6 THE WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE 1774–1783

WHAT DEVELOPMENTS led to mounting tensions between the colonies and Britain?

IN CONGRESS, July 4, 1776.

WHAT WAS the mood of the colonists leading up to the Declaration of Independence?

WHAT WERE some of the key differences between the British and American forces?

WHAT WERE the major turning points of the war?

WHAT WERE the terms of the Peace of Paris?

WHAT WERE the social effects of the war?

Credits

- **f.** The Henry Francis du Pont. Winterthur Museum Inc."Messotint, 1780-1800.Size: H. 7 3/8", W. 9 3/4". Courtesy, Winterthur Museum.
- **g.** The New York Historical Society. "Paul Jones Shooting a sailor," color engraving from the Olds Collection #366, no negative number. Collection of the New York Historical Society.
- **h.** The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, Inc. Benjamin West, 1783 "American Commissioners of Preliminary Negotiations" Courtesy, Winterthur Museum.

IMAGE KEY
for pages 132–133

- **a.** An 18th-century powder horn decorated with a map.
- **b.** Engraving printed by Benjamin Franklin in 1754 urging the colonies to unite.
- **c.** The 1783 Treaty of Paris that ended the American Revolution and recognized the independence of the United States.
- **d.** Drum belonging to William Diamond (Lexington Historical Society) and fife said to have been played at the Lexington fight early in the morning of April 19, 1775.
- **e.** The Declaration of Independence.
- **f.** A portion of a print depicting the capture of Major John André, the British agent who acted as go-between for the British authorities and Benedict Arnold.
- **g.** A portion of an engraving depicting John Paul Jones stopping an American sailor who was attempting to lower the ship's flag as a sign of surrender.
- **h.** Benjamin West's painting of the American commissioners who negotiated the Peace of Paris.
- **i.** A painting by a French army officer showing the diversity of American soldiers.

Headquarters, Valley Forge
January 14, 1778

I barely hinted to you my dearest Father my desire to augment the Continental Forces from an untried Source. . . . I would solicit you to cede me a number of your able bodied men Slaves, instead of leaving me a fortune. I would bring about a twofold good, first I would advance those who are unjustly deprived of the Rights of Mankind to a State which would be a proper Gradation between abject Slavery and perfect Liberty and besides I would reinforce the Defenders of Liberty with a number of gallant Soldiers. . . . If I could obtain authority for the purpose I would have a Corps of such men trained, uniformly clad, equip'd and ready in every respect to act at the opening of the next Campaign.

February 2, 1778

My dear Father,

The more I reflect upon the difficulties and delays which are likely to attend the completing our Continental Regiments, the more anxiously is my mind bent upon the Scheme which I lately communicated to you. . . . I was aware of having that monster popular Prejudice open-mouthed against me . . . [and] of being obliged to combat the arguments and perhaps the intrigues of interested persons. But zeal for the public Service and an ardent desire to assert the rights of humanity determined me to engage in this arduous business. . . .

You seem to think my dear Father, that men reconciled by long habit to the miseries of their Condition would prefer their ignominious bonds to the untasted Sweets of Liberty, especially when offer'd upon the terms which I propose. I confess indeed the minds of this unhappy species must be debased by a Servitude from which they can hope for no Relief but Death and that every motive to action but Fear must be also nearly extinguished in them. But do you think they are so perfectly moulded to their State as to be insensible that a better exists? Will the galling comparison between themselves and their masters leave them unenlightened in this respect? Can their Self-Love be so totally annihilated as not frequently to induce ardent wishes for a change? . . . I am tempted to believe that this trampled people have so much human left in them, as to be capable of aspiring to the rights of men by noble exertions, if some friend to mankind would point the Road, and give them prospect of Success.

I have long deplored the wretched State of these men and considered in their history, the bloody wars excited in Africa to furnish America with Slaves. The Groans of despairing multitudes toiling for the Luxuries of Merciless Tyrants. I have had the pleasure of conversing with you sometimes upon the means of restoring them to their rights. When can it be better done than when their enfranchisement may be made conducive to the Public Good.

—John Laurens

Henry Laurens Papers, vol 12, pp. 305, 309-392

JOHN LAURENS wrote these letters to his father, Henry, at one low point of the American Revolution, when victory seemed remote. The letters reveal much about the war and the aspirations and limitations of the Revolutionary generation. Henry, a wealthy slaveholder from South Carolina, was president of the Continental Congress; his son John was an aide to General Washington while the Continental Army wintered at Valley Forge.

John, then 23 years old, had been born in South Carolina but educated for the most part in Geneva and London, where he had been exposed to the progressive currents of the Enlightenment. Among these were compassion for the oppressed and the conviction that slavery should be abolished. The war for independence was a cause that appealed deeply to him. American republicanism combined a New Whig distrust of central authority with a belief in a government rooted in a virtuous citizenry. Clinging to this ideology, Americans at first expected to defeat the British Army with a citizens' militia, but they learned that they needed a professional fighting force of their own. With vital French assistance, the new American army triumphed, but the Continental Army was often critically short of soldiers.

Laurens sought to fill this need by enlisting slaves in the Army. This would also provide blacks with a stepping stone to freedom. However, he failed to convince legislatures in the Deep South to enroll black troops in exchange for their freedom.

His idealistic quest for social justice ended in South Carolina, where he died in one of the last skirmishes of the war.

The Outbreak of War and the Declaration of Independence, 1774–1776

After the Boston Tea Party, both the British and the Americans knew that they were approaching a crisis. A British officer in Massachusetts commented in late 1774 that "it is thought by every body here" that British forces would soon have "to take the field." "The people in general are very enraged," he explained, and some would "defend what they call their Liberties," to the death. Many Americans also expected a military confrontation but continued to hope that the king would not "reason with us only by the roar of his Cannon."

WHAT DEVELOPMENTS led to mounting tensions between the colonies and Britain?

Mounting Tensions

In May 1774, General Thomas Gage, the commander in chief of the British army in America, replaced Thomas Hutchinson as governor of Massachusetts. After Gage dissolved the Massachusetts legislature, the General Court, it defied him by assembling anyway. Calling itself the Provincial Congress, the legislature in October 1774 appointed an emergency executive body, the **Committee of Safety**, headed by John Hancock, which began stockpiling weapons and organizing militia volunteers. Some localities had already provided for the formation of special companies of **Minute Men**, who were to be ready at "a minute's warning in Case of an alarm."

Enforcing the Continental Association's boycott of British goods, local committees sometimes assaulted suspected loyalists and destroyed their property. The increasingly polarized atmosphere, combined with the drift toward military confrontation, drove a growing wedge between American loyalists and the patriot anti-British American Whigs.

Committee of Safety Any of the extralegal committees that directed the revolutionary movement and carried on the functions of government at the local level in the period between the breakdown of royal authority and the establishment of regular governments.

Minute Men Special companies of militia formed in Massachusetts and elsewhere beginning in late 1744.

This dramatic engraving of the first battle of the American Revolution at Lexington, Massachusetts, on April 19, 1775, is not the photographic work of an eyewitness to events but a close approximation to it. Ralph Earl, a painter, and Amos Doolittle, an engraver, walked over the battlefields at Lexington and Concord a few days after the engagement, interviewed spectators and participants, and collaborated in producing four large engravings that depict the events with considerable accuracy. This scene from the first plate shows British troops firing on the American militia at Lexington.

Battle of Lexington, April 19th 1775." OH: 13 3/4" OW: 19". Courtesy , Winterthur Museum"

The Loyalists' Dilemma

Loyalists and Whigs began to part company in earnest during the fall and winter of 1774–1775 as the threat of war mounted. Most loyalists were farmers, officeholders and professionals, and many were recent immigrants to the colonies, who felt more secure under the protection of the Crown than with more established Americans. Including those who did not actually fight, the loyalists numbered close to half a million men and women—some 20 percent of the colonies' free population.

British Coercion and Conciliation

The British parliamentary elections in the fall of 1774 strengthened Prime Minister Lord North's hand and enabled Parliament to prohibit the New England (and later other) colonies from trading outside the British Empire or sending their ships to the North Atlantic fishing grounds. Meanwhile, in a gesture of appeasement, Parliament endorsed Lord North's **Conciliatory Proposition** pledging not to tax the colonies if they would voluntarily contribute to the defense of the empire. Had it specified a maximum colonial contribution and had it been offered ten years earlier, the colonists might have found the Conciliatory Proposition acceptable. Now it was too late. North's government, in any case, had already sent orders to General Gage to take decisive action against the Massachusetts rebels. These orders triggered the first clash between British and American forces.

The Battles of Lexington and Concord

Gage received his orders on April 14, 1775. On the night of April 18, he assembled seven hundred men on the Boston Common and marched them toward the little towns of Lexington and Concord, some 20 miles away (see Map 6–1). Their mission was to arrest rebel leaders Samuel Adams and John Hancock (then staying in Lexington) and to destroy the military supplies the Committee of Safety had assembled at Concord. Patriots in Boston got wind of the troop movements and sent out riders—one of them the silversmith Paul Revere—to warn their fellows. Adams and Hancock escaped.

When the British soldiers reached Lexington at dawn, they found about seventy armed militiamen drawn up in formation on the village green. Their precise intentions are not clear. Outnumbered ten to one, they probably did not plan to begin a fight. More likely, they were there in a show of defiance.

Months of mounting tension exploded on the Lexington green. A British major ordered the militia to disperse. They were starting to obey when a shot cracked through the dawn stillness. No one now knows who fired. The British responded with a volley that killed or wounded eighteen Americans.

The British troops pressed on to Concord and burned what few supplies the Americans had not been able to hide. When their rear guard came under patriot fire at Concord's North Bridge, the British panicked. As they retreated to Boston, patriot Minute Men and other militia harried them from both sides of the road. By the time the column reached safety, 273 British soldiers were either dead, wounded, or missing. The four thousand Americans who had shot at them along the way suffered nearly one hundred dead, wounded, and missing. (See Overview p. 101 for summaries of this and other battles.)

The speed with which distant colonies heard about the outbreak of fighting at the **Battles of Lexington and Concord** suggests both the importance Americans attached to it and the extraordinary efforts patriots made to spread word of it.

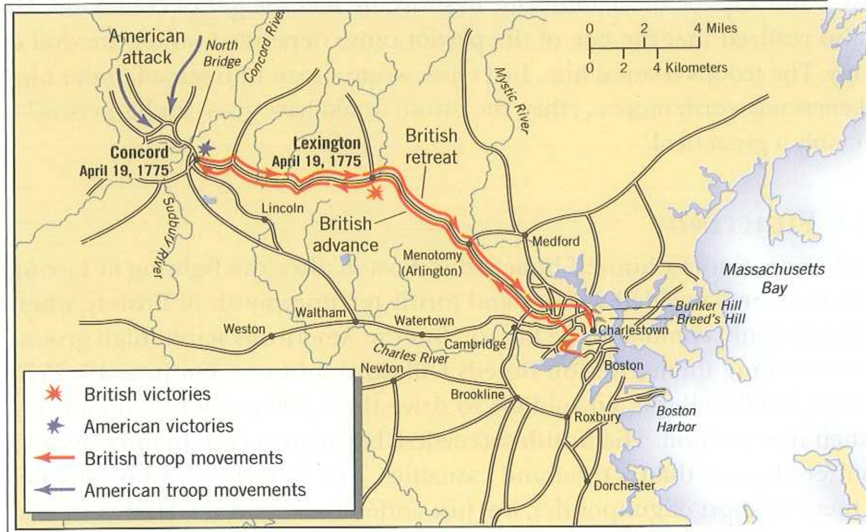
4–8
Address of the Inhabitants of Anson County to Governor Martin (1774)

Conciliatory Proposition Plan whereby Parliament would "forbear" taxation of Americans in colonies whose assemblies imposed taxes considered satisfactory by the British government.

