

History 201

Lectures 3



Interpreting the American Revolution

The leadership of the American Revolution went to fairly great lengths not to write histories of the Revolution. They commented about it from time to time in their letters and memoirs, but they were a little uncomfortable about writing much about the facts and events of the period. John Adams was asked on several occasions to write a history of the revolution, and refused. After it was over, Sam Adams made a bonfire behind his back porch, and very carefully burned all of his notes and letters from the period. For a couple of decades there was very little history written from the patriotic point of view. Ironically, the first histories of the Revolution were written, not by rebels (Patriots), but by Loyalists, who argued that the Revolution was a dreadful conspiracy fomented by a rabble of trouble makers and Puritan ministers. The first pro-Revolution history of the events was written by a woman named Mercy Warren Otis, who completed a three-volume work on the Revolution in 1805.

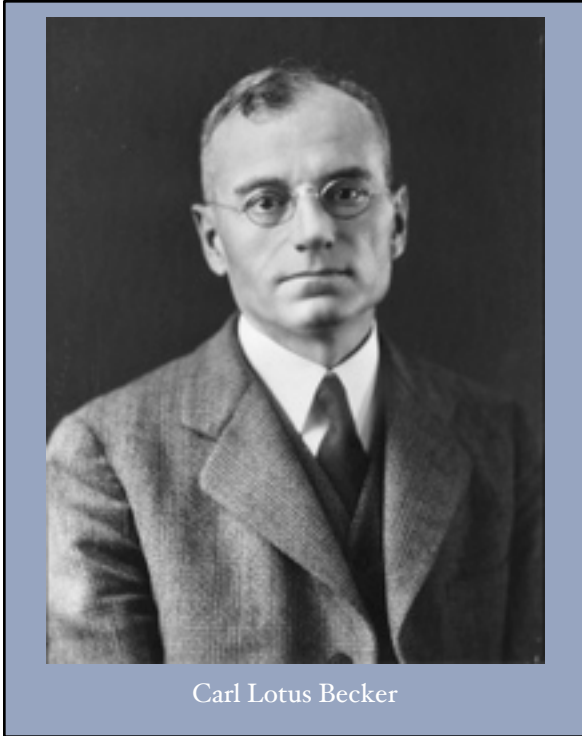
From the point of view of American historians since the event, 2 major frameworks have emerged that can be used to explain the events from 1763-1789— from the Proclamation of 1763 to the creation of the Constitution. These 2 frameworks each make consistent sense of the events and outcomes of the revolution.

The Whig view: This is the view taken by the rebels themselves. The Revolution was a revolt for freedom and liberty against the tyrannical regime of George III and his renegade ministry. The issue was liberty, the preservation of the rights of Englishmen against tyranny. It was a conservative revolution fought to preserve traditional values, not to create any new principles, but to preserve old liberties guaranteed to British citizens, and infringed upon by a tyrannical king, a corrupt ministry, and an unjust parliament. For whig historians, Americans, although they might have their differences, generally agreed on the principles of the Revolution, and fought together to achieve their liberties. This was not a social revolution, based on class, or group interests, but a conservative revolution to gain independence and liberty. It was only one revolution: the colonies vs. Great Britain. For



Mercy Warren Otis

Whig historians the culmination of the American Revolution was the creation and ratification of the Constitution of the United States. The Constitution represented an emphatic national act to codify and preserve the principles of the Revolution.



Carl Lotus Becker

The Progressive view: this historical interpretation emerged over one hundred years after the creation of the United States, during the Progressive Era (about 1900). In the new century (1900) the progressives saw conflict everywhere they looked. Usually the conflict had to do with class or interests. Workers vs. big business, railroads vs. farmers, bankers vs. borrowers, corrupt rich politicians vs. everybody else. This was the age of the muckraker. The progressive historians thus looked at the American Revolution, and saw conflicts, not only between colonists and the mother country, but between differing classes and interests in the colonies. The first important progressive historian was a man named Carl Lotus Becker. He put the interpretation this way. The American Revolution was not only about home rule, but also about who should rule at home. There were *two* revolutions, one against the mother country, and an internal revolution between small farmers and small merchants and mechanics against the wealthy, powerful elite. For Progressives, people were

motivated by interest, not by ideas. Progressives believed that ideas play very little role in conflict. Many, like Philip Davidson, even argued that ideas are simply rationalization and propaganda used by the elites to influence the common people to follow them, often in directions that fly against the interests of the latter. In this particular, they are much like European Marxists.

Charles Beard, a Progressive economic historian, argued that the aims of the Revolution were successful by 1783. America had achieved independence from Britain, and the states, under the Articles of Confederation, had achieved more democratic institutions that protected the political and economic rights of small farmers, small merchants and the poorer elements of American society from the wealthy elite. For Beard, the Constitution represented a counter-revolution, a coup by the wealthy elite to retake control of the nation and reassert their power and influence. For Progressives the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation were good, and represented the principles of the Revolution. The Constitution and establishment of the national federal system was a betrayal of the principles of the Revolution.

Either view can be used to interpret and make sense of the revolution, but, they are generally mutually exclusive interpretations. Even today, which you believe in is as much a matter of where you stand politically and ideologically as any other consideration. Historians who are conservative generally take the whig approach to the revolution, historians of a liberal persuasion use the progressive interpretation.

