

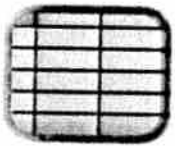
3.4 Fighting for Independence

How did the United States manage to win the Revolutionary War?

Explore

Civilians Pitch In

How did civilian colonists support the Revolution?



Americans' faith in their cause wavered after early British victories and the capture of major cities such as Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. Supplies were tough to obtain, and the soldiers had to endure grueling conditions. In response, just as Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* had spurred Americans to declare independence, Paine's pamphlet series *The American Crisis* energized the **Patriot** cause throughout the Revolution.

"These are the times that try men's souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman..."

—Thomas Paine, *The American Crisis*, 1776

The winter of 1777–1778 was a particularly rough time for Washington's troops, who were quartered at **Valley Forge**, about 20 miles west of Philadelphia, in Pennsylvania. Not only were food supplies inadequate, but there was insufficient fuel for fires to keep the barracks warm. There was also a shortage of boots, and some soldiers had only rags for clothes. **George Washington**'s success in keeping this army together—and persuading soldiers not to desert—contributed to his reputation as a great leader.

The soldiers in the **militias** and the **Continental Army** were all men except for a handful of women who disguised themselves and kept their gender secret. But these were not the only women contributing to the Revolutionary cause. Women did essential work to supply the troops. They made clothing, including winter coats. They ran family farms and businesses while husbands and sons were away fighting. They

collected and communicated information about troop movements.

Women also worked and lived under fire. Molly Pitcher was a nickname for women who assisted on the battlefield. Molly Pitchers traveled with the troops, serving as cooks, seamstresses, and nurses. They also distributed gunpowder and brought water to troops on the battlefield.

Probably the most famous Molly Pitcher was **Mary Ludwig Hays**. Hays followed her husband's regiment to help cook and take care of wounded soldiers. During the Battle of Monmouth, Mary took over her husband's cannon after he was injured. She fought throughout the entire battle, which the Americans won. Afterward, she was appointed sergeant and put on the regular army payroll.

Phillis Wheatley was enslaved at the age of seven or eight and lived in the north. Unlike nearly all other slaves, Phillis was taught by her masters to read and write. And unlike many other writers, Wheatley was successful enough during her lifetime to earn a living as a writer. She wrote poetry in praise of George Washington and the Revolution. Washington called her poetry "a striking proof of your great poetical Talents."

Civilians also provided financial assistance to the often cash-strapped American government. Haym Salomon, a Polish-born Jewish immigrant, negotiated with the French to secure financial aid for the American war effort. Solomon also personally gave interest-free loans to individual American leaders such as James Madison, as well as to the American military. Many of these loans were never repaid.

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Divided Loyalties

What roles did African Americans play in the Revolutionary War?

The British actively recruited **Loyalists** and enslaved people to serve in their armies. The royal governor of Virginia even issued a proclamation promising freedom to any enslaved people who fought for the British. Many had escaped from American farms when their owners fled from the British Army. They chose to fight for the British because they believed—or at least hoped—that Britain would protect their freedom better than the American colonists had. Others were enslaved people who were forcibly enlisted by their Loyalist “owners.”

On the colonists' side, African American soldiers had been fighting in the state **militias** since the start of the war. After 1776, when, in desperate need of soldiers, General Washington lifted the ban on black enlistment, at least 5,000 African American soldiers also served in the **Continental Army**.

Peter Salem was an African American soldier from Massachusetts. Salem played a vital role in the **Battle of Bunker Hill** when he shot Major John Pitcairn. When Pitcairn was lost, the British were sent into chaos, allowing the Americans time to retreat. Salem continued to fight in the war until it was over.

One man, **James Armistead**, was recognizable on both sides. An enslaved man, Armistead received permission from his owner to join the regiment of **Marquis de Lafayette**. He asked to join as Lafayette's servant, but the Marquis believed Armistead would be more useful as a spy. Armistead infiltrated the camp of British General Lord **Charles Cornwallis**, who then hired Armistead to spy for the British—making him a colonial double agent. Armistead allowed the Americans to find out about the fortifications at **Yorktown**, leading to the final battle of the war.

While many enslaved people on both sides were promised freedom for their roles, only a few were granted full **emancipation**. James Armistead had a letter written by Lafayette declaring him a brave hero who deserved freedom. It still took two years for him to be freed from slavery.

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Native Americans Choose Sides

How did Native Americans participate in the Revolutionary War?

Because the Revolutionary War took place on the Native Americans' homeland, it directly affected their lives. Yet there was much division between different Native American communities over which side to support in the conflict.

A few Native American nations, mainly in the northeastern parts of the country, were on friendly terms with colonists. But the majority of Native Americans did not want to encourage colonial expansion westward. Because England had sought to protect Native American lands from settlers, many Native Americans found it easier to back the British. They used their knowledge of the land to help the English armies. Many who had fought against the British in the French and Indian War remained hostile to Britain and chose to help the Americans.

About 1,500 Iroquois fought for the British throughout the war. One was Joseph Brant, whose native name was Thayendanegea. Brant was a Mohawk warrior who led four of the six nations of the Iroquois Confederacy into the war. He was educated at an Anglican missionary school in Connecticut and was the brother-in-law of the British superintendent of Indian Affairs. He had built a reputation as a skilled warrior. Colonists feared him after his raid on Cherry Valley, New York, in 1778, known as the Cherry Valley Massacre.