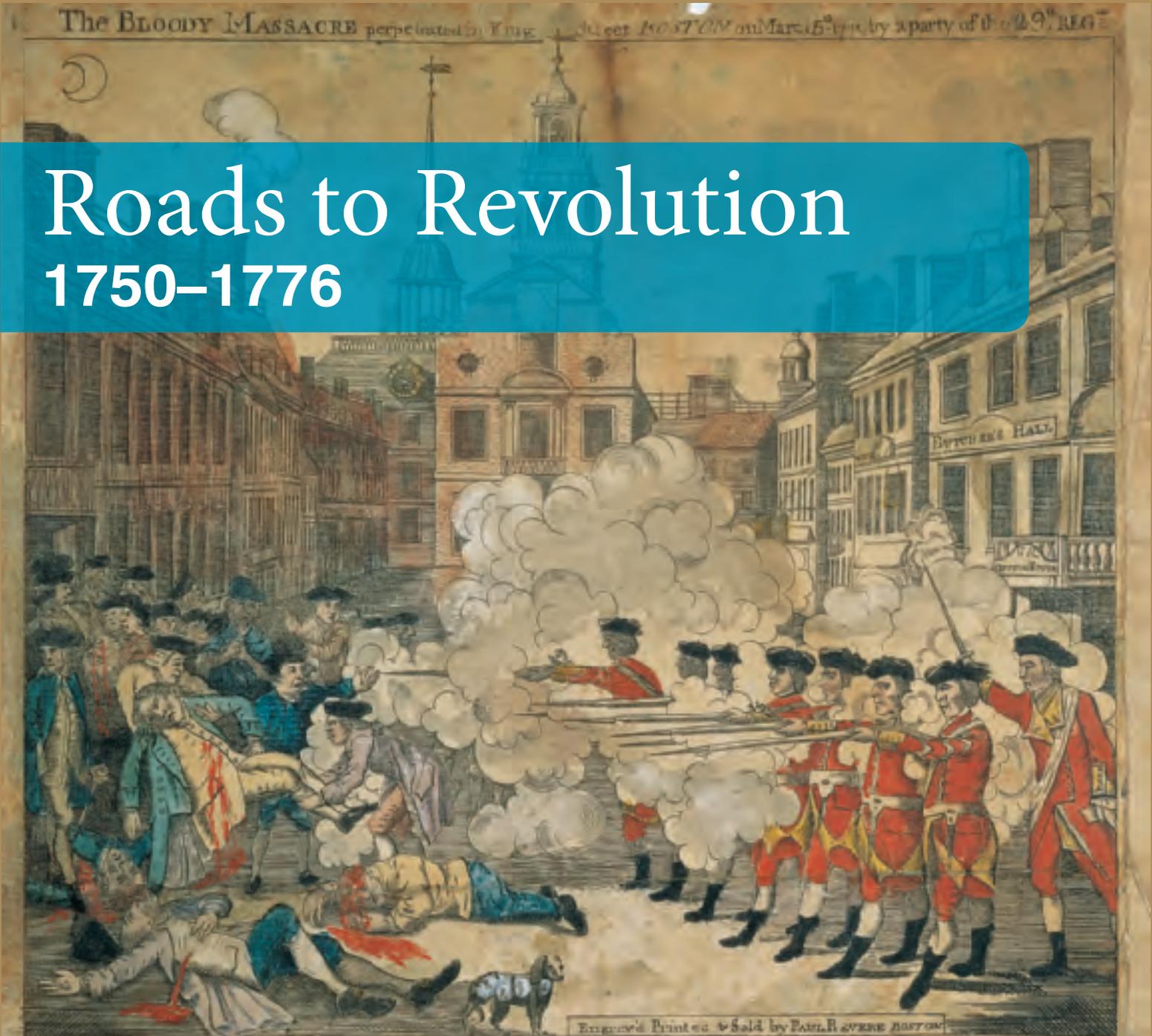


# 5

## Roads to Revolution 1750–1776



Unhappy Britain! see thy Sons deplore,  
Thy narrow Walks beset with guiltless Gore  
While rathless Power and its savage Bands,  
With murderous Rancour stretch their bloody Hands,  
Like fierce Barbarians grinning o'er their Prey,  
Approve the

If scalding drops from Rage from Anguish Wring,  
If speechless Sorrows labour in a tongue,  
Or if a weeping World can ought appease  
The plaintive Obolts of Victims such as these,  
The Patriot's copious Tears for each are shed,

But know Earth summons to that awful Goal,  
Where Justice strips the Murderer of his Soul,  
Should venal C— to the scandal of the Land,  
Snatch the reluctant Villain from her Hand,  
Keen Executions on this Plate infer'd,



**GEORGE ROBERT TWELVES HEWES**  
(*Bostonian Society*)

ON THE EVENING of March 5, 1770, an angry crowd of poor and working-class Bostonians gathered in front of the guard post outside the Boston customs house. The crowd was protesting a British soldier's abusive treatment of a Boston apprentice who was trying to collect a debt from a British officer. Suddenly, shots rang out. When the smoke had cleared, four Bostonians lay dead, and seven more were wounded, one mortally.

Among those in the crowd was an impoverished twenty-eight-year-old shoemaker named George Robert Twelves Hewes. Hewes had already witnessed, and once experienced, abuses by British troops, but the appalling violence of the **Boston Massacre**, as the shooting became known, led Hewes to political activism. Four of the five who died were personal friends, and he himself received a serious blow from a soldier's rifle butt. Over the next several days, Hewes attended meetings and signed petitions denouncing British conduct, and he later testified against the soldiers. Thereafter, he participated in such anti-British actions as the Boston Tea Party.

How was it that four thousand British troops were stationed on the streets of Boston—a city of sixteen thousand—in 1770? What had brought those troops and the city's residents to the point of violence? What led obscure, humble people like George Robert Twelves Hewes to become angry political activists in an age when the lowborn were supposed to leave politics to their social superiors? The Boston Massacre was one of a long chain of events, involving people from all walks of life, that culminated in a complete break between Britain and its American colonies.

The seeds of conflict between Britain and the colonies were planted during the **Seven Years' War** (1756–1763), known to Anglo-Americans as the French and Indian War, when Britain and the colonies together defeated France. As a result, Britain gained most of France's former territory in eastern North America. Thereafter, Parliament attempted to reorganize its suddenly enlarged empire by tightening control over economic and political affairs in the colonies. Long accustomed to benefiting economically from the empire while conducting provincial and local affairs on their own (see *Technology and Culture*), colonists resisted this effort to centralize decision making in London. Many colonists interpreted Britain's clampdown as calculated antagonism intended to deprive them of their prosperity and self-governance. Others stressed the importance of maintaining order and authority under British rule.

For many ordinary colonists like Hewes, the conflict was more than a constitutional crisis. In the port cities, crowds of poor and working people engaged in direct, often violent demonstrations against British authority. Sometimes, they acted in support of elite radicals, and other times in defiance of them. Settlers in the remote backcountry

**THE BOSTON MASSACRE, 1770, ENGRAVING BY PAUL REVERE** After this incident, a Bostonian observed, "unless there is some great alteration in the state of things, the era of the independence of the colonies is much nearer than I once thought it, or now wish it." (*Library of Congress*)

### **Triumph and Tensions: The British Empire, 1750–1763 (p. 122)**

A Fragile Peace, 1750–1754	122
The Seven Years' War in America, 1754–1760	123
The End of French North America, 1760–1763	124
Anglo-American Friction	126
Frontier Tensions	126

### **Imperial Authority, Colonial Opposition, 1760–1766 (p. 127)**

Writs of Assistance, 1760–1761	127
The Sugar Act, 1764	129
The Stamp Act Crisis, 1765–1766	129
Ideology, Religion, and Resistance	134

### **Resistance Resumes, 1766–1770 (p. 135)**

Opposing the Quartering Act, 1766–1767	135
Crisis over the Townshend Duties, 1767–1770	136
Customs "Racketeering," 1767–1770	137
"Wilkes and Liberty," 1768–1770	138
Women and Colonial Resistance	139

### **The Deepening Crisis, 1770–1774 (p. 140)**

The Boston Massacre, 1770	140
The Committees of Correspondence, 1772–1773	141
Conflicts in the Backcountry	141
The Tea Act, 1773	143

### **Toward Independence, 1774–1776 (p. 143)**

Liberty for African-Americans	144
The "Intolerable Acts"	144
The First Continental Congress	146
From Resistance to Rebellion	146
Common Sense	147
Declaring Independence	148

of several colonies invoked the language and ideas of urban radicals when resisting large landowners and distant colonial governments dominated by seaboard elites. These radical movements reflected economic tensions within the colonies as well as the growing defiance of elites by ordinary colonists. By the same token, the growing participation of white women in colonial resistance reflected their impatience with the restraints imposed by traditional gender norms. African-Americans and Native Americans had varying views, but many in each group perceived the colonists as greater threats to their liberty than Britain. Moreover, colonial protests were inspired by ideas and opposition movements in Britain and elsewhere in Europe.

Taken as a whole, colonial resistance involved many kinds of people with many outlooks. It arose most immediately from a constitutional crisis within the British Empire, but it also reflected deep democratic stirrings in America and in the Atlantic world generally. These stirrings would erupt in the American Revolution in 1776, then in the French Revolution in 1789, and subsequently spread over much of Europe and the Americas.

Most colonists expressed their opposition peacefully before 1775, through such tactics as legislative resolutions and commercial boycotts, and they did not foresee the revolutionary outcome of their protests. Despite eruptions of violence, relatively few Anglo-Americans and no royal officials or soldiers lost their lives during the twelve years prior to the battles at Lexington and Concord. Even after fighting broke out, colonists agonized for more than a year about whether to sever their political relationship with England, which even some

native-born colonists referred to affectionately as “home.” Anglo-Americans were the most reluctant of revolutionaries in 1776.

## Triumph and Tensions: The British Empire, 1750–1763

King George’s War ended in 1748 with Britain and France still intent on defeating one another. After a “diplomatic revolution” in which Austria shifted its allegiance from Britain to France, and Britain aligned with Prussia, the Seven Years’ War began. This global conflict pitted British and French forces against one another in every continent except Australia. The war resulted in the expulsion of France from mainland North America, leaving the region to a triumphant Britain. Yet even as war wound down, tensions developed within the victorious coalition of Britons, colonists, and Native Americans.

### A Fragile Peace, 1750–1754

The tinderbox for Anglo-French conflict in North America was the Ohio valley, claimed by Virginia, Pennsylvania, France, and the Six Nations Iroquois, as well as by the Native Americans who actually lived there.

Traders from Virginia and Pennsylvania were strengthening British influence among Indians in the Ohio valley. Seeking to drive out the traders, the French began building a chain of forts there in 1753. Virginia retaliated by sending troops under a twenty-one-year-old surveyor and speculator, **George Washington**, to persuade or force the French to leave. Fearing that Virginia had designs on their land, Native Americans refused to support Washington, and in 1754 French troops drove the Virginians back to their homes.

While Washington was in Ohio, British officials called a meeting in mid-1754 of delegates from Virginia and colonies to the north to negotiate a treaty with the Six Nations Iroquois. Iroquois support would be vital in any effort to drive the French from the Ohio valley. Seven colonies (but neither Virginia nor New Jersey) sent delegates to the Albany Congress in Albany, New York. Long allied with Britain in the Covenant Chain, the Iroquois were also bound by the Grand Settlement of 1701 to remain neutral in any Anglo-French war. Moreover, the easternmost Mohawk Iroquois were angry because New York settlers were encroaching on their land. Although the delegates obtained expressions of friendship from the Six Nations, Iroquois suspicions of Britain persisted.

The delegates also endorsed a proposal for a colonial confederation, the Albany Plan of Union, largely based on the ideas of Pennsylvania’s Benjamin

## FOCUS Questions

- How did Britain and its colonies view their joint victory over France in the Seven Years’ War?
- How did colonial resistance to the Stamp Act differ from earlier opposition to British imperial measures?
- In what ways did resistance to the Townshend duties differ from earlier colonial resistance efforts?
- In what ways did colonists’ views of parliamentary authority change after 1770?
- What led most colonists in 1776 to abandon their loyalty to Britain and choose national independence?



#### **CHIEF HENDRICK (THEYANOQUIN) OF THE MOHAWK IROQUOIS**

A longtime (but often critical) ally of the British, Hendrick led the Mohawk delegation to the Albany Congress. (Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University)

Franklin and Massachusetts's Thomas Hutchinson. The plan called for a Grand Council representing, and funded by, all the colonial assemblies. A crown-appointed executive officer would head the council, which would coordinate military defense and Indian affairs. Although later regarded as a precedent for American unity, the Albany Plan in fact came to nothing because no colonial legislature approved it.

### **The Seven Years' War in America, 1754–1760**

Although France and Britain remained at peace in Europe until 1756, Washington's 1754 clash with French troops began the war in North America. In response, the British dispatched General Edward Braddock and a thousand regular troops to North America to seize Fort Duquesne at the headwaters of the Ohio.

Scornful of colonial soldiers and friendly Indians, Braddock expected his disciplined redcoats to make short work of the enemy. On July 9, 1755, about 600 Native Americans and 250 French and Canadians ambushed Braddock's force of 2,200 Britons and

Virginians nine miles east of Fort Duquesne. Riddled by three hours of steady fire from an unseen foe, Braddock's troops retreated. Nine hundred British and provincial soldiers, including Braddock, died, compared to just twenty-three French and Indians.

