

Imagine that you are a colonial citizen in the spring of 1776. Tensions throughout the colonies are at their height. The second Continental Congress is meeting. What should we do?

1776:



What Should We Do?



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It is easy to see history as a series of events, each one simply unfolding after the other.

But in fact, the past is filled with key points at which different decisions might have changed the course of history. Wars could have been averted. Empires might have risen, or fallen. Everything could have been different.

Before it was history, it was a choice.

The decision to declare independence from England in 1776 was one such turning point. Though it seems inevitable now, in 1776 it was not certain that the colonies would break away from England, and there were many arguments against doing so.



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Patriots throwing tea overboard in Boston Harbor

The Colonies in Upheaval

Five years ago, in March of 1770, five citizens died as a result of what we now call the Boston Massacre. Boston colonists had been demonstrating against British taxes placed on imported goods when British soldiers opened fire. Three protesters died right away. Two perished later from their wounds.

This event spurred growing anti-British sentiment. Two years later, a new local government called the Committee of Correspondence emerged. In 1773, what has become known as the Boston Tea Party took place: Bostonians threw British tea into the harbor rather than pay tax on it. In 1774, the Committee of Correspondence set up the first Continental Congress,

which coordinated the colonies' responses to the British, and even now is rumored to control espionage rings.

A Special Relationship

English settlers first colonized America in the early 17th century. The Virginia colony was chartered by King James in 1606 and Captain Christopher Newport landed at Cape Henry in May 1607. England's purpose in establishing Virginia and the later colonies was to further its business interests. The colonies have provided new resources for the mother country as well as creating many new trade opportunities.

From the beginning, people came to America to seek their fortunes or improve their situations. We are, of course, British subjects; we have been expected to remain loyal to the Crown, and have enjoyed the rights that other subjects enjoy. Brisk trade has enabled us to prosper. The colonies have largely governed themselves, while Great Britain has protected us from the Indians inhabiting the wilderness, as well as from other nations.

In 1754, Virginia businessmen sent General George Washington to the Ohio Valley to dislodge

French troops from Fort Duquesne and lay claim to the land in western Pennsylvania. He was defeated by the French and their Indian allies, and we sought help from England, which came to our aid.

For nine years, the French and Indian War raged across the American countryside and much blood was spilled. Finally, English troops, with support from our colonial militia, were able to drive the French to sign a peace treaty in Paris in 1763.

Increased Pressure

It cost England a great deal to wage war against France for so long and to continue to protect the colonies. In his efforts to replenish the treasury, the King has put increasing pressure on the colonies.

American colonists were forbidden to settle west of the Appalachians. And to guard against French retaliation the Crown sent many more troops to the colonies. To pay for the cost of keeping the troops, Parliament established new taxes authorized, among others, by the Sugar Act in 1764 and the Stamp Act in 1765.

The Stamp Act was particularly vexing, as it required every printed document—wills, deeds, shipping bills, even playing cards— to carry a taxation stamp. As British subjects, many colo-

nists believe some of these taxes to be unlawful. The colonies have no representation in the British Parliament, thus no voice to speak against such taxation.

Yet taxes continue to be imposed.

The Townshend Act duties sought to defray 10 percent of England's expenses in protecting the

From the beginning, people came to America to seek their fortunes or improve their situations.

colonies by placing taxes on glass, lead, paint, and paper.

Then, the Tea Act of 1773 placed a tax on tea, a staple for colonists as it is for all Englishmen. For many colonists, it was the last straw. A group of Bostonians, some disguised as Indians, stole aboard three British vessels and threw an entire shipment of tea into the harbor rather than pay taxes on it.

The National Issues Forums Institute

This issue guide was prepared for the National Issues Forums Institute in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation. Issue guides in this series are used by civic and educational organizations interested in addressing public issues. These organizations use the books in locally initiated forums convened each year in hundreds of communities. For a description of the National Issues Forums, log onto the website: www.nifi.org.

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1776: *What Should We Do?*

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Opposition to the Stamp Act

The Stamp Act was an act of taxation imposed on the American colonies by the British Parliament, seeking greater revenue, which required all legal documents, newspapers, and playing cards to carry a stamp tax. The Pennsylvania Journal and Advertiser sarcastically suggests affixing this Death's Head stamp to imported goods.

