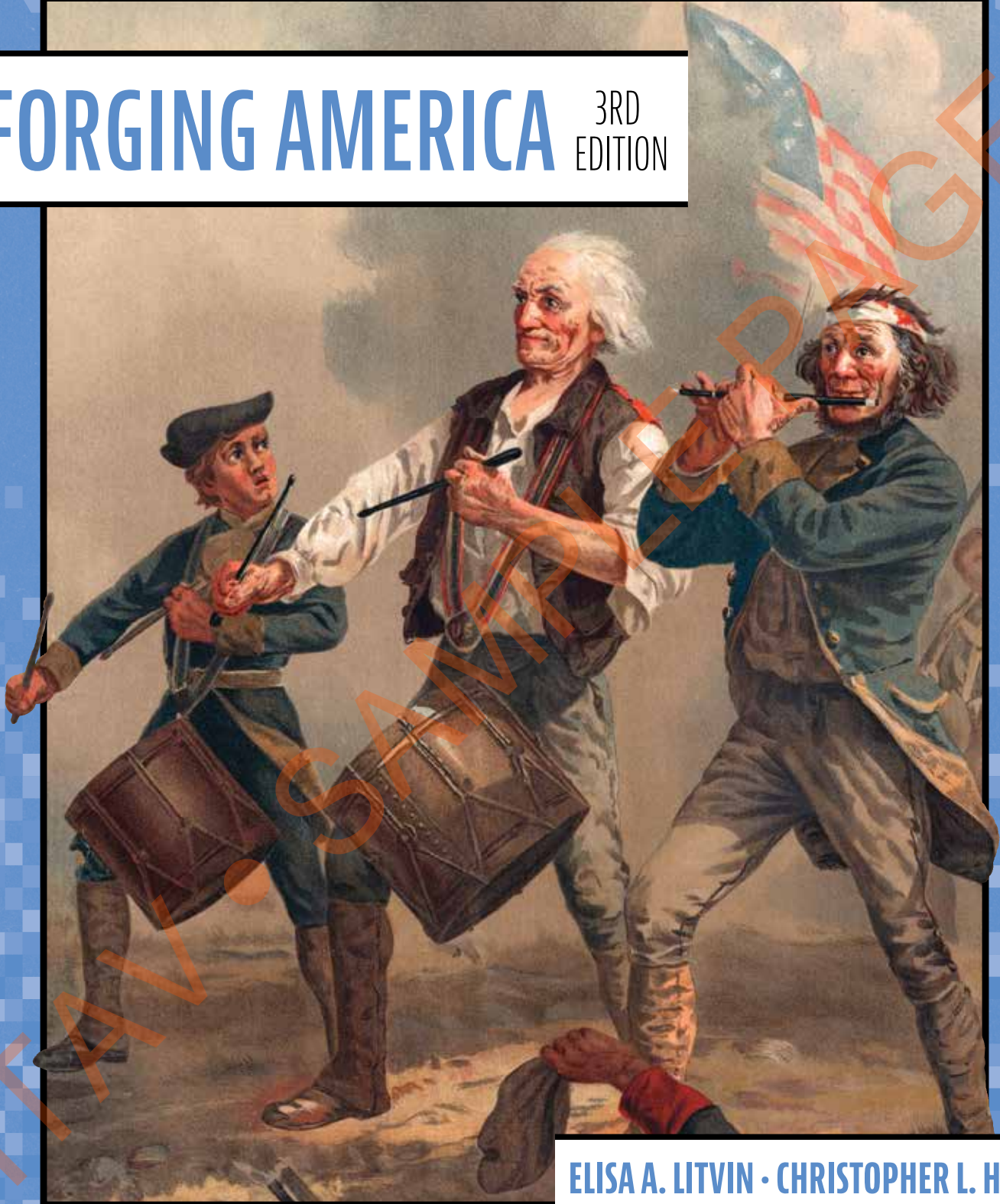


REVOLUTIONS

FORGING AMERICA

3RD
EDITION



ELISA A. LITVIN • CHRISTOPHER L. HART
DEBORAH ERIKSON • LAUREN PERFECT

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REVOLUTIONS—AN INTRODUCTION

A study of revolutions is important because it allows us to look at how critical moments in history alter the function of nations and their societies, and the lives of generations of people. They allow us to examine issues of power—who has it and who doesn’t—and to explore what happens when there is a radical shift in power.

STUDYING REVOLUTIONS

The study of Revolutions is based on the understanding that revolutions ‘represent a great rupture in time and are a major turning point in the collapse and destruction of an existing political order which results in extensive change to society.’¹ Often revolutions involve a transfer of power from the oppressor to the oppressed, from the privileged to the less privileged. In some instances, a revolution is a response to hierarchical authority and its inequalities, while in others a revolution can be a response to colonial oppression.

Typically, revolutions are driven by strong ideological beliefs about how society should operate. Central to these beliefs are ideas about equality and control, and how a government should balance these. It is important to note that while revolutions are considered primarily political events, there are also significant economic, social and cultural factors that need to be considered. In the context of Revolutions, these are examined through the lens of key historical thinking concepts.

WHAT IS A REVOLUTION?

The term ‘revolution’ is used widely and often loosely. Consider for example, how advertisers frequently refer to products as ‘revolutionary’ to generate a sense of something being special or beneficial or even necessary. Understanding what a revolution is—and what it is not—is crucial in a study of Revolutions. This is no easy feat as sometimes the term ‘revolution’ is used by different people to mean different things. This is evident when we consider the differences between a revolution and other forms of conflict such as a rebellion, a revolt or a coup, and the ways in which these terms are sometimes randomly assigned to different events.

THE CAUSES OF REVOLUTION

The causes of revolution are often complex and overlapping. It can be useful to consider the long-term and short-term **causes**, and the **triggers**, of revolution. If you consider the metaphor of a revolution as a fire, the descriptions to the right outline the role of each of these.

The path towards revolution is never a smooth one. Rarely do you see revolutionary tension steadily rise; rather it ebbs and flows as those in power attempt to put an end to discontent (through a combination of repression and reform). This results in periods of escalation and de-escalation of revolutionary beliefs and action. Identifying a series of crisis points in the lead up to revolution can help you more clearly see this process.

Of course, one of the challenges in a study of Revolutions is to evaluate the various factors that cause revolution. How are these factors related? Are some factors more significant than others? To what extent? Does this change over time? Why?

THE CONSEQUENCES OF REVOLUTION

Seizing power is only one of the hurdles a revolutionary party or movement faces. All too often, the threat of further revolution or counter-revolution drives the new government’s decisions and actions. Revolutionary ideals may be compromised. Arguably, the consequences of revolution can be unintended—this study asks you to identify the intended and unintended effects of revolution and evaluate how these impacted different groups of people at the time. You should compare the perspectives of people within and between groups and evaluate the positive and negative consequences of living in the ‘new society’.

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

Ultimately, the concepts of cause and consequence are used to understand not just the dynamics of a revolution but also to analyse the extent to which revolution resulted in change. The rhetoric of revolutionary leaders, parties and movements is often utopian—they promise a better life with greater freedom, less hierarchical control and more equality—but do they deliver? Sometimes the new regime ends up every bit (or even more) repressive than the regime it supplanted.

In comparing the political, economic and social dimensions of life in the ‘old’ and ‘new’ societies, this course of study invites an appraisal of the changes and continuities a revolution brought to society. What changes were evident? Were they positive or negative? What stayed the same (continued)? Why? Did life change for all groups in society or just for some? How do we know?

LONG-TERM CAUSES

The sources of fuel needed to stage a revolution are long-held political, economic, social and cultural structures, often based on issues of equality and control. These act to interrupt the status quo—much like chopping down a tree interrupts the ecology of a forest system.



SHORT-TERM CAUSES

Unresolved and growing over time, these structures generate grievances and resentments that metaphorically become the fuel for the revolutionary fire.



TRIGGERS

The spark that ignites a revolution can be planned or unplanned; it can be an **event** or the actions, or inactions, of an **individual** or a group. Regardless, the trigger often galvanises revolutionary **movements** into action. Sometimes that action involves a mass-movement, whilst at others it offers an opportunity that smaller groups can utilise to seize power.



SIGNIFICANCE

As you examine the causes and consequences of revolution, and the resultant changes and continuities, Revolutions also asks you to evaluate the relative significance of these. Were some movements, ideas, individuals and events more significant than others? Why/Why not? When assessing significance, consider:

Scale	How many people did it affect?
Duration	How long did it last?
Profundity (how profound something is)	What intensity of change did it produce? Deep impact or surface-level change?

PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS

Significance is a relative term. One must always ask—significant to whom? In answering this, consideration must be given to:

- the **perspectives** and experiences of different groups of people at the time. Were certain movements, ideas, individuals and events seen as more significant by certain groups? Why/why not?
- the **interpretations** of others (often historians) after the time. Have views of significance changed? Why/why not?

Ultimately, the complexities and moral dilemmas found in the study of revolutions makes for rewarding analysis and evaluation. As a student of Revolutions it is your job to grapple with these concepts and construct your own evidence-based historical arguments.

written by Catherine Hart

¹ VCAA, VCE History Study Design 2022–2026.

SECTION A

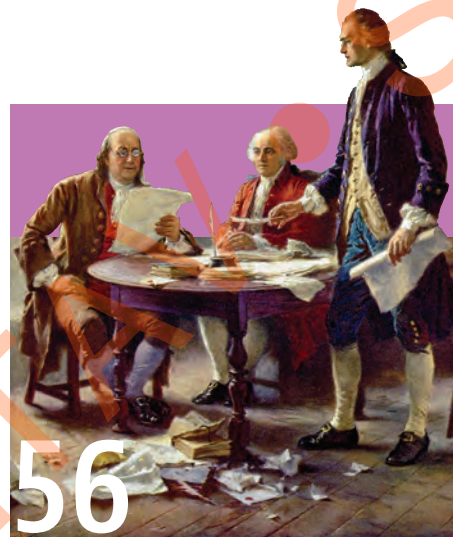
CAUSES OF REVOLUTION

- What were the significant causes of revolution?
- How did the actions of popular movements and particular individuals contribute to triggering a revolution?
- To what extent did social tensions and ideological conflicts contribute to the outbreak of revolution?¹



'If this be treason, make the most of it!'

Patrick Henry on opposing the Stamp Act



Number of men who signed the Declaration of Independence

THE 'BOSTON TEA PARTY'

(41,730 kg)

340

CHESTS

AMOUNT OF
TEA
DESTROYED

WORTH £9659
equivalent to
AUD\$2.2m today

'Liberty, once lost, is lost forever.'

John Adams,
letter to
Abigail Adams,
17 July 1775



'The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind.'

