

The Stirrings of Rebellion

MAIN IDEA

Conflict between Great Britain and the American colonies grew over issues of taxation, representation, and liberty.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The events that shaped the American Revolution are a turning point in humanity's fight for freedom.

Terms & Names

- Stamp Act
- Samuel Adams
- Townshend Acts
- Boston Massacre
- committees of correspondence
- Boston Tea Party
- King George III
- Intolerable Acts
- martial law
- minutemen

On the cold, clear night of March 5, 1770, a mob gathered outside the Customs House in Boston. They heckled the British sentry on guard, calling him a “lobster-back” to mock his red uniform. More soldiers arrived, and the mob began hurling stones and snowballs at them. At that moment, Crispus Attucks, a sailor of African and Native American ancestry, arrived with a group of angry laborers.

A PERSONAL VOICE JOHN ADAMS

“This Attucks . . . appears to have undertaken to be the hero of the night; and to lead this army with banners . . . up to King street with their clubs . . . [T]his man with his party cried, ‘Do not be afraid of them. . . .’ He had hardiness enough to fall in upon them, and with one hand took hold of a bayonet, and with the other knocked the man down.”

—quoted in *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution*



▲ Crispus Attucks

Attucks's action ignited the troops. Ignoring orders not to shoot, one soldier and then others fired on the crowd. Five people were killed; several were wounded. Crispus Attucks was, according to a newspaper account, the first to die.

The Colonies Organize to Resist Britain

The uprising at the Customs House illustrated the rising tensions between Britain and its American colonies. In order to finance debts from the French and Indian War, as well as from European wars, Parliament had turned hungry eyes on the colonies' resources.

THE STAMP ACT The seeds of increased tension were sown in March 1765 when Parliament, persuaded by Prime Minister George Grenville, passed the **Stamp Act**. The Stamp Act required colonists to purchase special stamped paper for every legal document, license, newspaper, pamphlet, and almanac, and imposed special “stamp duties” on packages of playing cards and dice. The tax reached into every colonial pocket. Colonists who disobeyed the law were to be tried in the vice-admiralty courts, where convictions were probable.



Background

A New York branch of the Sons of Liberty was also founded at around the same time as the Boston chapter.

Vocabulary

boycott: a collective refusal to use, buy, or deal with, especially as an act of protest

MAIN IDEA

Comparing

A How would you compare reactions to the Townshend Acts with reactions to the Stamp Act?

STAMP ACT PROTESTS When word of the Stamp Act reached the colonies in May of 1765, the colonists united in their defiance. Boston shopkeepers, artisans, and laborers organized a secret resistance group called the Sons of Liberty. One of its founders was Harvard-educated **Samuel Adams**, who, although unsuccessful in business and deeply in debt, proved himself to be a powerful and influential political activist.

By the end of the summer, the Sons of Liberty were harassing customs workers, stamp agents, and sometimes royal governors. Facing mob threats and demonstrations, stamp agents all over the colonies resigned. The Stamp Act was to become effective on November 1, 1765, but colonial protest prevented any stamps from being sold.

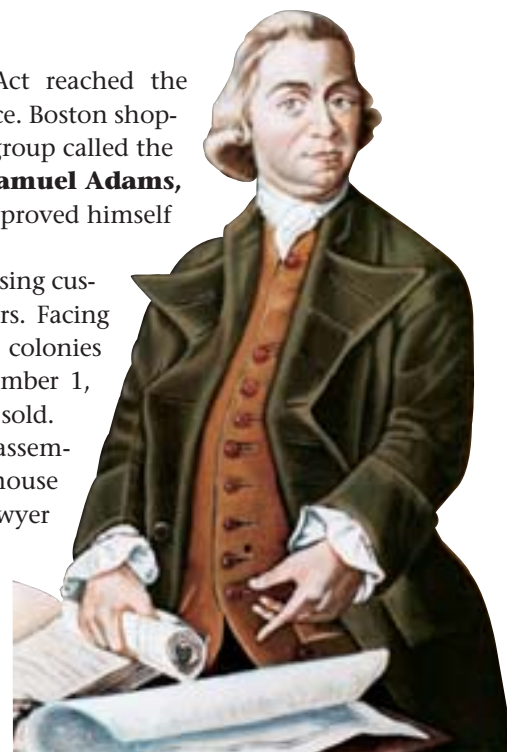
During 1765 and early 1766, the individual colonial assemblies confronted the Stamp Act measure. Virginia's lower house adopted several resolutions put forth by a 29-year-old lawyer named Patrick Henry. These resolutions stated that Virginians could be taxed only by the Virginia assembly—that is, only by their own representatives. Other assemblies passed similar resolutions.

