

The American Revolution: A History in Documents

Steven C. Bullock

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS



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For Christopher and for his cousins,
Conor and Kevin
Geoffrey and Scott
Calvin and Ian
Derrick, Zachary, Joel, and Aaron

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Cover: As British troops march into the town of
Concord, Massachusetts, on April 19, 1776, their
commanders view the situation from a hillside cemetery.
Earlier that morning, the soldiers had already fired on
colonists in Lexington, starting the war that led to
American independence. This image was drawn only a
few days after the event by a Connecticut militiaman
whose company arrived too late to join the battle.

Frontispiece: In 1789, New York City's Federal
Hall served as the site of both the first meeting of
Congress under the new United States Constitution
and the inauguration of George Washington as the
nation's first President. In this 1790 engraving,
Washington is being sworn in on the second
floor balcony.

Title page: Thirteen hands hold on to a chain sym-
bolizing the new nation. Despite this powerful
image of unity, the question of independence led to
intense controversy.

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What Is a Document?

To the historian, a document is, quite simply, any sort of historical evidence. It is a primary source, the raw material of history. A document may be more than the expected government paperwork, such as a treaty or passport. It is also a letter, diary, will, grocery list, newspaper article, recipe, memoir, oral history, school yearbook, map, chart, architectural plan, poster, musical score, play script, novel, political cartoon, painting, photograph—even an object.

Using primary sources allows us not just to read *about* history, but to read history itself. It allows us to immerse ourselves in the look and feel of an era gone by, to understand its people and their language, whether verbal or visual. And it allows us to take an active, hands-on role in (re)constructing history.

Using primary sources requires us to use our powers of detection to ferret out the relevant facts and to draw conclusions from them; just as Agatha Christie uses the scores in a bridge game to determine the identity of a murderer, the historian uses facts from a variety of sources—some, perhaps, seemingly inconsequential—to build a historical case.

The poet W. H. Auden wrote that history was the study of questions. Primary sources force us to ask questions—and then, by answering them, to construct a narrative or an argument that makes sense to us. Moreover, as we draw on the many sources from “the dust-bin of history,” we can endow that narrative with character, personality, and texture—all the elements that make history so endlessly intriguing.

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Cartoon

This political cartoon addresses the issue of church and state. It illustrates the Supreme Court's role in balancing the demands of the 1st Amendment of the Constitution and the desires of the religious population.

Illustration

Illustrations from children's books, such as this alphabet from the New England Primer, tell us how children were educated, and also what the religious and moral values of the time were.

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Map

A 1788 British map of India shows the region prior to British colonization, an indication of the kingdoms and provinces whose ethnic divisions would resurface later in India's history.

Treaty

A government document such as this 1805 treaty can reveal not only the details of government policy, but information about the people who signed it. Here, the Indians' names were written in English transliteration by U.S. officials; the Indians added pictographs to the right of their names.

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Literature

The first written version of the Old English epic *Beowulf*, from the late 10th century, is physical evidence of the transition from oral to written history. Charred by fire, it is also a physical record of the wear and tear of history.

How to Read a Document

This book presents documents, or primary sources, about the American Revolution. Many of them describe people's experiences (often their own) or attempts to convince others of the moral rightness or the practical benefits of taking a particular action. In trying to make sense of these pieces, it is important to recognize that they were shaped, molded to fit different purposes. Think about describing an exciting day to a sympathetic friend. Now imagine explaining the same events to a suspicious police officer. Both descriptions could be true, but each would probably highlight different events, use different language, and describe feelings differently.

The writers, speakers, and even artists represented in this book also made a similar set of choices. Asking questions about the author's view of their intended audience is an important way of understanding a document's significance. We can ask questions like: How do the authors shape their ideas and stories? What do they emphasize? What do they leave out? What moral values do they take for granted? What do they expect their readers to agree or disagree with?

Even words themselves can mean different things. For example, "liberty" is a key idea during these years. It could suggest what many of us often mean today when we use the word, the freedom to do what we want. But it could also mean not having to pay a tax, being able to vote for leaders, and even being allowed to keep other people in slavery—or all of these things at once.

Asking these sorts of questions about the documents is only a start, of course. But paying attention to ways that people use words and shape their presentations can help us understand more fully why the American Revolution is one of the most exciting and important periods in American history.

Title

The title page of Revolutionary-era books such as Thomas Paine's 1776 *Common Sense* conveyed a good deal of information. Even the titles themselves tended to be longer and more descriptive than most titles today. The lengthy subtitle here notes the work's main sections. The author's name, however, often did not appear. A great deal of political writing in this period was anonymous.

