

March to Independence Timeline

1767

The year 1767 was marked by the introduction of new British tax measures known as the Townshend Acts, which reignited colonial resistance and set the stage for further conflict between Britain and its American colonies. While the Stamp Act had been repealed in 1766, the British government, under the leadership of Charles Townshend, sought new ways to raise revenue from the colonies. The Townshend Acts and subsequent colonial responses were significant steps on the road to the American Revolution. Here's a detailed timeline of events in 1767:

Key Events in 1767:

1. Early 1767: Charles Townshend develops his revenue plan, seeking to impose duties on colonial imports to raise revenue and enforce British control.
2. May 13: Townshend formally introduces his proposals, targeting goods imported into the colonies.
3. June 15-29: The Townshend Acts are passed by Parliament, imposing duties on glass, lead, paper, paint, and tea, and creating new customs enforcement mechanisms in the colonies.
4. July-August: News of the Townshend Acts reaches the colonies, sparking resistance. Samuel Adams and others begin organizing protests and non-importation agreements.
5. October: John Dickinson publishes the first of his "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania," arguing that the Townshend Acts violate colonial rights. His writings gain widespread influence.
6. Late 1767: Boycotts of British goods spread throughout the colonies, with merchants and consumers agreeing to stop importing goods subject to the Townshend duties.

January-February 1767: British Efforts to Raise Revenue

- Early 1767: After the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766, the British government continues to face a large national debt from the Seven Years' War (French and Indian War) and the cost of maintaining British troops in the American colonies. Charles Townshend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, seeks new ways to generate revenue from the colonies.
- Townshend's Proposals: Townshend proposes new duties on imported goods in the colonies, believing that external taxes (on trade) would be more acceptable to colonists than internal taxes like the Stamp Act.

March-April 1767: Colonial Trade and British Economic Concerns

- Spring 1767: Colonial trade with Britain continues to recover after the repeal of the Stamp Act, but British officials remain concerned about the financial burden of maintaining military and administrative control over the colonies. Discussions in Parliament about new taxes intensify, as British merchants worry about the economic impact of further unrest in the colonies.
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May 1767: Townshend Acts Introduced

- May 13, 1767: Charles Townshend formally introduces his revenue measures, which later become known as the Townshend Acts. These acts are designed to raise money for the British government by imposing duties on imported goods in the colonies, such as glass, lead, paper, paint, and tea.
- Townshend's Motivation: Townshend believes these duties will be less controversial than the Stamp Act because they are external taxes (on imports) rather than internal taxes on goods produced within the colonies. The money raised would help pay for the salaries of British officials and governors in the colonies, thereby reducing their reliance on colonial assemblies for funding.

June 1767: The Townshend Acts Passed

- June 15-29, 1767: Parliament passes a series of measures known collectively as the Townshend Acts. These include:
 1. Revenue Act of 1767: This act imposes duties on imports of glass, lead, paint, paper, and tea into the American colonies. These taxes are intended to raise revenue to cover the costs of colonial administration and defense.
 2. Suspending Act: This measure suspends the New York Assembly until it agrees to comply with the Quartering Act of 1765, which required colonial assemblies to provide housing and supplies for British troops stationed in the colonies. New York had refused to fully comply with the act, leading to this punitive response.
 3. Indemnity Act: This act reduces taxes on tea imported to Britain by the British East India Company, allowing the company to export tea to the colonies at a lower price, but still with a tax. The goal is to increase tea sales while still collecting revenue.
 4. Customs Commissioners Act: This act creates the American Board of Customs Commissioners, headquartered in Boston, to better enforce trade regulations and prevent smuggling in the colonies. The board has broad powers to collect duties and enforce customs laws.
 5. Vice Admiralty Court Act: Expands the jurisdiction of British Vice-Admiralty Courts in the colonies to prosecute violators of customs laws. These courts operate without juries, which angers many colonists who see this as a denial of their traditional rights as Englishmen.

July-August 1767: Initial Colonial Reactions

- July 1767: News of the Townshend Acts begins to reach the colonies, leading to immediate discontent. Many colonists, especially in the merchant class, view these new duties as another form of taxation without representation, a principle they had strongly opposed during the Stamp Act crisis.
- Samuel Adams in Boston: Samuel Adams and other colonial leaders in Boston begin to organize resistance to the Townshend Acts. They argue that the acts, particularly the new customs commissioners and the suspension of the New York Assembly, represent a further erosion of colonial autonomy.

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- Merchants Begin Organizing Boycotts: In cities like Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, merchants start to organize non-importation agreements, pledging to boycott British goods subject to the new duties. The idea is to put economic pressure on Britain, similar to the successful boycott that helped bring about the repeal of the Stamp Act.
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September-October 1767: Widespread Colonial Resistance

- Fall 1767: Resistance to the Townshend Acts spreads throughout the colonies. Newspapers and pamphlets criticize the new taxes and the increased presence of British customs officials, who are viewed as corrupt and oppressive.
 - Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania: In October 1767, John Dickinson, a Pennsylvania lawyer and landowner, publishes the first of a series of essays titled "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania." These essays argue that the Townshend Acts are unconstitutional because they impose taxes for the purpose of raising revenue without the consent of the colonial assemblies. Dickinson's writings gain widespread popularity and help unify the colonies in opposition to the new laws.
 - Key Arguments of Dickinson's Letters:
 - Parliament does not have the right to tax the colonies for revenue purposes, only to regulate trade.
 - The imposition of taxes without consent is a violation of the British constitution and the rights of the colonists as British subjects.
 - Colonists must resist these taxes through peaceful means, including economic boycotts.
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November-December 1767: Boycotts and Non-Importation Agreements

- Late 1767: Non-importation agreements spread across the colonies, particularly in New York and Boston, where merchants agree to stop importing British goods subject to the Townshend duties. These boycotts are seen as a way to pressure Britain economically, much like the successful resistance to the Stamp Act.
 - Committees of Inspection: To enforce the boycotts, local communities establish Committees of Inspection to ensure that merchants and consumers adhere to the non-importation agreements. These committees gain significant power and play a major role in organizing resistance in the coming years.
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Introduction of the Townshend Acts

Early in 1766, Dr. Benjamin Franklin, of Philadelphia is one of many called to testify in London as the Members of Parliament struggle to understand why Americans had so forcibly resisted the Stamp Act. These British legislators hope to avoid a repeat of the furious reaction across the Atlantic as they ponder how to generate revenue from the colonies and remind those colonies of Parliament's right to tax—and control—them.

A year after the repeal of the Stamp Act and less than two months before Parliament passes the new Townshend Revenue Acts, a sense of what is to come is conveyed by Member of Parliament Thomas Whately as he hints to his correspondent (who will become a new customs commissioner) that "you will have much to do." This time the tax will come in the form of a duty on imports into the colonies, and the collection of those duties will be fully enforced.

On 29 June 1767 Parliament passes the Townshend Acts. They bear the name of Charles Townshend, Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is—as the chief treasurer of the British Empire—in charge of economic and financial matters. With the repeal of the Stamp Act, money is needed for ["defraying the expenses"](#) of administering the colonies in America. The Acts create a new Customs Commission and punish New York for refusing to abide by the Quartering Act of 1765.

Bostonians meet in Faneuil Hall the next October to consider a petition brought by fellow townsmen. It addresses a key issue raised by the Act—["the excessive use of foreign superfluities"](#)—and the extent to which this has increased the colonists' reliance on and subjugation to Britain.

From Philadelphia come a series of twelve letters from "a Farmer in Pennsylvania." They are first printed in *The Philadelphia Chronicle* and circulated to nearly all the other colonial newspapers and appear in pamphlet form in both America and England. They are among the most widely read publications of the period. The "Farmer" is John Dickinson, a London-educated lawyer who has been a member of Pennsylvania's assembly. As New York is being punished by the Townshend Acts, Dickinson warns that ["the cause of one is the cause of all."](#) In a subsequent letter, he examines the constitutionality of the Townshend Acts and declares the new import duties ["a dangerous innovation."](#) The colonists are being taxed by Parliament without being represented in Parliament. And they are Englishmen and deserve the rights of Englishmen!

Resistance to the Townshend Acts takes many forms, and involves an expanding network of individuals, families, neighbors, communities, and colonies from New England to Georgia. ["Ladies of the first quality"](#) do their share and newspaper reports use their example to inform and inspire readers to take action. The Massachusetts House of Representatives (part of the General Court) addresses a circulatory (or circular) letter ["to a](#)

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[sister colony](#)" and sends it to all the other legislative assemblies "on this continent" in February 1768. British administrators order the Massachusetts House to stop the circulation of the letter and forbid the other colonies to support it, but the damage is done. Of the 120 members of the Massachusetts House, 92 refuse to rescind this circular letter and their action inspires John Dickinson to once again take up his pen—this time to write a new song to the words of an old British military tune. [The Liberty Song](#) is printed on ballad sheets and sung throughout the colonies in a show of mutual support for resistance.

Massachusetts' royal governor Francis Bernard dissolves the colonial assembly of Massachusetts—the General Court. "[Deprived of the Councils of a General Assembly](#)," angry Bostonians call for a convention of Massachusetts towns in September 1768 to decide on next steps. And in far away Charlestown, South Carolina, support for this aggrieved sister colony to the north comes in a most dramatic fashion by means of "45 candles ... and [92 glasses](#)."

And then on 1 October, British troops begin to arrive in Boston.

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A Letter from Thomas Whatley to John Temple
London, 2d May, 1767.

Dear Sir,

I again trouble you by your Brother's Permission with a Packet of letters, which I am ashamed to send you; but he encourages me to go on, & I shall under such Encouragement be tempted now & then to take the same Liberty until you forbid me: This Time indeed I am under a kind of Necessity to enclose my Letters to you, as I really do not know how to direct to Mr Howard, not even to what Province, as he proposed to be somewhere in your neighbourhood during part of the Summer, but I am not sure whether he carries his Intentions into Execution. & of Dr Moffatt I only know that he is in the Colony of Connecticut, but in what Town he resides I cannot remember. You will be able to find them both, & I should be much obliged to you if you will convey my letters to them & to Mr Ingersol by private Hands, when you have Opportunities. I am happy at the same time to accompany this Trouble with my sincere Congratulations on the Alliance you have lately made, & which I find to be perfectly agreeable to your Family thro' all its Branches here. I shall soon too, I hope have it my power to follow these with other Compliments on your Appointment to an Office, of which in my last, of 24th Febr'y, I doubted whether the Establishment would this year take place; but I understand now that a Board of Customs will be fix'd at Boston, to consist of five Commissioners, two of whom are to be the Surveyors General for the Northern Districts. I hope the Situation will be more agreeable to you than your present Employment, but in either you will have much to do, as the Measure of taxing America is now so generally & so strongly supported here, & the One Fund which the Stamp Act was intended to create being destroy'd, it must be supplied by a Multiplicity of others, most of which will be import Duties. Many are at present under Consideration, such as Duties upon Wine, Oil, Fruit, Raisins & Currants, allowing the Carriage of them at the same Time to be direct from the Places of their Growth to America. A Salt Tax is also talk'd of, with a Drawback upon such as shall be used in the Fisheries. A Tonnage upon Shipping is another; but all of these, I suppose, will not take place at once; & which of them will be laid this year is not yet absolutely settled; but will be

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in a very few days, when the plan of Administration for ye Colonies will be laid before Parliament. Nothing has yet been done in either House; but in the House of Lords a Motion was made for an Address to submit to his Majesty's Consideration the proper Proceeding to be held in regard to the Act of Indemnity annexed to the Act of Compensation by the Assembly of Massachusetts Bay. I can hardly say who spoke of it with the most Indignation, & none attempted to vindicate it ; but the Ministers opposed y mode of taking Notice of it in an Address, because they said that it seem'd to reflect a Suspicion on the King's Servants, as if they could be wanting in their Duty, which they understood to be to advise the Crown to Disallow it. The Answer to this Objection was that the Inexpediency of an Act of Assembly was alone a sufficient Reason for Disallowing it; but the Illegality of this Act required more than a meer Reversal. That it was an Encroachment on the Prerogative; an Infringement of the Constitution: an Usurpation of Powers which neither House of Parliament pretended to exercise, for that the Power of Pardon was rested solely in the Crown; the Lords nor the Commons never attempted to indemnify without the Concurrence of the Crown; & that Concurrence could not be had to this Act of Assembly; for the Governor was only a Corporation Magistrate & not the King's Representative in the Province of Massachusetts Bay. That in Virginia, after Bacon's Rebellion, the Assembly there having passed such an Act of Indemnity, the Privy Council declared it null; & in the stead of it, sent over an Act ready drawn up & under the Great Seal, with Orders to the Assembly to pass it, & it is now in their Statute Book. That this should be treated in the same manner: & the rather because a meer Reversal would answer no purpose whatsoever; for that a Criminal once pardon'd is pardon'd for ever. The Grace cannot be recalled if it had been ever granted, & that therefore if this Act of Indemnity should be admitted to have existed a Moment as a legal Act, all the purposes intended by it would be obtain'd, & all the operations design'd by the Reversal would be defeated. The previous question was carried for the reasons I have given ;

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but as the Principles held by those who were for ye Motion were not controverted, I make no Doubt that the Measure suggested by them of declaring ye Act null & void ab initio will be adopted. In the Course of this & other Debates many Reflections have been drop'd upon past Transactions, & upon the present State of Affairs in America. The Distinction between internal and external Taxes frequently occurs, not now as a Subject of Debate, but a matter of reproach to those who maintain'd last year that Parliament had not a Right to lay the former as well as the latter. I told you in my last that that Doctrine was then always call'd nonsensical; It has been since said to be criminal and treasonable: & they who defended it then, disclaim it now, by alledging that the Declaratory Act has put an end to the Question, & determin'd the law. I overpower you with Politicks: if I do, you must blame your American brethren here who assure me that no subject from hence can be more interesting, & to you who are in a publick office it is indeed to a degree a personal concern. Your brother is almost my next door neighbour, & a very good one. He makes however frequent excursions into the country, which has more Charms to him than London, & has lately been to Newmarket races, where I thought his love & knowledge of horses would have found amusement; but his honest soul was so shocked at the scene of gaming & profligacy he saw there, that he is return'd determin'd to oppose every attempt that shall ever be made to introduce regular horse races at Boston. You will be so kind as to present my compliments to Mr Oliver & my other Friends on your side the Great Lake, & to believe me Ever yours.

Thomas Whately

A paper currency under Government Security is amongst other things now under consideration.