Chapter 6
The War for Independence, 1774—1783

Chapter Summary

Chapter 6 offers the student a survey of the final conflicts that led the American colonies to declare independence from Britain, the ensuing military conflict, and the terms of the peace treaty that granted them freedom. The topics discussed include the last failed attempts at resolution of conflict between the colonies and Britain; the accomplishments of the Second Continental Congress, including the adoption of the Declaration of Independence; the military history of the War for Independence; the nature of the peace agreement ending the war; and the impact of the war on American society.

I. The Outbreak of War and The Declaration of Independence, 1774–1776
   A. Mounting Tensions
   B. The Loyalists’ Dilemma
   C. British Coercion and Conciliation
   D. The Battles of Lexington and Concord
   E. The Second Continental Congress, 1775–1776
   F. Commander in Chief George Washington
   G. Early Fighting: Massachusetts, Virginia, the Carolinas, and Canada
   H. Independence
   I. Republicanism

II. The Combatants
   A. Professional Soldiers
   B. Women in the Contending Armies
   C. African American Participation in the War
   D. Native Americans and the War

III. The War in the North, 1776–1777
   A. The British Army Hesitates: Battles in New York and New Jersey
   B. The Year of the Hangman: Victory at Saratoga and Winter at Valley Forge

IV. The War Widens, 1778–1781
   A. The United States Gains an Ally
   B. Fighting on the Frontier and at Sea
   C. The Land War Moves South
   D. American Counterattacks

V. The American Victory, 1782–1783
   A. The Peace of Paris
   B. The Components of Success

VI. War and Society, 1775–1783
   A. The Women’s War
   B. Effect of the War on African Americans
   C. The War’s Impact on Native Americans
Learning Objectives

After a careful examination of Chapter 6, students should be able to do the following:

1. Identify the Loyalist populations in the American colonies and describe their responses to the deteriorating relations between the colonies and Britain by the mid-1770s.

2. Explain the circumstances and impact of the Battles of Lexington and Concord and explain why these opening shots are referred to as the shots heard round the world.

3. List the major accomplishments of the Second Continental Congress.

4. Identify George Washington and explain the reasons why he was selected to serve as Commander in Chief of the Continental Army.

5. Explain the nature of early American military forays into Quebec and comment on the degree of success attained by Americans there.

6. Identify Thomas Paine and explain the impact of his pamphlet *Common Sense* on the American movement toward independence.

7. Understand the connection between John Locke’s contract theory of government and Thomas Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence.

8. Explain the three major sections of the Declaration of Independence and what Jefferson accomplished in each.

9. Understand the term republicanism and what it meant to Americans in 1776. Explain the roots of American republicanism in country ideology and the experience of the Puritan commonwealth.

10. Explain the challenges faced by George Washington in transforming the Continental Army into professional military troops.

11. Describe the role of women in the American military during the Revolution.

12. Describe the role of African Americans and Native Americans in the military during the American Revolution.

13. Identify Sir William and Richard Howe and explain why their approach to fighting in the American Revolution has been characterized as hesitant.

14. Explain why the year 1777 in the American Revolution is referred to as the Year of the Hangman.

15. Understand the Battle of Saratoga as a turning point in the American Revolution.
16. Understand France’s motivation for entering into the Franco-American alliance and how the alliance transformed the Revolution into a world war.

17. Explain the nature of American naval warfare during the Revolution. Identify John Paul Jones and comment on his contribution to the naval war.

18. Explain the British southern strategy and the reasons why it backfired.

19. Identify the Peace of Paris of 1783. Explain the initial American demands during negotiation, the reasons why Americans negotiated a unilateral peace, and the final terms of the treaty.

20. Explain the reasons why America won the War for Independence. Point out the strengths of the American side as well as the weaknesses of the British.


