

The Era of Discontent and the Revolutionary War

Albany Plan of Union

The Albany Plan of Union was Benjamin Franklin's plan for a neocolonial government that would collect taxes and fund defense efforts. His plan, however, was rejected because many colonists still thought of themselves as British subjects and they also did not want to give up their right to tax themselves.

Articles of Confederation

The Articles of Confederation were crafted by John Dickinson in the late 1700s. After the end of the Revolutionary War, America needed a new national government. Under the Articles of Confederation, there was a single-chamber congress that was elected by state legislatures. States received only one vote, despite their differences in size and population. Congress could ask for money from the states but could not directly impose taxes unless every state agreed to it. There were no executive or judicial branches either. Congressional committees oversaw financial, diplomatic, and military affairs in America. The first President of the Continental Congress was John Hanson. The Confederation had its fair share of problems, since the national government was weak and Congress had limited power. The Articles of Confederation were designed weak in order to prevent a tyranny from forming. They did give us, however, the Northwest Ordinance. The Articles were eventually replaced by the Constitution, but some aspects of the Articles were kept.

Baron von Steuben

Baron von Steuben was a stern Prussian military officer that taught American soldiers during the Revolutionary War how to successfully fight the British.

Battle of Concord

The Battle of Concord is known as the "shot heard 'round the world." British troops were sent to Concord in order to confiscate weapons in order to lessen the revolutionary movement within the colonies. After exchanging fire in Lexington, the British met even more resistance in Concord and were forced to retreat.

Battle of Yorktown

The Battle of Yorktown was the last significant battle of the Revolutionary War. French and American forces, the latter being led by George Washington, led an assault on a British contingent led by Lord Charles Cornwallis. The British surrendered and negotiations began to end the war.

Benjamin Franklin

Benjamin Franklin was a respected inventor, scientist, diplomat, politician, author, and intellectual. He founded the colonies' first fire department, post office, and public library. He invented bifocals and conducted pioneering research on electricity. Franklin was also one of the members of the "Committee of Five" that drafted Declaration of Independence. As a diplomat, he negotiated the peace treaty that ended the Revolutionary War.

Bicameral Legislatures

Bicameral legislatures have an upper and lower house that share power. Early colonies had bicameral legislatures based on Parliament, and the Constitution also set up a bicameral legislature as well

Bill of Rights

The Bill of Rights refers to the first ten amendments of the Constitution. Proposed by James Madison in 1789, its purpose was to protect the rights of individuals against the possible abuses the Constitution allowed the federal government.

Boston Massacre

The Boston Massacre occurred after a large detachment of British soldiers were sent to Boston to keep the peace following protests over the Townshend Acts. On March 5, 1770, a mob threw rock-filled snowballs at a group of soldiers and was met with gunfire.

Boston Tea Party

The Boston Tea Party was a colonial protest against British taxes. Boston colonists, upset that the British were imposing new duties on tea sales, refused to allow tea-bearing ships unload in Boston Harbor. On December 16, 1773, a group of colonists boarded a ship and dumped tons of tea into the harbor. This event led to the Coercive Acts.

Checks and Balances

A system of checks and balances was put in place by the framers of the Constitution, including James Madison, in the late 1700s. This system was implemented so that no single part of government had too much power and that a tyranny did not develop. Checks and balances were put in place in Philadelphia while the Constitutional Convention discussed the new government. Under the checks and balances, people were represented equally and by population (due to having a bicameral legislature). The president in the executive branch could veto laws and choose the members of his cabinet, with the approval of senate.

Common Sense

Common Sense was written in the late 1700s by Thomas Paine. It challenged the authority of British rule, stating that America didn't need the help of Britain economically. Common Sense became popular among colonists all over America. The publication made many people realize that the king himself was to blame for the taxes, not just corrupt politicians. This is important because it changed colonists' feelings toward King George III and Britain and helped spread the idea of a revolution.

