

# Death and Taxes

For over 100 years, the settlement of the thirteen British colonies continued with very little intervention from the mother country. The arrangement where the British crown was able to relocate certain citizens that it really didn't want to its colonies without being seen as brutal and cruel seemed to work out for everyone. It would take a war to finally disrupt this system.

## Seven Year's War

The Seven Year's War was a European war that spilled over into many spheres of the globe, including the colonies in America. Since the defeat of the Spanish Armada, Britain had been on the rise toward becoming the main colonial superpower of Europe. France, however, also had significant control over different parts of the world, including the interior of North America and Canada. French ships controlled much of the Mississippi and Ohio River systems, making significant trade profits for the French crown.



*George Washington as a commander of the Continental Army during the French and Indian War. His leadership experience gained during this war would be invaluable to the American colonists a decade later.*

In 1754, the Seven Year's War (which is misnamed, since it actually lasted nine years) began. By 1756, the conflict had spread to the British Colonies, who found themselves at war with the French colonists, as well as certain significant Native American tribes. The alliance between the French and Native Americans gave the conflict its "American" name: *The French and Indian War*. Even this title is misleading since, there were Native Americans that sided with both sides in the war.

The impact of the Seven Year's War would eventually begin the colonies on their rebellious road to Revolution. Several important things happened during this war. The first was that colonists gained leadership training and experience with the British military. Leaders like George Washington received leadership experience and military training leading the colonists in their fighting against the French and Native Americans. Secondly, once the British won the war, the empire was solidified and established as the unquestioned international superpower. Third, the British took many of the French land, including Canada from the French, converting them into separate British colonies. This is the main reason for the juxtaposition of some French and British names for certain places and cities. For example, Quebec and Montreal are both French-built cities. Pittsburgh, named for William Pitt, was built on top of Fort Duquesne, a French fort. Most importantly, the war to protect the colonies caused King George of Britain to begin to more closely administrate his colonies.

## New Regulations and Taxes

While winning the war against the French, fighting a war on so many different continents had been costly for the British. This led the King and Parliament to begin to look for new ways to make sure the colonies were a benefit to the mother country. They argued that if the British military was to defend the American colonists, then the colonists should pay higher taxes to support those troops. The Crown also issued the Proclamation Line of 1763, ordering all colonists to remain on the coastal regions to the east of the Appalachian Mountains.



*The Boston Massacre occurred when British soldiers were sent to disperse a riotous crowd. The crowd began to throw rocks at the soldiers prompting them to fire on the crowd. 5 colonists were killed and 6 more were wounded. Then-lawyer and soon to be revolutionary John Adams was appointed to defend the soldiers in court.*

The colonists did not take kindly to the rekindled interest in the administration of their governments. Each colony had been largely left to manage itself with very little in the way of obligation or taxes to Great Britain. The colonists felt as though they were being asked to pay taxes without having representation in Parliament. Enlightenment Ideas which were becoming popular at this time led many citizens to begin to think about the role of government, and to question whether the British King had any real authority in the American colonies.



*The Boston Tea Party*

Initial attempts to raise taxes often met with passive resistance from the colonists. For example, when extra taxes were put on certain goods like Stamps, Molasses, or Sugar, many colonists would simply smuggle those goods in to the colonies without paying any import fees on them, called tariffs. This was illegal, but since many colonists did not consider themselves to be strongly supportive of the British Monarchy, it was often ignored, even by the tax collectors.

When these taxes failed to raise the revenue hoped for by the British, King George then began to replace many of the tax collectors and city officials with new officials loyal to the crown. These new officials began to enforce the laws much more strictly in the colonies. These new enforcement techniques pushed the colonists into more extreme forms of rebellion and demonstrations. Especially in New England towns like Boston, public demonstrations against certain British officials or policies became common. The rapidly escalating situation was becoming increasingly volatile.

## Revolution

By 1773 and 1774, some of the colonists had begun to resort to violence. John Locke's idea of social contract gave them the right to revolt and overturn the government if they felt their interests weren't being represented, and this is exactly what some did. British officials were lynched (hanged by a mob), tarred and feathered, or beaten. Colonists who supported the King, called "Tories" were often treated just as badly. The Boston Tea Party and other such demonstrations were approaching riotous levels.

In Britain, the King was forced to choose one of two courses proposed to him by Parliament. Some of the members of Parliament felt as though the King needed to back down from the colonists, in the interest of keeping the colonies under control. They argued that Britain still benefitted from the trade produced by the colonists, and that taking harder lines and attempts to control them would only push the colonists to Revolution. Others argued that the King could not afford to be



*In the Battle of Lexington and Concord, the colonial militia managed to cause the British army to retreat back to Boston.*

### Reading Comprehension Questions

1. How did the Seven Years War prepare the colonists for fighting the British in the Revolution?
2. What ways did the colonists respond to the new taxes made by the British?
3. Why do you think Emerson called Lexington and Concord "the shot heard round the world?"

### Write about it.

Write a brief (2-3 paragraphs) alternative history where the British decided to appease the colonists instead of trying to use force against them.

perceived as weak, and that if the rebellion were not dealt with in a demonstration of force, the entire British Empire could be in revolt. In this "fight or flight" moment of the British Empire, King George chose to fight.

With both sides on edge, and one step away from actual fighting, the situation was a ship full of dynamite waiting for a match. That match would be supplied in the Massachusetts colony. In 1775, the colony was declared to be in a state of rebellion against the British King. At the towns of Lexington and Concord, British soldiers were sent to seize weapons supplies and local militia moved to engage and stop them. Ralph Waldo Emerson described the battle as the "shot heard round the world." The American Revolution had begun.