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# 5 Wars and Empires

## 1750–1774

A War for Empire, 1754–1763 131

Postwar British Policies and Colonial Unity 137

Resistance to Britain Intensifies 141

Conclusion: Liberty within Empire 151

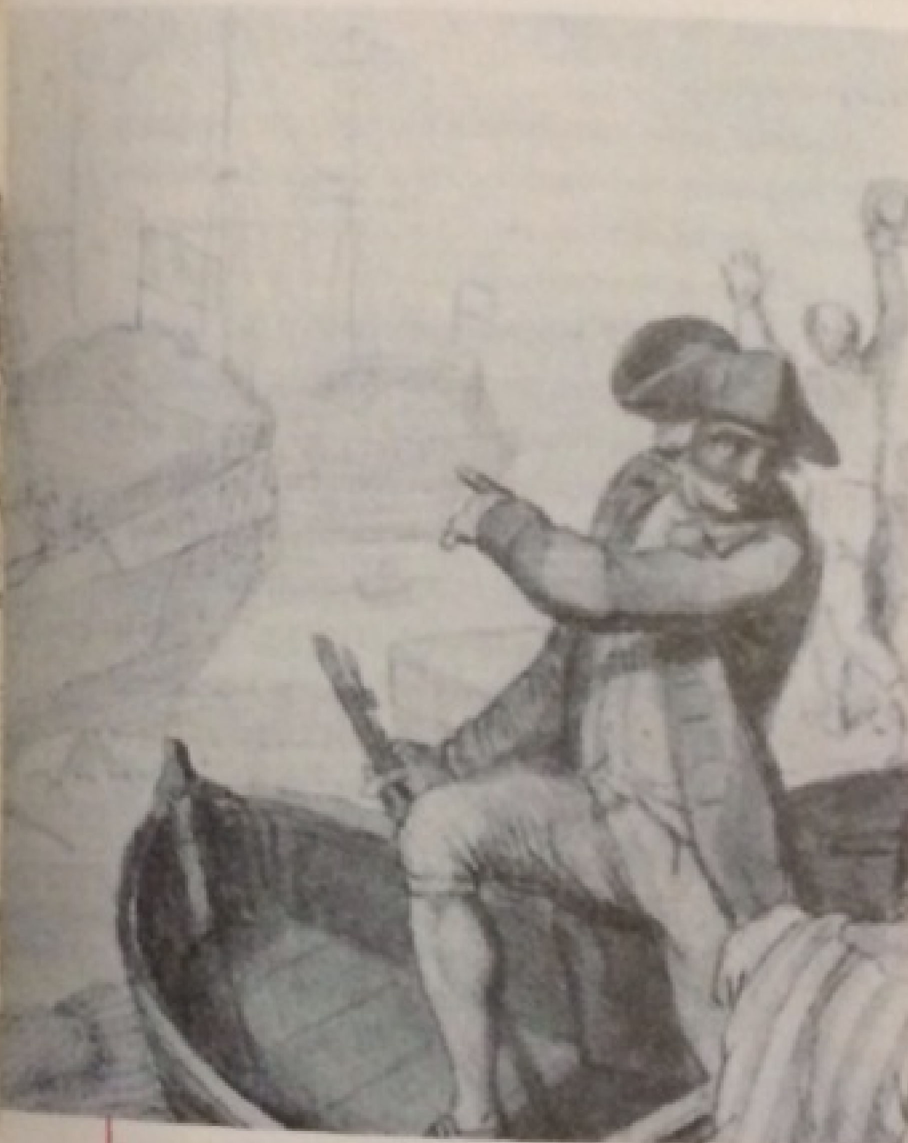
DOCUMENT PROJECT 5
The Boston Massacre 153

Private Collection/Photo: Fine Art Auctioneers New York, USA/The Bridgeman Art Library

The death of General James Wolfe, commander of British forces against the French at Quebec in 1759.

The Granger Collection

Paul Revere's engraving of British troops in Boston Harbor, 1774.



The Granger Collection, New York

Sketch of Boston Tea Party, 1773.

### AMERICAN HISTORIES

Although best known as the founding father of the United States, George Washington grew to adulthood as a loyal British subject. He was born in 1732 to a prosperous farm family in eastern Virginia. When George's father died in 1743, he became the ward of his half-brother Lawrence and moved to Lawrence's Mount Vernon estate. Lawrence's father-in-law, William Fairfax, was an agent for Lord Fairfax, one of the chief proprietors of the colony. When George was sixteen, William hired him as an assistant to a party surveying Lord Fairfax's land on Virginia's western frontier.

Although less well educated and less well positioned than the sons of Virginia's largest planters, George shared their ambitions. As a surveyor, he journeyed west, coming into contact with Indians, both friendly and hostile, as well as other colonists seeking land. George himself began investing in western properties. But when Lawrence Washington died in 1752, twenty-year-old George suddenly became head of a large estate. He gradually expanded Mount Vernon's boundaries and increased its profitability, in part by adding to Mount Vernon's enslaved workforce. He now had the resources to speculate more heavily in western lands.

George was soon appointed an officer in the Virginia militia, and in the fall of 1753 Virginia's governor sent him to warn the French stationed near Lake Erie against encroaching on British territory in the Ohio River valley. The French commander rebuffed Washington and within six months gained control of a British post near present-day Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and

named it Fort Duquesne. With help from Indians hostile to the French, Lieutenant Colonel Washington launched a surprise attack on Fort Duquesne in May 1754. The initial attack was successful and led the governors of Virginia and North Carolina to send in more troops under the command of the newly promoted Colonel Washington. The French then responded with a much larger force that repelled the British troops, and Washington was forced to surrender.

Colonel Washington gained valuable experience through both successful surveying expeditions and failed military ventures. As a landowner in Virginia and on the western frontier, he had also gained property to defend. Washington's fortunes and his family increased when he married the wealthy widow Martha Dandridge Custis in 1759 and became stepfather to her two children. An increasingly successful planter, Washington sought to extend Britain's North American empire westward as a way to create opportunities for an expanding population as well as a protective buffer against European and Indian foes.

Like Washington, Herman Husband hoped to improve his lot through hard work and the opportunities offered by the frontier. Born to a modest farm family in Maryland in 1724, he was swept up by the Great Awakening in the early 1740s. He became a New Light Presbyterian but later joined the Society of Friends, or Quakers. In 1754, as Washington headed to the Ohio valley, Husband explored prospects on the North Carolina frontier and decided to settle with his family at Sandy Creek.

Husband proved a successful farmer, but he denounced wealthy landowners and speculators who made it difficult for small farmers to obtain sufficient land. He also challenged established leaders in the Quaker meeting and was among a number of worshippers disowned from the Cane Creek Friends Meeting in 176[…]. Disputes within radical Protestant congregations we[re] not unusual in this period as members with deep re[li]gious convictions chose the liberty of their individu[al] conscience over church authority.

In 1766 a number of Quaker and Baptist farmers joined Husband in organizing the Sandy Creek Associa[]tion. The group hoped to increase farmers' political clo[ut] as a way to combat corruption among local officials. Th[e] association disbanded after two years, but its ideas live[d] on in a group called the Regulation, which brough[t] together frontier farmers who sought to "regulate" gov[]ernment abuse. Husband quickly emerged as one of the organization's chief spokesmen. The Regulators fir[st] tried to achieve reform through legal means. They pe[ti]tioned the North Carolina Assembly and Royal Govern[or] William Tryon, demanding legislative reforms and suin[g] local officials for extorting labor, land, or money from poorer residents.

Husband wrote pamphlets articulating the demands of the Regulators and wielding religious principles to jus[]tify resistance to existing laws and customs. In certain ways, his ideas echoed those of colonial leaders like Gov[]ernor Tryon, who had launched protests in 1765 against British efforts to impose taxes on the colonies. Tryon, however, viewed the Regulators as political foes who threatened the colony's peace and order. In 1768 he had Husband and other Regulators arrested, which confirmed the Regulators' belief that they could not receive fair treat[]ment at the hands of colonial officials. They then turned to extralegal methods to assert their rights, such as taking over courthouses so that legal proceedings against debt-ridden farmers could not proceed. This led the Regulators into open conflict with colonial officials. •

**THE AMERICAN HISTORIES** of Washington and Husband were shaped by both opportunities and conflicts. Mid-eighteenth-century colonial America offered greater opportunities for social advancement and personal expression than anywhere in Europe, but the efforts of individuals to take advantage of these opportunities often led to tension and discord. The conflicts on the frontiers of Virginia, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina foreshadowed a broader struggle for land and power within the American colonies. Religious and economic as well as political discord intensified in the mid-eighteenth century as conflicts within the colonies increasingly occurred alongside challenges to





British authority. Individual men and women made difficult choices about where their loyalties lay. Whatever their grievances, most worked hard to reform systems they considered unfair or abusive before resorting to more radical means of instituting change. Some, such as Washington, became revered leaders. Others, like Husband, gained local support but were viewed by those in authority as extremists who threatened to subvert the religious, economic, and political order.

## A War for Empire, 1754–1763

The war that erupted in the Ohio valley in 1754 sparked an enormous shift in political and economic relations in colonial North America. What began as a small-scale, regional conflict expanded into a brutal and lengthy global war. Known as the French and Indian War in North America and the Seven Years' War in Great Britain and Europe, the conflict led to a dramatic expansion of British territory in North America, but also to increasing demands from American colonists for more control over their own lives.

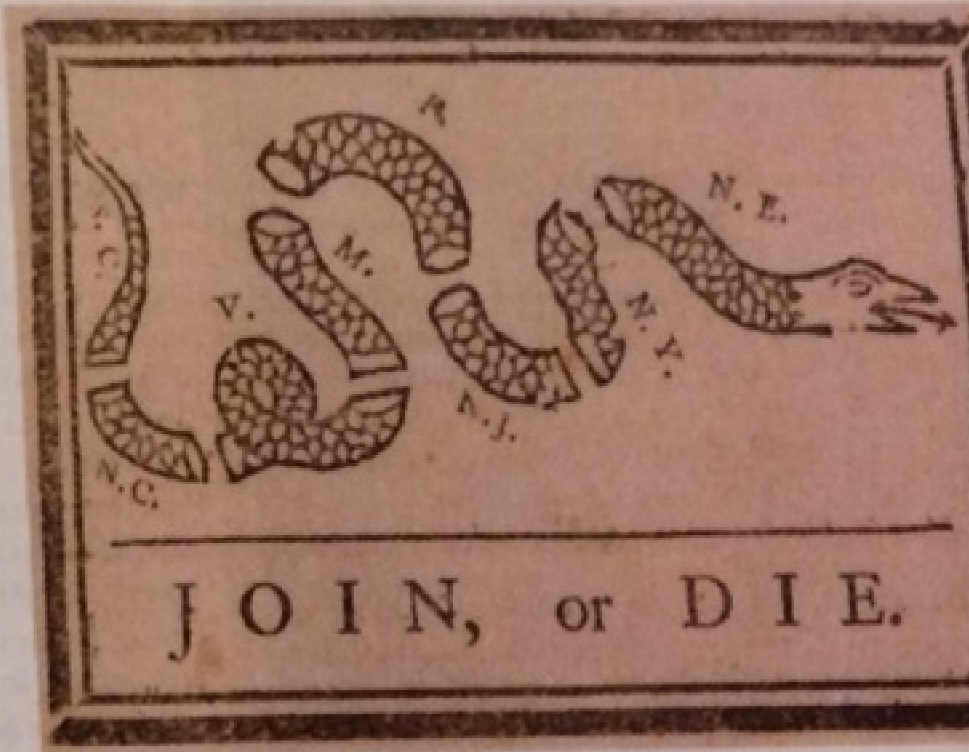
### The Opening Battles

Even before Washington and his troops were defeated in July 1754, the British sought to protect the colonies against threats from the French and the Indians. To limit such threats, the British were especially interested in cementing an alliance with the powerful Iroquois Confederacy, composed of six northeastern tribes. Thus the British invited an official delegation from the Iroquois to a meeting in June 1754 in Albany, New York, with representatives from the New England colonies, New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. Benjamin Franklin of Philadelphia had drawn up a Plan of Union that would establish a council of representatives from the various colonial assemblies to debate issues of frontier defense, trade, and territorial expansion and to recommend terms mutually agreeable to colonists and Indians. Their deliberations were to be overseen by a president-general appointed and supported by the British crown.

The **Albany Congress** created new bonds among a small circle of colonial leaders, but it failed to establish a firmer alliance with the Iroquois or resolve problems of colonial governance. The British government worried that the proposed council would prove too powerful, undermining the authority of the royal government. At the same time, the individual colonies were unwilling to give up any of their autonomy in military, trade, and political matters to some centralized body. Moreover, excluded from Franklin's Plan of Union, the Iroquois delegates at the Albany Congress broke off talks with the British in early July. The Iroquois became more suspicious and resentful when colonial land agents and fur traders used the Albany meeting as an opportunity to make side deals with individual Indian leaders.

Yet if war was going to erupt between the British and the French, the Iroquois and other Indian tribes could not afford to have the outcome decided by imperial powers alone. For most Indians, contests among European nations for land and power offered them the best chance of survival in the eighteenth century. They gained leverage as long as various imperial powers needed their trade items, military support, and political alliances. This leverage would be far more limited if one European nation controlled most of North America.

The various Indian tribes adopted different strategies. The Delaware, Huron, Miami, and Shawnee nations, for example, allied themselves with the French, hoping that a French victory would stop the far more numerous British colonists from invading their settlements in the Ohio valley




**Join, or Die**

Benjamin Franklin created the first political cartoon in American history to accom[pany] an editorial he wrote in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1754. Franklin's cartoon urge[d] mainland British colonies to unite politically during the French and Indian War. L[ore] had it that a snake could come back to life if its severed sections were attached [before] dusk. Library of Congress

Members of the Iroquois Confederacy, on the other hand, tried to play one power against the other, hoping to win concessions from the British in return for their military support. The Creek, Choctaw, and Cherokee nations also sought to perpetuate the existing stalemate among European powers by bargaining alternately with the British in Georgia and the Carolinas, the French in Louisiana, and the Spaniards in Florida.

Faced with incursions into their lands, some Indian tribes launched preemptive attacks on colonial settlements. Along the northern border of Massachusetts, for example, in present-day New Hampshire, Abenaki Indians attacked British settlements in August 1754, taking settlers captive and marching them north to Canada. There they traded them to the French, who later held the colonists for ransom or exchanged them for their own prisoners of war with the British.

**Colonel George Washington**

This 1772 oil painting by Charles Willson Peale portrays George Washington as a colonel in the Virginia militia. Washington commanded this militia during the French and Indian War following the death of General Braddock. After the war, Washington prospered as a planter and land speculator. The Granger Collection, New York

The British government soon decided it had to send additional troops to defend its American colonies against attacks from Indians and intrusions from the French. General Edward Braddock and two regiments arrived in 1755 to expel the French from Fort Duquesne. At the same time, colonial militia units were sent to battle the French and their Indian allies along the New York and New England frontiers. Colonel Washington joined Braddock as his personal aide-de-camp. Within months, however, Braddock's forces were ambushed, bludgeoned by French and Indian forces, and Braddock was killed. Washington was appointed commander of the Virginia troops, but with limited forces and meager financial support from the Virginia legislature, he had little hope of victory.

Other British forces fared little better during the next three years. Despite having far fewer colonists in North America than the British, the French had established extensive trade networks that helped them sustain a protracted war with support from numerous Indian nations. They also benefited from the help of European and Canadian soldiers as well as Irish conscripts who happily fought their British conquerors. Alternating guerrilla tactics with conventional warfare, the French captured several important forts, built a new one on Lake Champlain, and moved troops deep into British territory. The ineffectiveness of the British and colonial armies also encouraged Indian tribes along the New England and Appalachian frontiers to reclaim land from colonists. Bloody raids devastated many outlying settlements, leading to the death and capture of hundreds of Britain's colonial subjects.

## A Shift to Global War

As the British faced defeat after defeat in North America, European nations began to contest imperial claims elsewhere in the world. In 1756 France and Great Britain officially declared war against each other. Eventually Austria, Russia, Sweden, most of the German states, and Spain allied with France, while Portugal and Prussia sided with Great Britain. Naval warfare erupted in the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Battles were also fought in Europe, the West Indies, India, and the Philippines. By the end of 1757, Britain and its allies had been defeated in nearly every part of the globe. The war appeared to be nearing its end, with France in control.

Then in the summer of 1757, William Pitt took charge of the British war effort and transformed the political and military landscape. A man of formidable talents and grand vision, Pitt redirected British efforts toward victory in North America, while Prussian forces held the line in Europe. Pouring more soldiers and arms into the North American campaign along with young and ambitious officers, Pitt energized colonial and British troops.

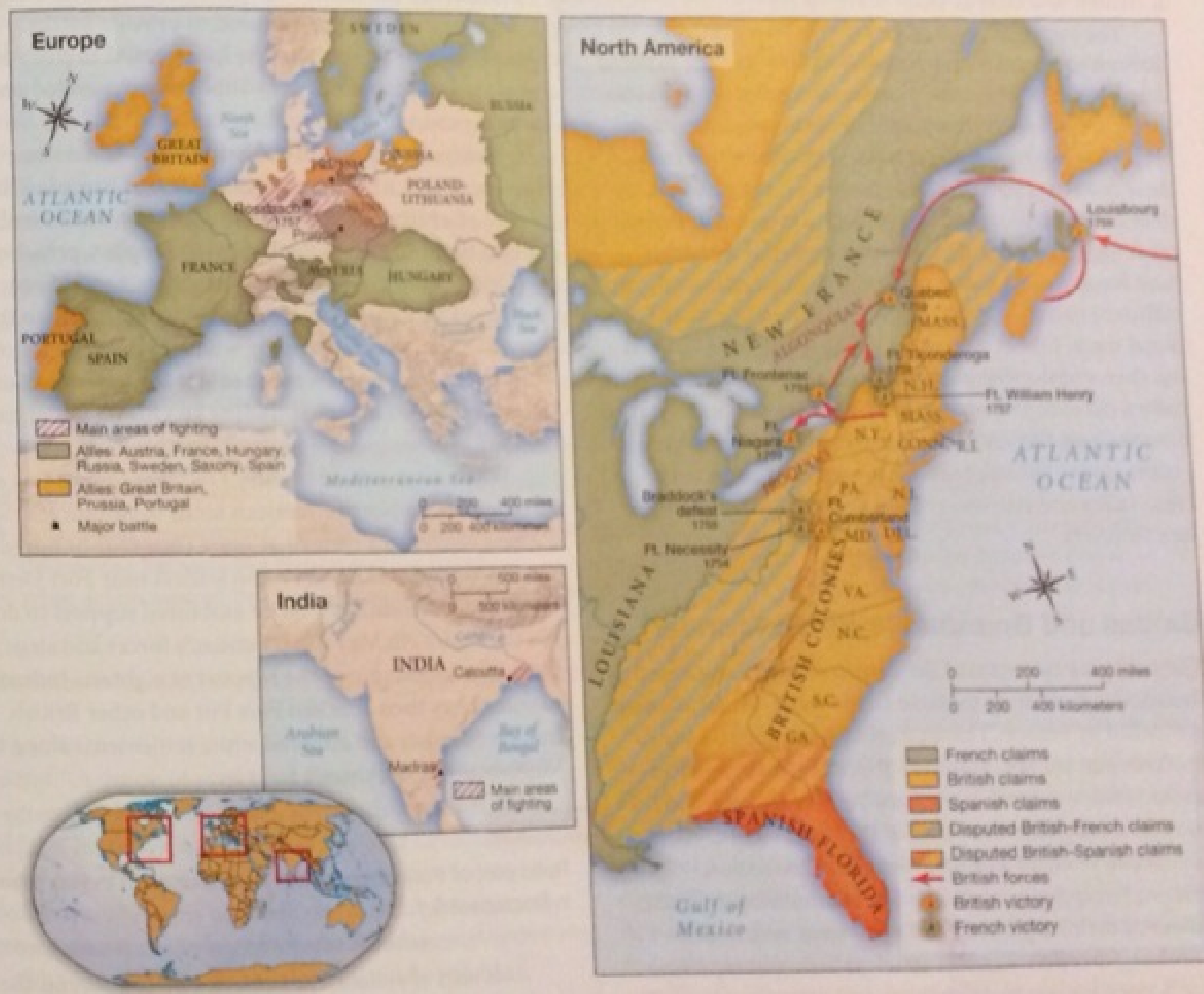




By the summer of 1758, the tide began to turn. In July, British generals recaptured the fort at Louisburg on Cape Breton Island, a key to France's defense of Canada. Then British troops with George Washington's aid seized Fort Duquesne, which was renamed Pittsburgh. Other British forces captured Fort Frontenac along the St. Lawrence River, while Prussia defeated French, Austrian, and Russian forces in Europe and Britain gained key victories in India (Map 5.1). In 1759 General Jeffrey Amherst captured Forts Ticonderoga and Crown Point on Lake Champlain. Then General James Wolfe, with only four thousand men, attacked a much larger French force in Quebec. Despite heavy casualties, including Wolfe himself, the British won Quebec and control of Canada.

## The Costs of Victory

Despite Wolfe's dramatic victory, the war dragged on in North America, Europe, India, and the West Indies for three more years. By then, however, King George III had tired of Pitt's grand, and expensive, strategy and dismissed him. He then opened peace negotiations with France and agreed to give up a number of conquered territories in order to finalize the **Peace of Paris** in 1763. Other countries




**MAP 5.1 The French and Indian War, 1754–1763**

Clashes between colonial militia units and French and Indian forces erupted in North America in 1754. The conflict helped launch a wider war that engulfed Europe as well as the West Indies and India. In the aftermath of this first global war, Britain gained control of present-day Canada and India, but France retained its West Indies colonies.

were ready to negotiate as well. To regain control of Cuba and the Philippines, Spain ceded Florida to Great Britain. Meanwhile France rewarded Spain for its support by granting it Louisiana and all French lands west of the Mississippi River. Despite these concessions, the British empire reigned supreme, regaining control of India as well as North America east of the Mississippi, all of Canada, and a number of Caribbean islands.

