

Chapter 5: The Problem of Empire, 1763-1776

I. Imperial Reform, 1763-1765

A. The Legacy of War

1. The Great War for Empire fundamentally changed the relationship between Britain and its American colonies.
2. The war exposed the weak authority of British royal governors and officials.
3. To assert their authority, the British began a strict enforcement of the Navigation Acts, Parliament passed a Revenue Act in 1762 that curbed corruption in the customs service, and the Royal Navy was instructed to seize vessels that were carrying goods between the mainland colonies and the French islands.
4. The British victory over the French resulted in a shift in imperial military policy; in 1763, the ministry deployed a peacetime army in North America, indicating its willingness to use force in order to preserve its authority over the colonies.
5. As Britain's national debt soared, higher import duties were imposed at home on tobacco and sugar, and excise levies (a kind of sales tax) were increased; the increases were passed on to British consumers.
6. American colonists paid only about one-fifth the amount of annual imperial taxes as did British taxpayers.
7. To collect the taxes, the government doubled the size of the British bureaucracy and increased its powers; smugglers were arrested and cargo was seized.
8. The price of empire had turned out to be debt and a more intrusive government. To reverse the growth of government power, British opposition parties (the Country Party and the Radical Whigs) demanded that Parliament be made more representative of the property-owning classes. Radicals like John Wilkes called for an end to **rotten boroughs**, tiny electoral districts whose voters were controlled by wealthy aristocrats and merchants.

B. George Grenville: Imperial Reformer

1. In 1763, Britain's empire in America had expanded, but the war left Britain in debt; British taxpayers paid five times as much in taxes as Americans, motivating British leaders to increase taxation on America.
2. Prime Minister George Grenville won approval of a Currency Act (1764) that banned the use of paper money as legal tender, thereby protecting the British merchants from colonial currency that was not worth its face value.
3. Grenville then proposed the Sugar Act of 1764 (a new navigation act) to replace the widely evaded Molasses Act of 1733.
4. Americans argued that the Sugar Act would not only wipe out trade with the French islands, but was also contrary to their constitution, since it established a tax and "all taxes ought to originate with the people."
5. The Sugar Act closed a Navigation Act loophole by extending the jurisdiction of **vice-admiralty courts** to all customs offenses, many of which had previously been tried before local common-law courts.
6. After living under a policy of salutary neglect, Americans felt that the new British policies were discriminatory and challenged the existing constitutional practices and understandings.
7. British officials insisted on the supremacy of parliamentary laws and denied that colonists were entitled to even the traditional legal rights of Englishmen, claiming that the right of no taxation without representation was confined to inhabitants of Great Britain only; the Americans, as colonists, were seen as second-class subjects of the king.

C. An Open Challenge: The Stamp Act

1. Taxation sparked the first great imperial crisis; Grenville followed the Sugar Act of 1764 with a proposal for a Stamp Act in 1765.
2. The Stamp Act would require small, printed markings on all court documents, land titles, and various other documents and served as revenue to keep British troops in America.
3. Grenville vowed to impose a stamp tax in 1765 unless the colonists would lay taxes for their own defense.
4. Benjamin Franklin proposed American representation in Parliament, but British officials rejected the idea, arguing that Americans received **virtual representation** in Parliament.
5. Grenville introduced the Stamp Act in Parliament with the goals being to not only raise revenue but to also assert the right of Parliament to lay an internal tax on the colonies.
6. Parliament also passed, at the request of General Gage, a Quartering Act directing colonial governments to provide barracks and food for the British troops stationed in the colonies. Parliament also approved Grenville's

proposal that violations of the Stamp Act be tried in vice-admiralty courts.

7. Using the doctrine of parliamentary supremacy, Grenville's attempt to fashion an imperial system in America provoked a constitutional confrontation with the colonies on taxation, jury trials, quartering of the military, and the question of representative self-government.

