

# THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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## Background, causes and in 1776 Independence

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### French and Indian War 1754-1763

The French and Indian War in Europe known as the "**Seven Years War**" (England declared war on France 1756...) saw the British pitted against the French, the Austrians, and the Spanish.

The war in the Americas started inauspiciously. George Washington was forced to surrender Fort Necessity in the Ohio Valley in 1754. The following year, British general Edward Braddock attempted to attack the French held Fort Duquesne. British troops were ambushed by the French and the Indians. Braddock was mortally wounded. It fell upon George Washington to extricate both British and Colonial forces from the wilderness.

In 1758, William Pitt came out of retirement and took over the British war effort. He directed additional war efforts in North America. He gave the colonists much greater independence in pursuing the war effort. This increased the enthusiasm among colonialists toward the war. (Also in 1758, the first Indian Reservation in America was founded – 3000 acres in New Jersey).

By the end of 1758, the British had begun to turn the tide in the war in North America. In September 1759 the British attacked Quebec. After a five day battle, British and American forces captured Quebec, ending French control of Canada.

**In 1760 the population of colonists in North America reaches 1,500,000.**

In 1762 England declares war against Spain and they then successfully attack Spanish outposts in the West Indies and Cuba.

In **February 1763, the Treaty of Paris was signed**. In this treaty, title to all French territory; east of the Mississippi (except New Orleans), was ceded to the British. The Spanish gave up Florida to the English in return for Cuba. Through a proclamation 1763, signed by King George III of England, any English settlements west of the Appalachian Mountains become prohibited. Those already settled in these regions has to return east of the mountains. This is an attempt to ease the tensions with Native Americans.

### British Impose New Taxes

In **1764 the English Parliament discuss new taxes** for the colonies to **help pay the war debt** brought on by the French and Indian War (which had doubled the English budget deficit) **and the expenses of running the colonies** (regular English troops for protection and English administration) and the newly acquired territories.

In 1764 the British imposed a series of taxes named the **American Revenue Act** (It's better known as the **Sugar Act**.) This act increased the duties on imported sugar and other items such as textiles, coffee, wines and indigo (dye). It doubled the duties on foreign goods reshipped from England to the colonies and also forbade the import of foreign rum and French wines. The act was combined with a greater attempt to enforce the existing tariffs.

## Stamp Tax Passed, Colonies Protest - 1765

The British, led by Prime Minister George Grenville, felt that the colonists should share some of the continued burden of sustaining British troops in the colonies. Grenville's first action was to order the navy to **enforce the Navigation Acts**. He then secured passage from the British parliament of the Sugar Act, which raised the duty on sugar and other items imported into the colonies.

Colonial protests forced the British to scale back the tariffs. The sugar tariffs were followed by the **Quartering Act, forcing colonists to provide housing and food for British troops**.

In **1765** a **Stamp Tax** was enacted. It imposed taxes on all legal documents (i.e. marriage licenses, newspapers, and 47 other documents). The colonists responded with vocal protests. Not only did these taxes hurt their pocketbooks, but they were highly visible (i.e. they were needed for every day transactions). In addition, to enforce the actions, the British announced that colonial offenders were to be tried in the hated Admiralty courts.

The protests, which grew, began developing new slogans including "*No taxation without representation*". One result of the protests was a meeting of the **Stamp Act Congress** in New York, to which **many of the colonies sent representatives**. The Congress prepares a resolution to be sent to King George III and the English Parliament. The petition requests the repeal of the Stamp Act and the Acts of 1764. The petition asserts that only colonial legislatures can tax colonial residents and that taxation without representation violates the colonists' basic civil rights. Many colonies also agree to not import any British goods until the Stamp Tax is repealed.

## Sons of Liberty Organized-1765

One of the American reactions to the stamp act was the **creation of secret organizations** throughout the colonies, known as **the Sons of Liberty**. Led by prominent citizens, they resorted to coercion to force stamp agents to resign their posts.

