

# English Colonial Era

1700 to 1763

**1700** - The Anglo population in the English colonies in America reaches 275,000, with Boston (pop. 7000) as the largest city, followed by New York (pop. 5000).

**1700** - In June, Massachusetts passes a law ordering all Roman Catholic priests to leave the colony within three months, upon penalty of life imprisonment or execution. New York then passes a similar law.

**1701** - In July, The French establish a settlement at Detroit. In October, Yale College is founded in Connecticut.

**1702** - In March, Queen Anne ascends the English throne. In May, England declares war on France after the death of the King of Spain, Charles II, to stop the union of France and Spain. This War of the Spanish Succession is called [Queen Anne's War](#) in the colonies, where the English and American colonists will battle the French, their Native American allies, and the Spanish for the next eleven years.

**1702** - In Maryland, the Anglican Church is established as the official church, financially supported by taxation imposed on all free men, male servants and slaves.

**1704** - In April, the first enduring newspaper in America, The Boston News-Letter, is published.

**1705** - In Virginia, slaves are assigned the status of real estate by the Virginia Black Code of 1705. In New York, a law against runaway slaves assigns the death penalty for those caught over 40 miles north of Albany. Massachusetts declares marriage between African Americans and whites to be illegal.

**1706** - January 17, [Benjamin Franklin](#) is born in Boston. In November, South Carolina establishes the Anglican Church as its official church.

**1707** - England, Scotland and Wales are combined into the United Kingdom of Great Britain by the Act of the Union, endorsed by Queen Anne.

**1710** - The English Parliament passes the [Post Office Act](#) which starts a postal system in the American colony controlled by the postmaster general of London and his deputy in New York City.

**1711** - Hostilities break out between Native Americans and settlers in North Carolina after the massacre of settlers there. The conflict, known as the Tuscarora Indian War will last two years.

**1712** - In May, the Carolina colony is officially divided into North Carolina and South Carolina. In June, the Pennsylvania assembly bans the import of slaves into that colony. In Massachusetts, the first sperm whale is captured at sea by an American from Nantucket.

**1713** - Queen Anne's War ends with the Treaty of Utrecht.

**1714** - Tea is introduced for the first time into the American Colonies. In August, King George I ascends to the English throne, succeeding Queen Anne.

**1716** - The first group of black slaves is brought to the Louisiana territory.

**1718** - New Orleans is founded by the French.

**1720** - The population of American colonists reaches 475,000. Boston (pop. 12,000) is the largest city, followed by Philadelphia (pop. 10,000) and New York (pop. 7000).

**1725** - The population of black slaves in the American colonies reaches 75,000.

**1726** - Riots occur in Philadelphia as poor people tear down the pillories and stocks and burn them.

**1727** - King George II ascends the English throne.

**1728** - Jewish colonists in New York City build the first American synagogue.

**1729** - [Benjamin Franklin](#) begins publishing The Pennsylvania Gazette, which eventually becomes the most popular colonial newspaper.

**1730** - Baltimore is founded in the Maryland colony.

**1731** - The first American public library is founded in Philadelphia by Benjamin Franklin.

**1732** - February 22, [George Washington](#) is born in Virginia. Also in February, the first mass is celebrated in the only Catholic church in colonial America, in Philadelphia. In June, Georgia, the 13th English colony, is founded.

**1732-1757** - Benjamin Franklin publishes [Poor Richard's Almanac](#), containing weather predictions, humor, proverbs and epigrams, selling nearly 10,000 copies per year.

**1733** - The [Molasses Act](#), passed by the English Parliament, imposes heavy duties on molasses, rum and sugar imported from non-British islands in the Caribbean to protect the English planters there from French and Dutch competition.

**1734** - In November, New York newspaper publisher [John Peter Zenger](#) is arrested and accused of seditious libel by the Governor. In December, the Great Awakening religious revival movement begins in Massachusetts. The movement will last ten years and spread to all of the American colonies.

**1735** - John Peter Zenger is brought to trial for seditious libel but is acquitted after his lawyer successfully convinces the jury that truth is a defense against libel.

**1737** - The first colonial copper coins are minted, in Connecticut.

**1739** - England declares war on Spain. As a result, in America, hostilities break out between Florida Spaniards and Georgia and South Carolina colonists. Also in 1739, three separate violent uprisings by black slaves occur in South Carolina.

**1740** - Fifty black slaves are hanged in Charleston, South Carolina, after plans for another revolt are revealed. Also in 1740, in Europe, the War of the Austrian Succession begins after the death of Emperor Charles VI and eventually results in France and Spain allied against England. The conflict is known in the American colonies as King George's War and lasts until 1748.

**1741** - Russian Tsar, Peter the Great, sponsors an expedition by Danish navigator Vitus Bering to explore the coast of Alaska.

**1743** - The American Philosophical Society is founded in Philadelphia by Ben Franklin and his associates.

**1747** - The New York Bar Association is founded in New York City.

**1750** - The [Iron Act](#) is passed by the English Parliament, limiting the growth of the iron industry in the American colonies to protect the English Iron industry.

**1751** - The [Currency Act](#) is passed by the English Parliament, banning the issuing of paper money by the New England colonies.

**1752** - The first general hospital is founded, in Philadelphia.

**1753** - Benjamin Franklin and William Hunter are appointed as postmasters general for the American colonies.

**1754** - The [French and Indian War](#) erupts as a result of disputes over land in the Ohio River Valley. In May, George Washington leads a small group of American colonists to victory over the French, then builds Fort Necessity in the Ohio territory. In July, after being attacked by numerically superior French forces, Washington surrenders the fort and retreats.

**1755** - In February, English General Edward Braddock arrives in Virginia with two regiments of English troops. Gen. Braddock assumes the post of commander in chief of all English forces in America. In April, Gen. Braddock and Lt. Col. George Washington set out with nearly 2000 men to battle the French in the Ohio territory. In July, a force of about 900 French and Indians defeat those English forces. Braddock is mortally wounded. Massachusetts Governor William Shirley then becomes the new commander in chief.

**1756** - England declares war on France, as the French and Indian War in the colonies now spreads to Europe.

**1757** - In June, William Pitt becomes England's Secretary of State and escalates the French and Indian War in the colonies by establishing a policy of unlimited warfare. In July, Benjamin Franklin begins a five year stay in London.

**1758** - In July, a devastating defeat occurs for English forces at Lake George, New York, as nearly two thousand men are lost during a frontal attack against well entrenched French forces at Fort Ticonderoga. French losses are 377. In November, the French abandon Fort Duquesne in the Ohio territory. Settlers then rush into the territory to establish homes. Also in 1758, the first Indian reservation in America is founded, in New Jersey, on 3000 acres.

**1759** - French Fort Niagara is captured by the English. Also in 1759, war erupts between Cherokee Indians and southern colonists.

**1760** - The population of colonists in America reaches 1,500,000. In March, much of Boston is destroyed by a raging fire. In September, Quebec surrenders to the English. In October, [George III](#) becomes the new English King.

**1762** - England declares war on Spain, which had been planning to ally itself with France and Austria. The British then successfully attack Spanish outposts in the West Indies and Cuba.

**1763** - The French and Indian War, known in Europe as the Seven Year's War, ends with the Treaty of Paris. Under the treaty, France gives England all French territory east of the Mississippi River, except New Orleans. The Spanish give up east and west Florida to the English in return for Cuba.

**1763** - In May, the Ottawa Native Americans under Chief Pontiac begin all-out warfare against the British west of Niagara, destroying several British forts and conducting a siege against the British at Detroit. In August, Pontiac's forces are defeated by the British near Pittsburgh. The siege of Detroit ends in November, but hostilities between the British and Chief Pontiac continue for several years.

## Prelude to Revolution

1763 to 1775

**1763** - The [Proclamation of 1763](#), signed by King George III of England, prohibits any English settlement west of the Appalachian mountains and requires those already settled in those regions to return east in an attempt to ease tensions with Native Americans.

