



# The Second Continental Congress

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The First Continental Congress  
The French and Indian War  
Life in the Original 13 Colonies  
**The Second Continental Congress**  
The Signers of the Declaration of  
Independence

Stamp Act Congress  
The Story of the Declaration of  
Independence  
An Overview of the American  
Revolution

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King George III was the King of England before, during, and after the Revolutionary War. After the American colonies were lost, George's popularity fell. In 1788, George suffered through an episode of insanity. He eventually recovered but had recurrences of the illness for the rest of his life. He is often called "Mad King George."

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## Stamp Acts and Tea Parties

Sometimes the **sequel** to a movie or book is not nearly as good as the original. That wasn't the case when the Second Continental Congress met in 1775, less than a year after the First Continental Congress had adjourned. As it turned out, there was even more excitement for the Second Congress and more than enough originality. The sequel to the First Continental Congress gave birth to the United States.

In 1775, the American colonies had existed under British rule for many years. For almost that entire time, the colonies and Great Britain got along just fine. Britain set some restrictions on the colonies and charged certain taxes. However, they hadn't made much of an effort to enforce the restrictions or collect the taxes.

Everything began to change after the French and Indian War ended in 1763. Though Britain won the conflict, it was deeply in debt for the costs of the fighting. King George III and the British Parliament decided that the American colonies should help pay this debt.

Most Americans were loyal to their king and mother country. But when the king and Parliament began to pass

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new taxes and trade **restrictions**, the colonists grumbled, complained, and protested.

### Stamp Act

The best-known of these new taxes was the Stamp Act. Passed by Parliament in March 1765, the Stamp Act required that colonists purchase special stamps for all legal documents and a variety of other printed materials. Specially appointed collectors would sell these stamps.

Historian Edmund Cody Burnett wrote of the Stamp Act, “A big lump of fat had been thrown into the fire, with the result that there was soon much sizzling.”<sup>1</sup> Protests broke out in the colonies. In October 1765, representatives of nine colonies met in New York for the Stamp Act Congress. The representatives agreed that Parliament was taxing the colonies without the colonies having any say in the matter.

The Act was supposed to go into effect November 1, 1765, but colonists staged public demonstrations against it. On that day stamp collectors stayed home, and there were barely any stamps for sale.

Meanwhile, Parliament was rethinking its strategy. In January 1766 it **repealed** the Stamp Act. At the same time, it voted to give itself supreme authority over the colonies. Parliament particularly wanted to control trade.<sup>2</sup>

Several years went by as Britain imposed first one restriction then another on the colonies’ trade. There were import duties on incoming goods and rules about where American raw materials and products could be exported.

### Boston Tea Party

The pot of simmering anger against all of these restrictions eventually boiled over in Boston in December 1773, when the Boston Tea Party took place. According to the



recently passed Tea Act, the East India Company would ship tea directly from India to the colonies to save on shipping costs. On paper it looked like tea would cost less. However, American merchants would pay new taxes on the tea. Parliament also gave the East India Company a **monopoly** on the tea trade in the colonies. They could raise prices any time they desired.<sup>3</sup>

Many colonists were already buying tea **smuggled** in from Holland and paying no taxes at all. Smuggled tea was cheaper. The prospect of higher prices was alarming.

The Sons of Liberty were a secret Boston organization of patriots. Samuel Adams led other members in dressing up as Indians and swarming aboard East India Company ships in Boston Harbor as they waited to be unloaded. The "Indians" dumped the tea overboard.<sup>4</sup>

Parliament fumed over this action and in spring of 1774 passed what the colonies called the **Intolerable** Acts. Many of these Acts carried harsh penalties for Massachusetts. Boston had to repay the East India Company for the tea

The destruction of the tea in Boston Harbor came to be called the Boston Tea Party. The British government was shocked by the actions of the colonists. King George III was determined to punish Boston and the whole colony of Massachusetts for this act.



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thrown overboard or the harbor would be closed even to fishing boats. Britain would take over governing Massachusetts, and colonists could be required to keep British soldiers in their homes.<sup>5</sup>

Boston refused to pay for the tea, and the harbor was closed on June 1. With the Stamp Act Congress in mind, colonial leaders decided to meet in Philadelphia. They hoped to find a solution to the problems in Boston. By late August, representatives of every colony except Georgia had made the trek to Philadelphia. They met in Carpenters' Hall on September 5 for the historic First Continental Congress.

### **First Continental Congress**

Independence was not on the minds of the delegates. Many of them even thought that Boston should pay for the tea. But most also thought that the closing of Boston Harbor and the other Intolerable Acts were too harsh. They wanted fair treatment for Boston and the other colonies. They wanted freedom to trade with other countries. Above all they wanted British General Thomas Gage to take his thousands of troops out of Boston.

The delegates believed that a reasonable approach to King George and Parliament would cause the British to repeal the Intolerable Acts. Britain had backed down about the Stamp Act. Maybe they would do the same for these acts.

The First Continental Congress debated how to get Britain to repeal the Intolerable Acts. The delegates didn't agree much of the time. Though they were controlled by Britain, they had different problems and needs. Each one wanted to solve its own problems with Britain first.

By the end of October, the delegates had hammered out some compromises. Congress sent letters to citizens in Britain, Canada, and the colonies. These letters explained





Payton Randolph of Virginia was easily elected chairman, or president, of the First Continental Congress. However, there was much argument and debate over who should be secretary of the Congress. Charles Thomson of Pennsylvania was finally elected to that post.

the **grievances** that the delegates felt they had against Britain. The delegates signed a plan called the Continental Association that called for a boycott against British goods. The delegates labored and argued over a letter to King George. This letter spelled out the problems, and asked for the king's help to resolve the issues.<sup>6</sup>

The First Continental Congress adjourned on October 26, 1774. The delegates agreed that they would meet again on May 10 the following year if Britain hadn't solved the problems. Massachusetts delegate John Adams wrote in his diary on October 28, "It is not very likely that I shall ever see this Part of the World again, but I shall ever retain a most greatfull, pleasing Sense, of the many Civilities I have received, in it."<sup>7</sup>

It turned out that Adams would have every opportunity to receive many more civilities from Philadelphia in the years to come.

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