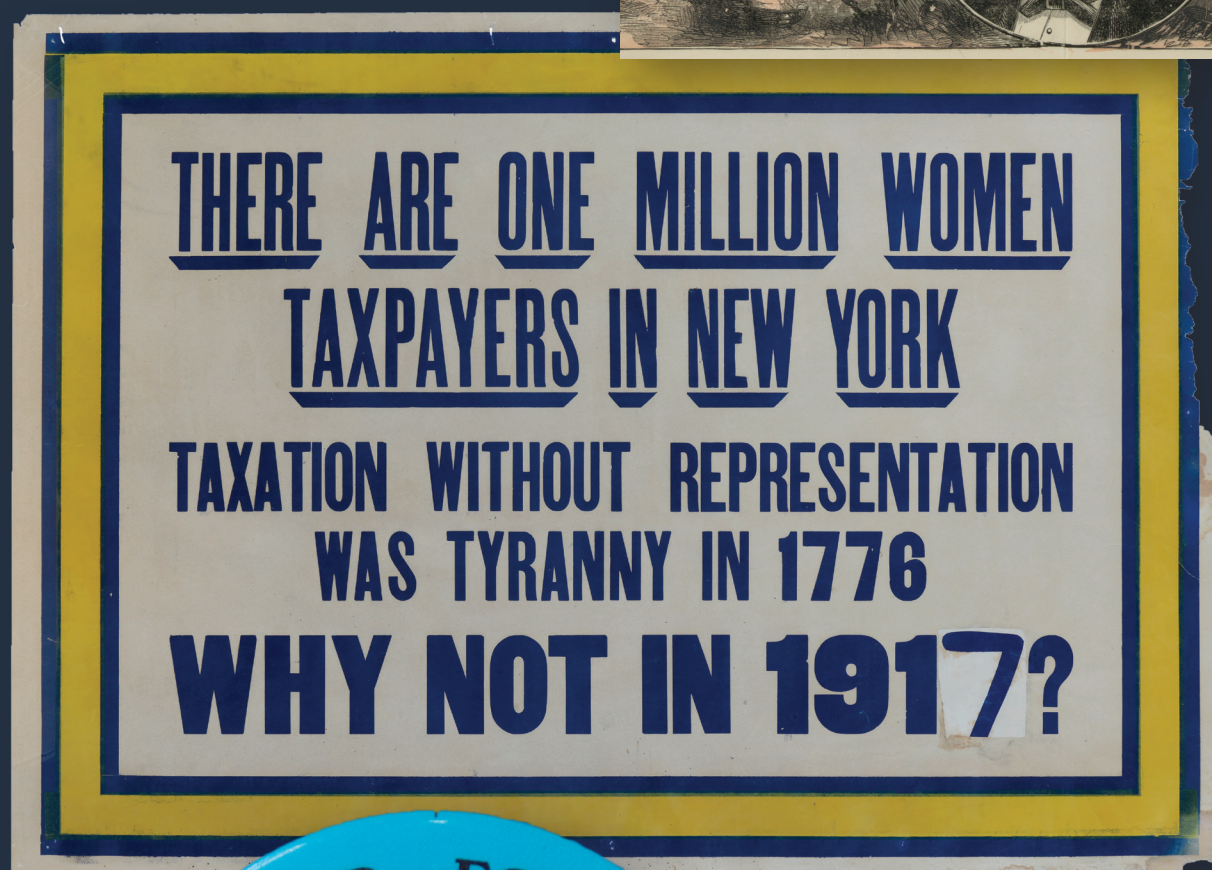


Anthony-Stanton-Bloomer, sculpture, Ted Aub, bronze, 1999
This sculpture depicts Amelia Bloomer introducing Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony in 1851, on the street in Seneca Falls. Anthony was visiting to attend an anti-slavery meeting, and the two quickly became friends and partners in the fight for women’s rights.
Seneca Falls Historical Society