As British colonists absorbed the shock of Braddock's disastrous loss, French-armed Shawnees, Delawares, and Mingos from the upper Ohio valley struck hard at encroaching settlers in western Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia. For three years, these attacks halted English expansion and prevented the three colonies from joining the British war against France.

Confronted by the numerically superior but disorganized Anglo-Americans, the French and their Native American allies—now including the Iroquois—captured Fort Oswego on Lake Ontario in 1756 and Fort William Henry on Lake George in 1757. The French now threatened central New York and western New England (see Map 5.1). In Europe, too, the war began badly for Britain, which by 1757 seemed to be facing defeat on all fronts.

In this dark hour, two developments turned the tide for Britain. First, the Iroquois and most Ohio Indians, angered at French treatment of them and sensing that the French were gaining too decisive an advantage, agreed at a treaty conference at Easton, Pennsylvania, in 1758 to abandon the French. Their subsequent withdrawal from Fort Duquesne enabled the British to capture it and other French forts. Many Native Americans withdrew from the fighting, while others actively joined Britain's cause.

The second decisive development occurred when William Pitt took control of military affairs in the British cabinet and reversed the downward course. Pitt saw himself as the man of the hour. "I know," he declared, "that I can save this country and that no one else can." True to his word, Pitt reinvigorated British patriotism throughout the empire. By the war's end, he was the colonists' most popular hero, the symbol of what Americans and the English could accomplish when united.

Needing British troops in Europe to face France and its allies (which included Spain after 1761), Pitt sought instead to use colonial soldiers on the North American front. He promised the colonies that if they raised the necessary men, Parliament would bear most of the cost of fighting the war. Pitt's offer generated unprecedented Anglo-American support. The colonies provided more than forty thousand troops in 1758–1759, far more soldiers than the crown sent to North America during the entire war.

"I know," Pitt declared, "that I can save this country and that no one else can."



**MAP 5.1 THE SEVEN YEARS' WAR IN NORTH AMERICA, 1754–1760** After experiencing major defeats early in the war, Anglo-American forces turned the tide against the French in 1758 by taking Fort Duquesne and Louisbourg. After Canada fell in 1760, the fighting shifted to Spain's Caribbean colonies.

The impact of Pitt's decision was immediate. Anglo-American troops under General Jeffery Amherst captured Fort Duquesne and Louisbourg in 1758 and drove the French from northern New York the next year. In September 1759, Quebec fell after General James Wolfe defeated the French commander-in-chief, Louis Joseph Montcalm, on the Plains of Abraham, where both commanders died in battle. French resistance ended in 1760 when Montreal surrendered.

### The End of French North America, 1760–1763

Although the fall of Montreal dashed French hopes of victory in North America, the war continued in Europe and elsewhere. Finally, with defeat inevitable, France in 1762 began negotiating with its enemies. The Seven Years' War officially ended with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763.

Under terms of the treaty, France gave up all its lands and claims east of the Mississippi (except New Orleans) to Britain. In return for Cuba, seized by the British in 1762, Spain ceded Florida to Britain. Neither France nor Britain wanted the other to control Louisiana, so in the Treaty of San Ildefonso (1762), France ceded the vast territory to Spain. Thus, France's once mighty North American empire was reduced to a few tiny fishing islands off Newfoundland and several prosperous sugar islands in the West Indies. Britain reigned supreme in eastern North America while Spain now claimed the west below Canada (see Map 5.2).

Several thousand French colonists in an area stretching from Quebec to Illinois to Louisiana were suddenly British and Spanish subjects. The most adversely affected Franco-Americans were the Acadians, who had been nominal British subjects since England took over Acadia in 1713 and renamed it Nova Scotia. In 1755, Nova Scotia's government



**DESTRUCTION OF QUEBEC, 1759** After the fall of Quebec to British forces, France's defeat in North America was virtually certain. (National Archives of Canada)



ordered all Acadians to swear loyalty to Britain and not to bear arms for France. After most refused to take the oath, British soldiers drove them from their homes. About 7,000 of the 18,000 Acadians were forcibly dispersed among Britain's other colonies, while others were sent to France or French colonies. Facing poverty and intense anti-French, anti-Catholic prejudice in the British colonies and seeking to remain together, a majority of the exiles and refugees eventually moved to Louisiana, where their descendants became known as Cajuns.

King George's War and the Seven Years' War produced ironically mixed effects. On one hand, they fused the bonds between the British and the Anglo-Americans. Fighting side by side against the French Catholic enemy, Britons and colonists had further strengthened their common identity. On the other hand, each war also planted seeds of mutual misunderstanding and suspicion.

**MAP 5.2 EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL CLAIMS, 1763**

The treaties of San Ildefonso (1762) and Paris (1763) divided France's North American empire between Britain and Spain. Britain in 1763 established direct imperial authority west of the Proclamation Line.



**GEORGE III, STUDIO OF A. RAMSAY, ca. 1767** Although unsure of himself and emotionally little more than a boy upon his accession to the English throne, George III possessed a deep moral sense and a fierce determination to rule as well as to reign. (*Allan Ramsay, Portrait of George III, oil on canvas, 97x63 inches. IMS33.21b Indianapolis Museum of Art, The James E. Roberts Fund*)

## Anglo-American Friction

During the Seven Years' War, British officers regularly complained about colonial troops, not only their inability to fight but also their tendency to return home—even in the midst of campaigns—when their terms were up or when they were not paid on time. For their part, colonial soldiers complained of British officers who, as one put it, treated their troops “but little better than slaves.”

Tensions between British officers and colonial civilians also flared. Officers complained about colonists being unwilling to provide food and shelter while Anglo-Americans resented the officers' arrogant manners. One general groused that South Carolinians were “extremely pleased to have Soldiers to protect their Plantations but will feel no inconveniences for them.” Quakers in the Pennsylvania assembly, acting from pacifist convictions, refused to vote funds to support the war effort, while assemblies in New York and Massachusetts opposed the quartering of British troops on their soil as an encroachment on English liberties. English authorities regarded such actions as affronts to the crown

and as undermining Britain's efforts to defend its territories.

Pitt's promise to reimburse the colonial assemblies for their military expenses angered many in Britain, who concluded that the colonists were escaping scot-free from the war's financial burden. Colonists had profited enormously from the war, as military contracts and spending by British troops brought an influx of British currency into the hands of farmers, artisans, and merchants. Some merchants had even traded with the French enemy during wartime. Meanwhile, Britain's national debt nearly doubled during the war, from £72 million to over £132 million. Whereas in 1763 the total debt of all thirteen colonies amounted to £2 million, the interest charges alone on the British debt came to more than £4 million a year. This debt was assumed by British landowners through a land tax and, increasingly, by ordinary consumers through excise duties on such everyday items as beer, tea, salt, and bread.

Colonists felt equally burdened. Those who profited during the war spent their additional income on British imports, the annual value of which doubled during the war. Thus, the war accelerated the Anglo-American “consumer revolution” in which colonists' purchases of British goods fueled Britain's economy, particularly its manufacturing sector. But when peace returned in 1760, the wartime boom in the colonies ended as abruptly as it had begun. To maintain their lifestyles, many colonists went into debt. British creditors obliged their American merchant customers by extending the usual period for remitting payments from six months to a year. Nevertheless, many recently prosperous colonists suddenly found themselves overloaded with debts and, in some cases, bankrupt. As colonial indebtedness to Britain grew, some Americans began to accuse the British of deliberately plotting to “enslave” the colonies.

The ascension to the British throne of King **George III** (ruled 1760–1820) at age twenty-two reinforced Anglo-American tensions. The new king was determined to have a strong influence on government policy, but neither his experience, his temperament, nor his philosophy suited him to the formidable task of building political coalitions and pursuing consistent policies. Until 1774, George III made frequent abrupt changes in government leadership that destabilized politics in Britain and exacerbated relations with the colonies.

## Frontier Tensions

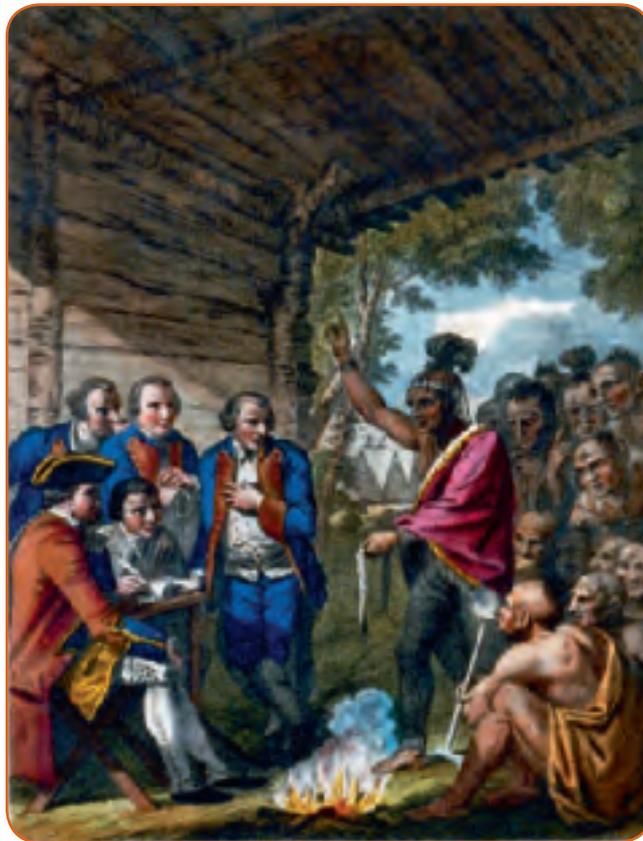
Victory over the French spurred new Anglo-Indian conflicts that drove the British debt even higher. With the French gone, Ohio and Great Lakes Indians recognized that they could no longer play the two imperial rivals off against each other. Their

fears that the British would treat them as subjects rather than as allies were confirmed when General Jeffery Amherst, Britain's commander in North America, ordered troops occupying former French posts not to distribute food, ammunition (needed for hunting), and other gifts as the French had done. Moreover, squatters from the colonies were moving onto Indian lands and harassing the occupants, and Native Americans feared that the British occupation was intended to support these incursions.

As tensions mounted, a Delaware Indian religious prophet named Neolin reported a vision in which the "Master of Life," or Great Spirit, instructed him to urge Native Americans of all tribes to unify and to take back their land and live on it as they had before Europeans—particularly the British—arrived (see *Going to the Source*). Drawing on Neolin's message and inspired by Pontiac, an Ottawa, Indians throughout the Ohio-Great Lakes region, unleashed **Pontiac's War**. During the spring and summer of 1763, they sacked eight British forts and besieged four others. But over the next six months, shortages of food and ammunition, a smallpox epidemic at Fort Pitt (triggered when British officers deliberately distributed infected blankets at a peace parley), and a recognition that the French would not return led the Indians to make peace with Britain.

Although not a military victory, Pontiac's War gained some political concessions for Native Americans. Hoping to conciliate the Indians and end the fighting, George III issued the **Proclamation of 1763**, asserting direct British control of land transactions, settlement, trade, and other activities of non-Indians west of a Proclamation Line along the Appalachian crest (see Map 5.2). The government sought to control Anglo-American expansion by asserting its authority over the various (and often competing) colonies claiming western lands. The proclamation recognized existing Indian land titles everywhere west of the "proclamation line" until such time as tribal governments agreed to cede their land to Britain through treaties. Although calming Indian fears, the proclamation angered the colonies by subordinating their western claims to imperial authority and by slowing expansion.

The uprising was also a factor in the British government's decision to leave ten thousand soldiers in France's former forts on the Great Lakes and in the Ohio valley to enforce the Proclamation of 1763. The cost of maintaining this military presence would reach almost a half million pounds a year, fully 6 percent of Britain's peacetime budget. Britons considered it perfectly reasonable for the colonists to help underwrite this expense. Although the troops would help offset the colonies' unfavorable balance of payments with Britain, many Anglo-Americans regarded them as a peacetime "standing army" that threatened their liberty and blocked their expansion onto Indian lands.



#### **INDIAN-BRITISH DIPLOMACY IN THE OHIO COUNTRY, 1764**

A brief truce during Pontiac's War brought Indian and British leaders together to talk peace. Here a Native American speaker presents a wampum belt to his counterparts. (*Library of Congress*)

## **Imperial Authority, Colonial Opposition, 1760–1766**

After the Seven Years' War, Anglo-American tensions centered on Britain's efforts to finance its suddenly enlarged empire through a series of revenue measures and to enforce these and other measures directly rather than relying on local authorities. Following passage of the Stamp Act, opposition movements arose in the mainland colonies to protest not only the new measures' costs but also what many people considered a dangerous extension of Parliament's power. Opponents came from all segments of colonial society, including poor and working people. The crisis revealed a widening gulf between British and colonial perceptions of the proper relationship between the empire and its colonies.

### **Writs of Assistance, 1760–1761**

Even before the Seven Years' War ended, British authorities attempted to halt American merchants' trade with the French enemy in the West Indies. In

## Pontiac Recounts a Prophet's Vision

Pontiac was an *ogema* (civil leader) of the Ottawa people. Like many eastern Indians, he distrusted British intentions after the Seven Years War. Speaking to an intertribal audience in spring 1763, Pontiac recounted the vision of the Delaware religious prophet, Neolin. In the following excerpt from that

speech (recorded by a French colonist), Pontiac repeats the words spoken to Neolin by the Master of Life. Note how the Master of Life accounts for the absence of wild animals, which others might attribute to commercial overhunting and the environmental effects of European settlement.

