

Canada & the American Revolution

The American Revolution was the result of a clash of rival ideas—the Thirteen Colonies wanted liberty (democracy) whereas the British wanted to maintain control (hegemony).

In 1759, the French threat in North America was gone. Therefore, the Thirteen Colonies felt comfortable asking England for more decision-making authority (or autonomy). However, the British were strong believers in tradition and monarchy. Thus, in an attempt to show the Americans who had authority Britain imposed a series of new taxes on the Thirteen Colonies. The Seven Years' War had nearly bankrupted Britain. The taxes weren't passed solely to show the Americans who was in control but also to pay off Britain's debts. These taxes eventually became known collectively by American colonists as the so-called "Intolerable Acts".

Most Colonists did not actually disagree with paying taxes. They just wanted some say in how their tax dollars were spent. To that end the colonists asked that they be given some representation in Westminster (Britain's legislative assembly). By the mid-1760s American journalists started writing articles entitled *No Taxation without Representation!* The Americans reasoned that if they had a duty to pay taxes they also had a right to decide how the money was spent. Britain denied all the American requests to elect representatives to Westminster. The British Empire was the most powerful empire on the globe at the time; therefore, it was laughable to the British to allow these puny colonists to have any direct say in the making of either imperial or domestic policy. The Crown, and not democratic representatives, would decide what was best for British North America.

The Thirteen Colonies refused to accept Britain's policy. Thus, the Americans established a representative body called the First Continental Congress in 1774. Congress was made up of representatives from each of the Thirteen Colonies. The Continental Congress was established so that the colonies could demonstrate their collective desire for reform to the Crown. Several members of Congress sailed for England in 1774 to press their case before Westminster. Westminster refused to listen. To demonstrate their resolve the British actually enacted several more measures to put the colonies in their place. One measure in particular, e.g. *Quebec Act (1774)*, etc. was a complete insult to America's honor. This is because the *Quebec Act* expanded Quebec's boundaries at the expense of the Thirteen Colonies; moreover, the act guaranteed the French language and the right of the French to religious freedom. This was a hard pill for a Protestant, French hating American public to accept.

Britain's repressive measures did not pacify the Americans. Instead, Britain's policies convinced most reasonable Americans a diplomatic solution with Great Britain was impossible. Interestingly, it appears the First Continental Congress didn't really believe Britain would listen to American demands for autonomy anyways. In 1774, the First Continental Congress not only sent a delegation to Westminster but also an open letter to Quebec entitled *An Appeal to the Inhabitants of Quebec*. The letter was an attempt by Congress to persuade the Canadiens to make common cause with them against Britain. The Canadiens, however, did not trust the Americans, e.g. attacks on New France during the Colonial Wars always started from the Thirteen Colonies; American colonists had always been outspokenly anti-French and anti-Catholic; and as recently as 1773 American newspapers were publishing stories calling for the destruction of Quebec and the removal of the French from North American soil. So it was not surprising that the majority of Canadiens rejected the American offer at an alliance. To the French Britain was the lesser of two evils; moreover, Britain's timely passage of the *Quebec Act* in 1774 had the desired effect on Canadiens, i.e. the French refused to risk their legal gains by supporting America in a war against one of the world's great empires. In 1775, the Thirteen Colonies called a Second Continental Congress and began preparing for war with the Mother Country and the invasion of Quebec.

The Invasion of Quebec

In 1775, the Second Continental Congress approved General George Washington's plan to invade Canada. Washington appointed General Richard Montgomery and Colonel Benedict Arnold to strike at Montreal and Quebec City respectively. Quebec was an important military objective. If it could be captured, the British would be denied a staging point from which to launch raids against the interior of the Thirteen Colonies. Montgomery first had to capture Fort St. Jean before he could proceed on to Montreal. If he didn't, his lines of supply would be surely cut off. Despite being outnumbered by the Americans, the British defenders of the fort were able to hold out for several weeks. Every week the defenders delayed Montgomery the closer winter came. Once Fort St. Jean was taken the Americans moved on to Montreal (which gave up without firing a shot). Governor Carleton disguised himself escaping Montreal and making his way to Quebec City to prepare its defenses. Initially, the Americans were greeted in Montreal as "liberators." However, as the occupation dragged on the Americans started to mistreat the Canadiens, e.g. General Montgomery was forced to take what he needed from the French people. The French consequently came to hate the occupying Americans.

While Montgomery was in Montreal, Colonel Arnold was making his way overland to attack Quebec City. The overland journey ended up taking longer than expected. Arnold's troops were beset by hunger, disease, and low morale. Moreover, the winter was fast approaching. In December, 1775, the two American armies converged on Quebec City. The Americans grew desperate as the winter snows arrived and their supplies dwindled to nothing.

The Americans made the fateful decision to attack Quebec City during the first snow storm. They hoped to take advantage of the cover offered by the storm and overwhelm the defenders by striking at one of the vulnerable points in the crumbling walls of the city. The American attack could not have gone more wrong: the English had prior knowledge of the American plan, Montgomery was killed in the first few moments of the battle, and Arnold's men walked into a trap which he himself barely escaped. The invasion proved unsuccessful and the Americans were forced to withdraw. On July 4th, 1776, America formally declared its independence from England by issuing the *Declaration of Independence*. Likewise Canada remained independent of the United States.