During the Post-War period (the 1950s) a new conservative whig position grew up that is often called the consensus school of history, because these historians argued that, in spite of differences in wealth and status, Americans generally have fewer differences in terms of class and interest than other societies and nations, and also that Americans generally agree upon most basic core ideas and values. The consensus historians stressed the importance of ideas in the growth of revolutionary feeling in the pre-revolutionary period. They argue that American history is characterized by a general continuity and ideological narrowness. Americans have always found general agreement on

fundamental principles like liberty, freedom of speech, and religion. Ideas are important, and the persistence and development of ideas over long periods of time are important and worthy of study by historians. They stress that the fulfillment of the ideals of the American represent, essentially, a work in progress producing a slow, but ever expanding growth of freedom and political and civil rights among the population of the United States.

Liberal historians from the Vietnam War Era have followed their Progressive antecedents, but stress conflicts of interests based, not so much on specific interests, but on class, race, gender and ethnicity. America is not a melting pot—it is a stew of races, class, gender, and ethnicity. They also argue that history has always focused too much on the concerns and interests of the white elite, and not enough attention has been paid to those oppressed segments of American society whose poverty, race or gender has left them “voiceless.” The constant struggle *among* Americans, for these New-Left historians isn’t so much about conflicts of interests as it is a cultural struggle between the oppressors and the oppressed. New-left historians take Becker’s admonition about the Revolution and home rule to heart, studying the domestic class conflicts between among Americans, to the point that some of them even seem to miss the fact that the British were involved at all.

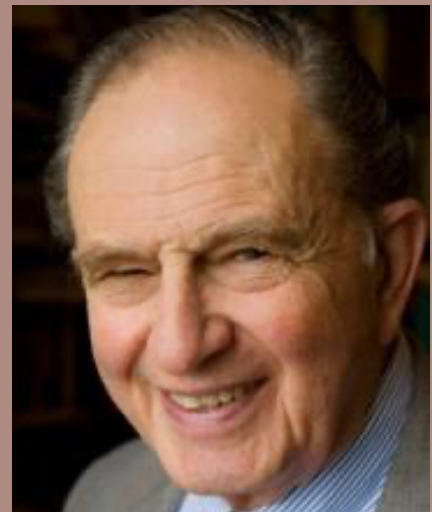
The 1980s saw a new group of historians of the American Revolution who argued that the ideas that helped to trigger the American Revolution were not home grown, but the product of a long history of English political thought about the purpose of government and liberty. For these historians among the most important Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood, the American Revolution was an English Revolution fought in America by Whigs against a corrupt Tory government. This conclusion was a difficult pill for both the right and the left. Consensus historians were critical of Bailyn and Wood because their study made an “American exceptionalist” view of the Revolution untenable. Historians on the left viewed the “republican thesis” as another attempt by the right to extol American homogeneity and to avoid focusing on social and economic diversity and class divisions.

So, that is a mini-survey of Interpretations of the American Revolution by historians since the end of the Revolution. All of these various schools of thought on the subject have some merit, and all of the historians try to interpret the Revolution in a way that fits all of the facts. Essentially, which interpretation that you prefer, has a great deal more to say about your ideology than it does about the actual, factual history of the American Revolution. Historians, like all story tellers, tell the story the way that they want told, that appeals to their preconceptions of the world.



Left: New Left historian,
Gary Nash.

Right: Bernard Bailyn
Below: Gordon Wood





A Tale of Two Georges

Our story begins in 1760 with the accession of George III to the throne of England. George was the third of a line of German kings, the Hanovers, brought over by Parliament in 1714 to rule over England. As I've already pointed out, Americans were very fond of the Hanover kings. They viewed them as just, caring and religious. Hanover rulers were seen as protectors of the Protestant religion and of the liberties and rights of Englishmen everywhere.

In November of 1760 George II died and his grandson, George III ascended the throne. He inherited not only the crown, but a war (Americans called it the French and Indian War), an enormous debt, and a family history of insanity. When the war ended in 1763, some leaders in parliament were unhappy with the peace. They felt that if the war went a little longer, Britain might have gotten the whole French empire instead of about 70% of it. George, however, saw that if the war continued, the nation might achieve victory and bankruptcy at the same time. In 1763 George's chief minister was George Grenville. Grenville was left with the unenviable task of raising enough money to pull Britain out of debt. At the same time he had to keep Britons from paying any more taxes than they were already paying. A series of wars and the need to pay for them had created a crushing tax burden in England. People paid more taxes than ever before, and the government feared that if the burden were increased they would face a revolution in England. So Grenville proposed that the American colonies shoulder their fair share of the taxes. After all, he argued, with some justice, most of the expense of Britain's last two wars had gone to defend the colonists. Britons hastily agreed with Grenville. He decided that the government would put America on a "pay as you go" basis. They should pay the price of royal government and defense in their



George III (Top)

George Grenville (Bottom)

colonies. It was not crushing over taxation, as the colonists would complain. The highest tax in America would still be 1/4 of what the ordinary Englishman paid. But taxes were something that colonists didn't like. Their own taxes were low. Some colonies had no taxes at all.

