

Participant ID: 15OT63782

What Unites the States: Events We Cannot Forget

May 3, 2026

1,268 words

Before 1778, the Continental Army was a feeble force against the British militia. They were faced with extreme deprivation – the people were starving, lacked clothing, and did not have access to shelter (“Winter at Valley Forge”). Diseases were eating away at America’s forces, and their situation seemed bleak. How were they, an untrained army, supposed to even stand a chance against a global superpower? That is when France, a true beacon of hope, stepped into the picture. The 1778 Treaty of Alliance truly turned the tables of war; it ended America’s supply crisis, brought in professional military power and training, and won America the victory at Yorktown (“5 Ways the French Helped Win the American Revolution”). The Franco-American alliance was the greatest factor in winning American independence and built the foundations for what America would become: a global icon of unity.

At the time, America’s economy was crumbling. Paper money had almost zero value, and it was growing increasingly difficult for people to have access to necessities, as well as materials for combat and the soldiers themselves. Not only did France provide loans, but it also bestowed America with numerous gifts that did not need to be paid back (“5 Ways the French Helped Win the American Revolution”). With this money, soldiers’ wages increased and they were able to purchase food from farms that had not been accepting American paper money. Finally, in 1781, Benjamin Franklin had obtained a huge grant from the French that successfully stabilized the economy.

While the colonies were only just beginning to rebel against Britain, they had little to no access to manufacturing bases for weaponry. Luckily, France was there to provide for them and become their primary factory - an estimated 90% of the gunpowder that was used by the Americans was given to them by the French. France had sent over hundreds of thousands of pounds of ammunition and muskets, so much so that by the Battle of Saratoga, most American

soldiers were carrying French-made weaponry (“France and the American Revolution”).

Additionally, France had also sent over engineers who had designed fortifications that the Continental Army had not been able to pull off themselves.

French manufacturing did not just provide the army with weapons. Industrial shipments made by France were able to fill the void left by dwindling resources needed for survival. In the time of Valley Forge, soldiers lacked proper clothing and footwear, and standard survival gear such as tents and blankets were nowhere to be found. However, thanks to the import of French-manufactured goods, supplies such as uniforms, leather boots, and survival equipment became standard-issue (“France and the American Revolution”). Soldiers were now able to do their jobs without being held back by impoverished conditions, which was a crucial step forward for the revolution.

Before 1778, the British Royal Navy had an unrelenting grip on American ports. The control Britain had over imports to the colonies made it dangerous and almost impossible for supply ships to arrive in support of the revolution. After the treaty, dozens of French warships and tens of thousands of sailors posed a threat to the control that the British held over the Atlantic (“Franco-American Alliance”). By subverting Britain’s concentrated focus on American ports, France managed to open both American and French ports to those who could direct supplies into the American war effort. This made it much easier for France, as well as other countries in support of the revolution, to import supplies and give soldiers what they needed to keep the rebellion alive.

Money and supplies were not the only things France provided to show support. The role that France had in improving the quality and skills of American soldiers was just as crucial in the

advancement of the revolution. The French had sent over their absolute best military minds and leaders to bring the American units forward. Baron von Steuben, the most well-known trainer of the American militia, was funded by France and sent to Valley Forge. Once he was there, he quickly went to work implementing European drills and building up the army into a professional force (“Baron Von Steuben”). Marquis de Lafayette, who was only 19 years old at the time, volunteered and became a major general. Using his own money, he provided uniforms and gear for his men, providing sophistication and legitimacy to his troops (“France and the American Revolution”). As a cover-up, France had provided “vacations” to many of its military engineers so that they could join and support the American cause. These specialists taught Americans skills they had lacked, such as building effective fortifications and conducting sieges. The professionals and brilliant minds that France provided for America only heightened the efficiency of the revolution.

France was the biggest factor in spreading awareness of the revolution. At the time, France was the cultural center of Europe, which meant that whatever was popular in Paris was popular everywhere. Benjamin Franklin was a huge figure within the country, bringing American ideals to a city full of people who were obsessed with him (“Treaty of Alliance With France”). Before 1778, various European monarchies simply viewed the Americans as traitors and rebels against Britain. Upon signing the Treaty of Alliance, America was recognized as a sovereign nation, causing a huge domino effect that led to other countries taking America seriously (“Franco-American Alliance”). This caused countries to rethink their relationship with America, since supporting them would no longer be viewed as simply supporting an unorganized riot. By bringing legitimacy to the American colonies, France successfully spread awareness of the American cause all over Europe and brought other countries into the picture.

The alliance managed to turn a struggling rebellion into a huge global conflict. By introducing new forces, Britain could no longer put all its focus on the colonies. France managed to knock the British off their pedestal - they abandoned the American capital and lost their ruthless control of the seas. Through this massive shift in power, America finally received its much-needed recognition as a sovereign nation (“5 Ways the French Helped Win the American Revolution”). This made it exceptionally easier to receive loans and other support from countries all over Europe. The American Revolution was no longer an insignificant rebellion against the British government, but a powerful call to action that caused a worldwide uproar.

Now comes the real question: why is this even important? Sure, France was the one thing that bridged the gap between America and its independence, but how does that apply today? As a nation, America was built off an incredibly important concept: you cannot accomplish great change alone. America gained its independence, not just by uniting as a nation, but by uniting with other forces around the world. Throughout all 250 years of its history, America has never been alone. America is not just a country - it is an idea. It is an ideology of togetherness and unification that defies borders. It is important not to forget this origin, lest the nation face its downfall.

Without the very first significant alliance between France and America, the United States would have never come to fruition. The records serve to prove that, with the right forces by its side, America is capable of shaking the world and making differences beyond local rebellion. “United” is an adjective that is not just for the states, but for those fighting for what is right all over the globe. If we forget our origins, we forget what makes us important, and we forget what we stand for. United we stand, divided we fall - as a nation, and as a world.

References

- “5 Ways the French Helped Win the American Revolution.” *History.Com*, A&E Television Networks, 28 May 2025, www.history.com/articles/american-revolution-french-role-help.
- “Baron von Steuben.” *American Battlefield Trust*, www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/baron-von-steuben. Accessed 3 April 2026.
- France and the American Revolution - Museum of the American Revolution*, www.amrevmuseum.org/france-and-the-american-revolution. Accessed 3 April 2026.
- Franco-American Alliance | 1778 Treaty, French-US Relations | Britannica*, www.britannica.com/event/Franco-American-Alliance. Accessed 3 April 2026.
- “Treaty of Alliance with France - the 10 Best and 10 Worst U.S. Foreign Policy Decisions.” *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, 6 Feb. 2026, www.cfr.org/ten-best-ten-worst-us-foreign-policy-decisions/treaty-of-alliance-with-france/.
- U.S. Department of State*, U.S. Department of State, history.state.gov/milestones/1776-1783/french-alliance. Accessed 3 April 2026.
- “Valley Forge: Facts, Location & Baron Von Steuben.” *History.Com*, A&E Television Networks, 3 Nov. 2025, www.history.com/articles/valley-forge.
- Washington’s Winters | George Washington’s Mount Vernon*, www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/so-hard-a-winter. Accessed 3 April 2026.

“Winter at Valley Forge.” *American Battlefield Trust*, www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/winter-valley-forge. Accessed 3 April 2026.