I am the Master of Life, whom you desire to know and to whom you would speak. Listen well to what I am going to say to you and all the red brethren. I am He who made heaven and earth, the trees, lakes, rivers, all men, and all that you see, and all that you have seen on earth. Because of this and because I love you, you must do what I say and leave what I hate. I do not like it that you drink until you lose your reason, as you do; or that you fight with each other; or that you take two wives, or run after the wives of others; . . . I hate that. You must have but one wife, and keep her until death. When you are going to war, you [must] . . . join the medicine dance, and believe that I am speaking. . . . It is . . . Manitou to whom you [should] speak. It is a bad spirit who whispers to you nothing but evil, and to whom you listen because you do not know me well. This land, where you live, I have made for you and not for others. How comes it that you suffer the whites on your lands? Can't you do without them? I know that those whom you call the children of your Great Father supply your wants, but if you were not bad, as you are, you would well do without them. You might live wholly as you did before you knew them. Before those whom

you call your brothers came on your lands, did you not live by bow and arrow? You had no need of gun nor powder, nor the rest of their things, and nevertheless you caught animals to live and clothe yourselves with their skins, but when I saw that you went to the bad, I called back the animals into the depths of the woods, so that you had need of your brothers to have your wants supplied and cover you. You have only to become good and do what I want, and I shall send back to you the animals to live on. I do not forbid you, for all that, to suffer among you the children of your father [whites who live peaceably among the Indians]. I love them, they know me and pray to me, and I give them their necessities and all that they bring to you, but as regards those [whites] who have come to trouble your country, drive them out, make war on them! I love them not, they know me not, they are my enemies and the enemies of your brothers! Send them back to the country which I made for them! There let them remain.

**Source:** *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections* (1886) 8:270–71.

### QUESTIONS

1. Why, according to the Master of Life, are Native Americans suffering?
2. What does the Master of Life say Indians must do so that the animals will return?



Go to the website at [www.cengage.com/history/boyerenduring7e](http://www.cengage.com/history/boyerenduring7e) for additional primary sources on this period.

1760, the royal governor of Massachusetts authorized revenue officers to employ a search warrant called a writ of assistance to seize illegally imported goods. The writ permitted customs officials to enter any ship or building (including a merchant's residence) where smuggled goods might be hidden. Because the document required no evidence of probable cause for suspicion, many critics considered it unconstitutional.

Writs of assistance proved effective against smuggling. In quick reaction, some Boston merchants hired lawyer James Otis to challenge the constitutionality of the writs. Before the Massachusetts Supreme Court in 1761, Otis argued that "an act against the Constitution is void"—even one passed by Parliament. But the court, influenced by Chief Justice Thomas Hutchinson, who noted the use of identical writs in England, ruled against the merchants.

Despite losing the case, Otis expressed the fundamental conception of many, both in Britain and in the colonies, of Parliament's role under the British constitution. The British constitution was not a written document but instead a collection of customs and accepted principles that guaranteed certain rights to all citizens. Most British politicians assumed that Parliament's laws were themselves part of the constitution and hence that Parliament could alter the constitution at will. But Otis contended that Parliament possessed no authority to violate the "rights of Englishmen," and he asserted that there were limits "beyond which if Parliaments go, their Acts bind not." Such challenges to parliamentary authority would be renewed once peace was restored.

## The Sugar Act, 1764

In 1764, three years after Otis challenged the writs of assistance, Parliament passed the **Sugar Act**. The measure's goal was to raise revenues to help offset Britain's military expenses in North America, and thus ended the exemption of colonial trade from revenue-raising measures. Under the Navigation Acts, English importers, not American producers, paid taxes on colonial products entering Britain, and then passed the cost on to consumers. So little revenue did the Navigation Acts bring in (just £1,800 in 1763) that they did not even pay the cost of their own enforcement.

The Sugar Act amended the Molasses Act of 1733, the last of the Navigation Acts, which taxed foreign (primarily French West Indian) molasses and rum entering the mainland colonies at sixpence per gallon. But colonial merchants had simply continued to import the cheaper French molasses after 1733,

bribing customs officials  $1\frac{1}{2}$  pence per gallon when it was unloaded. Hoping to end the bribery, Parliament lowered the duty to three-pence per gallon.

The Sugar Act also vastly complicated the requirements for shipping colonial goods. A captain now had to fill out a confusing series of documents to certify his trade as legal, and was required to post expensive bond to ensure his compliance.

Finally, the Sugar Act disregarded many traditional English protections for a fair trial. The law stipulated that smuggling cases be heard in vice-admiralty courts, where a British-appointed judge gave the verdict, rather than in colonial courts, in which juries decided the outcome. Because the Sugar Act (until 1768) awarded vice-admiralty judges 5 percent of any confiscated cargo, judges had a financial incentive to find defendants guilty. Also, customs officials could transfer cases to the vice-admiralty court at Halifax, Nova Scotia, far from any merchant's home port.

The British navy vigorously enforced the Sugar Act. A Boston resident complained in 1764 that "no vessel hardly comes in or goes out but they find some pretense to seize and detain her." That same year, Pennsylvania's chief justice reported that customs officers were extorting fees from small boats carrying lumber across the Delaware River to Philadelphia from New Jersey and seemed likely "to destroy this little River-trade."

Rather than pay the three-pence tax, Americans continued smuggling molasses until 1766. Then, to discourage smuggling, Britain lowered the duty to a penny—less than the customary bribe American shippers paid to get their cargoes past inspectors. The law thereafter raised about £30,000 annually in revenue.

Because the burden of the Sugar Act fell overwhelmingly on Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania, other provinces had little interest in resisting it. The Sugar Act's immediate effect was minor, but it irritated urban merchants and heightened colonists' sensitivities to the new direction of imperial policies.

## The Stamp Act Crisis, 1765–1766

The revenue raised by the Sugar Act did little to ease Britain's financial crisis. The national debt continued to rise, and Britons bemoaned the second-highest tax rates in Europe. Particularly irritating was the fact that by 1765 their rates averaged 26 shillings per person, whereas the colonial tax burden varied

Otis asserted that there were limits "beyond which if Parliaments go, their Acts bind not."



## Public Sanitation in Philadelphia

While increasingly preoccupied by colonial and imperial politics, city-dwellers also confronted long-standing environmental problems occasioned by rapid growth. The fastest growing city in eighteenth-century America was Philadelphia, whose population approached seventeen thousand in 1760 (see Figure 4.2 in Chapter 4). One key to Philadelphia's rise was its location as both a major Atlantic port and the gateway to Pennsylvania's farmlands and the Appalachian backcountry. Local geography also contributed to its success. Choosing a site where the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers met, William Penn had built Philadelphia along a system of streams and the tidal cove on the Delaware into which they flowed. Philadelphians referred to the principal stream and cove together as "the Dock," for their principal function. Lining the Dock's shores were the early city's mansions and public gathering spaces. As some residents pointed out in 1700, the Dock was the city's heart and "the Inducing Reason . . . to Settle the Town where it now is."

Over time, the growth that made Philadelphia so successful rendered its environment, especially its water, dangerous to inhabitants' health. Several leading industries used water for processing animals and grains into consumer products. Tanneries made leather by soaking cowhides several times in mixtures of water and acidic liquids, including sour milk and fermented rye, and with an alkaline solution of buttermilk and dung. When cleaning their vats, tanners dumped residues from these processes into the streets or into underground pits from which they seeped into wells and streams. Breweries and distilleries also used water-based procedures and similarly discarded their waste, while slaughterhouses deposited dung, grease, fat, and other unwanted byproducts into streets and streams. Individual residents exacerbated the problems by tossing garbage into streets, using privies that polluted wells, and leaving animal carcasses to rot in the open air. Most of the city's sewers were open channels that frequently backed up, diverting the sewage to the streets. Buildings and other obstructions caused stagnant pools to form in streets, and when the polluted water did drain freely, it flowed into the Dock.

Almost from Philadelphia's founding, residents had complained about the stench arising from waste and stagnant water left by the tanneries and other industries. Many attributed the city's frequent disease epidemics to these practices.

In 1739, a residents' petition complained of "the great Annoyance arising from the Slaughter-Houses, Tanyards, . . . etc. erected on the publick Dock, and Streets, adjacent." It called for prohibiting new tanneries and for eventually removing existing ones. Such efforts made little headway at first. Tanners, brewers, and other manufacturers were among the city's wealthiest residents and dissuaded their fellow elites from regulating their industries.

A turning point came in 1748 when, after another epidemic, the Pennsylvania Assembly appointed a committee to recommend improvements in Philadelphia's sanitation. One member, Benjamin Franklin, was already known both for his innovative approaches to urban issues, as when he organized Philadelphia's first fire company in 1736, and for his interest in the practical applications of technology. Combining these interests, Franklin advocated applying new findings in hydrology (the study of water and its distribution) and water-pumping technology to public sanitation. Accordingly, the committee recommended building a wall to keep the high tides of the Delaware River out of the Dock, widening the stream's channel, and covering over a tributary that had become a "common sewer." The plan was innovative not only because it was based on hydrology but also because it acknowledged the need for a public approach to sanitation problems. But once again, neither the city, the colony, nor private entrepreneurs would pay for the proposal. Many elites declined to assume the sense of civic responsibility that Franklin and his fellow advocates of Enlightenment sought to inculcate.

Only in the 1760s, after both growth and pollution had accelerated, did Philadelphia begin to address the Dock's problems effectively. In 1762, the Pennsylvania Assembly appointed a board to oversee the "Pitching [sloping], Paving and Cleansing" of streets and walkways, and the design, construction, and maintenance of sewers and storm drains—all intended to prevent waste and stagnant water from accumulating on land. In the next year, residents petitioned that the Dock itself be "cleared out, planked at the bottom, and walled on each side" to maximize its flow and prevent it from flooding. The Assembly responded by requiring adjoining property owners to build "a good, strong, substantial wall of good, flat stone from the bottom of the said Dock," and remove any "encroachments" that blocked drainage into



**“AN EAST PROSPECT OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA” (1756)** The Dock was located where the stream indicated on the right side of the map flows into the Delaware River. The engraving at the top illustrates Philadelphia’s dynamism as a port city at the time of the Seven Years’ War. (*Library of Congress*)

or on the streams. Finally, legislators had implemented the kind of public, engineering-based solution that Franklin had advocated two decades earlier.

While some owners evaded their responsibility, others went further by adding an arch over the principal stretch of the Dock. Then they installed market stalls on the newly available surface. Once an open waterway used for transport and valued as a central landmark, the Dock was now a completely enclosed, engineered sewer. A new generation of entrepreneurs dominated the neighborhood, catering to consumers who preferred a clean, attractive environment.

Although long in coming, the enclosure of the Dock illustrated the growing effectiveness of colonial elites in and out of government at working together to solve unprecedented public problems. Thereafter, as in the growing imperial controversy, poor and working people expressed their views as well. For example, some pointed out that improvements at the Dock had changed nothing in their own neighborhoods. Writing in a city newspaper in 1769, “Tom Trudge” lamented

the lot of “such poor fellows as I, who sup on a cup of skim milk, etc., have a parcel of half naked children about our doors, . . . whose wives must, at many seasons of the Year, wade to the knees in carrying a loaf of bread to bake, and near whose penurious doors the dung-cart never comes, nor the sound of the paver will be heard for many ages.” Both public and private solutions, “Trudge” and others asserted, favored the wealthy and ignored the less fortunate. But the Revolution would postpone the search for solutions. Philadelphia’s problems with polluted water persisted until 1799, when the city undertook construction of the United States’ first municipal water system.

## QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

- How did early manufacturing contribute to pollution in Philadelphia?
- How did engineering provide a successful resolution of sanitary problems at the Dock?

from  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  shillings per inhabitant. Well aware of how lightly the colonists were taxed, British prime minister George Grenville thought they should make a larger contribution to the empire's American expenses.

To raise such revenues, Parliament passed the **Stamp Act** in March 1765. The law obliged colonists to purchase and use special stamped (watermarked) paper for newspapers, customs documents, various licenses, college diplomas, playing cards, and legal forms used for recovering debts, transferring property, and making wills. As with the Sugar Act, violators would face prosecution in vice-admiralty courts, without juries. The prime minister projected yearly revenues of £60,000 to £100,000, which would offset 12 to 20 percent of North American military expenses.

Unlike the Sugar Act, which was an external tax levied on imports, the Stamp Act was an internal tax, or a duty levied directly on property, goods, and government services within the colonies. Whereas external taxes were intended to regulate trade and fell mainly on merchants and ship captains, internal taxes were designed to raise revenue for the crown and affected most people at least occasionally.

To Grenville and his supporters, the new tax seemed a small price for the benefits of empire, especially since Britons had been paying a similar tax since 1695. Nevertheless, some in England, most notably William Pitt, objected to Britain's levying an internal tax on the colonies. They emphasized that

the colonists had never been subject to British revenue bills and noted that they already taxed themselves through their own elected assemblies.

Grenville and his followers believed that while Americans did not directly elect members of Parliament, they were "virtually" represented there. The principle of virtual representation held that all members of Parliament stood above the

narrow interests of their constituents and each considered the welfare of all subjects when deciding issues. By definition, then, British subjects, including colonists, were not represented by particular individuals but by all members of Parliament.

