

Colonial Resistance and Rebellion

MAIN IDEA

Conflicts between Great Britain and the American colonies escalated, until the colonists finally declared their independence.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The ideas put forth by the colonists in the Declaration of Independence remain the guiding principles of the United States today.

Terms & Names

- King George III
- Sugar Act
- Stamp Act
- Samuel Adams
- Boston Massacre
- Boston Tea Party
- John Locke
- *Common Sense*
- Thomas Jefferson
- Declaration of Independence

One American's Story

Crispus Attucks was a sailor of African and Native-American ancestry. On the night of March 5, 1770, he was part of a large and angry crowd that had gathered at the Boston Customs House to harass the British soldiers stationed there. More soldiers soon arrived, and the mob began hurling stones and snowballs at them. Attucks then stepped forward.

A PERSONAL VOICE JOHN ADAMS

“This Attucks . . . appears to have undertaken to be the hero of the night; and to lead this army with banners . . . up to King street with their clubs This man with his party cried, ‘Do not be afraid of them,’ . . . He had hardiness enough to fall in upon them, and with one hand took hold of a bayonet, and with the other knocked the man down.”

—quoted in *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution*



▲ Crispus Attucks

Attucks's action ignited the troops. Ignoring orders not to shoot civilians, one soldier and then others fired on the crowd. Five people were killed; several were wounded. Crispus Attucks was, according to a newspaper account, the first to die.

The Colonies Organize to Resist Britain

Because the Proclamation of 1763 sought to halt expansion by the colonists west of the Appalachian Mountains, it convinced the colonists that the British government did not care about their needs. A second result of the French and Indian War—Britain's financial crisis—brought about new laws that reinforced the colonists' opinion.

THE SUGAR ACT Great Britain had borrowed so much money during the war that it nearly doubled its national debt. **King George III**, who had succeeded his grandfather in 1760, hoped to lower that debt. To do so, in 1763 the king chose a financial expert, George Grenville, to serve as prime minister.



By the time Grenville took over, tensions between Britain and one colony, Massachusetts, were on the rise. During the French and Indian War, the British had cracked down on colonial smuggling to ensure that merchants were not doing business in any French-held territories. In 1761, the royal governor of Massachusetts authorized the use of the writs of assistance, a general search warrant that allowed British customs officials to search any colonial ship or building they believed to be holding smuggled goods. Because many merchants worked out of their residences, the writs enabled British officials to enter and search colonial homes whether there was evidence of smuggling or not. The merchants of Boston were outraged.

Grenville's actions, however, soon angered merchants throughout the colonies. The new prime minister noticed that the American customs service, which collected duties, or taxes on imports, was losing money. Grenville concluded that the colonists were smuggling goods into the country without paying duties. In 1764 he prompted Parliament to enact a law known as the Sugar Act.

The **Sugar Act** did three things. It halved the duty on foreign-made molasses in the hopes that colonists would pay a lower tax rather than risk arrest by smuggling. It placed duties on certain imports that had not been taxed before. Most important, it provided that colonists accused of violating the act would be tried in a vice-admiralty court rather than a colonial court. There, each case would be decided by a single judge rather than by a jury of sympathetic colonists.

Colonial merchants complained that the Sugar Act would reduce their profits. Merchants and traders further claimed that Parliament had no right to tax the colonists because the colonists had not elected representatives to the body. The new regulations, however, had little effect on colonists besides merchants and traders. **A**

THE STAMP ACT In March 1765 Parliament passed the **Stamp Act**. This act imposed a tax on documents and printed items such as wills, newspapers, and playing cards. A stamp would be placed on the items to prove that the tax had been paid. It was the first tax that affected colonists directly because it was levied on goods and services. Previous taxes had been indirect, involving duties on imports.

In May of 1765, the colonists united to defy the law. Boston shopkeepers, artisans, and laborers organized a secret resistance group called the Sons of Liberty to protest the law. Meanwhile, the colonial assemblies declared that Parliament lacked the power to impose taxes on the colonies because the colonists were not represented in Parliament. In October 1765, merchants in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia agreed to a boycott of British goods until the Stamp Act was repealed. The widespread boycott worked, and in March 1766 Parliament repealed the law.

