

# American Revolution



*The Spirit of '76* by Archibald McNeal Willard  
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## I. Strengths and Weaknesses of Opposing Sides

### A. Great Britain

#### 1. Strengths

- a) Population (7.5 million to 2.5 million colonists)
- b) Monetary wealth
- c) Naval forces
- d) Professional army armed with 6' muskets with bayonets attached
  - i) 50,000 British
  - ii) 30,000 Hessians
  - iii) 30,000 American Loyalists

#### 2. Weaknesses

- a) Unrest in Ireland
- b) British government inept and confused, led by King George III and Lord North
- c) Lack of British desire to crush American cousins. Whigs cheered American victories.
- d) Military difficulties
  - i) Second-rate generals
  - ii) Brutal treatment of soldiers (one lashed 800 times for striking an officer)
  - iii) Inadequate, poor provisions (old, rancid, wormy). Undernourished
  - iv) Need for clear victory. A draw would be a colonial victory.
  - v) Armies were 3000 miles from home. Orders took months to reach the front.
  - vi) Vast colonial territory (1000 by 600 miles) to subdue. No urban nerve center to conquer.

## B. American

### 1. Strengths

- a) Outstanding leadership
  - i) Military--Washington
  - ii) Diplomatic--Franklin
  - iii) European imports--Lafayette, Kosciuzko
- b) Colonists fighting defensively
- c) Self-sustaining agricultural base
- d) Colonists were better marksmen (Americans accurate at 200 yds.)
- e) Moral advantage. Americans were supporting a just cause with a positive goal.

### 2. Weaknesses

- a) Colonies were badly organized, disunited for war.
- b) Continental Congress debated, but took little action and exercised less leadership
- c) No written constitution (Articles of Confederation) not adopted until 1781.
- d) Colonies were jealous of Congress, each other's region
- e) Economic difficulties
  - i) Little metallic currency available
  - ii) Fearful of taxation, Congress issued virtually worthless Continental currency
  - iii) Inflation led to increased prices, desertions from army.
- f) Limited military supplies
  - i) Inadequate firearms and powder
  - ii) Clothing and shoes scarce. At Valley Forge, 2800 men barefooted
- g) American soldiers were numerous but unreliable
- h) Profiteers used greed and speculation to weaken morale and aid the British

## II. American Secession

A. Second Continental Congress (May 1775) called Washington to head colonial army.

- 1) While not a military genius (he lost more battles than he won), he was trusted implicitly by his soldiers
- 2) He refused to be paid, though his records indicate expenses of over \$100,000
- 3) Shrewd political choice by Congress: Virginian, wealthy, aristocratic, above reproach.

B. Following Bunker Hill (costly victory for British), King George III proclaimed colonies in rebellion and hired Hessians to crush rebels.

C. Thomas Paine published *Common Sense*, a pamphlet selling 120,000 copies.

- 1) Appealed to natural law ("an island should not rule a continent")
- 2) King George was brutish and undeserving of colonials' respect
- 3) America had a moral obligation to the world to be independent and democratic.

D. Second Continental Congress declared independence July 2, 1776.

1. Jefferson headed the committee drafting the written statement.

Arguments were based on John Locke's contract theory of government:

- a) All people have natural rights ("Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness")
- b) When a government abuses rights, the people have a right to "alter or abolish" it
- c) King George has acted tyrannically. Long list of wrongs done by King to colonists.
- d) The colonies are independent.

2. Declaration gave a clear position for rebellious colonists, forcing others to choose rebellion or declare as Loyalists.

III. See the American Revolution chart for a summary of the war's major battles.

IV. Treaty of Paris (1783)

A. American negotiators (Franklin, Jay, John Adams) sought to advance American interests in lengthy negotiations

1. Original demands were for independence, large territorial concessions (Franklin wanted all of Canada), and fishing rights in North Atlantic.
2. Americans feared the French and Spanish would bargain with British at the expense of the U.S.
3. Ignoring the instructions of Congress, they made a separate peace with the British before full negotiations took place.

B. Major provisions

1. Britain formally recognized independence of U.S.
2. Boundaries set from Great Lakes on the North to the Mississippi River on the West to Florida on the South. No access to the Gulf of Mexico
3. No further persecution of Loyalists and restitution for confiscated property "recommended" to states.
4. Fishing access for Americans in waters off East Canada
5. No reference to ending slave trade, an original goal of the Americans