Grenville and his supporters also denied that colonists were exempt from British taxation because they elected their own assemblies. American assemblies, they alleged, were comparable to British local governments, whose powers did not nullify Parliament's authority over them. But Grenville's position clashed directly with that of colonists who had long maintained that their assemblies exercised

legislative powers equivalent to those of the House of Commons in Britain (see Chapter 4).

Many colonists felt that the Stamp Act forced them either to confront the issue of parliamentary taxation head-on or to surrender any claim to meaningful rights of self-government. However highly they regarded Parliament, few colonists imagined that it represented them. They accepted the validity of virtual representation for England and Scotland but denied that it extended to the colonies. Instead, they argued, their self-governance was similar to that of Ireland, whose Parliament alone could tax its people but could not interfere with laws, like the Navigation Acts, passed by the British Parliament. Speaking against the Sugar Act, James Otis had expressed this argument: "by [the British] Constitution, every man in the dominions is a free man: that no parts of His Majesty's dominions can be taxed without consent: that every part has a right to be represented in the supreme or some subordinate legislature." In essence, the colonists assumed that the empire was a loose federation in which their legislatures possessed considerable autonomy, rather than an extended nation governed directly from London.

To many colonists, passage of the Stamp Act demonstrated both Parliament's indifference to their interests and the shallowness of the theory of virtual representation. Provincial assemblies as well as colonial lobbyists in London had urged the act's defeat, but Parliament had dismissed these appeals without a hearing. Parliament "must have thought us Americans all a parcel of Apes and very tame Apes too," concluded Christopher Gadsden of South Carolina, "or they would have never ventured on such a hateful, baneful experiment."

In late May 1765, Patrick Henry, a twenty-nine-year-old Virginia lawyer and planter with a talent for fiery oratory, dramatically conveyed the rising spirit of resistance. Henry urged the Virginia House of Burgesses to adopt seven strongly worded resolutions denying Parliament's power to tax the colonies. In arguing for the resolutions, Henry reportedly stated that "he did not doubt but some good American would stand up in favor of his country." Viewing such language as treasonous, the legislators passed only the mildest four of Henry's resolutions. Garbled accounts of Henry's resolutions and the debates were published in other colonies, and by year's end seven other assemblies had passed resolutions against the act. As in Virginia, the resolutions were grounded in constitutional arguments and avoided Henry's inflammatory language.

Henry's words resonated more loudly outside elite political circles, particularly in Boston. There, in late summer, a group of middle-class artisans and small business owners joined together as the Loyal Nine to fight the Stamp Act. They recognized

"[E]very man in the dominions is a free man: that no parts of His Majesty's dominions can be taxed without consent."

that the stamp distributors, who alone could accept money for watermarked paper, were the law's weak link. If the public could pressure them into resigning before taxes became due on November 1, the Stamp Act would become inoperable.

It was no accident that Boston set the pace in opposing Parliament. No other port suffered so much from the Sugar Act's trade restrictions. But Boston's misery was compounded by older problems. For several decades, its shipbuilding industry had lost significant ground to New York and Philadelphia, and the output of its rum and sugar producers had fallen by half in just a decade. British impressment (forced recruitment) of Massachusetts fishermen for naval service had undermined the fishing industry. The resulting unemployment led to increased local taxes for poor relief. The taxes, along with a shrinking number of customers, drove many marginal artisans out of business and into the ranks of the poor. Other Bostonians, while remaining employed or in business, struggled in the face of rising prices and taxes. Moreover, the city had not recovered from a great fire in 1760 that had burned 176 warehouses and left every tenth family homeless.

Widespread economic distress produced an explosive situation in Boston. Already resentful of an elite whose fortunes had risen spectacularly while they suffered, many poor and working-class Bostonians blamed British officials and policies for the town's hard times. The crisis was sharpened because they were accustomed to gathering in large crowds that engaged in pointed political expression, both satirical and serious and usually directed against the "better sort."

In response to the Stamp Act, Boston's crowds aimed their traditional forms of protest more directly and forcefully at imperial officials. The morning of August 14 found a likeness of Boston's stamp distributor, Andrew Oliver, swinging from a tree guarded by a menacing crowd organized by the relatively moderate Loyal Nine. By dusk, Oliver had not resigned, so several hundred Bostonians demolished a building of Oliver's. Thereafter, the Loyal Nine withdrew, and the crowd continued on its own. The men surged toward Oliver's house, where they beheaded his effigy and "stamped" it to pieces. They then shattered the windows of his home, smashed his furniture, and even tore out the paneling. When officials tried to disperse the crowd, they were driven off under a barrage of rocks. Surveying his devastated home the next morning, Oliver announced his resignation.

Bitterness against the Stamp Act unleashed spontaneous, contagious violence. Twelve days after Oliver resigned, a crowd demolished the elegant home of Lieutenant Governor and Chief Justice Thomas Hutchinson. Boston's smugglers begrudged Hutchinson for some of his judicial decisions as

chief justice while many more citizens saw him as a symbol of the royal policies crippling Boston's economy and their own livelihoods. In their view, wealthy officials "rioted in luxury," with homes and fancy furnishings that cost hundreds of times the annual incomes of most Boston workingmen.

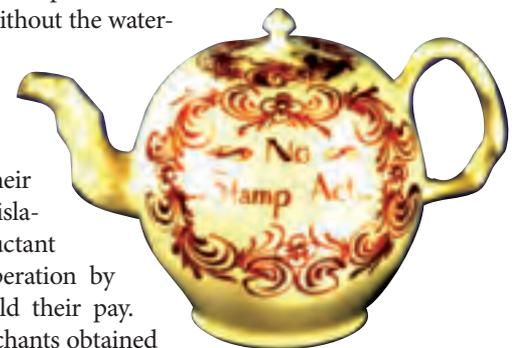
They were also reacting to Hutchinson's efforts to stop the destruction of his brother-in-law Andrew Oliver's house. Ironically, Hutchinson privately opposed the Stamp Act.

Thereafter, groups similar to the Loyal Nine calling themselves **Sons of Liberty** began forming throughout the colonies. After the assault on Hutchinson's mansion and an even more violent incident in Newport, Rhode Island, the leaders of the Sons of Liberty sought to prevent more such outbreaks. They recognized that people in the crowds were casting aside their customary deference toward their social "superiors," a development that could broaden to include all elites if not carefully contained. Fearful of alienating wealthy opponents of the Stamp Act, the Sons of Liberty focused their demonstrations strictly against property and invariably left avenues of escape for their victims. Especially fearful that one of their targets might be shot or killed, they forbade their followers to carry weapons.

In October 1765, representatives of nine colonial assemblies met in New York City in a **Stamp Act Congress**. The session was remarkable for the colonies' agreement on and bold articulation of the principle that Parliament lacked authority to levy taxes outside Great Britain and to deny any person a jury trial. "The Ministry never imagined we could or would so generally unite in opposition to their measures," wrote a Connecticut delegate, "nor I confess till I saw the Experiment made did I."

By late 1765, most stamp distributors had resigned or fled, and without the watermarked paper required by law, most royal customs officials and court officers were refusing to perform their duties. In response, legislators compelled the reluctant officials to resume operation by threatening to withhold their pay. At the same time, merchants obtained

"The Ministry never imagined we could or would so generally unite in opposition to their measures,"



**ANTI-STAMP ACT TEAPOT** Some colonists signaled their opposition to the Stamp Act on the pots from which they drank tea (ironically, purchased from British merchants). Less than a decade later, they would protest a British tax on tea itself. (*The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation*)



**THOMAS HUTCHINSON** As lieutenant governor and, later, governor of Massachusetts, Hutchinson believed that social and political order under British authority must be maintained at all costs. (*Thomas Hutchinson (1711-80) 1741 (oil on canvas)*, Truman, Edward/© Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA, USA./The Bridgeman Art Library)

sailing clearances by insisting they would sue if cargoes spoiled while delayed in port. By late December, the courts and harbors of almost every colony were again functioning.

Thus, colonial elites moved to keep an explosive situation from getting out of hand by supporting the moderate Sons of Liberty over more radical groups, by expressing opposition through the Stamp Act Congress, and by having colonial legislatures restore normal business. Elite leaders feared that chaos could break out, particularly if British troops landed to enforce the Stamp Act. An elite Pennsylvanian, John Dickinson, feared that revolutionary turmoil would lead to “a multitude of Commonwealths, Crimes, and Calamities, Centuries of mutual jealousies, Hatreds, Wars of Devastation, till at

John Dickinson feared that revolutionary turmoil would lead to “a multitude of Commonwealths, Crimes, and Calamities, Centuries of mutual jealousies, Hatreds, Wars of Devastation.”

last the exhausted provinces shall sink into savagery under the yoke of some fortunate Conqueror.”

To force the Stamp Act’s repeal, New York’s merchants agreed on October 31, 1765, to boycott all British goods, and businessmen in other cities soon followed their example. Because American colonists purchased about 40 percent of England’s manufactures, this nonimportation strategy put the English economy in danger of recession. Panicked English businessmen descended on Parliament to warn that continuation of the Stamp Act would stimulate a wave of bankruptcies, massive unemployment, and political unrest.

By early 1766, support was growing in Parliament for repeal of the Stamp Act. William Pitt denounced all efforts to tax the colonies, declaring, “I rejoice that America has resisted.” But most members supported repeal only as a matter of practicality, not as a surrender of principle. In March 1766, Parliament revoked the Stamp Act, but only in conjunction with passage of the **Declaratory Act**, which affirmed parliamentary power to legislate for the colonies “in all cases whatsoever.”

Because the Declaratory Act was written in general language, Anglo-Americans interpreted it to their own advantage. To them, the measure seemed no more than a parliamentary exercise in saving face to compensate for the Stamp Act’s repeal. The House of Commons, however, intended that the colonists take the Declaratory Act literally to mean that they could not claim exemption from any parliamentary statute, including a tax law. The Stamp Act crisis thus ended in a fundamental disagreement between Britain and America over Parliament’s authority in the colonies.

## Ideology, Religion, and Resistance

The Stamp Act and the conflicts around it revealed a chasm between Britain and its colonies that startled Anglo-Americans. For the first time, some of them critically reconsidered the imperial relationship. To put their concerns into perspective, educated colonists turned to the works of philosophers, historians, and political writers. Many more, both educated and uneducated, looked to religion.

By the 1760s, many colonists were familiar with the political writings of European Enlightenment thinkers, particularly John Locke (see Chapter 4). Locke argued that humans originated in a “state of nature” in which each man enjoyed the “natural rights” of life, liberty, and property. Thereafter, groups of men entered into a “social contract,” under which they formed governments for the sole purpose of protecting those individual rights. A government that encroached on natural rights, then, broke its contract with the people. In such cases, people could resist their government, although Locke cautioned against outright rebellion except in

the most extreme cases. To many colonial readers, Locke's concept of natural rights appeared to justify opposition to arbitrary legislation by Parliament.

Colonists also read European writers who emphasized excessive concentrations of executive power as tyrannical threats. Some of them developed a set of ideas termed "republican," in which they balanced Locke's emphasis on individual rights with an emphasis on the good of the people as a whole. "Republicans" especially admired the sense of civic duty that motivated citizens of the Roman republic. Like the early Romans, they maintained that a free people had to avoid moral and political corruption, and practice a disinterested "public virtue." An elected leader of a republic, one author noted, would command obedience "more by the virtue of the people, than by the terror of his power."

Among those influenced by republican ideas were a widely read group of English political writers known as oppositionists. According to the oppositionists, Parliament—consisting of the elected representatives of the people—formed the foundation of England's unique political liberties and protected those liberties against the inherent corruption and tyranny of executive power. But recent prime ministers, the oppositionists argued, had exploited the treasury's resources to bribe politicians and voters. Most members of Parliament, in their view, no longer represented the true interests of the people; rather, they had created self-interested "factions" and joined in a "conspiracy against liberty." Often referring to themselves as the "country party," the oppositionists feared that a power-hungry "court party" of unelected officials close to the king was using a corrupted Parliament to gain absolute power for themselves.

Influenced by such ideas, a number of colonists pointed to a diabolical conspiracy behind British policy during the Stamp Act crisis. Joseph Warren of Massachusetts noted that the act "induced some to imagine that the minister designed by this to force the colonies into a rebellion, and from thence to take occasion to treat them with severity, and, by military power, to reduce them to servitude." Over the next decade, a proliferation of pamphlets denounced British efforts to "enslave" the colonies through excessive taxation and the imposition of officials, judges, and a standing army directed from London. In such assaults on liberty and natural rights, some Americans found principled reasons for opposing British policies and actions.

Beginning with the Stamp Act protest, many Protestant clergymen, both Old Lights and New Lights (see Chapter 4), wove resistance to British authority into their sermons, summoning their congregations to protect their God-given liberty. "A just regard to our liberties . . . is so far from being displeasing to God that it would be ingratitude to him who has given them to

us to . . . tamely give them up," exhorted one New England minister. Most Anglican ministers, whose church was headed by the king, tried to stay neutral or opposed the protest; and pacifist Quakers kept out of the fray. But to large numbers of Congregationalist, Presbyterian, and Baptist clergymen, battling for the Lord and defending liberty were one and the same.

