

The Proclamation of 1763

A “proclamation” is a formal announcement. In the Proclamation of 1763, the British announced that the land won during the French and Indian War—the land west of the Appalachian Mountains—would be reserved for the Native Americans. It was against the law for colonists to settle in that area.

The British wanted to prevent any more wars with the Native Americans. They hoped it would be easier to protect the colonists if they lived only in the lands east of the Appalachians.

The colonists were frustrated by the Proclamation of 1763. Not only were they now unable to move westward as they had hoped, but the Proclamation also made it clear that the British intended to maintain an even tighter control over the colonies than ever before.

The Stamp Act

The British were in debt after the French and Indian War. They felt that the colonists should help pay for some of the expenses involved in defending the colonies from the French. The Stamp Act, passed in 1765, required the colonists to pay a tax on most printed materials, such as newspapers, pamphlets, marriage licenses, and playing cards. A colonist had to purchase a stamp and place it on any printed document to prove that he or she had paid the tax.

The colonists were very angered by the Stamp Act. They weren't upset just about having to pay the tax. They felt that their freedom had been threatened because they had no say in making the law. The colonists resented being taxed without their consent. Throughout the colonies, people responded in a number of ways:

- Groups such as the Sons of Liberty and the Daughters of Liberty stopped stamped papers from being unloaded at docks.
- Merchants organized a boycott of British goods. They agreed not to buy anything British.
- Representatives from nine colonies formed the Stamp Act Congress and declared that the stamp taxes could not be collected without the consent of the colonists. They demanded that Parliament repeal, or do away with, the act. Eventually, Parliament repealed the Stamp Act.

Lexington and Concord

Parliament rejected all petitions for change that came from the First Continental Congress. In April, 1775, British troops left Boston and marched to nearby Lexington and Concord. They planned to seize stores of colonial gunpowder and arms and to capture the “rebel” leaders, Samuel Adams and John Hancock.

At Lexington, colonial minutemen—colonists who had joined the militia—met the British soldiers. No one knows who fired first, but when the smoke cleared, eight colonists were dead and ten were wounded. The Redcoats pushed on to Concord, where they were met by more minutemen. Then, while the British retreated back to Boston, minutemen fired on them from behind trees and fences. At day’s end, the British suffered 273 casualties, while the colonists suffered less than one hundred.

After the battles of Lexington and Concord, thousands of minutemen from the area gathered around Boston in anticipation of the next battle. The Second Continental Congress met and drafted a new appeal to the King. But they also selected George Washington to head the army of minutemen surrounding Boston. The Revolutionary War had begun.

The Townshend Acts

Charles Townshend, the new British Prime Minister, imposed a small indirect tax on glass, lead, paper, and tea. The tax was “indirect” because it was collected at the sea ports (such as the one you see on this placard) before the items reached colonial stores. Since the tax would then be included in the price the colonists paid at the stores—and not added onto the price like with the Stamp Act—Townshend hoped the colonists would not even notice they were paying a tax.

They colonists, however, recognized the indirect tax. They saw it as an unjust form of taxation without representation. As under the Stamp Act, they organized a boycott of British goods.

The Boston Massacre

On March 5, 1770, a mob of colonists in Boston began to harass British troops, taunting them and throwing snowballs. The situation soon got out of hand, and finally, the troops opened fire. Five colonists died.

Most colonists believed that the British soldiers were completely at fault. The enraged citizens of Boston called a town meeting to demand the removal of the British troops and to argue for the trial of the British soldiers for murder. The British agreed to the colonists' demands.

The Boston Tea Party

In 1773 Parliament passed the Tea Act, which gave the British East Indies company a complete monopoly of the American tea business—meaning that colonists could only buy tea from this company. No other company could compete with it.

Despite the fact that this act actually lowered the price of tea, the colonists still opposed it. They viewed the Tea Act as merely another example of England making a decision that concerned the colonists without consulting them.

To protest the Tea Act, the Sons of Liberty organized the Boston Tea Party. Dressed as Native Americans, colonists raided three British ships in the Boston Harbor. They smashed open 340 chests of tea and dumped them into the harbor, while a crowd of people watched in approval.

The Intolerable Acts

“To coerce” means to force someone to do something. The British passed the Coercive Acts in reaction to the Boston Tea Party. They hoped to force colonists to pay for the tea lost and to obey British rule. The Coercive Acts closed the port of Boston and imposed military rule on all of Massachusetts. The Massachusetts legislature and town meetings were suspended.

Sam Adams, whose painting appears on this placard, helped to stir up colonial response to these acts. The colonists call the acts the “Intolerable Acts” because they did not feel that they could tolerate them. The taxes they had been battling were nothing in comparison to this harsh British crackdown on colonial rights. Although the acts applied only to Massachusetts, the other colonies rallied to protest them. The colonists feared that if such British actions were to continue, the rest of the colonies were in danger of losing their liberties as well. On the day the acts went into effect, flags throughout the colonies were flown at half-mast.

Meanwhile, in the towns surrounding Boston, “minutemen” began to store arms and to train for possible battle at a minute’s notice.

The First Continental Congress

As a result of the Coercive Acts, the colonies put aside their individual differences and, for the first time, agreed to work together to protect their collective rights. They felt they needed to present their complaints to the British as a unified group.

Representatives from 12 of the 13 colonies met and formed the First Continental Congress. They met in the building in Philadelphia that is featured on this placard. Distinguished men such as Samuel Adams, John Adams, George Washington, and Patrick Henry attended. After seven weeks, the Congress drew up the Declaration of Rights, as well as appeals to the King and to the British people. In addition, Congress called for a complete boycott of all trade with England. Both exports to and imports from England would cease. Violators were regularly tarred and feathered.