

## Overview of the American Revolution

"The American Revolution is the single most important event in American history. Not only did it create the United States, but it defined most of the persistent values and aspirations of the American people. The noblest ideals of Americans – the commitments to freedom, equality, constitutionalism, and the well-being of ordinary people – came out of the Revolutionary era. The Revolution gave Americans the consciousness that they were a people with a special destiny to lead the world toward liberty."

• Gordon Wood, *The Great Republic: A History of the American People*, 229.

### What caused the Revolution?: Three Schools of Thought

1. The Progressive Historians – Carl Becker, Charles Beard, Arthur Schlesinger Sr. believe that ideas are projected rationalizations of underlying economic interests. When the colonists set forth arguments about principles of liberty, they were really simply trying to protect their property.

It also turned into an internal colonial issue. Carl Becker argued that it was also a conflict over who should rule at home. Elites used the Revolution to try to maintain their hegemony, but they were challenged by poor farmers and debtors who saw the Revolution as a chance to create a more democratic republic. (Paxton Boys, Regulators, Moderators)

2. Neo-Whig Interpretation - Neo-Whigs believe that ideas are motivations for actions. They hold a straightforward and "old fashioned" interpretation of the American Revolution as a crisis based upon constitutional issues of the nature and extent of the authority of Parliament.
3. Historians of the Republican School believe that ideas act more indirectly by shaping our construction of reality. The American Revolutionaries viewed the events and policies of the 1760s and 1770s through an Old English idea that ALL governments are inherently dangerous b/c they will soon pursue their own needs over the needs of the people they are supposed to represent.

### Causes of Revolution

- End of Salutary Neglect (economic/political)
- Debt 122,603,336 pounds with an annual interest of 4,409,797 pounds." (economic/political/social)
- The number of English colonists in British North America doubled every 20 years - from about 1 million in 1750 to 2 million in 1770. (social)
- Fear of more Indian wars (economic/political/social)

### Causes of Revolution

- Trade between the colonies and GB exploded during the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. North American colonists were responsible for absorbing roughly a quarter of Britain's exports and the value of colonial exports to GB and imports from them rose rapidly. This "consumer revolution" empowered ordinary Americans and thus also broke down patterns of deference within the colonies and created general contempt for authority. Furthermore, as the debt of the colonial gentry increased, they become beholden to and resentful of British creditors. (Economic/Political)

### Causes of Revolution

- Accustomed to self-rule (political)
- "No taxation without representation" (political)
- "The power to tax is a power to destroy." (political)
- "Can an island be expected to govern a continent?" Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (political)
- *Distrust of ALL governments* (ideological)



### On the Eve of the Revolution ?

	Britain	Americans
Advantages	?	?
Disadvantages	?	?

### British Advantages

- British Population was 11 million. There were about 2 million free colonists and another 500,000 slaves.
- The British navy was the largest in the world and nearly half of its ships were committed to the American Revolution.
- The British army was a well-trained, professional force of nearly 50,000 in 1778 with an additional 30,000 German mercenaries. Americans field about 5,000 Continental troops who are aided by thousands in local militias.
- Many British generals have experience in the colonies during the French and Indian wars.

### British Generals

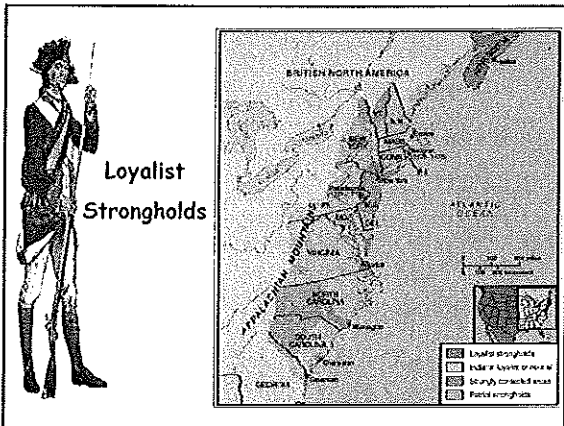
- Thomas Gage – Commander in Chief of British forces in North America from 1763 to 1775. In May, 1774, Gage was appointed Governor of Massachusetts to replace Thomas Hutchinson following the Boston Tea Party and was charged with enforcing the Coercive Acts and bringing order to Boston.
- Sir William Howe – Howe replaced Gage as Commander in Chief of British forces in North America in 1775. Was given the DUAT task of making BOTH war and Peace. At Bunker Hill, he led the charges of his troops into intense fire. Known for his patience as well as his bravery, Howe was perhaps too patient after Bunker Hill.
- Lord Richard Howe – William Howe's brother. Commander of the British Navy in the colonies until he resigned in 1778. Appointed to the peace commission in 1776 to try to gain terms to a truce, but this effort failed.

