

# Toward Independence

## *Why was there an American Revolution?*

### Introduction

An almost full moon cast a pale light over Boston on April 18, 1775. But the night was anything but quiet. Mounted on a fast horse named Brown Beauty, Paul Revere woke up the countryside with the alarming news that British troops, stationed in Boston, had orders to march to the nearby town of Concord and seize weapons the colonists had stored there!

This was news Patriots had been waiting for. Patriots (also called Whigs) were Americans who believed the colonies had the right to govern themselves. On hearing Revere's warning, Patriots around Concord grabbed their muskets and prepared to meet the advancing British troops.

The same news filled Loyalists (also called Tories) with dread. Loyalists were colonists who felt a deep loyalty to Great Britain. They saw themselves as faithful subjects of the king and were horrified by the idea of taking up arms against British troops. How did colonists come to be so divided in their feelings about the British? Most Americans were content with British rule in the early 1700s. However, this relationship between Great Britain and the colonies would quickly begin to change.

In the 1750s, Great Britain and the colonies fought a war against the French and their Indian allies that left Great Britain with huge debts and a vast new empire to protect. To solve these problems, the British government passed new laws that tightened its control of the colonies. Some of these laws also placed new taxes on the colonists.

Colonists were stunned when Great Britain suddenly changed the rules. For the most part, they had been able to make their own laws and determine their own taxes. Now angry colonists protested. In this lesson, you will see how these feelings led many colonists to consider rebelling against their government.

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### **Social Studies Vocabulary**

boycott

militia

repeal

tyranny

### **1. Before 1763**

By 1750, the American colonies were bursting with growth. In just a century, the population of the colonies had grown from 50,000 to more

than a million people. What brought about this rapid growth? Cheap land? Religious tolerance? Economic opportunity? While all of these were important in attracting people to the colonies, there was another important reason.

For more than a century, the British government had, for the most part, left the colonies alone to solve their own problems. During this time of salutary neglect, Americans in each colony had learned to govern themselves by electing their own assemblies. Like the British Parliament, the assemblies had the power to pass laws and to create and collect taxes. Each assembly also decided how the colony's tax money should be spent. Americans had more freedom to run their own affairs than ordinary people in any country in Europe. Self-government also made the colonies attractive to settlers.

**Conflict in the Ohio Valley** As the colonies grew, settlers began to dream of moving across the Appalachian Mountains and into the Ohio Valley—the region between the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Both Great Britain and France claimed this area. In 1754, the French honored their claim by building Fort Duquesne (du-KANE) where the city of Pittsburgh stands today.

News of the fort alarmed the governor of Virginia. He ordered a small force of Virginia **militia**, or a small army of citizens trained to fight in an emergency, to drive the French out of the Ohio Valley. The head of the militia, the governor decided, would be a 22-year-old volunteer named George Washington.

Today, Americans remember George Washington as a great Patriot, a military hero, and the first president of the United States. In 1754, however, he was just an ambitious young man. Washington wanted to become an officer in the British army. There was only one problem with his plan—most British officers believed that colonists made terrible soldiers.

The expedition into the Ohio Valley gave Washington a chance to prove them wrong. Near Fort Duquesne, Washington came across a French scouting party that was camped in the woods and ordered his men to open fire, leading to an easy victory. “I heard the bullets whistle,” he wrote afterward. “And, believe me, there is something charming in the sound.”

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**The French and Indian War** Washington's whistling bullets were the first shots in a conflict known as the French and Indian War. This war was part of a long struggle between France and Great Britain over territory and power. Because many American Indians fought with France in this latest conflict, the colonists called it the French and Indian War. At the beginning of the war, the colonies met at Albany, where Benjamin Franklin proposed the Albany Plan of Union, which called for the British colonies to form an alliance for their own defense. However, his plan did not win much support because the colonies did not think it was necessary to work together, and many of them relied on British protection. To their credit, the British took measures to defend their colonies during the French and Indian War.

In 1755, Great Britain sent 1,400 British soldiers, led by General Edward Braddock, to Virginia to finish the job that Washington had started. Hoping to make a good impression on General Braddock, Washington joined the army as a volunteer, aiding the soldiers in clearing the French out of the Ohio Valley.

However, Braddock's march into the Ohio Valley was a disaster. The troops were ambushed by French sharpshooters and their American Indian allies. Two-thirds of the soldiers were killed in the attack,

including General Braddock.

Washington himself narrowly escaped death. "I had four bullets through my Coat and two horses shot under me," he wrote in a letter. Showing great courage, Washington led the survivors back to Virginia. There, he was greeted as a hero.

The turning point of the French and Indian War came in 1759, when British troops captured Canada. As a result, in 1763, Great Britain and France signed a peace treaty, or agreement, finally ending the seven year war. In this treaty, France ceded, or gave, its claim of land in Canada to Great Britain.

Americans were thrilled with this victory because Great Britain now controlled a vastly expanded American empire. However, as the conflict with France drew to a close, new issues began to emerge between the colonists and Great Britain. A dramatic new chapter was about to begin for the American colonies.





## 2. Early British Actions in the Colonies

Changes that were taking place in Great Britain soon clouded the colonists' bright future. In 1760, a new king named George III had begun his reign toward the end of the French and Indian War. George was a successful British ruler during his 59-year reign, resisting the Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. However, George needed help managing his more distant foreign affairs in North America. The advisors George appointed to help him knew very little about the conditions in North America and were soon taking actions that enraged the colonists.

**The Proclamation of 1763** The British government faced a number of problems after the French and Indian War. One was how to keep colonists and American Indians from killing each other as settlers pushed westward. In his Proclamation of 1763, George said to simply draw a line down the crest of the Appalachian Mountains and tell settlers to stay east of that line and Indians to stay west of it.

To Americans, the king's order suggested **tyranny**, or the unjust use of

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government power. They argued that the lands east of the Appalachians were already mostly settled and that the only place that farmers could find available land was west of the mountains. Besides, the proclamation was too late. Settlers were already crossing the mountains.

The British government ignored these arguments. To keep peace on the frontier, it decided to expand the British army in America to 7,500 men.



**The Stamp Act** The British government had other problems besides keeping colonists and American Indians from fighting each other. One dilemma was how to pay off the large debt from the French and Indian War.

The solution seemed obvious to Prime Minister George Grenville, the leader of the British government. People in Great Britain were already paying taxes on everything from windows to salt. In contrast, Americans were probably the most lightly taxed people in the British Empire. It was time, said Grenville, for the colonists to pay their fair share of the cost of protecting them from Indians.

In 1765, Grenville proposed a new act, or law, called the Stamp Act, which required colonists to buy a stamp for every piece of paper they used. Newspapers, wills, licenses, and even playing cards had to be printed on stamped paper.

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Once again, the colonists sensed tyranny. One newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Journal*, said that as soon as “this shocking Act was known, it filled all British America from one End to the other, with Astonishment and Grief.”

It wasn't just the idea of higher taxes that upset the colonists. They were willing to pay taxes passed by their own assemblies, where their representatives could vote on them. Because the colonists had no representatives in Parliament, they saw the Stamp Act as a **violation** of their rights as British subjects. For this reason, they argued, Parliament had no right to tax them. “No taxation without representation!” they declared.

Loyalists simply refused to buy stamps, while other colonists protested the Stamp Act by sending messages to Parliament. Patriots, took more violent action. Mobs calling themselves Sons of Liberty attacked tax collectors' homes. Protesters in Connecticut even started to bury one tax collector alive. Only when he heard dirt being shoveled onto his coffin did the terrified tax collector agree to resign from his post.

