**Document Based Question: Albany Plan of Union**

Using the three documents and your knowledge of the 1700s in colonial America, answer the following question.

Was the Albany Plan of Union successful in achieving greater political unity in the colonies?

**Document A**

Benjamin Franklin, Reasons and Motives for the Albany Plan of Union. July 1754.

I. Reasons and Motives on which the Plan of Union was formed.

The Commissioners from a number of the northern colonies being met at Albany, and considering the difficulties that have always attended the most necessary general measures for the common defence, or for the annoyance of the enemy, when they were to be carried through the several particular assemblies of all the colonies; some assemblies being before at variance with their governors or councils, and the several branches of the government not on terms of doing business with each other; others taking the opportunity, when their concurrence is wanted, to push for favourite laws, powers, or points that they think could not at other times be obtained, and so *creating* disputes and quarrels; one assembly waiting to see what another will do, being afraid of doing more than its share, or desirous of doing less; or refusing to do any thing, because its country is not at present so much exposed as others, or because another will reap more immediate advantage; from one or other of which causes, the assemblies of six (out of seven) colonies applied to, had granted no assistance to Virginia, when lately invaded by the French, though purposely convened, and the importance of the occasion earnestly urged upon them: Considering moreover, that one principal encouragement to the French, in invading and insulting the British American dominions, was their knowledge of our disunited state, and of our weakness arising from such want of union; and that from hence different colonies were, at different times, extremely harassed, and put to great expence both of blood and treasure, who would have remained in peace, if the enemy had had cause to fear the drawing on themselves the resentment and power of the whole; the said Commissioners, considering also the present incroachments of the French, and the mischievous consequences that may be expected from them, if not opposed with our force, came to an unanimous resolution, *That an union of the colonies is absolutely necessary for their preservation*.

Why did Benjamin Franklin believe a union was necessary? What reasons did the colonies have for not joining together for the common good previously?

**Document B**

Hendrick, a Mohawk leader among the Iroquois Confederation, sought to renew diplomatic alliances between the Iroquois and the colonists. However, his speech at the meeting also criticized the British officials and colonial politicians for the weakness of their response in the face of French activities. Albany Congress June 1754.

"You have asked us the reason of our living in this divided manner; the reason is, your neglecting us these three years past; (then taking a stick and throwing it behind his back) You have thus thrown us behind your backs, and disregarded us; whereas, the French are subtle and vigilant people, ever using their utmost endeavors to seduce and bring our people over to them.

"Brethren, The encroachments of the French, and what you have said to us on that article on behalf of the king our father; as these matters were laid before us as of great importance, so we have made strict enquiry among all our people, if any of them have either sold or given the French leave to build the forts you mention, and we cannot find that either sale has been made or leave has been given; but the French have gone thither without our consent or approbation, nor ever mentioned it to us.

"Brethren, The governor of Virginia and the governor of Canada are both quarrelling about lands which belong to us, and such a quarrel as this may end in our destruction. They fight who shall have the land; the governors of Virginia and Pennsylvania have made paths through our country to trade, and built houses without acquainting us with it; They should have first asked our consent to build there, as was done when Oswego was built….

"Brethren, You desired us to speak from the bottom of our hearts, and we shall do it. Look about you, and see all these houses full of beaver, and money is all gone to Canada; likewise your powder, lead, and guns, which the French make use of at the Ohio.

“Brethren, You were desirous we should open our minds and our hearts to you; look at the French, they are men; they are fortifying every where; but we are ashamed to say it; you are like women, bare and open, without any fortifications.”

Who does Hendrick blame for the fractured relationship between the Iroquois and the British and why? What is his main complaint in paragraph three? What is the meaning of the last paragraph? What do you think he would like the British to do?

**Document C**

Benjamin Franklin’s woodcut illustration. First published in the Pennsylvania Gazette (newspaper) on May 9th, 1754, in an attempt to persuade colonists to unify for the purposes of joint defense against the French and their American Indian allies. This is considered the first American political cartoon.



Why did Franklin use the image of a cut up snake? What was he implying or suggesting? What do the abbreviated letters stand for? Is a picture worth a thousand words?

**Document D**

**Albany Plan of Union**

It is proposed that humble application be made for an act of Parliament of Great Britain, by virtue of which one general government may be formed in America, including all the said colonies, within and under which government each colony may retain its present constitution, except in the particulars wherein a change may be directed by the said act, as hereafter follows.

