

## Prelude to Revolution 1763 to 1776

**1763** - The **Proclamation of 1763**, signed by King George III of England, prohibits any English settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains and requires those already settled in those regions to return east as an attempt to ease tensions with Native Americans.

**1764** - The **Sugar Act** is passed by the English Parliament to offset the war debt brought on by the French and Indian War and to help pay for the expenses of running the colonies and newly acquired territories. This act increases the taxes on imported sugar and other items such as textiles, coffee, wines and indigo (dye). It doubles the taxes on foreign goods reshipped from England to the colonies and also forbids the import of foreign rum and French wines.

**1764** - The **Currency Act** prohibits the colonists from issuing any legal tender paper money. This act threatens to destabilize the entire colonial economy of both the industrial North and agricultural south, thus uniting the colonists against it.

**1764** - In May, at a town meeting in Boston, **James Otis** raises the issue of **“taxation without representation”** and urges a united response to the recent acts imposed by England. In August, Boston merchants begin a **boycott of British luxury goods**.

**1765** - In March, the **Stamp Act** is passed by the English Parliament imposing the first direct tax on the American colonies, to offset the high costs of the British military organization in America. Thus for the first time in the 150 year old history of the British colonies in America, the Americans will pay tax not to their own local legislatures in America, but directly to England.

Under the **Stamp Act**, all printed materials are taxed, including; newspapers, pamphlets, bills, legal documents, licenses, almanacs, dice and playing cards. The American colonists quickly unite in opposition, led by the most influential segments of colonial society - lawyers, publishers, land owners, ship builders and merchants - who are most affected by the Act, which is scheduled to go into effect on November 1.

**1765** - Also in March, the **Quartering Act** requires colonists to house British troops and supply them with food.

**1765** - In July, the **Sons of Liberty**, an underground organization opposed to the **Stamp Act**, is formed in a number of colonial towns. Its members use violence and intimidation to eventually force all of the British stamp agents to resign and also stop many American merchants from ordering British trade goods.

**1765** - In October, the **Stamp Act Congress** convenes in New York City, with representatives from nine of the colonies. The Congress prepares a **resolution** to be sent to King George III and the English Parliament. The petition requests the repeal of the Stamp Act and the Acts of 1764. The petition asserts that only colonial legislatures can tax colonial residents and that **“taxation without representation”** violates the colonists' basic civil rights.

**1765** - On November 1, most daily business and legal transactions in the colonies cease as the **Stamp Act** goes into effect with nearly all of the colonists refusing to use the stamps. In New York City, violence breaks out as a mob burns the royal governor in effigy, harasses British troops, and then loots houses.

**1765** - In December, British **General Thomas Gage**, commander of all English military forces in America, asks the New York assembly to make colonists comply with the **Quartering Act** and house and supply his troops. Also in December, the **American boycott of English imports** spreads, as over 200 Boston merchants join the movement.

1766 - In January, the New York assembly refuses to completely comply with General Gage's request to enforce the **Quartering Act**.

1766 - In March, King George III signs a bill repealing the Stamp Act after much debate in the English Parliament, which included an appearance by **Ben Franklin** arguing for repeal and warning of a possible revolution in the American colonies if the Stamp Act was enforced by the British military.

1766 - On the same day it repealed the Stamp Act; the English Parliament passes the **Declaratory Act** stating that the British government has total power to “**legislate any laws governing the American colonies in all cases whatsoever.**”

1766 - In April, news of the repeal of the **Stamp Act** results in celebrations in the colonies and a relaxation of the boycott of imported English trade goods.

1766 - In August, violence breaks out in New York between British soldiers and armed colonists, including **Sons of Liberty** members. The violence erupts as a result of the continuing refusal of New York colonists to comply with the **Quartering Act**. In December, the English Crown suspends the New York legislature after once again voting to refuse to comply with the Act.

1767 - In June, The English Parliament passes the **Townshend Revenue Acts**, imposing a new series of taxes on the colonists to offset the costs of administering and protecting the American colonies. Items taxed include imports such as paper, tea, glass, lead and paints. The Act also establishes a colonial board of customs commissioners in Boston. In October, Bostonians decide to reinstate a boycott of English luxury items.

