

The American Revolutionary War (1775-1783)

The American Revolutionary War, which unfolded between 1775 and 1783, was a pivotal chapter in the history of the 13 Colonies, marking their quest for independence from British rule. The seeds of discontent had been sown over years of tensions, fueled by issues such as taxation without representation and perceived infringements on colonial self-governance.

The American Revolutionary War, also known as the American War of Independence, was a conflict that lasted from April 1775 to September 1783. It resulted in the thirteen American colonies winning political independence from Great Britain and forming the United States of America. The war began with the Battles of Lexington and Concord in April 1775 and was formally declared in August 1775 by the British Parliament, which declared the colonies to be in a state of rebellion. The conflict was fought in North America, the Caribbean, and the Atlantic Ocean.

To explain more, the war was initially a civil war within the British Empire, but after 1778 it became an international war as France (in 1778) and Spain (in 1779) joined the colonies against Britain. The war was fought by small field armies, with the American forces numbering about 29,000 insurgents under arms throughout the country in 1781. The British army was a reliable and steady force of professionals, numbering about 42,000.

1. The Main Causes Leading to the Revolution

Several British policies in the American colonies during the 18th century led to disagreements and contributed to the tensions that eventually led to the American Revolution. Some notable policies include:

- ❖ **French and Indian War (1754-1763):** The French and Indian War, also known as the Seven Years' War, was a global conflict that involved multiple European powers, including France and Britain, as well as their respective North American colonies. The war was fought primarily in North America and ended with the Treaty of Paris in 1763, which saw France cede most of its North American territories to Britain.
 - The war left Britain in debt, leading to increased taxation on the American colonies to cover the costs of maintaining troops in North America. This taxation, without colonial representation in the British Parliament, was a major source of resentment and contributed to the growing tensions that led to the American Revolution
- ❖ **Navigation Acts 1756:** Enforced by the British government to regulate colonial trade, these acts restricted colonial commerce and required certain goods to be shipped only

to England. Colonists resented these restrictions, as they limited economic opportunities and profits.

- King George III used an old law to make the colonists pay taxes on goods shipped in English ships. The colonists responded by smuggling goods
 - **While the Navigation Acts alone did not directly cause the American Revolution**, they were part of a broader pattern of British policies that contributed to the growing resentment and desire for greater self-determination among the colonists. The restrictions on trade and economic autonomy played a role in shaping the colonial mindset and fostering opposition to British rule, contributing to the eventual outbreak of the American Revolution in 1775.
- ❖ **Writs of Assistance:** General search warrants issued by British American courts, played a significant role in the increasing tensions that led to the American Revolution. These warrants, which allowed customs officials to search homes and vessels without probable cause or express permission, were introduced in the 1760s to combat smuggling. However, they were perceived as a violation of the colonists' rights as British subjects, and their use sparked controversy and opposition.
- ❖ **James Otis, a Massachusetts lawyer**, challenged the writs in courts in 1761, arguing that they were against the fundamental principles of law and the English constitution. Although Otis lost the case, his arguments galvanized colonial resistance and helped to establish the principle that the colonists had rights that the British government could not infringe upon.

The writs of assistance were not major causes of the American Revolution, but they were a symbol of British abuses of power and a catalyst for the colonists' desire to assert their voice in stopping it.

- ❖ **Proclamation of 1763:** It prohibited colonial settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains after the French and Indian War. This was intended to ease conflicts with Native American tribes, but it frustrated colonists who desired access to the western lands.

In further elaboration, the Proclamation of 1763 was a royal decree issued by King George III of Great Britain on October 7, 1763, following the end of the French and Indian War. It drew a line along the Appalachian Mountains and prohibited British colonists from settling west of it.

The Proclamation of 1763, therefore, played a significant role in the lead-up to the American Revolution by fueling colonial dissatisfaction with imperial rule.

- ❖ **The Sugar Act actually:** also known as the American Revenue Act, was a British law passed by the Parliament of Great Britain on April 5, 1764, to crack down on molasses smuggling in the American colonies and to provide increased revenues to fund enlarged British Empire responsibilities following the French and Indian War. The act reduced the tax on molasses from six pence to three pence per gallon, but it also mandated that certain goods could only be shipped to Britain from the colonies, and nowhere else, which included lumber, one of the most valuable colonial exports.