## Townshend Acts Imposed on the Colonies 1767

In the summer of 1766, King George III of England replaced Prime Minister Rockingham with William Pitt. Pitt was popular in the colonies. He opposed the Stamp Act and believed that colonists were entitled to all the rights of English citizens.

Pitt suddenly became sick. Charles Townshend, Chancellor of the Exchequer, took over the effective reins of the government. Unlike his predecessor, Townshend was not concerned with the subtleties of the rights of American colonists. **Townshend wanted to strengthen the power of the British parliament** which would simultaneously strengthen the power of royal officials. He convinced the Parliament to **pass a series of laws imposing new taxes on the colonists**. These laws included **special taxes on lead, paint, paper, glass and tea imported by colonists**. In addition, the New York legislature was suspended until it agreed to quarter British soldiers.

The Acts also insured that colonial officials, including governors and judges, would receive their salaries directly from the Crown.

## Colonist Respond with Boycott 1767

The most tangible colonial protest to the Townshend Act was the **revival of an agreement not to import British goods, especially luxury products**. The Non-importation agreement slowly grew to include merchants in all of the colonies, with the exception of New Hampshire. **Within a year importation from Britain dropped almost in half**.

## **British Troops Land in Boston to Maintain Order-1768**

In May, a British warship armed with 50 cannons sails into Boston harbour after a call for help from custom commissioners who are constantly being harassed by Boston agitators. In June, a customs official is locked up in the cabin of the Liberty, a sloop owned by John Hancock. Imported wine is then unloaded illegally into Boston without payment of duties. Following this incident, customs officials seize Hancock's sloop. After threats of violence from Bostonians, **the customs officials** escape to an island off Boston, and then **request the intervention of British troops**. In response Lord Hillsborough, Secretary of State for the Colonies, dispatched two regiments - (4,000 troops), to restore order in Boston. The daily contact between British soldiers and colonists served to worsen relations.

**1770 - The population of the American colonies reaches 2,210,000 persons.**

## **Boston Massacre- 1770**

**An armed clash** between the British and the colonists was almost inevitable from the moment British troops were introduced in Boston. Brawls were constant between the British and the colonists, who were constantly insulting the troops. On March 5, 1770, a crowd of sixty towns' people surrounded British sentries guarding the customs house. They began pelting snowballs at the guards. Suddenly, a shot rang out, followed by several others. Ultimately, **11 colonists were hit. Five were dead**, including Crispus Attucks, a former slave. After the incident, the new Royal Governor of Massachusetts, Thomas Hutchinson, at the insistence of Sam Adams, withdraws British troops out of Boston to nearby harbour islands. The captain of the British soldiers, Thomas Preston, is then arrested along with eight of his men and charged with murder.

## **Townshend Acts Repealed 1770**

**The British parliament repealed the Townshend duties on all but tea.** Falling colonial imports and raising opposition convinced the British government that its policies were not working. Also, the Quartering Act is not renewed. **The British government**, led by Prime Minister Lord North, **maintained the taxes on tea**, in order to underscore the supremacy of parliament.

## **Colonist Burn Revenue Cutter Gaspee 1772**

On the afternoon of June 9th, 1772, a British customs schooner, the Gaspee, runs aground off Rhode Island in Narragansett Bay. Colonists from Providence led by merchant John Brown rows out to the schooner and attack it, set the British crew ashore, then burn the ship. **In September, a 500 pound reward is offered by the English Crown for the capture of those colonists, who would then be sent to England for trial. The announcement that they would be sent to England further upsets many American colonists.** None of the perpetrators were discovered by the British.

