



American Revolution

American Revolution Summary

The **American Revolution** refers to a seismic moment in history. First, because of the fact it led to the formation of the [United States](#) - a country whose economic and military power has been felt across the world.

The Massachusetts Minutemen who fired “the shots heard around the world” at Lexington and Concord likely had little idea of the eventual influence that their rebellion against [British](#) taxation would have. Secondly, the causes that the revolution came to represent - liberty, representation, freedom, and independence – laid the foundations for social democracies in the following centuries.



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The Surrender of Lord Cornwallis in the American Revolution

Famous figures such as [George Washington](#), [Thomas Jefferson](#), and [John Adams](#) could not have foreseen the almost holy reverence with which their words have been treated since. While the effects of the [revolution](#) may not have been immediately revolutionary, it's clear that the **Thirteen Colonies'** struggle for independence from British rule had a significant and lasting impact. As with any revolutionary moment, it's vital to take a step back and examine the causes and progression leading up to the eventual British surrender in 1783.

Seven Years' War

The American Revolution traces its beginnings to the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), a conflict with the [French](#) over territory that ended with a British victory. The **Seven Years' War** solidified Britain's stance as the most dominant European country in the world as it gained vast tracts of land in the process. However, as Britain tried to increase control of its American colonies in a variety of ways, colonists began rebelling.



Battle of Zorndorf

The expensive conflict had led to new and unpopular taxes. The British government attempted to raise revenue by taxing the colonies, first with the **Stamp Act of 1765** and then with the **Townshend Acts of 1767** and the **Tea Act of 1773**.

This led to increasing resentment. The colonists felt that these taxes were unfair since they were being taxed without any representation in parliament. The growing protests posed a simple question – why didn't the colonists have the same rights as British subjects? Two events in Boston in the early 1770s fanned the flames of resentment further.

First, in 1770, colonial resistance was met with violence at the Boston massacre, in which British soldiers killed five men after opening fire on a protesting mob. Second, in 1773, in response to the Tea Act, a group of Bostonians boarded British ships and dumped 342 chests of tea into Boston Harbor.



These acts were catalysts for more resentment as a vicious circle of retaliatory punitive measures from the British government only served to further enrage the colonists. Massachusetts and the New [England](#) area were now seen as a hotbed of rebellion, and the stage was set for an escalation into war. A group of delegates decided to meet in September 1774 to see what could be done about the situation.

This First Continental Congress included the likes of [George Washington](#) from Virginia, as well as John and [Samuel Adams](#) from Massachusetts. They did not demand independence at this first meeting, but they did issue a declaration of the rights due to every citizen, including life, liberty, property, assembly, and trial by jury – a forerunner for what would come later.

They were frustrated by taxation, but also at the continued British military presence in the colonies – an issue that would rear its head very soon. They agreed to meet for a second congress. In the convening time between congresses, war broke out.

Revere and Dawes warn of the British attack

On April 18, 1775, British soldiers marched to Concord to seize an arms cache that had been stockpiled by colonial militiamen. The two sides clashed at the Battle of Lexington and Concord, marking the first formal battle of the **Revolutionary War**. It was from this night that we also get one of the great tales and heroic figures of the revolution – that of Paul Revere and the other men riding through the night to sound the alarm and prepare the Massachusetts militia.

At the time the **Second Congress** met in the summer of 1775 (with new additions such as [Benjamin Franklin](#) and [Thomas Jefferson](#)), anti-British views were entrenched. They voted to raise a continental army with Washington as commander-in-chief. Thus began a series of battles throughout the fall and winter, starting with the **Battle of Bunker Hill in Boston**.

Though it was a victory for the British, these early skirmishes actually supplied encouragement for the lowly colonial forces, giving them inspiration for the fight ahead. With more trouble brewing – as early battles didn't bring any conclusive victories on either side – the colonists cemented their position on July 4, 1776, when they voted to adopt the **Declaration of Independence**.

This momentous document was the first time a nation's people formally asserted their right to choose their own government. It was drafted by a five-man committee, but the primary author was Thomas Jefferson. His famous words in the preamble read: "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among



these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

"Herein lies the essence of the lasting impact of the **American Revolution** – these words influenced by enlightenment ideas were a far cry from the European model of absolute monarchy. Though, of course, we know that this statement, in fact, referred to a small fraction of the population of the colonies; women, men without property, and slaves were all not considered to share those "inalienable rights." Nevertheless, this was the revolutionary beginning of what would be a long, imperfect process toward the democratic republic we know today.

As the colonists were declaring independence, the British were sending a huge fleet with 34,000 soldiers across the Atlantic to crush the rebellion. After this point, the Revolutionary War settled into a pattern of wins, losses, and stalemates for the next several years. Military history enthusiasts can enjoy the tales of Washington retreating across the Delaware River before launching a surprise attack on Christmas night in the early stages of the war or can reflect on the turning point through 1777-78 at Saratoga.

The American victory at Saratoga was crucial as it paved the way for [France](#), sensing British weakness, to enter the war on the colonists' side. What had been a civil war now became an international conflict. With the help of the training provided by a professional army, notably from the French aristocrat Marquis de Lafayette, Washington's forces rallied in the north. In the south, the colonists suffered many setbacks, with the famous betrayal of Benedict Arnold's defection to the British being the most famous of several other mutinies in the Continental Army.

Siege of Charleston



Siege by Alonzo Chappel An illustration



The British occupied Georgia by early 1779 and captured Charleston, South Carolina in May 1780 under General Cornwallis. However, a change of leadership in the American ranks led to Nathaniel Greene coming to the fore. His forces managed to push the British back to the Yorktown peninsula. With Washington also converging on the British, they were trapped and forced to surrender.

Though contemporaries didn't necessarily see it that way, this surrender effectively marked the end of the **American Revolutionary War**, with no further decisive action taking place before the British signed the **Treaty of Paris** in 1783. In signing the Treaty of Paris, Britain formally recognized the independence of the United States, and the colonists were free to go about building their free and independent country. We know that the story of the United States from here is not quite the legendary march of progress toward freedom and liberty.

The shortcomings of the founding fathers and the damages done by subsequent US governments are well-known. Nevertheless, from a weak confederation of thirteen colonies in the 18th century, in less than two hundred years, the US had become the most powerful nation in the world. Some of the reasons for American success can be found in the rights enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution.

The American victory was a kind of miracle, not only in the logistical nature of a rag-tag bunch of farmers overcoming an imperial army but also in the triumph of new ideas over entrenched monarchical systems. A new kind of politics, and new ways of thinking, had been born in history's greatest experiment - the United States!

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