

5.3 Early British Actions

Changes that were taking place in Britain soon clouded the colonists' bright future. A new king, George III, had been crowned in 1760. He was not a bright man. One historian wrote that "he was very stupid, really stupid." He was also proud and stubborn. Worse yet, he was determined to be a "take-charge" kind of ruler, especially in the colonies.

Unfortunately, the people George III chose to help him were not much brighter than he was. And they knew very little about conditions in America. Before long, they were taking actions that enraged the colonists.

The Proclamation of 1763 The British government faced a number of problems after the French and Indian War. One was how to keep colonists and Native Americans from killing each other as settlers pushed westward. No problem, said George III. Simply draw a line down the crest of the Appalachian Mountains. Tell settlers to stay east of that line and Indians to stay west of it.

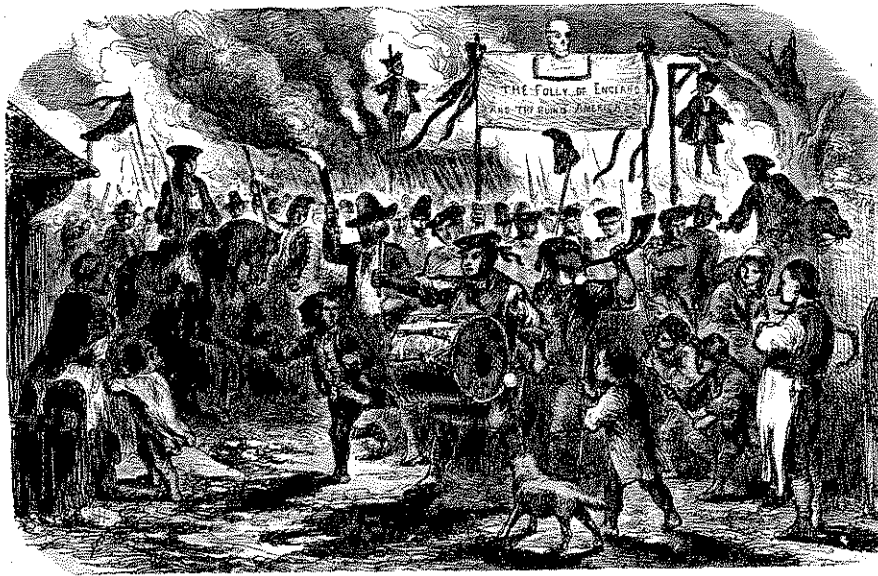
This was what the king ordered in his Proclamation of 1763. To Americans, the king's order suggested **tyranny**, or the unjust use of government power. They argued that the lands east of the Appalachians were already mostly settled. The only place that farmers could find new land was west of the mountains. Besides, the Proclamation was too late. Settlers were already crossing the mountains.

The British government ignored these arguments. To keep peace on the frontier, it decided to expand the British army in America to 7,500 men.

tyranny The unjust use of government power. A ruler who uses power in this way is called a *tyrant*.



The Proclamation of 1763 prohibited settlers from moving west of the Appalachian Mountains. King George hoped this would prevent conflict between the colonists and Native Americans.



The Stamp Act angered the colonists, who felt that taxation without representation was unfair. Protests, such as the one shown here, forced Parliament to repeal the act.

The Stamp Act The British government had other problems besides keeping colonists and Native Americans from killing each other. One was how to pay off the large debt left over from the French and Indian War.

The solution seemed obvious to Prime Minister George Grenville, the leader of the British government. People in Britain were already paying taxes on everything from windows to salt. In contrast, Americans were probably the most lightly taxed people in the British Empire. It was time, said Grenville, for the colonists to pay their fair share of the cost of protecting them.

In 1765, Grenville proposed a new act, or law, called the Stamp Act. This law required colonists to buy a stamp for every piece of paper they used. Newspapers had to be printed on stamped paper. Wills, licenses, and even playing cards had to have stamps.

Once again, the colonists sensed tyranny. One newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Journal*, said that as soon as “this shocking Act was known, it filled all British America from one End to the other, with Astonishment and Grief.”

It wasn't just the idea of higher taxes that upset the colonists. They were willing to pay taxes passed by their own assemblies, where their representatives could vote on them. But the colonists had no representatives in Parliament. For this reason, they argued, Parliament had no right to tax them. They saw the Stamp Act as a violation of their rights as British subjects. “No taxation without representation!” they cried.

Some colonists protested the Stamp Act by sending messages to Parliament. Loyalists simply refused to buy stamps. Patriots, however, took more violent action. Mobs calling themselves “Sons of Liberty” attacked tax collectors' homes. Protesters in Connecticut even started to bury one tax collector alive. Only when he heard dirt being shoveled onto his coffin did the terrified tax collector agree to resign from his post.

After months of protest, Parliament **repealed**, or canceled, the Stamp Act. Americans greeted the news with great celebration. Church bells rang, bands played, and everyone hoped the troubles with Britain were over.



