



Winning the War

MAIN IDEA

Strategic victories in the South and at Yorktown enabled the Americans to defeat the British.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The American defeat of the British established the United States as an independent Nation.

Terms & Names

- Yorktown
- Friedrich von Steuben
- Marquis de Lafayette
- Charles Cornwallis
- Treaty of Paris
- egalitarianism

One American's Story

Colonel William Fontaine of the Virginia militia stood with the American and French armies lining a road near **Yorktown**, Virginia, on the afternoon of October 19, 1781, to witness the formal British surrender. The French were dressed in bright blue coats and white trousers, while the American troops, standing proudly behind their generals, wore rough hunting shirts and faded Continental uniforms. Colonel Fontaine later described the scene.

A PERSONAL VOICE COLONEL WILLIAM FONTAINE

“I had the happiness to see that British army which so lately spread dismay and desolation through all our country, march forth . . . at 3 o'clock through our whole army, drawn up in two lines about 20 yards distance and return disrobed of all their terrors. . . . You could not have heard a whisper or seen the least motion throughout our whole line, but every countenance was erect and expressed a serene cheerfulness.”

—quoted in *The Yorktown Campaign and the Surrender of Cornwallis*, 1781

The American Revolution had finally ended, and the Americans had won—a fact that astonished the world. Several years before, in the depths of the Valley Forge winter of 1777–1778, few would have thought such an event possible.

▲ The detail of John Trumbull's painting of the British surrender at Yorktown depicts General Charles O'Hara, who stood in for General Cornwallis at the ceremony.

European Allies Shift the Balance

In February 1778, in the midst of the frozen winter at Valley Forge, American troops began an amazing transformation. **Friedrich von Steuben** (vŏn stōō'bən), a Prussian captain and talented drillmaster, volunteered his services to General Washington and went to work “to make regular soldiers out of country bumpkins.” Von Steuben taught the colonial soldiers to stand at attention, execute field maneuvers, fire and reload quickly, and wield bayonets. With the help of such European military leaders, the raw Continental Army was becoming an effective fighting force.



LAFAYETTE AND THE FRENCH Around the same time, another military leader, the **Marquis de Lafayette** (mär-kē' də läf'ē-ēt'), a brave, idealistic 20-year-old French aristocrat, offered his assistance. The young Lafayette joined Washington's staff and bore the misery of Valley Forge, lobbied for French reinforcements in France in 1779, and led a command in Virginia in the last years of the war.

The British Move South

After their devastating defeat at Saratoga, the British changed their military strategy; in the summer of 1778 they began to shift their operations to the South. There, the British hoped to rally Loyalist support, reclaim their former colonies in the region, and then slowly fight their way back north.

EARLY BRITISH SUCCESS IN THE SOUTH At the end of 1778, a British expedition easily took Savannah, Georgia, and by the spring of 1779, a royal governor once again commanded Georgia. In 1780, General Henry Clinton, who had replaced Howe in New York, along with the ambitious general **Charles Cornwallis** sailed south with 8,500 men. In their greatest victory of the war, the British captured Charles Town, South Carolina, in May 1780 and marched 5,500 American soldiers off as prisoners of war. Clinton then left for New York, leaving Cornwallis to command the British forces in the South and to conquer South and North Carolina. **A**

MAIN IDEA

Summarizing

A What was the British strategy in the South and how well did it work initially?

For most of 1780, Cornwallis succeeded. As the redcoats advanced, they were joined by thousands of African Americans who had escaped from Patriot slave





owners to join the British and win their freedom. In August, Cornwallis's army smashed American forces at Camden, South Carolina, and within three months the British had established forts across the state. However, when Cornwallis and his forces advanced into North Carolina, Patriot bands attacked them and cut British communication lines. The continuous harassment forced the redcoats to retreat to South Carolina.

BRITISH LOSSES IN 1781 Washington ordered Nathanael Greene, his ablest general, to march south and harass Cornwallis as he retreated. Greene divided his force into two groups, sending 600 soldiers under the command of General Daniel Morgan to South Carolina. Cornwallis in turn sent Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton and his troops to pursue Morgan's soldiers.

Morgan and his men led the British on a grueling chase through rough countryside. When the forces met in January 1781 at Cowpens, South Carolina, the British expected the outnumbered Americans to flee; but the Continental Army fought back, and forced the redcoats to surrender.

