The American Revolutionary War
Early attempt to unify the colonies

Mercantilism

Navigation Acts

French and Indian War

Pontiac’s Rebellion

Proclamation of 1763

Seeds of revolution
On May 9, 1754, *Join, or Die*, considered the first American political cartoon, was printed in *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. The impetus for the cartoon, which is believed to have been devised by Benjamin Franklin, was concern about increasing French pressure along the western frontier of the colonies.
Mercantilism

Defined as the economic system practiced mainly during the 17th and 18th centuries by European nations.

Based on the belief that there was a limited amount of wealth in the world and the way to get the most gold and silver was to heavily regulate manufacturing, trade, and production within a country and its colonies.

Great Britain, for example, would purchase raw materials from the North American colonies at a low price determined by the British government. Then the colonies were required to purchase the finished goods manufactured in Britain at high prices also set by the British government. The North American colonies were only allowed to trade within the British empire.

This system led to bitterness on the part of the colonists who had very little input in their economic policies.
How mercantilism worked

- Raw materials
- Finished products
- Colonies
- Mother country
Britain responded to illegal colonial trade by passing a series of enforcement laws known as the “Acts of Trade and Navigation”, or more commonly known, the *Navigation Acts*. Beginning in 1651, these acts restricted colonial trade in various ways, including:

1. All goods traded to and from the North American colonies had to be shipped in either colonial or British ships.
2. All crews of these ships had to be at least 75% British or colonial.
3. Certain products (tobacco, sugar, rice, molasses, and furs) could only be sold from the colonies to Britain.
4. Goods traded between colonies and Europe had to be unloaded at a British port.
France lost most of its overseas empire.

The size of British holdings in North America doubled with the acquisition of Canada and territory east of the Mississippi River.

The British treasury went deep into debt to pay for the war. They tried to pay it by taxing the American colonies, which led to resentment by the colonists towards Britain.

While the British saw their empire grow substantially, it became increasingly difficult to manage such a large territorial area.

Britain became the dominant world power at that time.
Pontiac was an Ottawa Indian Chieftain who formed a confederacy of various tribes in the region to protect their lands from encroaching British settlements.

After British General Jeffrey Amherst violated a treaty agreement, Pontiac and his confederacy attacked various forts on the western frontier of the British colonies, including Fort Detroit.
The British responded to Pontiac’s Rebellion with two separate military campaigns from Pennsylvania to retake forts seized by Pontiac.

Most of his confederacy surrendered, but Pontiac resisted, and only surrendered in 1766.
Faced with the difficult task of guarding a much larger empire in the “New World”, King George III issued the Proclamation of 1763. This restricted settlement to the east of a line drawn at the Appalachian Mountains. On the map, the red line signifies the western boundary for British colonial settlement.

The Proclamation also sought to stop the exploitative sale of Indian land.

The purpose of the Proclamation was to prevent further Indian frontier warfare after Pontiac’s Rebellion.
By 1763, the British Empire was the world’s “superpower”, stretching nearly around the world. In defeating the French, they now were in a position of dominance.

However, this status came at a substantial price. William Pitt, Secretary of State with sole charge of the direction of the war and foreign affairs put the British economy on shaky ground. In order to pay for the war, the British Crown found itself looking for ways to levy taxes on its’ citizens, both at home and in its North American colonies.

The colonists felt they were entitled to the same rights of representation as their fellow citizens in the mother country, and they began to feel that they were being taken advantage of by Parliament since they were denied meaningful representation. At this time, they felt mistreated, but the feelings would soon swell to outright revolution against the mother country.
Tensions escalated between the colonies and Britain

- Direct and indirect taxes
- Sugar Act
- Stamp Act
- Sons of Liberty
- Stamp Act Congress
- Committees of Correspondence
- Declaratory Act
- Townshend Acts
- Writs of Assistance
The colonists were angry that Parliament was levying taxes without (colonial) representatives on their behalf.

*Direct taxes*, such as the Stamp Act, were taxes *ADDED TO* the price of a good at the time of purchase. It was obvious to the consumer that he was paying extra for a tax levy.

*Indirect taxes* are taxes *INCLUDED* in the price of the product or service. That way, the consumer did not realize as readily that he was paying a tax.
Sugar Act (1764)

- Passed by Parliament upon the urging of Prime Minister George Grenville.
- Increased tax duties colonists had to pay on goods such as coffee, sugar, textiles, indigo, and wine.
- Grenville hoped to increase his popularity with the British people by decreasing their tax burden, while increasing the responsibility of the colonists to pay the cost of maintaining British troops in the colonies.
- Colonists opposed the idea of being taxed without representation in Parliament, which was one of the fundamental causes of the American Revolution.
The Stamp Act, passed by British Parliament March 22, 1765.

The purpose of the law was to pay for the high cost of managing and protecting the colonies, as well as the war debt from the French and Indian War.

AN ACT for granting and applying certain stamp duties, and other duties, in the British colonies and plantations in America, towards further defraying the expences of defending, protecting, and securing the same; and for amending such parts of the several acts of parliament relating to the trade and revenues of the said colonies and plantations, as direct the manner of determining and recovering the penalties and forfeitures therein mentioned.
The law required that a tax be placed on nearly all “everyday” transactions.

Included in the list were:
- Newspapers
- Diplomas
- Playing cards
- Printed sermons
- Deeds for transacted property
- Nearly all printed materials

 Colonists read with dismay about the new Stamp Tax imposed by the British Parliament
The colonists were angry over being taxed without their consent and without representation in Parliament. The physical symbol of the stamp was affixed to any document proving the tax had been paid, a constant reminder of what they viewed as unfair treatment by the British government.

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The Sons of Liberty brought together several colonial groups that opposed the Stamp Act. Many members of the group were less educated shopkeepers, artisans, and laborers. Sometimes their protests turned violent; harassing tax collectors, or in one instance, burning the home of Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson. Later, as the colonies edged closer to war, the Sons of Liberty masterminded the Boston Tea Party.
Born in 1722, he attended Boston Latin School as well as Harvard. After graduation, he became partners with his father in a brewing business. Adams’ father lost most of his fortune in a paper currency deal when the British government outlawed colonial paper currency, which may have been a factor in Samuel becoming a leader in the Sons of Liberty. Later he signed the Declaration of Independence and fought for the Bill of Rights to be included in the Constitution.

Radical advocate of independence from Britain. Proposed the Virginia Stamp Act Resolutions, and in his speech introducing them, Henry remarked, “…if this be treason, make the most of it!”. Henry’s most famous quote: “I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!”. Henry later served as governor of Virginia.
Seen as a symbol of unfair British authority, tax collectors were frequently hung in effigy, or as this colonial era drawing depicts, some tax collectors were tarred and feathered.

In this process, the head of the victim was shaved, and hot tar poured over it. Afterwards, a bag of feathers was shaken over him.
Delegates from nine colonies met in New York City in October, 1765 with the goal of convincing Britain to repeal the Stamp Act.

The Congress issued a Declaration of Rights and Grievances which included:

1. Only the colonial assemblies had a right to tax the colonies.
2. Trial by jury was a right, and the use of Admiralty Courts was abusive.
3. Colonists possessed all the rights of Englishmen.
4. Without voting rights, Parliament could NOT represent the colonists.
British merchants affected by the colonial stamp act boycotted, protested, and demanded the law be repealed.
• It was very difficult to communicate across distances in the 1700s. Committees of Correspondence were a communications network set up to keep groups that opposed British policies in touch with one another.

• The first committee was set up in Boston in 1764 as groups united in opposition to the Stamp Act. James Otis, a local lawyer, was one of the founders of the committee.

• More than 260 different committees were formed in Massachusetts and interacted with the Boston committee.

• By 1774, all 13 colonies had committees, and those committees were instrumental in providing the framework for the First Continental Congress.
The Declaratory Act, 1766

- Passed by Parliament as a “face saving” gesture
- Parliament asserted that it had the right to make and enforce laws that the American colonies would be required to obey
- Most leaders of the opposition movement to the Stamp Act didn’t pay much attention to the Declaratory Act, satisfied with their victory in getting the Stamp Act repealed
The Townshend Acts, 1767

They were a series of laws that replaced the Stamp Act. While the acts also taxed the colonists without their consent, they were indirect taxes, and therefore imbedded in the price of the goods purchased.

Examples of the laws included:

**New York Restraining Act**
- Suspended the NY Colonial Assembly when it did not agree to quartering act (civilians must house soldiers in their homes) passed by Parliament

**Reorganization of the Customs Service**
- Created “writs of assistance”

**Townshend Duty Act**
- Indirect taxes on many everyday purchases like lead, paper, paint, glass, and tea

Charles Townshend, British Chancellor of the Exchequer
Writs of Assistance were court orders, originally passed in Massachusetts in 1751, which allowed customs officials to search locations for “contraband”, items that were being smuggled into the colonies without the proper duties (taxes) being paid.

The searches were “non-specific”... the goods being searched for did not have to be announced, nor did the locations searched. Essentially they were blank search warrants with no limits.

Not only were colonial businesses allowed to be searched, but customs officials were also empowered to search private homes as well. Many colonists saw this as a direct violation of their rights.
James Otis, a former customs official and attorney, was an important leader in colonial opposition to British mercantile policies and the Townshend duties.

He represented Boston merchants in the court case that attempted to block renewal of the writs. Otis argued that the writs violated the colonists’ natural rights, noting:

“A man’s house is his castle; and whilst he is quiet, he is as well guarded as a prince in his castle. This writ, if it should be declared legal, would totally annihilate this privilege.”

After a harsh attack against a Boston Customs official published in a newspaper, the official found Otis, and beat him severely with a cane. For the remainder of his life, Otis was subject to bouts of temporary insanity, and was killed by lightning in 1783.
Although major protests to the taxes were limited to the colonies, they did cause significant reduction in trade.

People living in the American colonies greatly reduced the amount of items they purchased from British merchants because of the Townshend duties.

Therefore, British merchants pushed to have the taxes repealed, and they were in 1770. The British, however, maintained the tax on tea, which would have repercussions leading to the Boston Tea Party.
Steps towards war

- Boston Massacre
- The trial of the British soldiers
- Conflicting views of the event
- Boston Tea Party
- Intolerable Acts
- First Continental Congress
Paul Revere’s engraving of the Boston Massacre

March 5, 1770
The British military occupation of Boston increased the friction between the colonists and the soldiers and resulted in an event known as the “Boston Massacre”.

Apparently, several local youths began hurling snowballs at British sentries. Other Boston residents joined in.

The British soldiers moved into formation, and although ordered by their commander not to fire on the crowd, they did so. Five colonists died in the encounter, and six were injured. One of the killed was Crispus Attucks who is considered by some to be the first casualty of the American Revolution.
The engraving on the left, created by Paul Revere, demonstrates the colonial view of the massacre, with the British appearing to be the aggressors. The painting on the right, done by a British artist, shows the colonists armed and the British soldiers more in a defensive posture.

Without photographic evidence both sides could interpret the event to their advantage.
Among those killed in the Boston Massacre was Crispus Attucks. Generally believed to be a runaway slave, he is featured prominently in several of the engravings of the Massacre, and is considered in legend to be the first casualty in the American Revolution.

However, some modern historians believe that Attucks wasn’t the first killed, but rather was killed by a bullet deflected as it passed through another casualty of the Massacre.

Also killed was Samuel Gray, Samuel Maverick, James Caldwell, and Patrick Carr.
In October 1770, a trial was held in colonial court accusing several of the British soldiers involved in the shootings with murder. Six of the soldiers were found innocent of any charges. Two were convicted on manslaughter charges and were punished by having their thumbs branded. Their captain, Preston, was acquitted because the jury couldn’t be sure that he ordered his troops to fire into the crowd.

John Adams, defense attorney for the British soldiers. Later was elected the second president of the United States.
Boston Tea Party

December 16, 1773
Causes of the Boston Tea Party

- Under pressure, Parliament repealed the Townshend Acts
- However, as a symbol of British authority, Parliament maintained the tax on tea
- In 1773, the British Government passed the Tea Act, which gave the British East India Company a monopoly on tea sales by allowing them to sell tea at a lower price than their competitors
- The theory was that the colonists would accept the tax more readily if they were able to get tea from the East India Company at a lower price
- However colonial leaders in Boston protested, and cargoes of tea on ships were held in Boston Harbor
- The captain of one of the ships, unable to unload, decided to go back to England, but the British officials refused to allow the ship to leave
After it became known that the tea would not be removed from Boston Harbor, 50 members of the Sons of Liberty, led by Samuel Adams, dressed up like Mohawk Indians and boarded the ships, removing 342 chests of tea and throwing it overboard into the Harbor. More than 10,000 pounds sterling worth of tea was destroyed.
"In about three hours from the time we went on board, we had thus broken and thrown overboard every tea chest to be found in the ship, while those in the other ships were disposing of the tea in the same way, at the same time. We were surrounded by British armed ships, but no attempt was made to resist us.

