

FRANCO-AMERICAN ALLIANCE OF 1778



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Description

Through the use of various primary and secondary sources, including excerpts from the Franco American Alliance (1778), students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the basic terms of the 1778 alliance between France and the United States, how and why an absolutist French government under Louis XVI that was diametrically opposed to republican principals decided to support the American colonial cause against his arch rival Britain, and how the alliance was the deciding factor in a colonial victory over Britain and thus how the alliance undoubtedly helped cause the downfall of the Ancient Regime in France itself.

Subjects

World History, European History, US History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- Palace of Versailles, France
- Lafayette Statue, Paris
- Crillon Hotel, Paris
- Jardin du Luxembourg, Paris
- Statue of Lafayette and Washington, Paris
- Valley Forge, Pennsylvania

Essential Questions

- Why did France decide to intervene in the American Revolution on the side of the rebel colonials?
- What were the basic terms of the Treaty of Alliance 1778 between the Americans and the French?
- What role did the French play in helping the American colonies secure their independence?
- What happened to the French government as a result of the Alliance?
- Why did the American and French governments ultimately end their alliance in 1800?

Academic Summary

Excerpts from the Franco-American Treaty of Alliance (1778)

The most Christian king, and the United States of North America, to wit, New Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia, having this day concluded a treaty of amity and commerce, for the reciprocal advantage of their subjects and citizens, have thought it necessary to take into consideration the means of strengthening those engagements, and of rendering them useful to the safety and tranquilly of the two parties; particularly in case Great Britain, in resentment of that connection and of the good correspondence which is the object of the said treaty, should break the peace with France, either by direct hostilities, or by hindering her commerce and navigation in a manner contrary to the rights of nations, and the peace subsisting between the two crowns. And his majesty and the said United States, having resolved, in that case, to join their counsels and efforts against the enterprises of their common enemy, the respective plenipotentiaries empowered to concert the clauses and conditions proper to fulfil the said intentions, have, after the most mature deliberation, concluded and determined on the following articles.

Article I. If war should break out between France and Great Britain, during the continuance of the present war between the United States and England, his majesty and the said United States shall make it a common cause, and aid each other mutually with their good offices, their counsels, and their forces, according to the exigence of conjunctures, as becomes good and faithful allies.

Art. II. The essential and direct end of the present defensive alliance is, to maintain effectually the liberty, sovereignty, and independence absolute and unlimited of the said United States, as well in matters of government as of commerce.

Art. III. The two contracting parties shall, each on its own part, and in the manner it may judge most proper, make all the efforts in its power against their common enemy, in order to attain the end proposed.

Art. VIII. Neither of the two parties shall conclude either truce or peace with Great Britain, without the formal consent of the other first obtained; and they mutually engage not to lay down their arms until the independence of the United States shall have been formally, or tacitly, assured by the treaty or treaties, that shall terminate the war.

Art. X. The most Christian king and the United States agree to invite or admit other powers, who may have received injuries from England, to make common cause with them, and to accede to the present alliance, under such conditions as shall be freely agreed to and settled between all the parties.

Art. XI. The two parties guarantee, mutually, from the present time and forever, against all other powers, to wit, the United States to his most Christian majesty, the present possessions of the crown of France in America, as well as those which it may acquire by the future treaty of peace; and his most Christian

majesty guarantees, on his part, to the United States, their liberty, sovereignty, and independence, absolute and unlimited, as well in matters of government as of commerce, and also their possessions, and the additions or conquests that their confederation may obtain during the war, from any of the dominions now or heretofore possessed by Great Britain in North America, conformably to the fifth and sixth articles above written, the whole as their possession shall be affixed and assured to the said states at the moment of the cessation of their present war with England.

Art. XII. In order to fix more precisely the sense and application of the preceding article, the contracting parties declare, that in case of a rupture between France and England, the reciprocal guarantee declared in the said article shall have its full force and effect the moment such war shall break out; and if such rupture shall not take place, the mutual obligations of the said guarantee shall not commence until the moment of the cessation of the present war between the United States and England shall have ascertained their possessions.

Art XIII. The present treaty shall be ratified on both sides; and the ratification shall be exchanged in the space of six months or sooner if possible.

In faith whereof the respective plenipotentiaries, to wit, on the part of the most Christian king, Conrad Alexander Gérard, royal syndic of the city of Strasburg, and secretary of his majesty's council of state; and on the part of the United States, Benjamin Franklin, deputy of the general Congress from the state of Pennsylvania and president of the convention of the said State, Silas Deane, heretofore deputy from the state of Connecticut, and Arthur Lee, counsellor at law, have signed the above articles, both in the French and English languages; declaring, never-less, that the present treaty was originally composed and concluded in the French language; and they have hereunto affixed their seals. Done at Paris, this 6th day of February, one thousand seven hundred and seventy-eight.

