

The Road to the Declaration of Independence

1754 - 1763	<p>The French and Indian War began between the English and French over land in the Ohio River Valley. Colonists fought for England. The English won the war, but the war left them in debt and needing money. England looked at the colonies as a source of money and it led to a series of actions by King George and the English legislature, called Parliament that angered the colonists. In October of 1763, through the Proclamation of 1763, England banned colonists from settling west of the Appalachian mountains.</p> <p>Near the end of the war, English officials were given search warrants that allowed them to search warehouses, homes, and ships of colonists without a reason. A colonist and Boston lawyer, James Otis decided to challenge whether or not the warrants were legal in court. He argued that they violated the individual rights of the colonists.</p>
1764	<p>In April of 1764 Parliament taxed sugar that was imported, or brought into the colonies, to pay off the war debt and to help pay for the expenses of running the colonies. This act increased the duties, or taxes, on imported sugar and other items such as textiles, coffee, wines and indigo (dye). In response to this, Boston businesses start boycotting some English goods.</p> <p>In the fall of 1764, Parliament ordered colonies to stop printing their own money. Colonists opposed the order because they feared it would upset the economy.</p>
1765	<p>In March of 1765, Parliament passed the Stamp Act. Under the Stamp Act, all printed materials were taxed, including; newspapers, pamphlets, bills, legal documents, licenses, almanacs, dice and playing cards. The money collected from the tax did not go to colonial legislatures but directly to England. Later on in the same month, Parliament ordered colonial legislatures to pay for English soldiers that are located in the colonies. It also required colonists to house British troops and supply them food.</p> <p>In May, Patrick Henry, a colonist, gave a speech to the Virginia legislature saying that only the Virginia legislature, not Parliament, can tax Virginians. In July, a secret group of colonists called the Sons of Liberty formed in some towns. They were opposed to the Stamp Act and they used violence and intimidation to force all of the English stamp agents to resign. They also stopped many colonists from ordering English goods. In the fall, representatives from nine of the colonies met in New York and prepared a petition to be sent to King George III and Parliament. The petition requested that the Stamp Act and the Acts of 1764 stop being enforced. The petition stated that only colonial legislatures can tax colonists and that taxation without representation violated the colonists' basic civil rights.</p>
1766 & 1767	<p>In March of 1766, Parliament ended the Stamp Act, but it also passed the Declaratory Act. This act stated that England had total power to legislate any laws governing the colonies. In the summer of 1767, Parliament passed the Townshend Revenue Act. This act taxed many items imported into the colonies, such as: paper, tea, glass, lead and paints. In response, colonists decide to refuse to purchase, or boycott, some of these items.</p>
1768 & 1769	<p>In February of 1768, Samuel Adams from Massachusetts wrote a letter against taxation without representation, the idea that it is unfair to tax someone without giving them representation in government, and called for resistance to the Townshend Act. He encouraged other colonies to support the letter. In September, English ships sail into Boston Harbor and English troops set up permanent residence in Boston to keep order.</p> <p>In 1769, Philadelphia businesses join the boycott against British goods. Later in the year, New Jersey, Rhode Island, North Carolina also joins the boycott.</p>
1770 - 1773	<p>In March of 1770, the Boston Massacre happened. This event occurred when a large crowd of colonists crowded around and harassed English soldiers. In response, the soldiers fired their guns into the crowd killing five people and injuring six. After the incident, the troops are withdrawn out of Boston. The same day as the Boston Massacre, Parliament ended all taxes on imports except for tea.</p> <p>In May of 1773 Parliament made the British East India Company the only company allowed to import tea into the colonies. This is called the Tea Act. Months later, in response to the Tea Act, a group of colonists board English ships in Boston, and dump hundreds of chests of tea into the harbor. This becomes known as the Boston Tea Party.</p>

1774	<p>In response to the Boston Tea Party, Parliament passed a series of laws. Colonists call them the Intolerable Acts. The first of the acts closed the port of Boston until all the damage caused by the Tea Party is paid back. The English also put Massachusetts under military rule and more troops arrived in the colony. The second of the acts made it illegal for royal officials to be brought to trial in the colonies. Instead, their trials were held in England. The third act ended the colonial government in Massachusetts and instead allowed the royal governor to appoint the colonial legislature. The fourth act ordered colonists to house troops, even in colonists' homes. In the fifth and final act, Parliament gave land claimed by Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Virginia to Canada.</p> <p>In response to these acts, the First Continental Congress met in September in Philadelphia. Every colony, except Georgia, sent representatives. The Congress declared that these acts should not be obeyed and they began forming militias in the colonies. The Congress agreed to boycott English imports and to stop exporting goods to England.</p>
1775	<p>In early 1775, Massachusetts began forming militia units and Parliament declared the colony to be in a state of rebellion. A month later, King George passed an act ordering the New England (Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island) colonies to trade only with England.</p> <p>On April 18, Paul Revere rode from Boston to warn colonists that English troops were coming to take weapons away from the colonists. The following day, on April 19, both sides begin fighting at Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts. This is the first battle of the Revolutionary War and is referred to as "the shot heard 'round the world."</p> <p>The following month, the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia. The Congress named George Washington as the commander in chief of the Continental (colonial) Army.</p> <p>On June 17th, the first major battle, the Battle of Bunker Hill, occurred between the English and colonial troops. England won the battle.</p> <p>After the battle, the Second Continental Congress sent a petition to King George asking him to reach an agreement with the colonists so that fighting does not have to continue. The King refused to read the petition. Instead King George proclaimed that the colonists were rebelling and he ordered troops to end the rebellion. In addition, Parliament ordered an end to colonial trade.</p>
1776	<p>In January of 1776 Thomas Paine published <i>Common Sense</i>. The 50-page pamphlet criticized King George and argued for colonial independence. In April, the Continental Congress declared colonial shipping ports open to all traffic except the English. Throughout the year, battles between England and the colonists continued.</p> <p>On June 7, Richard Henry Lee, from Virginia, presented a formal plan calling for the colonies to declare its independence from England. On June 11, Congress created a committee to draft a declaration of independence. Thomas Jefferson is chosen by the committee to prepare the first draft of the declaration, which he completed in one day. On June 28, Jefferson's Declaration of Independence is presented to the Congress. On July 4, the Congress formally supported Jefferson's Declaration, with copies sent to all of the colonies. The actual signing of the document occurred on August 2 with most of the 55 members of Congress placing their names on the document.</p>