

Main Idea

The British imposed new policies on their American colonies, sparking rebellion and, in time, the American Revolution.

Reading Focus

1. How did British colonial policies lead to American independence?
2. What were the aims of the Continental Congresses?
3. Which ideas and events inspired the Declaration of Independence?
4. How did the first state governments reflect the conflict that led to the American Revolution?

Key Terms

New England Confederation

Iroquois Confederation

Albany Plan of Union

Stamp Act

First Continental Congress

Second Continental Congress

Virginia Declaration of Rights

The Road to Independence

(pg. 37–40)

The road that led the American colonies to unite with one another and break with Great Britain was filled with conflict. In part, the break was the result of the British government's failure to recognize the traditions of English government the colonists believed important.

Early Attempts at Unity The colonies had several early attempts at forming a union. One of the earliest steps toward colonial unity came in 1643 when the Plymouth, Connecticut, Massachusetts Bay, and New Haven colonies formed the **New England Confederation**. Its purpose was to defend against Native American attacks.

The French and Indian War (1754–1763) spurred the next attempt at unity. In 1754, as fighting raged on the colonies' western frontier, Great Britain urged its colonies to sign a treaty with the **Iroquois Confederation**, a powerful alliance of six Native American nations—the Mohawk,

Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora.

To gain the support of the Iroquois in the fight against the French, the northern colonies invited Iroquois leaders to a meeting in Albany, New York. At the meeting, Benjamin Franklin, inspired by the Iroquois, proposed a plan that became known as the **Albany Plan of Union**. It called for a council of representatives appointed by the colonial assemblies and a president general appointed by the king. The council would control trade and raise armies. The plan was rejected by the colonies and the king, but it later became the basis for an early draft of the first official constitution of the new United States.

Growing Tensions By the mid-1700s the colonists had grown used to handling their own affairs with little interference from the crown. Soon after George III became king in 1760, however, the British government tightened control over the colonies. Many in Parliament believed the colonies had

become too independent. The British government also needed a way to pay for the French and Indian War.

Changes in British Policies Beginning in 1764 with the Sugar Act, Parliament passed a series of taxes to help raise money. The colonists' reaction to the **Stamp Act** of 1765, Parliament's first attempt to tax the colonists directly, should have been a warning sign of the rough times to come. The Stamp Act required a government tax stamp on paper goods and all legal documents. Secret organizations called the Sons of Liberty acted to stop the stamp agents. In October 1765 nine colonies sent delegates to the Stamp Act Congress in New York. The congress sent a petition to the king protesting the Stamp Act.

Colonial Protests Parliament repealed the Stamp Act, but it passed other taxes. On March 5, 1770, British soldiers fired into a crowd of colonial protestors in Boston, killing five people in the Boston Massacre. After the event, colonists formed resistance groups. Organized letter writing by the Committees of Correspondence established communication among the colonies.

Protests came to a head with the Boston Tea Party in 1773. Colonists disguised as Native Americans dumped British ships' tea cargo into the Boston Harbor after the government gave all rights to the American tea trade to one British company. Parliament then passed a new set of laws, known as the Intolerable Acts, in 1774. Among other things, the acts ended all forms of self-rule in Massachusetts.

Reading Check Identifying the Main Idea Why were the colonists angry?

The Continental Congresses (pg. 40–41)

Virginia and Massachusetts assemblies called for a colonial meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Every colony except Georgia sent delegates to the **First Continental Congress** in Philadelphia in the fall of 1774. The group sent George III the Declaration and Resolves that included a set of demands, including the repeal of the Intolerable Acts. The delegates agreed to meet in May should the king refuse their petition.

The British rejected the colonists' demands. In April 1775, British troops clashed with colonial militia, or armed fighters, at Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts. Three weeks after Lexington and Concord, the **Second Continental Congress** met in Philadelphia. Again representatives from 12 of the 13 colonies attended. The group organized the Continental Army, with George Washington as its commander. The congress also sent the king a final appeal asking for Parliament to end the new harsher laws. The document was called the Olive Branch Petition. The king refused, declaring that the colonies were in a full state of rebellion. The Revolutionary War was now under way.

The Congress took on the role of a government. It raised troops, borrowed money, and declared the colonies independent from Britain. Support for the Congress's actions was widespread, particularly after the publication of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*.

Reading Check Identifying the Main Idea What were the First and Second Continental Congresses?

The Declaration of Independence (pg. 41)

The war continued for months before the Declaration of Independence was written. After passing a resolution to officially declare independence, the Congress appointed five people to write the formal document. Thomas Jefferson wrote most of the document. Jefferson likely drew on the **Virginia Declaration of Rights** that the Virginia House of Burgesses had adopted just one month earlier. Inspired by the philosophy of John Locke and written mostly by George Mason, the Virginia Declaration proclaimed “all men are by nature equally free and independent and have certain inherent [natural] rights” that cannot be denied.

Jefferson’s document stated that people have “unalienable” rights to “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” that no government can take away. The Declaration also supports the idea of the social contract—people give government its power to govern and can take away this power if the government is governing unjustly. The Congress adopted the Declaration on July 4, 1776.

SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT

1. **Explain** What actions did the British government take that the colonists opposed?
2. **Recall** Why was the **First Continental Congress** called?
3. **Describe** Why did the Congress draft the Declaration of Independence?
4. **Identify** What principles in state constitutions later influenced the writing of the U.S. Constitution?

Reading Check Summarizing What ideas did Thomas Jefferson include in the Declaration of Independence?

The State Constitutions (pg. 42)

In May 1776 the Continental Congress passed a resolution encouraging each colony to draft its plan for government. By 1780, each of the 13 newly independent states had adopted its own written constitution. These early documents reflected many of the ideals of republican government and later influenced the writing of the U.S. Constitution. Important principles established by the new state governments in their constitutions included:

- Republican governments with strong legislatures made up of elected representatives
- Separation of powers among three branches of government—legislative, executive, and judicial
- Limited powers for state governments
- Protections of people’s individual rights and liberties.

Reading Check Summarizing What principles were in state constitutions?