

Reading Guide  
*These Truths: A History of the United States*, Part 1, pages 1-149  
By Jill Lepore

Chapter 2  
“The Rulers and the Ruled”

“Long before shots were fired at Lexington and Concord...a revolutionary tradition was forged, not by the English in America, but by Indians waging wars and slaves waging rebellions. They revolted again and again. Their revolutions came in waves that lashed the land. They asked the same question, unrelentingly: *By what right are we ruled?*” -- p. 55

“The English in the colonies understood their rights as “free men” as deriving from an “ancient constitution” that guaranteed that even kings were subject to the “laws of the land.” These same people sold Indians and bought Africans. *By what right did they rule them, in their city on a hill?*” -- p. 45

“In American history, the relationship between liberty and slavery is at once deep and dark: the threat of black rebellion gave license to white political opposition. *The American political tradition was forged by philosophers and by statesmen, by printers and by writers, and it was forged, too, by slaves.*” -- p. 64

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*This is a very important chapter, largely because it shines a bright, harsh light on American History. Re-read those three quotes above carefully. Jill Lepore is laying out an ARGUMENT about the history of the United States that is decidedly different than those offered by conventional high-school textbooks. She is arguing that Native Americans, African slaves, and women were not passive victims of European actions, she is asserting that Indians & enslaved Africans actively contributed to principles of freedom embodied in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.*

*This is a challenging chapter in many ways, but complex history requires complex thinking and careful reading.*

*The ideas presented in this chapter—in this book--represent the ‘deep end of the pool,’ as they say. This is college-level thinking.*

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This chapter reading guide will not summarize every fact. It will frame the key concepts and themes Jill Lepore is making.

p. 32-33 The paragraphs on the **English Reformation** are important. (**The English Reformation** was a series of events in 16th-century England by which the Church of England broke away from the authority of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church.) Understanding the **Protestant Reformation** (see p. 42) is critical to understanding the evolution of religious, political, and civil thought in the modern world—challenging established authority.

p. 33-34 The first English colonies in North America—Virginia and Plymouth Colonies—were established for very different reasons. With them developed new ideas about liberty, about “the consent of the governed,” and the hypocrisies that the institution of slavery exposed.

p. 35 **Edward Coke** eventually became “the leading theorist of **English common law**, as we’ll see.



Edward Coke



Captain John Smith



Thomas Hobbes

p. 36-37 The true story of **John Smith** and the founding of Virginia colony, 1607

p. 37. **Thomas Hobbes** authored *Leviathan*, which is one of political science’s most important early works.

p. 37. Tobacco’s arrival, and its unintended consequences.

p. 38 In 1619, the **House of Burgesses** was established, and the arrival of **the first captured Africans** in Virginia occurred.

p. 38-39 The journey of the *Mayflower*, the founding of Plymouth Colony.

p. 40-41 **Edward Coke** re-emerges in London challenging King James, who asserted that he was king by **divine right**. Coke argued that the law was above the king and that common law must be obeyed by the king.

p. 41 The story of the **Magna Carta**, 1215.

p. 42. A new doctrine of evidence and new method of inquiry: “An observed or witnessed act or thing...is the basis of the truth.”

p. 43-45 This tension over divine right and the right of dissent led to 20,000 dissenters, led by people like **John Winthrop**, leaving England for **New England**...these are people sometimes called the Pilgrims or the Puritans. New colonies pop up along the Atlantic Coast for different groups—“each its own experiment in the rule of the people and freedom of speech.” (p. 50)

p. 45 The ongoing hypocrisy: Almost half of New Englanders’ wealth came from sugar grown by West Indian (Caribbean) African slaves. **By what right did they rule them, in their city on a hill?**

p. 45-49 Sugar plantations and slavery in the West Indies...and English contradictions about liberty, freedom of speech, religion, and the press, while they expanded and justified slavery.

p. 49-50. Roger Williams' colony of Rhode Island – “liberty of conscience.” Rhode Island accepted Catholics, Jews, & Muslims (but not atheists).