The wars that erupted between 1754 and 1763 reshaped European empires, transformed patterns of global trade, and initially seemed to tighten bonds between North American residents and the mother country. English colonists in North America as well as their Scottish, Irish, German, and Dutch neighbors celebrated the British victory. Yet the Peace of Paris did not resolve many of the problems that had plagued the colonies before the war, and it created new ones as well.

The incredible cost of the war raised particularly difficult problems. Over the course of the war, the national debt of Great Britain had more than doubled. At the same time, as the North American colonies grew and conflicts erupted along their frontiers, the costs of administering these colonies increased fivefold. With an empire that stretched around the globe, the British crown and Parliament were forced to consider how to pay off war debts, raise funds to administer old and new territories, and keep sufficient currency in circulation for expanding international trade. Just as important, the Peace of Paris ignored the claims of the Iroquois, Shawnee, Creek, and other Indian tribes to the territories that France and Spain turned over to Great Britain. Nor did the treaty settle contested claims among the colonies themselves over lands in the Ohio valley and elsewhere along British North America's new frontiers.

## Battles and Boundaries on the Frontier

The sweeping character of the British victory encouraged thousands of colonists to move farther west, into lands once controlled by France. This exacerbated tensions on the southern and western frontiers of British North America, tensions that escalated in the final years of the war and continued long after the Peace of Paris was signed.

In late 1759, for example, the Cherokee nation, reacting to repeated incursions on their hunting grounds, dissolved their long-term trade agreement with South Carolina. Cherokee warriors attacked backcountry farms and homes, leading to counterattacks by British troops. The fighting continued into 1761, when Cherokees on the Virginia frontier launched raids on colonists there. General Jeffrey Amherst then sent 2,800 troops to invade Cherokee territory and end the conflict. The soldiers sacked fifteen villages; killed men, women, and children; and burned acres of fields.

Although British raids diminished the Cherokees' ability to mount a substantial attack, sporadic assaults on frontier settlements continued for years. These conflicts fueled resentments among backcountry settlers against political leaders in more settled regions of the colonies who rarely provided sufficient funds or soldiers for frontier defense. The raids also intensified hostility toward Indians.

A more serious conflict erupted in the Ohio valley when Indians there realized the consequences of Britain's victory in Quebec. As the British took over French forts along the Great Lakes and in the Ohio valley in 1760, they immediately antagonized local Indian groups by hunting and fishing on tribal lands and depriving villages of much-needed food. British traders also defrauded Indians on numerous occasions and ignored traditional obligations of gift giving. They refused to provide kettles, gunpowder, or weapons to the Indians and thereby caused near starvation among many tribes that depended on hunting and trade.

The harsh realities of the British regime led some Indians to seek a return to ways of life that preceded the arrival of white men. An Indian visionary named Neolin, known to the British as the Delaware Prophet, preached that Indians had been corrupted by contact with Europeans and urged them to purify themselves by returning to their ancient traditions, abandoning white ways, and reclaiming their lands. Neolin was a prophet, not a warrior, but his message inspired others, including an Ottawa leader named Pontiac.

When news arrived in early 1763 that France was about to cede all of its North American lands to Britain and Spain, Pontiac convened a council of more than four hundred Ottawa, Potawatomi, and Huron leaders near Fort Detroit. Drawing on Neolin's vision, he mobilized support to drive out the British. In May 1763, Pontiac's forces laid siege to Detroit and soon gained the support of eighteen Indian nations. They then attacked Fort Pitt and other British frontier outposts and attacked white settlements along the Virginia and Pennsylvania frontier.

**Explore**

Read part of Pontiac's speech to a council of Indian tribes in Document 5.1.

Accounts of violent encounters with Indians on the frontier circulated throughout the colonies and sparked resentment among local colonists as well as British troops. Many colonists did not bother to distinguish between friendly and hostile Indians, and General Amherst claimed that all Indians deserved extermination "for the good of





**DOCUMENT 5.1**

## Pontiac | Speech to Ottawa, Potawatomi, and Huron Leaders, 1763

Following Great Britain's victory in the French and Indian War, many American Indian leaders grew discontented with British settlements in the former French territories. In the Great Lakes region, this dissatisfaction turned to open rebellion when Pontiac, an Ottawa leader, convened a council of local tribes who then laid siege to Fort Detroit. Pontiac's speech at that council is excerpted here. Though the siege was ultimately unsuccessful, Pontiac's uprising soon spread beyond the Detroit region and lasted until the summer of 1766, when the British negotiated a peace with Pontiac and other Indian leaders.

**Explore**

It is important, my brothers, that we should exterminate from our land this nation, whose only object is our death. You must be all sensible, as well as myself, that we can no longer supply our wants in the way we were accustomed to do with our Fathers the French. They [the English] sell us their goods at double the price that the French made us pay, and yet their merchandise is good for nothing; for no sooner have we bought a blanket or other thing to cover us than it is necessary to procure others against the time of departing for our wintering ground. Neither will they let us have them on credit, as our brothers the French used to do. When I visit the English chief, and inform him of the death of any of our comrades, instead of lamenting, as our brothers the French used to do, they make game of us. If I ask him for any thing for our sick, he refuses, and tells us he does not want us, from which it is apparent he seeks our death. We must therefore, in return, destroy them without delay; there is nothing to prevent us: there are but few of them, and we shall easily overcome them—why should we not attack them? Are we not men? Have I not shown you the belts [beaded belts symbolizing a treaty] I received from our Great Father the King of France? He tells us to strike—why should we not listen to his words? What do you fear? The time has arrived.

Source: Francis Parkman, *The Conspiracy of Pontiac and the Indian Wars after the Conquest of Canada* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1884), 330.

**Interpret the Evidence**

- How would you explain Chief Pontiac's decision to emphasize the differences between the French and the British?
- What action against the British does he advocate, and why?

**Put It in Context**

How does Pontiac's speech reflect larger tensions between British officials and colonists and various Indian nations?

mankind." A group of men from Paxton Creek, Pennsylvania, agreed. In December 1763, they raided families of peaceful, Christian Conestoga Indians near Lancaster, killing thirty. Protests from eastern colonists infuriated the Paxton Boys, who then marched on Philadelphia demanding protection from "savages" on the frontier.

Although violence on the frontier slowly subsided, neither side had achieved victory. Without French support, Pontiac and his followers ran out of guns and ammunition and had to retreat. About the same time, Benjamin Franklin negotiated a truce between the Paxton Boys and the Pennsylvania authorities, but it did not settle the fundamental issues over protection of western settlers. These conflicts convinced the British that the government could not endure further costly frontier clashes. So in October 1763, the crown issued a proclamation forbidding colonial settlement west of a line running down the Appalachian Mountains to create a buffer between Indians and colonists (Map 5.2).

The **Proclamation Line of 1763** denied colonists the right to settle west of the Appalachian Mountains. Instituted just months after the Peace of Paris was signed, the Proclamation Line frustrated colonists who sought the economic benefits won by a long and bloody war. Small

**MAP 5.2 British Conflicts with Indians, 1758–1763, and the Proclamation Line**

The entrance of British troops into former French territory in the Ohio River valley following the French and Indian War fueled conflicts with Indian nations. Colonists in Pennsylvania and the Carolinas also battled with Indians, including tribes who were allies or remained neutral during the war. Parliament established the Proclamation Line to limit westward expansion and thereby diminish such hostilities.

farmers, backcountry settlers, and squatters had hoped to improve their lot by acquiring rich farmlands, and wealthy land speculators like Washington had staked claims to property no longer threatened by the French or their Indian allies. Now both groups were told to stay put.

## Conflicts over Land and Labor Escalate

Conflicts among colonists and with Britain were not confined to frontier regions. Land riots directed against the leasing policies of landlords and the greed of speculators had plagued New York's Hudson valley and New Jersey before the war, and these struggles continued into the 1760s. New clashes also occurred in the Carolinas as pioneer settlers like Herman Husband clashed with landlords and speculators there.

Even before the French and Indian War ended, the owners of large estates along the Hudson River in New York State raised rents and reduced the rights of tenants. These enormous estates had been granted in two periods. In 1629 the Dutch government established a patroon system by which men who provided fifty adult settlers to New Amsterdam were granted vast estates. Then in the early 1680s, the newly installed English governor Thomas Dongan granted lands to a select group of Englishmen. Some of these estates encompassed nearly 400 square miles, far larger than the island of Manhattan. In the early eighteenth century, the titles to some of these estates were challenged by small landowners and tenants, but even where legitimate titles existed, tenants declared a moral right to own the land they had long farmed. The manors and estates of the Hudson valley, they claimed, were more appropriate to a feudal government than to an enlightened empire.

Farmers in neighboring New Hampshire were drawn into battles over land when the king's Privy Council in London decided in 1764 that the Green Mountains belonged to New York rather than New Hampshire. Landlords along the Hudson River hoped to expand eastward into this region, but the farmers already living there claimed they had bought the land in good faith and deserved to keep it.

Following the Privy Council's decision, groups of farmers in New Hampshire waged guerrilla warfare against New York authorities, large landowners, and New York farmers who now claimed land that others had already cleared and settled. These Green Mountain Boys





**Catamount Tavern**

This nineteenth-century photograph shows the Catamount Tavern, located in present-day Bennington, Vermont. Here Ethan Allen founded the Green Mountain Boys and used the tavern as a meeting place. After British authorities ruled that the Green Mountains belonged to New York rather than New Hampshire, Allen and his troops battled outsiders seeking land, a struggle that lasted through the American Revolution. Courtesy, Vermont Historical Society

led by Ethan Allen, refused to recognize New York authorities as legitimate in the region and established their own local governments and popular courts.

Inspired by the Green Mountain Boys and earlier uprisings in New Jersey, tenants in the Hudson valley banded together in 1765–1766. Under the leadership of William Prendergast, a group of tenants calling themselves Levellers refused to pay rent and instead claimed freehold title to the land they farmed. New York tenants petitioned the colonial assembly and sought redress in a variety of ways. But landowners refused to negotiate, and Prendergast concluded that "there was no law for poor men."

In many ways, the beliefs of Allen, Prendergast, and their followers echoed those of Herman Husband and the North Carolina **Regulators**. All of these groups developed visible, well-organized networks of supporters, targeted specific landlords, sought redress first through colonial courts and assemblies, and then established popular militias and other institutions to govern themselves and to challenge those in authority. These challenges included attacks on property: Burning barns, attacking livestock, and pulling down fences were common practices among irate farmers.

Conflicts in North Carolina escalated when the colonial assembly, dominated by the eastern slaveholding elite, passed a measure to build a stately mansion for Governor Tryon with public funds. Outraged frontier farmers, many already in debt and paying high taxes, withheld their taxes, took over courthouses, and harassed corrupt local officials. By the spring of 1771, faced with what he viewed as open rebellion on his western frontier, Governor Tryon recruited a thousand militiamen to confront the Regulators. In May, armed conflict erupted. The Regulators were defeated, and half a dozen leaders were publicly hanged. Herman Husband managed to escape and headed to the Pennsylvania frontier to establish a new homestead for his family. There, too, he met frontier farmers angered by their lack of political representation, economic opportunity, and protection from Indians.

**REVIEW & RELATE**

- How did the French and Indian War and the subsequent peace treaty affect relations between Britain and its North American subjects?
- How did the French and Indian War and the increasing power of large landowners contribute to conflict between average colonists and colonial elites?

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## Postwar British Policies and Colonial Unity

Throughout the 1750s and 1760s, ordinary colonists challenged the authority of economic and political elites to impose their will on local communities and individual residents. Before and during the French and Indian War, most of these challenges involved conflicts among colonists themselves. Yet in the decade following the war, from

1764 to 1774, common grievances against Britain united colonists on the frontier and along the eastern seaboard, allowing them to launch effective protests against the British government. British policies, like the Proclamation Line of 1763, inspired widespread dissent as poor farmers, large landowners, and speculators sought to expand westward. A second policy, impressment, by which the Royal Navy forced young colonial men into military service, also aroused anger across regions and classes. At the same time, the Great Awakening, for all the upheaval it had engendered, provided colonists with shared ideas about moral principles and new techniques for mass communication. Finally, Britain's efforts to repay its war debts by taxing colonists and its plan to continue quartering troops in North America led colonists to forge intercolonial protest movements.

## Common Grievances

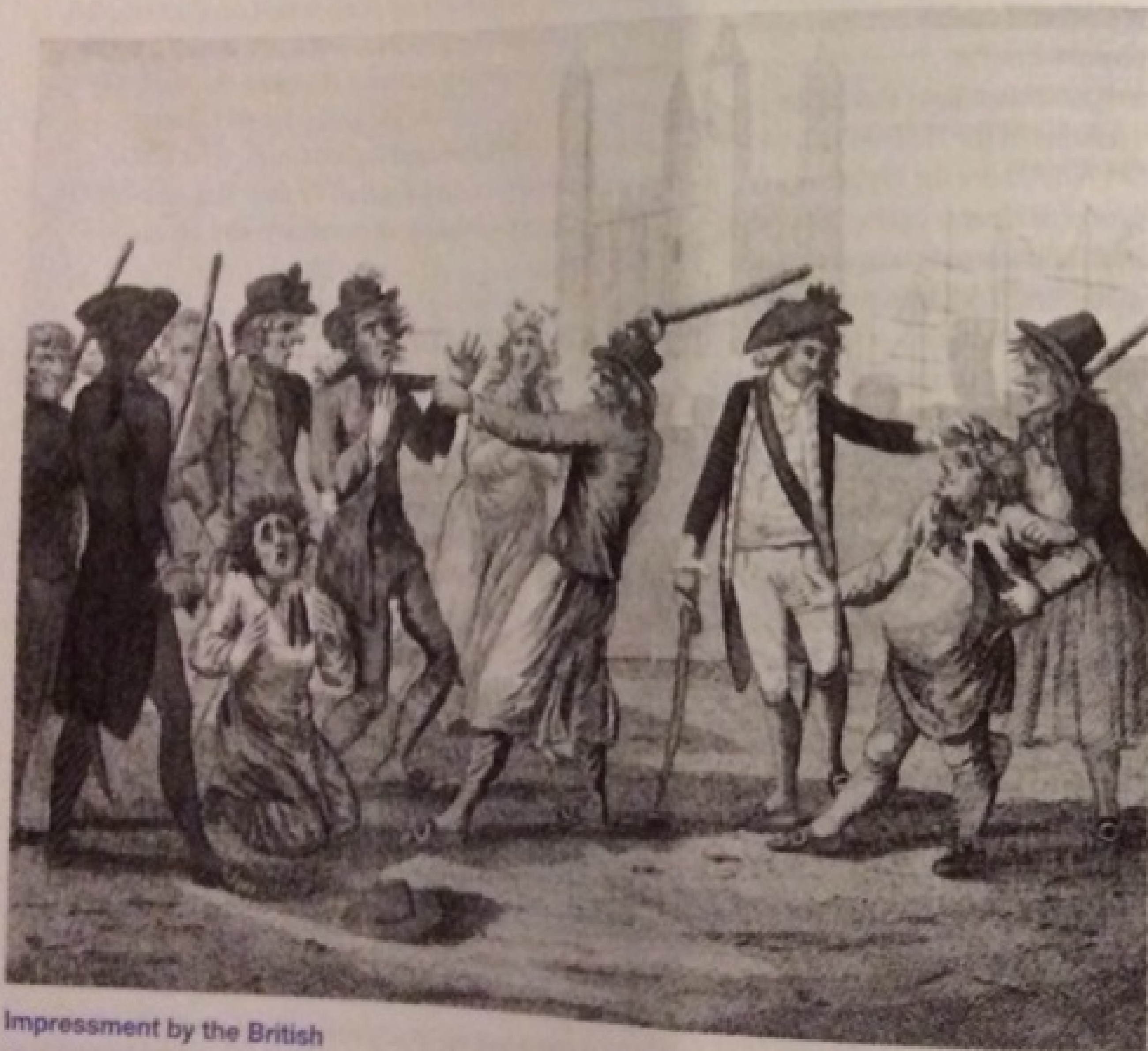
Like the Proclamation Line, which denied all colonists the right to settle beyond the Appalachian Mountains, the policy of impressment affected port city residents of all classes. British agents, desperate for seamen during the extended European wars of the eighteenth century, periodically impressed sailors and other poor men from British ports around the world, including seaboard cities in North America, and from merchant ships at sea. Impressment had been employed for decades by the time of the French and Indian War. Increasingly, however, merchants and other well-to-do American colonists joined common folk in demanding an end to this practice.

Seamen and dockworkers had good reason to fight off impressment agents. Men in the Royal Navy faced low wages, bad food, harsh punishment, rampant disease, and high mortality. As the practice escalated with each new war, the efforts of British naval officers and impressment agents to capture new "recruits" met violent resistance, especially in the North American colonies. At times, whole communities joined in the battle—relatives and friends, blacks and whites, women and men.

In 1757, in the midst of the French and Indian War, some 3,000 British soldiers cordoned off New York City and visited "the Taverns and other houses, where sailors usually resorted." According to printer Hugh Gaines, "All kinds of Tradesmen and Negroes" were hauled in by British press gangs. Local residents rioted along the docks the next day, but of the 800 men picked up the night before, some 400 were "retained in the service." With impressment robbing colonial seaports of much-needed laborers, some merchants and colonial officials began to petition Parliament for redress. But Parliament, seeing no reason why the British in America should avoid the fate of their counterparts in Great Britain, ignored the petitions.

In the aftermath of the French and Indian War, more serious impressment riots erupted in Boston, New York City, and Newport, Rhode Island. Increasingly, poor colonial seamen and dockworkers made common cause with owners of merchant ships and mercantile houses in protesting British policy. Colonial officials—mayors, governors, and custom agents—were caught in the middle. Some insisted on upholding the Royal Navy's right of impressment; others tried to placate both naval officers and local residents; and still others resisted what they saw as an oppressive imposition on the rights of colonists. Both those who resisted British authority and those who sought a compromise had to gain the support of the lower and middling classes to succeed.

Employers and politicians who opposed impressment gained an important advantage if they could direct the anger of colonists away from themselves and toward British officials and policies. The decision of British officials to continue quartering troops in the colonies gave local leaders another opportunity to join forces with ordinary colonists. Colonial towns and cities were required to quarter (that is, house and support) British troops even after the Peace of Paris was signed. While the troops were intended to protect the colonies against disgruntled Indians and French on their borders, they also provided reinforcements for impressment agents and surveillance over other illegal activities like smuggling and domestic manufacturing. Thus a range of issues and policies began to bind colonists together through common grievances against the British Parliament.



**Impressment by the British**

This eighteenth-century engraving depicts the harsh impressment of men into the British navy. Set in England, this illustration shows that impressment was widely practiced at home. Thus the British government did not single out colonists for special mistreatment. © Mary Evans/The Image Works

## Forging Ties across the Colonies

The ties forged between poorer and wealthier colonists over issues of westward expansion, impressment, and quartering grew stronger in the 1760s, but they tended to be localized in seaport cities or in specific areas of the frontier. Creating bonds across the colonies required considerably more effort in a period when communication and transportation beyond local areas were limited. The Albany Congress of 1754 had been one of the first attempts to develop intercolonial bonds, but it had not been very successful. Means had to be found to disseminate information and create a sense of common purpose if the colonists were going to persuade Parliament to take their complaints seriously. One important model for such intercolonial communication was the Great Awakening.

By the 1750s, the Great Awakening seemed to be marked more by dissension than by unity as new denominations continued to split from traditional churches. For example, in the Sandy Creek region of North Carolina, home to Herman Husband, radical Protestants formed the Separate Baptists (named for their separation from traditional Baptists) in order to proclaim a message of absolute spiritual equality. From the late 1750s through the 1770s, Separate Baptists converted thousands of small farmers, poor whites, and enslaved women and men and established churches throughout Virginia, Georgia, and the Carolinas.

Methodists, Dunkards, Moravians, and Quakers joined Separate Baptists in offering southern residents religious experiences that highlighted spiritual equality. Appealing to blacks and whites, women and men, they challenged the social order, especially in frontier regions that were beyond the reach of many established institutions. Some dissenting preachers invited slaves and free blacks to attend their services alongside local white farmers and laborers. Slaveholders and other elite southerners considered such practices outrageous and a challenge to the political as well as the social order.

Most women and men who converted to Separate Baptism, Methodism, or other forms of radical Protestantism did not link their religious conversion directly to politics. Those who did, including many Regulators, suggested that religion was a force for division rather than unity in the colonies. But as more and more ordinary colonists and colonial leaders voiced their anger at offensive British policies, evangelical techniques used to rouse the masses to salvation became important for mobilizing colonists to protest.

Thus even though the Great Awakening had spent its religious passion in most parts of North America by the 1760s, the techniques of mass communication and critiques of opulence and corruption it initiated provided emotional and practical ways of forging ties among widely dispersed colonists. Many evangelical preachers had condemned the lavish lifestyles of colonial elites and the spiritual corruption of local officials who failed to consider the needs of their less well-to-do neighbors. Now in the context of conflicts with Great Britain, colonial leaders could turn such rhetoric against new targets of resentment by paintin[g] Parliament and British officials as aristocrats with little fai[th] and less compassion.

During the Great Awakening, preachers also honed techniques of popular appeal that proved useful in uniting colonists to voice opposition to British policies. The public sermons and mass rallies meant to inspire loyalty to a greater moral cause could all be translated into forms applicable to political protest. These techniques challenged established forms of authority, which certainly gave pause to some colonial leaders. Nonetheless, casting aside deference to king and Parliament was necessary if colonists were going to gain rights within the British empire that met the needs of elites and laborers alike. The efforts of Great Britain to assert greater control over its North American colonies provided colonial dissidents an opportunity to test out these new ways to forge intercolonial ties.

