Four European naval powers—Spain, France, England, and the Netherlands (Holland)—created colonies in North America during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as part of their larger fight for global supremacy. Throughout the eighteenth century, wars raged across Europe, mostly pitting the Catholic nations of France and Spain against Protestant Great Britain and the Netherlands. The conflicts increasingly spread to the Americas, and by the middle of the eighteenth century, North America had become a primary battleground, involving both colonists and Native Americans allied with different European powers.

Spain’s sparsely populated settlements in the borderlands north of Mexico were small and weak compared to those in the British colonies. The Spanish had failed to create colonies with robust economies. Instead, Spain emphasized the conversion of native peoples to Catholicism, prohibited manufacturing within its colonies, strictly limited trade with the Native Americans, and searched—in vain—for gold.

The French and British colonies developed a thriving trade with Native Americans at the same time that the fierce rivalry between Great Britain and France gradually shifted the balance of power in Europe. By the end of the eighteenth century, Spain and the Netherlands would be in decline, leaving France and Great Britain to fight for dominance. The nearly constant warfare led Great Britain to tighten its control over the American colonies to raise the funds needed to combat France and Spain. Tensions over the British effort to preserve its empire at the expense of American freedoms would lead first to rebellion and eventually to revolution.

**Focus Questions**

1. What were the similarities and differences in the way that the British and French empires administered their colonies before 1763?

2. What were some of the effects of the French and Indian War? How did it change relations among the European powers in North America?

3. In what ways did the British try to strengthen their control over the colonies after the French and Indian War? How did the colonies respond?

4. What were the underlying factors in the events of the 1770s that led the colonies to declare their independence from Britain?
COMPETING NEIGHBORS

The French established colonies in North America at the same time as the English. The bitter rivalry between Great Britain and France fed France's desire to challenge the English presence in the Americas by establishing Catholic settlements in the Caribbean, Canada, and the region west of the Appalachian Mountains. Yet the French never invested the people or resources in North America that the English did. During the 1660s, the population of New France was less than that of the tiny English colony of Rhode Island. By the mid-eighteenth century, the residents of New France numbered less than 5 percent of British Americans.

NEW FRANCE

The actual settlement of New France began in 1605, when soldier-explorer Samuel de Champlain, the "Father of New France," founded Port-Royal in Acadia, along the eastern Canadian coast. Three years later, Champlain established Quebec, to the west, along the St. Lawrence River (Quebec is an Algonquian word meaning "where the river narrows"). Champlain was the first European to explore and map the Great Lakes.

Until his death in 1635, Champlain governed New France on behalf of trading companies exploiting the fur trade with the Indians. The trading companies sponsored Champlain's voyages in hopes of creating a prosperous commercial colony. In 1627, however, the French government ordered that only Catholics could live in New France. This restriction stunted its growth—as did the harsh winter climate. As a consequence, the number of French who colonized Canada was much smaller than the number of British, Dutch, and Spanish colonists in other North American colonies.

Champlain knew that the outnumbered French could survive only by befriending the native peoples. To that end, he dispatched young trappers and traders to live with the indigenous peoples, learn their languages and customs, marry native women, and serve as ambassadors of New France. Many of these hardy woodsmen were coureurs des bois (runners of the woods), who pushed into the forested regions around the Great Lakes and developed a thriving fur trade.

In 1663, French King Louis XIV changed struggling New France into a royal colony led by a governor-general who modeled his rule after that of the absolute monarch. New France was fully subject to the French king. The French colonists had no political rights or elected legislature, and public meetings could not be held without official permission.

To solidify New France, the king dispatched soldiers and settlers during the 1660s, including shiploads of young women, known as the King's Daughters, to be wives for the mostly male colonists. Louis XIV also awarded large grants of land, called seigneuries, to lure aristocratic settlers. The poorest farmers usually rented land from the seigneur.

Yet none of these efforts transformed New France from being essentially a fur-trading outpost. Only about 40,000 French immigrants came to the Western Hemisphere during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, even though the population of France was three times that of Spain. By 1750, when the British colonists in North America numbered about 1.5 million, the total French population was 70,000.

From their Canadian outposts along the Great Lakes, French explorers in the early 1670s moved southward down the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico. Louis Jolliet, a fur trader born in Quebec, teamed with Father Jacques Marquette, a Jesuit priest fluent in Indian languages, to explore the Wisconsin River south to the Mississippi River. Traveling in canoes, they paddled south to within 400 miles of the Gulf of Mexico, where they turned back for fear of encountering Spanish soldiers.

Other French explorers followed. In 1682, René-Robert Cavelier, sieur de La Salle, organized an expedition that started in Montreal, crossed the Great Lakes, and made it all the way down the Mississippi River to the Gulf.
of Mexico, the first European to do so. La Salle, who learned seven different Indian languages, hoped to create a string of fur-trading posts along the entire length of the river. Near what is today Venice, Mississippi, he buried an engraved plate and erected a cross, claiming for France the vast Ohio and Mississippi Valleys—all the way to the Rocky Mountains. He named the entire region Louisiana, after King Louis XIV.

Settlement of the Louisiana Territory finally began in 1699, when the French established a colony near Biloxi, Mississippi. The main settlement then moved to Mobile Bay and, in 1710, to the present site of Mobile, Alabama.

For nearly fifty years, the driving force in Louisiana was Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, sieur de Bienville. Sometimes called the Father of Louisiana, he served periodically as governor, and in 1718 he founded New Orleans, which shortly thereafter became the capital of the sprawling Louisiana colony encompassing much of the interior of the entire North American continent.

New France had one important advantage over its British rival: access to the great inland rivers that led to the heartland of the continent and the pelts of fur-bearing animals: beaver, otter, and mink. In the Illinois region, French settlers began farming the fertile soil, while Jesuits established missions to convert the Indians at places such as Terre Haute (“High Land,” in what is now Indiana) and Des Moines (“Of the Monks,” in present-day Iowa—the name probably shortened from Rivière des Moines, or “River of the Monks”).

THE BRITISH COLONIAL SYSTEM

The diverse British colonies in North America were quite different from those of New France. The colonial governments typically were headed by a royal
governor or proprietor who could appoint and remove officials, command the militia, and grant pardons to people convicted of crimes.

The British colonies, unlike the Spanish, French, or Dutch colonies, had elected legislatures; the “lower” houses were chosen by popular vote. Like Parliament, the assemblies controlled the budget and could pass laws and regulations. Most colonial assemblies exercised influence over the royal governors by paying their salaries. Unlike in New France, self-government in British America was expected and cherished.

**MERCANTILISM** The English Civil War during the 1640s sharply reduced the flow of money and people to America and created great confusion regarding colonial policies. It also forced English Americans to take sides in the conflict between Royalists and Puritans.

The 1651 victory of Oliver Cromwell’s Puritan army over the monarchy had direct effects in the colonies. As England’s new ruler, Cromwell embraced mercantilism, a political and economic policy adopted by most European monarchs during the seventeenth century. In a mercantile system, the government controlled all economic activities in an effort to strengthen national power. Key industries were regulated, taxed, or “subsidized” (supported by payments from the government). People with specialized skills or knowledge of new industrial technologies, such as textile machinery, were not allowed to leave the country.

Mercantilism also supported the creation of global empires. Colonies, it was assumed, enriched the mother country in several ways: (1) by providing silver and gold as well as the raw materials (furs, fish, grains, timber, sugar, tobacco, indigo, tar, etc.) needed to supply food, build ships, and produce goods; (2) by creating a captive market of colonial consumers who would be forced to buy goods created in the home country; (3) by relieving social tensions and political unrest in the home country, because colonies could absorb the growing numbers of poor, unemployed, and imprisoned; and, (4) by not producing goods that would compete with those produced in the home country.

**NAVIGATION ACTS** Such mercantilist assumptions prompted Oliver Cromwell to adopt the first in a series of Navigation Acts intended to increase control over its colonial economies. The Navigation Act of 1651 required that all goods going to and from the colonies be carried only in British-owned ships built in Britain. The law was intended to hurt the Dutch, who had developed a flourishing business shipping goods between America and Europe. Dutch shippers charged much less to transport goods than did the English, and they actively encouraged smuggling in the American colonies as a means of defying

the Navigation Acts. By 1652, England and the Netherlands were at war—the first of three naval conflicts that erupted between 1652 and 1674 involving the two Protestant rivals.

After the monarchy was restored to power in 1660, the new Royalist Parliament passed the Navigation Act of 1660, which specified that certain colonial products such as tobacco were to be shipped only to England or other colonies. The Navigation Act of 1663, called the Staples Act, required that all shipments of goods from Europe to America must first stop in Britain to be offloaded and taxed before being sent on to the colonies.

By 1700, the English had surpassed the Dutch as the world’s leading maritime power, and most products sent to and from America via Europe and Africa were carried in British ships. What the English government did not predict or fully understand was that the mercantile system would arouse resentment in the colonies.

