

Non-Colonists in the American Revolution

By ReadWorks

From the point of view of some Europeans, the American Revolution pitted the ideals of the Enlightenment, republicanism, and democracy against Europe's established order, as exemplified by Britain. Some countries found that watching wasn't enough—they joined the fight.

One of these countries was France. Without France, a very important ally of the United States in the Revolutionary War, the U.S. might not have defeated the British army. The French supported the colonists for a number of reasons. A weakened England could only heighten France's status and influence—both in Western Europe and around the world as various countries competed to establish colonies. Some French may have been seeking payback: only twelve years before the American Revolution, France was at war with Britain in the Seven Years' War, and they lost. This resulted in France being forced to give North American territories to Britain.

Five months after the Declaration of Independence was signed, Benjamin Franklin traveled to Paris. He hoped to explain the colonial cause to the French, and enlist their support. Franklin was already popular in France for his writings and scientific discoveries, and he was successfully able to secure French support. At first, France supported the colonists only in secret. Gunpowder, ammunition, weapons, and money were smuggled into the country, hidden in commercial ships. Military strategists crossed the Atlantic to advise Continental Army military commanders.

In February 1778, France officially recognized the United States (following the Battle of Saratoga, in which the Continental Army decisively defeated the British army and gave a resurgence of hope to the colonists' fight for independence), and the countries signed an alliance. French soldiers fought alongside colonists; French and British fleets clashed from Rhode Island down to Georgia. In addition to manpower, France contributed money and weapons. In total, France spent the equivalent of \$13 billion helping the colonial cause.

Spain also supported the colonists. First, like France, the Spanish contribution consisted of money and weapons. But in 1779, Spain joined France with military support. Also like France, the Spanish navy played an important role in combatting the formidable British fleet. Land and sea battles were sometimes fought far from the colonies, in the Mediterranean, the West Indies, and West Africa.

But French, Spanish, and colonial armies were not only fighting the British. A quarter of all soldiers under the British flag were actually from the area known as Germany today—

30,000 hired men in all. These soldiers were known as Hessians, because many of them were from the independent principality of Hesse-Cassel.

Native Americans also fought in the American Revolution. Most considered colonists to be a threat to their territory, and so they fought on the British side. In total, approximately 13,000 Native Americans fought against the colonists. But some Native Americans fought with the colonists. The Revolution was, for them, a controversial and divisive matter. For instance, the Iroquois Confederacy, also known as the Six Nations, was a powerful organization of tribes that tried to stay neutral. But pressed to choose a side, the Confederacy could reach no agreement; it split up, with two tribes pledging their allegiance to the colonists, and four to the British.

Not only did foreign nations join the Revolution, but foreign individuals did, too. Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, a Prussian, served as inspector general and major general of the Continental Army. He went on to serve as George Washington's chief of staff. He wrote *The Revolutionary War Drill Manual*, which was the official American drill manual for the next forty years.

Other notable figures were two men from Poland: Tadeusz Kościuszko and Casimir Pulaski. Tadeusz Kościuszko was born in Poland, moved to France, sailed to America, and rose to the rank of brigadier general. His countryman, Casimir Pulaski, has been called the “father of the American cavalry.” Pulaski organized and trained the Continental Army's horsemen, which had been used mostly for scouting. Pulaski was also promoted to general, but was killed in the war. Pulaski and Kościuszko joined the colonists out of idealism. They believed in the struggle for freedom and self-governance. As Pulaski wrote to George Washington after his arrival in Massachusetts, “I came here, where freedom is being defended, to serve it, and to live or die for it.”

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Which nation was a very important ally of the United States in the Revolutionary War?

- A Germany
- B Britain
- C France
- D Poland

2. What does the author describe in this passage?

- A the ways that different nations and individuals helped Americans in the Revolutionary War
- B the reasons why different nations decided to support Britain during the Revolutionary War
- C the reasons why the American army needed so much help from other nations and people
- D the reasoning Ben Franklin used to convince France to support the colonists in the Revolution

3. Read these sentences from the text.

"French soldiers fought alongside colonists; French and British fleets clashed from Rhode Island down to Georgia. In addition to manpower, France contributed money and weapons. In total, France spent the equivalent of \$13 billion helping the colonial cause."

What conclusion can you draw about France based on this evidence?

- A France was very committed to helping the colonists defeat the British.
- B France wanted to defeat the British as payback for the Seven Years' War.
- C France supported the colonists because of the ideals they represented.
- D France did not want to be as involved in the war as they were.

4. Read these sentences from the text.

"Other notable figures were two men from Poland: Tadeusz Kościuszko and Casimir Pulaski. [. . .] Pulaski and Kościuszko joined the colonists out of idealism. They believed in the struggle for freedom and self-governance. As Pulaski wrote to George Washington after his arrival in Massachusetts, 'I came here, where freedom is being defended, to serve it, and to live or die for it.'"

What conclusion can be drawn based on this evidence?

- A Most people did not agree with the colonists' reasons for the Revolution.
- B The ideals of the American Revolution appealed to people in other countries.
- C The colonists and the British were both fighting for freedom and self-governance.
- D Pulaski and Kościuszko felt that Poland was not a free and self-governed nation.

5. What is the main idea of this text?

- A The French chose to support the colonists in America because of their desire to improve their status by weakening Britain.
- B Many groups and individuals aside from the colonists and the British participated in the American Revolution.
- C Most people around the world supported the colonists in the American Revolution because of the ideals they represented.
- D The British received help from Native Americans and Hessians during the American Revolution.

6. Read these sentences from the text.

"Without France, a very important ally of the United States in the Revolutionary War, the U.S. might not have defeated the British army. The French supported the colonists for a number of reasons."

Based on these sentences, what does the word "ally" mean?

- A someone who fights against a group or country during a war
- B someone who helps to solve problems peacefully
- C someone who helps a group or country during a war
- D someone who helps all of the countries involved in a war

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

Most Native Americans fought on the British side _____ they considered colonists to be a threat to their territory.

- A although
- B because
- C therefore
- D before

8. Why did Casimir Pulaski and Tadeusz Kościuszko join the colonists' fight?

9. What reasons did the French have for supporting the colonists? Support your answer with two details from the text.

10. Non-colonists and non-British people fought in the American Revolution mostly to improve their own status or well-being. Argue for or against this statement, using evidence from the text.
