



American Legends: The Continental Congress

Charles River Editors

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*Chronicles the history leading up to the First Continental Congress to the final adjournment of the Second Continental Congress in 1789.

*Includes pictures of important people, places, and events.

*Discusses the seminal work of the Continental Congress, including the Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation.

"The appointment of the delegates to both these congresses was generally by popular conventions, though in some instances by state assemblies. But in neither case can the appointing body be considered the original depository of the power by which the delegates acted; for the conventions were either self-appointed "committees of safety" or hastily assembled popular gatherings, including but a small fraction of the population to be represented, and the state assemblies had no right to surrender to another body one atom of the power which had been granted to them, or to create a new power which should govern the people without their will. The source of the powers of congress is to be sought solely in the acquiescence of the people, without which every congressional resolution, with or without the benediction of popular conventions or state legislatures, would have been a mere brutum fulmen; and, as the congress unquestionably exercised national powers, operating over the whole country, the conclusion is inevitable that the will of the whole people is the source of national government in the United States, even from its first imperfect appearance in the second continental congress." – Cyclopædia of Political Science, 1899

The American Revolution is replete with seminal moments that every American learns in school, from the "shot heard 'round the world" to the Declaration of Independence, but in many ways the stories of the First and Second Continental Congress have been obscured by other events in Revolutionary history.

In the summer of 1774, patriot groups around the 13 colonies communicated with each other and brought about the first council that would unite all of them. That September, 56 delegates who had been chosen by their colonial legislatures to attend the First Continental Congress met in Philadelphia to craft a united response to the Intolerable Acts, debate the merits of a boycott of British trade, declare their rights and demand redress. The First Continental Congress eventually petitioned the British government to end the Intolerable Acts, while also determining to convene again the following summer.

As it turned out, the Revolution would be underway before the Second Continental Congress could convene, and that body would eventually oversee an 8 year war effort. The Second Continental Congress was the first American experiment with a federal government, and it learned important lessons and set several precedents, including civilian control of the military, financing a war effort, negotiating diplomatically with European powers like France, adopting the Declaration of Independence, and creating and implementing the Articles of Confederation.

By the time the Continental Congress gave way to the Congress of the Confederation (which itself gave way to the Constitution), the United States had gone full circle. Once a confederation of individual states who fashioned themselves and operated as separate countries, the United States was now one truly united country, ready to confront the heavy task of governing democratically without the assistance of a hereditary monarch. American Legends: The Continental Congress chronicles the history that led up to the formation of the First and Second Continental Congress, analyzes what each Continental Congress accomplished while meeting, and analyzes their legacy. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about the Continental Congress like you never have before, in no time at all.

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