

THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD

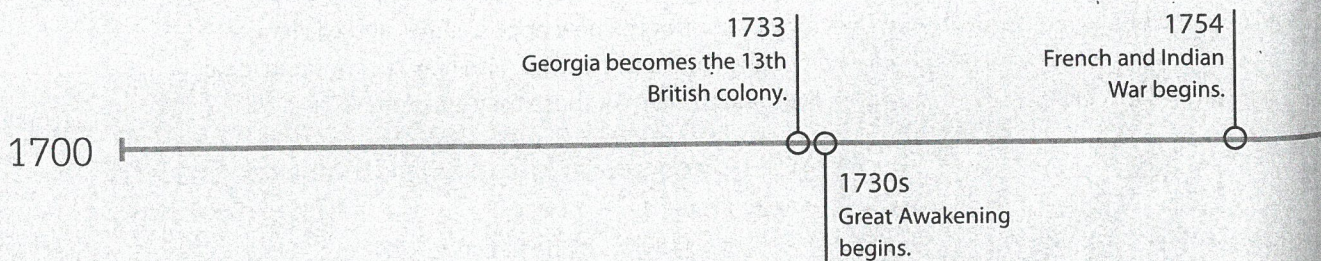
By the 1750s the colonies in North America had already begun to bind themselves together into a confederation. Even then, the colonists still thought of themselves as British subjects, despite a lack of representation in Parliament. The British government, in turn, protected the colonies from Native American and other European threats. After American colonial forces under George Washington tried unsuccessfully to drive the French from the Ohio River valley, Britain sent reinforcements, whom colonists helped support. By the time the French and Indian War ended in 1763, Britain controlled all the land east of the Mississippi River. But when the British tried to recover the costs of the war by taxing the colonists, they rebelled.

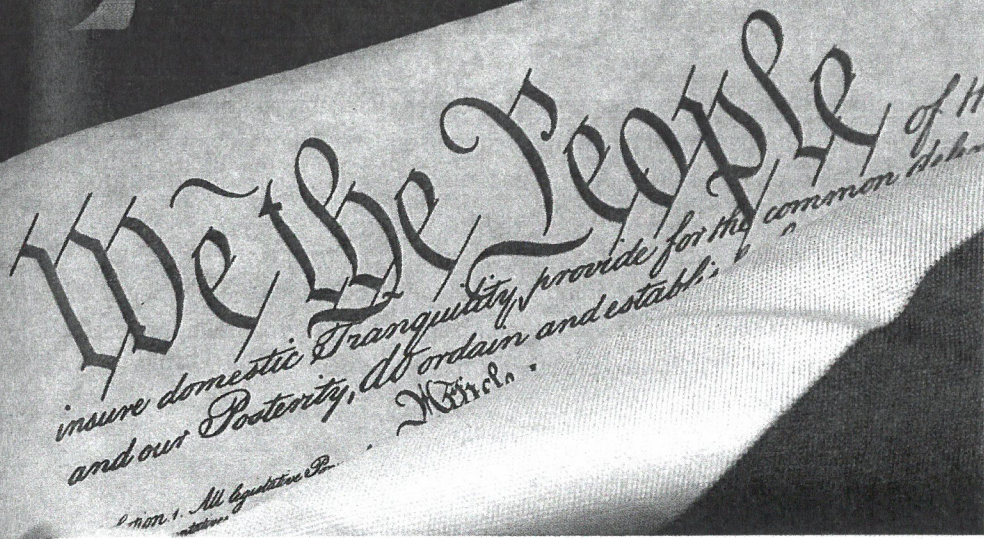
As the colonists moved toward independence, they drew on Enlightenment ideals, which questioned previously accepted truths about strongly centralized governments. People began to question traditional authority, eventually leading the colonists to break from Britain's control and embrace democracy. American colonial writers such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Jefferson adapted the ideals of the European Enlightenment to their own circumstances. In time, this new philosophy combined with a wave of religious enthusiasm called the Great Awakening. Preachers such as Jonathan Edwards called upon colonists to rededicate themselves to the original Puritan vision of sinless living, hard work, thrift, and responsibility, thus rekindling in the geographically and culturally diverse colonists a desire to be religious and ethical role models for all.