The Molasses Act of 1733 was a British law that imposed a tax on molasses, sugar, and rum imported from non-British foreign colonies into the North American colonies. It aimed to reserve a practical monopoly of the American sugar market to British West Indies sugarcane growers, who could not compete successfully with French and other foreign sugar producers. The act was strongly opposed by the American colonists, who relied on molasses for the rum industry and feared that the act would increase the price of rum and disrupt their economy. It was later replaced by the Sugar Act of 1764, which became an irritant contributing to the American Revolution

- ❖ **The Stamp Act of 1765:** was a direct tax imposed by the British Parliament on the American colonies, requiring that printed materials, legal documents, playing cards, and newspapers be produced on stamped paper made in London and carrying an embossed revenue stamp. The purpose of the tax was to pay for British military troops stationed in the American colonies after the French and Indian War. The act was highly controversial and led to widespread protests, boycotts, and acts of civil disobedience in the colonies. The colonists argued that they could not be taxed by a government in which they were not represented, leading to the famous slogan "**no taxation without representation.**"

The colonists responded by creating the Stamp Act Congress and refused to buy **stamps or stamped paper**. They also burned pictures of the King in effigy.

- ❖ **Intolerable Acts, also known as the Coercive Acts,** were major causes of the Revolutionary War. The Acts were a series of punitive measures passed by the British Parliament in response to the Boston Tea Party in 1773. The Acts included

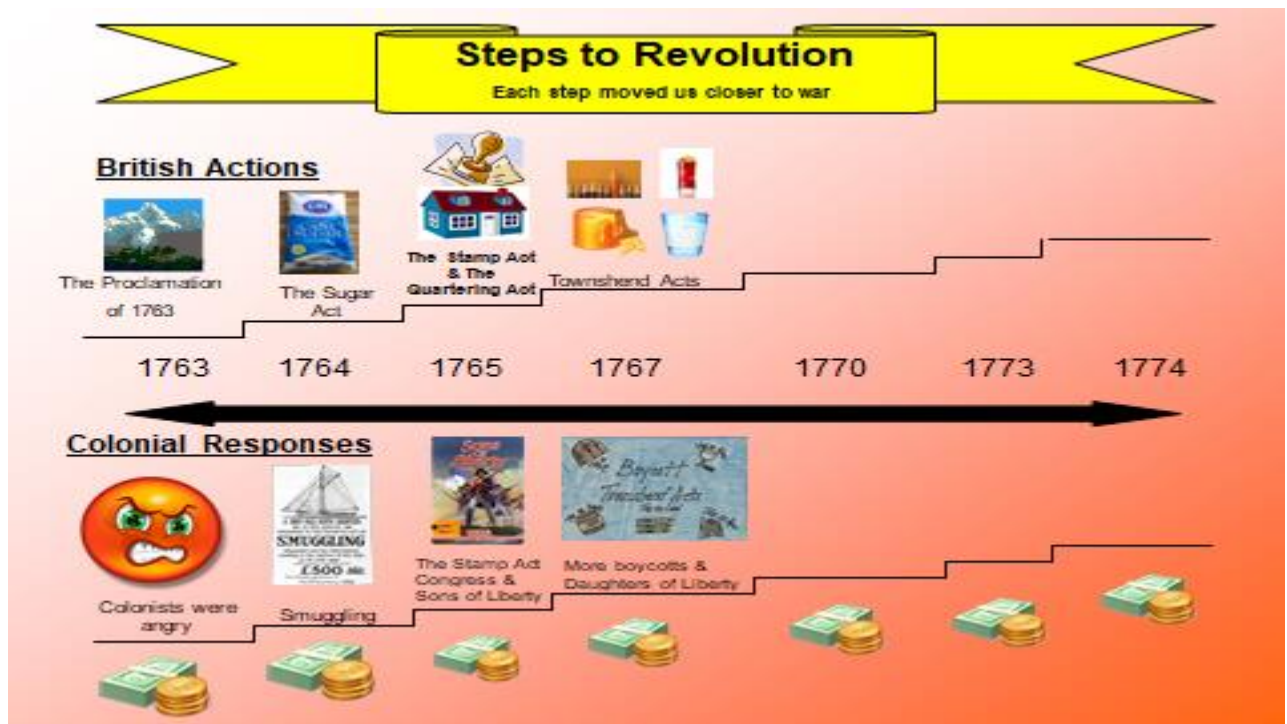
the Boston Port Act, which closed the port of Boston until the colonists paid for the destroyed tea; the **Massachusetts Government Act**, which revoked the colony's charter and placed it under military rule; the **Administration of Justice Act**, which allowed British officials accused of crimes to be tried in England rather than in the colonies; and **the Quartering Act**, which required colonists to provide housing and supplies for British troops.

