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American Revolution: The Birth of a Republic

TERMS & NAMES

- Declaration of Independence
- Thomas Jefferson
- checks and balances
- federal system
- Bill of Rights

MAIN IDEA

Enlightenment ideas helped spur the American colonies to create a new nation.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The revolution created a republic, the United States of America, that became a model for many nations of the world.

SETTING THE STAGE Philosophes such as Voltaire considered England's government the most progressive in Europe. England's ruler was no despot, not even an enlightened one. His power had been limited by law. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 had given England a constitutional monarchy. However, while the English monarch's power was being limited at home, the power of the English nation was spreading overseas.

Britain and Its American Colonies

When George III became king of Great Britain in 1760, his Atlantic coastal colonies were growing by leaps and bounds. Their combined population went from about 250,000 in 1700 to 2,150,000 in 1770, an eightfold increase. Economically, the colonies thrived on trade with the nations of Europe.

Along with increasing population and prosperity, a new sense of identity was growing in the colonists' minds. By the mid-1700s, colonists had been living in America for nearly 150 years. Each of the 13 colonies had its own government, and people were used to a great degree of independence. Colonists saw themselves less as British and more as Virginians or Pennsylvanians. However, they were still British subjects and were expected to obey British law.

In the 1660s, Parliament had passed trade laws called the Navigation Acts. These laws prevented colonists from selling their most valuable products to any country except Britain. In addition, colonists had to pay high taxes on imported French and Dutch goods. However, colonists found ways to get around these laws. Some merchants smuggled in goods to avoid paying British taxes. Smugglers could sneak in and out of the many small harbors all along the lengthy Atlantic coastline. British customs agents found it difficult to enforce the Navigation Acts.

For many years, Britain felt no need to tighten its hold on the colonies. Despite the smuggling, Britain's mercantilist policies had made colonial trade very profitable. Britain bought American raw materials for low prices and sold manufactured goods to the colonists. And despite British trade restrictions, colonial merchants also thrived. However, after the French and Indian War ended in 1763, Britain toughened its trade laws. These changes sparked growing anger in the colonies.

Americans Win Independence

In 1760, when George III took the throne, most Americans had no thoughts of either revolution or independence. They still thought of themselves as loyal subjects of the British king. Yet by 1776, many Americans were willing to risk their lives to break free of Britain.

During the French and Indian War, Great Britain had run up a huge debt in the war against France. Because American colonists benefited from Britain's victory, Britain expected the colonists to help pay the costs of the war. In 1765, Parliament passed the Stamp Act. According



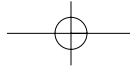
Many educated colonists were influenced by Enlightenment thought. This French snuff box pictures (left to right) Voltaire, Rousseau, and colonial statesman Benjamin Franklin.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

A. Recognizing Effects How did some colonists respond to the Navigation Acts?

Background

The French and Indian War was the part of the Seven Years' War fought in North America.



to this law, colonists had to pay a tax to have an official stamp put on wills, deeds, newspapers, and other printed material.

American colonists were outraged. They had never paid taxes directly to the British government before. Colonial lawyers argued that the stamp tax violated colonists' natural rights. In Britain, citizens consented to taxes through their representatives in Parliament. Because the colonists had no such representatives, Parliament could not tax them. The colonists demonstrated their defiance of this tax with angry protests and a boycott of British manufactured goods. The boycott proved so effective that Parliament gave up and repealed the Stamp Act in 1766.

Growing Hostility Leads to War Over the next decade, further events steadily led to war. Some colonial leaders, such as Boston's Samuel Adams, favored independence from Britain. They encouraged conflict with British authorities. At the same time, George III and his ministers made enemies of many moderate colonists by their harsh stands. In 1773, to protest an import tax on tea, Adams organized a raid against three British ships in Boston Harbor. The raiders dumped 342 chests of tea into the water. George III, infuriated by the "Boston Tea Party," as it was called, ordered the British navy to close the port of Boston. British troops occupied the city.

In September 1774, representatives from every colony except Georgia gathered in Philadelphia to form the First Continental Congress. This group protested the treatment of Boston. When the king paid little attention to their complaints, all 13 colonies decided to form the Second Continental Congress to debate their next move.

On April 19, 1775, British soldiers and American militiamen exchanged gunfire on the village green in Lexington, Massachusetts. The fighting spread to nearby Concord. When news of the fighting reached the Second Continental Congress, its members voted to raise an army under the command of a Virginian named George Washington. The American Revolution had begun.

