

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: 1775-1783

I. Second Continental Congress—May 10, 1775

- A. All 13 colonies present—delegates still not interested in independence but rather redressing of grievances (conservative position).
- B. Most significant act of Congress: Selected George Washington to head of the Continental Army.
 - Selection largely political - Northerners wanted to bring Virginia into the war.
- C. Declaration of the Causes & Necessity of Taking Up Arms (Jefferson & Dickinson)
 - 1. Drafted 2nd set of appeals to the king and British people for redress of American grievances.
 - 2. Seen as intermediate step towards the Declaration of Independence
 - (Declaration & Resolves from 1st Continental Congress was earlier step.)
 - 3. Adopted measures to raise money and to create an army and a navy.
- D. Olive Branch Petition (written largely by John Dickinson)
 - 1. Last ditch effort by moderates in the Continental Congress to prevent an all-out war.
 - 2. Once again, professed loyalty to the crown; sought to restore peace
 - 3. Appealed to the king to intercede with Parliament to reconsider the "Intolerable Acts"
 - 4. King refused to recognize Congress and the war raged on

II. Early Battles

- A. Ticonderoga and Crown Point—May 1775
 - 1. Tiny forces under Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain Boys of Vermont & Benedict Arnold of Connecticut surprised & captured Br. garrisons.
- B. Bunker Hill - June 17, 1775
 - 1. Colonials seized Breed's Hill—commanded a strong position overlooking Boston.
 - 2. Over 1,000 oncoming redcoats in ill-conceived frontal assault were mowed down by 1,500 American sharpshooters.
 - Americans had 140 killed and 441 wounded.
 - 3. American supply of gunpowder ran out and were forced to abandon the hill in disorder.
 - 4. Viewed as an American victory for the frightful British casualties inflicted.
 - 5. Bloodiest battle of the War for Independence
 - 6. British Army left Boston to conduct the war from New York.
- C. Following Bunker Hill, King formally proclaimed the colonies in rebellion (Aug. 23, 1775).
 - 1. This was tantamount to a declaration of war against the colonies.

2. 18,000 Hessians (German mercenary soldiers) hired by King to support British forces
 - Colonials shocked that the king would hire forces known as butchers for the war between Anglo-Saxon cousins.
- D. Americans failed to successfully invade Canada in Oct. 1775
 - Yet, invasion postponed large British offensive which eventually contributed to American victory at Saratoga.

III. *Declaration of Independence*

- A. Most Americans did not desire independence; proud to be British citizens
- B. Reasons for shift of loyalty
 1. Hiring of Hessians
 2. Burning of Falmouth & Norfolk
 3. Governor of Virginia promised slaves who would fight for the British would be freed.
 - Impact: persuaded many southern elite to join New England in the war effort.
- C. Thomas Paine's Common Sense (published early 1776)
 1. Became an instant best-seller in the colonies; effective propaganda
 2. Main ideas:
 - a. Colonial policy was inconsistent; independence was the only course
 - b. Nowhere in the physical universe did a smaller heavenly body control a larger one. Why should tiny England control huge North America?
 - c. King was nothing more than the "Royal Brute of Great Britain."
 - d. America had a sacred mission; moral obligation to the world to set up an independent, democratic republic, untainted by association with corrupt monarchical Britain.
 3. Persuaded Congress to go all the way for independence
 - a. Could not hope for aid from France unless they declared independence
 - b. France not interested in colonial reconstruction under Britain
- D. June 7, 1776, Philadelphia Congress, Richard Henry Lee moved for independence.
 1. "These United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states..."
 2. Motion was adopted on July 2, 1776
 3. Yet, formal explanation was needed to rally resistance at home and invite foreign nations to aid the American cause, especially France.
- E. Congress appointed Committee on Independence to prepare an appropriate statement shortly after Lee's speech on June 7.
 1. Task fell to a committee that chose Thomas Jefferson—33-year old Virginia attorney.
 - Other members: B. Franklin, J. Adams, Roger Sherman, & Robert Livingston
 2. Some debate and amendment had preceded its adoption especially slavery clause which was heavily modified with some portions being excised.
 - a. Jefferson had blamed England for continuing the slave trade despite colonial wishes (despite his owning slaves).
 - b. Yet, southerners in particular still favored slavery and dismissed the clause.