Battles of Lexington and Concord The first two battles of the American Revolution which resulted in a total of 273 British soldiers dead, wounded, and missing and nearly one hundred Americans dead, wounded, and missing.

MAP EXPLORATION

To explore an interactive version of this map, go to **http://www.prenhall.com/goldfield2/map6.1**



MAP 6–1
The Battles of Lexington and Concord This map shows the area around Boston, Massachusetts, where in April 1775 British and American forces fought the first military engagements of the Revolution.

WAS BRITAIN'S early strategy against the colonists effective?

Everywhere, news of Lexington and Concord spurred Whigs into action. The shots fired that April morning would, in the words of the nineteenth-century Concord philosopher and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, be "heard round the world." They signaled the start of the American Revolution.

WHERE TO LEARN MORE

Minute Man National Historic Park
Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts

The Second Continental Congress, 1775–1776

By the time the Second Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia on May 10, 1775, it had a war on its hands. Assuming leadership of the rebellion, Congress in the succeeding months became, in effect, a national government. It called for the patchwork of local forces to be organized into the Continental Army, authorized the formation of a navy, established a post office, and authorized the printing of paper continental dollars to meet its expenses. Denying Parliament's claim to govern the colonies but not yet ready to declare themselves independent, the delegates sought to preserve their ties to Britain by expressing loyalty to the crown. In the **Olive Branch Petition**, addressed to George III on July 5, they asked the king to protect his American subjects from the military actions ordered by Parliament. The following day, Congress approved the Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms, asserting the resolve of American patriots "to die freemen, rather than to live slaves."

Commander in Chief George Washington

To take command of the patriot forces around Boston—the newly named Continental Army—Congress turned to George Washington. John Adams, a Whig leader from Massachusetts, selected the Virginian. Realizing that this would help transform a local quarrel in New England into a continental conflict, Adams also expected Washington's leadership to help attract recruits from Virginia, which was then the most populous colony.

Olive Branch Petition Petition adopted by the Second Continental Congress as a last effort toward peace that avowed America's loyalty to George III and requested that he protect them from further aggressions.

Washington was the ideal person for the job. Some of his contemporaries had quicker minds and broader educations; Washington, however, was blessed with good judgment, a profound understanding of both the uses and the limitations of power, and a quiet air of authority. In short, he had the gift of command. He soon also realized that the fate of the patriot cause depended on the survival of the army. The troops revered him. In a crisis, wrote a man who served under him, "his likeness was worth more . . . than the British would have given for his person"—presumably a great deal.

Early Fighting

General Gage, finding himself besieged in Boston after the fighting at Lexington and Concord, decided to seize and fortify territory south of Boston, where his cannons could command the harbor. But the Americans seized high ground first, entrenching themselves on Breeds Hill north of town. On June 17, 1775, Gage sent 2,200 well-trained soldiers to drive the 1,700 patriot men and boys from their new position. The British succeeded, but at great cost. In three assaults, they suffered more than a thousand casualties. The Americans, who retreated when they ran short of gunpowder, lost just under four hundred dead or wounded. One glum British officer observed afterward that another such victory "would have ruined us." Misnamed for another hill nearby, this encounter has gone down in history as the Battle of Bunker Hill (see Map 6–2).

This portrait of George Washington appears in multiple versions depicting the victorious general against different backgrounds, including the battles of Princeton and Yorktown. The painter, Charles Willson Peale, served under Washington at Princeton, and the French commander at Yorktown, the Count de Rochambeau, took an appropriate version home with him in 1783.

Peale, Charles Willson (1741–1827). (after): George Washington after the battle of Princeton, January 3, 1777. 1779. Oil on canvas, 234.5x155 cm. Inv.:MV 4560. Photo: Gerard Blot. Chateaux de Versailles et de Trianon, Versailles, France. Reunion des Musees Nationaux/Art Resource, NY

During the winter of 1775–1776, the Americans dragged some sixty cannons 300 miles through snow and over mountains from Fort Ticonderoga to Boston, mounting them overlooking Boston harbor, and putting the British in an indefensible position. The British then evacuated Boston and moved their troops to Halifax, Nova Scotia. New England was for the moment secure for the patriots. Initial fighting in the South also went well for the patriots, who defeated loyalist forces, who included slaves who had been promised their freedom if they fought for the Loyalist cause, at Great Bridge, near Norfolk, and Moore's Creek Bridge in North Carolina. In June 1776, patriot forces also repulsed a large British expedition sent to capture Charleston, South Carolina.

In contrast, an attempt to win Canada to the patriot side met with disaster. Two American armies attacked in late 1775. One quickly captured Montreal. The other, under Benedict Arnold, approached Quebec through the Maine wilderness in the face of great hardships. Linking up outside heavily fortified Quebec, the American commanders attacked the city on December 31. The assault, followed by the Siege of Quebec, failed. Canada remained a British province.

Independence

The stunning American successes in New England and the South in late 1775 and early 1776 bolstered the patriots' confidence.

MAP 6–2
Early Fighting, 1775–1776 As this map clearly reveals, even the earliest fighting occurred in widely scattered areas, thereby complicating Britain's efforts to subdue the Americans.

WHAT WAS BRITAIN'S early strategy against the colonists?

In August 1775, King George III rejected Congress's Olive Branch Petition. Instead, he issued a proclamation declaring the colonies in rebellion and denying them his protection. In December, Parliament barred all exports from the American colonies. These aggressive actions, especially the king's, persuaded many colonists to abandon their loyalty to the crown. More and more, Whigs began to think seriously of declaring full independence from Britain.

QUICK REVIEW

General Washington

- John Adams hoped the choice of a Virginian would widen the conflict.
- Washington's qualifications: good judgment, understanding of power, air of authority.
- Washington had the respect and admiration of his troops.

CHRONOLOGY

1775	**April 19:** Battles of Lexington and Concord.
	May 10: Second Continental Congress meets.
	June 17: Battle of Bunker Hill.
	December 31: American attack on Quebec.
1776	**January 9:** Thomas Paine's *Common Sense.*
	July 4: Declaration of Independence.
	September 15: British take New York City.
	December 26: Battle of Trenton.
1777	**January 3:** Battle of Princeton.
	September 11: Battle of Brandywine Creek.
	October 17: American victory at Saratoga.
	Runaway inflation begins.
	Continental Army winters at Valley Forge.
1778	**February 6:** France and the United States sign an alliance.
	June 17: Congress refuses to negotiate with British peace commissioners.
	July 4: George Rogers Clark captures British post in the Mississippi Valley.
	December 29: British capture Savannah.
1779	**June 21:** Spain declares war on Britain.
	Americans devastate the Iroquois country.
	September 23: John Paul Jones captures the British ship *Serapis.*
1780	**May 12:** Fall of Charleston, South Carolina.
	October 7: Americans win Battle of Kings Mountain.
	Nathanael Greene takes command in the South.
1781	**January 17:** Americans defeat British at Battle of Cowpens.
	March 15: Battle of Guilford Court House.
	October 19: Cornwallis surrenders at Yorktown.
1783	**March 15:** Washington quells the Newburgh "Conspiracy."
	September 3: Peace of Paris signed.
	November 21: British begin evacuating New York.

5–4
A freelance writer urges his readers to use common sense (1776)

QUICK REVIEW

Common Sense
- Published by Tom Paine in January 1776.
- Denounced King George and made the case for independence.
- Sold more than 100,000 copies.

WHERE TO LEARN MORE

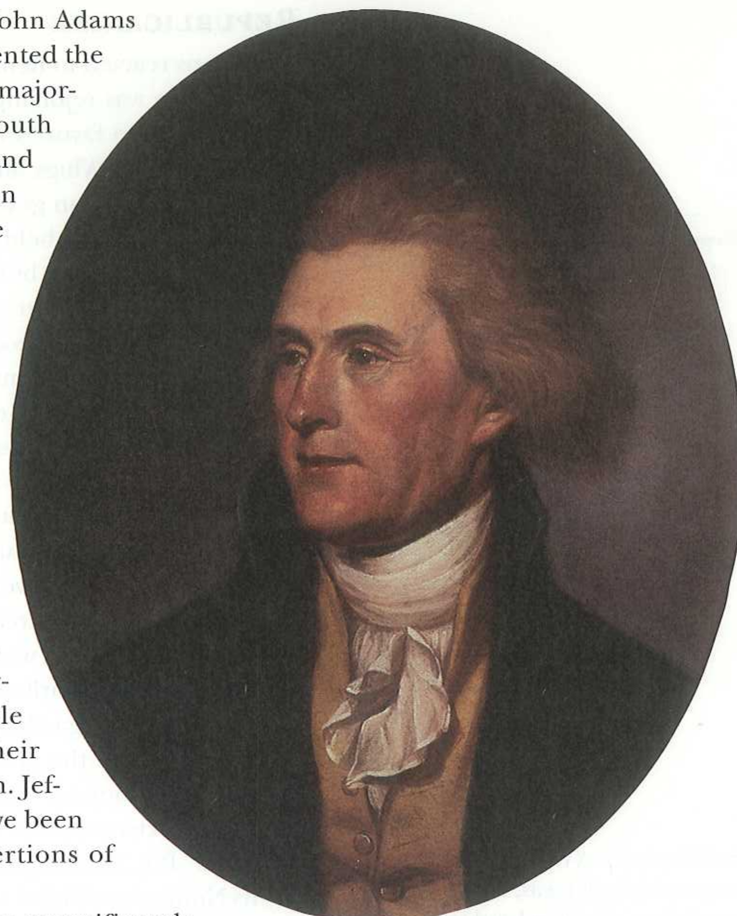
Independence National Historic Park, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

At this critical moment, a ne'er-do-well Englishman, recently arrived on American soil, gave the cause of independence a powerful boost. Thomas Paine was by trade a corsetmaker—and a twice-fired tax collector. Also a man of radical ideas that he expressed forcefully in the everyday English of ordinary people, he became a powerful polemicist for the American cause. In his pamphlet *Common Sense*, published in Philadelphia in January 1776, Paine denounced King George and made the case for independence. He ridiculed the absurdity of "supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island," and described the king as "the Royal Brute" whose tyranny should be thrown off. Simple common sense, Paine concluded, dictated that "'TIS TIME TO PART."

Common Sense, which promptly sold more than 100,000 copies throughout the colonies, helped predispose Americans toward independence. Tactical considerations also led patriot leaders toward a formal separation from Great Britain. Such a move would make it easier for America to gain desperately needed aid from foreign countries, especially from England's ancient enemy, France. Declaring independence would also give the local political elites leading the resistance to British rule a solid legal basis for their newly claimed authority.

On June 7, 1776, Virginian Richard Henry Lee introduced in Congress a resolution stating that the united colonies "are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States." Postponing a vote on the issue. Congress appointed a committee to draw up a declaration of independence. The committee turned to a young Virginian named Thomas Jefferson to compose the

first draft. "You can write ten times better than I," John Adams supposedly told Jefferson. When the committee presented the document to Congress and it became clear that the majority favored independence, the Pennsylvania and South Carolina delegations switched sides in favor of it, and the New York delegation decided to abstain. Thus when Congress voted on the resolution for independence on July 2, 1776, it was approved unanimously by all voting delegations. After further tinkering with the wording, Congress officially approved the **Declaration of Independence** on July 4, 1776.



Thomas Jefferson. Mather Brown, an American artist living in England, painted this picture of Jefferson for John Adams while the two men were in London on diplomatic missions in 1786. A companion portrait of Adams that Jefferson ordered for himself also survives. Brown's sensitive portrait of a thoughtful Jefferson is the earliest known likeness of him.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Congress intended the declaration to be a justification for America's secession from the British Empire. Jefferson later maintained that he did not write any more than what everyone was thinking. The political theory that lies behind the declaration is known as the **contract theory of government**. Developed by the late seventeenth-century English philosopher John Locke and others, the contract theory maintains that legitimate government rests on an agreement between the people and their rulers. The people are bound to obey their rulers only so long as the rulers offer them protection. Jefferson's prose, however, transformed what might have been a bland statement into one of history's great assertions of human rights.

