

The Times That Try Men's Souls

How the Underdogs Won the Revolutionary War, 1776–1783

Unit 3 3.5 The American Revolution

“THESE are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country ... he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.”

Thomas Paine
The American Crisis, No. I, December 1776

What the exam expects

Explain how one development contributed to the American colonists' victory over Great Britain from 1775 to 1783.

The Patriots won by outlasting a far richer enemy until France joined them. **George Washington** would not stake the **Continental Army** on one decisive battle, **militia** poured in at Saratoga, and **camp followers** cooked and nursed for soldiers Congress could barely pay. Britain took New York and Philadelphia, but it never destroyed the army.

Which factor most directly contradicts John Adams's claim that the Revolution happened "in the minds of the people" by 1775?

The large number of **Loyalists** contradicts it. About 15 to 20 percent of white colonists sided with the king and many others stayed neutral, so independence never won over every mind. As late as 1774, the First Continental Congress set aside **Galloway's Plan of Union**, a compromise inside the empire, by only one vote.

Why did France decide to aid the colonies in their war for independence?

France wanted to weaken Britain, the rival that had taken Canada from it in 1763, and its king had no wish to spread revolution. France sent only secret aid until the victory at **Saratoga** showed the Americans could win. The **French alliance** followed in 1778, and in 1781 a French army and fleet joined Washington to trap Cornwallis at **Yorktown**.

Explain one similarity or difference in how two groups in North America responded to a British policy from 1763 to 1783.

African Americans and Native nations both split between the two sides. After **Dunmore's Proclamation** promised freedom, hundreds of enslaved people fled to British lines, while about 5,000 **African American soldiers**, most of them free Northerners, fought for the Patriots. In the **Iroquois Confederacy**, most Mohawk sided with Britain to guard their land, but most Oneida joined the Patriots.

Don't mix these up

- × "By 1776, nearly all colonists wanted independence from Britain." Only about 40 percent of colonists actively backed the Patriot cause, and the rest were Loyalists or stayed neutral.
- × "France joined the war to spread democracy and liberty." Louis XVI was an absolute monarch who wanted to weaken Britain, and he waited until Saratoga showed the Americans could win.
- × "Yorktown was the turning point because it brought France into the war." Saratoga in 1777 brought France into the war, and Yorktown in 1781, where French soldiers and sailors outnumbered the Americans, ended the major fighting.

Study list

	What it was	Why it matters
Galloway's Plan of Union 1774	Joseph Galloway's proposal to the First Continental Congress for an American legislature inside the British Empire, with a Grand Council the assemblies would elect and a president general the king would appoint.	Congress set it aside by only one vote, so in 1774 many delegates still wanted a compromise inside the empire.
Patriots 1775–1783	Colonists who backed resistance to Britain and, from July 1776, independence. About 40 percent of the population actively supported the cause, most strongly in New England and Virginia.	Their commitment kept men enlisting and families feeding the army through years of defeat.
Loyalists 1775–1783	Colonists who stayed loyal to George III, by most estimates 15 to 20 percent of white colonists, strongest in New York, New Jersey, Georgia, and the port cities.	They made the Revolution a civil war between neighbors, and 60,000 to 80,000 of them left the country, many for Canada.
Militia 1775–1783	Part-time citizen soldiers, such as the Massachusetts minutemen, whom the colonies and later the states called out for short terms of service.	Though militia often broke in open battle, they swelled the army at Saratoga and kept the British from holding the southern backcountry.
Lexington and Concord 1775	The first battles of the war, when militia fought British troops who had marched from Boston to seize colonial arms and gunpowder at Concord, Massachusetts.	The fighting turned protest into war, and within two months Congress had formed the Continental Army under Washington.
Continental Army 1775–1783	The regular army that Congress created in June 1775 under Washington's command. Early recruits signed up for a year or less, and it rarely had more than about 20,000 men at once.	While militia came and went, this army stayed in the field, and as long as it survived, so did the rebellion.
George Washington 1775–1783	The Virginia planter whom Congress named to command the Continental Army in 1775. After nearly losing his army on Long Island in 1776, he avoided staking the war on one big battle.	He held the army together through defeats and hungry winters until he and the French could trap Cornwallis at Yorktown.

