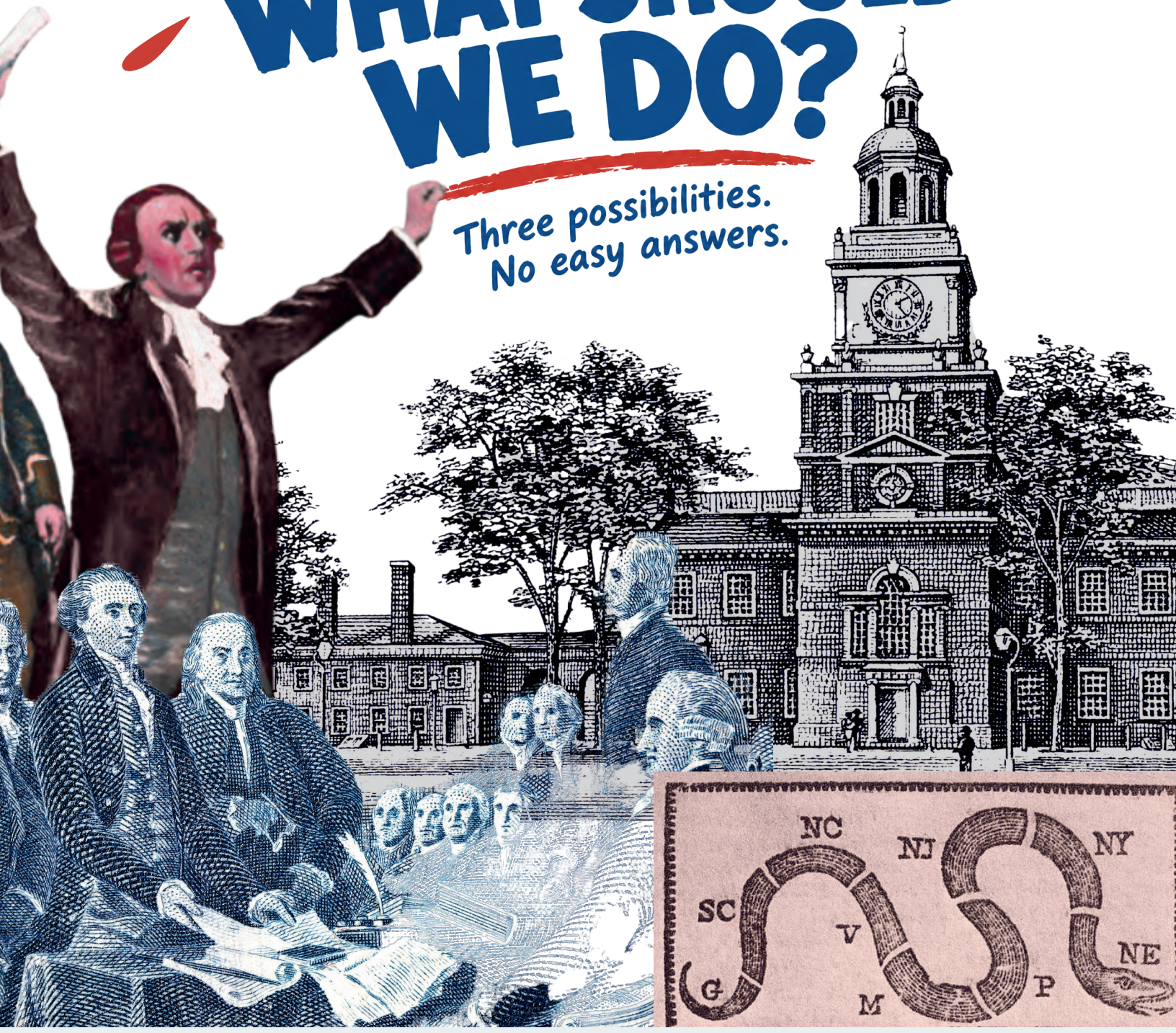
1776: WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

Three possibilities.
No easy answers.



NATIONAL ISSUES FORUMS INSTITUTE

Historic Decisions

James Madison Center for Civic Engagement
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY



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 Great Britain in 1776 was one such turning point. Though it seems inevitable now, in the years leading up to 1776 it was not certain that the colonies would break away from Great Britain, and there were many arguments against doing so.

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Introduction

The Colonies in Upheaval

Six years ago, in March of 1770, five people died as a result of what we now call the Boston Massacre. During a chaotic protest against British taxes placed on imported goods, and amidst frustration surrounding British troops in the city, British soldiers ended up opening fire. Three of the protesters died right away. Two perished later from their wounds.