Thomas Paine,
Common Sense

BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL

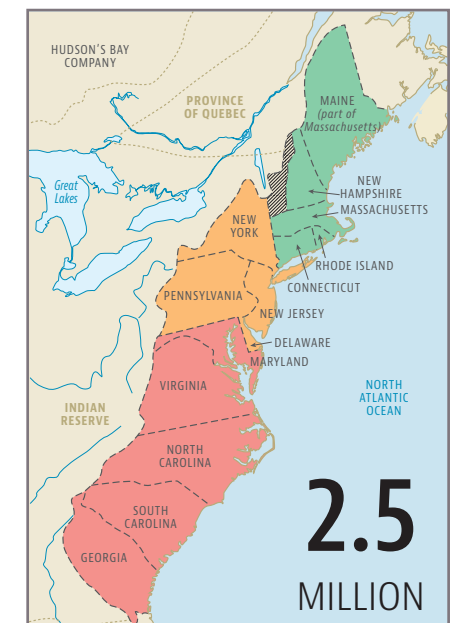
2000
BRITISH
SOLDIERS

1054 KILLED
OR WOUNDED



400 KILLED
OR WOUNDED

3200
AMERICAN
SOLDIERS



Estimated population of the 13 colonies in 1776

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.'

¹ Extract from the VCE History Revolutions Study Design (2022–2026) © VCAA, reproduced by permission.

TIMELINE

PRE-1754



1607

14 MAY 1607
English settlers land on a swampy strip of land in Jamestown and establish the first lasting British outpost in North America. Seventeen years later it becomes the colony of Virginia

1620

9 NOVEMBER 1620
Puritan settlers calling themselves ‘Pilgrims’ land their ship *Mayflower* at Plymouth, Massachusetts. On arrival they sign the ‘Mayflower Compact’, agreeing to set up a local government



1688

NOVEMBER 1688
The outbreak of King William’s War, a nine-year conflict between England and France, fought in both Europe and North America. It would be the first of five Anglo-French wars over the next 100 years

1733

17 MAY 1733
Westminster passes the Molasses Act to protect British sugar plantations in the West Indies. A heavy duty is added to any sugar or molasses purchased from the French or Dutch

1740s

1740s
The peak of both the European Enlightenment (a source of revolutionary ideas), and the Great Awakening (a renewal and transformation of American religion)

1754–4 JULY 1776

TIMELINE



KEY EVENT

1754

28 MAY 1754
Colonel George Washington of the Virginia militia attacks a French force in Pennsylvania, starting the French and Indian War

19 JUNE–11 JULY 1754
Delegates from seven of the thirteen colonies meet in Albany, New York, to discuss the growing crisis. They adopt Benjamin Franklin’s plan to unify the colonies, but it is rejected by both the king and the state assemblies

1760

25 OCTOBER 1760
George III becomes king of England. The population of the thirteen colonies passes 2 million people

1763

10 FEBRUARY 1763
The Treaty of Paris ends the French and Indian War. Britain takes control of French Canada and the western territories. Despite a debt in excess of £122 million, Westminster decides that a standing army of 10,000 men should stay in America to protect against native unrest

KEY EVENT

7 MAY 1763
The first attack of Pontiac’s Rebellion, a series of raids against British forts and settlements by a coalition of native tribes

7 OCTOBER 1763
King George III issues a Royal Proclamation prohibiting settlement or further land claims west of the Appalachian Mountains

DECEMBER 1763
Fearing government inaction, ‘Paxton Boys’ slaughter three settlements of peaceful natives in western Pennsylvania

KEY EVENT

1764

5 APRIL 1764
British Parliament passes the Sugar Act

JUNE 1764
Massachusetts convenes a committee to circulate information about the Sugar Act. Other colonies follow suit

KEY EVENT

1 SEPTEMBER 1764
London passes the Currency Act, taking control of the colonial currency system

DECEMBER 1764
Petitions and private letters protesting the Sugar Act arrive in London from the American colonies

1765

2 FEBRUARY 1765
With colonial defence set to cost £200,000 per year, Prime Minister George Grenville plans to extract £78,000 from the colonies. He meets with Benjamin Franklin to discuss methods of raising revenue from America with minimal unrest

KEY EVENT

22 MARCH 1765
British Parliament passes the Stamp Act to raise revenue from American colonies. It also passes a Quartering Act, requiring colonial assemblies to organise and supply accommodation for troops

KEY EVENT

24 MARCH 1765
British Parliament passes the Quartering Act





- May 1765
Stamp Act protests
- 7-25 October 1765
Stamp Act Congress
- 18 March 1766
Stamp Act repealed
- 15 June-2 July 1767
Townshend duties
- 5 March 1770
Boston Massacre
- 20 November 1772
Committee of Correspondence formed
- 16 December 1773
Boston Tea Party
- 31 March 1774
The first Coercive Act (Boston Port Act)
- 20 May 1774
Two more Coercive Acts
- 2 June 1774
Quartering Act revised

KEY EVENT
1765
(continued)

29-30 MAY 1765
Virginia assembly convenes to discuss the Stamp Act. Patrick Henry leads an opposition motion, the Stamp Act Resolves. Weeks later, protests against the Stamp Act begin in the streets of Boston and New York City

14 AUGUST 1765
An effigy of royal official Andrew Oliver is hung by a noose from a Boston tree (the 'Liberty Tree')

26 AUGUST 1765
The home of unpopular lieutenant-governor Thomas Hutchinson is raided, looted and vandalised by an angry mob

7-25 OCTOBER 1765
Delegates from nine colonies attend a Stamp Act Congress in New York, issuing a Declaration of Rights and Grievances

DECEMBER 1765
Groups in Boston begin referring to themselves as Sons of Liberty

DECEMBER 1765
The Stamp Act comes under attack within the British Parliament

KEY EVENT
1766

18 MARCH 1766
British Parliament formally repeals the Stamp Act after weeks of hot debate

On the same day, it passes the Declaratory Act, stating that it has legislative power over the colonies 'in all cases whatsoever'

APRIL 1766
News of the repeal of the Stamp Act reaches the American colonies, prompting celebrations and easing of trade boycotts

KEY EVENT
1767

15 JUNE-2 JULY 1767
Westminster passes a series of customs charges, called the 'Townshend duties', on goods imported to America from Britain

1768

11 FEBRUARY 1768
Boston radical Samuel Adams issues a 'circular letter' encouraging the colonies to unite and resist the Townshend duties

9 JUNE 1768
Armed British ships seize *Liberty*, a ship owned by John Hancock and suspected of smuggling wine and other goods

28 SEPTEMBER 1768
Two regiments of British soldiers arrive in Boston to keep order

1769

10 MARCH 1769
Town meetings in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, vote to join the boycott of British goods

1770

19 JANUARY 1770
'The Battle of Golden Hill': street fighting breaks out between British soldiers and New York Sons of Liberty, with several people seriously injured

KEY EVENT
1770
(continued)

5 MARCH 1770
The 'Boston Massacre': five colonial civilians are killed after a skirmish with British soldiers in downtown Boston

24-29 OCTOBER 1770
Trial of British Captain Preston over the events of the Boston Massacre. Preston is acquitted

1772

27 NOVEMBER-4 DECEMBER 1770
Trial of the eight British soldiers involved in the events of the Boston Massacre. All soldiers are found not guilty of murder, but two are found guilty of manslaughter

9 JUNE 1772
The British customs ship *Gaspee* runs ashore on Rhode Island, where it is boarded by locals and burned to the waterline

20 NOVEMBER 1772
A Boston town meeting, led by Samuel Adams, decides to form a twenty-one-man Committee of Correspondence

KEY EVENT

1773

12 MARCH 1773
The Virginian Assembly sets up its own eleven-man Committee of Correspondence; four other colonies follow suit

10 MAY 1773
London passes the Tea Act, permitting the British East India Company to sell surplus tea directly to American retailers

SEPTEMBER 1773
Opposition to the Tea Act grows in the colonies, particularly in Boston and New York City

KEY EVENT

1774

28 NOVEMBER-15 DECEMBER 1773
Three tea-laden British ships arriving in Boston Harbor are prevented from offloading their cargo

16 DECEMBER 1773
The Boston Tea Party: a small band raids the three ships and tips 342 crates of tea into Boston Harbor

31 MARCH 1774
The first Coercive Act, the Boston Port Act, closes Boston Harbor until the cost of the damaged tea has been repaid

KEY EVENT

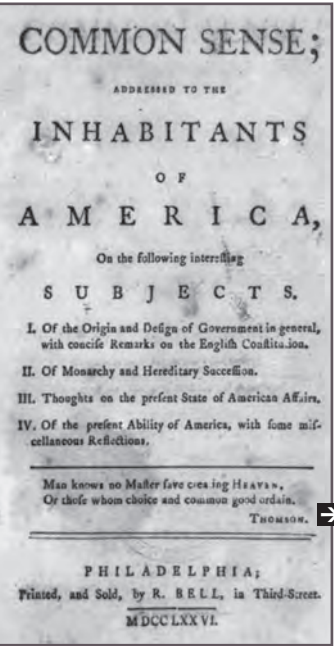
KEY EVENT

20 MAY 1774
Westminster passes a further two Coercive Acts: the Massachusetts Government Act and the Administration of Justice Act

2 JUNE 1774
British Parliament passes a revised form of the Quartering Act, empowering governors to house troops in vacant buildings

22 JUNE 1774
Royal assent is given to the Quebec Act, intended to secure the loyalty of French-Canadians, but it stirs up anti-Catholic sentiment in America





4 July 1776

Declaration of Independence

9 January 1776

Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* published

17 June 1775

Battle of Bunker Hill

10 May 1775

Second Continental Congress

19 April 1775

Battles of Lexington and Concord

5 September-24 October 1774

First Continental Congress

1 September 1774

Colony's weapons and gunpowder store seized

1774

(continued)

KEY EVENT

1 SEPTEMBER 1774

General Thomas Gage, new military governor of Massachusetts, seizes the colony's store of weapons and gunpowder

5 SEPTEMBER-24 OCTOBER 1774

The First Continental Congress meets to consider the consequences of the Coercive Acts and decide on a course of action. It drafts the Articles of Confederation and pledges to meet in a year's time

1775

KEY EVENT

9 FEBRUARY 1775

British Parliament declares Massachusetts to be in a state of rebellion

23 MARCH 1775

Patrick Henry delivers an anti-British speech: 'Give me liberty or give me death!'

19 APRIL 1775

Colonial militiamen skirmish with British troops at Lexington and Concord, with more than 120 men killed

10 MAY 1775

The Second Continental Congress convenes, on the same day that American forces capture British outpost Fort Ticonderoga

17 JUNE 1775

The Battle of Bunker Hill, Massachusetts: a costly victory for the British

19 JUNE 1775

Continental Congress appoints George Washington of Virginia as commander-in-chief of the newly formed Continental Army

5 JULY 1775

Continental Congress passes the 'olive branch petition', a last attempt to reconcile and make peace with England

6 JULY 1775

Continental Congress issues the Declaration on the Causes and Necessities for Taking up Arms, a document justifying defensive war

13 OCTOBER 1775

Continental Congress passes legislation for the equipping of two cruisers and establishment of a Marine Committee, setting up what will become the Continental Navy

29 NOVEMBER 1775

Continental Congress sets up the Committee of Secret Correspondence to seek out foreign pacts and alliances

23 DECEMBER 1775

King George III issues a proclamation declaring the American colonies closed and off-limits to all trade and commerce

1776

KEY EVENT

5 JANUARY 1776

The New Hampshire assembly drafts and passes a state Constitution, the first American state to do so

10 JANUARY 1776

Thomas Paine publishes *Common Sense*, which begins to circulate around the American colonies

1776

(continued)

KEY EVENT

26 MARCH 1776

South Carolina passes a state Constitution

12 APRIL 1776

North Carolina authorises its delegates to Congress to vote for independence from Britain, the first colony to do so

2 MAY 1776

King Louis XVI of France pledges \$1 million in arms and munitions to the Americans

29 JUNE 1776

A British flotilla of thirty warships, 300 supply ships and 40,000 men arrives in New York

2 JULY 1776

New Jersey passes a state Constitution

4 JULY 1776

The Declaration of Independence is drafted by Jefferson, then edited and adopted by the Second Continental Congress

6 FORGING AMERICA 3RD EDITION

SECTION A CAUSES OF REVOLUTION 7

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STIRRINGS OF REBELLION

(1763–1766)

CHAPTER 3



Source 3.01 *Stamp Act Protest 1765*, unknown artist, 1829. This artwork shows a Stamp Act agent being hung in effigy in New Hampshire.

