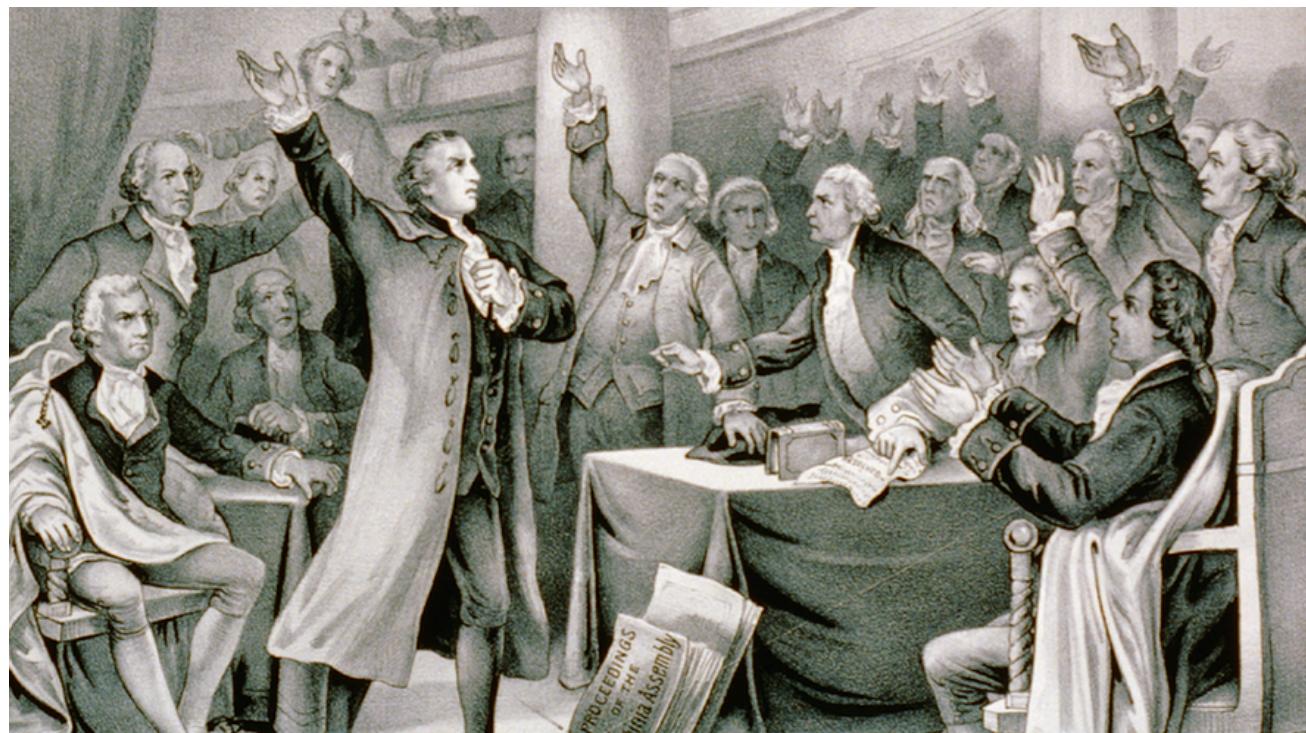


War of Words Erupts into the American Revolution

By USHistory.org, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.27.17

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Level **860L**



Patrick Henry (left, foreground) delivering his famous speech on the rights of the colonies before the Virginia Assembly on March 23, 1775. He concluded his speech with "give me liberty or give me death!" which became a battle cry of the Revolutionary War. Photo from Library of Congress

"No taxation without representation!"

"Give me liberty or give me death!"

These famous words touched off the American Revolution. Many American colonists felt they had no freedom under British rule. Others were not sure if they supported independence. Then they heard the powerful words of patriots such as Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson. Their words changed the minds of many colonists.

The words in the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the Articles of Confederation created the United States of America.

The Declaration of Independence

In the 1770s, the relationship between Britain and the American colonies was getting worse. The colonies called a series of meetings. On July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was signed, giving birth to the United States. Thomas Jefferson was a delegate from Virginia and wrote the Declaration of Independence. It was mainly a list of complaints against the king of England.

The Declaration of Independence said that governments exist to ensure the liberty of the people. Governments also get their powers from the people. Since the British had trampled on the colonists' rights, they had the right to declare their independence.

The Revolution and the Articles of Confederation

The British, of course, did not agree and continued to send troops to stop the rebellion. The war lasted until 1783, and the new American government began before it ended. The Articles of Confederation is the document that joined the 13 colonies and created the first government in the new nation. The agreement was America's first Constitution. It was written in 1776, but was not approved by the states until 1781.

Above all, the colonists wanted to preserve their liberties. The Articles of Confederation was a reaction to the tyranny of King George III, and it turned out to be a disaster. It gave most of the power to the states. The federal government had no power and only could pass laws. It could not control trade or keep the states from printing their own money. The head of the government could not make any real decisions, and there was no national court to settle disputes among states. Perhaps most importantly, the states could not organize to fight a war together or pay the debts once it was over.

Shays' Rebellion and the Constitution

By 1786, the new country was in serious trouble and states were quarreling over boundary lines and taxes. A weak economy left the states hurting. Also, many ordinary citizens, such as farmers and merchants, owed a lot of money as well. The farmers were being asked to pay high taxes, but their crops had been ruined during the revolution and they owed money too. They had to borrow money to build new farms. Shays' Rebellion was a revolt by angry farmers in western Massachusetts against the government.

It was an example of the chaos in the country. The Massachusetts militia finally put down the rebellion, but the incident showed that the government could not maintain law and order. The new country needed a stronger government. In 1787, Alexander Hamilton of New York began organizing a meeting in Philadelphia. This convention would eventually throw out the Articles of Confederation and write the Constitution.

In the end, the colonists created a government that preserved their liberties. Yet it could not keep law and order. Its failure helped the Founding Fathers create the perfect balance between liberty and order within the U.S. Constitution.