

## Important dates – US History

1774 - Colonists form First Continental Congress as Britain closes down Boston harbor and deploys troops in Massachusetts.

1775 - American Revolution: George Washington leads Continental Army to fight against British rule.

1776 4 July - Declaration of Independence endorsed by Congress; colonies declare independence.

1781 - Rebel states form loose confederation after defeating the British at the Battle of Yorktown.

1783 - Britain accepts loss of colonies by virtue of Treaty of Paris.

1787 - Founding Fathers draw up new constitution for United States of America. Constitution comes into effect in 1788.

1789 - George Washington elected first president of USA.

1791 - Bill of Rights guarantees individual freedom.

### US CONSTITUTION

The Constitution of the United States is the supreme law of the United States of America. The Constitution, originally comprising seven articles, delineates the national frame of government. **Its first three articles embody the doctrine of the separation of powers, whereby the federal government is divided into three branches:**

1. **The legislative**, consisting of the bicameral Congress (Article I)
2. **The executive**, consisting of the president and subordinate officers (Article II)
3. **The judicial**, consisting of the Supreme Court and other federal courts (Article III)

Article IV, Article V and Article VI embody concepts of *federalism*, describing the rights and responsibilities of state governments, the states in relationship to the federal government, and the shared process of constitutional amendment. Article VII establishes the procedure subsequently used by the thirteen States to ratify it. It is regarded as the oldest written and codified national constitution in force.

Since the Constitution came into force in 1789, it has been amended 27 times, including one amendment that repealed a previous one, in order to meet the needs of a nation that has profoundly changed since the eighteenth century. In general, **the first ten amendments**, known collectively as the **Bill of Rights**, offer specific protections of individual liberty and justice and place restrictions on the powers of government. The majority of the seventeen later amendments expand individual civil rights protections. Others address issues related to federal authority or modify government processes and procedures. Amendments to the United States Constitution, unlike ones made to many constitutions worldwide, are appended to the document. All four pages of the original U.S. Constitution are written on parchment.

According to the United States Senate: "*The Constitution's first three words—We the People—affirm that the government of the United States exists to serve its citizens. For over two centuries the Constitution has remained in force because its framers wisely separated and balanced governmental powers to safeguard the interests of majority rule and minority rights, of liberty and equality, and of the federal and state governments.*" The first permanent constitution of its kind,[a] it is interpreted, supplemented, and implemented by a large body of federal constitutional law, and has influenced the constitutions of many other nations such as Australia.

