

## **The American Revolutionary War (1775-1783)**

The American Revolutionary War, occurring from 1775 to 1783, was a crucial period in the 13 Colonies' history, driven by grievances such as taxation without representation and perceived colonial autonomy infringements by Britain. Also known as the American War of Independence, it culminated in the colonies gaining political freedom and forming the United States of America. Starting with the Battles of Lexington and Concord in 1775, the conflict escalated with Britain officially declaring the colonies in rebellion. Initially a civil war, it turned international when France and Spain joined the colonies against Britain in 1778 and 1779, respectively. Fought by relatively small armies, the American forces totaled around 29,000 insurgents by 1781, with engagements spanning North America, the Caribbean, and the Atlantic Ocean.

### **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.

Eg : 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**

It is 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**

It 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**

It 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**

They 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**, occurring on March 5, 1770, resulted in the deaths of five colonists and heightened tensions between American colonists and British soldiers, symbolizing the threat of British military occupation and spurring sentiments for American liberty.

**The Boston Tea Party**, on December 16, 1773, was a defiant response to the Tea Act, leading to the Intolerable Acts and ultimately the First Continental Congress, which laid the groundwork for the Declaration of Independence.

**The Battles of Lexington and Concord**, commencing on April 19, 1775, marked the start of the American Revolution, with minutemen resisting British troops and initiating guerrilla warfare, solidifying colonial alienation from Britain and prompting the Siege of Boston, ending in British evacuation.

## **3. The Making of the Revolution: Organization and Strategy**

### **□ The First Continental Congress**

The convening of **the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia on September 5, 1774**, was prompted by the enactment of the Intolerable Acts by the British Parliament,

particularly the closure of Boston's port. Rejecting proposed reconciliation efforts with British authority, the Congress instead embraced a declaration affirming fundamental personal rights such as life, liberty, property, assembly, and trial by jury. Delegates encompassed a spectrum of views, ranging from radical to conservative. Leading the radical faction advocating for significant concessions from Britain were figures like Patrick Henry of Virginia, Samuel Adams, and John Adams of Massachusetts, while moderates included George Washington of Virginia and John Dickinson of Pennsylvania.

Representing a more conservative stance were delegates like John Jay of New York and Joseph Galloway of Pennsylvania. Loyalist viewpoints, however, remained unrepresented as the Congress denounced taxation without representation and the presence of British troops without colonial consent. Since 1763, 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 began on May 10, 1775, in Philadelphia, soon after the Revolutionary War started. They formed a new country called the United Colonies, later renamed the United States of America in 1776. This Congress acted as the main government during the war, organizing militias, planning strategies, appointing diplomats, and creating a navy. They also established the Continental Army, which bore the brunt of the fighting. George Washington was made its commander on June 15, 1775.

The Congress tried to make peace with Britain by sending the Olive Branch Petition to King George III on July 8, but he rejected it. They met until March 1, 1781, when the Articles of Confederation, creating a new national government, took effect. The Continental Army, formed on June 14, 1775, coordinated the colonies' military efforts in the Revolution. Starting as a mix of local militias, it grew into a powerful force that could challenge the British army by 1780. **General George Washington** led the army throughout the war, which included soldiers from all 13 colonies, representing various backgrounds, including free and enslaved African-Americans.

### **Thomas Paine's Argument for Independence**

In January 1776, a pamphlet called *Common Sense*, written by Thomas Paine, was published. Paine, an English immigrant to the colonies, made a powerful argument that changed many people's minds. He said it didn't make sense for the colonies to be ruled by a

faraway island like Britain. He believed it was time for the colonies to become independent states and break away from British rule because the king's government was corrupt and his laws were unfair.

### **The Declaration of Independence**

The Declaration of Independence, approved on July 4, 1776, by the Continental Congress, marked the separation of 13 colonies in North America from Great Britain. It outlines the reasons for this separation and the founding principles of the United States. The famous opening words declare the necessity for people to break political ties when it becomes essential. After more than a year of deliberation, the Congress leaned towards independence. On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee introduced a resolution for independence, leading to a committee including Thomas Jefferson to draft a statement supporting this resolution. Jefferson's declaration listed grievances against King George III's government and justified the revolution based on fundamental principles.

### **4. The War**

From the first shots fired on Lexington green in 1775 to the final signing of a peace treaty in 1783, the American War for Independence, or Revolutionary War, was a long and bitter struggle. Americans not only fought a war during this period but also forged a new national identity, as the former colonies became the United States of America. Some 2.6 million people lived in the 13 colonies or states during the war. An estimated 40 percent of the population joined actively in the struggle against Britain. They called themselves American **Patriots**. A smaller number, 20–30 percent, sided with the British as **Loyalists**, while the rest tried to remain neutral and uninvolved.