But on the same day that it repealed the Stamp Act, Parliament passed the Declaratory Act, which asserted Parliament's full right "to bind the colonies and people of America in all cases whatsoever." Then, in 1767, Parliament passed the Townshend Acts, named after Charles Townshend, the leading government minister. The Townshend Acts taxed goods that were imported into the colony from Britain, such as lead, glass, paint, and paper. The Acts also imposed a tax on tea, the most popular drink in the colonies. Led by men such as **Samuel Adams**, one of the founders of the Sons of Liberty, the colonists again boycotted British goods. **B**

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Issues

A How did the Sugar Act cause tension between the colonists and Britain?

MAIN IDEA

Summarizing

B How did the colonists respond to the Stamp Act and the Townshend Acts?

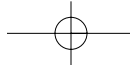
NOW & THEN

PROPOSITION 13

A more recent tax revolt occurred in California on June 6, 1978, when residents voted in a tax reform law known as Proposition 13. By the late 1970s, taxes in California were among the highest in the nation. The property tax alone was fifty-two percent above the national norm.

Proposition 13, initiated by ordinary citizens, limited the tax on real property to one percent of its assessed value in 1975–1976. It passed with sixty-five percent of the vote.

Because of the resulting loss of revenue, many state agencies were scaled down or cut. In 1984, California voters approved a state lottery that provides supplemental funds for education. But Proposition 13 still remains a topic of heated debate, as Californians—like other Americans across the country—struggle with conflicting desires: more government services vs. less taxes.



British Actions and Colonial Reactions, 1765–1775

1765 STAMP ACT

British Action

Britain passes the Stamp Act, a tax law requiring colonists to purchase special stamps to prove payment of tax.

Colonial Reaction

Colonists harass stamp distributors, boycott British goods, and prepare a Declaration of Rights and Grievances.

1767 TOWNSHEND ACTS

British Action

Britain taxes certain colonial imports and stations troops at major colonial ports to protect customs officers.

Colonial Reaction

Colonists protest “taxation without representation” and organize a new boycott of imported goods.

1770 BOSTON MASSACRE

British Action

Taunted by an angry mob, British troops fire into the crowd, killing five colonists.

Colonial Reaction

Colonial agitators label the conflict a massacre and publish a dramatic engraving depicting the violence.



This colonial engraving was meant to warn of the effects of the Stamp Act.

Tension Mounts in Massachusetts

As hostilities between the colonists and the British mounted, the atmosphere in Boston grew increasingly tense. The city soon erupted in bloody clashes and later in a daring tax protest, all of which pushed the colonists and Britain closer to war.

VIOLENCE ERUPTS IN BOSTON On March 5, 1770, a mob gathered in front of the Boston Customs House and taunted the British soldiers standing guard there. Shots were fired and five colonists, including Crispus Attucks, were killed or mortally wounded. Colonial leaders quickly labeled the confrontation the **Boston Massacre**.

Despite strong feelings on both sides, the political atmosphere relaxed somewhat during the next three years. Lord Frederick North, who later followed Grenville as the prime minister, realized that the Townshend Acts were costing more to enforce than they would ever bring in: in their first year, for example, the taxes raised only 295 pounds, while the cost of sending British troops to Boston

Background

Pounds are the basic monetary unit of British currency.

History Through

Art

THE BOSTON MASSACRE (1770)

Paul Revere was not only a patriot, but a silversmith and an engraver as well. One of the best known of his engravings, depicting the Boston Massacre, is a masterful piece of anti-British propaganda. Widely circulated, Revere's engraving played a key role in rallying revolutionary fervor.

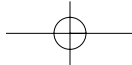
- The sign above the soldiers reads “Butcher’s Hall.”
- The British commander, Captain Preston (standing at the far right of the engraving) appears to be inciting the troops to fire. In fact, he tried to calm the situation.
- At the center foreground is a small dog, a detail that gave credence to the rumor that, following the shootings, dogs licked the blood of the victims from the street.

SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Visual Sources

1. According to the details of the engraving, what advantages do the soldiers have that the colonists do not? What point does the artist make through this contrast?
2. What do you think is the intended message behind the artist's use of smoke spreading out from the soldiers' rifles?

SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R23.