3. Declaration not addressed to England, nor did signers expect any response from the king.
 4. Declaration of Independence formally approved on July 4, 1776
- F. Declaration of Independence had three major parts:
1. Preamble (heavily influenced by John Locke)
 - a. Stated the rights of colonists to break away if natural rights were not protected: Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (property)
 - b. All men are created equal
 2. List of 27 grievances of the colonies (seen by Congress as most important part)
 - a. Underwent the most changes from the original draft -- 24 changes
 - b. Charged the King with imposing taxes w/o consent, eliminating trial by jury, abolishing valued laws, establishing a military dictatorship, maintaining standing armies in peacetime, cutting off trade, burning towns, hiring mercenaries, inciting Indian violence upon colonies
 3. Formal declaration of independence
 - a. Officially broke ties with England
 - b. "United States" officially an independent country
- G. Result: Foreign aid could now be successfully solicited

IV. *Patriots & Loyalists*

- A. "Tories" (loyalists) = about 20% of the American people
1. Colonists who fought for return to colonial rule; loyal to the king.
 2. Usually conservative: educated and wealthy; fearful of "mob rule."
 3. Older generation apt to be loyalists; younger generation more revolutionary
 4. King's officers and other beneficiaries of the crown
 5. Anglican clergy and a large portion of their followers; most numerous of the loyalists (except in Virginia)
 6. Well entrenched in aristocratic NY, Charleston, Quaker PA, and NJ.
 7. Least numerous in New England
 8. Ineffective at gaining allegiance of neutral colonists
- B. Patriots
1. Sometimes called "whigs" after British opposition party
 2. American rebels who fought both British soldiers and loyalists
 3. Most numerous in New England
 4. Constituted a minority movement
 5. More adept at gaining support from colonials
 6. Financing: Robert Morris, "the financier of the Revolution" helped Congress finance the war.
- C. The Loyalist Exodus
1. Loyalists regarded by Patriots as traitors.
 2. About 80,000 loyalists were driven out or fled the colonies
 - Estates confiscated and sold; helped finance the war
 3. 50,000 fought for the British

V. The War in 1776-1777: Britain changed its focus to the former Middle Colonies.

- A. Battle of Long Island (Summer & Fall 1776)
 - 1. Washington's army allowed to escape from Long Island to Manhattan and then NJ.
 - 2. British lost a great opportunity to crush the Americans early.
- B. Battle of Trenton (Dec. 1776)
 - 1. Washington crossed the ice-clogged Delaware River on Dec. 26, 1776
 - 2. At Trenton, surprised and captured about 1,000 Hessians who were sleeping off their Christmas partying.
- C. Battle of Princeton (Jan. 1777)
 - 1. One week after Trenton, Washington defeated a smaller British force at Princeton
 - 2. British forced to pull his outposts back to New York
 - 3. Trenton and Princeton was a gamble by Washington to achieve quick victories to revive the disintegrating Continental Army.
- D. Battle of Saratoga (most important battle of the American Revolution.
 - 1. British sought to capture New York and sever New England from rest of the Colonies
 - 2. Benedict Arnold saved New England by slowing down British invasion of New York
 - 3. General Burgoyne surrendered entire command at Saratoga on Oct. 17, 1777 to American General Horatio Gates.
 - 4. Saratoga one of history's most decisive battles
 - a. Made possible French aid which ultimately ensured American independence.
 - b. Spanish and Dutch eventually entered and England was faced with world war.
 - c. Revived the faltering colonial cause
- E. Washington retired to Valley Forge for winter of 1777-78
 - 1. Supplies were scarce: food, clothing
 - 2. Army whipped into shape by the Prussian drillmaster Baron von Steuben.
 - 3. Episode demonstrated American resolve despite horrible conditions.
- F. Benedict Arnold becomes a traitor in 1780 -- tremendous blow to American morale
 - 1. Arnold frustrated with his treatment by his superiors despite his heroic service
 - 2. Persuaded Washington to make him head of West Point
 - 3. Plotted with the British to sell out the key stronghold of West Point commanding the Hudson River
 - 4. Plot accidentally discovered by Washington

VI. Articles of Confederation adopted in 1777 (Drafted by John Dickinson)

- A. Set up by 2nd Continental Congress in light of exigencies: need to organize a nation and an army; maintain civil order and establish international recognition and credit; defend its territory from the British; and resolve internal quarrels and competition.)
- B. Did not go into effect until 1781.

- C. First constitution in U.S. history; lasted until 1789 when the Constitution was adopted
- D. Congress had power to: conduct war, handle foreign relations & secure loans, borrow money.
- E. No power to: regulate trade, conscript troops, levy taxes.

