

1763-1774 IMPERIAL CRISIS

The 1763 Peace of Paris treaty ended a seven-year imperial war for control of North America. British colonists in America were hopeful. Their mother country now held title to French Canada, Spanish Florida, and Louisiana lands east of the Mississippi River. Victory surely meant a lasting peace, opportunities for expansion, and prosperity.

New conflicts soon arose between the colonists, British government, and indigenous tribes. The next decade in what historians call the "Imperial Crisis" transformed once proud "free Britons" into rebellious, independence-seeking Americans.

Here's how the events that led to an armed struggle for a new nation unfolded.



A map showing lands in North America claimed by the British and French governments in North America... 1774 (Library of Congress)

1763

February 10
Treaty of Paris ends the Seven Years War (known here as the French and Indian War) and transfers French territory to Great Britain.

October 7
King George III issues the Royal Proclamation Line of 1763 forbidding new settlement west of a line along the Appalachian Mountains.

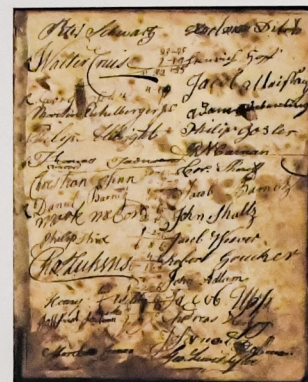
1775-1781 THE FIGHT FOR INDEPENDENCE

1775

March 22
One hundred and nine York County men form a military association. The Association of the First York Company was known as the York Blues.

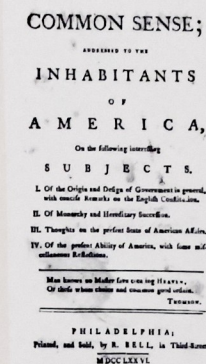
April 19
Patriot militias and British regulars engage in day-long battles outside Boston, beginning at dawn at Lexington. Fighting leaves sixty-five British dead and 180 wounded. Fifty Americans die and thirty-nine are wounded in the first major battle of the war.

May 10
Delegates from all 13 colonies meet in Philadelphia as the Second Continental Congress, the provisional government of the United Colonies of North America.



Muster Roll and Orderly Book, York County Associates & Militia, March 22, 1775 (VHC Library & Archives) See original document in the case on opposite wall.

...I KNOW NOT WHAT
COURSE OTHERS MAY
TAKE; BUT FOR ME,
GIVE ME LIBERTY, OR
GIVE ME DEATH.
-Patrick Henry, delegate to the
Virginia Second Convention,
March 23, 1775



(cover page) Common Sense...1776 (Library of Congress)

1776

January 10
Common Sense, a 47-page pamphlet, is published anonymously in Philadelphia. Its author (Thomas Paine) makes an impassioned call for independence from Britain.

March 17
British evacuate Boston under threat of bombardment by the Continental Army.

July 4
Congress unanimously ratifies the Declaration of Independence. Within days, York residents gather to hear it read.

THE CAUSE OF
AMERICA IS IN
GREAT MEASURE
THE CAUSE OF
ALL MANKIND.
-From Common Sense, 1776

1770

March 5
British troops fire on a Boston crowd, killing three (including Crispus Attucks) and wounding eight, two of whom would later die.



The bloody massacre perpetrated in King Street Boston... engraving by Paul Revere, 1770 (Library of Congress)

1774

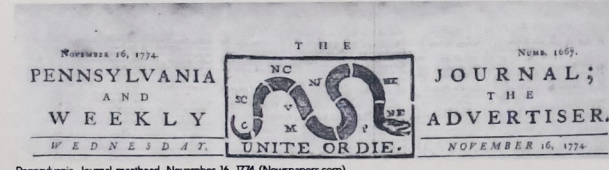
March 31
Parliament passes the first of five laws known as the Intolerable Acts to punish the colonies and Boston in the wake of its tea party.

September 5
Fifty-six delegates from 12 colonies meet in Philadelphia as a Continental Congress. They issue a Declaration of Rights on October 14 listing grievances and rights.

November 16
William Bradford adds the motto 'Unite or Die' to his newspaper's masthead. The image was first used by Benjamin Franklin in 1754 during the French and Indian War.