## Great Britain Seeks Greater Control

Until the French and Indian War, British officials and their colonial subjects coexisted in relative harmony. Economic growth led Britain to ignore much of the smuggling and domestic manufacturing that took place in the colonies. Although the system of mercantilism (see chapter 3) assumed that the colonies supplied raw materials and the mother country manufactured goods, a bit of manufacturing for local needs did not significantly disrupt British industry. Similarly, although the king and Parliament held ultimate political sovereignty, or final authority, over the American colonies, it was easier to allow some local government control over decisions, given the communication challenges created by distance.

This pattern of **benign** (or "salutary") **neglect** led some American colonists to view themselves as more independent of British control than they really were. Impressment offers a good example. The Royal Navy had the right to impress men when needed, yet even in the midst of the French and Indian War, American colonists viewed impressment as an unwarranted infringement on their rights as British subjects. Many colonists had also begun to see smuggling, domestic manufacturing, and local self-governance as rights rather than privileges. Thus when British officials decided to assert greater control, many colonists protested.

To King George III and to Parliament, asserting control over the colonies was both right and necessary. In 1763 King George appointed George Grenville to lead the British government. As prime minister and chancellor of the Exchequer, Grenville faced an economic depression in England, rebellious farmers opposed to a new tax on domestic cider, and growing numbers of unemployed soldiers returning from the war. He believed that regaining political and economic control in the colonies abroad could help resolve these crises at home.

Eighteenth-century wars, especially the French and Indian War, cost a fortune. British subjects in England paid taxes to help offset the nation's debts, even though few of them benefited as directly from the British victory as did their counterparts in the American colonies. The colonies would cost the British treasury more if the crown could not control colonists' movement into Indian territories, limit smuggling and domestic manufacturing, and house British troops in the colonies cheaply. With more British troops and officials stationed in or visiting the colonies during the French and Indian War, they had greater opportunities to observe colonial life. Many of these observers voiced concern about the extent of criminality in the colonies and the rebellious spirit that existed among many servants, seamen, frontiersmen, tenants, and even women and slaves. Others feared that the religious enthusiasm of the Great Awakening had nurtured disdain for established authority among the colonists. Clearly it was time to impose a true imperial order.

To establish order, Parliament launched a three-prong program. First, it sought stricter enforcement of existing laws and established a Board of Trade to centralize policies and ensure their implementation. The **Navigation Acts**, which prohibited smuggling, established guidelines for legal commerce, and set duties on trade items, were the most important laws to be enforced. Second, Parliament extended wartime policies into peacetime. For example, the Quartering Act of 1765 ensured that British troops would remain in the colonies to enforce imperial policy. Colonial governments were expected to support them by allowing them to use vacant buildings and providing them with food and supplies.

The third part of Grenville's colonial program was the most important. It called for the passage of new laws to raise funds and reestablish the sovereignty of British rule. The first revenue act passed by Parliament was the American Duties Act of 1764, known as the **Sugar Act**. It imposed an **import duty**, or tax, on sugar, coffee, wines, and other luxury items. The act also reduced the import tax on foreign molasses but insisted that the duty be collected, a shock to the many colonial merchants and rum distillers who relied on cheap molasses smuggled in from the French and Spanish Caribbean. The crackdown on smuggling increased the power of customs officers and established the first vice-admiralty courts in North America to ensure that the Sugar Act raised money for the crown. That same year, Parliament passed the Currency Act, which prohibited colonial assemblies from printing paper money or bills of credit. Taken together, these provisions meant that colonists would pay more money into the British treasury even as the supply of money (and illegal goods) diminished in the colonies.

29/4 SAMUEL A. OTIS

Has just imported, and is determined to sell at the lowest Advance, at Store No. 5, South Side of the Town-Dock, by Wholesale and Retail,

CHoice Jamaica Sugars by the Hogshead, Barrel, or single C. wt.
West-India and New-England-Rum.
Cotton Wool
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White Beans
3-4, 7/8 and yard wide Irish Linnens
Cotton Checks
Pins of all Numbers
Gun Powder
Ticklinburgs & Oznabrigs
Kilmarnock Caps
Belladine Sewing Silk
London Scythes
Seeming Twine——&c.
Cotton Cards
Roll Brimstone
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Allum

Best Sperma Ceti Candles,
Warranted Pure,

MADE AND SOLD by JOHN LANGDON in Fleet-Street, above HANCOCK's Wharf, near the Old North Meeting House. He also sells the best Refin'd Sperma Ceti Oil by the Barrel, Best Tallow Candles mould and dipp'd, and Bayberry Wax Candles. ALL as low as they can be had at any Place in Town.

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A collection of an Hundred of the best Sorts of young Grafted and Inoculated English Fruit Trees—of Apples—Pears-Plumbs—Cherries—Peaches—Apricots—Nectons—Quinces—Lime-Trees——English Elms—and Mulberry Trees for Silk Worms—Grape Vines of all Sorts—Red and White Dutch Currant Bushes—English Goosberry Bushes of all Sorts—Asparagus Plants of the large Early Sort—and Box for Edgings of Walks—Also, Garlick—Shalots—and Horse Radish 5/. Old Tenor a Pound.—All sorts of Dried Sweet Herbs.

N. B. Garden Seeds saved here most suitable for the West-Indies than any Imported, and warranted Good, &c. all at the very lowest Price for Cash, &c.—By William Davidson, Gardiner, in Seven-Star Lane, Boston.

TO BE SOLD,
By Joseph Dennie,
In Union-Street, opposite Mr. James Jackson's,

BOHEA TEA by the Chest or Hundred, Nutmegs, Pepper by the Bag or Hundred.

**Boston Advertisements**

Advertisements from the *Boston Gazette and Country Journal* show the array of consumer goods brought in to Boston Harbor. Among the items listed were rum, tea, and English cloth, all of which were subject to import duties and trade restrictions. As boycotts developed in the colonies, Bostonians would have to choose which of these items to continue buying. Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society



Some colonial leaders protested the Sugar Act through speeches, pamphlets, and petitions, and Massachusetts established a **committee of correspondence** to circulate concerns to leaders in other colonies. However, dissent remained disorganized and ineffective. Nonetheless, the passage of the Sugar and Currency Acts caused anxiety among many colonists, which was heightened by passage of the Quartering Act the next year. Colonial responses to these developments marked the first steps in an escalating conflict between British officials and their colonial subjects.

**REVIEW & RELATE**

- How did Britain's postwar policies lead to the emergence of unified colonial protests?
- Why did British policymakers believe they were justified in seeking to gain greater control over Britain's North American colonies?

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# Resistance to Britain Intensifies

Over the next decade, between 1764 and 1774, the British Parliament sought to extend its political and economic control over the American colonies, and the colonists periodically resisted. With each instance of resistance, Parliament demanded further submission to royal authority. With each demand for submission, colonists responded with greater assertions of their rights and autonomy. Yet no one—neither colonists nor British officials—could have imagined in 1764, or even in 1774, that a revolution was in the making.

## The Stamp Act Inspires Coordinated Resistance

Grenville decided that his next step would be to impose a stamp tax on the colonies similar to that long used in England. The stamp tax required that a revenue stamp be affixed to all transactions involving paper items, from newspapers and contracts to playing cards and diplomas. Grenville announced his plans in 1764, a full year before Parliament enacted the **Stamp Act** in the spring of 1765. The tax was to be collected by colonists appointed for the purpose, and the money was to be spent within the colonies at the direction of Parliament for "defending, protecting and securing the colonies." To Grenville and a majority in Parliament, the Stamp Act seemed completely fair. After all,

Englishmen paid on average 26 shillings in tax annually, while Bostonians averaged just 1 shilling. Moreover, the act was purposely written to benefit the American colonies.

The colonists viewed it in a more threatening light. The Stamp Act differed from earlier parliamentary laws in three important ways. First, by the time of its passage, the colonies were experiencing rising unemployment, falling wages, and a downturn in trade. All of these developments were exacerbated by the Sugar, Currency, and Quartering Acts passed by Parliament the previous year. Indeed, in cities like Boston, British soldiers often competed with colonists for scarce jobs in order to supplement their low wages. Second, critics viewed the Stamp Act as an attempt to control the *internal* affairs of the colonies. It was not an indirect tax on trade, paid by importers and exporters, but a direct tax on daily business: getting a marriage certificate, selling land, and publishing or buying a newspaper or an almanac. Third, such a direct intervention in the economic affairs of the colonies unleashed the concerns of leading colonial officials, merchants, lawyers, shopkeepers, and ministers that Parliament was taxing colonists who had no representation in its debates and decisions. Their arguments resonated with ordinary women and men, who were affected far more by the stamp tax than by an import duty on sugar, molasses, or wine.

By announcing the Stamp Act a year before its passage, Grenville assured that colonists had plenty of time to organize their opposition. In New York City, Boston, and other cities, merchants, traders, and artisans formed groups dedicated to the repeal of the Stamp Act. Soon Sons of Liberty, Daughters of Liberty, Sons of Neptune, Vox Populi, and similar organizations emerged to challenge the imposition of the Stamp Act. Even before the act was implemented, angry mobs throughout the colonies attacked stamp distributors. Some were beaten, others tarred and feathered, and all were forced to take an oath never to sell stamps again.

Colonists lodged more formal protests with the British government as well. The Virginia House of Burgesses, led by Patrick Henry, acted first. It passed five resolutions, which it sent to Parliament, denouncing taxation without representation. The Virginia Resolves were reprinted in many colonial newspapers and repeated by orators to eager audiences in Massachusetts and elsewhere. At the same time, the Massachusetts House adopted a circular letter—a written protest circulated to the other colonial assemblies—calling for a congress to be held in New York City in October 1765 to consider the threat posed by the Stamp Act.

In the meantime, popular protests multiplied. The protests turned violent in Boston, where **Sons of Liberty** leaders like Samuel Adams organized mass demonstrations. Adams modeled his oratory on that of itinerant preachers, but with a political twist. Sons of Liberty also spread anti-British sentiment through newspapers and handbills that they posted on trees and buildings throughout the city and in surrounding towns. At dawn on August 14, 1765, the Boston Sons of Liberty hung an effigy of stamp distributor Andrew Oliver on a tree and called for his resignation. A mock funeral procession, joined by farmers, artisans, apprentices, and the poor, marched to Boston Common. The crowd, led by twenty-seven-year-old Ebenezer Mackintosh—a shoemaker, a veteran of the French and Indian War, and a popular working-class leader—carried the fake corpse to the Boston stamp office and destroyed the building. Demonstrators saved pieces of lumber, "stamped" them, and set them on fire outside Oliver's house. Oliver, wisely, had already left town.

Oliver's brother-in-law, Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson, arrived at the scene and tried to quiet the crowd, but he only angered them further. They soon destroyed Oliver's stable house, coach, and carriage, which the crowd saw as signs of aristocratic opulence. Twelve days later, demonstrators attacked the homes of Judge William Story, customs officer Benjamin Hallowell, and Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson.

The battle against the Stamp Act unfolded across the colonies with riots, beatings, and resignations reported from Newport, Rhode Island, to New Brunswick, New Jersey, to Charles Town (later Charleston), South Carolina. In Charleston, slave trader and stamp agent Henry Laurens was attacked by white artisans who hanged him in effigy and then by white workers and finally by slaves who harassed him with chants of "Liberty! Liberty!!" On November 1, 1765, when the Stamp Act officially took effect, not a single stamp agent remained in his post in the colonies.

Protesters carefully chose their targets: stamp agents, sheriffs, judges, and colonial officials. Even when violence erupted, it remained focused, with most crowds destroying stamps and stamp offices first and then turning to the private property of Stamp Act supporters. These protests made a mockery of notions of deference toward British rule. But they also revealed growing autonomy on the part of middling- and working-class colonists who attacked men of wealth and power, sometimes choosing artisans rather than wealthier men as their leaders. However, this was not primarily a class conflict because many wealthier colonists made common cause with artisans, small farmers, and the poor. Indeed, colonial elites considered themselves the leaders, inspiring popular uprisings through the power of their political arguments and oratorical skills, although they refused to support actions they considered too radical. For example, when Levellers in the Hudson valley proclaimed themselves Sons of Liberty and sought assistance from



Stamp Act rebels in New York City, the merchants, judges, and large landowners who led the protests there refused to help them.

It was these more affluent protesters who dominated the Stamp Act Congress in New York City in October 1765, which brought together twenty-seven delegates from nine colonies. The delegates petitioned Parliament to repeal the Stamp Act, arguing that taxation without representation was tyranny and that such laws "have a manifest Tendency to subvert the Rights and Liberties of the Colonists." Delegates then urged colonists to boycott British goods and refuse to pay the stamp tax. Yet they still proclaimed their loyalty to king and country.

The question of representation became a mainstay of colonial protests. Whereas the British accepted the notion of "virtual representation," by which members of Parliament gave voice to the views of particular classes and interests, the North American colonies had developed a system of representation based on locality. According to colonial leaders, only members of Parliament elected by colonists could represent their interests.

Even as delegates at the Stamp Act Congress declared themselves disaffected but loyal British subjects, they participated in the process of developing a common identity in the American colonies. Christopher Gadsden of South Carolina expressed the feeling most directly. "We should stand upon the broad common ground of natural rights," he argued. "There should be no New England man, no New-Yorker, known on the continent, but all of us Americans."

Eventually the British Parliament was forced to respond to colonial protests and even more to rising complaints from English merchants and traders whose business had been damaged by the colonists' boycott. Parliament repealed the Stamp Act in March 1766, and King George III granted his approval a month later. When news reached the colonies in May, crowds celebrated in the streets, church bells rang, and fireworks and muskets saluted the victory. Colonists now looked forward to a new and better relationship between themselves and the British government.

From the colonists' perspective, the crisis triggered by the passage of the Stamp Act demonstrated the limits of parliamentary control. Colonists had organized effectively and forced Parliament to repeal the hated legislation. Protests had raged across the colonies and attracted support from a wide range of colonists, including young and old, men and women, merchants, lawyers, artisans, and farmers. Individual leaders, like Patrick Henry of Virginia and Samuel Adams of Massachusetts, became more widely known through their fiery oratory and their success in appealing to the masses. The Stamp Act agitation also demonstrated the growing influence of ordinary citizens who led parades and demonstrations and joined in attacks on stamp agents and the homes of British officials. And the protests revealed the growing power of the written word and printed images in disseminating ideas among colonists. Broadsides, political cartoons, handbills, newspapers, and pamphlets circulated widely, reinforcing discussions and proclamations at taverns, rallies, demonstrations, and more formal political assemblies.

**Explore**

See Documents 5.2 and 5.3 for two different types of dissent.

For all the success of the Stamp Act protests, American colonists still could not imagine in 1765 that protest would ever lead to open revolt against British sovereignty. More well-to-do colonists were concerned that a revolution against British authority might fuel a dual revolution in which small farmers, tenants, servants, slaves, and laborers would rise up against their political and economic superiors in the colonies. Even most middling- and working-class protesters believed that the best solution to the colonies' problems was to gain greater economic and political rights within the British empire, not to break from it. After all, Great Britain was the most powerful nation in the world, and the colonies could only benefit from their place in its far-reaching empire.

## The Townshend Act and the Boston Massacre

The repeal of the Stamp Act in March 1766 led directly to Parliament's passage of the Declaratory Act. That act declared that Parliament had the authority to pass any law "to bind the colonies and peoples of North America" closer to Britain. No new tax or policy was established; Parliament simply wanted to proclaim Great Britain's political supremacy in the aftermath of the successful stamp tax protests.

Following this direct assertion of British sovereignty, relative harmony prevailed in the colonies for more than a year. Having rid themselves of the burden of parliamentary taxation, colonists were content to abide by less offensive restrictions on smuggling, domestic manufacturing, and similar matters. Then in June 1767, a new chancellor of the Exchequer, Charles Townshend, rose to power in England. He persuaded Parliament to return to the model offered by the earlier Sugar Act. The **Townshend Act**, like the Sugar Act, instituted an import tax on a range of items sent to the colonies, including glass, lead, paint, paper, and tea.

Now, however, even an indirect tax led to immediate protests and calls for a boycott of the items subject to the tax. In February 1768, Samuel Adams wrote a circular letter reminding colonists of the importance of the boycott, and the

DOCUMENTS 5.2 AND 5.3

## Protesting the Stamp Act: Two Views

The announcement of the Stamp Act in 1764 ignited widespread protests throughout the colonies. Colonial governments petitioned Parliament for its repeal, crowds attacked stamp agents and distributors, broadsides and newspapers denounced "taxation without representation," and boycotts and mass demonstrations were organized in major cities, some of which turned violent. Protests were not limited to the colonists, however, as shown in the petition to Parliament from London merchants, who argued that they were losing revenue because of colonial boycotts of British goods. The second document celebrates the repeal of the Stamp Act by depicting a funeral for the act led by its supporters. Dr. William Scott, who published letters supporting the Stamp Act in a London newspaper, leads the procession.

Explore

### 5.2 London Merchants Petition to Repeal the Stamp Act, 1766

And that, in consequence of the trade between the colonies and the mother country, as established and permitted for many years, and of the experience which the petitioners have had of the readiness of the Americans to make their just remittances to the utmost of their real ability, they have been induced to make and venture such large exportations of British manufactures, as to leave the colonies indebted to the merchants of Great Britain in the sum of several millions sterling; at that at this time the colonists, when pressed for payment, appeal to past experience, in proof of their willingness; but declare it is not in their power, at present, to make good their engagements, alleging, that the taxes and restrictions laid upon them, and the extension of the jurisdiction of vice admiralty courts established by some late acts of parliament, particularly . . . by an act passed in the fifth year of his present Majesty, for granting and applying certain stamp duties, and other duties, in the British colonies and plantations in America, with several regulations and restraints, which, if founded in acts of parliament for defined purposes, are represented to have been extended in such a manner as to disturb legal commerce and harass the fair trader, have so far interrupted the usual and former most fruitful branches of their commerce, restrained the sale of their produce, thrown the state of the several provinces into confusion, and brought on so great a number of actual bankruptcies, that the former opportunities and means of remittances and payments are utterly lost and taken from them; and that the petitioners are, by these unhappy events, reduced to the necessity of applying to the House, in order to secure themselves and their families from impending ruin; to prevent a multitude of manufacturers from becoming a burthen to the community, or else seeking their bread in other countries, to the irretrievable loss of this kingdom; and to preserve the strength of this nation entire.

Source: Guy Steven Callender, *Selections from the Economic History of the United States, 1765–1860* (Boston: Ginn, 1909), 146–47.



Explore

### 5.3 The Repeal, 1766

Library of Congress

**Interpret the Evidence**

- How do both the petition and the cartoon emphasize the economic arguments against the Stamp Act? What role, if any, do arguments about political representation play in these documents?
- Who do you think was the intended audience for each of these documents? What evidence can you find in each document to support your answer?

**Put It in Context**

What do these documents suggest about the more general relations among the colonies, British merchants, and Parliament in 1766?

Massachusetts Assembly disseminated it to other colonial assemblies. In response, Parliament posted two more British army regiments in Boston and New York City to enforce the law, including the Townshend Act. Angry colonists did not retreat when confronted by this show of military force. Instead, a group of outspoken colonial leaders demanded that colonists refuse to import goods of any kind from Britain.

**Explore**

See Document 5.4 for one colonist's objection to the Townshend Act.

This boycott depended especially on the support of women, who were often in charge of the day-to-day purchase of household items that appeared on the boycott list. Women were expected to boycott a wide array of British goods—gloves, hats, shoes, cloth, sugar, and tea among them. Single women and widows who supported themselves as shopkeepers were expected to join male merchants and store owners in refusing to sell British goods. To make up for the boycotted goods, wives, mothers, and daughters produced homespun shirts and dresses and brewed herbal teas to replace British products.

Despite the hardships, many colonial women embraced the boycott. Twenty-two-year-old Charity Clarke voiced the feelings of many colonists when she wrote to a friend in England, "If you English folks won't give us the liberty we ask . . . I will try to gather a number of ladies armed with spinning wheels [along with men] who shall learn to weave & keep sheep, and will retire beyond the reach of arbitrary power." Women organized spinning bees in which dozens of participants produced yards and yards of homespun cloth. By 1770 wearing homespun came to symbolize women's commitment to the colonial cause.

Refusing to drink tea offered another way for women to show their support of protests against parliamentary taxation. In February 1770, more than "300 Mistresses of Families, in which number the Ladies of the Highest Rank and Influence," signed a petition in Boston and pledged to abstain from drinking tea, and dozens of women from less prosperous families signed their own boycott agreement.

Boston women's refusal to drink tea and their participation in spinning bees were part of a highly publicized effort to make their city the center of opposition to the Townshend Act. Printed propaganda, demonstrations, rallies, and broadsides announced to the world that Bostonians rejected Parliament's right to impose its will, or at least its taxes, on the American colonies. Throughout the winter of 1769–1770, boys and young men confronted British soldiers stationed in Boston. Although they were angry over Parliament's taxation policies, Boston men also considered the soldiers, who moonlighted for extra pay, as economic competitors. The taunts and tension soon escalated into violence.

By March 1770, 1,700 British troops were stationed in Boston, a city of 18,000 people. On the evening of March 5, boys began throwing snowballs and insults at the lone soldier guarding the Boston Customs House. An angry crowd began milling about, now joined by a group of sailors led by Crispus Attucks, an ex-slave of mixed African and Indian ancestry. The nervous guard called for help, and Captain Thomas Preston arrived at the scene with seven British soldiers. He appealed to the "gentlemen" present to disperse the crowd. Instead, the harangues of the crowd continued, and snowballs, stones, and other projectiles flew in greater numbers. Then a gun fired, and soon more shooting erupted. Eleven men in the crowd were hit, and four were "killed on the Spot," including Crispus Attucks.