The Declaration of Independence consists of a magnificently stated opening assumption, two premises, and a powerful conclusion. The opening assumption is that all men are created equal, that they therefore have equal rights, and that they can neither give up these rights nor allow them to be taken away. The first premise—that people establish governments to protect their fundamental rights to life, liberty, and property—is a restatement of contract theory. (With a wonderful flourish reflecting the Enlightenment's optimism about human potential, Jefferson changed "property" to "the pursuit of happiness.") The second premise is a long list of charges meant to justify the Americans' rejection of their hitherto legitimate ruler. Then follows the dramatic conclusion: Americans can rightfully overthrow King George's rule and replace it with something more satisfactory.

Historians have spilled oceans of ink debating Jefferson's use of the expression "all men." Almost certainly he was thinking in the abstract and meant "humanity in general." In practice, of course, many people were excluded from full participation in eighteenth-century American society. Women, propertyless white men, and free black men had no formal political rights and limited legal rights, and slaves enjoyed no rights at all. (Although himself a slaveowner, Jefferson was deeply troubled by American slavery. He had wanted to include a denunciation of the slave trade among the charges against George III in the Declaration of Independence, but Congress took it out, believing that to blame the king for this inhumane business would appear hypocritical.) But if the words "all men are created equal" had limited practical meaning in 1776, they have ever since confronted Americans with a moral challenge.

Declaration of Independence
The document by which the Second Continental Congress announced and justified its decision to renounce the colonies' allegiance to the British government.

Contract theory of government
The belief that government is established by human beings to protect certain rights—such as life, liberty, and property—that are theirs by natural, divinely sanctioned law and that when government protects these rights, people are obligated to obey it.

Republicanism

Americans reacted to news of the Declaration of Independence with mixed emotions. There was rejoicing as orators read the declaration to great crowds. But even many who favored independence worried how Americans would govern themselves. Most Whigs, animated by the political ideology known as **republicanism**, thought a republican government was best suited to American society.

QUICK REVIEW

Republicanism
- Self-government: the best foundation for society and individual freedom.
- Called for consent of the governed.
- Suspicious of excessively centralized government.

Republicanism held that self-government—either directly by the citizens of a country or indirectly by their elected representatives—provided a more reliable foundation for the good society and individual freedom than rule by kings. Thus drawing on contract theory, as in the Declaration of Independence, republicanism called for government by consent of the governed. Drawing on country ideology, it was suspicious of excessively centralized government and insistent on the need for virtuous, public-spirited citizenry. Republicanism therefore helped give the American Revolution a moral dimension.

But other than a state that was not ruled by a hereditary king, what was a republic? Americans had at hand a recent example of a republic in the English Civil War of the mid-seventeenth century, in which English Puritans had for a time replaced the monarchy with a republican "Commonwealth," dedicated to advancing the "common weal," or common good. Some New Englanders, spiritual descendants of the Puritans, considered the Commonwealth to have been a noble experiment and regarded the American Revolution as another chance to establish a republic of the godly. "When the mere Politician weighs the Danger or Safety of his Country," warned one clergyman, "he computes them in Proportion to its Fortresses, Arms, Money, Provisions, Numbers of Fighting Men, and its Enemies." But, the clergyman continued, the "Christian Patriot" calculates them "by its Numbers of Sinful or praying People, and its Degrees of Holiness or Vice." Such language recalled the Great Awakening; it reached beyond the upper classes who had been directing resistance to the British and mobilized ordinary people for what their ministers repeatedly assured them was a just war against sin and despotism.

Republicanism A complex, changing body of ideas, values, and assumptions, closely related to country ideology, that influenced American political behavior during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The Combatants

WHAT WERE some of the key differences between the British and American forces?

Republican theory mistrusted professional armies as the instruments of tyrants. A free people, republicans insisted, relied for defense on their own patriotism. When individual or community rights were in danger, free men should grab their muskets from over the fireplace, assemble as the local militia, take care of the problem, and go home. (See, American Views, "A British Woman Observes an American Militia Exercise in 1775." p. 146) But militiamen, as one American general observed, had trouble coping with "the shocking scenes of war" because they were not "steeled by habit or fortified by military pride." In real battles, they often proved unreliable. Americans therefore faced a hard choice: develop a professional army or lose the war. In the end, they did what they had to do. While state militias continued to offer support, it was the disciplined forces of the **Continental Army** that won the crucial battles.

Continental Army The regular or professional army authorized by the Second Continental Congress and commanded by General George Washington during the Revolutionary War.

Professional Soldiers

Washington tightened things up in the new Continental Army. Eventually, he prevailed on Congress to adopt stricter regulations and to require enlistments for three years or the duration of the war. Although he used militia effectively,

This print, *Ye Foil'd, Ye Baffled Brittons,* shows the capture of Major John André, the British agent who acted as the go-between for British authorities and the American General Benedict Arnold, who planned to turn over the American fortress at West Point to them. The three militiamen who captured André, who was later hanged as a spy, reportedly refused a bribe for his release. The strange facial expressions of all the participants were probably the artist's crude attempt to indicate surprise.

Mezzotint, 1780 – 1800. Size: H. 7 3/ 8 in., W. 9 3/4 in. Courtesy, Winterthur Museum

his consistent aim was to turn the Continental Army into a disciplined force that could defeat the British in the large engagements of massed troops characteristic of eighteenth-century European warfare. Guerrilla fighters shooting from behind trees like "savages" had their place in the American war effort, but they could never win a decisive, formal battle. And only such a "civilized" victory would impress the other European powers and establish the legitimacy of the United States.

Many soldiers of fortune, as well as a few idealists, offered their services to American representatives in Europe. France's 19-year-old Marquis de Lafayette was one of the youngest, wealthiest, and most idealistic. Two Poles, Tadeusz Kosciuszko, an engineer, and Kazimierz Pulaski, a cavalry commander mortally wounded at the Battle of Savannah in 1779, also rendered good service. Most useful of all, probably, was Baron von Steuben. His title was new, but he had genuine experience in the Prussian army, continental Europe's best. He knew how to get along with American soldiers by explaining the reasons for his orders. He became the Continental Army's drillmaster, and thanks partly to him, Washington's troops increasingly came to resemble their disciplined European counterparts.

The British troops—and the nearly thirty thousand German mercenaries (Americans called them "Hessians") whom the British government also employed—offered Americans the clearest model of a professional army. Most enlisted men did come from the lower classes and from economically depressed areas, but many also had skills. Most British troops carried the "Brown Bess" musket. With bayonet attached, it was almost 6 feet long and weighed over 16 pounds. In battle, soldiers usually stood close together in lines three deep. They were expected to withstand bombardment without flinching, fire on command in volleys, charge with

QUICK REVIEW

Soldiers for Liberty

- France: Marquis de Lafayette
- Poland: Tadeusz Kosciuszko and Kazimierz Pulaski
- Prussia: Baron von Steuben

the bayonet, and use their heavy musket stock (the wooden end) to crush the skulls of any wounded enemy they strode over.

Military life was tough. On the march, seasoned troops carrying 60-pound packs normally covered about 15 miles a day but could go 30 miles in a "forced" march. In all weather conditions, the British wore heavy woolen uniforms dyed bright red for visibility on smoke-filled battlefields (hence their nickname "redcoats"). They were frequently undernourished, however, and many more died of disease than of injury in battle. Medical care was, by modern standards, primitive: Treatments for illness included bleeding and purging (induced vomiting and diarrhea). Serious arm or leg wounds usually meant amputation, without antiseptics or anesthetics, and often proved fatal.

QUICK REVIEW

Military Life

- Soldiers suffered from disease and lack of food.
- Discipline was severe.
- Soldiers of the Continental Army developed a community of their own.

Severe discipline held soldiers in line. Striking an officer or deserting could bring death; lesser offenses usually incurred a beating. Several hundred lashes, "well laid on" with the notorious cat-o'-ninetails (a whip with multiple cords, each ending in a nasty little knot or a metal ball), were not uncommon.

Soldiers amused themselves with gambling (despite regulations against it) and drinking. Perhaps two-thirds of the Redcoats were illiterate, and they all suffered from loneliness and boredom. Camaraderie and a legendary loyalty to their regiments sustained them.

After the winter of 1777–1778, conditions in the Continental Army came to resemble those of the British army. Like British regulars, American recruits tended to be low on the social scale. The chances for talented enlisted men to win an officer's commission were greater in the Continental Army than the British army. And despite their ragged uniforms, they carried themselves like soldiers. Indeed, Continental soldiers frequently had little more than "their ragged shirt flaps to cover their nakedness," and more than once their bare marching feet left bloody tracks in the snow.

Both British and American authorities had trouble supplying their troops. Both sides suffered from bureaucratic inefficiencies, but the fundamental problems of each were different. The British had plenty of hard-coin money with a stable value, which many American merchants and farmers were happy to take in payment for supplies. But the British had to rely mostly on supplies shipped to them from the British Isles. The Continental Army, in contrast, had to pay for supplies in paper money, both Continental dollars and state-issued currency, whose value sank steadily as the war progressed.

Feeling themselves outcasts from an uncaring society, the professional soldiers of the Continental Army developed a community of their own. The soldiers were "as strict a band of brotherhood as Masons," one later wrote, and their spirit kept them together in the face of misery. Attempts at mutiny in Washington's camp were few and largely unsuccessful.

Occasionally, American officers let their disgruntlement get out of hand. The most notorious such case was that of Benedict Arnold, a general who compiled a distinguished record during the first three years of the war but then came to feel himself shabbily treated by Congress and his superiors. Seeking better rewards for his abilities, he offered to surrender the strategic fort at West Point (which he commanded) to the enemy; before he could act, however, his plot was discovered, and he fled to the British, serving with them until the end of the war. Among Americans, his name became a synonym for traitor.

What was perhaps the most serious expression of army discontent—one that threatened the future of republican institutions and civilian government in the United States—occurred near Newburgh, New York, in March 1783, after the fighting was over. During the war, Congress had promised officers a pension of half pay for life (the custom in Great Britain), but now many veterans demanded in-

stead full pay for six years. When Congress failed to grant real assurances that *any* pay would be forthcoming, hotheaded young officers called a meeting that could have led to an armed uprising and military coup. General Washington, in a dramatic speech, subtly warned the men of all that they might lose by insubordination. A military coup would "open the flood Gates of Civil discord" and "deluge" the nation in blood; loyalty now, he said, would be "one more distinguished proof" of their patriotism. With the fate of the Revolution and the honor of the army hanging apparently in the balance, the movement collapsed. The officers and politicians behind the "conspiracy" were only bluffing, using the threat of a discontented army to frighten the states into granting Congress the power (which it then lacked) to levy taxes so it would have the funds to pay the army.

Women in the Contending Armies

Women accompanied many units on both sides, as was common in eighteenth-century warfare. A few were prostitutes. Most were the married or common-law consorts of ordinary soldiers. These women "camp followers" cooked and washed for the troops, occasionally helped load artillery, and provided most of the nursing care. A certain number in a company were subject to military orders and were authorized to draw rations and pay. The role of these women found its way into American folklore in the legend of Molly Pitcher (perhaps Mary Ludwig Hays, the wife of a Continental artillery sergeant), who heroically carried water to gunners to cool them and their overheated guns at the Battle of Monmouth Court House in 1778.