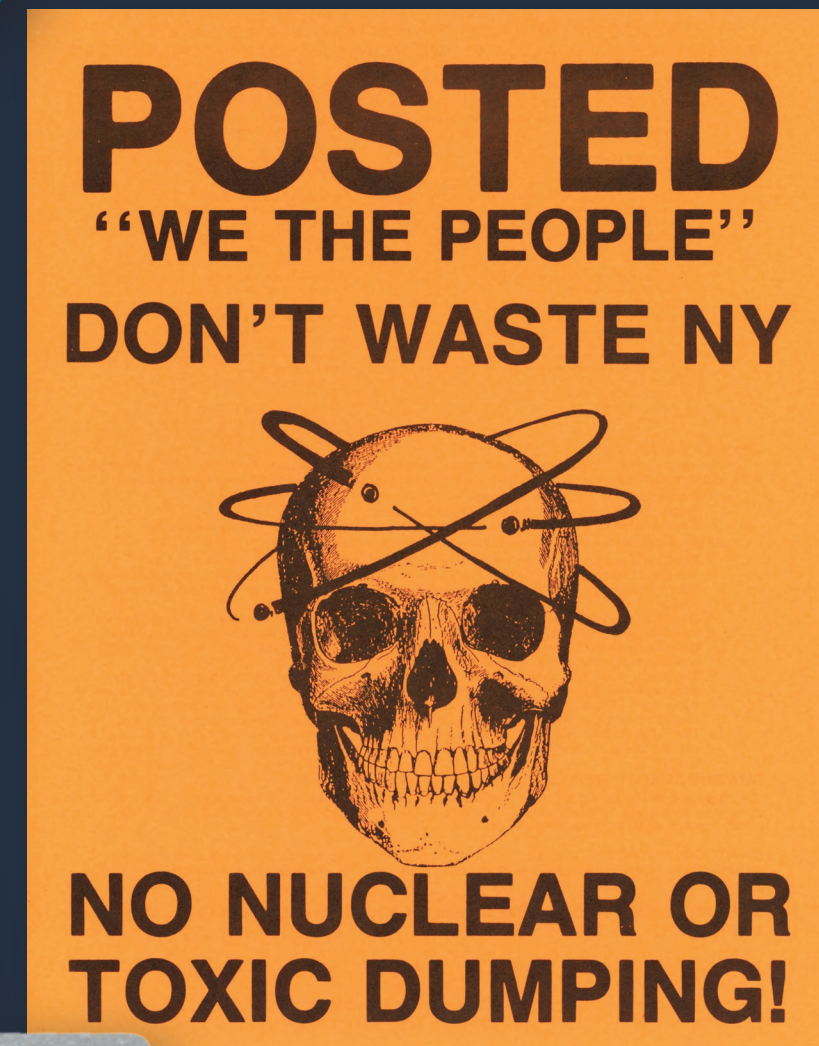


Emancipation by Thomas Nast, 1865
Slavery would not be abolished in New York State until 1827 and nationally in 1865 with the 13th Amendment.
Library of Congress

Poster, “Taxation Without Representation Was Tyranny in 1776, Why Not 1917?” c. 1915–1917
Howland Stone Store Museum



“We Deliver for the River, Clearwater,” button, c. 1990
Folk musician and activist Pete Seeger envisioned the Hudson River Sloop Clearwater as a vessel for education and outreach to raise awareness of the importance and health of the river.
New York State Museum, H-2025.43.2

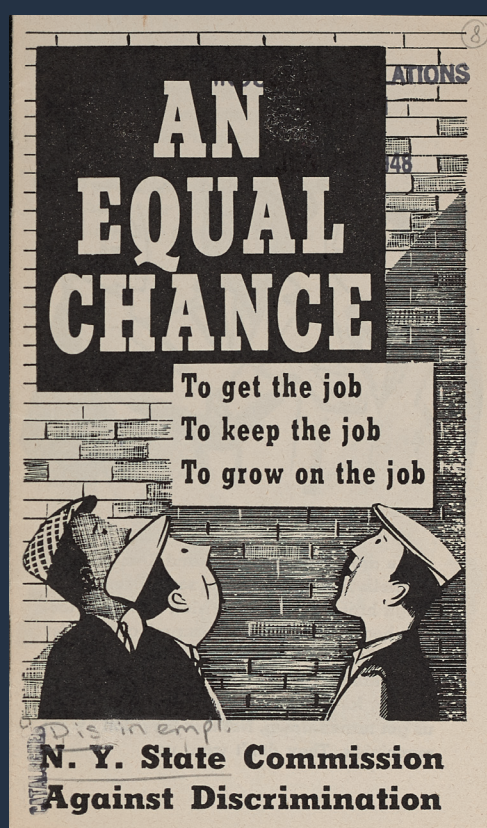


C.A.R.D. Application Poster, c. 1988–1993
In the 1980s, a new federal law dictated that states must manage their own low-level radioactive waste, leading to a state commission to identify sites for dumping. A grassroots coalition, including the Citizens Against Radioactive Dumping (C.A.R.D.) fought proposed sites in Cortland and Allegany Counties, and pushed the state to challenge the federal law.
Cortland County Historical Society

REVOLUTIONARY LEGACY

Civil Rights

Despite slavery's deep roots and enduring discrimination, New York became a national leader in civil rights through grassroots activism, landmark legal challenges, and some of the country's earliest state anti-discrimination laws.