Despite confusion about who, if anyone, gave the order to fire, colonists expressed outrage at the shooting of ordinary men on the streets of Boston. Samuel Adams and other Sons of Liberty, though horrified by the turn of events, recognized the incredible potential for anti-British propaganda. Adams organized a mass funeral for those killed, and thousands watched the caskets being paraded through the city. Newspaper editors and broadsides printed by the Sons of Liberty labeled the shooting a "massacre." When the accused soldiers were tried in Boston for the so-called **Boston Massacre** and the jury acquitted six of the eight of any crime, colonial leaders became more convinced that British rule had become tyrannical and that such tyranny must be opposed. **See Document Project 5: The Boston Massacre, page 153.**

To ensure that colonists throughout North America learned about the Boston Massacre, committees of correspondence formed once again to spread the news. These committees became important pipelines for sending information about plans and protests across the colonies, connecting seaport cities with one another and with like-minded colonists in the countryside. They also circulated an engraving by Bostonian Paul Revere that suggested the soldiers purposely shot at a peaceful crowd.

In the aftermath of the shootings, public pressure increased on Parliament to repeal the Townshend duties. Merchants in England and North America pleaded with Parliament to reconsider policies that had resulted in economic losses on both sides of the Atlantic. In response, Parliament repealed all of the Townshend duties except the import tax on tea. Parliament retained the tea tax to prove its political authority to do so.

## Continuing Conflicts at Home

As colonists in Boston and other seaport cities rallied to protest British taxation, other residents of the thirteen colonies continued to challenge authorities closer to home. In the same years as the Stamp Act and Townshend Act



**DOCUMENT 5.4**

### John Dickinson | Letter from a Farmer, 1768

In 1767 the British Parliament passed a series of taxes on the American colonies to raise revenue and gain greater control of colonial government and trade. The Townshend duties, as they were called, outraged many colonists. John Dickinson, a prominent Pennsylvania attorney who had been a representative at the Stamp Act Congress, wrote the most famous attacks on the Townshend Act. Published under the pseudonym "A Farmer," Dickinson's letters criticized British taxation policies and called for peaceful resistance to them.

**Explore**

I hope to demonstrate before these letters are concluded, yet even in such a supposed case, these colonies ought to regard the act with abhorrence. For who are a free people? Not those over whom government is reasonably and equitably exercised but those who live under a government, so *constitutionally checked* and *controuled*, that proper provision is made against its being otherwise exercised. The late act is founded on the destruction of this constitutional security.

If the parliament have a right to lay a duty of four shillings and eight pence on a hundred weight of glass, or a ream of paper, they have a right to lay a duty of any other sum on either. They may raise the duty, as the author before quoted says has been done in some countries, till it "exceeds seventeen or eighteen times the value of the commodity." In short, if they have a right to levy a tax of *one penny* upon us, they have a right to levy a *million* upon us: For where does their right stop? At any given number of pence, shillings, or pounds? To attempt to limit their right, after granting it to exist at all, is as contrary to reason, as granting it to exist at all is contrary to justice. If they have any right to tax us, then, whether our own money shall continue in our own pockets, or not, depends no longer on us, but on *them*. "There is nothing which we can call our own," or to use the words of Mr. Locke, "What property have we in that, which another may, by right, take, when he pleases, to himself?"

These duties, which will inevitably be levied upon us, and which are now levying upon us, are expressly laid for the sole purpose of taking money. This is the true definition of taxes. They are therefore taxes. This money is to be taken from us. We are therefore taxed. Those who are taxed without their own consent, given by themselves, or their representatives, are slaves. We are taxed without our own consent given by ourselves, or our representatives. We are therefore—I speak it with grief—I speak it with indignation—we are slaves.

Source: John Dickinson, *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies* (New York: The Outlook Company, 1903), 75–78.

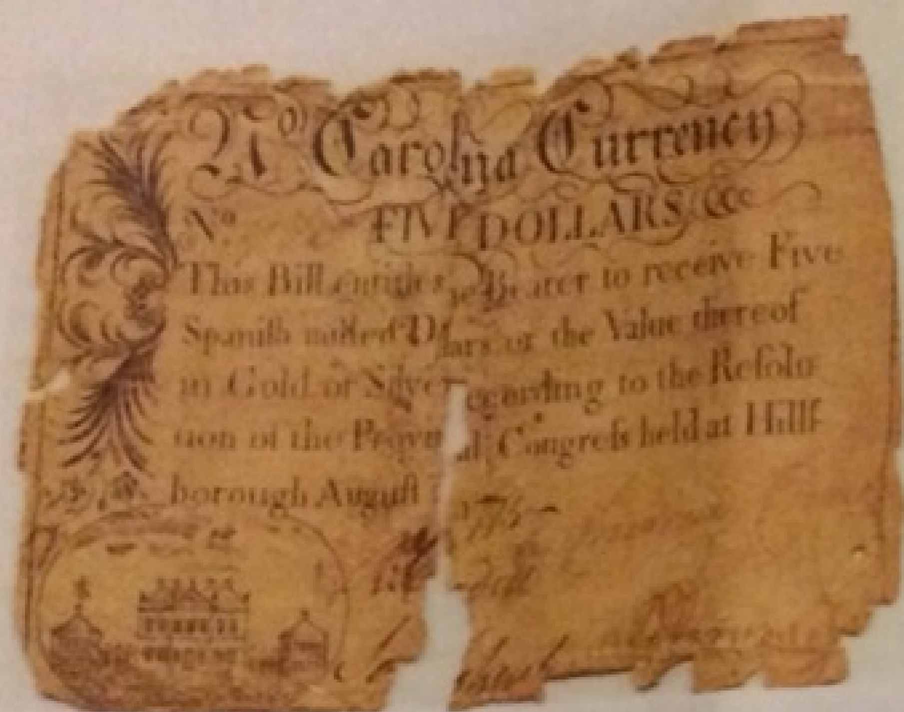
**Interpret the Evidence**

- Is Dickinson's main criticism of the Townshend duties that they are an economic burden, or is it broader than that?
- What is Dickinson's definition of a just government?

**Put It in Context**

What does Dickinson's complaint about colonists being treated as slaves suggest about the limits of his political vision?

protests, tenants in New Jersey and the Hudson valley continued their campaign for economic justice. So, too, did Herman Husband and the Sandy Creek Association. Governor Tryon of North Carolina had been among those who claimed that Parliament had abused its power in taxing the colonies, but he did not recognize such abuses in his own colony. Instead, he viewed the Regulators, formed during the campaign against the Townshend Act, as traitors. The Regulators, however, insisted that they were simply trying to protect farmers and laborers from deceitful speculators, corrupt politicians, and greedy employers. A year after the Boston Massacre, Governor Tryon sent troops to quell what he viewed as open rebellion on the Carolina frontier. The Regulators amassed two thousand farmers to defend




**The Regulators and Governor William Tryon**

When the Regulators rebelled against the Townshend duties in 1771 along the North Carolina frontier, Governor Tryon, who also questioned British tax policies, nevertheless dispatched colonial troops and crushed the rebellion. Tryon's lavish palace in New Bern appears in the lower left corner of this $5 bill, issued in 1775 on the eve of the American Revolution. North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

themselves, although Husband, a pacifist, was not among them. But when twenty Regulators were killed and more than a hundred wounded at the Battle of Alamance Creek in May 1771, he surely knew many of the fallen. Six Regulators were hanged a month later in front of Governor Tryon, local officials, and hundreds of neighboring farm families. Although North Carolina Regulators did not proclaim this the Alamance Massacre, many local residents harbored deep resentments against colonial officials for what they viewed as the slaughter of honest, hardworking men. Herman Husband fled the Carolina frontier and headed north.

Resentments against colonial leaders were not confined to North Carolina. An independent Regulator movement emerged in South Carolina in 1767. Far more effective than their North Carolina counterparts, South Carolina Regulators seized control of the western regions of the colony, took up arms, and established their own system of frontier justice. By 1769 the South Carolina Assembly negotiated a settlement with the Regulators, establishing new parishes in the colony's interior that ensured greater representation for frontier areas and extending colonial political institutions, such as courts and sheriffs, to the region.

## Tea and Widening Resistance

For a brief period after the Boston Massacre, conflicts within the colonies generally overshadowed protests against British policies. During this period, the tea tax was collected, the increased funds ensured that British officials in the colonies were less dependent on local assemblies to carry out their duties, and general prosperity seemed to lessen the antagonism between colonists and royal authorities. In May 1773, however, all that changed. That month Parliament passed a new act that granted the East India Company a monopoly on shipping and selling tea in the colonies. Although this did not add any new tax or raise the price of tea, it did fuel a new round of protests.

Founded in the early seventeenth century, the East India Company had been one of the major trading companies in the British empire and a symbol of British commercial supremacy for more than 150 years. By the 1770s, however, it was on the verge of economic collapse and asked for a monopoly on the tea trade and the right to sell tea through its own agents rather than through independent shopkeepers and merchants in the colonies. Many members of Parliament had invested in the East India Company, so their decision to grant it a monopoly on tea involved financial as well as political considerations. Still, the decision was not seen as especially controversial since East India Company tea sold by company agents cost less, even with the tax, than smuggled Dutch or French tea.

Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry, Christopher Gadsden, and other radicals had continued to view the tea tax as an illegal imposition on colonists and refused to pay it as a matter of principle. They had established committees of correspondence to keep up the pressure for a colony-wide boycott, and Adams published and circulated "Rights of the Colonies," a pamphlet that listed a range of grievances against British policies. Their concerns became the basis for a new round of protests when Parliament granted the East India Company its monopoly. By eliminating colonial merchants from the profits to be made on tea and implementing a monopoly for a single favored company, Parliament pushed merchants into joining with radicals to demand redress.

Committees of correspondence quickly organized another colony-wide boycott. In some cities, like Charleston, South Carolina, tea was unloaded from East India Company ships but never sold. In others, like New York, the ships were turned back at the port. Only in Boston, however, did violence erupt as ships loaded with tea, and protected by British troops, sat anchored in the harbor. On the night of December 16, 1773, the Sons of Liberty organized a "tea party." After a massive rally against British policy, a group of about fifty men disguised as Indians boarded the British ships and dumped forty-five tons of tea into the sea.



Although hundreds of spectators knew who had boarded the ship, witnesses refused to provide names or other information to British officials investigating the incident. The Boston Tea Party was a direct challenge to British authority and resulted in massive destruction of valuable property.

Parliament responded immediately with a show of force. The **Coercive Acts**, passed in 1774, closed the port of Boston until residents paid for the tea, moved Massachusetts court cases against royal officials back to England, and revoked the colony's charter in order to strengthen the authority of royal officials and weaken that of the colonial assembly. The British government also approved a new Quartering Act, which forced Boston residents to accommodate more soldiers in their own homes or build more barracks.

The royal government passed the Coercive Acts to punish Massachusetts and to discourage similar protests in other colonies. Instead, the legislation, which colonists called the **Intolerable Acts**, spurred a militant reaction. Committees of correspondence spread news of the fate of Boston and the entire colony of Massachusetts. Colonial leaders, who increasingly identified themselves as patriots, soon formed committees of safety—armed groups of colonists who gathered weapons and munitions and vowed to protect themselves against British encroachments on their rights and institutions. Other colonies sent support, both political and material, to Massachusetts and instituted a boycott of British goods. All ranks of people—merchants, laborers, farmers, housewives—throughout the colonies joined the boycott.

**Explore**

See Document 5.5 for a British reaction to colonial women's efforts to boycott tea.

At the same time, a group of patriots meeting in Williamsburg, Virginia, in the spring of 1774 called for colonies to send representatives to a **Continental Congress** to meet in Philadelphia the following September to discuss relations between the North American colonies and Great Britain.

By passing the Coercive Acts, Parliament had hoped to dampen the long-smoldering conflict with the colonies. Instead, it flared even brighter, with radical leaders committing themselves to the use of violence, moderate merchants and shopkeepers making common cause with radicals, and ordinary women and men embracing a boycott of all British goods.

## The Continental Congress and Colonial Unity

When the Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia's Carpenter Hall in September 1774, fifty-six delegates represented every colony but Georgia. Many of these men—and they were all men—had met before. Some had worked together in the Stamp Act Congress in 1765; others had joined forces in the intervening years on committees of correspondence or in petitions to Parliament. Still, the representatives disagreed on many fronts. Some were radicals like Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry, and Christopher Gadsden. Others held moderate views, including George Washington of Virginia and John Dickinson of Pennsylvania. And a few, like John Jay of New York, voiced more conservative positions.

Despite their differences, all the delegates agreed that the colonies must resist further parliamentary encroachments on their liberties. They did not talk of independence, but rather of reestablishing the freedoms that colonists had enjoyed in an earlier period: freedom from British taxes and from the presence of British troops and the right to control local economic and political affairs. Washington voiced the sentiments of many. Although opposed to the idea of independence, he echoed John Locke by refusing to submit "to the loss of those valuable rights and privileges, which are essential to the happiness of every free State, and without which life, liberty, and property are rendered totally insecure."

**First Continental Congress**

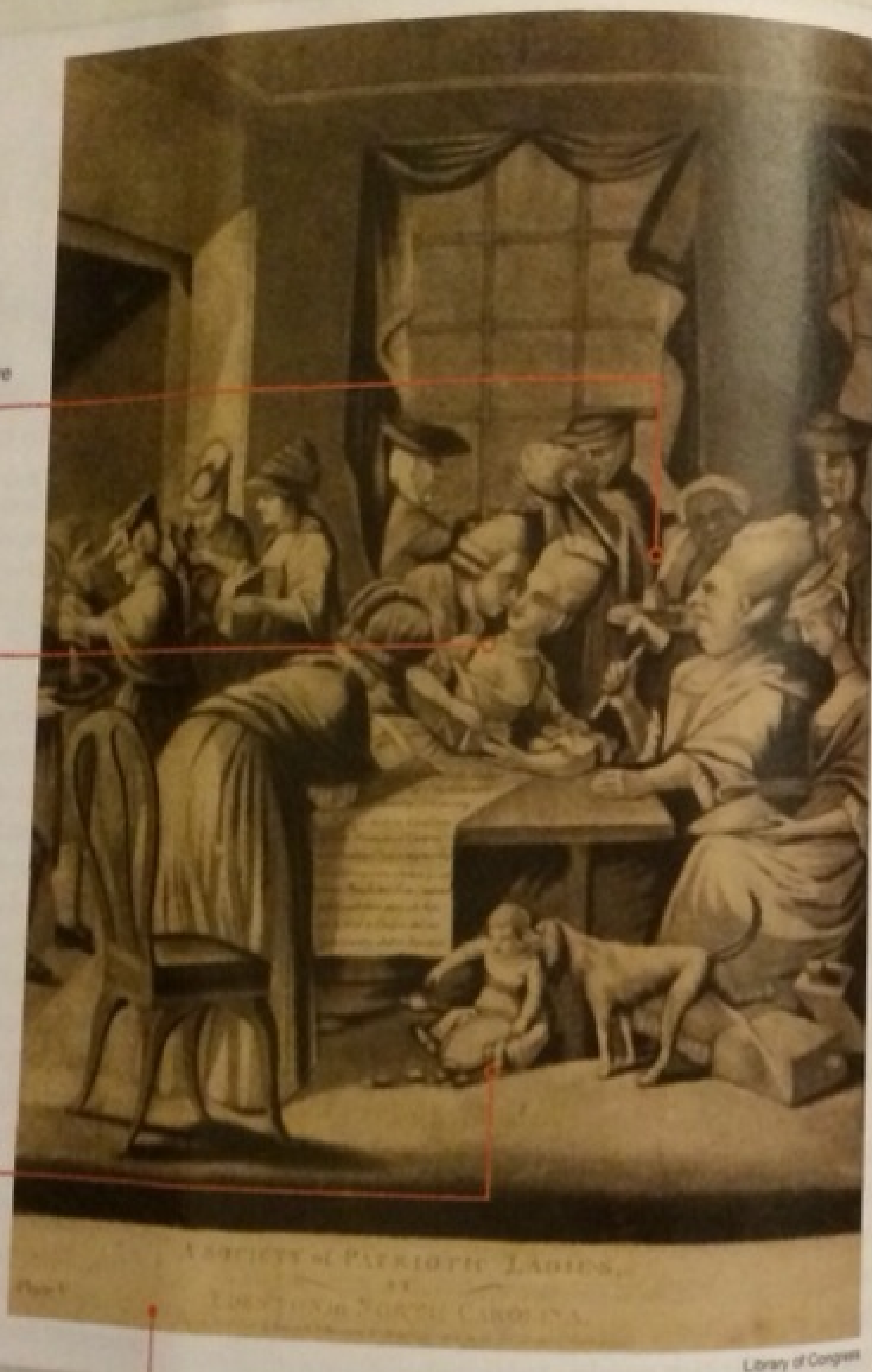
This 1783 French engraving depicts the meeting of the first Continental Congress, held in Philadelphia in September 1774. Fifty-six delegates attended from every colony but Georgia. After spending most of the first day debating whether to start the meeting off with a prayer, the congress got down to the business of petitioning King George III to remedy the colonists' grievances. The Granger Collection, New York

DOCUMENT 5.5

## The Edenton Proclamation, 1774

When colonial leaders called for a boycott of tea following the 1773 Tea Act, women throughout the colonies joined in the campaign. In Edenton, North Carolina, a group of women published a proclamation stating their allegiance to the cause of liberty by refusing to serve or drink British tea. Their public statement received much attention in both the American and the British press. The following political cartoon, which satirizes the Edenton women who signed the public declaration, appeared in several London newspapers.

Explore



What is the significance of the female slave holding the inkstand?

How are the women portrayed in this cartoon?

What is the presence of the infant and dog on the floor meant to suggest about the character of female petitioners?

Library of Congress

**Put It in Context**

How does the cartoon use contemporary understandings of women's role in society to undermine their actions?



To demonstrate their unified resistance to the Coercive Acts, delegates called on colonists to continue the boycott of British goods and to end all colonial exports to Great Britain. Committees were established in all of the colonies to coordinate and enforce these actions. Delegates also insisted that Americans were "entitled to a free and exclusive power of legislation in their several provincial legislatures." By 1774 a growing number of colonists supported these measures and the ideas on which they were based.

The delegates at the Continental Congress could not address all the colonists' grievances, and most had no interest in challenging race and class relations within the colonies themselves. Nonetheless, it was a significant event because the congress drew power away from individual colonies—most notably Massachusetts—and local organizations like the Sons of Liberty and placed the emphasis instead on colony-wide plans and actions. To some extent, the delegates shifted leadership of colonial protests away from more radical artisans, like Ebenezer Mackintosh, and put planning back in the hands of men of wealth and standing. Moreover, even as they denounced Parliament, many representatives felt a special loyalty to the king and sought his intervention to rectify relations between the mother country and the colonies.

### REVIEW & RELATE

- How and why did colonial resistance to British policies escalate in the decade following the conclusion of the French and Indian War?
- How did internal social and economic divisions shape the colonial response to British policies?

LEARNINGCurve bedfordstmartins.com/hewittlawson/LC

## Conclusion: Liberty within Empire

From the Sugar Act in 1764 to the Continental Congress in 1774, colonists reacted strongly to parliamentary efforts to impose greater control over the colonies. Their protests grew increasingly effective as colonists developed organizations, systems of communication, and arguments to buttress their position. Residents of seacoast cities like Boston and New York City developed especially visible and effective challenges, in large part because they generally had the most to lose if Britain implemented new economic, military, and legislative policies.

In frontier areas, such as the southern backcountry, the Hudson valley, and northern New England, complaints against British tyranny vied with those against colonial land speculators and officials throughout the 1760s and 1770s. Still, few of these agitators questioned the right of white colonists to claim Indian lands or enslave African labor. In this sense, at least, most frontier settlers made common cause with more elite colonists who challenged British authority, including the many planters and large landowners who attended the Continental Congress.

One other tie bound the colonists together in 1774. No matter how radical the rhetoric, the aim continued to be resistance to particular policies, not independence from the British empire. Colonists sought greater liberty within the empire, focusing on parliamentary policies concerning taxation, troops, and local political control. Only on rare occasions did a colonist question the fundamental framework of imperial governance, and even then, the questions did not lead to a radical reformulation of economic or political relations. And despite some colonists' opposition to certain parliamentary acts, many others supported British policies. While royal officials and many of their well-to-do neighbors were horrified by the new spirit of lawlessness that had erupted in the colonies, the majority of colonists did not participate in the Sons or Daughters of Liberty, the colonial congresses, or the petition campaigns. Small farmers and backcountry settlers were often far removed from centers of protest activity, while poor families in seaport cities who purchased few items to begin with had little interest in boycotts of British goods. Finally, some colonists still hesitated to consider open revolt against British rule for fear of a revolution from below. The activities of land rioters, Regulators, evangelical preachers, female petitioners, and African American converts to Christianity reminded more well-established settlers that the colonies harbored their own tensions and conflicts.

The fates of George Washington and Herman Husband suggest the uncertainties that still plagued the colonies and individual colonists in 1774. As Washington returned to his Virginia estate from the Continental Congress, he began to devote more time to military affairs. He took command of the volunteer militia companies in the colonies and chaired the committee on safety in his home county. Although still opposed to rebellion, he was nonetheless preparing for it. Herman Husband, on the other hand, had already watched his rebellion against oppressive government fail at the Battle of Alamance Creek. When the Continental Congress met in Philadelphia, he was living on the Pennsylvania frontier, trying to reestablish his farm and family there. Whether ruled by Great Britain or eastern colonial elites, he was most concerned with the rights of poor and working people. Yet he and Washington would have agreed with the great British parliamentarian Edmund Burke, who, on hearing of events in the American colonies in 1774, lamented, "Clouds, indeed, and darkness, rest upon the future."

