Making War and Republican Governments

Chapter 6 - 1776–1789

Annotated Chapter Outline

The following annotated chapter outline will help you review the major topics covered in this chapter.

I. The Trials of War, 1776–1778

A. War in the North

1. Few observers thought that the rebels stood a chance of defeating the British; Great Britain had more people and more money with which to fight.

2. Few Indians supported the rebels; they were opposed to the expansion of white settlement.

3. The British were seasoned troops, and the Americans were militarily weak.

4. Prime Minister North assembled a large invasion force and selected General William Howe to lead it; North ordered Howe to capture New York City and seize control of the Hudson River to isolate the radical Patriots in New England from the other colonies.

5. General William Howe and his 32,000 British troops landed outside New York City in July 1776, just as the Continental Congress was declaring independence in Philadelphia.

6. Outgunned and outmaneuvered, the Continental army retreated across the Hudson to New Jersey, then across the Delaware River to Philadelphia.

7. The British halted their campaign for the winter months, which allowed the Continental army a few minor triumphs that still could not mask British military superiority.

B. Armies and Strategies

1. General Howe’s military strategy was one of winning the surrender of opposing forces, rather than destroying them; this tactic failed to stop the rebellion in its early stage.

2. General Washington’s strategy was to draw the British away from the seacoast, extending their supply lines and draining their morale in a war of attrition.

3. The Continental army drew most of its recruits from the lower ranks of society, the majority of whom fought for a bonus of cash and land rather than out of patriotism.

4. The Continental army was also poorly provisioned and armed.

5. Given all these handicaps, Washington was fortunate to escape an overwhelming defeat in the first year of the war.

C. Victory at Saratoga

1. The primary British goal, the isolation of New England, was to be achieved with the help of General John Burgoyne, a small force of Iroquois, and General Howe.

2. Howe had a scheme of his own; he wanted to attack Philadelphia—home of the Continental Congress—and end the rebellion with a single victory.

3. Although Howe took the city, the plan failed because Washington and his troops withdrew from Philadelphia, and the Continental Congress fled to the interior, determined to continue the fight.

4. After victory at Fort Ticonderoga, General Burgoyne, confident that his army would easily defeat the rebels, slowed his advance.

5. American militiamen cut British supply lines and surrounded Burgoyne’s forces near Saratoga, New York. After several skirmishes, Burgoyne surrendered to General Horatio Gates.

6. The American victory at Saratoga was the turning point of the war and virtually ensured the diplomatic success of a military alliance with France.

D. The Perils of War

1. Wartime difficulties after the victory at Saratoga included a British naval blockade that cut supplies of European manufactures, the occupation of Boston and other major cities, and rising unemployment for urban and rural workers.

2. Faced with a shortage of goods and rising prices, government officials began requisitioning goods directly from the people; women’s wartime efforts increased farm household productivity and also boosted their self-esteem (and prompted some women to expect greater rights in the new republican society).

3. Product scarcity contributed to inflation.

4. The fighting exposed tens of thousands of civilians to displacement and death. Soldiers from both armies looted, raped, and burned farms. Civilians on both sides punished those they deemed disloyal by imposing taxes, fines, and beatings.

E. Financial Crisis

1. On the brink of bankruptcy, the new state governments printed paper money that was worth very little.

2. Lacking the authority to impose taxes, the Continental Congress borrowed gold from France. When those funds were exhausted, Congress also printed currency and bills of credit, which quickly declined in value.

3. Inflation contributed to social unrest and rising fears that the rebellion would collapse.

F. Valley Forge

1. Farmers refused to sell their crops for worthless currency, even to the Continental army. Either out of pacifism or the hopes of higher prices, farmers hoarded their grains or accepted gold or silver for their crops that only the British could pay.

2. Military morale crumbled as the Continental army suffered from lack of necessities; the winter of 1777–1778 at Valley Forge took as many lives as two years of fighting.

3. To counter falling morale, Baron von Steuben instituted a system of drill and maneuver that shaped the smaller Continental army into a much tougher and better-disciplined force.

II. The Path to Victory, 1778–1783

A. The French Alliance

1. Although France and America were unlikely partners, the French were intent on avenging their loss of Canada to Britain in the French and Indian War.

2. Upon learning of the American victory at Saratoga, French foreign minister Comte de Vergennes sought a formal alliance with the Continental Congress.

