

# 6

## CHAPTER

# Making War and Republican Governments

## 1776–1789

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When Patriots in Frederick County, Maryland, demanded his allegiance to their cause in 1776, Robert Gassaway would have none of it. "It was better for the poor people to lay down their arms and pay the duties and taxes laid upon them by King and Parliament than to be brought into slavery and commanded and ordered about [by you]," he told them. The story was much the same in Farmington, Connecticut, where Patriot officials imprisoned Nathaniel Jones and seventeen other men for "remaining neutral." In Pennsylvania, Quakers accused of Loyalism were rounded up, jailed, and charged with treason, and some were hanged for aiding the British cause. Everywhere, the outbreak of fighting in 1776 forced families to choose the Loyalist or the Patriot side.

The Patriots' control of most local governments gave them an edge in this battle. Patriot leaders organized militia units and recruited volunteers for the Continental army, a ragtag force that surprisingly held its own on the battlefield. "I admire the American troops tremendously!" exclaimed a French officer. "It is incredible that soldiers composed of every age, even children of fifteen, of whites and blacks, almost naked, unpaid, and rather poorly fed, can march so well and withstand fire so steadfastly."

Military service created political commitment, and vice versa. Many Patriot leaders encouraged Americans not only to support the war but also to take an active role in government. As more people did so, their political identities changed. Previously, Americans had lived within a social world dominated by the links of family, kinship, and locality. Now, the abstract bonds of citizenship connected them directly to more distant institutions of government. "From subjects to citizens the difference is immense," remarked South Carolina Patriot David Ramsay. By repudiating monarchical rule and raising a democratic army, the Patriots launched the age of republican revolutions.

Soon republicanism would throw France into turmoil and inspire revolutionaries in Spain's American colonies. The independence of the Anglo-American colonies, remarked the Venezuelan political leader Francisco de Miranda, who had been in New York and Philadelphia at the end of the American Revolution, "was bound to be . . . the infallible preliminary to our own [independence movement]." The Patriot uprising of 1776 set in motion a process that gradually replaced an Atlantic colonial system that spanned the Americas with an American system of new nations.

### IDENTIFY THE BIG IDEA

How revolutionary was the American Revolution? What political, social, and economic changes did it produce, and what stayed the same?



**General Washington, 1780** By war's end, George Washington was a hero on both sides of the Atlantic. This engraving, printed in Paris in 1780, shows him with various British bills and declarations in tatters at his feet while he holds copies of the Declaration of Independence and the Treaty of Alliance with France. In the background of this vaguely Orientalized scene, a black slave—presumably William Lee, Washington's valet and constant companion during the Revolution—saddles his horse. Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library.



## The Trials of War, 1776–1778

The Declaration of Independence appeared just as the British launched a full-scale military assault. For two years, British troops manhandled the Continental army. A few inspiring American victories kept the rebellion alive, but during the winters of 1776 and 1777, the Patriot cause hung in the balance.

### War in the North

Once the British resorted to military force, few Europeans gave the rebels a chance. The population of Great Britain was 11 million; the colonies, 2.5 million, 20 percent of whom were enslaved Africans. Moreover, the British government had access to the immense wealth generated by the South Atlantic System and the emerging Industrial Revolution. Britain also had the most powerful navy in the world, a standing army of 48,000 Britons plus thousands of German (Hessian) soldiers, and the support of thousands of American Loyalists and powerful Indian coalitions. In the Carolinas, the Cherokees resisted colonists' demands for their lands by allying with the British, as did four of the six Iroquois nations of New York (Map 6.1). In the Ohio country, Shawnees and their allies, armed by the British, attacked the new Kentucky settlements.

By contrast, the Americans were economically and militarily weak. They lacked a strong central government and a reliable source of tax revenue. Their new Continental army, commanded by General George Washington, consisted of 18,000 poorly trained and inexperienced recruits.

To demonstrate Britain's military superiority, the prime minister, Lord North, ordered General William Howe to capture New York City. His strategy was to seize control of the Hudson River and thereby isolate the radical Patriots in New England from the colonies to the south. As the Second Continental Congress declared independence in Philadelphia in July 1776, Howe landed 32,000 troops—British regulars and

German mercenaries—outside New York City. In August 1776, Howe defeated the Americans in the **Battle of Long Island** and forced their retreat to Manhattan Island. There, Howe outflanked Washington's troops and nearly trapped them. Outgunned and

outmaneuvered, the Continental army again retreated, eventually crossing the Hudson River to New Jersey.

#### UNDERSTAND POINTS OF VIEW

Why was control of New York City Britain's first military objective in the emerging war?



**MAP 6.1**  
Patriot and Loyalist Strongholds

Patriots were in the majority in most of the thirteen mainland colonies and used their control of local governments to funnel men, money, and supplies to the rebel cause. Although Loyalists could be found in every colony, their strongholds were limited to Nova Scotia, eastern New York, New Jersey, and certain areas in the South. However, most Native American peoples favored the British cause and bolstered the power of Loyalist militias in central New York (see Map 6.3) and in the Carolina backcountry.

By December, the British army had pushed the rebels across New Jersey and over the Delaware River into Pennsylvania.

From the Patriots' perspective, winter came just in time. Following eighteenth-century custom, the British halted their military campaign for the cold months, allowing the Americans to catch them off guard. On Christmas night 1776, Washington crossed the Delaware River and staged a successful surprise attack on Trenton, New Jersey, where he forced the surrender of 1,000 German soldiers. In early January 1777, the Continental army won a small victory at nearby Princeton (Map 6.2). But these minor triumphs could



**MAP 6.2**  
The War in the North, 1776–1777

In 1776, the British army drove Washington's forces across New Jersey into Pennsylvania. The Americans counterattacked successfully at Trenton and Princeton and then set up winter headquarters in Morristown. In 1777, British forces stayed on the offensive. General Howe attacked the Patriot capital, Philadelphia, from the south and captured it in early October. Meanwhile, General Burgoyne and Colonel St. Leger launched simultaneous invasions from Canada. With the help of thousands of New England militiamen, American troops commanded by General Horatio Gates defeated Burgoyne in August at Bennington, Vermont, and in October at Saratoga, New York, the military turning point in the war.

not mask British military superiority. "These are the times," wrote Thomas Paine, "that try men's souls."

## Armies and Strategies

Thanks in part to General Howe, the rebellion survived. Howe had opposed the Coercive Acts of 1774 and still hoped for a political compromise. So he did not try to destroy the American army but instead tried to show its weakness and persuade the Continental

Congress to give up the struggle. Howe's restrained tactics cost Britain the opportunity to nip the rebellion in the bud. For his part, Washington acted cautiously to avoid a major defeat: "On our Side the War should be defensive," he told Congress. His strategy was to draw the British away from the seacoast, extend their lines of supply, and sap their morale.

Congress had promised Washington a regular force of 75,000 men, but the Continental army never reached even a third of that number. Yeomen, refusing to be



### The Battle of Princeton

Black smoke from burning buildings partially obscures the sun as the muzzle flash from an American cannon lights up the battlefield. Pursued by Cornwallis after his surprise attack and victory at nearby Trenton, Washington (on horseback to the right of the flag) confronted three regiments of redcoats at Princeton. The Americans had an advantage in numbers and put the British to flight, but only after withstanding the bayonet charge depicted in the right-center of William Mercer's painting. Courtesy of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania Collection Atwater Kent Museum of Philadelphia.

“Haras’d with callouts” that took them away from their families and farms, would serve only in local militias. When the Virginia gentry imposed a military draft and three years of service on propertyless men — the “Lazy fellows who lurk about and are pests to Society” — they resisted so fiercely that the legislature had to pay them

substantial bounties and agree to shorter terms of service. The Continental soldiers recruited in Maryland by General William Smallwood were poor American youths and older foreign-born men, often British ex-convicts

and former indentured servants. Most enlisted for the \$20 cash bonus (about \$2,000 today) and the promise of 100 acres of land.

Molding such recruits into an effective fighting force was nearly impossible. Inexperienced soldiers panicked in the face of British attacks; thousands deserted, unwilling to submit to the discipline of military life. The soldiers who stayed resented the contempt

their officers had for the “camp followers,” the women who made do with the meager supplies provided to feed and care for the troops. General Philip Schuyler of New York complained that his troops were “destitute of provisions, without camp equipage, with little ammunition, and not a single piece of cannon.”

The Continental army was not only poorly supplied but was also held in suspicion by Radical Whig Patriots, who believed that a standing army was a threat to liberty. Even in wartime, they preferred militias to a professional fighting force. Given these handicaps, Washington and his army were fortunate to have escaped an overwhelming defeat.

### Victory at Saratoga

After Howe failed to achieve an overwhelming victory, Lord North and his colonial secretary, Lord George Germain, launched another major military campaign in 1777. Isolating New England remained the primary goal. To achieve it, Germain planned a three-pronged

#### IDENTIFY CAUSES

What factors made it difficult for the Continental Congress to create an effective army?



attack converging on Albany, New York. General John Burgoyne would lead a large contingent of regulars south from Quebec, Colonel Barry St. Leger and a force of Iroquois would attack from the west, and General Howe would lead troops north from New York City.

Howe instead decided to attack Philadelphia, the home of the Continental Congress, hoping to end the rebellion with a single decisive blow. But instead of marching quickly across New Jersey, Howe loaded his troops onto boats and sailed up the Chesapeake Bay to attack Philadelphia from the south. The plan worked. Howe's troops easily outflanked the American positions along Brandywine Creek in Delaware and, in late September, marched triumphantly into Philadelphia. However, the capture of the rebels' capital did not end the uprising; the Continental Congress, determined to continue the struggle, fled to the countryside.

Howe's slow campaign against Philadelphia contributed to the defeat of Burgoyne's army at **Saratoga**. Burgoyne's troops had at first advanced quickly, overwhelming the American defenses at Fort Ticonderoga in early July and driving south toward the Hudson River. Then they stalled. Burgoyne — nicknamed “Gentleman Johnny” — was used to high living and had fought in Europe in a leisurely fashion; believing his large army would easily dominate the rebels, he stopped early each day to pitch comfortable tents and eat elaborate dinners with his officers. The American troops led by General Horatio Gates also slowed Burgoyne's progress by felling huge trees in his path and raiding British supply lines to Canada.

At summer's end, Burgoyne's army of 6,000 British and German troops and 600 Loyalists and Indians was stuck near Saratoga, New York. Desperate for food and horses, in August the British raided nearby Bennington, Vermont, but were beaten back by 2,000 American militiamen. Patriot forces in the Mohawk Valley also threw St. Leger and the Iroquois into retreat. Making matters worse, the British commander in New York City recalled 4,000 troops he had sent toward Albany and ordered them to Philadelphia to bolster Howe's force. While Burgoyne waited in vain for help, thousands of Patriot militiamen from Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and New York joined Gates, blocking Burgoyne in a series of skirmishes that finally gave the British no avenue of escape. The Patriots “swarmed around the army like birds of prey,” reported an English sergeant, and in October 1777, they forced Burgoyne to surrender.

The victory at Saratoga was the turning point of the war. The Patriots captured more than 5,000 British



### Joseph Brant

Mohawk chief Thayendanegea, known to whites as Joseph Brant, was a devout member of the Church of England and helped to translate the Bible into the Mohawk language. Brant persuaded four of the six Iroquois nations to support Britain in the war. In 1778 and 1779, he led Iroquois warriors and Tory rangers in devastating attacks on American settlements in the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania and Cherry Valley in New York. In this 1797 portrait, artist Charles Willson Peale has portrayed Brant with European features. Independence National Historic Park.

troops and ensured the diplomatic success of American representatives in Paris, who won a military alliance with France.

## The Perils of War

The Patriots' triumph at Saratoga was tempered by wartime difficulties. A British naval blockade cut off supplies of European manufactures and disrupted the New England fishing industry; meanwhile, the British occupation of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia reduced trade. As Patriots, along with unemployed artisans and laborers, moved to the countryside, New York City's population declined from 21,000 to 10,000. The British blockade cut tobacco exports in the Chesapeake, so planters grew grain to sell to the contending armies. All across the land, farmers and artisans adapted to a war economy.

With goods now scarce, governments requisitioned military supplies directly from the people. In 1776, Connecticut officials asked the citizens of Hartford to



### American Militiamen

Beset by continuing shortages of cloth, the Patriot army dressed in a variety of uniforms and fabrics. This German engraving, taken from a drawing by a Hessian officer, shows two American militiamen (one of them barefoot) wearing hunting shirts and trousers made of ticking, the strong linen fabric often used to cover mattresses and pillows. Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University.

provide 1,000 coats and 1,600 shirts, and soldiers echoed their pleas. After losing all his shirts “except the one on my back” in the Battle of Long Island, Captain Edward Rogers told his wife that “the making of Cloath . . . must go on.” Patriot women responded; in Elizabeth, New Jersey, they promised “upwards of 100,000 yards of linnen and woolen cloth.” Other women assumed the burdens of farmwork while their men were away at war and acquired a taste for decision making. “We have sow’d our oats as you desired,” Sarah Cobb Paine wrote to her absent husband. “Had I been master I should have planted it to Corn.” Their self-esteem boosted by wartime activities, some women expected greater legal rights in the new republican society.

