

# Toward Independence

## 5.1 Introduction

An almost full moon cast a pale light over Boston on April 18, 1775. But the night was anything but quiet. Mounted on Brown Beauty, one of the fastest horses in Massachusetts, Paul Revere woke up the countryside with alarming news. British troops stationed in Boston were on the move! They had orders to march to the nearby town of Concord and seize weapons that the colonists had stored there.

This was news that local Patriots had been waiting for. **Patriots** (also called Whigs) were Americans who believed that the colonies had the right to govern themselves. On hearing Revere's warning, Patriots around Concord grabbed their muskets and prepared to meet the British troops.

The same news filled Loyalists (also called Tories) with dread. **Loyalists** were Americans who felt a deep loyalty to Great Britain. They saw themselves as faithful subjects of the king. They were horrified by the idea of taking up arms against British troops. How did colonists become so divided in their feelings about the British? As you read in the last chapter, most Americans were content with British rule in the early 1700s. In this chapter, you will learn what happened to change the relationship between Britain and the colonies.

The story begins in the 1750s, when Britain and the colonies fought a war against the French and their Indian **allies**. The French and Indian War left Britain with huge debts and a vast new empire to protect. To solve its problems, the British government passed new laws that tightened its control of the colonies. Some of these laws also placed new taxes on the colonists.

Americans were stunned. They had always had the right to make their own laws and taxes. Suddenly, Britain was changing the rules. It wasn't right, the colonists protested. It wasn't fair!

You probably know just how they felt. In this chapter, you will see how these feelings led the colonists to the brink of war.

## 5.2 Before 1763

By 1750, the American colonies were bursting with growth. In just a century, the population of the colonies had grown from 50,000 to more than a million people. What brought about this rapid growth? Cheap land? Religious tolerance? Economic opportunity? All of these were important in attracting people to the colonies. But there was another reason.

For more than a century, the British government had mostly left the colonies alone to solve their own problems. During this time, Americans had learned to govern themselves. Each colony elected its own assembly. Like the British Parliament, the assemblies had the power to pass laws and create taxes. Each assembly also decided how the colony's tax money should be spent. Americans had more freedom to run their own affairs than ordinary people in any country in Europe.

**Conflict in the Ohio Valley** As the colonies grew, settlers began to dream of moving across the Appalachian Mountains and into the Ohio Valley—the region between the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Both Britain and France claimed this area. In 1754, the French made good on their claim by building a fort where the city of Pittsburgh stands today. They called it Fort Duquesne.

News of the fort alarmed the governor of Virginia. He ordered a small force of Virginia **militia** to drive the French out of the Ohio Valley. Militias are small armies of citizens who are trained to fight in an emergency. To head the militia, the governor chose a 22-year-old volunteer named George Washington.

Today, Americans remember George Washington as a great Patriot, a military hero, and the first president of the United States. In 1754, however, he was just an ambitious young man with no land or money. Washington believed that his best chance of getting ahead was to become an officer in the British army. There was only one problem with his plan. Most British officers believed that colonists made lousy soldiers.

The expedition into the Ohio Valley gave Washington a chance to prove them wrong. Near Fort Duquesne, he came across a French scouting party that was camped in the woods. Washington ordered his men to open fire. It was an easy victory. "I heard the bullets whistle," he wrote afterward. "And, believe me, there is something charming in the sound."

**The French and Indian War** Washington's whistling bullets were the first shots in a conflict known as the French and Indian War. This war was part of a long struggle between France and Britain for territory and power. Because many Native Americans fought with France in this latest conflict, the colonists called it the French and Indian War.

In 1755, Britain sent 1,400 British soldiers to Virginia to finish the job that Washington had begun. They were led by a bumbling general named Edward Braddock. The soldiers' job was to clear the French out of the Ohio Valley. Washington joined the army as a volunteer, hoping to make a good impression on General Braddock.

The British army's march into the Ohio Valley was a disaster. The troops' bright red uniforms made them perfect targets for French sharpshooters and their Indian allies. Two-thirds of the soldiers were killed.

Washington himself narrowly escaped death. "I had four Bullets through my Coat and two horses shot under me," he wrote in his journal. Showing great courage, Washington led the survivors back to Virginia. There, he was greeted as a hero.

The French and Indian War raged for seven long years. The turning point came in 1759, when British troops captured Canada. In 1763, Britain and France signed a peace treaty ending the war. In this treaty, France ceded, or gave, Canada to Great Britain.

Americans were thrilled with this victory. Great Britain now controlled a vastly expanded American empire. Never before had the colonists felt so proud of being British. And never before had the future of the colonies looked so bright.

### 5.3 Early British Actions

Changes that were taking place in Britain soon clouded the colonists' bright future. A new king, George III, had been crowned in 1760. He was not a bright man. One historian wrote that "he was very stupid, really stupid." He was also proud and stubborn. Worse yet, he was determined to be a "take-charge" kind of ruler, especially in the colonies.

Unfortunately, the people George III chose to help him were not much brighter than he was. And they knew very little about conditions in America. Before long, they were taking actions that enraged the colonists.

***The Proclamation of 1763*** The British government faced a number of problems after the French and Indian War. One was how to keep colonists and Native Americans from killing each other as settlers pushed westward. No problem, said George III. Simply draw a line down the crest of the Appalachian Mountains. Tell settlers to stay east of that line and Indians to stay west of it.

This was what the king ordered in his Proclamation of 1763. To Americans, the king's order suggested **tyranny**, or the unjust use of government power. They argued that the lands east of the Appalachians were already mostly settled. The only place that farmers could find new land was west of the mountains. Besides, the Proclamation was too late. Settlers were already crossing the mountains.

The British government ignored these arguments. To keep peace on the frontier, it decided to expand the British army in America to 7,500 men.

***The Stamp Act*** The British government had other problems besides keeping colonists and Native Americans from killing each other. One was how to pay off the large debt left over from the French and Indian War.

The solution seemed obvious to Prime Minister George Grenville, the leader of the British government. People in Britain were already paying taxes on everything from windows to salt. In contrast, Americans were probably the most lightly taxed people in the British Empire. It was time, said Grenville, for the colonists to pay their fair share of the cost of protecting them.

In 1765, Grenville proposed a new act, or law, called the Stamp Act. This law required colonists to buy a stamp for every piece of paper they used. Newspapers had to be printed on stamped paper. Wills, licenses, and even playing cards had to have stamps.

Once again, the colonists sensed tyranny. One newspaper, The Pennsylvania Journal, said that as soon as "this shocking Act was known, it filled all British America from one End to the other, with Astonishment and Grief."

It wasn't just the idea of higher taxes that upset the colonists. They were willing to pay taxes passed by their own assemblies, where their representatives could vote on them. But the colonists had no representatives in Parliament. For this reason, they argued, Parliament had no right to tax them. They saw the Stamp Act as a violation of their rights as British subjects. "No taxation without representation!" they cried.

Some colonists protested the Stamp Act by sending messages to Parliament. Loyalists simply refused to buy stamps. Patriots, however, took more violent action. Mobs calling themselves "Sons of Liberty" attacked tax collectors' homes. Protesters in Connecticut even started to bury one tax collector alive. Only when he heard dirt being shoveled onto his coffin did the terrified tax collector agree to resign from his post.

After months of protest, Parliament **repealed**, or canceled, the Stamp Act. Americans greeted the news with great celebration. Church bells rang, bands played, and everyone hoped the troubles with Britain were over.

***The Quartering Act*** As anger over the Stamp Act began to fade, Americans noticed another law passed by Parliament in 1765. Called the Quartering Act, this law ordered colonial assemblies to provide British troops with quarters, or housing. The colonists were also told to furnish the soldiers with "candles, firing, bedding, cooking utensils, salt, vinegar, and...beer or cider."

