DBQ 3: WHAT CAUSED THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION?

Historical Background

Too often, the seeds of future wars grow from the results of earlier wars. This certainly was true of the American Revolution.

The earlier conflict was the French and Indian War, which ended in 1763. Britain and its American colonies defeated the French and their Indian allies. This war was the last of a long series of colonial-era wars dating back to 1689. Britain and France fought these conflicts for control of Europe and of their colonies throughout the world. The French and Indian War (1754-1763) was the last of these conflicts. More than the earlier wars, it was waged over the control of North America. People in all the British North American colonies rejoiced at the British victory. In 1763, American colonists were proud to be part of the British Empire.

Yet in 1775, America and Britain were at war. How could Americans, in the space of only twelve years, go from celebrating their membership in the British Empire to waging war against Britain?

Directions: The following question is based on the documents (1–5) that follow. Before reading these documents, be sure to

1. Carefully read and think about the document-based question that follows these directions.

2. Ask yourself: What do I already know about this question and its topic? What did I learn from reading the Historical Background section? If I had to answer the document-based question without reading any of the documents, what would I say?

3. Take a few minutes to jot down the major things you already know about this topic and question. What important names, dates, events, and major ideas do you already know?

4. Now read each document carefully. Ask yourself: How does this document help to answer the document-based question? Underline things of special importance and jot notes in the margins. If you’re confused by or don’t understand a document, go on to the next one. Later, if you have time, you can go back.

5. Develop a thesis statement that directly answers the document-based question. You’ll want to state this thesis early in your essay.

6. Briefly outline your entire essay. Make sure that what you say in it supports and proves your thesis statement. In your essay, plan how you’ll use the information found in the documents and what you know already about this topic.

(continued)
DBQ 3: WHAT CAUSED THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION? *CONTINUED*

7. Carefully write your essay. As you include supportive information from documents, be sure to cite the sources of this information. This will add authority and credibility to what you’re saying.

**Question: What caused the American Revolution?**

**PART A**

The following documents will help you answer the document-based question. Read each document carefully. Answer the question or questions that follow each document.

**Document 1**

Wars cost huge sums of money. After decades of war against France, Britain was deeply in debt in 1763. The government desperately needed money. British leaders expected the American colonies to help pay. After all, these wars had been waged, in large part, to protect the Americans from the French and their Indian allies. Raising taxes on the American colonists to help raise the needed funds seemed (to the British leaders) to be only fair and just. Surely, they thought, the Americans would agree.

One of the first taxes imposed by the British Parliament was commonly known as the Stamp Act. It required American colonists to pay fees on all kinds of printed documents. This included legal documents, licenses, newspapers, pamphlets, diplomas, and even decks of playing cards. John Adams was a young lawyer in Braintree, Massachusetts. He wrote a resolution protesting the Stamp Act. Braintree and many other towns in Massachusetts approved this resolution. The following excerpts come from that resolution.

> ... the Stamp Act ... a very burdensome and, in our opinion, unconstitutional tax is to be laid upon us all.

> ... this tax [is] unconstitutional. We have always understood it be to a grand and fundamental principle ... that no ... man should be subject to any tax to which he has not given his own consent [by voting for those who pass such a tax].

Adams went on to protest the process by which the Stamp Act was supposed to be enforced. He described what would happen when someone was arrested and charged with violating the law:

*(continued)*
DBQ 3: WHAT CAUSED THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION? CONTINUED

In the . . . courts one judge presides alone! No juries [are allowed]. This part of the act [violates our liberties and] is directly [opposed to our rights as Englishmen].


Why were many American colonists outraged by the British Stamp Act?

______________________________

Document 2

American colonists protested the Stamp Act and boycotted British imports. They threatened violence against anyone who tried to collect the taxes. In response, Parliament repealed the Stamp Act in early 1766. Most American colonists rejoiced at this action. They felt proud again to be English subjects. But Americans were alarmed at an official statement approved by Parliament at the time that it repealed the Stamp Act. This statement was called the Declaratory Act. It said that the British Parliament had the power to

. . . make laws . . . to bind the colonies and people of America, subjects of the Crown of Great Britain, in all cases whatsoever.

What angered American colonists about the Declaratory Act?

______________________________

Document 3

The next year, 1767, Parliament passed a new series of taxes called the Townshend Acts. American colonists now had to pay taxes on a number of popular British goods that they imported from England. These included items such as tea, paints, glass, ink, and dyes. Though these taxes were actually quite small, the outcry from many American leaders was huge. John Dickinson was a leading member of Pennsylvania’s colonial government. He protested these taxes in a series of newspaper articles. The following excerpts come from those articles.

(continued)
DBQ 3: WHAT CAUSED THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION? CONTINUED

There is another . . . act of Parliament which appears to me to be unconstitutional, and destructive to the liberty of these colonies. . . .