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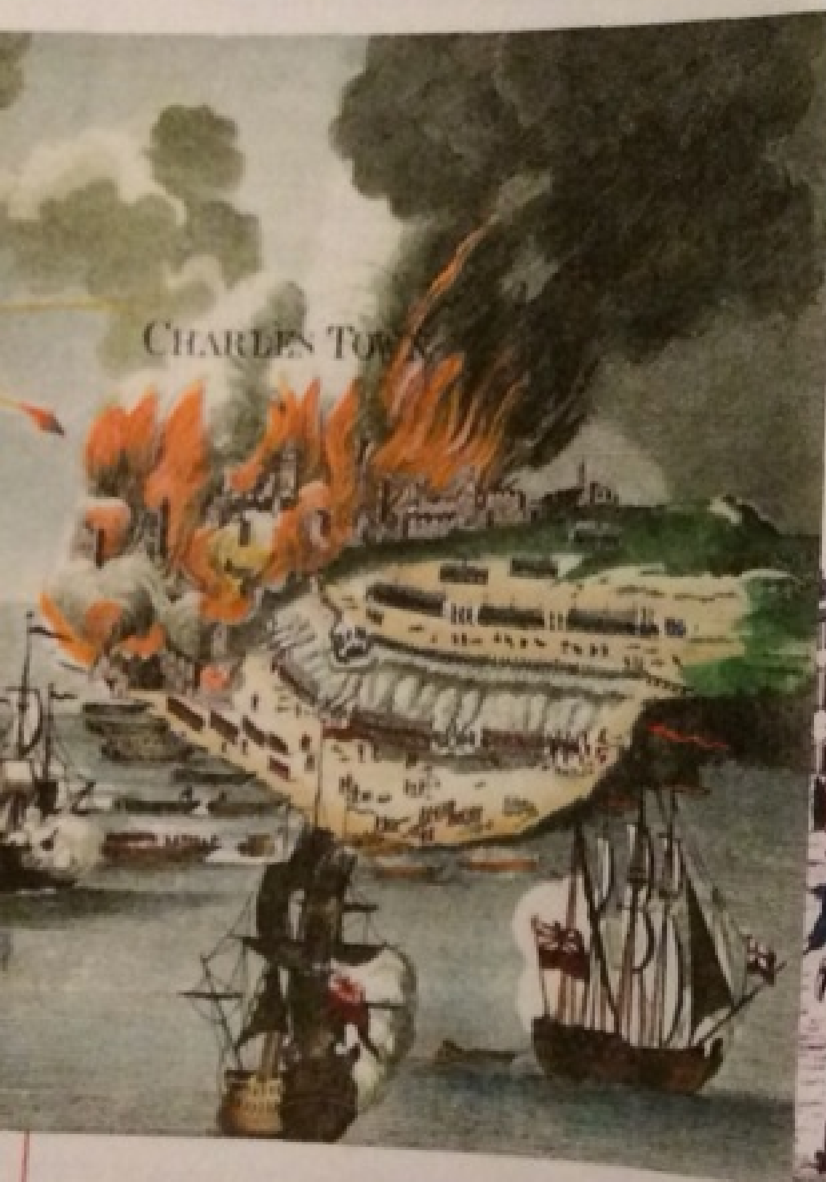
The Question of Independence 162
Choosing Sides 167
Fighting for Independence 170
Governing in Revolutionary Times 174
Winning the War and the Peace 179
Conclusion: Legacies of the Revolution 182
DOCUMENT PROJECT 6
Women in the Revolution 185

# 6 Revolutions

## 1775–1783

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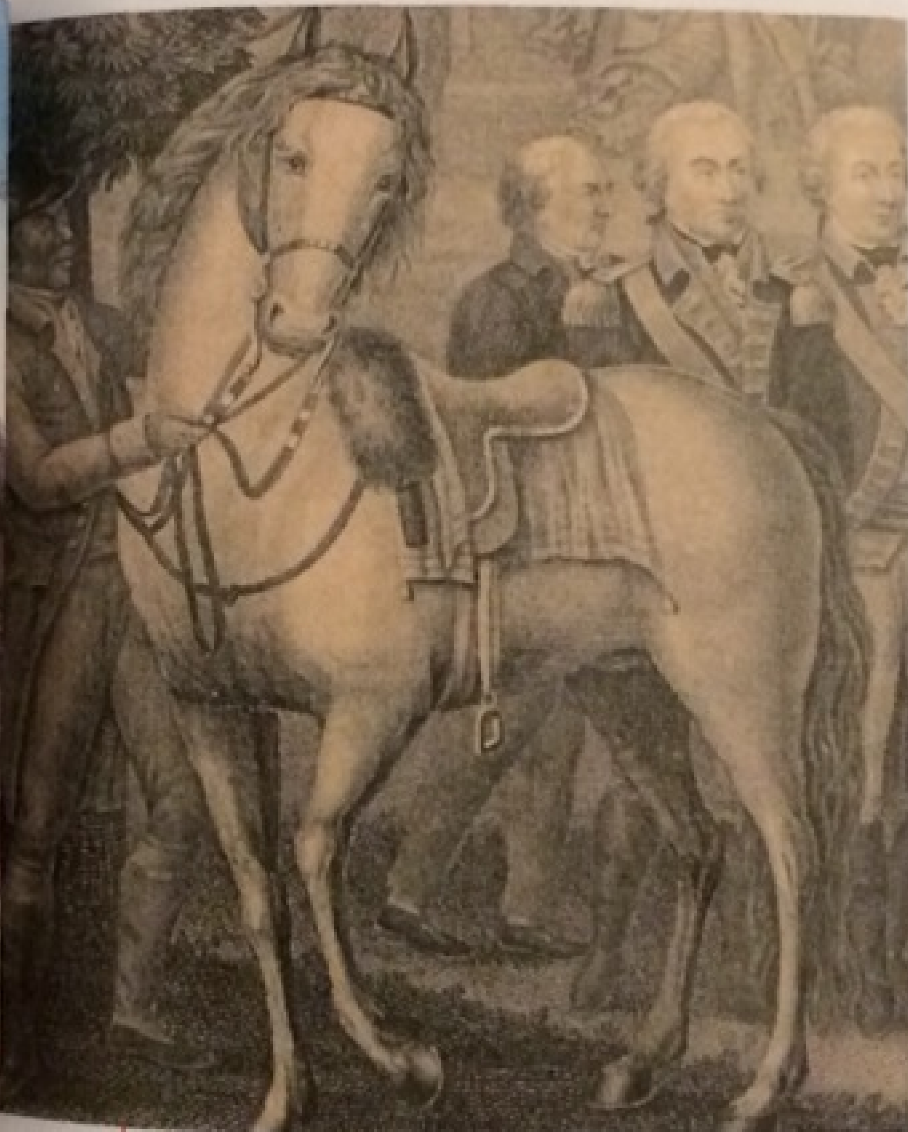
The Battle of Bunker Hill, June 17, 1775.

Library of Congress

Slaves destroy a statue of King George III in New York City on July 9, 1776.



Everett Collection

African American slave James Armistead worked as a spy for the Americans during the Revolutionary War.

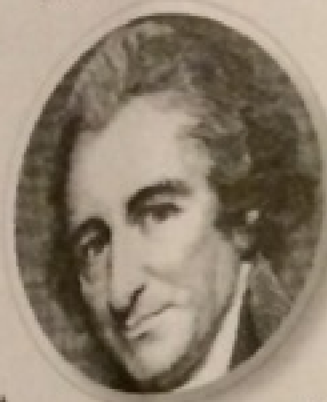
### AMERICAN HISTORIES

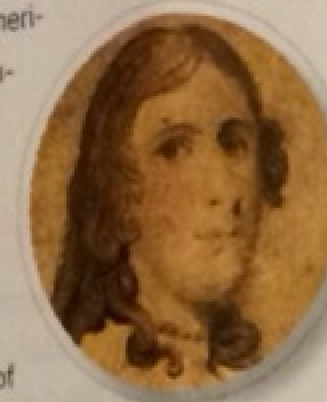
On November 30, 1774, Thomas Paine arrived in Philadelphia aboard a ship from London. At age thirty-seven, Paine had failed at several occupations and two marriages. But he was an impassioned writer. A pamphlet he wrote caught the eye of Benjamin Franklin, who helped him secure a job on *The Pennsylvania Magazine* just as tensions between the colonies and Great Britain neared open conflict.

Born in 1737, Paine was raised in an English market town by parents who owned a small grocery store and made whalebone corsets. The Paines managed to send him to school for a few years before his father introduced him to the trade of corset-making. Over the next dozen years, Paine also worked as a seaman, a preacher, a teacher, and an excise (or tax) collector. He drank heavily and beat both his wives. Yet despite his personal vices, Paine tried to improve himself and the lot of other British workers. He taught working-class children how to read and write and attended lectures on science and politics in London. As an excise collector in 1762, he wrote a pamphlet that argued for better pay and working conditions for tax collectors. He was fired from his job, but Franklin convinced Paine to try his luck in Philadelphia.

Paine quickly gained in-depth political knowledge of the conflicts between the colonies and Great Britain and gained patrons among Philadelphia's economic and political elite. When armed conflict with British troops erupted in April 1775, colonial debates over whether to declare independence intensified. Pamphlets were a popular means of influencing these debates, and Paine hoped to write one that would tip the balance in favor of independence.

Thomas Paine and Deborah Sampson





In January 1776, his pamphlet *Common Sense* did just that.

An instant success, *Common Sense* provided a rationale for independence and an emotional plea for creating a new democratic republic. Paine urged colonists not only to separate from England but also to establish a political structure that would ensure liberty and equality for all Americans: "A government of our own is our natural right," he concluded. "'Tis time to part."

When *Common Sense* was published in 1776, sixteen-year-old Deborah Sampson was working as a servant to Jeremiah and Susanna Thomas in Marlborough, Massachusetts. Indentured at the age of ten, she looked after the Thomases' five sons and worked hard in both the house and the fields. Jeremiah Thomas thought education was above the lot of servant girls, but Sampson insisted on reading whatever books she could find. However, her commitment to American independence likely developed less from reading and more from the fighting that raged in Massachusetts and drew male servants and the Thomas sons into the Continental Army in the 1770s.

When Deborah Sampson's term of service ended in 1778, she sought work as a weaver and then a teacher. In March 1782, she disguised herself as a man and enlisted in the Continental Army, which was then desperate for recruits. Her height and muscular frame allowed her to fool local recruiters, and she accepted the bounty paid to those who enlisted. But Deborah never reported for duty, and when her charade was discovered, she was forced to return the money.

In May 1782, Sampson enlisted a second time under the name Robert Shurtliff. To explain the absence of facial hair, she told the recruiter that she was only seventeen years old. For the next year, Sampson, disguised as Shurtliff, marched, fought, and lived with her Massachusetts regiment. Her ability to carry off the deception was helped by lax standards of hygiene: Soldiers rarely undressed fully to bathe, and most slept in their uniforms.

Even after the formal end of the war in March 1783, Sampson/Shurtliff continued to serve in the Continental Army. In the fall of 1783, she was sent to Philadelphia to help quash a mutiny by Continental soldiers angered over the army's failure to provide back pay. While there, Sampson/Shurtliff fell ill with a raging fever, and a doctor at a local army hospital discovered that "he" was a woman. He reported the news to General John Paterson, and Sampson was honorably discharged, having served the army faithfully for more than a year. •

photos: Library of Congress; Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society

As THE AMERICAN HISTORIES of Thomas Paine and Deborah Sampson demonstrate, the American Revolution transformed individual lives as well as the political life of the nation. Paine had failed financially and personally in England but gained fame in the colonies through his skills as a patriot pamphleteer. Sampson, who was forced into an early independence by her troubled family, excelled as a soldier. Still, while the American Revolution offered opportunities for some colonists, it promised hardship for others. Most Americans had to choose sides long before it was clear whether the colonists could defeat Great Britain, and the long years of conflict (1775–1783) took a toll on families and communities across the thirteen colonies. Over the course of a long and difficult war, could the patriots attract enough Tom Paines and Deborah Sampsons to secure independence and establish a new nation?

## The Question of Independence

The Continental Congress that met to protest the Coercive Acts (see chapter 5) adjourned in October 1774, but delegates reconvened in May 1775. During the intervening months, patriot leaders honed their arguments for resisting British tyranny, and committees of correspondence circulated the latest news and debates. While leading patriots began to advocate resistance in the strongest possible terms, the eruption of armed clashes between British soldiers and local farmers fueled the argument for independence. It also led the Continental Congress to establish a Continental Army in June 1775. A year later, in July 1776, as the fighting continued, the congress finally declared independence.

### Armed Conflict Erupts

As debates over independence intensified, the Sons of Liberty and other patriot groups not only spread propaganda against the British but also gathered and stored weapons and organized and trained local militia companies. Female patriots continued the boycott of British goods but began to manufacture bandages and bullets as well. Some northern colonists freed enslaved African Americans who agreed to enlist in the militia. Others kept close watch on the movements of British troops.

On April 18, 1775, Boston patriots observed British soldiers boarding boats in the harbor. The British were headed to Lexington, intending to confiscate guns and ammunition hidden there and in neighboring Concord and perhaps arrest patriot leaders. Hoping to warn his fellow patriots of the approaching soldiers, Paul Revere beat them to Lexington but was stopped on the road to Concord by the British. By that time, however, a network of riders was spreading the alarm. One of them alerted Concord residents of the impending danger.

Early in the morning of April 19, the first shots rang out on the village green of Lexington. After a brief exchange between British soldiers and local militiamen—known as minutemen for the speed with which they assembled—eight colonists lay dead. The British troops then moved on to Concord, where they uncovered and burned colonial

**The Battle of Lexington**

On April 19, 1775, British soldiers fought local militias, killing eight Lexington minutemen before marching off to Concord. Two visitors from Connecticut witnessed the battle on the village green in Lexington: Amos Doolittle, a silversmith, and Ralph Earl, a portraitist. From Earle's sketches, Doolittle engraved the militiamen scrambling for safety, while the main redcoat column advances from the north.

Superstock/Everett Collection

supplies. However, patriots in nearby towns had now been alerted. Borrowing guerrilla tactics from American Indians, the colonists hid behind trees, walls, and barns and battered the British soldiers as they marched back to Boston, killing 73 and wounding 200.

Word of the conflict traveled quickly. Outraged Bostonians attacked British troops and forced them to retreat to ships in the harbor. The victory was short-lived, however, and the British soon regained control of Boston. But colonial forces entrenched themselves on hills just north of the city. Then in May, Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain Boys from Vermont joined militias from Connecticut and Massachusetts to capture the British garrison at Fort Ticonderoga, New York. The battle for North America had begun.

When the **Second Continental Congress** convened in Philadelphia on May 10, 1775, the most critical question for delegates like Pennsylvania patriot John Dickinson was how to ensure time for discussion and negotiation. Armed conflict had erupted, but did that mean that independence should, or must, follow? Other delegates insisted that independence was the only appropriate response to armed attacks on colonial residents. Patrick Henry of Virginia declared, "Gentlemen may cry 'peace, peace' but there is no peace. The war is actually begun!"

Less than a month later, on June 16, British forces under General Sir William Howe attacked patriot fortifications on Breed's Hill and Bunker Hill, north of the city. The British won the day when patriots ran out of ammunition. But the redcoats—so called because of their bright red uniforms—suffered more than 1,000 casualties, while only half that number of patriots were killed or wounded. This costly victory allowed the British to maintain control of Boston for nine more months, but the heavy losses emboldened patriot militiamen.

## Building a Continental Army

The Battle of Bunker Hill convinced the congress to establish an army for the defense of the colonies and appoint forty-three-year-old Brigadier General George Washington as commander in chief. More comfortable leading troops than debating politics, Washington gave up his seat at the Continental Congress and on June 23 headed to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to take command of ten companies of frontier marksmen along with militia companies already engaged in battle.

Since the Continental Congress had not yet proclaimed itself a national government, Washington depended largely on the willingness of local militia companies to accept his command and of individual colonies to supply soldiers, arms, and ammunition. Throughout the summer of 1775, Washington wrote dozens of letters to patriot political leaders, including delegates at the Continental Congress, detailing the army's urgent need for men, supplies, and discipline. He sought to remove incompetent officers and improve order among the troops, who spent too much time drinking, gambling, visiting prostitutes, and fighting with militiamen from other locales.

As he sought to forge a disciplined army, Washington and his officers developed a twofold military strategy.

**Militiamen**

This 1784 German illustration shows a uniform worn by a sharpshooter (left) and a Pennsylvania regular infantryman (right). Patriot soldiers often dressed in the uniforms of their local militia, which gave the Continental Army a very diverse appearance. Many Germans (Hessians) who fought as mercenaries for the British would have seen these uniforms. Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library





Concerned about British forces and their Indian allies in Canada and New York, they sought to drive the British out of Boston and to secure the colonies from attack by enemy forces farther north. In November 1775, American troops under General Richard Montgomery captured Montreal. However, the difficult trek in cold weather decimated the patriot reinforcements led by General Benedict Arnold, and American troops failed to dislodge the British from Quebec. Smallpox ravaged many of the survivors.

Despite the disastrous outcome of the invasion of Canada, the Continental Army secured important victories in the winter of 1775–1776. To improve Washington's position in eastern Massachusetts, General Henry Knox retrieved weapons captured at Fort Ticonderoga. In March, Washington positioned the forty-three cannons on Dorchester Heights and surprised the British with a bombardment that drove them from Boston. General Howe was forced to retreat with his troops to Nova Scotia.

## Reasons for Caution and for Action

As the British retreated from Boston, the war had already spread into Virginia. In the spring of 1775, local militias had forced Lord Dunmore, Virginia's royal governor, to take refuge on British ships in Norfolk harbor. Dunmore encouraged white servants and black slaves to join him there, and thousands did so. When Dunmore led his army back into Virginia in November 1775, hundreds of black men fought with British troops at the Battle of Great Bridge. Once he reclaimed the governor's mansion in Williamsburg, Dunmore issued an official proclamation that declared "all indent[ur]ed Servants, Negroes or others (appertaining to Rebels)" to be free if they were "able and willing to bear Arms" for the British.

**Dunmore's Proclamation**, which offered freedom to slaves willing to fight for the crown, heightened concerns among patriot leaders about the consequences of declaring independence. Although they wanted liberty for themselves, most did not want to disrupt the plantation economy or the existing social hierarchy. Could the colonies throw off the shackles of British tyranny without loosening other bonds at the same time? Given these concerns, many delegates at the Continental Congress, which included large planters, successful merchants, and professional men, hesitated to act.

Moreover, some still hoped for a negotiated settlement. But the king and Parliament refused to compromise in any way with colonies that they considered to be in rebellion. Instead, in December 1775, the king prohibited any negotiation or trade with the colonies, adding further weight to the claims of radicals that independence was a necessity. The January 1776 publication of Tom Paine's ***Common Sense***, which sold more than 120,000 copies in three months, helped turn the tide toward independence as well.

Paine rooted his arguments both in biblical stories familiar to American readers and in newer scientific analogies, such as Isaac Newton's theory of gravity. It was Paine's ability to wield both religious and scientific ideas—appealing to the spirit and the intellect—that made *Common Sense* attractive to diverse groups of colonists. Within weeks of its publication, George Washington wrote to a friend that "the sound Doctrine and unanswerable reasoning containd [in] Common Sense" would convince colonists of the "Propriety of a Separation." Farmers and artisans also applauded *Common Sense*, debating its claims at taverns and coffeehouses, which had become increasingly popular venues for political discussion in the 1760s and 1770s.

**Explore**

Read Paine's words and a rebuttal in Documents 6.1 and 6.2.

By the spring of 1776, a growing number of patriots believed that independence was necessary. Colonies began to take control of their legislatures and instruct their delegates to the Continental Congress to support independence. The congress also sent an agent to France to request economic and military assistance for the patriot cause. And in May, the congress advised colonies that had not yet done so to establish independent governments.

## Declaring Independence

Taken together, the spread of armed conflict and the rationale offered in *Common Sense* convinced patriots that the time to declare independence was at hand. In early June 1776, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia introduced a motion to the Continental Congress, resolving that "these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, Free and Independent States." A heated debate followed in which Lee and John Adams argued passionately for independence. Eventually, even more cautious delegates, like Robert Livingston of New York, were convinced. Livingston concluded that "they should yield to the torrent if they hoped to direct it." He then joined Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and Roger Sherman on a committee to draft a formal statement justifying independence.

The thirty-three-year-old Jefferson took the lead in preparing the declaration. Building on ideas expressed by Paine, Adams, Lee, and George Mason, he drew on language used in the dozens of local "declarations" written earlier by town meetings, county officials, and colonial assemblies. The Virginia Declaration of Rights drafted by Mason in May 1776, for example, claimed that "all men are

**DOCUMENTS 6.1 AND 6.2**

## Debating Independence: Two Views

Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* was the most widely read pamphlet supporting American independence. Paine's plain style and use of biblical allusions appealed to ordinary people and ignited the Revolutionary movement. But not all colonists were convinced. Charles Inglis, rector of Trinity Church in New York City, published loyalist pamphlets, though often anonymously and from the safety of the British-occupied city. His 1776 pamphlet *The True Interest of America Impartially Stated* provided one of the most influential loyalist arguments.

**Explore**

### 6.1 Thomas Paine | *Common Sense*, January 1776

In England a King hath little more to do than to make war and give away places; which, in plain terms, is to impoverish the nation, and set it together by the ears. A pretty business, indeed, for a man to be allowed eight hundred thousand sterling a year for, and worshipped into the bargain! Of more worth is one honest man to society, and in the sight of God, than all the crowned ruffians that ever lived. . . .

But where, say some, is the King of America? I will tell you, friend, he reigns above, and does not make havock of mankind like the royal brute of Great Britain. Yet that we may not appear to be defective even in earthly honors, let a day be solemnly set apart for proclaiming the charter; let it be brought forth, placed on the divine law, the word of God; let a crown be placed thereon, by which the world may know that so far we approve of monarchy, that in America, THE LAW IS KING. For as in absolute governments the King is law, so in free countries the Law *ought* to be King; and there ought to be no other. But lest any ill use should afterwards arise, let the crown, at the conclusion of the ceremony, be demolished, and scattered among the people whose right it is.

A government of our own is our natural right; and when a man seriously reflects on the precariousness of his human affairs, he will become convinced, that it is infinitely wiser and safer, to form a constitution of our own in a cool deliberate manner, while we have it in our power, than to trust such an interesting event to time and chance.

Source: Thomas Paine, *Common Sense; Addressed to the Inhabitants of America* (London: H. D. Symonds, 1792), 11, 20.

