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## THE ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE (1750–1781)

In 1754 the colonists still considered themselves English subjects. Very few could have imagined the circumstances under which they would leave the British Empire. The events that led from almost universal loyalty to rebellion are frequently tested on the AP U.S. History Exam. Here is what you need to know:

### ALBANY PLAN OF UNION

In 1754 representatives from seven colonies met in Albany, New York to consider the **Albany Plan of Union**, developed by Benjamin Franklin. The plan provided for an intercolonial government and a system for collecting taxes for the colonies' defense. At that meeting, Franklin also tried to negotiate a treaty with the Iroquois. Franklin's efforts to unite the colonies failed to gain the approval of a single colonial legislature. The plan was rejected because the colonists did not want to relinquish control over their right to tax themselves, nor were they prepared to unite under a single colonial legislature. Franklin's frustration was well publicized in one of the first American political cartoons—his drawing of a snake broken into pieces, under which lie the words "Join or Die."

## THE SEVEN YEARS' WAR (1754–1763)

Yes, the Seven Years' War lasted for nine years. It is also called the **French and Indian War**, which is almost equally confusing because the French and Indians fought on the same side, not against each other. The Seven Years' War was the British name for the war. The colonists called it the "French and Indian War" because that's who they were fighting. It was actually one of several "wars for empire" fought between the British and the French, and the Americans just got stuck in the middle. This was arguably the first world war.

The war was the inevitable result of colonial expansion. (It was also caused by a number of inter-European power struggles, which is how Spain, Austria, Sweden, Prussia, and others got involved, but that is on the European history test, so you can worry about it some other time.) As English settlers moved into the Ohio Valley, the French tried to stop them by building fortified outposts at strategic entry spots. The French were trying to protect their profitable fur trade and their control of the region. A colonial contingent led by **George Washington** attacked a French outpost and lost badly. Washington surrendered and was allowed to return to Virginia, where he was welcomed as a hero. Other skirmishes and battles ensued, and in 1756 England officially declared war on France. Native Americans, choosing the lesser of two evils, allied themselves with the French (whom, based on Washington's performance, they expected to win the war). The war dragged on for years before the English finally gained the upper hand. When the war was over, England was the undisputed colonial power of the continent. The treaty gave England control of Canada and almost everything east of the Mississippi Valley. The French only kept two sugar islands, underscoring the impact of mercantilism since the French prioritized two small but highly profitable islands over the large landmass of Canada.

During the Seven Years' War, many Americans served in the English army and, for the first time, came into prolonged contact with English soldiers. The English did not make a good impression, both in how they treated their own soldiers and in how the soldiers behaved themselves. These contacts sowed the first seeds of **anti-British sentiment** in the colonies, particularly in New England, where much of the fighting took place and where most of the colonial soldiers came from.

The English victory spelled trouble for Native Americans, who had previously been able to use French and English disputes to their own advantage. They negotiated their allegiances in return for land, goods, and the right to be left alone. The Native Americans particularly disliked the English, however, because English expansionism was more disruptive to their way of life. The French had sent few colonists, and many of those colonists were fur trappers who did not settle anywhere permanently. In the aftermath of the war, the English raised the price of goods sold to the Native Americans (they now had a monopoly, after all) and ceased paying rent on their western forts. In response, Ottawa war chief **Pontiac** rallied a group of tribes in the Ohio Valley and attacked colonial outposts. The attacks and resultant wars are known as **Pontiac's Rebellion** (also known as **Pontiac's Uprising**).

In response to the initial attacks, the British government issued the **Proclamation of 1763**, forbidding settlement west of the rivers running through the Appalachians. The proclamation came too late. Settlers had already moved west of the line. The proclamation did have one effect, however. It agitated colonial settlers, who regarded it as unwarranted British interference in colonial affairs.

Pontiac's Rebellion was, in part, a response to the colonists expanding into the Ohio River Valley and encroaching on the Native Americans' lands. (Recall similar events such as the Pequot War and Bacon's Rebellion.) The British were forced to quell this rebellion at great cost in addition to the costs of fighting the French. They used germ warfare, in the form of smallpox-infected blankets, to help defeat the Ottawa. The resulting Proclamation of 1763 is significant for a number of reasons. 1763 is often viewed as a turning point in British-colonial relations in that it marks the end of salutary neglect. The Proclamation of 1763 may be viewed as the first in a new series of restrictions imposed on the colonists by the British Parliament, and in that way, it marks the first step on the "road to

revolution." Furthermore, it established a pattern of demarcating "Indian Territory," a pattern that would be adopted and pursued by the United States government long after the colonists gained their independence. (See for example the **Indian Removal Act**, 1830.)

