

# Disputes on Sovereignty During the American Revolution

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## Abstract

Britain's commercial and taxation policies in the early 1760s provoked resentment in the country's American colonies, but the deeper issue in debate was based on disputes about the nature and location of sovereignty in the British empire. The Westminster parliament claimed absolute sovereignty over the American colonies, but the Americans insisted that the sovereign authority over their internal affairs lay in each colony's provincial legislature. To resolve this increasingly bitter dispute, both sides put forward suggestions that attempted to reconcile the differences between them. These suggestions failed because neither side was prepared to sacrifice its vital interests. When the American colonies achieved their independence from the British parliament these new states had to decide the question of the nature and location of sovereignty for themselves. Their first solution, the Articles of Confederation, proved unsatisfactory. The

Federal Constitution made an impressive attempt to divide sovereignty between the national government and the governments of the individual states, but this did not prevent a civil war in the 1860s and there is still an open question whether sovereignty ultimately lies in the people, the written constitution or the Supreme Court.

**Key Words:** sovereignty, Westminster parliament, colonial legislatures, states' rights, Federal Constitution