

# 2. The Age of Reason

## This chapter

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there was a **scientific revolution** in Europe. Scientists including **René Descartes** and **Isaac Newton** argued that **humans should use reason to develop scientific knowledge**. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, a group of French political thinkers said that you could **use reason to solve political, social and economic problems**. They were referred to as the *Lumières*, which means the "enlighteners". In English, this intellectual movement is therefore called the **Enlightenment**, while this period of history is called the **Age of Reason**. In this chapter we will learn about:

- the **beliefs of the Enlightenment thinkers**, and their influence on the **enlightened despots**
- the causes, main events and consequences of the **American Revolution**, which was strongly influenced by the Enlightenment

## The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment thinkers, who included **Montesquieu**, **Voltaire** and **Rousseau**, wanted to **completely reform the political and social structures of the Ancien Régime**. They were **optimistic** that reason and science could be used to make the world a better place. These are some of their most important ideas:

- Reason tells us that **all humans are created equal**. We are the same species, so no-one is fundamentally superior. Therefore, people should have the **same rights**, and society should be made fairer.
- People should **pursue pleasure and happiness**.
- **Religion should be separate from politics**, because religion is a personal matter. Most Enlightenment thinkers were **deists**: they believed that God had created the world, but that he did not interfere in what happened now. They thought that events occurred according to natural, scientific laws.

### THE SEPARATION OF POWERS

**Montesquieu** (1689-1755) suggested that the **executive, legislative and judicial powers should be separated**, so that no individual or group would have too much power. He admired the British system of government, because there was a balance between the power of the king and the power of parliament.



#### Exercise 1

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Rousseau (1712-1778) says in *Emile* that:

*"Except for her sex, a woman is a man: she has the same organs, the same needs, the same abilities."* He also says that *"The man should be strong and active; the woman should be weak and passive. The one must have both the power and the will; ... the other should offer little resistance."*

Discuss this in pairs:

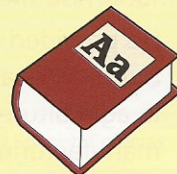
- Did Rousseau consider women equal to men?
- What did he think about women's role in society?

Explain the reasons for your answers.

### ENCYCLOPAEDIAS AND DICTIONARIES

Enlightenment thinkers believed in improving society through **education**. They therefore wrote a book called the **Encyclopédie**, which aimed to **gather all the knowledge in the world**. It was edited by **Denis Diderot**, and included articles by Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu. In total there were 28 volumes, with over 3,000 illustrations, and it took more than 20 years to complete the work.

Meanwhile, **Samuel Johnson** was writing the **first complete dictionary of the English language**. It included over 40,000 words, and he used 114,000 quotations to show how the words were used.



### Questions

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1. What was the difference between the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment?
2. What were the main ideas of the Enlightenment thinkers?
3. Was there separation of powers in the *Ancien Régime*?
4. What similarities are there between Diderot's *Encyclopédie* and the website Wikipedia?



# Enlightened despotism

During the Enlightenment, the absolute monarchs in Europe realised that many people wanted to change the political and social system. As a result, some monarchs introduced reforms based on reason and science:

- They **invested in agriculture and manufacturing**, and introduced **new crops**.
- They **supported the arts, sciences and education**.
- They **made the tax system fairer**, by reducing the privileges of the Church and the nobles.
- They **made the laws the same in the whole country**, and reduced the use of torture and the death penalty.
- They increased **religious tolerance**, and in some cases provided other new liberties, like freedom of speech.

However, these monarchs rejected Enlightenment ideas like equality, deism and the separation of powers.

**Monarchs who introduced reforms based on the Enlightenment, but maintained absolute power**, are known as **enlightened despots**. The most famous ones are Frederick the Great (Prussia), Catherine the Great (Russia), Charles III (Spain) and Joseph II (Austria).

