Prelude to a Revolution (1754 – 1774)

*Changes in Colonial Outlook*
- So how was it that the happy colonists changed their minds and, after over a century of peaceful subordination to Britain, began fighting for independence in 1776?
- Many factors affected their change of opinion. It was in the 1750s that the colonists first began looking away from their internal politics and paying attention to British policies, and the story of the 1760s and early 1700s is really a series of events that, one by one, widened the split.
- But it really all began with the Seven Years War [a.k.a. King George’s War, the French and Indian War], which ended in 1763 and left North America transformed.

*The Seven Years War*
- Anyhow, the Seven Years War informally began in July 1754 in the Ohio Valley when an inexperienced George Washington attacked the French, who were building a fort. The French kicked his sorry butt, so he surrendered, but the incident still managed to eventually spark a major war in Europe and in America.
- Right before the war actually started, in June 1754, delegates from several colonies had met for the Albany Congress, which had the goals of (1) convincing the Iroquois [who had always used their neutrality as a diplomatic weapon against all the sides involved] to join them and (2) coordinating colonial defenses. Neither goal was met b/c the governors of the individual colonies feared losing their autonomy.
- So Washington had screwed up big time, and throughout 1755 the British [under Gen. Braddock], who decided to attempt to kick the French out of N. America, continued to get beaten by French & Indian forces. Their only success was the deportation of the French from Nova Scotia [they sent them to Louisiana].
- After news of one particularly disastrous battle in 1756 the British and French formally declared war in Europe as well. Things still went badly in America, partially b/c the British and colonial forces just didn’t get along. But in 1757 the new secretary of state, William Pitt, managed to encourage the colonial forces to enlist by offering a compromise [Brits. would supposedly refund assemblies for their losses].
- Consequently [and also b/c of events in Europe] things improved until finally in 1763 France surrendered. According to the Treaty of Paris, France lost all her N. American possessions.

*British-Colonial Tensions During the Seven Years War*
- Both the Seven Years War itself and its aftermath increased British-colonial tensions. During the actual war, these factors contributed to initial anti-British feeling in the colonies:
  - The colonials favored Indian-style guerilla tactics; the British marched in formation.
  - Colonial militias served under their own captains but the Brits. wanted to take charge.
  - The colonials had no military protocols; the British were big on all that stuff.
  - The colonials didn’t want higher taxes to help pay for the war but the Brits. felt the colonials should pay for their own defense.
  - The colonial officers were casual but the Brits. wanted servants w/them, etc.
- Clearly, different styles of fighting led to significant resentment on both sides.

*1763: A Turning Point*
- Both the British and colonists were strongly affected by the end of the war. For Britain, its conclusion meant that (1) they had a much larger and safer colonial empire, (2) they had a much larger debt, and (3) they felt even more contempt for the colonists.
- For the colonies, the war had (1) united them against a common enemy for the first time and (2) created anger against the British, who were viewed as overly harsh commanders who had distain for the colonists.
- The end of the war also led to another key event. In Pontiac’s Rebellion (1763) Indian leader Pontiac united an unprecedented amount of tribes due to of concern about the spread of colonists and their culture.
- Although the colonists eventually triumphed, the British issued the Proclamation Line of 1763, which was a line that the colonists couldn’t settle past, to prevent further conflicts.

*English Attempts to Reorganize their Empire*
- Anyhow, due partially to their increasing debt and experiences in America, following 1763 the Brits. decided to reorganize [again].
- Their 1st reorganization, the Dominion of New England, had only lasted from the late 17th century until the Glorious Revolution.
- In 1761, even before the end of the war, the Brits. allowed for Writs of Assistance [officers allowed to board and inspect ships and confiscate goods not taxed] to be used in the colonies. James Otis brought a case against this [protection of property over parliamentary law] but he lost.
- Then, from 1763 to 1765 four very irritating pieces of legislation were passed by George Grenville…
  - Sugar Act (1764) – existing customs regulations were revised, new duties were placed on some foreign imports, and stronger measures were taken against smuggling. Seems just like Navigation Acts, which were accepted by the colonists, but this time the measures were explicitly designed to raise revenue [as opposed to channeling trade through Britain].
  - Currency Act (1764) – colonial paper $ was banned for trade [by 1769 it was decided col. $ would have no value at all]. This was passed b/c British officials felt they were being ripped off b/c colonial $ had such erratic values, but it greatly irritated colonial merchants, who lost out b/c their money was made useless.
*Quarreling Act (1765)* – required a raise in colonial taxes to provide for housing of soldiers in barracks near colonial centers.

