

CAUSES OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Cause 1 - Consequences of the French and Indian War: The French & Indian War took place in Europe and North America and involved France, England, Spain, and others. The war began because Britain felt they needed to prevent France from taking over land that was theirs. It ended with British control of North America. The war caused Britain's national debt to almost double. After the war there were still 10,000 British troops in the colonies. Money was needed to pay for them and the British government felt that the colonists should help cover the costs. The easiest way to do this was through taxation. The colonists did not object to contributing to the cost of their defense, but they did not see the need for British troops to remain in the colonies. They believed they could defend themselves. They also argued, that if they were to be taxed by Parliament, they should be represented in it. Even though they were allies, the war did not bring the British and colonists closer together. The colonists saw the British as a threat to their liberties. They felt their own governments were better suited to govern and defend their colonies. In 1765, the colonists still considered themselves British, however, the relationship between the colonists and Britain began to rapidly decline.

Cause 2 - Sons of Liberty: The Sons of Liberty were a semi-secret group. They started in Boston in 1765, but soon there were groups in every colony. Sam and John Adams were their leaders. They had to remain secret to avoid arrest. Many of their "protests" turned violent, and this made the British government think that all American protesters were criminals. They threatened the lives of tax collectors and even governors. They tarred and feathered people and tore down houses. They even led an attack on Massachusetts's Gov. Hutchinson's mansion. Often times, local sheriffs were too scared to take action. Violence of the Sons of Liberty forced the British government to send armed soldiers to keep law and order. This made the colonists even angrier with the British. People cursed at and spit on the soldiers. Then the government passed the Quartering Act, which required the colonists to pay for lodging the soldiers (People might even have to have a soldier sleep in their house!). The Sons of Liberty were responsible for the Boston Tea Party. The violent and continued opposition of the Sons of Liberty made the British government determined to make the Americans behave and submit to the authority of the crown and Parliament.

Cause 3 - Taxation/Representation in Parliament: From 1762-70, Britain was fighting wars globally. These conflicts increased Britain's national debt. The government needed to raise money. To do so, Parliament passed a number of taxes on the colonies. The Stamp Act was the first tax to spark serious colonial resistance. It caused the formation of the Stamp Act Congress whose goal was planning resistance to the taxes in any way possible. The colonists asserted that Britain did not have the right to tax them without representation and they also feared that this small tax would eventually lead to more taxation. At first, external taxes (Sugar Act and Navigation Acts) were accepted, because they were viewed as justifiable repayment for the crown's defense of the colonies. Later, however, internal taxes (Stamp Act) were seen as sly attempts to raise revenue. To the colonist this was unacceptable and they began to find ways around the laws. This led to smuggling, corruption, and a lack of respect for British law. During this time, new ideas of democracy emerged and the colonists began to form their own national identity and unite together. Resentment for lack of representation in Parliament and unmet demand for equal rights as British citizens led to the Boston Massacre and Boston Tea Party.

Cause 4 – Boston Massacre In 1767, Parliament passed taxes on tea, lead, glass, paint, and paper. They also established a Board of Customs in Boston. Bostonians protested by boycotting British goods. Customs

officials began to ask Parliament to guarantee their safety because they were constantly being threatened. As a result, the king sent troops to Boston. Bostonians resented the presence of the army in their town, and patriot leaders tried to incite hatred toward the soldiers. Some even began to discourage merchants from selling British goods. Storeowners who didn't follow along risked having their stores vandalized. Soon, civilians were clashing more and more with the soldiers. In March 1770, a guard posted in front of the Customs House was harassed by a group of men. In response, Capt. Preston led 7 soldiers to reinforce the guard. Amid the noise and confusion, shots were fired and 5 civilians were killed. The soldiers were arrested, and Bostonians demanded the removal of all remaining troops. Loyalists and patriots blamed each other for the confrontation. Loyalists sent their account to England while Patriots drafted and published a story implying that the incident was the result of a sinister plot. John Adams volunteered to defend the soldiers. Preston's trial began in October 1770. Surprisingly, the jury found him not guilty. Preston's men were tried separately and 6 of the soldiers were found not guilty; while 2 others were found guilty of manslaughter and escaped death. After the incident, the perception of British soldiers in the colonies would never be the same. The colonists viewed them as occupiers who had plans to crush their independence and beat them into submission.

Cause 5 – The Boston Tea Party: The Tea Party was the first colonial attempt to rebel with violence. The events leading to the Tea Party began years before, when the English won the French & Indian War. After the war, the king and Parliament imposed taxes on the colonies to make up for the cost of the war and to pay for defense. The colonists reacted with protests and boycotts that forced Parliament to repeal all the taxes except the Tea Act. Even though the tax on the tea was incredibly small, it still provoked protests. To avoid the tax, colonists began to smuggle tea. When the British East India Company realized, that the colonists were drinking cheap, smuggled tea, Parliament gave them the power to export tea without paying taxes. That way, their tea would be much cheaper than smuggled tea. The colonists reacted to this with anger. They wrote letters of protest to both Parliament and the King, but were ignored. In late 1773, the Sons of Liberty found out that three British cargo ships filled with tea, were heading for Boston. Over the following weeks speeches were made to get all colonists informed about their arrival. People even quit drinking tea. On November 18th, the ships arrived. Colonists wanted the governor to force the ships back to Britain. When he didn't agree, the Sons of Liberty, disguised as Indians, snuck on board the ships. They grabbed all the boxes of tea and threw them overboard in front of a large crowd. Altogether they destroyed 340 tea chests. The British Government reacted to the event by passing the "Intolerable Acts" and sending 4,000 British soldiers to close Boston Harbor and restore order.

Cause 6 – The "Intolerable Acts": Many colonists saw the Intolerable Acts as a violation of their constitutional rights, their natural rights, and their colonial charters. They viewed the acts as a threat to the liberties of all of British citizens in America. In Boston, the acts were viewed as an act of unnecessary and cruel punishment for the Boston Tea Party. As a result of the Intolerable Acts, even more colonists began to side against Britain. Parliament and the king had hoped that the Intolerable Acts would quash unrest in Massachusetts and force the colonists to accept the authority of Parliament. However, the plan backfired because the harshness of some of the acts made it difficult for moderates to speak in favor of Parliament. The acts promoted sympathy for Massachusetts and encouraged colonists from the other colonies to form the First Continental Congress and to boycott British goods. The Congress also pledged to support Massachusetts in case of attack, which meant that all of the colonies would become involved when the war began at Lexington & Concord.