	What it was	Why it matters
Continental currency 1775–1780	Paper money the Continental Congress printed to pay for the war, more than \$200 million in all. By March 1780 Congress itself valued 40 paper dollars at one silver dollar.	A Congress that could not tax left its soldiers unpaid and hungry, a weakness that carried into the Articles of Confederation.
Dunmore's Proclamation 1775	An offer by Virginia's royal governor, Lord Dunmore, to free enslaved people and indentured servants who left rebel masters to fight for the king. It left out anyone Loyalists enslaved.	Hundreds of enslaved people escaped to British lines, and the threat pushed Patriot leaders to accept Black soldiers themselves.
<i>The American Crisis</i> 1776	A pamphlet Thomas Paine wrote after marching with the army in its retreat across New Jersey, urging Americans to stand by the cause in defeat.	Paine wrote it days before most enlistments ran out, and the Patriots' refusal to quit became one reason they won.
Camp followers 1775–1783	Thousands of women, many of them soldiers' wives, who traveled with the army and cooked, washed, and nursed in return for rations. Some carried water and ammunition in battle.	Camp followers filled gaps that Congress could not, while women at home ran farms and raised money for the troops.
Iroquois Confederacy Haudenosaunee 1775–1783	A league of six nations in what is now New York. The war split it, with most Mohawk and Seneca fighting for Britain and most Oneida and Tuscarora joining the Patriots.	Most Native nations that fought backed Britain, which had tried since 1763 to limit colonial settlement on their land.
Battle of Saratoga 1777	An American victory in upstate New York, where British general John Burgoyne, marching south from Canada to cut off New England, surrendered about 6,000 men to Horatio Gates.	After Burgoyne's surrender, France believed the Americans could win and openly allied with them in February 1778.
Valley Forge 1777–1778	The Continental Army's winter camp, about 20 miles from British-held Philadelphia, where roughly 2,000 soldiers died, mostly of disease, as food and clothing ran short.	The army held together, and Baron von Steuben's drill turned it into a force that could face British regulars in open battle.
French alliance 1778	France's treaty with the United States, which recognized American independence and promised that neither ally would make a separate peace with Britain. Benjamin Franklin and two other commissioners negotiated it in Paris.	France joined the war to weaken Britain, which now had to defend its colonies around the world.

	What it was	Why it matters
African American soldiers 1775–1783	About 5,000 Black men who served on the Patriot side, most of them free Northerners in mixed units. In 1778 Rhode Island promised freedom to enslaved men who enlisted.	Black men fought for a revolution that proclaimed liberty, yet the war left slavery legal in most states.
Battle of Yorktown 1781	The siege in Virginia where American and French armies under Washington and Rochambeau trapped Cornwallis while a French fleet blocked any rescue by sea. Cornwallis surrendered more than 7,000 men.	The surrender ended the major fighting, and after Lord North's government fell in March 1782, peace talks began in Paris.
Treaty of Paris (1783) 1783	The peace treaty in which Britain recognized American independence, with a western border at the Mississippi River. Americans gained fishing rights off Canada, and no Native nation took part.	Its Mississippi boundary ran across land Native nations still held, which set up the western conflicts of the 1780s and 1790s.

Also in the film

Battle of Bunker Hill 1775	The fight outside Boston where British troops took the hill but suffered more than 1,000 casualties.
Battle of Trenton 1776	Washington's surprise attack after crossing the Delaware, where his army captured about 900 Hessians, German soldiers Britain had hired.
Southern strategy 1778–1781	Britain's shift of the war to the South, where it took Charleston but Loyalists could not hold the backcountry.
Philipsburg Proclamation 1779	Sir Henry Clinton's promise of protection to any enslaved person who fled a rebel owner, without asking for military service.
Sullivan Expedition 1779	The campaign Washington ordered against the Haudenosaunee, in which General John Sullivan's army burned about 40 towns and their crops.
Battle of Kings Mountain 1780	A Patriot militia victory over a Loyalist force in South Carolina, where nearly every fighter on both sides was American.
Nathanael Greene 1780–1781	The general Washington chose for the South, who lost battles but kept his army intact and wore Cornwallis down.
Battle of Cowpens 1781	Daniel Morgan's South Carolina victory, where militia fired two volleys and fell back before Continentals struck the charging British.

Short-answer practice

“In a word my dear Sir, if every nerve is not straind to recruit the New Army with all possible Expedition I think the game is pretty near up—owing in great Measure to the insidious Arts of the Enemy and disaffection of the Colonies beforementioned, but principally to the accursed policy of Short Inlistments and depending too much on Militia, the Evil consequences of which were foretold 15 Months ago with a spirit almost prophetick.”

George Washington, letter to his brother Samuel, December 18, 1776

- (a) Briefly describe ONE cause Washington gives in the excerpt for the danger facing his army in December 1776.

- (b) Briefly explain ONE development from December 1776 to 1778, not mentioned in the excerpt, that helped the Continental Army survive this crisis.

