

SOCIAL STUDIES 1102 DEVELOPMENT OF CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT

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II. THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

"The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave . . . If we were base enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest. There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged. Their clanking may be heard upon the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable—and let it come! I repeat, sir, let it come!" At the Virginia convention to choose delegates to a Second Continental Congress, the eloquent Patrick Henry prophesied that the Congress would do far more than strike back at the British for the clash at Lexington and Concord. Before the Congress adjourned, it would conduct a long and bitter war for independence from Great Britain.

On the face of it, such a war seemed preposterous.

The colonies were economically weak and politically inexperienced. Moreover, they did not even have a regular army until the Second Continental Congress authorized the raising of troops in 1775. Great Britain, on the other hand, was a leading world power.

Nevertheless, the American colonies eventually secured their freedom. Among the factors contributing to their victory were the persistence of patriot colonists, the leadership of George Washington, and the generous aid of the French. How these forces combined to win the independence of the colonies is the next part of the unfolding story of America.

SECTION OBJECTIVES

Read these objectives. When you have completed this section, you should be able:

4. To describe the response of the colonists to Britain's actions.
5. To explain the Declaration of Independence.
6. To describe the strengths and weaknesses of the Continental army.
7. To describe the important events of the Revolutionary War.
8. To name people who contributed to the war.

VOCABULARY

Study these words to enhance your learning success in this section.

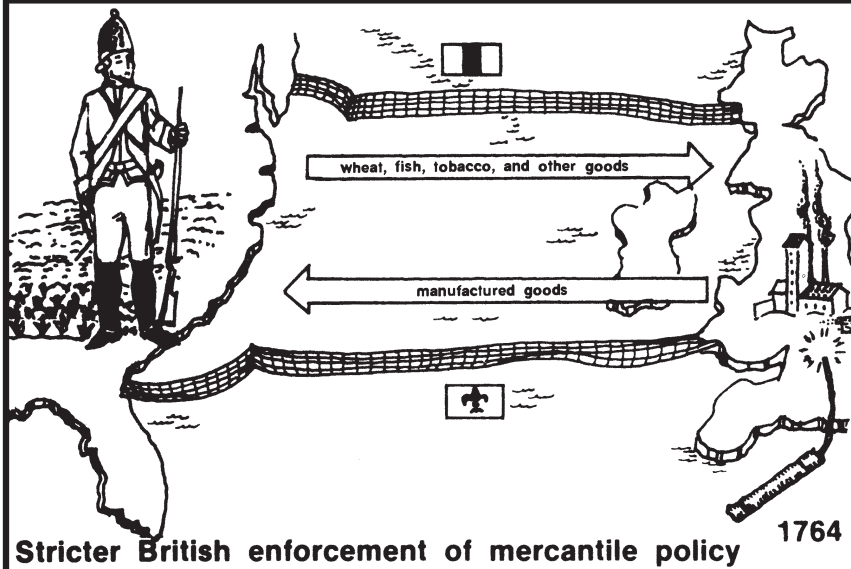
ally
compromise

Loyalist
mercenary

privateers
treaty



CAUSES OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



Stricter British enforcement of mercantile policy



Colonial resistance to British taxation



Royal decree preventing sale of western land



Opposition to keeping a British army in America



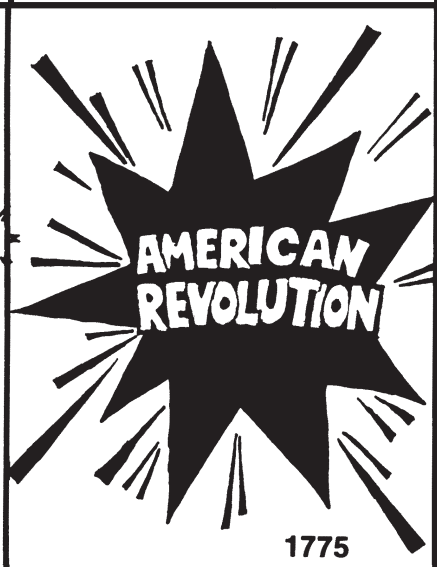
Weakening of ties through space and time



Struggle for more colonial home rule



Many colonial leaders emerge



SECOND CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

Before adjourning, the First Continental Congress had made plans to reconvene if the grievances against the mother country had not been solved. The news of the fighting at Lexington and Concord greeted the delegates as they assembled in Philadelphia for the Second Continental Congress in May of 1775.

A few of the delegates still hoped to patch up the differences between the colonies and the mother country, but the majority had come to believe that only a show of armed strength by the Americans could win concessions. The patriots felt that England would never come to terms now that the colonists had dared to fight against them. They believed that only complete independence could resolve the difficulties.

Decisive action taken. The first problem confronting the Congress involved Massachusetts. After halting the British advance, the Minutemen had driven them back into Boston. The Massachusetts militia was growing rapidly. Congress decided to establish a Continental Army with the militia from Massachusetts as part of it. George Washington, well known as a leader in the French and Indian War, a respected member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, and a staunch supporter of colonial causes, was chosen commander-in-chief. He helped the patriots to persist in what often seemed to be a hopeless cause. Without Washington, independence might not have been achieved.

