

The American Revolution (1763-1787) : how the Thirteen Colonies became the United States of America

1-America before the United-States.

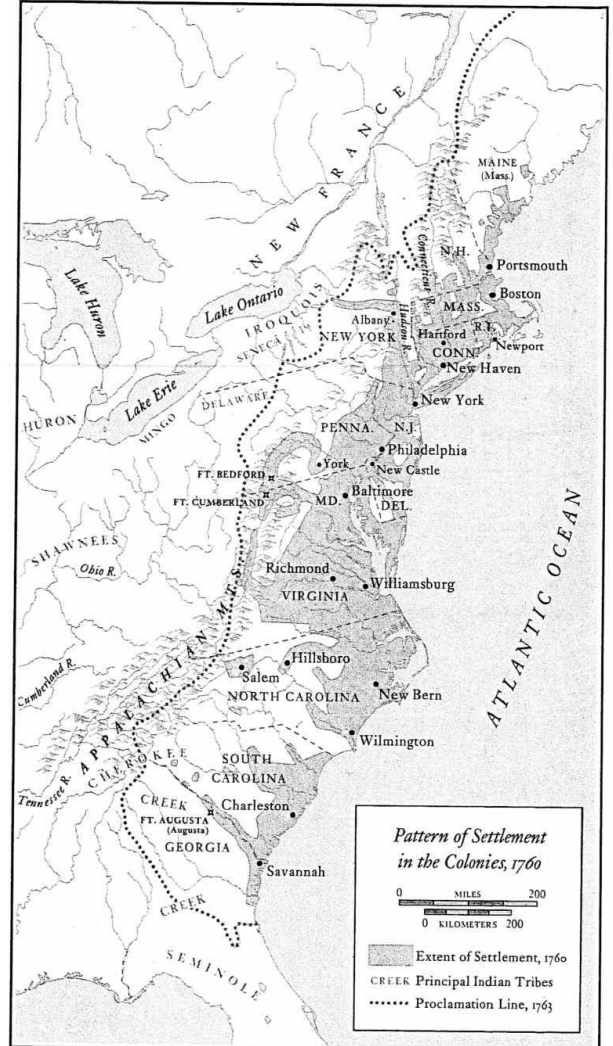
Document 1. The Thirteen Colonies in 1763.

Gordon S. Wood, *The American revolution : a history*, New York, Modern Library, 2002.

Document 2. The population of the Thirteen Colonies.

By 1770 Britain's mainland settlements contained a polyglot population of English, Scots, Germans, Dutch, Swiss, French, and Africans, although in 1680 most European settlers were English. By 1770 slavery had profoundly reshaped colonial life everywhere, whereas it cast only curious shadows in the mainland colonies as late as 1670. As early as 1720 cities of real urban complexity emerged from the meanest and simplest of towns. Modest as well as prosperous farmers increasingly thrust themselves into international market economies, some happily, some less so. Eighteenth-century colonial merchants and planters created and inherited wealth so vast that their predecessors scarcely could have comprehended it. [...] A vigorous religious pluralism overran the old orthodoxy of the Puritans in Massachusetts and the Anglicans in Virginia. [...] The America of the British mainland colonies had come to mean a new kind of society even if strong remnants of older societies still persisted past the American Revolution.

Jon Butler, *Becoming America: the Revolution before 1776*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 2000.



- 1-Introduce both documents.
- 2-Pick up all the words related to colonization in document 2.
- 3-Copy the table below and fill it up with information from both documents.