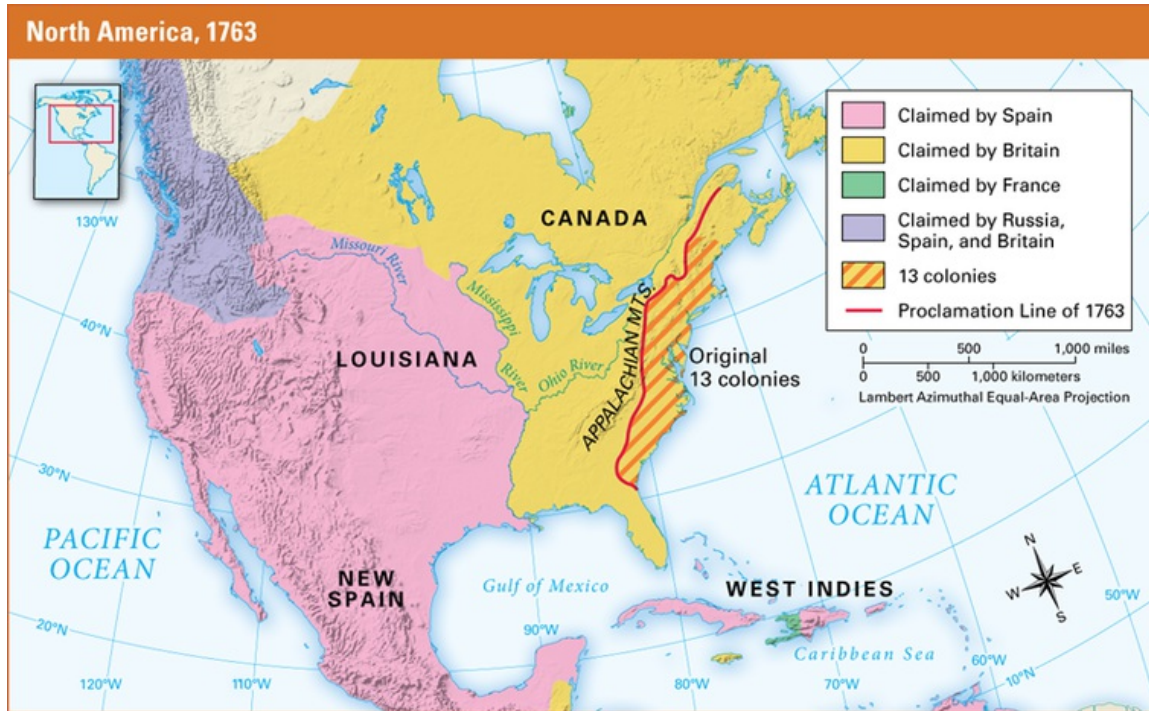
After months of protest, Parliament **repealed**, or canceled, the Stamp Act. Americans greeted the news with great celebration. Church bells rang, bands played, and everyone hoped the troubles with Great Britain were over.

**The Quartering Act** As anger over the Stamp Act began to fade, Americans noticed another law passed by Parliament in 1765. Called the Quartering Act, this law ordered colonial assemblies to provide British troops with quarters, or housing. The colonists were also told to furnish the soldiers with “candles, firing, bedding, cooking utensils, salt, vinegar, and . . . beer or cider.”

Of course, providing for the soldiers cost money. New Jersey protested that the new law was “as much an Act for laying taxes” on the colonists as the Stamp Act. New Yorkers asked why they should pay to keep troops in their colony. After all, they said, the soldiers just took up space and did nothing.

In 1767, the New York assembly decided not to approve any funds for “salt, vinegar and liquor” for the troops. In retaliation, the British government refused to let the assembly meet until it agreed to obey the Quartering Act. Once again, tempers began to rise on both sides of the Atlantic.





### 3. The Townshend Acts

The next British leader to face the challenge of taxing the colonies was Charles Townshend. Known as “Champagne Charlie” because of his habit of making speeches in Parliament after drinking champagne, Townshend believed that the colonists' bad behavior made it even more important to **retain** an army in the British colonies. Once he was asked in Parliament whether he would dare to make the colonists pay for that army. Stamping his foot, Townshend shouted, “I will, I will!”

Townshend kept his promise, and in 1767, he persuaded Parliament to pass the Townshend Acts. The new laws placed a duty, or tax, on certain goods the colonies imported from Great Britain, including such popular items as glass, paint, paper, and tea.

**A Boycott of British Goods** To many colonists, the Townshend duties were unacceptable. Once again, colonists were determined not to pay taxes that their assemblies had not voted on.

A Boston Patriot named Samuel Adams led the opposition to the Townshend Acts. Although Adams was a failure at business, he was gifted at stirring up protests through his speeches and writing. The governor of Massachusetts once complained, “Every dip of his pen stung like a horned snake.”

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In a letter protesting the Townshend Act, Adams argued that the new duties violated the colonists' rights as British citizens. The letter was sent to many of the other colonies. Soon, the colonies decided to **boycott** British goods in order to protect their rights. This was a peaceful form of protest that even Loyalists could support. One by one, all of the colonies agreed to support the boycott.

Since they did most of the shopping, women were very important in making the boycott work. The *Virginia Gazette* wrote that women could “do more for the good of her country than five hundred noisy sons of liberty, with all their mobs and riots.” Women found many ways to avoid buying British imports. They sewed dresses out of homespun cloth, brewed tea from pine needles, and bought only American-made goods.

**Repeal of the Townshend Acts** Meanwhile, a new leader named Lord North became head of the British government. Described by Townshend as a “great, heavy, booby-looking man,” Lord North embarrassed his supporters by taking naps in Parliament. However, he was good with numbers, and he could see that the Townshend duties were a big money-loser because duties didn't begin to make up for all the money British merchants were losing because of the boycott.

Early in 1770, North persuaded Parliament to repeal all of the Townshend duties, except for one—the tax on tea. Although, some members of Parliament argued that the duty on tea would lead to further conflict with the colonies, King George refused to give up on the idea of taxing Americans. “I am clear that there must always be one tax to keep up the right,” the king said. “And, as such, I approve the Tea Duty.”



#### 4. The Boston Massacre

On the same day that Parliament repealed most of the Townshend duties, a fight broke out between soldiers and colonists in Boston. When the dust cleared, five Bostonians were dead and others in the crowd were injured.

Patriots called this incident the Boston Massacre. A massacre is the killing of defenseless people. What really happened was a small riot.

Trouble had been brewing in Boston for months before the riot. To the British, Boston Patriots were the worst troublemakers in the colonies. In 1768, the British government had sent four regiments of troops to keep order in Boston.

Bostonians resented the British soldiers and made fun of their red uniforms by calling them "lobsterbacks." Samuel Adams even taught his dog to nip at soldiers' heels.

Despite such insults from the colonists, the British troops were forbidden to fire on citizens, but knowing this only made Bostonians bolder in their attacks. General Thomas Gage, the commander of the British army in America, wrote that "the people were as Lawless . . . after the Troops arrived, as they were before."

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**Mob Violence Breaks Out** On March 5, 1770, a noisy mob began throwing rocks and ice balls at troops guarding the Boston Customs House. “Come on you Rascals, you bloody-backs,” they shouted. “Fire if you dare.” Some people tried to persuade the crowd to go home, as did Captain Thomas Preston, the commander of the soldiers, but their pleas had no effect.

