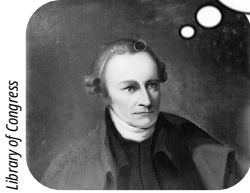




Hey, King: Get Off Our Backs!

Give me liberty, or give me death



Library of Congress

Patrick Henry

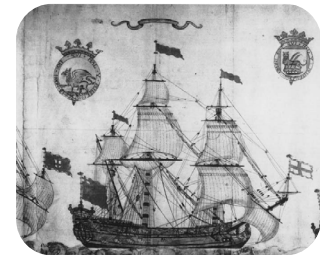
Hey, King: Get Off Our Backs!

Really? Was it that bad? By 1776, many of the colonists living under British rule thought so. In fact, things were so bad that they went to war to gain their independence. But why? What could have been so intolerable?

The first English men and women came to North America in 1607 looking for gold, and silver. Basically, a way to get rich fast. They were part of a trading company that convinced the King of England to grant them a **charter**, a document issued by the government giving them permission to set up a colony in North America. But they did not find what they were looking for. Times got so hard that early British colonists had to eat rats and each other to keep from starving. They also fought with powerful Native American groups, who sometimes helped them. In time, they had families. Big families. Their population grew, and they got used to making their own rules.

Hail to the King

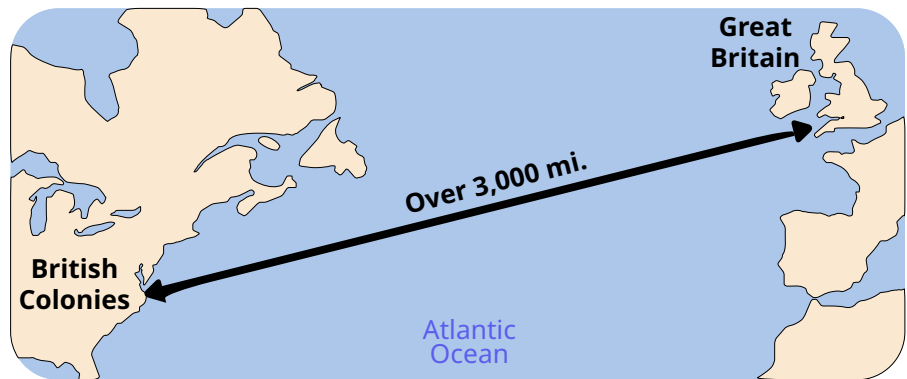
Back in England, the King probably figured he had a pretty good deal. Other people got seasick sailing across the ocean to claim Native people's lands for the crown while he sat in his palace. Except that being king just wasn't what it used to be. Before the *Magna Carta* in 1215, a king could really do what he wanted! But this was the 1600s, and now the English people had representatives in Parliament who made laws and stood up for peoples' rights. They even gave advice to the King. People in England (and later Great Britain) prized this role. They believed Britain and liberty went together. And because the British colonies were part of the British Empire, many colonists also saw themselves as worthy of these ideals.



Colonial Society of Massachusetts

You Don't Mind If We ... Uh ...

Govern yourselves, do you? In British America, the colonists needed some kind of government to deal with everyday problems. After all, the King was on the other side of the ocean. That meant news couldn't reach him from the colonies in under a month, and it took two more



to send back an answer. And because of their experience with Parliament, the colonists were used to having a say in government. In Virginia Colony, the first British colonists decided each community should have two representatives and they would all meet together. This group was called the **House of Burgesses**. Farther north, in Plymouth, colonists signed the *Mayflower Compact* agreeing to form a majority-rule government where most White men would vote on whatever issues came up.



Hey, King: Get Off Our Backs!

The King and Parliament were also pretty happy to let the colonists look after themselves as long as they kept sending valuable crops to Great Britain and buying lots of British goods. And the growing population meant this territory was profitable for the British. The population was young and there were many large families. By the mid-1700s, there were nearly 2 million people of European descent, and half a million enslaved people of African descent, living in Britain's colonies on the North American mainland. Each colony had its own government, and the people were used to counting on their governments to respond to their local needs. Even more than in Great Britain! Representatives came from their communities and represented them in government. When problems came up, the colonial governments took care of things themselves.

It wasn't perfect though. These examples show some self-government, but those in power still deliberately excluded many residents of the colony. Plus, the King still technically controlled the colonies, and the colonists had to follow Britain's laws. But in the day-to-day, the colonists were making many of their own decisions and governing things the way they wanted to without much direct interference from the British government.