*STAMP ACT (1765)* – this was the biggie. It affected almost every colonist b/c it required tax stamps on all printed materials, and it was the worst on merchants and the elite [who used more paper]. The act also asked that stamps be paid w/sterling and that violators be tried in vice-admiralty courts, which alarmed colonists.

- Though the acts were a natural consequence of the war, which created a large debt for Britain, they greatly annoyed the colonists and led to ever increasing resistance...

"Different Theories of Representation"

- Grenville’s acts illustrate the different theories of representation. While Grenville and the English believed that Parliament represented all British subjects by definition regardless of where they lived [Virtual Representation], colonists believed that they needed members that specifically represented their regions.
- Another ideology that was beginning to become popular in the colonies was that of the Real Whigs, who stated that a good government mainly left people alone and that government should not be allowed to encroach on people’s liberties and on their property.
- Although at first not many people interpreted British actions according to the Real Whig ideology, over time this point of view affected increasing numbers of colonists.

"Colonial Response to the Sugar and Currency Acts"

- The Sugar and Currency Acts could not have been implemented at a worse time, b/c the economy was already in the midst of a depression following the shift of the war to Europe. So merchants were all the more annoyed by the new taxes.
- Nevertheless, while individual colonists protested the new policies, lacking any precedent for a unified campaign Americans were uncoordinated and unsure of themselves in 1764. Eight colonial legislatures sent separate petitions to Parliament [all ignored], but that was it.
- The most important individual pamphlet relating to the Sugar Act was The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved by James Otis Jr., which discussed the main ideological dilemma of the time – how could the colonists justify their opposition to certain acts w/o challenging Parliament’s authority over them?

"1765: The Stamp Act Crisis"

- Initially, when the Stamp Act was passed, the response was pretty underwhelming as well. It seemed hopeless to resist. But Patrick Henry, a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, was not prepared to give up easily and instead wrote the Virginia Stamp Act Resolves.
- The resolves were passed [though some of the most radical sections were taken out]. The parts that were adopted essentially reasserted that the colonists had never given up the rights of British subjects, which included consent to taxation. This position was that of most colonists throughout the 1760s – they wanted some measure of independence and their rights, but not independence.
- Ideologically, during this time, America’s leaders were searching for some way to maintain self-government but still remain British subjects. But b/c of Brit. unwillingness to surrender on the issue of Parliamentary power this simply wasn’t going to work.
- But resistance to the Stamp Act was soon more than ideological arguments about Parliamentary power. Organizations began forming to resist the taxes, such as...
  - **Loyal Nine** – in August 1765 this Boston social club organized a demonstration that also included the lower classes. They also hung an effigy of the province’s stamp distributor, which caused him to publicly promise not to do what he was supposed to. Another demonstration, however, occurred shortly after that – but this time it was aimed at Governor Thomas Hutchinson, and concerned the elites [this illustrates the internal divisions between the demonstrators – for the elite it was political; for the laborers it was economic].
  - **Sons of Liberty** – so, to attempt to channel resistance into acceptable forms an intercolonial association, the Sons of Liberty, was formed. Although they could influence events, however, they couldn’t control them totally.
- Anyhow, by 1766 resistance was occurring on three different fronts: the Sons of Liberty [mass meetings, public support], a non-importation agreement organized by the merchants, and the Stamp Act Congress, which met in New York to draft the Stamp Act Resolves.

"1767: The Townshend Acts"

- Then, in March 1766 Parliament repealed the Stamp Act, partially b/c of the non-importation agreements, which turned London merchants against the Act. But the main reason for its repeal was the appointment of Lord Rockingham as prime minister instead of Grenville.
- Rockingham felt the law was a bad idea, but he still believed Parliament had the rights to tax the colonies and consequently passed the Declaratory Act [we can tax you if we want to], which was pretty much ignored in the midst of the celebrations of the Stamp Act’s repeal.
- The fragility of the Stamp Act victory was exposed by another change in the ministry. When William Pitt got sick, Charles Townshend became the dominant force and decided to impose some more taxes.
- The Townshend Acts (1767) were on trade goods [paper, glass, tea, etc.] but were different from the Navigation acts b/c they (1) applied to items imported from Britain and (2) were designed to raise money to pay for the salaries of royal officials [this is no good…remember, the power of the purse].
- Additionally, the acts established an American Board of Customs Commissioners and vice-admiralty courts at several colonial cities.