### British Generals (continued)

- General John Burgoyne – "Gentleman Johnny" Burgoyne. A very ambitious general. Famous for his gambling, his affairs, and his skills as a playwright. A "dandy" and a womanizer, Burgoyne rescued British forces in Quebec in 1776, but was commander who surrendered at Saratoga.
- Sir Henry Clinton – One of the three British general sent to give Thomas Gage help in Boston in 1776. Clinton commanded troops at Bunker Hill, Fort Sullivan, Charleston South Carolina, and New York early in the war. Then led the southern campaign for the British in 1777 and 1778. Replaced Howe in May 1778 as Commander in Chief of British forces in North America.
- Banastre Tarleton – became known as the General who would not take prisoners after Loyalists under his command massacred prisoners after the Battle of Waxhaw Creek in 1780.
- Lord Cornwallis – Appointed Major General at the start of the war. Commanded troops at the Victories at the Battle of Long Island, New Jersey, Brandywine, Camden and Philadelphia, but abandoned Burgoyne at Saratoga to capture Philadelphia. But will always be remembered for Surrendering to American forces at Yorktown.

### British Disadvantages

- Overconfident – British Generals and ordinary soldiers do not expect a fight from the Americans. They believe that the Americans are no match for them. In the initial stages of the Revolution, the British often blew bugles as if engaged in a fox hunt while fighting the Americans.
- 3000 mile supply line. Had to fight 3000 miles from home against a people defending their homeland.
- Ordinary British soldiers find conditions in America – the heat of summer and the cold of winter – unbearable.
- There was no single place – no capital - to capture in America that meant victory for the British.
- They have to WIN the war
- The British at least initially also conducted war with a goal of reconciliation and making peace.
- Could control the seaports but Not the interior



**Loyalist Strongholds**

The map shows British North America with various regions labeled: BRITISH NORTH AMERICA, ATLANTIC OCEAN, APPALACHIAN MOUNTAINS, and SOUTH ATLANTIC. A legend indicates:
 

- Black squares: Loyalist strongholds
- White squares: Under British control
- Grey squares: Strongly controlled areas
- Red squares: Rebel strongholds

### Washington (weaknesses)


- Must strive to control his temper and aggressiveness. Several times, especially in the war at Boston, he wants to attack the British when prudent councils overrule him. He is also considered "wooden" or unemotional by some who deal with him. Not considered a great military strategist by many military historians.

### Washington (strengths)

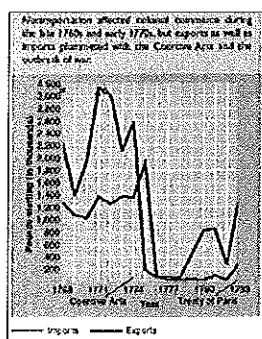
- Commanded tremendous respect. Earned as a result of his dress, conduct, physical prowess (including height, strength, grace, and appearance), and even more self-command, determination, and character. The flip side to this is that he is sometimes characterized as wooden. He was tall and always impeccably dressed. He was also extremely strong and one of the best horsemen of his day.

### Washington's Headaches

- Less than 50% of the colonists were **ACTIVELY** in favor of a war for independence [the rest were Loyalists and neutral, with more joining the neutrals as the war drug on].
- **State/colony loyalties.**
- Congress couldn't tax to raise money for the Continental Army.
- Poor training [until the arrival of Baron von Steuben].



### Exports & Imports: 1768-1783




Disruption affected colonial commerce during the late 1760s and early 1770s, but exports as well as imports plummeted with the Coercive Acts and the outbreak of war.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

### Military Strategies


The Americans	The British
■ Attrition [the Brits had a long supply line].	■ Break the colonies in half by getting between the No. & the So.
■ Guerilla tactics [fight an insurgent war → you don't have to win a battle, just wear the British down]	■ Blockade the ports to prevent the flow of goods and supplies from an ally.
■ BUT, fight European style pitched battles when the numbers allowed.	■ "Divide and Conquer" → use the Loyalists. (used poorly)
■ Make an alliance with one of Britain's enemies.	■ Should have tried to use Indians and Slaves also.