**1764** - The [Sugar Act](#) is passed by the English Parliament to offset the war debt brought on by the French and Indian War and to help pay for the expenses of running the colonies and newly acquired

territories. This act increases the duties on imported sugar and other items such as textiles, coffee, wines and indigo (dye). It doubles the duties on foreign goods reshipped from England to the colonies and also forbids the import of foreign rum and French wines.

**1764** - The English Parliament passes a measure to reorganize the American customs system to better enforce British trade laws, which have often been ignored in the past. A court is established in Halifax, Nova Scotia, that will have jurisdiction over all of the American colonies in trade matters.

**1764** - The [Currency Act](#) prohibits the colonists from issuing any legal tender paper money. This act threatens to destabilize the entire colonial economy of both the industrial North and agricultural South, thus uniting the colonists against it.

**1764** - In May, at a town meeting in Boston, James Otis raises the issue of taxation without representation and urges a united response to the recent acts imposed by England. In July, Otis publishes "The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved." In August, Boston merchants begin a boycott of British luxury goods.

**1765** - In March, the [Stamp Act](#) is passed by the English Parliament imposing the first direct tax on the American colonies, to offset the high costs of the British military organization in America. Thus for the first time in the 150 year old history of the British colonies in America, the Americans will pay tax not to their own local legislatures in America, but directly to England.

Under the Stamp Act, all printed materials are taxed, including; newspapers, pamphlets, bills, legal documents, licenses, almanacs, dice and playing cards. The American colonists quickly unite in opposition, led by the most influential segments of colonial society - lawyers, publishers, land owners, ship builders and merchants - who are most affected by the Act, which is scheduled to go into effect on November 1.

**1765** - Also in March, the [Quartering Act](#) requires colonists to house British troops and supply them with food.

**1765** - In May, in Virginia, Patrick Henry presents seven [Virginia Resolutions](#) to the House of Burgesses claiming that only the Virginia assembly can legally tax Virginia residents, saying, "If this be treason, make the most of it." Also in May, the first medical school in America is founded, in Philadelphia.

**1765** - In July, the [Sons of Liberty](#), an underground organization opposed to the Stamp Act, is formed in a number of colonial towns. Its members use violence and intimidation to eventually force all of the British stamp agents to resign and also stop many American merchants from ordering British trade goods.

**1765** - August 26, a mob in Boston attacks the home of Thomas Hutchinson, Chief Justice of Massachusetts, as Hutchinson and his family narrowly escape.

**1765** - In October, the [Stamp Act Congress](#) convenes in New York City, with representatives from nine of the colonies. The Congress prepares a [resolution](#) to be sent to King George III and the English Parliament. The petition requests the repeal of the Stamp Act and the Acts of 1764. The petition asserts that only colonial legislatures can tax colonial residents and that taxation without representation violates the colonists' basic civil rights.

**1765** - On November 1, most daily business and legal transactions in the colonies cease as the Stamp Act goes into effect with nearly all of the colonists refusing to use the stamps. In New York City, violence breaks out as a mob burns the royal governor in effigy, harasses British troops, then loots houses.

**1765** - In December, British General Thomas Gage, commander of all English military forces in America, asks the New York assembly to make colonists comply with the Quartering Act and house and supply his troops. Also in December, the American boycott of English imports spreads, as over 200 Boston merchants join the movement.

**1766** - In January, the New York assembly refuses to completely comply with Gen. Gage's request to enforce the Quartering Act.

**1766** - In March, King George III signs a bill repealing the Stamp Act after much debate in the English Parliament, which included an appearance by Ben Franklin arguing for repeal and warning of a possible revolution in the American colonies if the Stamp Act was enforced by the British military.

**1766** - On the same day it repealed the Stamp Act, the English Parliament passes the [Declaratory Act](#) stating that the British government has total power to legislate any laws governing the American colonies in all cases whatsoever.

**1766** - In April, news of the repeal of the Stamp Act results in celebrations in the colonies and a relaxation of the boycott of imported English trade goods.

**1766** - In August, violence breaks out in New York between British soldiers and armed colonists, including Sons of Liberty members. The violence erupts as a result of the continuing refusal of New York colonists to comply with the Quartering Act. In December, the New York legislature is suspended by the English Crown after once again voting to refuse to comply with the Act.

**1767** - In June, The English Parliament passes the [Townshend Revenue Acts](#), imposing a new series of taxes on the colonists to offset the costs of administering and protecting the American colonies. Items taxed include imports such as paper, tea, glass, lead and paints. The Act also establishes a colonial board of customs commissioners in Boston. In October, Bostonians decide to reinstate a boycott of English luxury items.



**1768** - In February, Samuel Adams of Massachusetts writes a [Circular Letter](#) opposing taxation without representation and calling for the colonists to unite in their actions against the British government. The letter is sent to assemblies throughout the colonies and also instructs them on the methods the Massachusetts general court is using to oppose the Townshend Acts.

**1768** - In April, England's Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Hillsborough, orders colonial governors to stop their own assemblies from endorsing Adams' circular letter. Hillsborough also orders the governor of Massachusetts to dissolve the general court if the Massachusetts assembly does not revoke the letter. By month's end, the assemblies of New Hampshire, Connecticut and New Jersey have endorsed the letter.

**1768** - In May, a British warship armed with 50 cannons sails into Boston harbor after a call for help from custom commissioners who are constantly being harassed by Boston agitators. In June, a customs official is locked up in the cabin of the Liberty, a sloop owned by John Hancock. Imported wine is then unloaded illegally into Boston without payment of duties. Following this incident, customs officials seize Hancock's sloop. After threats of violence from Bostonians, the customs officials escape to an island off Boston, then request the intervention of British troops.

**1768** - In July, the governor of Massachusetts dissolves the general court after the legislature defies his order to revoke Adams' circular letter. In August, in Boston and New York, merchants agree to boycott most British goods until the Townshend Acts are repealed. In September, at a town meeting in Boston, residents are urged to arm themselves. Later in September, English warships sail into Boston Harbor, then two regiments of English infantry land in Boston and set up permanent residence to keep order.

**1769** - In March, merchants in Philadelphia join the boycott of British trade goods. In May, a set of resolutions written by George Mason is presented by George Washington to the Virginia House of Burgesses. The *Virginia Resolves* oppose taxation without representation, the British opposition to the circular letters, and British plans to possibly send American agitators to England for trial. Ten days later, the Royal governor of Virginia dissolves the House of Burgesses. However, its members meet the next day in a Williamsburg tavern and agree to a boycott of British trade goods, luxury items and slaves.

**1769** - In July, in the territory of California, San Diego is founded by Franciscan Friar Juniper Serra. In October, the boycott of English goods spreads to New Jersey, Rhode Island, and then North Carolina.

**1770** - The population of the American colonies reaches 2,210,000 persons.

**1770** - Violence erupts in January between members of the Sons of Liberty in New York and 40 British soldiers over the posting of broadsheets by the British. Several men are seriously wounded.



**March 5, 1770** - The [Boston Massacre](#) occurs as a mob harasses British soldiers who then fire their muskets pointblank into the crowd, killing three instantly, mortally wounding two others and injuring six. After the incident, the new Royal Governor of Massachusetts, Thomas Hutchinson, at the insistence of Sam Adams, withdraws British troops out of Boston to nearby harbor islands. The captain of the British soldiers, Thomas Preston, is then arrested along with eight of his men and charged with murder.

**1770** - In April, the Townshend Acts are repealed by the British. All duties on imports into the colonies are eliminated except for tea. Also, the Quartering Act is not renewed.

**1770** - In October, trial begins for the British soldiers arrested after the Boston Massacre. Colonial lawyers John Adams and Josiah Quincy successfully defend Captain Preston and six of his men, who are acquitted. Two other soldiers are found guilty of manslaughter, branded, then released.

**1772** - In June, a British customs schooner, the *Gaspee*, runs aground off Rhode Island in Narragansett Bay. Colonists from Providence row out to the schooner and attack it, set the British crew ashore, then burn the ship. In September, a 500 pound reward is offered by the English Crown for the capture of those colonists, who would then be sent to England for trial. The announcement that they would be sent to England further upsets many American colonists.