1. That the said general government be administered by a President-General, to be appointed and supported by the crown; and a Grand Council, to be chosen by the representatives of the people of the several Colonies met in their respective assemblies.

2. That within -- months after the passing such act, the House of Representatives that happen to be sitting within that time, or that shall be especially for that purpose convened, may and shall choose members for the Grand Council, in the following proportion, that is to say,

 Massachusetts Bay 7 New Hampshire 2 Connecticut 5 Rhode Island 2 New York 4 New Jersey 3 Pennsylvania 6 Maryland 4 Virginia 7 North Carolina 4 South Carolina 4 ------ 48

3. -- who shall meet for the first time at the city of Philadelphia, being called by the President-General as soon as conveniently may be after his appointment.

4. That there shall be a new election of the members of the Grand Council every three years; and, on the death or resignation of any member, his place should be supplied by a new choice at the next sitting of the Assembly of the Colony he represented.

5. That after the first three years, when the proportion of money arising out of each Colony to the general treasury can be known, the number of members to be chosen for each Colony shall, from time to time, in all ensuing elections, be regulated by that proportion, yet so as that the number to be chosen by any one Province be not more than seven, nor less than two.

6. That the Grand Council shall meet once in every year, and oftener if occasion require, at such time and place as they shall adjourn to at the last preceding meeting, or as they shall be called to meet at by the President-General on any emergency; he having first obtained in writing the consent of seven of the members to such call, and sent duly and timely notice to the whole.

7. That the Grand Council have power to choose their speaker; and shall neither be dissolved, prorogued, nor continued sitting longer than six weeks at one time, without their own consent or the special command of the crown.

8. That the members of the Grand Council shall be allowed for their service ten shillings sterling per diem, during their session and journey to and from the place of meeting; twenty miles to be reckoned a day's journey.

9. That the assent of the President-General be requisite to all acts of the Grand Council, and that it be his office and duty to cause them to be carried into execution.

10. That the President-General, with the advice of the Grand Council, hold or direct all Indian treaties, in which the general interest of the Colonies may be concerned; and make peace or declare war with Indian nations.

11. That they make such laws as they judge necessary for regulating all Indian trade.

12. That they make all purchases from Indians, for the crown, of lands not now within the bounds of particular Colonies, or that shall not be within their bounds when some of them are reduced to more convenient dimensions.

13. That they make new settlements on such purchases, by granting lands in the King's name, reserving a quitrent to the crown for the use of the general treasury.

14. That they make laws for regulating and governing such new settlements, till the crown shall think fit to form them into particular governments.

15. That they raise and pay soldiers and build forts for the defence of any of the Colonies, and equip vessels of force to guard the coasts and protect the trade on the ocean, lakes, or great rivers; but they shall not impress men in any Colony, without the consent of the Legislature.

16. That for these purposes they have power to make laws, and lay and levy such general duties, imposts, or taxes, as to them shall appear most equal and just (considering the ability and other circumstances of the inhabitants in the several Colonies), and such as may be collected with the least inconvenience to the people; rather discouraging luxury, than loading industry with unnecessary burdens.

17. That they may appoint a General Treasurer and Particular Treasurer in each government when necessary; and, from time to time, may order the sums in the treasuries of each government into the general treasury; or draw on them for special payments, as they find most convenient.

18. Yet no money to issue but by joint orders of the President-General and Grand Council; except where sums have been appropriated to particular purposes, and the President-General is previously empowered by an act to draw such sums.

19. That the general accounts shall be yearly settled and reported to the several Assemblies.

20. That a quorum of the Grand Council, empowered to act with the President-General, do consist of twenty-five members; among whom there shall be one or more from a majority of the Colonies.

21. That the laws made by them for the purposes aforesaid shall not be repugnant, but, as near as may be, agreeable to the laws of England, and shall be transmitted to the King in Council for approbation, as soon as may be after their passing; and if not disapproved within three years after presentation, to remain in force.

22. That, in case of the death of the President-General, the Speaker of the Grand Council for the time being shall succeed, and be vested with the same powers and authorities, to continue till the King's pleasure be known.

