

British Acts and Actions (including Acts of Parliament) and Colonists' Reactions and Responses

A Presentation Based on the Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) Objectives for High School History Students

Georgia Standards of Excellence SSUSH3 Analyze the causes of the American Revolution.

SSUSH3b. Explain colonial response to the Proclamation of 1763, the Stamp Act, and the Intolerable Acts as seen in the Sons and Daughters of Liberty and the Committees of Correspondence.

I. Escalating Grievances

- A. As early as the 1650s, the British government began enacting a series of demands and restrictions that colonists in America found increasingly distasteful.
- B. These actions provoked a rebellion known as the American Revolution that was ultimately resolved by the Revolutionary War.

II. Navigation Acts: 1651-1696

- A. **British Act:** The Navigation Acts variously included all of the following:
 - 1. sea trade with colonies must be on English ships only and 75% of the sailors on these ships must be English.
 - 2. certain items (e.g., tobacco) may only be shipped to England or other British colonies.
 - 3. Goods to colonies of other countries must go through English ports first for taxation.
 - 4. New duties were imposed on inter-colonial trade.
 - 5. Allowed for general search warrants & Board of Trade oversight.
- B. **Colonial Reaction:** Many colonies simply ignored these regulations, and some colonists began smuggling goods to get around the taxes and shipping restrictions.

III. The Proclamation of 1763

- A. **British Act:** The Proclamation of 1763 was intended to prevent costly Indian wars by declaring that no new settlement would be allowed past the Appalachian Mountains without British approval. This enraged farmers and speculators who wanted access to this land.
- B. **Colonial Reaction:** The Proclamation of 1763 enraged farmers and speculators who wanted access to this land.

IV. Sugar Act (American Revenue Act of 1764)

- A. **British Act:** This act was introduced for Britain to raise money to pay for its costly wars.
 - 1. The law changed tax rates on sugar and molasses imported from foreign countries, and it added new taxes on silk, wine, coffee, pimento, and indigo.
 - 2. Also under this law, smugglers were presumed guilty until proven innocent, seizure without due process of law was allowed, and merchants were prevented from bringing lawsuits over seized goods.
- B. **Colonial Reaction:** Many colonists protested the act, merchants complained to Parliament about it, and others began protesting and writing pamphlets and letters condemning the act.

V. Currency Act of 1764

- A. **British Act:** The Currency Act of 1764 banned the use of paper money in the colonies, which especially angered artisans and farmers.
- B. **Colonial Reaction:** Colonial legislatures such as Virginia's House of Burgesses passed resolutions condemning this and other previous British acts and actions.

VI. Quartering Act (1765)

- A. **British Act:** This required colonists to pay for troop barracks, otherwise troops could stay in taverns, inns, vacant buildings and barns, and the colonists would be forced to pay the rent.
- B. **Colonial Reaction:** The act further angered the colonists and contributed to growing hostility toward the King and Parliament.

VII. Stamp Act (1765; repealed 1766)

- A. **British Act:** The Stamp Act was the first direct tax on the colonies by Britain. It required colonists to buy tax stamps for all printed matter.
- B. **Colonial Reactions:**
 - 1. Many colonists ignored it and boycotted British goods.
 - 2. Sons of Liberty, a protest group, formed in 1765 to hold meetings, public protests and demonstrations and they intimidated stamp sellers.
 - 3. The Stamp Act Congress, representatives from nine colonies, wrote a Declaration of Rights and Grievances that said only political representatives, not Parliament or the King, had the right to tax. They

petitioned King George and Parliament to repeal the Stamp Act, and this, combined with protests, boycotts and New York's non-importation agreement, led to repeal.

VIII. Declaratory Act (1766)

British Act: This law declared that parliament had power to make laws for colonies. It was passed in reaction to the Stamp Act and its repeal in order to assert English government's right to rule.

IX. Townshend Acts (1767)

- A. **British Acts:** These were new tax duties on various imports to colonies along with laws stipulating that:
 1. trials could be held in vice-admiralty courts
 2. the accused were considered guilty until proved innocent
 3. seizure of goods allowed without due process
 4. legalized writs of assistance (general search warrants)
- B. **Colonial Reactions:** Colonists attacked the Townshend Acts in a series of circular letters distributed to colonies.