The able doctor, or, America swallowing the bitter draught, etching published in a London magazine, May 1774 (Library of Congress)



Pennsylvania Journal masthead, November 16, 1774 (Newspapers.com)



French etching of an idealized view of the battle, ca. 1784 (Library of Congress)



The Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker's Hill, oil on canvas by John Trumbull, 1854 (American Revolution Institute)

June 17
British troops drive American forces from Bunker Hill and Breed's Hill overlooking Boston. The patriots inflict heavy losses in defeat.

July 6
Congress adopts the Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking up Arms, written by Thomas Jefferson and John Dickinson, to explain the actions of the colonies.



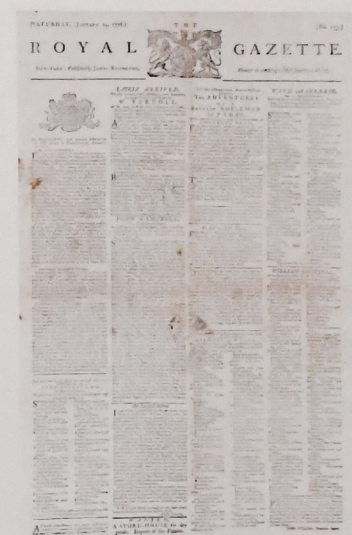
Thomas Paine, mezzotint by James Watson, 1783 (National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution)



First printing, Pennsylvania Evening Post (Phila.), July 6, 1776 (Newspapers.com)

August 22-30
British forces rout the Continental Army at the Battle of Long Island. Henry Miller's York Rifle Company helps American forces safely retreat.

November 16
General Howe's British army takes Fort Mifflin at the northern end of Manhattan Island. Among the 2,600 Americans captured are 400 soldiers from York County.



The Royal Gazette, Loyalist newspaper in British-held New York City, January 24, 1776 (Museum of the American Revolution)

1764

April 6
Parliament adopts a Sugar Act to regulate trade and raise revenue within the expanded empire.



No Stamp Act, American-made cast bronze political button, 1766 (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)

March 22
A stamp tax act is passed by Parliament to help finance the cost of defending the colonies in the late war, sparking protests.

1765

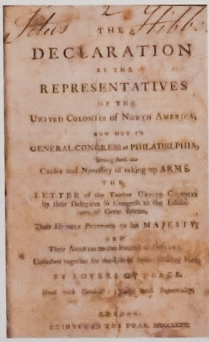


The Great Plague, or British Economy for the Years 1763, 1764, 1765, engraving published in London, 1765 (Library of Congress)

1773

December 16
Citizens of Boston protest a British tea tax, emptying into the harbor "every chest of tea aboard the three ships."

THIS DESTRUCTION OF THE TEA IS SO BOLD, SO DARING, SO FIRM, INTREPID AND INFLEXIBLE, AND IT MUST HAVE SO IMPORTANT CONSEQUENCES, AND SO LASTING, THAT I CANT BUT CONSIDER IT AS AN EPOCH IN HISTORY.
-John Adams' diary entry, December 17, 1773



The Declaration of the Representatives of the United Colonies of North America, 1775 (Lehigh University Library)

November 7
Virginia's royal governor Lord Dunmore signs a proclamation promising freedom for "indentured Servants, Negroes, or others" who join His Majesty's Troops.

December 31
American forces fail to capture Quebec in a major British victory that kills American General Richard Montgomery and wounds Benedict Arnold.

July 8
Congress sends an "Olive Branch Petition" to King George III affirming American loyalty to the crown. The king refuses to consider it.

July 25
York County Rifle Company arrives in Cambridge (MA) after a 25-day, 414-mile march. It is the first militia unit to arrive in response to George Washington's call for help. (By war's end, some 4,000 York County residents would serve.)



Plan of the operations of General Washington, against the Kings troops, London, 1777 (Library of Congress)

December 25-26
General Washington's army surprises Hessian troops in Trenton (NJ) after a daring overnight crossing of the ice-choked Delaware River. It is an inspiring victory amidst a series of American defeats.



Colonel George Baylor, miniature on ivory painted at Valley Forge by Charles Wilson Peale, Spring 1778 (The Society of the Cincinnati, Washington, D.C.)