The colonial assemblies also made a strong collective protest. In October 1765, delegates from nine colonies met in New York City. This Stamp Act Congress issued a Declaration of Rights and Grievances, which stated that Parliament lacked the power to impose taxes on the colonies because the colonists were not represented in Parliament. More than 10 years earlier, the colonies had rejected Benjamin Franklin's Albany Plan of Union, which called for a joint colonial council to address defense issues. Now, for the first time, the separate colonies began to act as one.

Merchants in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia agreed not to import goods manufactured in Britain until the Stamp Act was repealed. They expected that British merchants would force Parliament to repeal the Stamp Act. The widespread boycott worked. In March 1766, Parliament repealed the Stamp Act; but on the same day, to make its power clear, Parliament issued the Declaratory Act. This act asserted Parliament's full right to make laws "to bind the colonies and people of America . . . in all cases whatsoever."

THE TOWNSHEND ACTS Within a year after Parliament repealed the Stamp Act, Charles Townshend, the leading government minister at the time, impetuously decided on a new method of gaining revenue from the American colonies. His proposed revenue laws, passed by Parliament in 1767, became known as the **Townshend Acts**. Unlike the Stamp Act, which was a direct tax, these were indirect taxes, or duties levied on imported materials—glass, lead, paint, and paper—as they came into the colonies from Britain. The acts also imposed a three-penny tax on tea, the most popular drink in the colonies.

The colonists reacted with rage and well-organized resistance. Educated Americans spoke out against the Townshend Acts, protesting "taxation without representation." Boston's Samuel Adams called for another boycott of British goods, and American women of every rank in society became involved in the protest. Writer Mercy Otis Warren of Massachusetts urged women to lay their British "female ornaments aside," foregoing "feathers, furs, rich sattins and . . . capes." Wealthy women stopped buying British luxuries and joined other women in spinning bees. These were public displays of spinning and weaving of colonial-made cloth designed to show colonists' determination to boycott British-made cloth. Housewives also boycotted British tea and exchanged recipes for tea made from birch bark and sage. **A**



▲ Samuel Adams holding the instructions of a Boston town meeting and pointing to the Massachusetts charter.



Conflict intensified in June 1768. British agents in Boston seized the *Liberty*, a ship belonging to local merchant John Hancock. The customs inspector claimed that Hancock had smuggled in a shipment of wine from Madeira and had failed to pay the customs taxes. The seizure triggered riots against customs agents. In response, the British stationed 2,000 “redcoats,” or British soldiers—so named for the red jackets they wore—in Boston. **B**

MAIN IDEA
Evaluating

B Do you think that the colonists’ reaction to the seizing of the *Liberty* was justified?

Tension Mounts in Massachusetts

The presence of British soldiers in Boston’s streets charged the air with hostility. The city soon erupted in clashes between British soldiers and colonists and later in a daring tea protest, all of which pushed the colonists and Britain closer to war.

THE BOSTON MASSACRE One sore point was the competition for jobs between colonists and poorly paid soldiers who looked for extra work in local shipyards during off-duty hours. On the cold afternoon of March 5, 1770, a fist-fight broke out over jobs. That evening a mob gathered in front of the Customs House and taunted the guards. When Crispus Attucks and several dockhands appeared on the scene, an armed clash erupted, leaving Attucks and four others dead in the snow. Instantly, Samuel Adams and other colonial agitators labeled this confrontation the **Boston Massacre**, thus presenting it as a British attack on defenseless citizens.

Despite strong feelings on both sides, the political atmosphere relaxed somewhat during the next two years until 1772, when a group of Rhode Island colonists attacked a British customs schooner that patrolled the coast for smugglers. After the ship accidentally ran aground near Providence, the colonists boarded the vessel and burned it to the waterline. In response, King George named a special commission to seek out the suspects and bring them to England for trial.

History Through

Art

THE BOSTON MASSACRE

Paul Revere was not only a patriot, he was a silversmith and an engraver as well. One of the best-known of his engravings, depicting the Boston Massacre, is a masterful piece of anti-British propaganda. Widely circulated, Revere’s engraving played a key role in rallying revolutionary fervor.

- The sign above the redcoats reads “Butcher’s Hall.”
- The British commander, Captain Prescott (standing at the far right of the engraving) appears to be inciting the troops to fire, whereas in fact, he tried to calm the situation.
- At the center foreground is a small dog, a detail that gave credence to the rumor that, following the shootings, dogs licked the blood of the victims from the street.

SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Visual Sources

1. According to the details of the engraving, what advantages do the redcoats have that the colonists do not? What point does the artist make through this contrast?
2. How could this engraving have contributed to the growing support for the Patriots’ cause?



SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R23.

Image not available for use on CD-ROM. Please refer to the image in the textbook.


MAIN IDEA
Analyzing Motives

C Why were the committees of correspondence established?

The plan to haul Americans to England for trial ignited widespread alarm. The assemblies of Massachusetts and Virginia set up **committees of correspondence** to communicate with other colonies about this and other threats to American liberties. By 1774, such committees formed a buzzing communication network linking leaders in nearly all the colonies. **C**

THE BOSTON TEA PARTY Early in 1773, Lord Frederick North, the British prime minister, faced a new problem. The British East India Company, which held an official monopoly on tea imports, had been hit hard by the colonial boycotts. With its warehouses bulging with 17 million pounds of tea, the company was nearing bankruptcy. To save it, North devised the Tea Act, which granted the company the right to sell tea to the colonies free of the taxes that colonial tea sellers had to pay. This action would cut colonial merchants out of the tea trade, because the East India Company could sell its tea directly to consumers for less. North hoped the American colonists would simply buy the cheaper tea; instead, they protested violently.

On the moonlit evening of December 16, 1773, a large group of Boston rebels disguised themselves as Native Americans and proceeded to take action against three British tea ships anchored in the harbor. John Andrews, an onlooker, wrote a letter on December 18, 1773, describing what happened.

A PERSONAL VOICE JOHN ANDREWS

“They muster’d . . . to the number of about two hundred, and proceeded . . . to Griffin’s wharf, where [the three ships] lay, each with 114 chests of the ill fated article . . . and before nine o’clock in the evening, every chest from on board the three vessels was knock’d to pieces and flung over the sides.

They say the actors were Indians from Narragansett. Whether they were or not, . . . they appear’d as such, being cloath’d in Blankets with the heads muffled, and copper color’d countenances, being each arm’d with a hatchet or axe. . . .”

—quoted in 1776: *Journals of American Independence*

In this incident, later known as the **Boston Tea Party**, the “Indians” dumped 18,000 pounds of the East India Company’s tea into the waters of Boston Harbor.

THE INTOLERABLE ACTS King George III was infuriated by this organized destruction of British property, and he pressed Parliament to act. In 1774, Parliament responded by passing a series of measures that colonists called the **Intolerable Acts**. One law shut down Boston Harbor because the colonists had refused to pay for the damaged tea. Another, the Quartering Act, authorized British commanders to house soldiers in vacant private homes and other buildings. In addition to these measures, General Thomas Gage, commander in chief of British forces in North America, was appointed the new governor of Massachusetts. To keep the peace, he placed Boston under **martial law**, or rule imposed by military forces. **D**

The committees of correspondence quickly moved into action and assembled the First Continental Congress. In September 1774, 56 delegates met in Philadelphia and drew up a declaration of colonial rights. They defended the colonies’ right to run their own affairs. They supported the protests in Massachusetts and stated that if the British used force against the colonies, the colonies should fight back. They also agreed to reconvene in May 1775 if their demands weren’t met.