‘No parts of his Majesty’s dominions can be taxed without their consent.’

—James Otis

After 1763, the relationship between Britain and the thirteen American colonies began to change. The reasons for this are complex but at its heart were:

- changes in the British Government
- revision of imperial policy
- political and financial effects of the French and Indian War.

From 1763, the British Government decided to manage the American colonies more directly—until then, the colonies had ruled themselves for generations. British Parliament passed a series of acts and regulations relating to the colonies, with the aim of:

- restricting settlement
- exerting control over trade
- generating revenue to meet the cost of colonial defence.

When these policies were vigorously opposed and resisted in the colonies, the British Parliament responded with an increased military presence and by closing rebellious colonial legislatures.

KEY EVENTS

- **May–October 1763**
Pontiac’s War
- **October 1763**
The Royal Proclamation
- **April 1764**
The Sugar Act
- **September 1764**
The Currency Act
- **March 1765**
‘The Quartering Act’; The Stamp Act
- **May 1765**
Virginia Stamp Act Resolves
- **October 1765**
Stamp Act Congress
- **March 1766**
Stamp Act repealed

KEY QUESTIONS

- In what way was British mercantilist policy a long-term cause of the American Revolution?
- How did the Proclamation of 1763 lead to tensions between Great Britain and the colonies?
- To what extent was the Stamp Act Crisis a turning point in colonial politics?
- How did significant individuals, such as Patrick Henry and Samuel Adams, influence the outcome of the Stamp Act Crisis?
- In what way did the Sons of Liberty mobilise society against the Stamp Act?

THE PROCLAMATION ACT

KEY DEVELOPMENT

The Royal Proclamation (1763): ‘And We do hereby strictly forbid, on Pain of our Displeasure, all our loving Subjects from making any Purchases or Settlements whatever, or taking Possession of any of the Lands above reserved [to Native Americans] without our especial leave and Licence for that Purpose first obtained.’

The removal of French authority and the opening of the west filled the British colonists with optimism. Farming land had become scarce and expensive during the rapid population increases of the 1700s, so landless farmers and frontiersmen saw great opportunities in resettling further west.

The colonial elites also liked the situation. They laid claim to vast tracts of the western territory for subdivision, sale and profit later on. Both George Washington and Benjamin Franklin were avid land speculators and drew up claims on the new territories.

The rush by the colonists to acquire land presented two dilemmas for the Ministers in London:

- how to organise, settle and manage such a large area
- how to prevent skirmishes and a possible war with hostile Native Americans as colonial settlers pushed west.

PONTIAC’S WAR

In May 1763 the second scenario came to pass when Pontiac, an Odawa chieftain, launched the first in a string of attacks against British frontier settlements. Having been allied with France during the recent war, Pontiac was unhappy with the British victory and believed that driving English colonists from the west might inspire France to reclaim its former territories. Pontiac’s initial assault on Fort Detroit inspired almost every western tribe—Odawa, Huron, Ojibwa, Miami, Kickapoo, Delaware, Shawnee, Mingo and others—from the Great Lakes in the north to the lower Mississippi in the south. Large numbers of native people launched surprise attacks on British forts, wiping out garrisons and raiding unprotected settlements.

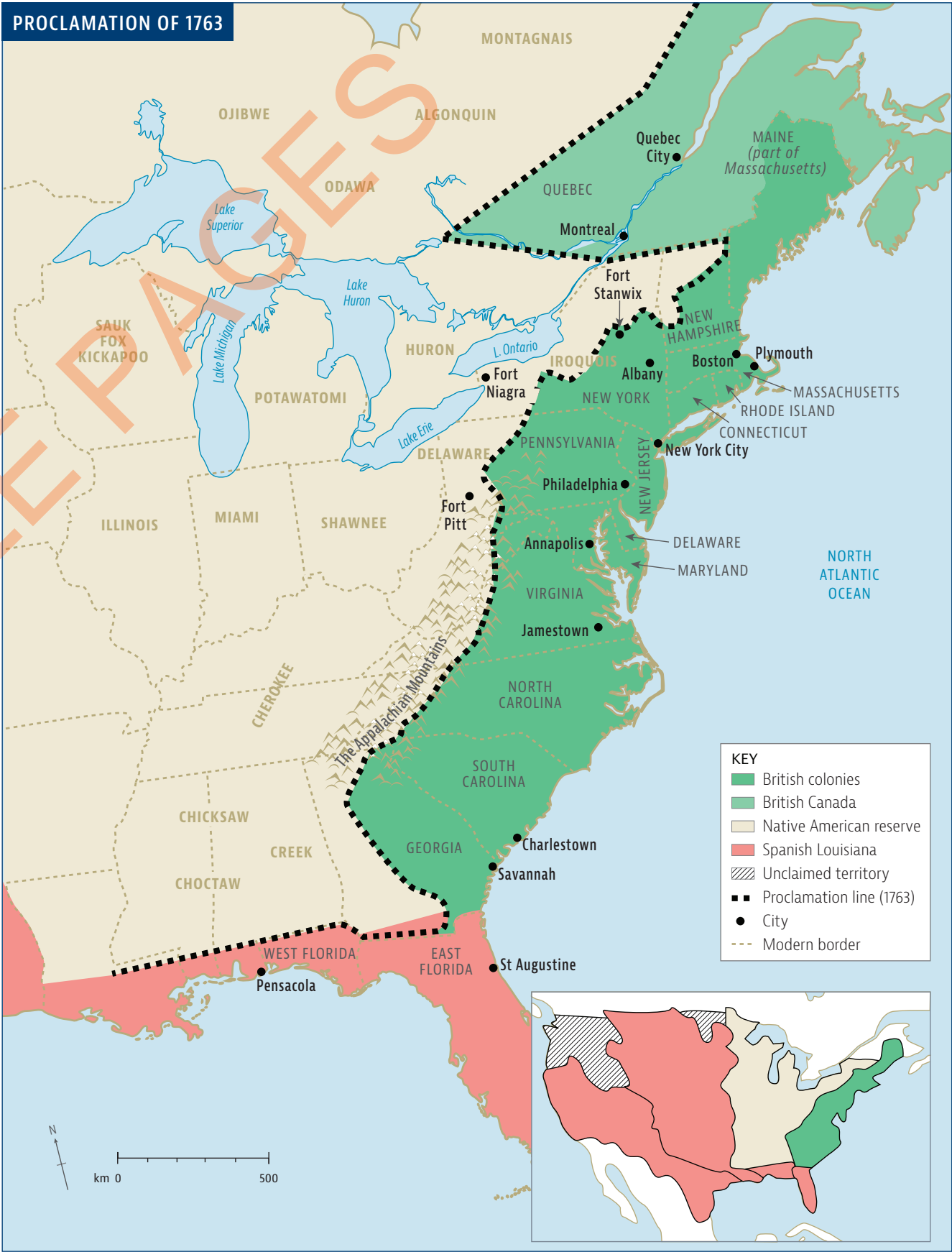
Pontiac was originally thought to have single-handedly unified and coordinated these attacks (and they are referred to as ‘Pontiac’s War’ or ‘Pontiac’s Rebellion’). Most historians now reject this view and consider the attacks a sign of widespread discontent among Native Americans, as well as an attempt to prevent settlers from moving further west. Pontiac’s bold raids are seen as the beginning of a chain reaction, as news of them spread southwards to other tribes along the frontier.

However, regardless of origins, the attacks were mostly successful: eight of thirteen British forts fell to Native Americans; hundreds of soldiers, militiamen and civilians died; and dozens of settlements were devastated. The British Army responded strongly where it could, but it lacked an extensive military presence along the western frontier. Instead, British officials negotiated a peace with the tribes.

Source 3.02 Visit of Pontiac and his Native American allies to British officer Major Gladwin during Pontiac’s War 1760s, unknown artist, nineteenth century.



Source 3.03



proclamation a new law or regulation issued by a monarch and announced publicly

DID YOU KNOW?
The old British currency system consisted of pounds (£), shillings (s) and pence (d): £1 = 20s, 1s = 12d.

➔ **Source 3.04** Merrill Jensen, *The Founding of a Nation* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1968), 387.

A ROYAL PROCLAMATION

Pontiac’s uprising saw the British cabinet rush through a measure it had been considering since the end of the war.

Released in October 1763, this Royal **Proclamation** drew a boundary line along the western fringe of the Appalachian Mountains and blocked all settlement west of the line. Current land claims or purchases of land from native tribes were invalidated and new ones prohibited. Hunting and fishing rights negotiated with some tribes in the wake of Pontiac’s War were included and formalised in the proclamation. In hindsight it seems to have been a common-sense policy, intended to prevent further conflict with Native Americans and unchecked colonisation of the western territory. For the colonists eyeing off land in the west, the proclamation was either a temporary annoyance or something to be disregarded altogether.

Merrill Jensen, *The Founding of a Nation*

There were settlers beyond the boundary line and more and more joined them, defying troops, speculators and governors’ proclamations to stop them. But the Virginia speculators with pre-war claims, and with new ones they hoped to establish, were interested in tens of thousands of acres, not mere clearings in the wilderness. Such men could not believe the boundary line would be permanent, protested against it, and made plans to go beyond it. George Washington, for instance, proposed surveys beyond the line so as to be ready to secure title the moment it was abandoned. He instructed his agent to search out good land, but above all to keep his plans a ‘profound secret’ because he did not want to be censured for open opposition to the Proclamation—or to have his speculating rivals adopt his methods.

BRITISH MANAGEMENT OF THE COLONIES

KEY DEVELOPMENT

Edmund Burke (1775): ‘If America gives you taxable objects on which you lay your duties here, and gives you, at the same time, a surplus by a foreign sale of her commodities ... she has performed her part to the British revenue.’

Colonies, by definition, are ruled by their ‘mother country’. In British America this was true in theory, as the thirteen colonies were under the nominal control of the king and a colonial governor—but things were very different in practice.

During the 1600s and early 1700s, Britain did not enforce all of the trade laws relating to the North American colonies. They also did not pay close attention to the way the colonies chose to govern themselves. This was because in the early decades the colonies were not as economically important as the British Government had hoped they would be. As long as Britain received some economic benefit from the colonies, they were left to their own devices. The arrangement was best expressed by British prime minister Robert Walpole, who declared that ‘if no restrictions were placed on the colonies they would flourish’.

After the French and Indian War, the British Parliament decided to rein in the colonies and enforce firmer colonial policy—and this would strongly contribute to revolution in America.

MERCANTILISM

KEY DEVELOPMENT

Another emerging problem between Britain and the American colonies was their changing perception of each other. The dominant British economic theory was **mercantilism**, which stated that the more trade, resources and gold reserves an empire possessed, the more powerful it was.

In line with mercantilist theory, colonies benefited and enriched the mother country by supplying natural resources and materials, and by providing a market for manufactured goods. America, rich in forests and farmland, supplied the raw materials needed by England’s growing industrial economy: cotton for its textile mills, iron for its forges, and timber for its furniture makers and shipbuilders.

The end products were then sold back to the colonies. This arrangement provided the British with ample raw materials, and provided the Americans with a stable market for whatever they grew, gathered or harvested.

However, for mercantilism to work, economic development in the colonies had to be restricted. Local manufacturing had to be limited so that colonials would continue to import finished goods—furniture, clothing, iron goods and so on—from England, rather than producing their own.

From the late 1600s, the British Parliament passed legislation banning or limiting the manufacture of certain items in the American colonies. The Iron Act (1750) encouraged America’s production of pig iron (or raw iron) but banned the colonial manufacture of iron tools, farming equipment or tinplate. Excessive production of certain types of clothing, such as woollen garments, was also restricted. American development was stunted by this prohibitive legislation—even after almost two centuries of settlement, agriculture was still the lifeblood of the colonies, while industrial and manufacturing existed only on a small scale.

Britain also sought to prevent the American colonies trading with the French, Spanish and Dutch, all of whom had commercial operations in North America and the Caribbean. A series of laws called the Navigation Acts, dating back to the mid-1600s, banned the trade of certain commodities with traders who were not British. Some items could be traded with foreigners but only if American **merchants** paid an additional customs fee. The Molasses Act (1733) required Americans to pay a sizeable duty (or tax) on sugar or molasses (sugar syrup) purchased in the French West Indies.

Alvin Rabushka, *Taxation in Colonial America*

A fundamental mercantilist principle was that colonies should supply useful commodities to strengthen the mother country. In order of importance were precious metals, commodities that could not be produced in England, naval stores, and products that could be profitably traded in international markets. Mercantilism provided the ideas that governed colonial economic relations ... that colonial interests were subordinate to the mother country; that trade with its colonies should be restricted to English subjects; that the trade and resources of a colony should be sent to the mother country; and that the trade and resources of a colony should be kept out of the hands of rivals. Colonies were to provide a captive market for English manufactured goods. Monopolised trade with its colonies could stimulate domestic employment and industry, thereby reducing industrial unrest, poverty and idleness. In political terms, colonies were regarded as possessions, not an integral component of the English state. Even though colonists were granted the political rights of Englishmen, colonies were to be administered for the economic and military benefit of the mother country.

mercantilism economic system where colonies existed only to enrich the ‘mother country’ with a supply of raw materials and purchases of manufactured goods

ACTIVITY

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Create a chart showing the flow of raw materials and manufactured goods between Britain and America under mercantilism.
- 2 List the advantages and disadvantages of the mercantilist system for both Britain and the American colonies.

merchant person who engages in buying, selling, importing and exporting goods for profit

➔ **Source 3.05** Alvin Rabushka, *Taxation in Colonial America* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 95–96.

ACTIVITY

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Read about the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and complete the tasks below.

- 1 What was ‘Pontiac’s War’? Why were the Native Americans upset with Britain?
- 2 Summarise the role played by George Washington in land acquisition in the western regions.
- 3 What evidence is there that colonials defied the Royal Proclamation of 1763?

MERCANTILISM: HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Because the events of the 1760s mark the beginnings of the American Revolution, historians have studied them closely. Different theories have emerged about how and why the revolution occurred. Some historians argue that the events in America must be viewed in the fuller context of the British Empire: its composition, complexities and administrative challenges. Both the colonies and the empire were changing throughout the eighteenth century; the revolution was as much a product of changing perceptions as it was of tensions between Britons and Americans.

These historians tend to view mercantilism—the principle that colonies exist to enrich the mother country—as having been mutually beneficial, allowing both Britain and her colonies to flourish. Problems only arose when British ministers attempted to reinterpret and strengthen mercantilist legislation when logic suggested that it should have been wound back. For these historians, the origins of the revolution lay in a clash of interests, not an ideological concern with rights and liberties. Charles Andrews (1863–1943) asserts that ideas about colonial rights were barely relevant to most Americans before the late 1760s. **Natural rights** were a ‘subject of more or less legal and metaphysical speculation’ that had little ‘marked influence on the popular mind’. However, by 1770, what began as a set of colonial grievances transformed into ‘a political and constitutional movement and only secondarily one that was financial, commercial or social!’

While Andrews undermined the view that mercantilism was a flawed policy, historian Lewis Namier (1888–1960) attacked the belief that King George III was an interfering **tyrant** whose actions provoked revolution.

Namier’s groundbreaking studies of British politics in the 1700s examined individuals and **factions** within British Parliament—and concluded that most acted in their own self-interest. The role played by the king in forming policy was more harmless than previously suggested: George III appointed ministers, as was his responsibility, but he almost always listened to their advice and rarely interfered in matters of policy. According to Namier, the king’s refusal to act upon American petitions was not pig-headed arrogance—rather, it was appropriate behaviour for a constitutional monarch to leave matters of government and empire to his ministry.

Lawrence H. Gipson (1880–1971) focused on broader changes within the empire, particularly the effects of the English triumph in the French and Indian War. Gipson argues that this victory created a **geopolitical** void in North America, radically altering the perspective of colonists. No longer hemmed in and threatened by France and Spain, British-Americans redefined their conceptions of ‘empire’—and they began to imagine a North America that they would own and run themselves. Suddenly, British rule in the colonies no longer seemed either necessary or relevant.

Lawrence H. Gipson, Victory in the French and Indian War

[Victory in the French and Indian War] not only freed colonials for the first time in the history of the English-speaking people in the New World from the dread of the French, their Indian allies, and the Spaniards, but ... opened up to them the prospect, if given freedom of action, of a vast growth of power and wealth with an amazing westward expansion ... If many Americans thought they had a perfect right to profit personally by trading with the enemy in time of war, how much more deeply must they have resented—in time of peace—the serious efforts made by the home government to enforce the elaborate restrictions on commercial trade?

Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr argues that the origins of the American Revolution can be found in seemingly ordinary items such as rum and molasses.

Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr, *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution*

A keen observer declared in retrospect ... that the union among the colonies had derived ‘its original source [from] a confederacy of Smugglers in Boston, Rhode Island and other seaport towns ...’. These gentry were aided and abetted by the rum-distillers, who were particularly powerful in New England. John Adams was franker than most historians when he reflected in his old age: ‘I know not why we should blush to confess that molasses was an essential ingredient in American independence’.

The first move was made by the merchants of Boston in April 1763, when they organised the ‘Society for encouraging Trade and Commerce within the province of Massachusetts Bay’ ... The merchants of New York were next to take action. Of these merchants Lieutenant-Governor Colden said: ‘Many of them have rose suddenly from the lowest rank of the people, to considerable fortunes, and chiefly by illicit trade in the last war. They abhor every limitation of trade and duty on it’ At the suggestion of the New York committee of merchants, the merchants of Philadelphia became active and appointed a committee to urge the Pennsylvania assembly to solicit Parliament to discontinue the molasses duties.

Source 3.07 Lawrence Gipson, ‘The American Revolution as an Aftermath of the Great War for Empire’ in *Political Science Quarterly* 65 (March 1950): 102.

Source 3.08 Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr, *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution* (Washington DC: Beard Books, 1939), 59–61.

Source 3.06 ‘The Political Cartoon, for the Year 1775’, unknown artist, Britain. It shows King George III and Lord Mansfield, seated on an open carriage drawn by two horses labelled ‘Obstinacy’ and ‘Pride’. They are about to lead Britain into an abyss, representing the war with the American colonies.



ACTIVITY

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Using Sources 3.07 and 3.08, the text on page 54 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 According to Schlesinger, what was the source of union between the colonies? What role did colonial merchants play in the development of the revolution?
- 2 How does Schlesinger’s emphasis differ from that of Lawrence Gipson? Are there any similarities?
- 3 What do the interpretations of Schlesinger, Gipson, Andrews and Namier add to your understanding of how Britain’s mercantilist approach affected the American colonies?

natural rights an Enlightenment belief that all individuals are born with certain rights, such as the right to life, and freedom from oppression

tyrant an oppressive and cruel ruler

factions people grouped according to their religious or political beliefs

geopolitical relating to national power, frontiers and the possibilities for expansion

TRADERS AND SMUGGLERS

Bernard Bailyn (2005): ‘What made all this possible—what helped bind the widespread and intensely competitive Atlantic commercial world together—was the mass of illegal trade that bypassed the formal, nationalistic constraints.’

Despite the restrictions and regulations imposed by mercantilism, some American colonists had become very wealthy through trade. The British economy boomed through much of the 1700s and the Navigation Acts virtually guaranteed colonial exporters a market for their goods.

Meanwhile, the fast-growing colonial population—with its thirst for all things British, and few local industries to draw upon—saw imports flourish. Most merchants lived in the great colonial port cities—Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Charlestown (later Charleston)—where they often played a role in local government. Most merchants belonged to the affluent middle class but a few merchants did so well—through a combination of inheritance, talent and economic circumstances—that they became the wealthiest people in America. Among the wealthiest merchants were:

- John Hancock (Massachusetts)
- Henry Laurens (South Carolina)
- Robert Morris (Pennsylvania)
- Edward Shippen (Pennsylvania).

Many American merchants increased their profits by finding ways around trade regulations. Smuggling was a common practice in colonial trade, dating back to the 1600s. Smuggling was done through:

- illegal shipping
- evading customs duties
- bribing customs officers.

America’s long coastline, its great distance from England and the lack of any significant naval presence made it easy to evade goods checks or customs inspectors. The willingness of poorly paid customs inspectors to accept bribes also helped—and some of them were virtually on John Hancock’s payroll. Most of this illicit trade was conducted with the other European powers: France, Spain, Portugal, Holland, Italy and the German states. By far the most commonly smuggled commodities were molasses and sugar, which were brought into America from the French colonies in the West Indies.

It is difficult to gauge the extent of smuggling in colonial America, as the merchants obviously kept no records of it and arrests were rare. However, smuggling is mentioned so frequently in letters, newspaper articles, governors’ diaries and other incidental documents that it must have been common practice. American captains and sailors tended to be blasé about smuggling—and some even viewed it as romantic.

➔ **Source 3.09** *Boston Evening Post*, 21 November 1763.

Boston Evening Post, 1763

There is no error so full of mischief as making acts and regulations oppressive to trade without enforcing them. This opens a door to corruption. This introduces a looseness in morals. This destroys the reverence and regard for oaths, on which government so much depends. This occasions a disregard to those acts of trade which are calculated for its real benefit. This entirely destroys the distinction, which ought to be preserved in all trading communities, between ‘merchant’ and ‘smuggler’.

The British were aware of the smuggling problem, as they had agents in European and Caribbean port cities, and an American ship loading illegal imports would have been quite conspicuous. The more conscientious officials reported suspected smugglers to their governors, some of whom reported them to London.

Ultimately, the question was not whether smuggling was taking place, but what action, if any, should be taken to stop it.

ACTIVITY

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Why did King George III issue the Royal Proclamation of 1763?
- 2 How did colonists view the Royal Proclamation of 1763?
- 3 How did mercantilism help the British economy?
- 4 Why did some colonial merchants choose illegal trade with other European colonies over legal trade with Britain?

COLONIAL TENSION IN FOUR ACTS

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Alan Taylor (2016): ‘Grenville also wanted to prove a point: that Parliament could exercise its sovereign power to tax the colonists.’

THE SUGAR ACT, 1764

The Sugar Act—officially called the American Revenue Act—was passed by British Parliament in April 1764. Its purpose was to increase commercial competition with the French West Indies and to better regulate American colonial trade. London had long been aware that American merchants were trading sugar and molasses with French colonies and avoiding most of the required duties (or taxes). The Sugar Act was an attempt to beat the smugglers by reducing the duty on foreign molasses from sixpence to threepence per gallon. This would make the British molasses a cheaper option for American traders, and undercut the appeal of French molasses.

However, there was more to the Sugar Act than simply incentives. The legislation also expanded the list of goods that were subject to a duty, including:

- raw sugar
- a range of wines
- coffee
- spices
- certain types of cloth.

The Sugar Act also tightened up the collection of these duties by endorsing ‘writs of assistance’. These writs were general search warrants with no expiry date, which allowed customs officials to enter any property they believed might contain smuggled goods. These writs had been around since 1760 and were grossly unpopular—even though they were rarely used.

In 1761, Boston lawyer James Otis challenged the legality of writs of assistance in the Massachusetts Supreme Court. Otis was acting on behalf of sixty-three merchants. In

DID YOU KNOW?

While some colonial Americans—particularly the wealthy—saw smugglers as criminals, others portrayed them as daring, romantic heroes undermining the British Navigation Acts.



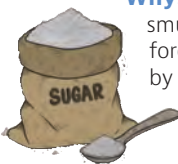
↑ Sugar cone and sugar tongs.

SUGAR ACT, 1764

When: April 1764

What: Import duty on foreign molasses and on raw sugar, among other things. Endorsed use of ‘writs of assistance’ to enforce the Act.

Why: To stop smuggling of foreign molasses by making English imports cheaper.



ACTIVITY

HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Source 3.10 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 What do the authors of the statement mean when they say ‘our trade is to be curtailed in its most profitable branches’?
- 2 Why might they have said that ‘it is the trade of the Colonies that renders them beneficial to the mother country’?
- 3 What do the authors suggest might happen if Britain continues to pass laws regulating trade and imposing customs duties?
- 4 From your broader knowledge, assess the strength of the Bostonians’ argument.

➔ **Source 3.10** Cited in *Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter*, 31 May 1764.

bullionism belief that a nation’s wealth was determined by the amount of gold, silver and foreign coin stored in its treasury

his four-hour closing speech, Otis argued that the writs were ‘against the fundamental principles of law’ and breached English rights, which had been established as far back as the Magna Carta in 1215. Despite Otis’ compelling argument, the case was eventually lost, and the writs continued to be issued against suspected smugglers.

Colonial outrage over writs of assistance reached its apex during the ‘Malcom affair’ of 1766. Described by historian William Cuddihy as ‘the most famous search in colonial America’, the home of Boston merchant Daniel Malcom was ransacked by customs officials, who had received a tip that Malcom had smuggled brandy and other liquors into his cellar. At first, Malcom cooperated with the officials, but eventually he refused their requests to open a locked cellar. Tensions flared and Malcom produced two pistols, threatening to blow out the brains of any customs officer who broke a lock or a door. During this stand-off, a mob of about 300 people gathered outside Malcom’s house, forcing the customs officials to retreat. Malcom was possibly following the instructions of James Otis, his lawyer, as a means of initiating a further legal challenge to the writs.²

The Sugar Act aroused plenty of resentment, especially in Boston. Although anger was initially confined to merchants, shipping companies and shopowners, these groups enjoyed influence in the press and at town meetings.

The merchants and their followers painted the Sugar Act as an attempt by the British to impose new taxes and collect them by force. The Massachusetts assembly joined the chorus of criticism, noting to the governor that ‘the civil rights of the colonies are affected by it, by their being deprived, in all cases of seizures, of that inestimable privilege and characteristic of English liberty—a trial by jury’. Historians Findling and Thackeray consider the Sugar Act to be ‘the point when British colonial policy regarding the North American colonies altered ... Parliament deliberately taxed the colonies to raise revenue for the empire—an action not previously undertaken’.³

Boston town meeting, statement to Massachusetts assembly, 1764

As you represent a town which lives by its trade, we expect in a very particular manner that you make it the object of your attention to support our commerce in all its just rights, to vindicate it from all unreasonable impositions, and promote its prosperity. Our trade has for a long time laboured under great discouragements; and it is with the deepest concern that we see such further difficulties coming upon it, as will reduce it to the lowest ebb if not totally obstruct and ruin it. We cannot help expressing our surprise of the intentions of the ministry to burden us with new taxes.

It is the trade of the Colonies that renders them beneficial to the mother country ... But if our trade is to be curtailed in its most profitable branches ... we shall be so far from being able to take the manufactures of Great Britain that it will be scarce[ly] possible for us to earn our bread.

THE CURRENCY ACT, 1764

In addition to protecting trade, the British Government aimed to increase its gold reserves. An important element of mercantilist theory was **bullionism**: the belief that a nation’s wealth was determined by the amount of gold, silver and foreign coin stored in its treasury. It was vital that more precious metals and ‘hard money’ flowed into England than out of it.

However, by 1762 the British economy was struggling, partly because of the expense of the war with France. Exports dropped and internal production began to slow; the amount of **specie** (gold and silver coin) coming into England decreased dramatically. The economic slump had a moderate impact across the Atlantic as British trading companies called in the debts of several colonial businesses.

The colonies, for the most part, avoided the economic downturn, which sparked curiosity and anger in London. Living in England as an agent of Pennsylvania, Benjamin Franklin was called upon by the Bank of England to explain why the colonies enjoyed such prosperity. ‘That is simple’, Franklin reportedly said. ‘In the colonies we make our own money. It is called colonial scrip. We issue it in proper proportion to the demands of trade and industry, to make the products pass easily from the producers to the consumers. In this manner, creating for ourselves our own paper money, we control its purchasing power and have no interest to pay to no-one.’⁴ England’s bankers were annoyed that the colonies had developed a separate currency system, and pressured the British Parliament to take action. In September 1764, just five months after the Sugar Act, Parliament passed the Currency Act.

The provisions of the Currency Act were relatively simple: it banned further printing of colonial paper money and prohibited the use of existing paper money to pay private debts. A similar measure had been implemented in 1751—although this was confined to New England and only limited the production of banknotes, not their use. The new Act ordered royal governors not to sign any new paper currency or agree to its being printed. This reform was problematic for American businesses and banks. They had long endured a shortage of gold and silver, and had no natural supply of these metals. They also were not allowed to get them by trading with France, Spain or other nations. The colonial scrip referred to by Franklin had been a workable substitute—but now this too would be restricted.

The Currency Act had consequences for American merchants and importers, who now had to find gold or foreign coin to settle their accounts with British companies. As the number of banknotes in circulation declined, Americans found trade within the colonies more difficult, and it became almost impossible to pay foreign debts. Bankruptcy—which was greatly feared at the time, because it was a crime punishable by imprisonment—increased steadily in the late 1760s. Many people claimed that the sugar and currency legislation had destroyed the American economy—though this was only partly true. Historians Egnal and Ernst suggest that the revolution began here, with a move towards economic independence.

Egnal and Ernst

While modern analysts may debate the wisdom of the varying colonial monetary practices and proposals, there is no doubt that Britain’s constant and jealous supervision of the colonists’ currency systems seriously weakened the Americans’ ability to control their own economy. The reaction to the Currency Act ... reflected a new and extreme phase of a long struggle of this aspect of economic **sovereignty**. Control over currency and banking was for some ... the ‘sovereign remedy.’



specie metallic currency such as gold or silver coin; also called ‘hard money’

DID YOU KNOW?

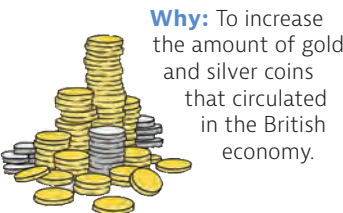
Spanish dollars and Portuguese reals were the most common foreign coins circulating in America. Local banknotes were issued in pounds, shillings and pence—although these were of less value than British currency.

➔ Gold coin with the image of King George III on the front and British coat of arms on the back.

CURRENCY ACT, 1764

When: September 1764

What: Banned printing of colonial paper money. Required use of gold or silver coins to settle debts.



Why: To increase the amount of gold and silver coins that circulated in the British economy.

➔ **Source 3.11** Marc Egnal and Joseph A. Ernst, ‘An Economic Interpretation of the American Revolution’ in *Historical Perspectives on the American Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 56.

sovereignty the right of a people, or a government acting on its behalf, to make decisions, form laws and exercise power within its own borders

DID YOU KNOW?

The military presence in Boston prompted Samuel Adams to publish a ‘Journal of Events’ that recorded ‘incidents’ of drunkenness, assault and rape by British soldiers. It later emerged that many of these stories were fabricated or grossly exaggerated.

QUARTERING ACT, 1765

When: March 1765
What: An update of the Mutiny Act. Required colonial assemblies to provide quarters (accomodation) to British soldiers.
Why: To help pay for the cost of posting soldiers to the colonies.



propaganda political materials—such as pamphlets, posters or cartoons—that carried a political message; often exaggerated or distorted

DID YOU KNOW?

The daily rate of pay for a private in the British Army was 8–10 pence, before deductions for food and lodging. At that time, a loaf of bread cost one penny, a pound of cheese four pence and a pound of tea one shilling (twelve pence).

THE QUARTERING ACT, 1765

While financial legislation caused concern among America’s wealthier merchants, average people were aggravated by a more obvious problem. The end of the French and Indian War should have seen the English military presence decline in America, but the number of British soldiers remained high long after the 1763 Treaty of Paris. Early in 1763, more than 10,000 British troops were still garrisoned in the colonies, mostly in the cities and along the frontier. For the British Government this was an expensive but necessary measure. Maintaining a few thousand troops in distant colonies was a financial burden—and this was on top of difficult economic times and a £138 million war debt. A view circulating in British Parliament was that the colonies should be contributing to the cost of the soldiers who protected them.

In March 1765, Parliament completed its annual update of the Mutiny Act, a perpetual law to ensure and improve discipline in the British military.

However, within its 1765 amendment was a provision requiring colonial assemblies to provide quartering (accommodation), food and other equipment for British soldiers. Shelter was to be offered in barracks, public buildings or halls, which were to be organised and provided by colonial authorities. If there were not enough buildings of this type available, colonial governors and assemblies were to rent suitable inns, tenements, barns or vacant houses. The colonial governments were also responsible for providing soldiers with firewood, candles, beer or rum, blankets and cooking utensils.

