

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE WAR
FOR AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE, 1763-1775

1760-1764: As a result of the French and Indian War, Great Britain begins to adopt a new policy of imperialism designed to administer North America and recoup part of the war's cost from the colonies

The Writs of Assistance, 1760

- A type of search warrant for enforcing the Navigation Acts
- General, reusable, and transferable search warrants that allowed a customs officer to search any premises for contraband.
- Use by royal customs officials escalate beginning in 1760
- Attorney James Otis argues that such writs violate English principles of law and equity and claims that search warrants must describe the particular persons and places to be searched, and must be based on some evidence instead of just mere suspicion.

Proclamation of 1763

- Prohibited colonials from moving west of the Appalachians
- Purpose: to avoid inciting disputes with Indians, thus preventing future uprisings/wars
- Colonials infuriated
 - Many veterans had fought in the war and felt betrayed: "We fought the war for the right to move west"
 - Land speculators believed Americans should have access to lands.

Sugar Acts passed in 1764

- First act ever passed specifically that raised revenue for the crown.
- Aimed to regulate the illegal triangular trade by collecting duties that the colonists had not paid for many years.
- Reduced taxes on molasses but taxed all molasses, not just molasses from French West Indies.

Quartering Act, 1765

- Certain colonies required to provide food & quarters for British troops.

1765-1774: Three great crises in the colonies lead to the American Revolution: Stamp Act, Townshend Acts, and Tea Act

The Stamp Act of 1765

- Purpose: to raise revenues to support the new military force in the colonies
- Provisions:
 - Official stamps on paper would serve as proof of payment.
 - Tax applied to published materials and legal documents, e.g.,

- pamphlets, newspapers, diplomas, bills of lading, marriage certificates, death certificates, mortgages, insurance policies, liquor licenses, & playing cards.
- English Prime Minister Grenville's view
 - Stamp Act was reasonable and just
 - Only required colonials to pay their fair share for colonial defense
- Colonists' views
 - distinguished between "legislation" and "taxation"
 - "Legislation, "external taxes," the right of Parliament regarding the empire; e.g. customs duties (tariffs)
 - Taxation, "internal taxes," exclusive right of local representative government
 - No taxation without representation"
 - British taxation was robbery; attacking sacred rights of property
- Grenville's response: colonies had "virtual representation" in Parliament
 - All British commoners were represented, in the House of Commons, even those who did not vote for members in Parliament.
- Stamp Act repealed in 1766 after widespread colonial agitation
- But at the same time, Parliament passed the Declaratory Act
 - Claimed that Parliament had the right to tax colonies in the future.
 - Purpose was partly to save face

Townshend Acts (1767)

- Charles Townshend took control of Parliament and sought to punish the colonies for the Stamp Act uprising.
- Provisions:
 - Small import duty placed on glass, white lead, paper, paint, silk and tea.
 - Tax was an indirect customs duty ("external tax")
- Colonial reaction
 - Colonies angrily interpreted the act as an inappropriate tax to raise revenue
- Boston "Massacre"
 - Peaceful arrival of troops in Boston aroused American resistance
 - Colonials fearful of standing armies; believed Britain sought to suppress colonial liberties.
 - March 5, 1770 British soldiers (having been provoked) fired on a crowd
 - Eleven civilians killed or wounded
 - Word of the "massacre" spread throughout the colonies (esp. by Sons of Liberty)
 - Colonial propaganda grossly exaggerated the event.
 - John Adams and the trial of the soldiers

- Committees of Correspondence
 - Samuel Adams used propaganda to whip up colonial resentment
 - Adams organized local committees of correspondence in Mass., Nov. 1772.
 - Chief function was to spread propaganda and information by interchanging letters in order to keep opposition to British policy alive.
 - Intercolonial committees of correspondence emerged, evolving directly into the first American congresses.

