Chapter 6
The Limits of Imperial Control, 1763–1775

Learning Objectives:

After reading Chapter 6, you should be able to:

1. Explain the different challenges to expansion that Spain faced at the hands of the other European powers.
2. Discuss the expansion of the British Empire and what challenges were encountered.
3. Detail the problems England faced after the Seven Years’ War and what steps Parliament took to correct the economy.
4. Relate a timetable of events demonstrating the breakdown of relations between the colonies and the English Crown.
5. Discuss the colonial boycott of English imported goods and how the Crown reacted.
6. Explain colonial mob violence and the progression of events leading to warfare.

Time Line:

1741
Vitus Bering claimed Alaska for Russia

1760
French forces surrendered to British at Montreal in final skirmish of the Seven Years’ War

1763
Spain acquired Louisiana from France
Britain acquired Florida from Spain
Pontiac’s Uprising, Detroit

1764
Parliament passed the American Duties Act of 1764, also known as the Revenue Act or the Sugar Act
Parliament passed the Currency Act of 1764

1765
Parliament passed the Quartering Act
Stamp Act passed, resulting in the dissenting Stamp Act Congress in New York
1766
Louis Bougainville made first French circumnavigation of the world
Parliament repealed the Stamp Act, passed Declaratory Act, Revenue Act of 1766

1767
Parliament passed Revenue Act of 1767, Customs Act of 1767

1768
Massachusetts legislature, led by Samuel Adams, petitioned the king for redress of colonial complaints
Massacre of St. George’s Field, London

1769
Spain established an outpost at San Diego Bay on the California coast

1770
Townsend Duties repealed save for the one on tea
Boston Massacre

1772
Gaspee Affair

1773
Committees of Correspondence formed in 11 colonies
Tea Act of 1773
Boston Tea Party

1774
Four Coercive Acts passed by Parliament to punish Massachusetts:
   -Administration of Justice Act
   -Boston Port Act
   -The Quartering Act
   -Massachusetts Government Act
also passed Quebec Act; all five together constituted the Intolerable Acts
Minutemen formed
First Continental Congress

1775
Spain populated San Francisco Bay area
Second Continental Congress
Battles of Lexington and Concord
“Shot heard ‘round the world”
Chapter Overview

As the European empires of Spain and Britain struggled with acute growing pains, American colonists bridled at imperial controls. The English Crown attempted to force the colonies to pay for themselves while colonists lashed out at the arbitrariness of central authority. By the 1770s, events began to spin out of control, carrying the American colonies towards revolution.

I. New Challenges to Spain’s Expanded Empire

With the vexing problem of refuting French claims to Louisiana settled, the Spanish regained nominal control of the American interior from the Mississippi to the Pacific Ocean. Tribes still controlled the land in reality, however, and it became clear that other nations remained interested in the region. Increasing problems with Russian, French, and British naval and trade expeditions along the Pacific coast prompted Spain to expand her mission/presidio system northward along the California coast.

A. Pacific Exploration, Hawaiian Contact

Burdened with a crushing war debt after the loss of the Seven Years’ War, the French looked to the South Pacific for other sources of revenue. In 1766, Antoine de Bougainville set out to search for new territory; while unsuccessful, he became the first Frenchman to circumnavigate the globe.

Always competitive, the British sent out their own series of explorers into the South Pacific. The most successful of these was James Cook, who came upon the populated Hawaiian Islands in 1778. The natives mistook the captain for a deity and welcomed him and his crew for an extended stay. A return visit in 1779 was not as successful; an angry crowd of Hawaiians killed Cook and four of his crew.
B. The Russians Lay Claim to Alaska

Using successful tactics developed in Siberia, Russian trappers used a combination of conquest and ransom to coerce Aleutian Islanders and Alaskan native peoples to hunt. In 1799, the czar gave the Russian-American Company exclusive rights to this trade. With strong outposts in Alaska, which had been claimed for Russia by Vitus Bering, the Russian-American Company worked south toward California, exploiting local trade opportunities and seeking appropriate climate and farmland to grow staples for the Alaskan trading posts. By 1812, Fort Ross, just north of San Francisco, became the southernmost Russian fort.