Constitutional Convention

The Constitutional Convention, held in Philadelphia in 1787, brought together 55 delegates to revisit the Articles of Confederation, which had failed to give the federal government enough authority to govern properly. Delegates worked for four months and came up with agreements like the Great Compromise, which established a bicameral legislature, and the Three-Fifths Compromise, which counted each slave as three-fifths of a person. The Convention led to the creation of the U.S. Constitution.

Currency Act

The Currency Act was an act that prevented the colonies from issuing paper money. Along with the Sugar Act and the Proclamation of 1763, the Currency Act signaled the end of salutary neglect.

Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4, 1776. Commissioned by the Continental Congress and written largely by Thomas Jefferson, it listed the colonies' disagreements with the British government. It also articulated the government's responsibility to serve its citizens and declared that all men have equal rights to life, liberty, and property.

Dominion of New England

The Dominion of New England was an attempt by the English government to enforce the Navigation Acts and to prevent illegal trade in the colonies. King James II centralized control of several colonies in the hands of Governor Edmund Andros, who banned town meetings and promoted the Church of England. The Dominion ended after word of the Glorious Revolution reached the colonies; the colonists themselves rose up, arrested Andros, and ended the Dominion.

Executive Privilege

Executive privilege refers to the principle that the president has the right to withhold information from Congress and the public when doing so would protect national security. The precedent was established by George Washington in 1797 in response to the House of Representatives' request to review all documents related to the Washington administration's negotiation of the Treaty of San Lorenzo.

Federalist Papers

The Federalist Papers lay out the argument for ratification of the U.S. Constitution. They explain the philosophy behind, and rationale for, the new system of government proposed under the Constitution. The Federalist Papers were written by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay and published anonymously in a New York newspaper. They had a powerful effect on public opinion, especially in New York.

Federalists and Antifederalists

When the Constitution was being created in Philadelphia in the late 1700s, people both supported and opposed it. Americans who were for the Constitution were called Federalists. Federalists believed that the Articles of Confederation were weak and needed to be replaced with a plan with a stronger national government. The national government would protect the people and there was no need for a bill of rights. Federalists were usually wealthier and had more influence. Important Federalists included George Washington and Alexander Hamilton. On the other hand, Antifederalists believed that the Articles of Confederation could be saved and that a strong national government would be harmful and threaten everyone's rights. They also disliked the fact that the proposed Constitution did not have a bill of rights. Important Antifederalists included Patrick Henry, James Monroe, and Thomas Jefferson.

First Continental Congress

The First Continental Congress brought together delegates from every colony except Georgia to discuss grievances against the British Crown. The Congress came up with a list of laws it wanted repealed and enumerated a limited set of circumstances under which it would accept Parliamentary interference. The delegates agreed to boycott British goods until their demands were addressed and set up committees of observation to enforce the boycott.

Franco-American Alliance

While serving as a diplomat in Europe during the Revolutionary War, Benjamin Franklin negotiated the Franco-American Alliance, which brought the French into the conflict on the side of the colonists. The French government, still struggling from its defeat during the French and Indian War, provided reinforcements to the colonial forces.

George Washington

George Washington was the commander of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. He was then chosen by the Electoral College to serve as the first president of the United States. As president, Washington used his authority with restraint, delegating power to subordinates and using his veto only when he believed a bill was unconstitutional. He refused to serve a third term, establishing a precedent that would later become law.

George Washington's Farewell Address

In George Washington's farewell address as president, published in 1796, he called upon future presidents to avoid permanent alliances with foreign powers. Washington's advice proved prescient, as the policy of neutrality defined American foreign policy during the 1800s and again between World War I and World War II. Washington also condemned political parties, hailed the benefits of a central government, and stressed the importance of religion.