John Laurens, who hoped to raise black troops in South Carolina as a prelude to the general abolition of slavery, was the only member of George Washington's staff to be killed in battle. This commemorative portrait by Charles Willson Peale bears the Latin inscription "sweet and proper it is to die for one's country."
Independence National Historic Park

African-American and Native-American Participation in the War

On June 30, 1779, the British commander in chief, Sir Henry Clinton, promised to allow slaves who fled from rebel owners to join the royal troops to "follow . . . any Occupation" they wished. Hedged as this promise of freedom was, news of it spread quickly among the slave communities, and late in the war enough black people flocked to the British army in South Carolina and Georgia to make feeding and housing them a serious problem. The British shared the racial prejudices of many Americans, however, and despite their efforts to recruit African Americans, they were reluctant to arm them. Instead, the British put most of the ex-slaves to work as agricultural or construction workers (many of the free and enslaved black people accompanying American troops were similarly employed). A few relatively well equipped black British dragoons (mounted troops), however, saw some combat in South Carolina, much to the horror of local Whigs.

Approximately 5,000 African Americans fought against the British and for American independence, hundreds of them in the Continental Army. Many were freemen from Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Several free black men served among the defenders at Bunker Hill, and at least one distinguished himself sufficiently for his commander to commend him as "an experienced officer as well as an excellent soldier." But the idea of arming African Americans was not well received in the South.

• AMERICAN VIEWS •

A British Woman Observes an American Militia Exercise in 1775

The following description of North Carolinians preparing for war in 1775 comes from the travel journal of Janet Schaw, a Scotswoman visiting her brother Robert in America. Robert Schaw, although he was appointed a colonel in the North Carolina militia, disapproved of the American cause and eventually refused to take the oath of allegiance to the new state government. His wife, by contrast, according to Janet Schaw, was "so rooted an American, that she detests every thing that is European." Early in June 1775 Janet Schaw saw the militia train outside of Wilmington under their commander Robert Howe, who later became a major general in the Continental Army. She returned to Scotland in late 1775.

WHAT DOES this passage suggest about Janet Schaw's own views of the American cause? How accurately do you think it reflects the effectiveness of militia forces? What does it suggest about the relationship between patriots and loyalists?

We came down in the morning in time for the review, which the heat made as terrible to the spectators as to the soldiers, or what you please to call them. They had certainly fainted under it, had not the constant draughts of grog supported them. Their exercise was that of bush-fighting, but it appeared so confused and so perfectly different from any thing I ever saw, I cannot say whether they performed it well or not; but this I know that they were heated with rum till capable of committing the most shocking outrages. We stood in the balcony of Doctor Cobham's [a future loyalist] house and they were reviewed on a field mostly covered with what are called here scrubby oaks which are only a little better than brushwood. They at last however assembled on the plain field, and I must really laugh while I recollect their figures: 2000 men in their shirts and trousers, preceded by a very ill beat-drum and a fiddler, who was also in his shirt with a long sword and a cue at his hair, who played with all his might. They made indeed a most unmartial appearance. But the worst figure there can shoot from behind a bush and kill even a General Wolfe.

Before the review was over, I hear a cry of tar and feather. I was ready to faint at the idea of this dreadful operation. I would have gladly quitted the balcony, but was so much afraid the Victim was one of my friends, that I was not able to move; and he indeed proved to be one, tho' in a humble station. For it was Mr. Neilson's [a loyalist] poor English groom. You can hardly conceive what I felt when I saw him dragged forward, poor devil, frighted out of his wits. However at the request of some of the officers, who had been Neilson's friends, his punishment was changed into that of mounting on a table and begging pardon for having smiled at the regt. He was then drummed and fiddled out of the town, with a strict prohibition of ever being seen in it again.

Source: [Janet Schaw], *Journal of a Lady of Quality; Being the Narrative of a Journey from Scotland to the West Indies, North Carolina, and Portugal, in the Years 1774 to 1776*, ed. Evangeline Walker Andrews in Collaboration with Charles McLean Andrews (1923). Yale University Press.

Many Indians also favored the British. To Native Americans, the key issue of the American Revolution, as well as in most disputes with white settlers, was about their land. Many Indian peoples, including the Cherokees, decided that it was in their interest to back the British. Their aid mainly took the form of attacks on white frontier settlements. Usually they did not tell the British in advance what they were planning to do. Thus in one notorious incident, an Indian attack in the Hudson River Valley resulted in the mistaken scalping of Jane McCrae, the fiancé of a British officer. Whig propagandists exploited this tragedy to the fullest. Because they could not control the Indians, the British regarded their native allies as a liability as well as an asset and seldom made unrestricted use of them. Other Native Americans, such as the Oneidas and the Tuscaroras, however, joined the Americans.

The War in the North, 1776–1777

The Revolutionary War can be divided into three phases. In the first, from the outbreak of fighting in 1775 to 1778, most of the important battles took place in New England, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. During these years, the Americans faced the British alone. But in 1778, France entered the war on the American side, opening the second phase of the war. Fighting in the second phase would rage from 1778 to 1781 mainly in the South, at sea, and on the western frontier. The third phase of the war, from late 1781 to 1783, saw little actual fighting. With American victory assured, attention shifted to the diplomatic maneuvering leading up to the Treaty of Paris (1783), which ended the war and recognized American independence.

WHAT WERE the major turning points in the war?

The British Army Hesitates

During the first phase of the war, the British concentrated on subduing New England, the hotbed of what they saw as "rebellious principles." Replacing General Gage, the government appointed Sir William Howe as commander in chief of British forces and his brother, Richard Howe, as admiral of the naval forces in North American waters. New York City had been the headquarters of the British army during the late colonial period, and the Howes decided to make it their base of operations. In August 1776, the Howes landed troops on Long Island, and in the Battle of Brooklyn Heights they quickly drove the American forces deployed there from Brooklyn Heights and back to Manhattan Island (see Map 6–3, p. 148).

In the ensuing weeks, British forces overwhelmed Washington's forces, driving them out of Manhattan and then, moving north, clearing them from the area around the city at the Battle of White Plains. But the Howes were hesitant to deal a crushing blow, and the Americans were able to retreat across New Jersey into Pennsylvania. The American cause seemed lost, however; Congress fled from Philadelphia to Baltimore, and the Continental Army almost melted away.

On Christmas night, Washington led his forces back across the icy Delaware from Pennsylvania and, in the Battle of Trenton, launched an unorthodox surprise attack on a garrison of Hessian mercenaries at Trenton, New Jersey, on the morning of December 26. Still in the midst of their Christmas celebrations, the Hessians quickly surrendered. A week later, in the Battle of Princeton, Washington overwhelmed a British force at Princeton, New Jersey. Thereafter, Washington withdrew to winter quarters in Morristown, New Jersey, and the Howes made no further effort to pursue him. Both sides suspended operations until the spring.

QUICK REVIEW

Victories at Trenton and Princeton

- 1776: a series of defeats devastated the Continental Army.
- Christmas night 1776: Washington crosses the Delaware and launches a surprise attack.
- Victories at Trenton and Princeton revive the American cause.

The victories at Trenton and Princeton boosted morale and saved the American cause. But why did the Howes not annihilate the Continental Army while they had the chance? Clearly, they wanted to regain loyal subjects, not alienate them. But if they had inflicted a crushing defeat on the Americans, they would have risked making them permanent enemies of British rule. By the time it later became apparent that this cautious strategy was not working and the Howes were replaced with more aggressive commanders, the British had lost their best chance to win the war.

The Year of the Hangman

Contemporaries called 1777 the Year of the Hangman because the triple sevens suggested a row of gallows. Living up to its ominous name, it was indeed a crucial year for the American cause.

MAP EXPLORATION

To explore an interactive version of this map, go to **http://www.prenhall.com/goldfield2/map6.3**

MAP 6–3

The War in the North, 1776–1777 Most of the fighting between the British and Americans during the first part of the war occurred in the North, partly because British authorities assumed that the New England colonies were the most rebellious.

HOW WAS the scope of the early fighting a detriment to the British?

The British began the year by mounting a major effort to end the rebellion. Their strategy was to send a force south from Canada down the Hudson River to link up with the Howes in New York City, separate New England from the rest of the states, and then crush the rebellion in that most recalcitrant region. Unfortunately, there was no effort to coordinate strategy between the forces advancing

from Canada and the forces under the command of the Howes in New York. Thus in the end, poorly planned, poorly executed, and unsupported from the South, the campaign ended in disaster for the British.

Some five thousand Redcoats and three thousand German mercenaries assembled in Canada during the winter of 1776–1777 under the command of the jaunty, high-living, and popular "Gentleman Johnny" Burgoyne. The army finally set off in June with 1,500 horses hauling its heavy artillery and ponderous supply train. Crossing Lake Champlain, Burgoyne's army on July 5 recaptured Fort Ticonderoga, but success eluded him after that.

WHERE TO LEARN MORE

Saratoga National Historic Park, New York

Trouble began as the troops started moving overland through the woods at the southern end of the lake. Forced to clear away huge trees in its path felled by American axmen, the army crawled along at only two or three miles a day. Promised reinforcements never arrived, and a Whig militia force wiped out a force of eight hundred men that Burgoyne had sent into Vermont to round up badly needed horses. By October 1777, Burgoyne's army was down to less than six thousand men and was facing disaster. A force of nearly three thousand Continentals and nine thousand militia, commanded by General Horatio Gates, had now assembled to confront the British. Unable to break through the American lines, Burgoyne surrendered to Gates following the Battle of Saratoga on October 17, 1777. A stunning reversal for the British, Burgoyne's defeat would help convince the French to join the fighting on the American side.

WHERE TO LEARN MORE

Valley Forge National Historic Park, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania

While Burgoyne was meeting disaster, William Howe, rather than moving north to support him, was making plans to destroy Washington's army and capture Philadelphia. In July 1777, Howe's troops sailed from New York to Chesapeake Bay and from there marched on Philadelphia from the south. They met Washington's army on the banks of Brandywine Creek, near the Pennsylvania-Delaware border. The Americans put up a good fight before giving way with a loss of 1,200 killed or captured (twice as many as the British).

Howe occupied Philadelphia, and his men settled down in comfortable winter quarters. Congress fled to York, Pennsylvania, and the Continental Army established its own winter camp outside Philadelphia, at **Valley Forge**. Here Washington was joined by his wife, Martha, in a small stone farmhouse, surrounded by the log huts that his men built for themselves. The Continental Army's miserable winter at Valley Forge has become legendary in American history. Suffering from cold, disease, and starvation, as many as 2,500 soldiers died. Yet the troops managed to transform themselves into a disciplined professional army by drilling endlessly under the watchful eye of General von Steuben, and with the coming of spring, American prospects improved dramatically.

Valley Forge Area of Pennsylvania approximately 20 miles northwest of Philadelphia where General George Washington's Continental troops were quartered from December 1777 to June 1778 while British forces occupied Philadelphia during the Revolutionary War.

The War Widens, 1778–1781

Foreign intervention would transform the American Revolution into a virtual world war, engaging British forces in heavy fighting not only in North America but also in the West Indies and India. In the end, had it not been for French assistance, the American side probably would not have won the clear-cut victory it did.

WHAT WERE the consequences of the American alliance with France?

The United States Gains an Ally

Since late 1776, Benjamin Franklin and a team of American diplomats had been in Paris negotiating French support for the patriot cause. In the winter of 1777–1778, aware that a Franco-American alliance was close, Parliament belatedly tried to end the rebellion by granting the former colonies full autonomy,

including the exclusive right to tax themselves, in return for a resumption of allegiance to the Crown. But France and the United States concluded an alliance on February 6, 1778, and news of it reached America before the British commission arrived. Seeing independence within reach, Congress refused to negotiate.

The agreements the United States signed with France included both a commercial treaty and a military alliance. Both sides promised to fight together until Britain recognized the independence of the United States, and France pledged not to seek the return of lands in North America. In turn, France persuaded Spain to declare war on Britain in June 1779. The Spanish fleet augmented the naval power of the countries arrayed against Great Britain.