This event added to already growing anti-British sentiment. Over the next several years, Committees of Correspondence emerged across the colonies to support communication within and among them, as well as coordination of resistance to certain British policies. In 1773, what has become known as the Boston Tea Party took place: Bostonians threw British tea into the harbor rather than pay taxes on it. In 1774, delegates from all but one of the colonies convened at the First Continental Congress, which coordinated the colonies' responses to the British and enforced the resulting restrictions on trade. Tensions are high. But we don't all agree on the way forward.

A Special Relationship

British 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. Great Britain'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.

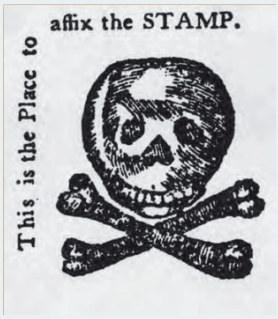
From the beginning, people came to America from Great Britain to seek their fortunes or improve their situations. We are, of course, British subjects; we have been expected to remain loyal to the Crown, and have enjoyed the rights that other subjects enjoy. Brisk trade has enabled us to prosper. The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

In 1754, the Lieutenant Governor of Virginia sent 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 indigenous allies, and we sought help from Great Britain, which came to our aid.

For nine years, the French and Indian War raged across the American countryside and much blood was spilled. Finally, British troops, with support from our colonial militia and indigenous allies, were able to drive the French to sign a peace treaty in Paris in 1763. But many of the indigenous groups who had allied with the French haven't surrendered, which poses a threat to the British territorial boundary at the frontier.



Patriots throwing tea overboard in Boston Harbor | ©Bettmann/CORBIS



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 suggested affixing this Death's Head stamp to imported goods.

Increased Pressure

When the war ended, Great Britain was deeply in debt. It costs Great Britain a great deal to keep troops at the frontier to defend their newly acquired territory. They argue that we colonists benefit from the protection, so we should have to share the burden of the cost. At the same time, the Proclamation of 1763 made it illegal for us to to settle west of the Appalachians. Either way, Parliament established new taxes authorized by acts like the Sugar Act in 1764 and the Stamp Act in 1765. This has put increasing economic pressure on the colonies.

The Stamp Act was particularly vexing to many colonists, as it required every printed document—wills, deeds, shipping bills, even playing cards— to carry a taxation stamp. As British subjects, many believe some of these taxes to be unlawful. We in the colonies have no representation in the British Parliament, thus no voice to speak against such taxation.

Yet more taxes have been imposed.

The Townshend Act duties sought to defray 10 percent of Great Britain's expenses in protecting the 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. For many, it was the last straw. A group of Bostonians, some disguised as indigenous people, stole aboard three British vessels and threw a shipment of tea into the harbor rather than pay taxes on it.

A Choice to Be Made

More recently, in 1774, a series of acts of the British Parliament (in large part in response to the Tea Party) sought to bring the Massachusetts government under greater control of the British government, force colonists to house British troops in their communities - sometimes resulting in troops staying in colonists' homes - and send colonists accused of crimes back to Great Britain for trial. We have come to call these the Intolerable Acts.

The situation has moved 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 surrounded Boston and held British troops under siege for almost a year.

A second Continental Congress has already begun meeting and planning in Philadelphia. It is made up of delegates from each of our 13 colonies. The Continental Congress must make a decision for all of us.

1760:
King George II dies; his grandson, King George III, takes throne (October 25).

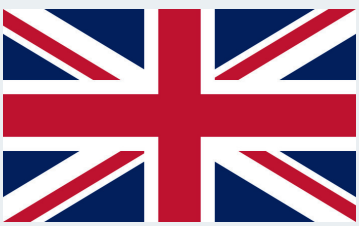
1763:
Treaty of Paris ends French and Indian War (February 10).

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).

1765:
Sons of Liberty established to resist British (August).

1767:
Townshend Acts place duties on many imports (June 29).



What Are Our Options?

It is not clear what we ought to do. Some say we should declare a break from Great Britain. 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 diplomacy.

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

As people living in the various colonies, we need to talk about what we should do about our relationship with Great Britain:

- **Option 1: Maintain loyalty to Great Britain and avoid war.** The monarchy offers needed protection, and a war with Great Britain is unwise and unjustified.
- **Option 2: Declare independence in clear terms.** The colonies should be bold and declare independence from Great Britain, establish a confederation to work together for common defense, and accept whatever consequences a war may bring, including losses of economic standing and human life.
- **Option 3: Use diplomacy.** While the colonies have legitimate grievances, they can be resolved without bloodshed. We should form an American parliament made up of representatives from the colonies and negotiate an agreement with Great Britain that no new laws governing America would be made without the assent of both American and British Parliaments.