Still, goods remained scarce and pricey. Hard-pressed consumers assailed shopkeepers as “enemies, extortioners, and monopolizers” and called for government regulation. But when the New England states imposed price ceilings in 1777, many farmers and

artisans refused to sell their goods. Ultimately, a government official admitted, consumers had to pay the higher market prices “or submit to starving.”

The fighting endangered tens of thousands of civilians. A British officer, Lord Rawdon, favored giving “free liberty to the soldiers to ravage [the country] at will, that these infatuated creatures may feel what a calamity war is.” As British and American armies marched back and forth across New Jersey, they forced Patriot and Loyalist families to flee their homes to escape arrest — or worse. Soldiers and partisans looted farms, and disorderly troops harassed and raped women and girls. “An army, even a friendly one, are a dreadful scourge to any people,” wrote one Connecticut soldier. “You cannot imagine what devastation and distress mark their steps.”

The war divided many farm communities. Patriots formed committees of safety to collect taxes and seized the property of those who refused to pay. “Every Body submitted to our Sovereign Lord the Mob,” lamented a Loyalist preacher. In parts of Maryland, the number of “nonassociators” — those who refused to join either side — was so large that they successfully defied Patriot mobs. “Stand off you dammed rebel sons of bitches,” shouted Robert Davis of Anne Arundel County, “I will shoot you if you come any nearer.”

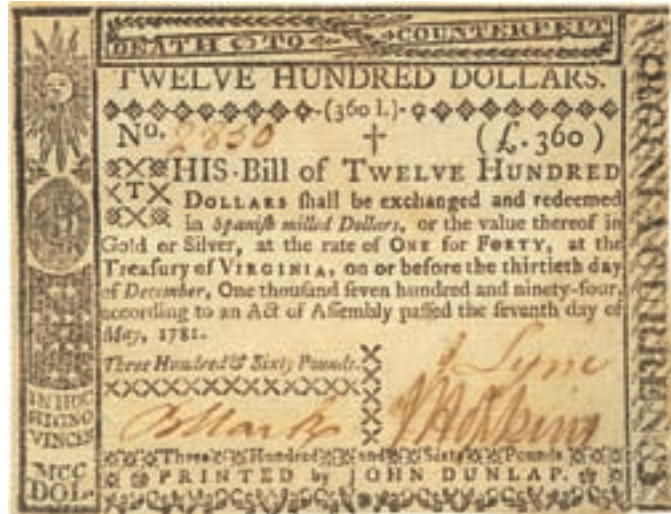
### Financial Crisis

Such defiance exposed the weakness of Patriot governments. Most states were afraid to raise taxes, so officials issued bonds to secure gold or silver from wealthy individuals. When those funds ran out, individual states financed the war by issuing so much paper money — some \$260 million all told — that it lost worth, and most people refused to accept it at face value. In North Carolina, even tax collectors eventually rejected the state’s currency.

The finances of the Continental Congress collapsed, too, despite the efforts of Philadelphia merchant Robert Morris, the government’s chief treasury official. Because the Congress lacked the authority to impose taxes, Morris relied on funds requisitioned from the states, but the states paid late or not at all. So Morris secured loans from France and Holland and sold Continental loan certificates to some thirteen thousand firms and individuals. All the while, the Congress was issuing paper money — some \$200 million between 1776 and 1779 — which, like state currencies, quickly fell in value. In 1778, a family needed \$7 in Continental bills to buy goods worth \$1 in gold or silver. As the exchange rate deteriorated — to 42 to 1 in

### Paper Currency

Testifying to their independent status, the new state governments printed their own currencies. Rejecting the English system of pounds and shillings, Virginia used the Spanish gold dollar as its basic unit of currency, although the equivalent in English pounds is also shown. Initially, \$1,200 was equal to £360—a ratio of 3.3 to 1. By 1781, Virginia had printed so much paper money to pay its soldiers and wartime expenses that the value of its currency had depreciated. It now took \$40 in Virginia currency to buy the same amount of goods as £1 sterling. The American Numismatic Society.



1779, 100 to 1 in 1780, and 146 to 1 in 1781 — it sparked social upheaval. In Boston, a mob of women accosted merchant Thomas Boylston, “seazd him by his Neck,” and forced him to sell his wares at traditional prices. In rural Ulster County, New York, women told the committee of safety to lower food prices or “their husbands and sons shall fight no more.” As morale crumbled, Patriot leaders feared the rebellion would collapse.

### Valley Forge

Fears reached their peak during the winter of 1777. While Howe’s army lived comfortably in Philadelphia, Washington’s army retreated 20 miles to **Valley Forge**, where 12,000 soldiers and hundreds of camp followers suffered horribly. “The army . . . now begins to grow sickly,” a surgeon confided to his diary. “Poor food—hard lodging—cold weather—fatigue—nasty clothes—nasty cookery. . . . Why are we sent here to starve and freeze?” Nearby farmers refused to help. Some were pacifists, Quakers and German sectarians unwilling to support either side. Others looked out for their own families, selling grain for gold from British quartermasters but refusing depreciated Continental currency. “Such a dearth of public spirit, and want of public virtue,” lamented Washington. By spring, more than 200 officers had resigned, 1,000 hungry soldiers had deserted, and another 3,000 had died from malnutrition and disease. That winter at Valley Forge took as many American lives as had two years of fighting.

In this dark hour, Baron von Steuben raised the readiness of the American army. A former Prussian military officer, von Steuben was one of a handful of republican-minded foreign aristocrats who joined the American cause. Appointed as inspector general of the

Continental army, he instituted a strict drill system and encouraged officers to become more professional. Thanks to von Steuben, the smaller army that emerged from Valley Forge in the spring of 1778 was a much tougher and better-disciplined force.

## The Path to Victory, 1778–1783

Wars are often won by astute diplomacy, and so it was with the War of Independence. The Patriots’ prospects improved dramatically in 1778, when the Continental Congress concluded a military alliance with France, the most powerful nation in Europe. The alliance gave the Americans desperately needed money, supplies, and, eventually, troops. And it confronted Britain with an international war that challenged its domination of the Atlantic and Indian oceans.

### The French Alliance

France and America were unlikely partners. France was Catholic and a monarchy; the United States was Protestant and a federation of republics. From 1689 to 1763, the two peoples had been enemies: New Englanders had brutally uprooted the French population from Acadia (Nova Scotia) in 1755, and the French and their Indian allies had raided British settlements. But the Comte de Vergennes, the French foreign minister, was determined to avenge the loss of Canada during the Great War for Empire (see Chapter 4) and persuaded King Louis XVI to provide the rebellious colonies with a secret loan and much-needed gunpowder. When



news of the rebel victory at Saratoga reached Paris in December 1777, Vergennes sought a formal alliance.

Benjamin Franklin and other American diplomats craftily exploited France's rivalry with Britain to win an explicit commitment to American independence. The Treaty of Alliance of February 1778 specified that once France entered the war, neither partner would sign a separate peace without the "liberty, sovereignty, and independence" of the United States. In return, the Continental Congress agreed to recognize any French conquests in the West Indies. "France and America," warned Britain's Lord Stormont, "were indissolubly leagued for our destruction."

The alliance gave new life to the Patriots' cause. "There has been a great change in this state since the news from France," a Patriot soldier reported from Pennsylvania. Farmers — "mercenary wretches," he called them — "were as eager for Continental Money now as they were a few weeks ago for British gold." Its confidence bolstered, the Continental Congress addressed the demands of the officer corps. Most officers were gentlemen who equipped themselves and raised volunteers; in return, they insisted on lifetime military pensions at half pay. John Adams condemned the officers for "scrambling for rank and pay like apes for nuts," but General Washington urged the Congress to grant the pensions: "The salvation of the cause depends upon it." The Congress reluctantly granted the officers half pay, but only for seven years.

Meanwhile, the war had become unpopular in Britain. At first, George III was determined to crush the rebellion. If America won independence, he warned Lord North, "the West Indies must follow them. Ireland would soon follow the same plan and be a separate state, then this island would be reduced to itself, and soon

would be a poor island indeed." Stunned by the defeat at Saratoga, however, the king changed his mind. To thwart an American alliance with France, he authorized North to seek a negotiated settlement. In February 1778, North

persuaded Parliament to repeal the Tea and Prohibitory Acts and, amazingly, to renounce its power to tax the colonies. But the Patriots, now allied with France and committed to independence, rejected North's overture.

## War in the South

The French alliance did not bring a rapid end to the war. When France entered the conflict in June 1778, it hoped to seize all of Britain's sugar islands. Spain,

which joined the war against Britain in 1779, aimed to regain Florida and the fortress of Gibraltar at the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea.

**Britain's Southern Strategy** For its part, the British government revised its military strategy to defend the West Indies and capture the rich tobacco- and rice-growing colonies: Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. Once conquered, the ministry planned to use the Scottish Highlanders in the Carolinas and other Loyalists to hold them. It had already mobilized the Cherokees and Delawares against the land-hungry Americans and knew that the Patriots' fears of slave uprisings weakened them militarily (Map 6.3). As South Carolina Patriots admitted to the Continental Congress, they could raise only a few recruits "by reason of the great proportion of citizens necessary to remain at home to prevent insurrection among the Negroes."

The large number of slaves in the South made the Revolution a "triangular war," in which African Americans constituted a strategic problem for Patriots and a tempting, if dangerous, opportunity for the British. Britain actively recruited slaves to its cause. The effort began with Dunmore's controversial proclamation in November 1775 recruiting slaves to his Ethiopian Regiment (see Chapter 5). In 1779, the **Philipsburg Proclamation** declared that any slave who deserted a rebel master would receive protection, freedom, and land from Great Britain. Together, these proclamations led some 30,000 African Americans to take refuge behind British lines. George Washington initially barred blacks from the Continental army, but he relented in 1777. By war's end, African Americans could enlist in every state but South Carolina and Georgia, and some 5,000 — slave and free — fought for the Patriot cause (Thinking Like a Historian, p. 192).

It fell to Sir Henry Clinton — acutely aware of the role slaves might play — to implement Britain's southern strategy. From the British army's main base in New York City, Clinton launched a seaborne attack on Savannah, Georgia. Troops commanded by Colonel Archibald Campbell captured the town in December 1778. Mobilizing hundreds of blacks to transport supplies, Campbell moved inland and captured Augusta early in 1779. By year's end, Clinton's forces and local Loyalists controlled coastal Georgia and had 10,000 troops poised for an assault on South Carolina.

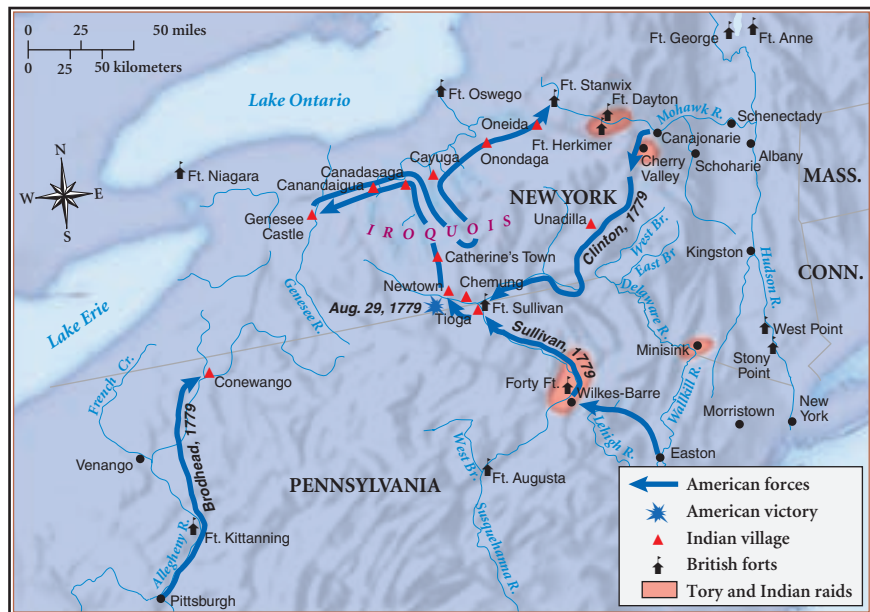
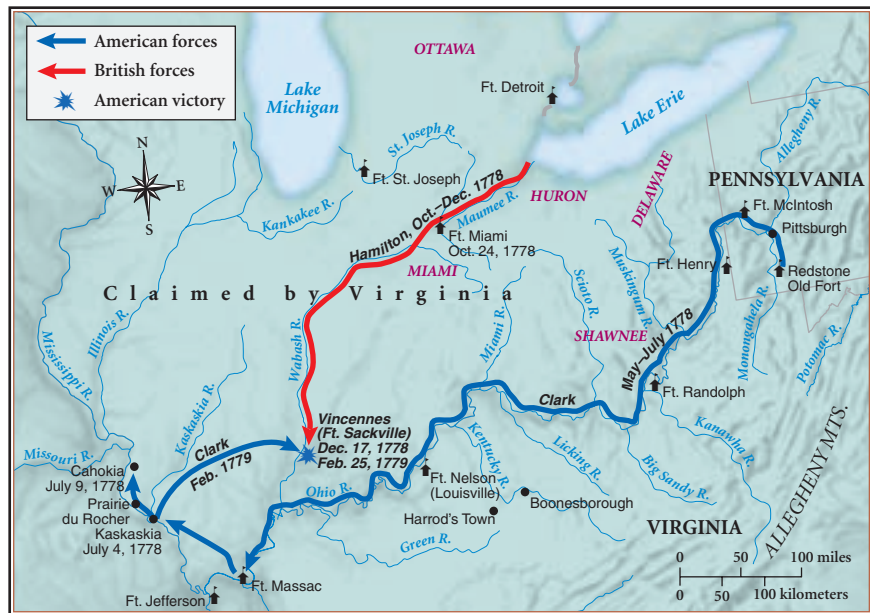
In 1780, British forces marched from victory to victory (Map 6.4). In May, Clinton forced the surrender of Charleston, South Carolina, and its garrison of 5,000 troops. Then Lord Charles Cornwallis assumed control of the British forces and, at Camden, defeated an

### EXPLAIN CONSEQUENCES

What were the most important results of the Patriot victory at Saratoga?