Motto

Quotations from other authors played an important part in eighteenth-century political argument. Although the popular British poet James Thompson was not opposed to the British monarchy, Paine employs his lines here to underline the argument that hereditary monarchy was a foolish idea that Americans should reject. The letter "s" in the beginning or middle of a word was printed in a way that looks like present-day "f."

Imprint

The imprint indicates the location, printer, and date of a work. As the imprint here notes, *Common Sense* was originally published in Philadelphia. This edition was printed in New York shortly afterwards to meet the expected demand for the popular piece in that area. Although the publication date is not noted here, it was probably soon after the January 1776 appearance of the original edition.

Images

The images in this book are not simply illustrations. They are also primary source documents that can be as revealing as the written word. Paul Revere's popular print of the Boston Massacre appeared only a few days after it occurred in March 1770. The image and variations on it by Revere and others were the only pictures of the event that people saw.

Engravings

Although they could not be as large or as visually rich as a good painting, engravings were cheaper and could be reproduced easily. Made by printing from a metal plate from which an image had been scraped away, they were then printed as part of magazines, newspapers, or books. Or they could, as with this example, be sold separately. Copies of this print were colored by hand before they were sold.

Messages

Many of the images in this period sought to make a statement about a controversial issue. Paul Revere's print of the Boston Massacre appeared only a few days after the incident. It was titled "The Bloody Massacre Perpetrated in King Street Boston." The clothing, facial expressions, and gestures of the soldiers and civilians reinforce this interpretation. The testimonies of witnesses suggest a more chaotic scene in which the crowd was larger and much more aggressive than is shown here.

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Introduction

Madness and the Revolution

Benjamin Rush, perhaps the most influential American physician of the late eighteenth-century, held an unusual view of the American Revolution. He thought that it caused mental illness. In an essay published in 1789, he argued that some supporters of the American side had become so obsessed with liberty during the war with Great Britain that they could not accept any form of government afterward. As a result, they developed a "species of insanity" that he called *Anarchia*, referring to "anarchy," a society without government. Loyalists, people who had opposed independence, often suffered from another type of mental sickness caused by defeat, what he called *Revolutiania*.

Rush, a signer of Declaration of Independence and a professor of chemistry, did not believe that Americans were unusually unbalanced. On the contrary, people who had supported the Revolution had been especially healthy. Inspired by "the love of liberty and their country," American soldiers had been able to endure "hunger, cold, and nakedness," with "patience" and "firmness." Patriotic civilians received similar benefits. They experienced "uncommon cheerfulness" and even increased fertility. Some formerly childless couples had even been able to conceive for the first time during the war. Rush believed that such unusual developments were not surprising, since the Revolution had naturally led to "effects . . . both upon the mind and body, which have seldom occurred."

Benjamin Rush was the first professor of chemistry in America and the new nation's most important physician. Rush's many articles and pamphlets helped encourage the adoption of the American Constitution, the expansion of education for women, and the end of slavery in Pennsylvania and the northern United States.

Rush's account of the medical effects of the Revolution was a part of his continuing attempt to make sense of the sweeping changes in which he had participated. The difficulties he had in doing so are perhaps not surprising. More than two centuries later, the events that led to the creation of the United States of America still seem extraordinary. The war for independence, which had ended only five years before Rush's 1789 essay, had been fought against the dominant superpower of the time, then at the height of its eighteenth-century influence. The conflict lasted longer than any later American war except the Vietnam War, and in proportion to the population it resulted in three times as many American deaths as World War II.

The effects of the Revolution lasted long beyond the war. Beside establishing the United States of America itself, the Revolution also created a system of government that still operates and the emphasis on equality and individual rights that still distinguishes American culture. The Revolution and its aftermath also changed American society, ending slavery in the North and encouraging new opportunities for women to gain formal education—reforms that Rush himself fought for.

Even allowing for the difficulties of interpreting such major developments at close range, Rush's ideas about insanity brought on by the Revolution seem more than a bit bizarre—although certainly less dangerous than his later belief that the proper remedy for almost any major illness was removing large quantities of the sick person's blood. But he based his somewhat suspect conclusions upon a series of perceptive observations in the essay that help to underline some of the key characteristics of the Revolution that he helped to create.

