Chapter 5
Imperial Breakdown, 1763—1774

Chapter Summary

Chapter 5 addresses the road toward colonial unity and resistance to British imperial administration after the French and Indian War. The topics explored in this chapter include the challenges facing Britain in North America after the French and Indian War; heightened tensions between Native Americans and American colonists after the war; changes in British imperial administration, including taxation of the American colonists; the impact of the changing political scene on tensions among colonists, particularly the Regulator Movement in the Carolinas; and the colonial movement toward unity—culminating with the convening of the First Continental Congress.

I. Imperial Reorganization
   A. British Problems
   B. Dealing with the New Territories
   C. Indian Affairs
   D. Curbing the Assemblies
   E. The Sugar and Stamp Acts

II. American Reactions
   A. Constitutional Issues
   B. Taxation and the Political Culture
   C. Protesting the Taxes

III. The Aftermath of the Stamp Act Crisis
   A. A Strained Relationship
   B. Regulator Movements

IV. The Townshend Crisis
   A. Townshend’s Plan
   B. American Boycott
   C. The Boston Massacre
   D. The “Quiet Period”
   E. The Boston Tea Party
   F. The Intolerable Acts

V. The Road to Revolution
   A. American Response to the Intolerable Acts
   B. The First Continental Congress
   C. The Continental Association
   D. Political Divisions

VI. Conclusion
Learning Objectives

After a careful examination of Chapter 5, students should be able to do the following:

1. Explain the problems facing Britain after the French and Indian War and list the Parliamentary laws enacted during the Grenville administration in an effort to address these problems.

2. Identify the major colonial conflicts with Native Americans after the war and how these conflicts illustrated problems with the acquisition of western lands.

3. Describe the power exercised by colonial assemblies by 1764 and how Parliament attempted to challenge that power after the French and Indian War.

4. Define the provisions of the Stamp Act and why this law was distinctive from the other laws passed during the Grenville administration.

5. Discuss the Stamp Act Crisis. What were the legal, financial, and social factors connected to the American resistance to this law?

6. Define the term *writs of assistance* and explain how this issue contributed to the constitutional conflict over the Stamp Act in Massachusetts.

7. Identify the Sons of Liberty and understand their historical significance as an example of popular resistance to British policy.

8. Compare the effectiveness of the Stamp Act Congress and the Albany Congress in terms of effecting colonial unity and advancing American political interests.

9. Define the Regulator Movement and explain the impact of British imperial policy on social tensions in the colonies.

10. Explain the Townshend Duty Act and why Americans resisted this trade tax even though it was an external tax.


12. List the Intolerable Acts and explain their purpose as well as their impact on Britain’s relationship with the American colonies.

13. Discuss the First Continental Congress and list its major accomplishments.

14. Comment on the political division within the American colonies regarding resistance to British policy and explain the emergence of the Whig and Tory factions.
Topics for Classroom Lectures

1. Prepare a presentation focusing on the Stamp Act Crisis as the first example of formal American resistance to British imperial policy after the French and Indian War. Explain the disagreement between American colonists and the British regarding the concepts of virtual representation and actual representation, and discuss their disagreement over the concepts of internal and external taxation. Look at the major pieces of legislation coming out of the Grenville administration and demonstrate the distinction of the Stamp Act from the others, such as the Sugar Act, the Quartering Act, or the Currency Act. Examine the phrase, Taxation without representation is tyranny! and have students understand the true meaning of the words. In other words, colonists were saying, (Internal) taxation without (actual) representation is tyranny!

2. Discuss the evolution of colonial unity between 1755 and 1774. Examine the Albany Congress, the Stamp Act Congress, and the First Continental Congress. What was the extent of colonial participation in each congress? What issues motivated the convening of these meetings? How successful was each in demonstrating or promoting the degree of unity among the colonies?

Topics for Class Discussion and Essays

1. Hold a class discussion on the circumstances surrounding the Boston Massacre. How much do we know about what really happened? Take this opportunity to introduce to students the inconsistencies in the detail of historical research, since few accounts of this incident offer the exact same description of the event. Look at the role of John Adams in this affair. How do students react to discovering that he defended the British officer in an American court? How did John Adams’s role in this incident differ from that of his cousin, Samuel Adams? How do students explain the difference?

2. Have students read an article challenging the propriety of the American colonial response to British imperial policy after the French and Indian War. Were Americans treated that badly? Were they treated differently or worse than other British colonists? What was the true cause of revolution?

Topics for Term Papers and Class Projects

1. Examine the roles of John Adams and Samuel Adams in the events leading up to the American Revolution. Study their religious, philosophical, and family backgrounds and how these aspects of their lives helped to define the nature of their support for the Revolution. Why were their roles so different, and how did their political styles compliment each other?

2. Explore American colonial opposition to the American Revolution. Who were the Tories? Were there regional, social, or economic factors that contributed to a colonist’s resistance to revolution? How did Tories respond to the actuality of the Revolution?
Resources for Lectures and Research Projects


Audio-Visual Resources

This video takes a look at the leader of the American Revolution and comes from the popular A&E Biography series.

Based on the Joseph Ellis book, this set of videos explores six moments that dramatically impacted American history. Showcased are such founding fathers as Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison.

This film explores the life of America's first president, offering both personal and professional perspectives on the man who originated the American presidency.

This episode from the PBS series on the American Revolution explores pre-revolutionary politics in the colonies, focusing on the Stamp Act and the Boston Tea Party.