3. The Treaty of Alliance of 1778 specified that neither France nor America would sign a separate peace agreement before America’s independence was ensured.

4. In return, American diplomats pledged that their government would recognize any French conquests in the West Indies.

5. Alliance with the French gave the American army access to supplies and money, strengthening the army and giving it new hope.

6. Upon the urging of Washington, Congress reluctantly agreed to grant officers half pay after the war for a period of seven years.

7. The war became increasingly unpopular in Britain.

8. In 1778, Parliament repealed the Tea and Prohibitory Acts and renounced its power to tax the colonies.

9. Due in part to America’s alliance with France, the Continental Congress rejected Britain’s offer to return to the constitutional condition that existed before the Sugar and Stamp Acts.

B. War in the South

1. Britain’s Southern Strategy

a. American allies had ulterior motives for joining the war: France concentrated its forces in the West Indies because it wanted to capture a rich sugar island; Spain loaned naval assistance because it wanted to regain Florida and Gibraltar.

b. The British strategy was to capture the rich tobacco and rice-growing colonies and to take advantage of racial divisions in the South.

c. The Revolution became a “triangular war” because the British as well as the Americans recruited slaves to their militaries.

d. By the end of 1779, Sir Henry Clinton and his men had reconquered Georgia, and in 1780, Lord Charles Cornwallis and his men took control of South Carolina.

e. The tide of the battle turned when another republican-minded European aristocrat, the Marquis de Lafayette, convinced Louis XVI to send French troops to America.

2. Guerilla Warfare in the Carolinas

a. General Nathanael Greene devised a new military strategy: divide the local militiamen into small groups with strong leaders so that they could harass the less mobile British.

b. Weakened by the war of attrition, the British retreated, hoping for a decisive victory in Virginia.

c. Abandoned by the British navy and surrounded by the French navy and Washington’s Continental army, Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown in October 1781.

d. Isolated diplomatically in Europe, stymied militarily in America, and lacking public support at home, Britain gave up prosecution of the war.

C. The Patriot Advantage

1. Angry members of Parliament demanded an explanation for how a mighty country such as Britain could be defeated by a motley colonial army; the ministry blamed the military leadership, pointing with some justification to a series of military blunders.

2. The Patriots had French support and, in George Washington, an inspired leader who kept morale from faltering and mobilized militiamen at crucial moments.

3. The American people, who tolerated inflation and depreciating paper currency, were crucial to victory.

D. Diplomatic Triumph

1. In the Treaty of Paris, signed in September 1783, Great Britain recognized independence of its seaboard colonies and relinquished claims to lands south of the Great Lakes.

2. This land, between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River, was the domain of undefeated, pro-British Indian peoples.

3. Leaving the Native Americans to their fate, British negotiators did not insist on a separate Indian territory. The Continental Congress and several states forced Indians to cede much of their land.

4. Other treaty provisions granted Americans North Atlantic fishing rights, forbade the British from “carrying away any negroes or other property,” and guaranteed freedom of navigation on the Mississippi to American citizens “forever.”

5. In return, the American government allowed British merchants to recover prewar debts and encouraged the state legislatures to return confiscated property to Loyalists and grant them citizenship.

6. The British made peace with France and Spain through the Treaty of Versailles.

7. Only Americans profited greatly from the treaties; they gained independence from Britain and access to the interior of the North American continent for settlement.

III. Creating Republican Institutions, 1776–1787

A. The State Constitutions: How Much Democracy?

1. Pennsylvania’s Controversial Constitution

a. In 1776, Congress urged Americans to suppress royal authority and establish new governing institutions by writing state constitutions to achieve republicanism.

b. The Declaration of Independence stated that governments derive “their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

c. Pennsylvania’s constitution abolished property owning as a test of citizenship, allowed all male taxpayers to vote and hold office, and created a unicameral (one-house) legislature with complete power.

d. John Adams denounced the Pennsylvania unicameral legislature as “so democratical that it must produce confusion and every evil work.”

2. Tempering Democracy

a. In his *Thoughts on Government* (1776), Adams devised a system of government that dispersed authority by assigning lawmaking, administering, and judging to separate branches; called for a bicameral (two-house) legislature in which the upper house, filled with property-owning men, would check the power of the popular majorities in the lower house; and proposed an elected governor with the power to veto laws and an appointed—not elected—judiciary to review them.

b. Conservative Patriots endorsed Adams’s system. The bicameral legislature emerged as the dominant branch of government, and state constitutions apportioned seats on the basis of population, but most states retained property qualifications for voting and office holding.

c. Only in Vermont and Pennsylvania were radical Patriots able to take power and create truly democratic institutions; yet in all the new states, representative legislatures had more power and the day-to-day politics became much more responsive to the demands of average citizens.

