SSUSH4 – Analyze the ideological, military, social, and diplomatic aspects of the American Revolution.

The American Revolution helped to form the ideological, military, social, and diplomatic foundation upon which the United States is based. Ideological reasons for the war’s outbreak are emphasized in the Declaration of Independence. John Locke’s thoughts regarding natural rights and the Social Contract Theory are used as justification for independence laid out in the document and continue to be cornerstones of American identity. The military efforts of George Washington and the Continental Army against the well established British forces exemplify determination and commitment to the new nation. The American Revolution’s emphasis on skilled command and military training remain basic tenets of the modern United States military. Diplomacy was essential in America’s revolutionary success. Forging relationships through diplomatic negotiation has been essential in maintaining freedom and democracy throughout the history of the United States. Although the cause of independence was ideologically based on the visionary dream of natural rights, not all social groups who supported the cause benefitted from the victory. Women, American Indians, and enslaved and free Blacks contributed to the war effort in various capacities, even without much hope of gaining rights in the newly created United States.

a. Investigate the intellectual sources, organization, and argument of the Declaration of Independence including the role of Thomas Jefferson and the Committee of Five.

The Declaration of Independence was the ideological explanation for American independence. Although Thomas Jefferson was the principal author of the document, he was one member of the Committee of Five who had been tasked with drafting a statement to represent the Continental Congress delegates’ decision to seek independence from Britain.

Richard Henry Lee, a delegate to the Continental Congress from Virginia, proposed in June of 1776 that the colonies should be free and independent. The full Congress voted in favor of the break from British control on July 2, 1776 and formally adopted the Declaration of Independence two days later on July 4, 1776. The document had been under construction since early June.

Tension had escalated in Boston between the Patriots and the British who occupied the city throughout 1776. Frenzied support for Thomas Paine’s Common Sense pamphlet also helped embolden the American Patriots. By June of 1776, the Continental Congress recognized the critical juncture they were fast approaching and designated five delegates to write a rationale for independence. The Committee of Five, as they were known, included Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Robert Livingston of New York, and Roger Sherman of Connecticut. Jefferson was known to be a prolific writer and was asked by the group to write an initial draft of the public statement for independence.

After about two weeks of diligent work, Jefferson presented the draft to some of the other members of the Committee of Five for review. They made only a few minor adjustments and
the document was provided to the full Continental Congress on June 28, 1776 for consideration. A few sticking points emerged that caused more revisions to be made to Jefferson’s draft. In all, there were eighty-six changes made by the Continental Congress to Jefferson’s draft before it was finally adopted on July 4, 1776. The major revisions to the document concerned slavery. Some of the delegates from Southern Colonies refused to sign the document as written by Jefferson because it was critical of slavery. All references to slavery were consequently struck from the document.

Scholarly debate continues today on the origins of the ideas contained in the Declaration of Independence. Most scholars hold that the ideas of John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* significantly influenced Jefferson’s writing. John Locke was a British philosopher who believed that all individuals naturally possess certain rights regardless of status. As part of these natural rights, Locke proposed that people have the right to choose their own form of government and consequently give it power.

The Social Contract Theory, subscribed to by John Locke and other political thinkers, forms the basis of this argument. on each side’s rights and responsibilities. The people give the government its power and in return the government gives the people defense and protection of their natural rights while managing the government. The people have a responsibility in the arrangement to follow the laws created by the government intended to manage and protect the nation. If people don’t follow the laws, the government will restrict their individual rights. If the government, at some point, abuses the power given to it by the people, the people in turn have the right to replace or overthrow the government.

This social contract arrangement is the basis for colonial independence. The colonists believed that King George III’s government had violated their social contract and abused its power with the implementation of unfair taxes, attacks by British forces against colonial citizens, and the restrictions placed on local colonial assemblies. The colonists, in turn, believed they were exercising their right to replace or overthrow the government that had abused the power it had been given.

Locke’s key ideas of “natural rights” form the foundation of the social contract theory. He believed that all people possess natural rights that are unconditional, such as a person’s life, liberty, and property. A discussion of these rights and their protection is prominently featured in the Declaration of Independence’s Preamble.

