

At age eighteen, all American citizens are eligible to vote in state and national elections. This has not always been the case. It took an amendment to the U.S. Constitution—one of only seventeen that have been added since ratification of the Bill of Rights in 1791—to guarantee the vote in national elections to those younger than twenty-one years of age.

In 1942, during World War II, Representative Jennings Randolph (D-WV) proposed a constitutional amendment that would lower the voting age to eighteen, believing that since young men were old enough to be drafted, go to war, and fight and die for their country, they also should be allowed to vote. He continued to reintroduce his proposal during every session of Congress and in 1954 President Dwight D. Eisenhower endorsed the idea in his State of the Union Address. Presidents Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon—men who had also called upon the nation's young men to fight on foreign shores—echoed his appeal.¹

During the 1960s, the campaign to lower the voting age took on a new sense of urgency as the draft sent hundreds of thousands of young men to fight in the unpopular war in Vietnam, and thousands of men and women were killed in action. "Old Enough to Fight, Old Enough to Vote" was one popular slogan of the day. By 1970, four states—the U.S. Constitution allows states to set the eligibility requirements for their voters—had lowered their voting ages to eighteen. Later that year, Congress passed legislation lowering the voting age in national, state, and local elections to eighteen.

The state of Oregon, however, challenged the constitutionality of the law in court, arguing that the Constitution did not give Congress the authority to establish a uniform voting age in state and local government elections. The U.S. Supreme Court agreed.² The decision from the divided Court meant that those under age twenty-one could vote in national elections but that the states were free to prohibit them from voting in state and local elections. The decision presented the states with a logistical nightmare. States setting the voting age at twenty-one would be forced to keep two sets of registration books: one for voters twenty-one and over and one for voters under twenty-one.

Jennings Randolph, by then a senator from West Virginia, reintroduced his proposed amendment to lower the national voting age to eighteen.³ Within three months of the Supreme Court's decision, Congress sent the proposed Twenty-Sixth Amendment to the states for their ratification. The required three-fourths of the states approved the amendment within three months—making its adoption on June 30, 1971, the quickest in the history of the constitutional amending process.



The Framers never intended the U.S. Constitution to be easily changed. They made the amendment process time consuming and difficult. Over the years, thousands of amendments—including those to prohibit child labor, provide equal rights for women, grant statehood to the District of Columbia, balance the federal budget, and ban flag burning—have been debated or sent to the states for approval, only to die slow deaths. Only twenty seven amendments have made their way into the Constitution. What the Framers wrote in Philadelphia has continued to work, in spite of increasing demands on and dissatisfaction with our national government. Although Americans often clamor for reform, perhaps they are happier with the system of government created by the Framers than they realize. The ideas that went into the making of the Constitution and the ways it has evolved to address the problems of a growing and changing nation form the core of our discussion in this chapter.

New World

The Western Hemisphere of Earth, also called The Americas, which was unknown to Europeans before 1492.

Benjamin Franklin

A brilliant inventor and senior statesman at the Constitutional Convention who urged colonial unity as early as 1754, twenty-two years before the Declaration of Independence.

French and Indian War

The American phase of what was called the Seven Years War, fought from 1754 to 1763 between Britain and France with Indian allies.

mercantilism

An economic theory designed to increase a nation's wealth through the development of commercial industry and a favorable balance of trade.

ROOTS OF THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

2.1 Identify the causes of the American Revolution and the ideals on which the United States and the Constitution are based.

Beginning in the early seventeenth century, colonists came to the **New World** for a variety of reasons. Often, they sought a new start on a continent where land was plentiful or saw business opportunities to be gained in the New World. Others wished to escape religious persecution. The independence and diversity of the settlers in the New World complicated the question of how best to rule the new colonies. Almost all of the colonists agreed that the king ruled by divine right, but British monarchs allowed the colonists significant liberties in terms of self-government, religious practices, and economic organization. For 140 years, this system worked fairly well.⁴ By the early 1750s, however, after a century and a half of physical separation, development of colonial industry and relative self-governance by the colonies led to weakening ties with—and loyalties to—the Crown.

As early as 1754, at the urgings of **Benjamin Franklin**, more than twenty representatives from the Mid-Atlantic and Northern colonies met in Albany, New York. Their chief concern was their role in the **French and Indian War** being fought in the colonies between the French and English. The resultant Albany Plan of Union, however, was rejected by the states but bits found their way into the Articles of Confederation.

By the early 1760s, each of the thirteen colonies had drafted its own constitution, which provided the fundamental rules or laws by which it operated. Moreover, many of the most oppressive British traditions—feudalism, a rigid class system, and the absolute authority of the king—were absent in the colonies. Land was abundant. The guild and craft systems that severely limited entry into many skilled professions in Great Britain were not part of life in the colonies because individuals could freely pursue skilled crafts. And, although religion was central to the lives of most colonists, no single state church existed, so the colonists did not follow the British practice of compulsory tithing (giving a fixed percentage of one's earnings to the state-sanctioned and state-supported church).

Trade and Taxation

Mercantilism, an economic theory designed to increase a nation's wealth through the development of commercial industry and a favorable balance of trade, justified Britain's maintenance of strict import/export controls on the colonies. From 1650 until well into the 1700s, Britain tried to control colonial imports and exports, believing it critical to export more goods than it imported as a way of increasing the gold and silver in its treasury. Britain found it difficult to enforce these policies, however, and the colonists, seeing little self-benefit in their operation, widely ignored them.

This fragile arrangement was soon put to the test. The French and Indian War, fought from 1754 to 1763 on the western frontier of the colonies and in Canada, was part of a global war initiated by the British—then the greatest power in the world. This American phase of what was called the Seven Years War was fought between Britain and France with American Indians as French allies. To raise money to pay for the war as well as the expenses of administering the colonies, Parliament enacted the Sugar Act in 1764. This act placed taxes on sugar, wine, coffee, and other products commonly exported to the colonies. A postwar colonial depression heightened resentment of the tax. Major protest, however, failed to materialize until imposition of the Stamp Act by the British Parliament in 1765. This law required that all paper items—from playing cards to books—bought and sold in the colonies carry a stamp mandated by the Crown. The colonists feared this act would establish

a precedent for the British Parliament not only to control commerce in the colonies but also to raise revenues from the colonists without approval of the colonial governments. The political cry “no taxation without representation” rang out across the colonies. To add insult to injury, in 1765, Parliament passed the Quartering Act, which required colonists to furnish barracks or provide living quarters within their own homes for British troops.

Most colonists, especially those in New England, where these acts hit merchants hardest, were outraged. Men throughout the colonies organized the Sons of Liberty and women formed the Daughters of Liberty. Protests against the Stamp Act were violent and loud. Riots, often led by the Sons of Liberty, broke out. These were especially violent in Boston, where an angry mob burned the colonial governor’s home and protesters threatened British stamp agents charged with collecting the tax. The outraged colonists also organized a boycott of goods needing the stamps as well as a boycott of British imports.

First Steps Toward Independence

In 1765, at the urging of **Samuel Adams**, nine of the thirteen colonies sent representatives to a meeting in New York City where they drafted a detailed list of Crown violations of the colonists’ fundamental rights. Known as the **Stamp Act Congress**, this gathering was the first official meeting of the colonies and the first step toward creating a unified nation. Attendees defined what they thought to be the proper relationship between colonial governments and the British Parliament; they ardently believed Parliament had no authority to tax them without colonial representation in that body, yet they still remained loyal to the king. In contrast, the British believed that direct representation of the colonists was impractical and that members of Parliament represented the best interests of all the British, including the colonists who were British subjects.

The Stamp Act Congress and its petitions to the Crown did little to stop the onslaught of taxing measures. Parliament did, however, repeal the Stamp Act and revise the Sugar Act in 1766, largely because of the uproar made by British merchants who were losing large sums of money as a result of the boycotts. Rather than appeasing the colonists, however, these actions emboldened them to increase their resistance. In 1767, Parliament enacted the Townshend Acts, which imposed duties on all kinds of colonial imports, including tea. Responses from the **Sons and Daughters of Liberty** was immediate. Protesters announced another boycott of tea, and almost all colonists gave up their favorite drink in a united show of resistance to the tax and British authority.⁵ Tensions continued to run high, especially after the British sent 4,000 troops to Boston. On March 5, 1770, British troops opened fire on an unruly mob that included disgruntled dockworkers, whose jobs had been taken by British soldiers, and members of the Sons of Liberty, who were taunting the soldiers and throwing objects at British sentries stationed in front of the Boston Customs House where taxes were collected. The troops killed five colonists, including **Crispus Attucks**, an African American and the first American to die in the early days of unrest before the Revolution, in what became known as the Boston Massacre. The Massacre and Revere’s print are credited with transforming public opinion. Following this confrontation, the British Parliament lifted all duties except those on tea. The tea tax, however, continued to be a symbolic irritant. To keep this revolutionary fervor going, in 1772, at the suggestion of Samuel Adams, colonists created the Committees of Correspondence to keep each other abreast of developments with the British.

