

# It's a (tea) Party in the USA!

For about 100 years after the Spanish discovered the New World, Spain controlled most of the trade coming from and going to Europe from America. Toward the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there was a huge confrontation between the nations of Spain and England, with the British naval fleet defeating and sinking many of the Spanish ships. The Spanish empire was at an end, and the British Empire had begun.

## American Beginnings

While the Spanish had focused on settling South and Central America, the British and French had colonized North America, specifically the land east of the Mississippi River. For a long time, the 13 British colonies had enjoyed self-governing, which meant that they made their own laws. This also meant that they controlled all of the taxes that were charged for different things.

Different groups came to the American colonies for different reasons, and would then settle in a colony that made laws that favored their beliefs. For example, the colony of Maryland (Mary's land) was settled by Catholics, who were looking to get away from the way they were treated in England by the King. For hundreds of years, the King of England pretty much left his American colonies alone, but in the 1760's, things started to change.



The land marked "ceded" was given to the British by the French after the French and Indian War. France was not happy about this, but since they lost the war, they had to give the British what they asked for.

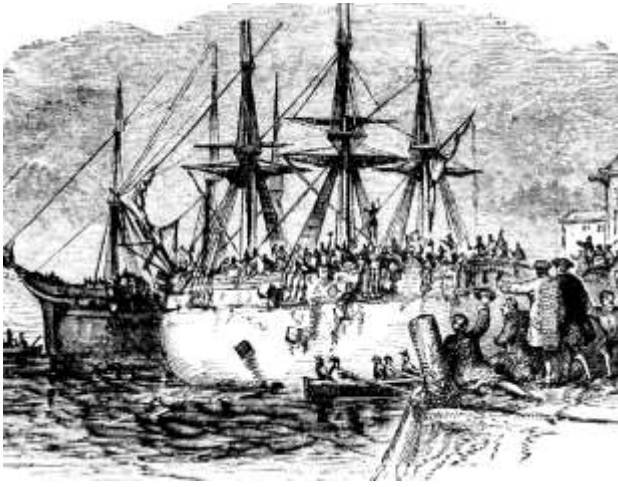
## Road to Revolution

During the 1760's, England and France got into a war, called the Seven Years War in Europe and the French and Indian War in the colonies. Their war spilled over into their colonies in America as well. During this time, England had to spend a lot of money protecting the colonies, so they also decided to raise the taxes. This ended up being a big problem, because the colonists didn't want to pay their money in taxes to the King, so they started to use ideas of Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke to protest against the taxes.

One of the things that the colonists began to do was to smuggle goods into their country. Smuggling is illegally bringing goods into a country. Normally, countries charge a fee to import things into the country, that way the country makes money from trade as well. The problem is, when you have to pay a tax, the store ends up selling the good for more money, and things get more expensive. An alternative is to just not pay the tax, but obviously this is illegal. Conflict between the British military and police officers and colonist smugglers often got violent.

## American Revolution

The most famous example of American protests during the time leading up to the American Revolution is called the Boston Tea Party. Britain had put a large tax on imports of tea, which made the price go up in the colonies. Upset about the tax, and wanting to make a statement, a group of Boston colonists dressed up like Indians in the middle of the night, broke into a ship in Boston harbor, and threw all



*Boston Tea Party*

of the tea overboard. This revolt, and others like it, led to harsher and harsher regulation, or control, of the colony by the military. In a few years, these conflicts between authorities and small groups of colonists would become open war between organized armies. The American Revolution had begun.

After about a year of fighting, each of the 13 colonies sent representatives to Philadelphia where they discussed what do about the fighting with Britain. During two of these meetings, called the First and Second Continental Congress, the representatives finally decided that they could not be British colonies any longer, and using Locke's ideas, they

declared that they were independent from the British monarchy. Even after this Declaration of Independence, the fighting would last for five more years. The French were still upset about losing their war with England a decade earlier, so they were more than willing to help the British colonists in their fight against the mother country, originally with supplies, but by the end of the war, they were also giving the colonists soldiers. The French king at the time could not have known that the ideas that the colonists were using against the British would spread to his country, and in less than 15 years, he would also lose his crown (and head) because of the spread of the revolution.

## A Republic...if you can keep it

Even after the fighting stopped, the British Colonists had to decide what they were going to do to set up a new government. Many colonists favored making George Washington the new king, but others feared that it would only be a matter of time before things got to be just as bad as they were before the Revolution. Using the Enlightenment ideas of separation of powers, natural rights, and social contract, the Founding Fathers decided instead to create a Republic, where the people would vote for



*The American colonists adopted the rattlesnake symbol because they felt that that represented their purpose. Rattlesnakes are not aggressive, but if they are threatened, they become deadly. Here, the rattlesnake (American colonies) present a gifts to the French Ambassador.*

representatives who would then make laws for them. To keep the government from becoming too powerful, every couple of years, elections would be held, to give the people the chance to change their government without wars and bloodshed. This is what made the United States of America so unique and important in world history; it was the first government that really let the citizens change their government by voting for new leaders without the violence of a revolution. When a woman asked Ben Franklin what kind of government they would have after the voting, Franklin replied to her "A republic...if you can keep it."

### Comprehension Questions:

1. What country were the 13 colonies originally controlled by?
2. Why did the colonists choose to represent themselves as a rattlesnake?
3. What did Franklin mean when he said "If you can keep it?"

Write about it.

The Declaration of Independence was like a break-up letter with the King of England. Pretend you are the colonists and you are breaking up with King George. Make sure you tell him why it isn't going to work.