II. The Dynamics of Rebellion, 1765–1770

A. Politicians Protest and the Crowd Rebels

1. Patriots – defenders of American rights – organized protests, rioted, and articulated an ideology of resistance.
2. Nine colonies sent delegates to the Stamp Act Congress of 1765 and issued a set of Resolves challenging the constitutionality of the Stamp and Sugar acts, declaring that only the colonists' elected representatives could tax them and speaking against the loss of American “rights and liberties,” especially trial by jury.
3. Most delegates were moderate men who sought compromise, not confrontation; they concluded the Resolves by requesting a repeal of the Stamp Act.
4. Popular resentment was not easily contained as angry colonial mobs, led by men who called themselves the **Sons of Liberty**, intimidated royal officials throughout the colonies.
5. The leaders of the Sons of Liberty tried to direct the raw energy of the crowd against new tax measures, but some followers had other reasons for protesting – resentment of cheap British imports that threatened their livelihoods, religious passions that ignited resentment of the arrogance and corruption of royal bureaucrats, and some simply for the excitement of it.
6. Popular resistance throughout the colonies nullified the Stamp Act; royal officials could no longer count on the popular support that had ensured the empire's stability for three generations.

B. The Ideological Roots of Resistance

1. The first American protests focused on particular economic and political matters.
2. Initially, the American resistance movement had no acknowledged leaders, no organization, and no clear goals.
3. Patriot lawyers and publicists provided the resistance movement with an intellectual rationale, a political agenda, and a visible cadre of leaders.
4. Patriot publicists drew on three intellectual traditions: English common law, the rationalist thought of the Enlightenment, and an ideological agenda based on the republican and Whig strands of the English political tradition.
5. Writings espousing these traditions turned a series of riots and tax protests into a coherent political movement.

C. Parliament Compromises, 1766

1. In Parliament, different political factions advocated radically different responses to the American challenge.
2. Hard-liners were outraged and wanted to send British soldiers to suppress the riots and force Americans to submit to the supremacy of Parliament.
3. Old Whigs felt that America was more important for its trade than its taxes and advocated repeal of the Stamp Act.
4. British merchants favored repeal because American boycotts of British goods had caused decreased sales.
5. Former Prime Minister William Pitt saw the act as a “failed policy” and demanded that it be repealed.
6. Lord Rockingham mollified colonists by repealing the Stamp Act and modifying the Sugar Act, but pacified hard-liners with the Declaratory Act of 1766, which reaffirmed Parliament's authority to make laws binding American colonists.
7. The Stamp Act crisis ended in compromise, which allowed hope that an imperial relationship could be forged that was acceptable to both British officials and American colonists.

D. Charles Townshend Steps In

1. Charles Townshend was convinced of the necessity of imperial reform and eager to reduce the English land tax. To achieve both, he strongly favored restrictions on colonial assemblies and promised to find a new source of English tax revenue in America.
2. To secure revenue for the salaries of imperial officials in the colonies, the Townshend Act of 1767 imposed duties on paper, paint, glass, and tea imported to America.
3. The Revenue Act of 1767 created the Board of American Customs Commissioners and vice-admiralty courts.
4. By using parliamentary-imposed tax revenues to finance administrative and judicial innovations, Townshend directly threatened the autonomy and authority of American political institutions.
5. The New York assembly was the first to oppose Townshend's policies when it refused to comply with the Quartering Act of 1765.

6. Though the British secretary of state threatened the appointment of a military governor to enforce the Quartering Act, instead the Restraining Act of 1767 was implemented, suspending the assembly until it submitted to the Quartering Act.
7. The Restraining Act raised the stakes of the conflict between Britain and its colonies in that it declared American governmental institutions completely dependent on parliamentary favor.

E. America Debates and Resists Again

1. Colonists saw the Townshend duties as taxes that were imposed without their consent, which reinvigorated the American resistance movement.
2. Townshend's measures turned American resistance into an organized movement.
3. Public support for nonimportation of British goods emerged, influencing colonial women – such as the Daughters of Liberty – as well as men and triggered a surge in domestic production through the increase of **homespun**.
4. The boycott mobilized Americans into organized political action, but American resistance only increased British determination.
5. By 1768, American resistance had prompted a plan for military coercion, with 4,000 British regulars encamped in Boston, Massachusetts.
6. In 1765, American resistance to taxation had provoked a parliamentary debate; in 1768, it produced a plan for military coercion.

