Chapter 5: Toward Independence: The Problem of Empire, 1763-1776

- **An Empire Transformed, 1763-1765**

  - The Great War for Empire left a mixed legacy in the colonies
  
  - British troops were stuck overseas, and the national debt that now faced the British was gigantic.

  - **The Legacy of War**

    - The war changed the relationship between Britain and the colonies.
    
    - During the war, British generals and American generals disagreed on military strategy.
    
    - After the war, the clash of cultures also was a problem, with the British treating the colonists like second class citizens.

  - **Disputes over Trade and Troops**

    - Ten thousand British troops were deployed to the colonies after the war, to “maintain the peace”.
    
    - However, the troops were there to enforce the new trade regulations, such as the Revenue Act of 1762, which tightened up the collection of trade duties, and had been avoided in the past by colonists that bribed customs officials.

  - **The National Debt**

    - British debt went from £75 million in 1756 to £133 million in 1763, just seven years later (from the French & Indian War, or better known as the Seven Years’ War in Europe).
    
    - In an attempt to get out of the red, the Prime Minister first raised taxes in England; taxes was raised on the poorest and the middling classes, import tax was increased on tobacco and sugar, and essentially a sales tax was levied on salt, beer, and distilled spirits, which raised their cost to consumers.
    
    - In an attempt to end these policies, the Radical Whig John Wilkes called for an end to rotten boroughs, which were tiny electoral districts controlled by wealthy aristocrats and merchants.

  - **George Grenville: Imperial Reformer**

    - Had been a member of Parliament since 1741, and became the British Prime Minister in 1763.
    
    - When he was elected prime minister, he decided that taxes on American colonies would have to be raised, because English citizens were paying nearly five times the amount of taxes when compared to colonists.

  - **The Sugar Act and Colonial Rights**
- The Sugar Act raised taxes on foreign sugar in the colonies, and was the replacement for the Molasses Act.

- The Sugar Act decreased the profits made by smuggling French sugar in an attempt to stop said smuggling by American merchants from the French West Indies.

- **Constitutional Objections**

  - Those that didn’t follow these new laws (acts) were subjected to being arrested and tried.

  - Trials took place in vice-admiralty courts, which were a maritime tribunal presided over by a British-appointed judge that takes place in Great Britain. Because of the newly enacted Sugar Act which closed the loophole, forced all the trials to be held this way.

- **An Open Challenge: The Stamp Act (of 1765)**

  - This sparked the first imperial crisis in the colonies because it affected the large majority of the colonists.

  - This would offset some of the cost of keeping the thousands of troops in the colonies, about £200,000 a year.

  - This act required stamps on any piece of paper – court documents, land titles, contracts, playing cards, newspapers, etc.

  - Virtual representation was what Great Britain claimed the colonists had when they argued taxation without representation. The British said that the colonies were “represented” by sugar planters and Atlantic merchants, although they were not really representative of the colonists at all.

- **The Dynamics of Rebellion, 1765-1770**

  - The colonists were facing an all-out-attack on their institutions, and they didn’t like it.

  - Colonists that were later referred to as Patriots, fought back through organized protests, encouraged riots, and articulated a compelling ideology of resistance.

- **Politicians Protest, and the Crowd Rebels**

  - Patrick Henry, who was a young headstrong member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, condemned Grenville’s new legislation and attacked George III for supporting it.

  - Although most of the House of Burgesses were shaken by his remarks, which bordered on treason, they did agree on the fact that the Stamp Act was an attempt “to Destroy American freedom”.


• The Stamp Act Congress

- Nine colonial assemblies sent delegates to the Stamp Act Congress, which met in New York City in October 1765.

- They issued a set of resolutions, known as the Stamp Act Resolves, which challenged the constitutionality of the Stamp and Sugar acts by declaring that only the colonists’ elected representatives could tax them.

- However, they were moderate men, and they still implored Parliament to see reason, that Americans “glory in being subjects of the best of Kings”, and they should relent on such strict measures on the colonies, lest rebellion be imminent.

- The Sons of Liberty in Boston participated in public rebellious acts, such as the beheading and burning of an effigy of collector Andrew Oliver. They rebelled in more provocative ways, such as tar & feathering of British appointed tax collectors.

• The Motives of the Crowd

- The motives of mob rebellions have now changed for the first time to contain political aspects.

- Crowds also boycotted British goods.

• The Ideological Roots of Resistance

- Resistances found their roots along ports, because that was where the majority of the acts were enforced.

- That the British had violated specific “liberties and privileges” embodied in colonial charters.

- A second major intellectual resource was rationalist thought of the Enlightenment.

• Parliament Compromises, 1766

- George III dismissed Grenville as the prime minister because of disputes over domestic policy – the new prime minister was Lord Rockingham.