MAIN IDEA
Analyzing Motives

D What did King George set out to achieve when he disciplined Massachusetts?

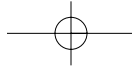
NOW & THEN

PROPOSITION 13

A more recent tax revolt occurred in California on June 6, 1978, when residents voted in a tax reform law known as Proposition 13. By the late 1970s, taxes in California were among the highest in the nation. The property tax alone was fifty-two percent above the national norm.

Proposition 13, initiated by ordinary citizens, limited the tax on real property to one percent of its value in 1975–1976. It passed with sixty-five percent of the vote.

Because of the resulting loss of revenue, many state agencies were scaled down or cut. In 1984, California voters approved a state lottery that provides supplemental funds for education. Proposition 13 still remains a topic of heated debate.



British Actions and Colonial Reactions, 1765–1775

1765 STAMP ACT

British Action

Britain passes the Stamp Act, a tax law requiring colonists to purchase special stamps to prove payment of tax.

Colonial Reaction

Colonists harass stamp distributors, boycott British goods, and prepare a Declaration of Rights and Grievances.

1767 TOWNSHEND ACTS

British Action

Britain taxes certain colonial imports and stations troops at major colonial ports to protect customs officers.

Colonial Reaction

Colonists protest “taxation without representation” and organize a new boycott of imported goods.

1770 BOSTON MASSACRE

British Action

British troops stationed in Boston are taunted by an angry mob. The troops fire into the crowd, killing five colonists.

Colonial Reaction

Colonial agitators label the conflict a massacre and publish a dramatic engraving depicting the violence.



▲ This colonial engraving was meant to warn of the effects of the Stamp Act.

Fighting Erupts at Lexington and Concord

After the First Continental Congress, colonists in many eastern New England towns stepped up military preparations. **Minutemen**, or civilian soldiers, began to quietly stockpile firearms and gunpowder. General Gage soon learned about these activities and prepared to strike back.

TO CONCORD, BY THE LEXINGTON ROAD The spring of 1775 was a cold one in New England. Because of the long winter frosts, food was scarce. General Gage had been forced to put his army on strict rations, and British morale was low. Around the same time, Gage became concerned about reports brought to him concerning large amounts of arms and munitions hidden outside of Boston.

In March, Gage sent agents toward Concord, a town outside of Boston reported to be the site of one of the stockpiles. The agents returned with maps detailing where arms were rumored to be stored in barns, empty buildings, and private homes. The agents also told that John Hancock and Samuel Adams, perhaps the two most prominent leaders of resistance to British authority, were staying in Lexington, a smaller community about five miles east of Concord. As the snows melted and the roads cleared, Gage drew up orders for his men to march along the Lexington Road to Concord, where they would seize and destroy all munitions that they could find.

“THE REGULARS ARE COMING!” As General Gage began to ready his troops quartered in Boston, minutemen were watching. Rumors were that a strike by British troops against resistance activities would come soon, although no one knew exactly when, nor did they know which towns would be targeted.

With Hancock and Adams in hiding, much of the leadership of resistance activity in Boston fell to a prominent young physician named Joseph Warren. Sometime during the afternoon of April 18, Doctor Warren consulted a confidential source close to the British high command. The source informed him that Gage intended to march on Concord by way of Lexington, seize Adams and Hancock, and destroy all hidden munitions. Warren immediately sent for Paul Revere, a member of the Sons of Liberty, and told him to warn Adams and Hancock as well as the townspeople along the way. Revere began to organize a network of riders who would spread the alarm. **E**

On the night of April 18, Paul Revere, William Dawes, and Samuel Prescott rode out to spread word that 700 British Regulars, or army soldiers, were headed

MAIN IDEA

Summarizing

E What did Warren order Paul Revere to do?