X. Escalating Hostilities

- A. Britain dissolved the Massachusetts and Virginia legislatures; Virginia's legislature then convened elsewhere and issued a non-importation agreement.
- B. In addition to the Sons of Liberty and other protesters, by 1769, Daughters of Liberty groups had evolved, making and advocating wearing "homespun" (homemade cloth rather than imported) as a type of boycott.

XI. The Boston Massacre (1770)

- A. By 1770, many residents of Boston, Massachusetts had become openly hostile toward British soldiers stationed there.
- B. On March 5, British soldiers had been ordered to protect the Customs House from a group of colonists gathered nearby.
- C. After a series of episodes including name calling, threats, and thrown snowballs, British troops fired on the colonists, killing four and wounding seven others.
- D. The Boston Massacre and its aftermath of outrage and protest led Britain to repeal all but one of the Townshend Acts, leaving only the tax on tea.

XII. Tea Act (1773)

- A. **British Act:** To give the British East India Company an advantage over the Dutch in selling tea, this act changed the law so the British company could pay the Townshend duty and still undersell its competitors.
- B. **Colonial Reactions:** As a new direct tax, this became a symbol of tyranny to colonists.
 1. Colonial resistance culminated in the Boston Tea Party (December 1773) and a similar action in New York (April 1774).
 2. At Thomas Jefferson's suggestion, Committees of Correspondence formed for inter-colonial communication regarding British activities. These communiqués shaped public opinion and organized resistance to British rule.

XIII. Intolerable Acts (1774) (aka Coercive Acts)

- A. **British Acts:** These were laws to punish Massachusetts for the Boston Tea Party and end colonial challenges to imperial authority:
 1. shut down Boston's port until tea paid for;
 2. changed councils, judges & sheriffs to appointments instead of being elected and town mtgs. were banned;
 3. moved trials of Brit. Soldiers & officials to English courts;
 4. required lodging of British troops at scene of disturbances (inc. private homes).
 5. To enforce these laws, Britain sent 2000 more troops to New England and appointed General Thomas Gage as Governor.
- B. **Colonial Response:** A Continental Congress was organized by the committees of correspondence.
 1. Met in Philadelphia, Sept. 5, 1774 to discuss Britain's actions. Some urged rebellion, others urged compromise.
 2. When Britain dissolved the Massachusetts Assembly, they published a **Declaration of Rights and Grievances** expressing loyalty to the king but condemning Coercive Acts, and they announced a **non-importation association** and organized **boycotts** of British goods.
 3. They agreed to meet again in May 1775 if crisis not resolved.

XIV. Lexington and Concord

- A. **British Actions:** On April 19, 1775, British soldiers marched toward Concord, Massachusetts to seize weapons and ammunition stored by the local militia. They were intercepted by Patriot militia at Lexington, and the first shots of the American Revolutionary War were fired.
- B. **Colonial Responses:** Three weeks after Lexington and Concord, a Second Continental Congress met and decided to:
1. adopt the Massachusetts militia as a Continental Army;
 2. appoint George Washington as general and the army 's Commander in Chief.

XV. A Recap of Major British Actions, 1651-1775

- Navigation Acts (1651-1696)
- Proclamation Act of 1763
- Sugar Act (1764)
- Quartering Act (1765)
- Stamp Act (1765)
- Declaratory Act (1766)
- Townshend Acts (1767)
- Tea Act (1773)
- Intolerable (or Coercive) Acts (1774)

XVI. A Recap of Important Colonial Responses to British Acts and Actions, 1651-1775

- Throughout this period colonists commonly reacted with protests, pamphlets, petitions and declarations decrying many of Great Britain's actions related to the North American colonies.
- Stamp Act Congress (October 1765)
- Sons of Liberty (1765)
- Daughters of Liberty (1769)
- Boston Tea Party (1773)
- Committees of Correspondence (1773)
- First Continental Congress (1774)
- Battle of Lexington and Concord (1775)
- Second Continental Congress (1775)
- Declaration of Independence (1776)