

There have been many times throughout history in which people have had to band together to fight for a common cause. A common cause we see people fighting for throughout history is freedom. Freedom of speech, freedom from abusive authorities, freedom from certain ideologies, and freedom to pursue their own paths. Common causes have almost always acted as a magnet for diverse groups of people. This is because, as Martin Luther King Jr. famously stated in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (1963), "Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed." One prime example of this in history is the American Revolution. The American Revolution was when the 13 original American colonies were under Britain's rule. Due to unfair treatment from Britain, the colonies revolted with the help of the people of France. The colonies eventually broke free and started a new nation, which is now modern-day America. The American Revolution helps demonstrate that common causes can unite people from diverse backgrounds. The French played a crucial role in helping the American colonies secure their independence.

This all started when Great Britain controlled the 13 colonies. Great Britain was involved in the Seven Years' War. The war was expensive and left Britain in debt, as a result, it began taxing its people more in 1763 (McCullough and Washington). Following this was the Proclamation of 1763, in which Great Britain drew a Territory line in the Appalachian

Mountains. This hurt many colonists because a major ideal at the time was westward expansion, and this territory line undermined it (“American History: From Foundations to 1900”). Because Britain was in debt, they were under a lot of pressure, so it passed the Stamp Act of 1765 (McCullough and Washington). This specifically targeted things such as Legal documents, licenses, newspapers, almanacs, pamphlets, playing cards, and dice (McCullough and Washington). This taxation irritated the colonists because Britain taxed them even though they didn't have a representative in the government who could speak for them. Britain also used the colonies as a source of raw materials, but when they were traded for other goods, the proceeds from those sales mainly went to Britain (McCullough and Washington). This all led to a lot of tension, and in 1770, the Boston Massacre occurred, which basically was where tensions escalated so much that British troops ended up attacking and killing colonial protesters. In 1773, colonists dumped tea into the harbor in protest, known as the Boston Tea Party, because the law forced them to buy tea only from the British East India Company, which further contributed to the high taxes (“Learn & Explore- Preparing for the Oath”).

In September 1774, colonial delegates met at the First Continental Congress to protest British policies, such as taxation without representation. They issued a declaration of rights and planned a follow-up meeting for 1775. Though the meeting could have happened on April 19,

1775, the Battles of Lexington and Concord began when British troops attempted to seize colonial weapons, marking the start of the American Revolution (“Revolutionary War”).

France was a longstanding enemy of Britain. They were always fighting each other to be more powerful. They were separated by only 21 miles of water during the Seven Years' War, which led to fighting over territory and frequent violent direct contact. France suffered severe losses in men and land at the hands of Britain during this time (“France and the American Revolution”). When France saw that the colonies' rebellion was really growing into something big, they saw an opportunity to weaken an old enemy: the British. During the spring of 1776, France began secretly helping the American Colonies. They shipped gunpowder, cannons, and muskets through a fake company, Rodrigue Hortalez and Company, to keep the British from finding out (“Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations”). In December of 1776, Benjamin Franklin was sent to France as a representative for the colonies. This was a good move because Benjamin Franklin was already famous in France for his work on electricity. Benjamin Franklin was also just really charismatic with the people, so France had a really positive view of America through him (“Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations”). The French were still hesitant to fully commit their army until they were sure the colonies could actually win.

That turning point came in 1777 with the Battle of Saratoga, where the American victory proved they were a force to be reckoned with (“Revolutionary War”). After this, on February 6, 1778, France and the colonies signed two documents that changed the nature of the war. The first was the Treaty of Amity and Commerce. Benjamin Franklin's work in France, representing the American people, really helped with this. It was the first time a major world power officially recognized America as a sovereign nation (“France and the American Revolution”). This agreement opened vital trade routes, allowing American ships to access French ports to obtain the goods they desperately needed. More importantly, it sent a clear message to the rest of the world that the American cause was serious (“France and the American Revolution”). Also, the Treaty of Alliance (Franco-American Treaty) was a defensive military pact that bound the two nations against the British, their common enemy. This treaty was unique because it included a "no separate peace" statement. This meant that Great Britain decided to attack France in retaliation for France's support of the colonies; the United States was now obligated to intervene and defend them (“Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations ”). This made the two nations a single team. This ensured that the fight for American independence wouldn't stop until the British finally gave up or were defeated. France and the colonies couldn't stop fighting until American independence was secured. France even renounced its future claims to North

American territories. This specific promise meant that France officially gave up its right to try and reclaim its former territories in North America, such as Canada, which it had lost to Britain in previous wars (“France and the American Revolution”). This was a massive win for the colonists because it removed the fear that France was only helping them so they could move back in and take over once the British were gone. This was very reassuring to the colonists.