## FREDERICK THE GREAT OF PRUSSIA (RULED 1740-1786)

**Frederick the Great** invited **Voltaire** to his court to teach him about Enlightenment ideas. They became friends, and Frederick introduced many reforms that were influenced by Voltaire:

### AGRICULTURAL REFORM

Frederick created new farmland by draining marshes, and built canals for transport. He gave peasants tools and seeds to help them recover from the Seven Years' War. However, he didn't want peasants to learn too much, as it might make them unhappy with their position in society.

### RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

Although Prussia was mainly Protestant, Frederick gave Catholics who lived there equal rights. He even said that he would build a mosque in Berlin if any Muslims wanted to settle there. In spite of this, he discriminated against Jews.

### ANIMAL WELFARE

Frederick had read about Newton's love of animals, and he criticised hunting as cruel, rough and uneducated. He also founded the first veterinary school in Germany.

## ENLIGHTENED DESPOTISM IN SPAIN: CHARLES III (RULED 1759-1788)

**Charles III** was the fifth son of Philip V. When he became King of Spain, he had already ruled the **Kingdom of the Two Sicilies** for 25 years. In Spain, he introduced a great number of reforms, in order to modernise the country:

- He provided hospitals, built canals and invested in agriculture and manufacturing.
- He **made work honourable** (see page 10), which allowed nobles to participate actively in the economy.
- He reduced the power of the Church, **limited the Inquisition**, and **expelled the Jesuits from Spain**.
- He encouraged the teaching of **practical subjects**, such as the natural sciences, maths and law.
- When Charles first came to Madrid the city was dark, dirty and smelly, so he established a rubbish collection service, sewers and street lighting. Wide avenues, parks and grand buildings were also built.



Left: statue of Charles III. Right: the Prado in Madrid, which was built during Charles's reign.

### Questions

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5. Why do you think that enlightened despots rejected Enlightenment ideas like equality and the separation of powers?
6. How did Frederick the Great help to increase food production in Prussia?
7. Name three things that Charles III did to support the Spanish economy.
8. What were Charles III's religious reforms?



# Background to the American Revolution

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, European countries controlled most of the Americas, but there were also a few areas that were not colonised (see top map). The main powers in **South America** were **Spain and Portugal**, while the main powers in **North America** were **Spain and Britain**.

## BRITISH NORTH AMERICA

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the British established **thirteen colonies** in North America. Later they also gained territory from France and Spain, which made the whole area **east of the Mississippi River** part of the British Empire (see bottom map).

The inhabitants were British, German, Dutch and French **colonists**, as well as **African slaves** and **Native Americans** (see box). Each colony had a governor chosen by the king, but an elected assembly took most important decisions, so the colonies mainly **governed themselves**.

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, **the thirteen colonies rebelled against Britain**. This is known as the **American Revolution**, and it led to the establishment of the United States of America. Next we will look at the events that led to the American Revolution.

## THE BOSTON MASSACRE

In the 1760s, Britain needed to **raise taxes to repay its debts**. The American colonists paid less tax than people in Britain, so the British government increased their taxes. However, the colonists felt this was unfair:

- The taxes were mainly to **pay for wars in Europe**, which they felt had nothing to do with them.
- They **had no Members of Parliament**, so the British government didn't represent them. The slogan "**no taxation without representation**" became popular.

