THE STRUGGLE FOR HEGEMONY IN NORTH AMERICA

"This new world has been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from every part of Europe. Hither have fled, not from the tender embraces of the mother, but from the cruelty of the monster; and it is so far true of England that the same tyranny which drove the first emigrants from home pursued their descendants still . . ."

Thomas Paine, Common Sense (1776)

I. Introduction

According to Thomas Jefferson, the causes of the American Revolution could be traced to "a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States." Was the Revolution the result of economic and political abuses by Britain? Or was it, as one historian has noted, "a product of the way the colonists perceived and interpreted those events." Today's discussion will focus on some of the key events that led to the Revolution. By the time we finish today's discussion you should be able to do the following:

1. Explain how the Restoration and mercantilism contributed to tensions between England and its colonies.

2. Identify the political and economic consequences of the Seven Years' War.


4. Explain the consequence on the

II. The Impact of the Restoration

A. The Restoration of the English Monarchy

1. In 1660, England restored its monarchy when Parliament voted to invite Charles II (r. 1660-1685) to return from France.

Image 1A31i01: Charles II

2. With order restored to England, Charles II decided it was time to assert royal authority in the Americas. Recall that the first phase of colonization had been decentralized effort as commercial companies, religious organizations, and individual entrepreneurs led the way.

   a. It was clear to the crown that the colonies could be a source of wealth for England. However, if England sought to tap into this wealth then direct government involvement would be necessary.

3. One way accomplish this goal was to implement a political-economic theory referred to as mercantilism.
B. Mercantilism

1. One historian explains "Under mercantilism, every nation sought to sell more than it bought. To maximize the state's welfare, government tried to regulate and protect industry and commerce. Colonies existed to enhance national self-sufficiency, provide essential raw materials, and serve as a market for finished products."

   a. Thomas Mun, an English economist, summarized these ideas in a 1664 treatise called *England's Treasure by Foreign Trade*.

2. It was through Navigation Acts that the English crown would enforce mercantilism. Navigation Acts were intended to protect English commerce from foreign competition.

3. In 1660, for example, England passed the Enumerated Commodities Act. This Act stated that the colonies could only export specified commodities (tobacco, sugar, cotton, indigo) to England. The Duties Act (1673) established custom collectors in colonies.

III. An Imperial Crisis

A. The Impact of the Anglo-French Wars

1. For over one hundred years, England and France had been involved in a series of wars on the continent. The scope of these wars also involved their respective colonies. The Anglo-French Wars became a fiscal burden to England as it plunged it into debt.

   Map 1A31m01

   a. The turning point in the Anglo-French conflict came during the Seven Years War/French-Indian War (1754/6-1763). Whereas previous conflicts had originated in Europe, this particular war received its start in North America.

   Map 1A32m02

2. The Ohio Valley became the center of turmoil. Fur traders from Pennsylvania and Virginia were eager to trade with Native Americans in the region. France responded to these encroachments by building a series of forts. Clashes eventually led to a full-out war.

3. While initially the war did not go well for England, William Pitt's (1756) appointment as chief minister to the king would bring change for the better. This war ended in 1763 through the Peace of Paris (1763). The treaty gave England Canada, territory east of the Mississippi River, and Florida.

   Map 1A32m03

   a. The geopolitical consequence of this war was the removal of French influence from North America. Ironically, the western frontier would now become a pressing problem for England as colonists sought access to new land.
B. The Proclamation Line of 1763

1. To deal with this problem, the Proclamation Line of 1763 was issued. It restricted colonial settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains. Through this proclamation, England hoped to avoid costly wars with Native Americans (Pontiac's War).

