The Problem of Empire

Chapter 5 - 1763–1776

Annotated Chapter Outline

The following annotated chapter outline will help you review the major topics covered in this chapter.

I. An Empire Transformed

A. The Costs of Empire

1. Britain’s national debt soared as a result of the Great War for Empire, and to pay it off, higher import duties were imposed at home, and excise levies (a kind of sales tax) were increased; the increases were passed on to British consumers.

2. To collect taxes, the size of the British bureaucracy was doubled and its powers increased. Smugglers were arrested and cargo was seized.

3. The price of empire had turned out to be debt and a more intrusive government. To reverse the growth of government power, British opposition parties (the Country Party and the Radical Whigs) demanded that Parliament be made more representative of the property-owning classes.

4. The war also exposed the weak authority of British royal governors and officials; to assert its authority, Parliament passed a Revenue Act in 1762 that curbed corruption in the customs service, and the Royal Navy was instructed to seize vessels that were carrying goods between the mainland colonies and the French islands.

5. The British victory over the French resulted in a shift in imperial military policy; in 1763, the ministry deployed a peacetime army in North America, indicating its willingness to use force to preserve its authority over all the inhabitants of the colonies.

6. Ministers believed that the colonists, who gained most of the benefits from the war, should also pay their fair share of the expenses accrued during and after the conflict.

B. George Grenville and the Reform Impulse

1. The Sugar Act

a. Reform-minded Prime Minister George Grenville won approval of the Currency Act of 1764 that banned the use of paper money as legal tender, thereby protecting the British merchants from colonial currency that was not worth its face value.

b. Grenville then proposed the Sugar Act of 1764 (a new Navigation Act) to replace the widely evaded Molasses Act of 1733.

c. Americans, arguing that the Sugar Act would wipe out rum distilleries, vowed to disobey the law.

2. The End of Salutary Neglect

a. Americans also argued that the Sugar Act was contrary to their Constitution, since it established a tax and “all taxes ought to originate with the people.”

b. The Sugar Act closed a Navigation Act loophole by extending the jurisdiction of vice-admiralty courts to all customs offenses, many of which had previously been tried before local common-law courts.

c. After living under a policy of salutary neglect, Americans believed that the new British policies were discriminatory and deprived them of their basic rights as British citizens.

d. British officials insisted on the supremacy of parliamentary laws and denied that colonists were entitled to even the traditional legal rights of Englishmen, such as the right of no taxation without representation; the Americans, as colonists, were second-class subjects of the king.

C. An Open Challenge: The Stamp Act

1. Taxation sparked the first great imperial crisis; Grenville followed the Sugar Act of 1764 with a proposal for a Stamp Act in 1765.

2. The Stamp Act would require small, printed markings on all court documents, land titles, and various other documents and served as revenue to keep British troops in America.

3. Benjamin Franklin proposed American representation in Parliament, but British officials rejected the idea, arguing that Americans received virtual representation in Parliament.

4. Grenville introduced the Stamp Act in Parliament with the goals being to not only raise revenue but to also assert the right of Parliament to lay an internal tax on the colonies.

5. Parliament also passed, at the request of General Thomas Gage, the Quartering Act of 1765 directing colonial governments to provide barracks and food for the British troops stationed in the colonies. Parliament also approved Grenville’s proposal that violations of the Stamp Act be tried in vice-admiralty courts.

6. Using the doctrine of parliamentary supremacy, Grenville’s attempt to fashion an imperial system in America provoked a constitutional confrontation with the colonies on taxation, jury trials, military quartering, and the general question of representative self-government.

II. The Dynamics of Rebellion, 1765–1770

A. Formal Protests and the Politics of the Crowd

1. The Stamp Act Congress

a. Patriots—defenders of American rights—organized protests, rioted, and articulated an ideology of resistance.

b. Several colonial assemblies issued formal protests condemning the Stamp Act as a violation of American freedoms.

c. Nine colonies sent delegates to the Stamp Act Congress of 1765 and issued a set of Resolves challenging the constitutionality of the Stamp and Sugar Acts, declaring that only the colonists’ elected representatives could tax them and speaking against the loss of American “rights and liberties,” especially trial by jury.

d. Most delegates were moderate men who sought compromise, not confrontation; they humbly petitioned for repeal of the Stamp Act. Several also called for a boycott of British goods.

2. Crowd Actions

a. Angry colonial mobs, led by men who called themselves the Sons of Liberty, demanded the resignation of tax collectors and destroyed the property of supporters of imperial authority. Shopkeepers, artisans, laborers, and seamen intimidated royal officials throughout the colonies.