"An equal chance to get the job, to keep the job, to grow on the job," by the N.Y. State Commission Against Discrimination, 1948

New York became the first state in the nation to ban employment discrimination based on race, religion, or national origin in 1945. New York State Archives



Anti-lynching banner at NAACP Headquarters in New York City, c. 1930

Every time a lynching occurred in the US between 1920 and 1936, the NAACP flew this flag from their headquarters on Fifth Avenue in New York City, forcing white Americans to confront the prevalence of racial violence. According to NAACP records, there were 4,743 lynchings in the US between 1882 and 1968. Library of Congress

Labor Rights

As an industrial powerhouse, New York set national standards for workplace safety, fair wages, child labor restrictions, and anti-discrimination protections, often linking labor reform with broader civil rights struggles.

Abolition

Although slavery persisted in New York until 1827, the state became a national center of abolitionism, with Black and white activists building powerful antislavery networks, advancing emancipation, and helping lead the Underground Railroad movement.



Frederick Douglass, c. 1845

Born enslaved in Maryland, Douglass escaped to freedom in New York City in 1838. He became a prominent abolitionist on the lecture circuit. In 1847, Douglass moved to Rochester, New York, where he began publishing the *North Star*, a nationwide abolitionist newspaper. Onondaga Historical Association

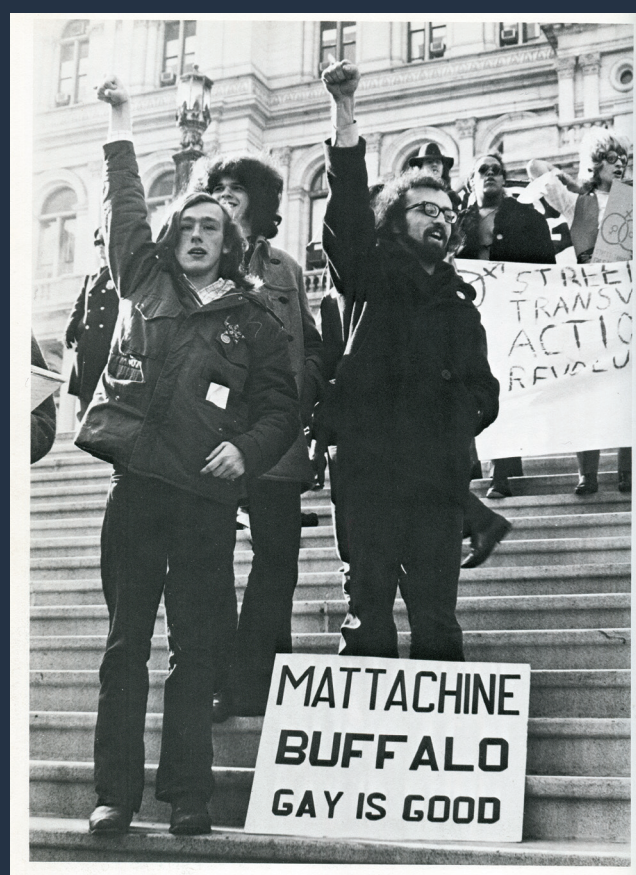
Women's Rights

New York led the women's rights movement nationally, laying out a call to action at the 1848 Seneca Falls convention, organizing to win the vote statewide in 1917 (three years before the nation), and continuing to press for constitutional equality.



Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, c. 1890

Stanton and Anthony devoted their lives to the passage of women's suffrage in New York and at the national level. Neither would see the vote before their death. Library of Congress



Members of the Buffalo chapter of the Mattachine Society on the steps of the New York State Capitol following the first "gay liberation" march in Albany, 1971. Torch Yearbook, 1972, M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York

LGBTQ+ Rights

From the uprising at the Stonewall Inn in 1969 to statewide marriage equality in 2011, New York has been at the forefront of the national movement for LGBTQ+ rights.

Environmental Rights

New Yorkers fought in courts and on the waterways to push for environmental protections, resulting in landmark rulings and laws banning harmful chemicals, punishing polluters, and affirming every resident's right to clean air and water.



Sachem Sam George, Cayuga Nation, and Maya van Rossum, an author of the Green Amendment, at a rally in 2024

The Green Amendment to the New York State Constitution put environmental rights on par with other fundamental human rights. Kelly Garlock for Green Amendments for the Generations, GreenAmendment.org