Learning Outcomes

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

LO 1 Explain Britain’s main reasons for attempting to overturn salutary neglect.

LO 2 Explain how the colonists responded to the new acts, and trace the evolutionary process that brought the colonies closer to rebellion.

LO 3 Trace the path to revolution from the Townshend Acts of 1767 to the meeting of the First Continental Congress.

LO 4 Explain how the American Revolution began, and describe the first battles of the conflict.
“The British came to see the colonists as not only resisting the demands of their mother country, but also as getting free armed protection from the world’s most powerful army.”

Getting the colonies organized for the French and Indian War revealed a number of problems for Britain, the most serious of which was the lax enforcement of royal policies in the colonies, the principle labeled salutary neglect (for more on salutary neglect, see Chapter 4). The tradition of salutary neglect meant that the colonies were slower to mobilize when the British demanded adherence to their dictates. It also meant that the colonists paid few taxes. After the expensive French and Indian War, the British came to see the colonists as not only resisting the demands of their mother country, but also as getting free armed protection from the world’s most powerful army. The British, meanwhile, were being taxed pretty stiffly, in part to help secure American economic development. The colonists, the British pointed out, also benefited from having had that army remove the colonists’ most powerful competition (the French) from the land. Should the colonists not pay for these benefits?

As the French and Indian War came to a close in 1763, Britain decided to remedy these problems through a series of reforms that tightened control over the colonies and limited the areas where colonists could settle. The colonists resisted these encroachments, however, for they had become accustomed to the self-rule implied in salutary neglect. In addition, since the Enlightenment, Englishmen had sought to protect their “natural rights” from encroachment by their rulers. It did not matter if the ruler was a king or a parliament: if either institution violated one's rights to life, liberty, and property, all Englishmen felt they could reasonably rebel. From the colonists’ perspective, they hoped that England’s King George would protect them from what they saw as the enmity of a jealous Parliament. The English, on the other hand, saw the colonists as a bunch of headstrong upstarts, demanding rights without assuming the responsibilities inherent to them. As this rhetoric escalated, conflict escalated as well. And it all began during the French and Indian War.

**LO1 British Attempts to Rein in the Colonies**

The British plan to reform colonial relations had three main goals: (1) to tighten control by eliminating absenteeism and corruption of royal officials in the colonies and by limiting smuggling, by which colonists were avoiding taxes, tariffs, and regulations; (2) to limit the areas where colonists could settle; and (3) to raise greater revenue.
Tightening Control

England began its attempts to rein in the colonies in 1760, shortly before the end of the war with France. In that year, the Privy Council, which advised the Crown on various matters, issued the “Orders in Council,” which required absentee officials to occupy their posts instead of collecting the salary and then paying a substitute to occupy the post. The Privy Council also rewarded officers and crews of naval vessels for seizing smuggling ships. There ought to be no more absentee colonial leadership, and smugglers were to be punished for avoiding taxes.

Limiting Settlement

The next major reform was the Proclamation of 1763, which did three things: (1) placed a moratorium on government sale of western lands; (2) put trade with Indians under royal control; and (3) forbade settlement west of the Proclamation Line, which followed the crest of the Appalachians (see Map 4.3). The Proclamation’s thrust was to control British settlement and push the colonists into the newly acquired colonies of Canada and Florida. Royal officials also believed that the policy would protect British manufacturing, because if colonists moved too far from the Atlantic coast, they would develop their own manufacturing industries rather than import British goods.

Many colonists who were merely frustrated by the Orders in Council were infuriated by the Proclamation. After all, in their minds, the French and Indian War had been fought so that the colonists could move farther west. Many colonists had celebrated the British victory, believing that the removal of the French from the region would make westward colonial expansion a possibility. King George’s proclamation directly contradicted this belief. Ultimately, the Proclamation of 1763 was impossible to enforce. Settlers moved across the line anyway, and the royal government lacked the resources to stop them.

Raising Revenue

The final piece of reform was George Grenville’s plan for paying off Britain’s debt. The British had tried to prevent the colonists’ evasion of royal taxes earlier in the 1700s, most notably with the 1751 Writs of Assistance, which gave British officials the right to inspect not only places of work, but also private homes. The colonists fought this infringement on their liberties, although they did not persuade the Crown to reverse the decision. Grenville, who became England’s prime minister in 1763, contributed to these woes. He convinced Parliament to pass several specific acts in the 1760s that significantly increased the Crown’s interference in the economy of its colonies. It was these revenue acts as much as anything else that signaled the end of salutary neglect.