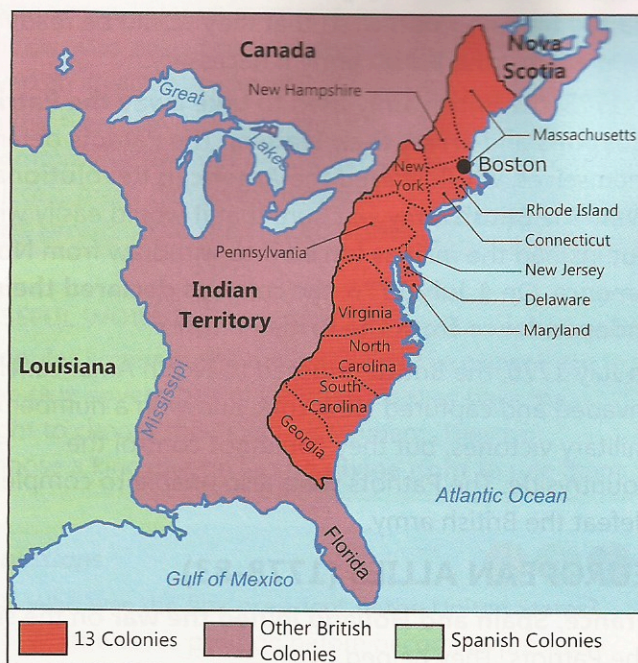
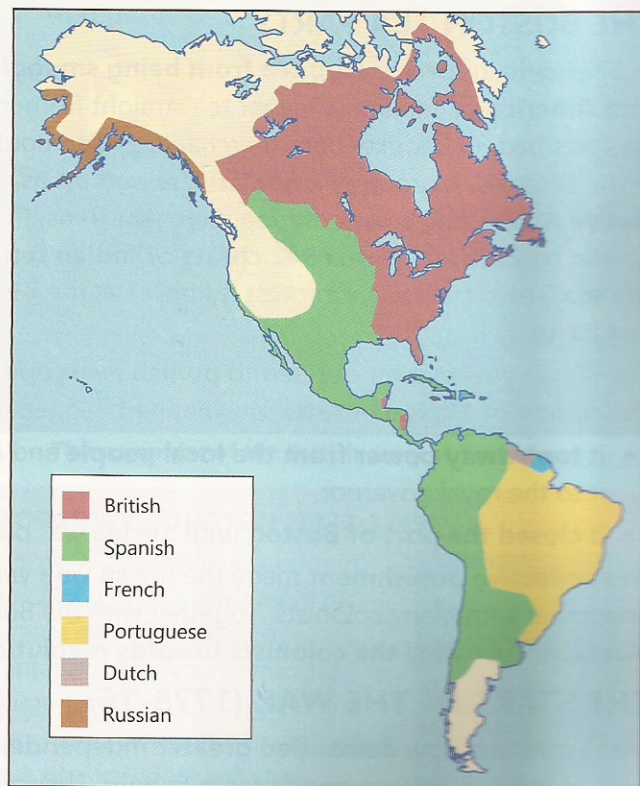
The increase in taxes led to many protests in the colonies, so Britain sent more soldiers to America to maintain order. In 1770 British soldiers **killed five people** in Boston during a riot. The colonists called it the **Boston Massacre**.

### NATIVE AMERICANS

The tribes who lived in North America are normally called **Native Americans** or **American Indians**. Most of these tribes **did not believe that you could own the land**.

They had **no territory or kingdoms**, only areas where they traditionally hunted and farmed. They didn't understand why Europeans wanted to own farms.

Nevertheless, early colonists in North America mostly **had good relationships with the Native Americans**. They traded and formed alliances with local tribes.



### Questions

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9. What geographical feature divided the Spanish and British colonies in North America?
10. Who lived in the British colonies in America?
11. What happened in the American Revolution and what was the result?
12. Explain what was meant by the slogan "No taxation without representation".
13. Was the Boston Massacre really a massacre? Why did the colonists call it that?



# The American Revolutionary War

## THE BOSTON TEA PARTY

In 1773, Britain tried to **stop tea from being smuggled into America** by sending cheaper tea straight from India. This was bad for shopkeepers, merchants and smugglers in the colonies. A group of **colonists dressed up as Native Americans** boarded three merchant ships in Boston harbour and **threw 342 chests of Indian tea into the sea** (see picture). This protest is known as the **Boston Tea Party**.

The British government decided to **punish everyone in the colony of Massachusetts** for what had happened:

- It **took away power from the local people** and gave it to the royal governor.
- It **closed the port of Boston** until the tea was paid for.

