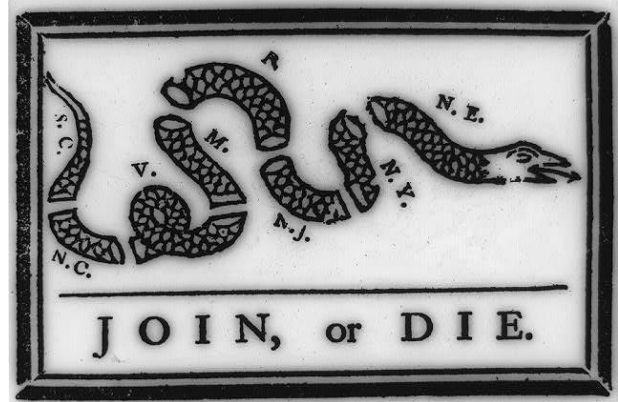


‘United Colonies’ Become the ‘United States of America’

On September 9, 1776, the Second Continental Congress adopted a new name for what had been called the "United Colonies." The name "United States of America" has remained since then as a symbol of freedom and independence.

Benjamin Franklin popularized the concept of a political union with his May 9, 1754 warning in the Pennsylvania Gazette to the British colonies in America to ‘Join or Die’, exhorting them to unite against the French and the Indians, showing a segmented snake, "S.C., N.C., V., M., P., N.J., N.Y., [and] N.E." (LOC) The “Snake Cartoon,” which appeared in the Gazette directly below the article, has usually been considered the first American political cartoon. (National Archives)



In a letter to Richard Partridge on May 8, 1754 (just before the start of the French and Indian War), Franklin, referenced tensions between the British Colonies, French, and local Indians (he included “a Paragraph of News from our Gazette, with an Emblem printed therewith” and noted) ...

The Indian Chiefs, however, have dispatch'd Messages to Pennsylvania, and Virginia, desiring that the English would not be discouraged, but send out their Warriors to join them, and drive the French out of the Country before they fortify; otherwise the Trade will be lost, and, to their great Grief, an eternal Separation made between the Indians and their Brethren the English.

'Tis farther said, that besides the French that came down from Venango, another Body of near 400, is coming up the Ohio; and that 600 French Indians, of the Chippaways and Ottaways, are coming down Siota River, from the Lake, to join them; and many more French are expected from Canada; the Design being to establish themselves, settle their Indians, and build Forts just on the Back of our Settlements in all our Colonies; from which Forts, as they did from Crown-Point, they may send out their Parties to kill and scalp the Inhabitants, and ruin the Frontier Counties.

Accordingly we hear, that the Back Settlers in Virginia, are so terrify'd by the Murdering and Scalping of the Family last Winter, and the Taking of this Fort, that they begin already to abandon their Plantations, and remove to Places of more Safety.

The Confidence of the French in this Undertaking seems well-grounded on the present disunited State of the British Colonies, and the extreme Difficulty of bringing so many different Governments and Assemblies to agree in any speedy and effectual Measures for our common Defence and Security; while our Enemies have the very great Advantage of being under one Direction, with one Council, and one Purse.

Hence, and from the great Distance of Britain, they presume that they may with Impunity violate the most solemn Treaties subsisting between the two Crowns, kill, seize and imprison our Traders, and confiscate their Effects at Pleasure (as they have done for several Years past) murder and scalp our Farmers, with their Wives and Children, and take an easy Possession of such Parts of the British Territory as they find most convenient for them; which if they are permitted to do, must end in the Destruction of the British Interest, Trade and Plantations in America.

Early References to United States

Thomas Jefferson is credited as being the first person to come up with the name (United States), which he used while drafting the Declaration of Independence. In June 1776, Jefferson's draft version of the Declaration started with the following sentence: "A Declaration of the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in General Congress assembled."

The final version of the Declaration starts with the date July 4, 1776 and the following statement: "The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America."

Richard Henry Lee of Virginia had used the name "United Colonies" in a June resolution to Congress; he wrote, "Resolved, That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved."

These thoughts are included in the Declaration's final paragraph,

"We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States."

Also, the words "United States of America" appeared in the first draft of the Articles of Confederation on July 8, 1776, as it was submitted to Congress. The Articles weren't ratified by the states until March 1781.

The United Colonies Become the United States

On Monday, September 9, 1776, the Continental Congress moved to approve some important resolutions. John Adams notes in his Diary on that day,

Resolved, that in all Continental Commissions, and other Instruments where heretofore the Words, 'United Colonies,' have been used, the Stile be altered for the future to the United States.