**COLONIAL RESENTMENT** Colonial merchants and shippers loudly complained about the Navigation Acts, but the English government refused to lift its restrictions. New England, which shipped 90 percent of all American exports, was particularly hard hit. In 1678, a defiant Massachusetts legislature declared that the Navigation Acts had no legal standing. In 1684,
King Charles II tried to teach the rebellious colonists a lesson by revoking the royal charter for Massachusetts.

The following year, King Charles II died and was succeeded by his brother, King James II, the first Catholic monarch in more than 100 years. To demonstrate his power over Americans, the new king reorganized the New England colonies into a single royal supercolony called the Dominion of New England.

In 1686, the newly appointed royal governor, the authoritarian Sir Edmund Andros, arrived in Boston to take control of the Dominion. Andros stripped New Englanders of their civil rights, imposed new taxes as well as the Anglican religion, ignored town governments, strictly enforced the Navigation Acts, and punished smugglers who tried to avoid regulation altogether.

**The Glorious Revolution**

In 1688, the Dominion of New England added the former Dutch provinces of New York, East Jersey, and West Jersey to its control, just a few months before the **Glorious Revolution** erupted in England in December. The revolution was called “Glorious” because it took place with little bloodshed. James II was forced to flee to France and was replaced by the king’s Protestant daughter Mary and her Protestant husband William III, the ruling Dutch Prince.

William III and Mary II would rule as constitutional monarchs, their powers limited by the Parliament. The new king and queen soon issued a religious Toleration Act and a Bill of Rights to ensure that there never again would be an absolute monarchy in England.

In 1689, Americans in Boston staged their own revolution upon learning of the transfer of power in London. A group of merchants, ministers, and militiamen (citizen-soldiers) arrested Governor Andros and his aides and removed Massachusetts Bay Colony from the new Dominion of New England. Within a few weeks, the other colonies that had been absorbed into the Dominion also restored their independence.

William and Mary allowed all the colonies to regain their former status except Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth, which after some delay were united under a new charter in 1691 as the royal colony of Massachusetts Bay.

William and Mary, however, were determined to crack down on American smuggling and rebelliousness. They appointed new royal governors in Massachusetts, New York, and Maryland. In Massachusetts, the governor was given authority to veto acts of the colonial assembly, and he removed the requirement that only church members could vote in elections.

**John Locke on Revolution** The Glorious Revolution in England had significant long-term effects on American history in that the removal of King James II revealed that a hated monarch could be deposed according to constitutional principles. The long-standing geographical designation “Great Britain” for the united kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Wales would soon be revived as the nation’s official name.

A powerful justification for revolution appeared in 1690 when the English philosopher John Locke published his *Two Treatises on Government*, which had an enormous impact on political thought in the colonies. Locke rejected the “divine” right of monarchs to govern with absolute power. He also insisted that people are endowed with natural rights to life, liberty, and property. Locke noted that it was the need to protect those natural rights that led people to establish governments in the first place. When rulers failed to protect the property and lives of their subjects, Locke argued, the people had the right—in extreme cases—to overthrow the monarch and change the government.

**An Emerging Colonial System**

In early 1689, New Yorkers sent a message to King William thanking him for delivering England from “tyranny, popery, and slavery.” Many colonists were disappointed, however, when the king cracked down on American smugglers. The Act to Prevent Frauds and Abuses of 1696 required colonial royal governors to enforce the Navigation Acts, allowed customs officials in America to use “writs of assistance” (general search warrants that did not have to specify the place to be searched), and ordered that accused smugglers be tried in royal admiralty courts (because juries in colonial courts rarely convicted their peers). Admiralty cases were decided by judges appointed by the royal governors.

Soon, however, British efforts to enforce the Navigation Acts waned. King George I (r. 1714–1727) and George II (r. 1727–1760), German princes who were descendants of James I, showed much less interest in enforcing colonial trade laws. Robert Walpole, the long-serving prime minister (1721–1742) and lord of the treasury, decided that the American colonies should be left alone to export needed raw materials (timber, tobacco, rice, indigo) and to buy various manufactured goods from the mother country.

Under Walpole’s leadership, Britain followed a policy of “a wise and salutary neglect” of the Navigation Acts and gave the colonies greater freedom to pursue their economic interests. What Walpole did not realize was that such salutary neglect would create among many colonists an independent attitude that would eventually blossom into revolution.
THE HABIT OF SELF-GOVERNMENT Government within the American colonies evolved without plan during the eighteenth century as the colonial assemblies acquired powers, particularly with respect to government appointments, that Parliament had yet to exercise itself.

The English colonies in America, unlike New France and New Spain, benefited from elected legislative assemblies. Whether called the House of Burgesses (Virginia), Delegates (Maryland), Representatives (Massachusetts), or simply the assembly, the “lower” houses were chosen by popular vote. Only male property owners could vote, based upon the notion that only men who held a tangible “stake in society” could vote responsibly. Because property holding was much more widespread in America than in Europe, a greater proportion of the men could vote and hold office in the colonies. Members of the colonial assemblies tended to be wealthy, prominent figures, but there were exceptions. One unsympathetic colonist observed in 1744 that the New Jersey Assembly “was chiefly composed of mechanicks and ignorant wretches; obstinate to the last degree.”

The most profound political trend during the early eighteenth century was the growing power exercised by the colonial assemblies. Like Parliament, the assemblies controlled the budget through their vote on taxes and expenditures, and they held the power to initiate legislation. Most of the colonial assemblies also exerted leverage on the royal governors by controlling their salaries. Throughout the eighteenth century the assemblies expanded their power and influence, sometimes in conflict with the governors, sometimes in harmony with them. Self-government in America became first a habit, then a “right.” By the mid-eighteenth century, the American colonies had become largely self-governing.

WARFARE IN THE COLONIES

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 transformed relations among the great powers of Europe. Protestants William and Mary, for example, were passionate foes of Catholic France’s Louis XIV. King William organized an alliance of European nations against the French in a transatlantic war known in the American colonies as King William’s War (1689–1697).

It was the first of four major wars fought in Europe and the colonies over the next seventy-four years. In each case, Britain and its European allies fought against Catholic France or Spain and their allies. By the end of the eighteenth century, the struggle between the British and the French would shift the balance of power in Europe.

In all four of the wars except the last, the Seven Years’ War, battles in the North American colonies were but a sideshow accompanying massive warfare in Europe. Although the wars involved many nations, including Indians who fought on both sides, the conflicts centered on the intense struggle for supremacy between the British and the French, a struggle that ended up profoundly shifting the international balance of power among the great powers of Europe.

The prolonged warfare during the eighteenth century had a devastating effect on New England, especially Massachusetts, for it was closest to the battlefields of French Canada. The wars also reshaped Britain’s relationship with America. Great Britain emerged from the wars in 1763 as the most powerful nation in the world. Thereafter, international commerce became increasingly essential to the expanding British Empire, thus making the American colonies even more strategically significant.

THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR The most important conflict between Britain and France in North America was the French and Indian War (1754–1763), globally known as the Seven Years’ War. Unlike the earlier wars, the French and Indian War started in America and ended with a decisive victory. It was sparked by French and British competition for the ancestral Indian lands in the vast Ohio Valley, and the stakes were high. Whoever controlled the “Ohio Country” would control the entire continent because of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.

To defend their interests in the Ohio Country, the French pushed south from Canada and built forts in the region. When Virginia’s British governor learned of the forts, he sent an ambitious twenty-two-year-old militia officer, Major George Washington, to warn the French to leave. Washington made his way on foot and by horseback, canoe, and raft more than 450 miles to Fort Le Boeuf (just south of Lake Erie, in northwest Pennsylvania) in late 1753, only to be rudely rebuffed by the French.

A few months later, in the spring of 1754, Washington, now a lieutenant colonel, went back to the Ohio Country with 150 volunteer soldiers and Indian allies. They planned to build a fort where the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio Rivers converged (where the city of Pittsburgh later developed). The so-called Forks of the Ohio was the key strategic gateway to the vast western territory west of the Appalachian Mountains, and both sides were determined to control it.

After two months of difficult travel through densely forested, hilly terrain, Washington learned that French soldiers had beaten him to the site and built Fort Duquesne in western Pennsylvania. Washington decided to camp about
forty miles from the fort. The next day, the Virginians ambushed a French scouting party, killing ten soldiers, including the commander—the first fatalities in what would become the French and Indian War.

Washington and his troops, reinforced by more Virginians and British soldiers dispatched from South Carolina, hastily constructed a tiny circular stockade at Great Meadows in western Pennsylvania. They called it Fort Necessity. Washington remarked that the valley provided "a charming field for an encounter," but there was nothing charming about the battle that erupted when a large French force attacked in a rainstorm on July 3, 1754.

After the day-long, lopsided Battle of Great Meadows, Washington surrendered, having seen a third of his 300 men killed or wounded. The French and their Indian allies lost only three men. The French commander then forced Washington to surrender his French prisoners and admit that he had "assassinated" the group of French soldiers at the earlier encounter. On July 4, 1754, Washington and the defeated Virginians began trudging home. Most of them, he noted, "are almost naked, and scarcely a man has either shoes, stockings, or hat."

France was now in undisputed control of the Ohio Country. Washington's bungled expedition not only had failed to oust the French; it had triggered a massive world war. As a British politician exclaimed, "the volley fired by a young Virginian in the backwoods of America set the world on fire."

**THE ALBANY PLAN** British officials, worried about war with the French and their Indian allies, urgently called a meeting of the northern colonies as far south as Maryland. Twenty-one representatives from seven colonies gathered in Albany, New York. It was the first time that a large group of colonial delegates had met to take joint action.

At the urging of Pennsylvania's Benjamin Franklin, the Albany Congress (June 19–July 11, 1754) approved the Albany Plan of Union. It called for eleven colonies to band together, headed by a president appointed by the king. Each colonial assembly would send two to seven delegates to a "grand council,"

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**MAJOR CAMPAIGNS OF THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR**

- What was the significance of the siege of Fort Necessity?
- What was the Albany Plan of Union?
- What led to the British victory over France in North America in 1759?

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**The first American political cartoon** Benjamin Franklin's plea to the colonies to unite against the French in 1754 would become popular again twenty years later, when the colonies faced a different threat.
which would have legislative powers. The Union would have jurisdiction over
Indian affairs.

The Albany Plan of Union was too radical for the time, however. British
officials and the colonial legislatures, eager to maintain their powers, wanted
simply a military alliance against Indian attacks, so they rejected the Albany
Plan. Benjamin Franklin later maintained that the Plan of Union, had it been
adopted, may have postponed or eliminated the eventual need for a full-scale
colonial revolution. Franklin’s proposal, however, did have a lasting signifi-
cance in that it would be the model for the form of governance (Articles of
Confederation) created by the new American nation in 1777.

WAR IN NORTH AMERICA With the failure of the Albany Plan, the
British government decided to force a showdown with the “presumptuous”
French in North America. In June 1755, a British fleet captured the French
forts protecting Acadia, a colony of New France along the Atlantic coast of
Canada. The British then expelled 11,500 Acadians, the Catholic French res-
idents. Hundreds of them eventually found their way to French Louisiana,
where they became known as Cajuns (the name derived from Acadians).

In 1755, the British government sent 1,000 soldiers to dislodge the French
from the Ohio Country. The arrival of unprecedented numbers of “redcoat”
soldiers on American soil would change the dynamics of British North Amer-
ica. Although the colonists endorsed the use of force against the French, they
later would oppose the use of British soldiers to enforce colonial regulations.

BRaddock’s DEFEAT The British commander in chief in America,
General Edward Braddock, was a stubborn, overconfident officer who refused
to recruit large numbers of Indian allies. Braddock viewed Indians with open
contempt, telling those willing to fight with him that he would not reward them
with land for doing so: “No savage should inherit the land.” His dismissal of
the Indians and his ignorance of unconventional warfare in American forests
would prove fatal. Neither he nor his Irish troops had any experience fighting
in the wilderness.

With the addition of some American militiamen, including George Wash-
ington as a volunteer officer, Braddock’s force left northern Virginia to confront
the French, hacking a 125-mile-long road west through the rugged Allegheny
Mountains toward Fort Duquesne.

On July 9, 1755, as the British neared the fort, they were ambushed by
French soldiers, Canadian militiamen, and Indians. The British troops,
dressed in impractical bright-red wool uniforms in the summer heat, suf-
fered shocking losses. Braddock was mortally wounded and would die three
days later. Washington, his coat riddled by four bullets, helped lead a hasty
retreat.

What came to be called the Battle of Monongahela was one of the worst
British defeats in history. The French and Indians killed 63 of 86 British of-
cers, 914 out of 1,373 soldiers, and captured the British cannons and supplies.
Twelve of the wounded British soldiers left behind on the battlefield were
stripped and burned alive by Indians. A devastated Washington wrote his
brother that the British army had “been scandalously beaten by a trifling body
of men.” The vaunted redcoats “broke & run as sheep pursued by hounds,” but
the Virginians, he noted, “behaved like Men and died like Soldiers.”

A WORLD WAR While Brad-
dock’s stunning defeat sent shock
waves through the colonies, Indians
allied with the French began attacking
American farms throughout western
Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia,
killing, scalping, or capturing hun-
dreds of men, women, and children. Desperate to respond, the Pennsylvania
provincial government offered 130 Spanish dollars for each male Indian scalp
and 50 dollars for female scalps.

Indians and colonists killed each other mercilessly throughout 1755 and
1756 during the French and Indian War. It was not until May 1756, however,
that Protestant Britain and Catholic France formally declared war in Europe.
The first truly “world war,” the Seven Years’ War in Europe and the French and
Indian War in North America would eventually be fought on four continents
and three oceans around the globe. In the end, it would redraw the political
map of the world.
The onset of war brought into office a new British government, with William Pitt as prime minister. His exceptional ability and self-assurance matched his towering ego. "I know that I can save England and no one else can," he announced. Pitt assembled a huge force of 45,000 British troops and American militiamen, and in August 1759, they captured the French forts near the Canadian border at Ticonderoga, Crown Point, and Niagara.

THE BATTLE OF QUEBEC In 1759, the French and Indian War reached its climax with a series of British triumphs on land and at sea. The most decisive victory was at Quebec, the hilltop fortress city and the capital of French Canada. During the dark of night, some 4,500 British troops scaled the cliffs above the St. Lawrence River and at dawn surprised the unprepared French defenders in a battle that lasted only ten minutes. The French retreated, only to surrender four days later.

The Battle of Quebec was the turning point in the war. Therefore, the conflict in North America diminished although the fighting dragged on until 1763. In the South, fighting flared up between the Carolina settlers and the Cherokee Nation. A force of British regulars and colonial militia broke Cherokee resistance in 1761.

A NEW BRITISH KING Meanwhile, the Seven Years’ War played out around the globe. In Europe, huge armies ravaged each other. Hundreds of towns and cities were plundered and more than a million people killed.

On October 25, 1760, British King George II arose at 6 A.M., drank his morning chocolate milk, and suddenly died on his toilet as the result of a ruptured artery. His death shocked the nation and brought an untested new king to the throne.

George II’s inexperienced successor was his twenty-two-year-old grandson, George III, who was despised by his grandfather. Although initially shy and insecure, the young king, the first in his German royal family to be born and raised in England, was an unabashed patriot: “I glory in the name of Britain.” He became a strong-willed leader who oversaw the military defeat of France and Spain in the Seven Years’ War. The Treaty of Paris, which ended the war, made Great Britain the ruler of an enormous world empire. The American colonists celebrated the great British victories with as much excitement and pride as did Londoners.

THE TREATY OF PARIS (1763) In the Treaty of Paris, signed in February 1763, Britain took control of many important French colonies around the world, including several incredibly profitable “sugar island” colonies in the West Indies, most of the French colonies in India, and all of France’s North American possessions east of the Mississippi River: all of Canada and what was then called Spanish Florida (including much of present-day Alabama and Mississippi). As compensation, the treaty gave Spain control over the vast Louisiana Territory, including New Orleans and all French land west of the Mississippi River. The loss of Louisiana left France with no territory on the North American continent. British Americans were delighted with the outcome of the war. As a New England minister declared, Great Britain had reached the “summit of earthly grandeur and glory.”

Britain’s spectacular military success created massive challenges, however. The national debt doubled during the war, and the new cost of maintaining the sprawling North American empire, including the permanent stationing of British soldiers in the colonies, was staggering. In winning a huge global empire, British leaders developed what one historian has called an “arrogant triumphalism,” which led them to tighten—and ultimately lose—their control over the Indians and colonists in North America.

MANAGING A NEW EMPIRE No sooner was the Treaty of Paris signed than King George III and his cabinet, working through Parliament, began strictly enforcing economic regulations on the American colonies to help reduce the crushing national debt caused by the war. During and after the war, the British government increased taxes in Britain to fund the military expenses. In 1763, the average British citizen paid twenty-six times as much in taxes each year as the average American colonist paid. With that in mind, British leaders thought it only fair that the Americans should pay more of the expenses for administering and defending the colonies.

Many Americans disagreed, however, arguing that the various Navigation Acts restricting their economic activity were already a form of tax on them. The tension between the British need for greater revenue from the colonies and the Americans’ defense of their rights and liberties set in motion a chain of events that would lead to revolution and independence. “It is truly a miserable thing,” said a Connecticut minister in December 1763, “that we no sooner leave fighting our neighbors, the French, but we must fall to quarreling among ourselves.”
What events led to the first clashes between the French and the British in the late seventeenth century?
Why did New England suffer more than other regions of North America during the wars of the eighteenth century?
What were the long-term financial, military, and political consequences of the wars between France and Britain?

How did the map of North America change between 1713 and 1763?
How did Spain win the Louisiana Territory?
What were the consequences of the British gaining all the land east of the Mississippi River?

PONTIAC'S REBELLION After the war, colonists began squabbling over Indian-owned land west of the Appalachian Mountains that the French had ceded to the British in the Treaty of Paris. Native American leaders, none of whom attended the meetings leading to the treaty, were shocked to learn that the French had “given” their ancestral lands to the British. Ohio Indians complained to British army officers that “as soon as you conquered the French, you did not care how you treated us.” One chieftain claimed that the British had treated them “like slaves.”

The Indians fought back in the spring of 1763, capturing most of the British forts around the Great Lakes and in the Ohio Valley. “Never was panic more general,” reported the Pennsylvania Gazette, “than that of the Backwoods Inhabitants, whose terrors at this time exceed that followed on the defeat of General Braddock.”
Native Americans raided colonial settlements in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, destroying farms and killing thousands. "Every day, for some time past," reported a Marylander, "has offered the melancholy scene of poor distressed families...who have deserted their plantations, for fear of falling into the cruel hands of our savage enemies." The refugees told of terrible massacres in which settlers "were most cruelly butchered; the woman was roasted...and several of the men had awls thrust in their eyes, and spears, arrows, pitchforks, etc., sticking in their bodies."

The widespread Indian attacks in the spring and summer of 1763 came to be called Pontiac's Rebellion because of the prominent role played by the inspiring Ottawa chieftain who sought to unify several tribes in the effort to stop American expansion. Pontiac told a British official that the "French never conquered us, neither did they purchase a foot of our Country, nor have they a right to give it to you."

In December 1763, a group of frontier ruffians in Pennsylvania took the law into their own hands. Outraged at the unwillingness of pacifist Quakers in the Pennsylvania assembly to protect white settlers on the frontier from marauding Indians, a group called the Paxton Boys, Scots-Irish farmers from Paxton, near Harrisburg, armed with tomahawks and rifles, took revenge by massacring and scalping peaceful Conestogas—men, women, and children. Then they threatened to kill the so-called Moravian Indians, a group of Christian converts living near Bethlehem. When the Indians took refuge in Philadelphia, some 1,500 Paxton Boys marched on the capital, where Benjamin Franklin helped persuade the ungovernable frontiersmen to return home.

THE PROCLAMATION LINE To help keep peace with the Indians and to abide by the terms of an earlier agreement with the Delawares and Shawnees, called the Treaty of Easton (1758), King George III issued the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which drew an imaginary line along the crest of the Appalachian Mountains from Canada south to Georgia. White settlers ("our loving subjects") were forbidden to go west of the line in order to ensure that the Indians would not be "molested or disturbed" on their ancestral lands.

For the first time, American territorial expansion was to be controlled by royal officials. In practice, the proclamation line ended the activities of speculators buying huge tracts of Indian lands but did not keep land-hungry settlers from pushing across the steep Appalachian ridges into Indian country. By 1767, an Indian chief was complaining that whites were "making more encroachments on their Country than ever they had before."

REGULATING THE COLONIES

As Britain tightened its hold over the colonies after 1763, Americans reminded Parliament that their original charters guaranteed they should be treated as if they were English citizens, with all the rights and liberties protected by the nation's constitutional traditions. Such arguments, however, fell on deaf ears in Parliament. As one member explained, the British were determined "to make North America pay [for] its own army."

GRENVILLE'S COLONIAL POLICY Just as the Proclamation of 1763 was being drafted, a new British government led by George Grenville began to grapple with the huge debts the government had accumulated during the war along with the added expenses of maintaining troops in America. Grenville insisted that the Americans, whom he called the "least taxed people in the world," must pay for the soldiers defending them. He also resented the large number of American merchants who engaged in smuggling to avoid paying British taxes on imported goods. Grenville ordered colonial officials to tighten enforcement of the Navigation Acts and sent warships to capture smugglers who, if caught, would be tried in new military courts rather than civilian jury trials.

THE SUGAR ACT Grenville's effort to enforce the various Navigation Acts posed a serious threat to New England's prosperity. Distilling rum out of molasses, a sweet syrup made from sugarcane, had become quite profitable, especially if the molasses could be smuggled in from Caribbean islands still controlled by the French.

To generate more money from the colonies, Grenville put through the American Revenue Act of 1764, commonly known as the Sugar Act, which cut the tax on molasses in half. Doing so, he believed, would reduce the temptation to smuggle French molasses or to bribe royal customs officers. But the Sugar Act also added new duties (taxes) on other goods (sugar, wines, coffee, spices) imported into America. The new revenues generated by the Sugar Act, Grenville estimated, would help pay for "the necessary expenses of defending, protecting, and securing, the said colonies."

With the Sugar Act, Parliament, for the first time, adopted a policy designed to raise revenues from the colonies and not merely to regulate trade with other nations. Colonists claimed that the Sugar Act taxed them without their consent, since they had no elected representatives in Parliament. British officials argued, however, that Parliament's power was absolute and indivisible. If the Americans accepted parliamentary authority in any area, they had to accept
its authority in every area. In the end, however, the controversial new sugar tax did not produce more revenue for Great Britain; the cost of enforcing it was four times greater than the revenue it generated.

THE CURRENCY ACT  Americans equally hated another of Grenville’s new regulatory measures, the Currency Act of 1764, which prohibited the colonies from coining or printing money, while requiring that all payments for British goods imported into the colonies must be in gold or silver coins or in a commodity like tobacco. The colonies had long faced a chronic shortage of “hard” money (gold and silver coins, called specie), which kept flowing overseas to pay debts in England.

To address the lack of specie, many colonies issued their own paper money, which could not be used in other colonies. British creditors feared payment in a currency of such fluctuating value. To alleviate their fears, Grenville implemented the Currency Act. By banning paper money, it caused the value of existing paper money to plummet. As a Philadelphia newspaper complained, “The Times are Dreadful, Dismal, Doleful, Dolorous, and dollar-less.”

THE STAMP ACT  Prime Minister Grenville excelled at doing the wrong thing—repeatedly. In 1765, for example, he persuaded Parliament to pass the Quartering Act, which required Americans to feed and house British troops. Most Americans saw no need for so many British soldiers in colonial cities. If the British were there to defend against Indians, why weren’t they positioned closer to the Indians?

Some colonists decided that the Quartering Act was actually an effort to use British soldiers to bully the Americans. William Knox, a British colonial official, admitted as much in 1763 when he said that the “main purpose” of keeping an army in America was “to secure the dependence of the colonies on Great Britain.”

Yet Grenville aggravated colonial concerns by pushing through an even more controversial measure. On February 13, 1765, Parliament passed the Stamp Act, which required colonists to purchase stamped paper for virtually every possible use: newspapers, pamphlets, bonds, leases, deeds, licenses, insurance policies, college diplomas, even playing cards. The requirement was to go into effect November 1. The Stamp Act was the first effort by Parliament to place a tax directly on American goods and services rather than levying an “external” tax on imports and exports. Not a single colony supported the new measure.

THE WHIG POINT OF VIEW  Grenville’s colonial policies outraged many Americans, especially those living in the large port cities: Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston. Unwittingly, the prime minister had stirred up a storm of protest and set in motion a violent debate about the proper relationship between Great Britain and her colonies. In the late eighteenth century, the Americans who opposed British policies began to call themselves Patriots or Whigs, a name earlier applied to British critics of royal power. In turn, Whigs labeled the king and his “corrupt” government ministers and Parliamentary supporters as Tories, a term of abuse meaning friends of the king.

In 1764 and 1765, Whigs felt that Grenville was violating their rights in several ways. A professional army was usually a weapon used by tyrants, and now, with the French defeated and Canada solidly under British control, thousands of British soldiers remained in America. Were the troops there to protect the colonists or to scare them into obedience?

Whigs also argued that British citizens had the right to be taxed only by their elected representatives in Parliament, but Americans had no such representatives. British leaders countered that the colonists enjoyed virtual representation in Parliament. William Pitt, a staunch supporter of American rights in Parliament, dismissed Grenville’s concept of virtual representation as “the most contemptible idea that ever entered into the head of a man.” Many others, in both Britain and America, agreed. Sir Francis Bernard, the royal governor of Massachusetts, correctly predicted that the new stamp tax “would cause a great Alarm & meet much Opposition” in the colonies.

PROTESTS IN THE COLONIES  The Stamp Act aroused fierce resentment and resistance. A New Yorker wrote that “this single stroke has lost Great Britain the affection of all her colonies.” In a flood of pamphlets, speeches, resolutions, and street protests, critics repeated a slogan familiar to Americans: “No taxation without representation [in Parliament].”

Protesters, calling themselves Sons of Liberty, emerged in every colony, often meeting beneath “liberty trees”—in Boston a great elm, in Charleston, South Carolina, a live oak. In New York City, the Sons of Liberty erected “liberty poles” as symbols of their resistance. In Virginia, Patrick Henry convinced the assembly to pass the “Stamp Act Resolutions,” which asserted yet again that the colonists could not be taxed without being first consulted by the British government or represented in Parliament by their own elected members.

THE NONIMPORTATION MOVEMENT  Americans opposed to the Stamp Act knew that the most powerful form of leverage they had against
Patriots saw the effort to boycott British products as a way to restore their own virtue. A Rhode Islander declared that a primary cause of America’s problems was the “luxury and extravagance” brought on by their freewheeling purchases of British goods. The nonimportation movement would help Americans restore “our frugality, industry, and simplicity of manners.” A Boston minister claimed that those who could not do without British luxury goods and be satisfied with “plainness and simplicity” did not deserve to be American citizens.

**Colonial Unity** The boycotts worked; imports of British goods fell by 40 percent. At the same time, the Virginia House of Burgesses struck the first official blow against the Stamp Act with the Virginia Resolves, a series of resolutions inspired by the fiery Patrick Henry. Virginians, Henry declared, were entitled to all the rights of Englishmen, and Englishmen could be taxed only by their own elected representatives. Because Virginians had no elected representatives in Parliament, they could only be taxed by the Virginia

The British was economic. To put pressure on the British government and show that the colonists themselves had not become “dependent” on Britain’s “empire of goods,” Patriots by the thousands between 1767 and 1770 signed what were called nonimportation agreements, pledging not to buy or consume any British goods.

The nonimportation movement of the 1760s and 1770s united Whigs from different communities and different colonies. It also enabled women to play a significant role resisting Britain’s colonial policies. Calling themselves Daughters of Liberty, many colonial women stopped buying imported British clothes. They also quit drinking British tea in order to “save this abused Country from Ruin and Slavery.” Using herbs and flowers, they made “Liberty Tea” instead.

The Daughters of Liberty also participated in public “spinning bees,” whereby they would gather in the town square to weave and spin yarn and wool into fabric, known as “homespun.” In 1769 the Boston Evening Post reported that the “industry and frugality of American ladies” were enabling “the political salvation of a whole continent.”
legislature. Newspapers spread the Virginia Resolves throughout the colonies, and other colonial assemblies hastened to follow Virginia’s example. “No taxation without representation” became the echoing rally cry for American Whigs.

In 1765, the Massachusetts House of Representatives invited the other colonial assemblies to send delegates to New York City to discuss their opposition to the Stamp Act. Nine responded, and from October 7–25, 1765, the Stamp Act Congress formulated a Declaration of the Rights and Grievances of the Colonies. The delegates insisted that they would accept no taxes being “imposed on them” without “their own consent, given personally, or by their representatives.” Grenville responded by denouncing his colonial critics as “ungrateful” for all of the benefits provided them by the British government.

**REPEAL OF THE STAMP ACT** The storm over the Stamp Act had scarcely erupted before Grenville was out of office. He had lost the confidence of the king, who replaced him with Lord Rockingham in July 1765. Then, in mid-August 1765, nearly three months before the Stamp Act was to take effect, a Boston mob plundered the homes of the royal lieutenant governor, Thomas Hutchinson, and the official in charge of enforcing the stamp tax. Thoroughly shaken, the Boston stamp agent resigned, and other stamp agents throughout the colonies were hounded out of office.

The growing violence in America and the success of the nonimportation movement convinced Rockingham that the Stamp Act was a mistake. In February 1766, a humiliated Parliament repealed it. To save face, Parliament passed the Declaratory Act, which asserted its power to govern the colonies “in all cases whatsoever.”

The repeal of the Stamp Act set off excited demonstrations throughout the colonies. Sally Franklin wrote to her father Benjamin in Europe that Philadelphia’s church bells were rung and bonfires were built. “I never heard so much noise in my life,” she noted.

**THE TOWNSHEND ACTS** In July 1766, King George III replaced Lord Rockingham with William Pitt, the former prime minister who had exercised heroic leadership during the Seven Years’ War. For a time, the guiding force in the Pitt ministry was the witty but reckless Charles Townshend, the treasury chief whose “abilities were superior to those of all men,” said a colleague, “and his judgment [common sense] below that of any man.”

In 1767, Townshend pushed through Parliament his ill-fated plan to generate more colonial revenue. A few months later, he died at age forty-two, leaving behind a bitter legacy: the Townshend Acts. The Revenue Act of 1767, which taxed colonial imports of glass, lead, paint, paper, and tea, was the most hated. It posed an even more severe threat than Grenville’s taxes had, for Townshend planned to use the new tax revenues to pay the salaries of the royal governors in the colonies. Until that point, the colonial assemblies paid the salaries, thus giving them some leverage over them. John Adams observed that Townshend’s plan would make the royal governor “independent of the people” and disrupt “that balance of power which is essential to all free governments.” Writing in the Boston Gazette, Adams insisted that such “an independent ruler, [is] a monster in a free state.”

**DISCONTENT ON THE FRONTIER**

Some colonists had little interest in the disputes over British regulatory policy raging along the seaboard. Parts of the backcountry stirred with quarrels that had nothing to do with the Stamp and Townshend Acts. Rival claims to lands east of Lake Champlain pitted New York against New Hampshire. Eventually the residents of the disputed area would form their own state of Vermont, created in 1777 although not recognized as a member of the Union until 1791.

In the south, frontiersmen in South Carolina issued a rising chorus of complaints about the lack of colonial protection—from horse thieves, cattle rustlers, and Indians. Backcountry residents organized societies, called Regulators, to administer vigilante justice in the region, and refused to pay taxes until they gained effective government. In 1769, the assembly finally set up six circuit courts in the region but without responding to the backcountry’s demand for representation in the legislative assemblies.

In North Carolina the protest was less over the lack of government than over the abuses and extortion by appointees from the eastern part of the colony. Western farmers felt especially oppressed by the government’s refusal either to issue paper money or to accept produce in payment of taxes, and in 1766 they organized to resist. Efforts of these Regulators to stop seizures of property and other court proceedings led to more disorders and the enactment of a bill that made the rioters guilty of treason. That the Regulators tended to be Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians who preached plain living, while the coastal elite tended to be Anglicans who paraded their wealth, injected a religious and social element into the squabbles.

In the spring of 1771, North Carolina’s royal governor William Tryon led 1,200 militiamen into battle against Regulators. There his forces defeated some
2,000 ill-organized Regulators in the Battle of Alamance, in which eight were killed on each side. Tryon's men then ranged through the backcountry, forcing some 6,500 Piedmont settlers to sign an oath of allegiance to the king.

These disputes and revolts within the colonies illustrate the diversity of opinion and outlook among Americans on the eve of the Revolution. Colonists were of many minds about many things, including British rule, but also differed with one another over how best to protest against particular grievances.

**The Crisis Grows**

The Townshend Acts surprised and angered many colonists. As American rage bubbled over, Samuel Adams of Boston, one of the most radical rebels, decided that a small group of determined Whigs could generate a mass movement. "It does not take a majority to prevail," Adams insisted, "but rather an irate, tireless minority, keen on setting brushfires of freedom in the minds of men."

Early in 1768, Adams and Boston attorney James Otis Jr. convinced the Massachusetts assembly to circulate a letter they had written to the other colonies. It restated the illegality of taxation without representation in Parliament and invited the support of other colonies. British officials ordered the Massachusetts assembly to withdraw the letter. They refused, and the king ordered the assembly dissolved.

In response to an appeal by the royal governor of Massachusetts, 3,000 British troops were sent to Boston in October 1768 to maintain order. Loyalists, as the Americans who supported the king and Parliament were often called, welcomed the soldiers; Patriots, those rebelling against British authority, viewed the British troops as an occupation force. Meanwhile, in London the king appointed still another new chief minister, Frederick, Lord North, in January 1770.

**The First Bloodshed** In 1765, Benjamin Franklin had predicted that although British soldiers sent to America would "not find a rebellion; they may indeed make one." The growing tensions between rebellious Americans and British troops triggered several violent incidents. The first, called the Battle at Golden Hill, occurred in New York City, where "Liberty Boys" kept erecting "liberty poles," only to see British soldiers knock them down. The soldiers, called "lobsterbacks" or "redcoats" because of their bright red uniforms, also began posting signs declaring that the Sons of Liberty were "the real enemies of society."

On January 18, 1770, a group of Patriots captured two British soldiers. Soon, an angry crowd formed around the twenty British soldiers sent to rescue their comrades. The outnumbered soldiers retreated. When they reached Golden Hill, more soldiers arrived. At that point, the redcoats turned on the crowd pursuing them. An officer yelled: "Draw your bayonets and cut your way through them!" They attacked the crowd, and in the confusion, several on both sides were seriously hurt.

The next day, more brawls erupted. Once the British soldiers left the scene, the Sons of Liberty erected another liberty pole which bore the inscription: "Liberty and Property." The first blood had been shed in the growing conflict over American liberties, and it was soon followed by more violence.

**The Boston Massacre** Massachusetts had long been the center of resistance to British authority. In Boston, the presence of thousands of British soldiers had become a constant source of irritation. Crowds frequently heckled the soldiers, many of whom earned the abuse by harassing and intimating Americans.

On the evening of March 5, 1770, two dozen Boston rowdies—teens, Irishmen, blacks, and sailors—began taunting and throwing icicles at Hugh White, a British soldier guarding the Custom House. Someone rang the town fire bell, drawing a larger crowd to the scene as the taunting continued: "Kill him, kill him, knock him down. Fire, damn you, fire, you dare not fire!"

A squad of soldiers arrived to help White, but the surly crowd surrounded them. When someone knocked a soldier down, he arose and fired his musket. Others joined in. When the smoke cleared, five people lay dead or dying, and eight more were wounded. The first one killed, or so the story goes, was Crispus Attucks, a former slave who worked at the docks.

The so-called Boston Massacre sent shock waves throughout the colonies and all the way to London. Virtually the entire city of Boston attended the funerals for the deceased. Only the decision to postpone the trial of the British
soldiers for six months allowed the tensions to subside. At the same time, the impact of the colonial boycott of British products persuaded Lord North to modify the Townshend Acts.

Late in April 1770, Parliament repealed all the Townshend duties except for the tea tax, which the king wanted to keep as a symbol of Parliament’s authority. Colonial discontent subsided for two years thereafter. The redcoats left Boston, but remained in Canada, and the British navy still patrolled the New England coast.

THE GASPÉE INCIDENT In June 1772, a naval incident further eroded the colonies’ fragile relationship with the mother country. Near Warwick, Rhode Island, the HMS Gaspée, a British warship, ran aground while chasing suspected American smugglers. Its hungry crew seized local sheep, hogs, and chickens from local farms. An enraged crowd, some of them dressed as Mohawk Indians, then boarded the Gaspée, shot the captain, removed the crew, looted the ship, and then burned it.

The Gaspée incident symbolized the intensity of anti-British feelings among growing numbers of Americans. When the British tried to take the suspects to London for trial, Patriots organized in protest. Thomas Jefferson said that it was the threat of transporting Americans for trials in Britain that reignited anti-British activities in Virginia.

In response to the Gaspée incident, Samuel Adams organized the Committee of Correspondence, which issued a statement of American rights and grievances and invited other towns to do the same. Similar committees sprang up across Massachusetts and in other colonies, forming a unified network of resistance. "The flame is kindled and like lightning it catches from soul to soul," reported Abigail Adams, the high-spirited wife of future president John Adams. By 1772, Thomas Hutchinson, now the royal governor of Massachusetts, could tell the colonial assembly that the choice facing Americans was stark: they must choose between obeying "the supreme authority of Parliament" and "total independence."

THE BOSTON TEA PARTY The new British prime minister, Lord North, soon provided the spark to transform resentment into rebellion. In 1773, he tried to bail out the struggling East India Company, which had in its British warehouses some 17 million pounds of tea that it desperately needed to sell before it rotted. Parliament passed the Tea Act of 1773 to allow the company to send its tea directly to America without paying any taxes. British tea merchants could thereby undercut the prices charged by their American competitors, most of whom were smugglers who bought tea from the Dutch. At the same time, King George III told Lord North to "compel obedience" in the colonies.

In Massachusetts, the Committees of Correspondence, backed by Boston merchants, alerted colonists that the British government was trying to purchase colonial submission with cheap tea. The reduction in the price of tea was a clever trick to make colonists accept taxation without consent. In Boston, furious Americans decided that their passion for liberty outweighed their love for tea. On December 16, 1773, scores of Patriots disguised as Indians boarded three British ships in Boston Harbor and dumped overboard 342 chests filled with 46 tons of East India Company tea.

The Boston Tea Party pushed British officials to the breaking point. The destruction of so much valuable tea convinced the king and his advisers that a forceful response was required. "The colonists must either submit or triumph," George III wrote to Lord North, who decided to make an example of Boston
to the rest of the colonies. "We are now to establish our authority [over the colonies]," North said, "or give it up entirely."

**THE COERCIVE ACTS** In 1774, Lord North convinced Parliament to punish rebellious Boston by enacting a cluster of harsh laws, called the Coercive Acts (Americans renamed them the "Intolerable" Acts). The Boston Port Act closed the Boston harbor until the city paid for the lost tea. A new Quastring Act ordered colonists to provide lodging for British soldiers. The Imperial Administration of Justice Act said that any royal official accused of a major crime would be tried back in Great Britain rather than in the colony.

Finally, the Massachusetts Government Act gave the royal governor the authority to appoint the colony's legislative council, which until then had been elected by the people, as well as judges and sheriffs. It also ordered that no town meeting could be held without the royal governor's consent. In May, lieutenant-General Thomas Gage, commander in chief of British forces in North America, was named governor of Massachusetts and assumed command of the British soldiers who had returned to Boston.

The Intolerable Acts shocked colonists. No one had expected such a severe action to the Boston Tea Party. Many towns held meetings in violation of the new laws, and voters elected their own unauthorized provincial legislative assembly—which ordered town governments to quit paying taxes to the royal governor. By August 1774, Patriots across Massachusetts had essentially taken control of local governments. They also began stockpiling weapons and gunpowder in anticipation of an eventual clash with British troops.

Elsewhere, colonists rallied to help Boston, raising money, sending supplies, and boycotting, as well as burning or dumping British tea. In Williamsburg, when the Virginia assembly met in May, a member of the Committee of Correspondence, Thomas Jefferson, suggested that June 1, the effective date of the Boston Port Act, become an official day of fasting and prayer in Virginia.

The royal governor responded by dissolving the assembly, whose members then retired to the Raleigh Tavern where they decided to form a Continental Congress to represent all the colonies more effectively in the confrontation with Britain. As Samuel Savage, a Connecticut colonist wrote May 1774, the conflict had come down to a single question: "Whether we shall or shall not be governed by a British Parliament."

**THE FIRST CONTINENTAL CONGRESS** On September 5, 1774, the fifty-five delegates making up the First Continental Congress assembled in Philadelphia. It was the first time that all of the colonies had met to coordinate policies. Over seven weeks, the Congress endorsed the Suffolk Resolves, which urged Massachusetts to resist British tyranny with force. The Congress then adopted a Declaration of American Rights, which proclaimed once again the rights of Americans as British citizens and denied Parliament's authority to regulate internal colonial affairs. "We demand no new rights," said the Congress. "We ask only for peace, liberty, and security."

Finally, the Congress adopted the Continental Association of 1774, which recommended that every colony organize committees to enforce a new and complete boycott of all imported British goods, a dramatic step that would be followed by a refusal to send American goods (exports) to Britain. If the ideal of republican virtue meant anything, it meant the sacrificing of self-interest for the public good. The Association was designed to show that Americans could deny themselves the "baubles of Britain" in order to demonstrate their commitment to colonial liberties and constitutional rights.

The county and city committees forming the Continental Association became the organizational network for the resistance movement. Seven thousand men across the colonies served on the local committees, and many more women helped put the boycotts into practice. The committees required
colonists to sign an oath refusing to purchase British goods. In East Haddam, Connecticut, a Loyalist doctor was tarred, feathered, and rubbed with pig dung. Such violent incidents led Loyalists to claim that it was better to be a slave to the king than to a Patriot mob.

Thousands of ordinary men and women participated in the boycott of British goods, and their sacrifices on behalf of colonial liberties provided the momentum leading to revolution. It was common people who enforced the boycott, volunteered in Patriot militia units, attended town meetings, and ousted royal officials. As the people of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, declared in a petition, “We have always believed that the people are the fountain of power.”

The growing rebellion against “British tyranny” now extended well beyond simple grievances over taxation. Patriots decided that there was a *conspiracy* against their liberties at work in London. In Boston, an increasingly nervous General Gage requested that more British troops be sent to suppress the growing rebellion. Mercy Otis Warren wrote that most Americans still balked “at the idea of drawing the sword against the nation from whence she [America] derived her origin.” She feared, however, that Britain was poised “to plunge her dagger into the bosom of her affectionate offspring.”

**LAST-MINUTE COMPROMISE** In London, King George fumed. He wrote Lord North that “blows must decide” whether the Americans “are to be subject to this country or independent.” In early 1775, Parliament declared that Massachusetts was officially “in rebellion” and prohibited the New England colonies from trading with any nation outside the British Empire. On February 27, 1775, Lord North issued the Conciliatory Propositions, which offered to resolve the festering dispute by eliminating all taxes on any colony that voluntarily paid both its share for military defense and the salaries of the royal governors. In other words, North was asking the colonies to tax themselves. By the time the Conciliatory Propositions arrived in America, shooting had already started.

**BOLD TALK OF WAR** While most of the Patriots believed that Britain would back down, Patrick Henry of Virginia dramatically declared that war was unavoidable. The twenty-nine-year-old Henry, a farmer and storekeeper turned lawyer, claimed that the colonies “have done everything that could be done to avert the storm which is now coming on,” but their efforts had been met only by “violence and insult.” Freedom, the defiant Henry shouted, could be bought only with blood. If forced to choose, he supposedly shouted, “give me liberty”—then paused dramatically, clenched his fist as if it held a dagger, and plunged it into his chest—“or give me death.” Loyalists shouted “Treason!” amid the applause.

As Henry predicted, events quickly moved toward armed conflict. By mid-1775, the king and Parliament had effectively lost control; they could neither persuade nor force the Patriots to accept new regulations and revenue measures. In Boston, General Gage warned that armed conflict would unleash the “horrors of civil war.” But Lord Sandwich, head of the British navy, dismissed the rebels as “raw, undisciplined, cowardly men” without an army or navy. Major John Pitcairn, a British army officer, agreed, writing from Boston that “one active campaign, a smart action, and burning two or three of their towns, will set everything to rights.”

**LEXINGTON AND CONCORD** Major Pitcairn soon had his chance to quash the rebel resistance. On April 14, 1775, the British army in Boston received secret orders to stop the “open rebellion” in Massachusetts. General Gage had decided to arrest rebel leaders such as Samuel Adams and seize the militia’s gunpowder stored at Concord, sixteen miles northwest of Boston.

After dark on April 18, some 800 British soldiers secretly boarded boats and crossed the Charles River to Cambridge, then set out westward on foot to Lexington, a town about eleven miles away. When Patriots got wind of the plan, Paul Revere and William Dawes mounted their horses for their famous “midnight ride” to warn the rebel leaders that the British were coming.

In the gray dawn light of April 19, an advance unit of 238 redcoats found American Captain John Parker and about seventy “Minutemen” (Patriot militia who could assemble at a “minute’s” notice), lined up on the Lexington town square, while dozens of villagers watched.

Parker and his men intended only a silent protest, but Major Pitcairn rode onto the Lexington Green, swinging his sword and yelling, “Disperse, you damned rebels! You dogs, run!” The outnumbered militiamen were backing away when someone fired. The British soldiers shot at the Minutemen, then charged them with bayonets, leaving eight dead and ten wounded. Jonathan
Harrington, a militiaman who was shot in the back, managed to crawl across the Green, only to die on his doorstep.

The British officers quickly brought their men under control and led them to Concord, where they destroyed hidden military supplies. While marching out of the town, they encountered American riflemen at the North Bridge. Shots were fired, and a dozen or so British soldiers were killed or wounded. More important, the short skirmish and ringing church bells alerted rebel farmers, ministers, craftsmen, and merchants from nearby communities to grab their muskets. They were, as one of them said, determined to “be free or die.”

By noon, the British began a ragged retreat back to Lexington. Less than a mile out of Concord, they suffered the first of many ambushes. The narrow road turned into a gauntlet of death as rebel marksmen fired on the British troops from behind stone walls, trees, barns, and houses. “It was a day full of horror,” one of the soldiers recalled. “The Patriots seemed maddened.”

During the fighting along the road leading to Lexington, a British soldier was searching a house for rebel snipers when he ran into twenty-five-year-old Patriot James Hayward, a school teacher. The redcoat pointed his musket at the American and said, “Stop, you’re a dead man.” Hayward raised his weapon and answered, “So are you.” They fired simultaneously. The British soldier died instantly, and Hayward succumbed to a head wound eight hours later.

By nightfall, the redcoat survivors were safely back in Boston, having suffered three times as many dead and wounded as the Americans. A British general reported that the colonists had earned his respect: “Whoever looks upon them as an irregular mob will find himself much mistaken.”

Until the Battles of Lexington and Concord, both sides had mistakenly assumed that the other would back down when confronted with deadly force. Instead, the clash of arms turned a resistance movement into a war of rebellion. Masses of ordinary people were determined to fight for their freedoms against a British parliament and king bent on denying them their civil and legal rights. In Virginia, Thomas Jefferson reported that the news from Concord and Lexington had unleashed “a frenzy of revenge [against the British]” among “all ranks of people.”

**The Spreading Conflict**

On June 15, 1775, the Second Continental Congress unanimously selected forty-three-year-old George Washington to lead a new national army. His service in the French and Indian War had made him one of the few experienced
American officers, and he was admired for his success as a planter, surveyor, and land speculator, as well as for his service in the Virginia legislature and the Continental Congress. Perhaps more important, he looked like a leader. Tall and strong, Washington was a superb horseman and fearless fighter.

Washington humbly accepted the responsibility of leading the American war effort, but refused to be paid. A few weeks later, Mercy Otis Warren wrote a friend in London that Washington was “a man whose military abilities & public & private virtue place him in the first class of the Good & the Brave.”

**THE BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL** On Saturday, June 17, the very day that George Washington was named commander in chief, Patriot militiamen engaged British forces in their first major clash, the Battle of Bunker Hill (adjoining Breed’s Hill was the battle’s actual location).

In an effort to strengthen their control over the area around Boston, some 2,400 British troops based in the city boarded boats and crossed over the Charles River to the Charlestown Peninsula, where they formed lines and advanced up Breed’s Hill in tight formation through waist-high grass and across pasture fences, as the American defenders watched from behind their earthworks.

The militiamen, mostly farmers, waited until the redcoats had come within thirty paces, then loosed a volley that shattered the front ranks. The British attacked again, but the Patriot riflemen forced them to retreat a second time. During the third British assault, the colonists ran out of gunpowder and retreated in panic and confusion. “I jumped over the walls,” Peter Brown remembered, “and ran for about half a mile while [musket] balls flew like hailstones and cannons roared like thunder.”

The British took the high ground but were too tired to pursue the rebels. They had suffered 1,054 casualties, over twice the American losses. “A dearly bought victory,” reported British general Henry Clinton; “another such would have ruined us.” There followed a nine-month stalemate around Boston, with each side hoping for a negotiated settlement. Abigail Adams reported that the Patriots still living in Boston, where the British army governed by martial law, were being treated “like abject slaves under the most cruel and despotic of tyrants.”

**“OPEN AND AVOWED ENEMIES”** Three weeks after the Battle of Bunker Hill, in July 1775, the Continental Congress sent the king the Olive Branch Petition, urging him to negotiate with his rebellious colonies. When the petition reached London, however, King George refused to look at it. On August 22, he denounced the Americans as “open and avowed enemies.” His arrogant dismissal of the Olive Branch Petition convinced Abigail Adams that war was now certain: “the die is cast ... the sword is now our only, yet dreadful, alternative.”

**OUTRIGHT REBELLION** Resistance had grown into outright rebellion, but few Patriots were ready to call for American independence. They still considered themselves British subjects. When the Second Continental Congress convened at Philadelphia on May 10, 1775, most of the delegates still wanted Parliament to restore their rights so that they could resume being loyal British colonists.

Meanwhile, the British army in Boston was under siege by militia units and small groups of musket-toting men who had arrived from across New England to join the rebellion. They were still farmers, not trained soldiers, and the uprising was not yet an army; it lacked an organized command structure and effective support system. The Patriots also lacked training, discipline, canons, muskets, bullets, gunpowder, and blankets. What they did have was a growing sense of confidence and resolve. As a Massachusetts Patriot said, “Our
all is at stake. Death and devastation are the instant consequences of delay. Every moment is infinitely precious.”

With each passing day, war fever infected more and more colonists. “Oh that I were a soldier!” John Adams wrote home to Abigail from Philadelphia. “I will be. I am reading military books. Everybody must, and will, and shall be a soldier.” On the very day that Congress met, the British Fort Ticonderoga, on Lake Champlain in upstate New York near the Canadian border, fell to a Patriot force of “Green Mountain Boys” led by Ethan Allen of Vermont and Massachusetts volunteers under Benedict Arnold. Two days later, the Patriots captured a smaller British fort at Crown Point, north of Ticonderoga.

INDEPENDENCE

The Revolutionary War was well underway in January 1776 when Thomas Paine, a recently arrived thirty-nine-year-old English emigrant who had found work as a radical journalist in Philadelphia, provided the Patriot cause with a stirring pamphlet titled Common Sense. Until it appeared, colonial grievances had been mainly directed at Parliament. Paine, however, directly attacked the British monarchy by openly appealing to the “passions and feelings of mankind.”