**MAP 6.3****Native Americans and the War in the West, 1778–1779**

Many Indian peoples remained neutral, but others, fearing land-hungry Patriot farmers, used British-supplied guns to raid American settlements. To thwart attacks by militant Shawnees, Cherokees, and Delawares, a Patriot militia led by George Rogers Clark captured the British fort and supply depot at Vincennes on the Wabash River in February 1779. To the north, Patriot generals John Sullivan and James Clinton defeated pro-British Indian forces near Tioga (on the New York–Pennsylvania border) in August 1779 and then systematically destroyed villages and crops throughout the lands of the Iroquois.



American force commanded by General Horatio Gates, the hero of Saratoga. Only 1,200 Patriot militiamen joined Gates at Camden, a fifth of the number at Saratoga. Cornwallis took control of South Carolina, and hundreds of African Americans fled to freedom behind British lines. The southern strategy was working.

Then the tide of battle turned. Thanks to another republican-minded European aristocrat, the Marquis de Lafayette, France finally dispatched troops to the American mainland. A longtime supporter of the American cause, Lafayette persuaded King Louis XVI to send General Comte de Rochambeau and 5,500 men

to Newport, Rhode Island, in 1780. There, they threatened the British forces holding New York City.

**Guerrilla Warfare in the Carolinas** Meanwhile, Washington dispatched General Nathanael Greene to recapture the Carolinas, where he found “a country that has been ravaged and plundered by both friends and enemies.” Greene put local militiamen, who had been “without discipline and addicted to plundering,” under strong leaders and unleashed them on less mobile British forces. In October 1780, Patriot militia defeated a regiment of Loyalists at King’s Mountain, South Carolina, taking about one thousand prisoners.





## The Black Soldier's Dilemma

For African American slaves, the Revolution offered no clear path to freedom. Some slaves agreed to fight for Britain because of its promise to liberate slaves who fought against their masters. While some were freed, many others died fighting, were forced into servitude in the army, or even sold into slavery in the West Indies. Patriots at first refused the service of black soldiers, then enlisted them in small numbers, but always upheld the property rights of masters.

### 1. **Dunmore's Proclamation, 1775.** *Virginia's Governor Dunmore issued this proclamation in response to the emerging rebellion and formed his recruits into the so-called Ethiopian Regiment.*

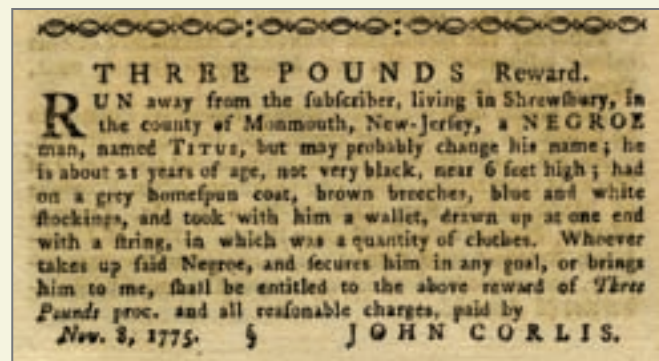
To defeat such unreasonable Purposes . . . that the Peace, and good Order of this Colony may be again restored . . . I have thought fit to issue this my Proclamation, hereby declaring, that until the aforesaid good Purposes can be obtained, I do in Virtue of the Power and Authority to me given, by His majesty, determine to execute Martial Law, and cause the same to be executed throughout this Colony: and to the end that Peace and good Order may the sooner be [effected], I do require every Person capable of bearing Arms, to [resort] to His majesty's standard, or be looked upon as Traitors to His [majesty] . . . I do hereby further declare all indentured Servants, Negroes, or others, (appertaining to Rebels,) free that are able and willing to bear Arms, they joining His majesty's Troops as soon as may be, for the more speedily reducing this Colony to a proper Sense of their Duty.

### 2. **Virginia's response to Dunmore's Proclamation, 1775.** *A month later, Virginia's General Assembly issued the following response.*

WHEREAS lord Dunmore, by his proclamation, dated on board the ship William, off Norfolk, the 7th day of November 1775, hath offered freedom to such able-bodied slaves as are willing to join him, and take up arms, against the good people of this colony, giving thereby encouragement to a general insurrection . . . it is enacted, that all negro or other slaves, conspiring to rebel or make insurrection, shall suffer death. . . . We think it proper to declare, that all slaves who have been, or shall be seduced, by his lordship's proclamation, or other arts, to desert their masters' service, and take up arms against the inhabitants of this colony, shall be liable to such punishment as shall hereafter be directed by the General Convention. . . . [A]ll such, who have taken this unlawful and wicked step, may return in safety to their duty, and escape the punishment due their crimes. . . . And we do

farther earnestly recommend it to all humane and benevolent persons in this colony to explain and make known this our offer of mercy to those unfortunate people.

### 3. **Runaway advertisement, 1775.** *Titus—or, as he was later known, Captain Tye of the Ethiopian Regiment—abandoned his Delaware master in response to Dunmore's Proclamation.*



Source: Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.

### 4. **Report of Bernardo de Gálvez, 1780.** *Fighting against the British in support of the Patriots, Louisiana governor Bernardo de Gálvez raised a mixed regiment, almost half of whom were slaves and free people of color from New Orleans. He praised their efforts in this report of his campaign.*

No less deserving of eulogy are the companies of Negroes and free Mulattoes who were continually occupied in the outposts, in false attacks, and discoveries, exchanging shots with the enemy . . . conduct[ing] themselves with as much valor and generosity as the whites.

### 5. **Boston King gains his freedom, 1783.** *In 1780, Boston King, like many other southern slaves, escaped to the British army. Here he describes his experiences at war's end.*

About this time, peace was restored between America and Great Britain which diffused universal joy among all

parties except us, who had escaped slavery and taken refuge in the English army; for a report prevailed at New-York that all the slaves, in number two thousand, were to be delivered up to their masters, altho' some of them had been three or four years among the English. This dreadful rumour filled us with inexpressible anguish and terror, especially when we saw our old masters coming from Virginia, North-Carolina and other parts and seizing upon slaves in the streets of New-York, or even dragging them out of their beds. Many of the slaves had very cruel masters, so that the thought of returning home with them embittered life to us. For some days we lost our appetite for food, and sleep departed from our eyes. The English had compassion upon us in the day of our distress, and issued out a Proclamation importing "That all slaves should be free who had taken refuge in the British lines and claimed the sanction and privileges of the Proclamations respecting the security and protection of Negroes." In consequence of this, each of us received a certificate from the commanding officer at New-York, which dispelled our fears and filled us with joy and gratitude.

**6. Jehu Grant is re-enslaved, 1778.** *Jehu Grant of Narragansett, Rhode Island, was owned by a Loyalist. In August 1777 he escaped and joined the Patriot side; ten months later, his master tracked him down and reclaimed him. In 1837 Grant applied for a pension from the U.S. government and supplied the following narrative of his experience. His application was denied.*

[I] enlisted as a soldier but was put to the service of a teamster in the summer and a waiter in the winter . . . I was then grown to manhood, in the full vigor and strength of life, and heard much about the cruel and arbitrary things done by the British. Their ships lay within a few miles of my master's house, which stood near the shore, and I was confident that my master traded with them, and I suffered much from fear that I should be sent aboard a ship of war. This I disliked. But when I saw liberty poles and the people all engaged for the support of freedom, I could not but like and be pleased with such thing (God forgive me if I sinned in so feeling). And living on the borders of Rhode Island, where whole

companies of colored people enlisted, it added to my fears and dread of being sold to the British. These considerations induced me to enlist into the American army, where I served faithful about ten months, when my master found and took me home. Had I been taught to read or understand the precepts of the Gospel, "Servants obey your master," I might have done otherwise, notwithstanding the songs of liberty that saluted my ear, thrilled through my heart.

Sources: (1) Lord Dunmore's Proclamation, Learn NC, North Carolina Digital History "Revolutionary North Carolina," [www.learnnc.org](http://www.learnnc.org); (2) J. N. Brenaman, *A History of Virginia Conventions* (Richmond: J. L. Hill Printing Company, 1902), p. 30; (4) Thomas Truxtun Moebs, *Black Soldiers-Black Sailors-Black Ink: Research Guide on African-Americans in U. S. Military History, 1526-1900* (Chesapeake Bay, Paris: Moebs Publishing Company, 1994), 1125; (5) Boston King, *Book of Negroes* (New York, 1783), in Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 107, 150; (6) Jehu Grant, To Hon. J. L. Edwards, Commissioner of Pension, 1836, in *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence*, ed. John C. Dann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 27-28.

### ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE

1. Why was Dunmore willing to offer freedom to slaves (source 1) when they were a recognized form of property under the British Empire? What assumptions about the loyalties of slaves underlie the response of the Virginia assembly (source 2)?
2. Why might Louisiana governor Bernardo de Gálvez (source 4) have made a point of praising the contributions of black soldiers to the Patriot cause?
3. Compare the runaway ad for Titus (source 3) and the narratives of Boston King and Jehu Grant (sources 5 and 6). What goals did British officers hope to achieve in their relations with slaves? What Patriot values trumped slaves' individual liberties during and after the war?

### PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Considering these sources along with the chapter contents and what you've learned in class, write a short essay that explains how the presence of slaves created a "triangular war" in the South, assesses the choices that individual slaves had to make during the Revolution, and considers how the differences in the institution of slavery between northern and southern colonies shaped slaves' experiences in the war.





**MAP 6.4**  
The War in the South, 1778–1781

Britain's southern military strategy started well. British forces captured Savannah in December 1778, took control of Georgia during 1779, and vanquished Charleston in May 1780. Over the next eighteen months, brutal warfare between the British troops and Loyalist units and the Continental army and militia raged in the interior of the Carolinas and ended in a stalemate. Hoping to break the deadlock, British general Charles Cornwallis carried the battle into Virginia in 1781. A Franco-American army led by Washington and Lafayette, with the help of the French fleet under Admiral de Grasse, surrounded Cornwallis's forces on the Yorktown Peninsula and forced their surrender.

American guerrillas commanded by the “Swamp Fox,” General Francis Marion, also won a series of small but fierce battles. Then, in January 1781, General Daniel Morgan led an American force to a bloody victory at Cowpens, South Carolina. In March, Greene's soldiers fought Cornwallis's seasoned army to a draw at North Carolina's Guilford Court House. Weakened by this

war of attrition, the British general decided to concede the Carolinas to Greene and seek a decisive victory in Virginia. There, many Patriot militiamen had refused to take up arms, claiming that “the Rich wanted the Poor to fight for them.”