Voicing such a message, clergymen exerted an enormous influence on public opinion. Far more Americans heard sermons than had access to newspapers or pamphlets. Provincial proclamations of days of "fasting and public humiliation"—a traditional means of focusing public attention on an issue and invoking divine aid—inspired sermons on the theme of God's sending the people woes only to strengthen and sustain them until victory. Moreover, protest leaders' calls for boycotting British luxuries fit neatly with traditional pulpit warnings against self-indulgence and wastefulness. Few ordinary Americans escaped the unceasing public reminders that community solidarity against British tyranny and "corruption" meant rejecting sin and obeying God.

An elected leader of a republic, one author noted, would command obedience "more by the virtue of the people, than by the terror of his power."

## Resistance Resumes, 1766–1770

Although Parliament's repeal of the Stamp Act momentarily quieted colonial protests, its search for new sources of revenue soon revived them. While British leaders condemned the colonists for evading their financial responsibilities and for insubordination, growing numbers of Anglo-Americans became convinced that the Stamp Act had not been an isolated mistake but rather part of a deliberate design to undermine colonial self-governance. In this, they were joined by many in Britain who opposed policies that seemed to threaten Britons and colonists alike.

## Opposing the Quartering Act, 1766–1767

Hoping to end disarray in Parliament, George III in August 1766 summoned William Pitt to form a cabinet. Previously sympathetic to the colonies, Pitt might have repaired the Stamp Act's damage, for no Englishman was more respected in America. But after Pitt's health collapsed in March 1767, effective leadership passed to his Chancellor of the Exchequer (treasurer) Charles Townshend.

Just as Townshend took office, a conflict arose with the New York assembly over the Quartering Act, enacted in 1765. This law ordered colonial legislatures to pay for certain goods needed by soldiers stationed within their respective borders. The necessities were inexpensive barracks supplies such as candles, windowpanes, and mattress straw.

Despite its minimal cost, the Quartering Act aroused resentment, for it constituted an indirect tax; that is, although it did not (like the Stamp Act) empower royal officials to collect money directly from the colonists, it obligated assemblies to raise a stated amount of revenue. Such obligations clashed with the assemblies' claimed power to initiate all revenue-raising measures. The law fell lightly or not at all on most colonies; but New York, where more soldiers were stationed than in any other province, refused to comply.

New York's resistance to the Quartering Act produced a torrent of anti-American feeling in Parliament, whose members remained bitter at having had to withdraw the Stamp Act. In response, they passed the New York Suspending Act (1767), which would delay the assembly until it appropriated the funds. The assembly quickly complied before the measure became law.

Although New York's retreat averted further confrontation, the Quartering Act demonstrated that British leaders would not hesitate to defend Parliament's authority through the most drastic of all steps: by interfering with American claims to self-governance.

## Crisis over the Townshend Duties, 1767–1770

As Parliament passed the New York Suspending Act, Townshend expanded his efforts to subordinate the colonies to Parliament's authority and raise revenues in America. He sought to tax the colonists by exploiting an oversight in their arguments against the Stamp Act. In confronting the Stamp Act, Americans had emphasized their opposition to internal taxes but had said little about Parliament's right to tax imports as they entered the colonies. Townshend chose to interpret this silence as evidence that the colonists accepted Britain's right to tax

their trade—to impose external taxes. Yet not all British politicians were so mistaken. “They will laugh at you,” predicted a now wiser George Grenville, “for your distinctions about regulations of trade.” Brushing aside Grenville's warnings, Parliament passed the **Revenue**

**Act** (popularly called the Townshend duties) in June and July 1767. The new law taxed glass, paint, lead, paper, and tea imported to the colonies from England.

The Revenue Act differed significantly from what Americans had long seen as a legitimate way of regulating trade through taxation. To the colonists, charging a duty was a lawful way for British authorities to control trade only if that duty excluded foreign goods by making them prohibitively expensive to consumers. The Revenue Act, however, set moderate rates that did not price goods out of the colonial market; clearly, its purpose was to collect money for the treasury. Thus from the colonial standpoint, Townshend's duties were taxes just like the Stamp Act duties.

In reality, the Revenue Act would never yield anything like the income that Townshend anticipated. Of the various items taxed, only tea produced any significant revenue—£20,000 of the £37,000 that the law was expected to yield. And because the measure would serve its purpose only if British tea were affordable to colonial consumers, Townshend eliminated £60,000 worth of import fees paid on tea entering Britain from India before transshipment to America. On balance, the Revenue Act worsened the British treasury's deficit by £23,000. But by 1767, Parliament was less concerned with raising revenues than with asserting its authority over the colonies.

Colonial resistance to the Revenue Act remained weak until December 1767, when John Dickinson published twelve essays entitled *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania*. The essays argued that although Parliament could regulate trade by imposing duties, no tax designed to produce revenue could be considered constitutional unless a people's elected representatives voted for it. Dickinson said nothing that others had not stated or implied during the Stamp Act crisis. Rather, his contribution lay in persuading recent opponents of the Stamp Act that their arguments also applied to the Revenue Act. In early 1768, the Massachusetts assembly condemned the Townshend duties and commissioned Samuel Adams to draft a “circular letter” calling on other colonial legislatures to join it. Adams's letter forthrightly condemned taxation without representation. But it acknowledged Parliament as the “supreme legislative Power over the whole Empire,” and it advocated no illegal activities. Three other colonies approved Adams's message and Virginia sent out a more strongly worded circular letter of its own. But most colonial legislatures reacted indifferently. In fact, resistance to the Revenue Act might have disintegrated had the British government not overreacted to the circular letters.

Parliamentary leaders regarded even the mild Massachusetts letter as “little better than an incentive

“They will laugh at you for your distinctions about regulations of trade.”

to Rebellion.” Following Townshend’s sudden death in 1767, Lord Hillsborough, first appointee to the new post of secretary of state for the colonies, took charge of British policy. Hillsborough flatly told the Massachusetts assembly to disown its letter, forbade all colonial assemblies to endorse it, and commanded royal governors to dissolve any legislature that violated his instructions. George III later commented that he never met “a man of less judgment than Lord Hillsborough.”

To protest Hillsborough’s crude bullying, many legislatures previously indifferent to the Massachusetts circular letter now adopted it enthusiastically. In obedience to Hillsborough, royal governors responded by dismissing legislatures in Massachusetts and elsewhere. These moves played directly into the hands of Samuel Adams, James Otis, and others who sought to ignite widespread public opposition to the Townshend duties.

Although outraged over the Revenue Act, colonial activists needed some effective means of pressuring Parliament for its repeal. One approach, nonimportation, seemed especially promising because it offered an alternative to violence and would distress Britain’s economy. In August 1768, Boston’s merchants therefore adopted a nonimportation agreement, and the tactic slowly spread southward. “Save your money, and you save your country!” became the watchword of the Sons of Liberty, who began reorganizing after two years of inactivity. The success of nonimportation depended on the compliance of merchants whose livelihood relied on buying and selling imports. In several major communities, including Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charles Town, merchants continued buying British goods until 1769. Nevertheless, the boycott did significantly limit British imports and mobilized colonists into resuming resistance to British policies.

By 1770, a new British prime minister, Lord North, favored eliminating most of the Townshend duties to prevent the American boycott from widening. But to underscore British authority, he insisted on retaining the tax on tea. Parliament agreed, and in April 1770, giving in for the second time in four years to colonial pressure, it repealed most of the Townshend duties.

Parliament’s partial repeal produced a dilemma for American politicians. They considered it intolerable that taxes remained on tea, the most profitable item for the royal treasury. Colonial leaders were unsure whether they should press on with the nonimportation agreement until they achieved total victory, or whether it would suffice to maintain a selective boycott of tea. When the nonimportation movement collapsed in July 1770, colonists resisted external taxation by voluntary agreements not to drink British tea. Through nonconsumption, they

succeeded in limiting revenue from tea to about one-sixth the level originally expected. Yet colonial resistance leaders took little satisfaction in having forced Parliament to compromise. The tea duty remained a galling reminder that Parliament refused to retreat from the broadest possible interpretation of the Declaratory Act.

## Customs “Racketeering,” 1767–1770

Besides taxing colonial imports, Townshend had sought additional means of financing British rule in America. Traditionally, royal governors had depended on colonial legislatures to vote their salaries, and assemblies used this power to influence governors’ actions. At Townshend’s urging, Parliament authorized paying the salaries of governors and other royal officials in America from revenues raised there, thus freeing officials from the assemblies’ control and influence. In effect, by stripping the assemblies of their most potent weapon, the power of the purse, Parliament’s action threatened to tip the balance of power away from elected colonial representatives and toward unelected royal officials.

Townshend hoped to raise revenue through stricter enforcement of existing customs laws. Accordingly, he also persuaded Parliament in 1767 to establish the American Board of Customs Commissioners. The law raised the number of port officials, funded a colonial coast guard, and provided money for secret informers. It awarded an informer one-third of the value of all goods and ships appropriated through a conviction for smuggling. That fines could be tripled under certain circumstances provided an even greater incentive to seize illegal cargoes. Smuggling cases were heard in vice-admiralty courts, moreover, where the probability of conviction was extremely high. But the law quickly drew protests because of the way it was enforced and because it assumed those accused to be guilty until or unless they could prove otherwise.

Under the new provisions, revenue agents commonly filed charges for technical violations of the Sugar Act, which gave them a pretext for seizing the entire ship. They most often exploited a provision that declared any cargo illegal that had been loaded or unloaded without a customs officer’s written authorization. Customs commissioners also invaded the traditional rights of sailors, who had long supplemented their incomes by making small sales between ports. Anything stored in a sailor’s chest had been considered his private property. Under the new policy,

George III later commented that he never met “a man of less judgment than Lord Hillsborough.”

crewmen saw their trunks ruthlessly broken open by inspectors who confiscated trading stock worth several months' wages because it was not listed on the captain's loading papers.

Above all, customs commissioners' use of informers provoked retaliation. In 1769, the *Pennsylvania Journal* scorned these agents as "dogs of prey, thirsting after the fortunes of worthy and wealthy men." By betraying the trust of employers, and sometimes of friends, informers aroused hatred in their victims and were roughly handled whenever found.

To merchants and seamen alike, the commissioners had embarked on a program of "customs racketeering" that constituted little more than a system of legalized piracy. Nowhere were customs

agents and informers more detested than in Boston, where in June 1768 citizens retaliated against them. The occasion was the seizure, on a technicality, of Boston merchant John Hancock's sloop *Liberty*. Hancock, reportedly North America's richest merchant and a leading opponent of British taxation, had become a chief target of the customs commissioners. Now

they fined him £9,000, an amount almost thirteen times greater than the taxes he supposedly evaded on a shipment of Madeira wine. A crowd, "chiefly sturdy boys and Negroes," in Thomas Hutchinson's words, tried to prevent the towing of Hancock's ship and then began assaulting customs agents. Growing to several hundred as it surged through the streets, the mob drove all revenue inspectors from Boston.

Under Lord North, the British government, aware of customs officers' excesses, took steps to dampen colonial protests. Prosecutors dropped the charges against Hancock, fearing that he would appeal a conviction in England, where honest officials might take action against the commissioners responsible for violating his rights. But British officials were conceding nothing to the colonists. For at the same time, they dispatched four thousand troops to Boston, making clear that they would not tolerate further violent defiance of their authority.

### **"Wilkes and Liberty," 1768–1770**

Although wealthy Britons blamed the colonists for their high taxes, others in England found common cause with the Americans. They formed a movement that arose during the 1760s to oppose the

domestic and foreign policies of George III and a Parliament dominated by wealthy landowners. Their leader was John Wilkes, a fiery London editor and member of Parliament who acquired notoriety in 1763 when his newspaper regularly and irreverently denounced George III's policies. The government finally arrested Wilkes for seditious libel, but to great popular acclaim, he won his case in court. The government, however, succeeded in shutting down his newspaper and in persuading a majority in the House of Commons to deny Wilkes his seat. After again offending the government with a publication, Wilkes fled to Paris.

Defying a warrant for his arrest, Wilkes returned to England in 1768 and again ran for Parliament. By this time, British policies were sparking widespread protests. Merchants and artisans in London, Bristol, and other cities demanded the dismissal of the "obnoxious" ministers who were "ruining our manufactories by invidiously imposing and establishing the most impolitic and unconstitutional taxations and regulations on your Majesty's colonies." They were joined by (nonvoting) weavers, coal heavers, seamen, and other workers who protested low wages and high prices that stemmed in part from government policies. All these people rallied around the cry "Wilkes and liberty!"

After being elected again to Parliament, Wilkes was arrested. The next day, twenty to forty thousand angry "Wilkesites" gathered on St. George's Fields, outside the prison where he was held. When members of the crowd began throwing stones, soldiers and police responded with gunfire, killing eleven protesters. The "massacre of St. George's Fields" had given the movement some martyrs. Wilkes and an associate were elected twice more and were both times denied their seats by other legislators. Wilkes was besieged by outpourings of popular support from the colonies as well as from Britain. Some Virginians sent him tobacco, and the South Carolina assembly voted to contribute £1,500 to help defray his debts. He maintained a regular correspondence with the Boston Sons of Liberty and, upon his release in April 1770, was hailed in a massive Boston celebration as "the illustrious martyr to Liberty."

Wilkes's cause sharpened the political thinking of government opponents in Britain and the colonies alike. Thousands of English voters signed petitions to Parliament protesting its refusal to seat Wilkes as an affront to the electorate's will. Some of them formed a Society of the Supporters of the Bill of Rights "to defend and maintain the legal, constitutional liberty of the subject." While more "respectable" opponents of the government such as William Pitt and Edmund Burke disdained Wilkes

The *Pennsylvania Journal* scorned informers as "dogs of prey, thirsting after the fortunes of worthy and wealthy men."