**1772** - In November, a Boston town meeting assembles, called by Sam Adams. During the meeting, a 21 member committee of correspondence is appointed to communicate with other towns and colonies. A few weeks later, the town meeting endorses three radical proclamations asserting the rights of the colonies to self-rule.

**1773** - In March, the Virginia House of Burgesses appoints an eleven member committee of correspondence to communicate with the other colonies regarding common complaints against the British. Members of that committee include, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry and Richard Henry Lee.

Virginia is followed a few months later by New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut and South Carolina.

**1773** - May 10, the Tea Act takes effect. It maintains a threepenny per pound import tax on tea arriving in the colonies, which had already been in effect for six years. It also gives the near bankrupt British East India Company a virtual tea monopoly by allowing it to sell directly to colonial agents, bypassing any middlemen, thus underselling American merchants. The East India Company had successfully lobbied Parliament for such a measure. In September, Parliament authorizes the company to ship half a million pounds of tea to a group of chosen tea agents.

**1773** - In October, colonists hold a mass meeting in Philadelphia in opposition to the tea tax and the monopoly of the East India Company. A committee then forces British tea agents to resign their positions. In November, a town meeting is held in Boston endorsing the actions taken by Philadelphia colonists. Bostonians then try, but fail, to get their British tea agents to resign. A few weeks later, three ships bearing tea sail into Boston harbor.

**1773** - November 29/30, two mass meetings occur in Boston over what to do about the tea aboard the three ships now docked in Boston harbor. Colonists decide to send the tea on the ship, Dartmouth, back to England without paying any import duties. The Royal Governor of Massachusetts, Hutchinson, is opposed to this and orders harbor officials not to let the ship sail out of the harbor unless the tea taxes have been paid.



**December 16, 1773** - About 8000 Bostonians gather to hear Sam Adams tell them Royal Governor Hutchinson has repeated his command not to allow the ships out of the harbor until the tea taxes are paid. That night, the [Boston Tea Party](#) occurs as colonial activists disguise themselves as Mohawk Indians then board the ships and dump all 342 containers of tea into the harbor.

**1774** - In March, an angry English Parliament passes the first of a series of Coercive Acts (called Intolerable Acts by Americans) in response to the rebellion in Massachusetts. The Boston Port Bill effectively shuts down all commercial shipping in Boston harbor until Massachusetts pays the taxes owed on the tea dumped in the harbor and also reimburses the East India Company for the loss of the tea.

**1774** - May 12, Bostonians at a town meeting call for a boycott of British imports in response to the Boston Port Bill. May 13, General Thomas Gage, commander of all British military forces in the colonies, arrives in Boston and replaces Hutchinson as Royal governor, putting Massachusetts under military rule. He is followed by the arrival of four regiments of British troops.

**1774** - May 17-23, colonists in Providence, New York and Philadelphia begin calling for an intercolonial congress to overcome the Coercive Acts and discuss a common course of action against the British.

**1774** - May 20, The English Parliament enacts the next series of Coercive Acts, which include the Massachusetts Regulating Act and the Government Act virtually ending any self-rule by the colonists there. Instead, the English Crown and the Royal governor assume political power formerly exercised by colonists. Also enacted; the Administration of Justice Act which protects royal officials in Massachusetts from being sued in colonial courts, and the Quebec Act establishing a centralized government in Canada controlled by the Crown and English Parliament. The Quebec Act greatly upsets American colonists by extending the southern boundary of Canada into territories claimed by Massachusetts, Connecticut and Virginia.

**1774** - In June, a new version of the 1765 [Quartering Act](#) is enacted by the English Parliament requiring all of the American colonies to provide housing for British troops in occupied houses and taverns and in unoccupied buildings. In September, Massachusetts Governor Gage seizes that colony's arsenal of weapons at Charlestown.

**1774** - September 5 to October 26, the [First Continental Congress](#) meets in Philadelphia with 56 delegates, representing every colony, except Georgia. Attendants include Patrick Henry, George Washington, Sam Adams and John Hancock.

On September 17, the Congress declares its opposition to the Coercive Acts, saying they are "not to be obeyed," and also promotes the formation of local militia units. On October 14, a [Declaration and Resolves](#) is adopted that opposes the Coercive Acts, the Quebec Act, and other measure taken by the British that undermine self-rule. The rights of the colonists are asserted, including the rights to "life, liberty and property." On October 20, the Congress adopts the [Continental Association](#) in which delegates agree to a boycott of English imports, effect an embargo of exports to Britain, and discontinue the slave trade.

**1775** - February 1, in Cambridge, Mass., a provincial congress is held during which John Hancock and Joseph Warren begin defensive preparations for a state of war. February 9, the English Parliament declares Massachusetts to be in a state of rebellion. March 23, in Virginia, Patrick Henry delivers a [speech](#) against British rule, stating, "Give me liberty or give me death!" March 30, the [New England Restraining Act](#) is endorsed by King George III, requiring New England colonies to trade exclusively with England and also bans fishing in the North Atlantic.

**1775** - In April, Massachusetts Governor Gage is ordered to enforce the Coercive Acts and suppress "open rebellion" among the colonists by all necessary force.

## Conflict and Revolution

1775 to 1776

**April 14, 1775** - Massachusetts Governor Gage is secretly ordered by the British to enforce the Coercive Acts and suppress "open rebellion" among colonists by using all necessary force.

**April 18, 1775** - General Gage orders 700 British soldiers to Concord to destroy the colonists' weapons depot.



That night, Paul Revere and William Dawes are sent from Boston to warn colonists. Revere reaches Lexington about midnight and warns Sam Adams and John Hancock who are hiding out there.



At dawn on April 19 about 70 armed Massachusetts militiamen stand face to face on Lexington Green with the British advance guard. An unordered 'shot heard around the world' begins the [American Revolution](#). A volley of British muskets followed by a charge with bayonets leaves eight Americans dead and ten wounded. The British regroup and head for the depot in Concord, destroying

the colonists' weapons and supplies. At the North Bridge in Concord, a British platoon is attacked by militiamen, with 14 casualties.



British forces then begin a long retreat from Lexington back to Boston and are harassed and shot at all along the way by farmers and rebels and suffer over 250 casualties. News of the events at Lexington and Concord spreads like wildfire throughout the Colonies.

**April 23, 1775** - The [Provincial Congress](#) in Massachusetts orders 13,600 American soldiers to be mobilized. Colonial volunteers from all over New England assemble and head for Boston, then establish camps around the city and begin a year long siege of British-held Boston.



**May 10, 1775** - American forces led by Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold capture Fort Ticonderoga in New York. The fort contains a much needed supply of military equipment including cannons which are then hauled to Boston by ox teams.



**May 10, 1775** - The [Second Continental Congress](#) convenes in Philadelphia, with John Hancock elected as its president. On May 15, the Congress places the colonies in a state of defense. On June 15, the Congress unanimously votes to appoint George Washington general and commander-in-chief of the new Continental Army.



**June 17, 1775** - The first major fight between British and American troops occurs at Boston in the [Battle of Bunker Hill](#). American troops are dug in along the high ground of Breed's Hill (the actual location) and are attacked by a frontal assault of over 2000 British soldiers who storm up the hill. The Americans are ordered not to fire until they can see "the whites of their eyes." As the British get within 15 paces, the Americans let loose a deadly volley of musket fire and halt the British advance. The British then regroup and attack 30 minutes later with the same result. A third attack, however, succeeds as the Americans run out of ammunition and are left only with bayonets and stones to defend themselves. The British succeed in taking the hill, but at a loss of half their force, over a thousand casualties, with the Americans losing about 400, including important colonial leader, General Joseph Warren.



**July 3, 1775** - At Cambridge, Massachusetts, [George Washington](#) takes command of the Continental Army which now has about 17,000 men.

See also: [George Washington Picture Gallery](#)

**July 5, 1775** - The Continental Congress adopts the [Olive Branch Petition](#) which expresses hope for a reconciliation with Britain, appealing directly to the King for help in achieving this. In August, King George III refuses even to look at the petition and instead issues a [proclamation](#) declaring the Americans to be in a state of open rebellion.