Note: These are not the only possible options that existed. For example, a possible fourth position that many colonists held at the time was to continue restricting exports and imports with Great Britain and enact other forms of economic and political resistance without declaring independence.



1770: Boston Massacre (March 5).

1772: Committees of Correspondence established to publicize news of the British threat (November).

1773: Tea Act taxes tea (May 10).

Boston Tea Party protest (December 16).

1774: Britain passes the "Intolerable Acts" (March 31 - June 2).

First Continental Congress meets (September 5 - October 21).

1774: Boston town meeting appoints Committee of Safety as provisional Massachusetts government (autumn).

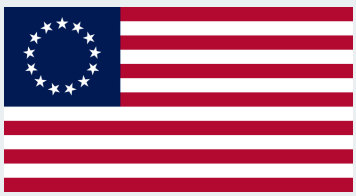
1775: Battles of Lexington and Concord (April 19).

Siege of Boston (April 19, 1775 - March 17, 1776).

1775: Second Continental Congress meets (March 10, 1775 - March 1, 1781).

Continental Army established (June 14).

1776: Thomas Paine publishes *Common Sense* (January 10).



Option 1 Maintain Loyalty to Great Britain and Avoid War

The monarchy offers needed protection, and a war with Great Britain is unwise and unjustified.

"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 may be easy to imagine that everyone supports independence, sentiment is in fact much more mixed. Less than half the populace actively supports a break with Great Britain. Tens of thousands of colonists will fight for the British as soldiers, even against other colonists.

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

A Common Bond, a Debt of Gratitude, and an Unjustified Rebellion

The American colonies were founded on the basis of charters from Great Britain, and Great Britain has continued to provide protection and resources for almost two centuries. People inclined to support this option say that we owe a debt to Great Britain.

As James Chalmers points out in his pamphlet Plain Truth, "The people of Great Britain, encouraged by the extension of their laws and commerce to those colonies, powerfully assisted our merchants and planters, insomuch, that our settlements increased rapidly."

Indeed, if Britain 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, the Prime Minister, Lord George Grenville, put it this way: "Protection and obedience are reciprocal. Great Britain protects America, America is bound to yield obedience."

Many people believe that, as British citizens, American colonists are already subject to 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 British legal system. "With all its imperfections [the British 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, agreed:



King George III | ©Image Asset Management Ltd./Superstock

"The British constitution, consisting of King, Lords, and Commons is recognized, both by Britishmen 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. A Britishman glories in being subject to, and protected by, such a government."

Moreover, even in times when the imperfections of the British constitution do become apparent, as British subjects, we should still uphold and abide by the rules of constitutional government. Parliament has the legal authority to create laws governing us, so attempts by colonists to resist them are just breaking the law.

Avoiding Mob Rule

In these tumultuous times, many have urged boycotting British goods. Boston shopkeepers were instructed by the town council not to import from Britain. Some merchants were opposed to this course of action and refused to abide by the boycott, including Theophilus Lillie, a dry goods seller. In 1769, he announced he would not sign the "nonimportation" agreement.

The town meeting 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 loyalty to Great Britain 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, according to those who support this option. The British Empire is the most powerful government 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 Great Britain, in this view, is almost certain death. Even those who survived would see their livelihood destroyed as Great Britain would surely retaliate by strangling trade.

Samuel Seabury outlines practical reasons for loyalty 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 Great Britain? 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 Great Britain. It would fail disastrously.

What We Could Do

The best course of action, according to Option 1, is to reaffirm loyalty to Great Britain. We owe our existence to the empire, and any other option would ruin us.

The Continental Congress should:

- Break up the Continental Army, disavow actions of the Boston militia, and call for the Sons of Liberty to disband. **But**, even if we do this, the sentiments that spurred the Sons of Liberty and colonial militias will not simply disappear. Violence may break out again.
- Call for an end to all boycotts and urge merchants to trade with Great Britain. **But**, commerce in the colonies is one of the chief means for Great Britain 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.



George Washington raises the British flag at Fort du Quesne during the French and Indian War. | ©CORBIS

Option 2 Declare Independence In Clear Tearms

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

Thomas Jefferson and George Washington credit Patrick Henry's words with convincing the Virginia House of Burgesses to send Virginian troops to battle the British: "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 Great Britain 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!"

The second option holds that Henry is correct. It is time to be bold, to make a stand, and to declare American independence—regardless of the consequences.

A Battle Already Joined

People drawn to Option 2 say the road to independence began at least a year ago. The conflict at Lexington and Concord in April 1775 and subsequent siege of Boston make it impossible not to continue the battle to its conclusion. We should finish what we started.

Upon the urging of the first Continental Congress, colonies have begun to form Committees of Safety that serve as their true governments.

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

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. | ©CORBIS



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 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."

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 would 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 25,000—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 Confederation

How shall we best govern ourselves? Most colonies are already working on their own constitutions, 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 Great Britain. 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 independence and governance be separated. The first action must be to break away from Great Britain. A simple confederation, providing only as much organization as is necessary, will suffice, they say.

A new set of Articles of Confederation under this option could recognize each state's sovereignty and independence. Under this model, states could be friendly allies who could act together for most purposes. Decisions made by the confederation could be made on a one-state, one-vote basis but no state would be forced to take any action it opposed. The states (rather than a central government) could provide funds for the operation of the new country.

What We Could Do

This option holds that the colonies should declare our independence, establish a confederation 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 Great Britain 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 we may not get. The new loosely joined confederation 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 uncertain funding, 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.



Patrick Henry giving his speech opposing the Stamp Act | ©Bettmann/CORBIS.

Option 3 Use Diplomacy to Pursue Our Aims

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



The First Continental Congress, 1774 | ©Architect of the Capitol

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 British 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 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 some justification for us colonists to help fund the British troops that have been sent to the frontier to defend territory acquired during the French and Indian War.

No, from this perspective 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 Britishmen 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, Great Britain. We remain British subjects, and retain all of the rights inherent in British citizenship.

A Plan of Union

However, because of the distance between Great Britain and the colonies, it may be impossible for representatives in Parliament to stay in touch with our concerns. It takes months for communications to cross the Atlantic. So Joseph Galloway proposed a plan that would recognize Britain's Parliament as the highest authority but give colonists practical representation.

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 Great Britain.

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 one in a series of actions we should pursue. Just as important is to persuade members of Parliament to treat the colonies more fairly.

There are already a number of prominent British 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 executive, originates from the people," Burgh has a great deal to say about changes Great Britain should make in governing the colonies.

Another friend of America is Edmund Burke, who has expressed great support. 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: "The people of the colonies are descendants of Britishmen. Great Britain, 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 British ideas and on British 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 within the British government system. 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 Britishmen are granted.

The Enemy of My Enemy

Option 3 does not suggest we simply behave well and hope for the best. While seeking a diplomatic path forward is preferable, it remains possible that Great Britain may declare war on the colonies or take military actions that force us to defend ourselves. For that reason, this option suggests we also follow other dictates of diplomacy: reaching out—quietly—to longtime adversaries of Great Britain, 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 have to be delicately undertaken, for they could undermine 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 institutionalizes the representation and authority we need within the British system of government, yet maintains our fundamental allegiance to the Crown and reaffirms our British rights.

The Continental Congress should:

- Establish an American legislature that operates in conjunction with the British Parliament. **But**, people in the colonies will continue to be subject to a government , 3,000 miles away.
- Work toward changing views of British Parliamentarians, relying on counsel of British statesmen open to a more equitable relationship between the Crown and colonies. **But**, representation in Parliament won't guarantee colonies will be treated fairly. People sympathetic to colonies may remain a minority and the majority may 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 colonies. Furthermore, New England, which feels 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?

OPTIONS SUMMARY

Imagine that you are living 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 government has placed immense pressure on the colonies, and the New England militia has begun to fight back. A series of proclamations and acts of Parliament, 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 some government positions with people who are loyal to the Crown. King George has sent fresh troops to Boston and naval vessels are occupying Boston Harbor, enforcing a blockade that prevents goods from coming in or out.

Many people in the colonies are infuriated about all of this, particularly after the colonies supported the British in the war against the French.

But not everyone feels that way. There are also plenty who feel that some of the actions taken by the British are justified. These people believe that colonists should in fact help pay for the protection of the frontier and that, as British citizens, they are subject to the laws of the British Parliament and that rebellion is both unjustified and unlawful.

And there are numerous perspectives in between, as well as possible approaches to take to address the situation.

The Continental Congress, made up of representatives of the colonies, must decide what to do: should we declare independence, continue to put diplomatic or economic pressure on the British for increased autonomy, or reaffirm our loyalty to the Crown and work within the existing imperial system? What would you counsel, and why?

Option 1 Maintain Loyalty to Great Britain and Avoid War

The monarchy offers needed protection, and a war with Great Britain is unwise and unjustified.

