

# Hey, King: Get Off Our Backs!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



Patrick Henry

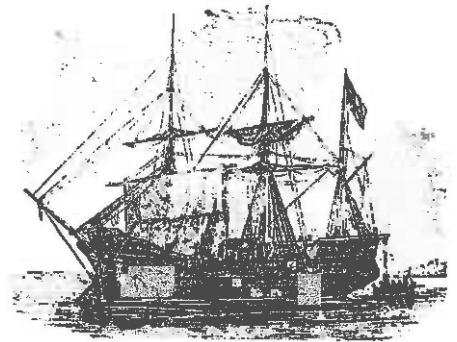
Give me liberty,  
or give me

Really? Was it that bad? By 1776, the American colonists living under English rule thought so. In fact, things were so bad that they went to war to gain their independence. But why? What could have been so intolerable?

The first Englishmen came to America four hundred years ago looking for gold, silver, and a waterway to Asia. They were part of a trading company that convinced the king of England to grant them a **charter** giving them permission to set up a colony in America. But they did not find what they were looking for. Times got so hard those first settlers had to eat rats and even each other to keep from starving to death. Pretty soon, though, more people arrived and times got better. The English were here to stay.

## Hail to the King

Back in England, the King probably figured he had a pretty good deal. Other people got seasick sailing across the ocean to settle an untamed land while he sat in his palace ruling England. Except that being king just wasn't what it used to be. Back in the 1200s, a king could really do what he wanted! But this was the 1600s, and now the English people had representatives in **Parliament** who made laws and stood up for peoples' rights. They even gave advice to the king. Bah!



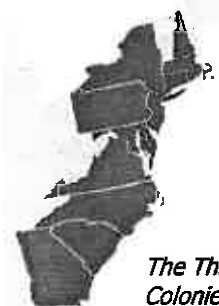
## You Don't Mind If We . . . Uh . . .

Govern ourselves, do you? In America, the colonists needed some kind of government to deal with everyday problems. After all, the king was on the other side of the ocean. And because of Parliament, the colonists were used to having a say in government. In Virginia Colony, the first settlers decided each community should have two representatives and that all the representatives would meet together. Farther north, in Plymouth, the colonists signed a **compact** agreeing to form a majority-rule government where all the men would vote on whatever issues came up. (Women didn't get to vote in 1620.) Even so, the king still controlled the colonies, and the colonists had to follow England's laws.

The House of Burgesses was the group of representatives in Virginia. The Mayflower Compact was the agreement the Plymouth colonists signed while they were still on board the Mayflower, before they set foot on dry land. Even then, they knew they would need a government!

## We're Doing Just Fine, Thanks

England had a lot of other colonies besides those in America and plenty of other problems to deal with. The king and Parliament didn't have much time to pay attention to the American colonists. By the mid-1700s there were 13 colonies, and each colony had its own government. These little governments grew stronger and more used to being in control. When problems came up, the colonial governments took care of things themselves. The colonists were out on their own, making their own decisions, governing things the way they wanted to without much interference.



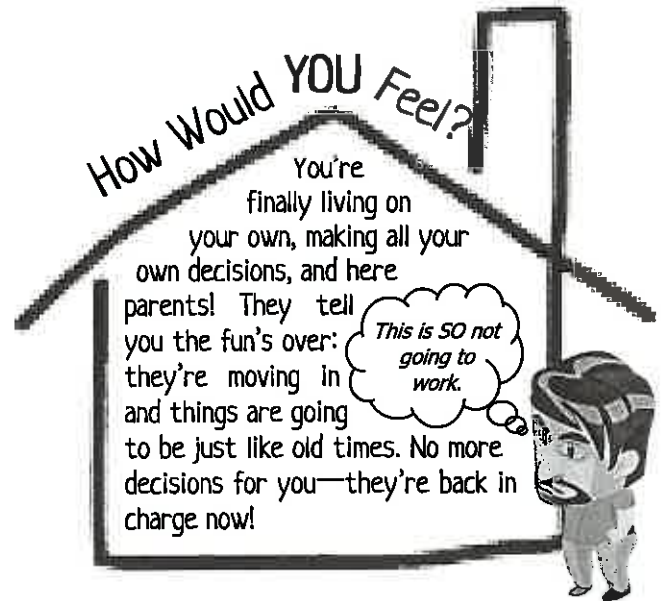
The Thirteen Colonies

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## A Raw Deal

But then times got tough, and the British government went looking for money. Great Britain, which now included both England and Scotland, saw its colonies around the world as a source of profit. Colonies were places to cut timber, grow crops such as cotton and coffee, and mine for valuable minerals. The king forced the colonists to sell these raw materials back to England at really cheap prices. People in England would use the materials to make finished products. But did the colonists get a bargain on these items because they provided the materials? No way! The king forced the colonists to buy the finished products at extra high prices.



