

Call for Colonial Unity

Lesson 2

In the 1700s, the French, who had settled in what is now Canada, and the British were interested in the same land—land west of the British colonies to the Mississippi River. Disagreements between the two countries would lead to war. The British colonists were concerned about protection. What could they do?

The Albany Plan

In 1754, a convention was held in Albany, New York. The purpose of the convention was to decide how the colonies would defend themselves from the French. The leader of the convention was Benjamin Franklin. He suggested that a congress be formed and that the colonies send representatives to the congress. It would make treaties with various tribes, collect taxes for an army, and oversee how western lands were settled. In this way, the colonies would work together to defend themselves. Franklin's ideas were called the *Albany Plan*.

The Albany delegates, representatives sent to the convention by the colonies, approved the plan, but not one colonial assembly accepted it. The plan failed. There were too many differences between the colonies, especially over the issue of taxation. Even though the plan was not approved, the idea of having a congress and forming a union of colonies had been established.

The colonial leaders knew a union was needed, but they could not agree on how it should be done. A few years later, serious problems with Great Britain, which ruled the British colonies, made a union necessary. The Americans could not longer allow their differences to divide them into thirteen separate colonies.

The First Continental Congress

The British changed their policies toward the colonies after the French and Indian War (1756–1763). The colonies could no longer run their governments as they wanted. Britain passed strict laws, many of them involving taxes, that the colonists had to follow. The colonists were not happy with these changes or with the taxes.

The colonies decided to send delegates to a meeting to discuss the problems. The First Continental Congress met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in September of 1774. The delegates drew up a list of grievances and a Declaration of Rights. A new spirit of cooperation had been established. The representatives agreed to meet again in 1775. When the British king, George III, and Parliament viewed the actions of the colonists as defiance of their rule, many leaders of the colonies knew the time had come for America to declare its independence from Britain.



Ben Franklin suggested the Albany Plan.

The Declaration of Independence

The **Declaration of Independence** stated that the American colonies were free from British rule. The document was written mainly by Thomas Jefferson in 1776. Educated people such as Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and John Adams studied the writings of great philosophers. A philosopher is a thinker who writes about very complicated ideas. Philosophers also make theories about how certain things came to be. Thomas Jefferson was greatly influenced by the philosopher John Locke.

John Locke had argued that there is a contract between the government and the people. If the government violates the natural rights of the people, they can rebel and set up a new government. In the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson wrote that all people have certain natural rights, such as "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." If a government does not protect these rights, it loses its right to govern. On the evening of July 4, 1776, the delegates voted to approve the Declaration of Independence.

Write your answers to the following questions.

1. Why did early attempts to form a union fail? _____

2. Why was the Albany Convention held? _____

3. Even though the Albany Plan was turned down, two important ideas were established. What were those ideas?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
4. What changes did the British make in the American colonies?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
5. Why was the First Continental Congress important to the American colonists?

6. Who wrote the Declaration of Independence? _____
7. Why is John Locke important to American government? _____

8. What were three rights Jefferson said were natural rights? _____