Rush believed that the Revolution's impact upon the human body was particularly great because the colonists had been so closely attached to their mother country. Family relations, legal customs, trade, and a common sense of pride in the British nation and its form of government—connected Great Britain with its colonies.

Rush noted that these bonds had been developing for almost two hundred years by the time the American colonies declared their independence. Britons had first settled permanently on the mainland in 1607; by 1776, the colonists numbered about 2.5 million. One-fifth of them were Africans, who had been brought to America against their will. Others came from Holland, Germany, Ireland, and France. Despite this diversity of origins,

Britain's influence was disproportionately significant. Trade, political engagement, and printed materials all helped to spread not only its goods but also political ideas that emphasized individual liberty and limited government.

Ironically, the strongest evidence of these close ties lay in the anger with which the colonists turned against Britain. After 1765 imperial leaders imposed a variety of new colonial taxes and regulations, primarily to raise money to pay the debts created by the French and Indian War and the new obligations that victory had created. Britain also wanted to enforce regulations that had been largely ignored in its colonies. The colonists, however, saw things differently. They believed that their liberties, a foundation of their national identity, were at stake. For most, at least until the Revolutionary War began, opposition to British measures was not opposition to Britain itself, but a defense of British ideals. As Rush noted in 1788, the colonists' "resentments" were magnified by "the number and force of these ancient bonds of affection and union."

The Revolution that resulted from the breaking of these ancient bonds with Britain, Rush observed, affected everyone, "every inhabitant of the country of both sexes." "An indifferent, or neutral spectator of the controversy," he observed, "was scarcely to be found in any of the states." Although many Americans (perhaps more than half) had attempted to remain neutral at the beginning of the war, continued fighting eventually forced colonists to choose sides.

The circumstance affecting these decisions varied by place, time, and even individual situation. New York City remained in British hands from 1776 to the end of the Revolution. New England saw much more fighting at the beginning of the war, the South at the end. But even for people who were never close to a battle (and there were not many in a war that touched all new thirteen states), the Revolution affected them in a variety of ways from inflation and taxation to new governments in the states as well as the nation. And everyone would have known someone who served in the armed forces. About 9 percent of the population served in the American military, and about one out of every eight of these men died.

Not everyone supported this substantial effort. Before, during, and after the Revolution, Americans disagreed, often violently. Perhaps twice as many Americans supported the British as fought for independence. Some one thousand African-American Loyalists, almost all former slaves, settled in Africa after the war,

having decided that their own battle for liberty required taking the British side. In all, perhaps sixty to eighty thousand Americans left, rather than acknowledge the claims of the new nation.

Even against an opposition that included perhaps one-fifth of the American population and had the world's most powerful military forces on its side, the Patriots still failed to present a united front. As General Washington pleaded with Congress during the beginning of the war to supply his Continental Army adequately, Benjamin Rush and others engaged in a prolonged campaign to remove him. Rush's discussion of the Revolution's physical and mental effects similarly formed part of an important debate. His essay warning of the madness of rejecting good government was written in late 1788 as the Bill of Rights was being written and Pennsylvania's constitution was under bitter attack. The Constitution of the United States had been accepted earlier that year by only a narrow margin over the opposition of a majority of Americans.

A large part of the difficulties of unifying Americans lay in their recognition that a great deal was at stake. "It was generally believed by the friends of the Revolution," Rush recalled in 1788, "that the very existence of *freedom* upon our globe, was involved in the issue of the contest in favor of the United States." The problems involved in both defining what this freedom meant and how it should be put into practice provoked endless discussions, angry exchanges, and even outright rebellions. For Rush, these questions involved not only political but physical and mental health. The wrong choices could literally lead to insanity.

Rush, however, also warned that the results of people's actions could not be fully predicted. His autobiography even suggested that "human nature has derived more honor from [the decision for independence] than it deserves." "Not one man in a thousand," he wrote, had either thought about or "wished for the independence of our country in 1774" and very few in 1776 "foresaw the immense influence [the decision] would soon have upon the national and individual characters of Americans." He and others were mostly "blind actors in the business."

Rush did not consider the unexpected results of independence and other decisions a reason to stop fighting for greater freedom. He often insisted that the Revolution was not simply a single event, something that happened once. Instead, it was a continuing process. The end of the war, he cautioned in 1788, "did not terminate the American Revolution." Instead, as he had written the previous year, "nothing but the first act of the great drama is closed."

