

Road to the Revolution: Timeline of Events

The American Revolution did not happen suddenly and without warning. It was the result of 40 years of increasing tension and anger. Both sides played a role in escalating the conflict -- including the English government abusing its power over the colonies and the colonists taking actions that were meant to antagonize the English government. In some cases, the two sides simply didn't see eye-to-eye about things that were happening and interpreted the same events in different ways. Here are some of these events...

1733: The Molasses Act taxes rum, molasses, and sugar produced in the English West Indies for sale to the colonies. Colonists argue that it seeks to protect English economic interests at the colonists' expense.

1750: Parliament passed the Iron Act, which limits the development of iron manufacturing in the colonies. Benjamin Franklin published a paper denouncing the absurdity of restraining the colony's economic growth.

1754: For the fourth time since the 1680s, England and France go to war. The conflict is known as the Seven Years' War in Europe and the French and Indian War in North America. When it ended in 1763, France gave up Canada and the Ohio River Valley to the English.

1763: To prevent the colonists from rushing into territories previously owned by the French and provoking conflict with the Indians, Parliament passes the Proclamation of 1763. This law forbids the colonists from moving into land west of the Appalachians. To enforce the Proclamation, the royal government stations 10,000 troops in the colonies -- the first time a standing army has been stationed in the colonies in peacetime.

1764: To maintain the army and repay war debts, Parliament decides to impose taxes on colonial trade. The Sugar Act taxes foreign wines, coffee, and textiles imported into the colonies. England requires colonial ships to fill out papers detailing their cargo and destination, while the royal navy patrols the coast to search for smugglers.

1765: Parliament passed the Stamp Act, which requires a tax stamp on legal documents, almanacs, newspapers, pamphlets, and playing cards. This was the first direct tax Parliament had ever placed on the colonies. Colonists boycott English goods and intimidate stamp distributors into resigning. London merchants eventually persuaded Parliament to repeal the act because their businesses are being hurt by the boycott.

1767: England passes the Townshend Acts to tax glass, lead, paint, paper, and tea to the colonies. Revenue from the acts is supposed to be used to pay the salaries of colonial governors and judges. England loses money from colonists boycotting the items that are being taxed and realizes the Townshend Acts are a mistake. The taxes are repealed 3 years later, except for the tax on tea.

1770: English soldiers under Captain Thomas Preston fired on a Boston crowd, killing five and wounding six. It is unclear who is responsible for causing the event, but Colonial newspapers call the event the “Boston Massacre” and dramatize the event.

1773: Parliament passes the Tea Act, authorizing the East India Company to bypass American merchants and sell tea directly to the colonies. This makes English tea much cheaper than tea smuggled from other countries, which angers colonial merchants. Colonists in Boston disguise themselves as Indians, board three vessels owned by the East India Company, and dump 342 canisters of English tea into the water. The English government responds harshly by passing the Coercive Acts (known in the colonies as the Intolerable Acts). These acts close Boston’s harbor to trade, forbid town meetings more than once a year, allow for English troops to stay in unoccupied homes in the city, and appoints an English army general as Massachusetts’ royal governor.

1774: In September, the first Continental Congress meets in Philadelphia to organize resistance to English policies. It declares that all trade with England should be suspended.

1775: English General Thomas Gage is ordered to use military force to put down challenges to royal authority in the colonies. To stop colonial military preparations, he dispatches royal troops to destroy rebel supplies at Concord, Massachusetts. On April 19, English soldiers arrived at Lexington and order 70 armed “Minutemen” to disperse. Some fires a shot and English soldiers return fire, killing 8 colonists. The English soldiers move on to Concord, destroy the supplies they found, and march back to Boston. As they are marching, colonists take shots at them from behind hedges and walls. English losses are 65 dead, 173 wounded, and 26 missing. Colonists losses are 49 dead and 46 wounded or missing.

1775: In May, the second Continental Congress meets in Philadelphia and appoints George Washington commander-in-chief.

1776: The second Continental Congress passes a resolution that reads: “...That these united Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States, that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved” (*The Declaration of Independence*).