

II. The Stamp Act Crisis (1765)

A. A New Kind of Tax

1. In 1765, the British government created a new law that placed taxes on the use of paper in the American colonies. It required that stamps be placed on a legal documents, such as diplomas, newspapers, and licenses.
2. The stamps could only be obtained at government offices, and a payment was required.
3. Previously, the British government had only placed taxes on goods that moved between the colonies and the mother country (Britain). This was believed proper because the colony had been created to help the mother country avoid trade with other countries.
4. The Stamp Act, however, was a tax on products being used only within the colonies. It had nothing to do with trade with the home country. In this way it was a new kind of tax.

B. Patrick Henry and the Virginia Resolves

1. In the Virginia House of Burgesses, a new representative named Patrick Henry stood forward to argue that the Stamp Act was an unjust tax.
2. Henry explained that according to British traditions, going back to the Magna Carta that only a Parliament where the people were represented could tax them.
3. Since the only parliaments where American colonists were represented were in their own colonies, these were the only parliaments that could tax them.
4. In his famous speech, Patrick Henry warned the King of Britain, George III to be careful about imposing new kinds of taxes on the people, by giving him a history lesson. In the climax of his speech he said, "Caesar had his Brutus, Charles I his Cromwell, and George III...may profit by their example."
5. Many burgesses were upset with this warning, which seemed like a threat to the king, but the House of Burgesses still passes the "Virginia Resolves," which complained that they were being taxed unfairly by the British parliament.

C. The Declaratory Act (1766) and Townshend Acts (1767)

1. When it came time for the stamps to first be collected according to the new law, nobody was willing to buy them. After a while, people resumed their normal lives as if the law did not exist.
2. This rejection of the law was so widespread, that the British parliament did not know how to react. They decided to repeal the law, and try something else.
3. On the same day that the Parliament repealed the law, it passed another law, the Declaratory Act, which asserted that the Parliament had the right to impose any tax it chose on the colonies.
4. The next year it created a new set of duties on various products being imported into the colonies, including paper, paint, glass, and tea. This was done through the Townshend Acts of 1767.

III. Trouble in Boston

A. The Boston Massacre (1770)

1. To stop continued "smuggling" and protests against the latest taxes, the British government sent 1000 troops to Boston.

2. The people of Boston were, of course, disturbed at having the army patrolling their city.
3. One night in 1770, they marched on the Customs House to protest. The troops who were on guard were pushed around and had snowballs thrown at them. As the crowd became more violent one soldier fired in a panic. Very quickly the situation was out of control and three colonists had been killed.
4. Throughout the colonies this moment became known as the “Boston Massacre.” People believed that it showed that the British government intended treat the colonists like slaves.

B. The Boston Tea Party (1773)

1. On the very day of the Boston Massacre, the British Parliament had decided to stop charging certain taxes, and to lower the tax on tea.
2. The colonists believed this was a trick, to get them to accept new taxes, which could be raised later, when people were used to paying them.
3. When a cargo of tea arrived in Boston in 1773, colonists calling themselves the “Sons of Liberty” dressed up as Indians, jumped on board the ship, and dumped the tea into the harbor. This is known as the “Boston Tea Party.”
4. Of course, the British government could not allow property to be destroyed in this way, without punishing those responsible...

IV. The Escalating Conflict

A. The Coercive Acts (1774)

1. In answer to the violent resistance to its taxation measures, the British government passes laws to punish Massachusetts and all the American colonies.
2. The Port of Boston was closed, and Massachusetts was placed under the control of a military governor, General Gage.
3. With the Quebec Act of 1774, the Province of Quebec was enlarged all the way down to the Ohio river, making it illegal for the American colonists to take over the land they had fought for in the French and Indian War.

B. The First Continental Congress

1. In answer to Britain's latest acts, the thirteen colonies again held a congress to discuss their common problems.
2. They agreed to a “non-importation, non-exportation, non-consumption” association to try to convince British merchants to put pressure on the British Parliament.
3. They also agreed to form colonial militia to prepare resistance to Britain's next move.

C. Give Me Liberty, or Give Me Death!

1. In March of 1775, Patrick Henry once more stood before the representatives of the House of Burgesses – this time with a definite call to rebellion.
2. He explained that he was guided by the “lamp” of experience, and that judging according to the past, one could only predict even worse treatment of the colonies by Britain. His final lines were:
“...Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?
...I know not what course others may take; but as for me, *give me liberty, or give me death!*”