

Overview of the American Revolution

Sarah Collinge

Before our country became known as the United States, it was divided into thirteen original colonies owned by Great Britain. This land, though owned by Great Britain, was known for the freedoms it offered—the freedom to worship, the freedom to own land, and the freedom to work.

By the 1700s, many people had come to the colonies from countries such as Great Britain, Germany, France, Holland, and Sweden. By the 1700s there were almost two million people living in the British colonies.

Many people living in the colonies were happy to be British subjects. Great Britain offered the colonists military protection and had already come to the aid of the colonists during the French and Indian War of 1754–1763. These citizens, known as Loyalists or Tories, did not desire to form their own country and stayed loyal to the British king.

Other colonists desired freedom from Great Britain. After the French and Indian War, Great Britain needed money to pay war debts. British Parliament began to tax the colonies. The colonists were not allowed to vote on these taxes. Some colonists thought this was unfair. They began to call themselves Patriots—a name describing people who love their country enough to fight for it. Patriots were also known “rebels” because they went against the laws of the King.

Due to the rebellion, King George III sent British soldiers to the colonies. This made colonists angry. They did not want British soldiers living in their homes and guarding their cities. Colonists began to prepare to fight. They formed their own militia—trained soldiers called Minutemen.

Delegates from each colony formed the First Continental Congress, and appointed George Washington to lead the colonial army. These 56 delegates wanted the colonies to become independent from Great Britain. They decided to declare independence from Great Britain in a formal document known as the Declaration of Independence. Signed by all the delegates on July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence declared, “all men are created equal.”

Despite the inspiring declaration, Great Britain did not agree to give colonists their freedom. Thirty thousand British troops were sent to New York Harbor, and the violent battle waged on.

Slaves and Native Americans joined the fight. They each had their own beliefs about freedom and citizenship—they chose sides based on whom they thought would be most fair to their people. Some fought with the Loyalists, others with the Patriots. Despite their dedication, the freedoms outlined in the Declaration of Independence were not meant for them. The declaration did not free slaves—slaves would continue to fight for their freedoms even after the Revolutionary War ended in 1783.

Resources:

Liberty Kids. (2004). The Revolutionary War: What were we fighting about? Online article retrieved on 1/2/2012 from <http://libertyskids.com>

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