This measure, coming as it did after three other troublesome pieces of legislation, provoked an angry response. Through misunderstanding, misrepresentation and **propaganda**, the updated Mutiny Act was portrayed as an obscene attempt to force free citizens to host unruly British soldiers in their private homes. Colonial stirrers began referring to it as the ‘Quartering Act’—although this was never its title—and protesting that it ignored the fundamental rights of Englishmen. In reality the Act said nothing about housing soldiers in private homes, while it provided compensation at reasonable set rates for the owners of inns, barns and vacant houses.

In some colonies there was little fuss and the assemblies complied with the Act. Pennsylvania, for example, willingly gave British soldiers accommodation up until 1774. Other colonies objected to the obligations placed on them, arguing that the order to provide rented accommodation, food and necessities was simply an alternative form of taxation. In New York, which contained the largest contingent of soldiers at the time the Act was passed, rioting by locals led the assembly to refuse to enforce any of the quartering requirements. This drew an angry response from the British Government, which later passed the New York Restraining Act, suspending the New York assembly for not complying with the law.

THE STAMP ACT, 1765

The fourth and most notorious British Act of the colonial era was the Stamp Act. This Act was passed in March 1765, the same month as the Mutiny Act.

No decision prompted more revolutionary fervour than the Stamp Act. From the colonial elite to common artisans and sailors, from cities to remote villages, ordinary people and their leaders spoke against the new tax. The crisis spawned one of the most famous revolutionary slogans in history, ‘no taxation without representation’, a phrase dating from 1750 that was adopted by James Otis, Patrick Henry and others.

The slogan referred to the fact that the colonies did not have direct representation in British Parliament. Instead of having their own elected Members of Parliament, English politicians believed that the colonists had ‘virtual’ representation because they were subjects of the British Crown. Some colonists believed that taxes could not be raised if they had not directly agreed to them, either by a direct vote or by having their own representatives in Parliament vote on their behalf.

Yet despite the uproar it caused in America, British Parliament did not view the introduction of a stamp tax as unusual. Stamp duties had been applied in Britain since 1689, copied from the Dutch, largely as an emergency measure to fund wars. Bills of sale, deeds, titles, mortgages, indentures, contracts, wills, insurance policies and other documents were not legal until they bore evidence that the appropriate duty had been paid. There were protests when stamp taxes were first introduced in England, but over time they were grudgingly accepted. They became an important source of revenue. When the government needed money, it simply added to the list of items on which stamp taxes were payable.

So imposing a stamp tax in America was considered a minor reform by those who passed it. They forecast the collection of £60,000 to be passed to British officials in the colonies for ‘procurement of supplies for the troops stationed there’.⁵ A common misconception is that the Stamp Act arrived in America by surprise and caught the colonies unaware—but this was not the case. The British Parliament actually floated the idea in the colonies in mid-1764. It signalled its intent to raise revenue in America, proposed a stamp duty as a means of doing so and invited colonial legislatures to suggest alternatives. Most colonial legislatures opposed any stamp tax but could suggest no other option, so Parliament began work on the bill.

Benjamin Franklin, America’s most prominent figure in Europe, was in London when the Stamp Act went to a vote in Parliament. Acting on instructions from Pennsylvania, Franklin attempted to stop the bill by petitioning the king and lobbying leading parliamentarians. This failed, and the Stamp Act passed into law. Almost overnight, Franklin transformed himself from colonial-rights advocate to self-interested entrepreneur. He snapped up large quantities of embossed stamp paper for export to America. He also recommended a friend for the lucrative position of stamp distributor in Philadelphia. When word of this filtered back to Philadelphia, an angry mob declared Franklin a traitor and besieged his home, trapping his wife Deborah for several hours.

ACTIVITY

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 According to politicians in London, what were the advantages of the Sugar Act, both for England and for the colonists?
- 2 Why did the colonists dislike the Sugar Act?
- 3 Why was it difficult for colonists to follow the regulations of the Currency Act?
- 4 What were the changes to the Mutiny Act (Quartering Act) in 1765?
- 5 How significant was the colonists’ renaming of the Mutiny Act as ‘the Quartering Act’?
- 6 Why did the British Parliament view the Stamp Act as a reasonable piece of legislation?
- 7 Why did the colonists view the Stamp Act as an unreasonable piece of legislation?



Source 3.12 *Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser* (24 October 1765), ‘This is the Place to affix the Stamp.’ A satirical ad protesting the passage of the Stamp Act. The skull and crossbones symbolise the death of free press.

DID YOU KNOW?

Under the provisions of the Stamp Act, a pack of cards was liable for a one shilling tax stamp; a set of dice incurred a tax of ten shillings. Landlords were outraged by the tax on liquor licences: four pounds, which was a year’s wages for some.

STAMP ACT, 1765

When: March 1765
What: Tax on official documents, such as contracts and wills, and on other reading materials, such as newspapers.
Why: To raise money to help pay the government debt as a result of the French and Indian War.



COLONIAL RESPONSES TO THE STAMP ACT

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Resolves of the Pennsylvania Assembly on the Stamp Act (1765): ‘That it is the inherent Birth-right ... of every British Subject, to be taxed only by his own Consent, or that of his legal Representatives.’

News of the Stamp Act reached the colonies in April 1765, with the tax scheduled to come into effect on the first day of November. The response was broader and more intense than even the pessimists in England had predicted. This was largely because of the timing.

The political climate in the colonies, particularly regarding matters of British policy, was sceptical and paranoid. The very nature of the Stamp Act was also problematic. Imposed on a wide variety of official and semi-official documents—such as contracts, bills of sale, wills, property titles, broadsheets and periodicals—it affected a wide range of people. Fifteen different categories of legal document were taxed, which upset colonial lawyers. Bonds, contracts and bills of sale were taxed, which aggravated merchants and retailers. Newspapers and pamphlets were taxed by the page, which outraged publishers, journalists and essayists. Gambling items like dice and playing cards also needed stamps, which affected common labourers, dockhands and sailors.

DISORDER IN BOSTON AND ELSEWHERE

Over the next seven months there was intense debate, protest and petitioning across the thirteen colonies. Colonial assemblymen were furious at the British Government’s disregard of their views. Merchants, still complaining about trade regulations and the Sugar Act, joined in the chorus of protest. Speaker after speaker railed against Britain, from political theorists arguing for better representation to tavern troublemakers predicting that new taxes would bleed the colonies dry. Others argued that if the right to tax was conceded once, then it was conceded forever and might go on and on.

boycott withhold money from a particular nation or group, or refuse to trade with them

Source 3.13 *Bostonians Protesting the Stamp Act by burning the stamps in a bonfire by Daniel Chodowiecki, 1784.*



A consensus emerged that if the new tax stamps were **boycotted**—that is, if people didn’t buy them—then the Act could not be enforced. A campaign of non-compliance was started and seemed to have been effective, with only a few tax stamps sold in the colony of Georgia. Other colonies went further, deciding that the best propaganda, in the words of Patricia Bradley, ‘was a combination of the related word and representative deed’.⁶

Ideas and words were supported by harassment, intimidation and violence directed at royal officials. Two of the most famous victims were Andrew Oliver and Thomas Hutchinson. Oliver was the man appointed by Parliament to oversee the



Source 3.14

implementation of the Stamp Act in Massachusetts. On 14 August 1765, his **effigy** was hanged and burned from the **Liberty Tree**, a huge elm tree near Boston Common. An angry mob left the scene and marched on Oliver’s house, robbed it, and made off with the supplies of the stamp paper. The assault on property and the implied threat to his safety were too much for the ‘king’s stamp man’ and Oliver resigned his position.

Another attack followed a fortnight later, this time on the home of the Lieutenant-Governor Thomas Hutchinson. Hutchinson was a forthright and self-important figure who was widely disliked. Samuel Adams particularly despised him and rarely failed to mention and condemn Hutchinson in his written rants. Hutchinson actually considered the Stamp Act to be a flawed policy—but he was a royal official, and had to implement it. On 26 August 1765, a large mob gathered outside Hutchinson’s home. When the crowd smashed windows, Hutchinson and his family fled for their lives. The mob entered, raiding his wine cellar, stealing £900 in cash, ransacking the building and destroying his priceless collection of books.

Throughout the second half of 1765, officials in other colonies also suffered threats, intimidation, vandalism, arson and beatings. The stamp commissioners of both Newport (Rhode Island), and Charleston (South Carolina), were hung in effigy by mobs opposed to the new stamp duty.⁷ Life became difficult and dangerous for any official in charge of carrying out the new Stamp Act.

effigy a crude dummy, scarecrow or mannequin representing a specific person, often set alight as a public show of intimidation or criticism

Liberty Tree a symbol of freedom, based on a large elm tree in Boston Common that was a meeting place for various Sons of Liberty activities; other American towns had their own ‘liberty trees’

DID YOU KNOW?

Andrew Oliver was not completely discouraged by the burning of his effigy in 1765. He became lieutenant-governor of Massachusetts in 1771.

ACTIVITY

HISTORICAL SOURCES

Using Source 3.15 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

- 1 Look at how the Bostonians are represented in this painting. How are they dressed? What group or class do you think they belong to?
- 2 Who is the 'Excise-man'? What is happening to him, and why?
- 3 Why do you think the Stamp Act has been hung upside down on the Liberty Tree?
- 4 Do you think the artist was sympathetic to the actions depicted? Explain your answer.
- 5 Using your broader knowledge, discuss what the source adds to an understanding of pre-revolutionary America. What other perspectives were there on the Stamp Act at the time?



➔ Source 3.15 *The Bostonians Paying the Excise-man, or Tarring and Feathering*, attributed to Philip Dawe, 1774.

CAUSES OF REVOLUTION—BRITISH REVENUE ACTS

After reading about the Acts and proclamations imposed on the American colonies up to 1765, draw up a table like the one below and fill it in.

BRITISH REVENUE ACTS			
BRITISH LAW	YEAR IMPOSED	PROVISIONS OF ACT	COLONIAL RESPONSES TO ACT
Royal Proclamation			
Sugar Act			
Currency Act			
Quartering Act			
Stamp Act			

DISSENT GROWS

Considerable opposition to the Stamp Act broke out in other colonies. In Virginia, a young Williamsburg lawyer named Patrick Henry ran for election to the House of Burgesses specifically to challenge the Stamp Act.

After just one week as a representative, Patrick Henry introduced a series of five resolves (or resolutions) that rejected any British authority to tax the colonies. He spoke in favour of these resolves in the strongest possible terms, criticising the king and making a thinly veiled comparison between King George III and Julius Caesar and Charles I—both of whom were assassinated by their rivals. This prompted cries of 'treason!' in the chamber and folklore has it that Patrick Henry responded with, 'If this be treason, make the most of it'. The record suggests that he later apologised to the house for his 'intemperate remarks' and reaffirmed his loyalty to the king.

KEY INDIVIDUAL
(see p. 255)



↑ Patrick Henry.

treason an idea or action that threatens or undermines the ruling monarch or government; in most cases it is a serious criminal offence punishable by death

The Virginia Stamp Act Resolves, 1765

Resolved, that the first adventurers and settlers of His Majesty's colony and dominion of Virginia brought with them ... all the liberties, privileges, franchises, and immunities ... held, enjoyed, and possessed by the people of Great Britain.

Resolved, that ... the colonists aforesaid are declared entitled to all liberties, privileges, and immunities ... as if they had been abiding and born within the realm of England.