Exploiting these social divisions, Cornwallis moved easily through the Tidewater region of Virginia in the



### Francis Marion Crossing the Pedee River

Francis Marion was a master of the ferocious guerrilla fighting that characterized the war in South Carolina. Though Patriot general Horatio Gates had little confidence in him, Marion led an irregular militia brigade in several successful attacks. After chasing Marion into a swamp, British general Banastre Tarleton declared, “As for this damned old fox, the Devil himself could not catch him.” Soon Patriots began calling Marion the Swamp Fox. In 1851, William T. Ranney painted Marion (on horseback in a white shirt and blue coat) and his men crossing the Pedee River in flatboats. Ranney included an unidentified (and possibly fictionalized) black oarsman. Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, William T. Ranney (1813–1857). *Marion Crossing the Pedee*, oil on canvas, 1850.

early summer of 1781. Reinforcements sent from New York and commanded by General Benedict Arnold, the infamous Patriot traitor, bolstered his ranks. As Arnold and Cornwallis sparred with an American force led by Lafayette near the York Peninsula, Washington was informed that France had finally sent its powerful West Indian fleet to North America, and he devised an audacious plan. Feigning an assault on New York City, he secretly marched General Rochambeau’s army from Rhode Island to Virginia. Simultaneously, the French fleet took control of Chesapeake Bay. By the time the British discovered Washington’s scheme, Cornwallis was surrounded, his 9,500-man army outnumbered 2 to 1 on land and cut off from reinforcement or retreat by sea. In a hopeless position, Cornwallis surrendered at **Yorktown** in October 1781.

The Franco-American victory broke the resolve of the British government. “Oh God! It is all over!” Lord

North exclaimed. Isolated diplomatically in Europe, stymied militarily in America, and lacking public support at home, the British ministry gave up active prosecution of the war on the American mainland.

### The Patriot Advantage

How could mighty Britain, victorious in the Great War for Empire, lose to a motley rebel army? The British ministry pointed to a series of blunders by the military leadership. Why had Howe not ruthlessly pursued Washington’s army in 1776? Why had Howe and Burgoyne failed to coordinate their attacks in 1777? Why had Cornwallis marched deep into the Patriot-dominated state of Virginia in 1781?

### IDENTIFY CAUSES

What were the keys to the Patriot victory in the South?



Historians acknowledge British mistakes, but they also attribute the rebels' victory to French aid and the inspired leadership of George Washington. Astutely deferring to elected officials, Washington won the support of the Continental Congress and the state govern-

ments. Confident of his military abilities, he pursued a defensive strategy that minimized casualties and maintained the morale of his officers and soldiers through five difficult years of war. Moreover, the Patriots' control of local govern-

ments gave Washington a greater margin for error than the British generals had. Local militiamen provided the edge in the 1777 victory at Saratoga and forced Cornwallis from the Carolinas in 1781.

In the end, it was the American people who decided the outcome, especially the one-third of the white colonists who were zealous Patriots. Tens of thousands of these farmers and artisans accepted Continental bills in payment for supplies, and thousands of soldiers took them as pay, even as the currency literally depreciated in their pockets. Rampant inflation meant that every paper dollar held for a week lost value, imposing a hidden “**currency tax**” on those who accepted the paper currency. Each individual tax was small—a few pennies on each dollar. But as millions of dollars changed hands multiple times, the currency taxes paid by ordinary citizens financed the American military victory.

## Diplomatic Triumph

After Yorktown, diplomats took two years to conclude a peace treaty. Talks began in Paris in April 1782, but the French and Spanish, still hoping to seize a West Indian island or Gibraltar, stalled for time. Their tactics infuriated American diplomats Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and John Jay. So the Americans negotiated secretly with the British, prepared if necessary to ignore the Treaty of Alliance and sign a separate peace. British ministers were equally eager: Parliament wanted peace, and they feared the loss of a rich sugar island.

Consequently, the American diplomats secured extremely favorable terms. In the **Treaty of Paris**, signed in September 1783, Great Britain formally recognized American independence and relinquished its claims to lands south of the Great Lakes and east of the Mississippi River. The British negotiators did not insist on a separate territory for their Indian allies. “In endeavouring to assist you,” a Wea Indian complained to a British general, “it seems we have wrought our own ruin.” The Cherokees were forced to relinquish claims to 5 million

acres—three-quarters of their territory—in treaties with Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia, while New York and the Continental Congress pressed the Iroquois and Ohio Indians to cede much of their land as well. British officials, like those of other early modern empires, found it easy to abandon allies they had never really understood (America Compared, p. 197).

The Paris treaty also granted Americans fishing rights off Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, prohibited the British from “carrying away any negroes or other property,” and guaranteed freedom of navigation on the Mississippi to American citizens “forever.” In return, the American government allowed British merchants to pursue legal claims for prewar debts and encouraged the state legislatures to return confiscated property to Loyalists and grant them citizenship.

In the Treaty of Versailles, signed simultaneously, Britain made peace with France and Spain. Neither American ally gained very much. Spain reclaimed Florida from Britain, but not the strategic fortress at Gibraltar. France received the Caribbean island of Tobago, small consolation for a war that had sharply raised taxes and quadrupled France's national debt. Just six years later, cries for tax relief and political liberty would spark the French Revolution. Only Americans profited handsomely; the treaties gave them independence and access to the trans-Appalachian west.

## Creating Republican Institutions, 1776–1787

When the Patriots declared independence, they confronted the issue of political authority. “Which of us shall be the rulers?” asked a Philadelphia newspaper. The question was multifaceted. Would power reside in the national government or the states? Who would control the new republican institutions: traditional elites or average citizens? Would women have greater political and legal rights? What would be the status of slaves in the new republic?

### The State Constitutions: How Much Democracy?

In May 1776, the Second Continental Congress urged Americans to reject royal authority and establish republican governments. Most states quickly complied. “Constitutions employ every pen,” an observer noted. Within six months, Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, New Jersey, Delaware, and Pennsylvania had all ratified

### TRACE CHANGE OVER TIME

Despite being at a clear disadvantage at the start of the war, the American Patriots won. Why?



## China's Growing Empire

As Britain was losing control of its multiethnic empire in North America, China's Qing [pronounced Ching] dynasty was consolidating its authority over borderlands peoples during the eighteenth century. And just as Europeans relied on ethnographic descriptions of Native Americans to understand the peoples and territories they hoped to control, Chinese authorities used ethnographic manuals that included prose, poetry, and illustrations to make sense of their new subjects. These excerpts from a set of "Miao albums" illustrate the cultural characteristics they observed in, or ascribed to, one such group of these non-Chinese (or non-Han) peoples.

### Bulong (Basket-Repairing) Zhongjia

The Bulong Zhongjia are located in Dinfan and Guangshun Districts. Their customs are similar to those of the Kayou. For them, the New Year begins in the twelfth month. They greet it by striking a bronze drum. When they dig in the ground and find a drum, they consider it to be the legacy of Zhuge Liang [an ancient Chinese hero claimed as a forebear]. The rich must pay a high price to buy the drum. At funerals, cattle are butchered and dressed, and relatives and friends are invited. Drinking from the "ox horn of happiness," the guests often get drunk and sometimes even wind up killing each other. The host does not usually eat meat but only fish and shrimp. After burial, the grave is covered by an umbrella. By nature the Bulong are alert and fierce. When coming and going they carry sharp knives. They will avenge even an angry look.

### Nong (Agricultural) Miao

The Nong Miao are located in the Zhenfeng District, which once belonged to Guangxi. . . . Men shave their heads and dress just like Han people. Women wear short tunics and long skirts, and cover their heads with colorful scarves. They still follow Miao customs. Their nature is fierce and cruel; they enjoy killing.

### Gedou Miao

The Gedou Miao are found in Zhenyuan, Shibing, and Huangping. They are as good at hunting as the Turen. Women wear their hair up, inclined toward one side, with a comb inserted. Their short tunics are collarless, and their skirts do not reach beyond the knee. They embroider in five colors on the bust and the sleeves, and ornament themselves with seashells [shaped] like silk-worm cocoons, stringing them together like real pearls. If a man is injured by one of their poisoned arrows he will die immediately. They are not, however, given to thievery.

Source: From *The Art of Ethnography: A Chinese "Miao Album,"* translated by David M. Deal and Laura Hostetler (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006). Reprinted by permission of the University of Washington Press.

### QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. What attributes seemed especially meaningful to the authors of these descriptions?
2. Why would the authors have singled out the particular qualities that are remarked upon here? How does this compare to the ways in which the British viewed their Native Americans?

new constitutions, and Connecticut and Rhode Island had revised their colonial charters to delete references to the king.

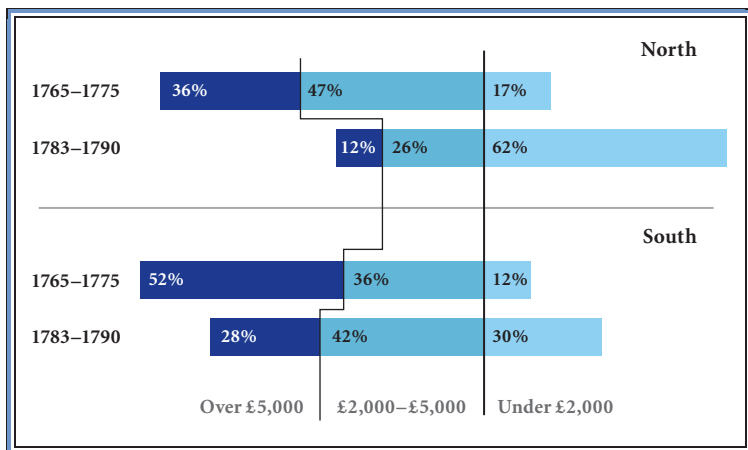
Republicanism meant more than ousting the king. The Declaration of Independence stated the principle of popular sovereignty: governments derive "their just powers from the consent of the governed." In the heat of revolution, many Patriots gave this clause a further democratic twist. In North Carolina, the backcountry farmers of Mecklenburg County told their delegates to the state's constitutional convention to "oppose

everything that leans to aristocracy or power in the hands of the rich." In Virginia, voters elected a new assembly in 1776 that, an eyewitness remarked, "was composed of men not quite so well dressed, nor so politely educated, nor so highly born" as colonial-era legislatures (Figure 6.1).



To see a longer excerpt of the Mecklenburg delegates' document, along with other primary sources from this period, see *Sources for America's History*.





**FIGURE 6.1**  
**Middling Men Enter the Halls of Government, 1765–1790**

Before the Revolution, wealthy men (with assets of £2,000 or more, as measured by tax lists and probate records) dominated most colonial assemblies. The power of money was especially apparent in the southern colonies, where representatives worth at least £5,000 formed a majority of the legislators. However, in the new American republic, the proportion of middling legislators (yeomen farmers and others worth less than £2,000) increased dramatically, especially in the northern states. Adapted from Jackson T. Main, “Government by the People: The American Revolution and the Democratization of the Legislatures,” by Jackson T. Main in *William and Mary Quarterly*, series 3, 23 (1966). Used by permission of *William and Mary Quarterly*, Omohundro Institute of Early History and Culture.

**Pennsylvania’s Controversial Constitution** This democratic impulse flowered in Pennsylvania, thanks to a coalition of Scots-Irish farmers, Philadelphia artisans, and Enlightenment-influenced intellectuals. In 1776, these insurgents ousted every officeholder of the Penn family’s proprietary government, abolished property ownership as a qualification for voting, and granted all taxpaying men the right to vote and hold office. The **Pennsylvania constitution of 1776** also created a unicameral (one-house) legislature with complete power; there was no governor to exercise a veto. Other provisions mandated a system of elementary education and protected citizens from imprisonment for debt.

Pennsylvania’s democratic constitution alarmed many leading Patriots. From Boston, John Adams denounced the unicameral legislature as “so democratical that it must produce confusion and every evil work.” Along with other conservative Patriots, Adams wanted to restrict office holding to “men of learning, leisure and easy circumstances” and warned of oppression under majority rule: “If you give [ordinary citizens] the command or preponderance in the . . . legislature, they will vote all property out of the hands of you aristocrats.”

**Tempering Democracy** To counter the appeal of the Pennsylvania constitution, Adams published *Thoughts on Government* (1776). In that treatise, he adapted the British Whig theory of **mixed government** (a sharing of power among the monarch, the House of Lords, and the Commons) to a republican society. To disperse authority and preserve liberty, he insisted on separate institutions: legislatures would make laws, the executive would administer them, and the judiciary would

enforce them. Adams also demanded a bicameral (two-house) legislature with an upper house of substantial property owners to offset the popular majorities in the lower one. As further curbs on democracy, he proposed an elected governor with veto power and an appointed — not elected — judiciary.

Conservative Patriots endorsed Adams’s governmental system. In New York’s constitution of 1777, property qualifications for voting excluded 20 percent of white men from assembly elections and 60 percent from casting ballots for the governor and the upper house. In South Carolina, elite planters used property rules to disqualify about 90 percent of white men from office holding. The 1778 constitution required candidates for governor to have a debt-free estate of £10,000 (about \$700,000 today), senators to be worth £2,000, and assemblymen to own property valued at £1,000. Even in traditionally democratic Massachusetts, the 1780 constitution, authored primarily by Adams, raised property qualifications for voting and office holding and skewed the lower house toward eastern, mercantile interests.