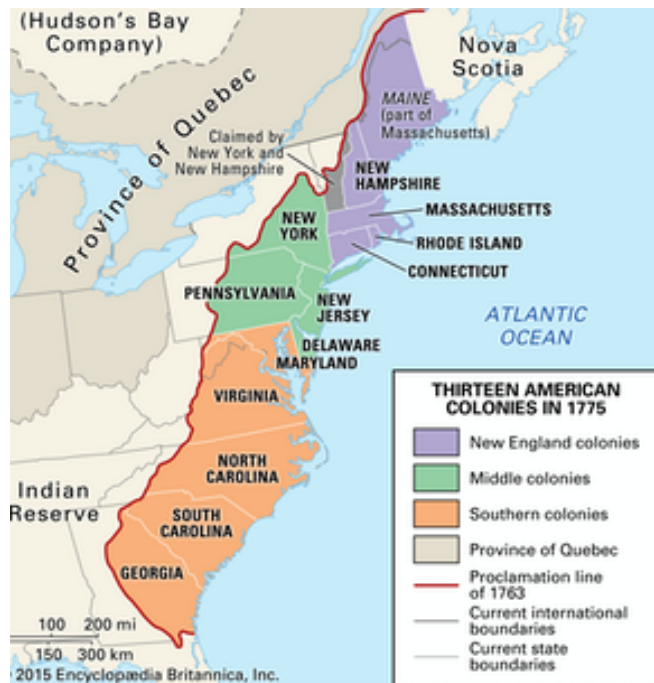
Grenville began with a tax plan that was designed to raise customs revenues on sugar and molasses. There was already a sugar tax of 6 pennies per gallon on non-english sugar in place (since 1753), but Americans rarely paid it. The northern colonies had a thriving rum industry. They used all of the molasses that the english west Indian colonies could produce, and still needed more. So they bought molasses from french, Spanish and Dutch colonies. But rather than pay the sugar tax, they smuggled the molasses into port. Smuggling, in fact was a respected profession in New England. The smuggling had continued during the French and Indian War. English officials were horrified that the molasses trade with French colonies continued even though great Britain was at war with France. As food prices rose in the French Indies, New England smugglers traded flour for molasses and made a killing. The British government was not amused.

So Grenville's first program for America was a new Sugar Act. In 1763, he cut the tax to 3 pennies, but vowed to enforce the law. New rules and regulations were created to get the tax collected. More red tape, more paper work, new fees, and the court that would try smuggling cases was moved out of Boston to Nova Scotia in Canada. All of these new policies raised the cost of doing business, which angered honest shippers, and it also made smuggling much more difficult, which angered the smugglers. At first only shippers and merchants were upset, but these merchants had a wide network of communications, and could thus put together a continent wide protest.

In 1764, Parliament passed the next plank in Grenville's program. The Currency Act stated that colonial paper currency would no longer be accepted as legal tender for payment of debts. This act was passed because from time to time colonial legislatures created paper money to be used as legal tender for the payment of debts and taxes in that colony. Several colonies created inflated paper money with almost no value, which debtors used to pay off their debts. Rhode Island and North

Carolina were the worst offenders. New York and Massachusetts were the most careful to maintain good economic sense with their paper money. But parliament treated all the colonies the same. An important consequence of this act was that it treated all colonists as "Americans." Colonists generally saw themselves as New Yorkers, or Virginians, or Rhode Islanders. The Currency Act essentially dropped all of the colonists into the same boat, and thereafter, they began to think of themselves as Americans.

In 1763, George III, concerned to promote peace in the American colonies, drew up a proclamation that placed a line down the Appalachian Mountains. He stated that the west side of the line should belong to Indians, and white settlement had to stop at the line. Many colonists were angered by the Proclamation of 1763. They felt that the western lands, taken from France, was a legitimate reward for defeating the French and their Indian allies.



They felt that the British government had slammed the door to new opportunity in their faces. It really angered people who had invested a great deal of their time and wealth in land speculation in the West, among them, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Patrick Henry, Robert Morris, and James Madison.

The most annoying piece of Grenville's legislation was the Stamp Act. It annoyed practically everyone

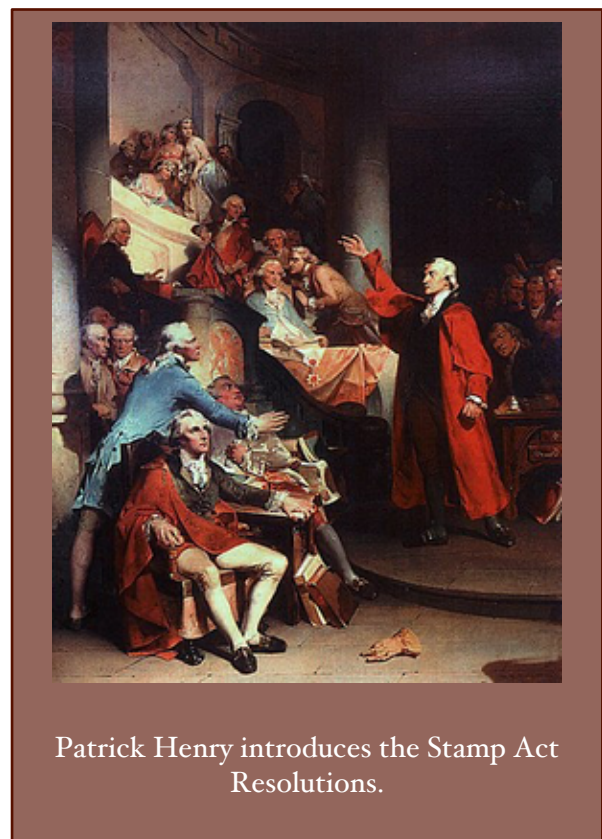
in colonies. The act was passed because 1) there was a growing suspicion in Britain that the Americans would never voluntarily raise money either to pay for their own upkeep and defense, or to reduce the British debt. 2) A similar stamp tax had been a popular means of raising revenues in Britain; and 3) the tax was expected to raise enough money in the colonies to defray the enormous cost of colonial defense. The stamp tax placed a small tax on all legal processes. Legal documents printed on paper that did not have a stamp embossed on it were not to be recognized by law. It also taxed each page of every colonial newspaper. This single act had the effect of uniting all of the colonials against British policy. It also unified colonial newspapers against the act.



