

Title of Presentation: “Cast Off the Yoke of Tyranny!”: The Reformation’s Influence Upon the Enlightenment and Revolutions Around the Atlantic World

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This paper explores the inextricable link between the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and Revolutions around the Atlantic World, particularly the American and French Revolutions. The Reformation was, in a political sense, a revolt against tyrannical authority. Consequently, everywhere it went, revolution broke out. This included the Peasants’ Revolt in Germany, the English Civil War (in which the Puritans beheaded King Charles II), and eventually, the American War for Independence, and the French Revolution, during the eighteenth century. Many historians correctly attribute much of Jeffersonian thought in the Declaration of Independence to English Enlightenment philosopher John Locke. However, this often takes John Locke out of his own historical context, as it makes him a separate factor in the chain of events from the Reformation itself. John Locke was a product of his sixteenth-century English environment, where the Geneva Bible (which the Puritans translated into English as exiles during the reign of Mary Tudor) held immense popularity even more so than the Authorized Version of the Bible (1611), otherwise known as the King James Version of the Bible. Thus, John Locke and the Protestant Reformation cannot rightly be seen as two separate streams leading to the American Revolution and beyond. Rather, this paper shows that they are both part of the same stream that led to the tumultuous events across the Atlantic World that forever redefined many nations in the process. Thus, the Atlantic World Revolutions are but the place to which Reformation thinking naturally flowed. Unless the Revolutions are understood from their respective nations’ history in the Protestant Reformation and its aftermath, the entire scope of their history will not be fully grasped.