3. The Motives of the Crowd

a. Rioters had many reasons for protesting—resentment toward military officers, religious passions that ignited dislike of the arrogance and corruption of royal bureaucrats, and simply the excitement of it.

b. Popular resistance throughout the colonies nullified the Stamp Act; this success confirmed the Patriot ideology that political authority rose through the people.

B. The Ideological Roots of Resistance

1. Although initial American protests focused on particular economic and political matters, patriot lawyers and publicists also provided the resistance movement with an intellectual rationale, a political agenda, and a visible cadre of leaders.

2. Patriot publicists drew on three intellectual traditions: English common law, the rationalist thought of the Enlightenment, and an ideological agenda based on the republican and Whig strands of the English political tradition.

3. Writings espousing these traditions turned a series of riots and tax protests into a coherent political movement.

C. Another Kind of Freedom

1. The Patriot rhetoric of colonists becoming the slaves of Parliament through taxation without representation inspired the first expressions of opposition to slavery as a violation of human rights and motivated slaves in northern colonies to file petitions to end slavery.

2. Southern slave holders, fearful of ending slavery for economic reasons, suppressed language referring to the natural rights for human beings.

3. African Americans did not gain rights or true liberty during the struggle for colonial independence.

D. Parliament and Patriots Square Off Again

1. Charles Townshend Steps In

a. In Parliament, the new prime minister Lord Rockingham mollified colonists by repealing the Stamp Act and modifying the Sugar Act, but he pacified hard-liners with the Declaratory Act of 1766, which reaffirmed Parliament’s authority to make laws binding American colonists.

b. Chancellor of the exchequer Charles Townshend strongly favored restrictions on colonial assemblies and promised to find a new source of English tax revenue in America. To secure revenue for the salaries of imperial officials in the colonies, the Townshend Act of 1767 imposed duties on paper, paint, glass, and tea imported to America. The Revenue Act of 1767 created a board of customs commissioners in Boston and vice-admiralty courts in Halifax, Boston, Philadelphia, and Charleston.

c. By using parliamentary-imposed tax revenues to finance administrative and judicial innovations, Townshend directly threatened the autonomy and authority of American political institutions.

d. To limit colonial constitutional debate over internal taxation, Townshend levied duties only on trade, a type of tax colonists had traditionally not opposed.

2. A Second Boycott and the Daughters of Liberty

a. Townshend’s measures turned American resistance into an organized boycott of British goods.

b. Colonial women, traditionally concerned with the community’s wellbeing, organized into groups—such as the Daughters of Liberty—and supported the nonimportation movement by expanding domestic production through the increase in homespun cloth. Such activism brought women into the public sphere.

c. The boycott also mobilized colonial assemblies into political action. Surveillance, coercion, and harassment of merchants and customers who resisted the movement contributed to divisions within colonial society.

3. Troops to Boston

a. American resistance only increased British determination. In 1765, American resistance to taxation had provoked a parliamentary debate; in 1768, it produced a plan for military coercion and resulted in the sending of 2,000 British troops to Boston.

E. The Problem of the West

1. British government officials also debated the issue of land in the West acquired through the Treaty of Paris in 1763, the Proclamation Line that divided colonists from Indians, and the three new colonies of Quebec, East Florida, and West Florida.

2. Gentlemen speculators desiring investments, officers paid for their service during the Seven Years’ War in land warrants, Indian traders wishing to sell land grants they received from Ohio Indians, and countless squatters contributed to a sizable migration into the Ohio River Valley.

3. Ohio Indians hoped to stem this movement by organizing the Scioto Confederacy.

4. Colonial secretary Hillsborough intended to turn the Proclamation Line from a temporary into a permanent demarcation.

5. Colonial migrants, confused and frustrated by this policy change, vowed to protect their property rights.

F. Parliament Wavers

1. The Boston Massacre

a. The American trade boycott began to have a major impact on the British economy. The rising trade deficit with the Americans convinced some British merchants to petition Parliament that the Townshend duties were a mistake.

b. Early in 1770, Lord North persuaded Parliament to accept a compromise plan that repealed the duties on manufactured items but retained the tax on tea as a symbol of Parliament’s supremacy.

c. The Boston Massacre, the killing of five Bostonians by British soldiers on March 5, 1770, created much resentment toward the crown and Parliament.