Parliament spent a great deal of time and effort to study the impact of the stamp tax on the colonies. Parliamentary committees had met and gotten input from colonial agents like Benjamin Franklin, who was in London at the time, representing both Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. Franklin and the other colonial agents didn't think that the taxes would cause much of a stir in the colonies. In fact, they even supported the stamp tax. Nobody expected the explosion that would occur.

So what was the big deal? One problem we've already looked at, but let's refresh: it's the way the colonists understood the British constitution.

Englishmen viewed taxes as gifts, freely given by the consent of the people. Now, since it would have been very awkward to get every freeholder to vote on every tax, they believed that taxes were created by their representatives. So in England, Englishmen were taxed by Parliament. In the colonies, each colonial assembly raised taxes for their colony. The problem with the stamp tax was that it was raised, not by the colonial assemblies, but by the Parliament of England. Colonists argued that this was taxation without representation. Colonials accepted the right of parliament to create taxes that were used to regulate trade within the British Empire, which they called "external taxes." But they did not accept the power of Parliament to create taxes on internal matters, in which the colonial assemblies were seen to hold sway. Parliament disagreed. They argued that they represented, not just the freeholders of England, but all English subjects everywhere.



Patrick Henry introduces the Stamp Act Resolutions.

News of the Stamp Act passage arrived in the colonies in May of 1765. In Virginia, Patrick Henry, a new member of the House of Burgesses, introduced the Stamp Act Resolutions. Henry was an excellent parliamentarian and speaker. He was a

backcountry gentleman who had been a failure at every honest occupation he had tried, and so had become a lawyer. Henry waited until the end of the session when most of the members had gone home. When 39 of the 116 burgesses were present he introduced seven resolutions. Only four of them passed. The three that failed were the most radical. The four that passed were the least radical, but the newspapers in Massachusetts and elsewhere printed all seven of the resolves without mentioning that only 4 had passed. It appeared that Virginia had hurled a challenge at Parliament and Great Britain.

Massachusetts refused to be upstaged by Virginian. The Massachusetts Assembly called for a Stamp Act Congress to agree on a common strategy for the colonies. The Massachusetts popular leadership also mobilized the mob. A demonstration in Boston turned into a riot in front of the governor's mansion. The mob trashed the customs agent's house and burned his records. They then moved to Governor Hutchinson's house, but some of his neighbors threatened the mob with guns and it dispersed and went home.

The morning after the Boston riot, the Massachusetts stamp-tax collector resigned. In Connecticut, Jared Ingersoll, a popular fellow and the new stamp collector for that colony read the newspaper and found himself being compared to Judas Iscariot. On his way to the legislature that morning he was met by some rather hefty fellows who claimed to be members of the Sons of Liberty. They forced to resign as stamp-tax collector. In Maryland the Sons of Liberty held a mock funeral for the Stamp Act and buried a coffin right in front of the new stamp-tax collector. He got the message and ran away to New York. There, members of the New York Sons of Liberty grabbed him and carried him back to Maryland, where he resigned.

What was all the trouble over anyway? Why not just do as Governor Hutchinson, or Ben Franklin, or other colonial leaders recommended—obey the law, and work diligently to get it repealed. There were a several reasons. Here are a couple.

In English constitutional law, a precedent changes the constitution. If the colonials had obeyed the law, they felt that would create a precedent that



THE STAMP ACT RIOTS AT BOSTON.

would firmly establish Parliament's right to tax them. Since they did not elect members to the British Parliament, they would have been unable to control them by voting them out of office. This, colonists reasoned would give Parliament tyrannical power over the colonies. Colonists argued that, should they give in to the Stamp Act, Parliament might create more and more taxes until the colonists would eventually be taxed into abject poverty. After all, the colonists reasoned with some justice, if Parliament can tax Americans, who have no power to stop the new taxes, they can cut taxes on English subjects who do send representatives to Parliament.

The purpose of the tax was to pay royal officials. American legislatures dominated colonial governments because they could withhold the salaries of royal officials, especially the governors. If the tax act raised revenues, and officials were paid out of those revenues, governors would become too independent of the colonial assemblies, and would be more dependent on London for their incomes. This meant that the supremacy of the local assemblies could have been compromised.

Meanwhile in London, increasing pressure by merchants and English opposition members in Parliament caused the repeal of the Stamp Act. American opposition to the act had very little to do with the repeal, but it did worry some members of the British government. They asked the question "shall Parliament be obeyed?" Some members who had come around to the idea of repeal still argued that the colonists should be required to at least pay the tax once, otherwise American colonists would become the final judges of which English laws they would obey and which they would ignore or riot over. Grenville's government fell, but Grenville was still a member of Parliament. He argued on the floor of the House of Commons that repeal was not the end of Britain's problems with America, but only the beginning. He was right.



