

A Brief History of the United States

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Unit Three

Britain challenged France for possession of North America in the **French and Indian War** of 1756-1763. The British defeated the French and reigned supreme over North America. After the British victory in the French and Indian War, the colonists were feeling good about themselves as British subjects. But the enormous cost of the war caused the British to begin taxing the colonists (**the Stamp Act, the Townshend Acts, the Tea Act**). The colonists resented this immensely. They cried, “**no taxation without representation.**” The British responded that they enjoyed “**virtual representation.**”

Additionally, after winning the war the colonists were told they could not cross the Appalachians and settle in the Ohio River Valley (**the Proclamation of 1763**). The colonists began to unite. They sent **Ben Franklin** to testify in Parliament. They formed the **Committees of Correspondence**. A group of rebels known as the **Sons of Liberty** stoked colonial passions. The **Boston Tea Party** resulted in the **Intolerable Acts**. **The First Continental Congress** met to decide what to do, and sent the **Olive Branch Petition**. The king responded with a threat to hang them for treason. War flared up between the ill-prepared colonists and the mighty British military machine. The first battles at **Lexington** and **Concord** become known as “the shot heard ‘round the world.”

1775-1800 American Revolution- Critical Period-Constitutional Federalism:

That began to change when they were taxed, regulated, and legislated. The American Revolution was fought between the world’s mightiest power, England, and its wayward America Colonies. The Americans shocked the world and earned victory with the help of France and Spain. During the war, the Articles of Confederation were written, becoming the first form of government. These documents had flaws that were later corrected by the Constitution.

Even at the beginning of the **American Revolution**, there were many people who were either more pro-British or completely indifferent to the cause of independence. The American colonists were divided into three groups: the **Patriots/Whigs**, **Loyalists/Tories**, and the largest group, the **neutralists**. At the conclusion of the war many Loyalists moved to Canada to remain under British authority. Both the Loyalists and the Patriots were fighting the American Revolution to persuade the neutralists to join their cause. To persuade the neutralists, **Thomas Paine** wrote the pamphlet **Common Sense** in 1776. Later that same year, on July 4th, **Thomas Jefferson’s** preeminent statement of rights, the **Declaration of Independence**, was signed and has been celebrated as America’s birthday ever since. With his army about to dissolve, **George Washington** iconically crossed the Delaware River on December 25th 1776, to attack the **Hessian mercenaries** in the Battle of Trenton.

The American army scored a surprising victory at the **Battle of Saratoga**, causing the French to support our cause, mainly to defeat the British. The war concluded with an American victory at the **Battle of Yorktown** in 1781. The **Treaty of Paris** was signed in 1783 granting America its independence.

During the war, the **Articles of Confederation** were written, which became our first governing document. Although extremely weak, they led us through the crisis. Most notable were the passage of the **Land Ordinance of 1785**, which divided the present day Midwest into “townships” and “sections,” and set aside the 16th section in each township for the support of public education; and the **Northwest Ordinance** (1787), which both provided for future states to be admitted on equal footing with the original 13, and reflecting the Revolutionary spirit, prohibited slavery in any states carved out of the Old Northwest. Many northern states began banning slavery as it didn’t seem to fit with the ideals of the Revolution.

Women’s status was beginning to change slightly, albeit only perceptually—they were valued for their role in raising children to be good citizens, and instilling republican ideals in them; this is known as **Republican Motherhood**. But, women were still confined to the home as the term **Cult of Domesticity** reflects. Despite **Abigail Adams’s** admonition to her husband to “**remember the ladies,**” women gained virtually no political or legal rights as a result of the Revolution.

As the republic moved forward, it became increasingly obvious to the founders that the government was too weak. This was especially apparent after a discontented group of in-debt farmers attacked the government during **Shays' Rebellion**. The **Constitutional Convention** was called to fix the Articles of Confederation, but the delegates immediately determined that there was no fixing the Articles, and that they needed to design a new document entirely. They wanted a **chief executive**, the **power to tax**, and an **independent judiciary**. Unfortunately, there was not an argument on what the document should look like. The debates that followed were acrimonious and the convention nearly ended at one point over representation until the **Great Compromise** saved the day. Other compromises included the **Commerce Compromise** and the **Three-Fifths Compromise**. The person who contributed the most to the final design of the Constitution was **James Madison**, "The Father of the Constitution."

When the **Constitution** was sent to the states for **ratification** the debate was renewed and intensified. The seeds of political parties developed. The **Federalists**, led by **Alexander Hamilton**, called for strong central government and supported the new Constitution. Hamilton, Madison, and John Jay wrote the **Federalist Papers** in defense of the Constitution. The **Anti-Federalists**, including **Patrick Henry** and **Samuel Adams**, worried that the Constitution did not adequately protect individual or state rights. The Constitution was **ratified** in 1789 and in 1791 **the Bill of Rights** was added to protect individual rights (as had been promised by Madison in order to secure the approval of the last states to ratify).