B. Women Seek a Public Voice

1. Upper-class women entered into the debate but remained second-class citizens unable to participate directly in politics.

2. Although not demanding equality to men, women sought legal equality such as owning property and signing contracts.

3. Most politicians ignored women’s requests, as did most men who insisted on traditional gender roles that empowered themselves.

4. The republican quest for educated citizenry provided the avenue for the most important advances made by American women.

C. The War’s Losers: Loyalists, Native Americans, and Slaves

1. While some Loyalist lands were either sold or given to Patriot tenants, in general the revolutionary upheaval did not alter the structure of rural communities.

2. Social turmoil was greatest in the cities, as Patriot merchants replaced Loyalists at the top of the economic ladder.

3. The war replaced a tradition-oriented economic elite—one that invested its profits from trade in real estate and became landlords—with a group of entrepreneurial-minded republican merchants who promoted new trading ventures and domestic manufacturing.

4. The Revolution inspired yeomen and upstart entrepreneurs to demand property rights and access to land in the West from their new republican state governments.

5. Native Americans challenged movement into the Ohio River Valley.

6. Southern planters articulated Revolutionary principles to defend their right to human property.

7. White Americans denied Native Americans and slaves the rights and liberties for which they had fought in the Revolution.

D. The Articles of Confederation

1. Continuing Fiscal Crisis

a. Congress approved in November 1777 the Articles of Confederation.

b. The Articles provided for a loose confederation in which each state retained its independence.

c. The confederation government had the authority to declare war and peace, make treaties, and adjudicate disputes between states, print money, and requisition funds from the states.

d. A major weakness under the Articles was that Congress lacked the authority to impose taxes.

e. Disputes between the states over land claims in the West delayed ratification of the Articles until 1781.

f. Robert Morris persuaded Congress to charter the Bank of North America in the hope that its notes would stabilize the inflated Continental currency.

g. The Confederation refused Morris’s proposal for an import duty to raise revenues for the national government.

h. Instead, Congress asserted the Confederation’s title to the trans-Appalachian west in order to sell it and raise revenue for the government.

2. The Northwest Ordinance

a. By 1784, Congress created the Southwest and Mississippi Territories, the future states of Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi, on lands ceded by North Carolina and Georgia. Slavery was allowed.

b. Congress established three ordinances that provided for orderly settlement of the “Old Northwest.” The Ordinance of 1784 created the principle of territories becoming states, and the Land Ordinance of 1785 inaugurated the rectangular-grid survey system and specified a minimum price of $1 an acre.

c. The 1787 Northwest Ordinance outlined the step-by-step process territories had to follow to become states and outlawed slavery north of the Ohio River.

d. These ordinances provided for orderly settlement in the West while reducing the prospect of dependent “colonies” of the states. But they also contributed to future rift over slavery and conflict with Native Americans.

E. Shays’s Rebellion

1. In the East, peace brought recession; the British Navigation Acts barred Americans from trading with the British West Indies, and low-priced British goods flooded American markets.

2. State governments were saddled with large war debts in the form of bonds, which speculators demanded state governments redeem quickly and at full value, a policy that required high taxes; yet yeomen farmers and artisans, hard hit by the postwar recession, demanded and were given tax relief.

3. To assist indebted yeomen, many states printed more paper currency and passed laws allowing debtors to pay their creditors in installments.

4. The lack of such debtor-relief legislation in Massachusetts provoked an armed uprising led by Captain Daniel Shays known as Shays’s Rebellion—a struggle against taxes imposed by an unresponsive government that resembled American resistance to the British Stamp Act.

5. To preserve its authority, Massachusetts passed the Riot Act outlawing illegal assemblies.

6. Governor James Bowdoin’s military force dispersed Shays’s dwindling army during the winter of 1786**–**1787.

7. Many middling Patriot families who had suffered during the war believed that they had traded one kind of tyranny for another; others feared the fate of the republican experiment and called for a stronger national government.

IV. The Constitution of 1787

A. The Rise of a Nationalist Faction

1. Money questions dominated the postwar agenda, and officials looked at them from a national rather than a state perspective and became advocates of a stronger central government.

