Chapter 6: From Empire to Independence, 1750–1776

Chapter Review

I. AMERICAN COMMUNITIES The First Continental Congress Shapes a National Political Community

In 1774, delegates from 12 colonies met in Philadelphia for the first meeting of the Continental Congress. The Congress nearly broke down over the issue of whether prayers would open the session. Over seven weeks of meetings and social gatherings, a community of national leaders emerged. In this fashion, Congress began the process of forging a national community. The vignette describes the difficulty—and the importance—of building such a community from America’s diverse local communities.

II. THE SEVEN YEARS’ WAR IN AMERICA

The Seven Years’ War was the final conflict between British and French forces in North America before the French Revolution. It decided the fate of territory between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River, and set in motion the conflict between colonists and Britain that would lead to the American Revolution.

a. The Albany Conference of 1754

In 1754, delegates from the various colonies met in Albany in an unsuccessful attempt to negotiate an Iroquois alliance. The delegates at the Albany Conference adopted Benjamin Franklin’s Plan of Union, but the colonial assemblies they represented rejected it.

b. France vs. Britain in America

The issue of expansion eventually led to war between Great Britain and France. The lack of unity seriously hindered the British colonies in their conflicts with the French and their Indian allies. Some Indians allied with the French, but many other tribes remained neutral, playing one European power off the other.

c. Frontier Warfare

In 1756, fighting broke out in the upper Ohio backcountry when the French defeated two armies, first under George Washington and second under Edward Braddock. The British suffered major defeats during the first two years of what became known as the French and Indian War in North America, or the Seven Years’ War in Europe. The British expulsion of French-speaking Acadians led to the creation of the “Cajun” community in Louisiana.

MHL Map: The Seven Years’ War at www.myhistorylab.com
d. The Conquest of Canada

In an effort to take Canada, the British poured in money and men and settled old disputes with the Iroquois. By 1760 the fall of Montreal ended the French North American empire. Under the Treaty of Paris, France lost all its American mainland possessions. Its claims east of the Mississippi went to the British, except for New Orleans which was ceded to Spain; its claims west of the Mississippi went to Spain.

e. The Struggle for the West

Indians in the Ohio Valley felt betrayed. Many became followers of Neolin (“The Delaware Prophet”), who urged purification and holy war. In 1763, a series of attacks throughout the backcountry ended in stalemate with the British. In an effort to maintain the peace, the English issued the Proclamation of 1763, which set aside the area west of the Appalachian Mountains for Indians. White settlers ignored the line and moved into the Ohio Valley. A series of conflicts and treaties with Indian tribes expanded British lands.

III. THE EMERGENCE OF AMERICAN NATIONALISM

Britain’s success in the Seven Years’ War blindered the empire to the sense of separate identity American colonists had started to develop.

a. An American Identity

Conflicts between English and Americans grew during the Seven Years’ War. The war promoted nationalism and the idea of a wider American community, strengthening American identity. The conduct of the British army, and the cruelty employed by its officers, shocked colonists. Commercial links and improved roads brought colonies into closer contact with each other.

b. The Press, Politics, and Republicanism

Newspapers provided a means of widely communicating news of intercolonial affairs and expressing controversial opinions. Americans read the writings of radical Whigs who warned of a government conspiracy to quash liberty and institute tyranny. Only the constant vigilance of free people could protect liberty. Ideas collectively known as “republicanism” emerged that insisted that an independent people should control its own affairs. These ideas meshed well with the American colonial experience of property ownership, representative assemblies, and the struggle with royal authority.

c. The Sugar and Stamp Acts

The British need for additional revenue tested American unity. The high cost of maintaining troops along the Proclamation Line and the expense of servicing the large debt accumulated in the Seven Years’ War led the British to pass new colonial taxes. The Sugar Act tightened enforcement of customs regulations. Opponents called for a boycott
of British goods, an idea that spread throughout the port cities. In early 1765 the British passed the Stamp Act, requiring tax stamps to be purchased for many items.

d. The Stamp Act Crisis

Americans protested not only the expense, but the constitutional implications. The British claimed that Parliament represented all citizens of the empire through “virtual representation.” Americans asserted that only their own legislatures could levy taxes. Nine colonies issued denunciations of the act, declaring “no taxation without representation.” In Massachusetts, opposition was led by upper- and middle-class men who successfully mobilized working-class Bostonians. What was intended as a peaceful protest rally turned into a violent attack on those associated with the tax. Mobs successfully intimidated officials from selling the stamps. Nine colonies met at the Stamp Act Congress, passing resolutions against Parliament’s right to tax the colonies.

A boycott of British goods led to the Act’s repeal amid assertions of Parliamentary supremacy.

