1. Stamp Act 1765

**Background:** The British government faced a large debt after the French and Indian War. To help pay for this debt, Prime Minister George Grenville proposed a new act, or law, called the Stamp Act. This law required colonists to buy a stamp for every piece of paper they used. Newspapers had to be printed on stamped paper. Licenses, wills, even playing cards had to have stamps. It wasn’t just the idea of higher taxes that upset the colonists. They were willing to pay taxes passed in their own assemblies, where their representatives could vote on them. But the colonists had no representatives in the British Parliament. For this reason, they argued, Parliament had no right to tax them. They saw the Stamp Act as a violation of their rights and declared, “No taxation without representation!” Some Loyalists protested the Stamp Act by refusing to buy stamps while others, the Patriots, took a more violent approach. Mobs of Patriots calling themselves the **Sons of Liberty** attacked tax collector’s homes. After months of protests, Parliament repealed, or canceled, the Stamp Act.

**Source:** Colonial protests and riots against the Stamp Act planted the seeds of independence that sprouted into the American Revolution a decade later. Benjamin Wilson, *The Repeal, or, the Funeral of Miss Ame-Stamp* (London, 1766).
2. Quartering Act 1765

*Background:* Parliament passed the Quartering Act in 1765 that required colonial assemblies to provide British troops with quarters, or housing. And if the soldiers outnumbered colonial housing, they would be quartered (housed) in inns, alehouses, barns, or other buildings. The colonists were also told to furnish the soldiers with “candles, firing, bedding, cooking utensils, salt, vinegar, beer and cider.” Providing for the soldiers cost money. About 1,500 British troops arrived in New York City in 1766, however, the New York Assembly refused to supply housing for the troops; the British troops were forced to remain on their ships. For failure to comply with the Quartering Act, Parliament prohibited the New York Assembly to meet, and prohibited the Governor from signing any new laws. The Governor of New York managed to convince Parliament that the Assembly had complied, and that they had begun spending money on quartering British troops. All other colonies, with the exception of Pennsylvania, circumvented (avoided) the Quartering Act.

*Source:* Passed in 1765, the Quartering Act made colonists provide housing and food for redcoats stationed in the area. This made colonists angry at troops and added to the growing unrest against the British.
3. Townshend Acts 1767

**Background:** Charles Townshend became the British leader and believed the colonists’ bad behavior made it even more important for the British to keep an army in America. He passed the Townshend Acts in 1767 to help pay for this army. The Townshend Acts place a duty, or a tax, on certain goods the colonies imported from Great Britain. These goods included such popular items as glass, paint, paper and tea. The colonists, again, were determined not to pay taxes that their assemblies had not voted on. A Boston Patriot named **Samuel Adams** led the opposition to the Townshend Act. Adams wrote a letter protesting the Townshend Acts that was sent to every colony. The letter argued the taxes violated the colonists’ rights. To protect those rights, the colonies decided to boycott British goods. Meanwhile, a new leader named Lord North became the head of the British government, and in 1770, realizing the taxes didn’t make up for all the money British merchants were losing because of the boycott, he persuaded Parliament to repeal all of the Townsend taxes, except for one – the tax on tea.

**Source:** A political cartoon representing the Townshend Act. Parliament eventually repealed the Townshend Acts, except for the tax on tea.
4. Boston Massacre 1770

*Background:* On March 5, 1770, a noisy mob began throwing rocks and ice balls at troops guarding the Boston Customs House. As the mob pressed forward, someone knocked a soldier to the ground. The troops panicked and opened fire. Two bullets struck Crispus Attucks, a black man at the front of the crowd. Three were killed immediately and two died later of their wounds. Sam Adams saw this event as an opportunity to rile anti-British feeling. He called the riot a “horrid massacre.” Paul Revere, a local Patriot and silversmith, engraved a famous picture of the event showing soldiers firing on peaceful, unarmed citizens. Loyalists saw this tragedy as proof that troops were needed in America more than ever, if only to control the Patriots. A lawyer named John Adams, cousin to Sam Adams, agreed to defend the soldiers, even though he was a Patriot. He argued the soldiers acted in self-defense. The jury found six of the soldiers not guilty. Two of them were found guilty only for manslaughter, or causing death without meaning to.

*Source:* This famous depiction of the event was engraved by Paul Revere. The Old State House is depicted in the background.
5. The Tea Act (1773)

CRISIS IN BRITAIN

In 1763, the British Empire emerged as the victor of the Seven Years’ War (1756-63), also known as the French and Indian War in America. Although the victory greatly expanded the empire’s territory, it also left it with a massive national debt [money that needs to get paid back], and the British government looked to its North American colonies as a great source of revenue [money].

Background: The Tea Act of 1773 was one of several measures imposed on the American colonists by the heavily indebted British government in the decade leading up to the American Revolutionary War. The act’s main purpose was not to raise revenue from the colonies, but instead to bail out the floundering [struggling] East India Company, a key actor in the British economy. If the country’s largest company could get back on its feet and thrive, the British government would have a good source of tax revenue! The British government granted the company a monopoly on the importation and sale of tea in the colonies. The colonists had never accepted the lawfulness of the duty [tax] placed on tea, and the Tea Act rekindled their opposition to it. Many colonists, in defiance, stopped drinking tea all together, and instead began drinking coffee. In fact, this is the origin of the popularity of coffee in America! The colonists continued to resist, which culminated in an outcome known as the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773.