A Choice to Be Made

More recently, in 1774, a series of proclamations and acts of the Crown (in large part in response to the Tea Party) would bring the Massachusetts government under the control of the British government, force colonists to house English troops in their homes, and send colonists accused of crimes back to Great Britain for trial. We have come to call these the Intolerable Acts.

But, the situation has moved well beyond the province of taxes, laws, and grievances. King George has sent fresh troops to Boston and, upon the King's orders, British ships are blockading Boston Harbor to prevent any ships carrying colonial goods from entering or leaving until colonists pay for the tea that was destroyed.

What's worse, armed conflict has broken out. In April 1775 in Lexington and Concord, members of the militia surprised and defeated British troops who were forced to retreat to Charlestown, just north of Boston. Massachusetts militia

Key Dates

1760:

King George II dies; his grandson, King George III takes throne (October 25).

1764:

Sugar Act taxes sugar; Currency Act forbids colonies from printing money (April 5, September 1).

1765:

Stamp Act imposed on all printed materials (March 22).

1767:

Townshend Acts place duties on many imports (June 29).

1760-1765

1765-1770



1763:

Treaty of Paris ends French and Indian War (February 10).

1765:

Sons of Liberty established to resist British (August).

surrounded Boston and held British troops under siege for almost a year.

A second Continental Congress has already begun meeting and planning in Philadelphia. Like the first one, it is made up of delegates from 12 of our 13 colonies.

The Continental Congress must make a decision for all of us.

What Are Our Options?


It is not at all clear what we ought to do. Some say we should declare a break from England in no uncertain terms. Others say such a move runs counter to our obligations as British subjects and the many years of good relations we have enjoyed. Still others say that any move provoking the greatest power on Earth is foolhardy and we ought instead to work on our specific grievances through diplomatic means.

Each of these courses of action has benefits, and each one could cost us dearly. The right answer is not apparent.

As free-born citizens of the various colonies, we need to talk about what we should do about our relationship with England:

- Option One: Remain unwavering in support of the King. We should be true to our heritage and remember that people in the 13 colonies are subjects of the Crown.
- Option Two: Declare independence in clear terms. The colonies should be bold and declare their independence from Great Britain, establish a confederacy to work together for common defense, and accept whatever consequences this may bring.
- Option Three: Use diplomacy to pursue our aims. While the colonies have legitimate grievances, they can be resolved without bloodshed. We should form an American parliament made up of representatives from the various colonies, but which would make new rules only with the assent of the British parliament.



1770: Boston Massacre (March 5).	1773: Tea Act taxes tea (May 10).	1774: Britain passes the “Intolerable Acts” (March 31 – June 2).	1775: Battles of Lexington and Concord (April 19).	1776: Thomas Paine publishes <i>Common Sense</i> (January 10).
	1773: Boston Tea Party protest (December 16).	1774: First Continental Congress meets (September 5 – October 21).	1775: Siege of Boston (April 19, 1775 – March 17, 1776).	
1770-1775			1775-1780	
1772: Committees of Correspondence established to publicize news of the British threat (November).		1774: Boston town meeting appoints Committee of Safety as provi- sional Massachusetts government (autumn).	1775: Second Continental Congress meets (May 10, 1775 – March 1, 1781).	
			1775: Continental Army established (June 14).	

Remain Unwavering in Support of the King

*We should be true to our heritage
and remember that people in the 13
colonies are subjects of the Crown.*

“Obedience to government is every man’s duty, because it is every man’s interest,” preacher Jonathan Boucher said in his final sermon last year at St. Barnabas Church in Maryland. He pointed out that obedience to government is as much a moral duty as anything else:

It is particularly incumbent on Christians, because (in addition to its moral fitness) it is enjoined by the positive commands of God; and, therefore, when Christians are disobedient to human ordinances, they are also disobedient to God.

Boucher was not alone in believing that disobedience to the Crown is fundamentally and morally wrong. While it is easy to imagine that everyone supports independence, sentiment is in fact much more mixed. Less than half the populace actively supports a break with England. Tens



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King George III of England

of thousands of colonials will fight for the British as soldiers, even against other colonists.¹

This first option holds that such loyalty is not only morally correct—it is also by far the most prudent course of action.

A Common Bond and a Debt of Gratitude

The American colonies were founded on the basis of charters from England, and England has continued to provide protection and resources for almost two centuries. People inclined to support this option say that we owe a debt to England. As James Chalmers points out in his recent pamphlet *Plain Truth*, “The people of England, encouraged by the extension of their laws and commerce to those colonies, powerfully assisted our merchants and planters, insomuch, that our settlements increased rapidly.”