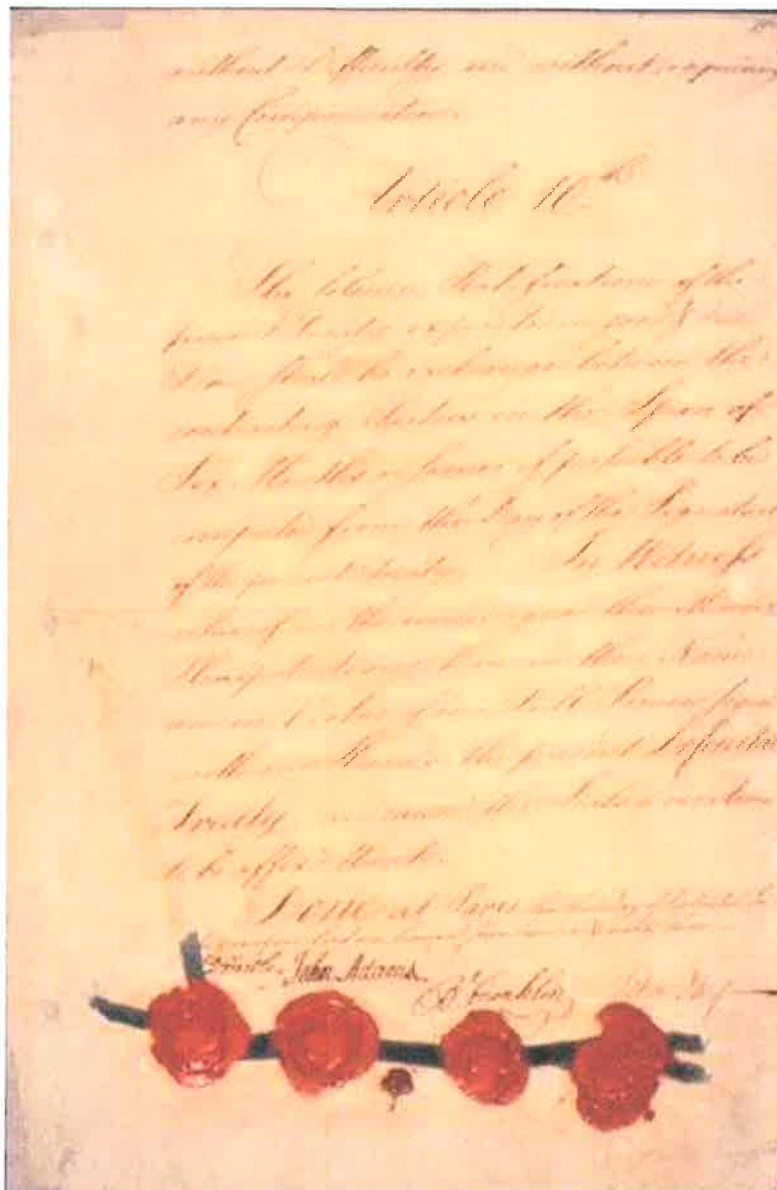
## American Revolution – the aftermath

Preliminary articles of peace were signed on November 30, 1782, and the Peace of Paris (September 3, 1783) ended the U.S. War of Independence. Great Britain recognized the independence of the United States (with western boundaries to the Mississippi River) and ceded Florida to Spain. Other provisions called for payment of U.S. private debts to British citizens, American use of the Newfoundland fisheries, and fair treatment for American colonials loyal to Britain.



**Paris, Peace of.** *Signing the Preliminary Treaty of Peace at Paris, November 30, 1782*, print reproduction of a painting by Carl Seiler. John Jay (far left) and Benjamin Franklin are depicted standing. *U.S. Diplomacy Center*

In explaining the outcome of the war, scholars have pointed out that the British never contrived an overall general strategy for winning it. Also, even if the war could have been terminated by British power in the early stages, the generals during that period, notably Howe, declined to make a prompt, vigorous, intelligent application of that power. They acted, to be sure, within the conventions of their age, but in choosing to take minimal risks (for example, Carleton at Ticonderoga and Howe at Brooklyn Heights and later in New Jersey and Pennsylvania) they lost the opportunity to deal potentially mortal blows to the rebellion. There was also a grave lack of understanding and cooperation at crucial moments (as with Burgoyne and Howe in 1777). Finally, the British counted too strongly on loyalist support they did not receive.



**Treaty of Paris.** The Treaty of Paris, made final on September 3, 1783, ended the American Revolution. *National Archives, Washington, D.C.*

But British mistakes alone could not account for the success of the United States. Feeble as their war effort occasionally became, the Americans were able generally to take advantage of their enemies' mistakes. The Continental Army, moreover, was by no means an inept force even before Steuben's reforms. The militias, while usually unreliable, could perform admirably under the leadership of men who understood them, like Arnold, Greene, and Morgan, and often reinforced the Continentals in crises. Furthermore, Washington, a rock in adversity, learned slowly but reasonably well the art of generalship. The supplies and funds furnished by France from 1776 to 1778 were invaluable, while French military and naval support after 1778 was essential. The outcome, therefore, resulted from a combination of British blunders, American efforts, and French assistance.

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The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica

# The Consequences of the American Revolution

Like the earlier distinction between “*origins*” and “*causes*,” the Revolution also had short- and long-term consequences. Perhaps the most important immediate consequence of declaring independence was the creation of state constitutions in 1776 and 1777. The Revolution also unleashed powerful political, social, and economic forces that would transform the post-Revolution politics and society, including increased participation in politics and governance, the legal institutionalization of religious toleration, and the growth and diffusion of the population. The Revolution also had significant short-term effects on the lives of women in the new United States of America. In the long-term, the Revolution would also have significant effects on the lives of slaves and free blacks as well as the institution of slavery itself. It also affected Native Americans by opening up western settlement and creating governments hostile to their territorial claims. Even more broadly, the Revolution ended the mercantilist economy, opening new opportunities in trade and manufacturing.