Charles Townshend

The Stamp Act was repealed in 1766, but Parliament immediately passed the Declaratory Act. This act stated that Parliament had the right to pass legislation in reference to the American colonies in "all cases whatsoever." Americans were too busy celebrating the repeal of the Stamp Act to notice the Declaratory Act. They raised statues to King George III for saving them, he didn't have anything to do with the repeal. All in all, colonists decided that the system worked, and the king, in spite of bad advice from his evil ministers and Parliament, had done the right thing by his American subjects.

So what did the excitement of 1765-66 accomplish when all was said and done? 1) the colonies were far more unified than before; 2) colonial protest helped to organize across the colonies. 3) the colonies had stood nose to nose with England and England had blinked first. On the English side 1) Britain was still deeply in debt; 2) news of the American celebration of the Stamp Act repeal reached England, and members of Parliament began to worry about future colonial problems.

Grenville was succeeded by a brilliant but erratic statesman named Charles Townshend. He was not only a statesman but a well known London playboy nicknamed "Champagne Charley." He announced in Parliament that he had a plan to raise the necessary revenues in America without causing trouble. He lied! But Parliament promptly took him at his word, and, led by his political opponents, they lowered the English property taxes. Townsend, who didn't have the beginning of a clue about how to tax the colonies was stuck with the obligation of finding one, or finding something to do with himself outside of politics! Townsend remembered that Franklin and other colonial agents had talked to a Parliamentary committee about "external" and "internal" taxes.

The agents had argued that colonists didn't mind paying "external" taxes created by Parliament, but had no intention of paying "internal" foisted upon them by Parliament. Townshend missed the

explanation that agents said made the difference. "External taxes" were customs duties that helped to regulate trade around the Empire. Now, leaving aside the fact that we already know how much American traders respected this kind of "external tax" like the Sugar Act. Townshend's new taxes weren't really meant to regulate trade, but to raise revenue.

In 1767 Parliament passed the so-called "Townshend Acts" which imposed duties on glass, lead, paper, tea, and painter's colors. All of these goods were imported from England because it was cheaper to buy them from Britain than it would have been to try to build factories to produce them in the colonies. These duties caused a new rash of protests from colonists. Generally, violence was not used, but customs agents in Boston and New York were roughly handled at times.

Two regiments of British troops were quartered in Boston in 1770 to insure that the laws would be enforced. A brawl between these troops and a street crowd developed into a mob action; in the press in

front of the customs house, a shot was fired, British troops responded to the shot and discharged their weapons at point blank into the shouting, jostling civilians, killing five of them and wounding several others. Within 24 hours this incident was being called the "Boston Massacre." Although the action had very little to do with the issues at hand, those who died in it were made martyrs by the colonial press.

Meanwhile, in London, the failure of the Townshend acts to raise any revenue, and Townshend's general incompetence led to another shuffle in the ministry. King George's favorite minister, Lord North, took control of colonial policy. He promised to heal the wounds which had developed between England and

the colonies. He repealed the Townshend acts in 1770, all except for the small tax on tea which he left as a reminder that England *could* tax the American colonies. As a result of his diligence not to do anything to the colonists a period of peace ensued that lasted some three years. The period was disastrous for the most radical colonial leaders. They tried to rile citizens up with speeches at the anniversary of the Boston Massacre, and inflammatory newspaper articles, but all in all, things were returning to normal in the colonies. The radicals were worried, their political power and prestige in the colonies were based on opposition to Britain, during the peace they watched their political primacy slip away.

In spite of his best intentions Lord North gave the American radicals what they needed. The problem was tea. In the late 1770s, English folks, who had been big into tea drinking, were introduced to hot chocolate. They couldn't get enough of the stuff, and lost interest in tea. The East India Company, which had a monopoly on tea in Britain and her colonies, suddenly found itself with a tea surplus in English ports. Thousands of pounds of the stuff was rotting in English warehouses. In order to sell it more efficiently, Lord North and Parliament decided that they would make it available to retailers in America directly. Tea in America was pretty expensive



Frederick, Lord North, 2nd Earl of Guilford



The Boston Massacre. Print by Paul Revere, colored colonial perceptions of the event.

English political cartoon shows cabinet members forcing tea into "America," while her sister, "Britannia" turns her head in disgust.



because it was sold to shops through a series of distributors, who all wanted their profits. North and the Company hoped that Americans would drink English tea, now cheaper and more easily obtained, than the inferior Dutch tea that the Americans habitually smuggled into America ports. The Tea Act of 1773 cut out all the distributors and allowed American sellers to buy tea directly from the British East India Company. Ironically, the act actually lowered the price of superior English tea to colonists. The tax (remember, the only tax left over from the Townshend Acts) was paid along with the sale of the tea to retailers, so the colonists themselves would not have noticed it. But the American radicals were upset by the tax. To them the Tea Act was a vile conspiracy to force Americans to pay parliamentary taxation. The radicals argued that the “conspiracy” was even more insidious because it sugar coated with lower prices,

The most outstanding incident caused by the tax occurred in Boston. Radicals very loosely disguised as Indians boarded three ships in Boston harbor and dumped the tea into the sea. Elsewhere in the colonies, the locals either refused to allow the tea to be unloaded, or prevented its sale until the tea spoiled.