The political legacy of the Revolution was complex. Only in Pennsylvania and Vermont were radical Patriots able to create truly democratic institutions. Yet in all the new states, representative legislatures had acquired more power, and average citizens now had greater power at the polls and greater influence in the halls of government.

## Women Seek a Public Voice

The extraordinary excitement of the Revolutionary era tested the dictum that only men could engage in politics. Men controlled all public institutions — legislatures, juries, government offices — but upper-class women engaged in political debate and, defying

### COMPARE AND CONTRAST

What aspects of the Pennsylvania constitution were most objectionable to Adams, and what did he advocate instead?

men's scorn, filled their letters, diaries, and conversations with opinions on public issues. "The men say we have no business [with politics]," Eliza Wilkinson of South Carolina complained in 1783. "They won't even allow us liberty of thought, and that is all I want."

As Wilkinson's remark suggests, most women did not insist on civic equality with men; many sought only an end to restrictive customs and laws. Abigail Adams demanded equal legal rights for married women, who under common law could not own property, enter into contracts, or initiate lawsuits. The war bonds she purchased had to be held in a trust run by a male relative. "Men would be tyrants" if they continued to hold such power over women, Adams declared to her husband, John, criticizing him and other Patriots for "emancipating all nations" from monarchical despotism while "retaining absolute power over Wives."

Most politicians ignored women's requests, and most men insisted on traditional sexual and political prerogatives. Long-married husbands remained patriarchs who dominated their households, and even young men who embraced the republican ideal of "companionate marriage" did not support legal equality for their wives and daughters. Except in New Jersey, which until 1807 allowed unmarried and widowed female property holders to vote, women remained disenfranchised. In the new American republic, only white men enjoyed full citizenship.

Nevertheless, the republican belief in an educated citizenry created opportunities for some women. In her 1779 essay "On the Equality of the Sexes," Judith Sargent Murray argued that men and women had equal capacities for memory and that women had superior imaginations. She conceded that most women were inferior to men in judgment and reasoning, but only from lack of training: "We can only reason from what we know," she argued, and most women had been denied "the opportunity of acquiring knowledge." That situation changed in the 1790s, when the attorney general of Massachusetts declared that girls had an equal right to schooling under the state constitution. By 1850, the literacy rates of women and men in the northeastern states were equal, and educated women again challenged their subordinate legal and political status.

## The War's Losers: Loyalists, Native Americans, and Slaves

The success of republican institutions was assisted by the departure of as many as 100,000 Loyalists, many of whom suffered severe financial losses. Some Patriots demanded revolutionary justice: the seizure of



### Judith Sargent Murray

Judith Sargent Murray was perhaps the most accomplished female essayist of the Revolutionary era. Publishing under various pen names, she advocated for economic independence and better educational opportunities for women. Two years before Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), she published "On the Equality of the Sexes" in the *Massachusetts Magazine*. Her letter books, which run to twenty volumes, were discovered only in 1984; the Judith Sargent Murray Society ([jmsociety.com](http://jmsociety.com)) is now transcribing and indexing them for publication. This striking portrait by John Singleton Copley hints at her intelligence and sardonic wit. Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago/Art Resource, NY.

all Loyalist property and its distribution to needy Americans. But most officials were unwilling to go so far. When state governments did seize Loyalist property, they often auctioned it to the highest bidders; only rarely did small-scale farmers benefit. In the cities, Patriot merchants replaced Loyalists at the top of the economic ladder, supplanting a traditional economic elite — who often invested profits from trade in real estate — with republican entrepreneurs who tended to promote new trading ventures and domestic manufacturing. This shift facilitated America's economic development in the years to come.

### IDENTIFY CAUSES

What impact did republican ideals have on gender roles and expectations during the Revolutionary era?

Though the Revolution did not result in widespread property redistribution, it did encourage yeomen, middling planters, and small-time entrepreneurs to believe that their new republican governments would protect their property and ensure widespread access to land. In western counties, former Regulators demanded that the new governments be more responsive to their needs; beyond the Appalachians, thousands of squatters who had occupied lands in Kentucky and Tennessee expected their claims to be recognized and lands to be made available on easy terms. If the United States were to secure the loyalty of westerners, it would have to meet their needs more effectively than the British Empire had.

This meant, among other things, extinguishing Native American claims to land as quickly as possible.

## EXPLAIN CONSEQUENCES

How did the Revolutionary commitment to liberty and the protection of property affect enslaved African Americans and western Indians?

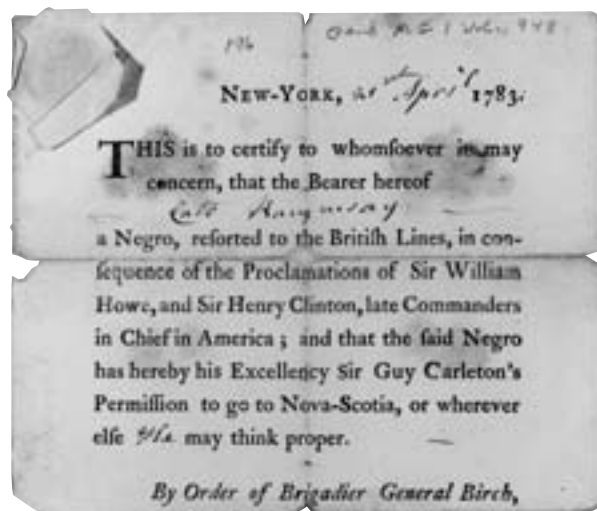
At war's end, George Washington commented on the "rage for speculating" in Ohio Valley lands. "Men in these times, talk with as much facility of fifty, a hundred, and even 500,000 Acres as a Gentleman formerly would do of 1000 acres." "If we make a right use of our natural advantages," a Fourth of July orator observed, "we soon must be a truly great and happy people." Native American land claims stood as a conspicuous barrier to the "natural advantages" he imagined.

For southern slaveholders, the Revolution was fought to protect property rights, and any sentiment favoring slave emancipation met with violent objections. When Virginia Methodists called for general emancipation in 1785, slaveholders used Revolutionary principles to defend their right to human property. They "risked [their] Lives and Fortunes, and waded through Seas of Blood" to secure "the Possession of [their] Rights of Liberty and Property," only to hear of "a very subtle and daring Attempt" to "dispossess us of a very important Part of our Property." Emancipation would bring "Want, Poverty, Distress, and Ruin to the Free Citizen." The liberties coveted by ordinary white Americans bore hard on the interests of Native Americans and slaves.

As Patriots embraced independence in 1776, they envisioned a central government with limited powers. Carter Braxton of Virginia thought the Continental Congress should "regulate the affairs of trade, war, peace, alliances, &c." but "should by no means have authority to interfere with the internal police [governance] or domestic concerns of any Colony."

## The Articles of Confederation

That idea informed the **Articles of Confederation**, which were approved by the Continental Congress in November 1777. The Articles provided for a loose union in which "each state retains its sovereignty, freedom, and independence." As an association of equals, each state had one vote regardless of its size, population, or wealth. Important laws needed the approval of nine of the thirteen states, and changes in the Articles required unanimous consent. Though the Confederation had significant powers on paper — it could declare war, make treaties with foreign nations, adjudicate disputes between the states, borrow and print money, and requisition funds from the states "for the common defense or general welfare" — it had major weaknesses as well. It had neither a chief executive nor a judiciary. Though it could make treaties, it could not enforce their provisions, since the states remained sovereign. Most important, it lacked the power to tax either the states or the people.



### A Black Loyalist Pass, 1783

White Patriots claimed their freedom by fighting *against* the British; thousands of black slaves won their liberty by fighting *for* them. This pass certifies that Cato Ramsay (actually Ramsey), "a Negro, resorted to the British Lines" in search of the freedom promised by Virginia royal governor Dunmore and British commander Henry Clinton to slaves who escaped from Patriot owners. Now age forty-five and a "slim fellow," Ramsey had escaped from his owner, John Ramsey of Norfolk, Virginia, in 1776, probably fleeing to Dunmore's ships. Seven years later, he ended up in New York, reunited with his wife, China Godfrey (thirty-five), and their three children: James (twenty), Betsey (fifteen), and Nelly Ramsey (ten), who had fled subsequently from other owners. As the British evacuated New York in 1783, Ramsey and his family were free "to go to Nova-Scotia," where they worked as farmers. Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management.



Although the Congress exercised authority from 1776—raising the Continental army, negotiating the treaty with France, and financing the war—the Articles won formal ratification only in 1781. The delay stemmed from conflicts over western lands. The royal charters of Virginia, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and other states set boundaries stretching to the Pacific Ocean. States without western lands—Maryland and Pennsylvania—refused to accept the Articles until the land-rich states relinquished these claims to the Confederation. Threatened by Cornwallis’s army in 1781, Virginia gave up its claims, and Maryland, the last holdout, finally ratified the Articles (Map 6.5).

**Continuing Fiscal Crisis** By 1780, the central government was nearly bankrupt, and General Washington called urgently for a national tax system; without one, he warned, “our cause is lost.” Led by Robert Morris, who became superintendent of finance in 1781, nationalist-minded Patriots tried to expand the Confederation’s authority. They persuaded Congress to charter the Bank of North America, a private institution in Philadelphia, arguing that its notes would stabilize the inflated Continental currency. Morris also created a central bureaucracy to manage the Confederation’s finances and urged Congress to enact a 5 percent import tax. Rhode Island and New York rejected the tax proposal. His state had opposed British import duties, New York’s representative declared, and it would not accept them from Congress. To raise revenue, Congress looked to the sale of western lands. In 1783, it asserted that the recently signed Treaty of Paris had extinguished the Indians’ rights to those lands and made them the property of the United States.

**The Northwest Ordinance** By 1784, more than thirty thousand settlers had already moved to Kentucky and Tennessee, despite the uncertainties of frontier warfare, and after the war their numbers grew rapidly. In that year, the residents of what is now eastern Tennessee organized a new state, called it Franklin, and sought admission to the Confederation. To preserve its authority over the West, Congress refused to recognize Franklin. Subsequently, Congress created the Southwest and Mississippi Territories (the future states of Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi) from lands ceded by North Carolina and Georgia. Because these cessions carried the stipulation that “no regulation . . . shall tend to emancipate slaves,” these states and all those south of the Ohio River allowed human bondage.

However, the Confederation Congress banned slavery north of the Ohio River. Between 1784 and

1787, it issued three important ordinances organizing the “Old Northwest.” The Ordinance of 1784, written by Thomas Jefferson, established the principle that territories could become states as their populations grew. The Land Ordinance of 1785 mandated a rectangular-grid system of surveying and specified a minimum price of \$1 an acre. It also required that half of the townships be sold in single blocks of 23,040 acres each, which only large-scale speculators could afford, and the rest in parcels of 640 acres each, which restricted their sale to well-to-do farmers (Map 6.6).

Finally, the **Northwest Ordinance of 1787** created the territories that would eventually become the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. The ordinance prohibited slavery and earmarked funds from land sales for the support of schools. It also specified that Congress would appoint a governor and judges to administer each new territory until the population reached 5,000 free adult men, at which point the citizens could elect a territorial legislature. When the population reached 60,000, the legislature could devise a republican constitution and apply to join the Confederation.

The land ordinances of the 1780s were a great and enduring achievement of the Confederation Congress. They provided for orderly settlement and the admission of new states on the basis of equality; there would be no politically dependent “colonies” in the West. But they also extended the geographical division between slave and free areas that would haunt the nation in the coming decades. And they implicitly invalidated Native American claims to an enormous swath of territory—a corollary that would soon lead the newly independent nation, once again, into war.

## Shays’s Rebellion

Though many national leaders were optimistic about the long-term prospects of the United States, postwar economic conditions were grim. The Revolution had crippled American shipping and cut exports of tobacco, rice, and wheat. The British Navigation Acts, which had nurtured colonial commerce, now barred Americans from legal trade with the British West Indies. Moreover, low-priced British manufactures (and some from India as well) were flooding American markets, driving urban artisans and wartime textile firms out of business.