- There were three factions advocating for repeal of the Stamp Act.

  1. The Old Whigs – now led by Lord Rockingham, who had long maintained that America was more important for its “flourishing and increasing trade” than for its tax revenues.

  2. British merchants and manufacturers – the interests of these people pointed out that the American trade boycott was cutting deeply into British exports.

  3. William Pitt – former prime minister and his allies in Parliament argued that the Stamp Act was a mistake and demanded it “be repealed absolutely, totally, and immediately.”

- In the end, Lord Rockingham decided to compromise, he repealed the Stamp Act and
reduced the duty imposed by the Sugar Act on French molasses to a penny a gallon. To quell imperial reformers and hardliners, he passed the Declaratory Act of 1766, which explicitly reaffirmed Parliament’s “full power and authority” over any legislation in the colonies.

- **Charles Townshend Steps In**
  - William Pitt was once again, named to prime minister, when Rockingham’s ministry collapsed over domestics issues.
  
  - However, because William Pitt was chronically ill with gout, he often missed parliamentary debates, leaving the chancellor of the exchequer, Charles Townshend, in command.

  - Townshend’s views of the colonies were most similar to those of former prime minister George Grenville.

- **The Townshend Act (of 1767)**
  - This new tax legislation had both fiscal and political goals.

  - Imposed duties on colonial imports of paper, paint, glass, and tea, and would raise about £40,000 a year. This money would be mostly used to pay the salaries of royal governors, judges, and other imperial officials.

  - Politically, this act was meant to undermine the autonomy and authority of American political institutions.

- **The Restraining Act**
  - The full implications of Townshend’s policies became clear in New York, where the assembly refused to comply with the Quartering Act of 1765. Soon after however, they offered limited assistance to soldiers, and in response to this Townshend demanded full compliance, threatening to impose a special duty on New York’s imports and exports if they did not.

  - In summary, the Restraining Act stated that Parliament could suspend colonial legislature if they did not follow tax legislations or do as Parliament ordered them too.

- **America Debates and Resists Again**
  - The Townshend Acts revived the constitutional debate over taxation.

  - Some Americans, such as Benjamin Franklin, made a distinction between external and internal taxes, and that these newly levied internal taxes were not acceptable.

- **The Second Boycott**
  - This new boycott of British goods occurred in response to the Townshend Acts, because the colonial legislatures believed they were designed to raise revenue, which meant they were taxes imposed without consent.

  - This boycott discouraged the purchase of “foreign superfluities” and promoted the
domestic manufacture of cloth and other necessities.

- **The Daughters of Liberty**
  
  - Produced “homespuns”, clothing that was produced in the colonies, for the colonies.
  
  - Crucial to the nonimportation movements, because it allowed the mobilization of women in boycotts against the British.

- **Britain Responds**
  
  - When letters from the Massachusetts House opposing the Townshend duties reached London, they responded by sending General Thomas Gage and four thousand British troops to Boston.
  
  - They were determined to bring the rebellious New Englanders to their knees – in 1765, American resistance to taxation had provoked a parliamentary debate; in 1768, it produced a plan for military coercion.

- **Lord North Compromises, 1770**
  
  - Radical Whig John Wilkes was elected to parliament because of troubled times in England (famine, droughts, etc).
  
  - He used his new position to increase his attacks on government corruption in Great Britain.

- **Non-importation Succeeds**
  
  - Normally, the colonists had a trade deficit of £500,000; but in 1768, they imported less from Britain, cutting the deficit to £230,000.
  
  - By 1769, the boycott of British goods, couple with the colonies’ staple exports and shipping services to overseas markets, had yielded a balance-of-payments surplus of £816,000.
  
  - Lord North succeeds as British Prime Minister, sets out to save the empire by designing new compromises. Lord North convinces Parliament to repeal most of the Townshend duties; however he retained the tax on tea as a symbol of Parliament’s supremacy.
  
  - In response to Lord North’s actions, the colonists ended the boycott of British goods.

- **Sovereignty Debated**
  
  - Although most Americans ignored the Radical Whigs’ charges ad remained loyal to the empire, five years of conflict over taxes and constitutional principles had taken their toll.
  
  - In 1765, American leaders accepted Parliament’s authority; however, just five years later, in 1770, America’s most outspoken patriots – Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania, Patrick Henry of Virginia, and Samuel Adams of Massachusetts – were tossing around the idea of becoming a sovereign state.
The Road to Independence, 1771-1776

- The repeal of the Townshend duties in 1770 seemed to restore harmony to the British Empire; but below the surface lay strong passions and mutual distrust.

- In 1773, these emotions erupted, destroying any hope of compromise, and within two years, the Americans and the British clashed in armed conflict, and Patriot legislators were forming provisional governments and building military forces, the two essentials for independence.