"Colonial Response to the Townshend Acts"
- This time there was no hesitation. Many essays were written, but John Dickinson’s *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* best expressed colonial sentiments – Parliament could regulate colonial trade but not use that power to raise revenue.
- The Massachusetts Assembly called for unity in the face of the Acts and circulated a joint petition of protest, which the ministry ordered them to recall, giving the other assemblies the incentive to join forces against it. Recall was rejected, and the governor dissolved the assembly.
- Another important aspect of colonial resistance was the second non-importation movement, which was led by the Daughters of Liberty, who encouraged home spinning bees, etc. Although the boycotts were not complete [some merchants, who were now in the midst of a boom, broke the agreements] they still had a significant effect, and in April 1770 the Townshend duties were repealed except for the tea tax.
- Even though the rest of the Townshend Acts [just not the taxes] were still there, it didn’t seem like such a big deal since the bulk of the taxes had been removed.

*1770: The Boston Massacre*

- On the same day Lord North [the new prime minister] proposed repealing the Townshend duties, the rather misnamed Boston Massacre occurred in which five civilians were killed. The source of the problem was the decision to base the Board of Customs Commissioners in Boston.
- Ever since the customs people came, mobs targeted them – consequently, two regiments of troops were assigned to Boston. They constantly reminded people of British power and also took jobs from Boston laborers, which really annoyed them.
- So on March 5, 1770 laborers began throwing snowballs at soldiers, which led to shooting [even though it was not allowed]. This was a tremendous political weapon for the patriots [nevertheless they didn’t approve of the crowd action that generated the problem and consequently tried the soldiers fairly].

*1770 – 1772: The Calm Before the Storm*

- From 1770 to 1772 superficial calm prevailed in the colonies. Still, some newspapers began publishing essays that used Real Whig ideology to accuse Britain of scheming to oppress the colonies. It was a conspiracy! But nobody really advocated independence [yet].
- So patriots continued to view themselves as British subjects. They devised systems in which they would have their own legislatures but remain loyal to the king, but this was directly contradictory to British conceptions of Parliament's power.
- But the calm ended in Fall 1772, when the Brits. began implementing the part of the Townshend Act about governors being paid from customs revenues. In response to this, a Committee of Correspondence [led by Samuel Adams] was created in Boston to gather publicity for the patriot cause.

*1773: The Tea Act and Boston Tea Party*

- By 1773 the only Townshend duty still in effect was the tea tax. Though some colonists were still boycotting it, many had given up. But then, in May 1773 Parliament passed the Tea Act, which was designed to save the East India Co. from bankruptcy.
- The Tea Act made EIC’s tea the only legal tea in America and enabled the company to sell directly to the colonies, which would allow them to price tea competitively w/smugglers. Though this would result in cheaper tea, it was seen as another attempt to make them admit that Parliament could tax them by leaders.
- This act led to the famous Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773, where aprox. 10,000 pounds [money] of tea were dumped into the water.

*1774: The Coercive “Intolerable” and Quebec Acts*

- In response to the Tea Party, the Coercive Acts included the…
  - Port Bill – the port of Boston was shut down until the tea was paid in full [enforced by Massachusetts Gov. Thomas Gage]. Purpose was to set example for other colonies.
  - Government Act – annulled what was left of the Massachusetts Charter [had already gone through several incarnations] and destroyed all colonial power in the legislature. Limited town meetings as well.
  - [new] Quartering Act – this now forced colonial assemblies to either build barracks or have citizens house the soldiers themselves.
  - Administration of Justice Act – soldiers who killed colonists were to be tried in British courts [i.e. allowed to get away w/it]. “Extraterritoriality.”

- The Quebec Acts were passed around the same time – they annoyed colonists b/c they allowed Catholicism in formerly French territories and also allowed the French colonists to go past the Declaration Line and into the Ohio River Valley.
- The colonists felt as though all their worst fears about the British plot had been confirmed, and the colonies agreed to send delegates to Philadelphia in September 1774 for the Continental Congress. There was no turning back…