### COMPARE AND CONTRAST

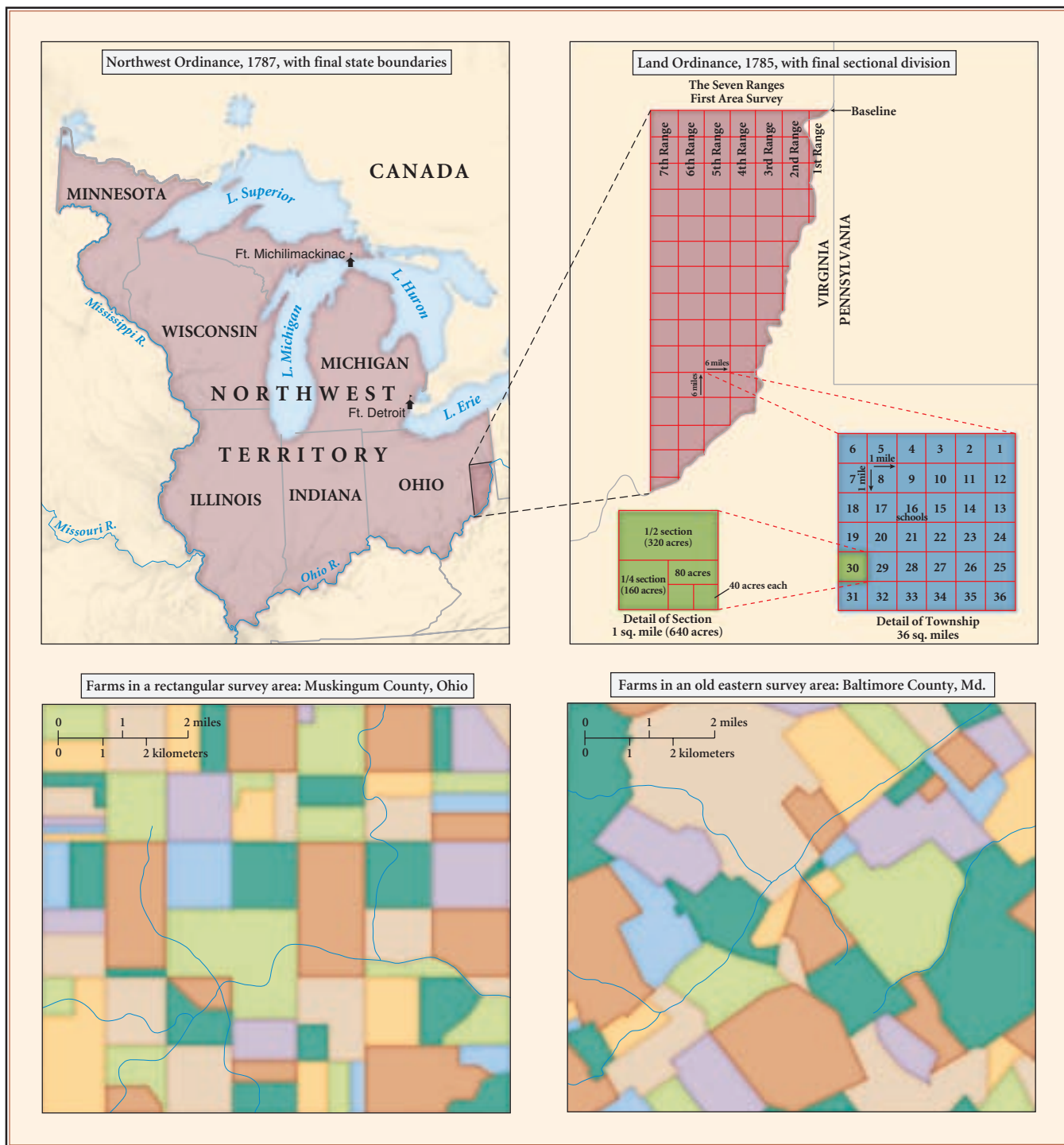
In what ways did the Confederation function effectively, and what were its greatest failings?

**MAP 6.5****The Confederation and Western Land Claims, 1781–1802**

The Congress formed by the Articles of Confederation had to resolve conflicting state claims to western lands. For example, the territories claimed by New York and Virginia on the basis of their royal charters overlapped extensively. Beginning in 1781, the Confederation Congress and, after 1789, the U.S. Congress persuaded all of the states to cede their western claims, creating a “national domain” open to all citizens. In the Northwest Ordinance (1787), the Congress divided the domain north of the Ohio River into territories and set up democratic procedures by which they could eventually join the Union as states. South of the Ohio River, the Congress allowed the existing southern states to play a substantial role in settling the ceded lands.

The fiscal condition of the state governments was dire, primarily because of war debts. Well-to-do merchants and landowners (including Abigail Adams) had invested in state bonds during the war; others had speculated in debt certificates, buying them on the cheap from hard-pressed farmers and soldiers. Now

creditors and speculators demanded that the state governments redeem the bonds and certificates quickly and at full value, a policy that would require tax increases and a decrease in the amount of paper currency. Most legislatures—now including substantial numbers of middling farmers and artisans—refused. Instead they



**MAP 6.6**  
**Land Division in the Northwest Territory**

Throughout the Northwest Territory, government surveyors imposed a rectangular grid on the landscape, regardless of the local topography, so that farmers bought neatly defined tracts of land. The right-angled property lines in Muskingum County, Ohio (lower left), contrasted sharply with those in Baltimore County, Maryland (lower right), where—as in most of the eastern and southern states—boundaries followed the contours of the land.



authorized new issues of paper currency and allowed debtors to pay private creditors in installments. Although wealthy men deplored these measures as “intoxicating Draughts of Liberty” that destroyed “the just rights of creditors,” such political intervention prevented social upheaval.

In Massachusetts, however, the new constitution placed power in the hands of a mercantile elite that owned the bulk of the state’s war bonds. Ignoring the interests of ordinary citizens, the legislature increased taxes fivefold to pay off wartime debts—and it stipulated that they be paid in hard currency. Even for substantial farmers, this was a crushing burden. When cash-strapped farmers could not pay both their taxes and their debts, creditors threatened lawsuits. Debtor Ephraim Wetmore heard a rumor that merchant Stephan Salisbury “would have my Body Dead or Alive in case I did not pay.” To protect their livelihoods, farmers called extralegal conventions to protest high taxes and property seizures. Then mobs of angry farmers, including men of high status, closed the courts by force. “[I] had no Intensions to Destroy the Publick Government,” declared Captain Adam Wheeler, a former town selectman; his goal was simply to prevent “Valuable and Industrious members of Society [being] dragged from their families to prison” because of their debts. These crowd actions grew into a full-scale revolt led by Captain Daniel Shays, a Continental army veteran.

As a revolt against taxes imposed by an unresponsive government, **Shays’s Rebellion** resembled American resistance to the British Stamp Act. Consciously linking themselves to the Patriot movement, Shays’s men placed pine twigs in their hats just as Continental troops had done. “The people have turned against their teachers the doctrines which were inculcated to effect the late revolution,” complained Fisher Ames, a conservative Massachusetts lawmaker. Some of the radical Patriots of 1776 likewise condemned the Shaysites:

“[Men who] would lessen the Weight of Government lawfully exercised must be Enemies to our happy Revolution and Common Liberty,” charged Samuel Adams. To put down the rebellion, the Massachusetts legislature passed

the Riot Act, and wealthy bondholders equipped a formidable fighting force, which Governor James Bowdoin used to disperse Shays’s ragtag army during the winter of 1786–1787.

Although Shays’s Rebellion failed, it showed that many middling Patriot families felt that American

oppressors had replaced British tyrants. Massachusetts voters turned Governor Bowdoin out of office, and debt-ridden farmers in New York, northern Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and New Hampshire closed court-houses and forced their governments to provide economic relief. British officials in Canada predicted the imminent demise of the United States; and American leaders urged purposeful action to save their republican experiment. Events in Massachusetts, declared nationalist Henry Knox, formed “the strongest arguments possible” for the creation of “a strong general government.”

## The Constitution of 1787

These issues ultimately led to the drafting of a national constitution. From its creation, the U.S. Constitution was a controversial document, both acclaimed for solving the nation’s woes and condemned for perverting its republican principles. Critics charged that republican institutions worked only in small political units—the states. Advocates replied that the Constitution extended republicanism by adding another level of government elected by the people. In the new two-level political federation created by the Constitution, the national government would exercise limited, delegated powers, and the existing state governments would retain authority over all other matters.

## The Rise of a Nationalist Faction

Money questions—debts, taxes, and tariffs—dominated the postwar political agenda. Americans who had served the Confederation as military officers, officials, and diplomats viewed these issues from a national perspective and advocated a stronger central government. George Washington, Robert Morris, Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, and John Adams wanted Congress to control foreign and interstate commerce and tariff policy. However, lawmakers in Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania—states with strong commercial traditions—insisted on controlling their own tariffs, both to protect their artisans from low-cost imports and to assist their merchants. Most southern states opposed tariffs because planters wanted to import British textiles and ironware at the lowest possible prices.

Nonetheless, some southern leaders became nationalists because their state legislatures had cut taxes and refused to redeem state war bonds. Such policies, lamented wealthy bondholder Charles Lee of Virginia, led taxpayers to believe they would “never be compelled

### PLACE EVENTS IN CONTEXT

How did the Shaysites draw on the Revolution for inspiration?

to pay” the public debt. Creditors also condemned state laws that “stayed” (delayed) the payment of mortgages and other private debts. “While men are madly accumulating enormous debts, their legislators are making provisions for their nonpayment,” complained a South Carolina merchant. To undercut the democratic majorities in the state legislatures, creditors joined the movement for a stronger central government.

Spurred on by Shays’s Rebellion, nationalists in Congress secured a resolution calling for a convention to revise the Articles of Confederation. Only an “efficient plan from the Convention,” a fellow nationalist wrote to James Madison, “can prevent anarchy first & civil convulsions afterwards.”

## The Philadelphia Convention

In May 1787, fifty-five delegates arrived in Philadelphia. They came from every state except Rhode Island, where the legislature opposed increasing central authority. Most were strong nationalists; forty-two had served in the Confederation Congress. They were also educated and propertied: merchants, slaveholding planters, and “monied men.” There were no artisans, backcountry settlers, or tenants, and only a single yeoman farmer.

Some influential Patriots missed the convention. John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were serving as American ministers to Britain and France, respectively. The Massachusetts General Court rejected Sam Adams as a delegate because he opposed a stronger national government, and his fellow firebrand from Virginia, Patrick Henry, refused to attend because he “smelt a rat.”

The absence of experienced leaders and contrary-minded delegates allowed capable younger nationalists to set the agenda. Declaring that the convention would “decide for ever the fate of Republican Government,” James Madison insisted on increased national authority. Alexander Hamilton of New York likewise demanded a strong central government to protect the republic from “the imprudence of democracy.”

**The Virginia and New Jersey Plans** The delegates elected George Washington as their presiding officer and voted to meet behind closed doors. Then—momentously—they decided not to revise the Articles of Confederation but rather to consider the so-called **Virginia Plan**, a scheme for a powerful national government devised by James Madison. Just thirty-six years old, Madison was determined to fashion national political institutions run by men of high character. A graduate of Princeton, he had read classical and

modern political theory and served in both the Confederation Congress and the Virginia assembly. Once an optimistic Patriot, Madison had grown discouraged because of the “narrow ambition” and outlook of state legislators.

Madison’s Virginia Plan differed from the Articles of Confederation in three crucial respects. First, the plan rejected state sovereignty in favor of the “supremacy of national authority,” including the power to overturn state laws. Second, it called for the national government to be established by the people (not the states) and for national laws to operate directly on citizens of the various states. Third, the plan proposed a three-tier election system in which ordinary voters would elect only the lower house of the national legislature. This lower house would then select the upper house, and both houses would appoint the executive and judiciary.

From a political perspective, Madison’s plan had two fatal flaws. First, most state politicians and



**James Madison, Statesman**

Throughout his long public life, Madison kept the details of his private life to himself. His biography, he believed, should be a record of his public accomplishments, not his private affairs. Future generations celebrated him not as a great man (like Hamilton or Jefferson) or as a great president (like Washington), but as an original and incisive political thinker. The chief architect of the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights, Madison was the preeminent republican political theorist of his generation. Mead Art Museum, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts, Bequest of Herbert L. Pratt (Class of 1895) # 1945.82.

citizens resolutely opposed allowing the national government to veto state laws. Second, the plan based representation in the lower house on population; this provision, a Delaware delegate warned, would allow the populous states to “crush the small ones whenever they stand in the way of their ambitious or interested views.”

So delegates from Delaware and other small states rallied behind a plan devised by William Paterson of New Jersey. The **New Jersey Plan** gave the Confederation the power to raise revenue, control commerce, and make binding requisitions on the states. But it preserved the states’ control of their own laws and guaranteed their equality: as in the Confederation Congress, each state would have one vote in a unicameral legislature. Delegates from the more populous states vigorously opposed this provision. After a month-long debate on the two plans, a bare majority of the states agreed to use Madison’s Virginia Plan as the basis of discussion.

This decision raised the odds that the convention would create a more powerful national government. Outraged by this prospect, two New York delegates, Robert Yates and John Lansing, accused their colleagues of exceeding their mandate to revise the Articles and left the convention. The remaining delegates met six days a week during the summer of 1787, debating both high principles and practical details. Experienced politicians, they looked for a plan that would be acceptable to most citizens and existing political interests. Pierce Butler of South Carolina invoked a classical Greek precedent: “We must follow the example of Solon, who gave the Athenians not the best government he could devise but the best they would receive.”

**The Great Compromise** As the convention grappled with the central problem of the representation of large and small states, the Connecticut delegates suggested a possible solution. They proposed that the national legislature’s upper chamber (the Senate) have two members from each state, while seats in the lower chamber (the House of Representatives) be apportioned by population (determined every ten years by a national census). After bitter debate, delegates from the populous states reluctantly accepted this “Great Compromise.”