The British government had enough! The government decided to punish Boston for the destruction of the tea. Parliament passed a series of laws that colonists called the Intolerable Acts.

The Boston Port Act—Boston harbor was closed to all commerce until the Province of Massachusetts paid for the destroyed tea.

The Massachusetts Government Act -- the charter of 1691 was suspended and all officials who were not Crown appointees were dismissed from office. Town meetings were forbidden to assemble without the permission of the crown governor, and the Massachusetts General Court (colonial assembly) was closed.

The Administration of Justice Act -- any government official charged with a capital offense was granted the right to trial in England rather than in the colonies.

The Quartering Act — the Province of Massachusetts was ordered to provide food and lodging for British soldiers stationed there. If the colony refused to build barracks for the troops, they would be quartered in private homes.

The Americans responded by calling the First Continental Congress. It first considered a proposal to stand as a body to accept or reject British laws. This proposal failed. Next they considered and approved a series of motions from the town meeting at Suffolk, Massachusetts, which declared that Great Britain had no right to pass the Intolerable Acts. The Congress sent a “Declaration of Rights and Grievances” to Britain demanding the return of their rights as English subjects, and the repeal of laws passed since 1763 that they felt deprived them of their just rights.

The most important action of the congress was to urge the American colonies to boycott trade with great Britain. It also created an association of the colonies that were to enforce the boycott. This Continental Association became the first quasi-legal American organization for legal enforcement. And having done that, the First Continental Congress adjourned, with the understanding that it would reconvene the next year.



The American Revolution

Now let's shift our focus to Massachusetts. The colony was occupied by British troops under the command of General Sir Thomas Gage. Gage had served off and on for years in America and he knew Americans. He was even married to one, Margaret Kemble Gage. He was in a position, and had the experience to tell Parliament that they were screwing up, and he frequently did so. But Parliament had no desire to listen to him. Gage had an informant inside the Boston Committee of Correspondence, Benjamin Church, who relayed intelligence to him on rebel activities. Church used the money he received from Gage to support his mistress. Gage was probably a double agent, giving information on the radicals to Gage, and passing information about military matters to the radicals. It is also probable that Margaret Gage was a spy for the Sons of Liberty. Gage told parliament that the troubles were not just the work of a few disaffected radicals,

but that the freeholders of Massachusetts supported the rebellion, and that meant that the several thousand militiamen of the colony were solidly on the side of the rebels. Gage said that England had best be nice to the colonies until troop strength in Massachusetts could be built up to 25,000. The government in England decided that Gage was paranoid and a coward. The military leaders in England thought that Americans would not fight.

In 1774, in mid-crisis, Parliament adjourned for Christmas. When they returned they asked the king to issue a proclamation that the colonies were in a state of rebellion. They also suggested to Gage that he quietly arrest all of the Boston agitators. They wanted Gage to do something! These orders were intercepted by the Sons of Liberty. Gage decided to march to Concord where the rebels had been stockpiling arms. Church had already told Gage where the stuff was. Gage planned the raid in secret. It was possibly the worst kept military secret in the history of warfare! Everybody knew about it. Colonists were overheard discussing details of it over drinks in the taverns of Boston the day before it was to take place. Colonial militia had built fires on high ground between Boston



General Sir Thomas Gage



and Concord to light as the redcoats passed, to indicate to the local militia units where the British column was.

A small militia unit under a fellow named John Parker mustered the day before the British push on the Lexington green. A messenger from the Sons of Liberty informed Parker that a column of 800-1000 British heavy infantry would probably be marching through Lexington the next morning. Parker was a veteran, and knew that his militia wouldn't have a chance against veteran British infantry, so he sent his men home. Then about 1:00am Sam Adams rode into town and had a long talk with Parker. The next morning Parker mustered his men on the town green. It is possible that Adams wanted the war to start in the village of Lexington. No one would believe that a small poorly trained and armed militia would fire the first shot against such odds, so if there was trouble, the blame would fall on the British. There was, and it did. One shot was fired as the British entered the village green. The redcoats replied with a volley and charged. We don't actually know who fired that shot, or from where it was fired, but it had the desired effect. The British began firing. Eight militiamen men were killed and ten were wounded, many shot in the back as they tried to escape the carnage. The British column reformed and continued their march to Concord.

After a brief skirmish with the Concord militia, they found nothing, and began to march back to Boston. By this time, the local militia from all over Middlesex County had begun to muster,

and snipers began firing on the column from cover from the hills surrounding the Concord road.. The British casualties on the march back were very high. In fact the only thing that saved the column was reinforcements from Boston. They managed to straggle back, still under sporadic fire, to Boston. Overnight thousands of militiamen converged from all over the colony on the city. Boston was effectively under siege.

Delegates for the Second Continental Congress were on their way to Philadelphia. When they arrived they found that they had a war on their hands. One of their first duties was to create a Continental Army and pick a general to lead it. Congress gave the supreme command to a man who insisted that he didn't want it, but was the only person to show up at the meeting in a military uniform — George Washington. While debate went on in Philadelphia about what to do, the bloodiest battle of the Revolution took place.

England still refused to send reinforcements, instead they sent three new generals. These were among the worst generals that Britain ever put on the field of battle, their names were John Burgoyne, Sir Henry Clinton and William Howe. At Bunker Hill the British got their chance to destroy the rebels, and very possibly end the war with a decisive victory before it had even started. They blew it. The rebels had taken up a position on the heights of the Charlestown Neck. Gage recommended that troops be employed to cut the rebels off at the neck and starve them out. But Howe was senior officer. He ordered a frontal

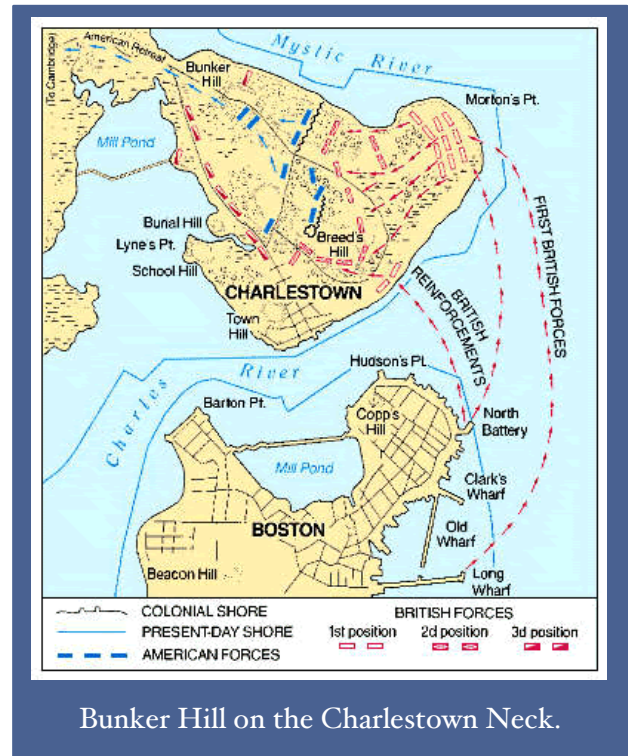


Gen. Sir William Howe

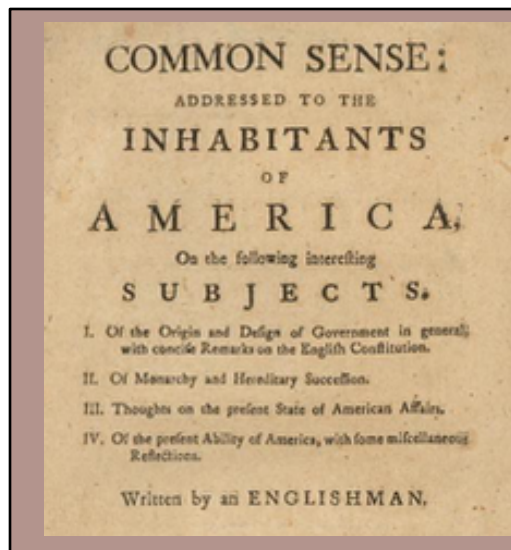
assault up the hill in full pack (75-100lbs). A fair portion of the British infantry were killed on the first assault. Howe ordered a second with much the same results. Finally he allowed his troops to remove their packs, and the redcoats forced the rebels to retreat. They did so and escaped across the undefended neck to reassemble and retire in order. Howe suffered 35% casualties, rebel losses were minimal. Although the English called it a victory, the rebels saw it otherwise. Once again, Americans had fought with British regulars and were successful. The British had complained that the rebels had violated the rules of war, and cheated on the Concord retreat by fighting like Indians, hiding and sniping from behind cover. But Bunker Hill had been a set piece, European style battle, and the Americans had beaten the British again. The rebels felt exhilarated, the British were worried.

Fighting in the colonies continued for more than a year before the Continental Congress decided in favor of independence. There were several reasons for this hesitation. First, many Americans had a sentimental attachment to their mother country; secondly, some Americans feared that British rule might be replaced with either anarchy or a worse form of despotism. Third, some leaders thought that Parliament might give in and abandon their policies toward the colonies; fourth, colonial merchants were reluctant to lose the trade privileges that they enjoyed under the British flag. Finally, many colonial assemblies had failed to give specific instructions to their congressional delegates. These delegates didn't want to take such a great step as separation without the consent of their constituents.

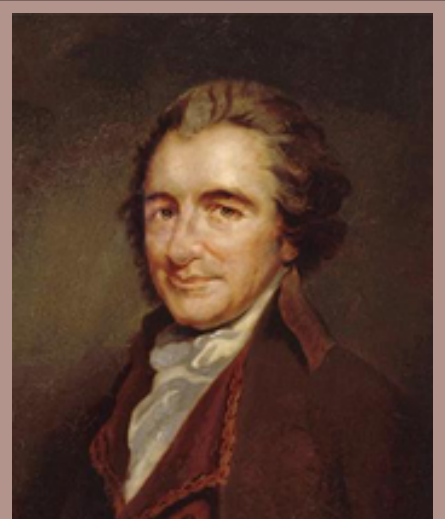
The clincher that moved enough colonists to support revolution and independence was a pamphlet written by a Philadelphia corset maker named Thomas Paine entitled *Common Sense*. Paine argued that it was inconsistent to try to pretend to be good British citizens while fighting British troops. For the first time, Paine blamed the king for America's misfortunes, not the Parliament, or a corrupt ministry. He blasted the notion of monarchy in general, and George III as a monarch in particular. Paine wrote, "monarchy, and succession, have laid the world in blood and ashes." "In England a king hath little more to do than to make



Bunker Hill on the Charlestown Neck.