¹Robert M. Calhoun, *A Companion to the American Revolution*.

Indeed, if England had not come to our rescue in the French and Indian War, America could now be under French rule. Three years after the French and Indian War ended, Prime Minister George Greenville put it this way: “Protection and obedience are reciprocal. Great Britain protects America, America is bound to yield obedience.”

As British subjects, American colonists are already members of the greatest government on the planet. Beyond simply being the envy of the world, the British constitution makes for a just system for its subjects. We are allowed to govern ourselves to a large extent, and we benefit from the English legal system. “With all its imperfections [the English constitution] is, and ever will be, the pride and envy of mankind,” Chalmers wrote.

Writing under the unlikely pen name of “Massachusettensis,” attorney Daniel Leonard, heartily agreed:

The British constitution, consisting of King, Lords, and Commons is recognized, both by Englishmen and foreigners, to be the most perfect system that the wisdom of the ages has produced. The distribution of powers are

so just, and the proportions are so exact, as at once to support and control each other. An Englishman glories in being subject to, and protected by, such a government.

Avoiding Mob Rule

In these tumultuous times, many have urged a boycott of English goods. Shopkeepers in Boston, for instance, were instructed by the town council

“Protection and obedience are reciprocal. Great Britain protects America, America is bound to yield obedience.”

not to import anything from Britain. Some merchants were opposed to this course of action and refused to abide by the boycott. Theophilus Lillie,



George Washington and his soldiers raise the British flag at Fort du Quesne during the French and Indian War.

a dry goods seller, was one such. In 1769, he announced that he would not sign onto the “nonimportation” agreement.

The town meeting then passed a proclamation calling Lillie and others who broke the boycott “Enemies of their Country” and printed a list of their names. The pressure did not stop there. Groups of townsfolk made threatening visits to these merchants and burned them in effigy.

Many saw this as mob rule, and Lillie wrote a letter printed in the January 15, 1770, *Boston Chronicle*:

If one set of private subjects may at any time take upon themselves to punish another set of private subjects just when they please, it's such a sort of government as I never heard of before; and according to my poor notion of government, this is one of the principal things which government is designed to prevent; and I own I had rather be a slave under one master (for I know who he is I may perhaps be able to please him) than a slave to a hundred or more whom I don't know where to find, nor what they will expect of me.

To Lillie, and others who feel that loyalty to England is the best course, the alternative is mob rule, or anarchy.

Prudence and Safety

There is, however, an even stronger reason to remain loyal to the Crown, those who support this option say. England is the most powerful nation on Earth. It is one thing to cause Britain a bit of trouble, as the American colonists have been doing for some years now. It is another thing to commit treason through open rebellion.

To break from England, in this view, is almost sure suicide. Even those who survived would see their livelihood destroyed as Great Britain would surely retaliate by strangling trade.

Rector Samuel Seabury outlines the many practical reasons for remaining loyal in his 1774 tract, “Letters of a Westchester Farmer”:

Can we think to threaten, and bully, and frighten the supreme government of the nation into a compliance with our demands? Can we expect to force a submission to our peevish and petulant humours, by exciting clamors and riots in England? We ought to know the temper

and spirit, the power and strength of the nation better. A single campaign, should she exert her force, would ruin us effectually. . . .

The fleets of Great-Britain command respect throughout the globe. Her influence extends to every part of the earth. Her manufactures are equal to any, superior to most in the world. Her wealth is great. . . .

The case is very different with us. We have no trade but under the protection of Great-Britain. We can trade no where but where she pleases. We have no influence abroad, no ambassadors, no consuls, no fleet to protect our ships in passing the seas, nor our merchants and people in foreign countries.

This option holds that it is folly to imagine any serious break with England. It would fail disastrously.

What We Could Do

The best course of action, according to Option One, is to reaffirm loyalty to Great Britain. Not only do we owe our very existence to the empire, but any other course of action would surely ruin us.

The Continental Congress should:

- Break up the Continental Army, disavow the actions of the Boston militia, and call for the Sons of Liberty to disband.

But, even if we do this, the sentiments that spurred formation of the Sons of Liberty and the colonial militias will not simply disappear. Violence may well break out again.

- Call for an end to all boycotts and urge merchants to continue (or resume) trading with England.

But, commerce in the colonies is one of the chief means for England to defray the expenses of running its empire, so colonial businesses will continue to be highly taxed.