**JOHN WILKES, BY WILLIAM HOGARTH, 1763** Detesting Wilkes and all he stood for, Hogarth depicted the radical leader as menacing and untrustworthy. (William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan)

for courting the “mob,” his movement emboldened them to speak more forcefully against the government, especially on its policies toward the colonies. Wilkes’s movement also provided powerful reinforcement for colonists’ challenges to the authority of Parliament and the British government.

## Women and Colonial Resistance

Colonial boycotts of British goods provided a unique opportunity for white women to join the resistance to British policies. White women’s participation in public affairs had been widening slowly and unevenly in the colonies for several decades. By the 1760s, when colonial protests against British policies began, colonial women such as Sarah Osborn (see Chapter 4) had become well-known religious activists. Calling themselves the Daughters of Liberty, a contingent of upper-class female patriots had played a part in defeating the Stamp Act. Some had attended political rallies during the Stamp Act

crisis, and many more had expressed their opposition in discussions and correspondence with family and friends.

Just two years later, women assumed an even more visible role during the Townshend crisis. To protest the Revenue Act’s tax on tea, more than three hundred “mistresses of families” in Boston denounced consumption of the beverage in early 1770. In some ways, the threat of nonconsumption was even more effective than that of nonimportation, for women served and drank most of the tea consumed by colonists.

Nonconsumption agreements soon became popular and were extended to include English manufactures, especially clothing. Again women played a vital role, both because they made most household purchases and because it was they who could replace British imports with apparel of their own making. Responding to leaders’ pleas that they expand domestic cloth production, women of all social ranks, even those who customarily did not weave their own fabric or sew their own clothing, organized spinning bees. These events attracted intense publicity as evidence of American determination to forgo luxury and idleness for the common defense of liberty. One historian calculates that more than sixteen hundred women participated in spinning bees in New England alone from 1768 to 1770. The colonial cause, noted a New York woman, had enlisted “a fighting army of amazons...armed with spinning wheels.”

Spinning bees not only helped undermine the notion that women had no place in public life but also endowed spinning and weaving, previously considered routine household tasks, with special political virtue. “Women might recover to this country the full and free enjoyment of all our rights, properties and privileges,” exclaimed the Reverend John Cleaveland of Ipswich, Massachusetts, in 1769, adding that this “is more than the men have been able to do.” For many colonists, such logic enlarged the arena of supposed feminine virtues from strictly religious matters to include political issues.

Spinning bees, combined with female support for boycotting tea, dramatically demonstrated that American resistance ran far deeper than the protests of a few male merchants and the largely male crowds in American seaports. Women’s participation showed that colonial protests extended into the heart of American households and congregations, and were leading to broader popular participation in politics.

The colonial cause, noted a New York woman, had enlisted “a fighting army of amazons...armed with spinning wheels.”



**MERCY OTIS WARREN, BY JOHN SINGLETON COPLEY, 1763**

An essayist and playwright, Warren was the most prominent woman intellectual of the Revolutionary era. (*Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Bequest of Winslow Warren. Photograph © 2009 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*)

## The Deepening Crisis, 1770–1774

After 1770, the imperial crisis grew more ominous. Colonists and British troops clashed on the streets of Boston. Resistance leaders in the colonies developed means of systematically coordinating their actions and policies. After Bostonians defied a new act of Parliament, the Tea Act, Britain was determined to subordinate the colonies once and for all. Adding to the tensions of the period were several violent conflicts that erupted in the western backcountry.

### The Boston Massacre, 1770

As noted, in response to the violence provoked by Hancock's case, British authorities had dispatched four thousand troops to Boston in the summer and fall of 1768. Resentful Bostonians regarded the redcoats as a standing army that threatened their liberty, as well as a financial burden.

In the presence of so many soldiers, Boston took on the atmosphere of an occupied city and crackled

with tension. Armed sentries and resentful civilians traded insults. The overwhelmingly Protestant townspeople were especially angered that many soldiers were Irish Catholics. The poorly paid enlisted men, moreover, were free to seek employment when off-duty. Often agreeing to work for less than local laborers, they generated fierce hostility in a community that was plagued by persistently high unemployment.

Poor Bostonians' deep-seated resentment against British authority erupted on February 22, 1770, when a customs informer shot into a crowd picketing the home of a customs-paying merchant, killing an eleven-year-old boy. While elite Bostonians had disdained the unruly exchanges between soldiers and crowds, the horror at a child's death momentarily united the community. "My Eyes never beheld such a funeral," wrote John Adams. "A vast Number of Boys walked before the Coffin, a vast Number of Women and Men after it. ... This Shews there are many more Lives to spend if wanted in the Service of their country."

Although the army had played no part in the shooting, it became a natural target for popular frustration and rage. A week after the boy's funeral, tensions between troops and a crowd led by Crispus Attucks, a seaman of African and Native American descent, and including George Robert Twelves Hewes, erupted at the guard post protecting the customs office. When an officer tried to disperse the civilians, his men endured a steady barrage of flying objects and dares to shoot. A private finally did fire, after having been knocked down by a block of ice, and then shouted, "Fire! Fire!" to his fellow soldiers. The soldiers' volley hit eleven persons, five of whom, including Attucks, died.

The shock that followed the March 5 bloodshed marked the emotional high point of the Townshend crisis. Royal authorities in Massachusetts tried to defuse the situation by isolating all British soldiers on a fortified island in the harbor, and Governor Thomas Hutchinson promised that the soldiers who had fired would be tried. John Adams, an elite patriot who opposed crowd actions, served as their attorney. Adams appealed to the Boston jury by claiming that the soldiers had been provoked by a "motley rabble of saucy boys, negroes and mulattoes, Irish teagues, and outlandish jack tarres," in other words, people not considered "respectable" by the city's elites and middle class. All but two of the soldiers were acquitted, and those found guilty suffered only a branding on their thumbs.

Burning hatreds produced by an intolerable situation underlay the Boston Massacre, as it came to be called in conscious recollection of the St. George's Fields Massacre in London. The shooting of unarmed American civilians by British soldiers

and the light punishment given the soldiers forced the colonists to confront the stark possibility that the British government was bent on coercing and suppressing them through naked force. In a play written by Mercy Otis Warren, a character predicted that soon “Murders, blood and carnage/ Shall crimson all these streets” as patriots rose to defend their republican liberty against tyrannical authority.

## The Committees of Correspondence, 1772–1773

In the fall of 1772, Lord North was preparing to implement Townshend’s goal of paying the royal governors’ salaries out of customs revenue. The colonists had always viewed efforts to free the governors from financial dependence on the legislatures as a threat to representative government. In response, Samuel Adams persuaded Boston’s town meeting to request that every Massachusetts community appoint a committee whose members would be responsible for exchanging information and coordinating measures to defend colonial rights. Of approximately 260 towns, about half immediately established “committees of correspondence,” and most others did so within a year. The idea soon spread throughout New England.

The committees of correspondence were resistance leaders’ first attempt to maintain close and continuing political cooperation over a wide area. By linking almost every interior community to Boston through a network of dedicated activists, the system enabled Adams to send out messages for each local committee to read at its own town meeting, which would then debate the issues and adopt a formal resolution. Involving tens of thousands of colonists to consider evidence that their rights were in danger, the system enabled them to take a personal stand by voting.

Adams’s most successful effort to mobilize popular sentiment came in June 1773, when he publicized some letters written by Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson that Benjamin Franklin had obtained. Massachusetts town meetings discovered through the letters that Hutchinson had advocated “an abridgement of what are called English liberties” and “a great restraint of natural liberty.” The publication of Hutchinson’s correspondence confirmed many colonists’ suspicions of a plot to destroy basic freedoms.

In March 1773, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, and Richard Henry Lee proposed that Virginia establish committees of correspondence. Within a year, every province but Pennsylvania had followed its example. By early 1774, a communications web linked colonial leaders for the first time since the Stamp Act crisis of 1766.

## Conflicts in the Backcountry

Although most of the turbulence between 1763 and 1775 swirled in the eastern seaports, numerous clashes, involving Native Americans, colonists, and colonial governments, erupted in the West. These conflicts were rooted in the rapid population growth that had spurred the migration of whites to the Appalachian backcountry.

Backcountry tensions surfaced soon after the Seven Years’ War in western Pennsylvania, where Scots-Irish Presbyterian settlers had fought repeatedly with Native Americans. Settlers near Paxton, Pennsylvania, resented the Quaker-dominated assembly for failing to provide them with adequate military protection and for denying them equal representation in the legislature. They also concluded that all Native Americans, regardless of wartime conduct, were their racial enemies. In December 1763, armed settlers attacked two villages of peaceful Conestoga Indians, killing and scalping men, women, and children. In February 1764, about 200 “Paxton Boys,” as they were called, set out for Philadelphia, with plans to kill Christian Indian refugees there. A government delegation headed by Benjamin Franklin met the armed, mounted mob on the outskirts of the city. After Franklin promised that the assembly would consider their grievances, the Paxton Boys returned home.

Land pressures and the lack of adequate revenue from the colonies left the British government utterly helpless in enforcing the Proclamation of 1763. Speculators such as George Washington sought western land because “any person who . . . neglects the present opportunity of hunting out good Lands will never regain it.” Settlers, traders, hunters, and thieves trespassed on Indian land, often responding violently when confronted by the occupants. In the meantime, the British government was unable to maintain garrisons at many of its forts or to enforce violations of laws and treaties. Under such pressure, Britain and its Six Nations Iroquois allies agreed in the Treaty of Fort Stanwix (1768) to grant lands along the Ohio River that were occupied and claimed by Shawnees, Delawares, and Cherokees to the governments of Pennsylvania and Virginia.

The treaty only heightened western tensions, especially in the Ohio country, where settlers agitated to establish a new colony, Kentucky. Growing violence culminated in 1774 in the unprovoked slaughter by colonists of thirteen Shawnees and Mingos,

Hutchinson had advocated “an abridgement of what are called English liberties” and “a great restraint of natural liberty.”



**PAXTON BOYS EXPEDITION** Militia units organize in Philadelphia, ready to march against the Paxton Boys if necessary. (Granger Collection)

including eight members of the family of Logan, until then a moderate Mingo leader. The outraged Logan led a force of Shawnees and Mingos who retaliated by killing an equal number of white Virginians and then offered to make peace. Repudiating the offer, Virginia mobilized for what became known as Lord Dunmore's War (1774), for the colony's governor. In a decisive battle, the English soundly defeated Logan's people. During the peace conference that followed, Virginia gained uncontested rights to lands south of the Ohio in exchange for its claims on the northern side. But Anglo-Indian resentments persisted, and fighting would resume once Britain and its colonies went to war.

Other western disputes led to conflict among the colonists themselves. Settlers moving west in Massachusetts in the early 1760s found their titles challenged by powerful New York landlords. When two landlords threatened to evict tenant farmers in 1766, the New Englanders joined the tenants in an armed uprising, calling themselves Sons of Liberty after the Stamp Act protesters. In 1769, settlers moving west from New Hampshire also came into conflict with New York. After four years of guerrilla

warfare, the New Hampshire settlers, calling themselves the Green Mountain Boys, established an independent government. Unrecognized at the time, it eventually became the state of Vermont. A third group of New England settlers from Connecticut settled in the Wyoming valley

of Pennsylvania, where they clashed in 1774 with Pennsylvanians claiming title to the same land.

Expansion also provoked conflicts between backcountry settlers and their colonial governments. In North Carolina, a group known as the Regulators aimed to redress the grievances of westerners who, underrepresented in the colonial assembly, found themselves exploited by eastern officeholders. The Regulator movement climaxed on May 16, 1771, at the battle of Alamance Creek. Leading an army of perhaps thirteen hundred eastern militiamen, North Carolina's royal governor defeated about twenty-five hundred Regulators in a clash that produced almost three hundred casualties. Although the Regulator uprising then disintegrated, it crippled the colony's subsequent ability to resist British authority.

An armed Regulator movement also arose in South Carolina, in this case to counter the government's unwillingness to prosecute bandits who were terrorizing settlers. But the South Carolina government did not dispatch its militia to the backcountry for fear that the colony's restive slave population might use the occasion to revolt. Instead, it conceded to the principal demands of the Regulators by establishing four new judicial circuits and allowing jury trials in the newly settled areas.

Although not directly interrelated, these episodes all reflected the tensions generated by an increasingly land hungry white population and its willingness to resort to violence against Native Americans, other colonists, and British officials. As Anglo-American tensions mounted in older settled areas, the western settlers' anxious mood spread.

“[A]ny person who ... neglects the present opportunity of hunting out good Lands will never regain it.”

## The Tea Act, 1773

Colonial smuggling and nonconsumption had taken a heavy toll on the British East India Company, which enjoyed a legal monopoly on the sale of tea within Britain's empire. By 1773, with tons of tea rotting in its warehouses, the company was teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. Lord North could not afford to let the company fail. Not only did it pay substantial duties on the tea it shipped to Britain, but it also subsidized British rule in India (as discussed in Chapter 6, Beyond America).

In May 1773, to save the beleaguered East India Company from financial ruin, Parliament passed the **Tea Act**, which eliminated all remaining import duties on tea entering England and thus lowered the selling price to consumers. To lower the price further, the Tea Act also permitted the company to sell its tea directly to consumers rather than through wholesalers. These two concessions reduced the cost of company tea in the colonies well below the price of all smuggled competition. Parliament expected simple economic self-interest to overcome Anglo-American scruples about buying taxed tea.

