

PrepUS History

Unit 2 - The American Revolution

The War for Independence, Part 1

Directions: Read the handout thoroughly, using a **YELLOW** highlighter to highlight any important vocabulary/terms/names/events that you think might be historically important. Write the vocabulary word/name/event title in the margins next to the highlighted text.

The Two Armies Face Off

The British felt they would crush the colonists. The colonists thought Great Britain would give up quickly after losing a few battles.

The British were confident because they had:

- the strongest navy in the world
- a well-trained army
- great wealth from their worldwide empire
- a large population (over 8 million people)

In comparison, the colonists had

- a weak navy
- no regular army, just local militia groups
- a lack of fighting experience
- a shortage of weapons and ammunition
- some people who did not support the war.

As many as one in three people in the colonies may have remained loyal to Great Britain. They were called Loyalists, or Tories. Some relied on the British for their jobs. Others thought a revolution would cause too much trouble or did not agree with the reasons for the war. Even neighbors and family members disagreed. Benjamin Franklin was an important Patriot while his son, William, was a Loyalist.

Great Britain also had mercenaries, soldiers who were paid to fight. The Americans called them Hessians. Some African Americans also supported Great Britain and the Loyalists. Great Britain sometimes promised freedom to African Americans who helped the British cause.

The Patriots had the advantages of fighting on their own land. The British would be fighting far from home. All of the British supplies and soldiers had to come from far away. They were also fighting for a great cause—their independence from Britain. This gave them strong motivation to fight. The Patriots' greatest advantage was the leadership of George Washington. He was courageous, determined, and an excellent leader.

After the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the Continental Congress acted as a national government. Congress, however, had limited powers. They did not have the power to raise money through taxes. Some members of Congress, such as James Madison from Virginia, called for a stronger national government.

Not everyone agreed with this idea. After living with harsh British rule, the colonists did not want to give power to the new government. This made it hard for Congress to raise money and recruit, or enlist, soldiers.

Many of the troops were members of a local militia, or people who are called to fight when needed. Many needed to tend to their farms to support their families. Congress established the Continental Army so that soldiers could be trained and paid. At first, soldiers signed up for a year at a time. General Washington, however, felt soldiers should agree to stay until the war was over. It was also difficult to find good leaders. Some were capable young men from the army. Others had experience in earlier wars.

A few women were involved in the fighting. Margaret Corbin went with her husband, then took his place when he died in battle. A legend says that a woman called “Molly Pitcher” fought in the war and brought pitchers of water to the soldiers. Deborah Sampson disguised herself as a man so she could join the fight, too.

Early Campaigns

Early battles of the American Revolution were fought by smaller numbers of soldiers. At Bunker Hill, in Massachusetts, about 2,200 British soldiers fought about 1,200 Americans. The British outnumbered the Americans and won the battle, but lost many more troops. They quickly realized more troops were needed to fight the war.

In 1776, Great Britain sent 32,000 more troops to help fight the war. The Patriots did not have a large army, about 20,000 soldiers, but they were very determined. In August 1776, the two armies met in the Battle of Long Island in New York. The British caught a Patriot spy, Nathan Hale. Before he was hanged, Hale supposedly said, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

The British had more men and more supplies. Many Patriot soldiers had no shoes, socks, or jackets. The Battle of Long Island was a serious defeat for the Continental Army. The British leader chased the Continental Army across New Jersey into Pennsylvania. He could have probably captured all of the Patriot troops, but he was satisfied that Washington was defeated, and he let him go.

This was a difficult time for the Continental Army. Even General Washington worried. They needed more men and more supplies. Many African Americans wanted to join the Army but were not allowed to. Washington asked Congress to reconsider. Historians estimate that around 5,000 African Americans eventually fought.

General Washington did not give up. On Christmas night, he and his troops crossed the icy Delaware River. He surprised a Hessian force camped in Trenton, New Jersey. After this victory, they marched on to Princeton, New Jersey. Washington pushed back the British troops they met there. The battles encouraged the troops to believe they could win.

British Strategy

The British had a plan to win in 1777. They wanted to cut off New England from the Middle Colonies. They needed to take Albany, New York, and control the Hudson River. The British plan involved coming in to Albany from three directions at the same time. General Burgoyne would move south from Canada, Lieutenant Colonel St. Leger would move east from Lake Ontario, and General Howe would move north up the Hudson River.

General Howe changed his plans, capturing Philadelphia instead. The Continental Congress was forced to escape. Howe stayed in Philadelphia for the winter. St. Leger also lost a battle to the Americans and did not reach Albany.

General Burgoyne captured Fort Ticonderoga in July 1777, but needed supplies. He sent troops to Vermont, but the local militia, called the Green Mountain Boys, attacked. Burgoyne's troops retreated to Saratoga, New York. There, American general Horatio Gates surrounded them and Burgoyne surrendered on October 17, 1777.

The British plan to take Albany and the Hudson River had failed. The Americans had won a huge victory at Saratoga. The American win at the Battle of Saratoga changed the course of the war.

NOW - go back through the reading and use a **DIFFERENT COLORED** highlighter to highlight the portion of the text that answers each of questions below, marking the text with the question number. If you already highlighted the text that answers a question in yellow, just write the question number in the margin next to it (you do not need to highlight it again in the other color).

1. What disadvantages did the Patriots face in fighting the British?
2. What were two reasons that people in the colonies stayed loyal to Britain?
3. What were three advantages the Patriots had during the American Revolution?
4. Why did Congress need to establish the Continental Army?
5. Who were two of the more famous women involved in the American Revolution and what did they do?
6. About how many African Americans fought in the war?
7. What were two important American wins in the early days of the American Revolution?
8. What was the British plan in 1777?
9. How did Howe's victory in Philadelphia lead to Burgoyne's defeat at Saratoga?
10. What were two reasons that the British plan to take Albany failed?