- (c) Briefly explain how ONE European ally contributed to the American victory over Great Britain from 1778 to 1781.

Galloway's Plan of Union

1774

The Times That Try Men's Souls

Patriots

1775–1783

The Times That Try Men's Souls

Loyalists

1775–1783

The Times That Try Men's Souls

Militia

1775–1783

The Times That Try Men's Souls

Lexington and Concord

1775

The Times That Try Men's Souls

Continental Army

1775–1783

The Times That Try Men's Souls

George Washington

1775–1783

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Continental currency

1775–1780

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Dunmore's Proclamation

1775

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The American Crisis

1776

The Times That Try Men's Souls

Colonists who actively backed the Revolution, about 40 percent of the population, strongest in New England and Virginia.

They outlasted an empire with a bigger army and more money.

Part-time citizen soldiers, like the minutemen, whom the states called out for a few months at a time.

At Saratoga, militia kept arriving until Burgoyne had no way out.

The regular American army that Congress created in 1775, with Washington in command.

Britain could not end the war without destroying it.

Congress's wartime paper money, which became nearly worthless because no taxes backed it.

"Not worth a continental" came to mean worthless.

Paine's December 1776 pamphlet that opened "These are the times that try men's souls."

It rallied Patriots when the cause seemed close to collapse.

Joseph Galloway's plan for an American legislature that would keep the colonies inside the British Empire.

Even in 1774, many colonial leaders hoped to stay British.

Colonists who sided with the king, about 15 to 20 percent of white colonists.

The colonists never stood united behind independence.

The first battles of the Revolution, where Massachusetts militia fought British troops in April 1775.

The shooting war began here, more than a year before independence.

Commander of the Continental Army, who kept it alive by not staking the war on one battle.

The army's survival bought time for the French alliance to pay off.

Lord Dunmore's 1775 offer of freedom to enslaved people who left rebel owners to fight for the king.

Patriots soon let some Black men serve, partly to keep them from the British.

Camp followers

1775–1783

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Iroquois Confederacy

Haudenosaunee

1775–1783

The Times That Try Men's Souls

Battle of Saratoga

1777

The Times That Try Men's Souls

Valley Forge

1777–1778

The Times That Try Men's Souls

French alliance

1778

The Times That Try Men's Souls

African American soldiers

1775–1783

The Times That Try Men's Souls

Battle of Yorktown

1781

The Times That Try Men's Souls

Treaty of Paris (1783)

1783

The Times That Try Men's Souls

The six-nation league of upstate New York, which the war split between Britain and the Patriots.

Most Mohawk backed Britain to guard their land, and most Oneida backed the Patriots.

The army's hungry winter camp near Philadelphia, where about 2,000 soldiers died.

The army survived the winter and came out better trained.

About 5,000 Black men, mostly free Northerners, who fought on the Patriot side.

Some enslaved men won their freedom by serving.

The 1783 peace in which Britain recognized U.S. independence, with a Mississippi River border.

Britain signed away the West, but Native nations still held it.

Women who traveled with the army, cooking, washing, and nursing in return for rations.

Women's labor kept a poorly supplied army in the field.

The 1777 American victory in New York where Burgoyne surrendered his whole army.

Saratoga turned the war by bringing France in.

France's 1778 treaty that recognized American independence and brought France into the war against Britain.

French troops and ships made the Yorktown victory possible.

The 1781 siege in Virginia where Cornwallis surrendered to American and French armies.

The loss convinced Parliament that Britain could not win the war.

Model answers

- (a) Briefly describe ONE cause Washington gives in the excerpt for the danger facing his army in December 1776.

Washington blamed the danger mainly on short enlistments. Most of his soldiers' terms ran out on December 31, 1776, so the army could melt away in the middle of a losing campaign, and he did not trust militia to fill the gap.

- (b) Briefly explain ONE development from December 1776 to 1778, not mentioned in the excerpt, that helped the Continental Army survive this crisis.

Washington's army crossed the Delaware on the night of December 25, 1776, and captured about 900 Hessians at Trenton the next morning. The victory revived Patriot morale, and a \$10 bounty then persuaded at least half of his New England troops to stay six more weeks.

- (c) Briefly explain how ONE European ally contributed to the American victory over Great Britain from 1778 to 1781.

France gave the Americans money, soldiers, and a fleet that could challenge the Royal Navy. It allied with the United States in February 1778, after Saratoga. In 1781 de Grasse's fleet blocked any British rescue by sea while Rochambeau's army joined Washington's at Yorktown, and Cornwallis surrendered.