**Patriots:** The majority of Patriots came from New England and Virginia. Many soldiers were hesitant to leave their own areas. They joined local militia units for brief stints, went back to work on their farms, and then returned to duty. Despite hundreds of thousands fighting for the Patriot cause, General Washington never had more than 20,000 regular troops under his command at once. His army struggled with shortages of supplies, inadequate equipment, and infrequent pay.

**African Americans:** Initially, George Washington dismissed the notion of African Americans joining the Patriot army. However, when the British offered freedom to slaves who joined their ranks, Washington and Congress swiftly extended the same offer. Around 5,000

African Americans fought for the Patriots, primarily freemen from the North who served alongside white soldiers, although there were also all-African-American units. They participated in numerous military engagements throughout the war, with individuals like Peter Salem earning recognition for their valor.

**Loyalists/Tories:** The Revolutionary War can be seen as a civil conflict where American Patriots opposed pro-British Loyalists, also known as Tories, who remained loyal to the king. Nearly 60,000 American Tories fought alongside British soldiers, providing them with support and participating in raids on Patriot properties. Family members sometimes found themselves on opposing sides, exemplified by Benjamin Franklin's son, William Franklin, who sided with the Tories. Estimates suggest there were between 520,000 to 780,000 American Tories, with states like New York, New Jersey, and Georgia likely having the majority. As the war neared its end, about 80,000 Loyalists left the states to settle in Canada or Britain to avoid persecution from the victorious Patriots. While Loyalists came from various backgrounds, they tended to be wealthier and more conservative than the Patriots, with many government officials and Anglican clergymen remaining loyal to the crown.

**Native Americans:** At first, the Native Americans tried to stay out of the war. Eventually, however, attacks by Americans moved many Native Americans to support the British, who promised to limit colonial settlements in the West.

## **5. Initial American Losses and Hardships**

The first three years of the war, 1775 to 1777, went badly for Washington's poorly trained and equipped revolutionary army. It barely escaped complete disaster in a battle for New York City in 1776, in which Washington's forces were routed by the British. By the end of 1777, the British occupied both New York and Philadelphia. After losing Philadelphia, Washington's demoralized troops suffered through the severe winter of 1777-1778 camped at Valley Forge in Pennsylvania. Economic troubles added to the Patriots' bleak prospects. British occupation of American ports resulted in a 95 percent decline in trade between 1775 and 1777. Goods were scarce, and inflation was rampant. The paper money issued by Congress, known as Continentals, became almost worthless.

**Alliance with France:** Early American victories didn't impress other nations much, but everything changed with the Battle of Saratoga in October 1777. British General Burgoyne aimed to isolate New England by marching from Canada, but American generals Gates and

Arnold stopped him, leading to a British surrender. This victory convinced France to join the war against Britain, as they sought to weaken their old enemy. France had been secretly helping the Americans since 1775, but after Saratoga, they openly allied with them in 1778. This alliance, followed by Spain and Holland joining the fight, proved crucial for America, as it forced Britain to spread its military resources thin.

## **6. Victory**

Faced with a larger war, Britain decided to consolidate its forces in America. British troops were pulled out of Philadelphia, and New York became the chief base of British operations. In a campaign through 1778–1779, the Patriots, led by George Rogers Clark, captured a series of British forts in the Illinois country to gain control of parts of the vast Ohio territory. In 1780, the British army adopted a southern strategy, concentrating its military campaigns in Virginia and the Carolinas where Loyalists were especially numerous and active. Yorktown: In 1781, the last major battle of the Revolutionary War was fought near Yorktown, Virginia, on the shores of Chesapeake Bay. Strongly supported by French naval and military forces, Washington's army forced the surrender of a large British army commanded by General Charles Cornwallis.

## **Treaty of Paris**

In London, news of Cornwallis' defeat at Yorktown came as a heavy blow to the Tory party in Parliament that was responsible for conducting the war. The war had become increasingly unpopular in England, partly because it placed a heavy strain on the British economy and the government's finances. Lord North and other Tory ministers resigned and were replaced by leaders of the Whig party who wanted to end the war. In Paris, in 1783, a treaty of peace was finally signed by the various belligerents. The Treaty of Paris provided for the following: (1) Britain would recognize the existence of the United States as an independent nation. (2) The Mississippi River would be the western boundary of that nation. (3) Americans would have fishing rights off the coast of Canada. (4) Americans would pay debts owed to British merchants and honor Loyalist claims for property confiscated during the war.