The French partnering with America changed everything, as the French navy began challenging British control of the seas and French soldiers began fighting alongside American troops on the ground (“France and the American Revolution”). On the battlefield, George Washington was tasked with keeping the Continental Army together despite low supplies and freezing winters. The arrival of French resources and professional military training gave his troops the boost they desperately needed (McCullough and Washington). The Continental Army was unique because it was composed of all 13 colonies banded together to fight the British. Under British rule, the 13 colonies usually didn't get along. They acted as independent states within the colonies and rarely interacted with one another. This changed when the British began harshly taxing them, as with the Stamp Act. When this started happening, the colonies began to band together to push back against this common enemy (“Learn & Explore - Preparing for the Oath”). The treaties from before ensured that the Continental Army was no longer fighting alone,

but was now part of a partnership backed by the French Empire (“Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations”).

Another key figure was the Marquis de Lafayette, a 19-year-old French nobleman. Lafayette was so inspired by the idea of liberty that he left his home to serve under Washington. Even when the King of France at the time, Louis XVI, told Lafayette to stay, Lafayette began as a volunteer but soon became a tactical leader and a close friend of Washington. His nickname was "The Hero of the Two Worlds," according to Mary Stockwell of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association (“Marquis de Lafayette”). His passion for the colonies' cause made him a close friend of George Washington.

The height of this partnership was reached at the Siege of Yorktown in 1781, when French naval blockades and ground forces trapped the British army, leading to its surrender (“France and the American Revolution”). This victory eventually led to the Treaty of Paris in 1783, which officially recognized the United States as an independent nation. The bond between the French and the colonists during this time shows how a shared goal can bridge cultural divides and change the course of history. That marked the start of the Colonies becoming America.

The Siege of Yorktown and the subsequent Treaty of Paris were victories driven by teamwork, fueled by a shared vision of independence. The Americans and French transformed a

rebellion into a revolution (“France and the American Revolution”). This period of history stands as an example of how a common goal can unite people across cultural and political lines, proving that the fight for freedom is a universal cause. From the charisma of Benjamin Franklin to the selfless service of the Marquis de Lafayette and the leadership of George Washington, the story of American independence is fundamentally a story of partnership (McCullough and Washington).

The alliance between the French and the American colonists teaches us about the power of partnership and the importance of diplomacy. This event teaches us that no movement can succeed in total isolation. The colonists were people just like you and me. Even the most determined people, like the colonists, need allies and support to overcome challenges. It shows that shared values, like the desire for freedom, are the foundation of any cause. It is the building of bridges across different people, different cultures that helps secure victory. The colonies couldn't do it on their own. They were passionate, but they lacked the necessary resources. France was able to help them in ways that they couldn't help themselves. It took trust and communication; it was probably scary at times, but it had to happen. In our modern world, this serves as a reminder that global challenges, whatever they may be, require the same level of

cooperation and mutual sacrifice demonstrated by people like the colonists and the British centuries ago.

We all have heard variations of the statement that one person can make a change. One of my favorites is a ripple effect quote from Bobby Kennedy, "Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope," (Kennedy, Department of State Bulletin, 1966). The acts of the French and American people produced a ripple that is felt today. It gives me hope that every day, people can make a change. Benjamin Franklin, for example, wasn't born the famous figure that we know him as; it took a decision, repeated decisions to produce the image of him we have today. We have a required history class in public schools in America, so we can learn why things are the way they are today. We have the power to make a change that affects hundreds of people, and history is proof of that.

The legacy of this hard-won independence continues to influence the lives of Americans today, including my own family. As an American citizen, I owe my freedom to the success of the American Revolution. It literally shaped every freedom I enjoy daily, because these two nations banded together, I live in a society built on the principles of freedom and individual rights, rather than having to listen to a distant, controlling authority. A lot of my family immigrated to

America within the last 30 years. They were able to because America pushes this idea of freedom and is known for its blend of cultures. I can have friends of any color, religion, or ancestry from anywhere in the world. This history shows me I have the power to pursue my own path and express my ideas. Looking toward the future, it reassures me that when people from different backgrounds unite for a common good, they can change the course of history, ensuring that future generations can continue to live in a world where freedom is protected. My future kids can enjoy these freedoms.

The shared spark that created revolution

5/1/26

1,786 word count

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