USA

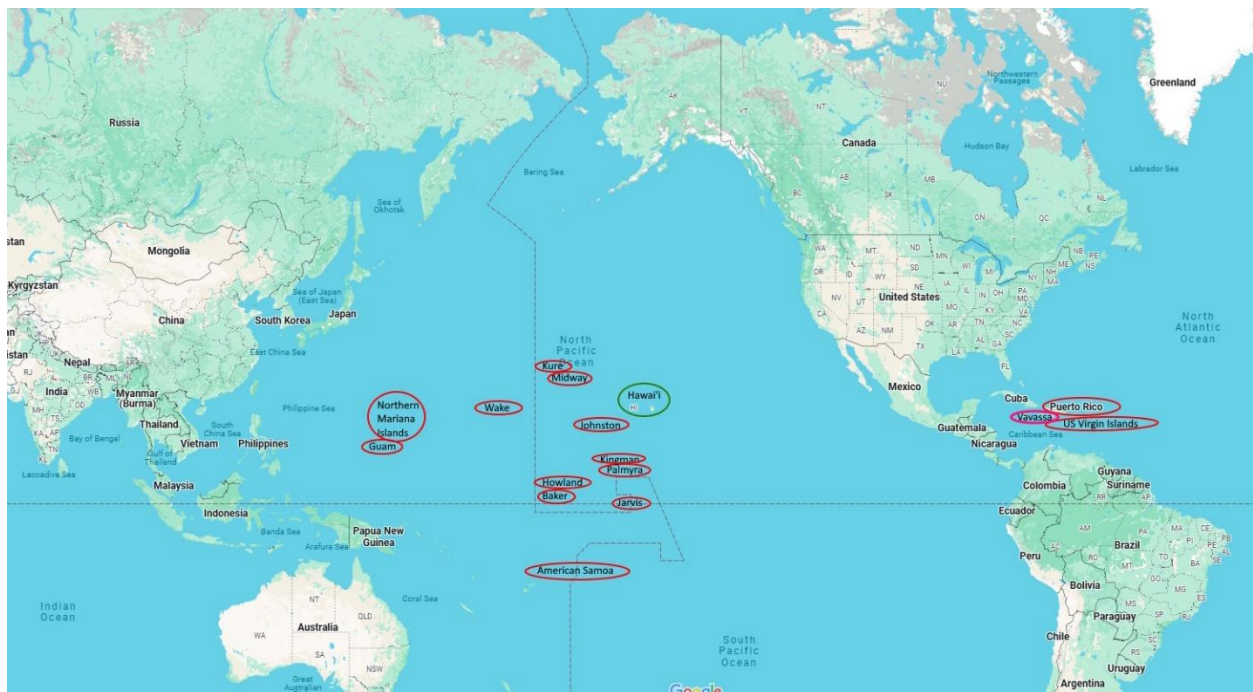
“The abbreviation ‘U. S. A.’ had its beginning in poor quality gunpowder.”

“June 7, 1776, two weeks before the Draft of the Declaration of Independence was reported, Henry Wisner, Robert Treat Paine, and Robert R. Livingston were appointed a committee to enquire into the defect of the gunpowder manufactured at Oswald Eve's mill at Frankfort, Pennsylvania, and instructed to take measures to remedy it.”

“They submitted their report August 28, 1776, and according to their recommendations, Congress resolved that inspectors be appointed to judge the quality of all gunpowder. Every caskful manufactured or purchased was to be examined and none received into the public magazines for the use of the United States of America but such as has been approved by the public inspector as to its quickness in firing, strength, dryness and other necessary qualities.”

“The inspector was to mark each cask so approved with the letters ‘U. S. A.’ and such other marks as were necessary to distinguish the several sorts of powder. Robert Towers was elected by Congress the first inspector of gunpowder.”

“This was the first official determination to use a distinguishing mark or brand this convenient and unmistakable letter triad was not settled upon. Instead, however, the Congress went back to the full words ‘United States.’” (John Fitzpatric, Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine, January 1920)



The Map shows the extent of the States, Territories, and Minor Outlying Islands of the United States. Unlike the extent of the Colonies in 1776, today, the United States spans about 9,500-miles from one extreme to the other (the Caribbean across North America to the western edge of the Pacific) and ten different time zones.

Information here is primarily from John Adams Diary, National Constitution Center, DAR Magazine, Library of Congress, and National Archives.