## **Right to self-rule 1772**

In November, a **Boston town meeting assembles**, called by Sam Adams. During the meeting, a 21 member committee of correspondence is appointed to communicate with other towns and colonies. **A few weeks later, the town meeting endorses three radical proclamations asserting the rights of the colonies to self-rule.**

## Tea Act 1773

May 10, the Tea Act takes effect. It maintains a three penny per pound import tax on tea arriving in the colonies, which had already been in effect for six years. It also **gives the near bankrupt British East India Company a virtual tea monopoly** by allowing it to sell directly to colonial agents, bypassing any middlemen, thus **underselling American merchants**. The East India Company had successfully lobbied Parliament for such a measure. In September, Parliament authorizes the company to ship half a million pounds of tea to a group of chosen tea agents.

In October, **colonists hold a mass meeting in Philadelphia in opposition to the tea tax and the monopoly of the East India Company**. A committee then forces British tea agents to resign their positions. In November, a town meeting is held in Boston endorsing the actions taken by Philadelphia colonists. Bostonians then try, but fail, to get their British tea agents to resign. A few weeks later, three ships bearing tea sail into Boston harbour.

## Boston Tea Party 1773

About 8000 Bostonians gather in the Old South Meeting house to hear Sam Adams tell them Royal Governor Hutchinson has repeated his command not to allow the ships out of the harbour until the tea taxes are paid. That night, the Boston Tea Party occurs as **colonial activists disguise themselves as Mohawk Indians then board the ships and dump all 342 containers of tea (90,000 pounds) into the harbour**.

## Coercive Acts Imposed By British 1774

The British were shocked by the destruction of the tea in Boston Harbour and other colonial protests. In March, an **angry English Parliament** passes the first of a series of **Coercive Acts** (called **Intolerable Acts** by Americans) in response to the rebellion in Massachusetts. The Boston Port Bill effectively **shuts down all commercial shipping in Boston harbour** until Massachusetts pays the taxes owed on the tea dumped in the harbour and also reimburses the East India Company for the loss of the tea.

May 17-23, colonists in Providence, New York and Philadelphia begin calling for an intercolonial congress to overcome the Coercive Acts and discuss a common course of action against the British.

May 20, **The English Parliament enacts the next series of Coercive Acts**, which include the **Massachusetts Regulating Act** and the **Government Act** virtually ending any self-rule by the colonists there. Instead, the **English Crown and the Royal governor assume political power** formerly exercised by colonists. Also enacted; the **Administration of Justice Act** which **protects royal officials in Massachusetts from being sued in colonial courts**, and the **Quebec Act establishing a centralized government in Canada controlled by the Crown and English Parliament**. The Quebec Act greatly upsets American colonists by extending the southern boundary of Canada into territories claimed by Massachusetts, Connecticut and Virginia.

In June, **a new version of the 1765 Quartering Act** is enacted by the English Parliament **requiring all of the American colonies to provide housing for British troops in occupied houses and taverns and in unoccupied buildings**. In September, Massachusetts Governor Gage seizes that colony's arsenal of weapons at Charlestown.

## First Continental Congress Meets 1774

September 5 to October 26, the **First Continental Congress meets in Philadelphia** with 56 delegates, representing every colony, except Georgia. Attendants include Patrick Henry, George Washington, Sam Adams and John Hancock.

On September 17, **the Congress declares its opposition to the Coercive Acts**, saying they are "not to be obeyed," and also **promotes the formation of local militia units**. On October 14, a Declaration and Resolves is adopted that opposes the Coercive Acts, the Quebec Act, and other measure taken by the British that undermine self-rule. The rights of the colonists are asserted, including the rights to **"life, liberty and property."** On October 20, the Congress adopts the Continental Association in **which delegates agree to a boycott of English imports, effect an embargo of exports to Britain, and discontinue the slave trade.**

## Lexington & Concord 1775

April 14, 1775 - Massachusetts Governor Gage is secretly ordered by the British to enforce the Coercive Acts and suppress "open rebellion" among colonists by using all necessary force. April 18, 1775 - General Gage orders 700 British soldiers to Concord to destroy the colonists' weapons depot. That night, Paul Revere and William Dawes are sent from Boston to warn colonists. Revere reaches Lexington about midnight and warns Sam Adams and John Hancock who are hiding out there.