The first of these acts was the Sugar Act of 1764, which was technically a cut in taxes on molasses and sugar brought into the colonies from non-British colonies in the West Indies. But it was troublesome to the colonists because, even though it reduced the assessment on sugar, it increased enforcement of tax collection. Furthermore, the act taxed items besides sugar, including indigo, pimento (allspice), some wines, and coffee. Britain was now evidently looking to the colonies as a source of direct revenue.
at the idea of British soldiers living in their houses, and the colonial assemblies often refused to provide the money required to feed and house these soldiers.

Most disruptive of all, however, was the Stamp Act. Passed by Parliament in 1765, the Stamp Act mandated the use of stamped paper for all official papers, including diplomas, marriage licenses, wills, newspapers, and playing cards. The stamp, embedded in the paper (not a topical stamp), indicated that a tax had been paid on the document. Grenville insisted that revenues from the tax go directly to soldiers protecting the North American colonies. He also mandated that those who avoided using taxed paper would be tried in a Crown-operated vice admiralty court, rather than by a trial of one’s peers. Not only had the Crown declared its intention to raise revenues from the colonists, but it had also indicated it was ready to enforce its actions.

The next intrusive act, the Quartering Act of 1765, required the colonies to feed and house British troops stationed in their territory. Colonists bristled

Many colonists rioted in protest of the passing of the Stamp Act. No one paid more dearly than Thomas Hutchinson, shown here fleeing his house.

British soldiers were harassed by colonial boys.
Beginnings of American Resistance

The Sugar Act was widely unpopular. New Englanders in particular saw that the new regulations threatened their profitable (though now illegal) rum trade. And the Quartering Act seemed wildly intrusive. But the Stamp Act provoked a much stronger backlash than the Sugar Act had, for three reasons (see “The reasons why...” box).

The Stamp Act Congress

To try to force Parliament to repeal the Stamp Act, opponents in Massachusetts initiated a circular letter inviting all of the colonies to send representatives to a congress to discuss resistance to the Stamp Act. This was a radical move; convening an intercolonial congress without British authorization was an illegal act. Nevertheless, the Stamp Act Congress convened in New York City in October 1765, with representatives from nine colonies in attendance.

Boycotts

In addition to these legalistic declarations, there were other, more potent forms of protest. In Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, and smaller ports, merchants signed agreements not to import British goods until the Stamp Act was repealed. In New England, women’s groups called “Daughters of Liberty” organized local boycotts against cloth and tea imported from Britain. These women also held “spin-

Circumstances

Although it began as an act of defiance, the Stamp Act Congress was largely conciliatory to the Crown. It acknowledged that the colonies were “subordinate” to Parliament in matters of administration, but it maintained that the colonists’ rights as Englishmen were infringed upon when Parliament levied taxes without providing the colonists with representation in Parliament. Resolutely noninflammatory, the Stamp Act Congress avoided words like slavery and tyranny, which were common in editorials of the day. Nevertheless, it did declare that taxes had never been imposed on the colonists by anyone other than colonial legislatures. It also differentiated between the Crown, to which the Stamp Act Congress pledged allegiance, and Parliament, to which it acknowledged a grudging “subordination.” In the end, the congress showed the colonists’ increasing tendency to collaborate as a single unit; it also began a pattern of finding fault with Parliament rather than with the king.

The Sugar Act was a direct tax on the colonists (instead of a regulation of trade), and the proceeds were meant to pay the salaries of colonial officials, something the colonists themselves had done in the past. Taxing the colonies so that the Crown could pay these salaries undermined colonial control over royal officials and seemed to indicate that Parliament was limiting colonists’ liberties.
ning bees” that encouraged American women to show loyalty to the resistance by producing homespun cloth. Locally produced clothing was a sign that one was a “patriot,” and colonial women like Abigail Adams and Deborah Sampson Franklin were the key to making it happen.

The boycott proved effective, especially in New York, where boycotters shut down the port. British exports to the colonies declined, and the opposition party in Parliament began to advocate repealing the Stamp Act. The boycotts were also meaningful because simple participation in a colonywide boycott radicalized the population, forcing them to choose sides. This was becoming larger than a protest of elite lawyers. The very clothes that people wore became a form of protest.