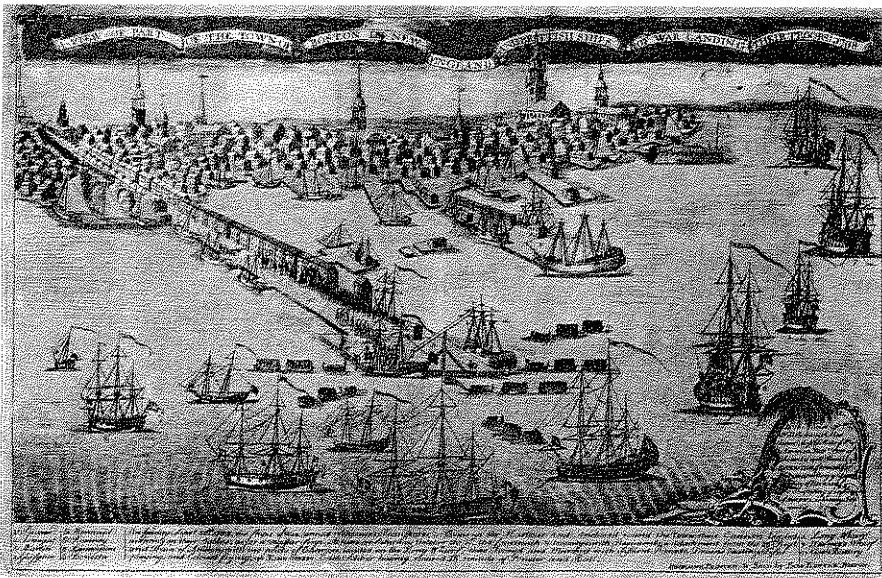
According to the Stamp Act, colonists had to buy stamps like this and place them on all paper products, such as newspapers, wills, and playing cards.

repeal to take back, or to cancel, a law

The Quartering Act As anger over the Stamp Act began to fade, Americans noticed another law passed by Parliament in 1765. Called the Quartering Act, this law ordered colonial assemblies to provide British troops with quarters, or housing. The colonists were also told to furnish the soldiers with “candles, firing, bedding, cooking utensils, salt, vinegar, and...beer or cider.”

Of course, providing for the soldiers cost money. New Jersey protested that the new law was “as much an Act for laying taxes” on the colonists as the Stamp Act. New Yorkers asked why they should pay to keep troops in their colony. After all, they said, the soldiers just took up space and did nothing.

In 1767, the New York assembly decided not to vote any funds for “salt, vinegar and liquor.” The British government reacted by refusing to let the assembly meet until it agreed to obey the Quartering Act. Once again, tempers began to rise on both sides of the Atlantic.



In 1768, the British government sent soldiers to Boston to enforce the Townshend Acts. This Paul Revere engraving shows the troops landing.

And he did. In 1767, Townshend persuaded Parliament to pass the Townshend Acts. The new laws placed a duty, or tax, on certain goods the colonies imported from Britain. These goods included such popular items as glass, paint, paper, and tea.

Having kept his promise, Townshend caught the flu and died. But his new laws increased the unhappiness of the colonists.

A Boycott of British Goods To many colonists, the Townshend duties were simply taxes in disguise. Once again, they were determined not to pay taxes that their assemblies had not voted on.

A Boston Patriot named Samuel Adams led the opposition to the Townshend Acts. Adams was not much to look at, and he was a failure at business. But he was gifted at stirring up protests through his speeches and writing. The governor of Massachusetts once complained, “Every dip of his pen stung like a horned snake.”

5.4 The Townshend Acts

The next British leader to face the challenge of taxing the colonies was Charles Townshend. He was also known as “Champagne Charlie” because of his habit of making speeches in Parliament after drinking champagne. Townshend believed that the colonists’ bad behavior made it even more important to keep an army in America. Once he was asked in Parliament if he would dare to make the colonists pay for that army. Stamping his foot, Townshend shouted, “I will, I will.”

Adams wrote a letter protesting the Townshend Acts that was sent to every colony. The letter argued that the new duties violated the colonists' rights as British citizens. To protect those rights, the colonies decided to **boycott** British goods. This was a peaceful form of protest that even Loyalists could support. One by one, all of the colonies agreed to support the boycott.

Women were very important in making the boycott work, since they did most of the shopping. The *Virginia Gazette* wrote that one woman could "do more for the good of her country than five hundred noisy sons of liberty, with all their mobs and riots." Women found many ways to avoid buying British imports. They sewed dresses out of homespun cloth, brewed tea from pine needles, and bought only American-made goods.

Repeal of the Townshend Acts Meanwhile, a new leader named Lord North became head of the British government. Described as a "great, heavy, booby-looking man," Lord North embarrassed his supporters by taking naps in Parliament. But he was good with numbers, and he could see that the Townshend duties were a big money-loser. The duties didn't begin to make up for all the money British merchants were losing because of the boycott.

Early in 1770, North persuaded Parliament to repeal all of the Townshend duties, except for one—the tax on tea. Some members of Parliament argued that keeping the duty on tea was asking for more trouble. But stubborn King George wasn't ready to give up on the idea of taxing Americans.

"I am clear that there must always be one tax to keep up the right," the king said. "And, as such, I approve the tea duty."

boycott To refuse to buy one or more goods from a certain source. An organized refusal by many people is also called a boycott.