**Level: Third Year**

**Module: Etude de Textes de Civilisation**

**Tutor : Boudjerida Messaouda**

**Lecture one  :The Road to Independence**

From Britain — began as a small skirmish between British troops and armed colonists on April 19, 1775. The British had set out from Boston, Massachusetts, to

seize weapons and ammunition that revolutionary colonists had collected in nearby villages. At Lexington, they met a group of Minutemen, who got that name because they were said to be ready to fight in a minute. The Minutemen intended only a silent protest, and their leader told them not to shoot unless fired on first. The British ordered the Minutemen to disperse,

and they complied. As they were withdrawing, someone fired a shot. The British troops attacked the Minutemen with guns and bayonets.

Fighting broke out at other places along the road as the British soldiers in their bright red uniforms made their way back to Boston. More than 250 “redcoats” were killed or wounded.

The Americans lost 93 men.

Deadly clashes continued around Boston as colonial representatives hurried to Philadelphia to discuss the situation. A majority voted to go to war against Britain. They agreed to combine colonial militias into a continental army, and they appointed George Washington of Virginia as commander-in-chief. At the same time, however, this Second Continental

Congress adopted a peace resolution urging King George III to prevent further hostilities. The king rejected it and on August 23 declared that the American colonies were in rebellion.

Calls for independence intensified in the coming months. Radical political theorist Thomas Paine helped crystallize the argument for separation. In a pamphlet called *Common Sense*,

which sold 100,000 copies, he attacked the idea of a hereditary monarchy. Paine presented two alternatives for America:

continued submission under a tyrannical king and outworn system of government, or liberty and happiness as a self- sufficient, independent republic.

The Second Continental Congress appointed a committee,

headed by Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, to prepare a document

outlining the colonies’ grievances against the king and

explaining their decision to break away. This Declaration of

Independence was adopted on July 4, 1776. The 4th of July has

since been celebrated as America’s Independence Day.

The Declaration of Independence not only announced the

birth of a new nation. It also set forth a philosophy of human

freedom that would become a dynamic force throughout the

world. It drew upon French and British political ideas, especially

those of John Locke in his *Second Treatise on Government*,

reaffirming the belief that political rights are basic human

rights, and are thus universal.

Declaring independence did not make Americans free.

British forces routed continental troops in New York, from

Long Island to New York City. They defeated the Americans

at Brandywine, Pennsylvania, and occupied Philadelphia,

forcing the Continental Congress to flee. American forces were

victorious at Saratoga, New York, and at Trenton and Princeton

in New Jersey. Yet George Washington continually struggled to

get the men and materials he desperately needed.

Decisive help came in 1778, when France recognized

the United States and signed a bilateral defense treaty.

Support from the French government, however, was based on

geopolitical, not ideological, reasons. France wanted to weaken

the power of Britain, its long-time adversary.

The fighting that began at Lexington, Massachusetts,

continued for eight years across a large portion of the

continent. Battles were fought from Montreal, Canada, in the

north to Savannah, Georgia, in the south. A huge British army

surrendered at Yorktown, Virginia, in 1781, yet the war dragged

on with inconclusive results for another two years. A peace

treaty was finally signed in Paris on April 15, 1783.

The Revolution had a significance far beyond North

America. It attracted the attention of Europe’s political theorists

and strengthened the concept of natural rights throughout the Western world. It attracted notables such as Thaddeus

Kosciusko, Friedrich von Steuben, and the Marquis de Lafayette,

who joined the revolution and hoped to transfer its liberal ideas

to their own countries.

The Treaty of Paris acknowledged the independence,

freedom, and sovereignty of the 13 former American colonies,

now states. The task of knitting them together into a new

nation lay ahead.