Meanwhile, Catherine the Great of Russia suggested that European powers form a League of Armed Neutrality to protect their trade with the United States and other warring countries against British interference. Denmark and Sweden soon joined; Austria, the Netherlands, Portugal, Prussia, and Sicily eventually followed. Britain, however, quickly went to war with Holland, ostensibly over another issue (to avoid war with the League), but really to cut off Dutch trade with the United States.

QUICK REVIEW

Britain Isolated

- League of Armed Neutrality: formed to protect trade with United States free from British interference.
- Members: Russia, Denmark, Sweden, Austria, the Netherlands, Portugal, Prussia, and Sicily.
- Britain declares war on the Dutch to cut off trade with United States.

Great Britain thus found itself nearly completely isolated and even, briefly, threatened with invasion. Accordingly, as early in the spring of 1778, the British replaced the Howes with a tough new commander, Sir Henry Clinton, instructing him to detach some of his troops to attack the French West Indies. Knowing he now faced a serious French threat, Clinton began consolidating his forces. He evacuated Philadelphia and pulled his troops slowly back across New Jersey to New York.

On June 28, 1778, Washington caught up with the British and engaged them at the Battle of Monmouth Court House. The day was hot and the battle hard-fought. For a while, it looked as if the now well-trained Americans might win, but a mix-up in orders cost Washington the victory. This inconclusive battle proved to be the last major engagement in the North for the rest of the war. Clinton withdrew to New York, and Continental troops occupied the hills along the Hudson Valley north of the city. The war shifted to other fronts.

Fighting on the Frontier and at Sea

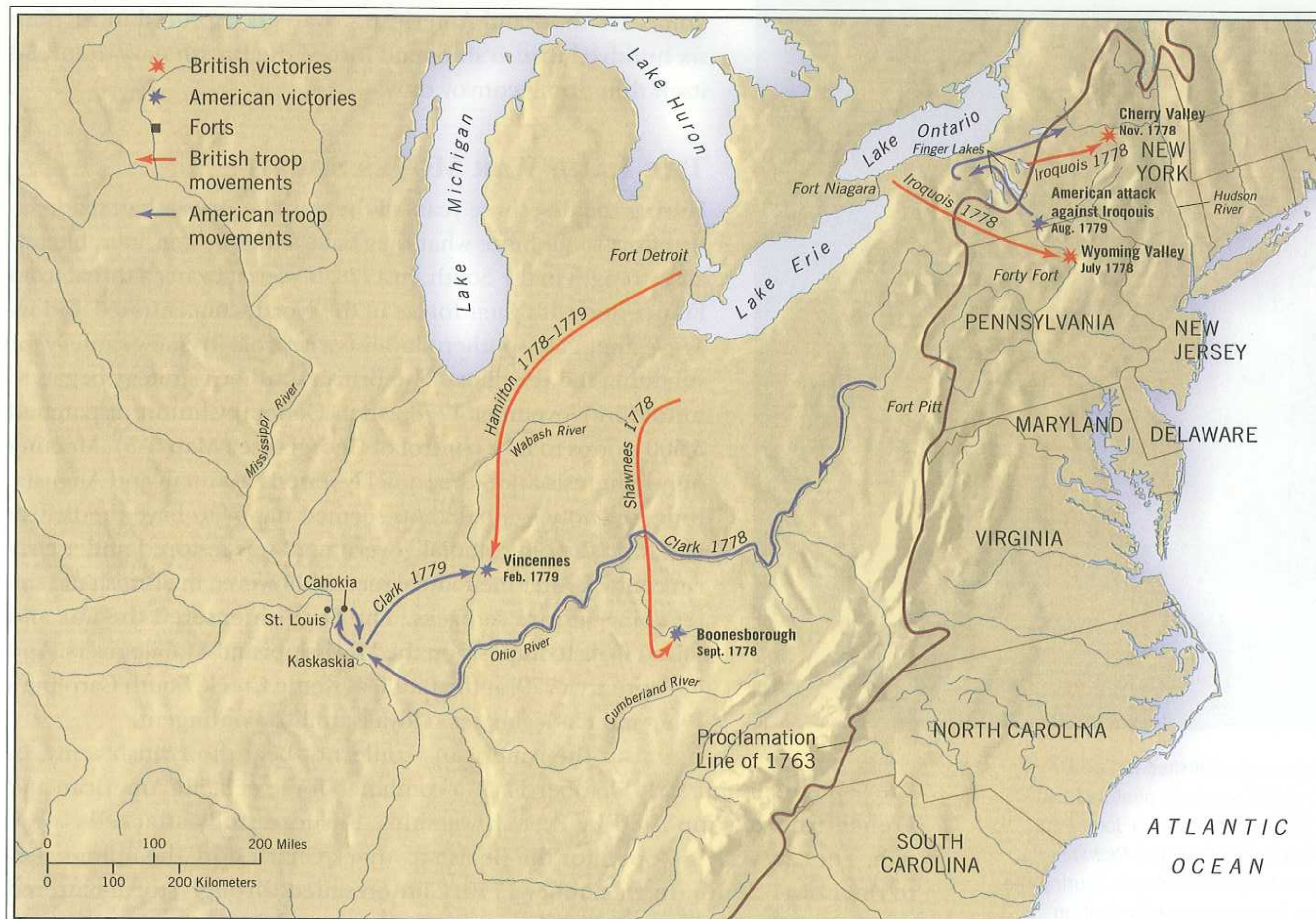
Native Americans called Kentucky "a dark and bloody ground," a designation that took on added meaning when Indians began raiding the territory in 1777 on British instructions. The nerve center for coordinating these attacks was the British post of Detroit, and the Americans accordingly made plans to capture it. After two unsuccessful expeditions, a third, under Virginian George Rogers Clark (see Map 6–4), captured three key British settlements in the Mississippi Valley (Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes) in July 1778. These successes may have strengthened American claims to the West at the end of the war.

Blood also ran on the Pennsylvania and upstate New York frontiers with British and Indian raids on settlers in Pennsylvania's Wyoming Valley and New York's Cherry Valley. Both raids became the stuff of legends and stimulated equally savage reprisals against the Iroquois, destroying forty-one Indian villages in the New York Finger Lakes region.

Anglo-American clashes at sea had begun in 1775, shortly after the Battles of Lexington and Concord and continued until the end of the war as Americans struggled to break the British navy's blockade. Great Britain was the preeminent sea power of the age, and the United States never came close to matching it, in either the number or the size of its ships. But Congress did its best to challenge the British at sea, and the Americans engaged in what was essentially a guerrilla naval war. Their naval flag, appropriately, pictured a rattlesnake and bore the motto "Don't Tread on Me."

MAP EXPLORATION

To explore an interactive version of this map, go to **http://www.prenhall.com/goldfield2/map6.4**



MAP 6–4

The War on the Frontier, 1778–1779 Significant battles in the Mississippi Valley and the frontiers of the seaboard states added to the ferocity of the fighting and strengthened some American claims to western lands.

WERE THE BRITISH at more of a disadvantage the farther from the coast they fought?

The country's first naval hero, Scottish-born John Paul Jones, was primarily a hit-and-run raider. In the colonies by chance when the war broke out, this adventurer offered his services to Congress. Benjamin Franklin helped Jones secure an old French merchant ship, which he outfitted for war and renamed the *Bon Homme Richard.* After capturing seventeen enemy vessels, he encountered the formidable H.M.S. *Serapis* in the North Sea on September 23, 1779. Completely outgunned, Jones brought the *Bon Homme Richard* close enough to make his small arms fire more effective. Asked by the British if he was surrendering, Jones gave the legendary reply, "I have not yet begun to fight." More than four hours later, the *Serapis* surrendered. Jones's crew took possession of the British vessel and left the crippled *Bon Homme Richard* to sink.

This engraving, published in London in 1779, shows an apocryphal incident during the battle in which John Paul Jones's ship *Bon Homme Richard* defeated the British *Serapis*. During the fighting, Jones supposedly shot an American sailor who attempted to lower the ship's flag as a sign of surrender; actually Jones only knocked him down with a pistol. Legend (and the artist) may have confused this incident with another earlier one—while Jones was still a Scotsman (note the bonnet)—in which Jones did kill a mutineer.

"Paul Jones Shooting a Sailor." Color engraving from the Olds Collection #366, no negative number. Collection of the New York Historical Society

Congress and the individual states supplemented America's naval forces by commissioning individual sea captains to outfit their merchant vessels with guns and act as privateers. Some two thousand American privateers captured more than six hundred British ships and forced the British navy to spread itself thin doing convoy duty.

The Land War Moves South

During the first three years of the war, the British had made little effort to mobilize what they believed to be considerable loyalist strength in the South. In 1778, however, facing a threat from France and with their forces in the North concentrated and inactive, they gave southern loyalists a key role in a new strategy for subduing the rebellion. The British southern strategy began to unfold in November 1778, when General Clinton dispatched 3,500 troops to take control of Georgia (see Map 6–5). Meeting only light resistance, they quickly seized Savannah and Augusta. Indeed, enough inhabitants seemed happy to have the British back that the old colonial government was restored under civilian control. After their initial success, however, the British did suffer some serious setbacks. The Spanish entered the war and seized British outposts on the Mississippi and Mobile rivers. And in February 1779, at the Battle of Kettle Creek, South Carolina's Whig militia decimated a loyalist militia contingent.

But the Americans could not beat the British army. In late September and early October 1779, a combined force of 5,500 American and French troops, supported by French warships, unsuccessfully attacked Savannah. The way was now open for the British to attack Charleston, the military key to the Lower South. In December 1779, Clinton sailed through storm-battered seas from New York to the Carolina coast with about nine thousand troops. In the Battle of Charleston, he encircled the city, trapping the patriot forces inside. On May 12, 1780, more than five thousand Continentals and militia laid down their arms—the worst American defeat of the war and the largest single loss of United States troops to a foreign army until the surrender of American forces in the Philippines to Japan in 1942.

The British were now poised to sweep all the South before them. So complete did the British success seem that Clinton tried to force the American troops whom he had taken prisoner to resume their duties as British subjects and join the loyalist militia. Thinking that matters were now well in hand, Clinton sailed back to New York, leaving the southern troops under the command of Lord Cornwallis.

Clinton's confidence that the South had returned securely to the loyalist camp was premature. Atrocities like Colonel Banastre Tarleton's slaughter of 350 Virginia Continentals who had already offered to surrender inflamed anti-British feelings. And Clinton's decision to force former rebels into the loyalist militia backfired, infuriating real loyalists—who saw their enemies getting off lightly—as well as Whigs. Atrocities and reprisals mounted on both sides.

WHERE TO LEARN MORE

Kings Mountain National Military Park and Cowpens National Battlefield, South Carolina

American Counterattacks

In 1780, after a complete rout of General Horatio Gates's forces near Camden, South Carolina, American morale revived when "over mountain men" (militia) from Virginia, western North and South Carolina, and what is today eastern Tennessee

MAP EXPLORATION

To explore an interactive version of this map, go to **http://www.prenhall.com/goldfield2/map6.5**

MAP 6–5

The War in the South, 1778–1781 During the latter part of the war, most of the major engagements occurred in the South. British forces won most of the early ones but could not control the immense territory involved and eventually surrendered at Yorktown.

WHY DID the war moved southward as it progressed?