This **collective punishment** made the British king very unpopular with many colonists. Together with the Boston Massacre, it **pushed the colonists towards revolution**.

## THE START OF THE WAR (1775-76)

Many colonists now **demanded greater independence**, and started **boycotting goods from Britain**. They also started training **militias**, so that they would be ready to fight against the British army if necessary.

In 1775, the British army tried to **take away the Patriot's weapons** and **arrest their leaders**. The Patriots defended themselves, which started the **American Revolutionary War**. The British army was sure that it would easily win, but instead the militias forced it to withdraw from North America. On **4 July 1776**, the colonies **declared their independence from the British Empire**.

In July 1776, the British returned to North America. They invaded and captured New York, and won a number of military victories, but they could not control the countryside. The Patriots were also unable to completely defeat the British army.

## EUROPEAN ALLIES (1778-83)

**France, Spain and Holland** joined the war on the side of the Patriots. They helped by:

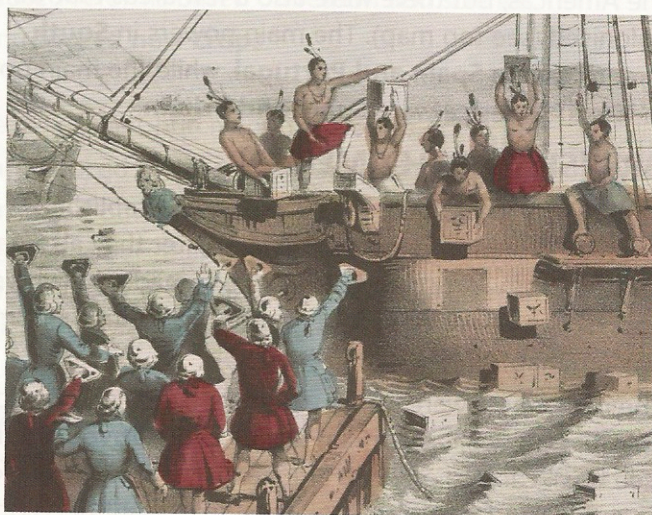
- **sending armies** to fight with the Patriots
- **attacking British colonies around the world**, so Britain had to send soldiers to protect them
- **attacking the British navy**, which Britain used to supply its troops and to move them around

### USEFUL WORDS

**Patriots:** colonists who opposed the British government.

**Boycott:** to refuse to buy certain products.

**Militia:** a military force made up of civilians rather than professional soldiers.



## GUERRILLA WARFARE

Some of the men in the militias were given extra training, and had to be **ready at a minute's notice**. These men were called **minutemen**. The British army had better training and equipment, so the minutemen avoided fighting big battles. Instead, they used **guerrilla tactics: they ambushed the British**, and then **disappeared into the countryside**.



The British army wore their traditional **red coats**, which were very easy to see.



Minutemen wore **ordinary clothes**, which were blue or brown, so it was easier for them to hide.

## Questions

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14. Why do you think that the Patriots dressed up as Native Americans during the Boston Tea Party?
15. Which two events pushed the colonists towards revolution?
16. How did the American Revolutionary War start?
17. Why were some men in the militia called minutemen?
18. Which countries supported the Patriots in their war against the British?
19. How did attacks on British colonies in other parts of the world help the Patriots?



# American independence

## THE END OF THE WAR (1781-83)

In 1781 the Spanish army defeated the British at Pensacola in Florida, while a joint Patriot and French army defeated them at Yorktown. **Britain had lost the war.** In 1783 the Treaty of Paris established peace:

- The **colonies gained independence.**
- Spain regained Florida and Minorca.
- Most of what is now **Canada remained British.**

The British didn't consider the thirteen colonies to be very valuable, but losing the war was a **humiliating military disaster for Britain.** However, the most important consequence of the revolution was that it **created the first republic based on Enlightenment ideas.** In the next chapter we will see how it also helped to bring about the **French Revolution.**



