



The Causes of the American Revolution

1763-1775



Origins of the American Revolution

- The growth of colonial assemblies and the ability for property owners to vote was dramatically different than the experience in Britain, or anywhere else in Europe at the time. Very few people owned property in Britain, while in the colonies, property ownership was actually quite common.
- There was no hereditary aristocracy in the American colonies as there was in Britain. While a few planters and merchants did amass a tremendous amount of wealth, their wealth paled in comparison to that of English nobles, for example.
- The Enlightenment inspired the colonists to become more educated and fostered a sense of independent thought. The Great Awakening taught the colonists to challenge traditional authority figures and gave them a belief in their own abilities.
- The presence of slavery meant that the colonists understood the value of freedom.

The French and Indian War

- The French and Indian War was a costly global conflict. While Great Britain did emerge victorious, it came at a high price.
- The British won a tremendous amount of territory in North America. It now acquired all of the land west to the Mississippi River, but this led to continued problems with the Native Americans such as Pontiac's Rebellion.
- The continued fear of Native American rebellions led the British to restrict colonial expansion into the West with the Proclamation Boundary Act of 1763. This was the first of a series of acts by the British government which angered the colonists, who defied the act and continued settling west of the boundary line.
- The French and Indian War had to be paid for and while the colonists were proud of their effort and the new land that has been acquired, most of the colonists felt that the British government should allow for it to be settled.

The Impact of the French and Indian War



The Causes of the American Revolution

- In order to pay for the French and Indian War, the British Parliament levied taxes on the colonists through the following acts and tightened their once loose control of colonial trade— a policy that had become known as salutary neglect.
- These acts included the Sugar Act (1764), the Stamp Act (1765), the Quartering Act (1765), the Declaratory Act (1766), the Townshend Acts (1767), the Tea Act (1773), the Quebec Act (1774) and the Coercive Acts (1774).
- While not all of the acts were for the purpose of raising tax revenue, each would anger the colonists and their protests against them, which often turned violent and were met with stiffer British resistance.
- It was the acts of Parliament— a legislative body in England which the colonists felt did not represent them— that led to the growing divide between the colonists and the British government and ultimately to war.

The Stamp Act (1765)

Description: a direct tax on all paper-based items or products, including correspondence and official documents

Colonial Reaction- furious protests break out throughout the colonies

British Reaction- indignation, shock and surprise

Colonial Goals: the colonists voiced in their Stamp Act Congress that Parliament had no right to tax the colonies that this was a job for their elected leaders in their colonial assemblies (taxation without representation); protest groups such as the Sons of Liberty emerge

British Goals: the British needed taxation revenue to pay for the costs of the French and Indian War and for defending the colonial frontier against Native American attacks

What was the result? The British issue the Declaratory Act of 1766, which cited that Parliament had the right to tax the colonies. While the colonists began forming tighter bonds, most of them also became much more organized in their protests against British taxation. This act started the process of changing the relationship between Britain and the colonies.

The Townshend Acts (1767)

Description: an indirect tax on items such as lead, paint, glass and tea.

Colonial Reaction- organized protests followed their passage, a hardening of the colonial resolve against British taxation and the presence of British troops led to the Boston Massacre.

British Reaction- to send more troops, customs collectors and royal officials to the colonies

Colonial Goals: While the colonists became more organized, women also became key players in the protest movements, as they made clothing and other products during the colonial boycotts of British goods.

British Goals: The British create more of a military-based presence in the colonies which leads to even more tensions.

What was the result? While the tensions between the colonists and the British government remained high and the military presence became more pronounced, for the next three years the relationship stood at an uneasy standstill.

The Tea Act (1773)

Description: it was an indirect tax on tea– that was never repealed from the Townshend Acts

Colonial Reaction- While the Boston Tea Party (1773) became the most famous act of organized protest during the period and showcased the colonists resolve to not pay any of the taxes levied by Parliament, other similar tea parties occurred throughout the colonies in their major ports of trade on a smaller scale

British Reaction- Massachusetts comes under military occupation, as the British government issues the Coercive Acts which closed the port of Boston.

Colonial Goals: The colonists create Committees of Correspondence and meet in the First Continental Congress– most wish to appeal to the King (George III) to reconcile with the British government, but the desire for a complete break from Britain is growing.

British Goals:to tighten their control over the colonists and to stamp out the growing colonial resistance

What was the result? The divisive Coercive Acts begin to inch the two sides closer to an armed conflict

The Coercive Acts (1774)

Description: close the port of Boston, halt colonial trade, stifle colonial assemblies and place Massachusetts under military rule

Colonial Reaction- Eventually, the organized colonial resistance hardens its resolve to the point of war, as the first battles of Lexington and Concord open the door to an armed conflict.

British Reaction- Britain considers the colonies in a state of open rebellion, if not open conflict.

Colonial Goals: Even at this stage, most of the colonists still want to reconcile with the British, but after the Battle of Bunker Hill, neither side is in the mood for reconciliation.

British Goals: With the colonies in open revolt, the British begin the preparations to crush the Patriot rebellion.

What was the result? The colonists appeal to King George III– the Olive Branch Petition is rejected. The colonists divide into three groups by 1776, with those who wanted to remain loyal to Britain, those who wanted to reconcile (but wished for some freedom within the British Empire) and the Patriots who wanted full independence. By 1776, the Patriots become the dominant group due to the growth of the conflict.

Thought Questions

- Port cities were centers of commerce and trade. Most of the British royal officials lived and were customs collectors in these cities, which made them the natural place where the protests would begin.
- Colonial unity emerged slowly as the colonists remained unsure of their loyalties. Eventually, three groups emerged (Loyalists, those who wished to reconcile and Patriots), but the open conflict unified most, but, not all of the colonists around the idea of independence.

Thought Items

- The colonists were prosperous (business was important to them), had helped defeat the French and for the most part, were much freer than other Europeans and were, for the most part, Protestant.
- b. There were a number of immigrants who the colonists were uncertain of their loyalty, the colonists saw their quarrel as being with the Parliament and not the king, at least in the beginning. Plus, the fear of squaring off against the most powerful army and navy in the world played a factor in their decision to wait for quite some time before declaring independence.
- c. Until 1763, the colonists had always been able to control their own affairs and for them, this had meant a tremendous level of freedom and prosperity. Many were immigrants or migrants who were enjoying these freedoms for the very first time.