Making Britain Rich

Great Britain, which now included both England and Scotland, always saw its colonies around the world as money-makers. Colonies were a profitable source of raw materials such as timber, cotton, tobacco, rice, and coffee. The King forced the colonists to sell these raw materials back to Great Britain at set prices. People in Great Britain would use the materials to make finished products which they sold back to the colonies. This all ensured Britain would make a huge profit from its colonies.

There was also another horrible way to maximize profit in this system. Colonists forced enslaved people from Africa to grow and harvest the raw materials without pay, and in inhumane working conditions. People in power in Great Britain and in the colonies also made a lot of money from the slave trade. Profits generated from the labor and trafficking of enslaved Africans allowed the British Empire to become very wealthy and powerful.

Hmm... What about taxing the American colonies?



Allen Ramsay (1713-1794)

King George III

Other Ways to Make Money

War also changed the relationship between Great Britain and its colonies. In the mid-1700s, Britain fought a series of expensive wars. Colonists in North America fought in one called the French and Indian War and were proud of their service in the King's army. But Britain had taken on a lot of debt to pay for war supplies, so it was looking for a way to make money fast. And war supplies were not the only thing they needed money for. The British gained new territory in North America as a result of the war and governing it would be expensive.

Taxing their colonists seemed like the perfect idea. British American colonists in North America paid far lower taxes than their friends and relatives back in Great Britain and governing that new territory would mostly benefit the colonists living there.





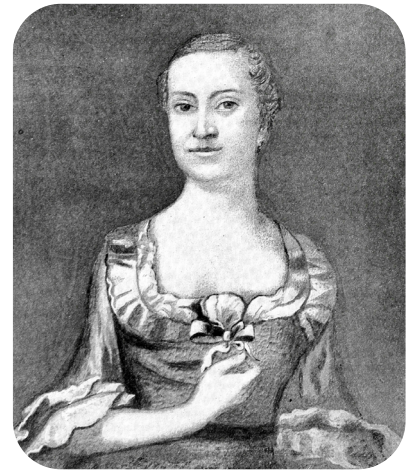
Hey, King: Get Off Our Backs!

So, in 1765, Britain passed the **Stamp Act**, which forced colonists to put expensive tax stamps on all legal documents, as well as newspapers, calendars, and playing cards. Because these were common and necessary materials, it would have made a good profit for Great Britain. But many colonists saw this as unfair since they did not have a direct vote in passing the Stamp Act. And they wanted to send a message about how they felt. They quit buying British goods so they would not have to pay the tax. And it worked! Britain repealed the Stamp Act in a matter of months, as soon as they saw how upset the colonists (and their powerful British friends) were about the new taxes. But the peace did not last.

From Bad to Worse

As soon as the Stamp Act was gone, the British passed the **Declaratory Act** saying that the colonies were dependent on the King and Parliament and declaring that all laws passed in the colonies had no effect. As if that wasn't bad enough, Britain also passed the **Townshend Revenue Act**, taxing things it knew the colonists couldn't make for themselves such as paint, glass, paper, lead, and tea. This Act also allowed British government workers to search peoples' houses and even break down doors to seize items the homeowners hadn't paid taxes on. Additionally, the **Quartering Acts** of 1765 and 1774 forced certain colonists to let British troops live in their houses. The soldiers didn't even have to pay rent!

Things just got worse from there. The **Tea Act** of 1773 actually reduced the tax on tea, but the colonists still saw it as the British trying to manipulate them into paying taxes. In protest, some colonists snuck onto a cargo ship during the night and dumped hundreds of crates of tea into the Boston Harbor. This was known as the **Boston Tea Party**. In response, the British passed a series of laws in 1774 that cracked down on rebellious activity in the Massachusetts colony. Colonists called these the **Intolerable Acts** because they felt they could not take it anymore. Many colonists were attached to the British concept of liberty but also felt ready to demand equality with all the King's subjects.



Magazine of American History, 1892

Penelope Barker organized the Edenton Tea Party. In 1774, 51 women in Edenton, NC wrote and signed a promise to boycott British tea and cloth. The document was mailed to Great Britain. It was one of the first public political acts by women in the British colonies.



In 1777, Prince Hall and seven other Black Americans sent a petition to the Massachusetts Legislature calling

for an end to slavery. He argued that a nation with a Declaration of Independence that says "all men are created equal" should not be a nation that enslaved people.