...THE AGREEABLE (SIC) NEWS FROM GENL. WASHINGTON HAS GIVEN NEW LIFE & SPIRITS TO EVERYONE HERE.
-James Smith, York native and delegate to Congress writing from Baltimore to his wife, Eleanor Smith, in York Town, December 31, 1778.

November 1
Congress recommends December 16 be set aside "for solemn thanksgiving and praise" for the "big success over the enemies of these United States."

November 1
Congress adopts the Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union, creating a legal framework for governance of the new United States.

December 1
Washington moves his troops into winter quarters at Valley Forge. The camp includes to 400 women-wives, nurses, and laundresses who work for food and wages.

6

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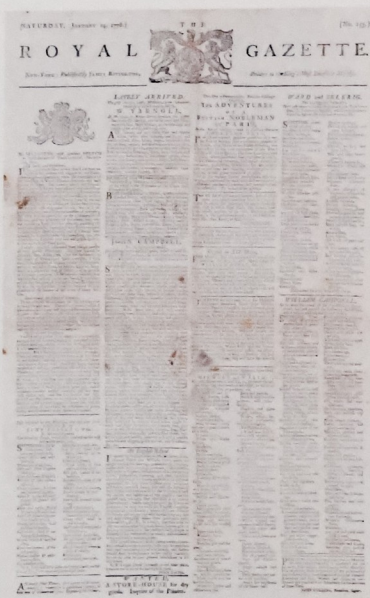
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The Royal Gazette, Loyalist newspaper in British-held New York City, January 24, 1778 (Museum of the American Revolution)



Colonel George Baylor, miniature on ivory painted at Valley Forge by Charles Wilson Peale, Spring 1778 (The Society of the Cincinnati, Washington, D.C.)

November 1

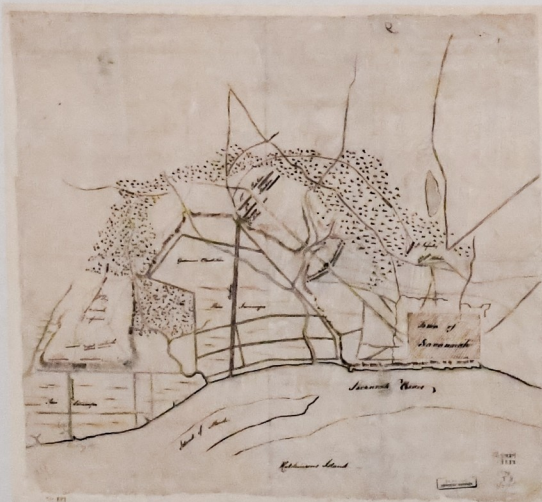
Congress recommends that December 18 be set aside "for solemn thanksgiving and praise" for the "signal success over the enemies of these United States."

November 15

Congress adopts the Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union, creating a legal framework for governance of the new United States.

December 19

Washington moves his troops into winter quarters at Valley Forge. The camp includes 250 to 400 women—wives, nurses, and laundresses who work for food and wages.



Taking of Savannah, manuscript map, 1778 (Library of Congress)

1777



George Washington at Princeton, oil on canvas by Charles Wilson Peale, 1779 (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts)



General Horatio Gates, oil on canvas by Charles Wilson Peale, 1782 (National Portrait Gallery)

January 3

Buoyed by its success at Trenton, Washington's army circles Lord Cornwallis's troops near Princeton and wins a minor victory. It's the third British defeat in ten days.

February 6

General Washington, finding smallpox spreading through his camp, gives an order "that the troops shall be inoculated."

June 14

Congress passes a resolution "That the flag of the thirteen United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation."



Benjamin Franklin, oil on canvas by John Trumbull, 1778 (Yale University Art Gallery)

June 18

The British evacuate Philadelphia and head to New York City, ending their nine-month occupation of America's largest city.

June 27

Continental Congress holds its last meeting in York Town's courthouse and prepares to resume its business in Philadelphia in early July.

June 28

British troops clash with a better trained Continental Army at the Battle of Monmouth (NJ). The Americans claim victory despite its inconclusive outcome.

July 6

The French fleet arrives in Delaware Bay. French, Spanish, and Dutch navies would help turn the tide of war in the Americans' favor.