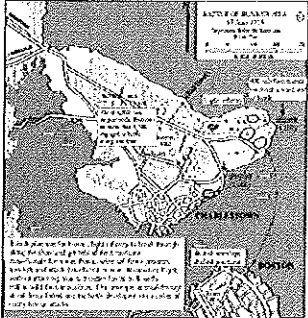


### Siege of Boston


- After the battles of Lexington and Concord, the British were driven back into Boston. Some six to eight thousand New England militiamen then surrounded the city to prevent the four thousand or so British troops from escaping. Still, the British controlled Boston Harbor because there was no American fleet to challenge them. They used this naval superiority to supply their troops and then bring in reinforcements. On May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1775, 4500 additional British troops and Generals William Howe, John Burgoyne, and Henry Clinton arrived in Boston.



### Bunker Hill (June, 1775)





The British suffered over 40% casualties.



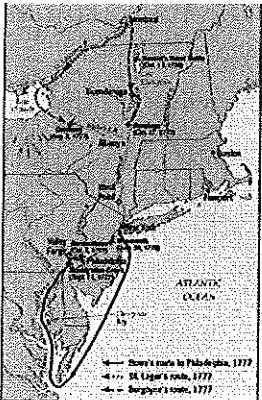
### Battle of "Bunker Hill"

- June 17, 1775 – Fortified by their reinforcements, the British sought to break free from Boston by taking an American fortification at Breed's Hill in Charlestown, just outside of Boston. Led by Howe, the British made three frontal assaults on entrenchments that had been dug at Breed's Hill. The third of these was successful, but about 1054 British troops died at Bunker Hill and 440 Americans. It proved to the British that the Americans would not ALWAYS flee when faced with British professionals.
- Thomas Gage said, it was "a dear bought victory, another such would have ruined us."


### Joseph Warren's Death at Bunker Hill

### Phase II: NY & PA [1777-1778]

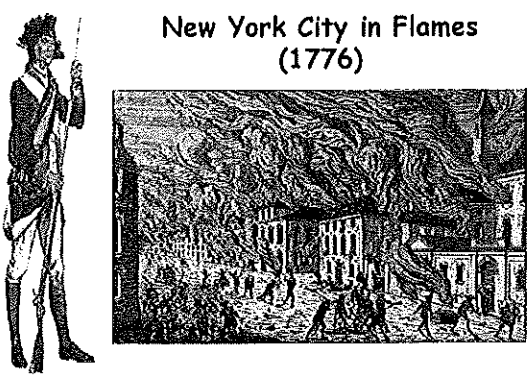


### Phase II: Middle Colony Campaign 1775-1776



- British ships arrive in NY harbor → believed Americans would give up when faced with British naval strength
- Washington evacuated NY, in a series of defeats and retreats. Memory of Bunker Hill????
- NY became a British stronghold
- Battles of New York, Long Island, New Jersey all strategic retreats.

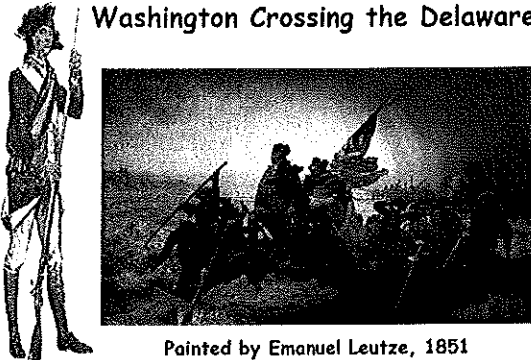
**New York City in Flames (1776)**



**STILL Phase II: New York and Pennsylvania (1777-8)**

- British focus on the middle colonies
- “divide & conquer” to isolate New England “radicals” from the other colonies
- Battle of Brandywine is another British victory and
- Continental Congress forced to flee Philadelphia!
- BUT!!! General Howe, should have been at Saratoga reinforcing Burgoyne

**Washington Crossing the Delaware**



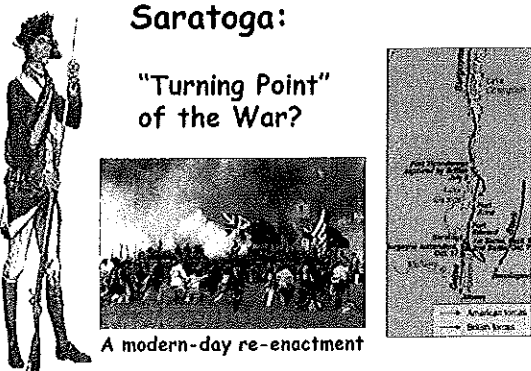
Painted by Emanuel Leutze, 1851

**Crossing the Delaware**

- Christmas Day, 1776
- Colonial forces launched surprise attack on Trenton
- The much-Feared Hessians were defeated! Morale
- Followed by another victory at Princeton
- Washington was able to hold his army together!

