

AP US HISTORY · UNIT 3

Unit 3 Full Study Guide

Topics 3.2 - 3.9, Synthesis Edition

AP US History Study Guide — Outside-Research Edition

This is a **synthesis** document — it pulls together the causation chains, historiography, and primary sources already built out in depth in the 8 individual topic guides (3.2–3.9) in this same folder. Read those for the full research, citations, terms-and-actors tables, and per-topic practice prompts. This guide's job is to show you how they connect into one continuous argument, which is exactly what a unit-spanning LEQ or DBQ rewards. Every OUTSIDE SOURCE — Beyond AMSCO fact used here is sourced in full in its home topic's guide — check there for the citation.

Master Timeline

Date	Event
1689–1748	King William's, Queen Anne's, and King George's Wars — the first three Anglo-French colonial wars
July 3, 1754	Washington surrenders at Fort Necessity — opening shot of the French and Indian War
1754	Albany Plan of Union proposed (Franklin) and rejected by the colonies
1756–1763	Seven Years' War (global); 1754–1763 in North America
1763	Peace of Paris ends the war; Pontiac's Rebellion; Proclamation of 1763
1764	Sugar Act
1765	Quartering Act; Stamp Act; Virginia Resolves (Patrick Henry); Stamp Act Congress
1766	Stamp Act repealed; Declaratory Act
1767	Townshend Acts
March 5, 1770	Boston Massacre
1770	Townshend Acts repealed (except the tea tax)
1772	Committees of Correspondence begin; the <i>Gaspee</i> burned
1773	Tea Act; Boston Tea Party (December)
1774	Intolerable Acts (Coercive Acts + Quebec Act); First Continental Congress (September)
April 18–19, 1775	Lexington and Concord
June 17, 1775	Bunker Hill
May 1775	Second Continental Congress convenes; Washington named commander-in-chief
July 1775	Olive Branch Petition sent, then rejected; Prohibitory Act
Jan. 1776	<i>Common Sense</i> published
July 4, 1776	Declaration of Independence adopted
1776–77	State constitutions drafted; Articles of Confederation drafted
1776–77	American losses in New York/Philadelphia; Valley Forge winter
Oct. 1777	Battle of Saratoga — the diplomatic turning point
1778	France formally allies with the U.S.
Sept. 5, 1781	Battle of the Chesapeake (French naval victory)
Oct. 1781	Siege of Yorktown — Cornwallis surrenders
1781	Articles of Confederation finally ratified (March)
1783	Treaty of Paris ends the war
1785	Land Ordinance of 1785
1786	Annapolis Convention; Shay's Rebellion begins
Jan. 25, 1787	Shay's forces routed at the Springfield arsenal

Date	Event
May–Sept. 1787	Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia
July 1787	Northwest Ordinance passed
Sept. 17, 1787	Constitution signed, sent to states
1787–88	<i>The Federalist Papers</i> and Anti-Federalist essays (Brutus No. 1, etc.) published
June 1788	New Hampshire ratifies — 9th state, technically enough to take effect
Nov. 1789 / May 1790	North Carolina, then Rhode Island — last two states to ratify
1791	Bill of Rights ratified

The Throughline of Unit 3

- Imperial war reshapes the empire (3.2).** Britain wins the Seven Years' War but nearly doubles its national debt (£75M → £133M) and inherits a territory too large to defend cheaply. It abandons *salutary neglect* and starts taxing/regulating the colonies directly — and, per historian Fred Anderson, the war also created a *psychological* mismatch: colonists came home assuming they were now equal partners in the empire, while Britain came home treating them as subordinate amateurs.
- Taxation sparks resistance (3.3).** A decade of revenue acts (Sugar, Stamp, Townshend, Tea) meets escalating colonial resistance — petitions, then boycotts, then violence — each cycle ending not because the money was resolved but because the *constitutional question* (does Parliament have the authority to tax at all?) never got answered. Small taxes kept functioning as tests of a much bigger principle.
- Ideas justify rebellion (3.4).** Enlightenment concepts — Locke's natural rights/consent/right-of-revolution framework, and (per historian Bernard Bailyn) a sincere ideological fear that concentrated power corrupts liberty — give colonists a vocabulary for a complete break, not just a better deal. Paine's *Common Sense* (Jan. 1776) translates that vocabulary from elite philosophy into a mass movement.
- War is fought and won (3.5).** Colonial unity, the Declaration's Lockean framing, and — decisively — Saratoga's diplomatic consequence (bringing France, then Spain and the Dutch, into the war) turn a losing rebellion into a war Britain can't afford to fully resource. The French navy, not just the French alliance, is what actually traps Cornwallis at Yorktown.
- Revolutionary ideals ripple outward and are also sharply limited (3.6).** "All men are created equal" opens a real if narrow window against slavery (1776–93) that the Constitution's own compromises help close, expands women's civic voice through "Republican Motherhood" without touching legal equality, and inspires the Haitian Revolution to go further than the U.S. itself ever did. Historian Gordon Wood argues the Revolution was nonetheless "radical" — just socially, not politically, radical.
- A weak national government is tried first (3.7).** Fear of recreating British tyranny produces a deliberately powerless Congress — no taxing power, no enforcement power, unanimous consent to amend. The Northwest Ordinance (1787) is a real accomplishment, but Shays's Rebellion (1786–87) turns quiet elite concern into political action for a new convention.
- A stronger government is designed and debated (3.8).** The Constitutional Convention resolves representation (Great Compromise), slavery (Three-Fifths and slave-trade compromises), and trade (Commercial Compromise) through hard bargaining, not consensus — and the ratification fight becomes a real, still-studied debate about whether *scale* (Madison, Federalist 10) or *closeness* (Brutus No. 1) better protects liberty. Federalists win by promising a Bill of Rights.
- The new system balances power carefully (3.9).** Federalism and separation of powers divide authority two different ways — vertically and horizontally — on Madison's core assumption (Federalist 51) that structure, not virtue, has to restrain power. The Bill of Rights (1791) is the final compromise of the founding era — though it would take until *Gitlow v. New York* (1925) for most of it to even apply to the states.