F. Lord North Compromises, 1770

1. As food shortages mounted in Scotland and northern England, riots spread across the English countryside. Riots in Ireland over the growing military budget there added to the ministry's difficulties.
2. The American trade boycott also began have a major impact on the British economy. The rising trade deficit with the Americans convinced some British ministers that the Townshend duties were a mistake and the king no longer supported the use of potential military force in Massachusetts.
3. In 1770, Lord North persuaded Parliament to accept a compromise plan that repealed the duties on manufactured items, but retained the tax on tea as a symbol of Parliament's supremacy. In response, colonists called off their boycott.
4. Even violence in New York and the Boston Massacre did not rupture the compromise.
5. By 1770, the most outspoken Patriots had repudiated parliamentary supremacy, claiming equality for the American assemblies within the empire.
6. Some Americans were prepared to resist by force if Parliament or the king insisted on exercising Britain's claim to sovereign power.

III. The Road to Independence, 1771–1776

A. A Compromise Repudiated

1. Samuel Adams established a committee of correspondence and formed a communication network between Massachusetts towns that stressed colonial rights. The burning of the *Gaspée* roused other states such as Virginia, Connecticut, South Carolina, and New Hampshire to set up their own committees of correspondence that would communicate with other colonies.
2. The committees sprang into action after the passage of the Tea Act, which relieved the British East India Company of paying taxes on tea it imported to Britain or exported to the colonies.
3. The Tea Act made the East India Company's tea less expensive than Dutch tea, which encouraged Americans to pay the Townshend duty.
4. Radical Patriots accused the ministry of bribing Americans to give up their principled opposition to British taxation.
5. The Patriots effectively nullified the Tea Act by forcing the East India Company's ships to return tea to Britain or to store it in public warehouses.
6. A scheme to land a shipment of tea and collect the tax led to a group of Patriots throwing the tea into Boston Harbor.
7. In 1774, Parliament rejected a proposal to repeal the Tea Act and instead enacted four Coercive Acts to force Massachusetts into submission.
8. The four Coercive Acts included a Port Bill, a Government Act, a new Quartering Act, and a Justice Act. Patriot leaders branded these acts the "Intolerable Acts."
9. The activities of the committees of correspondence created a sense of unity among Patriots.

10. Many colonial leaders saw the Quebec Act (1774) as another demonstration of Parliament's power to intervene in American domestic affairs, since it extended Quebec into territory claimed by American colonies and recognized Roman Catholicism.

B. The Continental Congress Responds

1. Delegates of the Continental Congress, a new colonial assembly, met in Philadelphia in September 1774 to address a set of controversial and divisive issues.
2. Under Pennsylvanian Joseph Galloway's proposal, America would have a president-general appointed by the king and a legislative council selected by the colonial assemblies.
3. Even though the council would have veto power over parliamentary legislation that affected America, the plan was rejected and seen as being too conciliatory.
4. Instead, the First Continental Congress passed a Declaration of Rights and Grievances that condemned and demanded the repeal of the Coercive Acts and repudiated the Declaratory Act.
5. The Congress began a program of economic retaliation, beginning with a non-importation agreement that went into effect in December 1774.
6. The British ministry branded the Continental Congress an illegal assembly and refused to send commissioners to America to negotiate.
7. The ministry declared that Americans had to pay for their own defense and administration and acknowledge Parliament's authority to tax them; it also imposed a blockade on American trade with foreign nations and ordered General Gage to suppress dissent in Massachusetts.

C. The Rising of the Countryside

1. Ultimately, the success of the urban-led Patriot movement would depend on the actions of the large rural population.
2. At first, most farmers had little interest in imperial issues, but the French and Indian War, which had taken their sons for military duty and pre- and post-war taxes, changed their attitudes.
3. The urban-led boycotts of 1765 and 1769 had also raised the political consciousness of many rural Americans.
4. Patriots also appealed to the yeomen tradition of agricultural independence, as many northern yeomen felt personally threatened by British imperial policy.
5. Despite their higher standard of living, southern slave owners had fears similar to those of the yeomen.