**Explore**

### 6.2 Charles Inglis | *The True Interest of America Impartially Stated*, March 1776

Suppose we were to revolt from Great Britain, declare ourselves independent, and set up a republic of our own—what would be the consequence? I stand aghast at the prospect; my blood runs chill when I think of the calamities, the complicated evils that must ensue, and may be clearly foreseen—it is impossible for any man to foresee them all. . . .

The Americans are properly Britons. They have the same manners, habits, and ideas of Britons; and have been accustomed to a similar form of government. But Britons never could bear the extremes, either of monarchy or republicanism. Some of their kings have aimed at despotism, but always failed. Repeated efforts have been made toward democracy, and they equally failed. Once, indeed, republicanism triumphed over the constitution; the despotism of one person ensued; both were finally expelled. . . . Limited monarchy is the form of government which is most favorable to liberty, which is best adapted to the genius and temper of Britons; although here and there among us a crackbrained zealot for democracy or absolute monarchy may be sometimes found.

Source: The Reverend Charles Inglis, *The True Interest of America Impartially Stated* (Philadelphia, 1776).

**Interpret the Evidence**

- How do Paine and Inglis differ in what they consider the proper form of government for the Americas?
- Why might Inglis have chosen to attack Paine's argument in *Common Sense* so vehemently?

**Put It in Context**

Why did the pamphlet emerge as a popular form of political discourse during the Revolutionary era?

born equally free and independent, and have certain inherent natural Rights." Central to many of these documents was the contract theory of government proposed by the seventeenth-century British philosopher John Locke. He argued that sovereignty resided in the people, who submitted voluntarily to laws and authorities in exchange for protection of their life, liberty, and property. The people could therefore reconstitute or overthrow a government that abused its powers. Jefferson summarized this argument and then listed the abuses and crimes perpetrated by King George III against the colonies, which justified patriots' decision to break their contract with British authorities.

Once prepared, the **Declaration of Independence** was then debated and revised. In the final version, all references to slavery were removed. But delegates agreed to list among the abuses suffered by the colonies the fact that the king "excited domestic insurrections amongst us," referring to the threat posed by Dunmore to the institution of slavery. On July 2, 1776, delegates from twelve colonies approved the Declaration, with only New York abstaining. Independence was publicly proclaimed on July 4 when the Declaration was published as a broadside to be circulated throughout the colonies, although such an act was tantamount to treason.

**REVIEW & RELATE**

- What challenges did Washington face when he was given command of the Continental Army?
- How and why did proponents of independence prevail in the debates that preceded the publication of the Declaration of Independence?

## Choosing Sides

Probably no more than half of American colonists actively supported the patriots. Perhaps a fifth actively supported the British, including many merchants and most officials appointed by the king and Parliament. The rest tried to stay neutral or were largely indifferent unless the war came to their doorstep. Both patriots and loyalists included men and women from all classes and races and from both rural and urban areas.

### Recruiting Supporters

Men who took up arms against the British before independence was declared and the women who supported them clearly demonstrated their commitment to the patriot cause. In some colonies, patriots had organized local committees, courts, and assemblies to assume governance should British officials lose their authority. White servants and enslaved blacks in Virginia who fled to British ships or marched with Lord Dunmore made their loyalties known as well. Some Indians, too, declared their allegiance early in the conflict. In May 1775, Guy Johnson, the British superintendent for Indian affairs for the northern colonies, left Albany, New York, and sought refuge in Canada. He was accompanied by 120 British loyalists and 90 Mohawk warriors. The latter were led by the mission-educated chief of the Mohawks, Joseph Brant (Thayendanegea), who had translated the Anglican prayer book into Mohawk and

who had fought with the British in the French and Indian War.

The Continental Congress, like Johnson, recognized the importance of Indians to the outcome of any colonial war. It appointed commissioners from the "United Colonies" to meet with representatives of the six nations of the Iroquois Confederacy in August 1775. While Brant's group of Mohawk warriors had already committed to supporting the British, some Oneida Indians, influenced by missionary and patriot sympathizer Samuel Kirkland, wanted to support the colonies. Others, however, urged neutrality, at least for the moment.

**Explore**

See Document 6.3 for one Oneida leader's reasons for remaining neutral.

Once independence was declared, there was far more pressure on all groups to choose sides. The stance of political and military leaders and soldiers was clear. But to win against Great Britain required the support of a large portion of the civilian population as well. As battle lines shifted back and forth across New England, the Middle Atlantic region, and the South, many civilians caught up in the fighting were faced with difficult choices.

**DOCUMENT 6.3**

## Oneida Address to Connecticut Governor Jonathan Trumbull, June 1775

American Indians faced a potentially perilous choice once the Revolutionary War began. Like the undecided colonists, Indians had to determine whether to align with the patriots or with the loyalists. The members of the Oneida tribe in Connecticut sought a middle course, hoping to stake out neutral ground between the opposing sides. The following statement from the chief warriors of the Oneida to the governor of Connecticut outlines the tribe's reasoning. The Oneidas eventually did take a side; unlike most tribes, they fought alongside the colonists.

**Explore**

BROTHERS: We have heard of the unhappy differences and great contention between you and Old England. We wonder greatly, and are troubled in our minds.

BROTHERS: Possess your minds in peace respecting us Indians. We cannot intermeddle in this dispute between two brothers. The quarrel seems to be unnatural. You are *two brothers of one blood*. We are unwilling to join on either side in such a contest, for we bear an equal affection to both you Old and New England. Should the great king of England apply to us for aid, we shall deny him; if the Colonies apply, we shall refuse. The present situation of you two brothers is new and strange to us. We Indians cannot find, nor recollect in the traditions of our ancestors, the like case, or a similar instance.

BROTHERS: For these reasons possess your minds in peace, and take no umbrage that we Indians refuse joining in the contest. We are for peace.

BROTHERS: Was it an alien, a foreign nation, who had struck you, we should look into the matter. We hope, through the wise government and good pleasure of God, your distresses may soon be removed and the dark clouds be dispersed.

BROTHERS: As we have declared for peace, we desire you will not apply to our Indian brethren in New England for their assistance. Let us Indians be all of one mind, and live with one another; and you white people settle your own disputes between yourselves.

Source: William Leete Stone, *Life of Joseph Brant—Thayendanegea* (New York: Anderson V. Blake, 1838), 1:62–63.

**Interpret the Evidence**

- Why does the Oneida chief address his audience as "brothers"?
- How does the chief justify the Oneidas' neutral stance?

**Put It in Context**

Why was it difficult, if not impossible, for Indians and colonists to remain neutral once the fighting started?





Many colonists who remained loyal to the king found safe haven in cities like New York, Newport, and Charleston, which remained under British control throughout much of the war. **Loyalist** men were welcomed as reinforcements to the British army. Still, those who made their loyalist sympathies clear risked a good deal. When British troops were forced out of cities or towns they had temporarily occupied, many loyalists faced harsh reprisals. Patriots had no qualms about invading the homes of loyalists, punishing women and children, and destroying or confiscating property. Grace Galloway was denounced by former friends and evicted from her Philadelphia home after her loyalist husband, Joseph, fled to New York City in 1777.

Many loyalists were members of the economic and political elite, but others came from ordinary backgrounds. Tenants, small farmers, and slaves joined the loyalist cause in defiance of their landlords, their owners, and wealthy planters. The Hudson valley was home to many poorer loyalists, whose sympathy for the British was heightened by the patriot commitments of their wealthy landlords. When the fighting moved south, many former Regulators (see chapter 5) also supported the British as a result of their hostility to patriot leaders among North Carolina's eastern elite.

Perhaps most importantly, the majority of Indian nations ultimately sided with the British. The Mohawk, Seneca, and Cayuga nations in the North and the Cherokee and Creek nations in the South were among Great Britain's leading allies. Although British efforts to limit colonial migration, such as the Proclamation Line of 1763, had failed, most Indian nations still believed that a British victory offered the only hope of ending further encroachments on their territory.

### Choosing Neutrality

Early in the war, many Indian nations proclaimed their neutrality. The Delaware and Shawnee nations, caught between British and American forces in the Ohio River valley, were especially eager to stay out of the fighting. The Shawnee chief Cornstalk worked tirelessly to maintain his nation's neutrality, but American soldiers killed him under a flag of truce in 1777. Eventually the Shawnees, like the Delawares, chose to ally with the British side after patriot forces refused to accept their claims of neutrality.

Colonists who sought to remain neutral during the war also faced hostility and danger. Some 80,000 Quakers, Mennonites, Amish, Shakers, and Moravians considered war immoral and embraced neutrality. These men refused to bear arms, hire substitutes, or pay taxes to new state governments. The largest number of religious pacifists lived in Pennsylvania. Despite Quakerism's deep roots there, pacifists were treated as suspect by both patriots and loyalists.

In June 1778, Pennsylvania authorities jailed nine Mennonite farmers who refused to take an oath of allegiance to the revolutionary government. Their worldly goods were sold by the state, leaving their wives and children destitute. Quakers were routinely fined and imprisoned for refusing to support the patriot cause and harassed by British authorities in the areas they controlled. At the same time, Quaker meetings regularly disciplined members who offered aid to either side, disowning more than 1,700 members during the Revolution. Betsy Ross was among those disciplined when her husband joined the patriot forces and she sewed flags for the Continental Army.

### Committing to Independence

After July 4, 1776, the decision to support independence took on new meaning. If the United States failed to win the war, all those who actively supported the cause could be considered traitors. The families of Continental soldiers faced especially difficult decisions as the conflict spread across the colonies and soldiers moved farther and farther from home. Men too old or too young to fight proved their patriotism by gathering arms and ammunition and patrolling local communities.

Meanwhile some female patriots accompanied their husbands or fiancés as camp followers, providing food, laundry, sewing, and other material resources to needy soldiers. Most patriot women remained at home, however, and demonstrated their commitment to independence by raising funds, gathering information, and sending clothes, bedding, and other goods to soldiers at the front. The Continental Army was desperately short of supplies from the beginning of the war. Northern women were urged to increase cloth production, while farm women in the South were asked to plant crops to feed the soldiers. The response was overwhelming. Women in Hartford, Connecticut, produced 1,000 coats and vests and 1,600 shirts in 1776 alone. Mary Fraier of Chester County, Pennsylvania, was one of many women who collected clothing door-to-door and then washed and mended it before delivering it to troops stationed nearby. Other women opened their homes to soldiers wounded in battle or ill with fevers, dysentery, and other diseases.

Some African American women also became ardent patriots. Phillis Wheatley of Boston, whose owners taught her to read and write, published a collection of poems in

1776 and sent a copy to General Washington. She urged readers to recognize Africans as children of God:

> Remember Christians, Negroes, black as Cain,
> May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train

Rewarded with freedom by her master, Wheatley was among a small number of blacks who actively supported the patriot cause. Of course, the majority of black Americans labored as slaves in the South. While some joined the British in hopes of gaining their freedom, most were not free to choose sides.

**REVIEW & RELATE**

- How did colonists choose sides during the Revolutionary War? What factors influenced their decisions?
- Why did so many Indian tribes try to stay neutral during the conflict? Why was it so difficult for Indians to remain neutral?

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## Fighting for Independence

After July 4, 1776, battles between British and colonial troops intensified, and the patriots suffered a series of military defeats that must have made some wonder about the wisdom of undertaking a revolution. It was more than five months after independence was declared before patriots celebrated a military victory against the British. In 1777, however, the tide turned for the Continental Army, although British forces remained formidable. A year later, it was clear that victory would not be easily won and that each side needed support from women on the home front as well as men on the battlefront.

### British Troops Gain Early Victories

In the summer of 1776, when General Washington tried to lead his army out of Boston to confront British troops en route to New York City, many soldiers deserted and returned home. They believed that New York men should defend New York. Among the soldiers who remained with Washington, many were landless laborers whose wives and sisters followed the troops as their only means of support. Although Washington deemed these "camp followers" undesirable, the few hundred women provided critical services to ordinary soldiers. Ultimately, Washington arrived in New York with 19,000 men, many of whom were poorly armed and poorly trained and some of whom were coerced into service by local committees of safety.

The ragtag Continental force faced a formidable foe with a powerful navy and a far larger and better-trained army. Throughout the summer, British ships sailed into New York harbor or anchored off the coast of Long Island. General Howe, hoping to overwhelm the colonists, ordered 10,000 troops to march into the city in the weeks immediately after the Declaration of Independence was signed. But the Continental Congress rejected Howe's offer of peace and a royal pardon.

So Howe prepared to take control of New York City by force and then march up the Hudson valley, isolating New York and New England from the rest of the rebellious colonies. He was aided by some 8,000 Hessian mercenaries (German soldiers being paid to fight for the British) and naval reinforcements under the command of Admiral Richard Howe. On August 27, 1776, British forces clashed with a far smaller contingent of Continentals on Long Island. More than 1,500 patriots were killed or wounded in the fierce fighting, diminishing the army's strength even further.

By November, the British had captured Fort Lee in New Jersey and attacked the Continental Army at Fort Washington, north of New York City. The large community of loyalists in the New York/New Jersey region served as ready hosts for General Howe and his officers, and ordinary redcoats survived by looting the stores, farms, and homes of patriots. Meanwhile Washington led his weary troops and camp followers into Pennsylvania, while the Continental Congress, fearing a British attack on Philadelphia, fled to Baltimore.

Although General Howe might have ended the patriot threat right then by a more aggressive campaign, he was interested primarily in wearing down the Continental Army so that the colonies would plead for peace. Neither he nor Washington engaged in full-scale frontal assaults. Washington did not have the troops or arms to do so, but he also hoped that the British would accept American independence once they saw the enormous effort it would take to defeat the colonies.

### Patriots Prevail in New Jersey

The Continental Army had not gained a single military victory between July 1776, when the colonies declared independence, and December. Fortunately for Washington, Howe followed the European tradition of waiting out the winter months and returning to combat after the spring thaw. This tactic gave the patriots the opportunity to regroup, repair weapons and wagons, and recruit soldiers. Yet Washington was not eager to face the cold and discomfort of the winter with troops discouraged by repeated defeats and retreats.

Camped in eastern Pennsylvania, Washington discovered that General Howe had sent Hessian troops to occupy



**The British Burn New York City, 1776**

This print by François Xavier Haberman shows several buildings along a New York City street set ablaze by the British troops of General William Howe on September 19, 1776. It also depicts citizens being beaten by redcoats while African slaves engage in looting. The British promised slaves their freedom if they opposed the patriots. Library of Congress

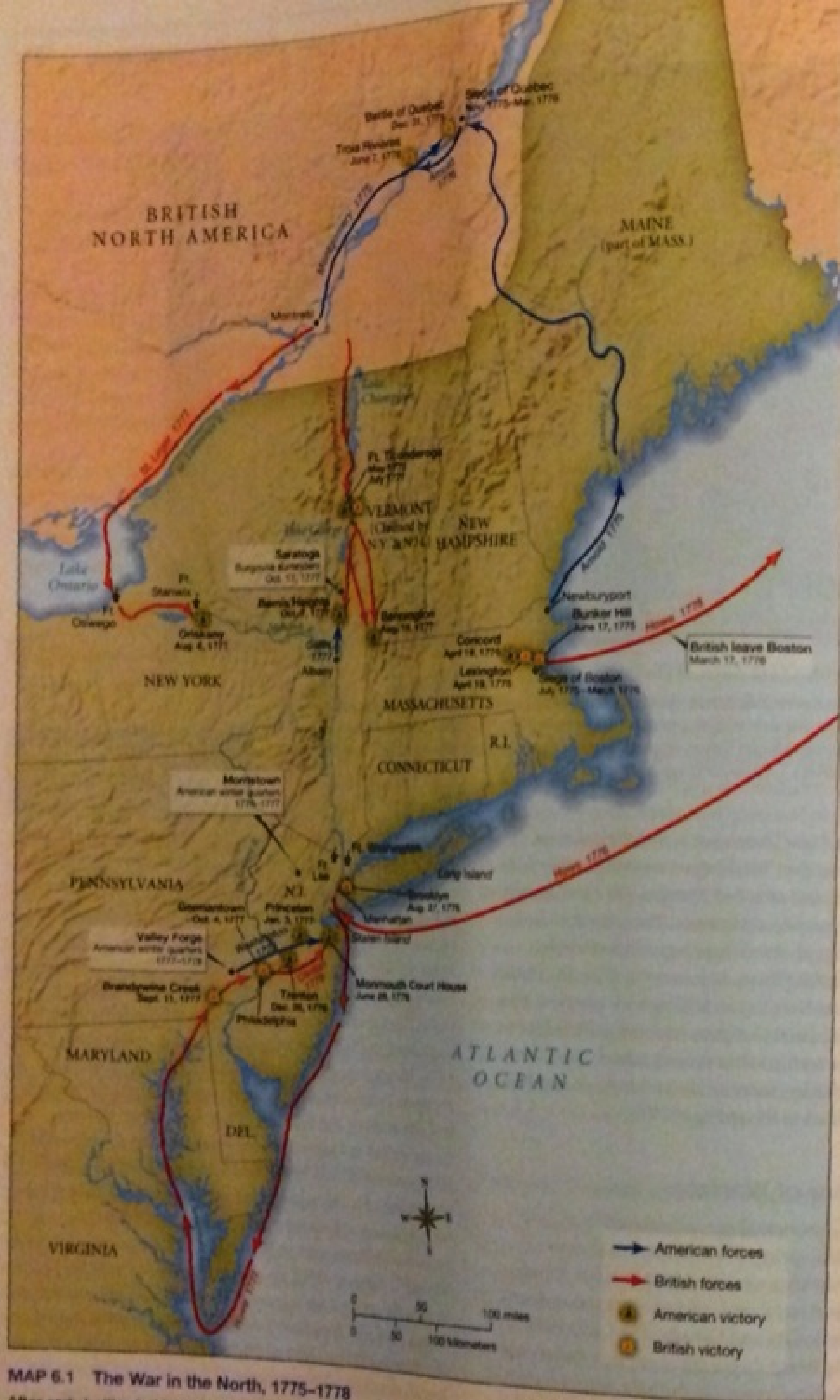
the city of Trenton, New Jersey, just across the Delaware River. On Christmas Eve, Washington crossed the river with some 2,500 soldiers and attacked Trenton. The Continentals quickly routed the surprised Hessians. Then they marched on Princeton, where they battled three regiments of regular British troops, defeating them on January 3, 1777. The British army retreated from New Jersey, settling back into New York City, and the Continental Congress returned to Philadelphia. By January 1777, it seemed clear to both sides that the conflict would indeed be harder, more costly, and more deadly than anyone had imagined in the spring of 1775.

### A Critical Year of Warfare

The British and Continental armies emerged from their winter camps in the spring of 1777. The British forces, including regular army units, American loyalists, Indian allies, Hessians, and naval men-of-war, were concentrated largely in New York City and Canada. The Continental forces, numbering fewer than 5,000 men, were entrenched near Morristown, New Jersey, far from the patriot centers of New England and from the coastal areas controlled by the British army and navy. Although the Continental Congress had returned to Philadelphia, it feared that the British would seek to capture the city and split the United States in two.

General Howe also believed that the key to victory was capturing Philadelphia, and he hoped that success there might lead the patriots to surrender. Washington's force was too small to defeat Howe's army, but it delayed his advance on the capital city by attacks along the way. En route, Howe learned that he was still expected to reinforce General John Burgoyne's soldiers, who were advancing south from Canada. Too late to redirect his efforts, Howe continued to Philadelphia and captured it in September 1777. Meanwhile Burgoyne and his 7,200 troops had regained control of Fort Ticonderoga on July 7. He continued south along the Hudson valley, but by late July his forces stalled as they waited for supplies from Canada and reinforcements from Howe and General Barry St. Leger.

In July, St. Leger had marched east through New York State while Joseph Brant and his sister Molly Brant, a powerful Indian leader in her own right, gathered a force of Mohawk, Seneca, and Cayuga warriors to support the British forces. But on August 6, they suffered a stunning defeat. At Oriskany, New York, a band of German American farmers led by General Nicholas Herkimer held off the British advance, allowing General Arnold to reach nearby Fort Stanwix with reinforcements. On August 23, the British and Indian troops were forced to retreat to Canada (Map 6.1).




**MAP 6.1 The War in the North, 1775–1778**
After early battles in Massachusetts, patriots invaded Canada but failed to capture Quebec. The British army captured New York City in 1776 and Philadelphia in 1777, but New Jersey remained a battle zone through 1778. Meanwhile General Burgoyne secured Canada for Britain and then headed south, but his forces were defeated by patriots at the crucial Battle of Saratoga.





General Howe's reinforcements never materialized, and Burgoyne now faced a brutal onslaught from patriot militiamen. Vermont's Green Mountain Boys, Continental soldiers under the command of Generals Horatio Gates and Benedict Arnold, and their Oneida allies also poured into the region. In September, patriots defeated the British at Freeman's Farm, with the British suffering twice the casualties of the Continentals. Fighting intensified in early October, when Burgoyne lost a second battle at Freeman's Farm. Ten days later, he surrendered his remaining army of 5,800 men to General Gates at nearby Saratoga, New York.