VII. France Becomes an Ally

- A. French eager to exact revenge on the British for the Seven Years War.
 - 1. Saw Revolutionary war as an opportunity to stab England in the back.
 - 2. New World colonies were England's most valuable overseas possessions
- B. Secret supply to the Americans
 - 1. France worried open aid to America might provoke British attacks on French interests.
 - 2. Americans Silas Deane and Benjamin Franklin arranged for significant amounts of munitions and military supplies to be shipped to America.
 - Helped forge the Franco-American Alliance.
 - 3. Marquis de Lafayette significant in helping Americans gain financial aid from France.
- C. Declaration of Independence a turning point for French aid
 - 1. Showed Americans meant business
 - 2. Victory at Saratoga displayed an excellent chance for defeating England
- D. Franco-American Alliance, 1778: France offers U.S. a treaty of alliance.
 - 1. Promised Americans recognition of independence.
 - 2. Both sides bound themselves to wage war until the US won its freedom or until both agreed to terms with Britain.
 - 3. Many Americans reluctantly accepted the treaty.
 - a. France a strong Roman Catholic country
 - b. Hitherto a traditional enemy of Britain for centuries.
- E. American Revolution turned into a world war that put severe stress on Britain's resources.
 - 1. Spain and Holland entered in 1779.
 - 2. Catherine the Great of Russia organized the League of Armed Neutrality
 - Lined up almost all remaining European neutrals in an attitude of passive hostility toward England as a result of England disturbing Baltic shipping.
 - 3. War raged in Europe, N.A., South America, the Caribbean, and Asia.

VIII. Land Frontier & Sea Frontier

- A. West raged throughout most of the war
 - 1. Indian allies of Britain attacked American frontier positions
 - 2. 1777 known as "the Bloody Year" on the frontier
 - Joseph Brant ("Monster Brant"), Mohawk Chief, and leader of the Iroquois Six Nations, led Indian raids in Backcountry PA and NY.
 - Forced to sign Treaty of Ft. Stanwyk -- 1st treaty bet. U.S. & Indians -- Indians lost most of their lands.
- B. Westward movement continued despite treacherous war conditions (especially Kentucky)
- C. Illinois country taken from the British

1. George Rogers Clark, a frontiersman, seized several British posts along the Ohio River by surprise: Kaskaskia, Cahokia (St. Louis), and Vincennes, Indiana.
 2. Helped quiet Indian involvement
 3. His admirers' credit him for forcing the British to cede the whole Ohio region in the peace treaty of Paris after the war. This is still a debate.
- D. The American Navy
1. John Paul Jones most famous American naval leader (Scottish born)
 2. Chief contribution was destroying British merchant shipping and carrying war into the waters around the British Isles.
 3. Did not affect Britain's navy
- E. American Privateers were more effective than the American navy
1. Privately owned ships authorized by Congress to attack enemy ships.
 2. 600 British ships captured; British captured as many American merchantmen & privateers.
 3. Brought in gold, harassed the British, and increased American morale by providing American victories.
- F. Major naval battles between British, French, & other European powers
1. Mostly in the West Indies
 2. British overcome by French, Spanish and Dutch.
 - War continued until 1785 when British won last battle near India.

IX. In 1778, Britain again changed its strategy: focused on former Southern Colonies

- A. Savannah, Georgia taken in late 1778-early 1779
- B. Charleston, SC, fell in 1780 (4th largest city in America)
 1. Devastating loss to American war-effort
 2. Heavier loss to the Americans than Saratoga was to the British
- C. Nathanael Greene eventually succeeded in clearing Georgia and S.C. of most British troops
 - Cornwallis forced to abandon the Southern strategy; fell back to Chesapeake Bay at Yorktown
- D. Battle of Yorktown: last major battle of the war
 1. French Admiral de Grasse, head of powerful fleet in W. Indies, advised Americans that he would join them in an assault on Cornwallis at Yorktown.
 2. Washington made 300-mile+ march to Chesapeake from NY.
 3. Accompanied by Rochambeau's French army, Washington attacked British by land as de Grasse blockaded them by sea after beating off the British fleet.
 4. Oct. 19, 1781, General Cornwallis surrendered entire force of 7,000 men
 5. War continued one more year (especially in the South)
- E. Newburgh "Conspiracy" (1783)
 1. Cause: Soldiers in the Continental Army were not paid regularly throughout the war and the money they did receive was often worthless due to inflation.
 2. Several officers, Congressional nationalists, sought to impose an impost on the states for back-pay by threatening to take over the American government.

- Horatio Gates was consulted about the possibility of using the army to force the states to surrender more power to the national government.
3. Washington appealed to the officers to end the conspiracy; they acquiesced.

