

Prologue to Revolution



"Give me liberty or give me death"
Patrick Henry before the Virginia House of Burgesses
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I. The New Imperial Policy (1763-1770)

A. French & Indian War altered the relationship between Britain and American colonies, bringing conflict and increased taxes to pay off Britain's national debt

1. Strict enforcement of Navigation Acts
2. Peacetime army of 10,000 remains in America, indicating willingness to use force to retain authority
3. Higher import duties on tobacco and sugar were imposed and excise taxes were increased

B. Early measures (1763-1766)

1. Grenville taxation program.

- a) Reform of custom service (prosecution of smugglers)
- b) **Sugar Act** threatened triangular trade by interfering with French molasses imports
 - i) Some colonists argued that Sugar Act was illegal, that all taxes needed to arise from the people
 - ii) Violators would be tried by Admiralty Courts, not juries (which often resulted in acquittals)
- c) Bureaucracy doubled in size to collect taxes and arrest smugglers
- d) **Currency Act** forbade the issue of paper money

2. Western problems

- a) Ottawa Indian leader Pontiac led an uprising against settlers, killing over 2000 and destroying British forts
- b) Proclamation of 1763 prevented western migration past the Appalachian Mountains
- c) Need for defense of frontier

C) Stamp Act (1765) sought to raise funds for defense of America by requiring all legal documents, as well as newspapers, playing cards, etc. to bear a government stamp.

1. Colonial opposition to new program

- a) Postwar depression left Americans short on cash
- b) Custom reform, Sugar Act, and currency limits cut flow of currency into the colonies
- c) Stamp Act affected lawyers, merchants, editors most heavily.
- d) Unlike the Sugar Act, this was the first internal tax intended to raise revenue
- e) Stamp Act Congress met to call for boycott of British goods and state that Parliament had no right to tax colonies without consent.
- f) Sons of Liberty used mob violence to force all stamp agents to resign.

2) Important constitutional issues

- i. Were the colonies represented in Parliament
- ii. Did Parliament have the right to tax the colonists if they had the right to regulate trade?

3. Parliament repealed Stamp Act but asserted its rights (with Declaratory Act) to regulate colonies "in all ways whatsoever."

D. Townshend Acts (1767-1770)--new duties placed on a number of goods (paper, paint, glass, and tea) led to protests against the collection of customs duties.

1. Samuel Adams led radicals in urging a renewed boycott of British goods

- and provided an issue to unify American sentiment
- 2. Boston Massacre resulted in deaths of four persons (1770) when soldiers sent to protect agents were attacked by a mob.
- 3. By 1770 all duties except that on tea were repealed. Tea tax was seen as symbolic of Parliament's supremacy

II. The Move Toward Independence (1770-1775)

A. Key factors

1. Constitutional factor--colonists demanded the right to examine the purpose for each law passed, refusing to obey those that raised revenue.,
2. Social conflicts factor
 - a) Lower class discontent resulted from limited franchise, established churches, inheritance laws.
 - b) Upper class colonists welcomed protest support from lower classes at first, but became alarmed with mob violence. England now had two groups of protestors to deal with.

B. Tea Act (1773)

1. In an attempt to support the East India Tea Company, Parliament removed the tax on tea and allowed it to be sold in the colonies through its own agents, not American retailers. British tea was cheaper, but to buy it was to pay a Townshend duty.
2. Mobs turned back tea ships in several ports and dumped shiploads into Boston Harbor.
3. Parliament responded with Coercive (Intolerable) Acts which
 - a) Closed Boston Harbor
 - b) Removed trials involving royal officials out of New England
 - c) Allowed for quartering of troops in colonists' homes
 - d) Extended Quebec's boundaries south, convincing colonists that liberty was threatened.

C. First Continental Congress (1774)

1. Radical delegates favored active resistance while moderates argued for conciliation.
2. Declaration of Rights and Grievances condemned Coercive Acts, denied Parliament's right to tax colonies, but promised obedience to the king
3. Set up Continental Association to prohibit importation of English goods and later the export of American goods to England.

D. As British control of Massachusetts dwindled to the area around Boston, colonists moved to protect military supply depots at Concord and Worcester. When British attempted to capture Concord, Minutemen responded with gunfire at Lexington and Concord

1. 73 British soldiers killed, 176 wounded
 2. Armed conflict between England and the colonists had now begun
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