

Fighting for Independence (1775- 1783)

British forces defeated **Continental Troops** in New York, Pennsylvania and Philadelphia. American forces were victorious at Saratoga (NY), and at Trenton and Princeton in New Jersey. Yet they continually struggled to get the men and materials they needed. Decisive help came in 1778, when France recognized the United States and signed a bilateral defense treaty. France wanted to weaken the power of Britain, its long-time adversary. Battles were fought from Montreal, Canada, in the north to Savannah, Georgia, in the south. A huge British army surrendered at **Yorktown**, Virginia, in **1781**, yet the war dragged on with inconclusive results for another two years. A **peace treaty** was finally signed in **Paris** on **April 15, 1783**.

Writing the Constitution in 1787

The 13 American colonies became the **13 United States of America in 1783**, following their war for independence from Britain. In 1787, delegates from the states met in Philadelphia, the meeting became known as the **Constitutional Convention** and chose **George Washington** to lead the discussion. The result was **the U.S Constitution**. Opponents voiced fears that a strong central government could become tyrannical and oppressive. Many Americans felt it lacked an essential element. They said it did not enumerate the rights of individuals. On September 1789, lawmakers agreed to add provisions to the constitution collectively known as **the Bill of Rights** or **The 10 Amendments**. These provisions promised all Americans freedom of religion, free press, free speech, the right to carry arms, the right to a fair trial by jury, and protection against cruel and unusual punishments.

1800s: Expansion, Amerindians and the Civil War.

The United States doubled in size with the purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803 and Florida from Spain in 1819. From 1816 to 1821, six new states were created. Between 1812 and 1852, the population tripled. The United States was a country of both civilized cities built on commerce and industry, and primitive frontiers where the rule of law was often ignored.

The new government of the United States tried at first to keep the peace by making treaties with the Amerindians. It also tried to make sure that settlers treated them fairly. A law of 1787 called the **Northwest Ordinance** said that the Amerindians' *"land and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and in their property, rights and liberty they never shall be invaded or disturbed."* But in 1830 the United States government passed a law called the **Indian Removal Act**, the law said that all Indians living east of the Mississippi River would be moved west to a place called **Indian Territory**. This was an area beyond the Mississippi that was thought to be unsuitable for white farmers.

The United States in 1850 was a huge nation stretched between two oceans. Wide differences in geography, natural resources, and development were obvious from region to region. Most Northerners were unwilling to challenge the existence of slavery in the South, yet many opposed its expansion into the western territories. Southerners argued that the territories themselves had the right to decide their status.

In April 1861 North and South went to war. The Southern states had claimed the right to secede and had formed their own **Confederacy**. Their forces fired the first shots. The Northern states, under the leadership of President Lincoln, were determined to stop the rebellion and preserve the Union. For four years, ground battles involving tens of thousands of soldiers and horses were fought in Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Georgia.

On January 1, 1863 **President Lincoln** issued the **Emancipation Proclamation**. It freed all slaves living in Confederate states and authorized the recruitment of African Americans into the Union army. Now the North was no longer fighting just to preserve the Union. It was fighting to end slavery. By April 1865, huge Union armies under the command of General Ulysses S. Grant had surrounded Robert E. Lee in Virginia. Lee surrendered, and the American Civil War was over. The divisions and hatreds that had led to the Civil War did not disappear after the fighting stopped. As Southern whites regained political power, Southern blacks suffered. They had gained their freedom but were prevented from enjoying it by local laws denying them access to many public facilities. They had gained the right to vote but were intimidated at the polls.