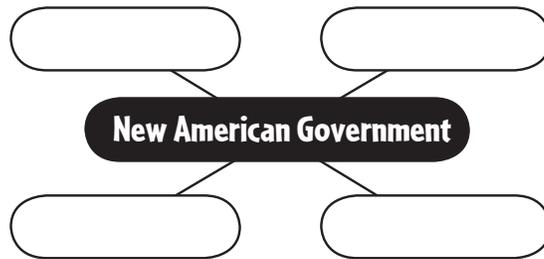


The American Revolution

Big Idea

The American Revolution and the formation of the United States of America seemed to confirm premises of the Enlightenment. As you read, use a chart like the one below to identify key aspects of the government created by the American colonists.



Read to Learn

Britain and the American Revolution *(page 566)*

Determining Cause and Effect

Why was the American Revolution such a gamble?

In 1707 England and Scotland were united into the United Kingdom of Great Britain. Parliament and the monarch shared power, with Parliament gradually becoming more important.

The British government wanted to raise taxes in the colonies to help pay for the war and the colonies' defense. In 1765 Parliament passed the Stamp Act, which imposed a tax on legal documents and newspapers. There was strong opposition, and the act was repealed in 1766. Crisis followed crisis in the 1770s. Fighting erupted in April 1775. The Second Continental Congress approved the Declaration of Independence. The revolution was a big gamble, as Britain was a strong military power with enormous financial resources. The Continental Army was made up of untrained amateurs.

Other nations, seeking revenge on Britain, supplied arms, money, and soldiers to the rebels.

The British decided to end the war in 1781. The Treaty of Paris in 1783, gave Americans control of the territory from the Appalachians to the Mississippi.



Read to Learn

The Birth of a New Nation *(page 569)*

Analyzing Information

What part of the Constitution guaranteed natural rights to Americans?

After throwing off oppressive rule, the former colonies, now states, feared a strong central government. Thus, their first constitution, the Articles of Confederation, created a government that lacked the power to deal with the nation's problems. In 1787 delegates met again and wrote an entirely new plan, called the Constitution.

The Constitution created a **federal system**, in which the national government and the state governments shared power. Based on Montesquieu's ideas, the national, or federal, government was separated into three branches: the executive (headed by the president), the legislative (the Congress), and the judicial (the courts). Each branch had some power to restrain acts of the other branches.

During negotiations over ratification, the new Congress proposed 12 amendments to the Constitution, and 10 of them were approved by the states. These 10 amendments became known as the Bill of Rights. They guaranteed freedom of religion, speech, press, petition, and assembly. They gave Americans the right to bear arms and to be protected against unreasonable searches and arrests. They guaranteed trial by jury, due process of law, and the protection of property rights.

Many of the rights in the Bill of Rights were similar to the natural rights proposed by the philosophes. Many Europeans saw the American Revolution as the acting out of the Enlightenment's political dreams. The creation of the United States seemed to confirm that a better world could be achieved.

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