For the Congress to choose Washington to lead the army was easy enough, but for the Congress to decide on their policy toward Britain was far more difficult. Finally, in July of 1775, the Congress adopted a "Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking up Arms" explaining to the king and to Parliament the reasons the colonists were fighting the British in Boston. Near the end of the series of meetings, Congress insisted that they did not mean to dissolve the union that had existed so long. The Congress endorsed the *Olive Branch Petition* begging Parliament to wait until an understanding could be achieved.

If the British government had accepted the Olive Branch Petition, discussions might have led to a **compromise**. However, the king angrily rejected the petition on the grounds that it was issued by assembly. The king immediately approved an act prohibiting all trade with the colonies and sent 30,000 troops as well as foreign **mercenaries** to crush the rebellion. Many of the foreign mercenaries were German soldiers called *Hessians*. Benjamin Franklin pointed out the irony in the British government's paying German soldiers to kill American colonists. Throughout the war, the presence of Hessians stirred the colonists to greater resistance.

In Massachusetts, the patriot recruits gathered in towns surrounding Boston. Although they were armed, the patriots had little training and no uniforms. Nevertheless, they were determined to face the highly trained British troops that were assembled in Boston. During the night of June 16, 1775, approximately twelve hundred patriots climbed Bunker Hill and Breed's Hill overlooking the city of Boston. Their plan was to hold these hills and to force the British to leave Boston. When morning came, the astonished British found that the Americans had taken up positions on Breed's Hill. General Gage, commander of the British redcoats, sent a body of troops to drive the Americans from their strategic location. While the citizens of Boston watched intently from their housetops, lines of British troops advanced in perfect order toward the summit of the hill. On two occasions they nearly reached the top, only to be driven back by the sharp-shooting patriots. Since the patriots were running short of powder, they were forced to withdraw from the hill when the British attacked for the third time.

The British, who felt that their troops were the finest in the world, were faced by untrained patriots in the Battle of Bunker Hill, yet they suffered almost double the losses that the patriots sustained. During the ensuing months, the patriot forces continued to surround Boston but were unable to clear the city of British troops.

Early in 1776, the patriots dragged a cannon hundreds of miles overland from northeastern New York to Boston and placed it on a strategic hill overlooking the Boston harbor. General Howe, the British commander, decided that Boston could no longer be held and ordered the British troops removed to Halifax, Nova Scotia. The patriots entered Boston and held it. No other major battles were fought in New England during the Revolutionary War.

While the battle was going on in the Boston area, Ethan Allan and other patriots seized Fort Ticonderoga in northeastern New York. The British also lost the battle at Crown Point.

These two victories encouraged the colonists to invade Canada and to seize Montreal. However, another expedition failed to take Quebec. In time, both expeditions withdrew because the combined forces of Benedict Arnold and General Richard Montgomery failed to capture Quebec. Arnold was wounded and Montgomery was killed in the disastrous battle. After a starving winter outside Quebec, the colonists retreated to Fort Ticonderoga when British reinforcements arrived in the spring.

In the Carolinas, more fighting was taking place. The North Carolina patriots defeated a group of colonists who had taken the side of the British. A British attack on Charleston was also successfully

turned back.

During this period many of the colonists still hoped for a reconciliation with England. The colonists believed that their efforts and willingness to shed their own blood would show the British leaders that they were bitterly opposed to the strict control from the mother country and that a more lenient attitude should be taken by the British leaders. However, instead of adopting a gentler approach, the British leaders declared that, should the colonists rebel, the British would establish a still harsher policy.

At that time the English decided not only to send more of their own troops to the colonies but also to hire the mercenaries from Germany to reinforce their ranks. This act further enraged the colonists and many were forced to admit that the possibility of reconciliation was becoming more and more remote.

Thomas Paine, who had recently come to America from

England, aroused many people to rebellion with his pamphlet, *Common Sense*. Paine called upon the Americans to break away from Great Britain. The break, he argued, was only common sense. Why, he asked, should a huge continent be tied to a little island thousands of miles away? Why should the colonists submit to laws that hurt their trade and industry? Why should American colonists continue swearing loyalty to a king who cared nothing for them and who had sent armies to oppress them? Paine insisted everything that seemed right and reasonable demanded separation from England.

Common Sense became a bestseller; its simple, straightforward, and highly dramatic style made it enormously popular. Paine's writing influenced popular thought and turned independence into something demanded by enough Americans to make it politically possible.



Answer these questions.

- 2.1 Why did the Second Continental Congress choose Washington as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army? _____
- 2.2 Why might a historian call the Battle of Bunker Hill a stalemate? _____
- 2.3 How did the patriots capture Boston? _____
- 2.4 How did the colonists feel about the Hessian troops who were hired by the British? _____



Complete these statements.