MHL Profile: Samuel Adams at www.myhistorylab.com
MHL Document: Benjamin Franklin, Testimony against the Stamp Act (1766) at www.myhistorylab.com

IV. “SAVE YOUR MONEY AND SAVE YOUR COUNTRY”

Opposition to the Stamp Act was more urban than rural and varied with profession. But the next round of British duties on imports sparked wider opposition among the colonists.

a. The Townshend Revenue Acts

In 1767, Parliament passed the Townshend duties, a new set of external taxes collected on goods before they entered colonial markets, and inaugurated stricter enforcement policies. Americans reasserted their opposition to all taxation without representation. But Americans remained loyal to the crown.

MHL Document: John Dickinson, from Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania (1768) at www.myhistorylab.com

b. An Early Political Boycott

Led by Bostonians, Americans in port cities revived their nonimportation agreements. Artisans took to the streets to enforce them. Nonimportation appealed to values of self-sufficiency and independence and brought rural people into the community of resistance. Colonial imports from Britain declined by 41 percent.

c. The Massachusetts Circular Letter
In 1768, the Massachusetts House of Representatives sent out a circular letter denouncing the Townshend Acts. British officials demanded its repeal, and the governor of Massachusetts shut down the Assembly. Threats of violence against royal officials led the British to station troops in Boston.

d. The Boston Massacre

Periodic incidents between soldiers and citizens escalated until 1770 when soldiers fired into a crowd, killing seven. News of the “Boston Massacre” helped galvanize public opinion against the British. The news of the repeal of the Townshend Acts lessened American resistance.

MHL Document: *Boston Gazette Description of the Boston Massacre (1770)* at www.myhistorylab.com

V. FROM RESISTANCE TO REBELLION

In 1773, the British Parliament’s Tea Act pushed American colonists over the edge, from resistance to rebellion.

a. Committees of Correspondence

In response to British encroachments on American rights and customs, Americans created committees of correspondence to communicate with other communities. Actions in Massachusetts confirmed colonial fears of British plans for stricter control of the colonies.

b. The Boston Tea Party

The 1773 Tea Act prompted mobs in Philadelphia and New York to intimidate tea importers. On Dec. 17, 1773, Bostonians dumped a shipload of tea into the harbor; soon, tea was destroyed in other cities, as well.


c. The Intolerable Acts

Britain punished Bostonians by passing the Intolerable Acts (the Coercive Acts) that ended the community’s self-rule. Troops could be quartered in private homes. At the same time, the Quebec Act established a highly centralized government for Quebec and toleration for Catholics. This seemed a preview of what was in store for Americans.

d. The First Continental Congress

In September 1774, delegates arrived in Philadelphia for the first meeting of the Continental Congress. Rather than overt attacks on British authority, Congress endorsed a
policy of boycotts against British goods. It called for democratically elected local committees to enforce these policies.

e. Lexington and Concord

In Massachusetts, local communities had organized minutemen to defend communities. When on the evening of April 18, 1775, the British left Boston to capture American ammunition in Concord, they triggered a firefight with local minutemen. The battles of Lexington and Concord ignited the American Revolution.

MHL Document: Patrick Henry, “Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death” (1775) at www.myhistorylab.com

VI. DECIDING FOR INDEPENDENCE

On the heels of the events in Massachusetts, militias mobilized throughout the colonies, and delegates from 12 colonies met in Philadelphia.

a. The Second Continental Congress

In May 1775, the Continental Congress met again. Within months, Georgia joined the Congress. Congress organized an army, commanded by George Washington. It issued $2 million in bills of credit. John Adams and Benjamin Franklin also played important roles.

b. Canada and the Spanish Borderlands

The Congress reached out to other British colonies, including Canada and the Caribbean islands, and to Spain, for support. Results varied.

c. Fighting in the North and South

An unsuccessful effort to take Canada ended in the spring of 1776. By March the British had been forced out of Boston. British efforts in the South had also failed.
MHL Document: Royal Proclamation of Rebellion (1775) at www.myhistorylab.com

d. No Turning Back

Hopes for reconciliation waned. In a brilliant pamphlet, Thomas Paine helped cut Americans’ emotional ties to Britain and the King.
History Bookshelf: Thomas Paine, Common Sense (1776) at www.myhistorylab.com

e. The Declaration of Independence
By July 1776, Congress was ready to take the final step. It approved Thomas Jefferson’s revised draft of the Declaration of Independence with no dissenting votes (New York abstained). Men of wealth and position committed treason against the government of England by signing a document that pledged them to the principle of equality.


**VII. CONCLUSION**

Americans forged a distinctively “American” identity that enabled them to strike out for independence.

**Learning Objectives**

Students should be able to answer the following questions after studying Chapter 6:

1. How did the Seven Years’ War change the relationship between the British government and its colonial subjects in North America?
2. What factors led to the growth of American nationalism in the 1760s?
3. How did political and economic problems in Britain contribute to unrest in the colonies?
4. What steps did Britain take to punish Massachusetts for the colonists’ acts of resistance?
5. What events led the second Continental Congress to declare independence?

