

The American Revolution: Political Upheaval Led to U.S. Independence

By History.com, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.12.17

Word Count **740**

Level **800L**



Continental Army Commander-in-Chief George Washington leads his soldiers in the Battle of Princeton on January 3, 1777. Photo from Wikimedia

The American Revolution was fought from 1775 to 1783. It is also known as the American Revolutionary War.

In 1775, America was made up of 13 colonies, governed by the king in England. The people who lived there, known as colonists, thought the British government was unfair. Soon, fighting began between British troops and colonial rebels. By the following summer, the rebels had formed the Continental Army and were fighting a war for their independence.

Trouble had been building

France assisted the Continental Army. Together, they forced the British to surrender in 1781. Americans had won their independence by 1783.

Well before that, by 1775, trouble had been building between colonists and the British authorities for more than 10 years. The British government tried to make more money off the colonies. They collected taxes on sugar, stamps, tea and other goods.

This angered many colonists. They hated paying taxes to the British government while not being able to vote or govern themselves. They wanted the same rights as other British citizens.

Declaration of rights

In 1770, British soldiers shot and killed five colonists in Boston, Massachusetts. It was called the Boston Massacre. In December 1773, a band of Bostonians dressed up as Native Americans. They boarded British ships and dumped 342 chests of tea into Boston Harbor. This outraged the British.

Then, in September 1774, a group of colonial leaders — including George Washington and John and Samuel Adams — met in Philadelphia. They discussed their anger with the British. This meeting was the First Continental Congress.

The group wrote a declaration of the rights that every citizen deserved: life, liberty, property and trial by jury.

Revolutionary War begins

The Continental Congress agreed to meet again later. On April 19, rebels clashed with British soldiers in Massachusetts at the Battle of Lexington and Concord. The Revolutionary War had begun.

Soon, the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia. This time, its leaders voted to form a Continental Army, and Washington was named its commander.

At the Battle of Bunker Hill in Boston, in 1775, colonial forces hurt the British army. It was the first official battle of the war. The battle was won by the British, but the colonists fought well and felt hopeful.

By March 1776, the colonial army forced the British to retreat from the base Fort Ticonderoga in New York.

Declaration of Independence



By now, most colonists wanted their independence and freedom from Britain. On July 4, colonial leaders voted to officially adopt the Declaration of Independence.

The British became determined to crush the rebellion. In August, they defeated Washington on Long Island, New York.

On Christmas night, Washington fought back with a surprise attack on the British in Trenton, New Jersey. He won again at Princeton, New Jersey, and the rebels now were feeling hopeful.

In 1777, the British General John Burgoyne's army took back Fort Ticonderoga. It was a crushing blow.

Washington and his troops settled for the winter around Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.



At one point, Burgoyne's army was unprotected in Saratoga, New York. An American force defeated it in the first and second Battles of Saratoga. This was a turning point of the American Revolution. After Saratoga, France decided to support the American rebels. The American Revolution had become a world war.

During the long winter at Valley Forge, Washington's troops got training from French military leaders.

On July 8, the French arrived, ready for battle with the British.

The Americans suffered setbacks from 1779 to 1781. Continental General Benedict Arnold switched sides, joining the British. The British captured Charleston, South Carolina in May 1780. British forces under Lord Charles Cornwallis crushed Gates' American troops at Camden, New Jersey in mid-August.

Forced to surrender

By the fall of 1781, Washington moved against Cornwallis on the Virginia coast with a large army. Meanwhile, a fleet of French warships prevented the British from recovering. Trapped, Cornwallis was forced to surrender his army on October 19.

The British and Americans signed a peace agreement in Paris, France, that November. On September 3, 1783, Britain officially recognized the independence of the United States.

After eight long years, the American Revolution finally came to a close.

Quiz

- 1 Which sentence from the article BEST supports the idea that the American colonists wanted to make their own government?
- (A) In 1775, America was made up of 13 colonies, governed by the king in England.
 - (B) They hated paying taxes to the British government while not being able to vote or govern themselves.
 - (C) During the long winter at Valley Forge, Washington's troops got training from French military leaders.
 - (D) The British and Americans signed a peace agreement in Paris, France, that November.
- 2 Based on information in the article, which of these statements is TRUE?
- (A) The French army helped the British soldiers fight against American colonists.
 - (B) The First Continental Congress voted to form an army for the colonists.
 - (C) Colonists defeated British soldiers at the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775.
 - (D) The declaration in 1774 stated the rights that every citizen deserved.
- 3 Based on the article, why was the Continental Congress important to the American Revolution?
- (A) because it helped to lower the taxes the colonists paid to the British
 - (B) because it was a major reason why colonists were upset with taxes and British rule
 - (C) because it established more rights and an army for American colonists
 - (D) because it allowed American colonists to travel back to England if they wanted to
- 4 What was the relationship between the French and the colonists during the Revolution?
- (A) The French army helped American colonists win.
 - (B) The French helped Americans dump British tea into the ocean.
 - (C) The French army helped the British soldiers beat the colonists.
 - (D) The French helped the colonists create the Declaration of Independence.

Answer Key

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