The new states drafted written constitutions, which, at the time, was an important innovation from the traditionally unwritten British Constitution. Most created weak governors and strong legislatures with regular elections and moderately increased the size of the electorate. A number of states followed the example of Virginia, which included a declaration or “*bill*” of rights in their constitution designed to protect the rights of individuals and circumscribe the prerogative of the government. Pennsylvania’s first state constitution was the most radical and democratic. They created a unicameral legislature and an Executive Council but no genuine executive. All free men could vote, including those who did not own property. Massachusetts’ constitution, passed in 1780, was less democratic but underwent a more popular process of ratification. In the fall of 1779, each town sent delegates—312 in all—to a constitutional convention in Cambridge. Town meetings debated the constitution draft and offered suggestions. Anticipating the later federal constitution, Massachusetts established a three-branch government based on checks and balances between the branches. Unlike some other states, it also offered the executive veto power over legislation. 1776 was the year of independence, but it was also the beginning of an unprecedented period of constitution-making and state building.

The Continental Congress ratified the Articles of Confederation in 1781. The Articles allowed each state one vote in the Continental Congress. But the Articles are perhaps most notable for what they did not allow. Congress was given no power to levy or collect taxes, regulate foreign or interstate commerce, or establish a federal judiciary. These shortcomings rendered the post-war Congress rather impotent.

Political and social life changed drastically after independence. Political participation grew as more people gained the right to vote. In addition, more common citizens (or “*new men*”) played increasingly important roles in local and state governance. Hierarchy within the states underwent significant changes. Locke’s ideas of “*natural law*” had been central to the Declaration of Independence and the state constitutions. Society became less deferential and more egalitarian, less aristocratic and more meritocratic.

The Revolution’s most important long-term economic consequence was the end of mercantilism. The British Empire had imposed various restrictions on the colonial economies including limiting trade, settlement, and manufacturing. The Revolution opened new markets and new trade relationships. The Americans’ victory also opened the western territories for invasion and settlement, which created new domestic markets. Americans began to create their own manufacturers, no longer content to rely on those in Britain.

Despite these important changes, the American Revolution had its limits. Following their unprecedented expansion into political affairs during the imperial resistance, women also served the patriot cause during the war. However, the Revolution did not result in civic equality for women. Instead, during the immediate post-war period, women became incorporated into the polity to some degree as “*republican mothers*.” These new republican societies required virtuous citizens and it became mothers’ responsibility to raise and educate future citizens. This opened opportunity for women regarding education, but they still remained largely on the peripheries of the new American polity.

Slaves and free blacks also impacted (and were impacted by) the Revolution. The British were the first to recruit black (or “*Ethiopian*”) regiments, as early as Dunmore’s Proclamation of 1775 in Virginia, which promised freedom to any slaves who would escape their masters and join the British cause. At first, Washington, a slaveholder himself, resisted allowing free blacks and former slaves to join the Continental Army, but he eventually relented. In 1775, Peter Salem’s master freed him to fight with the militia. Salem faced British Regulars in the battles at Lexington and Bunker Hill, where he fought valiantly with around three-dozen other black Americans. Salem not only contributed to the cause, but he earned the ability to determine his own life after his enlistment ended. Salem was not alone, but many more slaves seized upon the tumult of war to run away and secure their own freedom directly.

Between 30,000 and 100,000 slaves deserted their masters during the war. In 1783, thousands of Loyalist former slaves fled with the British army. They hoped that the British government would uphold the promise of freedom and help them establish new homes elsewhere in the Empire. The Treaty of Paris, which ended the war, demanded that British troops leave runaway slaves behind, but the British military commanders upheld earlier promises and evacuated thousands of freedmen, transporting them to Canada, the Caribbean, or Great Britain. But black loyalists continued to face social and economic marginalization, including restrictions on land ownership. In 1792, Black loyalist and Baptist preacher David George resisted discrimination, joining a colonization project that led nearly 1,200 former black Americans from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone, in Africa.

