Events Leading to American Independence

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In 1763, few people would have predicted a revolution in America just 13 years later.

There were no signs that Britain's American subjects were particularly unhappy — at least on the surface. The Colonies were well off. Likewise, King George III was not particularly oppressive — surely not as much as previous kings.

How, then, in a few short years did everything change? What happened to make the American colonists, most of whom thought of themselves as English subjects, want to break the ties that bound them to England?

Much happened between the years of 1763 and 1776. The colonists felt unfairly taxed, watched over like children, and ignored when they raised grievances.

For their part, the British found the colonists unwilling to pay their fair share for the administration of the British Empire. After all, citizens living in England paid more in taxes than was asked of any American.
Soon, some began questioning how it could be that a tiny island nation could rule the American continent.

A few key events would tip the English and colonists into war.

**The Royal Proclamation of 1763**

The Treaty of Paris marked the end of the French and Indian War. It granted Britain a great deal of North American land, but created a new series of problems.

The British gained the entire area between the Appalachian Mountains in the east and the Mississippi River in the west. Still they tried to discourage American colonists from settling in it because they didn't have enough officials to run. Also, French settlers and the Native Americans continued to fight against the British after the peace had been reached.

But this was not acceptable to their Colonial subjects. The Colonies themselves had began planning to expand their western boundaries. They thought it was a plot to keep them under Britain's thumb.

It became part of the long list of events where one side was misunderstood or ignored by the other.

**Britain imposes taxes on Colonies**

For more than 150 years, Britain had allowed the Colonies to more or less govern themselves. Suddenly, Britain began controlling the Colonies and enforcing its trade laws.

The British began charging the American colonists taxes because the country needed money. War had been expensive for England.

The taxes on American colonists were lower than those on British citizens. The money was used to pay for some of the cost of maintaining British troops in the 13 Colonies.

The Americans, however, saw it differently. Americans thought the British troops were there only to watch them, and they did not want to pay for that.

Also, the colonists had no representation in the British Parliament. This means there were no colonists in the British government who could represent the Colonies when decisions were being made. To tax the colonists without allowing them representation denied them their rights as Englishmen.

**Stamp Act is passed**

When parliament passed the Stamp Act in March 1765, it became the first direct tax on the Colonies.
Now, every legal document had to be written on stamped paper to prove colonists had paid taxes. Proof of owning land, wills, marriage licenses and other contracts were not legal unless they were prepared on this special paper. Newspaper, dice and playing cards also needed proof that taxes had been paid.

"No taxation without representation!" the colonists insisted.

**Boycotting Britain's goods**

The colonists refused to buy British goods. Soon, the pressure on England from struggling British merchants was too great to bear, and the Stamp Act was repealed the following year.

**Declaratory Act**

Relations were tense between the American Colonies and England. The British did not want the colony leaders to think they had power, so the British Parliament approved the Declaratory Act. It said England still had total control over the Colonies and could still tax the Colonies if it wanted.

Next, taxes were placed on glass, paper and tea. The money from the taxes would be used to pay the British governors of the Colonies. Usually, a colony had power over its governor’s pay, and his pay could be held back if the colony was unhappy with the governor. The colony could make the governor do what it wanted.
Now, the governors of the Colonies would be paid by the British government, and colonists lost some of their power.

**Taxing time for colonists**

The colonists stopped buying goods from England, and British sellers began losing money. Soon, the British government had no choice. Most of the new taxes were ended, but the tax on tea was kept.
Tensions rise in Boston

Nowhere was there greater resentment over the taxes than in Boston. The city was ready to riot and British officials in Boston feared for their lives. British soldiers were sent to Boston.
The Boston Massacre

On March 5, 1770, a mob of about 60 angry townspeople began hurling rocks and snowballs at soldiers.

The British fired, taking the lives of five men, including Crispus Attucks, a former slave.

Boycott on tea

Patriots told people not to buy tea, but many went further. British ships carrying tea were met with threats of violence in almost all American ports. Most ships turned around.

The Boston Tea Party

In Boston in 1773, Governor Thomas Hutchinson allowed three ships carrying tea to enter the harbor. On a cold December night, townspeople disguised themselves as Native Americans and stormed the ships, tossing 342 chests of tea into the water.

If that amount of tea was sold today it would be worth about $750,000.

The Intolerable Act

Parliament was utterly fed up with the Colonies.

It passed the Intolerable Act, which closed Boston Harbor until the owners of the tea were compensated for their loss. Town meetings were banned, and the power of the royal governor was increased.

It was under these tense circumstances that the First Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia on September 5, 1774. It was the first time the Colonies came together to oppose the British.