**Part one, “Issues behind the revolution”**

As we discuss the issues behind the American Revolution, let’s first look back to the French and Indian war. First, you must remember – the war was basically started when American colonists were expanding west, into the territory of the French and Native Americans, who were not too happy with this. The British really had no interest in fighting this conflict, but because they were in control of the eastern colonies, they felt as if they had no choice. Also remember, the French won several battles in the beginning. This meant that the British had to put way more money and effort into the conflict than they had wanted. Following the 1763 Treaty of Paris, the British felt that they needed to gain tighter control of the colonies and therefore began to change their policies.

First, it is important to look at British post-war policy. After winning the French and Indian War, the British began to treat the French and the Native Americans as conquered people, and occupied that territory. Unhappy with the British occupation in the Ohio territory, a group of Native American tribes, led by Chief Pontiac, launched a massive invasion on the British troops. This event, known as “Pontiac’s War” or “Pontiac’s Rebellion” was a disaster for the British. While the Native Americans lost approximately 200 men, the British lost over 450, as well as over 2,000 civilians who were either killed or captured.

As a result of Pontiac’s Rebellion, the British issued the “Proclamation of 1763.” This document stated that from then on out, there would be no further settlement by the colonists west of the Appalachian Mountains. That land would remain the land of the Native Americans, and would be left alone. Colonists would stay out of it—remember, it was the colonists going into that land that started the whole conflict in the first place. The Proclamation of 1763 was an attempt by the British to end conflicts with the Native Americans.

Sure, the Native Americans were happy here, for their land would no longer be invaded. And the British were happy as well, for they no longer had to worry about fighting against the Native Americans. Who do you think may have been uphappy then? Of course, the colonists. Their growing population created a need for more land, and that land happened to be west of the Appalachians. Sure, the British told them not to settle over there anymore…but as you’ll soon see, that’s not going to stop them. They’re going to ignore British rule and literally, continue to push the boundaries anyway.

Besides the ongoing conflicts with the Native Americans, the British were having ongoing financial problems following the French and Indian War. Remember, that war was part of a bigger war that was taking place between the two countries on more of a world scale. Wars cost a lot of money. Particularly the French and Indian War—it was over 2,000 miles from home, and they continually had to send men and supplies to the battlefront. Because the British were annoyed at the colonists, and because the British blame the colonists for the French and Indian War, they thought the colonists should have to pay. Throughout the war, and in the years thereafter, the British issued a series of taxes and acts. While the British saw this as necessary, the colonists were insulted that they could be treated such a way without having any representation in British government.

The Sugar Act of 1764 was one of the taxes to be levied on the colonists, setting a high tax on sugar products in the colonies. This was not the first time that the British had tried taxing the colonists, and in fact, they were taxing them less now than they were before. However, before, they almost never enforced the taxes. Now, they were strictly enforcing the taxes that they levied; because of this, people were outraged by the Sugar Act!

The Quartering Act of 1765 was not a tax, but instead, a demand. This act said that colonists must provide proper accommodations (room and board) to British soldiers in the area. This act began as a result of the French and Indian War. During that war, when the British were helping the colonists, they were often refused accommodations and had to pay for room and board wherever they went! Now, following the war, they were demanding it and the colonists were not happy!

Finally, the Stamp Act of 1765 stated that all legal documents must have a stamp on them, and that stamp had a high tax on it. Like the Sugar Act, this was to be highly enforced. Once again, colonists were outraged. As British officials tried to enforce this tax, they were often tarred and feathered, a public form of humiliation that was also very painful!

Because it did not go over well, Britain in a way gave in. In 1766, they passed the Declaratory Act. This repealed the Stamp Act, but it stated (or declared) that England had complete controls over the colonies and the colonists must do whatever is asked from here on out! Imagine a teacher saying, “You don’t have to do tonight’s homework, but you have to do everything I say for the rest of your life.” That’s essentially what Britain was telling the colonists.

By 1770, tensions were high between the British and the colonists. The colonists felt mistreated, often shouting, “No taxation without representation.” In the city of Boston, things were really taking a turn for the worse. In fact, British troops had been sent to Boston to silence the protests—the main opposition to British rule was in Boston.

As a British soldier was on patrol, a mob began to gather around him, shouting and verbal abuse and harassment. He was soon supported by eight more British soldiers, and the crowd of angry colonists grew larger and larger. As the colonists began shouting threats and throwing objects, the British soldiers began to fire into the crowd, killing five colonists. The first to die, Crispus Attucks, was a runaway slave.

In a Boston court, the British soldiers may have had very little chance. The colonists had hated the fact that these soldiers were even in the city, and wanted them out. However, a lawyer by the name of John Adams (later our nations’ second president) argued that if the colonists were going to fight for human rights, then the British should have them too. Although it was a very unpopular move, colonist John Adams successfully defended the British troops that were involved at the Boston Massacre.

In 1773, things continued to unravel in Boston. This time, the issue was tea. Yes, British Parliament decided to put a tax on Tea, one of the main beverages of the colonists at the time. This act was an attempt to save the British East India Company from bankruptcy. However, to the colonists, it was a clear violation of their rights of Englishmen. “No taxation without representation” became the motto. This means that they would refuse to pay a tax when they have no representation in the British government.

In some colonies, as shiploads of tea entered the ports, protesters refused to allow them unload, and the ships would be sent back to Britain. In Boston, however, things were different. The British-appointed governor of the colony, Thomas Hutchison, refused to allow the ship to go back to Britain. On December 16, 1773, after officials in Boston refused to return the taxed tea to Britain, a group of somewhere between 30 and 130 colonists dressed as Indians boarded the ships and destroyed 342 chests of tea by throwing it into Boston Harbor. This political protest was led by the Sons of Liberty, and was well defended by a man named Sam Adams.

Finally, the Coercive Acts of 1774 came, or the “Intolerable” Acts, as the colonists called them. Intolerable means ‘unbearable,’ which is exactly what they were. The British passed these as a result of the Boston Tea Party. They wanted to punish the colonists. This was a series of several acts, in fact. The first act took all power away from the colonial government of Massachusetts and stated that the colony would be under direct British control. In addition, it also closed Boston’s ports until Boston paid for all the lost tea from the Tea Party. Remember, almost all the money made in Boston came from the ports, so this was particularly damaging to the colony. Another act stated that every time a British official was accused of wrongdoing, he would be tried in a court in Britain, not in Massachusetts. Imagine what they could have gotten away with! Another Quartering Act was put in place. Finally, you surely how remember the colonists wanted some of that land gained during the French and Indian war? Well, the British grant part of that land back to Canada instead. Oh, the colonists were furious! It’s no wonder they call these acts ‘intolerable!”

Enough was enough! In response to all these events, the First Continental Congress was called! This was a meeting of 56 delegates from 12 of the 13 original colonies. The only colony that did not attend was Georgia—they were trouble with the Native American Indians in their territory and were still hoping for Britain to help them out with that. Anyway, this meeting of delegates was called as a response to the Intolerable Acts, and the First Continental Congress, as they were known, met on September 5, 1774 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at a place called Carpenter’s Hall.

At this first continental congress meeting, the delegates came up with several resolutions. First, they decided to renew a boycott on British goods. A boycott means they would refuse to buy British merchandise. Secondly, colonies were requested to begin forming and train their own state militias. Finally, the delegates appealed to King George of Britain, trying to get him to settle the issues rather than to go to war. They also decided that they would meet again in one year to see how things have progressed.