Of course, providing for the soldiers cost money. New Jersey protested that the new law was “as much an Act for laying taxes” on the colonists as the Stamp Act. New Yorkers asked why they should pay to keep troops in their colony. After all, they said, the soldiers just took up space and did nothing.

In 1767, the New York assembly decided not to vote any funds for “salt, vinegar and liquor.” The British government reacted by refusing to let the assembly meet until it agreed to obey the Quartering Act. Once again, tempers began to rise on both sides of the Atlantic.

#### **5.4 The Townshend Acts**

The next British leader to face the challenge of taxing the colonies was Charles Townshend. He was also known as “Champagne Charlie” because of his habit of making speeches in Parliament after drinking champagne. Townshend believed that the colonists’ bad behavior made it even more important to keep an army in America. Once he was asked in Parliament if he would dare to make the colonists pay for that army. Stamping his foot, Townshend shouted, “I will, I will.”

And he did. In 1767, Townshend persuaded Parliament to pass the Townshend Acts. The new laws placed a duty, or tax, on certain goods the colonies imported from Britain. These goods included such popular items as glass, paint, paper, and tea.

Having kept his promise, Townshend caught the flu and died. But his new laws increased the unhappiness of the colonists.

***A Boycott of British Goods*** To many colonists, the Townshend duties were simply taxes in disguise. Once again, they were determined not to pay taxes that their assemblies had not voted on.

A Boston Patriot named Samuel Adams led the opposition to the Townshend Acts. Adams was not much to look at, and he was a failure at business. But he was gifted at stirring up protests through his speeches and writing. The governor of Massachusetts once complained, “Every dip of his pen stung like a horned snake.”

Adams wrote a letter protesting the Townshend Acts that was sent to every colony. The letter argued that the new duties violated the colonists’ rights as British citizens. To protect those rights, the colonies decided to **boycott** British goods. This was a peaceful form of protest that even Loyalists could support. One by one, all of the colonies agreed to support the boycott.

Women were very important in making the boycott work, since they did most of the shopping. The Virginia Gazette wrote that one woman could “do more for the good of her country than five hundred noisy sons of liberty, with all their mobs and riots.” Women found many ways to avoid buying British imports. They sewed dresses out of homespun cloth, brewed tea from pine needles, and bought only American-made goods.

***Repeal of the Townshend Acts*** Meanwhile, a new leader named Lord North became head of the British government. Described as a “great, heavy, booby-looking man,” Lord North embarrassed his supporters by taking naps in Parliament. But he was good with numbers, and he could see that the Townshend duties were a big money-loser. The duties didn’t begin to make up for all the money British merchants were losing because of the boycott.

Early in 1770, North persuaded Parliament to repeal all of the Townshend duties, except for one—the tax on tea. Some members of Parliament argued that keeping the duty on tea was asking for more trouble. But stubborn King George wasn’t ready to give up on the idea of taxing Americans.

“I am clear that there must always be one tax to keep up the right,” the king said. “And, as such, I approve the tea duty.”

#### **5.5 The Boston Massacre**

On the same day that Parliament repealed most of the Townshend duties, a brawl broke out between soldiers and colonists in Boston. When the dust cleared, five Bostonians were dead and ten were injured.

Patriots called this incident the “Boston Massacre.” A massacre is the killing of defenseless people. What really happened was a small riot.

Trouble had been brewing in Boston for months before the riot. To the British, Boston Patriots were the worst troublemakers in the colonies. In 1768, the government had sent four regiments of troops to keep order in Boston.

Bostonians resented the British soldiers. They made fun of their red uniforms by calling them “lobsterbacks.” Sam Adams even taught his dog to nip at soldiers’ heels.

Despite such insults, the troops were forbidden to fire on citizens. Knowing this only made Bostonians bolder in their attacks. General Thomas Gage, the commander of the British army in America, wrote that “the people were as Lawless...after the Troops arrived, as they were before.”

***Mob Violence Breaks Out*** On March 5, 1770, a noisy mob began throwing rocks and ice balls at troops guarding the Boston Customs House. “Come on you Rascals, you bloody-backs,” they shouted. “Fire if you dare.” Some Patriot leaders tried to persuade the crowd to go home. So did Captain Thomas Preston, the commander of the soldiers. But their pleas had no effect.

As the mob pressed forward, someone knocked a soldier to the ground. The troops panicked and opened fire. Two bullets struck Crispus Attucks, a large black man at the front of the crowd. He was the first to die, but not the last. The enraged crowd went home only after receiving a promise that the troops would be tried for murder.

***Massacre or Self-Defense?*** Sam Adams saw this event as a perfect opportunity to whip up anti-British feeling. He called the riot a “horrid massacre” and had Paul Revere, a local silversmith, engrave a picture of it. Revere’s engraving shows soldiers firing at peaceful, unarmed citizens.

Prints of Revere’s engraving were distributed throughout the colonies. Patriots saw the Boston Massacre as proof that the British should pull out all of their troops from the colonies. Loyalists saw the tragedy as proof that troops were needed more than ever, if only to control Patriot hotheads.

One hero came out of this sad event. He was a Boston lawyer named John Adams. Like his cousin Sam, John Adams was a Patriot. But he also believed that every person had the right to a fair trial, even the hated redcoats (British soldiers). Adams agreed to defend the soldiers, even though he knew that his action would cost him friends and clients.

At the murder trial, Adams argued that the troops had acted in self-defense. The jury found six of the soldiers not guilty. Two of them were found guilty only of manslaughter, or causing death without meaning to.

Throughout his long life, John Adams remained proud of his defense of the British soldiers. He said that upholding the law in this case was “one of the best pieces of service I ever rendered to my country.”

## **5.6 The Boston Tea Party**

Despite the hopes of Patriots like Sam Adams, the Boston Massacre did not spark new protests against British rule. Instead, the repeal of the Townshend duties led to a period of calm. True, there was still a small duty on tea. But the tax didn’t seem to bother Loyalists very much. And Patriots could always drink Dutch tea that had been smuggled into the colonies without paying duties.

Things did not stay peaceful, however. In 1773, a new law called the Tea Act prompted more protests. One of them was the incident that became known as the Boston Tea Party.

***The Tea Act*** The Tea Act was Lord North’s attempt to rescue the British East India Company. This large trading company controlled all the trade between Britain and Asia. For years it had been a moneymaker for Britain. But the American boycott of British tea hurt the company badly. By 1773, it was in danger of going broke unless it could sell off the 17 million pounds of tea that was sitting in its London warehouses.

The Tea Act lowered the cost of tea that was sold by the British East Indian Company in the colonies. As a result, even taxed British tea became cheaper than smuggled Dutch tea. The Tea Act also gave the British East India Company a monopoly, or complete control, over tea sales in the colonies. From now on, the only merchants who could sell the bargain-priced tea were those chosen by the company.

Lord North may have thought he could trick Americans into buying taxed tea by making it so cheap, but colonists weren’t fooled. They saw the Tea Act as still another attempt to tax them without their consent.

In addition, many merchants were alarmed by the East India Company’s monopoly over the tea trade. They wondered what the British government might try to control next. Would there be a monopoly on cloth? On sugar? Nervous merchants wondered what would happen to their businesses if other goods were also restricted. The thought of more monopolies made them shudder.

***Tea Ships Arrive*** When the British East India Company’s tea ships sailed into American ports, angry protesters kept them from unloading their cargoes. More than one ship turned back for England, still filled with tea. In Boston, however, the governor ordered the British navy to block the exit from Boston Harbor. He insisted that the three tea ships would not leave until all their tea was unloaded.

On December 16, 1773, the Sons of Liberty decided to unload the tea, but not in the way the governor had in mind. That night, about 50 men dressed as Mohawk Indians boarded the three ships. One of them, George Hewes, described what happened:

*We then were ordered by our commander to open the hatches and take out all the chests of tea and throw them overboard...and we immediately proceeded to execute his orders, first cutting and splitting the chests with our*

*tomahawks... In about three hours from the time we went on board, we had thus broken and thrown overboard every tea chest to be found on the ship... We were surrounded by British armed ships, but no attempt was made to resist us.*

About 90,000 pounds of tea was dumped into the sea that night. Nothing else on the ships was touched.