The Declaration of Independence is organized into three key sections. The first section, the Preamble, calls the attention of the world to the plight of the American colonists. In this section, Jefferson laid out the main ideological reasons why the American colonies had chosen to, and had a right to, break away from the British government. Key ideas included in the Preamble are natural rights, the origin and purposes of government as explained above in the Social Contract Theory, and the reasons why the colonists had elected to rebel against the King and Parliament.
The second section of the Declaration of Independence is a list of grievances or justifications. This section contains 27 separate points of difference the colonists had with King George III and his government. The grievances provide evidence of the social contract violations the government made in its role with the people.

The final section of the document offers a discussion of the Americans’ many unsuccessful previous attempts to get relief from Britain. An example of the previous attempts for peace referred to in this section of the Declaration of Independence is the Olive Branch Petition. This was a plea directly to King George III by the colonists’ Second Continental Congress in 1775 for negotiation to avoid armed conflict, which was ignored by the king. The section ends with the colonists’ determination that the only way for Americans to have their rights restored is to reclaim them by declaring independence from Britain and by controlling their own government. The final signed document was printed for wide distribution throughout the thirteen new and independent states now united in war against Britain.

b. Explain the reason for and significance of the French alliance and other foreign assistance including the diplomacy of Benjamin Franklin and John Adams.

Americans faced the more prepared, better financed, and better equipped British military in the American Revolution. In order for the Americans to supplement their war effort, diplomats worked in Europe to secure help from other countries. Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, who had been key figures in the development of the Patriot cause in the colonies spent the majority of the American Revolution in Europe working to negotiate assistance from France, Spain, and the Netherlands. The French ultimately provided critical military and financial assistance, while the Spain and the Netherlands provided primarily financial assistance to the American cause.

A comparison of the resources held by the British and by the colonies at the time of the Declaration of Independence provides a solid explanation for why Benjamin Franklin and John Adams worked to secure the French alliance and foreign assistance during the Revolutionary War. The population of the thirteen colonies totaled about 2.5 million (of which 500,000 were slaves) and Great Britain’s population was about 8 million at the time of the American Revolution. In addition to this smaller pool from which to draw soldiers, not all colonists supported the Patriot cause. The Loyalists made up about 1/3 of the colonial population. Another critical disadvantage that the American forces faced was that the British military was made up of professional soldiers who were trained and supplied far better than the newly created Continental Army. Financially, the Continental Congress struggled to secure resources and equip the Continental Army to carry out the war because the newly created government lacked money to pay for the mounting costs. Under the provisions of the Articles of Confederation, the Continental Congress did not have the power to tax. Requests for voluntary payments from the states to the Continental Congress was their only method to generate revenue. The funds needed to finance the war were never fully provided by the states. Given all of these tremendous obstacles, it was critical for the Continental Congress to secure alliances and financial assistance from other countries.
France emerged as the greatest ally for the Americans during the Revolutionary War. Great Britain had become the dominant world power after successfully concluding the French and Indian War in 1763. Britain’s traditional enemies (France, Spain, and the Netherlands) looked for a way to regain the advantage in world trade. As Britain’s American colonies began rebelling, French government officials representing their king, Louis XVI, began negotiating with the Americans. Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin were instrumental in negotiating the Franco-American Treaty in 1778. The alliance essentially turned the tide of the war against Great Britain. French naval attacks in the Caribbean and against British holdings in India forced the Royal Navy to weaken its blockade along the eastern seaboard of the United States. The French also supplied large quantities of muskets, cannons, shot and powder to Washington’s forces. Spain and the Netherlands were also Britain’s rivals and contributed substantial financial assistance to the American cause.

It was after the colonists won the Battle of Saratoga, New York in 1777 that France was willing to openly support the Americans by entering the Revolutionary War opposed to their rival Great Britain. The naval support that ultimately came from the French was critical in winning the British surrender at the Battle of Yorktown in 1781. Benjamin Franklin had been working in France to secure the alliance since the winter of 1776. He spent much of his time interacting with the upper classes and educated elements of society in order to gain access to the French leadership. Franklin became very popular in France and was known for his folksy appearance such as wearing a fur cap instead of a fashionable wig common among the upper classes.