Glorious Revolution

The Glorious Revolution took place in the late 1600s in England. Charles II and his brother James II had become more openly Catholic, to the horror of the citizens. English politicians asked William of Orange and his wife Mary to intervene, causing James II to flee. They created a limited monarchy in which Parliament had to be summoned annually, all bills had to be signed, and traditional liberties needed to be respected. Assemblies rose to power during this time in the colonies, and the Dominion of New England was destroyed after word of the Glorious Revolution reached Anglo-Americans. This is important because Anglo-Americans, after hearing about the Glorious Revolution, rose up against the representatives in the colonies and got more control over themselves; learning in the process that they could get away with revolutions and rebellions.

Intolerable Acts

The Intolerable Acts consisted of the Coercive Acts and the Quebec Act. These acts were passed by Parliament in the mid-late 1700s. The Coercive Acts affected all of the colonies, but mainly Massachusetts due to the colony's rebellious nature. Essentially, Massachusetts was being punished for the Boston Tea Party. The Coercive Acts closed Boston Harbor, revoked the Massachusetts charter, and expanded on the Quartering Act. The new Quartering Act allowed soldiers to be housed in empty private buildings. The Quebec Act gave land that Americans hoped to inhabit to Quebec. Furthermore, the official religion of Quebec became Catholicism and let some small debates be decided by French-style courts.

Jay's Treaty

Jay's Treaty was negotiated between the United States and Britain in 1794. The treaty provided for a British withdrawal from the Northwest Territory and settled several trade disputes. It is widely credited with averting war, although opponents charged that John Jay had made too many concessions to the British.

John Adams

John Adams was president from 1797 to 1801. Like George Washington before him, he was a Federalist. The high point of his presidency was when he avoided war with France by negotiating a settlement after the French seized American ships. The low point was the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts, which allowed the government to expel foreigners and jail newspaper editors for “scandalous and malicious” writing.

Loyalists

Loyalists were colonists who remained loyal to Britain during the Revolutionary War. They included government officials, members of the Church of England, and merchants dependent on trade with England.

Market Economy

The market economy first developed during the Revolutionary War era as settlers began to raise crops for profit instead of for subsistence only. This kind of economy grows faster than subsistence economies but is also more prone to boom-and-bust cycles.

Marquis de Lafayette

Marquis de Lafayette was a French general and political leader who supported the American Revolution. The Continental Congress appointed him as major general before France had officially entered into an alliance with the United States. Lafayette was wounded at Brandywine in September 1777, and endured the miserable winter at Valley Forge with Washington and his troops.

Massachusetts Circular Letter

The Massachusetts Circular Letter was written by Samuel Adams in 1768 and it encouraged the protest of the Townshend Acts. The Massachusetts Assembly sent the letter to other colonial assemblies and asked them to join. The British demanded that the letter not be discussed, and royal governors dissolved assemblies that disobeyed this prohibition. This fueled colonial protests for the acts.

Minutemen

Minutemen were an elite group of colonial militiamen who were usually young and received special training. Minutemen fought the British during the Battles of Lexington and Concord and prior to those battles the “Midnight Riders,” who were minutemen, rode into towns to warn of the arrival of the British.

Navigation Acts

The Navigation Acts expanded English control over colonial commerce. Under the Acts, the colonies were required to sell certain products only to England, to buy certain products only from England, and to import any non-British goods via English ports with a fee attached. The Acts also forbade the colonies from producing many goods already produced by England. Many New World merchants turned to smuggling to get around these restrictions.

Northwest Ordinance

The Northwest Ordinance was a law developed in 1787. The law, which was established by the Continental Congress, designated all land above the Ohio River as part of the Northwest Territory. The Northwest Territory would one day be divided into different states, including Wisconsin, Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois. The Northwest Ordinance forbade slavery and set aside land to be used for education. Three stages were set up that allowed people to enter the union: a governor and judge were appointed, people wrote a temporary constitution and elected a legislature, and then a Congress-approved constitution would allow for the formation of a new state. The Northwest Ordinance is important because it helped lay the foundations for future states, influenced the movement of settlers, and set a precedent for a ban on slavery.