As the mob pressed forward, the troops, in a panic, opened fire. The bullets hit several people in the crowd, including Crispus Attucks, a black man at the front of the crowd. Attucks was the first to die after being struck by two bullets, but more deaths would soon follow. The now enraged crowd went home only after receiving a promise that the troops would be tried for murder.

**Massacre or Self-Defense?** Samuel Adams saw this event as a perfect opportunity to whip up anti-British feeling among the colonists. He called the riot in Boston a “horrid massacre” and had Paul Revere, a local silversmith, engrave a picture of it. Revere's engraving shows soldiers firing at peaceful, unarmed citizens.

Prints of Revere's engraving were distributed throughout the colonies, and Patriots saw the Boston Massacre as proof that the British should remove all of their British troops from the colonies. Loyalists, however, saw the tragedy as proof that British troops were needed more than ever, if only to control the Patriot hotheads.

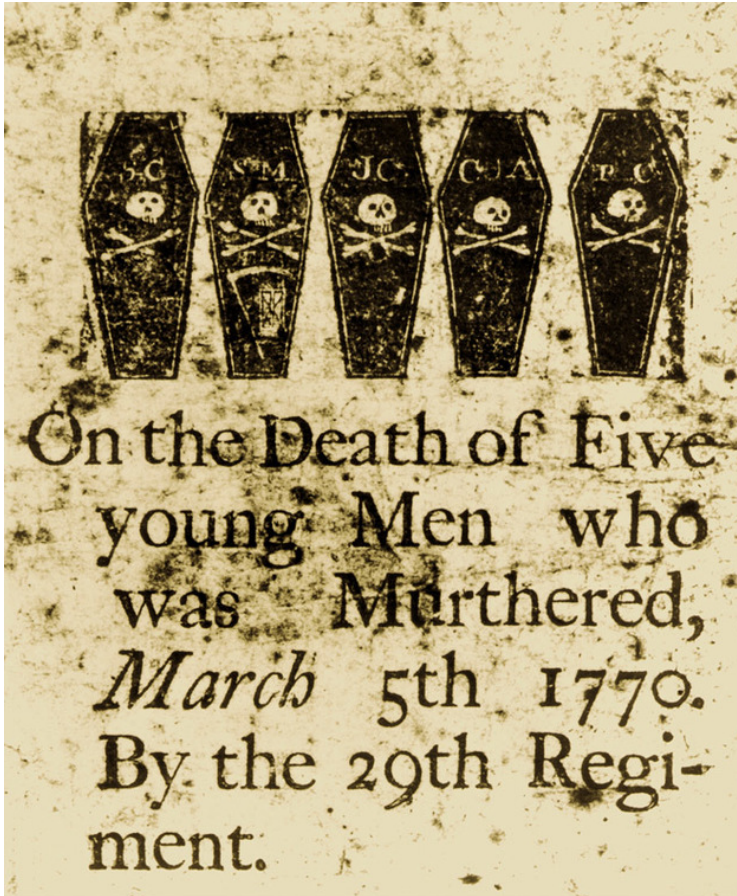
One hero, a Boston lawyer named John Adams, came out of this sad event. Although John Adams was a Patriot like his cousin Samuel, he also believed that every person, even the British soldiers, had the right to a fair trial. Adams agreed to defend the soldiers, even though he knew that his action would cost him friends and clients.

At the murder trial, Adams argued that the troops had acted in self-defense. The jury agreed with Adams and found six of the soldiers not guilty, while the remaining two of them were found guilty only of manslaughter, or causing death without meaning to.

Throughout his long life, John Adams remained proud of his defense of the British soldiers. He said that upholding the law in this case was “one of the best pieces of service I ever rendered to my country.”

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## 5. The Boston Tea Party

Despite the hopes of Patriots like Sam Adams, the Boston Massacre did not spark larger protests against British rule. Instead, the repeal of the Townshend duties led to a period of calm. While there was still a small duty on tea, the tax didn't seem to bother Loyalists very much, and the Patriots knew they could always drink Dutch tea that had been smuggled into the colonies without paying duties.

However, things did not stay peaceful because in 1773, a new law called the Tea Act prompted more protests. One of these protests became known as the Boston Tea Party.

**The Tea Act** The Tea Act was Lord North's attempt to rescue the British East India Company. This large trading company controlled all the trade between Great Britain and Asia. Although it had been a moneymaker for Great Britain for years, the American boycott of British tea hurt the company badly. By 1773, the tea company was in danger of going broke unless it could sell off the 17 million pounds of tea that were sitting in its London warehouses.

The Tea Act lowered the cost of tea that was sold by the British East India Company in the colonies. As a result, even taxed British tea became cheaper than smuggled Dutch tea. The Tea Act also gave the British East India Company a monopoly, or complete control, over tea sales in the colonies. From now on, the only merchants who could sell the bargain-priced tea were those chosen by the company.

Lord North may have thought he could persuade Americans to buy taxed tea by making it so cheap, but colonists weren't fooled. They saw the Tea Act as still another attempt to tax them without their consent.

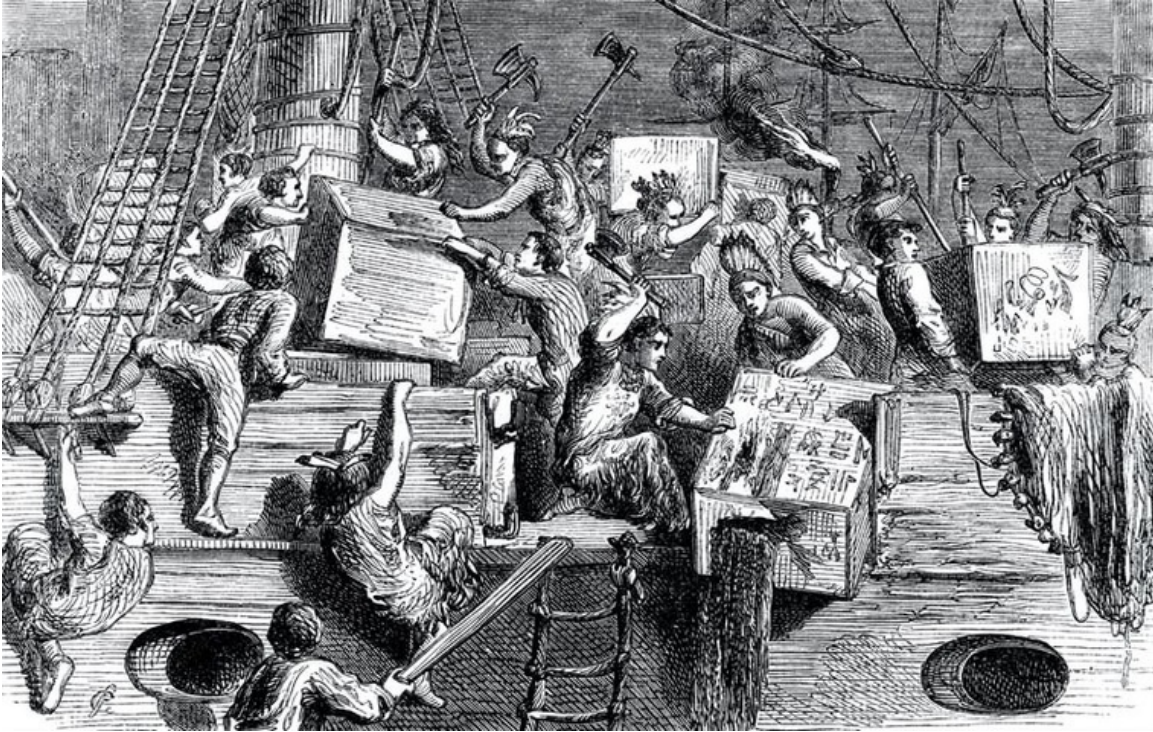
In addition, many merchants were alarmed by the East India Company's monopoly over the tea trade. They wondered what the British government might try to control next. Would their next monopoly be on cloth or on sugar? Nervous merchants wondered what would happen to their businesses if other goods were also **restricted**.