**July 6, 1775** - The Continental Congress issues a [Declaration on the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms](#) detailing the colonists' reasons for fighting the British and states the Americans are "resolved to die free men rather than live as slaves."

**July 26, 1775** - An American Post Office is established with Ben Franklin as Postmaster General.

**November 28, 1775** - The [American Navy](#) is established by Congress. The next day, Congress appoints a secret committee to seek help from European nations.

**December 23, 1775** - King George III issues a royal proclamation closing the American colonies to all commerce and trade, to take effect in March of 1776. Also in December, Congress is informed that France may offer support in the war against Britain.

**January 5, 1776** - The assembly of New Hampshire adopts the first American state constitution.



**January 9, 1776** - Thomas Paine's "[Common Sense](#)" is published in Philadelphia. The 50 page pamphlet is highly critical of King George III and attacks allegiance to Monarchy in principle while providing strong arguments for American independence. It becomes an instant best-seller in America. "We have it in our power to begin the world anew...American shall make a stand, not for herself alone, but for the world," Paine states.

**March 4-17, 1776** - American forces capture [Dorchester Heights](#) which overlooks Boston harbor. Captured British artillery from Fort Ticonderoga is placed on the heights to enforce the siege against the British in Boston. The British evacuate Boston and set sail for Halifax. George Washington then rushes to New York to set up defenses, anticipating the British plan to invade New York City.

**April 6, 1776** - The Continental Congress declares colonial shipping ports open to all traffic except the British. The Congress had already authorized privateer raids on British ships and also advised disarming all Americans loyal to England.

**April 12, 1776** - The North Carolina assembly is the first to empower its delegates in the Continental Congress to vote for independence from Britain.

**May 2, 1776** - The American revolutionaries get the much needed foreign support they had been hoping for. King Louis XVI of France commits one million dollars in arms and munitions. Spain then also promises support.

**May 10, 1776** - The Continental Congress authorizes each of the 13 colonies to form local (provincial) governments.

**June 28, 1776** - In South Carolina, American forces at [Fort Moultrie](#) successfully defend Charleston against a British naval attack and inflict heavy damage on the fleet.

**June-July, 1776** - A massive British war fleet arrives in New York Harbor consisting of 30 battleships with 1200 cannon, 30,000 soldiers, 10,000 sailors, and 300 supply ships, under the command of General William Howe and his brother Admiral Lord Richard Howe.

**June-July, 1776** - On June 7, [Richard Henry Lee](#), a Virginia delegate to the Continental Congress, presents a formal resolution calling for America to declare its independence from Britain. Congress decides to postpone its decision on this until July. On June 11, Congress appoints a committee to draft a declaration of independence. Committee members are [Thomas Jefferson](#), Benjamin Franklin, [John](#)

[Adams](#), Roger Livingston and Roger Sherman. Jefferson is chosen by the committee to prepare the [first draft](#) of the declaration, which he completes in one day. Just seventeen days later, June 28, Jefferson's Declaration of Independence is ready and is presented to the Congress, with changes made by Adams and Franklin. On July 2, twelve of thirteen colonial delegations (New York abstains) vote in support of Lee's resolution for independence. On July 4, the Congress formally endorses Jefferson's Declaration, with copies to be sent to all of the colonies. The actual signing of the document occurs on August 2, as most of the 55 members of Congress place their names on the parchment copy.

### [July 4, 1776 - United States Declaration of Independence](#)

**July 12, 1776** - As a show of force, two British frigates sail up the Hudson River blasting their guns. Peace feelers are then extended to the Americans. At the request of the British, Gen. Washington meets with Howe's representatives in New York and listens to vague offers of clemency for the American rebels. Washington politely declines, then leaves.

**August 27-29, 1776** - Gen. Howe leads 15,000 soldiers against Washington's army in the [Battle of Long Island](#). Washington, outnumbered two to one, suffers a severe defeat as his army is outflanked and scatters. The Americans retreat to Brooklyn Heights, facing possible capture by the British or even total surrender.



But at night, the Americans cross the East River in small boats and escape to Manhattan, then evacuate New York City and retreat up through Manhattan Island to Harlem Heights. Washington now changes tactics, avoiding large scale battles with the British by a series of retreats.

**September 11, 1776** - A peace conference is held on Staten Island with British Admiral, Lord Richard Howe, meeting American representatives including John Adams and Benjamin Franklin. The conference fails as Howe demands the colonists revoke the Declaration of Independence.

**September 16, 1776** - After evacuating New York City, Washington's army repulses a British attack during the [Battle of Harlem Heights](#) in upper Manhattan. Several days later, fire engulfs New York City and destroys over 300 buildings.

**September 22, 1776** - After he is caught spying on British troops on Long Island, [Nathan Hale](#) is executed without a trial, his last words, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

**September 26, 1776** - Congress appoints Jefferson, Franklin and Silas Deane to negotiate treaties with European governments. Franklin and Deane then travel to France seeking financial and military aid.

**October 9, 1776** - San Francisco is established by Spanish missionaries on the California coast.

**October 11, 1776** - A big defeat for the inexperienced American Navy on Lake Champlain at the hands of a British fleet of 87 gunships. In the 7 hour [Battle of Valcour Bay](#) most of the American flotilla of 83 gunships is crippled with the remaining ships destroyed in a second engagement two days later.

**October 28, 1776** - After evacuating his main forces from Manhattan, Washington's army suffers heavy casualties in the [Battle of White Plains](#) from Gen. Howe's forces. [Washington then retreats westward.](#)



**November, 1776** - More victories for the British as Fort Washington on Manhattan and its precious stores of over 100 cannon, thousands of muskets and cartridges is captured by Gen. Howe. The

Americans also lose Fort Lee in New Jersey to Gen. Cornwallis. Washington's army suffers 3000 casualties in the two defeats. Gen. Washington abandons the New York area and moves his forces further westward toward the Delaware River. Cornwallis now pursues him.

**December 6, 1776** - The naval base at Newport, Rhode Island, is captured by the British.

**December 11, 1776** - Washington takes his troops across the Delaware River into Pennsylvania. The next day, over concerns of a possible British attack, the Continental Congress abandons Philadelphia for Baltimore.

Among Washington's troops is [Thomas Paine](#), author of Common Sense, who now writes "...These are the times that try men's souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country: but he that stands it NOW deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like Hell, is not easily conquered. Yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph."



**December 25-26, 1776** - On Christmas, George Washington takes 2400 of his men and recrosses the Delaware River.



Washington then conducts a surprise raid on 1500 British-Hessians (German mercenaries) at Trenton, New Jersey.



The Hessians surrender after an hour with nearly 1000 taken prisoner by Washington who suffers only six wounded (including future president Lt. James Monroe). Washington reoccupies Trenton. The victory provides a much needed boost to the morale of all American Patriots.

## An Unlikely Victory

1777 to 1783

**January 3, 1777** - A second victory for Washington as his troops defeat the British at Princeton and drive them back toward New Brunswick. Washington then establishes winter quarters at Morristown, New Jersey. During the harsh winter, Washington's army shrinks to about a thousand men as enlistments expire and deserters flee the hardships. By spring, with the arrival of recruits, Washington will have 9000 men.

**March 12, 1777** - The Continental Congress returns to Philadelphia from Baltimore after Washington's successes against the British in New Jersey.

**April 27, 1777** - American troops under [Benedict Arnold](#) defeat the British at Ridgefield, Connecticut.

**June 14, 1777** - The flag of the United States consisting of 13 stars and 13 white and red stripes is mandated by Congress; [John Paul Jones](#) is chosen by Congress to captain the 18 gun vessel *Ranger* with his mission to raid coastal towns of England.

**June 17, 1777** - A British force of 7700 men under [Gen. John Burgoyne](#) invades from Canada, sailing down Lake Champlain toward Albany, planning to link up with Gen. Howe who will come north from New York City, thus cutting off New England from the rest of the colonies.

**July 6, 1777** - Gen. Burgoyne's troops stun the Americans with the capture of [Fort Ticonderoga](#) on Lake Champlain. Its military supplies are greatly needed by Washington's forces. The loss of the fort is a tremendous blow to American morale.

