

# Enlightenment and Revolution

*An Age of Revolutions*  
(1750–1914)



The Scientific Revolution

The Enlightenment

The American Revolution

## Thematic Icons



Economics and business



Geography and environment



Historical concepts and questions



Politics, government and citizenship



Religion and thought



Society and culture



War, diplomacy and foreign policy

**Icons:** For more detailed instructions, see the *User Guide*



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page



By the end of this section, you will have learned about the American Revolution and be able to answer the following key questions:

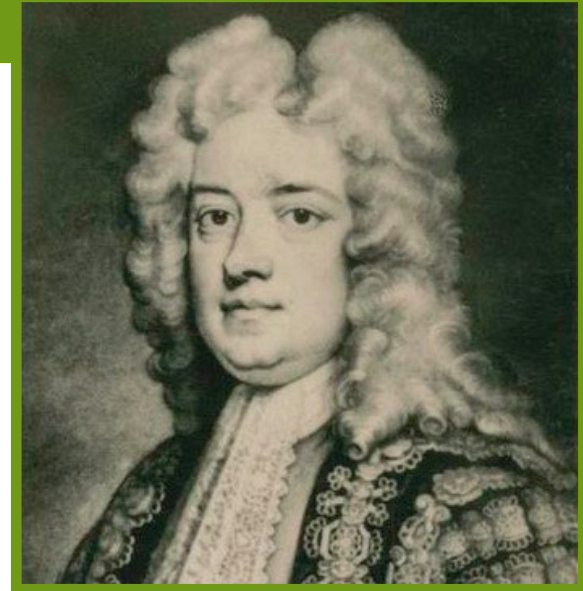
- What was the relationship between Britain and America before 1776?
- What happened in the War for Independence?
- How did the Enlightenment influence the Revolution and the new government?



The British first settled in America in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Although colonies existed for the sole benefit of the colonizer under the **mercantile** system of trade, Britain's policy towards America was largely one of **salutary neglect**.

This system worked effectively for both Britain and the colonies for over 100 years.

- The colonies flourished, developing strong economies, stable political systems and unique cultures.
- Britain received the benefits of colonial possessions with little administrative burden.



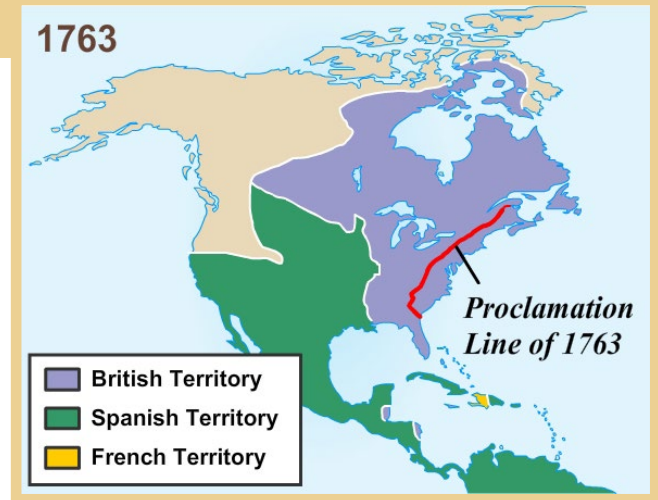
What was salutary neglect and why was it pursued?



By the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, Britain faced issues in both Europe and its colonies. This stretched its resources and changed the relationship between Britain and its colonies.

The contemporary European view of the world led to competition for land and resources, often leading to war. Although Britain fared well in its wars, they were expensive and left the nation in debt.

Since much of the **Seven Years' War** was to protect colonial possessions in America and most of the land won was in America, the British felt that the colonists should help pay.



Why would the American colonists dislike this idea?

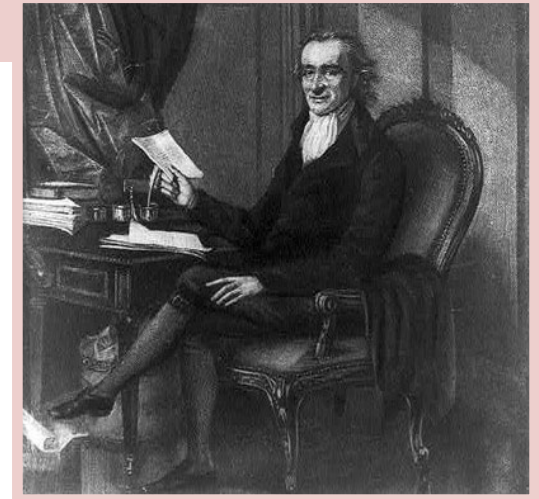




Enlightenment ideas had spread to America and were popular with the colonists. When Britain tried to tax the colonists in 1765, they believed it violated their natural rights.