America in the mid 18th century	
Territory	
Population	
Activities and wealth	
Religion	

2- From resistance to revolution (1763-1775)

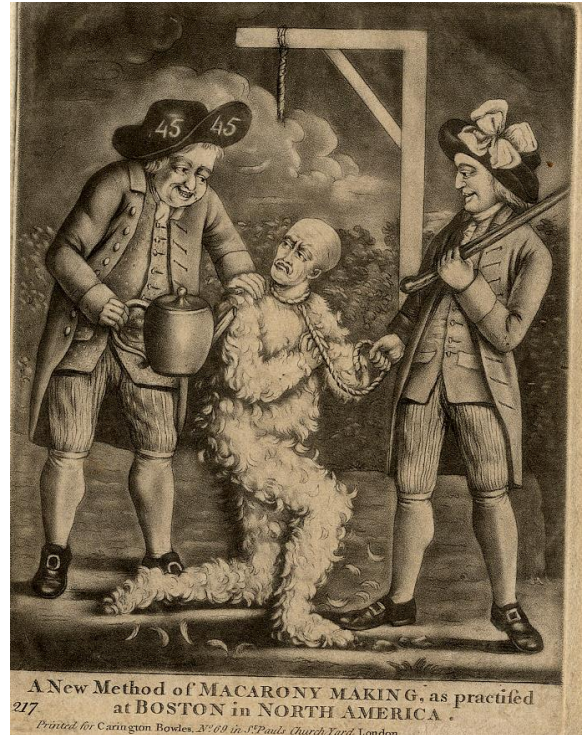
Document 1. The Stamp Act Crisis (1765-1766).

George Grenville, first lord of the treasury, announced plans to impose a stamp tax in America, (a tax on any printed material such as newspapers, books, playing cards, and all legal documents). The colonial assemblies argued that since Americans were not represented in Parliament, that body could not tax them (« no taxation without representation»). However Parliament passed the legislation. The reaction in America, partially coordinated by resistance groups calling themselves the Sons of Liberty, was immediate and violent. Rioting crowds forced distributors to resign. Governors could not compel the distribution of stamps, and thus the tax did not enforce itself. The repeal of the Stamp Act in March 1766 was a major defeat for Britain. Without question the Stamp Act crisis weakened royal authority in the colonies, heightened American suspicions about British policy, and encouraged further resistance.

Adapted from John L. Bullion, "Stamp Act", in *The Oxford Companion to United States History*, Oxford University Press, 2001.

Document 2. American patriots dealing with a custom official in 1774.

The man who has been tarred and feathered is probably John Malcolm, a British customs official who strongly supported British regulations and taxes. Printed for Carrington Bowles. No. 69 in St. Pauls Church Yard, London, (23 x 14.5 cm). The American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts, USA.



Document 3. The Boston tea party, December 16, 1773.



The Boston Tea Party was a protest by the American Colonists against the British in regards to the tea taxes that had been imposed on them.

This resulted in the passage of the punitive Coercive Acts in 1774 and pushed the two sides closer to war.

Destruction of tea at Boston Harbor, N. Currier (firm), 1846, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.,USA.

Document 4. Some of the Founding Fathers' famous quotes.

"The distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders are no more. I Am Not A Virginian, But An American!"

Patrick Henry, Speech in the First Continental Congress, 1774.

"It is a common observation here that our cause is the cause of all mankind, and that we are fighting for their liberty in defending our own".

Benjamin Franklin, Letter to Samuel Cooper, May 1, 1777.

1. Introduce all documents, separating first-hand sources from second-hand sources.
2. Name the reasons WHY the American colonists rebelled against Britain (doc 1,3 & 4).
3. Explain HOW they conducted their rebellion (all documents).
4. WHO were the people who rebelled against Britain? (all documents).

3-The American War of Independence (1775-1783)

Document 1. Surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, 1781.

The painting by John Trumbull is on display in the Rotunda of the US Capitol (1820). The subject of this painting is the surrender of the British army at Yorktown, Virginia, in 1781, which ended the last major campaign of the Revolutionary War.



