

# U.S. Government: Democracy

By the 1700s, areas of North America had been settled primarily by the British, French, and Spanish. The eastern part of North America belonged to the British and was known as the British colonies or the thirteen colonies. While these **colonists** (people living in colonies) mostly governed themselves in local matters, they were still ruled by the king of England and Parliament, a legislative body similar to our Congress.

During this time, Britain and France fought a war that ended in 1763. Britain won, but the war cost the British government a lot of money, so the British government and its king, George III, decided to **tax** their colonies in order to pay the war expenses. (A tax is a sum of money charged to the people, or citizens, by a government for the government to spend.) The British government taxed the colonists too much, and the colonists could not do anything about this because no one spoke for them in the British Parliament. In other words, they had no one to represent their opinions and point of view.

The colonists decided to rebel against the British government. "No taxation without representation!" the colonists said. The British government responded with more taxes and harsh treatment, so in September and October of 1774, twelve of the thirteen colonies met together to write their grievances against the British government.

This meeting is known as the First Continental Congress. The colonies also decided to **boycott** (refuse to buy) British goods and to form **militias** (armies) to defend their new rights. For the next few months, the British and the colonists fought each other. While military battles were being fought by troops, emotional battles were being fought by individuals. Fighting the British was difficult for many colonists because they themselves felt like they were British since they had emigrated from Britain. Nevertheless, most of them fought for independence. By April 1775, the Revolutionary War had begun.

The war was a long and bitter conflict, and many men died. Finally, in 1783, the colonists won the war. The thirteen colonies became an independent nation called the United States of America. The first government of the United States was called a confederation. Its constitution was called the Articles of Confederation. Each state sent **delegates** (representatives) to the government. Each state had one vote—a government by the people. This lasted for eight years, until some of the nation's leaders decided to improve the government. Those leaders met in 1787 at the Constitutional Convention and wrote the Constitution of the United States of America. That was the beginning of our government!

## Answer the Following

1. Why were the colonists unhappy with the British? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What was the First Continental Congress? Why did it meet? \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. What was our first constitution called? \_\_\_\_\_  
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4. How did our first government work? \_\_\_\_\_  
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