

## The American Revolution

After the Seven Years' War, British leaders wanted to get new revenues from the colonies. These revenues would be used to cover war costs, as well as to pay for the expenses of maintaining an army to defend the colonies.

In 1765, the Parliament imposed the Stamp Act on the colonies. The act required that certain printed materials, such as legal documents and newspapers, carry a stamp showing that a tax had been paid to Britain. Opposition was widespread and often violent, and the act was repealed in 1766. The crisis was over, but the cause of the dispute was not resolved.



Lord Cornwallis

**The War Begins** Crisis followed crisis in the 1770s. To counteract British actions, the colonies organized the First Continental Congress, which met in Philadelphia in September 1774. Outspoken members urged colonists to "take up arms and organize militias."

Fighting finally erupted between colonists and the British army in April 1775 in Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts. The Second Continental Congress met soon afterward and formed an army, called the Continental Army, with George Washington as commander in chief. Still, the colonists did not rush headlong into war. After the fighting in Lexington and Concord, more than a year passed before the decision was made to declare independence from the British Empire.

On July 4, 1776, the Second Continental Congress approved a declaration of independence written by Thomas Jefferson. A stirring political document, the Declaration of Independence declared the colonies to be "free and independent states absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown." The American Revolution had formally begun.

The war against Great Britain was a great gamble. Britain was a strong military power with enormous financial resources. The Continental Army of the Americans was made up of undisciplined amateurs who agreed to serve for only a short time.

**Foreign Support and British Defeat** Of great importance to the colonies' cause was support from foreign countries. These nations were eager to gain revenge for earlier defeats at the hands of the British.

The French supplied arms and money to the rebels from the beginning of the war. French officers and soldiers also served in Washington's army. In October

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1777, following a British defeat, the French granted diplomatic recognition to the American state.

Spain and the Dutch Republic also entered the war against Great Britain. Now, the British were faced with war against much of Europe, as well as against the Americans.

When the army of General Cornwallis was forced to surrender to combined American and French forces under Washington at Yorktown in 1781, the British decided to end the war. The Treaty of Paris, signed in 1783, recognized the independence of the American colonies and granted the Americans control of the western territory from the Appalachians to the Mississippi River.



**Reading Check** Explaining Why did foreign countries support the American cause?