Image not available for use on CD-ROM. Please refer to the image in the textbook.



1773 TEA ACT

British Action

Britain gives the East India Company special concessions in the colonial tea business and shuts out colonial tea merchants.

Colonial Reaction

Colonists in Boston rebel, dumping 18,000 pounds of East India Company tea into Boston harbor.

1774 INTOLERABLE ACTS

British Action

King George III tightens control over Massachusetts by closing Boston Harbor and quartering troops.

Colonial Reaction

Colonial leaders form the First Continental Congress and draw up a declaration of colonial rights.

1775 LEXINGTON AND CONCORD

British Action

General Gage orders troops to march to Concord, Massachusetts, and seize colonial weapons.

Colonial Reaction

Minutemen intercept the British and engage in battle—first at Lexington, and then at Concord.



▲ This bottle contains tea that colonists threw into Boston harbor during the Boston Tea Party.

was over 170,000 pounds. North persuaded Parliament to repeal the Townshend Acts, except for the tax on tea.

Tensions rose again in 1772 when a group of Rhode Island colonists attacked a British customs schooner that patrolled the coast for smugglers. The colonists boarded the vessel, which had accidentally run aground near Providence, and burned it to the waterline. In response, King George named a special commission to seek out the suspects and bring them to England for trial.

The plan to haul Americans to England for trial ignited widespread alarm. The assemblies of Massachusetts and Virginia set up committees of correspondence to communicate with other colonies about this and other threats to American liberties. By 1774, such committees formed a buzzing communication network linking leaders in nearly all the colonies.

THE BOSTON TEA PARTY In 1773, Lord North devised the Tea Act in order to save the nearly bankrupt British East India Company. The act granted the company the right to sell tea to the colonies free of the taxes that colonial tea sellers had to pay. This action would have cut colonial merchants out of the tea trade by enabling the East India Company to sell its tea directly to consumers for less. North hoped the American colonists would simply buy the cheaper tea; instead, they protested dramatically.

On the moonlit evening of December 16, 1773, a large group of Boston rebels disguised themselves as Native Americans and proceeded to take action against three British tea ships anchored in the harbor. In this incident, later known as the **Boston Tea Party**, the “Indians” dumped 18,000 pounds of the East India Company’s tea into the waters of Boston harbor.

THE INTOLERABLE ACTS An infuriated King George III pressed Parliament to act. In 1774, Parliament responded by passing a series of measures that colonists called the Intolerable Acts. One law shut down Boston harbor. Another, the Quartering Act, authorized British commanders to house soldiers in vacant private homes and other buildings. In addition to these measures, General Thomas Gage, commander-in-chief of British forces in North America, was appointed the new governor of Massachusetts. To keep the peace, he placed Boston under martial law, or rule imposed by military forces. **C**

In response to Britain’s actions, the committees of correspondence assembled the First Continental Congress. In September 1774, 56 delegates met in Philadelphia and drew up a declaration of colonial rights. They defended the colonies’ right to run their own affairs and stated that, if the British used force against the colonies, the colonies should fight back.

SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Charts

In what ways did colonial reaction to British rule intensify between 1765 and 1775?

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Motives

C What do you think King George set out to achieve when he disciplined Massachusetts?



▲ The Battle of Lexington, as depicted in a mid-nineteenth-century painting.

The Road to Revolution

After the First Continental Congress met, colonists in many eastern New England towns stepped up military preparations. Minutemen—civilian soldiers who pledged to be ready to fight against the British on a minute’s notice—quietly stockpiled firearms and gunpowder. General Thomas Gage soon learned about these activities. In the spring of 1775, he ordered troops to march from Boston to nearby Concord, Massachusetts, and to seize illegal weapons. **D**

FIGHTING AT LEXINGTON AND CONCORD Colonists in Boston were watching, and on the night of April 18, 1775, Paul Revere, William Dawes, and Samuel Prescott rode out to spread word that 700 British troops were headed for Concord. The darkened countryside rang with church bells and gunshots—prearranged signals, sent from town to town, that the British were coming.