Enough is Enough!

The colonists finally decided there was only one solution: self-government! On July 4, 1776, the colonies adopted the Declaration of Independence, announcing that the United States was free from Great Britain. It wasn't that easy, though. There was also the matter of fighting a war against Britain to make that freedom real. When the colonists won the Revolutionary War, Britain lost all control of the colonies. The United States of America was born.



Hey, King: Get Off Our Backs!

A. Complete the Sentences. Look in the reading to find the missing piece of each sentence.

1. The _____ was a signed agreement to form a majority-rule government.
2. The _____ Acts forced colonists to house British troops.
3. Britain saw its colonies as a source of _____.
4. If you sold a newspaper in 1765, you would have to put a _____ on it.
5. We celebrate the 4th of July because that's when the _____ was signed.
6. The Townshend Revenue Act allowed the government to _____ peoples' homes.
7. Virginia Colony's first government, where each community had two representatives, was called the _____.
8. The _____ Acts were a series of laws that tried to stop rebellious activity in Massachusetts.

B. Odd One Out. In each set, cross out or highlight the word that does not belong. Then, explain what the other three words have in common.

Glass
Cotton
Lead
Tea

1. _____

Mayflower Compact
Stamp Act
Declaratory Act
Quartering Act

2. _____

Minerals
Timber
Crops
Paint

3. _____

Legal documents
Newspapers
Troops
Calendars

4. _____

Boycott goods
Search houses
Fight a war
Destroy tea

5. _____

C. Cause and Effect. Match each effect with its cause listed below.

Effects

- _____ 1. In the 1600s, the King could not just do what he wanted.
- _____ 2. The first colonists started their own governments.
- _____ 3. Colonists were used to having a say in government.
- _____ 4. Britain needed a way to make money.
- _____ 5. The colonists boycotted British goods.
- _____ 6. The British taxed paint, glass, and lead.
- _____ 7. The colonists declared independence.
- _____ 8. Britain lost control of the colonies.

Because...

- A. They were angry about the Stamp Act taxes.
- B. The British government was too far away to deal with daily problems.
- C. They were tired of the way the British were treating them.
- D. He shared power with Parliament.
- E. The colonists won the Revolutionary War.
- F. They knew the colonists could not make those products themselves.
- G. In Great Britain, the Parliament represented the people.
- H. It was in debt after fighting expensive wars.



Hey, King: Get Off Our Backs!

D. Phrases to Know. Learn these phrases from the Declaration of Independence by matching each one with its definition.

- ___ 1. Unalienable rights
- ___ 2. Pursuit of happiness
- ___ 3. Natural rights
- ___ 4. Consent of the governed
- ___ 5. Just powers
- ___ 6. Self-evident



- A. Rights people are born with
- B. Can be seen just by looking at it
- C. Permission of those under the government's rule
- D. Rights that cannot be taken away
- E. Trying to find joy and contentment
- F. Powers that are fair

E. Reconstruct the Declaration. The outline below shows the four parts of the Declaration of Independence and the purpose of each. You will get a set of cutouts with statements that are in the Declaration. Decide which section each statement belongs in and piece the Declaration back together!

Part 1: Preamble

This introduction explains why the Declaration is being written.

Part 2: Natural Rights

The colonists explain the rights of people and the role of government power.

Part 3: Grievances

This is a list of the colonists' complaints.

Part 4: Resolution of Independence

The colonists declare their independence from Britain.

F. Fill in the Blanks. One of the most famous parts of the Declaration of Independence is written below. Use words from the list to complete it. Use the text from the matching activity for help!

We hold these truths to be self-_____, that all men are created _____, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable _____, that among these are _____, _____, and the pursuit of _____.

That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just _____ from the _____ of the governed,

That whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the _____ to alter or _____ it...

G. Find Those Rights! The Declaration lists three rights. Find and circle them in Activity C!



E. Reconstruct the Declaration. Cut out the statements and piece the Declaration of Independence back together.



PREAMBLE

NATURAL RIGHTS

GRIEVANCES

RESOLUTION OF INDEPENDENCE

The king has refused to agree to laws that would benefit the people.

Our own governments have been abolished.

All men are created equal.

The king has caused fighting among the colonists.

Our trade with the rest of the world has been cut off.

