

CHAPTER
17
SECTION 3

Section Summary

BIRTH OF THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC

In the mid-1700s, Britain was a formidable global power. Key reasons for this status included its location, support of commerce, and huge gains in territory around the world. Furthermore, the new king, George III, began to assert his leadership and royal power.

Britain's growing empire included 13 prosperous colonies on the east coast of North America. The colonists shared many values. These included an increasing sense of their own destiny separate from Britain. In some cases, Britain neglected to enforce laws dealing with colonial trade and manufacturing.

Tensions between the colonists and Britain grew as Parliament passed laws, such as the **Stamp Act**, that increased colonists' taxes. The colonists protested what they saw as "taxation without representation." A series of violent clashes with British soldiers intensified the colonists' anger. Finally, representatives from each colony, including **George Washington** of Virginia, met in the Continental Congress to decide what to do. Then in April 1775, colonists fought British soldiers at Lexington and Concord, and the American Revolution began.

On July 4, 1776, the Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence. Written primarily by **Thomas Jefferson**, it reflects John Locke's ideas about the rights to "life, liberty, and property." It also details the colonists' grievances and emphasizes the Enlightenment idea of **popular sovereignty**.

At first, chances for American success looked bleak. The colonists struggled against Britain's trained soldiers, huge fleet, and greater resources. When the colonists won the Battle of Saratoga, other European nations, such as France, joined the American side. With the help of the French fleet, Washington forced the British to surrender at **Yorktown, Virginia**, in 1781. Two years later American, British, and French diplomats signed the **Treaty of Paris**, ending the war.

By 1789, leaders of the new United States, such as **James Madison** and **Benjamin Franklin**, had established a **federal republic** under the Constitution. The new government was based on the separation of powers, an idea borrowed directly from Montesquieu. The Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the Constitution, protected basic rights. The United States Constitution put Enlightenment ideas into practice and has become an important symbol of freedom.

Review Questions

1. What first caused tensions to rise between the colonists and Britain?

2. What are some Enlightenment ideas found in the Declaration of Independence?

READING CHECK

How did France help the Americans win the Revolution?

VOCABULARY STRATEGY

What does the word *assert* mean in the underlined sentence?

What context clues can you find in the surrounding words, phrases, or sentences that hint at its meaning? Circle the word below that is a synonym for *assert*.

1. declare
2. deny

READING SKILL

Recognize Sequence Place the events leading to the American Revolution in the correct order.