2. Sovereignty Debated

a. By 1770, the most outspoken Patriots had repudiated parliamentary supremacy, claiming equality for the American assemblies within the empire.

b. Royal governors such as Thomas Hutchinson insisted that Parliament had supreme power.

c. Some Americans were prepared to resist by force if Parliament or the king insisted on exercising Britain’s claim to sovereign power.

III. The Road to Independence, 1771–1776

A. A Compromise Repudiated

1. The East India Company and the Tea Act

a. Samuel Adams established a committee of correspondence and formed a communication network between Massachusetts towns that stressed colonial rights. The burning of the customs vessel *Gaspée* roused other states such as Virginia, Connecticut, South Carolina, and New Hampshire to set up their own committees of correspondence that would communicate with other colonies.

b. The committees sprang into action after the passage of the Tea Act, which relieved the British East India Company of paying duties on tea it imported to Britain or exported to the colonies.

c. The Tea Act made the East India Company’s tea less expensive than Dutch tea, which Americans had smuggled into the colonies.

d. Radical Patriots accused the ministry of bribing Americans to give up their principled opposition to British taxation.

2. The Tea Party and the Coercive Acts

a. The Patriots effectively nullified the Tea Act by forcing the East India Company’s ships to return tea to Britain or to store it in public warehouses. In response to Massachusetts governor Hutchinson’s insistence to land a shipment of tea and collect the tax, a group of Patriots threw the tea into Boston Harbor.

b. In 1774, Parliament reacted to this defiance by enacting four Coercive Acts to force Massachusetts into submission.

c. The four Coercive Acts included the Boston Port Bill that closed Boston Harbor to shipping; the Massachusetts Government Act that annulled the colony’s charter and prohibited most town meetings; a new Quartering Act that mandated new barracks for British troops; and a Justice Act that allowed trials for capital crimes to be transferred to other colonies or to Britain. Patriot leaders branded these measures “Intolerable.”

d. The activities of the committees of correspondence created a sense of unity among Patriots.

e. Many colonial leaders saw the Quebec Act (1774) as another demonstration of Parliament’s power to intervene in American domestic affairs, since it extended Quebec into territory claimed by American colonies and recognized Roman Catholicism.

B. The Continental Congress Responds

1. Delegates from twelve colonies created the Continental Congress, a new colonial assembly, and met in Philadelphia in September 1774 to address a set of controversial and divisive issues.

2. Pennsylvanian Joseph Galloway proposed that America should have a president-general appointed by the king and a national legislative council selected by the colonial assemblies.

3. The plan was rejected by a single vote and was seen by a bare majority as being too conciliatory.

4. Instead, the First Continental Congress demanded the repeal of the Coercive Acts and repudiated the Declaratory Act, stipulating that British control be limited to matters of trade.

5. The Congress initiated a program of economic retaliation, beginning with a nonimportation agreement that went into effect in December 1774.

6. The British ministry branded the Continental Congress an illegal assembly and refused to send commissioners to America to negotiate.

7. The ministry declared that Americans had to pay for their own defense and administration and acknowledge Parliament’s authority to tax them; it also imposed a naval blockade on American trade with foreign nations and ordered General Gage to suppress dissent in Massachusetts.

C. The Rising of the Countryside

1. The Continental Association

a. Ultimately, the success of the urban-led Patriot movement would depend on the actions of the large rural population.

b. At first, most farmers had little interest in imperial issues, but the French and Indian War, which had taken their sons for military duty and pre- and post-war taxes, changed their attitudes.

c. The urban-led boycotts of 1765 and 1769 had also raised the political consciousness of many rural Americans through the establishment of the Continental Association and its rural committees.

d. Patriots also appealed to the yeomen tradition of agricultural independence, as many northern yeomen felt personally threatened by British imperial policy.

2. Southern Planters Fear Dependency

a. Despite their higher standard of living, southern slave owners had fears similar to those of the yeomen. As believers in English liberties and owners of slaves, they feared that their debts to British merchants would lead to political subjugation.

b. Southerners also realized that Parliament could use the Coercive Acts to end representative assemblies and seize private property.

D. Loyalists and Neutrals

1. Many prominent Americans worried that resistance to Britain would destroy respect for all political institutions, ending in mob rule.

2. Other social groups, such as tenant farmers and the Regulators, refused to support the resistance movement, arguing that wealthy Patriots intended to advance their own special interests.

3. Many colonists, such as the Quakers and Germans, opposed any violence based on religious conviction. Others attempted to stay neutral to protect property and livelihood.

4. Although an estimated 15 to 20 percent of white Americans remained loyal to the crown, Americans who favored resistance to British rule commanded the allegiance—or at least the acquiescence—of the majority of white Americans.

IV. Violence East and West

A. Lord Dunmore’s War

1. General Gage’s abandonment of Fort Pitt in October 1772 left settlers exposed and vulnerable to Indian attacks.

2. Lord Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia, used this opportunity to defy the crown and empower himself by organizing and training a militia. In 1775, Dunmore led this militia into successful battle against the Ohio Shawnees at Point Pleasant and claimed Kentucky.

3. Settlers in the backcountry supported this action, arguing that they were independent because the crown had abandoned them.

B. Armed Resistance in Massachusetts

1. When the Continental Congress met in 1774, New England was already in open defiance of British authority.

2. In September, General Gage ordered British troops to seize Patriot armories and storehouses at Charleston and Cambridge.

3. In response, 20,000 colonial militiamen mobilized to safeguard supply depots, the most famous regiment being the Minutemen of Concord.

4. On April 18, 1775, Gage dispatched 700 soldiers to capture colonial leaders and supplies at Concord.

5. Forewarned by Paul Revere and others, the local militiamen met the British first at Lexington and then at Concord.

6. As the British retreated, militiamen ambushed them from neighboring towns with both sides suffering losses.

7. Twelve years of economic conflict and constitutional debate ended in civil war.

C. The Second Continental Congress Organizes for War

1. Congress Versus King George

a. In May 1775, Patriots met in the Second Continental Congress to address the events at Lexington and Concord.

b. After losing battles at Breed’s Hill and Bunker Hill, Congress created a continental army headed by General George Washington.

c. Moderates led by John Dickinson of Pennsylvania passed a petition that expressed loyalty to the king and requested the repeal of oppressive parliamentary legislation.

d. Zealous Patriots such as John Adams and Patrick Henry won passage of a Declaration of the Causes and Necessities of Taking Up Arms.

e. The king refused the moderates’ petition and issued a Proclamation for Suppressing Rebellion and Sedition in August 1775.

f. Hoping to add a fourteenth colony to the rebellion, the Patriot forces invaded Canada and easily took Montreal in September; but in December 1775, they failed to capture Quebec City and withdrew.

g. American merchants cut off all exports to Britain and its West Indian sugar islands, and Parliament retaliated with a Prohibitory Act, banning all trade with the rebellious colonies.

2. Fighting in the South

a. Lord Dunmore of Virginia organized two military forces—one white, one black—and offered freedom to slaves and indentured servants who joined the Loyalist cause.

b. Faced with black unrest and pressed by yeomen and tenant farmers demanding independence, Patriot planters called for a break with Britain.

c. By April 1776, radical Patriots had, through military conflict, transformed the North Carolina assembly into an independent Provincial Congress, which instructed its representatives to support independence. By May 1776, Virginia Patriots had followed suit.

3. Occupying Kentucky

a. After Dunmore’s War in 1775, independent parties of settlers, such as Daniel Boone, moved into Kentucky and established fortlike settlements to protect their communities from the Ohio Indians.

b. In 1776, Virginia fulfilled the migrants’ request to be annexed by creating six frontier counties and supplying them with munitions. The Continental Congress supported this decision and dispatched troops and arms to the area.

D. Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*

1. Many colonists believed that opportunity for negotiations with Parliament still existed. John Dickinson convinced Congress in July 1775 to send King George III the Olive Branch Petition, which pleaded with the king to negotiate.

2. In January 1776, Thomas Paine published *Common Sense*—a call for independence and republicanism.

3. *Common Sense* aroused the general public and quickly turned thousands of Americans against British rule.

4. Paine’s message was not only popular but also clear—reject the arbitrary and tyrannical powers of the king and Parliament and create independent republican states.

E. Independence Declared

1. On July 4, 1776, the Congress approved a Declaration of Independence.

2. Thomas Jefferson, the main author of the Declaration, justified the revolt by blaming the rupture on George III rather than on Parliament.

3. Jefferson proclaimed that “all men are created equal”; they possess the rights of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”; and that government derives its power from the “consent of the governed.”

4. By linking these doctrines of individual liberty, popular sovereignty, and republican government with independence, Jefferson established them as defining values of the new nation.

5. Colonists celebrated the Declaration by burning George III in effigy and toppling statues of the king; these acts helped to break the ties to the monarch and to establish the legitimacy of republican state governments.