Most colonists accepted Parliament's authority to regulate trade. But Dickinson and many other colonial leaders were angry that the primary purpose of these taxes was to raise revenue for the British government. Three years earlier, John Adams had protested this in his attack on the Stamp Act. Dickinson agreed. Taxing the American colonists to raise money for the British government was unconstitutional. It was, as Dickinson said:

A violation of our rights . . . to raise money upon us WITHOUT OUR CONSENT. . . .

Later in this article, Dickinson pleaded with his fellow American colonists:

... my dear countrymen, ROUSE yourselves, and behold the ruin hanging over your heads. If you . . . admit that . . . Britain may [tax] us, for the purpose of levying money . . . without our consent . . . [then] we are . . . slaves. . . .


Why, according to Dickinson, was it unconstitutional for Parliament to tax the colonists?

Reread the arguments used by Dickinson in Document 3 and Adams in Document 1. According to these arguments, who (or what) did have the constitutional authority to tax the colonists?

Document 4

Opposition to British rule continued to grow among the American colonists. To protest against the Townshend Acts, colonists refused to buy imported (and taxed) goods from Britain. Meanwhile, British officials grew angrier at American acts of rebellion. The British became more determined to enforce their authority over the

(continued)
colonists. In 1768, the British government sent several hundred British troops to Boston. This New England city was the center of the growing colonial unrest. The mission of the troops was to protect the tax collectors and other British officials. The people of Boston had seen British troops before. Soldiers had passed through the city on their way to fight, or coming back from fighting, the French and Indians. But these British troops stayed in Boston.

The colonists resented having British troops stationed in their city. Soon this resentment turned into anger and hatred. Occasional fights broke out between British soldiers and Americans—on the docks, in taverns, and on the streets. On the evening of March 5, 1770, a group of young men began pelting some British soldiers with snowballs and curses. A British officer and several soldiers came to the aid of their comrades. An angry crowd quickly assembled. More snowballs and curses, and now some cobblestones, flew at the soldiers. In the confusion, a scuffle broke out and the soldiers fired into the mob. They killed five Americans and wounded others.

The Sons of Liberty were a group of American colonists who favored independence from Britain. They labeled this unfortunate event the “Boston Massacre.” One of their leaders, Paul Revere, engraved a picture of the “Boston Massacre.” Hundreds of copies were printed. They were sent through all of the American colonies. These copies were reprinted in newspapers and posted on walls and trees. Thousands of people saw the image in the weeks that followed.
DBQ 3: WHAT CAUSED THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION? CONTINUED

How does this picture portray the British soldiers and the Americans? Who seems to be at fault? ___________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

Does the picture portray the event of March 5, 1770, as it’s described in the paragraph on the previous page? Explain. ___________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

Document 5

Tensions remained high during the months following the Boston Massacre. Growing numbers of colonists now favored independence from Britain. British officials became more convinced that they should counter colonists’ actions with tough responses.

Still, cooler heads could have prevailed. Colonists were again drinking tea imported from Britain. Further violence and rebellion might have been avoided if calm could have been maintained.

But then, in December 1773, a new crisis developed. Several months earlier Parliament had granted to the British East India Company the sole right to sell tea to the American colonies. This made it possible for the company to lower the cost of tea for colonists. Some Americans were pleased that they could now buy tea at such low prices. But many others saw this as a British trick. They thought it was aimed at getting them to buy more tea and thus pay more of the hated tea tax. The Sons of Liberty warned British officials not to allow ships loaded with tea to come to America. But some did. On December 16, a group of rebellious colonists in Boston boarded three of these ships, broke into the cargo holds, and dumped 300 cases of tea overboard. When news of this “Boston Tea Party” reached London, members of Parliament were outraged. They passed what came to be known in America as the Intolerable Acts. These laws closed the port of Boston. They also banned town meetings throughout Massachusetts.

The other American colonies sympathized with Boston. They united to support the city. Colonial leaders called for the meeting of a Continental Congress. It met in the late summer of 1774 in Philadelphia. The Congress considered how to respond to Parliament's actions. The following are excerpts from resolutions passed by the First Continental Congress in October 1774.

(continued)
DBQ 3: WHAT CAUSED THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION? CONTINUED

...the foundation of English liberty and of all free government is the right in the people to participate in their legislative council....

Resolved, That the following acts of Parliament are infringements and violations of the rights of the colonists; and that the repeal of them is... necessary in order to restore harmony....

...several acts... which impose [taxes] for the purpose of raising revenue...

...acts... for stopping the port and blocking the harbor of Boston... keeping [British troops] in several... colonies in time of peace without the consent of the legislature[s]....

The following year, in April 1775, war broke out. The American Revolution began.

According to the resolutions of the First Continental Congress, what brought the colonists to the brink of war with Britain in 1774?

PART B

Essay: What caused the American Revolution?