Portrait of Heinrich Herbst by Lewis Miller, 1800 (YCHC Collection, Museum Purchase)

I AM EXCEEDING WELL SCITUATED WITH RESPECT TO A HOUSE & LODGINGS, THE LADY WITH WHOM I AM IS A MOST AGREEABLE, PLEASANT WOMAN.

—John Hancock, president of Congress, writing to his wife, Dorothy Hancock, October 1, 1777

1778

February 5

Prussian-born Friedrich von Steuben arrives in York Town seeking a Continental Army commission. Sent as a volunteer to Valley Forge, Von Steuben impresses Washington and is soon named temporary inspector general.

February 6

The American delegation in Paris, led by Benjamin Franklin, signs the Treaty of Amity and Commerce and Treaty of Alliance. It ensures military, financial, and material support for America. France soon declares war on Great Britain.

York Town, July 19.
ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD.
RAN AWAY last night from the subscriber, living in York-Town, a Negro Man named JACK, about twenty-five years of age, well set, knock knee'd, and walk very slubberly; had on and took with him when he went away, a grey nap coat, a yellow and blue striped jacket, a fine pair of overalls, a good pair of buckkin breeches, new shoes, a fine hat, and sundry tow shirts. He plays on the violin and German flute. It is supposed he is in company with a Negro Man belonging to Valentine Grantz, named Charles, as he ran away the same night. Whoever takes up said Negro and secures him in any goal, so that his matter may have him again, shall receive the above reward, paid by
MICHAEL SWOOPE.

Fugitive Slave Advertisement placed by Michael Swope of York Town in the Pennsylvania Packet (Philadelphia), July 27, 1779 (Newspapers.com)

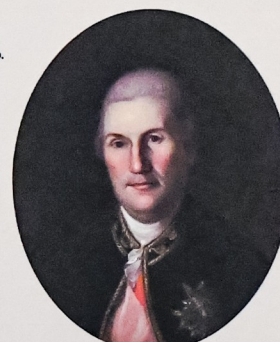
1779

February 14

American militia defeat Loyalist militia at the Battle of Kettle Creek, the first major American victory in the Georgia backcountry.

May 10–24

Royal Navy and British land forces conduct raids along the Chesapeake Bay, destroying ships and port facilities, military supplies, and tobacco.



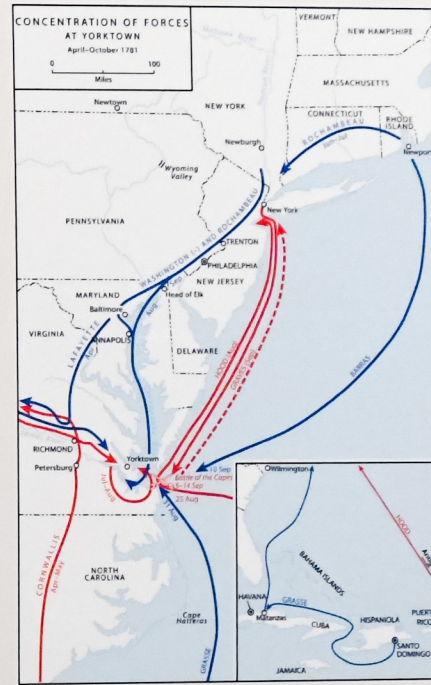
Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau, oil on canvas by Charles Wilson Peale, 1782 (Independence National Historical Park, National Park Service)

July 11

A French force of 7,000 under the command of the Comte de Rochambeau arrives in Rhode Island to support the American cause.

August 16

British General Charles Cornwallis win a major victory over General Horatio Gates' army at the Battle of Camden (SC). Baron de Kalb, who came to America with Lafayette, dies while saving his panicked troops during their retreat.



March to Victory: Washington, Rochambeau, and the Yorktown Campaign of 1781 (U.S. Army Center of Military History)

June 18 –

October 3

American General John Sullivan leads a scorched earth campaign against the Haudenosaunee, four nations of Iroquois people allied with the British. The army razes 40 villages, displacing 5,000 people.

September 7

Spain enters the war on the side of the United States. Spanish regulars joined by Acadian militia and native people capture Fort Bute in what is now southeast Louisiana.