The Acts were seen as a direct attack on colonial rights and liberties, and they further inflamed tensions between the colonists and the British government. The Acts led to the convening of the First Continental Congress in 1774, which marked a significant step towards the American Revolution

- ❖ **The Quartering Act of 1765:** a British parliamentary provision mandated colonial authorities to provide British forces stationed in their towns or villages with necessities such as food, drink, quarters, fuel, and transportation. This act, perceived as an assertion of British authority over the American colonies, stirred resentment, particularly in New York, where the largest contingent of reserves was quartered.

The act sparked disputes among the colonists who argued that it contravened the Bill of Rights of 1689, which prohibited taxation without representation and the maintenance of a standing army without Parliament's consent. This discontent contributed to the growing tensions between the colonies and the British government in the lead-up to the American Revolution.

- ❖ **The Townshend Acts:** a series of British acts of Parliament passed during 1767 and 1768. They were named after Charles Townshend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer who proposed the program. It imposed direct revenue duties on lead, glass, paper, paint, and tea, aiming to raise revenue to pay the salaries of some colonial governors and judges, previously paid by the colonial assemblies.



2. Key Events Leading to the Outbreak of the War

- **The Boston Massacre (1770):** a significant event that led to the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. It occurred on March 5, 1770, when a group of American colonists clashed with British soldiers in Boston, resulting in the death of five colonists and the injury of six others. The incident was heavily propagandized by colonists such as Paul Revere, who created an engraving of the confrontation that showed British soldiers slaughtering innocent colonists.
 - The Boston Massacre was a signal event leading to the Revolutionary War, and it imprinted into the minds of Bostonians the threat of British military occupation. It helped break the ties that bound Americans to Great Britain, and it marked the first instance in which blood was spilled over the cause of American liberty.
- **The Boston Tea Party:** It occurred on December 16, 1773. It is a key event leading to the outbreak of the American Revolution. The Tea Party was a response to the Tea Act, which allowed the British East India Company to sell tea in the colonies without paying taxes, effectively undercutting local merchants. The event was a symbolic act of defiance against British rule and led to the Intolerable Acts, or Coercive Acts, in 1774, which further alienated the colonists from British rule. The First Continental

Congress, which convened in 1774, was a direct result of the Tea Party and the Intolerable Acts, and it paved the way for the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

- **The Battles of Lexington and Concord, which occurred on April 19, 1775,** were a key event leading to the outbreak of the American Revolution. The battles were the initial skirmishes between British regulars and American provincials, marking the beginning of the American Revolution. Acting on orders from London to suppress the rebellious colonists, General Thomas Gage, recently appointed royal governor of Massachusetts, ordered his troops to seize the colonists' military stores at Concord.
 - En route from Boston, the British force of 700 men was met on Lexington Green by 77 local minutemen and others who had been forewarned of the raid by the colonists' efficient lines of communication, including the ride of Paul Revere. It is unclear who fired the first shot. Resistance melted away at Lexington, and the British moved on to Concord.
 - Most of the American military supplies had been hidden or destroyed before the British troops arrived. A British covering party at Concord's North Bridge was finally confronted by 320 to 400 American patriots and forced to withdraw. The march back to Boston was a genuine ordeal for the British, with Americans continually firing on them from behind roadside houses, barns, trees, and stone walls.
 - This experience established guerrilla warfare as the colonists' best defense strategy against the British. Total losses were British 273, American 95. The Battles of Lexington and Concord confirmed the alienation between the majority of colonists and the mother country, and it roused 16,000 New Englanders to join forces and begin the Siege of Boston, resulting in its evacuation by the British the following March.

3. The Making of the Revolution: Organization and Strategy

- ❖ **The First Continental Congress:** The First Continental Congress convened in response to the British Parliament's passage of the Intolerable Acts, which involved the closure of Boston's port. Meeting in Philadelphia on September 5, 1774, the Congress rejected a proposed reconciliation between British authority and colonial freedom. Instead, it adopted a declaration asserting personal rights, such as life, liberty, property, assembly, and trial by jury.

- The Congress also denounced taxation without representation and the presence of the British army in the colonies without consent. Petitioning the crown for redress of grievances since 1763, the Congress called for a general boycott of British goods and eventual non-exportation of American products to Britain or the British West Indies, with the exception of rice. Delegates from twelve of the thirteen American colonies convened to discuss their grievances and coordinate a response to British rule.
- The Congress passed the Continental Association, initiating a boycott of British goods, and drafted a Declaration and Resolves outlining the colonies' grievances and demands. This event marked a significant step towards the American Revolution, showcasing colonial unity and a collective willingness to oppose British rule.