News of the Boston Tea Party excited Patriots throughout the colonies. "This is the most magnificent moment of all," wrote John Adams in his journal the next day. "This Destruction of the Tea is so bold, so daring, so firm...it must have...important Consequences." He was right.

### **5.7 The Intolerable Acts**

Lord North was stunned by news of the Boston Tea Party. As he saw it, he had tried to help the colonists by sending them cheap tea. And what did they do? They threw it in the sea! This time they had gone too far!

King George agreed. To him, the issue was no longer about taxes. It was about Britain's control over the colonies. "We must master them totally," he declared, "or leave them to themselves." And the king wasn't about to leave the colonies to themselves.

Britain's anger led Parliament to pass a new series of laws in 1774. These laws were so harsh that many colonists called them "intolerable," or unacceptable. Throughout the colonies, they became known as the Intolerable Acts.

***Parliament Punishes Massachusetts*** The Intolerable Acts were designed to punish Massachusetts for the Boston Tea Party. The first law closed Boston Harbor to all shipping until the ruined tea was paid for. The second law placed the government of Massachusetts firmly under British control. Colonists in Massachusetts could not even hold a town meeting without the governor's permission. The third law said that British soldiers who were accused of murder would be tried in England, not in the colonies. Finally, more troops were sent to Boston to enforce the new laws.

A few British leaders worried that the Intolerable Acts might push the colonies into rebellion. But George III was sure they would force the colonists to give in to British authority.

***The Colonies Begin to Unite*** In fact, the Intolerable Acts did not force the colonists to give in. Boston Patriots declared they would "abandon their city to flames" before paying a penny for the lost tea. Merchants in other cities showed their support by closing their shops. Many colonies sent food and money to Boston so that its citizens would not starve.

In Virginia, lawmakers drafted a resolution in support of Massachusetts. The Virginians said that everyone's rights were at stake. "An attack made on one of our sister colonies," they declared, "is an attack made on all British America."

The Virginians also called for a congress, or meeting, of delegates from all the colonies. The purpose of the congress would be to find a peaceful solution to the conflicts with Great Britain.

Not all Americans agreed with this plan. In every colony, there were Loyalists who thought that Bostonians had gone too far and should pay for the tea. If they were forced to choose, they would side with the king against Sam Adams and his Sons of Liberty. To them, it was the misguided Patriots who were causing all the trouble.

***The First Continental Congress*** In September 1774, some 50 leaders from 12 colonies met in Philadelphia. The meeting brought together delegates from most of the British colonies on the North American continent. For this reason, it was called the First Continental Congress.

The delegates were used to thinking of themselves as citizens of their own colonies. Patrick Henry, a leader from Virginia, urged them to come together as one people. "I am not a Virginian," he declared, "but an American." But only strong Patriots like Sam and John Adams were ready to think of themselves this way. Many delegates were strong Loyalists who still thought of themselves as British. Still others, like George Washington, were somewhere in between. Only one thing united the delegates—their love of liberty and hatred of tyranny.

In spite of their differences, the delegates agreed to send a respectful message to King George. The message urged the king to consider their complaints and to recognize their rights.

The delegates also called for a new boycott of British goods until Parliament repealed the Intolerable Acts. Finally, they agreed to meet again the following May if the boycott didn't work.

***The Colonies Form Militias*** In towns and cities throughout the colonies, Patriots appointed committees to enforce the boycott. In case the boycott didn't work, they also began organizing local militias. In New England, the volunteers called themselves Minutemen because they could be ready to fight in just 60 seconds.

Across the colonies, militias marched and drilled. In New Hampshire, unknown persons stole 100 barrels of gunpowder and 16 cannons from a British fort. Similar thefts occurred in other colonies. Rather than forcing the colonies to give in, the Intolerable Acts had brought the two sides to the brink of war.