OVERVIEW

IMPORTANT BATTLES OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

	Battle	Date	Outcome
Early Fighting	Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts	Apr. 19, 1775	Contested
	Fort Ticonderoga, New York	May 10, 1775	American victory
	Breeds Hill ("Bunker Hill"), Boston, Massachusetts	June 17, 1775	Contested
	Great Bridge, Virginia	Dec. 9, 1775	American victory
	Quebec, Canada	Dec. 31, 1775	British repulse American assault
	Moore's Creek Bridge, North Carolina	Feb. 27, 1776	American victory
The War in the North	Brooklyn Heights, New York	Aug. 27, 1776	British victory
	White Plains, New York	Oct. 28, 1776	British victory
	Trenton, New Jersey	Dec. 26, 1776	American victory
	Princeton, New Jersey	Jan. 3, 1777	American victory
	Brandywine Creek, Pennsylvania	Sept. 11, 1777	British victory (opened way for British to take Philadelphia)
	Saratoga, New York	Sept. 19 and Oct. 17, 1777	American victory (helped persuade France to form an alliance with United States)
	Monmouth Court House, New Jersey	June 28, 1778	Contested
The War on the Frontier	Wyoming Valley, Pennsylvania	June and July 1778	British victory
	Kaskaskia and Cahokia, Illinois; Vincennes, Indiana	July 4, 1778– Feb. 23, 1779	American victories strengthen claims to Mississippi Valley
	Cherry Valley, New York	Nov. 11, 1778	British victory
The War in the South	Savannah, Georgia	Dec. 29, 1778	British victory (took control of Georgia)
	Kettle Creek, Georgia	Feb. 14, 1779	American victory
	Savannah, Georgia	Sept. 3– Oct. 28, 1779	British victory opened way for British to take Charleston
	Charleston, South Carolina	Feb. 11– May 12, 1780	British victory
	Camden, South Carolina	Aug. 16, 1780	British victory
	Kings Mountain, South Carolina	Oct. 7, 1780	American victory
	Cowpens, South Carolina	Jan. 17, 1781	American victory
	Guilford Court House, North Carolina	Mar. 15, 1781	Contested
	Yorktown, Virginia	Aug. 30– Oct. 19, 1781	American victory (persuaded Britain to end the war)

inflicted a defeat on the British at Kings Mountain, South Carolina, and Nathanael Greene replaced the discredited Gates, bringing competent leadership to the Continentals in the South. The resourceful Greene realized he would need an unorthodox strategy to defeat Cornwallis's larger army of seasoned professional troops. He divided his forces, keeping roughly half with him in northeastern South Carolina and sending the other half westward under General Daniel Morgan. At the Battle of Cowpens on January 17, 1781, Morgan cleverly posted his least reliable troops, the militia, in the front line, telling them to run after firing two volleys. When Tarleton attacked, the militia fired and withdrew. Thinking that the American ranks had broken, the Redcoats charged—straight into devastating fire from Morgan's Continentals. Tarleton escaped, but his reputation for invincibility had been destroyed.

Cornwallis now badly needed a battlefield victory. Burning his army's excess baggage, he set off in hot pursuit of Greene and Morgan, who had rejoined forces. The Continentals had the advantage of knowing the country, which was laced with rain-swollen rivers. Finally, on February 13, 1781, Greene's tired men crossed the Dan River into Virginia, and Cornwallis gave up the chase, marching his equally exhausted Redcoats southward. To his surprise, Cornwallis now found himself pursued—though cautiously, to be sure—by Greene. On March 15, the opposing forces met at Guilford Court House (near present-day Greensboro, North Carolina) in one of the war's bloodiest battles.

By the late summer of 1781, British fortunes were waning in the Lower South. The Redcoats held only the larger towns and the immediately surrounding countryside. With their superior staying power, they won most major engagements, but these victories brought them no lasting gain. As General Greene observed of the Americans, "We fight, get beat, and rise and fight again." Patriot guerrilla forces, led by such colorful figures as "Swamp Fox" Francis Marion, disrupted British communications between their Charleston headquarters and outlying garrisons. The loyalist militias that the British had hoped would pacify the countryside proved unequal to the task. Although Greene never defeated the Redcoats outright, his campaign was a strategic success. The British could not hold what they had taken; the Americans had time on their side. Frustrated, Cornwallis decided to conquer Virginia to cut off Greene's supplies and marched north to Yorktown, Virginia, during the summer of 1781.

The final military showdown of the war was at hand at Yorktown. By now, five thousand French soldiers were in America ready to fight alongside the Continentals, and a large French fleet in the West Indies had orders to support an attack on the British in North America. Faking preparations for an assault on British-occupied New York, the Continentals (commanded by Washington) and the French headed for the Chesapeake. Cornwallis and his six thousand Redcoats soon found themselves besieged behind their fortifications at Yorktown by 8,800 Americans and 7,800 French. A French naval victory gave the allies temporary command of the waters around Yorktown. Cornwallis had nowhere to go, and Clinton—still in New York—could not reinforce him quickly enough. On October 19, 1781, the British army surrendered.

WHERE TO LEARN MORE

Yorktown Battlefield, Colonial National Historical Park, Yorktown, Virginia

The American Victory, 1782–1783

WHAT WERE the terms of the Peace of Paris?

The British surrender at Yorktown marked the end of major fighting in North America, though skirmishes continued for another year. But the majority in Parliament now felt that enough men and money had been wasted trying to keep the Americans within the empire. In March 1782, the king accepted Lord North's resignation and appointed Lord Rockingham as prime minister, with a mandate to make peace.

The Peace of Paris

The peace negotiations, which took place in Paris, were lengthy. The Americans demanded independence, handsome territorial concessions—Franklin, the senior American negotiator, asked for all of Canada—and access to the rich, British-controlled fishing grounds in the North Atlantic. The new British prime minister, Lord Shelburne (Rockingham had died in 1782), was inclined to be conciliatory, hoping to help British merchants recover their lost colonial trade.

The American negotiators, Franklin, John Adams, and John Jay, masterfully threaded their way among the conflicting interests of the Americans, British, French, and Spanish. With good reason, they feared that the French and Spanish would strike a bargain with the British at the expense of the United States. As a result, the Americans disregarded Congress's instructions to avoid making peace unilaterally. Instead, they secretly worked out their own arrangements with the British that would meet Shelburne's objective of restoring Anglo-American commercial ties. On November 30, 1782, the negotiators signed a preliminary Anglo-American treaty of peace. Its terms were embodied in the final **Peace of Paris**, signed by all the belligerents on September 3, 1783.

QUICK REVIEW

Peace of Paris

- Signed September 3, 1783.
- United States got virtually everything it sought at peace talks.
- Treaty addressed important economic issues, but said nothing about slavery.

The Peace of Paris gave the United States nearly everything it sought except Canada (which was never really a serious issue). Great Britain acknowledged that the United States was "free, sovereign and independent." The northern boundary of the new nation extended west from the St. Croix River (which separated Maine from Nova Scotia) past the Great Lakes to what were thought to be the headwaters of the Mississippi River (see Map 6–6). The Mississippi itself—down to just north of New Orleans—formed the western border. Spain acquired the provinces of East and West Florida from Britain. This territory included a substantial chunk of present-day Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. The treaty did not, however, provide the United States with access to the Gulf of Mexico, which would be a source of diplomatic friction for years.

Several provisions of the treaty addressed important economic issues. Adams, on behalf of his fellow New Englanders, insisted on a provision granting American fishermen access to the waters off eastern Canada. The treaty also required that British forces, on quitting American soil, were to leave behind all American-owned property, including slaves. Another provision declared existing debts between citizens of Britain and the United States still valid, giving British merchants hope of collecting on their American accounts. Congress was to "recommend" that the states restore rights and property taken from loyalists during the war. Nothing was said about the slave trade, which Jay had hoped to ban.

The Components of Success

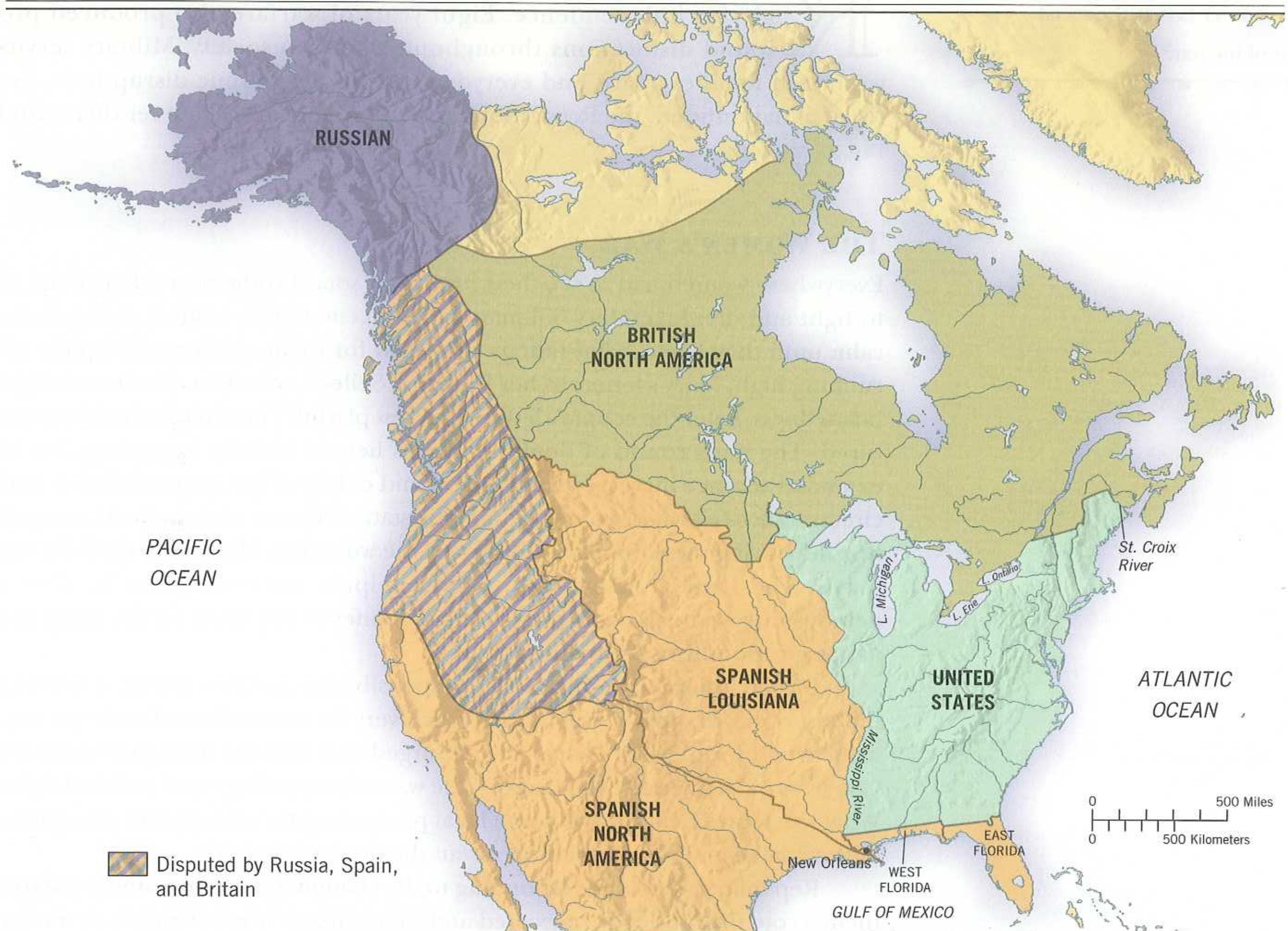
The War for Independence was over. In December 1783, the last British transports put to sea with troops evacuated from New York. Despite the provisions of the peace treaty and the objections of Southern planters, about three thousand African Americans went with them. Washington's Continental Army had already disbanded in the summer of 1783 (but not, as we have seen, before a dispute over pay came close to provoking a military coup). The American commander said an emotional farewell to his officers at New York City's Fraunces Tavern, resigned his commission to Congress, and like the legendary citizen-soldier Cincinnatus, who after defending the ancient Roman Republic gave up his power and went back to plowing his land, went home to Mount Vernon.

Peace of Paris Treaties signed in 1783 by Great Britain, the United States, France, Spain, and the Netherlands that ended the Revolutionary War.