❖ **The Second Continental Congress**

The Second Continental Congress was convened on May 10, 1775, in Philadelphia, shortly after the start of the Revolutionary War. The Congress created a new country that it first named the United Colonies, and in 1776, renamed the United States of America. The Congress functioned as the de facto national government at the outset of the Revolutionary War by raising militias, directing strategy, appointing diplomats, and creating a navy. The Congress also created **the Continental Army**, which was responsible for carrying the main battlefield burden of the war. The Congress appointed George Washington as the commander in chief of the American army on June 15, 1775. The Congress also drafted the Olive Branch Petition, which attempted to suggest means of resolving disputes between the colonies and Great Britain. Congress sent the petition to King George III on July 8, but he refused to receive it. **The Congress continued to meet until March 1, 1781, when the Articles of Confederation that established a new national government for the United States took effect.**

❖ **Formation of the Continental Army**

- The Continental Army was formed to coordinate the military efforts of the American colonies in the war against the British during the American Revolution. It was created on June 14, 1775, by a resolution passed by the Second Continental Congress.
- The army was initially a loosely coordinated band of militias and citizen-soldiers, but it evolved into a formal military force capable of overcoming the British army by 1780.

- General George Washington was appointed as the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army and served in this position throughout the war. The army reflected the diversity of the colonies, consisting of soldiers from all 13 colonies, including native-born and immigrant individuals of almost every nationality, as well as free and enslaved African-Americans.
- ❖ **The Declaration of Independence** is a document that was approved by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, and announced the separation of 13 North American British colonies from Great Britain. It states the principles on which the United States was founded and the reasons for separation from Great Britain. The document begins with the famous words, "When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them".
 - The Declaration of Independence is not legally binding, but it is powerful and continues to inspire people around the world to fight for freedom and equality. The document is divided into five parts: introduction, preamble, indictment of King George III, denunciation of the British people, and conclusion. The signers of the Declaration of Independence were the 56 delegates to the Second Continental Congress, representing each of the Thirteen Colonies.
 - The Declaration of Independence played a pivotal role in the American Revolution by solidifying the colonies' commitment to breaking away from British rule and establishing themselves as a new nation

The main ideas expressed in the Declaration of Independence include:

- **Equality:** The document asserts that "all men are created equal" and are endowed with certain unalienable rights
- **Unalienable Rights:** It proclaims that individuals have inherent rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, which cannot be taken away or surrendered.

- **Purpose of Government:** The Declaration states that the purpose of government is to protect these rights, and if a government fails to do so, the people have the right to alter or abolish it
- **Consent of the Governed:** It emphasizes that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, highlighting the importance of popular sovereignty

❖ **The Failure of Reconciliation**

The Failure of reconciliation between Britain and the American colonies was a significant factor in the drive for American independence. The First Continental Congress, convened in 1774, rejected a plan for reconciling British authority with colonial freedom and instead adopted a declaration of personal rights, denounced taxation without representation, and petitioned the crown for a redress of grievances. The Second Continental Congress, which met in 1775, created the Continental Army, appointed George Washington as its commander in chief, and ultimately functioned as the de facto national government at the outset of the Revolutionary War. Despite efforts such as the Olive Branch Petition, which attempted to resolve disputes between the colonies and Great Britain, the lack of reconciliation led to the American drive for independence

Strategies employed by both the British and the American Patriots during the American Revolutionary War were complex and adaptive, reflecting changing conditions and resources.

➤ **British Strategies**

- **Northern Campaign:** Initially focused on capturing New England, but after heavy losses at Bunker Hill, the British shifted focus to New York and New Jersey, hoping to divide the colonies and gain control of the Hudson River valley.
- **Philadelphia Campaign:** Attempted to capture Philadelphia and crush Washington's army, but despite temporarily succeeding, this move ultimately weakened British forces.
- **Southern Strategy:** Developed in response to French intervention, aimed to win the war by focusing on the South, where British sympathizers were numerous and colonial resistance less robust.
- **Invasion of the South:** Led by Lord Cornwallis, this effort sought to subjugate the South and cut off Patriot forces from each other, but it ultimately resulted in the loss of Charleston and the surrender at Yorktown