Olive Branch Petition

The Olive Branch Petition was adopted by the Second Continental Congress on July 5, 1775. A large number of delegates, led by John Dickinson, were still eager to avoid war with the British. The petition called upon King George to come up with a way to settle trade disputes with the colonies. King George, dismayed by the colonists’ armed attacks on British forces and believing the petition to be insincere, rejected the effort.

Proclamation of 1763

In the Proclamation of 1763, the British government forbade settlers from settling west of the rivers running through the Appalachians. It did so in response to attacks from tribes upset about territorial encroachment. The proclamation had little effect since settlers were already moving west. However, it did antagonize settlers who viewed it as unwarranted interference; some historians believe the proclamation marks the end of salutary neglect and the first step on the road to revolution.

Restoration

The Restoration took place in the mid-1600s and at this time King Charles II became ruler of Britain. He was restored as king after years of military rule and fighting. After the man in charge during the military rule, Oliver Cromwell, died, Charles II was restored as long as he agreed to forgive his enemies and promoted religious toleration. After Charles II regained the throne, more colonies were created and the government tried to tighten control over them. This is important because the English monarchy was reestablished and more colonies were started. This helped shape American and British history. Since Charles II and his brother James II disliked representative government, the Restoration also led to the Dominion of New England and less freedom for the colonial assemblies.

Salutary Neglect

Salutary neglect, or benign neglect, describes the way that the British treated the colonies before the French and Indian War. During this period, England appointed absentee customs officials but otherwise left the colonies alone. The colonies became used to this, so when Britain tried to assert more control later on many colonists had revolutionary sentiments.

Second Battle of Saratoga

The Second Battle of Saratoga was a key turning point in the Revolutionary War. The Continental Army surrounded British forces near Saratoga, New York, forcing John Burgoyne to surrender. This battle proved to the French that America had a fighting chance, and this led to the Franco-American Alliance in 1778. French aid greatly helped the Americans emerge victorious.

Second Continental Congress

The Second Continental Congress was held soon after the Battles of Lexington and Concord. The Congress laid the groundwork for war by printing money, establishing an official army, and creating government offices to oversee policy. The Congress also chose George Washington to lead the army, as he was well-liked by many.

Shays' Rebellion

Shays' Rebellion took place in the late 1700s. The rebellion took place because of an economic depression that hit Massachusetts especially hard, along with a huge tax increase. To make matters worse, bankers and merchants demanded to be paid in specie (gold and silver), which many poor farmers had very little of. Angry farmers, led by Daniel Shays, attempted to close courts in order to prevent sheriffs' auctions and foreclosures on mortgages. They were fighting against a "new tyranny"- the Massachusetts government. The Founding Fathers were upset and realized that the Articles of Confederation were too weak. Eventually, many of the rebels were captured and the rebellion ended. Shays' Rebellion is important because it was the first rebellion after the Revolutionary War and showed the rebellious spirit still present in Americans. The rebellion also led to the Philadelphia Convention and the adoption of the Constitution.

Sons of Liberty

Sons of Liberty were protest groups that formed throughout the colonies during the wave of anger caused by the Stamp Act. They organized protests and vandalism towards the British. Members of the group were responsible for the Boston Tea Party and the Gaspée Affair.

Stamp Act Congress

The Stamp Act Congress met in New York in the mid-1700s after the Stamp Act was imposed. Representatives came to New York from nine colonies. The Stamp Act Congress met because they wanted to discuss the Stamp Act, which had outraged many colonists. The Stamp Act was an internal tax that was placed on all paper products by the prime minister, George Grenville. The members of the Stamp Act Congress agreed that external taxes that did not directly affect colonists could be imposed by Parliament, but internal taxes such as the Stamp Act could not be passed by Parliament. They determined that local officials should be in charge of directly taxing the colonists. William Pitt, a member of Parliament, agreed with the colonies and objected to the tax as well. Overall, the Stamp Act Congress (and the colonists in general) thought Parliament couldn't impose the Stamp Act because colonists weren't represented in Parliament. Grenville defended the act by claiming that Parliament represented everyone from the entire British Empire. This "virtual representation" was one of the major complaints of the colonies. The Stamp Act Congress is important because it was the first Congress that brought members from multiple colonies together to discuss problems. It signified an attempt by the colonies to unite, which would one day lead to the American Revolution.

