

Chapter 7- The Road to Revolution

1763-1775

1. Introduction

1. Victory in the Seven Years' War made Britain the master of an enlarged imperial domain
2. But victory was painfully costly; the London government therefore struggled after 1763 to compel the American colonists to shoulder some of the financial costs of empire
3. This change in British colonial policy reinforced an emerging sense of American political identity and helped to precipitate the American Revolution
4. What began as a squabble about economic policies soon exposed irreconcilable differences between Americans and Britons over cherished political principles
5. The ensuing clash between the Americans and the Britons gave birth to a new nation

2. The Deep Roots of Revolution

1. The New World nurtured new ideas about the nature of society, citizen, and government
 1. In the Old World, few people born into such changeless surroundings dared to question their lowly social status but European immigrants weren't easily subdued
 2. In the American wilderness, they encountered a world that was theirs to make
2. Two ideas in particular had taken root in American colonists by the mid-18th century
 1. One was called *republicanism*; models of the ancient Greek and Roman republics defined a just society as one in which all citizens willingly subordinated their private, selfish interests to the common good (stability of society & authority of government)
 2. By its very nature, republicanism was opposed to hierarchical and authoritarian institutions such as aristocracy and monarchy
 3. A second idea that fundamentally shaped American political thought derived from a group of British political commentators known as "radical Whigs"
 4. The Whigs feared the threat to liberty posed by the arbitrary power of the monarchy and his ministers relative to elected representatives in Parliament (mounted attacks on the use of patronage and bribes by the king's ministers)
 5. The Whigs warned citizens to be on guard against corruption and to be eternally vigilant against possible conspiracies to denude them of their hard-won liberties
3. The circumstances of colonial life had done much to bolster alert attitudes
4. The Americans grew accustomed to running their own affairs; distance weakens authority and it came as a shock when Britain after 1763 tried to strengthen grip on the colonists

3. Mercantilism and Colonial Grievances

1. Not one of the original thirteen colonies except Georgia was formally planted by the British government (trading companies, religious groups, or land speculators)
2. The British authorities nevertheless embraced a theory, called mercantilism, that justified their control over the colonies (mercantilists believed that wealth was power)
 1. Mercantilists believed that wealth was power and that a country's economic wealth (military and political power) could be measured by the amount of gold or silver in its treasury—to amount gold/silver, a country needed to export more than it imported
 2. Possessing colonies thus conferred distinct advantages, since the colonies could both supply raw materials to the mother country and provide a market for exports
3. The London government looked on the American colonists more or less as tenants
 1. They were expected to furnish products such as tobacco, sugar, and ships' masts; to refrain from making for export certain products such as woolen cloth or beaver hats; to buy imported manufactured goods exclusively from Britain; and not to indulge in bothersome dreams of economic self-sufficiency or, worse, self-government
 2. Parliament passed laws to regulate the mercantilist system; the first of these, the Navigation Law of 1650 was aimed at rival Dutch shippers trying to elbow their way into the American carrying trade (thereafter all commerce flowing to and from the colonies could be transported only in British vessels)
 3. Subsequent laws required that European goods destined for American first had to be landed in Britain, where tariff duties could be collected and profit be made
 4. Other laws stipulated that American merchants must ship certain "enumerated" products, notably tobacco, to Britain, even though prices might be better elsewhere
4. British policy also inflicted a currency shortage on the colonies
 1. Since the colonists bought more from Britain than they sold there, the difference had to be made up in hard cash; every year, gold and silver coins, mostly earned in illicit trade with the West Indies, drained out the colonies, creating an acute money shortage
 2. To facilitate everyday purchases, the colonists resorted to butter, nails, pitch, and feathers for purposes of exchange (colonies issued paper money, which depreciated)
 3. Parliament prohibited colonial legislatures from printing paper currency and from passing indulgent bankruptcy laws—Americans thought welfare was being sacrificed
5. The British crown also reserved the right to nullify any legislation passed by the colonial assemblies; although the veto was used sparingly, colonists fiercely resented its existence

4. The Merits and Menace of Mercantilism

1. Until 1763, various Navigation Laws imposed no intolerable burden (loosely enforced)
2. Enterprising colonial merchants learned early to disregard or evade restrictions; some of the first American fortunes, like John Hancock's, were amassed by wholesale smuggling
3. Americans also reaped direct benefits from the mercantile system
 1. London paid liberal bounties to colonial producers of ship parts, over the protests of British competitors; Virginia tobacco planters enjoyed a monopoly in the market
 2. The colonists also benefited from the protection of the world's mightiest navy and a strong, seasoned army of redcoats, all without a penny of cost
4. Mercantilism stifled economic initiative and imposed a rankling dependency on British agents and creditors; most grievously, many Americans simply found the mercantilist system debasing (Americans felt that the economy was never allowed to come of age)
5. Revolution broke out because Britain failed to recognize an emerging nation when it saw