**Rioting**

Although the Stamp Act Congress and boycotts proved fruitful, rioting proved to be the most effective means of protest. To coordinate the riots, several colonists formed groups called the Sons of Liberty. Typically led by men of wealth and high social standing (such as Samuel Adams), the Sons of Liberty served as leaders in organizing protests and intimidating stamp officials. Mobs in Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island, and South Carolina burned the homes of stamp officials and hanged effigies of tax collectors, occasionally even tarring and feathering them. As a result of this intimidation, all known stamp officials resigned before the Stamp Act went into effect on November 1, 1765. When the Crown offered the positions to others, they refused the jobs. Furthermore, when the stamps and stamped paper arrived in America, colonists sent them back to England, destroyed them, or locked them away.

**Ideological Opposition**

In addition to these physical forms of protest, several colonial assemblies sent Parliament written protests, called “resolves.” The wording of the resolves was usually influenced by British political pamphlets that circulated at the time. Both the pamphlets and the resolves are significant because they articulated the ideas of liberty that positioned the colonists against Britain all the way to the Revolution.

The central drafters of the pamphlets called themselves Radical Whigs (which referred to the opposition party in England, the Whigs). Radical Whigs in England cast a suspicious eye on any infringement of personal liberties, and Radical Whigs in colonial America, such as James Otis of Massachusetts, argued that, because the colonists were not represented in Parliament, Parliament had no authority to tax them. These men coined the phrase “no taxation without representation.” The Radical Whigs claimed that the principle that taxation required representation had precedent in British law (in the Magna Carta) and was one of the basic English liberties.
In Virginia, Patrick Henry followed this same line of reasoning. He argued that the Stamp Act was unconstitutional because only the Virginia legislature had the authority to tax Virginians. He introduced a series of Resolutions Against the Stamp Act to the Virginia Legislature and asserted that anyone who supported the Stamp Act was an enemy to Virginia. Several of his Resolutions were passed by the Burgesses and forwarded to Parliament, indicating the level of radicalization provoked by the Stamp Act.

John Adams of Massachusetts framed another argument against Parliament’s right to tax the colonists. In his Instructions of the Town of Braintree to Their Representative, Adams argued that allowing Parliament to tax the colonists without their consent threatened the sanctity of private property and personal liberty. If Parliament could seize colonists’ property, Adams argued, then colonists were dependents of Parliament and not free men. Furthermore, Adams railed against Parliament for creating the specific courts (called vice admiralty courts) that denied the colonists the right to a trial by a jury of one’s peers. More than anything else, Adams argued, the colonists wanted liberty; they did not want to become slaves to the whim of a Parliament over which the colonists had no control.

Benjamin Franklin and Daniel Dulany (a celebrated Maryland attorney) promoted another argument against Parliament’s right to tax the colonists. They said, was vital to Parliamentary legitimacy that allowing Parliament to tax the colonists without their consent threatened the sanctity of private property and personal liberty. If Parliament could seize colonists’ property, Franklin argued, then colonists were dependents of Parliament and not free men. Furthermore, Franklin railed against Parliament for creating the specific courts (called vice admiralty courts) that denied the colonists the right to a trial by a jury of one’s peers. More than anything else, Franklin argued, the colonists wanted liberty; they did not want to become slaves to the whim of a Parliament over which the colonists had no control.

Franklin feared that internal legislation threatened private property. Both the Crown and many colonists questioned the validity of this distinction between the two forms of taxation. Although this was a milder argument than that of Adams, who rejected all taxes, it also demonstrated strong opposition to the Stamp Act.

**Opposition to the Opposition**

Not all colonists agreed with these dissenters. In fact, a large portion of colonists did not care one way or another about the Stamp Act. Meanwhile, some, such as James Otis, opposed the Stamp Act and resistance to it, favoring instead to advocate for a Parliamentary repeal. Still others, such as Lieutenant-Governor Thomas Hutchinson of Massachusetts, defended the Stamp Act as a fair policy. Hutchinson personally disliked the Stamp Act but believed that, because Parliament was the supreme legislative body in the Empire, everything it did was constitutional. Hutchinson said that no matter how inconvenient the Stamp Act was, duty and law required obedience. Hutchinson became a focal point of the rioters, who viewed him as a stooge of the Crown. They sent Hutchinson fleeing, and a mob eventually pulled the roof off his house and trashed all of his possessions. In 1765, resentments were heating up.