23. That all military commission officers, whether for land or sea service, to act under this general constitution, shall be nominated by the President-General; but the approbation of the Grand Council is to be obtained, before they receive their commissions. And all civil officers are to be nominated by the Grand Council, and to receive the President-General's approbation before they officiate.

24. But, in case of vacancy by death or removal of any officer, civil or military, under this constitution, the Governor of the Province in which such vacancy happens may appoint, till the pleasure of the President-General and Grand Council can be known.

25. That the particular military as well as civil establishments in each Colony remain in their present state, the general constitution notwithstanding; and that on sudden emergencies any Colony may defend itself, and lay the accounts of expense thence arising before the President-General and General Council, who may allow and order payment of the same, as far as they judge such accounts just and reasonable.

**Source:** *Leonard Larrabee, ed., Papers of Benjamin Franklin, vol. 5 (1959), 387-92.*

## Milestones: 1750-1775

### Albany Plan of Union, 1754

The Albany Plan of Union was a plan to place the British North American colonies under a more centralized government. The plan was adopted on July 10, 1754, by representatives from seven of the British North American colonies. Although never carried out, it was the first important plan to conceive of the colonies as a collective whole united under one government.



**Cartoon originally appearing in Franklin's Pennsylvania Gazette in 1754**

Representatives of the colonial governments adopted the Albany Plan during a larger meeting known as the Albany Congress. The British government in London had ordered the colonial governments to meet in 1754, initially because of a breakdown in negotiations between the colony of New York and the Mohawk nation, part of the Iroquois Confederation. More generally, imperial officials wanted to sign a treaty with the Iroquois that would articulate a clear colonial-Indian relations policy for all the colonies to follow. The colonial governments of Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and New Hampshire all sent commissioners to the Congress. Although the treaty with the Iroquois was the main purpose of the Congress, the delegates also met to discuss intercolonial cooperation on other matters. With the French and Indian War looming, the need for cooperation was urgent, especially for colonies likely to come under attack or invasion.

Prior to the Albany Congress, a number of intellectuals and government officials had formulated and published several tentative plans for centralizing the colonial governments of North America. Imperial officials saw the advantages of bringing the colonies under closer authority and supervision, while colonists saw the need to organize and defend common interests. One figure of emerging prominence among this group was Pennsylvanian Benjamin Franklin. Earlier, Franklin had written to friends and colleagues proposing a plan of voluntary union for the colonies. Upon hearing of the Albany Congress, his newspaper, the Pennsylvania Gazette, published the political cartoon 'Join or Die,' which illustrated the importance of union by comparing the colonies to pieces of a snake's body. The Pennsylvania government appointed Franklin as a commissioner to the Congress, and on his way, Franklin wrote to several New York commissioners outlining 'short hints towards a scheme for uniting the Northern Colonies' by means of an act of the British Parliament.

The Albany Congress began on June 19, and the commissioners voted unanimously to discuss the possibility of union on June 24. The union committee submitted a draft of the plan on June 28, and commissioners debated aspects of it until they adopted a final version on July 10.

Although only seven colonies sent commissioners, the plan proposed the union of all the British colonies except for Georgia and Delaware. The colonial governments were to select members of a 'Grand Council,' while the British Government would appoint a 'president General.' Together, these two branches of the unified government would regulate colonial-Indian relations and also resolve territorial disputes between the colonies. Acknowledging the tendency of royal colonial governors to override colonial legislatures and pursue unpopular policies, the Albany Plan gave the Grand Council greater relative authority. The plan also allowed the new government to levy taxes for its own support.

Despite the support of many colonial leaders, the plan, as formulated at Albany, did not become a reality. Colonial governments, sensing that it would curb their own authority and territorial rights, either rejected the plan or chose not to act on it at all. The British Government had already dispatched General Edward Braddock as military commander in chief along with two commissioners to handle Indian relations, and believed that directives from London would suffice in the management of colonial affairs.

The Albany Plan was not conceived out of a desire to secure independence from Great Britain. Many colonial commissioners actually wished to increase imperial authority in the colonies. Its framers saw it instead as a means to reform colonial-imperial relations, while recognizing that the colonies collectively shared certain common interests. However, the colonial governments' own fears of losing power, territory, and commerce at one another's expense, and at the expense of the British Parliament, ensured the Albany Plan's failure.