  
  • A Compromise Ignored
  
  - Committees of correspondence began to arise all over Massachusetts in 1772, their goals were to arouse political independence and rebellions.

  - By mid-1773, similar committees had appeared in Connecticut, New Hampshire, and South Carolina.

  • The Tea Act

  - The Tea Act was a tax legislation that made British tea cheaper, and was an attempt to bail the British East India Company out of debt.

  - The Colonists however, saw this as an attempt to force them into submitting to the Townshend duties, when in reality, they were lowering tea prices for them.

  • The Coercive Acts

  - Four measures passed by the British Parliament in 1774 as retribution for American colonial defiance and the Boston Tea Party.

    1. The acts closed the Boston port until colonists paid for the destroyed tea.

    2. Subjected the colony to a military government.

    3. Allowed convicted royal officials and soldiers to be tried outside the colony.

    4. Authorized housing for British troops in private American homes.

  • The Continental Congress Responds

  - Patriot leaders invited all colonial assemblies to send delegates to a new continent-wide body, the Continental Congress, however, newly acquired mainland colonies Florida, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland refused to do so. Georgia also didn’t send delegates.

  - They passed, by a majority, a Declaration of Rights and Grievances, which demanded the repeal of the Coercive Acts. They also repudiated the Declaratory Act of 1766.
- **The Countryside Rises Up**

  - The success of the urban-led Patriot movement depended largely on the rural population.

  - The average American farmer did not concern himself with politics, for his only concern was the soil he worked; however, the increased taxes and levies on their produce changed these views.

- **The Patriot Movement Expands**

  - A new boycott was placed on British goods, and this time it was actually enforced by colonists.

  - 80% of the families in Concord, Massachusetts, signed a “Solemn League and Covenant”, which supported non-importation.

  - Both Americans in the north and southern slave owners also had fears of money shortages, as large populations of yeoman and plantation owners fell into huge debts to British merchants.

- **Loyal Americans**

  - Many Loyal Americans feared that resistance to the British would end in mob rule, partially because the Sons of Liberty would often uphold their boycotts by intimidation and force.

  - Other social groups also refused to endorse the Patriot movement, such as the Germans and Quakers in Pennsylvania, who were largely pacifists.

  - Many tenants in New York supported the King simply because they hated their landlords.

  - Also some Regulators in the North Carolina backcountry and many farmers in eastern Maryland refused to support the Patriots for similar social divisions as those of the tenants.

  - Loyalists, were now the minority of the colonists, with the Americans who supported resistance to British rule commanded the allegiance of the majority of white Americans.

- **Compromise Fails**

  - The famous Minutemen, which “[stood] at a minutes warning in Case of alarm”, were raised in Massachusetts – 20,000 of them – to safeguard military supply depots for the Patriots.

  - On the night of April 18, 1775, after Lord Dartmouth had proclaimed Massachusetts to be in “open rebellion”, General Thomas Gage dispatched seven hundred soldiers to capture colonial leaders and supplies at Concord. However, Paul Revere and two other Bostonians warned the Patriots, and at dawn, local militiamen met the British troops first at Lexington and then at Concord.

  - The time for compromise was over, too much blood had been spilled; 73 British soldiers were dead, 174 wounded, and another 26 missing, while 49 Americans were killed and 39 wounded.
The Second Continental Congress Organizes for War

- Met in May of 1775 in Philadelphia, and soon after they did, 3000 British troops attacked American fortifications at Breed’s Hill and Bunker Hill.
- John Adams implored his fellow congressmen to raise a continental army and nominated George Washington to lead it.
- After bitter debate, the Congress approved the proposal, but only “by bare majorites”.

Congress Versus the King

- Americans drummed up support against the King, and the King eventually issued the Proclamation for Suppressing Rebellion and Sedition.
- They also went to war economically, with American merchants cutting off exports to Britain and its West Indian sugar islands, and with Great Britain outlawing all trade with the rebellious colonies.

Rebellion in the South

- Loyalists in the South promised freedom to slaves and indentured servants that joined their cause.

Thomas Paine’s Common Sense

- *Common Sense* was a rousing call for independence and a republican form of government.
- Paine launched an assault on the tradition political order in language that stirred popular emotion in *Common sense*.
- He called on Americans to reject the king and Parliament and create independent republican states.

Independence Declared

- In June 1776, inspired by Paine’s arguments and beset by armed Loyalists, Patriot conventions through the colonies urged a break from Britain, Richard Henry Lee presented the Virginia convention’s resolution to the Continental Congress, that they, the “United Colonies” part from Great Britain officially.
- On July 4, 1776, the Congress approved of the Declaration of Independence, which was mostly written by Thomas Jefferson.
- By linking these doctrines of individual liberty, popular sovereignty, and republican government with American independence, Jefferson established “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” as the defining values of the new nation.