ACT SEPARATE AND SECRET

(Part of the Treaty of Alliance, but not published for the public)

The most Christian King declares, in consequence of the intimate union which subsists between him and the King of Spain, that in concluding with the United States of America this Treaty of amity and commerce, and that of eventual and defensive alliance, his Majesty hath intended and intends to reserve expressly, as he reserves by this present separate and secret act, to his said Catholic Majesty, the Power of acceding to the said Treaties, and to participate in their stipulations at such time as he shall judge proper. It being well understood nevertheless, that if any of the stipulations of the said Treaties are not agreeable to the King of Spain, his Catholic Majesty may propose other conditions analogous to the principal aim of the alliance, and conformable to the Rules of equality, reciprocity and friendship.

The Deputies of the United States in the name of their constituents, accept the present Declaration in its full extent; and the Deputy of the said States, who is fully empowered to treat with Spain, promises to sign on the first Requisition of

his Catholic Majesty, the act or acts necessary to communicate to him the stipulations of the Treaties above written; And the said Deputy shall endeavor in good faith, the adjustment of the points in which the King of Spain may propose any alteration, conformable to the principles of equality, reciprocity and the most sincere and perfect amity; he the said Deputy not doubting but that the person or persons, empowered by his Catholic Majesty to treat with the United States, will do the same with regard to any Alterations of the same kind that may be thought necessary by the said Plenipotentiary of the United States. In Faith whereof, the respective Plenipotentiaries have signed the present separate and secret Article, and affixed to the same their Seals. Done at Paris, this sixth Day of February, one thousand seven hundred and seventy eight.

It was a mismatch of historic and epic proportions. In July 1776, thirteen British North American colonies declared their independence from the biggest and most powerful empire in the world. Filled with confidence and hope, delegates to the Congress in Philadelphia had declared to the world their “unalienable right” to stand together as an independent nation, words that would go on to inspire countless millions across the globe over the next 200 years. In 1776, however, those same words were mostly hollow bluster. Politicians for centuries have written and declared a great many things, but they themselves often don’t have to defend those words with their lives. Such was the case with those founding fathers in 1776.

After a few early colonial victories in 1775 and 1776, resulting in the evacuation of Boston by the British Army, his majesty’s forces had regrouped. By the winter of 1776, General Washington’s colonial army had suffered a series of defeats and was on the ropes. Looking back, an honest and objective analysis of the situation shows that Washington’s forces, really just a small rag-tag collection of farmers and citizen soldiers, stood little chance against the best equipped, best trained, most experienced professional army on the planet. By January 1777, the redcoats had taken back Long Island, New York City, and most of New Jersey. The Continental Congress had abandoned Philadelphia. Revolutionary fervor was at an all-time low among the populous.

If the American colonials were going to win, they desperately needed help. Great Britain’s arch enemy, France, seemed the most logical choice. After all, French and British armies had fought a series of conflicts across the globe for most of the 18th century. When they finally ended in the Peace of Paris 1763, France, which had once controlled a vast colonial empire in North America, stood bloodied and defeated. King Louis XV’s Canadian and American colonial empire was gone, mostly ceded to the British as a result of the treaty. Although his grandson (Louis XVI, who came to the throne in 1774) was an absolutist monarch who harbored no love for American rhetorical ideas behind the natural rights of man and theoretical equality for citizens, perhaps he could be persuaded to help fight the British. Louis and his government were sympathetic, but as long as British forces remained on the offensive, any alliance was out of the question. The Americans needed to show they could win.

The breakthrough came in October 1777. North of Albany, New York at the Battle

Saratoga, Colonial forces under General Horatio Gates defeated British forces under General Johnny Burgoyne. This victory, used publically as propaganda showing the viability of the colonial cause, was the excuse American and French negotiators needed to open talks. On 06 February, in what is now Hotel Crillion in Paris, French and American representatives signed the Franco-American Treaty of Alliance (1778). Under the terms of the alliance, France agreed to formally recognize the “United States” (all thirteen separate colonies were listed) as an independent country and to defend the new country. As a result, French naval and military forces were sent to the New World to help the colonials in their war for independence. Perhaps more importantly, French forces also engaged the British around the world, spreading the conflict far beyond the shores of North America. French materials and supplies also flowed into the American colonies.

