

American Revolution

The **American Revolution** was a rebellion and political movement in the Thirteen Colonies which peaked when colonists initiated an ultimately successful war for independence against the Kingdom of Great Britain. Leaders of the American Revolution were colonial separatist leaders who originally sought more autonomy within the British political system as British subjects, but later assembled to support the Revolutionary War, which successfully ended British colonial rule over the colonies, establishing their independence, and leading to the creation of the United States of America.

Discontent with colonial rule began shortly after the defeat of France in the French and Indian War. Although the colonies had fought and supported the war, Parliament imposed new taxes to compensate for wartime costs and turned control of the colonies' western lands over to the British officials in Montreal. Representatives from several colonies convened the Stamp Act Congress to articulate a response. Its "Declaration of Rights and Grievances" argued that taxation without representation violated their rights as Englishmen.

In 1767, tensions flared again following the British Parliament's passage of the Townshend Acts, a group of new taxes and regulations imposed on the thirteen colonies. In an effort to quell the mounting rebellion in the colonies, which was particularly severe in Massachusetts Bay Colony, King George III deployed troops to Boston. A local fracas resulted in the troops killing protesters in the Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770.

The Thirteen Colonies responded assertively. In 1772, anti-tax demonstrators in Rhode Island destroyed the Royal Navy customs schooner *Gaspee*. On December 16, 1773, in the Boston Tea Party, activists dressed themselves as Indians and dumped 340 chests of tea owned by the British East India Company and worth £9,659 into Boston Harbor. London responded decisively, closing Boston Harbor and enacting a series of punitive laws, which effectively ended self government in Massachusetts. In late 1774, 12 of the Thirteen Colonies (Georgia joined in 1775) sent delegates to the First Continental Congress, which convened at Carpenters' Hall in Philadelphia. It began coordinating Patriot resistance, which initially was carried out by local militias in the colonies, which gained military experience in the French and Indian War and began asserting rights of self-governance and defense.

In 1775, the King declared the Massachusetts Bay Colony to be in a state of open defiance and rebellion. On June 14, 1775, the Second Continental Congress, which convened at present-day Independence Hall in Philadelphia responded by authorizing formation of the Continental Army and appointing George Washington as its commander-in-chief. The fighting began two months earlier, in April 1775, when the British attempted to seize militia weapons but met resistance in the Battles of Lexington and Concord. The Continental Army expelled the British from Boston, leaving the Patriots in control of each colony.

In July 1776, the Second Continental Congress took the role of governing a new nation. It denounced King George III as a tyrant who trampled the colonists' rights as Englishmen, passed the Lee Resolution for national independence on July 2, and on July 4, 1776, adopted the Declaration of Independence, which embodied the political philosophies of liberalism and republicanism, rejected monarchy and aristocracy, and famously proclaimed that "all men are created equal".

The fighting continued for five years, now known as the Revolutionary War. During that time, France entered as an ally of the United States.

The decisive victory came in the fall of 1781, when the combined American and French armies captured an entire British army in the Siege of Yorktown. The defeat led to the collapse of King George's control of Parliament, with a majority now in favor of ending the war on American terms. On September 3, 1783, the British signed the Treaty of Paris giving the United States nearly all the territory east of the Mississippi River and south of the Great Lakes. About 60,000 Loyalists migrated to other British territories in Canada and elsewhere, but the great majority remained in the United States. With its victory in the American Revolution, the United States became the first constitutional republic in world history founded on the consent of the governed and the rule of law.

Suggested Readings:

1. Rao, B. V. (1996), *History of Europe (1450-1815)*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi.