Part II: The Widening Split—1763-65

In few other periods of American history does the pace of events compare to the years immediately after the French and Indian War. Within a decade, relationships that had been built up over 170 years between the colonies and the mother country were ruptured. The "salutary neglect" of an earlier era was forgotten. Minor disagreements often escalated into bitter, even violent, confrontations. Towns and villages throughout the colonies were thrown into turmoil, frequently pitting neighbor against neighbor and brother against brother.

The Price of Empire

Much of the turmoil that followed the French and Indian War was directly related to the outcome of the conflict. Even in victory, Britain was left with war debts of more than 140 million pounds. The financial burden on Britain was considerable. The mother country looked toward the colonies to help pay the costs of maintaining the British empire. To British officials, their expectations seemed reasonable. After all, the French and Indian War had been sparked by the colonists and its results had greatly benefited them.

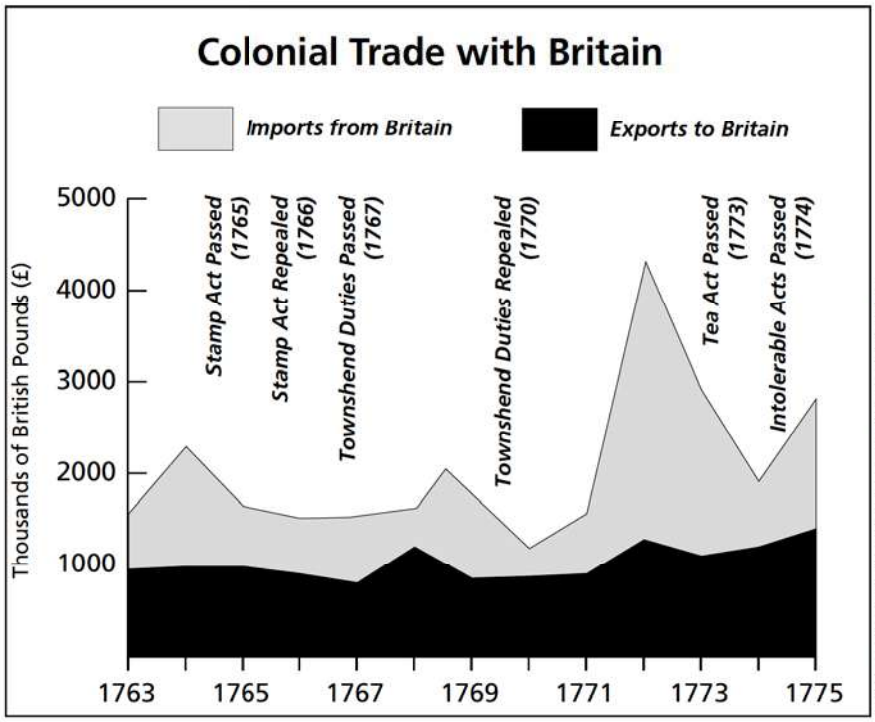
The colonies, in fact, were in a good position to lend support to the empire. Within a few years, colonial legislatures collected sufficient taxes to pay their own much smaller war debts. Furthermore, the colonists paid much less in taxes than their counterparts in Britain.

The French defeat also opened the door to westward expansion by the colonists. The movement west brought them into conflict with the Native Americans of the Great Lakes region. In 1763, Native American forces under the leadership of Chief Pontiac overran seven British forts before being pushed back.

How did Britain tighten control on the American colonists?

The quickening pace of colonial expansion alarmed London. British officials worried that colonial ties to the mother country would weaken as colonists settled further inland. To slow the westward expansion and avoid further trouble with the Indians, Britain issued the Proclamation of 1763. The decree forbade colonists from settling west of the Appalachians. The colonists objected to the restrictions drawn up by London and for the most part ignored them.

Meanwhile, the British increased the number of troops stationed along the frontier to seventy-five hundred. To pay for the soldiers, which cost about 320,000 pounds a year, the British imposed the Sugar Act in the colonies in 1764 to collect taxes on imported molasses. In 1765 they also passed the Stamp Act.



The Sugar Act in fact lowered the official tax on imported molasses from six pence a gallon to three pence. What changed was the level of enforcement. Before 1764, taxes on molasses imported from the French sugar-growing islands of the Caribbean were rarely collected in the colonies. The colonists relied on molasses as their main sweetener and as the basis for rum, their favorite alcoholic beverage.

To stop the smuggling of molasses, Britain gave its navy more power to seize merchant vessels. British naval courts, rather than local courts with juries, tried suspected smugglers.

From *The Cartoon History of the American Revolution.*

In "The Wise Men of Gotham and their Goose," a British cartoonist pokes fun at efforts by Parliament to squeeze more revenue out of the American colonies.

The Stamp Act required that all legal documents in the colonies bear a tax stamp that could be purchased only from official tax collectors. Bills of sale, wills, shipping invoices, even playing cards and newspapers had to carry the tax stamp. Prime Minister George Grenville, the author of the Stamp Act, offered to repeal the new tax if another source of revenue could be found. "[I] am not set upon this tax," Grenville remarked. "If the Americans dislike it and prefer any other method of raising the money themselves...and if they choose any other mode I shall be satisfied, provided the money be raised."

How did the colonists protest against British controls?

The Sugar Act and the Stamp Act raised revenue which was earmarked specifically to offset the cost of stationing British troops in North America. The announcement of the new taxes provoked a hornet's nest of protest in the colonies.

Colonial legislatures and towns declared the taxes to be "unlawful," "unconstitutional," and "without precedent." The colonists were particularly upset that they had no voice in developing tax policy. They contended that the new taxes denied them their basic rights as English subjects by taking away their property against their will.

Opponents of British policy called themselves patriots. James Otis, John Dickinson, and other patriots argued that the new taxes violated the principles of the British constitution. They conceded that Parliament had the right to regulate trade in the empire through taxes on imports. However, the patriots held that Parliament had crossed a crucial line by

imposing taxes designed specifically to raise revenue, since the colonists were not represented in the legislature.

> ***"For if our trade be taxed why not our lands and everything we possess and make use of? This we apprehend annihilates our charter Right to govern and tax ourselves. It strikes at our British privileges, which as we have never forfeited them we hold in common with our fellow subjects who are natives of Britain. If taxes are laid upon us in any shape without our having a legal representation where they are laid, are we not reduced from the character of free subjects to the miserable state of tributary slaves?"***
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> —Resolution adopted in Boston, May 1764

When officials in London suggested that parliamentary representation for the colonies might be considered, patriot leaders made it clear that was not the solution they had in mind. The legislatures of Virginia and South Carolina went so far as to pass resolutions rejecting the idea of colonial representation in Parliament. In effect, patriot spokesmen were saying that the colonies could be taxed only by their own colonial legislatures.

Meanwhile, groups of patriots calling themselves the "Sons of Liberty" harassed local tax collectors. The first outbreak of violence took place in Boston in 1765, when a mob destroyed the home of Andrew Oliver, a wealthy colonist who had been appointed as a stamp tax agent. The patriots carried out their attack under the rallying cry "liberty, property, and no stamp." A local garrison of sixty British troops did not attempt to intervene. Two weeks later, another mob led by the Sons of Liberty looted the house of the Massachusetts lieutenant governor, whose family had lived in the colony for several generations. Again, no one was punished for the attack.

Most worrisome for London was a boycott of British goods organized by colonial merchants. The merchants vowed that they would not import British products for resale in the colonies until the Stamp Act was repealed. Because the two million colonists represented a substantial market, British manufacturers were sure to feel the boycott. The boycott also made financial sense for many merchants. Cutting off imports would allow them to sell their existing stocks of merchandise at higher prices as supplies dried up.

What was Pitt's compromise?

The boycott brought quick results. British business leaders petitioned Parliament to repeal the Stamp Act, pointing out that colonial merchants not only refused to import British goods, but were unable to repay the nearly five million pounds they owed British suppliers. Whig leaders in Parliament, led by William Pitt, joined in the criticism of their country's tax measures toward the colonies.

Pitt genuinely sympathized with the complaints of the colonists. He shared their opposition to imposing taxes on citizens who had no voice in Parliament. More important, Pitt feared that the new taxes would loosen Britain's hold over its restless colonies in America and undermine trade (amounting to more than two million pounds a year) between the colonies and the mother country.

> ***"I stand up for this kingdom. I maintain, that the Parliament has a right to bind, to restrain America....When two countries are connected together, like England and her colonies, the one must necessarily govern, the greater must rule the less; but so rule it as not to contradict the fundamental principles that are common to both."***
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> —William Pitt

As Pitt recommended, the Stamp Act and the Sugar Act were repealed in 1766. British legislators then passed the Declaratory Act, stating that Parliament had full authority to make laws binding on the colonies "in all cases whatsoever."

Both sides of the Atlantic celebrated the end of the confrontation. Pitt won widespread praise. The inscription on a medal cast in his honor hailed him as, "The man who, having saved the parent, pleaded with success for her children."

In reality, the Stamp Act and the Sugar Act raised central issues that had not been resolved. The limits of colonial self-government remained unclear. So did the extent of the mother country's determination to curb the independent spirit of her colonial children.

Taxation without Representation

In 1767, the British government, now led by Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Townshend, tried once more to raise revenue from the colonies to help pay for the administration and protection of British North America. The government placed new taxes on the import of glass, lead, paint, paper, and tea. The "Townshend Duties," as the taxes came to be known, were expected to cover about 10 percent of Britain's expenses in North America.

Unlike the Stamp Act, which affected thousands of colonists conducting everyday business, the Townshend Duties were to be collected from colonial merchants before their imports could be unloaded in American ports. Townshend hoped that crafting a narrowly focused tax on the colonial merchant class would enable him to avoid the controversy kicked up by the Stamp Act. He was wrong.

How did the colonists react to the Townshend Duties?

News of the Townshend Duties triggered a new round of protests in the colonies. Merchants again staged boycotts of British goods. Pamphlets asserted that the new taxes denied the colonists their rights as English subjects and reduced them to the status of slaves. Patriot mobs enforced the boycott by burning the shops and merchandise of merchants who continued to trade with Britain.

In Boston, the most unruly of the colonial capitals, customs officers were attacked. Patriots seized a British patrol boat in Boston Harbor, carried it to the city commons, and publicly burned it. To maintain order, the British stationed four regiments in Boston.

The British pledged in 1769 to do away with the Townshend Duties, but Boston remained tense. In 1770, a street mob challenged British troops guarding Boston's customs house. The troops opened fire, leaving five colonists dead. Although patriots labeled the killings a "massacre," a colonial court found the British officer commanding the troops not guilty of a criminal offense.

Townshend's death in 1770 was followed by the formal repeal of the Townshend Duties. The colonial minister's replacement, Lord Frederick North, recognized that the costs of collecting new taxes in the colonies were often greater than the revenue raised. The British, however, were not willing to give up their authority to pass laws governing the colonies. Britain left a small tax on tea in the colonies in place to symbolize the power of the mother country.

Patriot leaders understood what was at stake. Colonial spokesmen such as Benjamin Franklin declared that the colonies were independent of Parliament and owed their allegiance only to the monarch. Franklin conceded that the colonies in the past had accepted laws passed by Parliament, but in the future he advised the colonists to "never adopt or acknowledge an Act of Parliament but by a formal law of our own [legislatures]."

Boston patriot Samuel Adams held that the colonies had enjoyed the right of self-government from the beginning. He contended that the original settlers of Massachusetts had made a compact with the king in which they agreed "to become his voluntary subjects, not his slaves."

> ***"[When] did they [the colonists] enter into an express promise to be subject to the control of the parent state? What is there to show that they were in any way bound to obey the acts of the British Parliament.... No body can have the power to make laws over***

a free people, but by their own consent."

—Samuel Adams

What caused the Boston Tea Party?

The Tea Act brought tensions in the colonies to a boiling point in 1773. The dispute had its roots in the financial troubles of the British East India Company, which produced tea in British colonial possessions in South Asia. To prevent the company from going bankrupt, Parliament granted it permission to sell tea directly to the colonies, bypassing the British and colonial merchants who acted as middlemen.

From *The Annals of America.*

Colonists tar and feather a customs house official for accepting a shipment of tea.

Direct sales would allow the East India Company to reduce its costs. Even after paying the small tax on imported tea, the company would be able to beat the prices of smuggled Dutch tea. (At the time, at least 75 percent of the tea consumed in the colonies and 60 percent of the tea in Britain was smuggled in from Dutch colonies.) British officials assumed that the new regulations would not meet resistance. They reasoned that colonial consumers would welcome the lower prices. By their calculations, the only losers in the new arrangement would be colonial traders who had smuggled Dutch tea.

Patriots, however, saw the Tea Act as another means to force the colonists to pay a tax on tea. Even patriot merchants who had been willing to pay the duty when they were unable to buy smuggled Dutch tea, such as John Hancock, joined the protest.

The most dramatic blow against the Tea Act occurred in Boston in December 1773, when patriots dressed as Indians boarded three East India Company ships in Boston Harbor. As 2,000 onlookers cheered, the patriots dumped 342 chests of tea overboard.

The "Boston Tea Party" was followed by similar disturbances in other colonial port cities. Colonists who acted as sales agents for British tea found themselves the targets of violence. Particularly cruel was the practice of "tarring and feathering," in which the victim's body was smeared with hot tar and then coated with feathers. Tarring and feathering

usually resulted in permanent scars and could produce crippling injuries or even death.

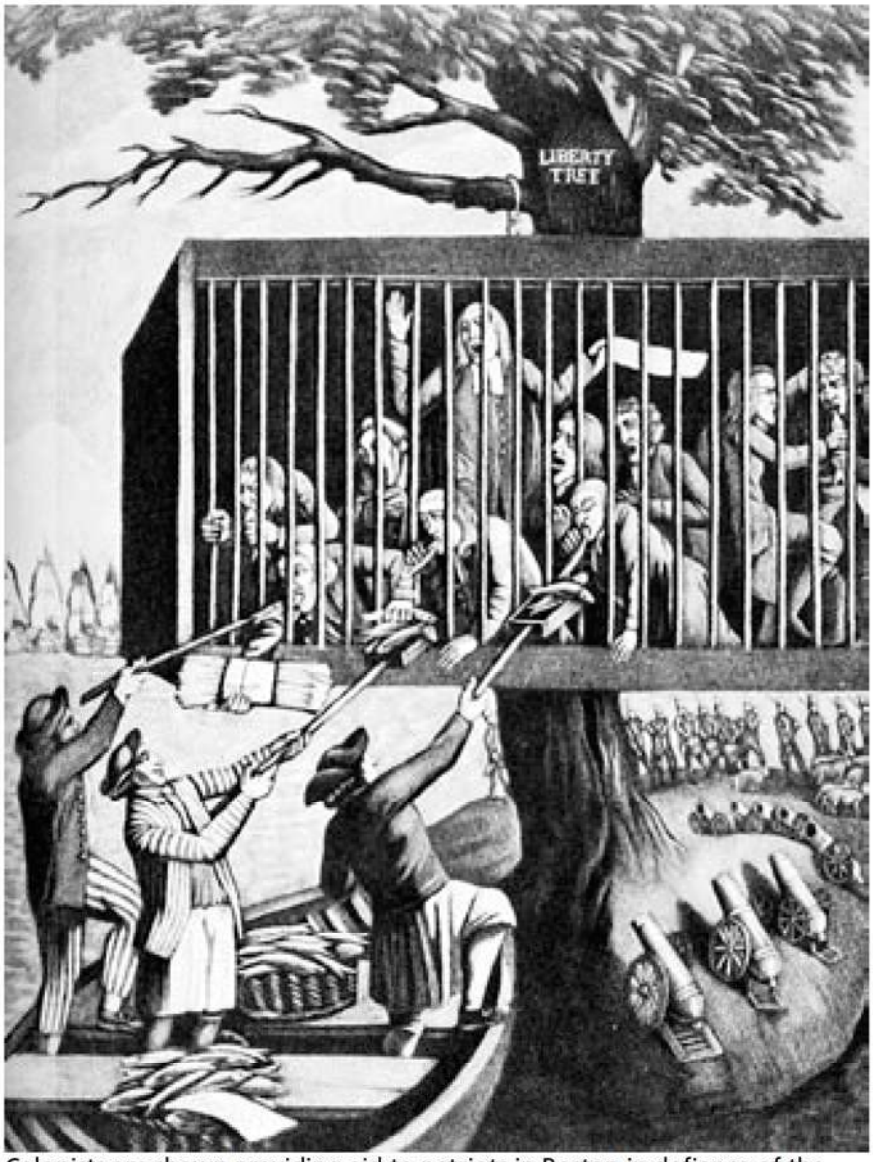
The mob actions concerned many of the patriot leaders. Economically and socially, most had much in common with the persecuted officials. They were well-educated and prosperous, with views and tastes that were similar to those of upper-class Whigs in Britain. The patriot leaders worried that the movement they had initiated would aggravate tensions between wealthy colonists and the craftsmen, dock workers, day laborers, and indentured servants who made up the lower classes. John Adams, a cousin of the outspoken Samuel Adams, warned that the "lower orders" standing up to British rule might eventually turn against his own class.

How did the Intolerable Acts backfire on Britain?

The British government's response to the Boston Tea Party was swift and uncommonly firm. In May 1774, Parliament closed the port of Boston and suspended the charter of Massachusetts. Even former defenders of the American colonists in Parliament agreed that Boston's patriots had to be punished. General Thomas Gage, the commander of British forces in North America, assumed the position of royal governor in Massachusetts and enforced the economic sanctions.

The patriots branded the new restrictions as the "Intolerable Acts." Rather than back down, they were encouraged by the groundswell of support from other colonies. Twenty years after Benjamin Franklin had first urged his fellow colonists to form a council, the colonies were indeed moving toward common action. In the summer of 1774, eleven colonial legislatures voted to send representatives to Philadelphia in September to discuss ways of aiding Massachusetts and presenting a united front in the face of British pressure.

Delegates to the First Continental Congress (which included every colony except Georgia) affirmed their loyalty to King George III while rejecting he authority of Parliament. They also



From *The Annals of America.*

Colonists are shown providing aid to patriots in Boston in defiance of the "Intolerable Acts" imposed by Britain.

set the stage for a collision with British power by voting to boycott trade with the mother country and by urging the colonies to form militias to resist the enforcement of the Intolerable Acts.

The Shot Heard 'Round the World

General Gage tried to minimize friction between his troops and the Massachusetts colonists. Like his predecessor, Gage did not attempt to stop public meetings and demonstrations against the British occupation of Boston. He also did little to block the activities of the militia groups which drilled in small towns throughout New England. (The militias were in fact the outgrowth of British laws that required able-bodied men to own a musket and take part in local militia drills. The policy had been originally intended to defend the colonies against attacks by the French and their Indian allies.)

Reports that the patriots were stockpiling large quantities of weapons and gunpowder did concern Gage. On several occasions, he ordered his troops to locate and seize the stockpiles. Gage scheduled one such mission for April 19, 1775, to take a patriot supply center in Concord, Massachusetts, twenty miles west of Boston.

At dawn, seven hundred British troops dispatched by Gage reached Lexington, five miles short of Concord. Members of local militias, known as "minutemen," had been forewarned of their arrival during the night and seventy of them had assembled on the village green. Shortly after the commanding British officer ordered the minutemen to disperse, a gun went off. No one knew who discharged the first shot, but the British troops responded by opening fire on the militia. Within minutes, eight minutemen lay dead or dying.

News of the bloodshed at Lexington was immediately relayed to Concord. Minutemen decided to counter the British advance at a wooden bridge crossing the Concord River. After coming under fire from the patriots, the British commander elected to return to Boston. The retreating British, however, faced hit-and-run attacks along the route from local minutemen. By the time the British reached the safety of Boston late that night, seventy-three from their ranks had been killed and more than two hundred were wounded or missing. Of the militia troops, about one hundred were killed or wounded.

The battles at Lexington and Concord were a dramatic escalation of the struggle between the British government and the colonists. Whether the clashes were an isolated incident, like the Boston massacre, or the beginning of a larger conflict remained to be seen. Even among the militia forces that had fought at Lexington and Concord, most believed that they were defending their rights as British citizens, not striving for independence.