

Chronology of America's Foundation: 1754-91

1754

Spring

Virginia militia troops under Major George Washington fail to dislodge the French from Fort Duquesne in western Pennsylvania.

July

Benjamin Franklin proposes the "Albany Plan of Union" to coordinate policies of the colonies. Colonial legislatures reject the plan.

1755

July

British forces under General Edward Braddock are repulsed by French and Indian forces near Fort Duquesne.

1759

September

British forces capture the French fortress at Quebec. The French governor surrenders Quebec province to the British the following year.

1763

February

The Treaty of Paris ends the French and Indian War (known in Britain as the Seven Years War). Britain expels the French from Canada, while returning Guadeloupe and Martinique to France.

May-November

Chief Pontiac leads an Indian uprising against British forts and colonial settlers in the Great Lakes region.

October

King George III issues the Proclamation of 1763, barring colonial settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains.

1764

April

The Sugar Act is passed by Parliament to raise revenue from the colonies for maintaining Britain's North American empire.

July

James Otis asserts that the colonies suffer from "taxation without representation" in his essay, "The Rights of the British Colonists Asserted and Proved."

August

Boston merchants agree to stop importing British goods.

1765

March

The Stamp Act and Quartering Act are passed by Parliament.

March-October

Colonial legislatures approve resolutions to protest the Stamp Act. The "Sons of Liberty" is founded to promote colonial rights.

October

The "Stamp Act Congress," meeting in New York, votes to send John Dickinson's Declaration of Rights and Grievances to King George III and Parliament.

November

The Stamp Act takes effect, sparking defiance among colonists.

1766

March

Parliament agrees to repeal the Stamp Act and Sugar Act. Parliament passes the Declaratory Act, affirming its authority to make laws for the colonies.

1767

June

Parliament passes the "Townshend Duties," imposing new taxes on the colonies to raise revenue for administration.

October

To protest the "Townshend Duties," colonial merchants again boycott British goods.

November-December

John Dickinson publishes "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania."

1768**October**

Two regiments of British troops are stationed in Boston to quell patriot protests in the city.

1770**March**

British troops kill five colonial protesters in what comes to be known as the “Boston Massacre.”

April

Parliament repeals most of the “Townshend Duties.” A small tax on tea is left in place.

October

A British officer, defended by John Adams, is acquitted of charges relating to the “Boston Massacre.”

1772**June-September**

Britain announces plans to begin directly paying British officials in Massachusetts. Patriots form the “Committee of Correspondence,” headed by James Otis, in response.

1773**May**

Parliament passes the Tea Act, permitting the British East India Company to sell tea directly to the colonies.

December

Patriots destroy the cargoes of British East India Company ships in what comes to be known as the “Boston Tea Party.”

1774**March**

Parliament passes the “Intolerable Acts” in response to patriot unrest in Massachusetts.

September

The First Continental Congress meets in Philadelphia to develop a response to the “Intolerable Acts.” The Congress rejects Parliament’s authority over the colonies.

1775**February**

Parliament declares Massachusetts to be in a state of rebellion.

March

Patrick Henry calls for “liberty or death” in a speech in the Virginia legislature.

April 19

British troops clash with colonial militia forces at Lexington and Concord.

May

The Second Continental Congress meets in Philadelphia. George Washington is asked to lead a colonial army.

June

British troops suffer more than one thousand casualties in the battle at Bunker Hill.

July

The Continental Congress adopts the “Olive Branch Petition” and the “Declaration of the Causes and Necessities of Taking Up Arms.” Calls for independence are rejected.

November

King George III declares that the colonies are in a state of rebellion.

December

American efforts to overrun British forces in Canada are repulsed at Quebec.

1776**January**

Thomas Paine publishes “Common Sense.”

March

British forces evacuate Boston.

May

France loans money to the Continental Congress.

June 11

The Continental Congress forms a committee to draft a call for independence.

July 4

The Continental Congress approves the Declaration of Independence.

September

British forces occupy New York City.

December

General Washington captures a British camp at Trenton, New Jersey.

1777

September

British forces capture Philadelphia, forcing the Continental Congress to flee.

October

American forces defeat a six thousand-man British army at Saratoga, New York.

November

The Continental Congress adopts the Articles of Confederation.

December

France recognizes the independence of the United States and signs an alliance with the new nation the following month.

1778

April-May

Captain John Paul Jones stages naval raids along the English coast.

December

The British capture Savannah, Georgia, and begin tightening their control over the southern colonies.

1779

June

Spain declares war against Britain.

September

An American and French effort to retake Savannah fails.

1780

Winter

American troops in New Jersey mutiny.

May

The British take 5,400 American troops prisoner in capturing Charleston, South Carolina.

October

American frontier troops overrun a loyalist outpost at King's Mountain, South Carolina. A string of American victories in the Carolinas follows.

1781

August

French warships defeat the British navy off the Virginia coast, leaving the army of General Charles Cornwallis trapped on the Yorktown peninsula.

October

Cornwallis surrenders his 7,500-man army at Yorktown. Britain abandons efforts to regain its American colonies.

1782

November

A preliminary peace treaty is reached between Britain and America.

1783

September

Britain and the United States sign the Treaty of Paris.

November

British forces evacuate New York City. Seven thousand loyalists leave with them.

1784

December

New York City is chosen as the temporary national capital.

1785

August

Spain and the United States fail to reach agreement on the use of the Mississippi River.

1786

February

Britain notifies the United States that it will not evacuate its forts in the Great Lakes region until the issue of pre-war debts is settled.

September

Delegates to a convention in Annapolis call on Congress to convene a meeting of the states in the spring of 1787.

1787

May-September

Delegates from twelve states meet in Philadelphia and draft a new Constitution.

October

The first installment of “The Federalist Papers” appears as states prepare to consider the ratification of the proposed Constitution.

1788

June

New Hampshire becomes the ninth state to ratify the proposed Constitution. The Constitution, at least in theory, takes effect.

July

Virginia and New York ratify the Constitution.

1789

January-February

Elections for the new Congress are held. George Washington is unanimously chosen to serve as the nation’s first president.

June

James Madison proposes twelve amendments protecting individual rights be added to the Constitution.

September

Congress approves the Bill of Rights and sends it to the states for ratification.

1791

December

The Bill of Rights becomes part of the Constitution.