

## Revolution and New Nation Module

### Increasing Tension

Events had been building up to the Declaration for over a decade. At the end of the French & Indian War in 1763, most people assumed that the North American British Colonies were happy to be part of the British Empire. They were prospering under British rule. The people of the Colonies considered themselves the loyal subjects of the Crown. But after the French & Indian War, Britain initiated a whole series of policies and laws that from the colonists' perspective, changed the relationship that had existed between Britain and the Colonies.

Prior to the Stamp Act crisis of 1765, when Britain wanted money from the colonists, they would go to the colonies individually. In each of the 13 colonies, there was a legislature that was elected by the people and Britain would ask those legislators to pass taxes on the people of that particular colony that would then be submitted to England. After the French & Indian War, there was a change in British policy. The leaders in Britain, because they had gone into so much debt fighting the French & Indian War and the people in Britain itself were already heavily taxed, were looking for new sources of revenue. So they started making policies which involved Parliament passing taxes that were imposed on the colonists. And from the colonists' point of view, this was changing the rules of the game. Parliament was taxing them and they elected no members to Parliament. So from their point of view, they were being taxed without their consent.

From the point of view of Britain, Parliament legislated and passed taxes for the Empire as a whole. The colonists were represented virtually in Parliament even though they elected no particular representatives. The colonists feared that if they allowed any of these taxes passed by Parliament, then there would be one tax after another. They would be deprived of their property completely.

There was a substantial minority by 1774 or 1775 who already believed that it was impossible to remain in the British Empire and remain a free people. But the process of convincing larger numbers of people took more time. A key moment there was the publication in January of 1776 of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*. That pamphlet really reached out to large numbers of people and explained it in terms that they could understand why independence was necessary.

I think it needs to be understood in terms of the Order of July 1775. It's a document called a *Declaration of the Causes and Necessities for Taking Up Arms*. That was passed by the Continental Congress and that set up the Continental Army. That explains why the colonists are upset and I think it's very interesting to see what changed in their language. Jefferson wrote that as well, so I think it's really interesting to see why in 1775 they were willing to take up arms, but not declare independence and they were willing to do that a year later. In the 1775 document, they don't blame the King. They only blame Parliament and his ministers for these problems. And that's the big difference between 1775 and 1776.

And there's another document written by Jefferson in 1774 called a *Summary View of the Rights of British America*. That was not an official document of the Continental Congress, but it was issued as a pamphlet. That represents the thinking of the most radical of the delegates in 1774 who are already

anticipating independence and seeing why it was becoming increasingly untenable for the colonies to remain in the British Empire.