**Background:** The Tea Act was Lord North’s attempt to rescue the British East India Tea Company. By 1773, the tea company was in danger of going broke unless it could sell off the 17 million pounds of tea sitting in its London warehouses. The *Tea Act* lowered the cost of tea sold by the British East India Company in the colonies. As a result, even taxed British tea became cheaper than smuggled Dutch tea. The Tea Act gave the British East India Company a monopoly (complete control) over tea. The colonists saw the Tea Act as another attempt to tax without their consent. When the British East India Company’s tea ships sailed into American ports, angry protestors kept them from unloading their cargoes. In Boston, the Royal Governor insisted that the ships unload their cargoes. December 16, 1773, the Sons of Liberty decided to unload the tea, but not in the way the Governor had in mind. That night, 50 men dressed as Mohawk Indians boarded the three ships, and threw 342 chests (about 90,000 pounds) of tea overboard. Colonists later called this event the Boston Tea Party.

**Source:** On the evening of December 16, 1773, the Sons of Liberty disguised as Mohawk Indians boarded three ships and dumped 342 chests of tea into the Boston Harbor. Of the many important Revolutionary events captured by Currier & Ives in their lithographs, The Destruction of Tea at Boston Harbor was one of the most popular.
7. Intolerable Acts 1774

**Background:** Great Britain’s anger over the Boston Tea Party led Parliament to pass a new series of laws to restore order in Massachusetts and punish Boston for their Tea Party. The Coercive Acts were a series of four acts established by the British government. These laws were so harsh that many colonists called them intolerable. The first of the “Intolerable Acts,” the Port Act, closed Boston harbor to all shipping until payment for the destroyed tea was made. In May, two additional Intolerable Acts forbade public meetings in Massachusetts unless approved by the Royal Governor, and transferred any trial of a British official accused of murder to England or another colony. And finally, more troops were sent to Boston to enforce these laws. However, the Intolerable Acts did not force the colonists to give in. Instead, Boston Patriots declared they would “abandon their city in flames” before paying a penny for lost tea. Many colonists sent food and money to Boston so that citizens would not starve. In Virginia, lawmakers called for a congress, or meeting, of delegates from all of the colonies. The purpose of the meeting was to find a peaceful solution to the conflicts with Great Britain.

**Source:** The Coercive Acts, also known as the Intolerable Acts. This series of laws closed the port of Boston to trade, limited colonial government, and more troops were sent to Boston to enforce laws. Engraving by Paul Revere depicting British troops landing in Boston in 1768.
8. First Continental Congress 1774

**Background:** In September 1774, some 50 leaders in 12 colonies met in Philadelphia. Georgia did not send delegates. Since the meeting brought together delegates from most of the British colonies on the North American continent, it was called the First Continental Congress. Patrick Henry, a leader from Virginia, urged the colonists to unite as Americans, not as citizens of separate colonies. “I am not a Virginian,” he declared, “but an American.” Many delegates were strong Loyalists who still thought of themselves as British. Despite their differences, the delegates agreed to send a respectful message to King George. The message urged the king to consider their complaints and recognize their rights. The delegates also agreed for a new boycott of British goods until Parliament repealed the Intolerable Acts. The Patriots appointed committees to enforce the boycott, and in case the boycott didn’t work, they organized local militias (small armies made up of ordinary citizens). In New England, a volunteer militia called themselves Minutemen because they could be ready to fight in 60 seconds. Rather than consider the colonists’ complaints, King George refused to even answer their message. “Blows must decide whether they are to be subject to this country or independent,” he said.

**Source:** Patrick Henry speaking to the First Continental Congress in 1774 urging them to unite as American, not as citizens in separate colonies. Painting by Jean Leon Gerome Ferris, 1895.
9. Lexington and Concord 1775

**Background:** In April 1775, a spy told General Gage, the king’s commander of the British troops in America, that colonists were hiding a large supply of gunpowder and weapons in a nearby village in Concord, Massachusetts. April 18, the general ordered 700 troops to march to Concord and seize the weapons. The colonists had their own spies, and when Gage’s troops marched covertly (secretly) that night, Paul Revere and others galloped through the countryside warning the colonist that the British were coming. The news reached Lexington, a town on the way to Concord. At dawn, the British reached Lexington, where Minutemen were waiting for them. A shot rang out – from where, no one knew for certain. When the fighting stopped, eight colonists lay dead or dying. The British cheered and moved onto Concord. In Concord, the colonists had already hidden the gunpowder and weapons the British were in search of. The militia Captain, Isaac Davis, marched his men toward Concord’s North Bridge to meet the British. The British opened fire, but Davis and his militiamen stood their ground. Surprised by the fury of the colonial attacks, the British fled in a panic. The retreat back to Boston was a nightmare for the British. More than 4,000 armed and angry militiamen lined their route, shooting at every redcoat they saw. By the end of the day, 74 British were dead and another 200 wounded or missing. The colonists suffered 49 losses and 41 wounded. Lexington and Concord proved that the colonists were willing to fight and die for their rights.

**Source:** *Concord Hymn* – Philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson’s famous poem about the North Bridge where Massachusetts farmers took aim at the British