As the colonists began to question their relationship with Great Britain, many gifted minds turned to political writing. Between 1763 and 1783, about two thousand inexpensive pamphlets were published, reaching thousands of people and stirring debate and action. *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine was a key pamphlet that helped move the colonists to revolution. Paine's Enlightenment ideas were combined with the Puritan belief that America was destined to be a model of freedom to the world. Thomas Jefferson also wrote pamphlets, but his great contribution to American government, literature, and the cause of freedom throughout the world is the Declaration of Independence, in which he eloquently articulated the natural law that would govern America. This natural law is

COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION

In a small group, review the timeline and discuss which literary or historical events had the most impact.





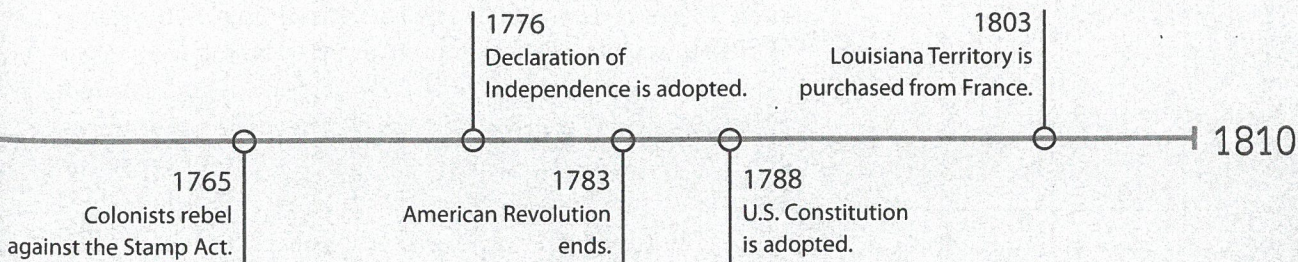
the idea that people are born with rights and freedoms and that it is the function of government to protect those freedoms.

Jefferson's Declaration marked the beginning of the colonies' independence, but it was the adoption of the Constitution of the United States of America in 1788 that created the lasting framework for an independent government and cemented the historical and literary legacies of its founders. Ideological debates over the scope and nature of federal power raged throughout the republic's early years. For example, in 1803 President Thomas Jefferson stirred controversy by purchasing the vast Louisiana Territory west of the Mississippi River from France, thus doubling the size of the United States. Jefferson, who normally favored a limited federal government, took this bold step even though the Constitution gave him no explicit authority to do so.

During the second half of the 18th century, the religious grip of the Puritans on New England began to relax as a new Yankee secular society emerged. In the early Colonial period, Puritan literary achievements were great, although they decried fiction and drama. As the Puritans saw their spiritual world view challenged by the political views of Enlightenment thinkers, even poetry sometimes examined political and social themes. Among the finest is the work of former slave Phillis Wheatley. In her poems and letters, Wheatley wrote of the "natural rights" of African Americans and pointed out the discrepancy between the colonists' "cry for freedom" and their enslavement of fellow human beings.

RESEARCH

What about this historical period interests you? Choose a topic, event, or person to learn more about. Then, add your own entry to the timeline.



Another voice calling for the rights of all citizens was Abigail Adams, whose husband John became the nation's second president. In letters written while the couple was apart, Adams encouraged her husband to include the rights of women in the nation's founding documents. Wheatley, Adams, and other women writers joined the Puritans and patriots who came before them to give us an understanding of the dreams and values that shaped our nation. All contributed their voices and ideals to building the metaphorical "city upon a hill" that Puritan preacher John Winthrop first envisioned as a beacon to all in 1630.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Choose the best answer to each question.

- 1 Why did the American colonists rebel against Britain?
 - A They didn't want to defend territory Britain had captured from the French.
 - B They didn't want to pay the costs of the French and Indian War.
 - C Britain tried to outlaw slavery in the colonies.
 - D Britain tried to keep Jefferson from buying the Louisiana Territory.

- 2 What type of publication became the major means of spreading political ideas?
 - F Books
 - G Almanacs
 - H Pamphlets
 - J Newspapers

- 3 What kind of writing did the Puritans disapprove of?
 - A Drama
 - B Poetry
 - C Sermons
 - D Letters