**Tea Ships Arrive** When the British East India Company's tea ships sailed into American ports, angry protesters kept them from unloading their cargoes, causing more than one ship to turn back for England still filled with tea. In Boston, however, the royal governor ordered the British navy to block the exit from Boston Harbor, insisting that the three tea ships would not leave until all their tea was unloaded.

On December 16, 1773, the Sons of Liberty decided to unload the tea, but not in the way the governor had in mind. That night, about 60 men dressed as Mohawk Indians boarded the three ships. One of them, George Hewes, described what happened:

*We then were ordered by our commander to open the hatches and take out all the chests of tea and throw them overboard . . . and we immediately proceeded to execute his orders, first cutting and splitting the chests with our tomahawks . . . In about three hours from the time we went on board, we had thus broken and thrown overboard every tea chest to be found on the ship . . . We were surrounded by British armed ships, but no attempt was made to resist us.*

The Sons of Liberty dumped about 90,000 pounds of tea into the sea that night, leaving everything else aboard the ship untouched. News of the Boston Tea Party excited Patriots throughout the colonies. "This is the most magnificent moment of all," wrote John Adams in his journal the next day. "This destruction of the tea is so bold, so daring, so firm . . . it must have . . . important consequences." He was right.



### 6. The Intolerable Acts

The news of the Boston Tea Party stunned Lord North, who believed that he had helped the colonists by sending them cheap tea. However, instead of being thankful for his generosity, the colonists had thrown the cheap tea into the sea! For North, the colonists' actions had gone too far.

King George agreed with Lord North, believing that the issue was no longer about taxes but about Great Britain's control over the colonies. "We must master them," he declared, "or totally leave them alone." The king wasn't about to leave the colonies to themselves, however.

In 1774, Great Britain's anger led Parliament to pass a new series of laws that were so harsh that many colonists called them intolerable, or unacceptable. Throughout the colonies, they became known as the Intolerable Acts.

**Parliament Punishes Massachusetts** The Intolerable Acts were designed to punish Massachusetts for the Boston Tea Party. The first law closed Boston Harbor to all shipping until the ruined tea was paid for. The second law placed the government of Massachusetts firmly under British control. Colonists in Massachusetts could not even hold a town meeting without the colonial governor's permission. The third law



said that British soldiers who were accused of murder would be tried in England, not in the colonies. Finally, more troops were sent to Boston to enforce the new laws.

A few British leaders worried that the Intolerable Acts might push the colonies into rebellion. But George III was sure they would force the colonists to give in to British **authority**.

**The Colonies Begin to Unite** In fact, the Intolerable Acts did not force the colonists to give in. Boston Patriots declared they would “abandon their city to flames” before paying a penny for the lost tea. Colonists in other cities showed their support by closing their shops, or by sending food and money to Boston so that its citizens would not starve.

In Virginia, lawmakers drafted a resolution in support of Massachusetts. The Virginians said that everyone's rights were at stake. “An attack made on one of our sister colonies,” they declared, “is an attack made on all British America.”

The Virginians also called for a congress, or meeting, of delegates from all the colonies. The purpose of the congress would be to find a peaceful solution to the conflicts with Great Britain.

Not all Americans agreed with this plan. In every colony, there were Loyalists who thought that Bostonians had gone too far and should pay for the tea. If they were forced to choose, they would side with the king against Sam Adams and his Sons of Liberty. In their view, it was the misguided Patriots who were causing all the trouble.

**The First Continental Congress** In September 1774, some 50 leaders from 12 colonies met in Philadelphia. The meeting brought together delegates from most of the British colonies on the North American continent, so it was called the First Continental Congress.

The delegates were used to thinking of themselves as citizens of their own colonies, but Patrick Henry, a leader from Virginia, urged them to come together as one people. “I am not a Virginian,” he declared, “but an American.” However, only strong Patriots like Sam and John Adams were ready to think of themselves this way, and other delegates were strong Loyalists who still thought of themselves as British. Still others, like George Washington, were somewhere in between. Only one thing united the delegates—their love of liberty and hatred of tyranny.

In spite of their differences, the delegates agreed to send a respectful message to King George. The message urged the king to consider their

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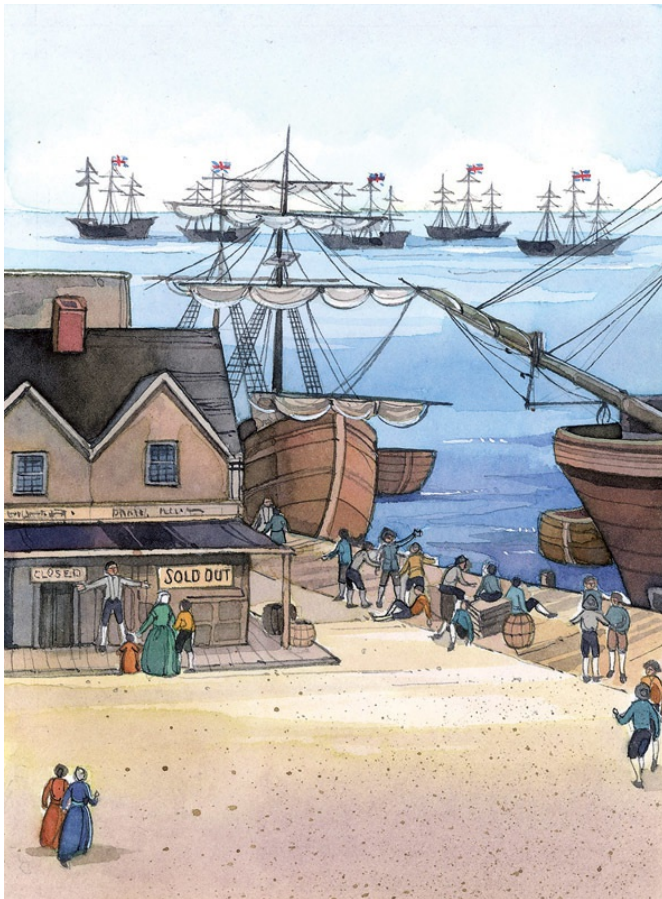
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complaints and to recognize their rights.

The delegates also called for a new boycott of British goods until Parliament repealed the Intolerable Acts. Finally, they agreed to meet again the following May if the boycott didn't work.

**The Colonies Form Militias** Patriots in towns and cities throughout the colonies organized boycotts against British goods. They also formed local militias in case the boycott didn't work. In New England, the volunteers called themselves Minutemen because they could be ready to fight in 60 seconds.

Across the colonies, militias marched and drilled. In New Hampshire, unknown persons stole 100 barrels of gunpowder and weapons from a British fort. Similar thefts occurred in other colonies. Rather than forcing the colonies to give in, the Intolerable Acts had brought the two sides to the brink of war.