Oliver Cromwell



Charles II



John Locke

p. 50. The return of an English king to the throne in 1660 is known as the **Restoration**, of the monarchy. It marked the return of [Charles II](#) as king (1660–85) following the period of [Oliver Cromwell](#)'s Commonwealth, as well as increased religious toleration. The bishops were restored to Parliament after Cromwell banished the Anglican (Church of England) bishops in favor of the Puritans (Presbyterians), which established a strict Anglican orthodoxy. The period, which also included the reign of [James II](#) (1685–88), was marked by an expansion in colonial trade, the [Anglo-Dutch Wars](#), and a revival of drama and literature.

p. 52-55 This is an important section on the English philosopher **John Locke**, whose *Two Treatises on Civil Government* heavily influenced Jefferson and the authors of the United States Constitution. **Property ownership** is central to Locke's thinking. This led him to argue that the Indians, having no property, had no government. And (p. 55) Locke makes an argument in favor of the right of one person to own another. It is acritical contradiction.

p. 55 In this section, Jill Lepore argues, “[Long before shots were fired at Lexington and Concord...a revolutionary tradition was forged, not by the English in America, but by Indians waging wars and slaves waging rebellions. They revolted again and again. Their revolutions came in waves that lashed the land. They asked the same question, unrelentingly: \*By what right are we ruled?\*” -- p. 55](#)

p. 55-59. The English colonies, fearing uprisings by Indians and slaves, abandoned their ideals about due process in favor of suppressing rebellions. These included suppressing literacy among slaves and the expanded use of torture.

- 1675 King Philip's War, an Algonquian rebellion led by Metacom
- Antigua 1736 ... slave rebellion led by a man named Court
- (p. 56) Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia in 1676 was an uprising of poor whites demanding the right to vote while preventing black men and women from securing their freedom.
- (p. 57) The Salem Witch Trials of 1692 were more about fear of Indian uprisings than it was of witchcraft, though 19 women and men were convicted of witchcraft.
- 1733 slave uprising on St. John's
- 1736 slave uprising on Antigua
- 1739 slave uprising in Jamaica led by Cudjoe (“The First Maroon War”)

- 1739 the Stono Rebellion in South Carolina led by Jemmy, who could read & write—leading to laws banning the teaching of reading and writing to slaves.

“The English...enjoyed a “literall advantage over the people they ruled, and they meant to keep it.” (p. 59)



Depiction of a Salem Witch Trial

Charles Town, Jamaica

p. 59-63 The growth of literacy among the English colonists led to the growth of a free press, which began to question authority.

- “Rags to Riches” -- **Benjamin Franklin’s** origins as a newspaper publisher (p. 60)
- “Rags to Rags” -- His sister **Jane Franklin’s** experience exemplified the limited scope of common women’s lives in the colonies. (p. 60)
- “Printers did not consider it their duty to print only facts; they considered it their duty to print the “Opinions of Men,” as Franklin put it, and let the best man win: truth will out.” (p. 61)
- (p. 61-63) The important trial of **John Peter Zenger**

p. 63-64 “...The idea that people may depose a tyrant...lay behind every slave rebellion.” Events in New York in the 1730s and 1740s “set a pattern in American politics.”

“It was lost on no one that the loudest calls for liberty in the early modern world came from a part of the world that was wholly dependent on slavery.” (p.64)

“In American history, the relationship between liberty and slavery is at once deep and dark: the threat of black rebellion gave license to white political opposition. **The American political tradition was forged by philosophers and by statesmen, by printers and by writers, and it was forged, too, by slaves.**” -- p. 64

p. 65-71 **Benjamin Franklin** is the focus of this section. In particular, his call for the colonies to unite for common defense and his promotion of the diffusion of knowledge through newspapers (*Poor Richard’s Almanac*), libraries, and the post office, and the colonies’ first learned society (the American Philosophical Society). “He wanted knowledge to circulate, blood in the colonies’ veins.” (p. 67)

- The colonies were becoming more alike. And in one way that was evident was in religious expression. **George Whitefield** was “a people’s preacher,” evangelical movement “emphasized the divinity of ordinary people, at the expense of the authority of their ministers.” (p. 68) This was a kind of revolution, too.



Benjamin Franklin

George Whitefield

p. 69 The Spanish and the French differed from the English regarding color. “Color in many ways marked status, but it did not mark a line between slavery and freedom, and color meant color: reds and browns, and pinks and yellows.... And Britain’s mainland colonies imagined only two colors: black and white, and two statuses: slave and free.”

**Manumission:** release from slavery

p. 70 Franklin’s views on the question of color. “He wrote about a new race, a people who were “white.”

p. 70 **The Albany Congress** of 1754 and Franklin’s proposed **Plan of Union**. “It was judg’d to have too much of the *Democratic*.”