Meanwhile, despite dissent in Britain over treatment of the colonies, Parliament passed another tea tax designed to shore up the sagging sales of the East India

Samuel Adams

Cousin of President John Adams and an early leader against the British and loyalist oppressors; he played a key role in developing the Committees of Correspondence and was active in Massachusetts and colonial politics.

Stamp Act Congress

A gathering of nine colonial representatives in 1765 in New York City where a detailed list of Crown violations was drafted; first official meeting of the colonies and the first official step toward creating a unified nation.

Sons and Daughters of Liberty

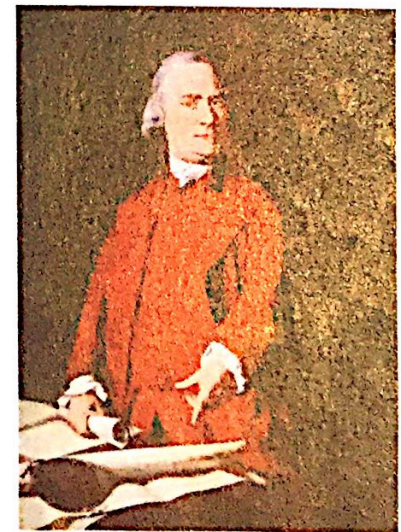
Loosely organized groups of patriotic American colonists who were early revolutionaries.

Crispus Attucks

An African American and first American to die in what became known as the Boston Massacre in 1770.

WHY WAS SAMUEL ADAMS IMPORTANT?

Samuel Adams (1722–1803), cousin of President John Adams, was an early leader against the British and loyalist oppressors. He played a key role in developing the Committees of Correspondence and was active in Massachusetts and colonial politics. Today, he is known for the beer that bears his name, which is ironic, considering he bankrupted his family’s brewery business.



WHAT REALLY HAPPENED AT THE BOSTON MASSACRE?

Paul Revere's famous engraving of the Boston Massacre played fast and loose with the facts. While the event occurred on a cold winter's night, the engraving features a clear sky and no ice or snow. Crispus Attucks, the revolution's first martyr, was African American, although the engraving depicts him as a white man seen lying on the ground closest to the British soldiers. Popular propaganda such as this engraving—and even dubbing the incident a "massacre"—did much to stoke anti-British sentiment in the years leading up to the Revolutionary War.



Company, a British exporter of tea. The colonists' boycott had left that trading company with more than 18 million pounds of tea in its warehouses. To rescue British merchants from disaster, in 1773, Parliament passed the Tea Act, which granted a monopoly to the financially strapped East India Company to sell tea imported from Britain. This act allowed the company to funnel business to American merchants loyal to the Crown, thereby undercutting dissident colonial merchants who could sell only tea imported from other nations. This practice drove down the price of tea and hurt colonial merchants who were forced to buy tea at higher prices from other sources.

When the next shipment of tea from Britain arrived in Boston, the colonists responded by throwing the Boston Tea Party; other colonies held similar tea parties up and down the eastern coast. King George III flew into a rage upon hearing of the actions of his disloyal subjects. "The die is now cast," the king told his prime minister. "The colonies must either submit or triumph."

King George III's first act of retaliation was to persuade Parliament to pass the Coercive Acts of 1774. Known in the colonies as the Intolerable Acts, they contained a key provision calling for a total blockade of Boston Harbor, cutting off Bostonians' access to many foodstuffs until restitution was made for the tea. Another provision reinforced the Quartering Act. It gave Massachusetts's royal governor the authority to house British soldiers in the homes of Boston citizens, allowing Britain to send an additional 4,000 soldiers in a show of force.

The First and Second Continental Congresses

The British could never have guessed how the cumulative impact of these actions would unite the colonists. The Committees of Correspondence spread the word, and the people of Boston received food and money from all over the thirteen colonies. The tax itself was no longer the key issue; now the extent of British authority over the colonies presented the far more important question. At the request of the colonial