The Unit's Big Historiographical Map

Unit 3 contains **four separate historians' debates** that are really one recurring argument wearing different clothes: *did the founding generation act from sincere principle, or did elite economic/political self-interest drive events that got dressed up in principled language?* Recognizing that these four debates are the same underlying question, applied to four different moments, is one of the strongest synthesis moves available on a Unit 3 essay.

Topic	The debate	"Principle" side	"Interest/structure" side
3.4	Why did colonists rebel?	Bernard Bailyn (<i>Ideological Origins</i> , 1967): sincere ideological fear that power corrupts liberty	Older Progressive historians (e.g., Charles Beard's generation): resistance rhetoric masked colonial elites' economic self-interest
3.6	How radical was the Revolution?	Gordon Wood (<i>Radicalism of the American Revolution</i> , 1992): genuinely transformed social relationships and status	Earlier consensus (conservative <i>and</i> Marxist historians agreed, for different reasons): not very radical at all — just a modest defense of existing liberties, or an incomplete elite-managed shuffle
3.7	Was the 1780s a real crisis?	John Fiske (coined "the Critical Period," 1888): near-collapse that justified the Constitution	Merrill Jensen (1950): a normal postwar depression, exaggerated by nationalists with a class interest in centralizing power
3.8	Was the Constitution democratic?	Mainstream/civic view: a hard-won balance of genuinely competing regional and political interests	Charles Beard (1913): delegates were bondholders/creditors protecting their own financial stakes — challenged since by Forrest McDonald (1958), who found the personalty/realty wealth split didn't hold up

How to use this on an essay: don't just summarize one side. The strongest response notices that Fiske's "Critical Period" framing is the Federalist argument from 1787–88 repeating itself as later historiography, while Jensen's challenge is structurally the same move Bailyn made against Progressive historians in a different topic — that's real historical thinking (sourcing/perspective) at the synthesis level, not just content recall.

The Full-Unit Causation Super-Chain

If a prompt asks you to explain "the causes of the American Revolution" or "the origins of the Constitution" at full-unit scope, this is the single chain to reason from — each topic guide above develops one link in far more depth:

Imperial rivalry in the Ohio Valley (3.2) → Seven Years' War and a doubled British debt → end of salutary neglect, new taxes and troop garrisons (3.2/3.3) → colonial resistance escalates because the dispute is constitutional (who may tax?), not financial (3.3) → Enlightenment natural-rights philosophy gives that resistance a vocabulary for complete separation, not just better terms (3.4) → Declaration of Independence and open war (3.5) → Saratoga brings in France, which is what actually wins the war (3.5) → independence is won, but the new states and Congress deliberately build a *weak* national government out of fear of recreating British-style power (3.7) → that weak government cannot tax, cannot regulate trade, and cannot contain Shays's Rebellion (3.7) → nationalists conclude confederation itself, not just poor execution, is the problem, and call a convention to replace it (3.8) → compromise (not consensus) produces the Constitution, ratified only after a promised Bill of Rights (3.8) → federalism and separation of powers formalize the founding generation's central belief that structure, not trusted virtue, must restrain power (3.9).

Consolidated Primary Sources Worth Quoting Directly

All verified and sourced in full in their home topic guide — quote these precisely rather than paraphrasing when you can.

