

Unit 2 The American Revolution

Key Terms

1. **Enlightenment** – An eighteenth-century philosophy stressing that reason could be used to improve the human condition by eradicating superstition, bigotry, and intolerance. Inspired by John Locke, Enlightenment thinkers such as Thomas Jefferson stressed the idea of natural rights. The second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence provides a timeless expression of Enlightened thought:
“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.”
2. **Virtual representation** – British belief that each member of Parliament presented the interests of all Englishmen, including the colonists. Rejected by colonists who argued that as Englishmen they could only be taxed by their own elected representatives.
3. **Republicanism** – Refers to the belief that government should be based on the consent of the people. Defended by Thomas Paine in *Common Sense*, Republicanism inspired the eighteenth-century American revolutionaries.

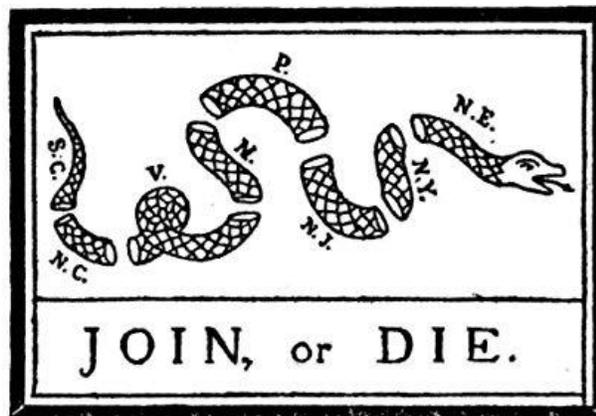
The Enlightenment

- I. **Key Concept – Change:** The British colonies participated in political, social, cultural, and economic exchanges with Great Britain that encouraged both stronger bonds with Britain and resistance to Britain’s control.
- II. **Context**
 - a. The Enlightenment was an eighteenth-century intellectual movement led by a group of English and French thinkers and writers.
 - b. At first, the Atlantic Ocean posed a formidable barrier that hindered communication between England and her North American colonies. However, as the frequency of transatlantic crossings increased, ships carried more than just goods and people. They also carried a flow of information that included pamphlets and letters written by leading Enlightenment figures.
 - c. Enlightened leaders formed a cosmopolitan “republic of letters” that included colonial leaders such as Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.
- III. **Core Beliefs**
 - a. Enlightened thinkers rejected superstition, bigotry, and intolerance. They stressed instead humans’ ability to become educated and to use reason to understand nature and improve society.
 - b. Enlightened thinkers believed that reason could be used to discover laws of economics and government that would improve society and make progress inevitable.
 - c. Enlightened thinkers accepted **John Locke’s** argument that every person was entitled to enjoy **natural rights** that included life, liberty, and property. The doctrine of natural rights implied a right to change governments that failed to protect a person’s life, liberty, and property.

- d. Under feudalism, social relationships were considered hierarchical and static. Likewise, under the Navigation Acts, the relationship between the colonies and Great Britain was a static one. In contrast, Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke viewed static relationships as inherently unnatural and therefore they advocated individual political rights, which in turn would lead (at least theoretically) to economic and social mobility.

The French and Indian War

- I. **Key Concept – Consequence:** Migration within North America and competition over resources, boundaries, and trade intensified conflicts among peoples and nations.
- II. **Context**
 - a. New France included Canada, the entire Mississippi River Valley and Louisiana. The French thus confined the British colonies to territory east of the Appalachian Mountains.
 - b. The French and Indian War began as a struggle for control of the Upper Ohio River Valley. The war was part of a wider contest between Great Britain and France in Europe known as the Seven Years' War.
- III. **Albany Plan of Union** – Promoted by Benjamin Franklin, the Albany Plan of Union called for the formation of a Grand Council of elected delegates that would oversee a common defense against French and Native American threats to frontier settlements.
 - a. Franklin's famous "Join, or Die" cartoon dramatically illustrated the need for greater colonial unity.



- b. The plan failed because colonial assemblies did not want to give up their autonomy. At the same time, the British feared that colonial unity would undermine their authority.
- IV. **War and Peace** – Great Britain won because the 1.2 million people in its thirteen colonies outnumbered the 75,000 inhabitants in New France.
 - a. The Treaty of Paris of 1763 ended French power in North America as Britain took title to Canada, Spanish Florida, and all the French lands east of the Mississippi River.
- V. **Impact on American Indians** – The French defeat left American Indians in a vulnerable position by ending long-standing trade and military alliances. American Indians could no longer negotiate favorable agreements by playing the French and English against each other.