- Urge townsfolk to identify and turn in those who have led and supported the rebellion.

But, the rebellion has had widespread support. This will cause friends and neighbors to take up arms against one another, and may split families. This will pit colony against colony, colonist against colonist.



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Patrick Henry giving his speech opposing the Stamp Act

Declare Independence in Clear Terms

*The colonies should be bold
and declare their independence
from Great Britain.*

Thomas Jefferson and George Washington credit Patrick Henry's words in March of this year with convincing the Virginia House of Burgesses to send Virginian troops to do battle with the English: "We have done everything that could be done, to avert the storm which is now coming on. We have petitioned; we have remonstrated; we have supplicated; we have prostrated ourselves before the throne."

Henry argued that in truth we have already broken with England and simply have not yet fully accepted this. He finished his oration with these stirring words:

Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace—but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! . . .

Why stand we here idle? . . . Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!

This second option holds that Henry is correct. It is time to be bold, to make a stand, and to

declare American independence from England—regardless of the consequences.

A Battle Already Joined

People drawn to this option say that the road to independence began at least a year ago. The conflict at Lexington and Concord in April 1775 and the subsequent siege of Boston has made it impossible to do anything else but continue the battle to its conclusion. We should finish what we started.

Upon the urging of the first Continental Congress, every colony has already formed a Committee of Safety that serves as its true government. Every colony but Pennsylvania has a militia at the ready.

In short, the colonies have already as much as begun a war. They have established their own shadow government. Hostilities are out in the open.

Furthermore, those who predict that American forces are doomed to defeat against the British army, may well be wrong. After all, our army and militia were certainly effective enough to force a British retreat from Lexington and Concord. According to Richard Wells, who writes in *A Few Political Reflections Submitted to the Consideration of the British Colonies, by a Citizen of Philadelphia*, it is time to come into our own as a nation. “The day of independent manhood

Building an Army

Just less than a year ago, in June 1775, the Continental Congress established a Continental Army. Many colonial militia units were already activated and at the ready, especially in New England. There were regiments already in place in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. When the army was formed, many of these groups had already seen battle with the British—having been stationed outside of Boston besieging the British general Thomas Gage, whom they had beaten back from Lexington and Concord.

The Continental Army now stands at 27 regiments, each of eight companies. Our army and militia totals about 20,000 men.

But even this large array of forces will likely not be sufficient, as Britain currently fields at least 36,000 men. That does not include the loyalists in the colonies—some estimate they number as many as 25,000²—who may be expected to fight alongside the Redcoats.

In this view the colonies must therefore continue to provide soldiers for General Washington and his army.

Create a Confederacy

How shall we best govern ourselves? Most colonies are already working on their own con-

stitutions, but our delegates to the Continental Congress are deeply split on just what a national government might look like if we were to break away from England. There is disagreement over how a new nation ought to function. Some favor a very strong central government, while others think that each colony should largely govern itself. Conflicting views about this matter have the potential for badly dividing us at a time when we must remain strong and united in our efforts to achieve our aims.

Those who support this option recognize this difficulty and recommend that the questions of

² Claude Halstead Van Tyne, *The Loyalists in the American Revolution*, p. 183.

“The day of independent manhood is at hand—we feel our strength; and with filial grateful sense of proper obedience, would wish to be esteemed the friend as well as the child of Britain.”

is at hand—we feel our strength; and with filial grateful sense of proper obedience, would wish to be esteemed the friend as well as the child of Britain.”



On the evening of April 19, 1775, British troops marched from Boston to Concord and were met at Lexington by American minutemen in the first battle of the American Revolution.

independence and *governance* be separated. The first action must be to break away from England. A simple confederacy, providing only as much organization as is necessary, will suffice.

A new set of Articles of Confederacy under this option would recognize each state's sovereignty and independence, and would even refrain from terming the resulting United States as a "nation." Instead, the states would be friendly allies who would act together for most purposes. Decisions made by the confederacy would be made on a one-state, one-vote basis but no state could be forced to take any action it opposed. The states (rather than a central government) would provide funds for the operation of the new country.

What We Could Do

This option holds that the colonies should declare their independence, establish a confederacy to work together for common defense, and accept whatever consequences this may bring.

The Continental Congress should:

- Declare that the colonies in America are independent and draft articles of confederation to preserve the sovereign rights and

independence of each state.

