Patriots and Loyalists

In 1776, the colonies were at war against Britain. About half the colonists were Patriots. A smaller group of colonists were Loyalists. Many colonists were neutral. Many enslaved African Americans were Loyalists because Britain promised them freedom. However, about 5,000 African Americans fought for independence from Britain. Most American Indians were neutral or Loyalists because they believed that the British would stop settlers from moving onto Indian lands. Many women were Patriots.

The British army had good training and weapons. Soldiers in the Continental Army had few supplies and little money. The Continental Army had some strengths. General George Washington led the Continental Army. He was a strong leader. American soldiers knew the land better than the British soldiers did. American soldiers believed strongly in their cause. For most British soldiers, fighting was just a job.

Fighting the War

In the spring of 1776, the Continental Army drove the British from Boston. Later, American troops lost battles in New York City. The defeats forced them to retreat. In December 1776, Washington and his army crossed the Delaware River. They surprised the British and defeated them in Trenton, New Jersey.

Then the Continental Army won a major battle near Saratoga, New York. This persuaded France to help the Americans by sending supplies and soldiers.

By 1779, neither side was winning. The British invaded the South, hoping Loyalists would help them fight. The British had some success and won some battles. However, southern Patriot commanders found new ways to fight and started to win battles. Francis Marion led surprise attacks. Nathanael Greene wore out the British by tricking them into chasing his army.

Finally, in 1781, Washington’s army surrounded the British at Yorktown, Virginia. The French navy blocked the harbor so the British could not retreat. Cornwallis surrendered. In 1783, the United States and Britain signed the Treaty of Paris to end the war. The United States had won its independence.