The surrender of the British army at Yorktown

## THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE



In 1775, the thirteen colonies established an assembly called the **Continental Congress**. Initially, most of its members wanted the colonies to remain in the British Empire. However, Britain's refusal to negotiate with the colonists increased support for **independence.**

**Thomas Jefferson** was asked to write a **Declaration of Independence**. As you have seen, on 4 July 1776 the Continental Congress signed the declaration:

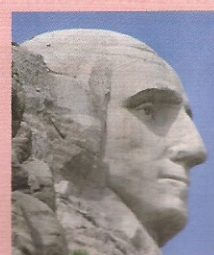
*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, including Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. We, therefore, in the name of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these United Colonies are Free and Independent States.*

**Adapted extracts from the Declaration of Independence**

This declaration, which was based on the ideas of the **Enlightenment**, made many Patriots feel that they were **fighting for a better, fairer society.**

## GEORGE WASHINGTON (1732-1799)

George Washington was born in the colony of Virginia, where his parents owned a tobacco plantation. As a young man he fought for the British against the French and Native Americans, which gave him **valuable military experience.** Later he married a rich widow, who owned big plantations. Together they lived an aristocratic lifestyle.



In the American Revolutionary War he was made **Commander in Chief of the Patriot army.** His success made him a war hero, and he became the **first president of the United States** (1789-97).

## USEFUL WORDS

**Popular sovereignty:** the belief that the **people are the true sovereigns** of the state, so they have the right to choose their own government. They can choose a king, but he has **no divine right** to rule them.

## Questions

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20. Who was the first president of the United States? What was his position before becoming president?
21. Did Britain lose all of its colonies in North America as a result of the revolution?
22. How did Spain benefit from the revolution?

## Exercise 2

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Work in pairs. Discuss the extracts from the Declaration of Independence.

- Which sentence expresses the idea of popular sovereignty?
- How was the Declaration influenced by the Enlightenment? Look at page 15 to help you.



# Art and architecture in the 18th century

The two most important artistic movements of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were **Rococo** and **Neoclassicism**. **Rococo**, which was associated with the *Ancien Régime*, was very popular in the royal courts and amongst the upper classes. **Neoclassicism** was *the artistic movement of the Enlightenment*.

## ROCOCO

**Rococo** was a development of the **Baroque** style, and they both use **light and shadow** to create a sense of **movement**. However, whereas Baroque painting often had a religious purpose, Rococo art was **mainly decorative**. As a result, Rococo paintings are much more **ornate and playful**.

**François Boucher's painting of Louis XV's mistress Madame Pompadour** (below) is typical, with its ornate clothes and furniture painted in pastel colours. The focus is on colour, rather than lines.



## NEOCLASSICISM

Neoclassicism represented a return to the **values of the Classical world**: reason, strength, self-sacrifice, austerity and patriotism. To the Enlightenment thinkers, Ancient Greece and Rome also represented **democratic values and equality between men**.

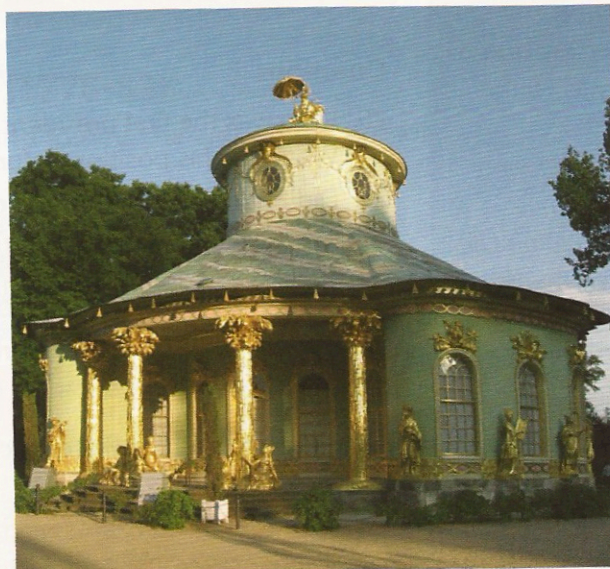
In **Jacques-Louis David's Oath of the Horatii** (below) three Roman brothers offer to fight a duel on behalf of the city. They are willing to lose their lives for their city: society is more important than the individual. David uses perspective and straight lines to focus our attention on the central theme of the painting. Lines are more important than colours, and the background is quite boring, so as not to distract us.



