

2

Rule Britannia!

Scott Stephenson: You've now moved through the glass doors. You've traveled back a decade-and-a-half to the early 1760s and colonial Americans are celebrating. After a century-and-a-half of colonization, they have a new king, King George the III, the first British-born monarch in a century. You can find his portrait on the wall. This is a reproduction of the 1761 coronation portrait of the new George III. Now in most museums, you can't touch anything, but feel free to touch the king. Here we've reproduced this portrait, and there will be a number of objects throughout the Museum that I'll point out as we go that you can explore and actually feel free to touch. In 1763, Britain and its American colonies had just won a great victory in the Seven Years' War. We also know that as the French and Indian War. It was fought against France and Spain and their allies.

This was a conflict that Winston Churchill would later call the first, first World War and it extended Britain's Empire from the Mississippi River in North America to the Ganges in India. Britain was the new Rome, the greatest global empire since the ancient world. Today, many people consider equality to be a fundamental human right, but in the mid-18th century, most people in Great Britain and the colonies assumed that inequality was natural. At the very top stood the King. He was the representative of the Church of England, and sovereignty and liberty flowed down through the orders of society, through the aristocracy, through the middling layers of society, to servants, and, at the very bottom, enslaved people. And this was assumed to be the natural order of things.

You'll notice a large red case filled with objects of different sizes. This is a remarkable collection of original artifacts owned and used by colonial Americans that express the sovereign authority of the King and colonial Americans' pride and being part of the British Empire. The names and images of British military heroes were everywhere. Have a look in this case and see if you can find a British Admiral on a teapot and a British General on a tall case clock. But all is not perfect: the King faces an impossible challenge. All of his subjects look to him for protection and support; he must be all things to all people. We're going to explore this conundrum in the next room where you'll encounter what we call an "object theater" that combines a film with original objects. This is going to tell the story of what happened after the Seven Years' War. After you viewed that presentation, move through into the next room where you'll see a recreation of Boston's Liberty Tree.