The “common sense” of the matter, Paine stressed, was that King George III had caused the rebellion and had ordered the savage and cruel denial of American rights. “Even brutes do not devour their young,” he wrote, “nor savages make war upon their families.” Yet Britain, the mother of America, was doing just that. Americans, Paine urged, should abandon the British monarchy: “The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries, his time to part.”

It was Paine who helped convince Americans that independence was not unrealistic, it was inevitable. Only by declaring independence, he predicted, could the colonists gain the crucial support of France and Spain: “The cause of America is in great measure the cause of all mankind.” The rest of the world would welcome and embrace an independent America; it would be the “glory of the earth.” Paine concluded that the “sun had never shined on a cause of greater worth.” He insisted that “we have it in our power to begin the world over again.”

Within three months, more than 150,000 copies of Paine’s stirring pamphlet were circulating throughout the colonies and around the world, an enormous number for the time. “Common Sense is working a powerful change in the minds of men,” George Washington reported.

BREAKING THE BONDS OF EMPIRE Common Sense inspired the colonial population from Massachusetts to Georgia and helped convince British subjects still loyal to the king to embrace the radical notion of independence. “Without the pen of Paine,” remembered John Adams, “the sword of Washington would have been wielded in vain.” During the spring and summer of 1776, some ninety local governments, towns and colonial legislatures, issued declarations of independence from Great Britain.

Momentum for independence was building in the Continental Congress, too, but success was by no means assured. In Congress, John Dickinson of Pennsylvania urged delay. On June 1, he warned that independence was a dangerous step since America had no national government or European allies. But his was a lone voice of caution.

In June 1776, one by one, the colonies authorized their delegates in the Continental Congress to take the final step. On June 7, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia moved “that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states.” Lee’s resolution passed on July 2, a date that John Adams predicted would “be the most memorable” in the history of America.
The more memorable date, however, became July 4, 1776, when the Congress formally adopted the Declaration of Independence. A few delegates refused to sign the momentous document; others, said John Adams, “signed with regret . . . and with many doubts.” Most, however, signed wholeheartedly, knowing full well that by doing so they were likely to be hanged if captured by British troops. Benjamin Franklin acknowledged how high the stakes were: “Well, Gentlemen,” he told the Congress, “we must now hang together, or we shall most assuredly hang separately.”

**IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.**

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen United States of America:

*The Declaration of Independence* The Declaration in its most frequently reproduced form, an 1823 engraving by William J. Stone.

**JEFFERSON’S DECLARATION** In Philadelphia in June 1776, thirty-three-year-old Thomas Jefferson, a brilliant Virginia attorney and planter serving in the Continental Congress, drafted a statement of independence that John Adams and Benjamin Franklin then edited, followed by the members of Congress themselves.

The Declaration of Independence was crucially important not simply because it marked the creation of a new nation but because of the ideals it expressed and the grievances it listed. It insisted that certain truths were self-evident, that “all men are created equal and independent” and have the right to create governments of their own choosing. Governments, in Thomas Jefferson’s words, derive “their just powers from the consent of the people,” who are entitled to “alter or abolish” those governments when rulers deny citizens their “unalienable rights” to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Because King George III was trying to impose “an absolute tyranny over these states,” the “Representatives of the United States of America” declared the thirteen “United Colonies” to be “Free and Independent States.”

**THE CONTRADICTIONS OF FREEDOM** Once the Continental Congress chose independence, the members set about revising Thomas Jefferson’s draft declaration before sending it to London. Southern representatives insisted on deleting the slave-owning Jefferson’s section criticizing George III for perpetuating the African slave trade. In doing so, they revealed the major contradiction at work in the movement for independence: the rhetoric of freedom that animated the Revolution did not apply to America’s original sin, the widespread system of slavery that fueled the southern economy. Slavery was the absence of liberty, yet few Americans confronted the inconsistency of their protests in defense of freedom—for whites.

In 1764, a group of slaves in Charleston watching a demonstration against British tyranny by white Sons of Liberty got caught up in the energies of the moment and began chanting “freedom, freedom, freedom.” But that was not at all what southern planters wanted for African Americans. In 1774, when a group of slaves killed four whites in a desperate attempt to gain their own freedom from tyranny, Georgia planters responded by capturing the rebels and burning them alive.

The Harvard-educated lawyer James Otis was one of the few Whigs who demanded freedom for blacks and women. In 1764, he had argued in a widely circulated pamphlet that “the colonists, black and white, born here, are free British subjects, and entitled to all the essential civil rights of such.” He even went so far as to suggest that slavery itself should be ended, since “all men . . . white or black” were “by the law of nature freeborn.”
Otis also asked, “Are not women born as free as men? Would it not be infamous to assert that the ladies are all slaves by nature?” His sister, Mercy Otis Warren, became a tireless advocate of American resistance to British “tyranny” through her poems, pamphlets, and plays. In a letter to a friend, she noted that British officials needed to realize that America’s “daughters are politicians and patriots and will aid the good work [of resistance] with their female efforts.”

In 1765, John Adams had snarled that he and other colonists angered by British actions would not “be their slaves.” Actual slaves insisted on independence too. In 1773, a group of enslaved African Americans in Boston appealed to the royal governor of Massachusetts to free them just as white Americans were defending their freedoms against British tyranny. In many respects, the slaves argued, they had a more compelling case for liberty: “We have no property, We have no wives! No children! No city! No country!”

A few months later, a group of four Boston slaves addressed a public letter to the town government in which they referred to the hypocrisy of slaveholders who protested against British regulations and taxes. “We expect great things from men who have made such a noble stand against the designs of their fellow-men to enslave them,” they noted. But freedom in 1776 was a celebration to which slaves were not invited. In 1775 the prominent South Carolinian William Henry Drayton expressed his horror that “impertinent” slaves were claiming “that the present contest [with Great Britain] was for obliging us to give them liberty.”

George Washington himself acknowledged the contradictory aspects of the Revolutionary movement when he warned that the alternative to declaring independence was to become “tame and abject slaves, as the blacks we rule over with such arbitrary sway [absolute power].” Washington and other slaveholders at the head of the Revolutionary movement, such as Thomas Jefferson, were in part so resistant to “British tyranny” because they witnessed every day what actual slavery was like—for the blacks under their control.

A morally perplexed Jefferson admitted the hypocrisy of slave-owning revolutionaries. “Southerners,” he wrote to a French friend, are “jealous of their own liberties but trampling on those of others.” Such inconsistency was not lost on others. Phillis Wheatley, the first African American writer to see her poetry published in America, highlighted the “absurdity” of white colonists claiming their freedom while continuing to exercise “oppressive power” over enslaved Africans.

“WE ALWAYS HAD GOVERNED OURSELVES.” Historians still debate the causes of the American Revolution. Americans in 1775–1776 were not desperately poor: overall, they probably enjoyed a higher standard of living than most other societies and lived under the freest institutions in the world. Their diet was better than that of Europeans, as was their average life span. In addition, the percentage of free property owners in the thirteen American colonies was higher than in Britain or Europe. As the wealthy Charlestonian Charles Pinckney remarked a few years later, Americans, by which he meant white Americans, were “more equal in their circumstances than the people of any other Country.” At the same time, the new taxes forced on Americans after 1763 were not as great as those imposed on the British people. It is also important to remember that many American colonists, perhaps as many as half, were indifferent, hesitant, or actively opposed to rebellion.

So why did the Americans revolt at all? Historians have highlighted many factors: the clumsy British efforts to tighten their regulation of colonial trade, the restrictions on colonists eager to acquire western lands, the growing tax burden, the mounting debts to British merchants, the lack of American representation in Parliament, and the role of radicals such as Samuel Adams and Patrick Henry in stirring up anti-British feelings.

Yet colonists sought liberty from British “tyranny” for reasons that were not so selfless or noble. Many of the New Englanders and New Yorkers most critical of tighter British regulations were smugglers. Boston merchant John Hancock, for example, embraced the Patriot cause in part because he was a wealthy smuggler. Paying more British taxes would have cost him a fortune. Likewise, South Carolina’s Henry Laurens and Virginia’s Landon Carter, both prosperous planters, worried that the British might abolish slavery.

Overall, however, what Americans most feared and resented were the British efforts to constrict their civil liberties, thereby denying their rights as British citizens. As Hugh Williamson, a Pennsylvania physician, explained, the
not oppressed by the Stamp Act?” Preston replied that he “never saw one of those stamps . . . I am certain I never paid a penny for one of them.” What about the tax on tea? “Tea-tax! I never drank a drop of the stuff; the boys threw it all overboard.” His interviewer finally asked why he decided to fight for independence. “Young man,” Preston explained, “what we meant in going for those redcoats was this: we always had governed ourselves, and we always meant to. They didn’t mean we should.”