5. The Stamp Tax Uproar

1. Victory-flushed Britain emerged from the Seven Years' War holding one of the biggest empires in the world and the biggest debt, some 140 million pounds, about half of which had been incurred defending the American colonies (moved to redefine relationship)
2. Prime Minister George Grenville first aroused the resentment of the colonists in 1763 by ordering the British navy to begin strictly enforcing the Navigations Laws
 1. He also secured from Parliament the so-called Sugar Act of 1764, the first law ever passed by that body for raising tax revenue in the colonies for the crown
 2. It increased the duty on foreign sugar imported from the West Indies
 3. After bitter protests, the duties were lowered substantially, and the agitation died down but resentment was kept burning by the Quartering Act of 1765, a measure that required certain colonies to provide food and quarters for British troops
3. In the same year, 1765, Grenville imposed the most odious measure of all: a stamp tax, to raise revenues to support the new military force; the Stamp Act mandated the use of stamped paper or the affixing the stamps, certifying payment of tax
 1. Stamps were required on bills of sale for about fifty trade items as well as on certain types of commercial and legal documents, including playing cards, pamphlets, newspapers, diplomas, bills of lading, and marriage licenses
 2. Grenville was simply asking the Americans to pay a fair share of the costs for their own defense, through taxes that were already familiar in Britain

3. The Americans were angrily aroused at what they regarded as Grenville's fiscal aggression; Grenville not only pinch their pocketbooks, he seemed to be striking at the local liberties they had come to assume as a matter of right
 4. Grenville's noxious legislation seemed to jeopardize the basic rights of the colonists as Englishmen; both the Sugar Act and the Stamp Act provided for trying offenders in the hated admiralty courts, where juries were not allowed
 5. Trial by jury and the precept of "innocent until proved guilty" were ancient privileges that British people everywhere, including the American colonists, held dear
 6. And why was a British army needed at all in the colonies, now that the French were expelled from the continent and Pontiac's warriors crushed?
 7. Many Americans began to sniff the strong scent of a conspiracy to strip them of their historic liberties; they lashed back and Stamp Act became the target that drew more fire
 1. Angry throats raised the cry, "No taxation without representation," and the Americans made a distinction between "legislation" and "taxation"
 2. They conceded the right of Parliament to legislate about matters that affected the entire empire, including the regulation of trade but denied the right of Parliament to impose taxes on Americans because no Americans were seated in Parliament
 3. Only their elected colonial legislatures, the Americans insisted, could legally tax
 8. Grenville dismissed these American protests as hairsplitting absurdities and asserted that the power of Parliament was supreme and undivided ("virtual representation" claimed that every member of Parliament represented all British subjects)
 9. The Americans scoffed at the notion of virtual representation
 10. The principle of no taxation without representation was supremely important, and the colonists clung to it with tenacious consistency; the British forced the Americans to deny the authority of Parliament and to begin to consider their own political independence
6. Parliament Forced to Repeal the Stamp Act
1. The most conspicuous assembled against the hated stamp tax was the Stamp Act Congress of 1765, which brought together in NYC 27 distinguished delegates from nine colonies
 1. The members drew up a statement of their rights and grievances and beseeched the king and Parliament to repeal the repugnant legislation
 2. The Stamp Act Congress, which was largely ignored in England, made little splash at the time in America but its ripples began to erode sectional suspicions because it brought together the same table leaders from the different and rival colonies (unity)