The king’s troops, known as “redcoats” because of their uniforms, reached Lexington, Massachusetts, five miles short of Concord, on the cold, windy dawn of April 19. As they neared the town, they saw 70 minutemen drawn up in lines on the village green. The British commander ordered the minutemen to lay down their arms and leave, and the colonists began to move out without laying down their muskets. Then someone fired, and the British soldiers sent a volley of shots into the departing militia. Eight minutemen were killed and ten more were wounded, but only one British soldier was injured. The Battle of Lexington, the first battle of the Revolutionary War, lasted only 15 minutes.

The British marched on to Concord, where they found an empty arsenal. After a brief skirmish with minutemen, the British soldiers lined up to march back to Boston, but the march quickly became a slaughter. Between 3,000 and 4,000 minutemen had assembled by now, and they fired on the marching troops from behind stone walls and trees. British soldiers fell by the dozen. Bloodied and humiliated, the remaining British soldiers made their way back to Boston that night. Colonists had become enemies of Britain and now held Boston and its encampment of British troops under siege.

MAIN IDEA

Evaluating

D Do you think the British underestimated the colonists in 1770–1775?



Vocabulary

reconciliation: the restoration of a former state of harmony or friendship

MAIN IDEA

Developing Historical Perspective

E Do you think that the Olive Branch Petition was too little too late?

THE SECOND CONTINENTAL CONGRESS In May of 1775, colonial leaders called the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia to debate their next move. The loyalties that divided colonists sparked endless debates at the Second Continental Congress. Some delegates called for independence, while others argued for reconciliation with Great Britain. Despite such differences, the Congress agreed to recognize the colonial militia as the Continental Army and appointed George Washington as its commander.

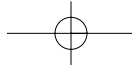
THE BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL Cooped up in Boston, British general Thomas Gage decided to strike at militiamen on Breed's Hill, north of the city and near Bunker Hill. On June 17, 1775, Gage sent 2,400 British soldiers up the hill. The colonists held their fire until the last minute and then began to mow down the advancing redcoats before finally retreating. By the time the smoke cleared, the colonists had lost 450 men, while the British had suffered over 1,000 casualties. The misnamed Battle of Bunker Hill would prove to be the deadliest battle of the war.

By July, the Second Continental Congress was readying the colonies for war though still hoping for peace. Most of the delegates, like most colonists, felt deep loyalty to George III and blamed the bloodshed on the king's ministers. On July 8, Congress sent the king the so-called Olive Branch Petition, urging a return to "the former harmony" between Britain and the colonies. **E**

King George flatly rejected the petition. Furthermore, he issued a proclamation stating that the colonies were in rebellion and urged Parliament to order a naval blockade to isolate a line of ships meant for the American coast.



▲ This painting shows "Bunker's Hill" before the battle, as shells from Boston set nearby Charles Town ablaze. At the battle, the British employed a formation they used throughout the war. They massed together, were visible for miles, and failed to take advantage of ground cover.



The Patriots Declare Independence

Despite the growing crisis, many colonists were uncertain about the idea of independence. However, in the months following the Olive Branch Petition, public opinion began to shift.

THE IDEAS BEHIND THE REVOLUTION This shift in public opinion occurred in large part because of the Enlightenment ideas that had spread throughout the colonies in the 1760s and 1770s. One of the key Enlightenment thinkers was English philosopher **John Locke**. Locke maintained that people have natural rights to life, liberty, and property. Furthermore, he contended, every society is based on a social contract—an agreement in which the people consent to choose and obey a government so long as it safeguards their natural rights. If the government violates that social contract by taking away or interfering with those rights, people have the right to resist and even overthrow the government. **F**

Other influences on colonial leaders who favored independence were religious traditions that supported the cause of liberty. One preacher of the time, Jonathan Mayhew, wrote that he had learned from the holy scriptures that wise, brave, and virtuous men were always friends of liberty. Some ministers even spoke from their pulpits in favor of liberty.

Yet the ideas of limited government and civil rights had been basic to English law since even before A.D. 1215, when the English nobility had forced King John to sign Magna Carta, or the Great Charter. Magna Carta acknowledged certain specific rights of the barons against the king, including some rights to due process, a speedy trial, and trial by a jury of one's peers. Its main significance, though, was to recognize that the sovereign did not have absolute authority, but was subject like all men and women to the rule of law. This principle was reaffirmed by the English Bill of Rights, accepted by King William and Queen Mary in 1689.