## 7. Lexington and Concord

King George had made many mistakes in his decisions about the colonies, which the First Continental Congress listed out in their message to the king. However, rather than consider the colonists' complaints, King George refused to even answer their message. "The New England governments are in a state of rebellion," he said. "Blows must decide whether they are to be subject to this country or independent." In Boston, General Gage, the king's commander of British troops in America, got ready to deliver those blows.

**The First Blow at Lexington** In April 1775, a spy told General Gage that the colonists were hiding a large supply of gunpowder and weapons in the nearby village of Concord. General Gage decided to strike at once.

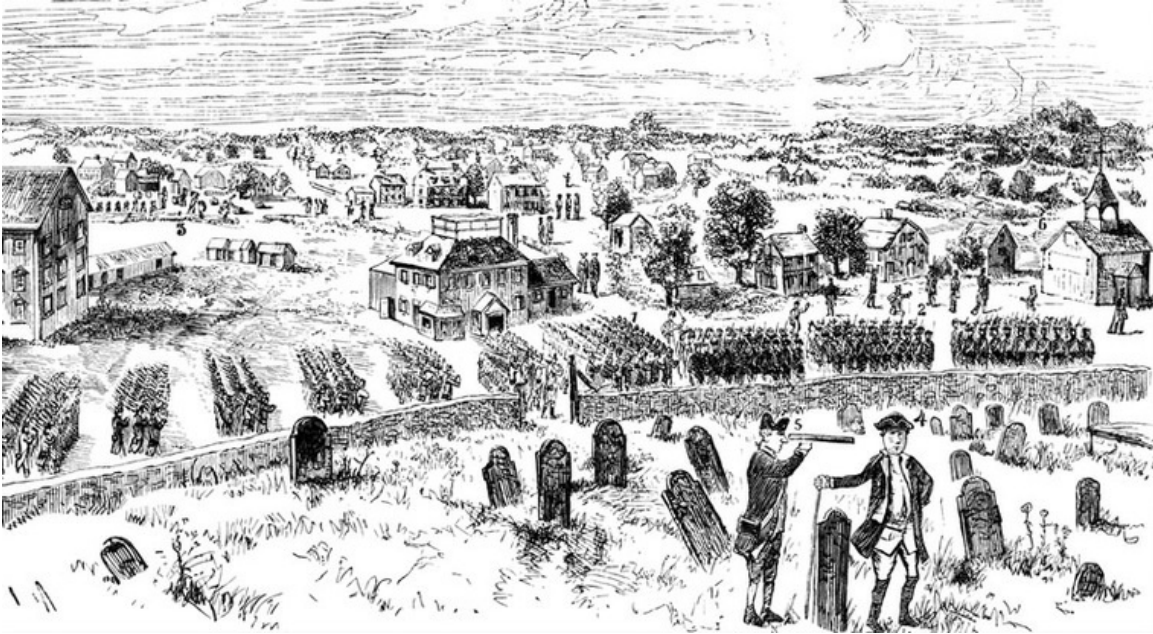
The general ordered 700 of his best troops to march to Concord and seize the weapons. To keep the colonists from moving the weapons, the attack had to be a surprise, so Gage had his troops march the 20 miles to Concord at night.

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But the colonists had their own spies, and when Gage's troops slipped out of Boston on April 18, 1775, Patriots were watching their every move. Soon Paul Revere and others were galloping through the countryside, warning colonists that the British soldiers were coming.

The news reached Lexington, a town on the road to Concord, in the early hours of April 19. Led by Captain John Parker, a small band of Minutemen gathered nervously in the chilly night air.



At dawn, the British troops reached the town green. “Stand your ground,” ordered Parker. “Don't fire unless fired upon, but if they mean to have a war, let it begin here.” As the Minutemen faced the British troops, a shot rang out—from where, no one knew for certain. Without orders, the soldiers rushed forward, shooting wildly, and a few Minutemen managed to return fire.

When the firing stopped, eight colonists lay dead or dying, and another ten were left limping to safety with painful wounds. The British troops gave three cheers for victory and continued their march to Concord.

**The Second Blow at Concord** By breakfast time, the British were in Concord, searching for gunpowder and weapons. However, the colonists had hidden them, and in frustration, the soldiers piled up gun carriages and set them on fire.

On a ridge outside the city, militiamen from the surrounding countryside watched the smoke rise. “Will you let them burn the town

down?” shouted one man. Captain Isaac Davis replied, “I haven't a man that's afraid to go.” Davis marched with his volunteers down the hill, and as they approached Concord's North Bridge, the British troops opened fire. Davis fell dead, a bullet through his heart.

The British expected the Americans to break and run, but to their surprise, the Minutemen stood their ground and fired back. Soon, it was the redcoats who were running away in panic.

The retreat back to Boston was a nightmare for the British because thousands of armed and angry Minutemen lined their route, shooting at every redcoat they saw. Some accounts show that by the end of the day, 74 British soldiers were dead and another 200 were wounded or missing while the colonists counted their own losses at only 49 dead and 41 wounded. A British officer described what it was like to face the colonists' fury that day. “Whoever looks upon them as an irregular mob,” the officer said, “will find himself much mistaken.”

Indeed, since the French and Indian War, the British had been mistaken about the colonists again and again. Their biggest mistake was in thinking that ordinary people—farmers, merchants, workers, and housewives—would not fight for the rights that they held dear. At Lexington and Concord, Americans proved they were not only willing to fight for their rights, they were even willing to die for them.



## Lesson Summary

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**In this lesson, you read about tensions between the colonies and Great Britain in the mid-1700s.**

**Before 1763** During the French and Indian War (1754-1763), Great Britain and France fought for territory and power in North America. When the war ended, France gave up Canada to Great Britain, which now had a much larger American empire to control.

**Early British Actions in the Colonies** The French and Indian War left Great Britain with huge debts. To raise money, Parliament decided to pass along the war costs to the Americans. To do this Parliament passed the Stamp Act in 1765. Colonists protested the Stamp Act because it was passed without colonial representation. Colonists also protested the Quartering Act, which required them to house British troops at the colonies' expense.

**The Townshend Acts and the Boston Massacre** The Townshend Acts imposed more taxes on the colonies, which divided many colonists into opposing camps. Loyalists urged obedience to Great Britain, but Patriots resisted “taxation without representation” through protests, boycotts, and riots. Tensions in Boston erupted into violence in 1770 when British troops fired into a crowd of colonists in what became known as the Boston Massacre.

**The Boston Tea Party and the Intolerable Acts** When Patriots protested a new tax on tea by throwing tea into Boston Harbor in 1773, Great Britain responded by passing the Intolerable Acts to force the colonies to give in to British authority. Patriots responded by forming the First Continental Congress and organizing colonial militias.

**Lexington and Concord** Fighting between Patriots and British troops at Lexington and Concord in 1775 showed that colonists would not only fight for their rights, but were willing to die for them.



### Reading Further

“I Love the Story of Paul Revere,  
Whether He Rode or Not”

**So said President Warren G. Harding in 1923. Like most Americans at that time, Harding probably learned about Revere as a schoolboy when he read a famous poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Later, when a skeptic claimed the story of Revere's ride never happened, Harding sprang to the poet's defense. But was Revere the patriotic hero Longfellow made him out to be?**

By 1860, the young nation whose fight for freedom began at Lexington and Concord was in danger of falling apart. War clouds gathered as Americans debated the issues of slavery and states' rights. The South, which had grown prosperous with slave labor, vigorously defended its way of life. The North, which had grown even more prosperous without slave labor, condemned slavery as morally wrong. Americans had never been so divided or so close to civil war.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who was then the nation's most popular poet, was a Northerner who opposed slavery. As he watched the nation move toward war, Longfellow began thinking about writing a new poem that would be a call to arms for all who loved liberty in such a time of peril.