1773 TEA ACT

British Action

Britain gives the East India Company special concessions in the colonial tea business and shuts out colonial tea merchants.

Colonial Reaction

Colonists in Boston rebel, dumping 18,000 pounds of East India Company tea into Boston Harbor.

1774 INTOLERABLE ACTS

British Action

King George III tightens control over Massachusetts by closing Boston Harbor and quartering troops.

Colonial Reaction

Colonial leaders form the First Continental Congress and draw up a declaration of colonial rights.

1775 LEXINGTON AND CONCORD

British Action

General Gage orders troops to march to Concord, Massachusetts, and seize colonial weapons.

Colonial Reaction

Minutemen intercept the British and engage in battle—first at Lexington, and then at Concord.



▲ This bottle contains tea that colonists threw into Boston Harbor during the Boston Tea Party.

SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Charts

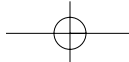
In what ways did colonial reaction to British rule intensify between 1765 and 1775?

for Concord. Before long, the darkened countryside rang with church bells and gunshots—prearranged signals to warn the population that the Regulars were coming.

Revere burst into the house where Adams and Hancock were staying and warned them to flee to the backwoods. He continued his ride until he, like Dawes, was detained by British troops. As Revere was being questioned, shots rang out and the British officer realized that the element of surprise had been lost. When more shots rang out, the officer ordered the prisoners released so that he could travel with greater speed to warn the other British troops marching toward Lexington that resistance awaited them there.



▲ The Battle of Lexington, as depicted in a mid-nineteenth-century painting.



◀ **A View of the Town of Concord**, painted by an unknown artist, shows British troops assembling on the village green.

“A GLORIOUS DAY FOR AMERICA”

By the morning of April 19, 1775, the king’s troops reached Lexington. As they neared the town, they saw 70 minutemen drawn up in lines on the village green. The British commander ordered the minutemen to leave, and the colonists began to move out without laying down their muskets. Then someone fired, and the British

soldiers sent a volley of shots into the departing militia. Eight minutemen were killed and ten more were wounded, but only one British soldier was injured. The Battle of Lexington lasted only 15 minutes.

The British marched on to Concord, where they found an empty arsenal. After a brief skirmish with minutemen, the British soldiers lined up to march back to Boston, but the march quickly became a slaughter. Between 3,000 and 4,000 minutemen had assembled by now, and they fired on the marching troops from behind stone walls and trees. British soldiers fell by the dozen. Bloodied and humiliated, the remaining British soldiers made their way back to Boston.

While the battles were going on, Adams and Hancock were fleeing deeper into the New England countryside. At one point, they heard the sound of musketfire in the distance. Adams remarked that it was a fine day and Hancock, assuming that his companion was speaking of the weather said, “Very pleasant.” “I mean,” Adams corrected Hancock, “this is a glorious day for America.”



ASSESSMENT

1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Stamp Act
- Boston Massacre
- Boston Tea Party
- martial law
- Samuel Adams
- committees of correspondence
- King George III
- minutemen
- Townshend Acts
- Intolerable Acts

MAIN IDEA

2. TAKING NOTES

Create a cluster diagram like the one shown and fill it in with events that demonstrate the conflict between Great Britain and the American colonies.



Choose one event to further explain in a paragraph.

CRITICAL THINKING

3. DEVELOPING HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

What opinion might a British soldier have had about the Boston Massacre? Explain and support your response. **Think About:**

- the start of the conflict on March 5, 1770
- the behavior of Crispus Attucks and other colonists
- the use of the event as propaganda

4. MAKING GENERALIZATIONS

Explain whether you think the British government acted wisely in its dealings with the colonies between 1765 and 1775. Support your explanation with examples from the text. **Think About:**

- the reasons for British actions
- the reactions of colonists
- the results of British actions