**July 23, 1777** - British Gen. Howe, with 15,000 men, sets sail from New York for Chesapeake Bay to capture Philadelphia, instead of sailing north to meet up with Gen. Burgoyne.

**July 27, 1777** - [Marquis de Lafayette](#), a 19 year old French aristocrat, arrives in Philadelphia and volunteers to serve without pay. Congress appoints him as a major general in the Continental Army. Lafayette will become one of Gen. Washington's most trusted aides.

**August 1, 1777** - Gen. Burgoyne reaches the Hudson after a grueling month spent crossing 23 miles of wilderness separating the southern tip of Lake Champlain from the northern tip of the Hudson River.

**August 16, 1777** - In the [Battle of Bennington](#), militiamen from Vermont, aided by Massachusetts troops, wipe out a detachment of 800 German Hessians sent by Gen. Burgoyne to seize horses.

**August 25, 1777** - British Gen. Howe disembarks at Chesapeake Bay with his troops.

**September 9-11, 1777** - In the [Battle of Brandywine Creek](#), Gen. Washington and the main American Army of 10,500 men are driven back toward Philadelphia by Gen. Howe's British troops. Both sides suffer heavy losses. Congress then leaves Philadelphia and resettles in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

**September 26, 1777** - British forces under Gen. Howe occupy Philadelphia. Congress then relocates to York, Pennsylvania.

**October 7, 1777** - The [Battle of Saratoga](#) results in the first major American victory of the Revolutionary War as [Gen. Horatio Gates](#) and Gen. Benedict Arnold defeat Gen. Burgoyne, inflicting 600 British casualties. American losses are only 150.



**October 17, 1777** - Gen. Burgoyne and his entire army of 5700 men surrender to the Americans led by Gen. Gates. The British are then marched to Boston, placed on ships and sent back to England after swearing not to serve again in the war against America. News of the American victory at Saratoga soon travels to Europe and boosts support of the American cause. In Paris the victory is celebrated as if it had been a French victory. Ben Franklin is received by the French Royal Court. France then recognizes the independence of America.

**November 15, 1777** - Congress adopts the [Articles of Confederation](#) as the government of the new United States of America, pending ratification by the individual states. Under the Articles, Congress is the sole authority of the new national government.

**December 17, 1777** - At Valley Forge in Pennsylvania, the Continental Army led by Washington sets up winter quarters.

**February 6, 1778** - American and French representatives sign two treaties in Paris: a [Treaty of Amity and Commerce](#) and a [Treaty of Alliance](#). France now officially recognizes the United States and will soon become the major supplier of military supplies to Washington's army. Both countries pledge to

fight until American independence is won, with neither country concluding any truce with Britain without the other's consent, and guarantee each other's possessions in America against all other powers.

The American struggle for independence is thus enlarged and will soon become a world war. After British vessels fire on French ships, the two nations declare war. Spain will enter in 1779 as an ally of France. The following year, Britain will declare war on the Dutch who have been engaging in profitable trade with the French and Americans. In addition to the war in America, the British will have to fight in the Mediterranean, Africa, India, the West Indies, and on the high seas. All the while facing possible invasion of England itself by the French.



**February 23, 1778** - [Baron von Steuben](#) of Prussia arrives at Valley Forge to join the Continental Army. He then begins much needed training and drilling of Washington's troops, now suffering from poor morale resulting from cold, hunger, disease, low supplies and desertions over the long, harsh winter.

**March 16, 1778** - A Peace Commission is created by the British Parliament to negotiate with the Americans. The commission then travels to Philadelphia where its offers granting all of the American demands, except independence, are rejected by Congress.

**May 8, 1778** - British General Henry Clinton replaces Gen. Howe as commander of all British forces in the American colonies.

**May 30, 1778** - A campaign of terror against American frontier settlements, instigated by the British, begins as 300 Iroquois Indians burn Cobleskill, New York.

**June 18, 1778** - Fearing a blockade by French ships, British Gen. Clinton withdraws his troops from Philadelphia and marches across New Jersey toward New York City. Americans then re-occupy Philadelphia.

**June 19, 1778** - Washington sends troops from Valley Forge to intercept Gen. Clinton.



**June 27/28, 1778** - The Battle of Monmouth occurs in New Jersey as Washington's troops and Gen. Clinton's troops fight to a standoff. On hearing that American Gen. Charles Lee had ordered a retreat, Gen. Washington becomes furious. Gen. Clinton then continues on toward New York.

**July 2, 1778** - Congress returns once again to Philadelphia.

**July 3, 1778** - British Loyalists and Indians massacre American settlers in the Wyoming Valley of northern Pennsylvania.

**July 8, 1778** - Gen. Washington sets up headquarters at West Point, New York.

**July 10, 1778** - France declares war against Britain.

**August 8, 1778** - American land forces and French ships attempt to conduct a combined siege against Newport, Rhode Island. But bad weather and delays of the land troops result in failure. The weather-damaged French fleet then sails to Boston for repairs.

**September 14, 1778** - [Ben Franklin](#) is appointed to be the American diplomatic representative in France.

**November 11, 1778** - At Cherry Valley, New York, Loyalists and Indians massacre over 40 American settlers.

**December 29, 1778** - The British begin a major southern campaign with the capture of Savannah, Georgia, followed a month later with the capture of Augusta.

**April 1-30, 1779** - In retaliation for Indian raids on colonial settlements, American troops from North Carolina and Virginia attack Chickamauga Indian villages in Tennessee.

**May 10, 1779** - British troops burn Portsmouth and Norfolk, Virginia.

**June 1, 1779** - British Gen. Clinton takes 6000 men up the Hudson toward West Point.

**June 16, 1779** - Spain declares war on England, but does not make an alliance with the American revolutionary forces.

**July 5-11, 1779** - Loyalists raid coastal towns in Connecticut, burning Fairfield, Norwalk and ships in New Haven harbor.

**July 10, 1779** - Naval ships from Massachusetts are destroyed by the British while attempting to take the Loyalist stronghold of Castine, Maine.

**August 14, 1779** - A peace plan is approved by Congress which stipulates independence, complete British evacuation of America and free navigation on the Mississippi River.

**August 29, 1779** - American forces defeat the combined Indian and Loyalist forces at Elmira, New York. Following the victory, American troops head northwest and destroy nearly 40 Cayuga and Seneca Indian villages in retaliation for the campaign of terror against American settlers.



**Sept. 3 - Oct. 28** - Americans suffer a major defeat while attacking the British at Savannah, Georgia. Among the 800 American and Allied casualties is [Count Casimir Pulaski](#) of Poland. British losses are only 140.

**September 23, 1779** - Off the coast of England, John Paul Jones fights a desperate battle with a British frigate. When the British demand his surrender, Jones responds, "I have not yet begun to fight!" Jones then captures the frigate before his own ship sinks.

**September 27, 1779** - [John Adams](#) is appointed by Congress to negotiate peace with England.

**October 17, 1779** - Washington sets up winter quarters at Morristown, New Jersey, where his troops will suffer another harsh winter without desperately needed supplies, resulting in low morale, desertions and attempts at mutiny.

**December 26, 1779** - British Gen. Clinton sets sail from New York with 8000 men and heads for Charleston, South Carolina, arriving there on Feb. 1.

**April 8, 1780** - The British attack begins against Charleston as warships sail past the cannons of Fort Moultrie and enter Charleston harbor. Washington sends reinforcements.

**May 6, 1780** - The British capture Fort Moultrie at Charleston, South Carolina.

**May 12, 1780** - The worst American defeat of the Revolutionary War occurs as the British capture [Charleston](#) and its 5400-man garrison (the entire southern American Army) along with four ships and a military arsenal. British losses are only 225.

**May 25, 1780** - After a severe winter, Gen. Washington faces a serious threat of mutiny at his winter camp in Morristown, New Jersey. Two Continental regiments conduct an armed march through the camp and demand immediate payment of salary (overdue by 5 months) and full rations. Troops from Pennsylvania put down the rebellion. Two leaders of the protest are then hanged.