Despite the failure of the Albany Plan, it served as a possible model for future attempts at union: it attempted to establish the division between the executive and legislative branches of government, while establishing a common governmental authority to deal with external relations. More importantly, it conceived of the colonies of mainland North America as a collective unit, separate from the mother country but also from the other British colonies in the West Indies and elsewhere.

## Milestones: 1750-1775

### French and Indian War/Seven Years' War, 1754-63

The French and Indian War was the North American conflict that was part of a larger imperial conflict between Great Britain and France known as the Seven Years' War. The French and Indian War began in 1754 and ended with the Treaty of Paris in 1763. The war provided Great Britain enormous territorial gains in North America, but disputes over subsequent frontier policy and paying the war's expenses led to colonial discontent, and ultimately to the American revolution.



**Map from the French and Indian War**

The French and Indian War resulted from ongoing frontier tensions in North America as both French and British imperial officials and colonists sought to extend each country's sphere of influence in frontier regions. In North America, the war pitted France, French colonists, and their Native allies against Great Britain, the Anglo-American colonists and the Iroquois Confederacy, which controlled most of upstate New York and parts of northern Pennsylvania. In 1753, prior to the outbreak of hostilities, Great Britain controlled the 13 colonies up to the Appalachian Mountains, but beyond lay New France, a very large, sparsely settled colony that stretched from Louisiana through the Mississippi Valley and Great Lakes to Canada. (See Incidents Leading up to the French and Indian War and Albany Plan)

The border between French and British possessions was not well defined, and one disputed territory was the upper Ohio River valley. The French had constructed a number of forts in this region in an attempt to strengthen their claim on the territory. British colonial forces, led by lieutenant colonel George Washington, attempted to expel the French in 1754, but were outnumbered and defeated by the French. When news of Washington's failure reached British Prime Minister Thomas Pelham-Holles, Duke of Newcastle, he called for a quick undeclared retaliatory strike. However, his adversaries in the Cabinet outmaneuvered him by making the plans public, thus alerting the French Government and escalating a distant frontier skirmish into a full-scale war.



**General Edward Braddock**

The war did not begin well for the British. The British Government sent General Edward Braddock to the colonies as commander in chief of British North American forces, but he alienated potential Indian allies and colonial leaders failed to cooperate with him. On July 13, 1755 Braddock himself died while on a failed expedition to capture Fort Duquesne in present-day Pittsburgh, after being mortally wounded in an ambush. The war in North America settled into a stalemate for the next several years, while in Europe the French scored an important naval victory and captured the British possession of Minorca in the Mediterranean in 1756. However, after 1757 the war began to turn in favor of Great Britain. British forces defeated French forces in India, and in 1759 British armies invaded and conquered Canada.

Facing defeat in North America and a tenuous position in Europe, the French Government attempted to engage the British in peace negotiations, but British minister William Pitt (the elder), Secretary for Southern Affairs, sought not only the French cession of Canada but also commercial concessions that the French Government found unacceptable. After these negotiations failed, Spanish King Charles III offered to come to the aid of his cousin, French King Louis XV, and their representatives signed an alliance known as the Family Compact on August 15, 1761. The terms of the agreement stated that Spain would declare war on Great Britain if the war did not end before May 1, 1762. Originally intended to pressure the British into a peace agreement, the Family Compact ultimately reinvigorated the French will to continue the war, and caused the British Government to declare war on Spain on January 4, 1762 after bitter infighting between King George III's ministers.

Despite facing such a formidable alliance, British naval strength and Spanish ineffectiveness led to British success. British forces seized French Caribbean islands, Spanish Cuba, and the Philippines. Fighting in Europe ended after a failed Spanish invasion of British ally Portugal. By 1763, French and Spanish diplomats began to seek peace. In the resulting Treaty of Paris (1763), Great Britain secured significant territorial gains, including all French territory east of the Mississippi river, as well as Spanish Florida, although the treaty returned Cuba to Spain.

Unfortunately for the British, the fruits of victory brought seeds of future trouble with Great Britain's American colonies. The war had been enormously expensive, and the British government's attempts to impose taxes on colonists to help cover these expenses resulted in increasing colonial resentment of British attempts to expand imperial authority in the colonies. British attempts to limit western expansion by colonists and inadvertent provocation of a major Indian war further angered the British subjects living in the American colonies. These disputes would ultimately spur colonial rebellion that eventually developed into a full-scale war for independence.