September 16 –

October 18

American and French troops fail to retake Savannah. During an assault, Polish native Kazimierz Pulaski is mortally wounded.



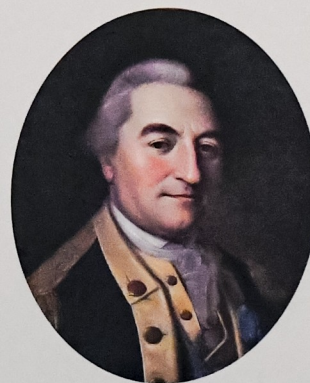
Brigadier General Casimir Pulaski, engraving, late 1800s (The New York Public Library)

December 22–24

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December 29

A British force of 3,100 takes Savannah (GA), part of the Crown's strategy to shift the war south. Many of the Continental Army and militia defenders are taken captive.



Major General Johann von Rabais de Kalb, oil on canvas by Charles Wilson Peale, 1781–1782 (Independence National Historical Park, National Park Service)

September 23

The treason of General Benedict Arnold is discovered. He eludes capture but fellow spy Major John Andre is caught and executed days later.

October 7

In a brief but bloody battle at King's Mountain (NC), backcountry Americans crush Loyalist militia killing 157, wounding 163, and taking 698 prisoners. The Patriots suffer 90 dead and wounded.

December 20

Britain declares war on the Dutch Republic, citing its support for the American war effort. It leaves them with no allies in Europe.

NEVER, PERHAPS, DID ANY MAN SUFFER DEATH WITH MORE JUSTICE, OR DESERVE IT LESS.
—Alexander Hamilton writing to John Laurens, around October 11, 1780



Surrender of the English Army at Yorktown—engraving by unknown (Virginia Museum of History and Culture)

AGREEABLE (SIC) NEWS THAT GENL WASHINGTON HAS A NEW LIFE & SPIRITS TO MOVE HERE.

—James Smith, York native and delegate to Congress, writing from Baltimore to his wife, Elizabeth Smith, in York Town, December 31, 1776.

1782-1783 TOWARDS A LASTING PEACE

1781 January 1

Soldiers of the Pennsylvania Line stage a mutiny in their camp near Morristown. They soon win concessions for better pay and housing conditions. After a later mutiny by New Jersey troops over similar issues, Washington has two of their leaders executed by firing squad.

January 17

At the Battle of Cowpens (SC). Continental troops and militia inflict the worst defeat of British forces since Saratoga in 1777.

March 1

Congress declares the Articles of Confederation as law of the land after receiving news of Maryland's assent — the final state to ratify.



MASSACRE OF THE CHRISTIAN INDIANS.
"Of the number thus cruelly murdered by the backwoodsmen of the upper Ohio, between fifty and sixty were women and children—some of them innocent babes."
From Henry Howe's Historical Collections of the Great West, 1852 (Wiki Commons)

1782

February 27

British House of Commons votes against further war with the United States, an informal recognition of American independence.

March 8

Pennsylvania militiamen rape, murder, and scalp ninety-six Native American Christian pacifist Moravians (mostly Lenape and Mohican) at the Moravian missionary village of Gnadenhuten in Ohio country.

September 11-13

Continental troops defending Fort Mifflin near present-day Wheeling (WVA) are besieged by Wyandot, Lenape, Shawnee, and Mingo warriors and a Loyalist unit.

October 7

The United States and Dutch Republic sign a treaty of trade and friendship. It followed Dutch recognition of the new nation secured six months earlier by John Adams.

November 30

The United States and Great Britain sign preliminary Articles of Peace. Britain agrees to withdraw its troops and recognize America's independence and national boundaries.