**Saratoga:**

**“Turning Point” of the War?**



A modern-day re-enactment

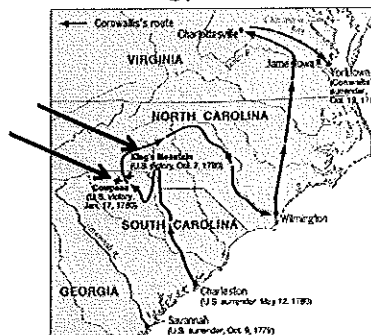
**Battle of Saratoga:**

- The Plan : 3 British units were to converge on American forces at Albany, trapping them
- Why doesn't this work?
- Howe was busy in Philadelphia → General Burgoyne forced to surrender when he ran out of supplies
- France aid became open & substantial!
- France officially recognized American independence!

### Valley Forge

- Not picked for any reason EXCEPT to control to whom the Pennsylvania farmers sold their crops.
- Br. Gen. Howe was in Philly Pa. and paying with specie – not Continental Dollars
- Low point for Washington's troops
- ¼ of Washington's troops die BUT
- Prussian Baron von Steuben arrived to help train soldiers → those who survive were turned into a disciplined fighting force

### Phase III: The Southern Strategy [1780-1781]



### British Assumptions

- The British assumed that the southern population was generally made up of Loyalists who would enthusiastically welcome the opportunity to overthrow the tyrannical rebels once British military power presented itself
- Thus the plan was to minimize the number of British troops and rely on the Loyalists themselves to play a significant role in their own liberation (to include capturing rebel leaders)
- As quickly as possible, responsibilities for police and defense would be turned over to the Americans, thus freeing British soldiers to move on to other areas

### Britain's "Southern Strategy"

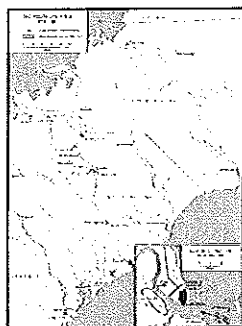


- ☒ Britain thought that there were more Loyalists in the South.
- ☒ Southern resources were more valuable/worth preserving.
- ☒ The British win a number of small victories, but cannot pacify the countryside [similar to U. S. failures in Vietnam]
- ☒ Excellent strategist  
US General:  
Nathaniel Greene



### The Fall of Charleston

- British General Clinton proceeded to bottle up a force of some 6,000 Americans commanded by Major General Benjamin Lincoln in Charleston.
- When Charleston is surrendered the colonies lost the largest city in the south and the region's political and economic center




### British Actions After Charleston

- The British had to decide how to deal with the rebels now under their control
  - Would significant numbers reaffirm their royal allegiance?
  - Could they be trusted?
  - Would significant numbers resist?
  - What form would resistance take?


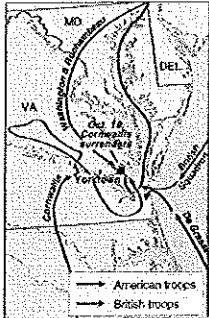

### British Actions After Charleston

- Clinton assigned Lieutenant General Charles, Earl Cornwallis the responsibility for dealing with the new situation
  - Cornwallis sent forces into the South Carolina interior with instructions to destroy any rebel forces and encourage the Loyalists to take control of local areas
  - Major losses at Cowpens and King's Mtn.



Charles Cornwallis



### The Battle of Yorktown (1781)

Count de Rochambeau

Admiral De Grasse

### Cornwallis' Surrender at Yorktown:


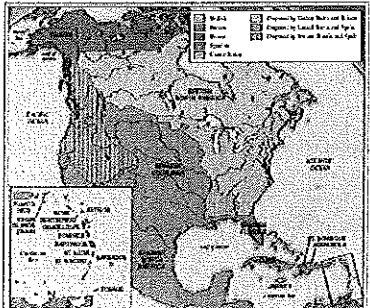



Painted by John Trumbull, 1797



# Why did the British Lose???

### North America After the Treaty of Paris, 1783


### Treaty of Paris of 1783





British negotiators refused to sit for this picture!