## ARCHITECTURE

Rococo and Baroque architecture are similar in many ways, but **Rococo** buildings are **less symmetrical** and more **decorative** and **colourful** (see right).

**Neoclassicism** is **austere and symmetrical**, and uses pillars, round arches and triangular pediments. The **Prado** is an example of Neoclassical architecture (see page 16).



### Questions

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23. Which artistic movement influenced Rococo?
24. Are lines or colours more important in:
  - a) Rococo art?
  - b) Neoclassical art?
25. Which values were admired by the Neoclassical movement?
26. Which earlier styles of art and architecture does Neoclassicism have most in common with?  
*Hint: Think about what Neoclassicism means.*
27. Explain the main differences between Rococo and Neoclassical architecture.



# THE AGE OF REASON - SUMMARY

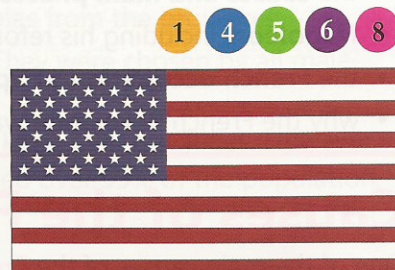
In this chapter, you have learned about the ideas of the **Enlightenment**, and how they inspired a **revolution in America**. We looked at:

- the ideas of the Enlightenment
- the types of reforms introduced by the **enlightened despots**
- the reasons for, and main events of, the **American Revolutionary War**
- the American **Declaration of Independence**
- **art and architecture** in the 18<sup>th</sup> century

## A. THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Use the Internet to help you answer these questions:

- A1. What do the 50 stars and 13 stripes on the **US flag** represent?
- A2. What did the original flag look like? When was it adopted?
- A3. Why does the United States have a national holiday on **4 July**?
- A4. When is **Thanksgiving**? What historical event does it commemorate?



## B. AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

The text in the box comes from a pamphlet called *Common Sense* written in 1776. Read it and answer the questions:

- B1. Are these statements about the pamphlet true or false?
- a) It emphasises the importance of America's relationship with Britain.
  - b) It emphasises the things that all Americans have in common, in order to make them feel that they are part of the same country.
  - c) It describes Europe as a place of civil and religious liberty.
  - d) It describes Europe as a place of tyranny and persecution.
  - e) It argues for independence for the American colonies.
- B2. Why does the pamphlet say that Europe, and not England, is the parent country of America?
- B3. Why does it say that people emigrated to America?

### ADAPTED EXTRACTS FROM COMMON SENSE

*Less than one third of the inhabitants in America are of English descent, so Europe, and not England, is the parent country of America. All Europeans who meet in America are countrymen, because England, Holland, Germany and Sweden are really very similar, if you compare them with the rest of the world.*

*This new world has provided shelter for all people who love civil and religious liberty. The persecution and tyranny that made them emigrate still exists in Great Britain and the rest of Europe. I challenge anyone to show a single advantage that this continent gains by being connected with Great Britain.*

## C. ARCHITECTURE

Use the Internet to find out about the **Royal Palace of Caserta**.

- C1. Where is it?
- C2. Who was it built for?
- C3. How big is it, and how many rooms does it have?
- C4. Describe some of its architectural features.
- C5. Which other building was it designed to compete with?
- C6. What type of factory was built at the palace?
- C7. What was "*Ferdinandopolis*" and why wasn't it completed?