Resolved, that the taxation of the people by themselves, or by persons chosen by themselves to represent them, who can only know what taxes the people are able to bear ... is the only security against a burdensome taxation, and the distinguishing characteristic of British freedom ...

Resolved, that His Majesty's people of this his most ancient and loyal colony have without interruption enjoyed the inestimable right of being governed by such laws, respecting their internal policy and taxation, as are derived from their own consent, with the approval of their sovereign, or his substitute; and that the same has never been forfeited ...

← Source 3.16 'Enclosure: Patrick Henry's Stamp Act Resolves, 30 May 1765,' *Founders Online*, National Archives, founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-07-02-0369-0002

ACTIVITY

GROUP WORK

In a small group, read through the Virginia Stamp Act Resolves (Source 3.16) and discuss their meaning and **implications**. How would Henry's resolves have affected the day-to-day administration of the American colonies?

implication the conclusion that can be drawn from something even though it is not stated directly

Objections to the Stamp Act continued to emerge elsewhere. Maryland's Daniel Dulany criticised it as an illegal Act in his essay *Considerations on the Propriety of Imposing Taxes in the British Colonies*. Richard Bland penned an eloquent examination of the crisis from a political viewpoint in *An Inquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies*. These and other pamphlets were discussed by a host of town meetings, many of which drafted resolutions condemning the Stamp Act.

Some cities organised boycotts of British goods. At least seven colonial assemblies put anti-Stamp Act petitions on ships to London, while British MPs such as Edmund Burke and William Pitt spoke against the Act in the House of Commons, accusing

the ministry of legislating beyond its authority. Street protests and vandalism broke out in New York, Rhode Island, New Hampshire and the Carolinas. Gangs promised retaliation against anyone seen buying a tax stamp, let alone those who dared sell them. By the end of 1765, fourteen stamp agents had been forced to resign.

Critics of the Stamp Act now began to argue for some form of unified colonial response. In October 1765, twenty-eight delegates from nine colonies gathered in New York for what later became known as the Stamp Act Congress. They produced a document called the Declaration of Rights and Grievances, which pledged affection and loyalty to the king but argued that George III and his Parliament had taken away colonial rights. It claimed that since the colonists could only vote for their local assemblies, only those bodies held the authority to tax them. It also asserted the right to trial by jury and complained about the shortage of specie (gold and silver coin) because of the Currency Act. It was not the first expression of colonial rights—but it was the first made by a body claiming to represent a majority of the American colonies.

ACTIVITY

LIST

1

List the four colonies that did *not* send representatives to the Stamp Act Congress.

2

List the arguments for and against the Stamp Act. Which groups were advantaged and disadvantaged by the Act?

THE SONS OF LIBERTY KEY GROUP

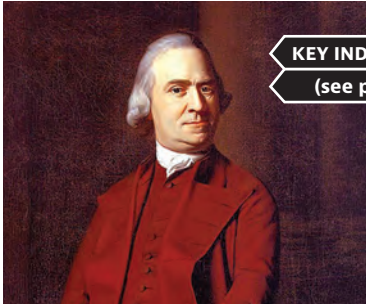
The Sons of Liberty began as local groups who organised or engaged in protest against the Stamp Act. However, it's difficult to say precisely what these groups did or how they operated. There was no single Sons of Liberty group. A range of groups emerged in different areas, each with its own leadership and membership base. The term became a catch-all phrase to include anyone engaged in anti-British activity. It was first used in the British Parliament by Isaac Barré, a veteran of the French and Indian War, who praised 'these sons of liberty' who were standing up for American rights.

In Boston, Massachusetts, the Sons of Liberty modelled themselves on a small group calling itself the Loyal Nine. Little is known about this body except that it was composed of nine Bostonian men who began meeting in May or June 1765 to organise opposition to the Stamp Act. Its members were small-scale merchants, artisans and shopkeepers who organised in secret and kept no records. As a result, the Loyal Nine is not as well known as other revolutionary activists. Activists Samuel Adams and Paul Revere were members of the Boston Sons of Liberty, but weren't members of the Loyal Nine—although they are likely to have been aware of the Loyal Nine, and possibly influenced by them. The Loyal Nine is believed to have organised the intimidation of Andrew Oliver in August 1765, an incident generally considered to be the starting point for the Sons of Liberty in Boston.

Once established in Massachusetts, Sons of Liberty groups emerged in other colonies. New York had its own group by November, while towns in New Hampshire, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina had similar organisations by the end of 1765. These gangs either adopted the Sons of Liberty name or had it given to them by excited journalists and pamphleteers.

DID YOU KNOW?
Isaac Barré was an Irish-born member of parliament who lost his left eye during the French and Indian War. He was one of the very few MPs with a close knowledge of America and he maintained friendships with many colonial merchants.

Samuel Adams.



KEY INDIVIDUAL
(see p. 250)

Other groups adopted names of their own choosing, such as Rhode Island's Respectable Populace. In most cases, the Sons of Liberty groups rejected secrecy and conspiracy—they gave their views in the press (they had many printers as members) and portrayed themselves as the protectors of colonial rights and the public good. Some attempted to form links with groups in other colonies through correspondence. The Boston and New York Sons of Liberty, for instance, were in regular contact from January 1766.

BOYCOTTS BY WOMEN

Colonial women were present at many of the gatherings and protests of 1765. They also played a significant role in defeating the Stamp Act. As household managers responsible for purchasing food, clothing and other items, women were ideally placed to organise anti-Stamp Act boycotts. Some economic historians suggest that this empowered colonial women and brought them into the political sphere, if only indirectly. T. H. Breen points out that, 'The wife [found herself] in a strategic position, located ... at the intersection of the household's three functions: reproduction, production and consumption'.⁸ Groups of women, mostly middle class, began organising meetings to discuss ways of opposing the stamp tax by refusing to buy imported goods.

Source 3.17 A view of the obelisk erected under Liberty-tree in Boston on the rejoicings for the repeal of the Stamp Act 1766, by Paul Revere, 1766.



ACTIVITY

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

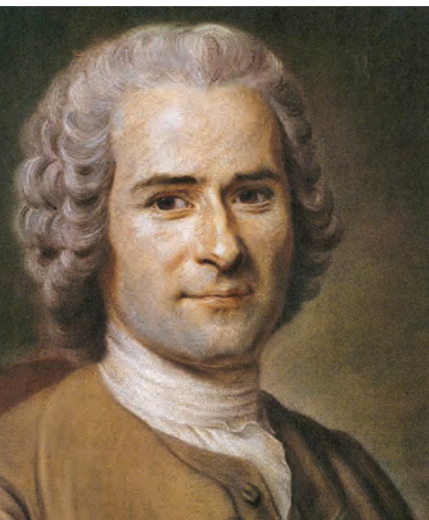
- 1
- In what ways did colonial people react to the Stamp Act?
- 2
- In what ways did colonial assemblies react to the Stamp Act?
- 3
- Why was there such a strong response to the Stamp Act throughout the colonies?

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

In a paragraph of 200–300 words, explain the significance of the Stamp Act as a prompt to revolutionary activity in the American colonies.

KEY IDEAS

IDEAS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



THE ENLIGHTENMENT, 1685–1780

The Enlightenment was a period when thinkers and writers challenged traditional authority, such as monarchy and religion. European philosophers, scientists and politicians developed the idea that society could be changed in a positive way through rational—or reasoned—thinking. As a result, this era is also known as the Age of Reason.

Enlightenment thinkers believed in rational questioning, and that progress could come from dialogue or discussion. Their ideas were read by educated people on both sides of the Atlantic, and formed the basis for several key documents of the American Revolution, including the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* and Samuel Adams' Circular Letter.

There were several important English and French philosophers during the Enlightenment, and their writings circulated widely among educated people, influencing their thoughts about personal rights and freedoms, and about the political contracts between individuals and their governments. The key English philosopher for the political ideas of the American Revolution was John Locke (1632–1704). Important French philosophers include Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) and Montesquieu (1689–1755). Rousseau's ideas about general will and representative government shaped the thinking of intellectual patriots, including Thomas Jefferson. Montesquieu's thinking about the separation of powers would be particularly influential during the drafting of the Constitution.

NATURAL RIGHTS

Natural rights developed out of debates about legal rights. Legal rights are given to a person by a legal system—but can be changed or removed if the related law is changed or removed. However, Enlightenment philosophers argued that natural rights are the rights a person is born with—and they cannot be changed or removed by a government or a legal system.

John Locke wrote in his *Second Treatise of Government* (1690) that people exist in a **natural state of equality where no one person has more power or authority than anyone else**. According to Locke, a person's natural rights include **equality, freedom and the right to protect life and property**. Locke believed that these rights were fundamental, and a person could not give them up to a government.

Francis Hutcheson, in his *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty in Virtue* (1725), took up Locke's argument and extended it. Hutcheson coined the phrase 'unalienable rights' for those rights that a government could not take away.

When Thomas Jefferson wrote the opening of the Declaration of Independence, he adopted the ideas about natural rights from both Locke and Hutcheson to create the following sentence: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain **unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.**'

REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT

The debate between the colonists and the British Government about what constituted representative government was based on British custom and political precedent.

Representatives of the common people (called 'the Commons') had been elected to Parliament as far back as 1275 CE, during the reign of King Edward I. Up until the eighteenth century, it was usual for these representatives to be landowners and to live in the area (or electorate) that voted for them.

But by the eighteenth century, the Members of Parliament—the elected representatives in the Commons—did not always live in the electorate that voted for them. On top of this, because of local differences in population and the requirement that voters own property, only about 17 per cent to 23 per cent of the adult males in Britain voted for representatives to the British Parliament.⁹

This led some politicians to believe that representation did not necessarily need to be by a local person who served as the voice of the adults in the electorate. British prime minister George Grenville was one key politician who tried to use this idea to his advantage. In order to justify the Stamp Act, Grenville and his secretary of the treasury, Thomas Whately, came up with the theory of 'virtual representation'. Historian Jack Greene summarises virtual representation like this: 'the colonists, like those individuals and groups who resided in Britain but had no voice in elections, were nonetheless virtually represented in Parliament'.¹⁰

However, colonial assemblies in the colonies had a much more direct link to the people who voted for them. Most farmers were freeholders (or landowners), so this meant that up to 75 per cent of adult males in the colonies qualified as voters.¹¹ Also, most colonies had rules that required representatives to live in the electorate that voted for them—and this led to a widespread belief in the colonies that representation was direct.

← (Opposite page: top to bottom)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau; Montesquieu; John Locke.

By 1763, the idea of direct representation had become such a deep-seated idea in America that several colonial lawyers and politicians argued for direct representation in the British Parliament. For example, James Otis, in his pamphlet *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved* (1764), argued: 'That the colonies ... should not only be continued in the enjoyment of subordinate legislation [colonial governments], but be also represented in some proportion to their number and estates, in the grand legislature of the nation[parliament]'.

These differing views of representative government would prove divisive from 1763 to 1776—especially during the Stamp Act crisis.

REPUBLICANISM

In eighteenth-century colonial America, republicanism was based on the idea of participation by citizens in the government for the good of the community. A good citizen had responsibilities and duties to the community, and all citizens were equal in these responsibilities and duties. It was linked to the ideas about representative government because, according to republicanism, a good government carried out the general will of the people.