Why did England lose the war?  
Why did the colonies win?

- Washington's forces simply wore the British down! Took advantage of England's greatest disadvantage – distance!
- Poor British military leadership! Allowed Washington's army to retreat so that they could fight another day!
- Americans had the support of England's enemies, especially the French!

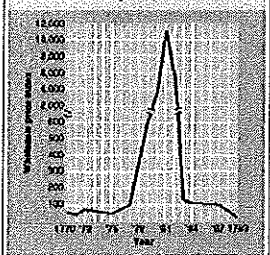


## Articles of Confederation Government: 1781~1789




### Wholesale Price Index: 1770-1789

Prices skyrocketed as Congress and the state governments printed huge amounts of paper money to cover the costs of the war and to the British blockade reduced the supply of goods. The resulting inflation was the worst in U.S. history.

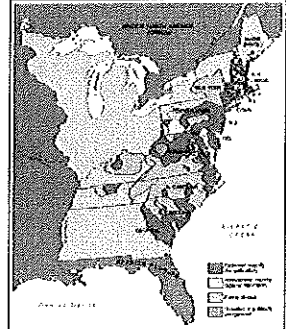



NOTE: 1860-1869 = 100

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census




### Federalist vs. Anti-Federalist Strongholds at the End of the War

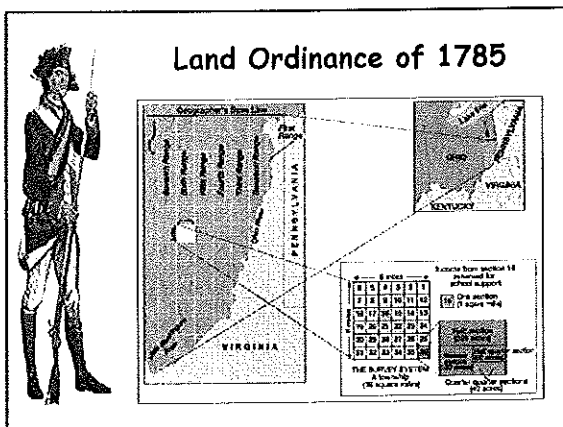
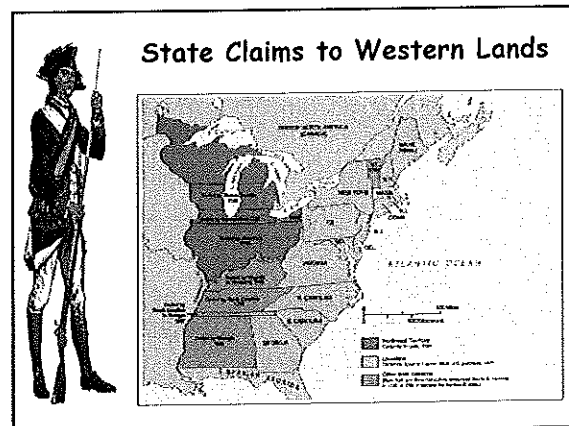
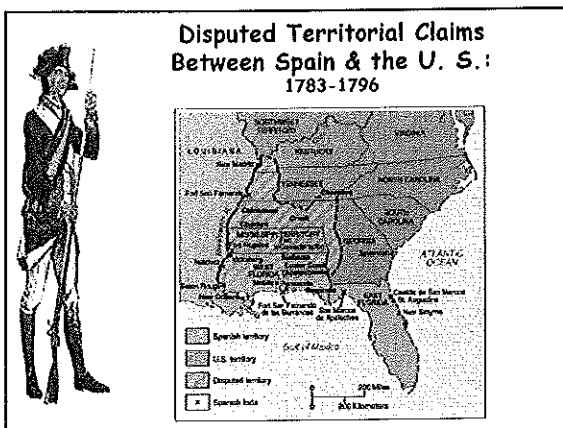
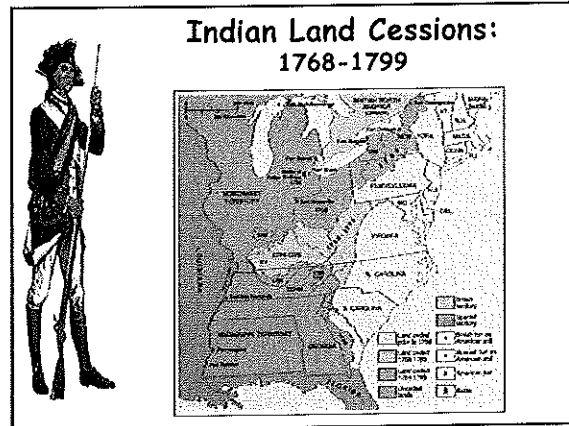
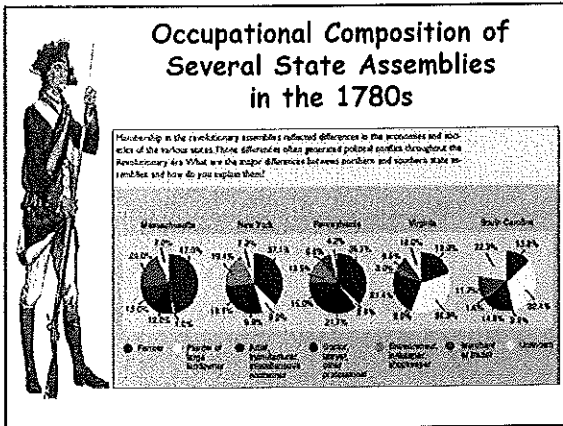
### Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation

- A unicameral Congress [9 of 13 votes to pass a law].
- 13 out of 13 to amend.
- Representatives were frequently absent.
- Could not tax or raise armies.
- No executive or judicial branches.



### State Constitutions

- Republicanism.
- Most had strong governors with veto power.
- Most had bicameral legislatures.
- Property required for voting.
- Some had universal white male suffrage.
- Most had bills of rights.
- Many had a continuation of state-established religions while others disestablished religion.



- ### Northwest Ordinance of 1787
- 
- One of the major accomplishments of the Confederation Congress!
  - Statehood achieved in three stages:
    1. Congress appointed 3 Judges & a governor to govern the territory.
    2. When population reached 5,000 adult male landowners → elect territorial legislature.
    3. When population reached 60,000 → elect delegates to a state constitutional convention.

### The United States in 1787

A map of the United States in 1787, showing the original 13 states and various territories. The map is labeled with state names: New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. It also shows territories like the Northwest Territory, Southwest Territory, and Florida. A legend indicates symbols for Colonies, Settled Land, and Unsettled Land. A scale bar at the bottom shows 0, 25, 50, 75, and 100 miles.

### American Exports, To & From Britain: 1783-1789

A line graph showing American Exports and Imports from Britain between 1783 and 1789. The Y-axis is labeled 'Millions of Pounds Sterling' and ranges from 0 to 3.5. The X-axis is labeled 'Year' and ranges from 1783 to 1789. The Imports line (dashed) starts at approximately 0.5 million in 1783, peaks at 3.0 million in 1784, and then fluctuates between 1.5 and 2.0 million. The Exports line (solid) starts at approximately 0.5 million in 1783 and remains relatively stable around 0.5 million. A shaded area between the lines from 1784 to 1788 is labeled 'Trade Deficit'.

Year	Imports (Millions of Pounds Sterling)	Exports (Millions of Pounds Sterling)
1783	0.5	0.5
1784	3.0	0.5
1785	2.0	0.5
1786	1.5	0.5
1787	1.8	0.5
1788	1.8	0.5
1789	2.2	0.5

### Annapolis Convention (1786)

- 12 representatives from 5 states [NY, NJ, PA, DE, VA]
- GOAL** → address barriers that limited trade and commerce between the states.
- Not enough states were represented to make any real progress.
- Sent a report to the Congress to call a meeting of all the states to meet in Philadelphia to examine areas broader than just trade and commerce.

### Shays' Rebellion: 1786-7

- Daniel Shays
- Western MA
- Small farmers angered by crushing debts and taxes.

A banknote from the Bank of Northampton, dated 1786, and a portrait of Daniel Shays, the leader of the rebellion.

### Shays' Rebellion: 1786-7

A map of Western Massachusetts showing the locations of Shays' Rebellion, including Westfield, Northampton, and Amherst. An illustration shows a battle scene with soldiers on horseback and on foot.

### Shays' Rebellion: 1786-7

*There could be no stronger evidence of the want of energy in our governments than these disorders.*

-- George Washington