Stamp Act

The Stamp Act imposed a tax on legal documents and licenses issued in the colonies. It angered many colonists, who felt their tradition of self-taxation was being threatened by Parliament. James Otis, Jr. coined the phrase "taxation without representation is tyranny" because of this law. In 1766 the Stamp Act was repealed.

The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved

The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved was the pamphlet written by James Otis that laid out the colonists' objections to the Stamp Act. Otis believed that colonists should not pay taxes because they were not granted Parliamentary representation. He argued for greater self-government or colonial representation in Parliament and not for secession from Great Britain.

The Wealth of Nations

The Wealth of Nations is a book written by Adam Smith, a man who lived in Scotland. The book was written in the late 1700s and was about economics. In his book, Smith proposed that a free-market economy would be best. It stood up to mercantilism, the common system of economy at the time. Nations began to take his advice and saw improvements in their overall economies. This book was important because it included ideas that brought economics to where they are today.

Townshend Acts

The Townshend Acts were drafted by Charles Townshend and they taxed goods imported to the colonies from Britain, created additional courts and government offices to enforce the Crown's rule, empowered the British to search any place suspected of hiding smuggled goods, and suspended the New York legislature for failing to supply men to serve in the British army.

Treaty of Paris

The Treaty of Paris, signed in 1783, was an agreement between America and Britain that ended the Revolutionary War. It was signed at the Hotel d' York in Paris by men including John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and John Jay. The treaty gave the thirteen colonies their independence, allowed the British Army to keep its property in North America, and established the dividing line between the United States and British North America.

Treaty of San Lorenzo

In 1795, President George Washington sent diplomat Thomas Pinckney to Spain, where Pinckney negotiated the Treaty of San Lorenzo. The treaty allowed American navigators free access to the Mississippi River and secured the removal of Spanish forts from American land. Spain also agreed that the borders of the U.S. would extend to the Mississippi River and the thirty-first parallel. The treaty is often considered the high point of Washington's administration.

Two Treatises of Government

The English philosopher John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* strongly influenced the Declaration of Independence. In the treatises, Locke challenged the divine right of kings and put forth the social contract theory, which argues that leaders govern with the consent of their subjects and this consent can be taken away at any time.

Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions

The Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions were written by James Madison and Thomas Jefferson in the late 1700s. These resolutions were created because they believed that the Alien and Sedition Acts were unconstitutional. Jefferson and Madison, who were Republicans, believed that states should have more power and disliked how much power the federal government had. They decided to draw up their resolutions and present them to the Virginia and Kentucky legislatures. The men wanted the states to be able to “nullify” laws that they deemed unconstitutional, such as the Alien and Sedition Acts. The two states agreed and passed these resolutions, and this nearly led to a civil war. The Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions are important because the resolutions could have potentially led to a civil war and to violence. States declared that they were equal and didn’t have to listen to every law, and this issue would arise later on in history during the Civil War-era.

Virtual Representation

In the 1760s, the Stamp Act and other taxes imposed on the colonies led to a debate about virtual representation. Many colonists argued that the English government could not tax them because it did not offer them representation in Parliament. The English responded by assuring them that since Parliament represented all British subjects, they were virtually represented by parliament even if they had not voted for a representative.

Whiskey Rebellion

The Whiskey Rebellion of 1794 was instigated by Pennsylvania farmers upset by a federal tax on whiskey, imposed to pay off debt from the Revolution. In response, President George Washington dispatched a militia to stop the revolt. This instance showed that the federal government was powerful enough and had authority over its citizens.