Map 1A31m04

2. It also wanted to protect the fur trade by allowing only licensed traders into the region.

3. This proclamation greatly upset colonists who felt they were being confined to the coast.

C. Paying for Empire

1. The end of the war with France now meant that England could focus on solidifying its empire. The first task at hand was raising revenues to pay for the expenses of empire. The burden of this challenge fell on the shoulders of George Grenville (1712-1770), Chancellor of the Exchequer (1763). Wars were a costly affair. By 1763, England had accumulated a deficit of 137,000,000 pounds. Adding to England's financial burden were the French territories that had been assimilated into its empire. Over 10,000 troops would be needed to secure these territories. Grenville, like many others, believed that revenue could be raised from the colonies. To accomplish this, a series of acts/trade laws were passed by Parliament. These included the following:

Image 1A31i01: George Grenville

a. The Sugar Act (1764) imposed charges on foreign wines, textiles etc . . . . It also sought to enlarge the customs service.

b. The Stamp Act (1765) affected a broader range of community. It required that official and legal documents and items such as newspapers must have stamps showing that a tax had been paid. Violations of the Stamp Act would be tried in vice-admiralty courts and not by jury. John Adams noted that the Stamp Act caused "The people, even the lowest ranks, have become more attentive to their liberties, more inquisitive about them, and more determined to defend them, than they were ever before known . . . ."

c. Quartering Act (1765) required that colonists furnish lodging and supplies to British troops to reduce the cost of maintaining a military presence in the colonies.

2. Like Grenville, Charles Townshend (1725-67) also served as Chancellor of the Exchequer. And like Grenville, he too looked toward the colonies for ways to pay for empire. In 1767, Parliament passed the Townshend Acts. These included the following:

a. Duty/Revenue Act (1767) placed duties on items such as glass, lead, tea, paper before they entered to colonies. These duties were to be used to pay the expenses of governors and judges.
b. He also sought to enforce laws that were already in place. For example, the New York Assembly was suspended when it did not comply with the Quartering Act.

3. By 1770, 4,000 British soldiers were stationed in Boston alone. Well, I do not need to stress that tension between colonists and British soldiers was growing to the point that brawls were not uncommon between the two. This tension reached new levels during the Boston Massacre in 1770.

Image 1A31i02: Boston Massacre

a. What happened and who caused it? That depends on the sources you consult. More or less this is what transpired. A melee between British soldiers and colonists concluded with British soldiers firing into a crowd. Five citizens were killed.

b. You can imagine how this event shocked the colonists. For many, it demonstrated "the standing army's potential for tyranny over innocent civilians."

IV. The Seeds of Independence

A. The Rights of the Colonists

1. "American radicals” began to lead opposition to taxation and regulation through Committees of Correspondence these individuals discussed English policy and plotted against it.

2. For example, it was at one of these committees that Samuel Adams (1722-1803) read his The Rights of the Colonists. Adams argued that "Among the natural rights of the Colonists are these: First, a right to life; Secondly, to liberty; Thirdly, to property; together with the right to support and defend them in the best manner they can. These are evident branches of, rather than deductions from, the duty of self-preservation, commonly called the first law of nature . . . . All men have a right to remain in a state of nature as long as they please; and in case of intolerable oppression, civil or religious, to leave the society they belong to, and enter into another."

B. The Intolerable Acts

1. In 1773 the Tea Act was passed with the aim of aiding the British East India Company and also making cheaper tea available to the colonists. This act relieved the British East India Company of duty on tea and granted monopoly of its transport to the colonies. Clearly, American importing merchants were not very happy about this. In response to this act, tea was destroyed in Boston port. This defiance of authority and destruction of property could not go unpunished. It did not. England responded with a series of punitive measures known as the Intolerable Acts (1774). These include the following:

Image 1A31i03: Boston Tea Party

a. The Boston Port Bill closed Boston port to all commerce until tea was paid for.
b. Massachusetts Government Act declared towns meetings were forbidden

c. The Administration of Justice Act allowed for British officials to be granted a right of trial in England or for moving trials to other colonies or England for those accused of injuring British officials.

d. The Quartering Act allowed for the lodging of soldiers in private homes.


3. It was just a matter of time before armed conflict would reach a new scale between "Americans" and the British. This occurred at Lexington and Concord (1775) when British soldiers clashed with Minutemen. Declaring independence was just around the corner!