Enlightenment Ideas Influence American Colonists Although a war had begun, the American colonists still debated their attachment to Great Britain. Many colonists wanted to remain part of Britain. A growing number, however, favored independence. They heard the persuasive arguments of colonial leaders such as Patrick Henry, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin. These leaders used Enlightenment ideas to justify independence. The colonists had asked for the same political rights as people in Britain, they said, but the king had stubbornly refused. Therefore, the colonists were justified in rebelling against a tyrant who had broken the social contract.

In July 1776, the Second Continental Congress issued the **Declaration of Independence**. This document, written by **Thomas Jefferson**, was firmly based on the ideas of John Locke and the Enlightenment. The Declaration reflected these ideas in its eloquent argument for natural rights.

Declaration of Independence

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness; that to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed.

Declaration of Independence

Since Locke had asserted that people had the right to rebel against an unjust ruler, the Declaration of Independence included a long list

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

B. Analyzing

Causes How did the French and Indian War lead to the Stamp Act?

Vocabulary

boycott: refusal to buy goods produced in a certain place or by a certain group.

HISTORY MAKERS



Thomas Jefferson
1743–1826

The author of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson of Virginia was a true figure of the Enlightenment. As a writer and statesman, he supported free speech, religious freedom, and other civil liberties. At the same time, he was also a slave owner.

Outside of politics, Jefferson was accomplished in many fields, including law, science, agriculture, and languages. He invented many practical devices, including an improved type of plow. One of the great architects of early America, he designed his magnificent home, Monticello. He also designed the Virginia state capitol building in Richmond and many buildings for the University of Virginia.

Of all his many achievements, Jefferson wanted to be most remembered for three: author of the Declaration of Independence, author of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, and founder of the University of Virginia.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

C. Comparing

How do Jefferson's "unalienable rights" compare with the natural rights expressed by Locke?

of George III's abuses. The document ended by breaking the ties between the colonies and Britain. The colonies, the Declaration said, "are absolved from all allegiance to the British crown."

Success for the Colonists When war was first declared, the odds seemed heavily weighted against the Americans. Washington's ragtag, poorly trained army faced the well-trained forces of the most powerful country in the world. In the end, however, the Americans won their war for independence.

Several reasons explain their success. First, the Americans' motivation for fighting was much stronger than that of the British, since their army was defending their homeland. Second, the overconfident British generals made several mistakes. Third, time itself was on the side of the Americans. The British could win battle after battle, as they did, and still lose the war. Fighting an overseas war, 3,000 miles from London, was terribly expensive. After a few years, tax-weary British citizens clamored for peace.

Finally, the Americans did not fight alone. Louis XVI of France had little sympathy for the ideals of the American Revolution, but he was eager to weaken France's rival, Britain. French entry into the war in 1778 was decisive. In 1781, combined forces of about 9,500 Americans and 7,800 French trapped a British army commanded by Lord Cornwallis near Yorktown, Virginia. Unable to escape, Cornwallis surrendered. The Americans were victorious.



Changing Idea: Colonial Attachment to Britain

Old Idea

American colonists considered themselves as subjects of the British king.



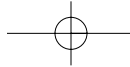
New Idea

After a long train of perceived abuses by the king, the colonists asserted their right to declare independence.

Americans Create a Republic

Shortly after declaring their independence, the 13 individual states recognized the need for a national government. As victory became certain, in 1781 all 13 states ratified a constitution. This plan of government was known as the Articles of Confederation. The Articles established the United States as a republic—a government in which citizens rule through elected representatives.

The Articles Create a Weak National Government To protect their authority, the 13 states created a loose confederation in which they held most of the power. Thus, the Articles of Confederation deliberately created a weak national government.



There were no executive or judicial branches. Instead, the Articles established only one body of government, the Congress. Each state, regardless of size, had one vote in Congress. Congress could declare war, enter into treaties, and coin money. It had no power, however, to collect taxes or regulate trade. Passing new laws was difficult because laws needed the approval of 9 of the 13 states.

These limits on the national government soon produced many problems. Although the new national government needed money in order to operate, it could only request contributions from the states. Angry Revolutionary War veterans bitterly complained that Congress still owed them back pay. Meanwhile, several states issued their own money. Some states even put tariffs on goods from neighboring states.

The nation's growing financial problems sparked a violent protest in Massachusetts. Debt-ridden farmers, led by a war veteran named Daniel Shays, demanded that the state lower taxes and issue paper money so that they could repay their debts. When the state refused, the rebels attacked several courthouses. Massachusetts authorities quickly crushed Shays's Rebellion.