But, such a move will irrevocably sever the colonies from England and lead to a war whose outcome is in grave doubt. The colonies will almost certainly require support from the French or other British adversaries, which they are unlikely to get. The new loosely joined confederacy may have trouble agreeing on fundamental decisions.

- Ask the colonies to continue to provide soldiers for the Continental Army.

But, the army will necessarily be weak as it will depend on volunteers, on funding by General Washington and others, and taxes beyond what most people can bear. Furthermore, if this effort to take arms against the Crown fails, leaders and soldiers will be hanged as traitors.

- Require that businesses cut off all trade with Britain.

But, this will surely drive many colonial businesses into ruin.



Architect of the Capitol

The First Continental Congress, 1774

Use Diplomacy to Pursue Our Aims

*While the colonies have
legitimate grievances, they can be
resolved without bloodshed.*

Addressing the first Continental Congress last year, Pennsylvania delegate Joseph Galloway begged them to “ask for a participation in the freedom and power of the English constitution in some other mode of incorporation, . . . by the regard you have for the honour and safety of your country, and as you wish to avoid a war with Great-Britain, which must terminate, at all events in the ruin of America, not to rely on a denial of the authority of Parliament.”

Galloway urged that we be mindful of *why* we are aggrieved and seek peaceful solutions to our legitimate grievances.

This option reminds us that among our chief complaints against Great Britain is lack of representation in Parliament. We should, therefore, form an American Parliament made up of representatives from the various colonies and negotiate an agreement that no new laws governing America would be made without the assent of both American and British Parliaments.

Taxation and Representation

“No taxation without representation,” a rallying cry for more than 10 years, has often been attributed to Boston lawyer James Otis Jr. As he wrote in *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*: “No parts of His Majesty’s dominions can be taxed without their consent; that every part has a right to be represented in the supreme or some subordinate legislature.”

In this view, the argument is not about whether we should remain loyal subjects of the King. Nor is it about taxes *per se*. Indeed, most recognize the need for England to recover the extensive costs borne in the pursuit of the French and Indian War, which was very much to our benefit.

No, our true grievances are over the *manner* in which taxes are proposed, approved, and levied.

We in the colonies argue that we are denied the right that other Englishmen have when it comes to taxes, because we have no representation in Parliament.

This option suggests that the remedy for this is simple: establish representation in the government of our mother country, England. We remain British subjects, and retain all of the rights inherent in British citizenship.

There is a precedent for such a move. Consider, for example, the case of Scotland, which is a part of the British Empire but also holds a number of seats in the British Parliament.

A Plan of Union

However, because the distance between England and the colonies is so great, it may be impossible for our representatives in Parliament to stay in touch with our concerns. It takes months for communications to cross the Atlantic. So Joseph Galloway has proposed an ingenious plan that would recognize Britain's Parliament as the highest authority, but still give colonists the practical representation they deserve.

Galloway has suggested that "a British and American legislature, for regulating the administration of the general affairs of America, be proposed and established in America . . . [and] that the said government be administered by a President-General, to be appointed by the King, and a Grand Council, to be chosen by the representatives of the people of the several colonies, in their respective assemblies."

Delegates to the Grand Council, or legislature, would hold three-year terms, and the body would meet once a year—or more when necessary. The council would function in America just as the House of Commons does in Great Britain while the President-General would administer the government.

All new acts of the council would be subject to the President-General's approval.

Most important, new laws could be written by either the Grand Council in America or by Parliament in Britain, but they would need to be approved by *both* in order to take effect.

When Galloway submitted his plan to the first Continental Congress, it was not ratified. However, knowing what we know now—that without some resolution of this issue war is unavoidable—those who support this option maintain that Galloway's proposal is clearly the best solution. It addresses the legitimate complaints of the colonies but avoids the anarchy that could result from a complete break with England.

We Must Persuade Parliament

This option holds that diplomacy offers the best chance for America to achieve its ends. Establishment of an American Grand Council is but one in a series of actions we should pursue. Just as important, in this view, is to persuade members of Parliament to treat the colonies more fairly.

There are already a number of prominent English advocates for our cause. America's great Scottish friend, the "Honest Whig" James Burgh, titles a chapter of his book, *Political Disquisitions*, "Of Taxation Without Representation." Holding that "all lawful authority, legislative, and

We in the colonies argue that we are denied the right that other Englishmen have when it comes to taxes, because we have no representation in Parliament.

executive, originates from the people," Burgh has a great deal to say about changes Great Britain should make in its approach to governing the colonies.