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One day in April 1860, as Longfellow took a walk with a friend in Boston, his companion told him a story that took place on another April day, some 85 years earlier. It was the tale of a midnight ride made by a silversmith named Paul Revere to alert the countryside to coming danger. Longfellow was inspired. Like Paul Revere's ride, the poem he planned would be a cry of alarm to awaken a sleeping nation.

Longfellow's finished work, titled "Paul Revere's Ride," was published in 1861. Over the next century, generations of schoolchildren would read and memorize its stirring lines. As you read the excerpt that follows, can you see why the poem captured Americans' imaginations?



An excerpt from  
**Paul Revere's Ride**

Listen, my children, and you shall hear  
 Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,  
 On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-five;  
 Hardly a man is now alive  
 Who remembers that famous day and year.

He said to his friend, "If the British march  
 By land or sea from the town to-night,  
 Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry arch  
 Of the North Church tower as a signal light—  
 One, if by land, and two, if by sea;  
 And I on the opposite shore will be,  
 Ready to ride and spread the alarm  
 Through every Middlesex village and farm,  
 For the country folk to be up and to arm."

Then he said, "Good night!" and with muffled oar  
 Silently rowed to the Charlestown shore . . .

And lo! as he looks, on the belfry's height  
 A glimmer, and then a gleam of light!  
 He springs to the saddle, the bridle he turns,  
 But lingers and gazes, till full on his sight  
 A second lamp in the belfry burns!

A hurry of hoofs in a village street,  
 A shape in the moonlight, a bulk in the dark,  
 And beneath, from the pebbles, in passing, a spark  
 Struck out by a steed flying fearless and fleet:  
 That was all! And yet, through the gloom and the light,  
 The fate of a nation was riding that night;  
 And the spark struck out by that steed, in his flight,  
 Kindled the land into flame with its heat . . .

It was one by the village clock,  
 When he galloped into Lexington.  
 He saw the gilded weathercock  
 Swim in the moonlight as he passed,  
 And the meeting-house windows, blank and bare,  
 Gaze at him with a spectral glare,  
 As if they already stood aghast  
 At the bloody work they would look upon.

This is the cover page of sheet music for a song  
 inspired by Longfellow's poem. The music was  
 written in the early 1900s.

It was two by the village clock,  
 When he came to the bridge in Concord town.  
 He heard the bleating of the flock . . .  
 And one was safe and asleep in his bed  
 Who at the bridge would be first to fall,  
 Who that day would be lying dead,  
 Pierced by a British musket-ball.

You know the rest. In the books you have read,  
 How the British Regulars fired and fled—  
 How the farmers gave them ball for ball,  
 From behind each fence and farm-yard wall,  
 Chasing the red-coats down the lane . . .

So through the night rode Paul Revere;  
 And so through the night went his cry of alarm  
 To every Middlesex village and farm—  
 A cry of defiance and not of fear,  
 A voice in the darkness, a knock at the door,  
 And a word that shall echo forevermore!  
 For borne on the night-wind of the Past,  
 Through all our history, to the last,  
 In the hour of darkness and peril and need,  
 The people will waken and listen to hear  
 The hurrying hoof-beats of that steed,  
 And the midnight message of Paul Revere.



## Longfellow Creates a Legend: The Lone Hero

Longfellow had set out to create a dramatic tale that would make patriotic hearts beat faster, and in the process, he transformed Paul Revere from a local folk hero into a national legend. Even today, millions of Americans know the opening lines of Longfellow's poem.

*Listen, my children, and you shall hear  
 Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,*

When we think of the events that launched the American Revolution, Longfellow's words help us picture them clearly. Revere asks a friend to send a signal by hanging lanterns from Boston's Old North Church when the British troops quartered there begin to move out.

*One, if by land, and two, if by sea;  
 And I on the opposite shore will be,*

The signal is lit and Revere gallops into the night, waking the countryside with the news that the British are coming.

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*So through the night rode Paul Revere;  
And so through the night went his cry of alarm  
To every Middlesex village and farm—  
A cry of defiance and not of fear,  
A voice in the darkness, a knock at the door,  
And a word that shall echo forevermore!*

Alerted by our lone hero, the colonists rise up to defend their homes and liberties against the approaching British troops.

*You know the rest. In the books you have read,  
How the British Regulars fired and fled—  
How the farmers gave them ball for ball,  
From behind each fence and farm-yard wall . . .*

The rest, as they say, is history. Or is it?

### **Skeptics Raise Doubts: Did Revere Really Ride?**

Historians were quick to point out many factual inaccuracies in Longfellow's telling. For example, the poet omitted the fact that Revere was captured by British troops while raising the alarm. Longfellow also left out the names of other messengers who participated that night, such as William Dawes and Samuel Prescott.

As doubts about the poem's truthfulness multiplied through the years, skeptics began to question the entire story. Some said Revere's ride did not happen at all. Or if it did, Revere was captured before he could warn many Patriots. These arguments annoyed President Harding, who defended Longfellow's version of the story. "Somebody made the ride and stirred the minutemen in the colonies to fight the battle of Lexington," he said. "I love the story of Paul Revere, whether he rode or not."

As time passed, more doubters threw cold water on the idea that Revere was a hero, with one skeptic saying that Revere "set out with two other guys for money." When the three were arrested he "turned stool pigeon and betrayed his two companions." But if this is true, wouldn't it mean Revere was a traitor to his cause?

### **Historians Weigh In: The Real Meaning of Revere's Ride**

While modern historians find no evidence that Revere was paid to ride or that he became an informer when he was captured, they also remind us that Revere was not the only hero of that momentous night. Within

hours of his ride, 122 colonists had lost their lives and many more lay wounded. As one historian writes,

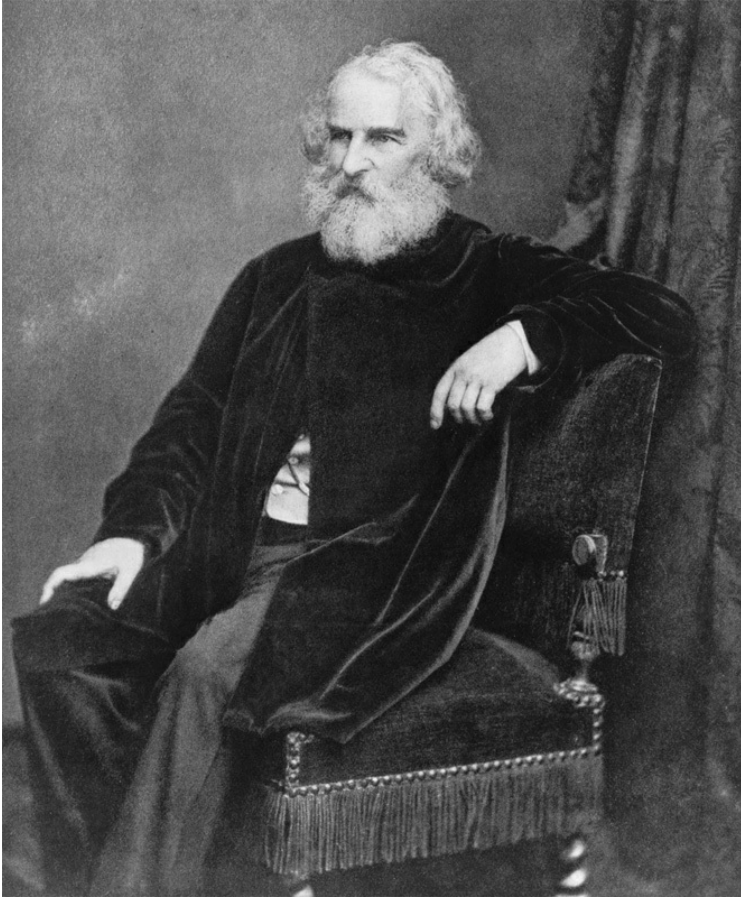
*Revere's ride was not the major event that day, nor was Revere's warning so critical in triggering the bloodbath. Patriotic farmers had been preparing to oppose the British for the better part of a year . . . His ride to Lexington . . . took on meaning only because numerous other political activists had, like Revere, dedicated themselves to the cause.*

