



British Leaders of the American Revolution

There are two sides to every story and the British leaders who were in power influenced the causes and eventual outcome of the Revolutionary War. Starting at the top, the King George III was King of England from 1760 until his death in 1820. The events of the Revolutionary War occurred during his reign. The Seven Years' War in Europe and the related French and Indian War in North America ended together in 1763. After the war Great Britain kept all its land in North America but had many debts to pay from these long wars. King George III issued the Royal Proclamation of 1763 that forbade any further westward expansion of the American colonies so England would not need to pay soldiers to defend more land. It was King George who decided that the tax on tea should remain to show the colonists that Great Britain had the right to tax the colonies. This tax was part of the cause of the Boston Tea Party in December 1773.

When the Revolutionary War began General Thomas Gage held two positions. He was appointed as the governor of Massachusetts and the commander-in-chief of the British forces in 1774. During colonial times the governor of a colony was appointed by British leaders. As governor, Gage was at the center of enforcing the Intolerable Acts that were unpopular with the colonists. As head of the military he fought the first battles of the Revolutionary War that occurred in Massachusetts. After these battles he resigned his positions and returned to England. General William Howe became the commander-in-chief. Under his leadership the British forces won significant victories but he did not pursue the defeat of the American forces. He favored a peaceful solution to the conflict. He resigned as commander-in-chief in 1778.

Henry Clinton was sent from England in 1775 and first saw action at the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775. He became Commander-in-Chief for North America in 1778. His second-in-command was General Charles Cornwallis. General Cornwallis is famous for his surrender at the Siege of Yorktown in 1781. Even though this surrender is sometimes called the end of the Revolutionary War, the war did not end until 1783 when the Treaty of Paris was signed. Cornwallis returned to England in 1782 as part of a prisoner exchange and later became the governor-general of India, another colonial holding of the British Empire.