LIBERTY

The eighteenth-century American idea of liberty was tied to John Locke's ideas of natural rights. For colonists, liberty meant the right to have individual consent to be governed, and the right to have their property protected from government interference.

According to historian Gordon S. Wood: 'Individual liberty and the public good were easily reconcilable because the important liberty in the Whig ideology was public or political liberty. In 1776 the solution to the problems of American politics seemed to rest not so much in emphasizing the private rights of individuals against the general will as it did in stressing the public rights of the collective people against the supposed privileged interests of their rulers'.¹²

A REPEAL WITH CONDITIONS

William Pitt (1766): ‘At the same time, let the sovereign authority of this country over the colonies be asserted in as strong terms as can be devised, and be made to extend every point of legislation whatsoever: that we may bind their trade, confine their manufactures, and exercise every power whatsoever—except that of taking money out of their pockets without their consent.’

The Stamp Act proved problematic in England, as well as in America. Several notable members of the House of Commons, such as Edmund Burke and William Beckford, had spoken against the bill during parliamentary debate. The English press also criticised the Act. In July 1765, the king dismissed Grenville as prime minister in favour of Lord Rockingham—and the Stamp Act lost its creator and strongest defender. Worrying reports about violence and intimidation in the colonies began to reach London in October. Both before and after these reports, British exporters complained about losing American contracts and income because of colonial boycotts.

Parliament spent nine days in January 1766 sifting through anti-Stamp Act petitions, many from America but most from English business interests. A bill for **repeal** was submitted, drawing a hostile response from some in Parliament. Lord Lyttleton produced an essay condemning the repeal and launching a stinging attack on the Americans. It was countersigned by thirty-three peers from the House of Lords. Common sense won out in the end: the House of Commons moved to repeal the Act (276 votes to 168), as did the House of Lords (105 votes to 71).

repeal the act of legally reversing an Act of parliament

Source 3.18 Phillis Wheatley, from the frontispiece of *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* by Phillis Wheatley, 1773.



In some colonies, the death of the Stamp Act prompted toasts to the health of the king, the wisdom of his Parliament and the glory of the British political system. In Boston a young slave girl, Phillis Wheatley, recognised these high spirits. Born in Gambia, Wheatley had been kidnapped and transported to Massachusetts when she was just seven years old. She was purchased as a slave by a wealthy merchant, John Wheatley, to do domestic work. His family treated her kindly. Phillis Wheatley received a good education and, by the age of twelve, was composing her own poetry. She was freed by John Wheatley in 1774. She chose to stay as a free woman with the family until his death in 1778. At the time of the repeal of the Stamp Act, Phillis Wheatley was barely in her teens, yet she composed a short poem about it.

Phillis Wheatley, poem, 1768
To the King's most Excellent Majesty on the Repealing of the Stamp Act
*Your subjects hope
The crown upon your head may flourish long
And in great wars your royal arms be strong.
May your sceptre many nations sway
Resent it on them that dislike obey
But how shall we exalt the British king.*

Source 3.19 Phillis Wheatley, *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley* (Raleigh: University of North Carolina Press, 1898), 126.

Cartoonists in London were less forgiving of George III's government. One biting engraving, *The Repeal, or the Funderal of Miss America-Stamp*, lampooned the pro-stamp tax ministers by showing them at a mock funeral for their failed legislation. In a climate where there was near-constant criticism of political decision-making and matters of empire, the failure of yet another element of economic policy severely embarrassed the government.

Source 3.20 *The Repeal, or the Funderal of Miss America-Stamp*, by Benjamin Wilson, 1766.

DID YOU KNOW?
For some time it seemed the House of Lords might vote to reject the repeal of the Stamp Act, but pressure from the king saw many of the Lords rethink their voting.



DECLARATORY ACT, 1766

Despite the repeal of the Stamp Act, the hardliners in the British Parliament refused to let the issue of colonial management rest. Rockingham's ministry only accepted repeal on the condition that it be accompanied by an assertion of parliamentary authority over the American colonies. Without such a provision, the further governance and regulation of America might prove impossible—and good order in other English colonies could be undermined.

So, on the same day that the Stamp Act was repealed, it was followed by a new piece of legislation, the Declaratory Act. It boomed across the Atlantic that, 'the said colonies and plantations in America have been, are, and of right ought to be, subordinate unto, and dependent upon the imperial crown and Parliament of Great Britain'. Furthermore, the Act declared that the king and Parliament 'had, hath, and of right ought to have, full power and authority to make laws and statutes ... to bind the colonies and people of America in all cases whatsoever'.

The Declaratory Act did not raise many eyebrows in America. Most people were swept up in celebrating the repeal of the Stamp Act. They saw the Declaratory Act as simply an attempt at parliamentary face-saving.

However, for the radicals, the last passage of the Act read as dramatic prophecy: Parliament was expressing its right and its intentions to pass laws over the colonies as it saw fit. There was some precedent in the similarly worded Dependency of Ireland Act of 1719, which had been used to dominate the independent Irish courts. Although the Declaratory Act had no practical implications, many historians consider it the point when the revolution transformed from an anti-taxation protest into something deeper.

➔ **Source 3.21** Randall Miller, ed., *Zubly: A Warm and Zealous Spirit* (Atlanta: Mercer University Press, 1982), 51.

Randall Miller, interpreting the impact of revolutionary pamphleteer John Joachim Zubly

The Declaratory Act ... among other events, combined to persuade many Americans that the English ministry regarded the colonies with contempt ... American political and constitutional thinkers began to take a closer look at the implications of the Declaratory Act ... Such a naked assertion of parliamentary power aroused American fears of legislative tyranny, and the unlucky and ill-considered British policies fuelled such apprehensions. From 1766 to 1770 Americans matured rapidly in their constitutional theory. They began to question Parliament's role to legislate for the empire at all and to posit a theory of divided sovereignty.

ACTIVITY

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Why would colonists have been happy about the repeal of the Stamp Act?
- 2 Why would politicians in England have been unhappy about the repeal of the Stamp Act?
- 3 Why was the Declaratory Act passed?

KEY SUMMARY POINTS

- The Proclamation Act of 1763 restricted colonial expansion west of the Appalachian Mountains, causing resentment among some colonists
- In order to pay for the debt of the French and Indian War and tighten its control of colonial revenue, the British Parliament passed four Acts: the Sugar Act, the Currency Act, the Quartering Act, and the Stamp Act
- The colonists protested against the Stamp Act as a direct tax, claiming that it was 'taxation without representation' and an overreach of Parliament's power
- Parliament repealed the Stamp Act but passed the Declaratory Act, which claimed Parliament's right to pass laws for the colonies on any matter it chose.

ACTIVITY

CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT—ESSAY

Write a 600–800-word essay on one of the topics below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by relevant evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, and a conclusion.

Alternatively, hold a class debate on one of these topics:

- 'The American colonists overreacted to a series of unpleasant but necessary measures, such as the Stamp Act.' Discuss.
- To what extent was British mercantilism to blame for tensions in pre-revolution America?
- 'The Sugar Act of 1764 marked a turning point in the American Revolution.' Discuss.



SAMUEL ADAMS, 1722–1803



↑ Samuel Adams, painted by John Singleton Copley in about 1772.

Samuel Adams arguably contributed more to the development of rebellion against the British in Boston than any other individual. He was described by a British governor as 'the most dangerous man in Massachusetts, dedicated to the perpetration of mischief'.

Adams was born in Boston, to a religious family of Puritan stock. He entered Harvard College with the aim of becoming a minister, but found politics and law more interesting. From a young age, he expressed his opposition to—and resentment of—British interference in American matters. This might be because his father was almost driven bankrupt after British legislation dissolved his sizeable mortgage business.

After Harvard, Adams tried his hand at several professions—all of them unsuccessfully—including mercantile accounting, malt production and tax collecting. He was better at politics, and became the leader of one of Boston's largest political factions. When British Parliament passed the Sugar Act and the Stamp Act, it gave Adams a platform for his constitutional theories and anti-British writings and speeches, and he became quite well known, especially among people at the lower levels of Boston society.

He was friendly with members of the Loyal Nine, and approved of gangs harassing and intimidating customs and taxation officials. Adams was a member of the Boston Sons of Liberty, and strongly objected to the increase of British troops in Boston in 1768.

There is no evidence that Adams organised the mob riot that led to the Boston 'Massacre'—but he certainly exploited the shootings to further his cause. He wrote the famous 1772 'Massachusetts Circular Letter', which led British Parliament to suspend the Massachusetts Assembly. Adams started Committees of Correspondence to spread information and revolutionary ideas. He was a leading figure during the 1773 customs crisis, which ended with the Boston Tea Party. Adams was elected to both Continental Congresses, but took a back seat to his cousin John, who was a more confident public speaker. He served on several congressional committees and worked behind the scenes to lobby other delegates to vote for independence.

KEY POINTS

- Led political opposition to British control of Boston and Massachusetts throughout the 1760s and 1770s
- Was a member of the Sons of Liberty
- Exploited events like the Boston Massacre and Boston Tea Party to incite further unrest and rebellion against Britain
- Wrote the 1772 Circular Letter claiming that import duties passed by British Parliament were illegal
- Elected to both the First and Second Continental Congresses.

JOHN HANCOCK, 1737–1793

John Hancock was one of the richest men in America in the mid-1700s. He was a Boston merchant who later became famous as the first person—and the person with the largest signature—to sign the Declaration of Independence.

Hancock was born in Massachusetts, and studied at Harvard College at the same time as John Adams, and then went on to work in his uncle's shipbuilding business. Part of his training included working in England for two years, where he built networks of clients and suppliers. He returned to America in 1762, inherited the shipbuilding business after his uncle died, and went on to become a Boston selectman (or town councillor).

Hancock's company was known for smuggling goods and dodging customs duties—a practice that John had learnt from his uncle. On Hancock's instructions, his ships and agents smuggled more than 1 million gallons (about 3.8 million litres) of molasses each year. They bought it cheaply from French merchants in the Caribbean, then bribed customs officials to turn a blind eye. Hancock's company avoided more than £30,000 of duty each year, and paid customs officials bribes that amounted to about 10 per cent of that amount. Hancock was not concerned about the British imposing any new trade duties—because he had no intention of paying them. Between 1766 and 1768, British customs officials began to target Hancock's ships with stop-and-search orders—with the most notable being the seizure of his ship *Liberty*.

Initially, Hancock was a moderate who pledged loyalty to Britain, but over time he became an outspoken opponent of the Sugar Act, the Navigation Acts—and any other British policy that affected his business. He became supportive of people like Samuel Adams and, in 1766, entered the Massachusetts Assembly. Hancock served in the Second Continental Congress and, in May 1775, he was elected its president. He carried out this task with skill, moderating often quarrelsome debates. Hancock also contributed a large share of his own fortune to the war effort.

KEY POINTS

- One of the richest men in colonial America
- Merchant and smuggler in Boston
- Opposed British import duties and their enforcement because they affected his business
- Served as president of the Second Continental Congress
- Noted signer of the Declaration of Independence
- Contributed a large amount of his own money to fund the Continental Army.



↑ John Hancock, as depicted by John Singleton Copley in 1765.