## **THE SUGAR ACT, THE CURRENCY ACT, AND THE STAMP ACT**

One result of the Seven Years' War was that in financing the war the British government had run up a huge debt. The new king, **George III**, and his prime minister, **George Grenville**, felt that the colonists should help pay that debt. After all, they reasoned, the colonies had been beneficiaries of the war; furthermore, their tax burden was relatively light compared to that of taxpayers in England, even on the same goods. Meanwhile, the colonists felt that they had provided so many soldiers that they had fulfilled their obligation.

Accordingly, Parliament imposed new regulations and taxes on the colonists. The first was the **Sugar Act** of 1764, which established a number of new duties and which also contained provisions aimed at deterring molasses smugglers. Although Parliament had previously passed other acts aimed at controlling colonial trade and manufacturing, there was little colonial resistance prior to the decade leading up to the Revolutionary War. There were benefits to being part of the vast British Empire and most Americans accepted regulations of trade such as the **Navigation Acts** as part of **mercantilism**. Furthermore, although laws such as the Molasses Act of 1733 were on the books, smuggling was common practice and little revenue from taxes was actually collected. Some historians have gone so far as to suggest that Parliament never intended the Molasses Act to raise revenue, but merely to function as a protective tariff aimed against French imports. Parliament was quite shrewd in passing the Sugar Act of 1764 in that this new act actually *lowered* the duty on molasses coming into the colonies from the West Indies. What angered the colonists the most was that this new regulation was to be more strictly enforced; duties were to be collected. It became more difficult for colonial shippers to avoid committing even minor violations of the Sugar Act. Furthermore, violators were to be arrested and tried in vice-admiralty courts, courts where a single judge issued a verdict without the deliberation of a jury. It was this last provision of the Sugar Act that suggested to some colonists that Parliament was overstepping its authority and violating their rights as Englishmen.

Another Parliamentary act, the **Currency Act**, forbade the colonies to issue paper money. Collectively, the Sugar Act, Currency Act, and Proclamation of 1763 caused a great deal of discontent in the colonies, whose residents bristled at what they correctly viewed as British attempts to exert greater control. These acts signaled a clear end to Britain's long-standing policy of salutary neglect. That these acts came during a postwar economic depression further aggravated the situation. Colonial protest to these acts, however, was uncoordinated and ineffective.

That all changed when Parliament passed the **Stamp Act** the following year, 1765. The Stamp Act included a number of provocative elements. First, it was a tax specifically aimed at raising revenue, thus awakening the colonists to the likelihood that even more taxes could follow. The Stamp Act demonstrated that the colonies' tradition of self-taxation was surely being unjustly taken by Parliament, much to the dismay of many colonists. Second, it was a broad-based tax, covering all legal documents and licenses. Not only did it affect almost everyone, but it particularly affected a group that was literate, persuasive, and argumentative—namely, lawyers. Third, it was a tax on goods produced within the colonies.

Reaction to the Stamp Act built on previous grievances, and consequently was more forceful than any protest preceding it. A pamphlet by James Otis, called *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*, laid out the colonists' argument against the taxes and became a bestseller of its day. Otis put forward the "No taxation without representation" argument that later became a rallying cry of the Revolution. Because the colonists did not elect members to Parliament, he argued, they were not obliged to pay taxes (following the accepted precept that no Englishman could be compelled to pay

taxes without his consent). Otis did *not* advocate secession; rather, he argued for either representation in Parliament or a greater degree of self-government for the colonies. Neither the British nor the colonists had much interest in creating a colonial delegation to Parliament. The British scoffed at the notion, arguing that the colonists were already represented in Parliament. Their argument was rooted in the theory of **virtual representation**, which stated that members of Parliament represented all British subjects regardless of who elected them. The colonists, for their part, knew that their representation would be too small to protect their interests and so never pushed the issue. What they wanted, and what the British were refusing to give them, was the right to determine their own taxes.

