

Franklin's Contributions to the American Revolution as a Diplomat in France



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Franklin and the American Revolution

In 1754, at a meeting of colonial representatives in Albany, New York, Franklin proposed a plan for uniting the colonies under a national congress. Although his Albany Plan was rejected, it helped lay the groundwork for the Articles of Confederation, which became the first constitution of the United States when ratified in 1781.

In 1757, Franklin traveled to London as a representative of the Pennsylvania Assembly, to which he was elected in 1751. Over several years, he worked to settle a tax dispute and other issues involving descendants of William Penn (1644-1718), the owners of the colony of Pennsylvania. After a brief period back in the U.S., Franklin lived primarily in London until 1775. While he was abroad, the British government began, in the mid-1760s, to impose a series of regulatory measures to assert greater control over its American colonies. In 1766, Franklin testified in the British Parliament against the Stamp Act of 1765, which required that all legal documents, newspapers, books, playing cards and other printed materials in the American colonies carry a tax stamp. Although the Stamp Act was repealed in 1766, additional regulatory measures followed, leading to ever-increasing anti-British sentiment and eventual armed uprising by the American colonists.

Franklin returned to Philadelphia in May 1775, shortly after the Revolutionary War (1775-83) had begun, and was selected to serve as a delegate to the Second Continental Congress, America's governing body at the time. In 1776, he was part of the five-member committee that helped draft the Declaration of Independence, in which the 13 American colonies declared their freedom from British rule. That same year, Congress sent Franklin to France to enlist that nation's help with the Revolutionary War. In February 1778, the French signed a military alliance with America and went on to provide soldiers, supplies and money that proved critical to America's victory in the war.

As minister to France starting in 1778, Franklin helped negotiate and draft the 1783 Treaty of Paris that ended the Revolutionary War.