

NO WAY OUT

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In the years leading up to the American Revolution, relations between the colonists and Great Britain had become greatly strained as a result of the Seven Years War, Proclamation of 1763, and an emergence of a growing identity that was uniquely American. Prior to 1760 and the end of the Seven Years War, also known as the French & Indian or The Great War for the Empire, the colonists had enjoyed a long history of "salutary neglect" during which the British government exercised very little authority over them and affected their lives very little. However, after the War when the British Government instituted taxes on the colonies to help pay the debt, the colonists rebelled seeing these as only monopolies in disguise. It was becoming clear that American economic interest no longer completely coincided with those of Great Britain.

After participating in the war, colonists realized the different political and economic interests of themselves and their British counterparts. American speech was different. The political language differed not only in practice but also in theory. During the period of salutary neglect the colonies created their own legislatures and councils in which representatives were elected by districts to vote and debate on laws affecting their respective colonies. This was not so concerning the British government, which was run by Parliament, an absolute power that considered it to represent all English subjects whether or not they lived in England. The colonists had come to believe that the only legislature they could depend on not to oppress them were people they themselves had voted for, and notion that was in direct contrast with the theory of virtual representation.

In an attempt to control the vast amount of new land acquired after the war, the Proclamation of 1763 was issued. It declared the waters flowing into the Atlantic from the Appalachian Mountains the temporary boundary for colonial settlement. However many colonists had already established claims west of this line and refused to abandon them regardless of the policy. This followed by the Sugar and Currency Acts a year later that established new taxes on certain foreign imports and outlawed colonial issuance of paper money, finally caused the colonists to protest. Although the only course of action taken by the colonists were eight separate petitions to Parliament requesting an appeal of the Sugar Act, which were ineffective, a bolder approach was taken by a Massachusetts attorney named James Otis. In his pamphlet *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*, he directly challenged the colonists to question Parliaments authority over them. He also maintained that Americans were "entitled to all the natural, essential, inherent, and inseparable right" of the British including the right not to be taxed without their own compliance. This ideology contained little original thought. Like most members of the elite Otis had been to college where the ideas of the Enlightenment had been spread. Years earlier, John Locke had concluded that all people were born with certain inalienable rights which included life, liberty, and property. These ideas would ultimately transform and become the basis of American political thought. The colonists did not immediately respond to this venture. It was after the passage of the Stamp Act, which would require a tax stamp on most printed material that real action began to take place on the part of the colonists. Widespread awareness lead to political activism with the creation of the Loyal Nine and Sons of Liberty which brought people of all ranks together in unified resistance and started a communication network among the colonists.

Once the Stamp Act was repealed these groups dispersed, their goal achieved. This, of course, was not to be the end of taxation by Parliament. So satisfied were the colonists in their victory over the Stamp Act that they virtually ignored the Declaratory Act which asserted Parliament's ability to tax and legislate. The declaration of total power over the colonies was not fully noticed by the colonists.

Although during this time the colonists are edging closer to confrontation the majority was still in favor of resistance, not rebellion. The colonies were still linked to the empire despite the growing differences between them. It was Tory Samuel Seabury who claimed that colonists were convinced that ministers of the Crown had a plan to enslave America and were in the process of putting it into execution. This exaggerated theory may not have been taken very seriously but its main idea, that Parliament strove to deprive Americans of their freedom, and that any government of power was a threat to individual liberty, was. Also, in *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania*, John Dickinson claimed that Parliament did not have the right to tax without representation, a reoccurring idea in the political thought of this time. He also contended that Parliament could regulate trade for the purpose of raising revenue. This is exactly what the Tea Act proposed. Tea was only to be sold by members of the East India Company. With this added tax tea was cheaper, however colonists saw it only as an attempt to establish a monopoly. In reaction, the participants who were now reunified under this new tax dropped 342 chests into Boston Harbor. The Coercive and Quebec Acts were a direct result of this action by the colonists their purpose being to punish the city that was the chief opposition of British policies. The Coercive Acts, which were a series of bills that not only closed the Boston harbor until the tea was paid for but altered the provinces

charter, allowing for an appointed charter instead of an elected one. The Quebec Acts were even worse for the colonists in that it granted more religious freedom to Catholics in a society founded by Protestants, and reinstated French civil law and established an appointed council as the governing body. These Acts, meant only to punish Boston, had a direct effect on all of the colonists. If Parliament would take that sort of action with one colony, what would stop it from doing the same thing elsewhere? The arguments of Seabury had become affirmed and in the colonists panicked reaction to these two acts, it seemed as if the plot to enslave Americans was being revealed. The Boston Committee of Correspondence urged all the colonies to boycott British goods immediately. Still attached to the empire, the colonies agreed to send delegates to Philadelphia for the First Continental Congress in the summer of 1774. Leading political figures and unwavering patriots such as Samuel Adams, John Adams, John Jay, and Patrick Henry headed it. The purpose of this meeting was to define American grievances, develop a plan for resistance, and to outline a theory of America's constitutional relationship with England. Out of this came the Declaration of Rights and Grievances in which John Adams created a compromise position. The document declared that Americans would obey Parliament only because doing so would be best for the two countries, but would still resist taxes in disguise. Also the delegates agreed on laws they wanted repealed such as the Continental Association which called for nonimportation of British goods, nonconsumption of British products and nonexportation of American goods to Britain and the British West Indies. Committees of observation were formed to ensure the enforcement of these decisions and for months just before the Revolutionary war were the acting government taking authority over British appointed governors.

Before the Revolutionary war, relations between the colonists and England had become greatly strained. Internal changes within the executive and legislative bodies of Parliament achieving greater power and the cost of the French and Indian War which heavily fell on the colonies created much disillusionment with imperial rule. The colonists had had enough of taxation and a lack of representation the Parliament, which punished them for attempting to boycott these actions. The colonists had finally reached the point and were ready for Revolution.