<https://www.aoc.gov/art/historic-rotunda-paintings/surrender-lord-cornwallis>

Document 2. British and American advantages in the War of Independence

When the colonies declared their independence (1776), many people on both sides doubted they could win the war. The British outnumbered and outgunned the Americans, and their troops were better trained and better equipped. The Americans' major advantage was logistic: they were fighting a war on familiar terrain. The turning point of the war came in 1777 when British general John Burgoyne's plan to isolate New England from the other rebel colonies failed. Burgoyne was forced to surrender at Saratoga, New York. The surprising American victory led to an alliance between France and the United States and the expansion of the war into an international conflict. American victory was assured when French and American forces defeated general Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia, in October 1781. The Treaty of Paris was negotiated in 1783.

Carol Berkin, Christopher Miller, Robert Cherny, James Gormly, *Making America: A History of the United States*, Volume I: To 1877

1. Introduce document 1 and describe it. What purpose does this painting serve?
2. According to document 2, what were the assets or advantages of the British Army? Why did the Americans win the war? Name and date the two major American victories.

4-The United States of America: a new state and a new political system

Document 1. The Declaration of Independence (1776)

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen United States of America, voted by Congress, July 4, 1776.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government [...]

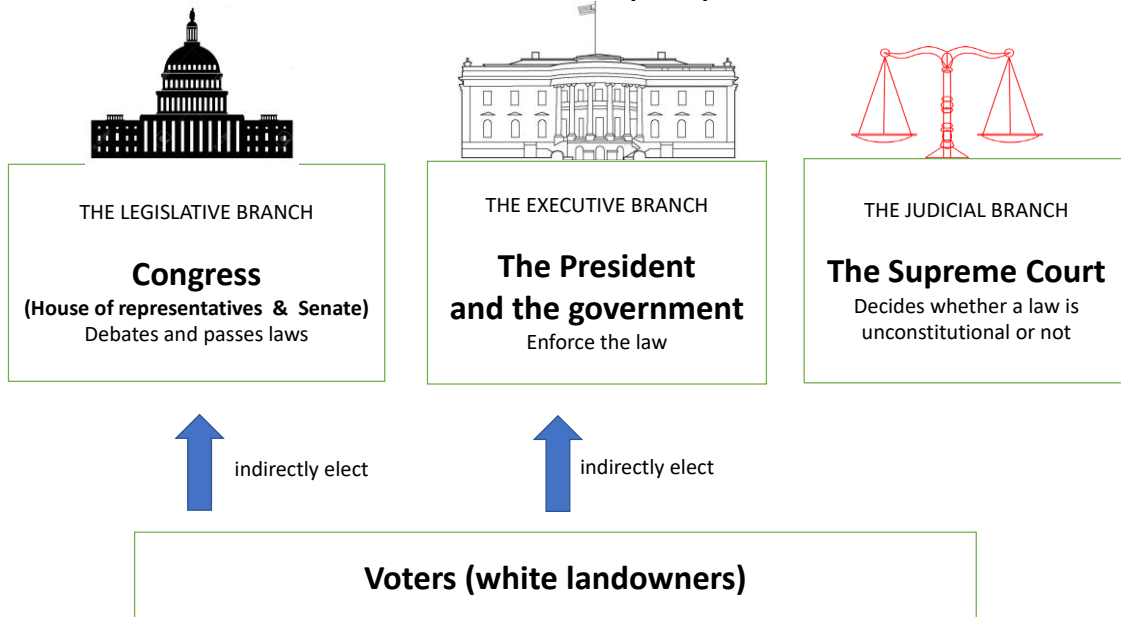
The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. [...]

We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States. [...]



stone engraving of the Declaration of Independence (1820).
www.archives.gov

Document 2. The Constitution of the United States (1787).



1. When and how did the colonists declare themselves independent? (doc 1)
2. Color the boxes in the key below with three different colors and highlight the excerpts of the Declaration of Independence according to the key:
 - Congress declares the Thirteen Colonies are independent and creates a new sovereign state
 - Congress asserts human rights
 - Congress justifies its rebellion against Great Britain
3. Which new political system did the Americans set up in 1787? To what extent was it democratic?
4. Can you see a contradiction between the first paragraph of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution?