

Transcript: Part Two, Episode Two- Tensions and Taxes Escalate

I'm Matthew, I'm Mike. Welcome back to Keep Liberty Alive. In Part Two, Episode One, we saw how the English enacted a bunch of taxes on the colonies and instituted several measures to get more control. This obviously led to much disgruntlement among the colonists and stoked tension between both sides. We ended the last episode with the Boston Massacre, which didn't help relations. But the English weren't finished yet. This is Part Two, Episode Two, Tensions and Taxes Escalate.

Several of the taxes that had been imposed on the colonies had been rescinded by the British. One Tax that was not, however, was the Tea Tax. Tea was imported by the British to the colonies through the British East India Company. The tea was shipped from India to London first and then to the colonies. This led to middlemen handling shipments in between and, together with the taxes, made the British tea cost-prohibitive, even though it was better tea. The colonists, being upset with the high prices and taxes, were smuggling in Dutch tea illegally, even though it was inferior. This caused much of the British tea that was transported to the colonies to be sent back to England, resulting in the British East India Company having way too much tea on its hands. Trying to alleviate this problem, the British passed the Tea Act of 1773, which included reducing taxes on tea and allowing the East India Company to ship tea directly to the colonies, thereby lowering prices by cutting out the middlemen. The British assumed, as did some American Colonists, that Americans would be amenable to buying British tea due to the lower costs. But it was too late. The damage had already been done. Most colonists refused to purchase the British tea and would not allow ships to unload their cargo at the harbors. This resulted in what we now call the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773, when colonists dressed as Native Americans (in part because they considered themselves Americans and not British Citizens) and associated with a group called the Sons of Liberty, boarded the ships in Boston and dumped the cargoes of tea into the harbor. This also happened in other ports, such as New York, but since Boston did it first, Boston took most of the blame. The British were not amused. This "insurrection" united all British parties against the radical Americans. Parliament passed the Boston Port Act, which closed Boston Harbor until the colonists paid for the tea. This was the first of the so-called "Coercive Acts" passed by British Parliament in 1774 that the colonists referred to as "the Intolerable Acts."

Next, was the Massachusetts Government Act, which revoked Massachusetts' charter and put it back under control of British Parliament. Other colonies rightly feared that the same could happen to them. Then was the Administration of Justice Act, which allowed trials of Royal officials to be held outside of Massachusetts for fear that they could not receive a fair trial. This was called the Murder Act by George Washington because it would allow British officials to escape justice. Then came the New Quartering Act. In the first Quartering Act, the colonists were required to supply housing and support for British soldiers, but the colonists had been reluctant to do so. Many claimed this act allowed British troops to commandeer colonists' houses, if necessary, although some claim this is disputed.

These and other acts were viewed by all of the colonies as a threat and not just to Massachusetts. They were called unconstitutional and violations of colonial rights. Richard Henry Lee of Virginia said they were, "a most wicked system for destroying the liberty of America." These acts led to even more colonists to rebel against England.

The first Continental Congress with delegates from the Thirteen colonies met from September 5 to October 26 in 1774 in Carpenter's Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The only colony not at this meeting was Georgia. The Congress agreed to a boycott of British goods that would take effect in December and they threatened to halt colonial exports to Britain if the Intolerable Acts were not repealed within a year.

They didn't make it a year. British troops were instructed to disarm the colonists in Massachusetts and seize their weapons at Lexington and Concord, which are to the west of Boston. Colonial Militia leaders were warned, by inside British sources, that the British "Redcoats" were going to do this and moved most of the weapons out ahead of time. The British, of course, did not know this and set out with 700 troops early in the morning on April 19, 1775, to march to Lexington and Concord and seize the weapons. Ahead of the British march some riders rode to warn militiamen of the British Advance. Paul Revere was the most famous of the riders in addition to Samuel Prescott and William Dawes among others. It was a secret ride, with no one shouting, "The British are coming." Paul Revere himself said his message was "the regulars are coming out", meaning the British troops. When the Redcoats reached Lexington, they encountered 77 militiamen and ordered them to throw down their arms. Someone fired a shot. No one knows who fired first.

The British then went to Concord and didn't find much, but decided to burn what little they did find. The fire got a little bit out of control and militiamen in the area thought the British were burning the whole town. The militiamen went to Concord's north bridge, which was guarded by British soldiers. The Redcoats fired at the militiamen and the militiamen fired back. This became known as the shot heard around the world.

As the British returned to Boston, a couple thousand militiamen, called Minutemen, because they were able to be ready at a moment's notice, followed them on their march. Along the way the Minutemen were firing at the British columns and the British started to flee in haste. The British finally reached Boston without too many casualties and were able to be reinforced with more British troops and the British navy. News of these battles spread throughout the colonies and the militias were encouraged, thinking a British defeat was possible. The American Revolution had begun.