**June 11, 1780** - A new Massachusetts constitution is endorsed asserting "all men are born free and equal," which includes black slaves.

**June 13, 1780** - [Gen. Horatio Gates](#) is commissioned by Congress to command the Southern Army.

**June 23, 1780** - American forces defeat the British in the [Battle of Springfield](#), New Jersey.

**July 11, 1780** - 6000 French soldiers under [Count de Rochambeau](#) arrive at Newport, Rhode Island. They will remain there for nearly a year, blockaded by the British fleet.

**August 3, 1780** - Benedict Arnold is appointed commander of West Point. Unknown to the Americans, he has been secretly collaborating with British Gen. Clinton since May of 1779 by supplying information on Gen. Washington's tactics.

**August 16, 1780** - A big defeat for the Americans in South Carolina as forces under Gen. Gates are defeated by troops of [Gen. Charles Cornwallis](#), resulting in 900 Americans killed and 1000 captured.

**August 18, 1780** - An American defeat at Fishing Creek, South Carolina, opens a route for Gen Cornwallis to invade North Carolina.

**September 23, 1780** - A British major in civilian clothing is captured near Tarrytown, New York. He is found to be carrying plans indicating Benedict Arnold intends to turn traitor and surrender West Point. Two days later, Arnold hears of the spy's capture and flees West Point to the British ship *Vulture* on the Hudson. He is later named a brigadier general in the British Army and will fight the Americans.

**October 7, 1780** - Gen. Cornwallis abandons his invasion of North Carolina after Americans capture his reinforcements, a Loyalist force of 1000 men.

**October 14, 1780** - [Gen. Nathanael Greene](#), Washington's most able and trusted General, is named as the new commander of the Southern Army, replacing Gen. Gates. Greene then begins a strategy of rallying popular support and wearing down the British by leading Gen. Cornwallis on a six month chase through the back woods of South Carolina into North Carolina into Virginia then back into North Carolina. The British, low on supplies, are forced to steal from any Americans they encounter, thus enraging them.

**January 3, 1781** - Mutiny among Americans in New Jersey as troops from Pennsylvania set up camp near Princeton and choose their own representatives to negotiate with state officials back in Pennsylvania. The crisis is eventually resolved through negotiations, but over half of the mutineers abandon the army.

**January 17, 1781** - An American victory at [Cowpens](#), South Carolina, as [Gen. Daniel Morgan](#) defeats British [Gen. Tarleton](#).

**January 20, 1781** - Mutiny among American troops at Pompton, New Jersey. The rebellion is put down seven days later by a 600-man force sent by Gen. Washington. Two of the leaders are then hanged.

**March 15, 1781** - Forces under Gen. Cornwallis suffer heavy losses in the [Battle of Guilford Courthouse](#) in North Carolina. As a result, Cornwallis abandons plans to conquer the Carolinas and retreats to Wilmington, then begins a campaign to conquer Virginia with an army of 7500 men.

**May 21, 1781** - Gen. Washington and French Gen. Rochambeau meet in Connecticut for a war council. Gen Rochambeau reluctantly agrees to Washington's plan for a joint French naval and American ground attack on New York.

**June 4, 1781** - [Thomas Jefferson](#) narrowly escapes capture by the British at Charlottesville, Virginia.

**June 10, 1781** - American troops under Marquis de Lafayette, Gen. Anthony Wayne and Baron von Steuben begin to form a combined force in Virginia to oppose British forces under Benedict Arnold and Gen. Cornwallis.

**June 11, 1781** - Congress appoints a Peace Commission comprised of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Jay and Henry Laurens. The commission supplements John Adams as the sole negotiator with the British.

**July 20, 1781** - Slaves in Williamsburg, Virginia, rebel and burn several buildings.

**August 1, 1781** - After several months of chasing Gen. Greene's army without much success, Gen. Cornwallis and his 10,000 tired soldiers arrive to seek rest at the small port of Yorktown, Virginia, on the Chesapeake Bay. He then establishes a base to communicate by sea with Gen. Clinton's forces in New York.

**August 14, 1781** - Gen. Washington abruptly changes plans and abandons the attack on New York in favor of Yorktown after receiving a letter from French Admiral [Count de Grasse](#) indicating his entire 29-ship French fleet with 3000 soldiers is now heading for the Chesapeake Bay near Cornwallis. Gen. Washington then coordinates with Gen. Rochambeau to rush their best troops south to Virginia to destroy the British position in Yorktown.

**August 30, 1781** - Count de Grasse's French fleet arrives off Yorktown, Virginia. De Grasse then lands troops near Yorktown, linking with Lafayette's American troops to cut Cornwallis off from any retreat by land.

**September 1, 1781** - The troops of Washington and Rochambeau arrive at Philadelphia.

**September 5-8, 1781** - Off Yorktown, a major naval battle between the French fleet of de Grasse and the outnumbered British fleet of Adm. Thomas Graves results in a victory for de Grasse. The British fleet retreats to New York for reinforcements, leaving the French fleet in control of the Chesapeake. The French fleet establishes a blockade, cutting Cornwallis off from any retreat by sea. French naval reinforcements then arrive from Newport.

**September 6, 1781** - Benedict Arnold's troops loot and burn the port of New London, Connecticut.

**September 14-24, 1781** - De Grasse sends his ships up the Chesapeake Bay to transport the armies of Washington and Rochambeau to Yorktown.

**September 28, 1781** - Gen. Washington, with a combined Allied army of 17,000 men, begins the siege of Yorktown. French cannons bombard Gen. Cornwallis and his 9000 men day and night while the Allied lines slowly advance and encircle them. British supplies run dangerously low.

**October 17, 1781** - As Yorktown is about to be taken, the British send out a flag of truce. Gen. Washington and Gen. Cornwallis then work out [terms of surrender](#).

**October 19, 1781** - As their band plays the tune, "The world turned upside down," the British army marches out in formation and surrenders at Yorktown. Hopes for a British victory in the war against America are dashed. In the English Parliament, there will soon be calls to bring this long costly war to an end.

**October 24, 1781** - 7000 British reinforcements under Gen. Clinton arrive at Chesapeake Bay but turn back on hearing of the surrender at Yorktown.

**January 1, 1782** - Loyalists begin leaving America, heading north to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

**January 5, 1782** - The British withdraw from North Carolina.

**February 27, 1782** - In England, the House of Commons votes against further war in America.

**March 5, 1782** - The British Parliament empowers the King to negotiate peace with the United States.

**March 7, 1782** - American militiamen massacre 96 Delaware Indians in Ohio in retaliation for Indian raids conducted by other tribes.

**March 20, 1782** - British Prime Minister, Lord North, resigns, succeeded two days later by Lord Rockingham who seeks immediate negotiations with the American peace commissioners.

**April 4, 1782** - Sir Guy Carleton becomes the new commander of British forces in America, replacing Gen. Clinton. Carleton will implement the new British policy of ending hostilities and withdraw British troops from America.

**April 12, 1782** - Peace talks begin in Paris between Ben Franklin and Richard Oswald of Britain.

**April 16, 1782** - Gen. Washington establishes American army headquarters at Newburgh, New York.

**April 19, 1782** - The Dutch recognize the United States of America as a result of negotiations conducted in the Netherlands by John Adams.

**June 11, 1782** - The British evacuate Savannah, Georgia.

**June 20, 1782** - Congress adopts the Great Seal of the United States of America.

**August 19, 1782** - Loyalist and Indian forces attack and defeat American settlers near Lexington, Kentucky.

**August 25, 1782** - Mohawk Indian Chief Joseph Brant conducts raids on settlements in Pennsylvania and Kentucky.

**August 27, 1782** - The last fighting of the Revolutionary War between Americans and British occurs with a skirmish in South Carolina along the Combahee River.

**November 10, 1782** - The final battle of the Revolutionary War occurs as Americans retaliate against Loyalist and Indian forces by attacking a Shawnee Indian village in the Ohio territory.

**November 30, 1782** - A preliminary peace treaty is signed in Paris. Terms include recognition of American independence and the boundaries of the United States, along with British withdrawal from America.