John Adams was also an American ambassador working in Europe to secure much needed support for the revolutionary cause. Adams spent some time in France with Benjamin Franklin at about the time that the formal alliance had been achieved. It was in the Netherlands that Adams had his greatest diplomatic impact. In April of 1782, when the Treaty of Paris was being negotiated, Adams secured the formal recognition of the United States and a substantial financial loan from the Dutch.

While in Europe, Franklin and Adams were representatives of the United States (along with John Jay and Henry Laurens) in negotiating the Treaty of Paris 1783 that settled the Revolutionary War. The diplomatic successes of both Benjamin Franklin and John Adams helped to secure the French military alliance and critical financial assistance from various European sources. The United States, given the significant limitations they faced in fighting against the more powerful and prepared British force, relied heavily on the support provided to them from Britain’s own European rivals.

c. Analyze George Washington as a military leader, including but not limited to the influence of Baron von Steuben, the Marquis de Lafayette, and the significance of Valley Forge in the creation of a professional military.

George Washington was appointed by the Continental Congress to be the Commander in Chief of the Continental Army in June 1775. Washington had developed an excellent military
reputation in the French and Indian War when he led British and Virginian forces out of the ambush that killed the British commander William Braddock.

After his appointment, Washington reorganized the Continental Army, secured additional equipment and supplies, and started a training program to turn inexperienced recruits into a professional military. As a field general, Washington was not the most skilled commander. Despite losing many battles, Washington’s strong personality and reputation garnered him the support and respect of American soldiers.

The Revolutionary Armies were composed of two distinct groups – the state militias and the Continental Army. Militias were organized by each state and community and generally provided their own weapons and uniforms. Enlistments were short term and training was poor among the militia groups that Washington had to manage as a supplement to the also struggling Continental Army. The militia groups were notoriously unreliable in battle. Washington once remarked that militia units, “...come in you cannot tell how, go, you cannot tell when; and act, you cannot tell where; consume your provisions, exhaust your stores, and leave you at last in a critical moment.” It was for these reasons that Washington had urged the Congress to provide for the creation of a standing army – the Continental Army.

In the newly created Continental Army, enlistments were from one to three years. Pay was meager. Rations were short and the army often had to scavenge to find supplies of food, fuel, and fodder. Disease, brought on by close confinement combined with poor diet and sanitation, was sometimes a bigger danger than the British Army. The most common camp killers were influenza, typhus, typhoid, and dysentery. The new Continental Army, faced with these challenges, limited their deadly effects through the work of dedicated surgeons, capable nurses, a smallpox inoculation program, and camp sanitation regulations.

Washington’s skill at maintaining his force under trying conditions is best shown during the winter months of 1777-1778 when the American Army was encamped for the season at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. In the Campaign of 1777, the British had tried to combine their Canadian forces with their forces in the American colonies. If successful, this plan would have split the American colonies north and south along the Hudson River. The British failed to accomplish their goal when they were defeated in central New York at Saratoga. A third British force attacked and successfully captured Philadelphia in September 1777. Washington attempted to re-capture Philadelphia but failed. With winter approaching, Washington withdrew the Continental Army into a winter encampment. The winter weather was harsh and the soldiers lacked adequate supplies. The army remained intact during the trying circumstances thanks to George Washington’s strong leadership. The critical success of the winter at Valley Forge proved to be the further development of the army. European soldiers such as the Prussian Baron von Steuben and the Marquis de Lafayette of France arrived at Valley Forge to assist Washington in making the winter months in camp productive by training the soldiers to be more effective when fighting resumed the following spring.
Baron Friedrich Wilhelm Augustus von Steuben had been recommended to Benjamin Franklin by the French Minister of War as someone who would be helpful in developing the American army. Once in America, Steuben was especially instrumental in teaching close-order drill critical for the maneuver and fire tactics of eighteenth century warfare. He created a military drill manual that was written in French. George Washington’s close aide, Alexander Hamilton, translated the manual into English. Valley Forge essentially became a boot camp to develop the American soldiers into more knowledgeable and trained fighters.