Angered by the defeat at Cowpens, Cornwallis attacked Greene two months later at Guilford Court House, North Carolina. Cornwallis won the battle, but the victory cost him nearly a fourth of his troops—93 were killed, over 400 were wounded, and 26 were missing. **B**

Greene had weakened the British, but he worried about the fight for the South. On April 3, 1781, he wrote a letter to Lafayette, asking for help.

A PERSONAL VOICE NATHANAEL GREENE

“[I] wish you to March your force Southward by Alexandria & Fredricksburg to Richmond. . . . It is impossible for the Southern States with all the exertions they can make under the many disadvantages they labour to save themselves. Subsistence is very difficult to be got and therefore it is necessary that the best of troops should be employed. . . . Every exertion should be made for the salvation of the Southern States for on them depend the liberty of the Northern.”

—from *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, vol. VIII

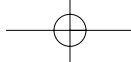
Daniel Morgan's colonial forces defeated a crack British regiment under Colonel Tarleton at the battle of Cowpens in 1781. More than 300 British soldiers were killed or wounded, and 600 were taken prisoner. This detail from *The Battle of Cowpens* by William Ranney shows that the Americans included both white and African-American soldiers. ▼



MAIN IDEA

Summarizing


B How did generals Morgan and Greene work together to defeat British forces?



After the exhausting battle in the Carolinas, Cornwallis chose to move the fight to Virginia, where he met up with reinforcements. First he tried to capture the divisions led by Lafayette and von Steuben. When that failed, Cornwallis made a fateful mistake: he led his army of 7,500 onto the peninsula between the James and York rivers and camped at Yorktown, a few miles from the original English settlement of Jamestown (see map, page 119). Cornwallis planned to fortify Yorktown, take Virginia, and then move north to join Clinton's forces.

The British Surrender at Yorktown


A combination of good luck and well-timed decisions now favored the American cause. In 1780, a French army of 6,000 had landed in Newport, Rhode Island, after the British left the city to focus on the South. The French had stationed one fleet there and were operating another in the West Indies. When news of Cornwallis's plans reached him, the Marquis de Lafayette suggested that the American and French armies join forces with the two French fleets and attack the British forces at Yorktown.

VICTORY AT YORKTOWN Following Lafayette's plan, the Americans and the French closed in on Cornwallis. A French naval force defeated a British fleet and then blocked the entrance to the Chesapeake Bay, thereby preventing a British rescue by sea. Meanwhile, about 17,000 French and American troops surrounded the British on the Yorktown peninsula and bombarded them day and night. The siege of Yorktown lasted about three weeks. On October 17, 1781, with his troops outnumbered by more than two to one and exhausted from constant shelling, Cornwallis finally raised the white flag of surrender. 

On October 19, a triumphant Washington, the French generals, and their troops assembled to accept the British surrender. After General Charles O'Hara, representing Cornwallis, handed over his sword, the British troops laid down their arms. In his diary, Captain Johann Ewald, a German officer, tried to explain this astonishing turn of events.

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Issues

 How did the French forces contribute to the American victory at Yorktown?

HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT

BENEDICT ARNOLD

In the early years of the Revolution, Benedict Arnold, a popular Patriot soldier and leader, helped defend New England and then served as the American commandant of Philadelphia. In the later years of the war, however, Arnold and his wife, Peggy Shippen Arnold, lived extravagantly. In 1779, Arnold was court-martialed and found guilty of using government supplies for personal use. Angry with Congress, Arnold, with his wife's support, shifted his allegiance to Great Britain.

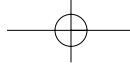
In 1780, Arnold decided to hand West Point, a strategic fort north of New York City, on the Hudson River, over to the British. To do so, he requested command of the fort. Despite Arnold's tarnished background, Washington granted his request. Fortunately, the Americans discovered the plot, and Arnold escaped to Britain. He died there, scorned by both sides as a traitor.

A PERSONAL VOICE CAPTAIN JOHANN EWALD

“With what soldiers in the world could one do what was done by these men, who go about nearly naked and in the greatest privation? Deny the best-disciplined soldiers of Europe what is due them and they will run away in droves, and the general will soon be alone. But from this one can perceive what an enthusiasm—which these poor fellows call ‘Liberty’—can do!”

—*Diary of the American War*

SEEKING PEACE Peace talks began in Paris in 1782. Representatives of four nations—the United States, Great Britain, France, and Spain—joined the negotiations, with each nation looking out for its own interests. Britain hoped to avoid giving America full independence. France supported American independence but feared America's becoming a major power. Spain was interested in acquiring the land between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River.