Another friend of America is Edmund Burke, who has expressed great support for our cause. In 1774, he argued before Parliament for repeal of the Townshend Acts, saying "Again, and again, revert to your own principles—Seek Peace, and ensue it—leave America, if she has taxable matter in her, to tax herself."

More recently, Burke spoke before that body on conciliation with the colonies:



Edmund Burke

The people of the colonies are descendants of Englishmen. England, Sir, is a nation, which still, I hope, respects, and formerly adored, her freedom. The colonists emigrated from you when this part of your character was most predominant; and they took this bias and direction the moment they parted from your hands. They are therefore not only devoted to liberty, but to liberty according to English ideas and on English principles. . . .

My idea, therefore, without considering whether we yield as matter of right or grant as matter of favor, is, to admit the people of our colonies into an interest in the Constitution, and, by recording that admission in the journals of Parliament, to give them as strong an assurance as the nature of the thing will admit that we mean forever to adhere to that solemn declaration of systematic indulgence.

These are but two of many supporters of the cause of American liberty.

This option says that we must continue to work with them and encourage them, for this is the only peaceful way we have to achieve the full set of rights that all other Englishmen are granted.

The Enemy of My Enemy

Option Three does not suggest we simply behave well and hope for the best. While seeking a diplomatic path forward is preferable, it remains possible that England may declare war on the colonies or, at a minimum, take military

actions that force us to defend ourselves with our army and militias.

For that reason, this option suggests we also follow other dictates of diplomacy: reaching out—quietly—to longtime adversaries of England, such as France and Spain.

If war breaks out, or conflicts become heated, we may then have supporters on the world stage. Such overtures will, of course, have to be delicately undertaken, for they could undermine our efforts to advance our cause in Parliament.

This option also suggests that it might be prudent to quietly build up citizen-led continental militias so that we are not caught completely undefended should efforts to find a peaceful resolution fail completely.

What We Could Do

This option holds that the colonies should work diplomatically to establish a form of governance that gives us the autonomy we need yet maintains our fundamental allegiance to the Crown and reaffirms our English rights.

The Continental Congress should:

- Establish an American legislature that would work with the British Parliament to make the colonies a confederation of independent states.

But, people in the colonies will continue to be subject to the decisions of the King, 3,000 miles away.

- Work toward changing the views of British Parliamentarians, relying on the counsel of prominent English statesmen who are open to a more equitable relationship between the Crown and its colonies.

But, representation in Parliament won't guarantee that the colonies will be treated fairly. People sympathetic to the colonies may remain a minority and the majority may still force its will on us.

- Seek to improve relations with France and other longstanding British adversaries, so that if war does come, we will not have to face Great Britain alone.

But, word of these moves may get out, causing Britain to punish the colonies. Furthermore, New England, which feels these grievances more strongly than other colonies, could declare independence on its own and weaken the position of the other colonies.

1776:

What Should We Do?

Imagine that you are a citizen in one of the 13 colonies in the spring of 1776. Tensions across America, especially in New England are at their height. Since the Boston Massacre, the British Crown has placed immense pressure on the colonies, and the New England militia has begun to fight back. A series of proclamations and acts of the Crown—which some call the Intolerable Acts—have been handed down that might force townsfolk to garrison troops, bring those accused of crimes back to Britain for trial, and replace almost every government position with people who are loyal to the Crown. All this

after the colonies eagerly supported the British in their war against the French.

King George has sent fresh troops to Boston and naval vessels are occupying Boston Harbor, enforcing a blockade that prevents goods made in the colonies from coming in or out. The Continental Congress, made up of representatives of the colonies must decide what to do. As citizens of the various colonies, we have an important matter to talk about:

What should we do about our relationship with England?