Thomas Paine, a Philadelphia corset maker, wrote *Common Sense*, a best-selling pamphlet that helped sell Americans on the idea of independence.



war and give away places; which, in plain terms, is to impoverish the nation and set it together by the ears." "Of more worth is one honest man to society, and in the sight of God, than all the crowned ruffians that ever lived!" He called George III the "royal brute of Britain." Paine went on to consider the future of America after independence with a scheme of republican government, annual elections, and popular representation in a national assembly. In essence, he sold the American colonists on republicanism without monarchy. The pamphlet was a best seller, it sold 120,000 copies in 3 months.

On 5 June, Congress began a debate on independence. They had, thus moved from defense to treason. Six delegates threatened to walk out. Congress put off a vote until July 1. For three days the Congress deadlocked, and finally on the fourth, they resolved their differences and voted for independence. But what, in destroying their status as members of the British Empire, were they left with? Were they one nation or thirteen? What was the function of the Continental Congress now that independence was declared? What kind of government or governments would Americans have? All of this had to be debated and decided in the midst of a revolution. Was the Declaration of Independence a guide to the creation of a new government, a statement of principle, or just a fancy declaration of war?

The Declaration of Independence was at once a statement of the rights of Englishmen in particular and all people in general. It was influenced primarily by the English philosopher, John Locke, and secondarily by Thomas Paine. Thomas Jefferson wrote it, and it went through numerous drafts before it was finally acceptable in the form in which it was signed. It consists of three parts, each of which has a specific purpose.

- 1) The preamble states three Lockean principles of politics and society. a) that all men are created equally, b) that their creator gave them certain rights that no one can take away; c) that men have an inalienable right to overturn any government that tries.
- 2) The next part of the document is a "list of particulars" that cites all of the bad things that the king did to the colonists.
- 3) The last part is a pledge by the signers that they will devote their lives, treasure and sacred honor to right these wrongs, and to achieve independence.

The Declaration is not a blue print for government, it is not a constitution, in fact it destroyed the British constitution in America. It is not really even a declaration of war, because you present those before the shooting starts, not after. So what is it? More than anything else, it is an explanation of why the colonies were in rebellion. But, it was also something else. It gave the rebels a definite creed with which to test fellow Americans' loyalty. It created a sharp distinction between "Patriots" and Loyalists (Tories), and it automatically stigmatized anyone who refused to accept separation with England as enemies to the rights and liberties of the American people. There was no longer a safe middle of the road for Americans who wanted to remain neutral. They had either to choose independence, side with the rebels, or be considered loyalists, and thus traitors to the cause of freedom.

For some reason it is fashionable among teachers of American history to spend lots of time on the campaigns and battles of the revolution—to draw a lot of maps on the chalk board, and talk at length about each. I think that I will pass. I will make a few comments and then we will move on.

Conduct of the war -- the Revolution was not so much won by the Americans as lost by the British. In eight years, there were only about 30 days of pitched battle. The British faced a logistical nightmare. How, in the age of sail does a nation supply and reinforce some 120,000 troops that are 3,000 miles from home? The answer is not well. This problem was compounded by the fact that the British were not particularly good at supplying their troops at any great distance anyway, and would still have trouble doing so, even by the middle of the next century. The British army had no organized and integrated system for support. There were frequent reports of starving British troops dressed in rags, waiting transports from England that either didn't come, or arrived with clothes that were little better than rags, and spoiled and rotten provisions.

The British insisted on combat by European standards. That is massed fire in ordered ranks. This system was devastating in close combat in an open field of battle, and in those areas where such warfare was possible the British generally won. But much of the war was guerrilla warfare in which ambush and surprise predominated, and European tactics didn't work. The British had allies in America in the thousands in every colony -- the Tories (I prefer the

term Loyalists), but they refused to use them. Many Loyalists were veterans of more fighting than the British commanders who refused to employ them. But the British had decided that Americans were untrustworthy, and, in the face of all of the facts, cowards. So they ignored the Loyalists who were itching to fight along side the British. The worst problem that the British had was a collection of the most incompetent and stupid commanders that were ever assembled on one side in a war. There were lots of excellent commanders in the British army, but most of them chose to sit the Revolution out. Many believed that the Americans were in the right, that their cause was just, so they preferred to stay home.

On the American side... The Continental Army was always tiny, usually very poorly trained, and at any time some fraction of it was AWOL. The Continental Army amounted to less than 3,000 on any given day. Much of the war was fought by county militia units. The quality of the militia varied from place to place. The New England militia was usually very good, and most adult militiamen were hardened veterans of both local action during the French and Indian war, and also warfare in Canada and the West. The Southern militia was not so good, and the militia in the Middle Colonies were the worst. Logistics for the Continental Army wasn't much better than of the British. The Continental supply department was riddled with corruption. It was hard to acquire local supplies with worthless Continental paper money, because a) it was worthless, and b) if the British caught a merchant with it, it amounted to treason. Troops were often paid in IOUs and there were several mutinies. The rebels would never have been able to win without the support of their foreign allies. The war was ultimately financed with French and Dutch money, and success came as much because of the support of the French Navy as anything else.

So the war was eventually won, and the outcome was thirteen independent republics under a loose national government created by the articles of confederation. So what? Well, first, please don't refer to the states of the United States (yes, it is that now) as *colonies* any more. They are not!



George Washington receives the surrender of General Cornwallis at Yorktown.