



Topic: The Political and Economic Causes of the American Revolution, 1756-1776

Grades: 8, 11

Course: American History

Context: In the years following the French and Indian War (1754-1763), the British government implemented a policy designed to use the colonies as a source of revenue. From their founding in the early 1600s, the 13 colonies had always served as a robust source of raw materials and commerce and the colonial subjects had only ever paid taxes to local colonial governments. The colonies were an essential part of a global British mercantilist empire and their raw materials and purchasing power served as an essential part of Britain's global economic success. In return, the British government guaranteed trade markets of colonial raw materials and provided the British navy for protection. Likewise, throughout the decades preceding the French and Indian War, Britain treated the 13 colonies with a policy of salutary neglect. This policy essentially gave the colonies some independence in self-rule as well as the freedom to trade outside the British Empire. However, Britain's involvement in the French and Indian War left its government with a tremendous financial debt. Both the king and Parliament decided it was time to directly tax the colonies as a way of paying back the war debt. This decision led to a decade of frustration and rebellion on behalf of the colonists that culminated in the Declaration of Independence in 1776. While Britain attempted to implement various unpopular tax laws, they simultaneously found themselves limiting the political rights of the colonists. This combination of new taxes and suspensions of rights led to an increasingly unworkable relationship between the colonists and the king, and American secession from Great Britain inevitably followed.

Focus: Most Americans are familiar with the slogan, "No taxation without representation," when exploring the causes of the American Revolution. It is true that while the English Parliament was busy passing new colonial tax laws, there was not a single voting member of Parliament from the 13 colonies. However, as much as unpopular taxes contributed to the outbreak of revolution, it is important to realize that the suspensions of political rights might have been the greater cause. In this lecture, students will explore the various economic and political factors that caused the 13 colonies to dissolve their relationship with the British king and Parliament.

Outcomes: Coming away from this lecture students will be able to identify and describe various political and economic limitations placed on the colonies. They will also be able to argue which category, if either, was the more influential force leading to the Declaration of Independence.

Factors:

- 4 Economic: Sugar Act, Stamp Act, Declaratory Act, Townshend Tea Act
- 4 Political: Quartering Act, Admiralty Courts, Writs of Assistance, Intolerable Acts

Student Writing: To what extent were perceived English abuses of the 13 colonies economic in nature and to what extent were they political? Which type was more influential in motivating the colonists to declare independence in 1776?

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