The Marquis de Lafayette also assisted in the professionalization and training of American forces during the winter at Valley Forge. He was a well-connected Frenchman who believed deeply in the American cause and volunteered to serve with Washington and helped to secure French resources. Lafayette worked closely with George Washington and was very successful and brave during many battles of the American Revolution, including Brandywine Creek and Yorktown. The French aristocrat was a critical link between the American military and the French alliance.

George Washington was a successful military commander because he recognized his force’s limitations in training and supplies. He forged a path to success based on the resources he had available and utilized the assistance of others supportive of the American cause. The winter at Valley Forge could have easily dissolved the American force as enlistments were coming to an end and desertion was also a great possibility for many soldiers given the trying conditions and limited success the Continental Army had experienced. Washington’s great leadership ability is evident in not only convincing soldiers to remain in the military, but to use the winter productively through training and assistance from the Baron von Steuben and the Marquis de Lafayette.

d. Investigate the role of geography at the Battles of Trenton, Saratoga, and Yorktown.

George Washington recognized the limitations his forces faced against the British Army and Navy. Most of the engagements between the Continental Army and the British were managed by Washington in such a way as to preserve his forces, prolong the war, and wear down the enemy’s will to fight. However, there were three battles in particular- Trenton, Saratoga, and Yorktown- where Washington won decisive victories and each is considered a turning point in the Revolutionary War. Geography played a significant role in each battle. In all three, rivers were essential in the Americans’ ability to trap the British and force them to surrender. The high ground occupied by the American forces at Saratoga also contributed to their success over the British in that pivotal battle.

Early in the war, Washington engaged the British in quick, strong strikes and then retreated as a means of overcoming the inadequate training of American forces and to boost morale. This principle is illustrated by Washington’s Crossing of the Delaware and subsequent Battle of Trenton on the night of December 25 and morning of December 26, 1776. The American forces under Washington’s command routed the Hessians (German mercenaries hired by the British to
fight in the Revolutionary War) in a surprise attack at Trenton, New Jersey. This decisive victory boosted the morale of American forces, which had been defeated in New York earlier that year.

Washington and the Continental Army had been forced out of New York during the late summer and fall of 1776. They had been forced to retreat to the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River. Washington used the poor weather conditions and geographic challenge of a river crossing to aid him in successfully carrying out the surprise attack at Trenton. Washington carefully planned the secret attack and led approximately 2,400 men across the icy Delaware River on Christmas night 1776. Increasingly poor weather conditions caused the river crossing to take far more time than Washington had planned. The ability to surprise the Hessian mercenaries camped at Trenton relied on the cover of darkness and a swift river crossing. Ultimately, Washington concluded that abandoning the planned attack and retreating back across the river was more dangerous than pushing forward in the early morning hours of December 26th. The attack was a resounding success and of the 1,500 Hessians trapped at Trenton by American forces, only 500 escaped without either being killed or captured. Only two soldiers in the Continental Army were killed and only four were wounded.

The Hessians were caught off-guard for a number of reasons. First, the proximity of the river to the Hessian camp at Trenton was thought to provide them with an extra barrier against attack. Second, the Christmas holiday was thought to be an unlikely time for military action. And third, the terrible storm that kicked up on Christmas night caused the Hessians to be even more relaxed in their surveillance, thinking that attack would not be possible in such conditions. The Crossing of the Delaware and subsequent victory at Trenton is considered significant in the war because of the confidence it gave to the American soldiers who had very little success in the preceding months.

The Battle of Saratoga is another critical battle from the Revolutionary War in which geography contributed to the American victory. The British plan to defeat the rebellious Americans was to take control of New York, which would drive a wedge between New England and the rest of the colonies. If the colonies were divided, the British believed the Americans would have no choice but to end the war. British commander General John Burgoyne was leading his forces south from Canada down Lake Champlain to the Hudson River. British General William Howe was to lead another force toward the north from New York City. The coordinated movements of the British was intended to secure the entire New York region. Howe, instead of trekking north as part of the plan to assist Burgoyne, pursued control of Philadelphia. Burgoyne subsequently was trapped by the Americans at Saratoga, New York and forced to surrender his forces.

The American commander who faced Burgoyne as the British moved south from Canada was General Horatio Gates. The British force was slowed because of the large supply convoy that traveled with Burgoyne. While Burgoyne slowly made his way from Canada toward the south, the Americans were steadily building fortifications on the high ground around Saratoga. Bemis Heights is a ridge that overlooks the Hudson River Valley where Burgoyne’s British forces were
headed. Having cannon on top of the ridge and fortified walls at the base gave the Americans control of the area.

When Burgoyne’s British forces approached the fighting ensued. After a number of weeks of intense fighting, the British were surrounded and Burgoyne was forced to surrender on October 17, 1777. Controlling the high ground at Bemis Heights with fortifications at the Hudson River geographically contributed to the American victory at Saratoga. This victory is considered a turning point in the American Revolution because it signaled to France that the Americans had a chance of winning. The French had been reluctant of openly agree to an alliance with the Americans for fear that victory was not possible. The victory at Saratoga was just what Benjamin Franklin needed in his European negotiations for alliance and support of the American cause.

The American Revolution concluded with the Battle of Yorktown in Virginia. Again, this decisive battle was influenced by the geography of the area. After the decisive victory at Saratoga and the resulting French alliance with America, the British adjusted their battle plan. Britain’s new plan was to have General Charles Cornwallis move the war to the southern states to try to separate those colonies from revolutionary forces in the north. Cornwallis immediately succeeded in a series of British victories, but the Americans were able to prevent a complete victory in the south. Cornwallis pursued the Americans into Virginia but was met with heavy resistance. Wishing to maintain communications with Great Britain by sea, General Cornwallis retreated to the coastal town of Yorktown on the Chesapeake Bay. While awaiting the British fleet, his forces were surrounded by the combined French and American armies.

In July, 1781 George Washington began moving his army toward the south from Rhode Island. The French Navy arrived at the Chesapeake Bay to block the British escape by sea. The American forces surrounded the British by land at Yorktown. After three weeks of fighting, the British General Cornwallis surrendered to Washington at Yorktown on October 17, 1781. This victory secured the final end to the American Revolution. The combined effort by the American forces and French Navy were critical. Geography contributed to the overall victory at Yorktown because again, the body of water served as another line of defense. The French Navy was able to cut off the escape route the British would have needed to prolong the war.

Geography played a role in the American Revolutionary War victories at Trenton, Saratoga, and Yorktown. Knowing the land can assist in military strategy. Controlling bodies of water and the high ground proved critical in these particular battles.

e. Examine the roles of women, American Indians, and enslaved and free Blacks in supporting the war effort.

Women, American Indians, and enslaved and free Blacks all played a role in supporting the American Revolutionary War effort. In addition to the efforts of the Daughters of Liberty to find alternative goods to feed and clothe families during the pre-Revolutionary War boycotts, women in America often traveled with the soldiers and sometimes served as spies during the
Military encampments often included large numbers of women. They were known as “camp followers” and would wash, sew, cook, and nurse the wounded and sick in camp. The women followed the soldiers because they were often afraid, hungry, and looking for work. Officers' wives also would be encamped with the soldiers from time to time. According to Mount Vernon records, Martha Washington spent 52 of the approximately 103 months of the war with or near George Washington. The number of women travelling with the American soldiers varied depending on the location and whether or not the military was engaged in an active campaign. There is even evidence that a few women, such as Deborah Samson, disguised themselves as men to participate in the fighting. As the questionable legend of “Molly Pitcher” portrays, she had been giving water to the soldiers when her husband collapsed and she picked up his spot in firing the cannon. “Molly Pitcher” may be a characterization of the combined realities of some women in the Revolutionary War including a woman named Margaret Corbin. Samson and Corbin are the only two women to later receive federal pensions for their Revolutionary War service.