2. More effective than the congress was the widespread adoption of nonimportation agreements against British goods; nonimportation agreements were in fact a promising stride toward union; they united the American people for the first time in common action
3. Mobilizing in support of nonimportation gave ordinary American men and women new opportunities to participate in colonial protests; such public defiance helped spread revolutionary fervor throughout American colonial society
4. Sometimes violence accompanied colonial protests; Groups such as the Sons of Liberty and Daughters of Liberty, took the law into their own hands; they enforced the nonimportation agreements against violators (ransacked houses of unpopular officials)
5. Shaken by colonial commotion, the machinery for collecting the tax broke down
 1. On that day in 1765 when the new act was to go into effect, the stamp agents had all been forced to resign, and there was no one to sell the stamps; the law defied
 2. England was hard hit; America had bought about 25% of all British exports, and about 50% of British shipping was devoted to the American trade
 3. Many merchants, manufacturers, and shippers suffered and loud demands converged on Parliament for repeal of the Stamp Act but many Britons didn't understand why they paid heavy taxes while in the colonies, they refused to pay 1/3 the amount
6. After a stormy debate, Parliament in 1766 grudgingly repealed the Stamp Act
 1. Having withdrawn the Stamp Act, Parliament in virtually the same breath provocatively passed the Declaratory Act, reaffirming Parliament's right "to bind" the colonies "in all cases whatsoever"; the British drew its line in the sand
 2. It defined the constitutional principle it would not yield absolute and unqualified sovereignty over its North American colonies (the stage was set for confrontation)
7. The Townshend Tea Tax and the Boston "Massacre"
 1. Control of the British ministry was now seized by the gifted "Champagne Charley" Townshend, a man who could deliver brilliant speeches in Parliament while drunk
 1. He persuaded Parliament in 1767 to pass the Townshend Acts; the most important of these new regulations was a light import duty on glass, lead, paper, paint, and tea
 2. Townshend made this tax, unlike the Stamp Act, an indirect customs duty payable at American ports (the colonists still saw taxes without representation)
 3. The impost on tea was especially irksome, for an estimated 1 million people drank the refreshing brew twice a day (colonists were in a rebellious mood)
 2. The new Townshend revenues were to be earmarked to pay the salaries of the royal governors and judges in America but the Americans regarded Townshend's tax as another

attempt to enchain them; their fears were confirmed when the London government suspended the legislature of New York in 1767 for not complying

3. Nonimportation agreements were quickly revived against the Townshend Acts but they proved less effective than those devised against the Stamp Act
4. The colonists took the new tax less seriously largely because it was light and indirect and found that they could secure smuggled tea at a cheap price (especially in Massachusetts)
5. British officials, faced with a breakdown of law and order, landed two regiments of troops in Boston in 1768 and a clash was inevitable (presence of the red-coated ruffians)
6. The Boston Massacre occurred on the evening of March 5, 1770 a crowd of some sixty townspeople set upon a squad of about ten redcoats, one of whom was hit by a club and another of whom was knocked down; under provocation the troops opened fire and killed or wounded eleven "innocent" citizens (one of the first to die was Crispus Attucks)

8. The Seditious Committees of Correspondence

1. By 1770 King George III, then only thirty-two years old, was strenuously attempting to assert the power of the British monarchy; he proved to be a bad ruler and surrounded himself with cooperative "yes-men" notably his prime minister, Lord North
2. The ill-timed Townshend Acts had failed to produce revenue, though they did produce near-rebellion (net proceeds from the tax in one year were a paltry 295 pounds while the annual military costs to Britain in the colonies had mounted to 170,000 pounds)
3. The government of Lord North, bowing to various pressures, finally persuaded Parliament to repeal the Townshend revenue duties but the tax on tea was kept
4. Flames of discontent in America continued to be fanned by numerous incidents, including the redoubled efforts of the British officials to enforce the Navigation Laws
 1. Resistance was further kindled by a master propagandist and engineer of rebellion, Samuel Adams of Boston, a cousin of John Adams
 2. Samuel Adams's signal contribution was to organize in Massachusetts the local committees of correspondence; after he had formed the first one in Boston during 1772, some eighty towns in the colony speedily set up similar organizations
 3. Their chief function was to spread the spirit of resistance by interchanging letters and thus keep alive opposition to British policy; intercolonial committees of correspondence were the next logical step; Virginia led the way in 1773
 4. Virginia created such a body as a standing committee of the House of Burgesses; within a short time, every colony had established a central committee through which it would exchange ideas and information with other colonies

5. These intercolonial groups were significant in stimulating and disseminating sentiment in favor of unity; they evolved directly into the first American congresses

9. Tea Parties at Boston and Elsewhere

1. By 1773 nothing had happened to make rebellion inevitable; nonimportation was weakening, increasing numbers of colonists were reluctantly paying the tea tax, because the legal tea was now cheaper than the smuggled tea, even cheaper than in England
2. In 1773, the British East India Company, overburdened with 17 million pounds of tea, was facing bankruptcy; if it collapsed, the London government would lose in revenue
 1. The ministry therefore decided to assist the company by awarding it a complete monopoly of the American tea business; the giant corporation would now be able to sell the coveted leaves more cheaply than ever before, even with the tax
 2. But many American tea drinkers, rather than rejoicing at the lower prices, cried foul; they saw this British move as a shabby attempt to trick the Americans, with the bait of cheaper tea, into swallowing the principle of the detested tax
 3. Fatefully, the British colonial authorities decided to enforce the law; once more, the colonists rose up in wrath to defy it
 4. In Philadelphia and New York, mass demonstrations forced the tea-bearing ships to return to England with their cargo holds still full
3. Only in Boston did a British official stubbornly refuse to be cowed
4. Massachusetts governor Thomas Hutchinson had already felt the fury of the mob and this time he was determined not to budge; he ordered the ships to be emptied
5. Provoked beyond restraint, a band of Bostonians, clumsily disguised as Indians, boarded the docked tea ships on December 16, 1773 and smashed open 342 chests and dumped the contents into Boston harbor (thus appropriately named the Boston Tea Party)
6. Reactions varied; radicals exulted in the people's zeal for liberty while conservatives complained that the destruction of private property violated the fundamental norms
7. The granting of some home rule to the Americans might at this stage still have prevented rebellion, but few Britons of that era were blessed with that wisdom (Edmund Burke)

10. Parliament Passes the Intolerable Acts

1. An irate Parliament responded speedily to the Boston Tea Party with measures that brewed a revolution; in 1774, it passed a series of acts designed to chastise Boston in particular Massachusetts in general (branded as the "massacre of American Liberty")
 1. Most drastic of all was the Boston Port Act; it closed the tea-stained harbor until damages were paid and order could be ensured

2. By other “Intolerable Acts” were accompanied in 1774 by the Quebec Act
 3. It was erroneously regarded in English-speaking America as part of the British reaction to the turbulence in Boston; for many years the British government had debated how it should administer the sixty thousand conquered Canadian French
 4. The French were guaranteed their Catholic religion; they were permitted to retain many of their old customs and institutions; the old boundaries of the province of Quebec were now extended southward all the way to the Ohio River
2. The Quebec Act, from the viewpoint of the French-Canadians was a shrewd and conciliatory measure but from the viewpoint of the American colonists, the Quebec Act was especially noxious; it seemed to set a dangerous precedent in American against jury trials and popular assemblies; it alarmed land speculators; it aroused anti-Catholics
 3. Anti-Catholics were shocked by the extension of Roman Catholic jurisdiction southward into a huge region that had once been earmarked for Protestantism

11. The Continental Congress and Bloodshed

1. American dissenters responded sympathetically to the plight of Massachusetts; flags were flown at half-mast throughout the colonies on the day that the Boston Port Act went into effect and sister colonies rallied to send food to the stricken city
2. Most memorable of the responses to the “Intolerable Acts” was the summoning of a Continental Congress in 1774 (it was to meet in Philadelphia to consider ways)
 1. Twelve of the thirteen colonies, with Georgia missing, sent fifty-five distinguished men, among them Sam Adams, John Adams, George Washington, and Patrick Henry
 2. Intercolonial frictions were partially melted away by social activity after work hours
 3. The First Continental Congress deliberated for seven weeks, from September 5 to October 26, 1774; it was not a legislative but a consultative body—a convention rather than a congress (John Adams played a stellar role)
 4. After prolonged argument the Congress drew up several dignified papers; these included a ringing Declaration of Rights, as well as solemn appeals to other British American colonies, to the king, and to the British people
 5. The most significant action of the Congress was the creation of The Association; it was a complete boycott of British goods: nonimportation, nonexportation, and nonconsumption—the delegates sought merely to repeal the offensive legislation and return to the days before parliamentary taxation (Congress met again May 1775)
3. But the fatal drift toward war continued; Parliament rejected the Congress’s petitions

4. In April 1775 the British commander in Boston sent a detachment of troops to nearby Lexington and Concord; they were to seize stores of colonial gunpowder and also to bag the “rebel” ringleaders, Samuel Adams and John Hancock
5. At Lexington the colonial “Minute Men” refused to disperse rapidly enough and shots were fired that killed eight Americans and wounded several more; the affair was more the “Lexington Massacre” than a battle; the redcoats pushed on to Concord whence they were forced to retreat by the rough and ready Americans
6. The bewildered British, fighting off murderous fire from militiamen crouched behind thick stone walls; they could count about three hundred casualties, including some seventy killed; Britain finally had a war on its hands with the Americans