C. Spain Colonizes the California Coast

Franciscan priests established scattered Indian missions between San Diego and San Francisco. These settlements remained small, isolated, and difficult to supply. Provisioning by sea was not very successful, so Spanish expeditions sought for many years for a dependable overland route. By doing so, Spain was accumulating solid legal grounds for claiming the land. This might have been enough to prevent encroachment by the powerful British, but it was not tested by war. The tiny California settlements endured, and Spain continued to exercise some control over its expanded American empire.

II. New Challenges to Britain’s Expanded Empire

The peace at the end of the Seven Years’ War, which brought wealth to a few and misery to many, produced growing tensions between colonial conservatives who enjoyed the rewards of the English class system and the majority of colonists who struggled to make ends meet. Some of the wealthy, ambitious young men sought another way to power by decreasing their distance from the lower class. During the next decade, the uncertain coalition between working men and these wealthy young men strengthened as their sense of a separate American identity developed into a new vision of America free from British rule.

A. Midwestern Lands and Pontiac’s War for Indian Independence

On the frontier, the Delaware holy man, Neolin, and the influential Ottawa warrior, Pontiac, forged a coalition of Ottawas, Potawatomies, and Hurons, and attacked Fort Detroit and Fort Pitt. Eighteen other Indian nations joined the coalition to drive the British out of the native homelands. Britain lost all remaining forts in the Ohio Valley and Great Lakes region, and tribes raided eastward into Pennsylvania and Virginia. Settlers responded with indiscriminate racial killing.

British General Amherst ordered a war of extermination, using all means available, including the intentional spreading of smallpox using contaminated blankets. Unable to win the siege when their ammunition ran out, the Indian coalition slowly collapsed. English losses were so significant
that the Crown forbade settlement west of the Appalachian Range to avoid further warfare. This so-called Proclamation Line of 1763 served mostly to anger upper class Virginians who made their living as land speculators. Additional treaties in following years only heightened the animosity of whites towards Indians.

B. Grenville’s Effort at Reform

During the 1760s, England tried to develop better control over the American colonies, where tax evasion had become a way of life. England’s war debt after the Seven Years’ conflict was staggering and as the post-war economic depression deepened, England looked to its colonies for increased revenue. Parliament, under the leadership of Robert Grenville, passed new customs regulations and tax laws to help pay the expenses incurred in defending the colonies and to turn a modest profit.

The ministers were not anticipating a powerful reaction from the colonies to these measures, which began with the American Duties Act (increased duties on colonial products), followed closely with the Currency Act of 1764 (prohibited colonies from printing money), as well as a Quartering Act (compelled colonists to assist the British Army).

C. The Stamp Act Imposed

Grenville’s most weighty reform, the Stamp Act (1765) was a complex measure of statutes requiring taxation stamps on a wide variety of articles sold in the colonies. This could include legal contracts and commissions, land deeds, liquor licenses, slave contracts, academic degrees, playing cards, and dice.

Designated colonial agents assigned by the Crown were intended to sell these stamps at a profit for themselves; however, the bulk of the revenue was intended for a separate account earmarked for the financial administration of America. Parliament was very pleased with this measure, which most ministers viewed as moderate and exceedingly fair. Better yet, revenue would grow with the colonial population since everyone used the taxed items from time to time.

D. The Stamp Act Resisted

American demonstrations against the Stamp Act were immediate and violent. Patrick Henry’s speeches set a philosophical precedent for self-taxation. Massachusetts called for a Stamp Act Congress of the colonies to be held in New York to beg relief from Parliament. Angry mobs determined the names of stamp distributors and harassed them aggressively, often forcing their resignation before the hated stamps even arrived from England. A few of these mobs began to organize and inflame the tempers of others. The most violent riot occurred in Boston, where Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson’s house was looted and vandalized. South Carolina workers harassed wealthy slave owners with demands for liberty. However, when blacks took
up the cry of liberty, white support for the demonstrations evaporated, lest white protests should fuel slave revolts.

III. “The Unconquerable Rage of the People”

A. Power Corrupts: An English Framework for Revolution

When discussions in England over the nature of monarchy turned to abuse of or the rise of tyranny, the assumption was that the empowerment of Parliament during the Glorious Revolution had ended these fears, yet constant vigilance was needed to protect citizens’ rights.

Englishmen congratulated themselves on having achieved the perfect balance of government. Ancient Greek political theorist Aristotle lent supporting evidence. However, a few dissenting voices in England published broadsides on the injustice of the patronage system for civil servants, a system rife with corruption. Although these writers were largely ignored in Britain, their message fell on eager ears in the colonies, where such discussions generated alarm and heated debate among those who saw class tyranny and malfeasance of office already evident in America.

B. Americans Practice Vigilance and Restraint

Fearing that every individual act of corruption represented a dangerous precedent, American colonists felt they must be alert if circumspect. First, all legal means of appeal and redress must be utilized. Even if forced to the streets, crowds should be orderly and threaten property before people. In the main, protests against the Stamp Act showed this restraint.

C. Rural Unrest: Tenant Farmers and Regulators

After 1765, local unrest seemed to explode in the more rural areas where most of the colonists lived. Numerous examples of uprisings are archived, all of which had to be suppressed by British troops. Tenant farmers seemed to carry the most anger, since taxation and the Stamp Act had hit them the hardest, and those with little have not much to lose.

Violence shook the Carolina Piedmont, where lawlessness ruled scant miles from the inhabited coast. In inland North Carolina, a corrupt elite developed with the fledgling circuit court system, an elite connected with political and financial muscle farther east and north. Appointed to various posts by the colonial governor, this elite seemed intolerable and self-serving to newcomers from Virginia and Pennsylvania.

These newcomers, in search of fertile land, grew in number and banded together to speak out for better representation for the backcountry areas in the colonial assemblies. They began organizing into groups called Regulators. Their worst suspicions about the corruption of government were confirmed with the news that public funds would go to build a stately mansion for the colonial
governor. Colonials like the Regulators would bear the cost of this mansion but few would ever see its location far east on the coast. Hundreds of backcountry families joined the growing Regulator movement in protest of this betrayal of the public wealth. In 1771, the governor finally called out a thousand men of the colonial militia and sent them into the Piedmont. Leaders of the Regulators were hanged and the majority of members were forced to sign loyalty oaths.

IV. A Conspiracy of Corrupt Ministers?

Class and religion continued to divide the colonists, sometimes leading to armed conflict. The biggest diversion to the infighting was the colossal corruption of the English government. Reflective colonists had to wonder if there existed a conspiracy against them and the few liberties they retained.

A series of weak ministries in London followed the administration of Grenville; however, Parliament was still keen on the colonial taxation issue. After repeal of the Stamp Act, the first outrage issued was the Revenue Act of 1766, which restructured the duty schedule for molasses. Grumbling, the colonists paid the duty, skeptically aware that doing so continued to set dangerous precedents.

They were correct, for Parliament was encouraged to impose additional hard-line measures, crafted by England’s Chancellor of the Exchequer, Charles Townsend, in 1767. Taxation without representation was now a colonial reality.

A. The Townsend Duties

As always, the royal government was low on funds, prompting Townsend to initiate the first of the duties that bear his name. The Revenue Act of 1767 created new duties on imports to the colonies such as glass, paint, lead, paper, and tea. Proceeds were again earmarked for the administration of justice and support of the colonial civil government.

Colonial skeptics knew that administration of justice really meant license to search American shops and homes with hateful “writs of assistance” to uncover smuggled goods. “Support of civil government” actually meant that corrupt colonial administrators could draw arbitrary paychecks directly from the duties paid by colonists instead of relying on a system of local oversight.

Similar acts and outrages followed. Parliament directed colonial governors, now being paid directly from tax and duty funds, to ignore any colonial legislative measure regarding control of how members were chosen. The Customs Act of 1767 established a separate Board of Customs for all of British North America; with its new headquarters disquietingly near in Boston instead
of London, the British would now have their fingers firmly on the pulse of American commerce. Several other Parliament actions strengthened the royal government’s presence in the colonies and assured that the flow of revenue back to England would continue.

While most English subjects looked upon these Acts as efficient signs of good government, the colonists were outraged at the growing mountain of regulations set upon them. In 1768, the Massachusetts legislature, led by Samuel Adams, formally petitioned the king for redress of their complaints, prompted other colonial legislatures to do the same, and in a provocative “Circular Letter,” condemned the hated Townsend Duties as taxation without representation.

Although emotions were high, colonial leaders managed to control most outbreaks of mob violence. Instead, they initiated a series of British boycotts, appealing to colonial self-sufficiency and non-violent protest.

The effects of the boycotts proved damaging to the British, who began losing more in trade than was being made in duties. Wealthy English traders began pressuring Parliament for some relief, and in 1770, they were forced to repeal all the Townsend duties save the one on tea. This action defused the colonial boycotts but continued to confirm Parliament’s right to tax the colonies at will.

B. The Boston Massacre

Tensions continued to mount in the colonies during 1768, especially in Boston where a reinforced garrison of British regulars kept order. According to revolutionary beliefs, any appearance of a standing army in peacetime meant danger, and the issue of how to feed and house 4,000 unwanted soldiers became an inflammatory one.

In 1770, the tension reached a zenith. When a hostile crowd threatened a British informer, he fired back, killing an eleven-year-old boy. A subsequent funeral brought multitudes of colonists into the streets for demonstrations. This became the pattern for days to come, and it was clear to all that confrontation was unavoidable. A tense standoff on March 5, outside the Boston customs house, resulted in the deaths of five colonists at the hands of the British soldiers. The anti-British cause had gained its first martyrs.

C. The Gaspee Affair

As the 1770s wore on, Bostonians made a point of commemorating “Massacre Day” each year. The continued presence of the British troops and corrupt and overzealous customs officials helped fuel resentment of the British.

In June, 1772 the Gaspee, a customs boat rumored to harass local shipping, ran aground near Pawtucket, Rhode Island. That night, more than a hundred raiders rowed out to the stranded vessel, drove off its crew, and set her afire.
This incident renewed bitter relations between England and the colonies. The crown demanded an investigation of the incident and extradition of the accused to England. The investigation went nowhere; many of the raiders came from influential Rhode Island families and local citizens were loathe to become informants in a process that denied the accused fundamental judicial rights. Committees of Correspondence were created in most colonial legislatures to serve as watchdogs against further infringement of rights.

V. Launching a Revolution

In 1767, before the inception of the Townsend duties, the colonies had imported 870,000 pounds of tea. Subsequent boycotts cut this amount to 110,000 pounds as colonists turned to smuggling or making root-based teas. Retraction of the boycotts in 1770 led to the resumption of the colonial purchase of English tea, although a duty remained in effect. Encouraged by these developments, the British government made plans to bail out the failing East India Company by liquidating the 18 million pounds of unsold tea in London warehouses.

A. The Tempest over Tea

In May, Parliament passed The Tea Act of 1773, which let the struggling East India Company bypass the costly requirement that all colonial imports had to come through England first. Any warehoused tea earmarked for the colonies would have its English duties refunded.

The company recruited a few local colonists to handle and distribute a planned 600,000 pounds of tea, for which they would be awarded 6 percent. The Sons of Liberty and other revolutionary groups vowed to keep the British tea ships from docking at colonial harbors, protesting the British insistence on taxation without representation.

In Boston, where tensions ran especially high in light of the Boston Massacre of five years past, the royal governor was determined to dock three approaching British ships heavy with British tea. As private firearms were scarce, the governor anticipated little need for force in unloading and distributing the tea cargo.

On December 16, following a prearranged plan, 150 men disguised as Indians with war hatchets marched to the docks and boarded the ships. As most of the citizenry looked on, these “Indians” spent most of the evening systematically breaking open the many chests of tea and dumping them overboard into the harbor. This act became a unifying event in the colonies and spurred similar acts of defiance against the British.
B. The Intolerable Acts

Parliament responded to the Boston Tea Party with measures meant to punish the city and assert English authority. General Gage, the commander of colonial British forces, replaced Governor Hutchinson as governor, effectively placing Massachusetts under martial law. In 1774, Parliament published the Coercive Acts—four statutes directed squarely at Massachusetts. The Boston Port Act enclosed Boston in a naval blockade until the cost of the ruined tea was paid off. The Administration of Justice Act allowed extradition of British citizens (such as those soldiers involved in the Boston Massacre) to other colonies or to England.

The Quartering Act gave British officers extended powers to commandeer living quarters and supplies for troops throughout the colonies. Finally, the Massachusetts Government Act removed certain democratic rhetoric from the Massachusetts Charter of 1691. Colonists would now have to obtain written permission from the colonial governor to have town meetings. Parliament went further, issuing the Quebec Act the same year; this measure vastly increased the official size of the Canadian holdings of England, effectively nullifying the claims of the colonies to western lands. Taken together, the Quebec Act and the Coercive Acts were known in the colonies as the Intolerable Acts, and ushered in a new phase of open rebellion against the Crown. Pamphlets were issued throughout the continent condemning the British and publicizing the plight of the Massachusetts colonists.

Within a few months, Massachusetts called for a congress of all the colonies, establishing its own revolutionary base in Concord, 17 miles from Boston. This base, known as the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, reorganized the local militia into loyal units ready to respond quickly to General Gage’s repeated attempt to confiscate colonial gunpowder. This militia became known as the Minutemen.

C. From Words to Action

Extralegal organizations, representing a broad spectrum of political stances, began to vie for power in hundreds of colonial villages. Boycotts of English products continued in earnest and widespread support developed for Massachusetts’ call for a unified congress. In 1774, all colonies except Georgia participated in the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia. This Congress managed to produce a Declaration of Rights and passed a range of measures that seemed a compromise of the wide convictions of the 56 delegates.

Most important, the delegates signed an agreement to resist British imports and halt all exports to London save for rice. They adjourned, calling for a Second Congress in 1775. Just before the date of the Second Congress, General Gage received orders from his English superiors to arrest the leaders of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress using any means at his disposal.

On April 18, 1775, Gage ordered a full regiment of English troops to row across the Charles River at night, march ten miles overland to Lexington, and there seize John Hancock and Sam
Adams. Next, the soldiers were to march the seven miles to Concord to capture the colonial military supply depot.

Alerted by lanterns from the Old North Church, riders Paul Revere and William Dawes hurried along separate routes to Lexington to warn Hancock and Adams. By the time the English regulars arrived in Lexington, seventy Minutemen stood against them on the town green. Firing, the British felled eight militiamen in the skirmish.

The British column then turned west to Concord and searched for the military supplies concealed there. Four hundred Minutemen advanced from the overlooking hillside. At the small bridge over the Concord River, the British opened fire with “the shot heard ‘round the world.” The colonists returned fire and by noon caused the exhausted British to retreat with 73 killed and 100 wounded. The Americans—losing 49 men—had handed the British their first colonial defeat.