We pledge our lives, fortunes, and honor in support of this Declaration of Independence.

Sometimes it becomes necessary for one group of people to cut ties with another group of people.

The king gets to decide whether the judges keep their jobs and how much they get paid.

New laws have taken away our right to a jury trial in many cases.

When government threatens peoples' natural rights, the people have the right to abolish it and make a new government.

We now cut all political connection with Great Britain.

The king has opened new government offices and sent "swarms of officers to harass our people."

The king has housed large numbers of troops in our communities.

Government must get its power from the consent of the governed.

When one group of people decides to separate from another, they should explain why.

We declare that the colonies are and should be free and independent states.

Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are "unalienable rights."

The king has tried to keep people from coming to the colonies to live.



Hey, King: Get Off Our Backs!



magistracy = office of the local government official

gaol = jail

comptroller = public official who manages government finances

900l. sterling = £900, or about \$162,000 (approx. value today)

repugnant = awful

obliged = forced

countenance = face

man of war = British naval ship

populace = people

countermand = send back

vend = sell

coach = carriage

effigy = a doll made to look like someone

abettor = supporter or helper

his excellency = the governor

The LONDON MAGAZINE: Or, GENTLEMAN'S *Monthly Intelligencer.*

For OCTOBER 1765.

By letters received from Boston in New-England, there is an account of a dangerous mob, which arose in the middle of August, on account of the stamp duty, and did considerable mischief; but on the 16th of August they were more violent than before, which continued till Sunday the 1st of September, by which time the **magistracy** had raised and armed five-hundred men, and had committed several of the rioters to **gaol**,—but not till they had destroyed all the goods and papers of the **comptroller**, judge of the admiralty, distributor of the stamps, as well as every individual article in the house of the lieutenant governor ... even to the uncovering his house, burning all his books and papers, carrying off even his clothes, as well as those of his sister and daughter, putting them on by way of masquerade, [taking] **900l. sterling** in cash, scarce leaving him any more than the shirt he had on.

For NOVEMBER 1765.

The stamp-duty is so **repugnant** to the ideas of the people of America, that in most of the northern colonies they have **obliged** the stamp-officers to resign their places. . . . When the stamped papers arrived at Philadelphia, the vessels in the harbour hoisted their colours half mast high, the bells rung, being muffled, and every **countenance** betrayed dejection. Finally, they obliged the stamp distributor to promise not to exercise his office, and the stamped papers were obliged to be taken on board a **man of war**, to secure them from the rage of the **populace**. The lawyers in New Jersey have resolved not to use the stamped papers.

For DECEMBER 1765.

Upon the arrival of the stamps at New-York, every sign of mourning appeared. The merchants soon after met and resolved to have no more goods shipped from Great Britain unless the stamp act be repealed; to **countermand** all orders already sent, and not to **vend** any goods sent from Great Britain after Jan. 1 next. The governor having secured the stamp paper in Fort George, a great assembly of persons, preceded by lights, went to the fort, took from the stables the governor's **coach**, which with his **effigy** they burnt, with every mark of contempt and exasperation, under the guns of the fort. After this they went to the house of major James (a supposed **abettor** of the stamp act) whose goods they likewise seized and consumed. The next day they forced from **his excellency** a declaration, that he would have nothing to do with the stamps.



Hey, King: Get Off Our Backs!

Part I. Illustrate. The London Magazine stories did not include any pictures. But what if they did? For each month, make an illustration that would help the reader understand what was happening in the British colonies. Include as many details from the reading as possible.

For OCTOBER 1765.

For NOVEMBER 1765.

For DECEMBER 1765.



Hey, King: Get Off Our Backs!

Part II. Protest! The colonists expressed their outrage in many ways. But which kinds of protest would be most effective at convincing Great Britain to repeal the Stamp Act? (It did repeal the Act in 1766.) Take a look at some of the ways that the colonists could have protested the Stamp Act and answer the questions.

- Don't order any more goods from Great Britain and cancel existing orders.
- Try to force the stamp officer to resign (quit).
- Destroy the property of government officials who support the Stamp Act.
- Try to force the governor to promise he won't have anything to do with the stamps.
- Refuse to sell anything sent from Great Britain.
- Burn the governor in effigy. (Burn a life-size model that looks like the governor).
- Refuse to use the stamps.
- Get a large group together to protest in public.

1. Which two actions do you think would be most effective and why?

2. What are the drawbacks of those actions?
