THE PROCLAMATION OF 1763

At the end of the French and Indian War (1754-1763), England had defeated all her enemies and was victorious on all fronts. With the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763, France's influence was completely eliminated from North America. Canada was English, as were all of the lands east of the Mississippi River to the Atlantic Ocean. Great Britain was supreme. The vast territories gained after years of struggle now had to be protected. A great Indian uprising in 1763 led by Chief Pontiac was a clear warning of how weak the border was with the absence of British soldiers.

England had a war debt of 120 million pounds sterling. The mother country wanted to keep the military establishment at a minimum. She was anxious for the Americans to pay their fair share of the cost, especially the maintenance of the troops along the frontier and in the outposts. The king and his ministers had a ready solution, and it was clearly stated in the Proclamation of 1763 as enacted by England's Parliament. No settlers would be allowed west of the Allegheny and Appalachian Mountains. This would ensure that the Indians would remain at peace. No large groups of British troops would have to be housed in the western regions and the outposts if the Native Americans remained peaceful. The land west of the Allegheny and Appalachian Mountains would be Indian hunting grounds. Anyone settled in that region would have to move back to the colonies.

The colonists were angered by the Proclamation of 1763. As far as they were concerned, this was a poor attempt to hold back the westward movement. The colonists, to a large extent, simply ignored the Proclamation of 1763 and continued to move across the mountains into the Ohio country. The colonists wanted the lands to the west. After all, why else was the French and Indian War fought? The reaction to the Proclamation of 1763 was the first of the complaints the colonists lodged against the crown, and it remained a sore point throughout the whole period leading up to the War for Independence.