

Events Leading to American Independence

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An engraving from 1789 of the Boston Tea Party. American colonists, angered by England's imposed taxes, threw chests of tea into Boston Harbor. Photo from Library of Congress

In 1763, it would have been hard to imagine a revolution.

Americans seemed happy enough. The Colonies were well off, and King George III was not especially hard on them. Actually, previous kings had been much worse.

How, then, in a few short years did everything change? Most of the American colonists thought of themselves as English citizens. What happened to make them want to break free from England?

Much happened between the years of 1763 and 1776. The colonists felt that Britain was taxing them unfairly. They thought Britain was treating them like children and ignoring their complaints.

For their part, the British felt the colonists should pay their fair share of taxes. Citizens living in England paid more.

Soon, some Americans began asking how a tiny island like Britain could rule the American continent.

A few important events led the English and colonists into war.

The Royal Proclamation of 1763

The French and Indian War ended in 1763. It was fought in what is now the United States and Canada.

The British gained the entire area between the Appalachian Mountains in the east and the Mississippi River in the west. Still they did not want American colonists settling there. It would have upset the French and Native Americans and could have led to fighting.

The colonies were not happy. They thought it was a plot to make them rely on Britain. It became part of the long list of problems. Each side felt the other side did not understand them or was ignoring them.

Britain imposes taxes on colonists

Britain had allowed the Colonies to rule themselves. Suddenly, Britain began controlling the Colonies.

The British began charging the American colonists taxes because they needed money. War had been expensive for Britain.

The taxes on American colonists were lower than those on British citizens. Money from taxing the Colonies paid to protect them.

The Americans, however, saw it differently. Americans thought British soldiers were sent only to watch them, and they did not want to pay for that.

Also, the colonists did not have elected officials in the British Parliament. They had no control over decisions being made by the British government. They felt that the British were ignoring their rights as Englishmen.

Stamp Act is passed

Parliament passed the Stamp Act in 1765. Now, stamped paper had to be used for every legal document to prove colonists had paid taxes. Land documents, wills and marriage licenses had to be on this special paper. Newspaper, dice and playing cards also were taxed.

Boycotting Britain's goods

The colonists said "No taxation without representation!" They refused to buy British goods. British merchants lost money and put pressure on the government. Parliament ended the Stamp Act the next year.

New Taxes

The British did not want the colony leaders to think they had power. The British Parliament passed a law saying England had total control over the Colonies.

The next taxes were on glass, paper and tea. As a result, the colonists stopped buying goods from England.

The Boston Massacre



The people of Boston was more angry about the taxes than anyone else. British officials feared for their lives, and soldiers were sent to protect them.

On March 5, 1770, townspeople began throwing rocks and snowballs at soldiers.

The British fired. They killed five men, including Crispus Attucks, a former slave.

The Boston Tea Party

British ships carrying tea were threatened in Colonial ports. Most ships turned around. In Boston, the governor allowed three ships carrying tea to enter the harbor. In December 1773, townspeople disguised themselves as Native Indians. They attacked the ships, tossing 342 chests of tea into the water.

The tea would be worth \$750,000 dollars if it was sold today.

The Intolerable Act

Parliament was fed up with the Colonies and passed the Intolerable Act.

The law closed Boston Harbor until the owners of the tea were paid back. It also said that people could not hold public meetings. The power of the British governor was also increased.

On September 5, the First Continental Congress opened in Philadelphia. It was the first time the Colonies came together to oppose the British.