Opponents of the Stamp Act united in the various colonies. In Virginia, Patrick Henry drafted the Virginia Stamp Act Resolves, protesting the tax and asserting the colonists' right to a large measure of self-government. (The Virginia legislature removed Henry's most radical propositions before passing the resolves.) In Boston, mobs burned the customs officers in effigy, tore down a customs house, and nearly destroyed the governor's mansion. Protest groups formed throughout the colonies, calling themselves "**Sons of Liberty**." The opposition was so effective that, by the time the law was supposed to take effect, not one of the Crown's appointed duty collectors was willing to perform his job. In 1766 Parliament repealed the Stamp Act. Just as important, George III replaced Prime Minister Grenville, whom the colonists now loathed, with Lord Rockingham, who had opposed the Stamp Act. Rockingham oversaw the repeal but also linked it to the passage of the **Declaratory Act**, which asserted the British government's right to tax and legislate in all cases anywhere in the colonies. Thus, although the colonists had won the battle over the stamp tax, they had not yet gained any ground in the war of principles over Parliament's powers in the colonies.

## THE TOWNSHEND ACTS

Rockingham remained prime minister for only two years. His replacement was William Pitt. Pitt, however, was ill, and the dominant figure in colonial affairs came to be the minister of the exchequer, Charles Townshend. Townshend drafted the eponymous **Townshend Acts**. The Townshend Acts, like the Stamp Act, contained several antagonistic measures. First, they taxed goods imported directly from Britain—the first such tax in the colonies. Mercantilism approved of duties on imports from other European nations but not on British imports. Second, some of the tax collected was set aside for the payment of tax collectors, meaning that colonial assemblies could no longer withhold government officials' wages in order to get their way. Third, the Townshend Acts created even more vice-admiralty courts and several new government offices to enforce the Crown's will in the colonies. Fourth, they suspended the New York legislature because it had refused to comply with a law requiring the colonists to supply British troops. Last, these acts instituted *writs of assistance*, licenses that gave the British the power to search any place they suspected of hiding smuggled goods.

The colonists got better at protesting with each new tax, and their reaction to the Townshend Acts was their strongest yet. The Massachusetts Assembly sent a letter (called the **Massachusetts Circular Letter**, written by Samuel Adams in 1768) to all other assemblies asking that they protest the new measures in unison. The British fanned the flames of protest by ordering the assemblies *not* to discuss the Massachusetts letter, virtually guaranteeing it to be all anyone *would* talk about. Governors of colonies where legislatures discussed the letter dissolved those legislatures, which, of course, further infuriated colonists. The colonists held numerous rallies and organized boycotts, and for the first time sought the support of "commoners" (previously such protests were confined largely to the aristocratic classes), making their rallies larger and much more intimidating. The boycotts were most successful because they affected British merchants, who then joined the protest. Colonial women were essential in the effort to replace British imports with "American" (New England) products. After two years, Parliament repealed the Townshend duties (except the duty on tea), although not the other statutes of the Townshend Acts.

As part of the Townshend Acts, the British stationed a large number of troops in Boston, and even after the duties were repealed, the soldiers remained. Officially sent to keep the peace, these soldiers in fact heightened tensions. For one thing, the detachment was huge—4,000 men in a city of only 16,000. To make matters worse, the soldiers sought off-hour employment and so competed with colonists for jobs. Numerous confrontations resulted, with the most famous on March 5, 1770, when a mob pelted a group of soldiers with rock-filled snowballs. The soldiers fired on the crowd, killing five; hence, the **Boston Massacre**. The propaganda campaign that followed suggested that the soldiers had shot into a crowd of innocent bystanders. Interestingly, John Adams defended the soldiers in court, helping to establish a tradition of giving a fair trial to all who are accused.

## THE CALM, AND THEN THE STORM

Oddly enough, for the next two years, nothing major happened. An uneasy status quo fell into place during this period. Colonial newspapers discussed ways in which the relationship between the mother country and the colonies might be altered so as to satisfy both sides, but still, nobody except a very few radicals suggested independence.

Things picked up in 1772 when the British implemented the part of the Townshend Acts that provided for colonial administrators to be paid from customs revenues (and not by the colonial legislatures). The colonists responded cautiously, setting up groups called **Committees of Correspondence** throughout the colonies to trade ideas and inform one another of the political mood. The committees also worked to convince more citizens to take an active interest in the conflict.