2. Without tariff revenues, Congress could not pay the interest on foreign debt, but key commercial states in the North and most planters in the South opposed national tariffs.

3. In order to prevent another internal conflict such as Shays’s Rebellion, nationalists in Congress called for a convention in Philadelphia and a revision of the Articles of Confederation.

B. The Philadelphia Convention

1. The Virginia and New Jersey Plans

a. In May 1787, delegates from every state except Rhode Island arrived in Philadelphia; most were “monied men” who supported creditors’ property rights and a central government.

b. John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Sam Adams, and Patrick Henry did not attend the convention. Nationalists were able to control the agenda.

c. Delegates elected George Washington as presiding officer and, to forestall popular opposition, voted to deliberate in secret.

d. The delegates decided not to revise the Articles of Confederation and instead considered James Madison’s Virginia Plan for national government.

e. Madison’s plan favored national authority, called for a national government that drew its authority from all the people and had direct power over them, and proposed a three-tier election system in which the people would elect only the lower house of the legislature.

f. The plan had two fatal flaws: most state politicians and citizens resolutely opposed the national government’s vetoing of state laws, and small states objected because they would have less influence than larger states.

g. Delegates from the small states preferred the New Jersey Plan, which strengthened the Confederation by giving it the power to raise revenue, control commerce, and make binding requisitions on the states. But it preserved the states’ control over their own laws and guaranteed their equality.

h. A bare majority of delegates passed the Virginia Plan, but the final plan had to be acceptable to existing political interests and social groups.

2. The Great Compromise

a. Delegates accepted the “Great Compromise” wherein the Senate would seat two members from each state, while seats in the House would be appointed on the basis of population.

b. The convention vested the judicial powers of the United States “in one supreme Court” and left the national legislature to decide whether to establish lower courts.

c. The convention did not interfere with state-set voting requirements, gave states the authority to elect members of the Senate, and placed the selection of the president in an electoral college chosen on a state-by-state basis.

3. Negotiations over Slavery

a. Gouverneur Morris forced debate over slavery through advocating protection of property rights but denying the legitimacy of feudal dues and slavery.

b. Southern planters succeeded in denying Congress the power to regulate slavery for twenty years.

c. To pacify southern slave owners, delegates agreed to a “fugitive clause” that allowed masters to reclaim enslaved blacks—or white indentured servants—who took refuge in other states; to mollify antislavery sentiment in the northern states, the delegates did not give slavery national legal recognition by explicitly mentioning it in the Constitution (which spoke instead of citizens and “all other Persons”); delegates also agreed to count three-fifth of all slaves toward representation as well as taxation, resulting in slave states influencing national politics until 1860.

4. National Authority

a. The Constitution was to be the “supreme” law of the land, and the national government held power over taxation, military defense, external commerce, and the making of laws.

b. The Constitution, signed on September 17, 1787, mandated that the United States honor the national debt and restricted the ability of state governments to assist debtors.

C. The People Debate Ratification

1. The Antifederalists

a. The Constitution would go into effect upon ratification by special conventions in at least nine of the thirteen states.

b. Nationalists began calling themselves Federalists and launched a political campaign supporting the proposed Constitution through pamphlets and newspaper articles.

c. Antifederalists opposed the Constitution, feared losing their power at the state level, dreaded elite rule, and pointed out that the document lacked a declaration of individual rights.

d. Well-educated Americans with a traditional republican outlook wanted the nation to remain a collection of small sovereign republics tied together only for trade and defense.

2. Federalists Respond

a. The Federalists pointed out that national authority would be divided among a president, a bicameral legislature, and a judiciary; each branch would “check and balance” the others and so preserve liberty.

b. Madison suggested that a republic was feasible in a large country because a multitude of special interests would prevent a single faction from becoming a dominant or oppressive power.

3. The Constitution Ratified

a. The Constitution won quick ratification in Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, and Connecticut. Maryland, South Carolina, and New Hampshire followed during the spring of 1788.

b. After much debate, Massachusetts, Virginia and New York ratified the Constitution because Federalists promised to add a national bill of rights.

c. Most Americans accepted the results of the ratifying conventions, reflecting their respect for republican principles of popular sovereignty and majority rule.

d. Unlike the French Revolution, the American Constitutional Revolution of 1787 did not result in mob violence.