➤ **American Patriot Strategies**

- **Preservation of a Good Army:** Under Washington's leadership, the American forces prioritized maintaining a disciplined and effective army, taking advantage of favorable situations to wear down the British
- **Defensive Posture:** Early in the war, the Patriots adopted a primarily defensive stance, waiting for the right moment to strike
- **Surprise Attacks:** Washington's surprise attacks at Trenton and Princeton in 1776 bolstered Patriot morale and undermined British confidence
- **Alliances:** The alliance with France proved critical, providing financial assistance, manpower, and naval power to the Patriots
- **Coordination with French Forces:** Washington and Rochambeau worked together to develop strategies that combined French and American strengths

It is significant to acknowledge that these strategies developed gradually, in response to alterations in the political situation, military capabilities, and global relations. Ultimately, the American Patriots emerged victorious due to their capacity to adjust to changing circumstances and uphold solidarity in the midst of challenges.

4. Diplomacy and the American Revolutionary war

Diplomacy was crucial during the American Revolutionary War as it allowed the newly formed United States to obtain support and acknowledgment from foreign countries. In order to gain independence, the American colonists had to establish connections with European nations, particularly France and Spain, who had similar objectives in terms of curbing British dominance.

➤ **Key aspects of diplomacy during the American Revolution include:**

- **Treaty of Alliance and Commerce (1778):** The United States secured a treaty of alliance and commerce with France, which allowed France to provide significant material support, including money, weapons, ships, and troops
- **Patient Diplomacy:** Benjamin Franklin, serving as a diplomat in France, demonstrated patience and skillful negotiation, leading to the Treaty of Alliance
- **Peace Commission:** In 1781, Congress sent a peace commission composed of John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and John Jay to negotiate an end to the conflict

- **Russian Efforts:** While unsuccessful, Francis Dana attempted to establish ties with Russia, seeking additional support for the American cause
- **League of Armed Neutrality:** The United States joined the League of Armed Neutrality, which aimed to protect neutral nations' rights to trade with belligerents
- **Preliminary Articles of Peace:** On November 30, 1782, the preliminary articles of peace were signed, marking a major step towards the conclusion of hostilities
- **Formal Peace of Paris:** The final peace treaty, known as the Treaty of Paris, was signed on September 3, 1783, formally ending the war

In sum, the use of diplomatic tactics played a vital role in the attainment of American independence. This enabled the newly-formed nation to establish connections with other nations and obtain the necessary assistance to overcome the British. These alliances had a profound impact on the trajectory of international relations, as they established a model for smaller nations to assert themselves against larger imperial powers.

5. Public and Political Reaction in Britain

During the American Revolutionary War, public and political reaction in Britain was mixed. Some segments of British society supported the war effort, while others opposed it. The British government and military leadership faced criticism for their handling of the conflict, including the decision to engage in a costly and protracted war with the American colonies. Some key aspects of public and political reaction in Britain during the American Revolution include:

Opposition to the War: Many British citizens opposed the war, viewing it as a costly and unnecessary conflict that drained resources and manpower from other areas of the empire.

Support for the War: Other segments of British society supported the war effort, viewing it as a necessary response to colonial rebellion and a means of preserving British power and prestige.

The war had significant political consequences in Britain, contributing to the downfall of the North ministry and the rise of the Rockingham ministry. The American Revolution sparked a broader debate over British imperial policy, with some arguing for greater autonomy for the colonies and others advocating for a more centralized and authoritarian approach.

The Move toward Independence

The move towards independence in the American colonies was driven by a complex interplay of events and ideas:

- **Failure of reconciliation:** Efforts to negotiate a peaceful solution with Britain, such as the First Continental Congress and the Olive Branch Petition, ultimately failed to bridge the divide between the colonies and the British government
- **Growing radicalization:** Moderate colonists gradually shifted towards more extreme positions due to ongoing tensions and perceived British inflexibility
- **Increased international influence:** Support from European powers, especially France, emboldened the colonies to pursue independence
- **Publication of influential works:** Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" helped to galvanize public opinion in favor of independence
- **Formation of alternative governing bodies:** Local committees and assemblies challenged British authority, providing practical alternatives to British governance
- **Closing of colonial ports:** The British Parliament's decision to close colonial ports in retaliation for the colonies' refusal to comply with British policies marked a turning point towards separation
- **Military engagements:** Battles between British forces and colonial militia demonstrated the colonies' ability to defend themselves and undermined British authority

These factors combined to create a climate in which the colonies felt compelled to assert their independence from Britain. The adoption of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, formally announced the colonies' intention to separate from British rule