Washington's leadership was only one of the reasons why the Americans won the Revolutionary War. French assistance played a crucial role. Some historians even

MAP EXPLORATION

To explore an interactive version of this map, go to **http://www.prenhall.com/goldfield2/map6.6**



MAP 6–6

North America after the Peace of Paris, 1783 The results of the American Revolution redrew the map of North America, confining Britain to Canada and giving the United States most of the area east of the Mississippi River, though Spain controlled its mouth for most of the next twenty years.

WHAT EFFECT did the Peace of Paris have on the future of the United States?

contend that without the massive infusion of French men and money in 1781, the Revolution would have failed. The British also contributed heavily to their own downfall. Their fatal mistakes included bureaucratic inefficiency, hesitant command, and, worst of all, overconfidence.

Yet it took 175,000 to 200,000 soldiers—Continentals and militia troops—to prevent Great Britain from recovering the colonies. Of these, some seven thousand died in battle for their "country and for its just cause." Those who served in the Continental Army, probably more than half of all who fought, served the longest and saw the most action. Their casualty rate—30 to 40 percent—may have been the highest of any war in which the United States has been engaged.

WHAT WERE the social effects of the war?

War and Society, 1775–1783

Regular combatants were not the only ones to suffer during the struggle for independence. Eight years of warfare also produced profound dislocations throughout American society. Military service wrenched families apart, and everyone endured economic disruptions. As a forge of nationhood, the Revolution tested all Americans, whatever their standing as citizens.

The Women's War

Everywhere women had to see their husbands, sons, brothers, and fiancés go off to fight and die. Like Mary Silliman in Connecticut, they waited, trying to stay calm until they knew "what tidings God" had for them. At first, with spirits still running high, Mary's letters to her husband, Selleck, reveal an affectionate lightheartedness. Later the couple's letters grew less playful. Then her husband was captured. The daily round of domestic duties helped to keep her going, but his extended absence increased her burdens and enlarged her responsibilities. Such circumstances elevated women's domestic status. Women also assumed new public roles during the conflict. Some nursed the wounded. More wove cloth for uniforms. The Ladies' Association of Philadelphia was established in 1780 to demonstrate women's patriotism and raise money to buy shirts for the army. Similar associations formed in other states.

Despite their increasing private responsibilities and new public activities, it did not occur to most women to encroach very far on traditional male prerogatives. When John Adam's wife, Abigail, urged him and the Second Continental Congress to "Remember the Ladies," she was not expecting equal political rights. What she wanted, rather, was some legal protections for women and recognition of their value and need for autonomy in the domestic sphere.

Republican ideology, responding to the changing status of women, assigned them a role that was at once exalted and subordinate. It was their job to nurture wise, virtuous, and public-spirited men. It would be this view of women that would prevail in the post-Revolutionary era.

Effect of the War on African Americans and Native Americans

In the Northern states, where slavery was already economically marginal and where black men were welcome as volunteers in the Continental Army, the Revolutionary War helped bring an end to slavery, although it remained legal there for some time (see Chapter 7). In the South, however, slavery was integral to the economy, and white planters viewed it as crucial to their postwar recovery, so the war ultimately strengthened the institution, especially in the Carolinas and Georgia. Of the African Americans who left with the British at the end of the war, many, both slave and free, went to the West Indies. Others settled in Canada, and some eventually went back to Africa, where Britain established the colony of Sierra Leone for them.

Survivors among the approximately thirteen thousand Native Americans who fought for the British did not have the option of leaving with them at the end of the war. How many died during the war is not known, but certainly many did. Their families and their communities also paid a high price. The Americans repeatedly invaded the Cherokees' homeland in the southern Appalachian Mountains and ravaged the Iroquois country in western New York.

FROM THEN TO NOW

The American Revolution and the Teaching of American History

In October 1994, TV viewers saw politically conservative talk show host Rush Limbaugh hold up a history book and begin ripping out pages. "Here's Paul Revere. He's gone," he exclaimed, and out went a page. "Here's George Washington. . . . He's gone. . . ." More pages bit the dust. "This is what we're doing to American history with this stupid new book, folks." The volume that prompted his outburst was the National History Standards—"the standards from hell" according to conservative critics. In response to such outbursts, Gary Nash, a leading author of the standards and an expert in early American history, repeatedly went on television to defend them, appearing in one twenty-four hour period on ABC, NBC, and PBS.

The furor arose out of a bipartisan attempt to improve education in the nation's schools. In 1989, President George H. W. Bush and the nation's governors announced that it was time "to establish clear national performance goals, goals that will make us internationally competitive . . . in the twenty-first century." The plan called for knowledgeable professionals to establish voluntary guidelines governing what schools should expect students to know about several core subjects, including history. The development of the history standards, which involved thousands of historians and history teachers, took more than two and a half years.

The heated reaction to the standards caught many by surprise, but it probably should not have. History, Nash has pointed out, is "unceasingly controversial because it provides so much of the substance for the way a society defines itself." This is certainly true of the history of the American Revolution—the focus of much of the ire of the standard's critics—because it is from the Revolution that the founding propositions of the nation emerged.

The authors of the standards wanted students to learn the results of recent research that has given voice to African Americans, Native Americans, women, and ordinary people and documented their active role in history. But critics complained that including this material would unduly diminish coverage of prominent figures like Revere and Washington. They also worried that calling attention, say, to African American life under slavery or to such incidents as the Paxton Boys' assault on their Indian neighbors would darken the narrative of American history.

How should one tell the story of the United States? A state legislature once resolved that school textbooks should emphasize "the history of hearts and souls inspired by wonderful American principles and traditions." Those who wrote the National History Standards believed that the "governing narrative" should be "the struggle to fulfill the American ideals of liberty, equal justice, and equality" as "various groups [sought] to elbow their way under the canopy of the nation's founding promises."

Compromise eventually quieted the controversy. After the Senate rejected the history standards, blue-ribbon panels of experts reviewed them, recommended some changes, and predicted that the revised version would make an important contribution toward "developing a responsible and productive citizenry." And indeed, teachers and school administrators throughout the country now regularly consult the revised standards to help them design an appropriate history curriculum.

But such controversies—or "memory wars"—have long been, and doubtless will remain, a recurring part of American history as competing segments of society seek to sanction their aspirations and achievement with differing versions of the common past.

With the peace treaty of 1783, Britain surrendered its territory east of the Mississippi, shocking and infuriating the Native Americans living there. They had not surrendered, and none of them had been at the negotiations in Paris. With the Americans now claiming their country by conquest, the Revolutionary War was a disaster for most Native Americans.

American soldiers at Yorktown in 1781 as drawn by a young officer in the French army, Jean-Baptiste-Antoine de Verger. The African American on the left is an infantryman of the First Rhode Island Regiment; the next, a musketeer; the third, with the fringed jacket, a rifleman. The man on the right is a Continental artilleryman, holding a lighted match used to fire cannons.

Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, John Hay Library, Brown University

The Price of Victory

The British and American armies both needed enormous quantities of supplies. This heavy demand disrupted the normal distribution of goods and drove up real prices seven- or eightfold. The widespread use of depreciating paper money by the American side amplified this rise in prices and triggered severe inflation. By March 1780, Congress was forced to admit officially that the continental dollar was worthless. (The popular expression "not worth a continental" suggests that the public had long since agreed.)

Necessity, not folly, drove Congress and the states to rely on the printing press. Rather than alienate citizens by immediately raising taxes to pay for the war, the states printed paper money supposedly redeemable by future tax revenues. Because the quantity of this paper money rose faster than the supply of goods and services, prices skyrocketed and the value of the money plunged. Savvy people tried to spend money before its value could drop further, whereas those who had salable commodities like grain tended to hoard them in the hope that the price would go even higher. The rampant inflation was demoralizing and divisive. Lucky speculators and unscrupulous profiteers grew rich while ordinary and patriotic people suffered. These conditions sparked more than thirty protest demonstrations. As usual, war and its deprivations brought out both the best and the worst in human nature.

The successful outcome of the war and the stable peace that followed suggest that most Americans somehow managed to cope. But during the last years of the conflict, their economic and psychological reserves ran low. The total real wealth of private individuals declined by an average of 0.5 percent annually from 1774 to 1805, even with the returning prosperity of the 1790s. Such statistics suggest the true economic cost of the War for Independence. And the atrocities committed on both sides—the burning, plundering, and murdering by regular troops, militias, and civilians acting on their own—provide nearly as accurate an indicator of the conflict's psychological cost.

Conclusion

Despite the devastation and divisiveness of the war, many people in Europe and the United States were convinced that it represented something momentous. The *Annual Register,* an influential British magazine reflecting respectable opinion, commented accurately in 1783 that the American Revolution . . . "has already overturned those favourite systems of policy and commerce, both in the old and in the new world, which the wisdom of the ages, and the power of the greatest nations, had in vain endeavored to render permanent; and it seems to have laid the seeds of still greater revolutions in the history and mutual relations of mankind."

Americans, indeed, had fired a shot heard round the world. Thanks in part to its heavy investment in the American Revolution, France suffered a grave financial crisis in the late 1780s. This in turn ushered in the political crisis that culminated in the French Revolution of 1789.

Once prosperous but distant provinces of a far-flung empire, the North American states had become an independent confederation, a grand experiment in republicanism whose fate mattered to enlightened men and women throughout the Western world. In his written farewell to the rank and file of his troops at the end of October 1783, Washington maintained that "the enlarged prospects of happiness, opened by the confirmation of our independence and sovereignty, almost exceed the power of description." He urged those who had fought with him to maintain their "strong attachments to the union" and "prove themselves not less virtuous and useful as citizens, than they have been persevering and victorious as soldiers." The work of securing the promise of the American Revolution, Washington knew, would now shift from the battlefield to the political arena.

Summary

The Outbreak of War and the Declaration of Independence, 1774–1776 After the Boston Tea Party, both the British and the Americans knew they were heading for a crisis. In a gesture of appeasement, Parliament endorsed the Conciliatory Proposition, pledging not to tax the colonies if they would contribute to the defense of the empire. But, it was too late. General Gage received orders to march to Lexington and Concord to arrest rebels. What ensued were to be the first battles of the Revolutionary War. On July 4, 1776, Congress officially approved the Declaration of Independence.

The Combatants The American forces were composed of a regular Continental Army and militiamen. British soldiers were, for the most part, better trained and organized. For both, military life was tough. And, often only severe discipline would hold soldiers in line. Women accompanied many units on both sides. Approximately 5,000 African Americans fought against the British and for American independence. Many Indians, however, decided it was in their best interest to join British forces in the war.

The War in the North, 1776–1777 During the first phase of the war, the British concentrated on subduing New England. As fighting moved down into New York and New Jersey, Washington won two key battles at Trenton and Princeton. The colonials continued on with a win at the Battle of Saratoga, only to suffer a costly defeat at Brandywine Creek. In the winter of 1777, a large number of colonial fighters camped at Valley Forge. Here, the hard winter and disease set in, but constant training improved their battle-reddiness by spring.

The War Widens, 1778–1781 Foreign intervention was to transform the American Revolution into a virtual world war. France allied with America and, Spain with France. Russia, Denmark, Sweden, Austria, the Netherlands, Portugal, Prussia, and Sicily joined a league to protect their trade with the combatants. The expansion of the war prompted the British to attack the southern states in the hope of gaining additional loyalist support. This strategy failed and in the last major battle of the war at Yorktown, Virginia, on October 19, 1781, the British army surrendered.

The American Victory, 1782–1783 The American victory accelerated peace talks, and the Peace of Paris was signed in 1783. Several provisions of the treaty addressed important economic issues such as access to fishing waters in Canada. The War for Independence was over, and British troops began their evacuation of America.