1783

June 20-24

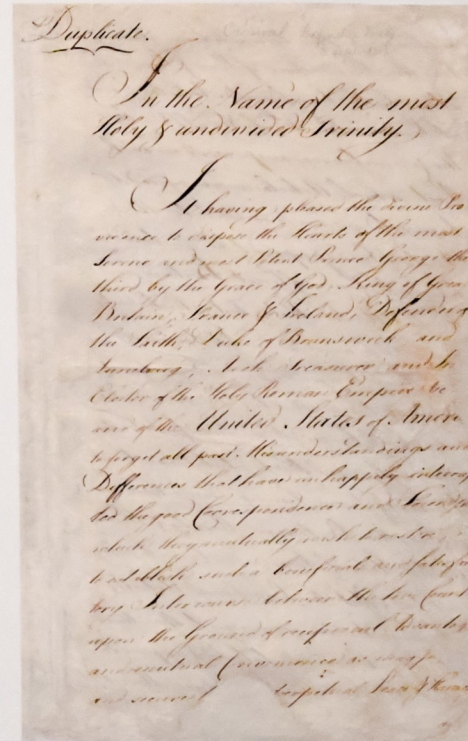
Continental soldiers mob the Pennsylvania State House demanding back pay. Frightened delegates to Congress flee Philadelphia, fearing for their safety. Washington sends 1,500 troops to quell what many call a mutiny.

September 3

The Treaty of Paris is signed, following two years of careful diplomacy. It officially ends the war and recognizes the former colonies as free, sovereign and independent states.

November 3

The Continental Army is disbanded as the first act of the Confederation Congress, the successor body to the Continental Congress.



(detail) Treaty of Paris, Article 1, recognizing the United States, September 1783 (National Archives and Records Administration)

November 25

British ships carrying troops and thousands of white and Black Loyalists leave New York harbor bound for Canada, the West Indies, and Great Britain.

December 23

George Washington resigns his military commission. The emotional ceremony in the Maryland State House, where Congress was meeting, set a powerful precedent for the peaceful transition of power for the fledgling nation.



General George Washington resigning his commission, December 23, 1783, oil on canvas by John Trumbull, 1822-1824 (Architect of the Capitol)

December 27

Eight men are wounded and one dies in a confrontation between Patriot militia and Loyalists at Cedar Bridge Tavern in Ocean County (NJ). It would be the war's final skirmish.



Allegorical painting depicting the Treaty of Friendship and Commerce between the States General of the United Netherlands and the United States... unknown artist, 1782-1785 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

March 15

British troops defeat a much larger American force under General Nathanael Greene at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse near Greensboro (NC). The victors suffer heavy losses—nearly a quarter of General Cornwallis's army—during the ninety-minute battle.

June 10

A combined French and American army, under the command of Rochambeau and Washington, march south toward Virginia. In August, the French fleet of 28 ships and 3,000 troops will sail north from the Caribbean.



March to Victory Washington, Rochambeau, and the Yorktown Campaign of 1781 (U.S. Army Center of Military History)

THUS HAS THE UNION,
BEGAN BY NECESSITY,
BEEN INDISSOLUBLY
CEMENTED.

—Pennsylvania Packet
newspaper (Philadelphia),
March 3, 1781

ANOTHER SUCH
VICTORY WOULD RUIN
THE BRITISH ARMY.

—Charles James Fox, Britain's Whig
Party leader, 1781

NEVER, PERHAPS, DID ANY MAN
SUFFER DEATH WITH MORE
JUSTICE, OR DESERVE IT LESS.

—Alexander Hamilton writing to John Laurens,
around October 11, 1780



Surrender of the English Army at Yorktown... engraving by unknown French artist, 1781 (Virginia Museum of History and Culture)

September 5

Admiral de Grasse's French fleet defeats the Royal Navy near the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. The British withdrawal leaves their army at Yorktown, VA without a resupply or evacuation option.

**September 28 -
October 19**

Washington and Rochambeau's troops join forces led by General Lafayette in Virginia. The Franco-American army of 14,000 surrounds Yorktown. After two weeks of heavy shelling, British General Cornwallis surrenders his 7,000 soldiers, 900 sailors, and 30 ships. Feigning illness, Cornwallis sends his second-in-command to offer his sword to Washington and Rochambeau.

O GOD! IT IS ALL OVER!

—British Prime Minister Frederick, Lord
North, upon learning of Cornwallis's
surrender on September 25, 1781

1783 THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The boundaries of the original thirteen American colonies now stretch beyond the Appalachian Mountains all the way to the Mississippi River. They include the homelands of many indigenous people.



An accurate map of the United States of America, with part of the surrounding provinces agreeable to the Treaty of Peace of 1783 (Boston Public Library)