12. Imperial Strength and Weakness

1. Aroused Americans had brashly rebelled against a mighty empire; the population odds were about three to one against the rebels (some 7.5 Britons to 2.5 million colonists)
 1. Britain then boasted a professional army of some fifty thousand men, as compared with the numerous but wretchedly trained American militia
 2. George III had the treasury to hire foreign soldiers and some thirty thousand Germans (Hessians) were ultimately employed; the British enrolled about fifty thousand American Loyalists and enlisted the services of many Indians
2. Yet Britain was weaker than it seemed at first glance; oppressed Ireland was a smoking volcano, and British troops had to be detached; France, bitter from defeat, was awaiting an opportunity to stab Britain in the back; London government was confused and inept
3. Many earnest and God-fearing Britons had no desire to kill their American cousins; the English Whig factions, opposed to Lord North’s Tory wing, openly cheered American victories; Whigs believed that the battle for British freedom was being fought in America
4. Britain’s army in America had to operate under endless difficulties; the generals were second-rate; the soldiers, were cruelly treated; Britain was operating some 3,000 miles from its home base and distance added greatly to the delays and uncertainties arising from storms and other mishaps when crossing the Atlantic Ocean
5. America’s geographical expanse was enormous: roughly 1,000 by 600 miles; the Americans wisely traded space for time (captured cities did little to affect the country)

13. American Pluses and Minuses

1. The revolutionists were blessed with outstanding leadership; George Washington was a giant among men; Benjamin Franklin was a master among diplomats
 1. Open foreign aid eventually came from France; numerous European officers many of them unemployed and impoverished, volunteered their swords for pay

2. In a class by himself was a wealthy young French nobleman, the Marquis de Lafayette; fleeing from boredom, loving glory and ultimately liberty, at age nineteen, was made a major-general in the colonial army; his commission was largely a recognition of his family influence and political connections (his services invaluable)
2. Other conditions aided the Americans; they were fighting defensively, with the odds, all things considered, favoring the defender; in agriculture, the colonies were self-sustaining
3. The Americans also enjoyed the moral advantage that came from belief in a just cause
4. Yet the American rebels were badly organized for war; from their earliest days, they had been almost fatally lacking in unity and the new nation lurched forward uncertainly
5. Even the Continental Congress, which directed the conflict, was hardly more than a debating society; the disorganized colonists fought almost the entire war before adopting a written constitution—the Articles of Confederation—in 1781
6. Jealous was conspicuous and individual states, proudly regarding themselves as sovereign, resented the attempts of congress to exercise its flimsy powers; sectional jealousy boiled up over the appointment of military leaders
7. Economic difficulties were nearly insuperable; metallic money had already been heavily drained away and the Continental Congress was forced to print “continental” paper money in great amounts—it depreciated to worth little more than nothing
8. Inflation of the currency inevitably skyrocketed prices; families of the soldier at the fighting front were hard hit; debtors easily acquired handfuls of the quasi-worthless money and gleefully paid their debts “without mercy”

14. A Thin Line of Heroes

1. Basic military supplies in the colonies were dangerously scanty, especially firearms
 1. Colonial Americans were not a well-armed people; firearms were to be found in only a small minority of households and many of those guns were property of the militia
 2. One reason for the eventual alliance with France was the need for a source of firearms
 3. Food was in short supply; manufactured goods also were generally in short supply in agricultural America and clothing and shoes were appallingly scarce
2. American militiamen were numerous but also highly unreliable; able-bodied American males had received rudimentary training, and many of these recruits served for short terms in the rebel armies but poorly trained militiamen could not stand up in the open field against professional British troops advancing with bayonets
3. A few thousand regulars—perhaps seven or eight thousand at the war’s end—were finally whipped into shape by stern drillmasters (German Baron von Stueben)

1. As they gained experience, these soldiers of the Continental line more than held their own against crack British troops (Stuben taught soldiers the use of the bayonet)
2. Blacks also fought and died for the American cause; although many states initially barred them from militia service, by war's end more than five thousand blacks had enlisted in the American armed forces (many blacks came from the northern states)
3. African-Americans also served on the British side; in November 1775 Lord Dunmore, royal governor of Virginia, issued a proclamation promising freedom for any enslaved black in Virginia who joined the British army ("Black Loyalists")
4. Morale in the Revolutionary army was badly undermined by American profiteers; putting profits before patriotism, they sold to the British because the invader could pay in gold
5. Speculators forced prices sky-high and some Bostonians made profits of 50 to 200 %
6. Washington never had as many as twenty thousand effective troops in one place at one time, despite bounties of land and other inducements; the brutal truth is that only a select minority of the American colonists attached themselves to the cause of independence with a spirit of selfless devotion; freedom-loving Patriots