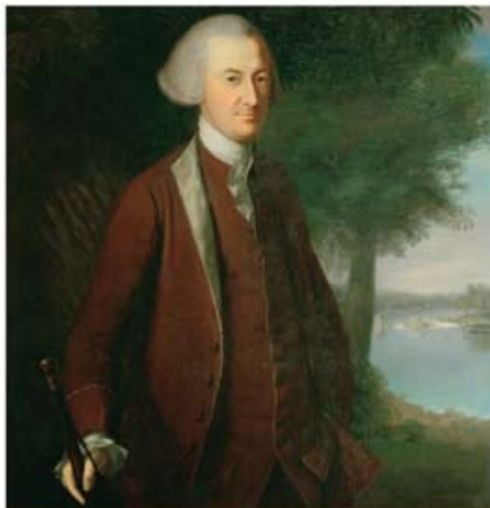


# Revolutionary War

THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR (1775–1783) was the struggle between Great Britain and its thirteen American colonies that led to the colonies' independence and the formation of the United States of America. As ideas of liberty, justice, and popular rule became institutionalized (in varying degrees) in the new American government, the Revolution influenced democratic aspirations and independence movements around the world.

► *John Dickinson's Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania laid out the colonial position on parliamentary taxation with great clarity. He later served as an officer in the Continental army, a member of the Continental Congress, and a delegate at the Constitutional Convention. This 1888 etching of Dickinson is by Albert Rosenthal.*



## The Road to War

By the mid-1700s the British colonists in North America had grown accustomed to a high degree of self-government. As long as the colonies produced goods needed by Britain, successive governments in London allowed the colonies to more or less rule themselves. However, after Britain had sent thousands of troops to the colonies during the French and Indian War (1753–1761), the government, left with a large debt, sought to avoid future conflicts.

*Parliament's attempts to tax the colonies led to protests from individuals and from the colonies' representative assemblies. The Pennsylvanian John Dickinson (1732–1808) was one such protester. Dickinson was no firebrand. He accepted that Great Britain had the right to control colonial trade, but because the colonists were not represented in Parliament, he denied Parliament's right to tax Americans or raise revenue by imposing mercantilist restrictions and requirements.*

*It may perhaps be objected, that Great-Britain has a right to lay what duties she pleases upon her exports, and it makes no difference to us whether they are paid here or there. To this I answer, these colonies require many things for their use, which the laws of Great-Britain prohibit them from getting any where but from her. Such are paper and glass.*

*That we may be legally bound to pay any general duties on these commodities, relative to the regulation of trade, is granted; but we being obliged by her laws to take them from Great-Britain, any special duties imposed on their exportation to us only, with intention to raise a revenue from us only, are as much taxes upon us, as those imposed by the Stamp-act. . . . It is nothing but the edition of a former book, with a new title page.*

LETTERS FROM A FARMER IN PENNSYLVANIA, LETTER 2 (1767)

Britain limited the colonies' westward expansion with the Proclamation of 1763, which was issued in response to the Indian uprising known as Pontiac's Rebellion. Parliament, attempting to share the economic burden of maintaining troops, imposed several new taxes on the colonists, the Stamp Act (1765) being one of them. That law required newspapers, legal documents (including contracts and wills), pamphlets, and other printed matter to have a stamp that showed taxes had been paid.

The colonists argued that Britain had no right to limit westward expansion and that only their colonial assemblies could tax them. The cry "No taxation without representation" echoed throughout the colonies. Though Parliament repealed the Stamp Act in 1766, on the very same day it did so it asserted its prerogatives by passing the Declaratory Act, which stated that Parliament could make whatever laws it saw fit for the colonies.

Between 1765 and 1775 relations between the colonists and Great Britain steadily deteriorated. In 1767 Parliament tried to raise revenue again by implementing the Townshend Acts, which taxed items that colonists used daily, such as glass and tea. Colonial outrage again led to repeal.

### Boston Takes Center Stage

On March 5, 1770, Boston became the scene of a confrontation between a mob and British soldiers. After receiving verbal abuse and a rain of snowballs and other debris, British soldiers fired into the crowd; five Bostonians were killed in what quickly became known as the Boston Massacre. In 1773 another group of colonists boarded a ship in Boston harbor and tossed its cargo of tea overboard to



protest the Tea Act. This action, the Boston Tea Party, led Parliament in 1774 to enact the Coercive Acts (called the Intolerable Acts in America), which limited the power of the Massachusetts assembly, closed the port of Boston, and allowed the quartering of British troops in civilian homes in the city. The Coercive Acts united the colonies against British commercial policy. In September 1774 colonial leaders from twelve colonies (Georgia was not present) met in Philadelphia at the First Continental Congress.

▲ This colored engraving (1883) by Howard Pyle captures the aspect of the Boston Massacre that outraged the colonists: British soldiers firing on American civilians. Samuel Adams denounced the massacre and called for the removal of British troops from Boston. His cousin John Adams later defended the British soldiers in court.