Topics for Classroom Lectures

1. Prepare a lecture on the Declaration of Independence in which you describe the adoption of this document by the Second Continental Congress as the moment of revolution. Begin by explaining the distinction between the terms resistance and revolution and how the adoption of the Declaration of Independence moved Americans from the former to the latter. Ask students about the legality of the actions of the Second Continental Congress. Was the adoption of the Declaration a legal act? What did Americans have to do to validate that action? Explain the importance of military victory and recognition of American independence by other nations in making the Declaration legitimate. Point out how the Franco-American alliance promoted validation of the Declaration by helping to achieve military victory and by offering Americans recognition of independent status.

2. Prepare a lecture on the factors that contributed to the American victory in the Revolution. Offer treatment of a variety of issues, including these American advantages: home territory, passion and commitment to the cause, and the French alliance. Among British disadvantages, include lack of commitment or passion, overconfidence, personal and kinship ties to Americans, and distractions at home as the war evolved into world war.
Topics for Class Discussion and Essays

1. Arrange a classroom discussion focusing on the content of the Declaration of Independence. Have students read the Declaration before coming to class and then present some of the following issues for discussion:
   a. Focus on the philosophical connections between the Declaration and the writings of John Locke by asking students to point out specific phrases in the document that directly reflect Lockean theory regarding natural law and the contract theory of government.
   b. Ask students to comment on Jefferson's use of the phrase all men are created equal. What did Jefferson mean when he used the phrase all men? Use this opportunity to discuss the meaning of the term democracy in the eighteenth-century Western world.
   c. This is also a good time to initiate a conversation about the issue of historical relevancy. Have students address the strengths and weaknesses of applying twentieth-century social and political standards to an eighteenth-century document. Explain how the assessment of history can be carried out on two levels. First, an assessment can be made based on historical relevancy. What does Jefferson's use of the term all men teach us about eighteenth-century social and intellectual history? Within what historical context is Jefferson writing? Second, point out to students the value of assessing history based on the social and cultural changes that have taken place in America since 1776. Twentieth-century Americans should be disturbed by the gender specific language used by Jefferson and should use that reaction to recognize the strides that Americans have made as a nation to make the term all men more inclusive.
   d. Explore the meaning of the phrase pursuit of happiness. What did it mean to Jefferson within the context of eighteenth-century philosophy? Are there connections between this phrase and the principles of a capitalist economy?
   e. Have students comment on religious references in the Declaration of Independence. Did the Revolution have a moral tone? What do these references say about the American tradition of separation of church and state?

2. Discuss the British southern strategy in the American Revolution. Why did the British believe the South to be a hotbed of Toryism? What populations in the South had a reason to resent patriotism and embrace loyalism? Why did the southern strategy fail, and what factors convinced the South to choose revolution?

Topics for Term Papers and Class Projects

1. Research the relationship between John and Abigail Adams during the years of the Second Continental Congress and the Revolution. Suggest that students read manuscripts of the letters written between John and Abigail and use them to research the role Abigail played in the life of her husband and her influence on him and his role in the Revolution. A study of Abigail Adams can also shed light on the general condition of many American women during the war. Abigail's letters reveal her political philosophy and her feelings about the Revolution. She also speaks of the hardships of war, including the shortage of supplies, the financial responsibilities of running the household, and the pressure of family responsibilities.

2. Examine Thomas Jefferson's influences in writing the Declaration of Independence. Was John Locke the only philosophical influence? How important were Scottish political philosophers of the Enlightenment?
3. George Washington has been described by one historian as the Indispensable Man. Write a paper exploring this premise. Was Washington indispensable to the American victory in the American Revolution? If so, why?

**Resources for Lectures and Research Projects**


**Audio-Visual Resources**

This six-part series presents the History Channel's look at the birth of the American nation.

This episode features the unique love and friendship between John and Abigail Adams.

*Save Our History: The Declaration of Independence*, A&E Video, 50 minutes.
This video, narrated by Harry Smith, examines the origins of the Declaration of Independence.

This video presents an examination of American freedom as it developed through the two defining moments of American history: the Revolution and the Civil War.

This video offers a personal and intimate look at the men behind the founding of the United States.

This six-hour video chronicles the birth of the American republic from the prelude of the revolution through independence and the adoption of the Constitution.