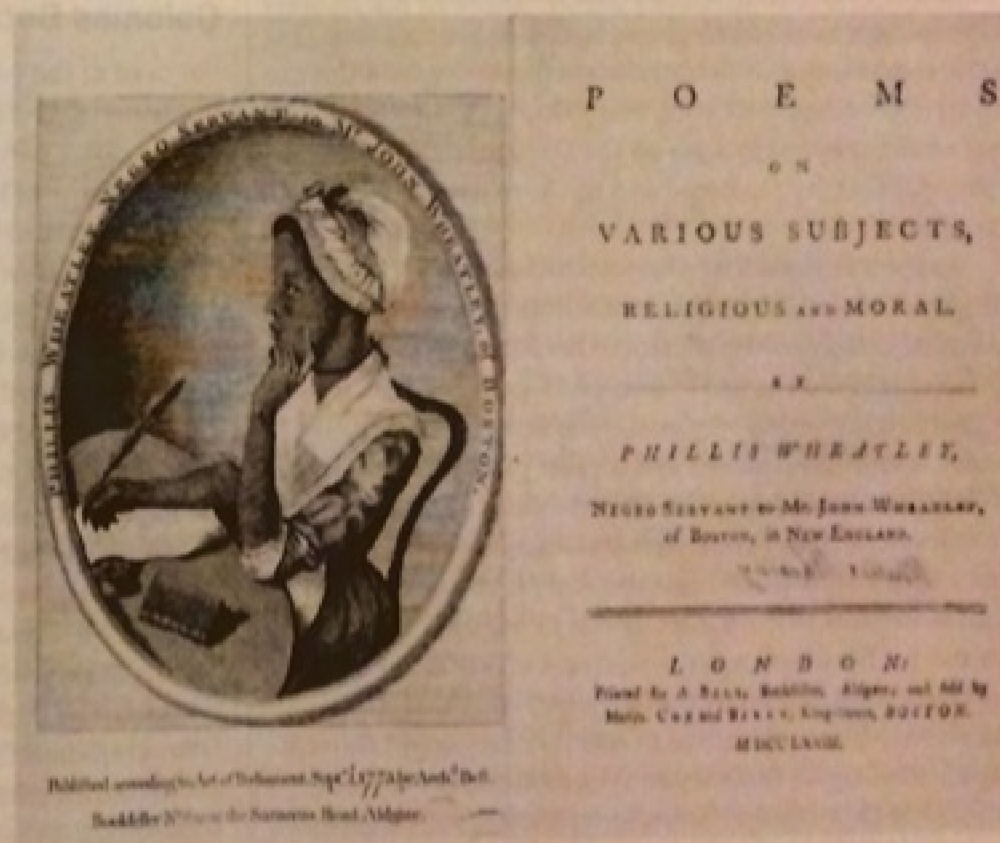
The Continental Army's victory in the **Battle of Saratoga** stunned the British and strengthened the patriots. It undercut the significance of Howe's victory at Philadelphia and indicated the general's misunderstanding of the character of the patriot cause and the nature of the war he was fighting. The patriot victory gave hope to General Washington as his troops dug in at Valley Forge for another long winter and to members of the Continental Congress who had temporarily retreated to York, Pennsylvania. It also gave Benjamin Franklin greater leverage to convince French officials to support the American cause.

Patriots on the home front were also plagued by problems in 1777–1778. Families living in battlefield areas were especially vulnerable to the shifting fortunes of war. When British troops captured Philadelphia in the fall of 1777, a British officer commandeered the house of Elizabeth Drinker, a well-to-do Quaker matron. An angry Drinker reported that the officer moved in with "3 Horses 2 Cows 2 Sheep and 3 Turkeys" along with "3 Servants 2 White Men and one Negro Boy." Meanwhile women who lived far from the conflict were forced to fend for themselves as soldiers moved wherever the Continental Army took them. The wives of political leaders also faced long years alone while their husbands remained at their posts. To hasten the end, many women formed voluntary associations, like the Ladies Association of Philadelphia, to provide critical resources for the army and thus aid the patriot cause. **See Document Project 6: Women in the Revolution, page 195.**

While most women worked tirelessly on the home front, some cast their fate with the army. Camp followers continued to provide critical services to the military, including cooking, washing, sewing, and nursing. They suffered along with the troops in the face of scarce supplies and harsh weather and depended like the soldiers on food, clothing, and bedding supplied by female volunteers in Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, and other cities.

## Patriots Gain Critical Assistance

Despite significant victories in the fall of 1777, the following winter proved especially difficult for Continental forces. The quarters at **Valley Forge** were again marked by bitter cold, poor food, inadequate clothing, and scarce supplies. Discipline deteriorated, and many recent recruits were poorly trained. Critical assistance arrived through the voluntary efforts of Baron Friedrich von Steuben, a Prussian officer recruited by Benjamin Franklin, who took charge of drilling soldiers. Other officers experienced in European warfare also joined the patriot cause during the winter of 1777–1778: the Marquis de Lafayette of France, Johann Baron de Kalb of Bavaria, and Thaddeus Kosciusko and Casimir Count Pulaski, both of Poland. The Continental Army continued to be plagued by problems of recruitment, discipline, wages, and supplies. But the contributions of Steuben, Lafayette, and other foreign volunteers, along with the leadership of Washington and his officers, sustained the military effort.




**Phillis Wheatley**
This portrait of Phillis Wheatley appears on the title page of her book of poems, printed in London in 1773. Like Deborah Sampson, Phillis Wheatley sided with the patriots, but as a writer, not a soldier. She won her personal freedom as a result of her efforts. The Pierpont Morgan Library/Art Resource, NY

Women with sufficient courage and resources served as spies and couriers for British and Continental forces. Lydia Darragh, a wealthy Philadelphian, eavesdropped on conversations among the British officers who occupied her house and then carried detailed notes to Washington hidden in the folds of her dress. Some women, like Nancy Hart Morgan of Georgia, took more direct action. Morgan protected her backcountry home from half a dozen British soldiers by lulling them into a sense of security at dinner, hiding their guns, and shooting two before neighbors came to hang the rest.

Some patriot women took up arms on the battlefield. A few, such as Margaret Corbin, accompanied their husbands to the front lines and were thrust into battle. When her husband was killed in battle at Fort Washington in November 1776, Corbin took his place loading and firing cannons until the fort fell to the British. In addition, a small number of women, like Deborah Sampson, disguised themselves as men and enlisted as soldiers.

### Surviving on the Home Front

Whether black or white, enslaved or free, women and children faced hardship, uncertainty, loneliness, and fear as a result of the war. Even those who did not directly engage enemy troops took on enormous burdens during the conflict. Farm wives had to take on the tasks of plowing or planting in addition to their normal domestic duties. In cities, women worked ceaselessly to find sufficient food, wood, candles, and cloth to maintain themselves and their children. One desperate wife, Mary Donnelly, wrote, "[I was] afraid to open my Eyes on the Daylight [lest] I should hear my infant cry for Bread and not have it in my power to relieve him."

As the war spread, women watched as Continental and British forces slaughtered cattle and hogs for food, stole corn and other crops or burned them to keep the enemy from obtaining supplies, looted houses and shops, and kidnapped or liberated slaves and servants. Some home invasions turned savage. Both patriot and loyalist papers in New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston reported cases of rape.

Despite the desperate circumstances, most women knew they had to act on their own behalf to survive. Faced with merchants who hoarded goods in hopes of making greater profits when prices rose, housewives raided stores and warehouses and took coffee, sugar, and other items they needed. Others learned as much as they could about family finances so that they could submit reports to local officials if their houses, farms, or businesses were damaged or looted. Growing numbers of women banded together to assist one another, to help more impoverished families, and to supply troops badly in need of clothes, food, bandages, and bullets.

**REVIEW & RELATE**

- How did the patriot forces fare in 1776? How and why did the tide of war turn in 1777?
- What role did colonial women and foreign men play in the conflict in the early years of the war?

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## Governing in Revolutionary Times

Amid the constant upheavals of war, patriot leaders established governments to replace those abolished by declaring independence. At the national level, responsibilities ranged from coordinating and funding military operations to developing diplomatic relations with foreign countries and Indian nations. At the state level, constitutions had to be drafted and approved, laws enforced, and military needs assessed and met. Whether state or national, new governments had to assure their followers that they were not simply replacing old forms of oppression with new ones. Yet few states moved to eliminate the most oppressive institution in the nation, slavery.

### Colonies Become States

For most of the war, the Continental Congress acted in lieu of a national government while the delegates worked to devise a more permanent structure. But the congress had little authority of its own and depended mainly on states for funds and manpower. Delegates did draft the **Articles of Confederation** in 1777 and submitted them to the states for approval. Eight of the thirteen states ratified the plan for a national government by mid-1778. But nearly three more years passed before the last state, Maryland, approved the Articles. The lack of a central government meant that state governments played a critical role throughout the war.

Even before the Continental Congress declared American independence, some colonies had forced royal officials to flee and established new state governments. Some states abided by the regulations in their colonial charters or by English common law. Others, including Delaware, South Carolina, Virginia, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, created new governments based on a written constitution. Because the earliest constitutions were written in the midst of war, they were often completed in haste, sometimes by legislative bodies without any specific authorization and without popular approval of the final document.



These constitutions reflected the fear of centralized power that emerged from the struggle against British tyranny. In Pennsylvania, radical patriots influenced by Tom Paine developed one of the most democratic constitutions, enhancing the power of voters and legislators and limiting the power of the executive branch. The constitution established only one legislative house, elected by popular vote, and the governor was replaced by an executive council. Those elected to the legislature could not serve for more than four in any seven years to discourage the formation of a political aristocracy in the state. Although Pennsylvania's constitution was among the most radical, all states limited centralized power in some way.

Finally, most states, building on the model offered by Virginia, included in their constitutions a bill of rights that ensured citizens freedom of the press, freedom of elections, speedy trials by one's peers, humane punishments, and the right to form militias. Some state constitutions expanded these rights to include freedom of speech and assembly, the right to petition and to bear arms, and equal protection of the laws. The New Jersey constitution, written in 1776, enfranchised all free inhabitants who met the property qualifications, thereby allowing some single or widowed women and free blacks to vote in local and state elections. This surprising decision was apparently made with little debate or dissent.

**Elizabeth "Mumbet" Freeman**

This watercolor portrait of Elizabeth "Mumbet" Freeman was painted on ivory by Susan Anne Ridley Sedgwick in 1811 when Freeman was sixty-nine. The first slave to be freed in Massachusetts as a result of a court case, she later worked as a domestic servant for her attorney, Theodore Sedgwick, Susan Ridley Sedgwick's father-in-law. © Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston/The Bridgeman Art Library

### Patriots Divide over Slavery

Although state constitutions were revolutionary in many respects, few of them addressed the issue of slavery. Only Vermont abolished slavery in its 1777 constitution. Legislators in Pennsylvania approved a gradual abolition law by which slaves born after 1780 could claim their freedom at age twenty-eight. In Massachusetts, two slaves sued for their freedom in county courts in 1780–1781. Quock Walker, who had been promised his freedom by a former master, sued his current master to gain manumission (release from slavery). About the same time, an enslaved woman, Mumbet, who was the widow of a Revolutionary soldier, initiated a similar case. Mumbet won her case and changed her name to Elizabeth Freeman. When Walker's owner appealed the local court's decision to free his slave, the Massachusetts Supreme Court cited the Mumbet case and ruled that slavery conflicted with the state constitution, which declared "all men . . . free and equal." Walker, too, was freed.

In southern states, however, slaves had little recourse to the law. No state south of Pennsylvania abolished the institution of slavery. And southerners held about 400,000 of the nation's 450,000 slaves. In states such as Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, life for enslaved women and men grew increasingly harsh during the war. Because British forces promised freedom to blacks who fought with them, slave owners and patriot armies in the South did everything possible to ensure that African Americans did not make it behind British lines. The thousands who did manage to flee to British-controlled areas were often left to defend themselves when the redcoats retreated. There were exceptions. Lord Dunmore took a few thousand blacks with him when he fled Virginia in 1776, and British forces under General Sir Henry Clinton carried some 20,000 African Americans aboard ships retreating from Charleston and Savannah in 1781.

Despite the uncertain prospects for African Americans, the American Revolution dealt a blow to the institution of slavery. For many blacks, Revolutionary ideals required the end of slavery. Northern free black communities grew rapidly during and after the war, especially in seaport cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Boston where labor was in high demand. In the South, too, thousands of slaves gained freedom during the war, either by joining the British or by

fleeing in the midst of battlefield chaos. As many as one-quarter of South Carolina's slaves had emancipated themselves by the end of the Revolution. Yet as the Continental Congress worked toward developing a framework for a national government, few delegates considered slavery or its abolition a significant issue.

## France Allies with the Patriots

The Continental Congress considered an alliance with France far more critical to patriot success than the issue of slavery. French financial and military support could aid the patriots immensely, and France's traditional rivalry with Great Britain made an alliance plausible.

For France, defeat of the British would mean increased trade with North America and redressing the balance of power in Europe, where Great Britain had gained the upper hand since France's defeat in the French and Indian War. Indeed, in 1775 the French government had secretly provided funds to smuggle military supplies to the colonies. In December 1776, the Continental Congress sent Benjamin Franklin to Paris to serve as an unofficial liaison for the newly independent United States. Franklin was enormously successful, securing supplies and becoming a favorite among the French aristocracy and ordinary citizens alike.

But the French were initially unwilling to forge a formal compact with the upstart patriots. Only when the Continental Army defeated General Burgoyne at Saratoga in October 1777 did King Louis XVI agree to an official alliance. By February 1778, Franklin had secured an agreement that approved trading rights between the United States and all French possessions. France then recognized the United States as an independent nation, relinquished French territorial claims on mainland North America, and sent troops to reinforce the Continental Army. In return, the United States promised to defend French holdings in the Caribbean. A year later, Spain allied itself with France to protect its own North American holdings.

British leaders, infuriated by the alliance, declared war on France. Yet doing so ensured that military conflicts would spread well beyond North America as French forces attacked British outposts in Gibraltar, the Bay of Bengal, Senegal in West Africa, and Grenada in the West Indies. British military expenditures skyrocketed from £4 million in 1775 to £20 million in 1782. Meanwhile, in addition to their attacks on British outposts, the French supplied the United States with military officers, weapons, funds, and critical naval resources. Spain contributed by capturing British forts in West Florida and using New Orleans as a base for privateering expeditions against British ships.

**Explore**

To read one French volunteer soldier's experience, see Document 6.4.

**Washington's French Allies**

This late-eighteenth-century painting by James Peale the Elder shows Washington and his generals at Yorktown, site of the final major battle of the Revolutionary War. Among Washington's generals were the Frenchmen the Marquis de Lafayette and the Comte de Rochambeau. Peale was not at Yorktown, but he fought in the Continental Army for three years. Peale Collection/Photo © Christie's Images/The Bridgeman Art Library



Faced with this new alliance, Britain's prime minister, Lord North (1771–1782), decided to concentrate British forces in New York City. This tactic forced the British army to abandon Philadelphia and return the city to patriot control in the summer of 1778. For the remainder of the war, New York City provided the sole British stronghold in the North, serving as a supply center and prisoner-of-war camp. At the same time, the American cause gained the support of the French navy, a critical addition given the limited state of American naval forces.

**DOCUMENT 6.4**

### Chevalier de Pontgibaud | A French Volunteer at Valley Forge, 1828

After a string of defeats in the fall of 1777, the Continental Army needed an encampment to wait out the winter and prepare for the fighting to resume in the spring. General George Washington chose to station his men in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. The conditions proved formidable; more than 2,000 men died from disease, exacerbated by poor housing and scant supplies. In the following selection, from a memoir written in 1828, Chevalier de Pontgibaud, a French volunteer in the Continental Army, describes his arrival at Valley Forge in December 1777.

**Explore**

*What problems seem particularly troublesome to Pontgibaud?*

*What is the significance of the woolen coats worn by Continental officers?*

*Why does Pontgibaud believe the colonial cause was eventually successful?*

Soon I came in sight of the camp. My imagination had pictured an army with uniforms, the glitter of arms, standards, etc., in short, military pomp of all sorts. Instead of the imposing spectacle I expected, I saw, grouped together or standing alone, a few militia men, poorly clad, and for the most part without shoes; many of them badly armed, but all well supplied with provisions, and I noticed that tea and sugar formed part of their rations. I did not then know that this was not unusual, and I laughed, for it made me think of the recruiting sergeants on the Quai de la Ferraille at Paris, who say to the yokels, "You will want for nothing when you are in the regiment, but if bread should run short you must not mind eating cakes." Here the soldiers had tea and sugar. In passing through the camp I also noticed soldiers wearing cotton night-caps under their hats, and some having for cloaks or great-coats, coarse woollen blankets, exactly like those provided for the patients in our French hospitals. I learned afterwards that these were the officers and generals.

Such, in strict truth, was—at the time I came amongst them—the appearance of this armed mob, the leader of whom was the man who has rendered the name of Washington famous; such were the colonists—unskilled warriors who learned in a few years how to conquer the finest troops that England could send against them. Such also—at the beginning of the War of Independence—was the state of want in the insurgent army, and such was the scarcity of money, and the poverty of that government, now so rich, powerful, and prosperous, that its notes, called Continental Paper Money, were nearly valueless.

Source: Chevalier de Pontgibaud, *A French Volunteer of the War for Independence*, ed. and trans. Robert Douglas (New York: J. W. Bouton, 1897), 40–41.

**Put It in Context**

How did the Continental Army differ from the military forces of European nations?

## Raising Armies and Funds

The French alliance did create one unintended problem for the Continental Army. When Americans heard that France was sending troops, fewer men volunteered for military service, even when bounties were offered. Others took the bounty and then failed to report for duty. Local officials had the authority to draft men into the army or to accept substitutes for draftees. By the late 1770s, some draftees forced enslaved men to take their place; others hired landless laborers, the handicapped, or the mentally unfit as substitutes.

As the war spread south and west in 1778–1779, Continental forces were stretched thin, and enlistments faltered further. Soldiers faced injuries, disease, and shortages of food and ammunition. Soldiers also risked capture by the British, one of the worst fates to befall a Continental. Most patriot prisoners were held in jails in New York City or on ships in the harbor under abusive, unsanitary conditions. Colonel Ethan Allen, a captive for two and a half years, described the filthy accommodations, inadequate water, and horrid stench of the British prisons and noted the "hellish delight and triumph of the tories . . . exulting over the dead bodies of their murdered countrymen." A few brave women like Elizabeth Burgin carried food and other supplies to patriot prisoners of war. Altogether, between 8,000 and 11,500 patriots died in British prisons in New York—more than died in battle.

The Continental Congress could do little to aid prisoners or their families, given the financial problems it faced. With no authority to impose taxes on American citizens, the congress had to find other ways to meet its financial responsibilities. It borrowed money from wealthy patriots, accepted loans from France and the Netherlands, and printed money of its own—some $200 million by 1780. However, money printed by the states was still used far more widely than were Continental dollars. "Continentals" depreciated so quickly that by late 1780 it took one hundred continentals to buy one silver dollar's worth of goods.

The situation in Philadelphia, the seat of national government, demonstrated the difficulties caused by inflation. In January 1779, housewives, sailors, and artisans gathered on the cold streets to protest high prices and low wages. Although officials tried to regulate prices, riots erupted and flour merchants were especially targeted by mobs of women and young people. By October, Philadelphia militiamen joined the protests, marching on the house of James Wilson, a Philadelphia lawyer who sided with merchants accused of hoarding goods. Hours of rioting followed, and eventually fifteen militiamen were arrested and fined. But in the following days, city officials distributed much-needed food to the poor. The Fort Wilson riot echoed events in towns and cities across the young nation.

The congress finally improved its financial standing slightly by using a $6 million loan from France to back certificates issued to wealthy patriots. Meanwhile states raised money through taxes to provide funds for government operations, backing for its paper money, and other expenses. Most residents found such taxes incredibly burdensome given wartime inflation, and even the most patriotic began to protest further efforts to squeeze money out of them. Thus the financial status of the new nation remained precarious.

## Indian Affairs and Land Claims

The congress also sought to settle land claims in the western regions of the nation and build alliances with additional Indian nations. The two issues were intertwined, and both were difficult to resolve. Most Indian nations had long-standing complaints against colonists who intruded on their lands, and many patriot leaders made it clear that independence would mean further expansion into western lands.

In the late 1770s, British forces and their Indian allies fought bitter battles against patriot militias and Continental forces all along the frontier. Each side destroyed property, ruined crops, and killed civilians. In the summer and fall of 1778, Indian and American civilians suffered through a series of brutal attacks in Wyoming, Pennsylvania; Onoquaga, New York (Brant's home community); and Cherry Valley, New York. Patriots and Indians also battled along the Virginia frontier after pioneer and militia leader Daniel Boone established a fort there in 1775.

In the South, 6,000 patriot troops laid waste to Cherokee villages in the Appalachian Mountains in retaliation for the killing of white intruders along the Watauga River by a renegade Cherokee warrior, Dragging Canoe. Yet a cousin of Dragging Canoe, Nancy Ward (Nanye-hi), who had married a white trader, remained sympathetic to the patriot cause. During the Revolution, she warned patriots of pending attacks by pro-British Cherokee warriors in 1776 and 1780, allowing the patriots to launch their own attacks. Ward apparently believed that white settlement was inevitable and that winning the friendship of patriots was the best way to ensure the survival of the Cherokee nation. Hers, however, was a minority voice among frontier Indians.

Much western land had already been claimed by individual states like Virginia, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, and Georgia. States with western claims hoped to use the lands to reward soldiers and expand their settlements. Maryland spoke for states without such claims, arguing that if such lands were "wrested from the common enemy by the blood and treasure of the thirteen States," they should be considered "common property, subject to be parcelled out by Congress into free and independent governments." In 1780 New York State finally ceded its western claims to the Continental Congress, and Connecticut and Massachusetts followed suit.



With land disputes settled, Maryland ratified the Articles of Confederation in March 1781, and a new national government was finally formed. But the congress's guarantee that western lands would be "disposed of for the common benefit of the United States" ensured continued conflicts with Indians.

**REVIEW & RELATE**

- What values and concerns shaped state governments during the Revolutionary War?
- What issues and challenges did the Continental Congress face even after the French joined the patriot side?

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# Winning the War and the Peace

From 1778 to 1781, the battlefront in the Revolution moved south and west. As conflicts with Britain and its Indian allies intensified along the western frontier, British troops reinforced by African American fugitives fought patriots in the Carolinas and Georgia. In the final years of the war, the patriots' ability to achieve victory rested on a combination of superb strategy, alliances with France and Spain, and the continued material support of affluent men and women. However, even after Britain's surrender in October 1781, the war dragged on while peace terms were negotiated. The celebrations of victory following the signing of a peace treaty were tempered by protests among Continental soldiers demanding back pay and by the realization of the new nation's looming problems.