THOMAS PAINE'S COMMON SENSE Just as important were the ideas of Thomas Paine. In a widely read 50-page pamphlet titled *Common Sense*, Paine attacked King George and the monarchy. Paine, a recent immigrant, argued that responsibility for British tyranny lay with “the royal brute of Britain.” Paine explained that his own revolt against the king had begun with Lexington and Concord.

Thomas Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense* helped to overcome many colonists' doubts about separating from Britain.



MAIN IDEA

Making Inferences

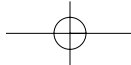
F Why might the ideals of the Enlightenment appeal to the colonists?

A PERSONAL VOICE THOMAS PAINE

“No man was a warmer wisher for a reconciliation than myself, before the fatal nineteenth of April, 1775, but the moment the event of that day was made known, I rejected the hardened, sullen tempered Pharaoh of England for ever . . . the wretch, that with the pretended title of Father of his people can unfeelingly hear of their slaughter, and composedly sleep with their blood upon his soul.”

—*Common Sense*

Paine declared that independence would allow America to trade more freely. He also stated that independence would give American colonists the chance to create a better society—one free from tyranny, with equal social and economic opportunities for all. *Common Sense* sold nearly 500,000 copies in 1776 and was widely applauded. In April 1776, George Washington wrote, “I find *Common Sense* is working a powerful change in the minds of many men.”



DECLARING INDEPENDENCE By the early summer of 1776, the wavering Continental Congress finally decided to urge each colony to form its own government. On June 7, Virginia delegate Richard Henry Lee moved that “these United Colonies are, and of a right ought to be, free and independent States.”

While talks on this fateful motion were under way, the Congress appointed a committee to prepare a formal **Declaration of Independence**. Virginia lawyer **Thomas Jefferson** was chosen to prepare the final draft.

Drawing on Locke’s ideas of natural rights, Jefferson’s document declared the rights of “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” to be “unalienable” rights—ones that can never be taken away. Jefferson then asserted that a government’s legitimate power can only come from the consent of the governed, and that when a government denies their unalienable rights, the people have the right to “alter or abolish” that government. Jefferson provided a long list of violations committed by the king and Parliament against the colonists’ unalienable rights. On that basis, the American colonies declared their independence from Britain. **G**

MAIN IDEA
Summarizing
G What reasons did Jefferson give to justify revolt by the colonies?

The Declaration states flatly that “all men are created equal.” When this phrase was written, it expressed the common belief that free citizens were political equals. It did not claim that all people had the same ability or ought to have equal wealth. It was not meant to embrace women, Native Americans, or African-American slaves—a large number of Americans. However, Jefferson’s words presented ideals that would later help these groups challenge traditional attitudes. In his first draft, Jefferson included an eloquent attack on the cruelty and injustice of the slave trade. However, South Carolina and Georgia, the two colonies most dependent on slavery, objected. In order to gain the votes of those two states, Jefferson dropped the offending passage.

On July 2, 1776, the delegates voted unanimously that the American colonies were free, and on July 4, 1776, they adopted the Declaration of Independence. The colonists had declared their freedom from Britain. They would now have to fight for it.

1

ASSESSMENT

1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • King George III • Sugar Act • Stamp Act 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Samuel Adams • Boston Massacre • Boston Tea Party 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Locke • Common Sense • Thomas Jefferson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declaration of Independence
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MAIN IDEA

2. TAKING NOTES

Create a cluster diagram like the one shown and fill it with events that demonstrate the conflict between Great Britain and the American colonies.



Choose one event to further explain in a paragraph.

CRITICAL THINKING

3. EVALUATING

Explain whether you think the British government acted wisely in its dealings with the colonies between 1765 and 1775. Support your explanation with examples from the text. **Think About:**

- the reasons for British action
- the reactions of colonists
- the results of British actions

4. ANALYZING EFFECTS

While Jefferson borrowed John Locke’s ideas, he changed Locke’s definition of the rights of men from “life, liberty, and property” to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” How do you think Jefferson’s rewording of Locke’s words has affected American life?

Think About:

- the experience of immigrants seeking new lives
- the experience of African Americans and Native Americans
- the socioeconomic groups living in America