**Identification**

*Explain the significance of each of the following:*

1. Louis Antoine de Bouganville:

2. James Cook:

3. Vitus Bering:

4. *promyshlenniki*:

5. The Russian-American Company:

6. Alexander Baranov:

7. Jose de Galvez:

8. Father Garces:

9. The Yuma Revolt:
10. Neolin:

11. Pontiac:

12. General Thomas Gage:

13. The Proclamation Line of 1763:

14. Robert Grenville:

15. American Duties Act of 1764:

16. The Currency Act of 1764:

17. The Stamp Act:

18. Exchequer:

19. Patrick Henry:

20. The Stamp Act Congress:

21. The Sons of Liberty:

22. Thomas Hutchinson:

23. Declaratory Act of 1766:
24. The Massacre of St. George’s Field

25. Levellers:

26. Regulators:

27. Tyron’s Palace:

28. Revenue Act of 1766:

29. The Townsend Duties:

30. The Boston Massacre:

31. The Boston Tea Party:

32. The Intolerable Acts:

33. Minutemen:

34. Concord, Massachusetts:

35. Paul Revere:
Multiple Choice Questions:

1. The goal of the Stamp Act of 1765 was to
   A. raise money to modernize the British navy.
   B. build cooperation with the colonial merchant class.
   C. raise money for the defense of the colonies.
   D. better control the colonial bureaucracy.
   E. none of the above.

2. The Virginia Resolves authored by ____________ rejected Parliament's right to levy taxes on the Virginia colony.
   A. George Wythe
   B. Thomas Jefferson
   C. Richard Henry Lee
   E. Patrick Henry

3. The repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766 was accompanied by
   A. a declaratory act that reaffirmed Parliament's prerogatives.
   B. a ban on the slave trade.
   C. an end to the whisky tax.
   D. religious restrictions on Catholics.
   E. a call for peaceful negotiation.

4. Colonial leaders borrowed many of their ideas about power and government from the
   A. “Real Whigs.”
   B. Native Americans.
   C. Ancient Greeks.
   D. Russians.
   E. none of the above.

5. Trenchard and Gordon's *Cato's Letters*:
   A. explained the official position of the British government.
   B. influenced American radicals with its critique of power.
   C. inspired the Stamp Act.
   D. offered a new plan of democratic government.
   E. was a defense of the slave trade.
6. The “Levelers” of the Hudson Valley were
   A. real estate speculators.
   B. political intriguers in the New York Assembly.
   C. merchants angry about the Stamp Act.
   D. angry tenant farmers.
   E. French traders.

7. The author of “Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania” was
   A. Patrick Henry.
   B. Charles Townshend.
   C. John Dickinson.
   D. Benjamin Franklin.
   E. William Penn, Jr.

8. The Townsend Duties were
   A. a guarantee of trial by jury.
   B. wildly greeted by colonial legislatures.
   C. the treaty that ended the Seven Years’ War.
   D. a list of responsibilities for English citizens.
   E. taxes on lead, glass, paint, and tea.

9. The repeal of the Townsend Duties ended all of those taxes except the tax on
   A. glass.
   B. lead.
   C. tea.
   D. paper.
   E. whisky.

10. The so-called Intolerable Acts included
    A. the Tea Act.
    B. a Religious Toleration Act.
    C. a Non-Importation Act.
    D. the Boston Port Act.
    E. all of the above.

MAP QUESTION:

Look at Map 6.3, specifically the numerous keys marked “British forts seized during Pontiac’s Rebellion in 1763.” Under the prophet Neolin, interior tribes united to remove the British colonists from tribal lands. Why was the attempt unsuccessful?
CONNECTING HISTORY

Protest tactics are numerous and show up often in the study of history. What protest tactics have been covered in the news recently? Are they much different from those of the past? Which seem to be most effective? What type of protest would you consider too radical for your own participation?

INTERPRETING HISTORY

Explain why Tyron Palace generated such outrage from this group of “Regulators.”

Answers to Multiple Choice Questions

1. C
2. E
3. A
4. C
5. B
6. D
7. C
8. E
9. C
10. D