In Britain, few people accepted any of the colonists’ arguments. Since they shouldered a heavy tax burden already, most of them felt that the colonists were asking for a better deal than British subjects living in the mother country received. The British regarded the colonists’ arguments as mere rationalizations to avoid paying taxes.

Members of Parliament also rejected the opposition to the Stamp Act. They argued the dubious point that the House of Commons represented the interests of all the king’s subjects, wherever they might reside. This theory of **virtual representation**, they said, was vital to Parliamentary legitimacy because many regions within England were not directly represented in Parliament. In addition, in some areas that were represented in the House of Commons, the people had no say in who represented them. Instead, the local nobility or the king selected their representative. King George himself owned the right to appoint more than fifty members to the House of Commons—more than 10 percent of the entire body. Under this theory, Parliament rejected the colonists’ demand for actual or deputy representation.
Repeal of the Stamp Act

A trade recession that gripped the British economy in late 1765 ended the bitter dispute. With a downturn in the economy, the king withdrew his tacit support of the Stamp Act for fear that the opposition to it would damage revenues too much. His withdrawal of support doomed the Stamp Act, and Parliament eventually repealed it. In repealing the act, however, Parliament stated that it was yielding not to the colonists’ demands, but to the king’s. To make this clear, on the same day it repealed the Stamp Act, Parliament passed the Declaratory Act, which affirmed its authority to legislate for the colonies “in all cases whatsoever.” Although it was largely symbolic, the Declaratory Act became one of the nonnegotiable claims that Parliament was unwilling to relinquish throughout the struggle. Its leaders would rather go to war than have Parliament lose authority.

News of the Declaratory Act perplexed American leaders, leaving them to wonder whether Parliament had accepted the distinction between internal and external taxation. If the distinction was not accepted, the Declaratory Act became a major move by Parliament to take away the Americans’ self-government and self-rule. The Townshend Acts of 1767

Townshend confirmed the colonists’ worst fears in the summer of 1767, when he steered new taxes through Parliament. Townshend considered the colonists’ distinction between internal and external taxes invalid, but he saw how he could use it to his advantage. He intended to raise revenue with new, external duties on the goods that the colonists imported from Britain. The resulting Townshend Acts laid duties on glass, lead for paint, tea, paper, and a handful of other items.

Opposition

Opposition to the Townshend Acts followed the pattern of the Stamp Act opposition—although...
more slowly, largely because of internal splits among merchants. But many colonists eventually began to boycott British goods again. Women stopped wearing silks and satins or serving tea and wine, making fashionable what they saw as a modest, patriotic life. By 1769 the boycotts were effective in every colony, having been spread by colonial newspapers, which shared information and important essays.

One essay, published in all but four colonial newspapers, offered a distinctive ideological protest to the Townshend Acts. Posing as a simple country gentleman resisting a corrupt government, the prominent lawyer John Dickinson wrote a series of essays called Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania—published in both Britain and America. Dickinson explained that the colonies had tolerated earlier duties because they accepted the idea that Parliament should regulate trade. The purpose of the Townshend duties, however, was not regulation, but revenue. Dickinson considered this unconstitutional. This was yet another argument against Britain’s attempts to overturn salutary neglect.

The Boston Massacre

Opposition to the Townshend Acts triggered rioting as well. Radicals in the Massachusetts legislature drafted a circular letter rejecting the Townshend Acts that was sent to all the colonies. Written primarily by Samuel Adams, the letter urged all merchants to enforce the boycott. In one case, colonist John Hancock’s sloop Liberty arrived in port in Boston with a cargo of wine. Colonists held the customs official hostage as the wine was unloaded without payment of the required duties. Similar protests followed in other towns. In response, the British sent troops to restore order, and by 1770 British troops were quartered in New York, Boston, and other major towns. The conflict was growing increasingly tense.

On March 5, 1770, a crowd of Boston rebels began throwing snowballs, oyster shells, and other debris at a British sentry in front of the Customs House, prompting the British captain to order more guards outside. When a stick hit one of the soldiers, he fell, and someone shouted, “Fire!” prompting a British guard to shoot into the crowd. Hearing the report, other soldiers shot into the crowd, and in the end, five colonists lay dead and six were wounded. The colonists called this the Boston Massacre. Nine British soldiers were tried for the act, and two were convicted of manslaughter (they were all defended by the future president John Adams). The “Massacre” served as important propaganda for the colonial agitators, despite the fact that the English had followed the rule of law and that most of the soldiers were found innocent in a colonial court of law. Furthermore, responses to the “Boston Massacre” sparked a vigorous debate within the colonies about how far rebellion should go. Many colonists remained on the side of the soldiers.

