

# 4 The American Revolution

## (1763–1783)

## KEY EVENTS

1770	Boston Massacre
1774	First Continental Congress meets
1775	Battle of Bunker Hill
1776	Declaration of Independence
1777	Battle of Saratoga
1781	Battle of Yorktown
1783	Treaty of Paris

## 1 Moving Toward Revolution

### ★ Section Focus

★ **Key Terms** writs of assistance ■ Stamp Act  
 ★ ■ Sons of Liberty ■ Declaratory Act  
 ★ ■ Townshend Acts ■ Boston Massacre  
 ★ ■ Committee of Correspondence ■ Boston  
 ★ Tea Party ■ Intolerable Acts ■ First  
 ★ Continental Congress

★ **Main Idea** After the French and Indian War, Britain changed its colonial policies to raise more revenue. Tensions developed as the colonists resisted what they considered to

be unlawful taxes and disregard of traditional rights.

★ **Objectives** As you read, look for answers to these questions:

1. How did Britain's victory in the French and Indian War lead to new problems?
2. What were the causes of tension between Britain and the colonies?
3. How did a new law about tea make the situation even worse?

It was sunny, but very cold, that day in February 1761 as Boston's leading citizens made their way to the Council Chamber of the Town Hall. The governor and his council arrived, lace ruffles on their shirts and swords at their sides. Boston's foremost merchants—63 of them—took their seats on three long rows of chairs. In the chamber a great fire burned to chase the winter cold.

All eyes were on the five judges, splendidly garbed in scarlet robes and great wigs powdered white. The chief justice was Thomas Hutchinson, the elegant, ambitious native son who was also lieutenant governor of Massachusetts. "Oyez, oyez," the clerk called out, using the French word for "Hear ye." The court came to order.

### THE WRITS OF ASSISTANCE CASE

The case the judges were about to hear struck at the heart of colonial relations with Britain. Fighting between the French and British in North

America was now over. In Boston money flowed. The merchants had grown rich from the trade in molasses, slaves, rum, and European fine goods.

But there was a problem. From the British point of view the merchants were smugglers. Throughout the war they had traded with the enemy, and they had smuggled goods ashore and sold them without paying customs duties.

By war's end Britain badly needed the money from such duties. Taxes in Britain had risen steeply to pay for the war. British public debt was now 20 times greater than that of the American colonies.

British officials set out to put the colonists back in their proper role of enriching Britain and obeying its laws. To do so, the government planned to use **writs of assistance**. These blank search warrants allowed officials to search for and confiscate smuggled goods at any time and in any place.

The Boston merchants had come to court to



This engraving shows some of the British forces that were occupying Boston, Massachusetts, in October 1768 to enforce the writs of assistance. **CIVIC VALUES** Describe the attitudes of the civilians and soldiers who appear in the foreground of the picture.

challenge the legality of the writs of assistance. They claimed the government should issue a separate search warrant each time a place was to be searched. The attorney general, who represented the Crown, argued that efficient collection of public taxes was more important than the liberty of any one individual. Furthermore, he said, writs of assistance had been legal in Britain since 1699, and what was law in England was law in the colonies.

James Otis represented the merchants. In response to the government's argument, Otis declared, "This writ is against the fundamental principles of English law. . . . A man is as secure in his house as a prince in his castle." No matter, he said, that writs of assistance were now legal in Britain; the writs were unconstitutional. They were against the common law and the law of nature.

Everyone knew what Otis meant by the law of nature. It was an idea best expressed by the English philosopher John Locke in the 1600s. The law of nature, said Locke, "teaches all mankind . . . that, being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions."

In the Writs of Assistance Case, Otis turned a matter of smuggling and search warrants into something much higher and much more basic—the right to liberty. In the end, the merchants lost their case, but people remembered Otis's stirring words.

Observing the trial was John Adams, age 25 and just starting his law career. Recalling the event 50 years later he said, "Here this day, in the old Council Chamber, the child Independence was born."

### PROBLEMS OF EMPIRE

By defeating France, Britain had greatly enlarged its American empire. It now controlled all of the North American continent east of the Mississippi River. The expanded empire forced Britain to focus attention on its American colonies.

The transfer of land from France to Britain was less simple than signing a piece of paper. People lived on that land—Indian people—and they feared English control. Most Indians of the interior were

### BIOGRAPHY

**JAMES OTIS (1725–1783)** was a prominent Boston lawyer who fought unfair British policies. Otis called together the Stamp Act Congress, which concluded that taxes could not be collected without the people's consent. Otis also argued against British searches of colonists' homes. However, Otis never denied Britain's right to make laws for the colonies.



allied with France and could not believe that their old ally was departing the scene. They were immensely upset as the British took over such forts as those at Detroit and Fort Pitt.

In May 1763 an Ottawa warrior named Pontiac forged an alliance of Indians to drive out the British. All summer fighting raged across the frontier. Finally, in October King George III issued the Proclamation of 1763 (page 73) to ease Indian fears and to bring peace to the frontier. American colonists deeply resented this limit on settlement.

Colonists also resented the efforts of Parliament to make them pay part of the price of empire. After the French and Indian War, 10,000 British soldiers remained in the colonies to protect the frontier. To raise funds for such expenses, Parliament passed the **Stamp Act** in 1765.

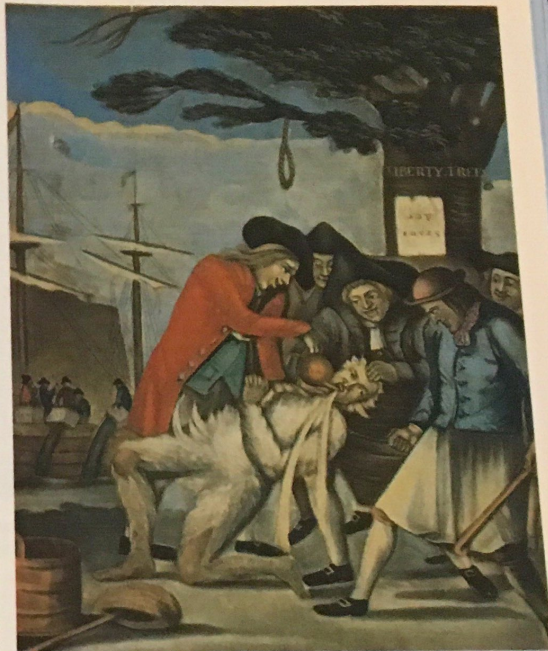
### STAMP ACT TURMOIL

The Stamp Act required that each sheet of every legal document had to carry a stamp showing that a tax had been paid. Every copy of a newspaper, a diploma, a will, a liquor license, a land deed, every advertisement, even playing cards were taxed. People had to use paper already marked with a stamp. This meant that they had to go to a special stamp tax office to purchase the stamped paper. Not only that, the tax was to be paid in silver coin—a scarce commodity in the colonies. The Stamp Act was the first attempt of Britain to tax the colonists directly. Those caught disobeying the law were to be tried in special courts in which there was no trial by jury.

The colonists reacted with rage. When word of the Stamp Act reached Virginia, the assembly issued the Stamp Act Resolves. These resolutions asserted that only the Virginia assembly had the right and power to lay taxes upon the colony. Furthermore, Virginians were “not bound to yield obedience to any law passed by Parliament.”

Citizens in every city organized themselves into secret societies called the **Sons of Liberty**. The Sons of Liberty burned the stamped paper wherever they could find it. They tarred and feathered customs officials. In Boston they ransacked the house of Chief Justice Hutchinson.

The roar of protest led Parliament to cancel the Stamp Act in 1766. But Parliament was not about



Colonists force a tarred-and-feathered excise (tax) collector to drink tea in this cartoon from 1774 entitled “Bostonians Paying the Excise Man.” In the background, colonists dump British tea overboard. **POLITICS** Do you think the artist’s viewpoint was pro- or anti-British? Why?

to knuckle under to the upstart colonists. It passed the **Declaratory Act**, asserting its right to rule and tax the colonies.

### ACTION AND REACTION

Jubilant at the repeal of the Stamp Act, few colonists paid attention to the Declaratory Act. It came as a surprise, therefore, in 1767 when Parliament passed the **Townshend Acts**. The king and Parliament still meant to get more revenues from the colonies. The Townshend Acts placed duties on glass, paper, paint, lead, and tea. These duties had to be paid in gold or silver. The money would be used to pay the salaries of the governors and other officials. Writs of assistance would be used to enforce the acts.

The Townshend Acts levied duties, not direct taxes. But the colonists were not interested in the distinction. The question was, wrote John Dickinson of Pennsylvania, “whether the parliament can legally take money out of our pockets, without our consent.” The Townshend Acts further threatened colonial liberty by taking financial control over local government from the elected assemblies. British officials would no longer need to cooperate with the assemblies because the assemblies would no longer be paying their salaries.

In Boston the town meeting voted to boycott the British goods. The driving force behind this vote was Samuel Adams. Cousin of John Adams, he was a revolutionary, a radical, and the firebrand of the Revolution. “Every dip of his pen stung like a horned snake,” complained the governor of Massachusetts.

“Every dip of his pen stung like a horned snake.”

—British official, on Samuel Adams

The boycott spread throughout the colonies. The Sons of Liberty pressured shopkeepers not to sell imported goods. Daughters of Liberty held spinning bees at which they drank herbal tea. These symbolic activities publicized the necessity of wearing and using American-made goods. Instead of learning stitchery, young women learned to knit. Charity Clarke, a New York teenager, wrote her English cousin of her vision of “a fighting army of amazons . . . armed with spinning wheels.”

When customs officials seized the merchant John Hancock’s ship *Liberty* in Boston harbor, riots broke out against the customs officials. Appalled, the king’s ministers decided to restore order by taking advantage of a recent law, the Quartering Act. The law said any colony could be forced to quarter—house and feed—British troops.

The decision to quarter troops in the city only made things worse. The common soldiers were poorly paid. They thus hired themselves out as laborers at rates lower than those that American



American Patriot Paul Revere made this engraving in 1770 in response to the Boston Massacre. Revere called his work “The Bloody Massacre” and sold it together with a patriotic poem. **HISTORY** Why might Revere’s portrayal of the incident be called patriot propaganda?

workers received. Resentments festered. Even Sam Adams’s shaggy dog took sides and became famous for biting only Redcoats. The redcoats and street youths often taunted each other. “Lobsters for sale!” the youths would holler. “Yankees!” the soldiers jeered. *Yankee* was intended as a term of ridicule, but colonists soon came to wear it with pride.

Tensions finally exploded in the incident called the **Boston Massacre**. On March 5, 1770, a gang of street youths and dock workers began pelting British soldiers with snowballs. Someone rang the church bells, the sign for people to come out for a fire. Hundreds poured into the streets. Fearing the angry mob, one soldier fired and then the others. When the smoke cleared, five men lay dead or mortally wounded. One was Crispus Attucks, a runaway slave. Seeking to inflame public opinion, the Sons of Liberty portrayed the incident as a “massacre.”

In a highly unpopular move, John Adams de-



This 1793 engraving is the earliest known picture of the Boston Tea Party. Colonists disguised as Mohawk Indians are destroying a cargo of British tea. **ECONOMICS** Why did Britain pass the Tea Act? Who among the colonists most resented low-priced British tea?

ecided to defend the eight British soldiers against the charge of murder. The law, he said, should be “deaf . . . to the clamors of the populace.” The jury found six to be innocent, and two guilty, of manslaughter.

Little more than a month later, the British Parliament repealed the Townshend Acts, keeping only the duty on tea as a symbol of its authority. The crisis seemed past, and peace and prosperity returned.

Sam Adams was not content to let people forget the cause of liberty. In 1772 Adams organized a **Committee of Correspondence** to maintain communication among Massachusetts towns. Soon committees sprang up in all the colonies, establishing a network over which vital news could quickly travel.

### THE BOSTON TEA PARTY

Soon the committees hummed with news of Parliament’s passage of the Tea Act of 1773. By this law, Parliament meant to bail the East India Company out of financial troubles by giving it a monopoly on

the American tea trade. The tea would arrive in the company’s own ships and be sold by its own agents. It would be even cheaper than smuggled tea.

Colonial shippers and merchants were appalled. If Parliament could establish a monopoly in tea, what monopoly might it create next? The Tea Act drove moderate merchants into the open arms of radical Sam Adams.

When the first tea shipments arrived, the Sons of Liberty were waiting. In Charleston the tea was unloaded into a damp warehouse but not sold. In Philadelphia and New York the Sons of Liberty persuaded the ships to turn back. In Boston they did something else.

On the night of December 16, 1773, Sons of Liberty, disguised as Indians and carrying hatchets, climbed aboard three tea ships with whoops and hollers. They methodically split open the 342 chests of tea and pushed them into the harbor. This was the **Boston Tea Party**. It was a deliberate effort by radicals such as Sam Adams to provoke Parliament.

## THE INTOLERABLE ACTS

Parliament took the bait. Furious, it retaliated by passing laws that the colonists referred to as the **Intolerable Acts**. One act closed the port of Boston until the tea had been paid for. Another act severely restricted representative government in Massachusetts. It gave the governor the power to appoint the council, all sheriffs, and all judges. Town meetings could be held only with the governor's permission, and towns were forbidden to appoint committees of correspondence. Still another act called for soldiers to be quartered in the colonies wherever it might be necessary. To enforce the laws, General Thomas Gage was appointed governor of Massachusetts. In effect, Massachusetts was under military rule.

At the same time Parliament passed the Quebec Act, but not as punishment. The Quebec Act permitted the continuation of French legal traditions and the Catholic religion in Quebec province. That Catholicism should be tolerated at their back door offended many colonists. But nothing offended them as much as the boundaries set for Quebec. Land speculators had been confident that the Proclamation of 1763 would be repealed, and they looked forward to pushing into the Ohio Valley. Instead, the Quebec Act gave all the land north of the Ohio River to Quebec. For the land-hungry, the Quebec Act was also an Intolerable Act.

In 1773 Sam Adams had written, "I wish we could arouse the continent." The Intolerable Acts of 1774 answered his wish. Other colonies sent food and money to Boston. The Virginia assembly declared the day of the port-closing to be a day of fasting and prayer. The committees of correspondence called for delegates from all the colonies to meet in Philadelphia.

In September 1774 the 56 delegates to the **First Continental Congress** in Philadelphia voted to establish another boycott of British goods unless the Intolerable Acts were repealed. From the Congress, John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail, "Let us eat potatoes and drink water; let us wear canvas and undressed sheepskins, rather than submit to the unrighteous . . . domination. . . ."

In London, calmer heads failed to influence Parliament. Parliament overwhelmingly defeated a bill that would have repealed the Intolerable Acts



## BIOGRAPHY

**ABIGAIL ADAMS (1744–1818)** was the wife of John Adams, the second President, and she was the mother of John Quincy Adams, the sixth President. A champion of women's rights, she urged her husband to "remember the ladies" when drafting the nation's new legal system. Her letters give a valuable picture of her society and times.

and recognized the Continental Congress as a legislative body. Meanwhile, during the winter of 1774–1775 the Minutemen, as members of New England's militias were called, practiced drills and built up stores of supplies and ammunition.

## SECTION REVIEW

- 1. KEY TERMS** writes of assistance, Stamp Act, Sons of Liberty, Declaratory Act, Townshend Acts, Boston Massacre, Committee of Correspondence, Boston Tea Party, Intolerable Acts, First Continental Congress
- 2. PEOPLE** John Locke, John Adams, Samuel Adams, Thomas Gage
- 3. COMPREHENSION** How did the French and Indian War affect British policy toward its American colonies?
- 4. COMPREHENSION** How did colonists respond to the Stamp Act? The Townshend Acts?
- 5. CRITICAL THINKING** Explain why you might agree or disagree with this statement: A wiser Parliament could have avoided antagonizing the colonists.