**December 14, 1782** - The British evacuate Charleston, South Carolina.

**December 15, 1782** - In France, strong objections are expressed by the French over the signing of the peace treaty in Paris without America first consulting them. Ben Franklin then soothes their anger with a diplomatic response and prevents a falling out between France and America.

**January 20, 1783** - England signs a preliminary peace treaty with France and Spain.

**February 3, 1783** - Spain recognizes the United States of America, followed later by Sweden, Denmark and Russia.

**February 4, 1783** - England officially declares an end to hostilities in America.

**March 10, 1783** - An anonymous letter circulates among Washington's senior officers camped at Newburgh, New York. The letter calls for an unauthorized meeting and urges the officers to defy the authority of the new U.S. national government (Congress) for its failure to honor past promises to the Continental Army. The next day, Gen. Washington forbids the unauthorized meeting and instead suggests a regular meeting to be held on March 15. A second anonymous letter then appears and is circulated. This letter falsely claims Washington himself sympathizes with the rebellious officers.

**March 15, 1783** - General Washington gathers his officers and talks them out of a rebellion against the authority of Congress, and in effect preserves the American democracy. [Read more about this](#)

**April 11, 1783** - Congress officially declares an end to the Revolutionary War.

**April 26, 1783** - 7000 Loyalists set sail from New York for Canada, bringing a total of 100,000 Loyalists who have now fled America.

**June 13, 1783** - The main part of the Continental Army disbands.

**June 24, 1783** - To avoid protests from angry and unpaid war veterans, Congress leaves Philadelphia and relocates to Princeton, New Jersey.

**July 8, 1783** - The Supreme Court of Massachusetts abolishes slavery in that state.

**September 3, 1783** - The [Treaty of Paris](#) is signed by the United States and Great Britain. Congress will ratify the treaty on January 14, 1784.

**October 7, 1783** - In Virginia, the House of Burgesses grants freedom to slaves who served in the Continental Army.

**November 2, 1783** - George Washington delivers his farewell address to his army. The next day, remaining troops are discharged.

**November 25, 1783** - Washington enters Manhattan as the last British troops leave.

**November 26, 1783** - Congress meets in Annapolis, Maryland.



**December 23, 1783** - Following a triumphant journey from New York to Annapolis, George Washington, victorious commander in chief of the American Revolutionary Army, appears before Congress and voluntarily [resigns his commission](#), an event unprecedented in history.

## A New Nation

1784 to 1790

**January 14, 1784** - The [Treaty of Paris](#) is ratified by Congress. The Revolutionary War officially ends.

**March 1, 1784** - A congressional committee led by [Thomas Jefferson](#) proposes to divide up sprawling western territories into states, to be considered equal with the original 13. Jefferson also proposes a ban on slavery everywhere in the U.S. after 1800. This proposal is narrowly defeated.

**August 30, 1784** - Beginning of the [China Trade](#), as the American Ship *Empress of China*, sailing from New York, arrives at Canton, China. The ship will return with exotic goods, including silks and tea, spurring large numbers of American merchants to enter the trade.

**September 22, 1784** - Russians establish their first settlement in Alaska, on Kodiak Island.

**January 11, 1785** - Congress relocates to New York City, temporary capital of the U.S.

**February 24, 1785** - Although England refuses to send an ambassador to the U.S., [John Adams](#) is sent as the American ambassador to Britain. He will spend the next three years trying without success to settle problems regarding the existence of a string of British forts along the Canadian border, pre-war debts owed to British creditors, post-war American treatment of Loyalists, and the closing of the West Indian colonies to American trade.

**May 8, 1785** - Congress passes the [Land Ordinance of 1785](#) which divides the northwest territories into townships, each set at 6 square miles, subdivided into 36 lots of 640 acres each, with each lot selling for no less than \$640.

**January 16, 1786** - The Virginia legislature passes Jefferson's [Ordinance of Religious Freedom](#) guaranteeing that no man may be forced to attend or support any church or be discriminated against because of his religious preference. This will later serve as the model for the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

**Summer of 1786** - Americans suffer from post-war economic depression including a shortage of currency, high taxes, nagging creditors, farm foreclosures and bankruptcies.

**August 8, 1786** - Congress adopts a monetary system based on the Spanish dollar, with a gold piece valued at \$10, silver pieces at \$1, one-tenth of \$1 also in silver, and copper pennies.

**August 22-25, 1786** - Angry representatives from 50 towns in Massachusetts meet to discuss money problems including the rising number of foreclosures, the high cost of lawsuits, heavy land and poll taxes, high salaries for state officials, and demands for new paper money as a means of credit.

**August 31, 1786** - In Massachusetts, to prevent debtors from being tried and put in prison, ex-Revolutionary War Captain [Daniel Shays](#), who is now a bankrupt farmer, leads an armed mob and prevents the Northampton Court from holding a session.

**September 20, 1786** - In New Hampshire, an armed mob marches on the state assembly and demands enactment of an issue of paper money.

**September 26, 1786** - [Shays' rebels](#), fearing they might be charged with treason, [confront](#) 600 militiamen protecting the state Massachusetts Supreme Court session in Springfield and force the court to adjourn.

**October 16, 1786** - Congress establishes the United States mint.

**October 20, 1786** - Congress authorizes Secretary of War Henry Knox to raise an army of 1340 men over concerns of the safety of the federal arsenal at Springfield, Mass.

**December 26, 1786** - Shays assembles 1200 men near Worcester, Mass. and heads toward Springfield. Massachusetts Governor, Bowdoin, then orders mobilization of a 4400 man force.

**January 26, 1787** - Shays' rebels attack the federal arsenal at Springfield but are unsuccessful. Revolutionary War hero, Gen. Benjamin Lincoln, then arrives with reinforcements from Boston to pursue the rebels.

**February 4, 1787** - Gen. Lincoln's troops attack Shays' rebels at Petersham, Massachusetts, and capture 150 rebels. Shays flees north to Vermont.

**February 21, 1787** - Amid calls for a stronger central government, due in part to Shays' Rebellion, Congress endorses a resolution calling for a constitutional convention to be held in Philadelphia, beginning in May.

**May 25, 1787** - With 29 delegates from nine states present, the constitutional convention begins in the state house (Independence Hall) in Philadelphia. A total of 73 delegates have been chosen by the states (excluding Rhode Island) although only 55 will actually attend. There are 21 veterans of the Revolutionary War and 8 signers of the Declaration of Independence. The delegates are farmers, merchants, lawyers and bankers, with an average age of 42, and include the brilliant 36 year old James Madison, the central figure at the convention, and 81 year old Ben Franklin. Thomas Jefferson, serving abroad as ambassador to France, does not attend.

The delegates first vote is to keep the proceedings absolutely secret. George Washington is then nominated as president of the constitutional convention.

**June 19, 1787** - Rather than revise the Articles of Confederation, delegates at the constitutional convention vote to create an entirely new form of national government separated into three branches - the legislative, executive and judicial - thus dispersing power with checks and balances, and competing factions, as a measure of protection against tyranny by a controlling majority.

**July 13, 1787** - Congress enacts the [Northwest Ordinance](#) which establishes formal procedures for transforming territories into states. It provides for the eventual establishment of three to five states in the area north of the Ohio River, to be considered equal with the original 13. The Ordinance includes a Bill of Rights that guarantees freedom of religion, the right to trial by jury, public education and a ban on slavery in the Northwest.

**July 16, 1787** - At the constitutional convention, Roger Sherman proposes a compromise which allows for representation in the House of Representatives based on each state's population and equal representation for all of the states in the Senate. The numerous black slaves in the South are to counted at only three fifths of their total number. A rough draft of the constitution is then drawn up.

**August 6-10, 1787** - Items in the draft constitution are debated including the length of terms for the president and legislators, the power of Congress to regulate commerce, and a proposed 20 year ban on any Congressional action concerning slavery.