Other state-related issues were quickly settled by restricting (or leaving ambiguous) the extent of central authority. Some delegates opposed a national system of courts, predicting that “the states will revolt at such encroachments” on their judicial authority.

This danger led the convention to vest the judicial power “in one supreme Court” and allow the new national legislature to decide whether to establish lower courts within the states. The convention also refused to set a property requirement for voting in national elections. “Eight or nine states have extended the right of suffrage beyond the freeholders,” George Mason of Virginia pointed out. “What will people there say if they should be disfranchised?” Finally, the convention specified that state legislatures would elect members of the upper house, or Senate, and the states would select the electors who would choose the president. By allowing states to have important roles in the new constitutional system, the delegates hoped that their citizens would accept limits on state sovereignty.

**Negotiations over Slavery** The shadow of slavery hovered over many debates, and Gouverneur Morris of New York brought it into view. To safeguard property rights, Morris wanted life terms for senators, a property qualification for voting in national elections, and a strong president with veto power. Nonetheless, he rejected the legitimacy of two traditional types of property: the feudal dues claimed by aristocratic landowners and the ownership of slaves. An advocate of free markets and personal liberty, Morris condemned slavery as “a nefarious institution.”

Many slave-owning delegates from the Chesapeake region, including Madison and George Mason, recognized that slavery contradicted republican principles and hoped for its eventual demise. They supported an end to American participation in the Atlantic slave trade, a proposal the South Carolina and Georgia delegates angrily rejected. Unless the importation of African slaves continued, these rice planters and merchants declared, their states “shall not be parties to the Union.” At their insistence, the convention denied Congress the power to regulate immigration—and so the slave trade—until 1808 (American Voices, p. 208).

The delegates devised other slavery-related compromises. To mollify southern planters, they wrote a “fugitive clause” that allowed masters to reclaim enslaved blacks (or white indentured servants) who fled to other states. But in acknowledgment of the anti-slavery sentiments of Morris and other northerners, the delegates excluded the words *slavery* and *slave* from the Constitution; it spoke only of citizens and “all other Persons.” Because slaves lacked the vote, antislavery delegates wanted their census numbers excluded when apportioning seats in Congress.



Southerners—ironically, given that they considered slaves property—demanded that slaves be counted in the census the same as full citizens, to increase the South’s representation. Ultimately, the delegates agreed that each slave would count as three-fifths of a free person for purposes of representation and taxation, a compromise that helped southern planters dominate the national government until 1860.

**National Authority** Having addressed the concerns of small states and slave states, the convention created a powerful national government. The Constitution declared that congressional legislation was the “supreme” law of the land. It gave the new government the power to tax, raise an army and a navy, and regulate foreign and interstate commerce, with the authority to make all laws “necessary and proper” to implement those and other provisions. To assist creditors and establish the new government’s fiscal integrity, the Constitution required the United States to honor the existing national debt and prohibited the states from issuing paper money or enacting “any Law impairing the Obligation of Contracts.”

The proposed constitution was not a “perfect production,” Benjamin Franklin admitted, as he urged the delegates to sign it in September 1787. But the great statesman confessed his astonishment at finding “this system approaching so near to perfection.” His colleagues apparently agreed; all but three signed the document.

## The People Debate Ratification

The procedure for ratifying the new constitution was as controversial as its contents. Knowing that Rhode Island (and perhaps other states) would reject it, the delegates did not submit the Constitution to the state legislatures for their unanimous consent, as required by the Articles of Confederation. Instead, they arbitrarily—and cleverly—declared that it would take effect when ratified by conventions in nine of the thirteen states.

As the constitutional debate began in early 1788, the nationalists seized the initiative with two bold moves. First, they called themselves **Federalists**, suggesting that they supported a federal union—a loose, decentralized system—and obscuring their commitment to a strong national government. Second, they launched a coordinated campaign in pamphlets and newspapers to explain and justify the Philadelphia constitution.

**The Antifederalists** The opponents of the Constitution, called by default the **Antifederalists**, had diverse backgrounds and motives. Some, like Governor George Clinton of New York, feared that state governments would lose power. Rural democrats protested that the proposed document, unlike most state constitutions, lacked a declaration of individual rights; they also feared that the central government would be run by wealthy men. “Lawyers and men of learning and monied men expect to be managers of this Constitution,” worried a Massachusetts farmer. “[T]hey will swallow up all of us little folks . . . just as the whale swallowed up Jonah.” Giving political substance to these fears, Melancton Smith of New York argued that the large electoral districts prescribed by the Constitution would restrict office holding to wealthy men, whereas the smaller districts used in state elections usually produced legislatures “composed principally of respectable yeomanry.” John Quincy Adams agreed: if only “eight men” would represent Massachusetts, “they will infallibly be chosen from the aristocratic part of the community.”

Smith summed up the views of Americans who held traditional republican values. To keep government “close to the people,” they wanted the states to remain small sovereign republics tied together only for trade and defense—not the “United States” but the “States United.” Citing the French political philosopher Montesquieu, Antifederalists argued that republican institutions were best suited to small polities. “No extensive empire can be governed on republican principles,” declared James Winthrop of Massachusetts. Patrick Henry worried that the Constitution would recreate British rule: high taxes, an oppressive bureaucracy, a standing army, and a “great and mighty President . . . supported in extravagant munificence.” As another Antifederalist put it, “I had rather be a free citizen of the small republic of Massachusetts than an oppressed subject of the great American empire.”

**Federalists Respond** In New York, where ratification was hotly contested, James Madison, John Jay, and Alexander Hamilton defended the proposed constitution in a series of eighty-five essays written in 1787 and 1788, collectively titled *The Federalist*. This work influenced political leaders throughout the country and subsequently won acclaim as an important treatise of practical republicanism. Its authors denied that a

### COMPARE AND CONTRAST

How did the Constitution, in its final form, differ from the plan that James Madison originally proposed?



## The First National Debate over Slavery

In this part of the text, we trace the impact of republican ideology on American politics and society. What happened when republicanism collided head-on with the well-established practice of slavery? After the Revolution, the Massachusetts courts abolished slavery, but in 1787, slavery was legal in the rest of the Union and was the bedrock of social order and agricultural production in the southern states. A look at the debates on the issue of the African slave trade at the Philadelphia convention and in a state ratifying convention shows that slavery was an extremely divisive issue at the birth of the nation—a dark cloud threatening the bright future of the young republic.

### The Constitutional Convention

Slavery was not a major topic of discussion at the Philadelphia convention, but it surfaced a number of times, notably in the important debate over representation (which produced the three-fifths clause). A discussion of the Atlantic slave trade began when Luther Martin, a delegate from Maryland, proposed a clause allowing Congress to impose a tax on or prohibit the importation of slaves.

Mr. Martin proposed to vary article 7, sect. 4 so as to allow a prohibition or tax on the importation of slaves. . . . [He believed] it was inconsistent with the principles of the Revolution, and dishonorable to the American character, to have such a feature [promoting the slave trade] in the Constitution.

Mr. [John] Rutledge [of South Carolina declared that] religion and humanity had nothing to do with this question. Interest alone is the governing principle with nations. The true question at present is whether the Southern states shall or shall not be parties to the Union. . . .

Mr. [Oliver] Ellsworth [of Connecticut] was for leaving the clause as it stands. Let every state import what it pleases. The morality or wisdom of slavery are considerations belonging to the states themselves. . . . The old Confederation had not meddled with this point, and he did not see any greater necessity for bringing it within the policy of the new one.

Mr. [Charles C.] Pinckney [said] South Carolina can never receive the plan [for a new constitution] if it prohibits the slave trade. In every proposed extension of the powers of Congress, that state has expressly and watchfully excepted that of meddling with the importation of Negroes. . . .

Mr. [Roger] Sherman [of Connecticut] was for leaving the clause as it stands. He disapproved of the slave trade; yet, as the states were now possessed of the right

to import slaves, . . . and as it was expedient to have as few objections as possible to the proposed scheme of government, he thought it best to leave the matter as we find it.

Col. [George] Mason [of Virginia stated that] this infernal trade originated in the avarice of British merchants. The British government constantly checked the attempts of Virginia to put a stop to it. The present question concerns not the importing states alone, but the whole Union. . . . Maryland and Virginia, he said, had already prohibited the importation of slaves expressly. North Carolina had done the same in substance. All this would be in vain if South Carolina and Georgia be at liberty to import. The Western people are already calling out for slaves for their new lands, and will fill that country with slaves, if they can be got through South Carolina and Georgia. Slavery discourages arts and manufactures. The poor despise labor when performed by slaves. They prevent the immigration of whites, who really enrich and strengthen a country. . . .

Every master of slaves is born a petty tyrant. They bring the judgment of Heaven on a country. As nations cannot be rewarded or punished in the next world, they must be in this. By an inevitable chain of causes and effects, Providence punishes national sins by national calamities. . . . He held it essential, in every point of view, that the general government should have power to prevent the increase of slavery.

Mr. Ellsworth, as he had never owned a slave, could not judge of the effects of slavery on character. He said, however, that if it was to be considered in a moral light, we ought to go further, and free those already in the country. . . . Let us not intermeddle. As population increases, poor laborers will be so plenty as to render slaves useless. Slavery, in time, will not be a speck in our country. . . .

Gen. [Charles C.] Pinckney [argued that] South Carolina and Georgia cannot do without slaves. As to

Virginia, she will gain by stopping the importations. Her slaves will rise in value, and she has more than she wants. It would be unequal to require South Carolina and Georgia to confederate on such unequal terms. . . . He contended that the importation of slaves would be for the interest of the whole Union. The more slaves, the more produce to employ the carrying trade; the more consumption also; and the more of this, the more revenue for the common treasury. . . . [He] should consider a rejection of the [present] clause as an exclusion of South Carolina from the Union.

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Source: Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1911), 2: 364–365, 369–372.

## The Massachusetts Ratifying Convention

In Philadelphia, the delegates agreed on a compromise: they gave Congress the power to tax or prohibit slave imports, as Luther Martin had proposed, but withheld that power for twenty years. In the Massachusetts convention, the delegates split on this issue and on many others. They ratified the Constitution by a narrow margin, 187 to 168.

Mr. Neal (from Kittery) [an Antifederalist] went over the ground of objection to . . . the idea that slave trade was allowed to be continued for 20 years. His profession, he said, obliged him to bear witness against any thing that should favor the making merchandize of the bodies of men, and unless his objection was removed, he could not put his hand to the constitution. Other gentlemen said, in addition to this idea, that there was not even a proposition that the negroes ever shall be free: and Gen. Thompson exclaimed — “Mr. President, shall it be said, that after we have established our own independence and freedom, we make slaves of others? Oh! Washington . . . he has immortalized himself! but he holds those in slavery who have a good right to be free as he is. . . .”

On the other side, gentlemen said, that the step taken in this article, towards the abolition of slavery, was one of the beauties of the constitution. They observed, that in the confederation there was no provision whatever for its ever being abolished; but this constitution provides, that Congress may after twenty years, totally annihilate the slave trade. . . .

Mr. Heath (Federalist): . . . I apprehend that it is not in our power to do any thing for or against those who are in slavery in the southern states. No gentleman within these walls detests every idea of slavery more than I do: it is generally detested by the people of this commonwealth, and I ardently hope that the time will soon come, when our brethren in the southern states will view it as we do, and put a stop to it; but to this we have no right to compel them.

Two questions naturally arise: if we ratify the Constitution, shall we do any thing by our act to hold the blacks in slavery or shall we become the partakers of other men’s sins? I think neither of them: each state is sovereign and independent to a certain degree, and they have a right, and will regulate their own internal affairs, as to themselves appears proper. . . . We are not in this case partakers of other men’s sins. . . .

The federal convention went as far as they could; the migration or immigration &c. is confined to the states, now existing only, new states cannot claim it. Congress, by their ordinance for erecting new states, some time since, declared that there shall be no slavery in them. But whether those in slavery in the southern states, will be emancipated after the year 1808, I do not pretend to determine: I rather doubt it.

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Source: Jonathan Elliot, ed., *The Debates . . . on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1836), 1: 103–105, 107, 112, 117.

### QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. At the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, what were the main arguments for and against federal restrictions on the Atlantic slave trade? How do you explain the position taken by the Connecticut delegates in Philadelphia and Mr. Heath in the Massachusetts debate?
2. What argument does George Mason, a Virginia slave owner, make in favor of prohibiting the Atlantic slave trade?
3. What evidence of regional tensions appears in the documents? Several men from different states—Mason from Virginia, Ellsworth from Connecticut, and Heath from Massachusetts—offered predictions about the future of slavery. How accurate were they?