D. Loyalist Americans

1. Many prominent Americans worried that resistance to Britain would destroy respect for all political institutions, ending in mob rule.
2. Other social groups, such as tenant farmers, the Regulators, and some enslaved blacks, refused to support the resistance movement.
3. Some prominent Americans of "loyal principles" denounced the Patriot movement and formed a small, ineffective pro-British party, but Americans who favored resistance to British rule commanded the allegiance – or at least the acquiescence – of the majority of white Americans.

E. Armed Resistance Begins

1. When the Continental Congress met in 1774, New England was already in open defiance of British authority.
2. In September, General Gage ordered British troops to seize Patriot armories and storehouses at Charleston and Cambridge.
3. In response, 20,000 colonial militiamen mobilized to safeguard supply depots, the most famous regiment being the **Minutemen** of Concord.
4. On April 18, 1775, Gage dispatched soldiers to capture colonial leaders and supplies at Concord.
5. Forewarned by Paul Revere and others, the local militiamen met the British first at Lexington and then at Concord.
6. As the British retreated, militiamen ambushed them from neighboring towns with both sides suffering losses.
7. Twelve years of economic conflict and constitutional debate ended in civil war.

F. The Second Continental Congress Organizes for War

1. After losing battles at Breed's Hill and Bunker Hill, in 1775 the Continental Congress created a Continental army headed by General George Washington.
2. Moderates led by John Dickinson of Pennsylvania passed a petition that expressed loyalty to the king and requested the repeal of oppressive parliamentary legislation.
3. Zealous Patriots such as John Adams and Patrick Henry won passage of a Declaration of the Causes and

Necessities of Taking Up Arms.

4. The king refused the moderates' petition and issued a Proclamation for Suppressing Rebellion and Sedition in August 1775.
5. Hoping to add a fourteenth colony to the rebellion, the Patriot forces invaded Canada and took Montreal in September but later failed to capture Quebec.
6. American merchants cut off all exports to Britain and its West Indian sugar islands, and Parliament retaliated with a Prohibitory Act, banning trade with the rebellious colonies.
7. Lord Dunmore of Virginia organized two military forces – one white, one black – and offered freedom to slaves and indentured servants who joined the Loyalist cause.
8. Faced with black unrest and pressed by yeomen and tenant farmers demanding independence, Patriot planters called for a break with Britain.
9. By April of 1776, Radical Patriots had, through military conflict, transformed the North Carolina assembly into an independent Provincial Congress, which instructed its representatives to support independence. By May 1776, Virginia Patriots had followed suit.

G. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*

1. Many colonists retained a deep loyalty to the crown, as to do otherwise might threaten all paternal authority and disrupt the hierarchical social order.
2. By 1775, the Patriot cause was gaining greater support among artisans and laborers.
3. Many Scots-Irish in Philadelphia became Patriots for religious reasons, and some well-educated persons questioned the idea of monarchy altogether.
4. In January 1776, Thomas Paine published *Common Sense* – a call for independence and republicanism.
5. *Common Sense* aroused the general public and quickly turned thousands of Americans against British rule.
6. Paine's message was not only popular but also clear – reject the arbitrary powers of the king and Parliament and create independent republican states.

H. Independence Declared

1. On July 4, 1776, the Congress approved a Declaration of Independence.
2. Thomas Jefferson, the main author of the Declaration, justified the revolt by blaming the rupture on George III rather than on Parliament.
3. Jefferson proclaimed that "all men are created equal"; they possess the rights of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"; and that government derives its power from the "consent of the governed."
4. By linking these doctrines of individual liberty, **popular sovereignty**, and republican government with independence, Jefferson established them as defining values of the new nation.
5. Colonists celebrated the Declaration by burning George III in effigy and toppling statues of the king; these acts helped to break the ties to the monarch and to establish the legitimacy of republican state governments.