Steps Leading to Independence: 1765 to 1774

1765 February — The Stamp Act
A tax on all legal documents, newspapers, decks of cards, and dice.

This Act is received with an outcry from every colony as it directly affects the average colonist.

It sparks political debate about whether Parliament has the right to tax America.

Patrick Henry begins to speak out in the Virginia House of Burgesses against these Acts by Parliament. He maintains that the House of Burgesses has “the only and sole exclusive right and power to lay taxes.”

1765 October — The Stamp Act Congress
A group of conservative representatives, including some of the best minds in the colonies, meets in New York.

They formulate a petition that they send to the king stating their objection to the stamp tax.

This is the first time a unified congress expresses concern about colonial rights to the Crown.

1766 — Declaratory Act
Parliament enacts this law on the same day it repeals the Stamp Act. It states that:

1773 — The Tea Act
Parliament passes this tax in order to salvage the failing East India Company.

The tax burden is insignificant; however, it gives radical colonists reason to stir up protests.

That Parliament is granting a monopoly to its own company is the main source of fury.

The colonists fear that their own merchants will lose business.

The protests culminate in the “Boston Tea Party,” in which colonists throw British cargo overboard into Boston Harbor.

1774 — The Coercive Acts
These Acts are passed by Parliament in retaliation for the Boston Tea Party. They state that no one can “take up, discharge, or lay on land... any goods, wares, or merchandise whatsoever, to be brought from any other country, province or place, or any other part of Massachusetts under pain of forfeiture.”

The Acts impose an economic boycott on Boston.

They forbid the election of the governor’s council in Massachusetts by the Assembly.

They allow the Crown to appoint the governor’s council.