- **Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (1689):** government requires "the consent of the governed" and may be dissolved if it violates natural rights to life, liberty, and property. (3.4)
- **Declaration of Independence (1776):** "We hold these truths to be self-evident..." — a near point-by-point echo of Locke's framework. (3.4/3.5)
- **Stamp Act Congress, Declaration of Rights and Grievances (1765):** "no taxes ever have been, or can be constitutionally imposed on [colonists], but by their respective legislatures." (3.3)
- **Northwest Ordinance, Article 6 (1787):** "There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory..." — immediately followed by a fugitive-slave proviso protecting slavery in existing states. (3.7)
- **Federalist No. 10 (Madison, 1787):** defines *faction* and argues a **larger** republic dilutes any single faction's power. (3.8)
- **Brutus No. 1 (1787):** argues free republics only survive at **small** scale, where representatives stay accountable. (3.8)
- **Federalist No. 51 (Madison, 1788):** "If men were angels, no government would be necessary... Ambition must be made to counteract ambition." (3.9)

Recommended Videos (Whole Unit)

- **Heimler's History** — "APUSH Unit 3 REVIEW [Period 3: 1754–1800] — Everything You NEED to Know!" The single best whole-unit review, tying 3.2–3.9 together in one pass. (YouTube channel @heimlershistory, verified via search.)
- Each individual topic guide (3.2–3.9) in this folder also has its own topic-matched Heimler's History video plus, for a few topics, a second video on a specific angle (CrashCourse US History episodes for 3.2/3.3, a Gordon Wood podcast interview referenced in 3.6, etc.) — see that guide's "Recommended Videos" section.

Compare/Contrast Reference Tables

Weak government (Articles) vs. strong government (Constitution)

Feature	Articles of Confederation	Constitution
Legislature	Unicameral, 1 vote/state	Bicameral (House + Senate)
Executive	None	President
Judiciary	None	Supreme Court + federal courts
Taxation	No power to tax	Can tax and regulate commerce
Amendment	Unanimous vote required	9/13 states to ratify; Article V process to amend afterward
Law enforcement	No power to enforce laws	Executive branch enforces laws

Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists, and Virginia Plan vs. New Jersey Plan vs. Great Compromise — full tables in the Topic 3.8 guide.

Key People Across the Unit

- **George Washington:** militia commander sparking the French and Indian War (3.2) → commander-in-chief of the Continental Army (3.5) → unanimously elected chair of the Constitutional Convention (3.8)
- **Benjamin Franklin:** proposes the Albany Plan (3.2) → elder statesman at the Constitutional Convention, age 81 (3.8) — his own son William was a Loyalist (3.5)
- **James Madison:** drafts the Virginia Plan (3.8) → "Father of the Constitution" → co-authors *The Federalist Papers* (3.8) → drafts the Bill of Rights (3.9) — a genuinely different political philosophy (strong-nationalist) from the states'-rights Democratic-Republican he becomes in the 1790s
- **Samuel Adams:** Massachusetts Circular Letter and Boston Massacre propaganda (3.3) → Committees of Correspondence (3.3) → *not* chosen as a Constitutional Convention delegate (3.8)
- **Patrick Henry:** Virginia Resolves against the Stamp Act (3.3) → First Continental Congress radical (3.5) → refuses to attend the Constitutional Convention → prominent Anti-Federalist in Virginia's ratification fight (3.8)
- **Thomas Jefferson:** drafts the Declaration of Independence (3.5); absent from the Constitutional Convention, in Europe on diplomatic business (3.8)
- **Alexander Hamilton:** pushes for the Annapolis and Philadelphia Conventions (3.8) → Constitutional Convention nationalist → co-authors *The Federalist Papers*, helps swing New York's ratification (3.8)
- **John Dickinson:** *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* opposing the Townshend Acts (3.3) → drafts the Articles of Confederation (3.7) → Constitutional Convention delegate (3.8) — the same person on both sides of the weak-government/strong-government arc

Full-Unit LEQ/DBQ Practice Prompts

1. **Causation, full-unit scope:** "Evaluate the extent to which economic factors, rather than political philosophy, explain the origins of both the American Revolution and the U.S. Constitution." A strong thesis has to take a position across **two** separate historiographical debates (Bailyn-vs-Progressive for the Revolution, Beard-vs-McDonald for the Constitution) and show whether your answer is consistent across both moments or genuinely different for each.

2. **Comparison, full-unit scope:** *"Compare the political structure of government under the Articles of Confederation with the political structure established by the Constitution, and explain why reformers concluded amendment was insufficient and replacement was necessary."* Use the Full-Unit Causation Super-Chain above as your evidence spine.
3. **Continuity and change, full-unit scope:** *"Evaluate the extent to which the ideals proclaimed in 1776 were realized in the government and society actually built by 1791."* A strong thesis draws on 3.6 (women, enslaved Americans, Native nations) **and** 3.8/3.9 (compromises that structurally protected slavery, an Electoral College built to filter democracy) to argue for a specific, defensible gap between ideal and practice — not just "some progress, some limits."

One Thing to Remember

Every "weakness," "compromise," and "betrayal" in this unit was somebody's deliberate, reasonable response to the failure that came immediately before it: salutary neglect ends because of war debt; the Articles are weak because of fear of British-style power; the Constitution centralizes power because the Articles proved too weak; the Bill of Rights exists because Anti-Federalists feared the Constitution centralized too much. Unit 3 isn't a list of events — it's one long argument about how much power a government needs, with each answer creating the next problem.