Repeal

The same day as the Boston Massacre, Parliament repealed most provisions of the Townshend Acts. But, as a symbol of its continued control, it left the
tax on tea in place; the colonists accepted the tea tax and dropped their boycott, claiming victory in the conflict.

But this sort of compromise meant that Parliament and the rebelling colonists had not reached a clear agreement, leaving the situation ripe for future conflicts. For the next several years, no major issue emerged to galvanize colonial opposition, lulling many in Britain and in the colonies into the belief that the crisis was over. This was a relief to the Crown, as well as to the many colonists who were content with the colonies' relationship to the royal government. Furthermore, royal officials in America did their best to foster this pacified view, asserting that subordination of the colonies had finally been achieved. This, however, was merely the surface view.

Local Conflicts, 1770–1773

If unified colonial opposition declined between 1770 and 1773, local conflicts continued, demonstrating that colonists remained assertive and that royal control was tenuous.

The Gaspée Incident

The most noteworthy local conflict was the Gaspée incident. In Rhode Island, colonists from Providence boarded and burned an English naval vessel, the Gaspée, that had run aground while in pursuit of a colonial ship accused of smuggling. This was quite a radical move. Britain assembled a royal commission of British officials in America to identify the perpetrators and remand them to England for trial. The local commission, however, shortly became the target of colonial protest. Committees of correspondence, or organized groups of letter writers, coordinated opposition to the extradition of the suspects, and, as a result, the perpetrators of the Gaspée incident were never identified or tried.

Committees of Correspondence

Massachusetts’s colonists also continued their resistance to royal policies. In 1772, several Bostonians set up a committee of correspondence to inform other Massachusetts towns and other colonies of their grievances, “as Men, as Christians, and as Subjects.” This organization aimed to stir up dissent and unite the colonists in their opposition. Several other colonists from towns outside of Boston joined these committees, creating a method for the relatively quick transmission of information between the colonies. As letters circulated from one committee to the next, they passed along information, helping to unify colonial opposition to the Crown.

Choosing Sides

Although local opposition to Crown policies was significant between 1770 and 1773, it was not as widespread as the protests that emerged in response to the Stamp Act or the Townshend Acts. And, although some colonial leaders tried to transform local concerns into colonywide grievances, most issues never achieved more than local prominence, mainly because most colonists were reluctant to engage in a full-on confrontation with the Crown.

Within cities like Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, wealthy people remained mostly supportive of the Crown, while artisans and merchants, who had been financially stung by several economic acts passed by the Crown, were the most avid patriots. Many people did not favor conflict and could not imagine rebellion. New England’s slaves, meanwhile, attempted to use the language of political freedom to their benefit, and in 1773 and 1774 they petitioned the colonial government for their freedom. When the legislature passed a bill on their behalf, the royal governor vetoed it. Regardless, the slaves made it clear that whoever promised to free them would earn their support.

In the Southern Colonies and the Chesapeake, many of the most powerful families remained supportive of the Crown, whose policies had enriched them in the first place. Meanwhile, those living in rural areas were more supportive of the rebels, mainly because they felt slighted by the meager amount of self-rule that the colonial elite granted them. These internal cleavages would persist through the Revolutionary War, although between

Women were the key players in reducing tea consumption, while men were the staunchest advocates of using violent means.
In 1773, Parliament passed the Tea Act. The act was designed not to anger the colonists, but to give the East India Company a monopoly on the sale of tea to North America (the company was badly in debt and had influence in Parliament).

**Provisions of the Act**

The Tea Act had three provisions: (1) it lowered the colonists’ duty on tea; (2) it granted the East India Company the monopoly; and (3) it appointed royal agents who were to pay the duty in England and then sell the tea to the colonists. This last provision meant that colonial merchants could no longer sell tea. Prior to the Tea Act, most colonists had bought smuggled Dutch tea because it was cheaper than the English variety. The Tea Act was designed to bring British tea to the colonies at a lower price, thus undercutting the illegal Dutch trade. Because tea was the most common beverage consumed by the colonists, Parliament and the East India Company hoped that the colonies would be pleased with the measure and buy more tea.