—Ray Raphael, *Founding Myths: Stories that Hide Our Patriotic Past*, 2004

The real meaning of Revere's ride is what it tells us about these unsung heroes. On hearing that the British soldiers were coming, those patriotic farmers had a choice. They could remain safe in their beds or rise up to defend their rights. Looking at their response, historian David Hackett Fischer writes, “The history of a free people is the history of hard choices. In that respect, when Paul Revere alarmed the Massachusetts countryside, he was carrying a message for us.”

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### **The Sugar Act (1764)**

The Sugar Act of 1764 was implemented with the intention of raising revenue for Great Britain. The act placed a tax on sugar and other goods brought into the colonies as a way to raise funds to pay for the Seven Years War. An excerpt from the act is below.

*... Whereas it is expedient that new provisions and regulations should be established for improving the revenue of this kingdom, and for extending and securing the navigation and commerce between Great Britain and your Majesty's dominions in America, which, by the peace, have been so happily enlarged: and whereas it is just and necessary, that a revenue be raised, in your Majesty's said dominions in America, for defraying the expences of defending, protecting, and securing the same; we, your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the commons of Great Britain, in parliament assembled, being desirous to make some provision, in this present session of parliament, towards raising the said revenue in America, have resolved to give and grant unto your Majesty the several rates and duties herein after-mentioned; and do most humbly beseech your Majesty that it may be enacted; and be it enacted*

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*by the King's most excellent majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the lords spiritual and temporal, and commons, in this present parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, That from and after the twenty ninth day of September, one thousand seven hundred and sixty four, there shall be raised, levied, collected, and paid, unto his Majesty, his heirs and successors, for and upon all white or clayed sugars of the produce or manufacture of any colony or plantation in America, not under the dominion of his Majesty, his heirs and successors; for and upon indigo, and coffee of foreign produce or manufacture; for and upon wines (except French wine;) for and upon all wrought silks, bengals, and stuffs, mixed with silk or herbs of the manufacture of Persia, China, or East India, and all callico painted, dyed, printed, or stained there; and for and upon all foreign linen cloth called Cambrick and French Lawns, which shall be imported or brought into any colony or plantation in America, which now is, or hereafter may be, under the dominion of his Majesty, his heirs and successors, the several rates and duties following; that is to say,*

*For every hundred weight avoirdupois of such foreign white or clayed sugars, one pound two shillings, over and above all other duties imposed by any former act of parliament.*

*For every pound weight avoirdupois of such foreign indigo, six pence.*

*For every hundred weight avoirdupois of such foreign coffee, which shall be imported from any place, except Great Britain, two pounds, nineteen shillings, and nine pence.*

*For every ton of wine of the growth of the Madeiras, or of any other island or place from whence such wine may be lawfully imported, and which shall be so imported from such islands or place, the sum of seven pounds.*

*For every ton of Portugal, Spanish, or any other wine (except French wine) imported from Great Britain, the sum of ten shillings.*

*For every pound weight avoirdupois of wrought silks, bengals, and stuffs, mixed silk or herbs, of the manufacture of Persia, China, or East India, imported from Great Britain, two shillings.*

*For every piece of callico painted, dyed, printed, or stained, in Persia, China, or East India, imported from Great Britain, two shillings and six pence.*

*For every piece of foreign linen cloth, called Cambrick, imported from Great Britain, three shillings.*

*For every piece of French lawn imported from Great Britain, three shillings.*

*And after those rates for any greater or lesser quantity of such goods respectively.*

*II. And it is hereby further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That from and after the said twenty ninth day of September, one thousand seven hundred and sixty four, there shall also be raised, levied, collected, and paid, unto his Majesty, his heirs and successors, for and upon all coffee and pimento of the growth and produce of any British colony or plantation in America, which shall be there laden on board any British ship or vessel, to be carried out from thence to any other place whatsoever, except Great Britain, the several rates and duties following; that is to say,*

*III. For every hundred weight avoirdupois of such British coffee, seven shillings.*

*For every pound weight avoirdupois of such British pimento, one halfpenny.*

*IV. And whereas an act was made in the sixth year of the reign of his late majesty King George the Second, intituled, An act for the better securing and encouraging the trade of his Majesty's sugar colonies in America, which was to continue in force for five years, to be computed from the twenty fourth day of June, one thousand seven hundred and thirty three, and to the end of the then next session of parliament, and which, by several subsequent acts made in the eleventh, the nineteenth, the twenty sixth, and twenty ninth, and the thirty first years of the reign of his said late Majesty, was, from time to time, continued; and, by an act made in the first year of the reign of his present Majesty, was further continued until the end of this present session of parliament; and although the said act hath been found in some degree useful, yet it is highly expedient that the same should be altered, enforced, and made more effectual; but, in consideration of the great distance of several of the said colonies and plantations from this kingdom, it will be proper further to continue the said act for a short space, before any alterations and amendments shall take effect, in order that all persons concerned may have due and proper notice thereof; be it therefore enacted by the authority aforesaid, That the said act made in the sixth year of the reign of his late majesty King George the Second, intituled, An act for the better securing and encouraging the trade of his Majesty's sugar colonies in America, shall be, and the same is hereby further continued, until the thirtieth day of*

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*September, one thousand seven hundred and sixty four.*

*V. And it be further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That from the twenty ninth day of September, one thousand seven hundred and sixty four, the said act, subject to such alterations and amendments as are herein after contained, shall be, and the same is hereby made perpetual....*

*XLIV. And it is hereby further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That from and after the said twenty ninth day of September, one thousand seven hundred and sixty four, no person shall be admitted to enter a claim to any ship or goods seized in pursuance of this or any other act of parliament, and prosecuted in any of the British colonies or plantations in America, until sufficient security be first given, by persons of known ability, in the court where such seizure is prosecuted, in the penalty of sixty pounds, to answer the costs and charges of prosecution; and, in default of giving such security, such ship or goods shall be adjudged to be forfeited, and shall be condemned.*

*XLV. And it is hereby further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That from and after the twenty ninth day of September, one thousand seven hundred and sixty four, if any ship or goods shall be seized for any cause of forfeiture, and any dispute shall arise whether the customs and duties for such goods have been paid, or the same have been lawfully imported or exported, or concerning the growth, product, or manufacture, of such goods, or the place from whence such goods were brought, then, and in such cases, the proof thereof shall lie upon the owner or claimer of such ship or goods, and not upon the officer who shall seize or stop the same; any law, custom, or usage, any law, custom, or usage, to the contrary notwithstanding.*