## Fighting in the West

While the congress debated the fate of western land claims, battles continued in the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys. British commanders at Fort Michilimackinac on Lake Huron recruited Sioux, Chippewa, and Sauk warriors to attack Spanish forces along the Mississippi, while soldiers at Fort Detroit armed Ottawa, Fox, and Miami warriors to assault American settlers flooding into the Ohio River valley. British forces from Fort Detroit also moved deeper into this region, establishing a post at Vincennes on the Wabash River.

The response to these British forays was effective, if not well coordinated. In 1778 a young patriot surveyor, George Rogers Clark of Virginia, organized a patriot expedition to counter Indian raids in the west and to reinforce Spanish and French allies in the upper Mississippi valley. He fought successfully against British and Indian forces at Kaskaskia and Cahokia on the Mississippi River. Then Clark marched his troops through the bitter February cold and launched a surprise attack on British forces at Vincennes. Although Detroit remained in British hands, Spanish troops defeated British-allied Indian forces that attacked St. Louis, giving the patriots greater control in the Ohio valley (Map 6.2).

In the summer of 1779, General John Sullivan led 4,000 patriot troops on a campaign to wipe out Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, and Onondaga villages in central and western New York. He succeeded in ending most attacks by Britain's Iroquois allies and disrupting the supplies being sent by British forces at Fort Niagara. Patriot attacks in Ohio also continued. In one of the worst atrocities fomented by patriots, Pennsylvania militiamen massacred more than one hundred Delaware men, women, and children near present-day Canton, Ohio, even though the Delawares had converted to Christianity and declared their neutrality.

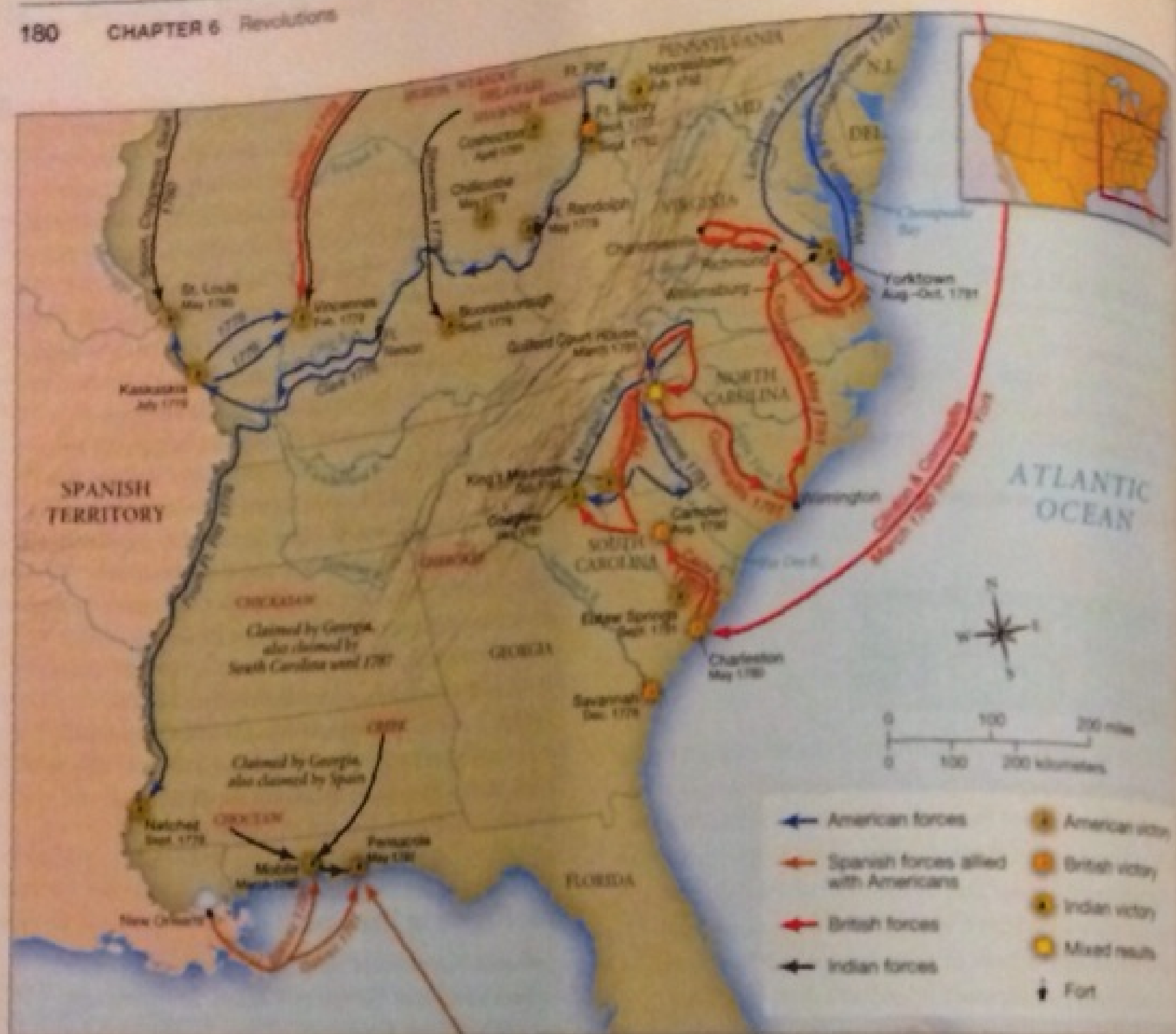
Battles between Indian nations and American settlers did not end with the American Revolution. For the moment, however, patriot militia units and Continental forces supported by French and Spanish allies had defeated British and Indian efforts to control the Mississippi and Ohio River valleys.

## War Rages in the South

Meanwhile British troops sought to regain control of southern states from Georgia to Virginia. British troops captured Savannah, Georgia, in 1778 and soon extended their control over the entire state. When General Clinton was called north in late 1778 to lead British troops against Washington's Continentals in New Jersey, he left the southern campaign in the hands of Lord Charles Cornwallis.

In May 1780, General Cornwallis reclaimed Charleston, South Carolina, and accepted the surrender of 5,000 Continental soldiers, the largest surrender of patriot troops during the war. He then evicted patriots from the city, purged them from the state government, gained military control of the state, and imposed loyalty oaths on all Carolinians able to fight. To aid his efforts, local loyalists organized militias to battle patriots in the interior. Banastre Tarleton led one especially vicious company of loyalists who slaughtered civilians and murdered many who surrendered. In retaliation, planter and merchant Thomas Sumter organized 800 men who showed a similar disregard for regular army procedures, raiding largely defenseless loyalist settlements near Hanging Rock, South Carolina, in August 1780.

Conflicts between patriots and loyalists raged across the South until the war's end (see Map 6.2). As retaliatory violence erupted in the interior of South Carolina, General Gates marched his Continental troops south to join 2,000 militiamen from Virginia and North Carolina. But his




**MAP 6.2 The War in the West and the South, 1777–1782**

Between 1780 and 1781, major battles between Continental and British troops took place in Virginia and the Carolinas, and the British general Cornwallis finally surrendered at Yorktown, Virginia, in October 1781. But patriot forces also battled British troops and their Indian allies from 1777 to 1782 in the Ohio River valley, the lower Mississippi River, and the Gulf coast.

troops were exhausted and short of food, and on August 16 Cornwallis won a smashing victory against the combined patriot forces at Camden, South Carolina. Soon after news of Gates's defeat reached General Washington, he heard that Benedict Arnold, commander at West Point, had defected to the British. Indeed, he had been passing information to the British for some time.

Suddenly, British chances for victory seemed more hopeful. Clinton had moved the bulk of northern troops into New York City and could send units south from there to bolster Cornwallis. Cornwallis was in control of Georgia and South Carolina, and local loyalists were eager to gain control of the southern countryside. Meanwhile Continental soldiers in the North mutinied in early 1780 over terms of enlistment and pay. Patriot morale was low, funds were scarce, and civilians were growing weary of the war.

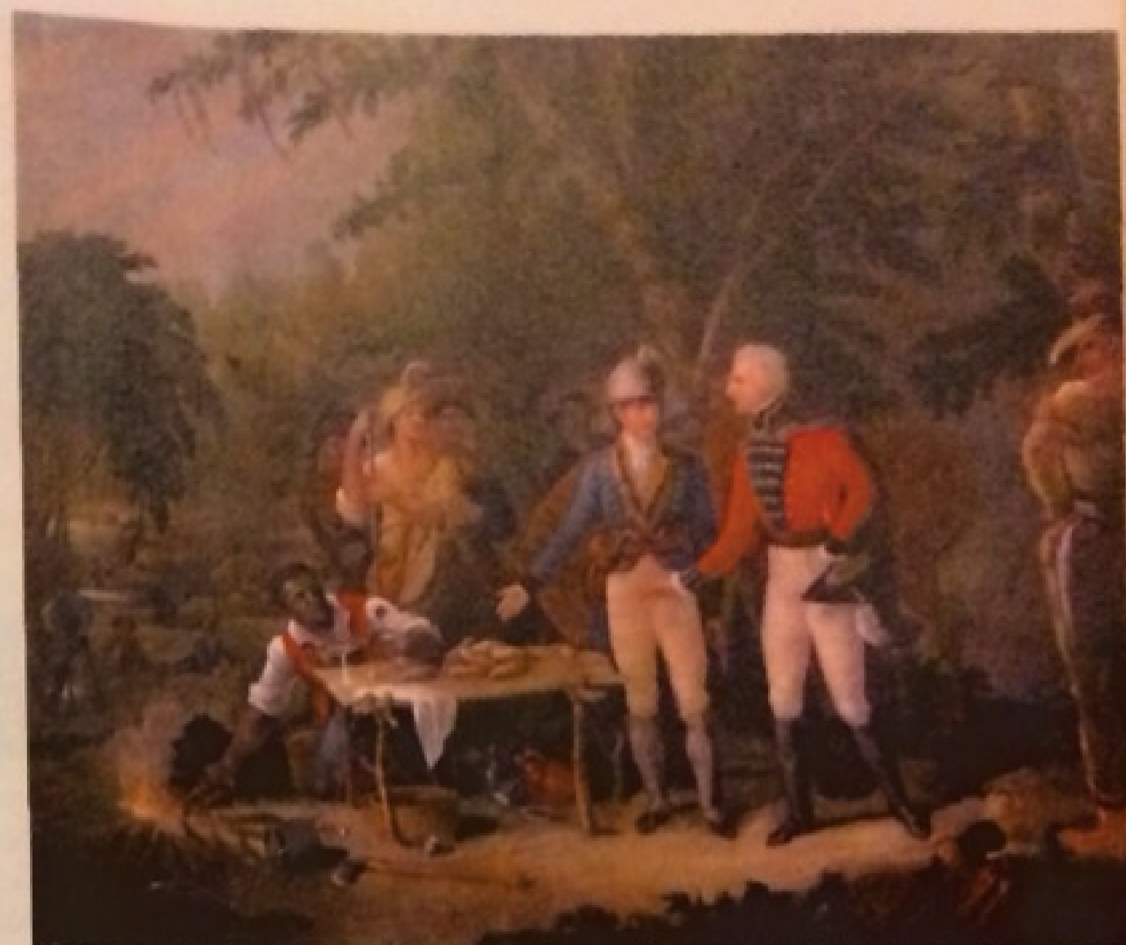
Yet somehow the patriots prevailed. A combination of luck, strong leadership, and French support turned the tide. In October 1780, when Continental hopes looked especially bleak, a group of 800 frontier sharpshooters routed Major Patrick Ferguson's loyalist troops at King's Mountain in South Carolina. The victory kept Cornwallis from advancing into North Carolina and gave the Continentals a chance to regroup.

Shortly after the battle at King's Mountain, Washington sent General Nathanael Greene of Rhode Island to replace Gates as head of southern operations. Taking advice from local militia leaders like Daniel Morgan and Francis Marion, Greene divided his limited force into even smaller units. Marion and Morgan each led 300 Continental soldiers into the South Carolina backcountry, picking up hundreds of local militiamen along the way. At the village of Cowpens, Morgan drew Tarleton's much larger force into a circle of sharpshooters backed by Continentals and an armed cavalry. While Tarleton escaped, 100 of his men died and 800 were captured.



Cornwallis, enraged at the patriot victory, pursued Continental forces as they retreated. But Cornwallis's troops had outrun their cannons, and Greene circled back and attacked them at Guilford Court House. Although Cornwallis eventually forced the Continentals to withdraw from the battlefield, his troops suffered enormous losses. In August 1781, frustrated at the ease with which patriot forces still found local support in the South, he hunkered down in Yorktown on the Virginia coast and waited for Clinton to send reinforcements from New York.

Washington now coordinated strategy with his French allies. Comte de Rochambeau marched his 5,000 troops south from Rhode Island to Virginia as General Lafayette led his troops south along Virginia's eastern shore. At the same time, French naval ships headed north from the West Indies. One unit cut off a British fleet trying to resupply Cornwallis by sea. Another joined up with American privateers to bombard Cornwallis's forces. By mid-October, British supplies had run out, and it was clear that Clinton was not going to send reinforcements. On October 19, 1781, the British army admitted defeat.



**Francis Marion**

Francis Marion, known as "the Swamp Fox," and his militia waged guerrilla warfare against the British in South Carolina. Marion wreaked havoc by avoiding frontal assaults, instead conducting quick surprise attacks. This print from an 1836 painting by John Blake White shows Marion in striking headgear inviting a British officer to share a meal, while Marion's slave Oscar kneels by the table. Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library

## An Uncertain Peace

The Continental Army had managed the impossible. It had defeated the British army and won the colonies' independence. Yet even with the surrender at **Yorktown**, the war continued in fits and starts. Peace negotiations in Paris dragged on as French, Spanish, British, and American representatives sought to settle a host of issues. Meanwhile British forces challenged Continental troops in and around New York City even as American recruiters found it nearly impossible to find new enlistments.

Some Continental soldiers continued to fight, but others focused on the long-festering issue of overdue wages. When the congress decided in June 1783 to discharge the remaining troops without providing back pay, a near mutiny erupted in Pennsylvania. Nearly 300 soldiers marched on the congress in Philadelphia. Washington sent troops, including Deborah Sampson/Robert Shurtliff, to put down the mutiny, and bloodshed was avoided when the Pennsylvania soldiers agreed to accept half pay and certificates for the remainder. Despite this compromise, the issue of back pay would continue to plague the nation over the next decade.

Meanwhile patriot representatives in Paris—Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and John Jay—continued to negotiate peace terms. Rising antiwar sentiment on the British home front, especially after the surrender at Yorktown, forced the government's hand. But the Comte de Vergennes, the French foreign minister, opposed the Americans' republican principles and refused to consider the American delegates as his political equals. Given the importance of the French to the American victory, the congress had instructed its delegates to defer to French wishes. This blocked the American representatives from signing a separate peace with the British.

Eventually, however, U.S. delegates finalized a treaty that secured substantial benefits for the young nation. The United States gained control of all lands south of Canada and north of Louisiana and Florida stretching to the Mississippi River. In addition, the treaty recognized the United States to be "free Sovereign and independent states." Spain signed a separate treaty with Great Britain in which it regained control of Florida. Despite their role in the war, none of the Indian nations that occupied the lands under negotiation were consulted.

When the **Treaty of Paris** was finally signed on September 2, 1783, thousands of British troops and their supporters left the colonies for Canada, the West Indies, or England. British soldiers on the western frontier were supposed to be withdrawn at the same time, but they remained for many years and continued to foment hostilities between Indians in the region and U.S. settlers along the frontier.

The evacuation of the British also entailed the exodus of thousands of African Americans who had fought against the patriots. At the end of the war, British officials granted certificates of manumission to more than 1,300 men, 900 women, and 700 children. The largest number of these freed blacks settled in Nova Scotia, where they received small allotments of land from the British. Most, however, lacked the money, tools, or livestock to make such homesteads profitable. Despite these obstacles, some created a small Afro-Canadian community in Nova Scotia, while others migrated to areas considered more hospitable to black residents, such as Sierra Leone. Although thousands gained their freedom by taking up arms for the British, few were well rewarded for their efforts.

**Explore**

See Document 6.5 for a black loyalist's petition to the British cabinet.

### A Surprising Victory

Americans had managed to defeat one of the most powerful military forces in the world. That victory resulted from the convergence of many circumstances. Certainly Americans benefited from fighting on their own soil. Their knowledge of the land and its resources as well as earlier experiences fighting against Indians and the French helped prepare them for battles against the British.

Just as important, British troops and officers were far removed from centers of decision making and supplies. Even supplies housed in Canada could not be easily transported the relatively short distance into New York. British commanders were often hesitant to make decisions independently, but awaiting instructions from England proved costly on several occasions, especially since strategists in London often had little sense of conditions on the ground in America.

Both sides depended on outsiders for assistance, but here, too, Americans gained the advantage. While the British army certainly outnumbered its Continental adversary, it relied heavily on German mercenaries, Indian allies, and freed blacks to bolster its regular troops. In victory, such "foreign" forces were relatively reliable, but in defeat, many of them chose to look out for their own interests. The patriots meanwhile marched with French and Spanish armies well prepared to challenge British troops and motivated to gain advantages for France and Spain if Britain was defeated.

Perhaps most importantly, a British victory was [illegible] impossible without conquering the American colonies one by one. Because a large percentage of colonists supported the patriot cause, British troops had to contend not only with Continental soldiers but also with an aroused citizenry fighting for its independence.

**REVIEW & RELATE**

- How and why did the Americans win the Revolutionary War?
- What uncertainties and challenges did the new nation face in the immediate aftermath of victory?

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## Conclusion: Legacies of the Revolution

After the approval of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Hutchinson, the British official who had gained fame during the Stamp Act upheavals in Boston, charged that patriot leaders had "sought independence from the beginning." But the gradual and almost reluctant move from resistance to revolution in the American colonies suggests otherwise. When faced with threats from British troops, a sufficient number of colonists took up arms to create the reality of war, and this surge of hostilities finally gave the advantage to those political leaders urging independence.

The victory over Great Britain won that independence but left the United States confronting difficult problems. Most soldiers simply wanted to return home and reestablish their former lives. But the government's inability to pay back wages and the huge debt the nation owed to private citizens and state and foreign governments hinted at difficult economic times ahead.

Like many soldiers, Deborah Sampson embraced a conventional life after the war. But times were hard. A decade after she was discharged, Massachusetts finally granted her a small pension for her wartime service. In 18[illegible] Paul Revere successfully appealed to the U.S. Congress to grant her a federal pension. When Sampson died in 182[illegible], a special congressional act awarded her children additional money. Many men also waited years to receive compensation for their wartime service while they struggled to reestablish farms and businesses and pay off the debts that accrued while they were fighting for independence.

Political leaders tried to address the concerns of former soldiers and ordinary citizens while they developed a governmental structure to manage an expansive and diverse nation. Within a few years of achieving independence, financial distress among small farmers and tensions with Indians on the western frontier intensified concerns about the ability of the



**DOCUMENT 6.5**

### Thomas Peters | Petition to the British Cabinet, 1790

*During the war, thousands of African Americans fled from slavery to join the British. Former slave Thomas Peters escaped from his owner in North Carolina and became a sergeant in a British regiment called the Black Pioneers. Like other loyalists, he settled in Nova Scotia after the war. He soon realized that even in Canada blacks were treated unequally. In 1790 he went to London to present the following petition to the British cabinet on behalf of other black loyalists. Faced with persistent inequality, Peters and many other ex-slaves eventually migrated to Sierra Leone.*

**Explore**

The humble Memorial and Petition of Thomas Peters a free Negro and late a Serjt. [sergeant] in the Regiment of Guides and Pioneers serving in North America under the command of Genl. Sir Henry Clinton on Behalf of himself and others the Black Pioneers and loyal Black Refugees hereinafter described

Sheweth

That your Memorialist and the said other Black Pioneers having served in North America as aforesaid for the Space of seven years and upwards, during the War, afterwards went to Nova Scotia under the Promise of obtaining the usual Grant of Lands and Provision.

That notwithstanding they have made repeated Applications to all Persons in that Country who they conceived likely to put them in Possession of the due Allotments, the said Pioneers with their Wives and Children amounting together in the whole to the Number of 102 People now remain at Annapolis Royal have not yet obtained their Allotments of Land except one single Acre of land each for a Town Lot and tho' a further Proportion of 20 Acres each Private man (viz) about a 5th part of the Allowance of Land that is due to them was actually laid out and located for them agreeable to the Governor's Order it was afterwards taken from them on Pretense that it had been included in some former Grant and they have never yet obtained other Lands in Lieu thereof and remain destitute and helpless.

Source: Great Britain, Public Record Office, Colonial Office file CO217/63fol. 63, reprinted in David Northrup, *Crosscurrents in the Black Atlantic* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008), 39–40.

**Interpret the Evidence**

- On what grounds do Peters and his supporters base their claims to land in Nova Scotia?
- How were they rewarded for their service in the British military?

**Put It in Context**

What was required to make freedom meaningful for ex-slaves living in the United States or abroad?

confederation government to secure order and prosperity. In response, some patriots demanded a new political compact to strengthen the national government. But others feared that such a change would simply replicate British tyranny.

Leading revolutionaries engaged in heated debates over the best means to unify and stabilize the United States in the decade following the Revolution. However, some key leaders lived abroad in this period. Although Thomas Paine was awarded land and money by Pennsylvania and the U.S. Congress, in 1791 he moved to France, where he wrote pamphlets advocating revolution there. His increasingly radical political views and attacks on organized religion led many Americans to malign the former hero. He returned to the United States in 1802, but his death in New York City in 1809 was mentioned only briefly in most newspapers. Other patriot leaders remained celebrated figures, but Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams all spent significant amounts of time in England and France as ambassadors for the young nation. There they played key roles in building ties to European powers, thus ensuring U.S. security.

The legacies of the Revolution seemed far from clear in the decade following the American victory. As problems escalated, Americans were challenged to reimagine their political future while holding on to the republican impulses that drove them to revolution.