- 2.5 The Second Continental Congress appointed _____ as commander-in-chief of the colonial army.
- 2.6 The Congress adopted the _____ begging Parliament not to break from the colonies until a compromise could be worked out.
- 2.7 German soldiers who fought in the Revolutionary War were called _____.
- 2.8 The British general at the Battle of Bunker Hill was _____.
- 2.9 Ethan Allen and his army captured _____ in northeastern New York.
- 2.10 Canada was invaded by the combined forces of a. _____ and b. _____.
- 2.11 Soldiers who fight for someone for pay are called _____.
- 2.12 Thomas Paine wrote the pamphlet a. _____, which called for the colonies to break away from b. _____.

Independence declared. Early in June of 1776 at the Second Continental Congress, one of the delegates, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, took the floor and said that he had been directed by his colony to present the following resolution: "That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved." Meanwhile a committee was delegated to draw up a Declaration of Independence. A young man from Virginia, Thomas Jefferson, who had a rare gift for expressing his thoughts in clear and inspiring words, soon had prepared a declaration for the Congress to consider.

After a few days of discussion, Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. After long months of uncertainty, the fateful step had been taken. No longer were the colonists fighting as British subjects for their rights in the British Empire. Now they were founders of a new nation. No longer would they refer to the "United Colonies." Now they spoke proudly of the United States of America. July 4, 1776, is one of the most significant days in American history; for it was the true beginning of the country.

The Declaration of Independence did two important things. First, it expressed a bold new idea concerning the rights of people. Before this time most men had believed that whatever rights they had were granted to them by the government under which they lived, but Jefferson believed that all men are born with certain rights that cannot be taken from them by any government. In the Declaration he stated this belief in decisive words: "We hold these

truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Jefferson went on to say that the purpose of a government is "to secure these rights," and governments must have "the consent of the governed." Whenever a government does not protect these rights or have the consent of the governed, "it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it." Then the people should set up a new government, in such a form as to bring about "their Safety and Happiness."

Secondly, the Declaration of Independence broke all ties with England. The colonies had suffered patiently, wrote Jefferson, under the harsh laws of Great Britain. Now "it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government . . . We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, . . . do . . . solemnly . . . declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, . . ."

The adoption of the Declaration of Independence marked a turning point in the quarrel between the mother country and the colonies. They were forced to choose sides. For the patriots the adoption of the Declaration was a triumph. For many of the moderates and conservatives, it was something of a personal tragedy. They now had to decide whether to support king and Parliament or to throw in their lot with the rebels.

Certainly God overruled in the war to allow the colonies to be victorious. However, God condemns all rebellion (I Samuel 15:23). God could have provided a solution for the colonists without their resorting to war.



Answer these question.

2.13 What was the important new concept of the Declaration of Independence? _____

2.14 According to Jefferson, what is the purpose of the government and what is the duty of the people if the government does not fulfill its purpose? _____

2.15 What two main things did the Declaration do for the colonists? _____

- 2.16 What problem did the Declaration pose for moderates and conservatives? _____
- _____
- _____
- 2.17 Considerable time elapsed between the passage of the Stamp Act in 1765, the Boston Massacre in 1770, and The Declaration of Independence in 1776. Why didn't the colonists declare their independence sooner? _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
-  **Complete these statements.**
- 2.18 The Virginian who introduced a resolution calling for freedom and independence from Great Britain was _____ .
- 2.19 The Virginian who was asked to draw up a declaration for independence was _____
- _____ .

As the news of the Declaration of Independence spread through the states, people received it with mixed feeling. Despite their happiness they wondered what could happen next. How could the United States hope to succeed against the might of England? It was one thing for Congress to declare the United States free and independent, but it would be another thing for the states to win that independence. What chance had thirteen small, poorly equipped states against the army and navy of the strongest nation in the world?

Continental army mobilized. The patriot forces lacked training and organization. Against Britain's armies of well-trained regulars, the patriots seem ill-matched. The men in the Continental Army had little experience in military tactics and fighting in open battle. Their training had been limited largely to frontier warfare against the Indians and the French. Their officers had little experience compared with the British officers. The Continental army was loosely organized. Most of its men had joined, not because they had been ordered to do so, but because they wanted to join, of their own free will. Such volunteers felt free to return to their homes

whenever their short terms of service were finished. As a result, the leaders of the army could hardly tell from day to day how many men were under their command. In addition, the colonies had no real navy. They did not have even one first-class man-of-war to send against the strongest navy in the world.

The patriots also lacked equipment and money. To carry on a war, the patriots needed equipment and supplies—muskets and cannon, bullets and powder, uniforms and food. In addition, the Second Continental Congress had little money to buy these things. The Congress did not have the power to tax the people. It could only ask the states to give money, and the sums of money received were very small. Congress tried to buy supplies with paper money, which it had printed in large quantities; but many people did not like to accept this money in payment for goods. Paper money is not worth much unless it can be exchanged for gold and silver or unless the government that issues it is strong. The Continental Congress had little gold or silver, for it was a new and weak government. As the war dragged on, Continental paper money bought less and less. "Not worth a continental" became a way of saying that something was worthless.