But the Tea Act alarmed many Americans, above all because it would raise revenue with which the British government would pay royal governors. The law thus threatened to corrupt Americans into accepting the principle of parliamentary taxation by taking advantage of their weakness for a frivolous luxury. Quickly, therefore, the committees of correspondence decided to prevent East India Company cargoes from being landed, either by pressuring the company's agents to refuse acceptance or by intercepting the ships at sea and ordering them home. In Philadelphia, an anonymous "Committee for Tarring and Feathering" warned harbor pilots not to guide any ships carrying tea into port.

In Boston, however, this strategy failed. On November 28, 1773, the first ship came under the jurisdiction of the customs house, where duties would have to be paid on its cargo within twenty days. Otherwise, the cargo would be seized from the captain and the tea claimed by the company's agents and placed on sale. When Samuel Adams, John Hancock, and other popular leaders requested a special clearance for the ship's departure, Thomas Hutchinson refused.

On the evening of December 16, five thousand Bostonians gathered at Old South Church. Samuel Adams informed them of Hutchinson's insistence upon landing the tea and proclaimed that "this meeting can do no more to save the country." About fifty young men, including George Robert Twelves Hewes, stepped forward and disguised themselves as Mohawk Indians—symbolizing a virtuous, proud, and assertive American identity distinct from that



**BOSTONIANS PAYING THE EXCISE (TAX) MAN** In this engraving, a crowd protests the Tea Act by forcing a British tax collector to drink tea. (Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University)

of corrupt Britain. Armed with "tomahawks," they headed for the wharf, followed by most of the crowd.

The disciplined band assaulted no one and damaged nothing but the hated cargo. For almost an hour, thousands of onlookers stood silently transfixed, as if at a religious service, peering through the crisp, cold air of a moonlit night. The only sounds were the steady chop of hatchets breaking open wooden chests and the soft splash of tea—forty-five tons in all—on the water. When Boston's "Tea Party," as it was later called, was finished, the participants left quietly, and the town lapsed into a profound hush.

## Toward Independence, 1774–1776

The calm that followed the Boston Tea Party proved to be a calm before the storm. The incident inflamed the British government and Parliament, which now determined once and for all to quash colonial insubordination. Colonial political leaders responded with equal determination to defend self-government and liberty. The empire and its

American colonies were on a collision course, leading by spring 1775 to armed clashes. Yet even after blood was shed, colonists hesitated before declaring their independence from Britain. In the meantime, free and enslaved African-Americans pondered how best to realize their own freedom.

## Liberty for African-Americans

Throughout the imperial crisis, African-Americans, as a deeply alienated group within society, quickly responded to calls for liberty and equality. In January 1766, when a group of blacks, inspired by anti-Stamp Act protests, had marched through Charles Town, South Carolina, shouting “Liberty!” they were arrested for inciting a rebellion. Thereafter, unrest among slaves—usually in the form of violence or escape—kept pace with that among white rebels. Then in 1772, a court decision in England electrified much of the black population. A Massachusetts slave, James Somerset, had accompanied his master to England, where he ran away but was recaptured. Aided by Quaker abolitionists, Somerset sued for his freedom. Writing for the King’s Court, Lord Chief Justice William Mansfield ruled that because Parliament had never explicitly established slavery in England, Somerset must be freed.

Although the decision applied only to Somerset and had no force in the colonies, it inspired African-Americans to pursue their freedom. In January 1773, some of Somerset’s fellow Massachusetts blacks filed the first of three petitions to the legislature, arguing that the decision should be extended to the colony. In Virginia and Maryland, dozens of enslaved persons ran away from their masters and sought passage aboard ships bound for England. As Anglo-American tensions mounted in 1774, many slaves, especially in the Chesapeake colonies, looked for war and the arrival of British troops as a means to their liberation. The young Virginia planter James Madison remarked that “if America and Britain come to a hostile rupture, I am afraid an insurrection among the slaves may and will be promoted” by England.

Madison’s fears were borne out in November 1775 when Virginia’s governor, Lord Dunmore, promised freedom to any able-bodied enslaved man who enlisted in the cause of restoring royal authority. Like Florida’s offer of refuge to escaping South Carolina slaves (see Chapter 4), **Lord Dunmore’s Proclamation** intended to undermine a planter-dominated society by appealing to slaves’ longings for freedom. About one thousand Virginia blacks flocked to Dunmore. Those who fought donned uniforms proclaiming “Liberty to Slaves.” Dunmore’s proclamation associated British forces with slave liberation in the minds of both blacks

and whites in the southern colonies, an association that continued during the war that followed.

## The “Intolerable Acts”

Following the Boston Tea Party, Lord North fumed that only “New England fanatics” could imagine themselves oppressed by inexpensive tea. A member of Parliament drew wild applause by declaring that “the town of Boston ought to be knocked about by the ears, and destroyed.” In vain the Americans’ supporter, Edmund Burke, pleaded for the one action that could end the crisis. “Leave America . . . to tax herself. . . . Leave the Americans as they anciently stood.” The British government, however, swiftly asserted its authority by enacting four “Coercive Acts” that, together with the unrelated Quebec Act, became known to colonists as the “**Intolerable Acts**.”

The first of the Coercive Acts, the Boston Port Bill, became law on April 1, 1774. It ordered the navy to close Boston harbor unless the town arranged to pay for the ruined tea by June 1. Lord North’s cabinet deliberately imposed this impossibly short deadline to ensure the harbor’s closing, which would lead to serious economic distress.

The second Coercive Act, the Massachusetts Government Act, revoked the Massachusetts charter and restructured the government. The colony’s upper house would no longer be elected annually by the assembly but instead be appointed for life by the crown. The governor would independently appoint all judges and sheriffs, while sheriffs would appoint jurymen, who previously had been elected. Finally, towns could hold no more than one meeting a year without the governor’s permission. These changes brought Massachusetts into line with other royal colonies.

The third of the new acts, the Administration of Justice Act, which some colonists cynically called the Murder Act, permitted any person charged with murder while enforcing royal authority in Massachusetts (such as the British soldiers indicted for the Boston Massacre) to be tried in England or in other colonies.

Finally, a new Quartering Act went beyond the earlier act of 1765 by allowing the governor to requisition empty private buildings for housing troops.

Americans learned of the Quebec Act along with the previous four statutes and associated it with them. Intended to cement loyalty to Britain among conquered French-Canadian Catholics, the law retained Roman Catholicism as Quebec’s established religion. This provision alarmed Protestant Anglo-Americans who widely believed that Catholicism went hand in hand with despotism. Furthermore, the Quebec Act gave Canada’s governors sweeping powers but established no legislature. It also permitted property



Jonathan Sewall, feared that Congress was enthroning “their High Mightinesses, the MOB.”

through rigged trials. By this reasoning, the new Quartering Act would repress any resistance by forcing troops on an unwilling population, and the “Murder Act” would encourage massacres by preventing local juries from convicting soldiers who killed civilians. Once resistance in Massachusetts had been smashed,

the Quebec Act would serve as a blueprint for extinguishing representative government throughout the colonies. Parliament would revoke every colony’s charter and introduce a government like Quebec’s. Elected assemblies, freedom of religion for Protestants, and jury trials would all disappear.

Intended by Parliament simply to punish Massachusetts and particularly that rotten apple in the barrel, Boston—the acts instead pushed most colonies to the brink of rebellion. Repeal of these laws became, in effect, the colonists’ nonnegotiable demand. Of the twenty-seven reasons justifying the break with Britain that Americans later cited in the Declaration of Independence, six concerned these statutes.

## The First Continental Congress

In response to the “Intolerable Acts,” the extralegal committees of correspondence of every colony but Georgia sent delegates to a **Continental Congress** in Philadelphia. The fifty-six delegates assembled on September 5, 1774, to find a way of defending the colonies’ rights in common. Those in attendance included Samuel and John Adams of Massachusetts; John Jay of New York; Joseph Galloway and John Dickinson of Pennsylvania; and Patrick Henry, Richard Henry Lee, and George Washington of Virginia.

The First Continental Congress opened by endorsing a set of statements called the Suffolk Resolves. Recently adopted at a convention of Massachusetts towns, the resolves declared that the colonies owed no obedience to any of the Coercive Acts, that a provisional government should collect all taxes until the former Massachusetts charter was restored, and that defensive measures should be taken in the event of an attack by royal troops. The Continental Congress also voted to boycott all British imports after December 1 and to halt almost all exports to Britain and its West Indian possessions after September 1775 unless a reconciliation had been accomplished. This agreement, the Continental Association, would be enforced by locally elected committees of “observation” or “safety,” whose members in effect would be seizing control of American trade from the royal customs service.

Such bold defiance displeased some delegates. Jay, Dickinson, Galloway, and other moderates who dominated the middle-colony contingent feared

the internal turmoil that would surely accompany a head-on confrontation with Britain. These “trimmers” (John Adams’s scornful phrase) unsuccessfully opposed nonimportation and tried in vain to win endorsement of Galloway’s plan for an American legislature that would share the authority to tax and govern the colonies with Parliament.

Finally, however, the delegates summarized their principles and demands in a petition to the king. This document affirmed Parliament’s power to regulate imperial commerce, but it argued that all previous parliamentary efforts to impose taxes, enforce laws through admiralty courts, suspend assemblies, and unilaterally revoke charters were unconstitutional. By addressing the king rather than Parliament, Congress was imploring George III to end the crisis by dismissing those ministers responsible for passing the Coercive Acts.

## From Resistance to Rebellion

The divisions within the Continental Congress mirrored those within Anglo-American society at large. Tensions between moderates and radicals ran high, and bonds between Americans formerly united in outlook sometimes snapped. John Adams’s onetime friend Jonathan Sewall, for example, charged that the Congress had made the “breach with the parent state a thousand times more irreparable than it was before.” Fearing that Congress was enthroning “their High Mightinesses, the MOB,” he and like-minded Americans refused to defy the king.

To solidify their defiance, resistance leaders coerced colonists who refused to support them. Thus the elected committees that Congress had created to enforce the Continental Association often became vigilantes, compelling merchants who still traded with Britain to burn their imports and make public apologies, browbeating clergymen who preached pro-British sermons, and pressuring Americans to adopt simpler diets and dress in order to relieve their dependence on British imports. Additionally, in colony after colony, the committees took on government functions by organizing volunteer military companies and extralegal legislatures. By the spring of 1775, patriots had established provincial “congresses” that paralleled and rivaled the existing assemblies headed by royal governors.

Colonists prepared for the worst by collecting arms and organizing extralegal militia units (locally known as minutemen) whose members could respond instantly to an emergency. On April 19, 1775, Massachusetts’s Governor Gage sent seven hundred British soldiers to seize military supplies that colonists had stored at Concord. Two couriers, William Dawes and Paul Revere, rode out to warn nearby towns of the troop movements. At Lexington, about seventy minutemen confronted the soldiers. After a

confused skirmish in which eight minutemen died and a single redcoat was wounded, the British pushed on to Concord. There they found few munitions but encountered a growing swarm of armed Yankees. When some minutemen mistakenly thought the town was being burned, they exchanged fire with the British regulars and touched off a running battle that continued for most of the sixteen miles back to Boston. By day's end, the redcoats had suffered 273 casualties, compared to only 92 for the colonists. These engagements awakened the countryside, and by the evening of April 20, some twenty thousand New Englanders were besieging the British garrison in Boston.

Three weeks later, the Second Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia. Most delegates still opposed independence and at Dickinson's urging agreed to send a "loyal message" to George III. Dickinson composed the **Olive Branch Petition** listing three demands: a cease-fire at Boston, repeal of the Coercive Acts, and negotiations to establish guarantees of American rights. Yet while pleading for peace, the delegates also passed measures that Britain could only construe as rebellious. In particular, they voted in

May 1775 to establish an "American continental army" and appointed George Washington its commander.

The Olive Branch Petition reached London along with news of the Continental Army's formation and of a battle fought just outside Boston on June 17. In this engagement, British troops attacked colonists entrenched on Breed's Hill and Bunker Hill. Although they succeeded in dislodging the Americans, the British suffered 1,154 casualties out of twenty-two hundred men, compared to a loss of 311 patriots.

After Bunker Hill, many Britons wanted retaliation, not reconciliation. On August 23, George III proclaimed New England in a state of rebellion, and in October he extended that pronouncement to include all the colonies. In December, Parliament likewise declared all the colonies rebellious, outlawing all British trade with them and subjecting their ships to seizure.