1768 - In February, **Samuel Adams** of Massachusetts writes a **Circular Letter** opposing “**taxation without representation**” and calling for the colonists to unite in their actions against the British government. The letter is sent to assemblies throughout the colonies and also instructs them on the methods the Massachusetts general court is using to oppose the Townshend Acts.

1768 - In May, a British warship armed with 50 cannons sails into Boston harbor after a call for help from custom commissioners who are constantly being harassed by Boston agitators. In June, a customs official is locked up in the cabin of the **Liberty**, a sloop (small sailing vessel) owned by **John Hancock**. Imported wine is then unloaded illegally into Boston without payment of duties. Following this incident, customs officials seize Hancock's sloop. After threats of violence from Bostonians, the customs officials escape to an island off Boston, and then request the intervention of British troops.

1769 - In March, merchants in Philadelphia join the boycott of British trade goods. In May, **George Washington** presents a set of resolutions written by **George Mason** to the Virginia House of Burgesses. The Virginia Resolves oppose “**taxation without representation.**” the British opposition to the circular letters, and British plans to possibly send American agitators to England for trial. Ten days later, the Royal governor of Virginia dissolves the **House of Burgesses**. However, its members meet the next day in a Williamsburg tavern and agree to a boycott of British trade goods, luxury items and slaves.

1770 - Violence erupts in January between members of the **Sons of Liberty** in New York and 40 British soldiers over the posting of broadsheets by the British. Several men are seriously wounded.

**March 5, 1770** - The **Boston Massacre** occurs as a mob harasses British soldiers who then fire their rifles pointblank into the crowd, killing three instantly, mortally wounding two others and injuring six. After the incident, the new Royal Governor of Massachusetts, **Thomas Hutchinson**, at the insistence of Sam Adams, withdraws British troops out of Boston to nearby harbor islands. The captain of the British soldiers, **Thomas Preston**, is then arrested along with eight of his men and charged with murder.

1770 - In April, the **Townshend Acts** are repealed by the British. All taxes on imports into the colonies are eliminated except for tea. Also, the **Quartering Act** is not renewed.

1770 - In October, the trial begins for the British soldiers arrested after the **Boston Massacre**. Colonial lawyers **John Adams and Josiah Quincy** successfully defend Captain Preston and six of his men, who are acquitted. Two other soldiers are found guilty of manslaughter, branded, and then released.

1772 - In June, a British customs schooner, the **Gaspee**, runs aground off Rhode Island in Narragansett Bay. Colonists from Providence row out to the schooner and attack it, send the British crew ashore, then burn the ship. In September, a 500-pound reward is offered by the English Crown for the capture of those colonists, who would then be sent to England for trial. The announcement that they would be sent to England further upsets many American colonists (should be tried in a Colonial court).

1772 - In November, a Boston town meeting assembles, called by Sam Adams. During the meeting, a 21-member **committee of correspondence** is appointed to communicate with other towns and colonies. A few weeks later, the town meeting endorses three radical proclamations asserting the rights of the colonies to self-rule.

1773 - In March, the **Virginia House of Burgesses** appoints an eleven-member committee of correspondence to communicate with the other colonies regarding common complaints against the British. Members of that committee include, **Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry and Richard Henry Lee**. Virginia is followed a few months later by New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut and South Carolina.

1773 - May 10, the **Tea Act** takes effect. It maintains a three-penny per pound import tax on tea arriving in the colonies, which had already been in effect for six years. It also gives the near bankrupt **British East India Company** a virtual tea monopoly by allowing it to sell directly to colonial agents, bypassing any middlemen, thus underselling American merchants. The East India Company had successfully lobbied Parliament for such a measure. In September, Parliament authorizes the company to ship half a million pounds of tea to a group of chosen tea agents.

1773 - In October, colonists hold a mass meeting in Philadelphia in opposition to the tea tax and the monopoly of the East India Company. A committee then forces British tea agents to resign their positions. In November, a town meeting is held in Boston endorsing the actions taken by Philadelphia colonists. Bostonians then try, but fail, to get their British tea agents to resign. A few weeks later, three ships bearing tea sail into Boston harbor.