**Colonial Response**

This was not the case, for two reasons. Naturally, powerful colonial tea merchants were upset at losing the business. In addition, the timing of the act meant that many colonists interpreted it as yet another move to establish Parliament’s authority. Radical Whigs pointed out that until 1773 the duty on tea had been paid in Britain. But now, under the Tea Act, the duty would be collected from British agents who had collected the revenue from the Americans. Instead of a tax laid in England and collected in England, it was a tax laid in England and collected in America.

The colonists responded as they had before, only more violently. They published protests and pressured anyone concerned with the enforcement of the law to send tea back to Britain. They forged a campaign of intimidation by threatening anyone who tried to enforce the Act. In short, the colonists planned to nullify the Tea Act by refusing to comply with it. Women were the key players in reducing tea consumption, while men were the staunchest advocates of using violent means.

**The Boston Tea Party**

Most of the tea-bearing ships that encountered resistance simply returned to England. But in Boston, the tea issue was especially sensitive because Governor Thomas Hutchinson’s son was one of the major consignees, and Hutchinson was determined to support his son’s enterprise. In addition, Hutchinson viewed the Tea Act as a chance to demonstrate his fidelity to the Crown in the face of the most rebellious colony in North America. Thus, when Bostonians pressed to have the tea returned to England, Hutchinson said that was fine, so long as they paid the tax on the tea first.

The rebelling colonists refused, and in this impasse, the ship simply sat in Boston Harbor. The deadlock could not last; by law, the tax had to be paid within twenty days, which, in this case, meant it had to be paid by December 17, 1773. Governor Hutchinson vowed to have the tea unloaded and the tax paid on the day of the deadline. To prevent this, on the night of December 16, an organized squad of roughly sixty colonists dressed as Mohawk Indians boarded the ship and dumped the entire cargo—342 chests of tea—into Boston Harbor. Historians are unsure why they chose that particular disguise to commit their act of protest. Perhaps it was to distinguish themselves from others? Perhaps costumes promoted unity? Perhaps Native Americans symbolized both savagery and radical democracy, freed from the constraints of British “civilization”?
For Boston radicals like the Sons of Liberty, the Boston Tea Party was momentous. Bostonians were proud that they had made a powerful strike against the Crown, and they noted that discipline among their ranks was maintained. Beyond the tea, the squad did not commit vandalism or destroy any other property.

But they also recognized that they had pushed the conflict to a new level. After the destruction of British property, colonists could only speculate on how the British government would react to this new provocation. Refraining from buying tea was essentially a passive protest; destroying an entire ship’s worth was something altogether different.

The Coercive and Quebec Acts, 1774

Parliament’s response came quickly. A few members of Parliament argued that the Tea Party’s ringleaders should be arrested. The majority disagreed, recalling the failure of the government to bring to trial the perpetrators of the Gaspée incident. To avoid the difficulties of prosecuting the individual Bostonians, Parliament opted to pass punitive legislation—the so-called Coercive Acts—in 1774.

The Coercive Acts

The laws that came to be called the Coercive Acts actually comprised four separate acts, most of which attempted to punish Massachusetts for the Tea Party. Parliament thought it could attack Massachusetts and thus divide the colonists in order to reconquer them. The four acts were (1) the Boston Port Act, which closed Boston’s harbor until the town paid for the destroyed tea; (2) the Massachusetts Government Act, which terminated most self-government in the colony; (3) the Administration of Justice Act, which dictated that any British official charged with a capital offense in the colonies could be tried in Great Britain (this issue had arisen after the trials that resulted from the Boston Massacre); and (4) the Quartering Act, which applied to all the colonies and allowed the British Army to house troops wherever necessary, including private buildings.

The Quebec Act

A fifth act followed the same year. The Quebec Act straightened out several legal issues in Canada but...
also did two other things: (1) it guaranteed French Canadians the right to practice Roman Catholicism, which appalled the colonists, especially in New England, where almost everyone was a Protestant unaccustomed to accommodating other religions; and (2) it declared that much of England’s holdings across the Proclamation Line of 1763 (everything west of the Appalachian Mountains) would be governed from Quebec. The colonists were infuriated that the Crown was governing this land from the north rather than the east. After all, many colonists felt they had fought for possession of this land during the French and Indian War. The colonists’ widespread anti-Catholicism and their land lust led them to link the Quebec Act and the Coercive Acts, referring to them together as Intolerable Acts.