**September 17, 1787** - Thirty nine delegates vote to approve and then sign the final draft of the new Constitution.

The Legislative Branch will consist of two houses. The upper house (Senate) to be composed of nominees selected by state assemblies for six year terms; the lower house (House of Representatives) to be elected every two years by popular vote.

The Executive Branch is to be headed by a chief executive (President) elected every four years by presidential electors from the states. The President is granted sweeping powers including: veto power over Congress which can be overridden by a two-thirds vote in each house; commander in chief of the armies; power to make treaties with the advice and consent of two-thirds of the Senate; power to appoint judges, diplomats and other officers with the consent of the Senate; power to recommend legislation and responsibility for execution of the laws.

The President is required to report each year to the legislative branch on the state of the nation. The legislative branch has the power to remove the President from office. The House can impeach the President for treason, bribery or other high crimes and misdemeanors with actual removal from office occurring by a two-thirds vote of the Senate.

The Judicial Branch consists of a Supreme Court headed by a chief justice. The court has the implied power to review laws that conflict with the Constitution.

**September 19, 1787** - For the first time the proposed Constitution is made public as printed copies of the text are distributed. A storm of controversy soon arises as most people had only expected a revision of the Articles of Confederation, not a new central government with similarities to the British system they had just overthrown.

**September 28, 1787** - Congress votes to send the Constitution to the state legislatures for ratification, needing the approval of nine states.

**October 27, 1787** - The Federalists, who advocate a strong central government and approval of the new Constitution, begin publishing essays in favor of ratification. Written by Alexander Hamilton, [James Madison](#) and John Jay, the total number of articles will eventually reach 85 and be compiled and published as the Federalist Papers.

**December 7, 1787** - Delaware is the first of the nine states needed to ratify the Constitution. To be followed by: Pennsylvania (Dec. 12) New Jersey (Dec. 18) Georgia (Jan. 2, 1788) Connecticut (Jan. 9) Massachusetts (Feb. 7) Maryland (April 28) South Carolina (May 23) and New Hampshire (June 21).

**February 6, 1788** - Anti-Federalists in Massachusetts, led by [Sam Adams](#) and John Hancock, favor a more decentralized system of government and give their support to ratification of the Constitution only after a compromise is reached that amendments will be included which guarantee civil liberties.

**February 27, 1788** - In Massachusetts, following an incident in which free blacks were kidnapped and transported to the island of Martinique, the Massachusetts legislature declares the slavery trade illegal and provides for monetary damages to victims of kidnappings.

**March 24, 1788** - In Rhode Island, the Constitution is rejected by a popular referendum. The state, fearful of consolidated federal power, had refused to send a delegation to the constitutional convention in Philadelphia and had subsequently rejected a state convention to consider ratification.

**June 2, 1788** - In Virginia, anti-Federalist forces, led by Patrick Henry and George Mason, oppose ratification of the Constitution. They are joined by [Richard Henry Lee](#) who calls for a bill of rights and a lower house set up on a more democratic basis.

**June 25, 1788** - In Virginia, the Federalists, led by James Madison, finally prevail as ratification of the Constitution (with a proposed bill of rights and 20 other changes) is endorsed by a close vote of 89 to 75.

**July 2, 1788** - A formal announcement is made by the president of Congress that the [Constitution of the United States](#) is now in effect, having been ratified by the required nine states.

**July 8, 1788** - A committee in the old Congress (still under the Articles of Confederation) is established to prepare for an orderly transfer of power, including procedures for electing representatives to the first Congress under the new Constitution and procedures for choosing the electors of the first president.

**July 26, 1788** - The state of New York votes 30 to 27 to endorse ratification while also recommending a bill of rights be included.

**September 13, 1788** - New York City is chosen by Congress to be the temporary seat of the new U.S. government.

**October-December** - Commodity prices stabilize, spurring economic recovery and a gradual return to pre-war levels of prosperity.

**November 1, 1788** - The old Congress, operating under the Articles of Confederation, adjourns. The U.S. is temporarily without a central government.

**November 21, 1788** - North Carolina endorses the Constitution by a vote of 194 to 77.

**December 23, 1788** - Maryland proposes giving a 10 square-mile area along the Potomac River for the establishment of a federal town to be the new seat of the U.S. government.

**January 7, 1789** - Presidential electors are chosen in the 11 ratifying states, except New York.

**January 23, 1789** - Georgetown University, the first Catholic college in the U.S., is founded by Father John Carroll.

**February 4, 1789** - Ballots are cast in the first presidential election, to be counted on April 6.

**March 4, 1789** - The first Congress convenes in New York City, but is unable to achieve a quorum, since most members are still traveling there.

**April 1, 1789** - A quorum is reached in Congress with 30 of 59 members present and the House of Representatives begins to function. Of the 59 members, 54 had also been delegates to the constitutional convention.

**April 6, 1789** - In the Senate, with 9 of 22 senators present, the presidential ballots cast on Feb. 4 are counted. George Washington is the unanimous choice for President with 69 votes. John Adams is elected Vice President with 34 votes. Messengers are then sent to inform Washington and Adams.

**April 14, 1789** - Charles Thomson, secretary of Congress, arrives at Mount Vernon and informs George Washington of his election as President. Two days later, Washington leaves for New York City.

**April 21, 1789** - John Adams arrives in New York and is sworn in as Vice President, then takes his seat as presiding officer of the Senate.

**April 23, 1789** - After an eight day triumphal journey, Washington arrives in New York City.

**April 30, 1789** - On the balcony of New York's Federal Hall, George Washington, at age 57, is sworn in as the first President of the United States. He then enters the Senate chamber to deliver his [inaugural address](#).

**May 7, 1789** - The first inaugural ball occurs in honor of [President Washington](#).

**June 1, 1789** - In its first act, Congress establishes the procedure for administering oaths of office.

**July 4, 1789** - Congress passes its first tax, an 8.5 percent protective tax on 30 different items, with items arriving on American ships charged at a lower rate than foreign ships.

**July 14, 1789** - In France, the French Revolution begins with the fall of the Bastille in Paris, an event witnessed by the American ambassador, Thomas Jefferson.

**July 20, 1789** - Congress passes the Tonnage Act of 1789 levying a 50 cents per ton tax on foreign ships entering American ports, 30 cents per ton on American built but foreign owned ships, and 6 cents per ton on American ships.

**July 27, 1789** - Congress begins organization of the departments of government with the establishment of the Department of Foreign Affairs, later renamed the Department of State. Followed by the War Department (Aug. 7) Treasury Dept. (Sept. 2) and Postmaster General under the Treasury Dept. (Sept. 2).

**September 22, 1789** - The Federal Judiciary Act passed by Congress establishes a six-man Supreme Court, attorney general, 13 federal district courts and 3 circuit courts. All federal cases would originate in the district court and, if appealed, would go to the circuit court and from there to the Supreme Court.



**September 25, 1789** - Congress submits 12 proposed constitutional amendments to the states for ratification. The first ten will be ratified and added to the Constitution in 1791 as the [Bill of Rights](#).

**September 29, 1789** - The U.S. Army is established by Congress. Totalling 1000 men, it consists of one regiment of eight infantry companies and one battalion of four artillery companies.

**November 26, 1789** - A Day of Thanksgiving is established by a congressional resolution and a proclamation by George Washington.

**March 1, 1790** - A Census Act is passed by Congress. The first census, finished on Aug. 1, indicates a total population of nearly 4 million persons in the U.S. and western territories. African Americans make up 19 percent of the population, with 90 percent living in the South. Native Americans were not counted, although there were likely over 80 tribes with 150,000 persons. For white Americans, the average age is under 16. Most white families are large, with an average of eight children born. The white population will double every 22 years.

The largest American city is Philadelphia, with 42,000 persons, followed by New York (33,000) Boston (18,000) Charleston (16,000) and Baltimore (13,000). The majority of Americans are involved in agricultural pursuits, with little industrial activity occurring at this time.

**April 17, 1790** - Benjamin Franklin dies in Philadelphia at age 84. His funeral four days later draws over 20,000 mourners.

**July 10, 1790** - The House of Representatives votes to locate the national capital on a 10 square-mile site along the Potomac, with President George Washington choosing the exact location.