Inspired by thinkers like John Locke, the colonists argued that they should not pay taxes without being represented in the British government when decisions about these policies were being made.

**Thomas Paine**, a pamphleteer in America, stimulated people with Enlightenment ideas in his popular work **Common Sense**. Over the next decade, tensions continued to increase.





Through the 1760s and 1770s, Britain repeatedly tried to tax and control the colonies.

These attempts were met with resistance that often led to the repeal of individual taxation laws. However, with each repeal, new approaches were attempted.

Can you match each act the British tried to impose to the correct year and description?

Press **start** to begin.

**start**





The British reacted strongly to the **Boston Tea Party** and the **Coercive Acts** caused huge tensions in the colonies.

In September 1774, the colonists sent representatives to the **First Continental Congress**. They tried unsuccessfully to get the British parliament to end these acts.

In April 1775, British troops clashed with American militia men at the **Battles of Lexington and Concord**. This started the **American Revolution**.



In May 1775, the **Second Continental Congress** met. State representatives began by seeking reconciliation with Britain, but by the summer of 1776, they declared their independence using the ideals of the Enlightenment to justify their actions.





The Continental Congress wrote the **Declaration of Independence** to justify their reasons for rebellion and why the 13 colonies wanted to separate from Britain. Watch this animation to read the declaration in full and to find out more about the arguments and language it uses.

Press **start** to begin.

**start**



How did the Enlightenment influence the Declaration?



The war for independence was a long and difficult one, lasting from 1775 to 1781. Many initially believed it would be over quickly and that Britain's military superiority would be decisive. However, there were several reasons why the colonists won:

- the Americans had stronger motivation to fight as they were protecting their homeland and livelihoods
- Britain was overconfident and made several tactical mistakes
- fighting a war abroad was very expensive for Britain
- from 1778, France supported the Americans.



How did the war end and what happened afterwards?



In *Two Treatises of Government*, John Locke clearly stated that a government must be responsible for and responsive to the needs of the governed. The American **Founding Fathers** sought to create a government that reflected this principle.

Basic individual rights of liberty and property should be protected

Freedom of speech, religion and the press should be upheld



Government should be stable and its power should be able to be checked

The most qualified men should serve in government

What was the first central government like?



To address the problems of the Articles of Confederation, a new **Constitution** was drawn up in 1787. The power to rule was given by the people to the central government in this way.



The new American government had its basis in democracy, but in actual fact it was a **federalist** government. Power was shared between the national and state governments, though the federal government had overriding power.

The central government had its power checked by being divided into three branches: executive, legislative and judicial. The peaceful transference of power is guaranteed by the election process and the establishment of term limits.







# Bill of Rights



In order to get the Constitution ratified, the **Bill of Rights** was added. This consisted of ten amendments which protected the individual rights and freedoms of Americans.

Watch this animation to read the amendments in full and to find out more about its coverage and language used.

Press **start** to begin.

**start**





# The Founding Fathers



The **Founding Fathers** were a group of men that helped establish and structure the government of the newly formed United States. Many of them were influenced by Enlightenment ideas.

Press on each image to find out more about the key people involved in founding this new nation.

Press **start** to begin.

**start**





The ideas of the Enlightenment were put into action in the form of the American Revolution.

The carefully considered approach to the writing of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights changed many people's thinking about the nature of government.

A belief in rights, reform and progress began to prevail as a result of the American Revolution.



Using your knowledge of the Enlightenment thinkers, what do you think they would have thought of the U.S. Constitution and the federalist system?





Test your knowledge of the Enlightenment era with this quiz.

Choose the correct answer to each question to see how much you can remember about the Enlightenment era.

Press **start** to begin.

start







Test your understanding of the Enlightenment era by recapping key terms and important people using this glossary. Press on the tabs and then each term to see a definition.  
Press **start** to begin.

start