Colonial Response

The various acts were intended to break the colonists’ spirit, to dissolve colonial unity, and to isolate Massachusetts. But the actual consequences were different. At the most basic level, Bostonians refused to pay the penalties required by the Port Act. A small number of pro-British merchants offered to pay the fines on the city’s behalf, but a group of rebellious colonists threatened them, too. The rejection of the offer was a strong measure of the colonists’ convictions because the port closure inflicted considerable suffering on the people who depended on trade to maintain their economic well-being.

Through committees of correspondence, colonists everywhere heard of Massachusetts’s plight. Virginia, South Carolina, and Connecticut sent food. Thus, rather than isolating Massachusetts, the acts unified the colonies.

The First Continental Congress

This colonial unity is best seen in the meeting of the First Continental Congress. In May 1774, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, New York, and Virginia called for an intercolony congress to address the growing crisis (doing so without consent from the Crown, which was still illegal). In September, delegates from twelve colonies met in the First Continental Congress at Philadelphia to consider the American response to the Coercive Acts. Only Georgia was absent, principally because Creek Indians were actively fighting Georgians over western expansion, and the colonists there felt they needed British defensive support.

The delegates considered several plans of action. Ultimately, the congress created the Continental Association, which supervised a boycott of British trade. The association was prefaced with a “Declaration of Rights” that asserted the natural-rights foundation of the colonists’ resistance, affirming the trio of natural rights put forward by John Locke—“life, liberty, and property.” This was not yet independence, though. The delegates to the first Continental Congress tried to maintain a balance between supporting colonists’ rights and affirming the role of the Crown. In 1774 they were pursuing autonomy, not independence. They agreed to meet again the next year.

LO4 The Shot Heard ’Round the World

Meanwhile, back in Boston, local militias were preparing for battle. Parliament, these men felt, had pushed far enough; they would no longer tolerate more infringements on their liberties. Furthermore, who knew what the Crown would do next to plague their economic existence? Indeed, by mid-1774 colonists in western Massachusetts had essentially taken over the towns and evicted British officials. Like many colonists, they really did believe the British were coming to take away their freedoms.

Militia Preparations

To ready themselves for battle, Massachusetts colonists stockpiled guns in several locations outside Boston, while militia groups drilled defiantly in town squares. They also developed a “Provincial Congress” that assumed the role of a colonial government outside the Crown. Other Massachusetts counties organized conventions to unify the resistance. In some areas, colonists opposed the Administration of Justice Act by closing courts rather than permitting the governor’s appointed judges to sit.

Other colonies followed Massachusetts’s lead, organizing their own provincial congresses, committees, and conventions. Patriots near urban centers formed committees of correspondence to circulate news, information, and instructions throughout the colonies. Although not all colonists were so enthusi-
astic for war, especially outside the cities that were affected most by Britain’s policies, there was a growing sense that the conflict between Britain and its North American colonies might result in a full-scale rebellion.

Britain’s Response to the Preparations

The colonists’ military preparedness became evident to the British in September 1774, when Massachusetts’ patriots responded to false rumors that the royal governor had ordered the British Army to seize colonial gunpowder and that British troops had fired on the people of Boston. Roughly 3,000 colonists responded to the “Powder Alarm” by converging on Boston, a city of approximately 15,000 inhabitants. Many more patriots were on the road to Boston when news came that the rumors were untrue. The governor, Thomas Gage, realized that his army was outnumbered and that the colonists were prepared to actually fight. In response, he ordered the construction of fortifications across the small strip of land that connected Boston to the mainland (see Map 5.1) and asked Parliament for 20,000 more British troops.

Lexington and Concord

By the spring of 1775, tensions were at a fever pitch. Feeling threatened, the British secretary of state pressured Gage to curb the colonists’ military planning. So, in April 1775, Gage sent troops to the town of Concord, about 20 miles northwest of Boston, to capture the colonial military supplies hidden there and to arrest the patriot leaders John Hancock and Samuel Adams.

The British soldiers were thus armed and resolute when they left Boston on April 18, 1775. Despite the soldiers’ efforts to move quietly, Boston patriots detected the troop movement and sent Paul Revere, William Dawes, and Samuel Prescott on horseback to alert the colonists in the countryside between Boston and Concord (only Prescott made it all the way to Concord; the others were captured on the way). On the morning of April 19, a militia assembled in Lexington to halt the British before they reached Concord. The British, still the most powerful army in the world at the time, did not back down. The American militia captain ordered his men (called “Minutemen” because they supposedly were ready on a minute’s notice) to retreat after the much stronger British forces ordered them to disperse. As some of the rebelling colonists retreated, some fired a shot (both sides later claimed the other fired first), and the British soldiers began firing on the militia. The colonists suffered eighteen casualties (eight killed and ten wounded), while the British suffered only one, after this, the supposed “shot heard ‘round the world.”