X. Peace at Paris

- A. British ready to come to terms after losses in India, West Indies, and Mediterranean
 1. Lord North's ministry collapsed in March 1782, temporarily ending the personal rule of George III.
 2. Whig ministry (more sympathetic to Americans) replaced the Tory regime.
- B. French attempt to create a weak U.S.
 1. American diplomats Ben Franklin, John Adams, and John Jay sent by Congress to make no separate peace and to consult with France at all stages of negotiations.
 - a. Disregarded the directive as they were highly suspicious of France & Spain.
 - b. John Jay believed France wanted to keep US east of the Allegheny mountains and give western territories to its ally Spain for its help in the war.
 2. U.S. turns to Great Britain
 - a. Britain eager to separate U.S. from anti-British alliance.
 - b. Preliminary Treaty signed in 1782
- C. Treaty of Paris of 1783: Britain formally recognized US independence
 1. Granted US generous boundaries stretching to the Mississippi on the west, the Great Lakes in the north, and to Spanish Florida in the south (Spain had rewon Florida)
 - a. Americans allowed to retain a share in the valuable Newfoundland fisheries.
 - b. British promised troops would not take slaves from America.
 2. American concessions:
 - a. Loyalists could not be further persecuted
 - b. Congress was to recommend to state legislatures that confiscated Loyalist property be restored
 - c. American states were bound to pay British creditors for debts long owed.
 - d. U.S. did not comply with many of these concessions and it became partial cause of another war with Britain in 1812.
 3. France formally approved the British-American terms (officially, no separate Franco-American peace)
 4. America alone gained from the war
 - a. Britain lost colonies and other territories
 - b. France got revenge but became bankrupt which caused French Revolution.
 - c. Spain gained little

XI. American society during the war

- A. Over 250,000 American soldiers fought
 - 10% who fought died; largest % of any American war in history (Civil War = 2%)
- B. British captured and occupied most major cities including Boston, NYC, and Philadelphia.
- C. War Economy: all of society became involved in the war.
 - 1. State and national governments created.
 - 2. Men with military experience volunteered for positions in the army.
 - 3. Some merchants loaned money to the army and to Congress. Others made fortunes from wartime contracts.
 - 4. Most of the fighting was done by the poorest Americans
 - Young city laborers, farm boys, indentured servants, and sometimes slaves.
 - 5. African Americans fought on both sides.
 - 5,000 in the Continental army and nearly 30,000 in the British army in return for promises of freedom.
 - 6. Native Americans also fought with the British since they hoped to keep land-hungry Americans out of their territories.
 - Bitter feelings remained long after the war ended.
- D. Women in the War
 - 1. Women managed farms and businesses while men served in the army
 - 2. Other women traveled with the Army as cooks and nurses.
 - 3. Women became more politically active and expressed their thoughts more freely.

XII. CHANGE IN SOCIETY DUE TO THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

- A. Many conservative Loyalists no longer in America; paved way for more democratic reforms in state governments.
- B. Slavery issue
 - 1. Rise of anti-slavery societies in all the northern states (plus Virginia)
 - Quakers the first to found such societies.
 - 2. Slavery eradicated in most northern states by 1800
 - Quok Walker case in Massachusetts (1781) effectively ended slavery there.
 - 3. Slavery not allowed above Ohio River in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787
 - 4. Slave trade to be abolished in 1808 according to Constitution.
 - 5. By 1860, 250,000 free blacks lived in the North, but were disliked and discriminated against
 - Several states forbade entrance of blacks, most blacks denied right to vote, and some states barred blacks from public schools.
 - 6. Thousands of slaves in the South were freed after the Revolution and became free blacks
 - 7. Yet, slavery remained strong in the South, especially after 1793 (cotton gin)
- C. Stronger emphasis on equality: public hatred of Cincinnati Society

1. However, equality did not triumph until much later due to tenant farming, poor rights for women and children, slavery, and land requirements for voting and office holding (although reduced) were not eliminated.
 2. Further reduction of land-holding requirements for voting began to occur in 1820s.
 3. End of primogeniture and entail before 1800.
 - a. Primogeniture: eldest son inherits father's estate.
 - b. Entail: Estates could not be sold off in pieces; guaranteed large landholdings to a family and meant less land available for purchase to the public.
- D. Separation of Church & State: Jefferson's Virginia Statute on Religious Freedom, 1786
1. Anglican Church replaced by a disestablished Episcopal church in much of the South.
 2. Congregational churches in New England slower to disestablish (CT in 1818, MA in 1833)
- E. State governments:
1. Three branches: weak governors, strong legislatures, judicial branch
 2. sovereignty of states, republicanism
- F. Indians no longer enjoyed British protection and became subject to U.S. expansion westward.
-- Iroquois suffered significant losses after the war
- G. Women did not enjoy increased rights; idea of "Republican Motherhood" took hold.