- a. **Pontiac's Rebellion** – Confident in their superior military position, the British withheld traditional gifts of guns, powder, and lead. Unwilling to submit to the British, Chief Pontiac turned anti-British animosity into an uprising designed to expel the unwanted Redcoats from Indian lands. The British finally suppressed Pontiac's warriors at a cost of over 2,000 lives.
- b. Hoping to avoid further conflict with the Native Americans, the British issued the Proclamation of 1763 prohibiting the colonists from settling west of the Appalachians. Land-hungry settlers ignored the Proclamation Line and soon poured into Kentucky.

VI. **Effects of the French and Indian War**

- a. The victorious end to the war sparked strong feelings of colonial pride. Having supplied 20,000 soldiers and spent over 2 million pounds, the colonists viewed themselves as important and loyal partners of the British empire.
- b. While the British leaders also celebrated their glorious victory, the long war left Britain with a great empire and an enormous national debt that doubled to 130 million pounds.
- c. The looming financial crisis forced Britain's young and untested King George III and his prime minister George Grenville to reassess their colonial policies. Grenville reached a fateful decision when he insisted that the colonies had to begin paying a fair share of the "costs of the empire".

The Stamp Act Crisis

- I. **Key Concept – Causation:** British attempts to assert tighter control over its American colonies and the colonial resolve to pursue self-government led to a colonial independence movement and the Revolutionary War.

II. **The Stamp Act Crisis, 1765-1766**

- a. Parliament passed the Stamp Act to raise revenue to help pay for British troops stationed in America.
- b. The Stamp Act required a 1-shilling (about 25 cents) stamp on newspapers and playing cards, a 3-shilling stamp on legal documents, a 2-pound (about 10 dollars) stamp on college diplomas, and a 10-pound (about 50 dollars) stamp on a lawyer's license.

III. **Colonial Reaction:**

- a. Prime Minister Grenville did not expect opposition to the Stamp Act. He was wrong. Outraged colonial leaders insisted that only their provincial assemblies had the power to raise taxes.
- b. British leaders responded by arguing that Parliament was based upon a system of virtual representation in which each member of parliament represented the interests of all Englishmen, including the colonists.
- c. The colonists rejected virtual representation, arguing that as Englishmen they could only be taxed by their own elected representatives. Their defiant slogan, "No taxation without representation" succinctly summarized the colonial position.

- d. The colonists did more than shout slogans. In October 1765, nine colonies sent representatives to a **Stamp Act Congress** in New York City. This marked the first inter-colonial meeting since the Albany Congress. Unlike the earlier meeting, the Stamp Act Congress drafted a petition to Parliament and called for a boycott of important British goods.

IV. **Parliament Responds**

- a. Parliament used the doctrine of virtual representation to rebut the colonial petition. But they could not ignore the boycott of British goods as exports fell by 15 percent.
- b. Pressured by many angry merchants and their unemployed workers, Parliament rescinded the Stamp Act while also issuing a little-noticed Declaratory Act reasserting their authority over the colonies.

- V. **Key Concepts – Continuity and Change:** The Stamp Act crisis did not galvanize a consensus to declare independence as Americans still remained loyal to King George. However, it did mark the beginning of an increasingly divisive dispute over the relationship between Parliament and the colonies.

The Road to Revolution

- I. **Context** – No single event caused the American revolution. Instead, it was precipitated by the cumulative effect of a series of British actions and colonial reactions.
 - a. Before the French and Indian War, John Adams compared the thirteen colonies to “thirteen clocks” each of which kept its own time. However, the once divided colonies began to act in unison as a budget crisis escalated into a fateful dispute that sparked an independence movement.

II. **The Townshend Crisis, 1767-1770**

- a. In 1767, Charles Townshend, the head of the British treasury, persuaded Parliament to enact a new revenue act. The Townshend Act imposed import duties on such everyday items as paint, glass, paper, and tea. Townshend proposed to use the revenue for military expenses to pay the salaries of royal governors and other colonial officials.
- b. The **Townshend Act** reignited the dispute over taxation. The Massachusetts legislature promptly condemned the new taxes and urged other colonial assemblies to join their protest. At the same time, merchants in Boston began the **nonimportation movement** to boycott British goods.

III. **Boston Massacre**

- a. American resistance stiffened Townshend’s determination to impose his will on the recalcitrant Bostonians. In late 1768, the first of 4,000 royal troops began to arrive in Boston. Bostonians resented the presence of these troops in their city. On the night of March 5, 1770, a rowdy group of hecklers taunted a squad of British soldiers stationed outside the Boston Customs house. An alarmed soldier fired into the crowd. When the smoke cleared, five townspeople lay on the ground, dead or dying.

- b. Led by Sam Adams, enraged patriots branded the incident the “Boston Massacre”. Paul Revere’s partisan engraving further inflamed colonial opinion by depicting the British soldiers as merciless brutes who killed innocent civilians.