Not long after, the British granted the foundering East India Tea Company a monopoly on the tea trade in the colonies as well as a portion of new duties to be collected on tea sales. The result was cheaper tea for the colonists, but the colonists saw a more important issue: Parliament was once again imposing new taxes on them. In Boston, the colonists refused to allow the ships to unload their cargo, and the governor refused to allow them to leave the harbor. On December 16, 1773, a group of Sons of Liberty, poorly disguised as Mohawks, boarded a ship and dumped its cargo into Boston Harbor. It took them three hours to jettison the approximately £10,000 worth of tea. The incident is known as the **Boston Tea Party**.

The English responded with a number of punitive measures, known collectively as the **Coercive Acts** (also called the “**Intolerable Acts**”). One measure closed Boston Harbor to all but essential trade (food and firewood) and declared it would remain closed until the tea was paid for. Several measures tightened English control over the Massachusetts government and its courts, and yet another required civilians to house British soldiers. The Coercive Acts convinced many colonists that their days of semi-autonomy were over and that the future held even further encroachments on their liberties by the Crown. To make matters worse, at the same time Parliament passed the Coercive Acts, it also passed the **Quebec Act**, which, to the colonists’ chagrin, (1) granted greater liberties to Catholics, whom the Protestant colonial majority distrusted, and (2) extended the boundaries of the Quebec Territory, thus further impeding westward expansion.

The colonists met to discuss their grievances. All colonies except Georgia sent delegates to the **First Continental Congress**, which convened in late 1774. All perspectives were represented—Pennsylvania’s delegation included conservatives such as Joseph Galloway, while Virginia sent two radicals, Richard Henry Lee and **Patrick Henry**. The goals of the meeting were to enumerate American grievances, to develop a strategy for addressing those grievances, and to formulate a colonial position on the proper relationship between the royal government and the colonial governments. The Congress came up with a list of those laws the colonists wanted repealed and agreed to impose a boycott on British goods until their grievances were redressed. The delegates also agreed that towns should set up **committees of observation** to enforce the boycott; in time, these committees became their towns’

*de facto* governments. Perhaps most important, the Congress formulated a limited set of parameters within which it considered Parliamentary interference in colonial affairs justified; all other spheres, the delegates agreed, should be left to the colonists themselves. This position represented a major break with British tradition and, accordingly, a major step toward independence.

Throughout the winter of 1774 and the spring of 1775, the committees of observation expanded their powers. In many colonies they supplanted the British-sanctioned assemblies. They led acts of insubordination by collecting taxes, disrupting court sessions, and, most ominously, organizing militias and stockpiling weapons. As **John Adams** would later comment about the period: "The Revolution was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people.... This radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affections of the people was the real American Revolution."

## THE SHOT HEARD 'ROUND THE WORLD

The British underestimated the strength of the growing pro-revolutionary movement. Government officials mistakenly believed that if they arrested the ringleaders and confiscated their arsenals, violence could be averted. To that end, the English dispatched troops to confiscate weapons in Concord, Massachusetts in April 1775. The troops had to first pass through Lexington, where they confronted a small colonial militia, called "**minutemen**" because they reputedly could be ready to fight on a minute's notice. Someone, probably one of the minutemen, fired a shot, which drew British return fire. When the **Battle of Lexington** was over, the minutemen had suffered 18 casualties, including eight dead. The British proceeded to **Concord**, where a much larger contingent of minutemen awaited them. The Massachusetts militia inflicted numerous casualties on the British "**redcoats**" and forced them to retreat. That a contingent of colonial farmers could repel the army of the world's largest empire was monumental, which is why the **Battle of Concord** is sometimes referred to as "the shot heard 'round the world." The two opponents dug in around Boston, but during the next year only one major battle was fought. The two sides regrouped and planned their next moves.

For the colonists, the period provided time to rally citizens to the cause of independence. Not all were convinced. Among those remaining loyal to the Crown—such people were called "**Loyalists**"—were government officials, devout Anglicans (members of the Church of England), merchants dependent on trade with England, and many religious and ethnic minorities who feared persecution at the hands of the rebels. Many slaves believed their chances for liberty were better with the British than with the colonists, a belief strengthened when the royal governor of Virginia offered to free those slaves who escaped and joined the British army. The pre-Revolutionary War era saw an increase in the number of slave insurrections, dampening some Southerners' enthusiasm for revolution. The **patriots** were mostly white Protestant property holders and gentry, as well as urban artisans, especially in New England, where Puritans had long shown antagonism toward Anglicans. Much of the rest of the population just hoped the whole thing would blow over. The Quakers of Pennsylvania, for example, were pacifists and so wanted to avoid war.