A New Constitution Concerned leaders such as George Washington and James Madison believed that Shays's Rebellion underscored the need for a strong national government. In February 1787, Congress approved a Constitutional Convention to revise the Articles of Confederation. The Constitutional Convention held its first session on May 25, 1787. The 55 delegates were experienced statesmen who were familiar with the political theories of Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau.

Although the delegates shared basic ideas on government, they sometimes disagreed on how to put them into practice. For almost four months the delegates argued over important questions. Who should be represented in Congress? How many votes should each state have? The delegates' deliberations produced not only compromises but also new approaches to governing. Using the political ideas of the Enlightenment, the delegates created a new system of government.

The Federal System Like Montesquieu, the delegates distrusted a powerful central government controlled by one person or group. They therefore established three separate branches—legislative, executive, and judicial. This provided a built-in system of **checks**

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

D. Making

Inferences What was the fundamental cause of the nation's problems under the Articles of Confederation?

U.S. Constitution: An Enlightenment Document

Enlightenment Idea

Locke

A government's power comes from the consent of the people

U.S. Constitution

- Preamble begins "We the People of the United States" to establish legitimacy
- Creates representative government
- Limits government powers

Montesquieu

Separation of powers

- Federal system of government
- Powers divided among three branches
- System of checks and balances

Rousseau

Direct democracy

- Public election of president and Congress

Voltaire

Free speech, religious toleration

- Bill of Rights provides for freedom of speech and religion

Beccaria

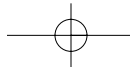
Accused have rights, no torture

- Bill of Rights protects rights of accused and prohibits cruel and unusual punishment

SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Charts

1. From whose idea stems the system of checks and balances?
2. Which of the Enlightenment ideas are reflected in the Bill of Rights?





and balances, with each branch checking the actions of the other two. For example, the president received the power to veto legislation passed by Congress. However, the Congress could override a presidential veto with the approval of two-thirds of its members.

Although the Constitution created a strong central government, it did not eliminate local governments. Instead, the Constitution set up a **federal system** in which power was divided between national and state governments.

The delegates agreed with Locke and Rousseau that governments draw their authority from the consent of the governed. The Constitution's preamble sums up this principle:

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The Bill of Rights The delegates signed the new Constitution on September 17, 1787. In order to become law, however, the Constitution required approval by conventions in at least 9 of the 13 states. These conventions were marked by sharp debate. Supporters of the Constitution, called the Federalists, argued that the new government would provide a better balance between national and state powers. Their opponents, the Antifederalists, feared that the Constitution gave the central government too much power. They also wanted a bill of rights to protect the rights of individual citizens.

In order to gain support, the Federalists promised to add a bill of rights to the Constitution. This promise cleared the way for approval. Congress formally added to the Constitution the ten amendments known as the **Bill of Rights**. These amendments protected such basic rights as freedom of speech, press, assembly, and religion. Many of these rights had been advocated by Voltaire, Rousseau, and Locke.

The Constitution and Bill of Rights marked a turning point in people's ideas about government. Both documents put Enlightenment ideas into practice. They expressed an optimistic view that reason and reform could prevail and that progress was inevitable. Such optimism swept across the Atlantic. However, the monarchies and the privileged classes didn't give up power and position easily. As Chapter 7 explains, the struggle to attain the principles of the Enlightenment continued in France.

GlobalImpact



The French Revolution

The American Revolution inspired the growing number of French people who were seeking reform in their own country. They saw the new government of the United States as a step toward realizing the ideals of the Enlightenment. They hoped the next step would be reform in France.

The Declaration of Independence was widely circulated and admired in France. French officers like the Marquis de Lafayette, who fought for American independence, returned to France with stories of the war. Such personal accounts intrigued many a reader.

When the French bishop Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand wrote about this time period years later, he would say, "We talked of nothing but America."

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

E. Analyzing Issues

Explain the controversy over ratifying the Constitution. What did each side believe?

Section 4 Assessment

1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- Declaration of Independence
- Thomas Jefferson
- checks and balances
- federal system
- Bill of Rights

2. TAKING NOTES

Create a chart like the one below. On the left, list problems faced by the Americans as colonists and in shaping their republic. On the right, record their actions and decisions to solve those problems.

Problem	Solution

Which of the solutions that you recorded represented a compromise?

3. ANALYZING ISSUES

How does the opening statement from the Declaration of Independence (page 184) reflect enlightened thinking?

4. ANALYZING THEMES

Revolution Summarize the ideas from the American Revolution concerning separation of powers, liberty, equality, democracy, popular sovereignty, human rights, constitutionalism, and nationalism.