- c. On the same day the Boston Massacre occurred, Parliament repealed all the Townshend duties except the one on tea. Although harmony seemed to have been restored, the Townshend crisis exacerbated feelings of distrust between British officials and a new, increasingly radical generation of American leaders.

IV. Intolerable Acts Crisis, 1773-1776

- a. On December 16, 1773 a group of Boston patriots disguised as Mohawk Indians boarded three British ships and threw 342 chests of tea into the harbor.
 - i. The so-called **Boston Tea Party** infuriated British authorities. Parliament promptly passed the **Coercive Acts** to punish Boston for the wanton destruction of private property.
- b. Known in America as the Intolerable Acts, the legislation closed the port of Boston, sharply curtailed town meetings, and authorized the army to quarter troops wherever they were needed.
- c. Parliament’s punitive actions seemed to confirm the colonists’ fear that Britain intended to restrict each colony’s right to self-government.
- d. The British strategy failed to isolate Boston. In September 1774, fifty-five elected representatives met in Philadelphia to reach a unified colonial response to the Intolerable Acts. The **First Continental Congress** called for a complete boycott of British goods and urged the colonies to organize militia for defensive purposes.

V. Second Continental Congress

- a. The Second Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia in May 1775. The delegates faced an ever-deepening crisis. Bloody battles between colonial militia and British soldiers had just been fought in **Lexington and Concord**. The Congress responded by creating a Continental Army and naming George Washington as its commander.
- b. Despite this aggressive action, the delegates refused to declare war. Like most colonists, they wavered between acts of resistance and attempts at reconciliation.

The Revolutionary Mindset

I. The Impact of British Taxes and Regulations

- a. Parliament passed the Stamp Act, the Townshend Act, and the Tea Act to raise revenue to help pay for imperial expenses. Instead, these laws raised questions about Parliament's right to tax the colonies.
- b. Parliament passed the Proclamation of 1763, the Quartering Act of 1756, and the Intolerable Acts to tighten its control over the increasingly rebellious colonists. Instead, these regulatory acts intensified the colonists' resistance to British rule and their commitment to republicanism.
 - i. **Republicanism** – a belief in republicanism inspired the American revolutionaries. This is a belief that government should be based on the consent of the governed.
 1. As resistance to British taxes and regulations intensified, colonial leaders became more and more convinced that a republic is preferable to a monarchy because it would establish a government responsible to the people.

II. The Influence of *Common Sense*

- a. In January 1776, Thomas Paine published a pamphlet entitled *Common Sense* to persuade the colonists to declare their independence from Great Britain.
- b. Paine vigorously defended republican principles while denouncing monarchy as a form of government that produced a constant threat to people's liberty. Paine assailed George III as an oppressive "royal brute" who should be scorned and not venerated.
- c. Paine rejected calls for a compromise and instead called upon the colonists to declare independence and "begin the world over again".
- d. **Key Concept – Significance:** *Common Sense* became an instant bestseller as people throughout the colonies agreed with Paine's compelling argument for independence.

III. The Declaration of Independence

- a. Declaration of Independence marked a momentous turning point in American history. Prior to the declaration the colonists were still subjects of the British Crown. The Declaration of Independence created a new American identity by transforming a dispute over taxes into a fight for independence.
- b. Jefferson opened the declaration with a concise and compelling statement of principles and self-evident truths. Inspired by John Locke's philosophy of natural rights, Jefferson asserted that government derive "their just powers from the consent of the governed". The governed are entitled to "alter or abolish" their ties to a government that denies them their "unalienable rights" to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness".
- c. The Declaration of Independence also marked a turning point in American history because it has had enduring consequences that transcended its initial purpose. Jefferson did not base his argument on the narrow "rights of Englishmen". Instead, he left a lasting impression on the conscience of the world by appealing to universal principles derived from "the laws of Nature and Nature's God". Although not originally fulfilled, Jefferson's ringing statement that "all men are created equal" became an integral part of the American dream.

- d. The Declaration of Independence did not call for the abolition of the slave trade. The reality of slavery thus contradicted Jefferson's eloquent statement of republican ideals.

The Revolutionary War

I. Why America Won

- a. British commanders underestimated the fighting ability of American soldiers. Led by George Washington, America's military commanders proved to be resourceful and resilient.
- b. The British government was confused, inept, and divided.
- c. The French alliance provided indispensable military, financial, and diplomatic support. The **Battle of Saratoga** led to this alliance.
- d. American soldiers fought for the ideals of republicanism. They won because of the power of their ideas, not the idea of their power.

II. The Treaty of Paris of 1783

- a. The treaty recognized American independence and sovereignty over territories extending from the Mississippi River on the west, to the Great Lakes on the north, and to Spanish Florida on the South.
- b. American pledged to compensate Loyalists whose lands had been confiscated by state governments.