Main Arguments in Favor of This Option	Examples of What Might Be Done	Consequences and Trade-offs
Maintain Loyalty to Great Britain and Avoid War The monarchy offers needed protection, and a war is unwise and unjustified. Supporters of this approach feel the colonies are a proud part of the British Empire, the greatest government and strongest military power on Earth. For most colonists, Great Britain is our 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 British law. Many people in the colonies have prospered economically and enjoy the British army's protection. Advocates argue the colonies are legally and legitimately governed by British Parliament and should abide by its just laws.	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.	The sentiments that spurred these actions will not disappear. They will be driven underground only to reemerge in the future.
	Those in business should continue to trade with Britain, paying tariffs and taxes as required by law.	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.
	People should identify and turn over to the British those who have led the rebellion.	This will pit colony against colony and friends and neighbors against one another.



Voices from History

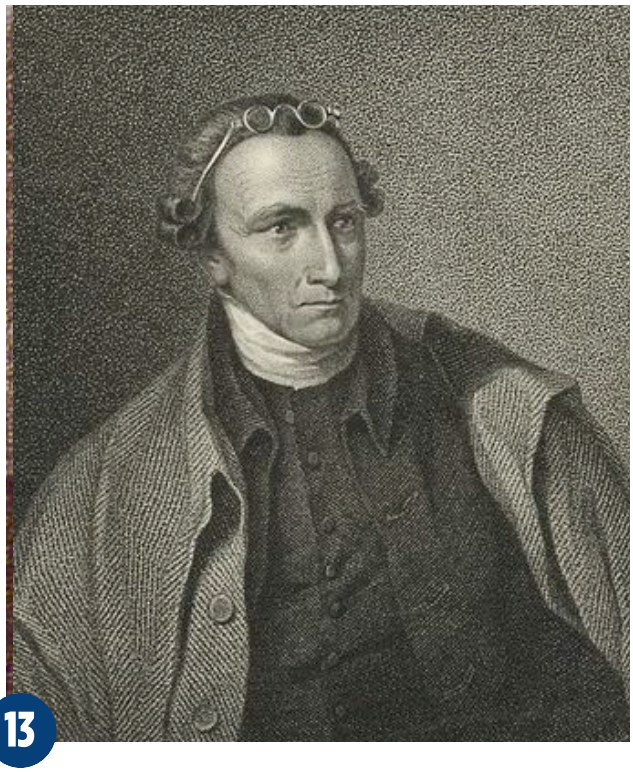
Jonathan Boucher, clergyman, 1775

"*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.*"

Option 2 Declare Independence In Clear Tearms

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

Main Arguments in Favor of This Option	Examples of What Might Be Done	Consequences and Trade-offs
Declare Independence in Clear Terms We should be bold and declare that the 13 colonies are independent states. Proponents of this perspective believe that Great Britain has steadily stripped colonists of our 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. The colonies should declare their independence, establish a confederation to work together for common defense, and accept whatever consequences this may bring.	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.	This will sever colonies from Great Britain and lead to a war we will almost certainly lose. The new confederation may have difficulty agreeing on fundamental decisions.
	Ask the colonies to provide soldiers for the Continental Army led by General Washington.	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.
	Businesses should cut off all trade with Britain.	The economic risks of independence will drive many businessmen into ruin.



Voices from History

Patrick Henry, to the Second Virginia Convention, March 23, 1775

"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."

Option 3 Use Diplomacy to Pursue Our Aims

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

Main Arguments in Favor of This Option	Examples of What Might Be Done	Consequences and Trade-offs
Use Diplomacy to Pursue Our Aims This approach seeks to negotiate a peaceful solution. Supporters believe that 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 and would be hard to unify. The main grievance is lack of representation in Parliament. We should form an American version of Parliament with representatives. New rules would require assent of both American and British Parliaments. Meanwhile, we should build military and economic strength and seek friendlier relations with British adversaries, like France, in case diplomacy fails.	Establish an American legislature that would work with the British Parliament. Laws affecting the colonies would require approval from both bodies.	People in the colonies would continue to be subject to decisions made by the King, 3,000 miles away.
	Persuade members of Parliament to treat the colonies more fairly, relying on the counsel of prominent British statesmen who are open to change in the British approach to the colonies.	Representation in Parliament won't guarantee colonies will be treated fairly. People sympathetic to them may remain a minority and the majority may still force its will on us.
	Quietly build citizen-led continental militias. Improve relations with France and other British adversaries, so if war does come, we will not have to face Great Britain alone.	New England, which feels grievances most strongly, may declare independence and weaken our position. Cultivating Great Britain's enemies may cause them to punish colonies more.



Voices from History

Joseph Galloway to First Continental Congress, 1774

"Let us ask for a participation in the freedom and power of the British 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."

1776: WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

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