## Common Sense

Despite the turn of events, many colonists clung to hopes of reconciliation. Even John Adams, who

**A VIEW OF THE TOWN OF CONCORD, 1775, BY RALPH EARL** British troops enter Concord to search for armaments. A few hours later, hostilities with the townspeople would erupt. (*Concord Museum*)



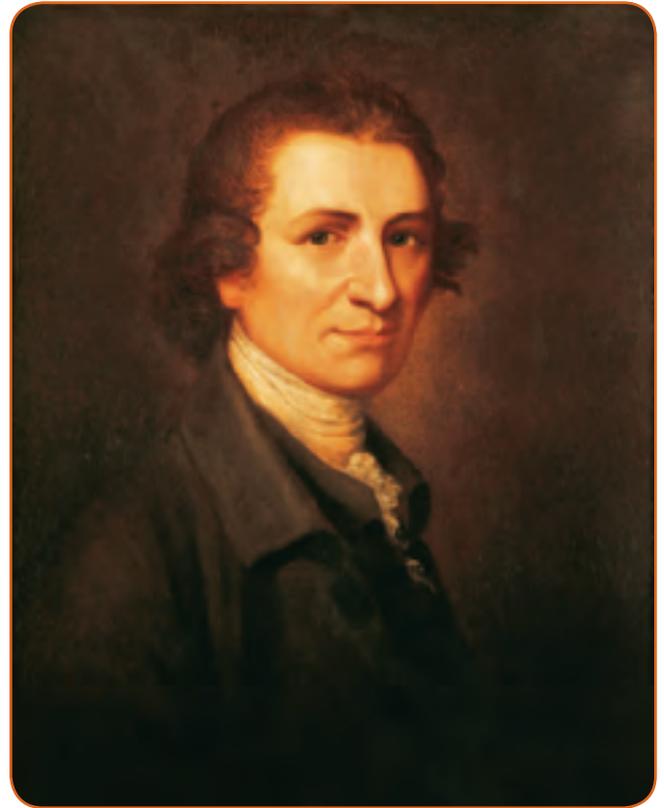
believed in the inevitability of separation, described himself as “fond of reconciliation, if we could reasonably entertain Hopes of it on a constitutional basis.”

Through 1775, many colonists clung to the notion that evil ministers rather than the king were forcing unconstitutional measures on them. But with George III having declared the colonies to be in “open and avowed rebellion...for the purpose of establishing an independent empire,” Anglo-Americans had no choice but either to submit or to acknowledge their goal of national independence.

Most colonists’ sentimental attachment to the king, the last emotional barrier to their accepting independence, finally crumbled in January 1776 with the publication of Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*. A failed corset maker and schoolmaster, Paine immigrated to the colonies from England late in 1774 with a letter of introduction from Benjamin Franklin, a penchant for radical politics, and a gift for writing plain and pungent prose that anyone could understand.

Paine told Americans what they had been unable to bring themselves to say: monarchy was an institution rooted in superstition, dangerous to liberty, and inappropriate to Americans. The king was “the royal brute” and a “hardened, sullen-tempered Pharaoh.” Whereas previous writers had maintained that certain corrupt politicians were directing an English conspiracy against American liberty, Paine argued that such a conspiracy was rooted in the very institutions of monarchy and empire. Moreover, he argued, America had no economic need for the British connection. As he put it, “The commerce by which she [America] hath enriched herself are the necessaries of life, and will always have a market while eating is the custom in Europe.” In addition, he pointed out the events of the preceding six months had made independence a reality. Finally, Paine linked America’s awakening nationalism with the sense of religious mission felt by many when he proclaimed, “We have it in our power to begin the world over again. A situation, similar to the present, hath not happened since the days of Noah until now.” America, in Paine’s view, would be not only a new nation but a new kind of nation, a model society founded on republican principles and unburdened by the oppressive beliefs and corrupt institutions of the European past.

Printed in both English and German, *Common Sense* sold more than one hundred thousand copies within three months, equal to one for every fourth or fifth adult male, making it a best seller. Readers passed copies from hand to hand and read passages aloud in public gatherings. The *Connecticut Gazette* described Paine’s pamphlet as “a landflood that sweeps all before it.” *Common Sense* had dissolved lingering allegiance to George III and Great



**THOMAS PAINE** Having arrived in the colonies less than two years earlier, Paine became a best-selling author with the publication of *Common Sense* (1776). (Art Gallery, Williams Center, Lafayette College)

Britain, removing the last psychological barrier to American independence.

## Declaring Independence

As Americans absorbed Paine’s views, the military conflict between Britain and the colonies escalated, making the possibility of reconciliation even less likely. In May 1775, irregular troops from Vermont and Massachusetts had captured Fort Ticonderoga and Crown Point on the key route connecting New York and Canada. Six months later, Washington ordered Colonel Henry Knox, the army’s senior artilleryman, to bring the British artillery seized at Ticonderoga to reinforce the siege of Boston. Knox and his men built crude sleds to haul their fifty-nine cannons through dense forest and rugged, snow-covered mountains. Forty days and three hundred miles after leaving Ticonderoga, Knox and his exhausted troops reported to Washington in January 1776. They had accomplished one of the Revolution’s great feats of endurance. The guns from Ticonderoga placed the outnumbered British in a hopeless position and forced them to evacuate Boston on March 17, 1776.

Regrouping and augmenting its forces at Halifax, Nova Scotia, Britain planned an assault on New York to drive a wedge between rebellious New

England and the other colonies. Recognizing New York's strategic importance, Washington led most of his troops there in April 1776.

Other military moves reinforced the drift toward all-out war. In June, Congress ordered a two-pronged assault on Canada in which forces under General Philip Schuyler would move northward via Fort Ticonderoga to Montreal while Benedict Arnold would lead a march through the Maine forest to Quebec. Schuyler succeeded but Arnold failed. As Britain poured troops into Canada, the Americans prudently withdrew. At the same time, a British offensive in the southern colonies failed after an unsuccessful attempt to seize Charles Town.

By spring 1776, Paine's pamphlet, reinforced by the growing reality of war, had stimulated dozens of local gatherings—artisan guilds, town meetings, county conventions, and militia musters—to pass resolutions favoring American independence. The groundswell quickly spread to the colonies' extralegal legislatures. New England was already in rebellion, and Rhode Island declared itself independent in May 1776. The middle colonies hesitated to support independence because they feared, correctly, that any war would largely be fought over control of Philadelphia and New York. Following the news in April that North Carolina's congressional delegates were authorized to vote for independence, several southern colonies pressed for separation. Virginia's legislature instructed its delegates to propose independence, which Richard Henry Lee did on June 7. Formally adopting Lee's resolution on July 2, Congress created the United States of America.

The task of drafting a statement to justify the colonies' separation from England fell to a committee of five, including John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson, with Jefferson as the principal author. Among Congress's revisions to Jefferson's first draft: insertion of the phrase "pursuit of happiness" in place of "property" in the Declaration's most famous sentence, and its deletion of a statement blaming George III for foisting the slave trade on unwilling colonists. The **Declaration of Independence** (reprinted in the Appendix at the back of this volume) never mentioned Parliament by name, for Congress had moved beyond arguments over legislative representation and now wanted to separate America altogether from Britain and its head of state, the king. Jefferson listed twenty-seven "injuries and usurpations" committed by George III against the colonies. And he drew on a familiar line of radical thinking when he added that the king's actions had as their "direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states."

Like Paine, Jefferson elevated the colonists' grievances from a dispute over English freedoms to a struggle of universal dimensions. In the tradition

of Locke and other Enlightenment figures, Jefferson argued that the English government had violated its contract with the colonists, thereby giving them the right to replace it with a government of their own design. And his eloquent emphasis on the equality of all individuals and their natural entitlement to justice, liberty, and self-fulfillment expressed republicans' deepest longing for a government that would rest on neither legal privilege nor exploitation of the majority by the few.

Jefferson addressed the Declaration of Independence as much to Americans uncertain about the wisdom of independence as to world opinion, for even at this late date a significant minority opposed independence or were uncertain whether to endorse it. Above all, he wanted to convince his fellow citizens that social and political progress could no longer be accomplished within the British Empire. But he left unanswered just which Americans were and were not equal to one another and entitled to liberty. All the colonies endorsing the Declaration countenanced, on grounds of racial inequality, the enslavement of blacks and severe restrictions on the rights of free blacks. Moreover, all had property qualifications that prevented many white men from voting. The proclamation that "all men" were created equal accorded with the Anglo-American assumption that women could not and should not function politically or legally as autonomous individuals. And Jefferson's accusation that George III had unleashed "the merciless Indian savages" on innocent colonists seemed to place Native Americans outside the bounds of humanity.

Was the Declaration of Independence a statement that expressed the sentiments of all but a minority of colonists? In a very narrow sense it was, but by framing the Declaration in universal terms, Jefferson and the Continental Congress made it something much greater. The ideas motivating Jefferson and his fellow delegates had moved thousands of ordinary colonists to political action over the preceding eleven years, both on their own behalf and on behalf of the colonies in their quarrel with Britain. For better or worse, the struggle for national independence had hastened, and become intertwined with, a quest for equality and personal independence that, for many Americans, transcended boundaries of class, race, or gender. In their reading, the Declaration never claimed that perfect justice and equal opportunity existed in the United States; rather, it challenged the Revolutionary generation and all who later inherited the nation to bring this ideal closer to reality.

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# CHRONOLOGY

# 1750–1776

<b>1754</b>	Albany Congress.	<b>1768</b>	( <i>Cont.</i> ) First Treaty of Fort Stanwix. St. George's Fields Massacre in London.
<b>1754–1761</b>	Seven Years' War (in Europe, 1756–1763).	<b>1770</b>	Townshend duties, except tea tax, repealed. Boston Massacre.
<b>1755</b>	British expel Acadians from Nova Scotia.	<b>1771</b>	Battle of Alamance Creek in North Carolina.
<b>1760</b>	George III becomes king of Great Britain. Writs of assistance.	<b>1772–1774</b>	Committees of correspondence formed.
<b>1762</b>	Treaty of San Ildefonso.	<b>1772</b>	Somerset decision in England.
<b>1763</b>	Treaty of Paris. Pontiac's War. Proclamation of 1763.	<b>1773</b>	Tea Act and Boston Tea Party.
<b>1763–1764</b>	Paxton Boys uprising in Pennsylvania.	<b>1774</b>	Lord Dunmore's War. Coercive Acts and Quebec Act. First Continental Congress.
<b>1764</b>	Sugar Act.	<b>1775</b>	Battles of Lexington and Concord. Lord Dunmore's Proclamation. Olive Branch Petition. Battles at Breed's Hill and Bunker Hill. George III and Parliament declare colonies to be in rebellion.
<b>1765</b>	Stamp Act. African-Americans demand liberty in Charles Town. First Quartering Act.	<b>1776</b>	Thomas Paine, <i>Common Sense</i> . Declaration of Independence.
<b>1766</b>	Stamp Act repealed. Declaratory Act.		
<b>1767</b>	Revenue Act (Townshend duties). American Board of Customs Commissioners created.		
<b>1768</b>	Massachusetts "circular letters." John Hancock's ship <i>Liberty</i> seized by Boston customs commissioner.		

## CONCLUSION

In 1763, Britain and its North American colonies concluded a stunning victory over France, entirely eliminating that nation's formidable mainland American empire. Colonists proudly joined in hailing Britain as the world's most powerful nation, and they fully expected to reap territorial and economic benefits from the victory. Yet by 1775, colonists and Britons were fighting with one another. The war had exhausted Britain's treasury and led the government to look to the colonies for help in defraying the costs of maintaining its enlarged empire. In attempting to collect more revenue and to centralize imperial authority, English officials confronted the ambitions and attitudes of Americans who felt themselves to be in every way equal to Britons.

The differences between British and American viewpoints sharpened slowly and unevenly between 1760 and 1776. One major turning point was the Stamp Act crisis (1765–1766), when many Americans began questioning Parliament's authority, as opposed to that of their own elected legislatures, to levy taxes in the colonies. Colonists also broadened their protests during the Stamp Act crisis, moving beyond carefully worded petitions to fiery resolutions, crowd actions, an intercolonial congress, and

a nonimportation movement. Colonial resistance became even more effective during the crisis over the Townshend duties (1767–1770) because of both increased intercolonial cooperation and support from within Britain. Thereafter, growing numbers of colonists moved from simply denying Parliament's authority to tax them to rejecting virtually any British authority over them.

After 1774, independence was almost inevitable. Yet Americans were the most reluctant of revolutionaries—even after their own state and national legislatures were functioning, their troops had clashed with Britain's, and George III had declared them to be in rebellion. Tom Paine's prose finally persuaded them that they could stand on their own, without the support of Britain's markets, manufactures, or monarch. Thereafter, a grass-roots independence movement began, leading Congress in July 1776 to proclaim American independence and, thereby, to declare revolutionary war.

Americans by no means followed a single road to revolution. Ambitious elites resented British efforts to curtail colonial autonomy as exercised almost exclusively by members of their own class in the assemblies. They and many more in the middle classes were angered by British policies that made commerce less profitable and consumption

more costly. But others, including both western settlers and poor and working city dwellers like George Robert Twelves Hewes, defied conventions demanding that humble people defer to the authority of their social superiors. Sometimes resorting to violence, they directed their wrath toward British officials and colonial elites alike. Many African-

Americans, on the other hand, considered Britain as more likely than white colonists, especially slaveholders, to liberate them. And Native Americans recognized that British authority, however limited, provided a measure of protection from land-hungry colonists. These divisions would persist after the eruption of full-scale revolutionary war.

## KEY TERMS

Boston Massacre (p. 121)	Sons of Liberty (p. 133)	Lord Dunmore's Proclamation (p. 144)
Seven Years' War (p. 121)	Stamp Act Congress (p. 133)	"Intolerable Acts" (p. 144)
George Washington (p. 122)	Declaratory Act (p. 134)	Continental Congress (p. 146)
George III (p. 126)	Revenue Act (p. 136)	Olive Branch Petition (p. 147)
Pontiac's War (p. 127)	"committees of correspondence" (p. 141)	Common Sense (p. 148)
Proclamation of 1763 (p. 127)	Tea Act (p. 143)	Declaration of Independence (p. 149)
Sugar Act (p. 129)		
Stamp Act (p. 132)		

## FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

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