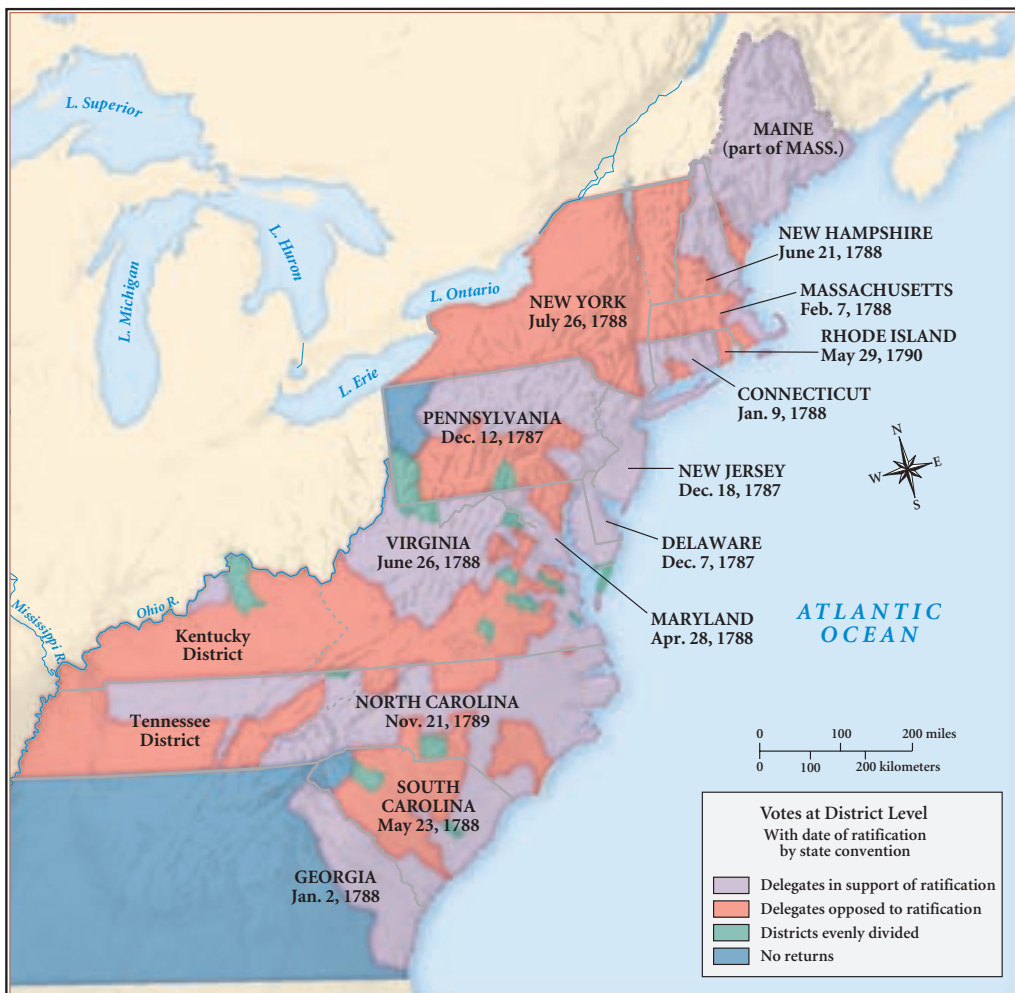


centralized government would lead to domestic tyranny. Drawing on Montesquieu's theories and John Adams's *Thoughts on Government*, Madison, Jay, and Hamilton pointed out that authority would be divided among the president, a bicameral legislature, and a judiciary. Each branch of government would "check and balance" the others and so preserve liberty.

In "Federalist No. 10," Madison challenged the view that republican governments only worked in small polities, arguing that a large state would better protect republican liberty. It was "sown in the nature of man," Madison wrote, for individuals to seek power and form factions. Indeed, "a landed interest, a manufacturing interest, a mercantile interest, a moneyed interest, with many lesser interests, grow up of necessity in civilized nations." A free society should welcome all factions but keep any one of them from becoming dominant—something best achieved in a large republic. "Extend the sphere and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests," Madison concluded, inhibiting the formation of a major-eager "to invade the rights of other citizens."

**The Constitution Ratified** The delegates debating these issues in the state ratification conventions included untutored farmers and middling artisans as well as educated gentlemen. Generally, backcountry delegates were Antifederalists, while those from coastal areas were Federalists. In Pennsylvania, Philadelphia merchants and artisans joined commercial farmers to ratify the Constitution. Other early Federalist successes came in four less populous states—Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, and Connecticut—where delegates hoped that a strong national government would offset the power of large neighboring states (Map 6.7).

The Constitution's first real test came in January 1788 in Massachusetts, a hotbed of Antifederalist sentiment. Influential Patriots, including Samuel Adams and Governor John Hancock, opposed the new constitution, as did many followers of Daniel Shays. But Boston artisans, who wanted tariff protection from British imports, supported ratification. To win over other delegates, Federalist leaders assured the convention that they would recommend a national bill of



**MAP 6.7**

**Ratifying the Constitution of 1787**

In 1907, geographer Owen Libby mapped the votes of members of the state conventions that ratified the Constitution. His map showed that most delegates from seaboard or commercial farming districts (which sent many delegates to the conventions) supported the Constitution, while those from sparsely represented, subsistence-oriented backcountry areas opposed it. Subsequent research has confirmed Libby's socioeconomic interpretation of the voting patterns in North and South Carolina and in Massachusetts. However, other states' delegates were influenced by different factors. For example, in Georgia, delegates from all regions voted for ratification.

rights. By a close vote of 187 to 168, the Federalists carried the day.

Spring brought Federalist victories in Maryland, South Carolina, and New Hampshire, reaching the nine-state quota required for ratification. But it took the powerful arguments advanced in *The Federalist* and more promises of a bill of rights to secure the Constitution's adoption in the essential states of Virginia and New York. The votes were again close: 89 to 79 in Virginia and 30 to 27 in New York.

Testifying to their respect for popular sovereignty and majority rule, most Americans accepted the verdict of the ratifying conventions. "A decided majority" of the New Hampshire assembly had opposed the "new system," reported Joshua Atherton, but now they said, "It is adopted, let us try it." In Virginia, Patrick Henry vowed to "submit as a quiet citizen" and fight for amendments "in a constitutional way."

Unlike in France, where the Revolution of 1789 divided the society into irreconcilable factions for generations, the American Constitutional Revolution of 1787 created a national republic that enjoyed broad popular support. Federalists celebrated their triumph by organizing great processions in the seaport cities. By marching in an orderly fashion — in conscious contrast to the riotous Revolutionary mobs — Federalist-minded citizens affirmed their allegiance to a self-governing but elite-ruled republican nation.

## SUMMARY

In this chapter, we examined the unfolding of two related sets of events. The first was the war between Britain and its rebellious colonies that began in 1776 and ended in 1783. The two great battles of Saratoga (1777) and Yorktown (1781) determined the outcome of that conflict. Surprisingly, given the military might of the British Empire, both were American victories. These triumphs testify to the determination of George Washington, the resilience of the Continental army, and support for the Patriot cause from hundreds of local militias and tens of thousands of taxpaying citizens.

This popular support reflected the Patriots' second success: building effective institutions of republican government. These elected institutions of local and state governance evolved out of colonial-era town meetings and representative assemblies. They were defined in the state constitutions written between 1776 and 1781, and their principles informed the first national constitution, the Articles of Confederation. Despite the challenges posed by conflicts over suffrage, women's rights, and fiscal policy, these self-governing political institutions carried the new republic successfully through the war-torn era and laid the foundation for the Constitution of 1787, the national charter that endures today.

## CHAPTER REVIEW

**MAKE IT STICK** Go to **LearningCurve** to retain what you've read.



### KEY TERMS

Identify and explain the significance of each term below.

#### Key Concepts and Events

**Battle of Long Island (1776)**  
(p. 184)

**Battle of Saratoga (1777)** (p. 187)  
**Valley Forge** (p. 189)

**Philipsburg Proclamation** (p. 190)

**Battle of Yorktown (1781)** (p. 195)  
**currency tax** (p. 196)

**Treaty of Paris of 1783** (p. 196)

**Pennsylvania constitution of 1776** (p. 198)

**mixed government** (p. 198)

**Articles of Confederation** (p. 200)

**Northwest Ordinance of 1787**  
(p. 201)

**Shays's Rebellion** (p. 204)

**Virginia Plan** (p. 205)

**New Jersey Plan** (p. 206)

**Federalists** (p. 207)

**Antifederalists** (p. 207)

**Federalist No. 10** (p. 210)

#### KEY PEOPLE

**General George Washington**  
(p. 184)

**General William Howe** (p. 184)

**General Horatio Gates** (p. 187)

**Robert Morris** (p. 188)

**Baron von Steuben** (p. 189)

**Judith Sargent Murray** (p. 199)

**James Madison** (p. 205)

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

Answer these questions to demonstrate your understanding of the chapter's main ideas.

1. What were the principal reasons that Great Britain, despite its enormous military advantages, lost the War for Independence?
2. The war had wrenching effects on the American economy. What economic problems became especially acute during wartime? How did the states and the Second Continental Congress attempt to address them?
3. Federalists and Antifederalists both claimed to represent the true spirit of the American Revolution. Which of these competing visions of national identity do you think was right? Why?
4. **THEMATIC UNDERSTANDING** Consider the events listed under “Work, Exchange, and Technology” and “Politics and Power” for the period 1776–1787 on the thematic timeline on page 149. How did war debt and inflation influence the development of political institutions during these years?

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

Recognize the larger developments and continuities within and across chapters by answering these questions.

1. **ACROSS TIME AND PLACE** In Chapter 5, we saw the way that protests against imperial policy grew until colonists chose to declare their independence rather than submit to Parliament's authority. By 1787, the problems created by the Revolutionary War forced leaders of the newly independent states to consider plans for their own powerful central government. What problems led nationalists to believe such a step was necessary? How did Antifederalists draw on Revolutionary ideas to make their case against the Constitution? What claims did nationalists make in response to dampen Antifederalist fears?
2. **VISUAL EVIDENCE** Look again at Map 6.5 on page 202 showing western land claims in the 1780s. If these claims had not been ceded to the Continental Congress, what would have been the likely result? Why was it so important to the survival of the Confederation that individual states give up their claims to these western lands?

## MORE TO EXPLORE

Start here to learn more about the events discussed in this chapter.

Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country* (1995). Tracks the experiences of numerous Native American communities in the Revolution.

Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders* (1999). Explores the ideas and legacy of the Antifederalists.

John C. Dann, ed., *The Revolution Remembered* (1980). Contains vivid eyewitness accounts of the Revolution.

Pauline Maier, *Ratification* (2010). A compelling narrative of the debate over the Constitution.

Michael McDonnell, *The Politics of War* (2007). A penetrating account of Virginia's mobilization for war.

Leonard Richards, *Shays's Rebellion* (2003). A persuasive interpretation of the rebellion's participants and motives.



**TIMELINE** Ask yourself why this chapter begins and ends with these dates and then identify the links among related events.

<b>1776</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Second Continental Congress declares independence</li> <li>• Howe forces Washington to retreat from New York and New Jersey</li> <li>• Pennsylvania approves democratic state constitution</li> <li>• John Adams publishes <i>Thoughts on Government</i></li> </ul>
<b>1777</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articles of Confederation create central government</li> <li>• Howe occupies Philadelphia (September)</li> <li>• Gates defeats Burgoyne at Saratoga (October)</li> </ul>
<b>1778</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Franco-American alliance (February)</li> <li>• Lord North seeks political settlement</li> <li>• Congress rejects negotiations</li> <li>• British adopt southern strategy</li> <li>• British capture Savannah (December)</li> </ul>
<b>1778–1781</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Severe inflation of Continental currency</li> </ul>
<b>1779</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• British and American forces battle in Georgia</li> </ul>
<b>1780</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinton seizes Charleston (May)</li> <li>• French troops land in Rhode Island</li> </ul>
<b>1781</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cornwallis invades Virginia (April), surrenders at Yorktown (October)</li> <li>• States finally ratify Articles of Confederation</li> </ul>
<b>1783</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treaty of Paris (September 3) officially ends war</li> </ul>
<b>1784–1785</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congress enacts political and land ordinances for new states</li> </ul>
<b>1786</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nationalists hold convention in Annapolis, Maryland</li> <li>• Shays's Rebellion roils Massachusetts</li> </ul>
<b>1787</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congress passes Northwest Ordinance</li> <li>• Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia</li> </ul>
<b>1787–1788</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jay, Madison, and Hamilton write <i>The Federalist</i></li> <li>• Eleven states ratify U.S. Constitution</li> </ul>

**KEY TURNING POINTS:** Gates defeats Burgoyne at Saratoga (1777), the Franco-American alliance (1778), and Cornwallis surrenders at Yorktown (1781). How were these three events linked? How important was the French alliance to the Patriot victory?