Hmm... What about taxing the American



King George III



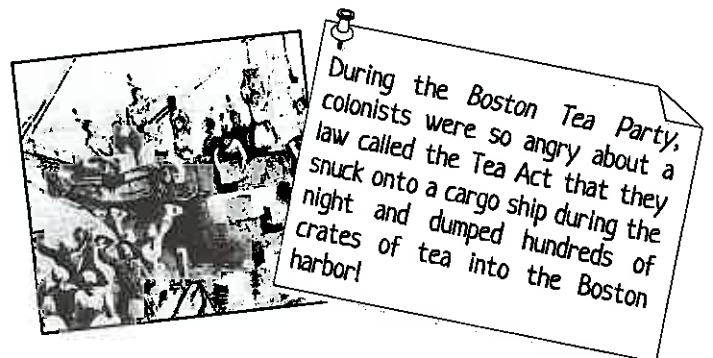
A Stamp

## Looking for a Fast Buck?

That was only the beginning. In the mid-1700's, Britain fought two expensive wars. Britain had taken out a lot of debt to pay for the war, so it went looking for a way to make money fast. Taxing the American colonists seemed like the perfect idea. So in 1765, Britain passed the **Stamp Act**, which forced colonists to put expensive tax stamps on all legal documents, as well as newspapers, calendars, and almanacs. The colonists had an answer for that: They quit buying British goods! But this *boycott* didn't work for long. Britain repealed the Stamp Act after one year, but things did not get better.

## From Bad to Worse

As soon as the Stamp Act was gone, the British passed the **Declaratory Act** saying that the colonies were dependent on the king and declaring that all laws passed in the colonies had no effect. As if that weren't bad enough, Britain also passed the **Townshend Revenue Act**, taxing things it knew the colonists couldn't make for themselves: paint, glass, paper, lead, and tea. This Act also allowed British government workers to search peoples' houses and even break down doors to seize items the homeowner hadn't paid taxes for. The **Quartering Acts** of 1765 and 1774 forced certain colonists to let British troops live in their houses. In the 1770s, a series of laws cracked down on rebellious activity in Massachusetts colony. Colonists called these the **Intolerable Acts**.



## Enough is Enough!

The colonists finally decided there was only one solution: Independence! On July 4, 1776, leaders of the colonies signed the Declaration of Independence, breaking ties with Britain. It wasn't that easy, though. There was the small matter of fighting a war against Britain to make that freedom real. When the Americans won the Revolutionary War, Britain lost all control of the colonies. The United States of America was born.

**PREAMBLE**

**NATURAL RIGHTS**

**GRIEVANCES**

**RESOLUTION OF INDEPENDENCE**

The king has refused to agree to laws that would benefit the people.

Our own governments have been abolished.

All men are created equal.

The king has caused fighting among the colonists.

Our trade with the rest of the world has been cut off.

We pledge our lives, fortunes, and honor in support of this Declaration of Independence.

Sometimes it becomes necessary for one group of people to cut ties with another group of people.

The king gets to decide whether the judges keep their jobs and how much they get paid.

New laws have taken away our right to a jury trial in many cases.

When government threatens peoples' natural rights, the people have the right to abolish it and make a new government.

We now cut all political connection with Great Britain.

The king has opened new government offices and sent "swarms of officers to harass our people."

The king has housed large numbers of troops in our communities

Government must get its power from the consent of the governed.

When one group of people decides to separate from another, they should explain why.

We declare that the colonies are and should be free and independent states.

Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are "unalienable rights."

The king has tried to keep people from coming to the colonies to live.

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**Fill In the Blank.** Look in the reading to find the missing piece of each sentence.

1. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a signed agreement.
2. The \_\_\_\_\_ Acts forced colonists to house British troops.
3. Britain saw its colonies as a source of \_\_\_\_\_.
4. If you sold a newspaper in 1765, you would have to put a \_\_\_\_\_ on it.
5. We celebrate the 4th of July because that's when the \_\_\_\_\_ was signed.
6. The Townshend Revenue Act allowed the government to \_\_\_\_\_ peoples' homes.
7. Virginia Colony's first government was called the \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The colonists had to follow the laws of \_\_\_\_\_.



**Odd One Out.** In each set, cross out the word that doesn't belong. In the oval, explain what the three remaining words have in common.

Glass  
Cotton  
Lead  
Tea

9.

Mayflower Compact  
Stamp Act  
Declaratory Act  
Quartering Act

10.

Minerals  
Timber  
Crops  
Paint

11.

Legal documents  
Newspapers  
Troops  
Calendars

12.

Boycott goods  
Search houses  
Fight a war  
Destroy tea

13.

**Cause and Effect.** Match each effect with its cause listed below.

## EFFECTS

- \_\_\_ 14. In the 1600s, the king could not just do what he wanted.
- \_\_\_ 15. The first colonists started their own governments.
- \_\_\_ 16. Colonists were used to having a say in government.
- \_\_\_ 17. Britain needed a way to make money.
- \_\_\_ 18. The colonists boycotted British goods.
- \_\_\_ 19. The British taxed paint, glass, and lead.
- \_\_\_ 20. The colonists declared independence.
- \_\_\_ 21. Britain lost control of the colonies.

## BECAUSE...

- A. They were angry about the Stamp Act taxes.
- B. The British government was too far away to deal with daily problems.
- C. They were tired of the way the British were treating them.
- D. He shared power with Parliament.
- E. The colonists won the Revolutionary War.
- F. They knew the colonists could not make those products themselves.
- G. In England, the Parliament represented people in government.
- H. It was in debt after fighting expensive wars.