**Discussion Suggestions and Possible Answers**

1. How did overwhelming British success in the Seven Years’ War lead to an imperial crisis in British North America?

   **Answer:** British success in the Seven Years’ War blinded them to the emerging sense of identity within the colonies. Moreover, the cost of victory had been extraordinarily high and the British hoped to pay off some of their wartime debt by taxing the colonies. Furthermore, Parliament sought to assert its power in the colonies for the first time. The colonists met all of these innovations with strong, concerted resistance.

2. Outline the changes in British policy toward the colonies from 1750 to 1776.

   **Answer:** British policy toward the colonies changed quite dramatically from 1750 to 1776. Parliament sought to impose internal taxes for the first time with the Stamp Act in 1765. A series of protests eventually led to repeal, but other taxes would be levied in the years to follow. Parliament took an increasingly strong stand against the colonies, sending troops to Boston in 1768 and closing the Port of Boston in 1774 in response to the Boston Tea Party. The Quebec Act of 1774, which installed a tight hierarchical administration of the former French Colony of Quebec was seen as a precursor to what Parliament planned for the American colonies as well.
3. Trace the developing sense of an American national community over this same period.

**Answer:** An American national community had been developing since the Great Awakening. The process was accelerated by the Seven Years’ War, when colonists came to recognize their considerable cultural and social differences from British citizens on the other side of the Atlantic. This cohesion was accelerated by the spread of newspapers, which enabled information to reach different colonies much more rapidly. Political unity, such as the opposition to the Stamp Act in 1765 and then the Continental Congress in 1774 added to the emerging sense of nationhood.

4. What were the principal events leading to the beginning of armed conflict at Lexington and Concord?

**Answer:** The British responded to the Boston Tea Party with the Intolerable Acts, closing the port of Boston until the cost of the tea was repaid. The colonies met in Philadelphia at the Continental Congress, and called for boycotts on British goods. In Massachusetts, local militias were organized and when a detachment of British troops was sent to seize military stores like gunpowder and cannon in Concord. They were met by the militia in the first battle of what would become the American Revolution.

5. How were the ideals of American republicanism expressed in the Declaration of Independence?

**Answer:** Republicanism means that an independent people should govern themselves and these ideals were expressed by Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration called for representative assemblies instead of a king and the independence of the American people to secure their own liberty—the right of all free people.

**Lecture Outline**

The Seven Years’ War in America
- The Albany Conference of 1754
- Colonial Aims and Indian Interests
- Frontier Warfare
- The Conquest of Canada
- The Struggle for the West

The Imperial Crisis in British North America
- The Emergence of American Nationalism
- The Press, Politics, and Republicanism
- The Sugar and Stamp Acts
- The Stamp Act Crisis
- Repeal of the Stamp Act

“Save Your Money and Save Your Country”
The Townshend Revenue Acts
Nonimportation: An Early Political Boycott
The Massachusetts Circular Letter
The Politics of Revolt and the Boston Massacre

From Resistance to Rebellion
   Intercolonial Cooperation
   The Boston Tea Party
   The Intolerable Acts
   The First Continental Congress
   Lexington and Concord

Deciding for Independence
   The Second Continental Congress
   Canada, the Spanish Borderlands, and the Revolution
   Fighting in the North and South
   No Turning Back
   The Declaration of Independence

Resources (Web, Films/Video)

Web
American Archives: Documents of the American Revolution, 1774-1776:
http://dig.lib.niu.edu/amarch/index.html

Films/Video
The War that Made America (240 minutes). PBS, 2006. Account of the French and Indian War, paying special attention to the role of George Washington and the importance of native peoples in the conflict.


My History Lab Connections

Reinforce what you learned in this chapter by studying the many documents, images, maps, review tools, and videos available at www.myhistorylab.com.

Read and Review

Read the Documents
Benjamin Franklin, Testimony Against the Stamp Act (1766)
Otis, The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved (1763)
The Stamp Act Crisis
John Dickinson, Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania (1768)
Boston Gazette Description of the Boston Massacre (1770)
John Andrew to William Barrell, Boston Tea Party (1773)
Patrick Henry, Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death (1775)
Joseph Warren, “Account of the Battle of Lexington” (1775)
Royal Proclamation of Rebellion (1775)

See the Maps
The Seven Years’ War

Research and Explore

Read the Documents
Exploring America: The Stamp Act

Read the Biographies
Samuel Adams
Thomas Hutchinson

History Bookshelf
Thomas Paine, Common Sense (1776)

Hear the Audio
The Connecticut Peddler

Watch the Videos
The Revolution

Critical Thinking Exercises