After the British rout of the Minutemen, the British marched to Concord, but by the time they arrived, Hancock and Adams had fled, and it is uncertain whether the cautious British would have exacerbated the already explosive situation by carrying out the capture of these two prominent colonists. Instead, when they took their position at one end of the North Bridge in Concord, they were met by another armed militia that positioned itself at the opposite end of the bridge. The militia fired on the British troops and forced them to alter their route back to Boston. This was the first time Americans had fired against the British Army (colloquially referred to as the Redcoats) in a formal confrontation. It was also the first time the Redcoats had been forced to retreat in the face of an American enemy.

The Minutemen made the Redcoats’ return to Boston a nightmare. Militiamen gathered from surrounding towns to pursue the British the entire way, firing from behind stone walls and trees. The British suffered heavy casualties and, once in Boston, found themselves besieged by thousands more militiamen. Over the course of the day, the Americans suffered 95 casualties, while the British suffered 273, including 73 dead. This was a marked escalation of the colonial conflict; for the first time, Americans had killed British soldiers in battle.

Colonial Response to Lexington and Concord

Following the battles of Lexington and Concord, the colonists had to determine what their best response might be. Had an all-out war begun? What about the many colonists who did not support the rebellion?

On May 10, 1775, the Second Continental Congress gathered in Philadelphia to answer this question. The congress enacted several policies,
including acknowledging the militia companies surrounding Boston as the core of a new “Continental Army” and appointing as its general a Virginian, George Washington. (The selection of a Virginian was meant to balance the predominance of Massachusetts militiamen in the army, thus showing colonial unity.) The Second Continental Congress passed resolutions supporting war, which included a sharp rejection of all authority under the king in America. It also adopted the “Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms.” These were bold, brave actions, although no one was sure whether this was a battle over grievances against Parliament or one with a goal of independence.

Regardless, without formally declaring the colonies’ independence, the Continental Congress was beginning to behave more like the government of an independent nation than that of a territory within an empire. The congress remained cautious about the word independence, though, and in July 1775 it approved the “Olive Branch Petition,” written by John Dickinson, which declared that the colonists were still loyal to King George III and implored the king to seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The king ignored the petition, viewing the colonists as insubordinate subjects of the Crown.

**The Battle of Bunker Hill**

Within weeks, the hesitancy shown at the Second Continental Congress vanished. Local battles inspired this eagerness, especially the biggest battle, which occurred in Boston. After Lexington and Concord, thousands of men from throughout the colonies joined the Minutemen around Boston to besiege the British military. On June 17, 1775, the British Army sent troops across the Charles River to capture the colonists’ cannons located on Breed’s Hill, which overlooked Boston and was connected to nearby Bunker Hill by a saddle of land. The
small conflicts spread across the land. Second, it convinced Britain that many colonists, not just a handful of troublemakers, were part of the rebellion. Because of this realization, Parliament issued the American Prohibitory Act, which declared the colonies to be “in open rebellion,” forbade commerce with the colonies by blockading their ports, and made colonial ships and their cargo subject to seizure as if they were the property “of open enemies.” Now that Parliament had declared the colonies to be in rebellion, this meant that any leaders who were caught could be tried for treason and executed. This raised the stakes dramatically. A rebellion was turning into a revolution. What had begun in the early 1760s as the Crown’s attempt to tighten control over its North American colonies had led those colonies to unite in order to claim their independence.

And in the end . . .

When news of the Battle of Bunker Hill spread through the colonies and reached Britain, it had two key effects. First, it prompted thousands of additional colonists to join the opposition to Britain, as

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<td>June 17, 1775</td>
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What else was happening . . .

1769 Shoelaces are invented in England.
1772 Joseph Priestley invents soda water.
1773 Seamstress Betsy Ross and her husband, John, begin renting the Philadelphia house where she will sew the first American flag.
1774 Empress Catherine II’s Russian troops defeat Turkey, adding the Southern Ukraine, the Northern Caucasus, and Crimea to the Russian Empire.