Many observers expected the savvy European diplomats to outwit the Americans at the bargaining table. But the Continental Congress chose an able team of negotiators—John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and John Jay of New York. Together the three demanded that Britain recognize American independence before any other negotiations began. Once Britain agreed to full independence, the talks officially opened.

In September 1783, the delegates signed the **Treaty of Paris**, which confirmed U.S. independence and set the boundaries of the new nation. The United States now stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River and from Canada to the Florida border.

Some provisions of the treaty promised future trouble. The British made no attempt to protect the land interests of their Native American allies, and the treaty did not specify when the British would evacuate their American forts. On the other side, the Americans agreed that British creditors could collect debts owed them by Americans and promised to allow Loyalists to sue in state courts for recovery of their losses. The state governments, however, later failed to honor this agreement. **D**

MAIN IDEA

Summarizing

D What issues did the Treaty of Paris leave unresolved?

The War Becomes a Symbol of Liberty

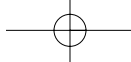
With the signing of the Treaty of Paris, all European nations recognized the United States of America. Former British subjects now possessed a new identity as free Americans, loyal to a new ideal. The American Revolution would inspire the world as both a democratic revolution and a war for independence.

THE IMPACT ON AMERICAN SOCIETY Revolutionary ideals set a new course for American society. During the war, class distinctions between rich and poor had begun to blur as the wealthy wore homespun clothing and military leaders showed respect for all of their men. These changes stimulated a rise of **egalitarianism**—a belief in the equality of all people—which fostered a new attitude: the idea that ability, effort, and virtue, not wealth or family, defined one's worth.

The egalitarianism of the 1780s, however, applied only to white males. It did not bring any new political rights to women. A few states made it possible for women to divorce, but common law still dictated that a married woman's property belonged to her husband.

This “A New and Correct Map of the United States of North America,” of 1784 was one of the first maps produced to show the boundaries of the new nation. Unfortunately, it contained much inaccurate information, such as the incorrect placement of rivers.





Moreover, most African Americans were still enslaved, and even those who were free usually faced discrimination and poverty. However by 1804, many Northern states had taken steps to outlaw slavery.

The Southern states, where slavery was more entrenched, did not outlaw the practice, but most made it easier for slave owners to free their slaves. Planters in the upper South debated the morality of slavery, and some, like George Washington, freed their slaves. In Maryland and Virginia, the number of free blacks increased from about 4,000 to over 20,000 following the war. The slavery debate generally did not reach the Deep South, although some Southern slaveholders did have grave misgivings.

For Native Americans, the Revolution brought uncertainty. During both the French and Indian War and the Revolution, many Native American communities had either been destroyed or displaced, and the Native American population east of the Mississippi had declined by about 50 percent. Postwar developments further threatened Native American interests, as settlers from the United States moved west and began taking tribal lands left unprotected by the Treaty of Paris. **E**

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Issues

E What were the exceptions to the spirit of egalitarianism that arose after the Revolutionary War?

THE CHALLENGE OF CREATING A GOVERNMENT In adopting the Declaration of Independence, Americans had rejected the British system of government, in which kings and nobles held power. In its place, they set out to build a stable republic, a government of the people. The Continental Congress had chosen a motto for the reverse side of the Great Seal of the United States: “a new order of the ages.” Creating this new order forced Americans to address complex questions: Who should participate in government? How should the government answer to the people? How could a government be set up so that opposing groups of citizens would all have a voice?



▲ English potter Josiah Wedgwood designed this anti-slavery cameo and sent copies of it to Benjamin Franklin.

SECTION 4 ASSESSMENT

1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Yorktown
- Marquis de Lafayette
- Treaty of Paris
- egalitarianism
- Friedrich von Steuben
- Charles Cornwallis

MAIN IDEA

2. SUMMARIZING

Choose five significant events described in this section. For each, write a newspaper headline that summarizes its significance.

Event	Headline

Choose one of the headlines and write the first paragraph of the article.

CRITICAL THINKING

3. ANALYZING CAUSES

Do you think the colonists could have won independence without aid from foreigners? Explain.

Think About:

- the military needs of the Americans and strengths of the French
- the Americans' belief in their fight for independence
- von Steuben and de Lafayette

4. ANALYZING EFFECTS

What were the effects of the Revolutionary War on the American colonists? **Think About:**

- political effects
- economic effects
- social effects

5. EVALUATING

In your opinion, what was the single biggest challenge facing the new country?