## **7. Legacy of the American Revolutionary War**

The impact of the American Revolution is long-lasting and diverse. It created a democratic government that protects people's rights and freedoms through a system of checks and



balances. These revolutionary ideas still motivate discussions on politics, activism, and fairness in modern America. Globally, the revolution inspired other countries seeking independence and helped establish the United States as an influential nation. Despite difficulties such as how Loyalists were treated, relationships with Native Americans, slavery, and women's rights issues, the revolution's legacy shows how powerful revolutionary ideas are and how determined people can change their future.

### **Political Implications of the War**

The American Revolution changed history in big ways. It brought in new ideas about how a country should be run. Instead of kings and nobles making the decisions, the focus shifted to regular people. This shift set the stage for democracy, where everyone has rights and the government's power is limited. Documents like the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution started it all, inspiring other countries to fight for independence and shaping how we think about things like rights, freedom, and being part of a community.

### **Social Change**

In addition to revolutionizing the politics of the 13 states, the War for Independence also had a profound effect on American society. Some changes occurred immediately before the war ended, while others evolved gradually as the ideas of the Revolution began to filter into the thoughts and attitudes of the common people.

**Abolition of Aristocratic Titles:** State constitutions and laws abolished old institutions that had originated in medieval Europe. No legislature could grant titles of nobility, nor could any court recognize the feudal practice of primogeniture (the first born son's right to inherit his parents' property). Whatever aristocracy existed in colonial America was further weakened by the confiscation of large estates owned by Loyalists. Many such estates were subdivided and sold to raise money for the war.

**Separation of Church and State:** Most states adopted the principle of separation of church and state; in other words, they refused to give financial support to any religious group. The Anglican Church, which formerly had been closely tied to the king's government, was disestablished in the South (lost state support). Only in three New England states—New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Massachusetts—did the Congregational Church continue to receive state support in the form of a religious tax. This practice was finally discontinued in New England early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Women:** Throughout the war, both Patriots and Loyalists relied heavily on the support of women. Some women accompanied their husbands to military camps, serving as cooks and nurses. In rare cases, women even fought in battles, such as Mary McCauley (Molly Pitcher) at the Battle of Monmouth or Deborah Sampson, who disguised herself as a man and served as a soldier for a year. However, the most significant contribution of women during the war was in sustaining the colonial economy. While men were away fighting, women managed family farms and businesses, providing essential food and clothing for the war effort. Despite their vital roles, women remained in a subordinate position, as highlighted by Abigail Adams's plea to her husband, John Adams, urging him to prioritize the needs of women.

**Slavery:** The institution of slavery contradicted the spirit of the, which advocated for equality among all people. Initially, some Revolutionary leaders recognized this and took steps to address it. The Continental Congress voted to stop importing slaves, and most states followed suit. In the North, many states ended slavery, and some southern owners even freed their slaves voluntarily. However, after the Revolutionary War, many southern slave owners began to see slavery as necessary for their economy. They developed justifications, both religious and political, to continue holding people in bondage for life.

## **8. Philosophical Foundations of the American Revolution**

For Americans, especially those who were in positions of leadership, there was a long tradition of loyalty to the king and England. As the differences between them grew, many Americans searched for an explanation and justification for this changing relationship.

### **□ The Enlightenment**

In the 18th century, some educated Americans were interested in a European movement called the Enlightenment. This movement believed that using human reason could solve many of society's problems and improve the world. One major thinker of this time was John Locke, an English philosopher. Locke's ideas, outlined in his book *Two Treatises of Government*, were very influential in America. He argued that governments should follow natural laws that protect people's rights because they are human. He believed that ultimate power belongs to the people, not the government. Locke also said that if a government doesn't protect people's rights, citizens have the right and duty to overthrow it.

Other Enlightenment philosophers adopted and expounded on Locke's ideas. His stress on natural rights would provide a rationale for the American Revolution and later for the basic principles of the U.S. Constitution.

### □ Other ideas of the Enlightenment

During the mid-18th century, a period known as the Enlightenment was in full swing. This was when future American leaders like Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, and Adams were growing up. Many thinkers during this time, both in Europe and America, followed Enlightenment ideas. They were often Deists, believing that while God created natural laws, they didn't think God intervened much in human affairs. They believed strongly in using reason to solve problems and valued science and respect for all people. Their political ideas, influenced by thinkers like Locke and Rousseau, had a big impact on educated Americans in the 1760s and 1770s. This was the time when revolutionary ideas were brewing, leading eventually to the American Revolution.