The **Second Continental Congress** convened during this period, just weeks after the battles of Lexington and Concord. Throughout the summer, the Congress prepared for war by establishing a **Continental Army**, printing money, and creating government offices to supervise policy. The Congress chose **George Washington** to lead the army because he was both well-liked and a Southerner (thus bolstering support in an area with many loyalists). There is a lot of interesting military history about Washington's command, but because the AP ignores military history, so too does this review.

Not all delegates thought that war was inevitable, and many followed John Dickinson, who was pushing for reconciliation with Britain using the **Olive Branch Petition**. Adopted by the Continental Congress on July 5, 1775 following the skirmish at Breed's Hill, often known as Bunker Hill, the Olive Branch petition was a last-ditch attempt to avoid armed conflict. King George III, however, was hardly

interested in the proposal since he considered the colonists to be in open rebellion given their boycotts, attacks on royal officials, and resistance at Lexington and Concord. Still, it is worth noting that just one year before the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, the colonial leaders were trying to reconcile with the mother country.

## THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

The rebels were still looking for the masterpiece of propaganda that would rally colonists to their cause. They got it in *Common Sense*, a pamphlet published in January of 1776 by an English printer named **Thomas Paine**. Paine not only advocated colonial independence, he also argued for the merits of republicanism over monarchy. The pamphlet was an even bigger success than James Otis's *The Rights of British Colonies Asserted and Proved*. In a nation of 2 million, many of whom couldn't read, it sold more than 100,000 copies in its first three months (proportionally, about the same as selling 13 million CDs or digital album downloads today).

In June, the Congress was looking for a rousing statement of its ideals, and it commissioned **Thomas Jefferson** to write the **Declaration of Independence**. He did not let them down. The Declaration not only enumerates the colonies' grievances against the Crown, but it also articulates the principle of individual liberty and the government's fundamental responsibility to serve the people. Despite its obvious flaws—most especially that it pertained only to white, propertied men—it remains a work of enormous power. With the document's signing on July 4, 1776, the Revolutionary War became a war for independence.

Chronology of Events Leading to Revolutionary War			
1763	-French and Indian War ends -Pontiac's Rebellion -Proclamation of 1763	1772	-parts of Townshend Acts implemented -Committees of Correspondence formed
1764	-Sugar Act -Currency Act	1773	-British give the Dutch East India Tea Company monopoly on tea in colonies -Boston Tea Party
1765	-Stamp Act -Stamp Act crisis -Sons of Liberty formed	1774	-Coercive Acts (aka "Intolerable Acts") -Quebec Act -First Continental Congress meets -Committees of Observation form
1766	-Grenville replaced by Rockingham as prime minister -Stamp Act repealed -Declaratory Act	1775	-Battles of Lexington and Concord -Second Continental Congress meets
1767	-Townshend Acts	1776	-Declaration of Independence
1770	-Townshend duties repealed (except tea tax) -Boston Massacre		

After several years of fighting, the British surrendered at Yorktown in October of 1781. You should remember a few other facts about the war. The Continental Army (as opposed to local militias) had trouble recruiting good soldiers. Eventually, the Congress recruited blacks, and up to 5,000 fought on the side of the rebels (in return, most of those who had been slaves were granted their freedom). The **Franco-American Alliance**, negotiated by **Ben Franklin** in 1778, brought the French into the war on the side of the colonists, after the battle of Saratoga. This was hardly surprising given the lingering resentment of the French toward the English after the French and Indian War. This alliance helped the colonists considerably. Ultimately, the colonists won a war of attrition; like the United States in Vietnam almost two centuries later, the British were outlasted and ultimately forced to abandon an unpopular war on foreign soil. The **Treaty of Paris**, signed at the end of 1783, granted the United States independence and generous territorial rights. (This Treaty of Paris is not to be confused with the Treaty of Paris that ended the French and Indian War or the Treaty of Paris that ended the Spanish-American War in 1898. Paris was all the rage as a treaty name, apparently.)

Neither the Declaration of Independence, with its bold statement that "all men are created equal," nor the revolution with its republican ideology, abolished slavery. These events also did not bring about a more egalitarian society. Like blacks, many women played a significant role in the Revolutionary War, either as "camp followers" or by maintaining households and businesses while the men were off fighting the Revolution. It would take another war to end slavery (the Civil War) and two World Wars to help bring about greater political and economic equality for women.