Other women served as spies for the Continental Army. The British Army frequently hired local women to clean, cook, and sew for them. This arrangement allowed great access to the British commanders and for eavesdropping on their plans. Some female spies reported directly to Patriot commanders and others sent messages stitched inside button covers or the hems of clothing. Their ability to inconspicuously gather information made them quite valuable to the Patriot cause. There were also Loyalist women who acted as spies among the Patriots and reported back to the British.

American Indians found themselves in a difficult position as the colonists were fighting the British over control of North American lands. Most of the western American Indians sided with the British in an effort to try to prevent further settlement in the region by American colonists as was the policy of the British Proclamation of 1763. Other American Indian groups in the east were divided over which side to support. The six tribes of the longstanding Iroquois League were divided. Two tribes, the Oneidas and the Tuscaroras, supported the Patriots in the Revolutionary War. The other four tribes- the Mohawks, Seneca, Cayuga, and Onondaga- sided with the British. The Cherokee tribe in the South also split its loyalty between the Patriot cause and the British. The allegiance of the small numbers of American Indians to the colonists had minimal impact on the outcome of the war. Those who did help to fight on the side of the victorious Americans were dismayed when the negotiations for the Treaty of Paris did not include American Indian representatives and their lands were not protected from colonial settlement.

Enslaved and free Blacks, in many cases, viewed the American Revolution as an opportunity for expanding their own rights with the basis for revolution being a call to protect natural rights.
Crispus Attucks, a Black man living in Boston, was one of the Americans killed by the British at the Boston Massacre. He was supporting the Patriots in their efforts to challenge the increased British presence and control over the colonial city. Estimates suggest at least 5,000 enslaved and free Blacks fought with the Patriots. However, those who fought with the Continental Army and with the colonial militia groups did not receive their freedom following the conclusion of the Revolutionary War.

Women, American Indians, and enslaved and free Blacks all contributed to the Patriot cause through volunteering to fight and through support of the military forces. Their sacrifices however were not rewarded or recognized in the war’s 1783 Treaty of Paris settlement. The groups were also not extended rights by the new government of the United States even though natural rights were a primary focus of the Patriot’s Declaration of Independence. While the cause for independence captured the loyalty of many societal groups, not all groups reaped the rewards of victory.

**f. Explain the significance of the Treaty of Paris, 1783.**

The 1783 Treaty of Paris ended the American Revolutionary War. The negotiated settlement is significant because the United States won its independence from Great Britain and gained possession of land stretching to the Mississippi River. The provisions for land boundaries and the considerations for Loyalists are important features of the document.

The United States sent three negotiators to represent the new nation in peace talks held in Paris. John Adams who had been representing the United States in the Netherlands, John Jay who had been representing the United States in Spain, and Benjamin Franklin who had secured the French alliance were the three Americans at the peace talks. After extended discussions beginning in April 1782, a peace agreement was reached in September of 1783. Adams, Jay, and Franklin had secured an exceptionally favorable agreement for the United States.

The provisions of the **1783 Treaty of Paris** include:

1. Great Britain recognized its former American colonies as an independent nation.
2. The western boundary of the new United States was to be the Mississippi River.
3. Fishing rights off the coast of Newfoundland were guaranteed to the United States.
4. Pre-war debts owed by Americans to British merchants would be paid.
5. States would be encouraged by the Continental Congress to restore the homes, land and confiscated possessions back to Loyalists.

Great Britain signed separate peace treaties with France and Spain. In these agreements, Spain reclaimed control of Florida and land west of the Mississippi River creating the boundaries of the United States. Britain kept control of Canada. France lost its North American lands but regained some of the lands around the world it had lost to Britain during the earlier wars between the two nations.
The 1783 Treaty of Paris is significant because it emboldened the new United States with significant territorial gains beyond the Appalachian Mountains allowing for expansion. The new United States was set to establish its government and sought to prosper through trade of American goods.