By 1781, the tide was turning towards an American victory. In October of that year, General Washington’s colonials, supported by a French army of almost 8000 men, trapped General Cornwallis and his British army at the Yorktown Peninsula in Virginia. When 29 French warships appeared off the coast, cutting off Cornwallis’ retreat, the British surrendered. It was the last battle of the American Revolution. News of the surrender hit the British public hard and support for the war deteriorated rapidly across the kingdom. In September 1783 British and American representatives formally signed the Treaty of Paris ending the war. The United States was officially independent. Franco-American relations, so critical to colonial success, would eventually sour. During the war, the French government ironically drained its treasury funding a conflict dedicated to ideas fundamentally opposed to French notions of absolutism. French officers like Lafayette fighting with Washington in America came to believe a change was necessary in their own homeland. By 1789, desperate for additional funding to help replenish his empty coffers, Louis called for more taxes on the French commoners. This decision helped spark the French Revolution. American leaders (including then President Washington) at first supported reforms in France, but when the revolution turned to violent excess, the American government expressed its neutrality in the ever-growing disturbance. After Louis lost his throne (and his head), Washington’s government stopped paying its debts to the French government, claiming that the debts were owed to the French crown only. By 1798, the American Navy (in support of the British) was fighting a war at sea with French ships. Few Americans were killed or wounded in the skirmishes, but the alliance was dead. After Napoleon came to power in Paris, a new treaty was signed in 1800 formally abandoning the alliance. Over the next century, as the two countries suffered through their own trials and tribulations, relations eventually warmed. In the 1880s, the Statue of Liberty, a permanent memorial to American independence was created in France and then erected in New York Harbor. Smaller versions of the statue can be found around France, including the original bronze model used by French designers which can be seen in the Jardin du Luxembourg (a large public park in Paris).

Through the use of various primary and secondary sources, including excerpts from the Franco American Alliance (1778), students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the basic terms of the 1778 alliance between France and the United States, how and why an absolutist French government under Louis XVI that was

diametrically opposed to republican principals decided to support the American colonial cause against his arch rival Britain, how the alliance was the deciding factor in a colonial victory over Britain and thus how the alliance undoubtedly helped cause the downfall of the Ancient Regime in France itself.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain the basic terms of the Franco-American Alliance of 1778.
2. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how and why absolutist France and Louis XVI supported an American independence movement dedicated to republican principles.
3. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how the Franco-American Alliance was the deciding factor in a colonial victory in the American Revolution.
4. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how support for the American revolutionary cause ultimately doomed the French Ancient Regime.

Procedure

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: What happened to the French North American Empire in 1763? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture – Franco-American Alliance 1778 (20 min)
- Video – France in the American Revolution (10 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the sources and articles about the Franco-American Alliance (1778), taking notes as appropriate. (20 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of the articles for homework to prepare for class discussion.
- Suggestion: Break students into groups and assign different articles to each group.
- Suggestion: AP/Advanced students should concentrate on primary sources.
- Group Activity – Socratic Discussion: The Franco-American Alliance 1778 and its consequences (20 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail the Franco American Alliance (1778), how and why an absolutist French government under Louis XVI that was diametrically opposed to republican principals decided to support the American colonial cause against his arch rival Britain, how the alliance was the deciding factor in a colonial victory over Britain and thus how the alliance undoubtedly helped cause the downfall of the Ancient Regime in France itself.

Extension

On tour: Original Bronze Model of the Statue of Liberty, Jardin du Luxembourg, Paris

While on tour, students in Paris can see the original bronze model for the Statue of Liberty used by French sculptor Frederic Auguste Bartholdi. The public park, located in the “6th arrondissement” is home to over 100 statues and monuments. The statue was donated by Bartholdi’s wife in 1905 and can be found close to Rue Guynemer.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/amrev/turning/french.html
The French Alliance, May 4, 1778 (primary source) – from the Library of Congress
- www.ushistory.org/valleyforge/history/alliance_washington.html
French Alliance Brings Joy to Washington at Valley Forge (website)
- www.norfolkchapter.org/Treaty_of_Alliance_1778.html
Franco-American Alliance 1778 (website)
- www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/alliance.html
Treaty of Alliance with France (website) – from the Library of Congress, this site is a great introduction to the alliance and has a multitude of primary and secondary links. Highly recommended as a great place to start for all classes.
- www.earlyamerica.com/review/winter2000/lafayette.html
The Marquis de Lafayette's dual role in the French Engagement in America (website)
- www.xenophongroup.com/mcjoynt/alliance2.htm
Perspective on the French-American Alliance (academic paper) – this academic paper does a great job of detailing the alliance. Highly recommended for AP / Advanced students.
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4glTewduYU
David Shi on the Role of the French in the American Revolution (video) – this 3-minute video, highly recommended for all classes, presents a brief overview of French involvement in the Revolution by David Shi, noted author and speaker.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=-seZJUJbGkl
Washington's Generals Marquis de Lafayette (video) – this 45-minute video from the Military Channel, is probably too long for most in-class showings, but is great background material for this lesson.

Background Information

- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Alliance_\(1778\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Alliance_(1778))
Treaty of Alliance 1778 – Wikipedia article
- www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/france/country_profile
On the Road: France – from Passports Educational Travel

Key Terms

- Absolutist
- American Revolution
- Battle of Saratoga
- Colonials
- Franco-American Alliance 1778
- Lafayette
- Louis XVI
- Statue of Liberty
- Treaty
- Washington