1773 - November 29/30, two mass meetings occur in Boston over what to do about the tea aboard the three ships now docked in Boston harbor. Colonists decide to send the tea on the ship, Dartmouth, back to England without paying any import duties. The Royal Governor of Massachusetts, Hutchinson, is opposed to this and orders harbor officials not to let the ship sail out of the harbor unless the tea taxes have been paid.

**December 16, 1773** - About 8000 Bostonians gather to hear Sam Adams tell them Royal Governor Hutchinson has repeated his command not to allow the ships out of the harbor until the tea taxes are paid. That night, the **Boston Tea Party** occurs as colonial activists disguise themselves as Mohawk Indians then board the ships and dump all 342 containers of tea into the harbor.

1774 - In March, an angry English Parliament passes the first of a series of **Coercive Acts** (called **Intolerable Acts** by Americans) in response to the rebellion in Massachusetts. The **Boston Port Bill** effectively shuts down all commercial shipping into Boston harbor until Massachusetts pays the taxes owed on the tea dumped in the harbor and also reimburses the East India Company for the loss of the tea.

1774 - May 17-23, colonists in Providence, New York and Philadelphia begin calling for an intercolonial congress to overcome the **Coercive Acts** and discuss a common course of action against the British.

1774 - May 20, The English Parliament enacts the next series of Coercive Acts, which include the **Massachusetts Regulating Act and the Government Act** virtually ending any self-rule by the colonists there. Instead, the English Crown and the Royal governor assume political power formerly exercised by colonists. Also enacted, the **Administration of Justice Act**, which protects royal officials in Massachusetts from being sued in colonial courts, and the **Quebec Act** establishing a centralized government in Canada controlled by the Crown and English Parliament. The Quebec Act greatly upsets American colonists by extending the **southern boundary of Canada** into territories claimed by Massachusetts, Connecticut and Virginia.

1774 - In June, a new version of the 1765 **Quartering Act** is enacted by the English Parliament requiring all of the American colonies to provide housing for British troops in occupied houses and taverns and in unoccupied buildings. In September, Massachusetts Governor Gage seizes that colony's arsenal of weapons at Charlestown.

1774 - September 5 to October 26, the **First Continental Congress** meets in Philadelphia with 56 delegates, representing every colony, except Georgia. Attendants include **Patrick Henry, George Washington, Sam Adams and John Hancock**.

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

1775 - February 1, in Cambridge, Mass., a provincial congress is held during which John Hancock and Joseph Warren begin defensive preparations for a state of war. February 9, the English Parliament declares Massachusetts to be in a state of rebellion. March 23, in Virginia, Patrick Henry delivers a speech against British rule, stating, **"Give me liberty or give me death!"** March 30, the **New England Restraining Act** is endorsed by King George III, requiring New England colonies to trade exclusively with England and also bans fishing in the North Atlantic.

1775- April 19, **Minutemen** and British soldiers clash at **Lexington and Concord** (Massachusetts) "The shot heard 'round the world."

1775- May, The **Second Continental Congress** meets in Philadelphia. The Congress accomplishes several important items in preparation for defense of the colonies if necessary. The Congress creates the **Continental Army** and names **George Washington Commander in Chief**. Still, in May of 1775 the majority of delegates were not seeking independence from Britain. Only radicals like John Adams were of this mindset. In fact, that July, Congress approved the **Olive Branch Petition**, a direct appeal to the king. The American delegates pleaded with George III to attempt peaceful resolution and declared their loyalty to the Crown. The King refused to receive this petition and instead declared the colonies to be in a state of rebellion in August. Insult turned to injury when George ordered the hiring of **Hessian** mercenaries to bring the colonists under control. Americans now felt less and less like their English brethren.

1776- January, **Thomas Paine's Common Sense** is published and distributed throughout the colonies.

1776- July, **The Declaration of Independence** is adopted by the Continental Congress. Aside from declaring colonial independence from Britain, the Declaration provides a rationale for independence by clearly laying out colonial grievances against King George III and asserting their right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." The Declaration is eventually publicly read to crowds throughout the colonies.