*XLVI. And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That from and after the twenty ninth day of September, one thousand seven hundred and sixty four, in case any information shall be commenced and brought to trial in America, on account of any seizure of any ship or goods as forfeited by this or any other act of parliament relating to his Majesty's customs, wherein a verdict or sentence shall be given for the claimer thereof; and it shall appear to the judge or court before whom the same shall be tried, that there was a probable cause of seizure, the judge or court before whom the same shall be tried shall certify on the record or other proceedings, that there was a probable cause for the prosecutors seizing the said ship or goods; and, in such case, the defendant shall not be intitled to any costs of suit whatsoever; nor shall the person who seized the said ship or goods, be liable to any action, or other suit or prosecution, on account of such seizure: and in any case*



*any action, or other suit or prosecution, shall be commenced and brought to trial against any person or persons whatsoever, on account of the seizing any such ship or goods, where no information shall be commenced or brought to trial to condemn the same, and a verdict or sentence shall be given upon such action or prosecution against the defendant or defendants, if the court or judge before whom such action or prosecution, shall certify in like manner as aforesaid that there was a probable cause for such seizure, then the plaintiff besides his ship or goods so seized, or the value thereof, shall not be intitled to above two pence damages, nor to any costs of suit; nor shall the defendant in such prosecution be fined above one shilling.*

*XLVII. And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That if any action or suit shall be commenced, either in Great Britain or America, against any person or persons for any thing done in pursuance of this or any other act of parliament relating to his Majesty's customs, the defendant or defendants in such action or suit may plead the general issue, and give the said acts, and the special matter, in evidence at any trial to be had thereupon, and that the same was done in pursuance and by the authority of such act; and if it shall appear so to have been done, the jury shall find for the defendant or defendants; and if the plaintiff shall be non-suited, or discontinue his action after the defendant or defendants shall have appeared, or if judgment shall be given upon verdict or demurrer against the plaintiff, the defendant or defendants shall recover treble costs, and have the like remedy for the same as defendants have in other cases by law...*

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Sugar Act of 1764 excerpt from The Avalon Project at Yale Law School

Entire Selection:

[https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/sugar\\_act\\_1764.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/sugar_act_1764.asp)

Accessed July, 2019

## **Choosing Sides**

The American Revolution divided the colonists and the British into two sides; the Patriots and Loyalists. The Patriots were Americans who believed that the colonies had the right to self-govern. The Loyalists, on the other hand, were supporters of British rule over the colonies. When the war began, the Patriots were poorly organized with an untrained

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army. In fighting the war, the Patriots hoped to gain independent economic and political control, as British taxation and overbearing rule had frustrated many colonists. The British, meanwhile, maintained a professional army with hired mercenaries from Germany. The British sought to maintain control over the colonies, as it was a strong source of revenue for the monarchy.

The American Revolution played out on many battlefields, but soldiers were not the only ones to take part. The war had many heroes, and it also had many victims. Women gave much to the American Revolution. Enslaved Africans and American Indians were also involved.

### **Women and the War**

During the war, women had a key role in maintaining necessary societal functions and shaping the future generation. Though the war was a destructive force, many women carried on and ran family businesses. They planted and harvested crops. They did their best to take care of their children. Many women served as spies for the Patriot army, while others nursed the sick and wounded. A nurse had a greater chance of dying from disease than a soldier had of dying in battle. Some women used their household skills for the war. For instance, women in Philadelphia led an effort to raise money and make clothing for the troops.

Women also helped win public support for the war. Writer Mercy Otis Warren was one example, and so was Mary Katherine Goddard of Maryland, who helped publish a newspaper. Some women traveled with the troops, cared for them, and, in a few cases, took part in combat as well. Anna Lane was wounded at the Battle of Germantown in 1777. Deborah Sampson dressed as a male soldier and fought in several battles. She hoped that her decisions to enlist would be so that “we [women] might be permitted and acknowledged to enjoy what we had so nobly declared we would possess, or lose with our lives – freedom and independence.” Only when she became sick with a fever did an army doctor discover her secret. Mary Ludwig Hays McCauley, known as Molly Pitcher, took her husband's place as a gunner when he was hurt at the Battle of Monmouth in 1778.

Most notably, however, was the notion of the “republican mothers.” This idea entailed that the colonies needed intelligent and self-disciplined citizens in order to form a strong foundation for the new republic following the end of the war. This duty was passed along to wives and mothers, who were responsible for raising their sons to be these intelligent and self-sufficient individuals. This desire for strong

political figures for the new government during this time increased the significance of womens' sphere of influence during the American Revolution.

### **African American and the War**

Five hundred thousand slaves lived in the colonies in 1776. The American Revolution brought them challenges, choices, and opportunities. The British offered freedom to slaves who joined their side. Tens of thousands of enslaved African Americans were motivated to join the war efforts with this offer, and ran away from their owners. Many slaves gave valuable service to the British by fighting in battle, serving as spies, and performing many jobs in army camps. Some slaves did, in fact, win their freedom. However, running away was risky. Sometimes, the British turned away slaves who wanted to join them, and the British even forced away many escaped slaves during the battle of Yorktown. Many of them starved or died from disease, while others were caught and returned to their owners.

Some African Americans fought for the Patriot cause in hopes of earning their freedom and proving their worth; it is estimated that at least 5,000 black soldiers fought against the British. Additionally, 5 percent of American soldiers at the Battle of Bunker Hill were African American. In 1775, a black soldier named Salem Poor became a hero after fighting at the Battle of Bunker Hill in Boston. Early in the American Revolution, African Americans could not join the Patriot ranks. Some white colonists did not want to arm slaves, but this worry faded as the war dragged on. African Americans found ways to help the Patriots off the battlefield, too. One example is James Armistead who served as a spy and pretended to serve the British. For his work, Armistead won his freedom. Following the end of the war, the military service of African Americans helped to end slavery in New England, whereas the middle states of New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey adopted policies of gradual emancipation for two decades beginning in 1780. Despite this, however, freed African Americans still experienced constant discrimination. Soon after, cotton became a major industry in the South, causing slavery to persist.

### **American Indians and the War**

Another group affected by the American Revolution were American Indians, who saw both the colonists and the British as a threat as both the colonists. A few American Indian tribes helped fight on the side of the colonists, while some sided with the British. These tribes thought that the British were less of a threat to their way of life than the

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colonists were. They also hoped that if the British won the war, they would stop colonial expansion westward into Indian territory. One Seneca warrior even argued in response to an American request for assistance with war efforts that, "You say they are all mad, foolish, wicked, and deceitful - I say you are so and they are wise for you want us to destroy ourselves in your War and they advise us to live in Peace." Many American Indians, however, tried to stay out of the war. In fact, they hoped that the two sides would weaken each other, which in turn would help the American Indians maintain their land and sovereignty.

However, staying out of the war proved difficult as few tribes could avoid being caught in the fighting. Neither the British nor the Americans fully trusted the American Indians, and each side punished tribes harshly for helping the other side. Furthermore, both the American and British troops often raided American Indian villages to take food supplies. As a result, hunger among the American Indians was widespread.

By the war's end, many tribes were struggling to survive. The Patriot victory had only made things worse. The British had previously tried to slow western settlement, but now that British rule had ended, white settlers were again pushing west, moving in large numbers onto American Indian lands. This led to many American Indian tribes being forcibly removed from their land. Other tribes were forced to integrate into white American society by white settlers. The culture and traditions of American Indians were at risk.