### **5.8 Lexington and Concord**

King George had made many mistakes in his decisions about the colonies. The Continental Congress listed all these mistakes in its message to the king. Now he made another one.

Rather than consider the colonists' complaints, King George refused even to answer their message. "The New England governments are in a state of rebellion," he said. "Blows must decide whether they are to be subject to this country or independent." In Boston, General Gage, the king's commander of British troops in America, got ready to deliver those blows.

***The First Blow at Lexington*** In April 1775, a spy told General Gage that the colonists were hiding a large supply of gunpowder and weapons in the nearby village of Concord. Gage decided to strike at once.

The general ordered 700 of his best troops to march to Concord and seize the weapons. To keep the colonists from moving the weapons, the attack had to be a surprise. And so Gage had his troops march the 20 miles to Concord at night.

The colonists had their own spies. When Gage's troops slipped out of Boston on April 18, 1775, Patriots were watching their every move. Soon Paul Revere and William Dawes were galloping through the countryside, warning colonists that the British were coming.

At Lexington, a village on the road to Concord, a small band of Minutemen gathered nervously in the chilly night air. "Stand your ground," ordered Captain John Parker. "Don't fire unless fired upon! But if they mean to have a war, let it begin here."

Suddenly, British troops appeared in the early morning mist. A shot rang out—from where, no one knew for certain. Without orders, the soldiers rushed forward, shooting wildly.

When the firing stopped, eight colonists lay dead or dying. Another ten were limping to safety with painful wounds. The British gave three cheers for victory and marched on to Concord.

***The Second Blow at Concord*** By breakfast time, the British were in Concord, looking for gunpowder and weapons. But colonists had moved the gunpowder and hidden the weapons. In frustration, the soldiers piled up a few wooden tools, tents, and gun carriages and set them on fire.

On a ridge outside the city, militiamen from the surrounding countryside watched the smoke rise. "Are you going to let them burn the town down?" shouted one man.

"No!" replied Captain Isaac Davis. "I haven't a man that's afraid to go."

Captain Davis marched his volunteers down the hill. As they approached Concord's North Bridge, British troops opened fire. Davis fell dead, a bullet through his heart.

The British expected the Americans to break and run. To their surprise, the Minutemen stood their ground and fired back. Two minutes later, it was the redcoats who were running away in panic.

The retreat back to Boston was a nightmare for the British. More than 4,000 armed and angry Minutemen lined their route, shooting at every redcoat they saw. By the end of the day, 74 British soldiers were dead, and another 200 were wounded or missing. The colonists counted their own losses as 49 dead and 41 wounded.

A British officer described what it was like to face the colonists' fury that day. "Whoever looks upon them as an irregular mob," the officer said, "will find himself much mistaken."

Indeed, since the French and Indian War, the British had been mistaken about Americans again and again. Their biggest mistake, however, was in thinking that ordinary people—farmers, merchants, workers, and housewives—would not fight for rights that they held dear. At Lexington and Concord, Americans proved they were not only willing to fight for their rights. They were even willing to die for them.

### **5.9 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, you read about tensions between the colonies and Britain between 1763 and 1775. You used the metaphor of a principal and students to describe that relationship. American colonists had grown used to governing themselves, and they felt strongly about their right to do so.

The French and Indian War left Britain with huge debts and a much larger empire to govern. Parliament tried to deal with these challenges by imposing new taxes and passing new laws. These actions divided many of the colonists into opposing camps. Loyalists urged obedience to Britain, but Patriots resisted "taxation without representation" through protests, boycotts, and riots.

In 1774, delegates at the First Continental Congress sent a formal complaint to the king. Meanwhile, Patriots began forming militias to defend themselves against British troops.

King George III was determined to teach the colonists a lesson. But at Lexington and Concord, Patriots showed they would rather fight than give up their rights. In the next chapter, you will see how these clashes triggered an all-out war and the birth of a new nation.