...The next morning, after we had cleared the ships of the tea, it was discovered that very considerable quantities of it were floating upon the surface of the water; and to prevent the possibility of any of its being saved for use, a number of small boats were manned by sailors and citizens, who rowed them into those parts of the harbor wherever the tea was visible, and by beating it with oars and paddles so thoroughly drenched it as to render its entire destruction inevitable."

George Hewes, Tea Party Participant
In this cartoon from London Magazine, Lord North, author of the Boston Port Act, forces the “tea” (the Intolerable Acts) down the throat of America while “Mother Brittania” weeps in the background. Paul Revere saw the effectiveness of the cartoon and distributed it widely in the colonies.
Passed in response to the Boston Tea Party by Parliament in 1774

Officially called the “Coercive Acts”, but they were nicknamed the “Intolerable Acts” in the colonies

They were designed to punish the colony of Massachusetts until the tea destroyed in the Boston Tea Party was paid for
"Intolerable Acts," one of which closed the port of Boston. In this print the artist symbolized the closing of the port by placing the Bostonians in a cage suspended from the Liberty Tree. One of the men in the cage holds a paper inscribed "They cried unto the Lord in their Trouble & he saved tham out of their Distress. Psalm cvii 13." This scriptural passage may be a reference to the religious heritage of Massachusetts.

The three men in the small boat attempting to feed the hungry men in the cage represent the other American colonies that sent supplies to aid the citizens of Boston during the crisis. The fish have been placed on the ends of poles that are then thrust through the bars of the cage. British soldiers on the shore with cannons, and warships in the harbor symbolize the continued blockade.

Although published in a London paper, people on both sides of the conflict could have viewed this print favorably. A patriot viewer might see the print as a representation of the "poor Bostonians," caged and starving because of Great Britain's unfair policies and restrictions. A loyalist viewer might see the print as depicting a "we've got them now" attitude, showing colonists boxed in by their own illegal actions and paying the appropriate consequences for defying the authority of the Crown.”
The major laws considered “intolerable”

- **Boston Port Act:** Closed the Port at Boston Harbor until the tea was paid for.

- **Quartering Act:** Forced the citizens of Massachusetts to house and feed British soldiers in their homes.

- **Massachusetts Government Act:** Suspended the Massachusetts Colonial Legislature until the tea was paid for.

- **Administration of Justice Act:** Guaranteed that British officials would not be tried in colonial courts for capital crimes, but extradited to Britain. This meant local courts could not try British officials giving them free reign.
The Intolerable Acts primarily punished Boston, while these two laws passed around the same time affected a greater area.

**Quebec Act:** Restored French common law and moved the southern boundary of Quebec to the Ohio River. Since many colonial land speculators had claims in the frontier, this caused them to be concerned.

**Currency Act:** Prohibited the colonies from issuing paper money. Since many colonies had already issued script, their money was worthless and the result was a severely handicapped colonial economy.
Print shows satire of American women from Edenton, North Carolina, pledging to boycott English tea in response to Continental Congress resolution in 1774 to boycott English goods.
The British government attempted to restore order in Boston through martial law

- Another result of the Boston Tea Party was that the Massachusetts colony was placed under martial law
- In martial law, military authority usually takes the place of civilian justice
- Persons accused of violations of orders under martial law (for example, a curfew) are generally tried by military tribunal or courts martial
- In some instances, the punishment for violations of martial law may be death even though the civilian law does not allow for capital punishment
- Martial law in US History is rare, although it was used during the Civil War (1861-1865), and World War II (1941-1945)
Delegates from 12 colonies (all except Georgia) met to discuss the situation with Britain in the fall of 1774.

They met at Carpenters’ Hall in Philadelphia in what became known as the “First Continental Congress” to convince Parliament to repeal the Intolerable Acts.

The Congress did not intend to declare independence from Britain. The delegates believed that they were entitled to the same rights as all Englishmen and that the Intolerable Acts and other laws violated those rights. At the conclusion of the Congress, the delegates signed non-importation agreements boycotting British goods. In addition, they pledged to meet again in 1775 if the Intolerable Acts were not repealed. However, before the delegates could meet again, the Revolutionary War had begun, and the Second Continental Congress found itself occupied with the conduct of a war rather than repeal of the Intolerable Acts.
This painting of Patrick Henry addressing the First Continental Congress can be found in the House Corridor of the United States Capitol.