OPTION ONE: Maintain and Affirm Our Allegiance

Main Arguments in Favor of This Option	Examples of What Might Be Done	Some Consequences and Trade-Offs to Consider
<p>Remain Unwavering in Our Support of the King</p> <p>Be true to our heritage and remember that people in the 13 colonies are subjects of the Crown.</p> <p>The colonies are a proud part of the British Empire, the strongest nation on Earth. For most colonists, England is their homeland. We share a common language and traditions. Most of us share the same religious faith as well. Our colonial justice system is derived from English law. The people in the colonies have prospered economically and enjoy the protection of the British army.</p> <p>It is both wrong and foolhardy for the colonies to rebel and break away from the homeland.</p> <p>Voices from History: “Obedience to government is every man’s duty, because it is every man’s interest; but it is particularly incumbent on Christians, because (in addition to its moral fitness) it is enjoined by the positive commands of God; and, therefore, when Christians are disobedient to human ordinances, they are also disobedient to God.”</p> <p>— Jonathan Boucher, clergyman, final American sermon in 1775</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Continental Congress should disband the Continental Army, disavow the actions of the Boston militia, and call for New England citizens to disband the Sons of Liberty. Those in business should continue to trade with Britain, paying tariffs and taxes as required by law. People should identify and turn over to the British those who have led the rebellion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sentiments that spurred these actions will not disappear. They will be driven underground only to reemerge in the future. The costs of running the British Empire will be borne increasingly on colonial enterprises, which may fail to thrive under the burden of high taxation. This will pit colony against colony and friends and neighbors against one another.

★ OPTION TWO: Seize the Moment

Main Arguments in Favor of This Option	Examples of What Might Be Done	Some Consequences and Trade-Offs to Consider
<h3>Declare Independence in Clear Terms</h3> <p>Be bold and declare that the 13 colonies are independent states.</p> <p>The Crown has steadily stripped colonists of their freedoms and inherent rights as human beings. This is against natural law and it is intolerable. There can be no lasting peace or economic prosperity without liberty. People everywhere are demanding independence.</p> <p>The colonies should declare their independence, establish a confederacy to work together for common defense, and accept whatever consequences this may bring.</p> <p>Voices from History: “We have done everything that could be done, to avert the storm which is now coming on. We have petitioned; we have remonstrated; we have supplicated; we have prostrated ourselves before the throne... There is no longer any room for hope. . . . Give me liberty or give me death.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">—Patrick Henry, to the Second Virginia Convention, March 23, 1775</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declare that the colonies in America are and ought to be independent and draft Articles of Confederation to preserve the sovereign rights and independence of each state. • Ask the colonies to provide soldiers for the Continental Army led by General Washington. • Businesses should cut off all trade with Britain. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This will irrevocably sever the colonies from England and lead to a war we will almost certainly lose. Also, the new confederacy may have great difficulty agreeing on fundamental decisions. • There is not enough money to properly equip an army. People would be taxed beyond what most can bear. If this effort fails, leaders and soldiers will be hanged as traitors. • The economic risks of independence will drive many businessmen into ruin.

★ OPTION THREE: Craft a New Way

Main Arguments in Favor of This Option	Examples of What Might Be Done	Some Consequences and Trade-Offs to Consider
<h3>Use Diplomacy to Pursue Our Aims</h3> <p>Negotiate a peaceful solution.</p> <p>While the colonies have legitimate grievances, they can be surmounted without bloodshed. As separate entities with little holding us together, the colonies are not ready for complete independence. Colonists do not all hail from England and would be hard to unify.</p> <p>The main grievance is lack of representation in Parliament. We should form an American version of Parliament made up of representatives from the various colonies. New rules for America would require assent of both American and British Parliaments.</p> <p>Alternatively, the colonies could have a minority voice in the British Parliament while retaining a measure of independence. Meanwhile, we should build up our military and economic strength and seek friendlier relations with traditional British adversaries, such as France, in case diplomacy fails.</p> <p>Voices from History: “Let us ask for a participation in the freedom and power of the English constitution in some other mode of incorporation. . . . I therefore beseech you . . . by the regard you have for the honour and safety of your country, and as you wish to avoid a war with Great-Britain, which must terminate, at all events in the ruin of America, not to rely on a denial of the authority of Parliament.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">—Joseph Galloway to the First Continental Congress, September 28, 1774</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish an American legislature that would work with the British Parliament to make the colonies a confederation of independent states. • Persuade members of Parliament to treat the colonies more fairly, relying on the counsel of prominent English statesmen who are open to change in the British approach to the colonies. • Quietly build up citizen-led continental militias. Seek to improve relations with France and other longstanding British adversaries, so that if war does come, we will not have to face Great Britain alone. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People in the colonies would continue to be subject to decisions made by the King, 3,000 miles away. • Representation in Parliament won't guarantee the colonies will be treated fairly. People sympathetic to the colonies may remain a minority and the majority may still force its will on us. • New England, which feels these grievances more strongly than other colonies, could declare independence and weaken the position of the others. Cultivating England's enemies may cause the Crown to punish the colonies even further.