At dawn on April 19 about **70 armed Massachusetts militiamen stand face to face on Lexington Green with the British advance guard. An unordered 'shot heard around the world' begins the American Revolution.** A volley of British rifle fire followed by a charge with bayonets **leaves eight Americans dead and ten wounded.** The British regroup and head for the depot in Concord, destroying the colonists' weapons and supplies. **At the North Bridge in Concord, a British platoon is attacked by militiamen, with 14 casualties.**

British forces then begin a long retreat from Lexington back to Boston and are harassed and shot at all along the way by farmers and rebels and suffer over 250 casualties. News of the events at Lexington and Concord spreads like wildfire throughout the Colonies.

April 23, 1775 - **The Provincial Congress in Massachusetts orders 13,600 American soldiers to be mobilized.** Colonial volunteers from all over New England assemble and head for Boston, then establish camps around the city and begin a year long siege of British-held Boston.

## First Continental Congress & Battle of Bunker Hill 1775

The **Second Continental Congress** convenes in Philadelphia, with John Hancock elected as its president. On May 15, 1775, the Congress places the colonies in a state of defence. On June 15, **the Congress unanimously votes to appoint George Washington general and commander-in-chief of the new Continental Army.**

The **first major fight** between British and American troops occurs at Boston, 17 June 1775, in **the Battle of Bunker Hill.** American troops are dug in along the high ground of Breed's Hill (the actual location) and are attacked by a frontal assault of over 2000 British soldiers who storm up the hill. The British succeed in taking the hill, but at a loss of half their force, over a thousand casualties, with the Americans losing about 400, including important colonial leader, General Joseph Warren.

## Reconciliation or taking up Arms? 1775-1776

The Continental Congress adopts the Olive Branch Petition July 5, 1775, which expresses **hope for a reconciliation with Britain, appealing directly to the King** for help in achieving this. In August, **King George III refuses even to look at the petition and instead issues a proclamation declaring the Americans to be in a state of open rebellion.**

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

The **American Navy is established by Congress.** The next day, Congress appoints a secret committee to seek help from European nations.

**King George III issues a royal proclamation closing the American colonies to all commerce and trade, to take effect in March of 1776.** Also in December, **Congress is informed that France may offer support in the war against Britain.**

The assembly of New Hampshire adopts the first American state constitution in January 5, 1776.

## Common Sense by Thomas Paine 1776

**Thomas Paine's "Common Sense"** is published in Philadelphia January 9, 1776. The 50 page pamphlet is highly critical of King George III and attacks allegiance to Monarchy in principle while providing strong arguments for American independence. **It becomes an instant best-seller in America.** *"We have it in our power to begin the world anew...American shall make a stand, not for herself alone, but for the world,"* Paine states.

## French support 1776

**The American revolutionaries get the much needed foreign support** they had been hoping for. **King Louis XVI of France commits one million dollars in arms and munitions.** Spain then also promises support.

The **Continental Congress authorizes each of the 13 colonies to form local (provincial) governments** at May 10, 1776.

On June 7, Richard Henry Lee, a Virginia delegate to the Continental Congress, presents a formal resolution calling for America to declare its independence from Britain. Congress decides to postpone its decision on this until July. On June 11, **Congress appoints a committee to draft a declaration of independence. Committee members are Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Roger Livingston and Roger Sherman. Jefferson is chosen by the committee to prepare the first draft of the declaration, which he completes in one day.** Just seventeen days later, June 28, Jefferson's Declaration of Independence is ready and is presented to the Congress, with changes made by Adams and Franklin. On July 2, twelve of thirteen colonial delegations (New York abstains) vote in support of Lee's resolution for independence. **On July 4, the Congress formally endorses Jefferson's Declaration, with copies to be sent to all of the colonies.** The actual signing of the document occurs on August 2, as most of the 55 members of Congress place their names on the parchment copy.

## July 4, 1776 - United States Declaration of Independence