The Tea Act Crisis and the First Continental Congress

- Tea Act (1773)
 - British government granted British East India Company a monopoly of the American tea trade.
 - Government placed a small tax on the tea.
 - Price of tea would be even lower than existing prices, even with the tax.
 - Americans reacted angrily: saw Tea Act as an attempt to trick colonies into accepting the tax through cheaper tea.
- Boston Tea Party, Dec. 16, 1773
 - Sons of Liberty, dressed as Indians, boarded three ships, smashed hundreds of chests open, and dumped the tea into the harbor.
- “Intolerable Acts” (Coercive Acts)
 - 1774, Parliament passed laws designed to punish Boston for the Tea Party
 - Boston Port Act
 - harbor remained closed until damages were paid and law and order restored.
 - Massachusetts Government Act
 - Massachusetts charter revoked
 - King had power to appoint the Governor’s Council, not the assembly
 - Forbade town meetings except for election of town officials.
 - Administration of Justice Act
 - Enforcing officials who killed colonists could now be tried in England instead of the colonies (thereby avoiding colonial justice).
 - Quartering Act
 - Provided for the quartering of troops once again in Boston.
- The First Continental Congress
 - In response to “Intolerable Acts,” the committees of correspondence urged the colonies to act quickly.
 - First Continental Congress met in autumn 1774
 - Delegates included Samuel Adams, John Adams, George Washington, & Patrick Henry.
 - Actions:

- Denounced “Intolerable” Acts
- Called on colonies to suspend all trade with rest of British empire
- Yet, Congress restated allegiance to the King
- No real desire to independent; merely wanted grievances redressed.

1775-1776: The Resort to War and Independence

Lexington and Concord — “The Shot Heard around the World”

- Parliament ordered General Gage, new Governor of Massachusetts, to arrest leaders of the rebellion and prepare for military action.
- Gage sought to prevent bloodshed by disarming the local militia.
 - April 1775, 700 British redcoats sent secretly to nearby Lexington & Concord to seize gunpowder and arrest Sam Adams & John Hancock.
 - Paul Revere’s ride
 - Battle of Lexington and Concord began when Minutemen refused to disperse on the Lexington Green and shots were fired.
 - 8 Americans killed, 10 wounded.
 - Redcoats continued on to Concord. 6 miles away.
 - As more militia arrived, the British withdrew under heavy fire to Boston.
 - Colonials begin year-long siege of Boston.

Escalation: The Battle of Bunker Hill

- June 17—The first major fight between British and American troops occurs at Boston in the Battle of Bunker Hill.
 - American troops are dug in along the high ground of Breed's Hill (the actual location) and are attacked by a frontal assault of over 2000 British soldiers who storm up the hill.
 - The British succeed in taking the hill, but at a loss of half their force, over a thousand casualties, with the Americans losing about 400, including important colonial leader, General Joseph Warren.

The Second Continental Congress

- May 10, 1775—The Second Continental Congress convenes in Philadelphia, with John Hancock elected as its president.
- On May 15, 1775, the Congress places the colonies in a state of defense.
- On June 15, the Congress unanimously votes to appoint George Washington general and commander-in-chief of the new Continental Army.
- July 5, 1775—The Continental Congress adopts the Olive Branch Petition which expresses hope for a reconciliation with Britain,

appealing directly to the King for help in achieving this. In August, King George III refuses even to look at the petition and instead issues a proclamation declaring the Americans to be in a state of open rebellion.

- July 6, 1775—The Continental Congress issues a Declaration on the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms detailing the colonists' reasons for fighting the British and states the Americans are "resolved to die free men rather than live as slaves."

1776: Independence

- January 9, 1776—Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" is published in Philadelphia.

- The 50 page pamphlet is highly critical of King George III and attacks allegiance to Monarchy in principle while providing strong arguments for American independence.
- It becomes an instant best-seller in America.

- June-July 1776:

- On June 7, Richard Henry Lee, a Virginia delegate to the Continental Congress, presents a formal resolution calling for America to declare its independence from Britain.
- On June 11, Congress appoints a committee to draft a declaration of independence.

- Committee members are Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Roger Livingston and Roger Sherman. Jefferson is chosen by the committee to prepare the first draft of the declaration, which he completes in one day.

- On July 2, twelve of thirteen colonial delegations (New York abstains) vote in support of Lee's resolution for independence. On July 4, the Congress formally endorses Jefferson's Declaration, with copies to be sent to all of the colonies. The actual signing of the document occurs on August 2, as most of the 55 members of Congress place their names on the parchment copy.

- June-July—A massive British war fleet arrives in New York Harbor consisting of 30 battleships with 1200 cannon, 30,000 soldiers, 10,000 sailors, and 300 supply ships, under the command of General William Howe and his brother Admiral Lord Richard Howe.