The fight for liberty led some Americans to manumit their slaves, and most of the new northern states soon passed gradual emancipation laws. Manumission also occurred in the Upper South, but in the Lower South, some masters revoked their offers of freedom for service, and other freedmen were forced back into bondage. The Revolution’s rhetoric of equality created a “*revolutionary generation*” of slaves and free blacks that would eventually encourage the antislavery movement. Slave revolts began to incorporate claims for freedom based on revolutionary ideals. In the long-term, the Revolution failed to reconcile slavery with these new egalitarian republican societies, a tension that eventually boiled over in the 1830s and 1840s and effectively tore the nation in two in the 1850s and 1860s.

Native Americans, too, participated in and were affected by the Revolution. Many Native American tribes and confederacies, such as the Shawnee, Creek, Cherokee, and Iroquois, sided with the British. They had hoped for a British victory that would continue to restrain the land-hungry colonial settlers from moving west beyond the Appalachian Mountains. Unfortunately, the Americans’ victory and Native Americans’ support for the British created a pretense for justifying the rapid, and often brutal expansion into the western territories. Native American tribes would continue to be displaced and pushed further west throughout the nineteenth century. Ultimately, American independence marked the beginning of the end of what had remained of Native American independence.

# Women and Politics in the Era of the American Revolution

Historians once assumed that, because women in the era of the American Revolution could not vote and showed very little interest in attaining the franchise, they were essentially apolitical beings. Scholars now recognize that women were actively engaged in the debates that accompanied the movement toward independence, and that after the war many sought a more expansive political role for themselves. Moreover, men welcomed women's support for the war effort. If they saw women as especially fit for domestic duties, many continued to seek women's political guidance and help even after the war ended.

Granted, those women who wanted a more active and unmediated relationship to the body politic faced severe legal and ideological obstacles. The common law system of coverture gave married women no control over their bodies or to property, and thus accorded them no formal venue to express their political opinions. Religious convention had it that women, the "*weaker sex*," were the authors of original sin. The ideology associated with "republicanism" argued that the attributes of independence, self-reliance, physical strength, and bravery were exclusively masculine virtues. Many observers characterized women as essentially selfish and frivolous creatures who hungered after luxuries and could not contain their carnal appetites. Nevertheless, some women carved out political roles for themselves.

In the lead up to the war, many women played active, even essential roles in various non-consumption movements, promising to refrain from purchasing English goods, and attacking those merchants who refused to boycott prohibited goods. Some took to the streets, participating in riots that periodically disturbed the tranquility of colonial cities. A few published plays and poems proclaiming their patriotic views. Those women, who would become loyalists, were also active, never reluctant, to express their disapproval of the protest movement.

During the war, many women demonstrated their loyalty to the patriot cause by shouldering the burdens of absent husbands. They managed farms and businesses. First in Philadelphia, and then in other cities, women went from door to door collecting money for the Continental Army. Some accompanied husbands to the battlefield, where they tended to the material needs of soldiers. A very few disguised themselves as men and joined the army, exposing as a lie the notion that only men had the capacity to sacrifice their lives for the good of the country. Loyalist women continued to express their political views, even though doing so brought them little more than physical suffering and emotional pain. African American women took advantage of wartime chaos to run away from their masters and forge new, independent lives for themselves.

After the war, women marched in parades, lobbied and petitioned legislators, attended sessions of Congress, and participated in political rallies—lending their support to particular candidates or factions. Elite women published novels, poems, and plays. Some hosted salons where men and women gathered to discuss political issues. In New Jersey, single property-owning women voted.

By the end of the century, however, proponents of women's political rights lost ground, in part because new "*scientific*" notions of gender difference prepared the way for the concept of "*separate spheres*." Politics became more organized, leaving little room for women to express their views "*out of doors*," even as judges and legislators defined women as naturally dependent. Still, white, middle class women in particular took advantage of better educational opportunities, finding ways to influence the public sphere without demanding formal political rights. They read, wrote, and organized benevolent societies, laying the groundwork for the antebellum reform movements of the mid-19th century.

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