The War and Society, 1775–1783 The war had a great effect on many different aspects of American society. Women everywhere lost husbands, sons, and fathers. Women, also assumed new public roles and increased responsibilities at home. In the Northern states, the war helped bring an end to slavery. In the South, however, slavery was integral to the economy. The successful outcome of the war and the stable peace that followed suggest that most Americans somehow managed to cope with the new world in which they found themselves.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who were the loyalists and how many of them were there? Why did British and American attempts in 1775 to avert war fail?
2. What actions did the Second Continental Congress take in 1775 and 1776? Why did it choose George Washington to command its army? Why was he a good choice?
3. Why did Congress declare independence in July 1776? How did Americans justify their claim to independence?
4. What was republicanism, and why was the enthusiasm that it inspired insufficient to win the war?
5. Why did the British not crush the Americans immediately? Why did France decide to enter the war as an ally of the United States?
6. Why did the United States ultimately win? What were the immediate results of the American victory?

KEY TERMS

Battles of Lexington and Concord (p. 137)
Committee of Safety (p. 135)
Conciliatory Proposition (p. 136)
Continental Army (p. 142)
Contract theory of government (p. 141)
Declaration of Independence (p. 141)
Minute Men (p. 135)
Olive Branch Petition (p. 137)
Peace of Paris (p. 156)
Republicanism (p. 142)
Valley Forge (p. 149)

WHERE TO LEARN MORE

- **Gnadenhutten Monument and Shoenbrunn Village near New Philadelphia, Ohio.** Reconstructed buildings mark a Moravian Indian settlement whose inhabitants were massacred by American in 1782. The website for the museum and park, http://www.geocities.com/tusc_hat/gnaden.html, gives a brief history of the village and Revolutionary War massacre.
- **Independence National Historical Park, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.** Independence Hall, where Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, is the most historic building in Philadelphia. The informative website can be accessed through Links to the Past: National Park Service Cultural Resources' comprehensive listing of historic sites in the National Park system, http://www.cr.nps.gov
- **Kings Mountain National Military Park and Cowpens National Battlefield, South Carolina.** Situated approximately 20 miles apart, these were the sites of two battles in October 1780 and January 1781 that turned the tide of the war in the South. Both have museums and exhibits. The official site is accessible through Links to the Past: National Park Service Cultural Resources, http://www.cr.nps.gov But see also Battles of the American Revolutionary War, http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/k12/history/aha/battles.html, for a brief description of the battles and their contexts.
- **Minute Man National Historical Park, Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts.** There are visitors' centers at both Lexington and Concord with explanatory displays. Visitors may also follow the self-guided Battle Road Automobile Tour. The official website is accessible through Links to the Past: National Park Service Cultural Resources, http://www.cr.nps.gov
- **Saratoga National Historical Park, New York.** The park preserves and commemorates the American victory that led to French entry into the war. There is a museum with artifacts from the battlefield. Both the explanatory displays and the topography of the area make this an especially illuminating site. The official website is accessible through Links to the Past: National Park Service Cultural Resources, http://www.cr.nps.gov
- **Valley Forge National Historical Park, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.** Reconstructed huts convey a sense of life in the Continental Army camp at Valley Forge during the hard winter of 1777–1778. The official website is accessible through Links to the Past: National Park Service Cultural Resources, http://www.cr.nps.gov
- **Yorktown Battlefield, Colonial National Historical Park, Yorktown, Virginia.** The park commemorates the great American victory here. Innovative exhibits enable visitors to follow the course of the war from a multicultural perspective. The official website is accessible through Links to the Past: National Park Service Cultural Resources, http://www.cr.nps.gov

For additional study resources for this chapter, go to:
www.prenhall.com/goldfield/chapter6

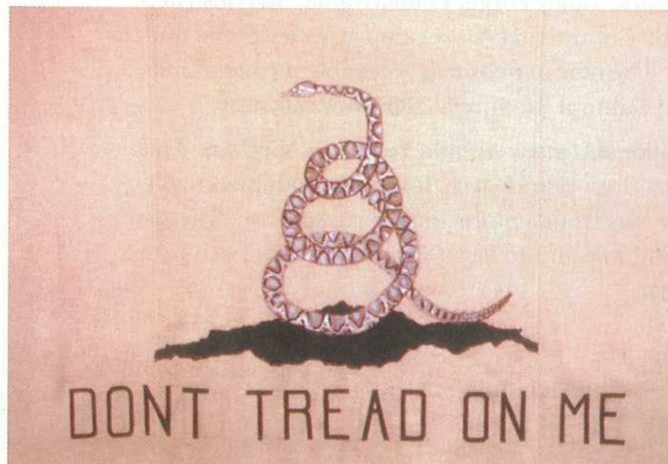
The Rattlesnake as a National Symbol

WHAT OTHER characteristics of snakes in general, and rattlesnakes in particular, might have appealed to Revolutionary Era Americans in choosing a national symbol?

One of the tasks facing the Revolutionary generation was to create symbols around which to rally. There was no official flag, no anthem, no Uncle Sam. Benjamin Franklin made perhaps the earliest attempt to create a visual symbol for the prospective nation when he drew "Join, Or Die" to accompany his 1754 Plan of Union. He pictured the colonies as a snake cut into pieces. Why a snake? In mythology, snakes can reattach themselves. Twenty years later, Paul Revere used the snake for the masthead of the revolutionary newspaper, the *Massachusetts Spy*. Once war began, military units adopted the snake as their battle flag. The most famous of these is the Gadsden flag. Christopher Gadsden was a delegate to the Second Continental Congress from South Carolina who played a leading role in creating the U.S. Navy and in appointing Esek Hopkins of Rhode Island as its first commander. He gave the Gadsden flag to Hopkins for his personal standard.

In 1775, pleased with the popular adoption of the snake as a national symbol, Benjamin Franklin noted, that:

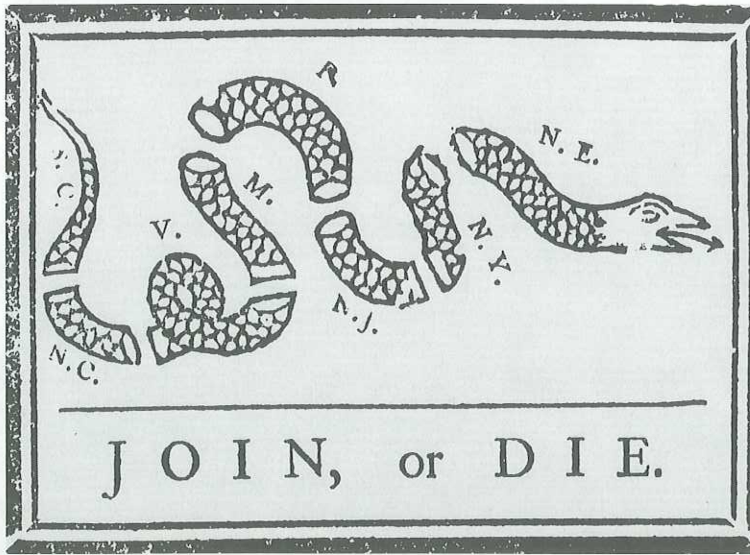
> As if anxious to prevent all pretentions of quarrelling with her, the weapons with which nature has furnished her, she conceals in the roof of her mouth, so that, to those who are unacquainted with her, she appears to be a most defenceless animal; and even when those weapons are shewn and extended for her defence, they appear weak and contemptible; but their wounds however small, are decisive and fatal: — Conscious of this, she never wounds till she has generously given notice, even to her enemy, and cautioned him against the danger of treading on her.—Was I wrong, Sir, in thinking this a strong picture of the temper and conduct of America?

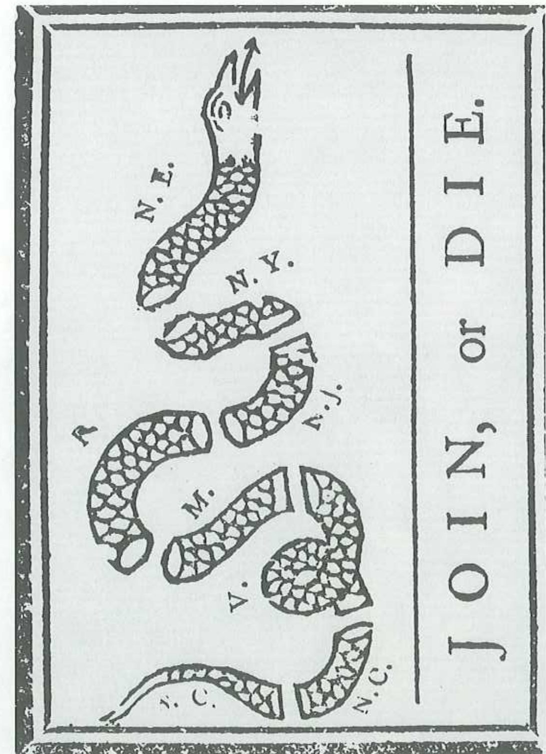


◀ The Gadsden flag, used initially by the U.S. Navy. By 1775 the lines indicating the divisions among the colonies have disappeared. The snake has become the rattlesnake, a reptile unique to North America, and one with a highly poisonous venom. "Don't Tread On Me" captured the revolutionaries' insistence that they fought only to defend their liberties.
Corbis / Bettmann

When rotated, Franklin's snake described the North American coastline: He omitted Georgia, only recently founded and inhabited largely by convicts freed from British prisons.

Revere's snake has reattached itself, although the lines where the divisions had been are still visible. Franklin only pictured twelve colonies, but Revere added "G" for Georgia. Further, Revere's snake confronts the British lion. The united serpent is far larger than the lion, something which anticipated Thomas Paine's argument in *Common Sense* that it made no sense for an island to rule a continent.





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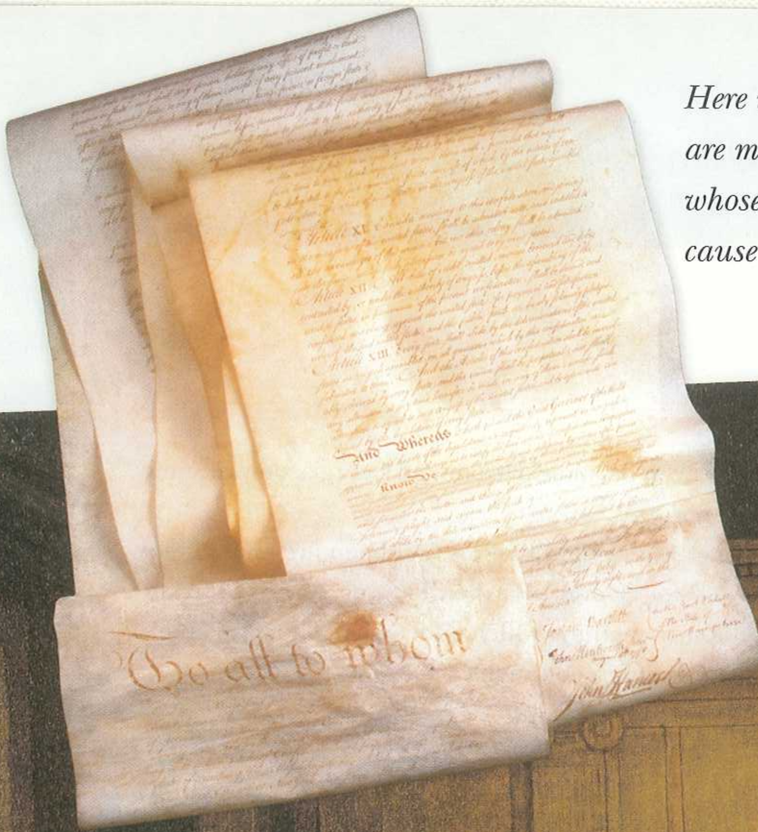
When rotated, Franklin's snake imitated the North American coastline; he omitted Georgia, which was newly found and inhabited largely by convicts freed from British prisons.
North Wind Picture Archives


To all to whom

Here individuals of all nations
are melted into a new race of men,
whose labours and posterity will one day
cause great changes in the world.

Congress voting on the issue of independence.