Such a view of the Revolution suggests some ways of approaching the documents collected here. These materials illuminate not only the great principles and figures that played a part in the Revolution, but also a variety of less well-known people—individuals and groups whose sacrifices were just as great and whose contributions were perhaps as essential to the outcome. The documents also illustrate the range of choices and possibilities open to people at the time. Such a vision of the Revolution sometimes lacks the heroism and moral certainty of an interpretation that stresses the far-reaching wisdom of patriotic leaders. But seeing the changes from Rush's perspective requires rejecting the common impulse to worship the founding fathers as god-like individuals. The documents included here suggest that paying attention to the participation of all Americans, noting the unexpected consequences of people's choices, and recognizing the continuing nature of the process, provides a clearer understanding of—and a greater appreciation for—what Rush rightly called a "great drama."

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Chapter One

The Family Quarrel

The Coming of the Revolution

In 1768, Benjamin Rush visited London. A physician and a professor of chemistry at the College of Philadelphia, Rush later became a leader in the Revolutionary movement and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. But in 1768, he wanted to sit on the king's throne. He was visiting the meeting place of the House of Lords, the upper house of the British legislature, when he noticed it. His guide resisted Rush's request to try out the throne, but finally gave him permission. The experience, Rush explained to a friend later, was so overwhelming that he could not even think straight: "Such a crowd of ideas poured in upon my mind that I can scarcely recollect one of them." The entire room made him feel "as if [he] walked on sacred ground."

As Rush's overwhelming reactions suggest, the connection between Americans and their mother country had continued to be strong past the middle of the eighteenth century. Indeed, in many ways, the relationship was growing closer. The dramatic growth of population, settlement, and economy within the colonies meant that they traded more with Great Britain, and these trade routes also served as pathways by which ideas, fashions, and visitors moved between the center and the edges of the British empire. The American Revolution has often been seen as merely the final step in a process of separation. The experience of Rush and others suggests that in many ways the colonies were becoming more like Great Britain and more closely tied to it. Even after more than a century of American settlement, colonists still spoke of going to Britain as going "home."

Despite Rush's deep emotional connection with Britain, however, his loyalty was not unconditional. When he entered the House of Commons, the other branch of the British legislature, he was at first

In this 1765 political cartoon, the American artist John Singleton Copley uses a complicated series of symbols to attack the Stamp Act. On the right, the symbol of Britain, Britannia, flies across the Atlantic. She brings "Pandora's Box," the mythical origin of evil in the world, representing the Stamp Act. Beneath the Tree of Liberty lies America, portrayed as an Indian. The protectors of Liberty, including Minerva (the helmeted goddess of wisdom), try to keep the tax from America, who is already near death.

considerably less impressed. It was, he noted, "the place where the infernal scheme for enslaving America" began. Rush looked around the "cursed" room until he found the spot where William Pitt, Britain's prime minister during its triumph in the Seven Years War (or French and Indian War), had spoken out against taxing the colonies. After sitting in Pitt's seat for a long time, Rush rose and recited Pitt's words aloud: "Americans are the sons, not the bastards of Englishmen." Remembering this powerful defense of the colonists' liberties and their place in the English national family inspired him almost as much as sitting on the throne. "I was ready," he wrote, "to kiss the very walls that had re-echoed to his voice upon that glorious occasion."

Rush's strong sense of the importance of British freedom (and the dangers of losing it) matched his awe at the majesty of the British government. In theory, freedom and government were closely allied. Both Britons and colonists regularly celebrated the British "constitution," meaning not a written document but its system of government. The later American Patriot, and President, John Adams argued in 1765 that this constitution represented "the most perfect combination of human powers in society which finite wisdom has yet contrived . . . for the preservation of liberty and the production of happiness." Three years later, Rush similarly was most moved not by the thought of being free from Britain but by being recognized as a full member of its family.

But loyalty and liberty were not so closely allied in practice. In the years after the Seven Years War ended in 1763, Americans' loyalty to the British government and their acceptance of British values often pulled them in different directions. Starting most notably with the 1765 Stamp Act that aroused Pitt's impassioned defense of the Americans, the British government attempted to change the terms of the colonists' place in the empire. The colonies would be a source of revenue; their trade would be regulated more carefully. Americans did not see these changes as simple adjustments to old policies. Instead

Paul Revere's 1770 engraving for the Boston Gazette celebrates Britain's role in protecting liberty. The female symbol of Britain holds a liberty cap (symbolic of deliverance from slavery) on a pole in one hand. With the other, she sets free a captive bird.

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the new measures represented frightening threats to their liberty to have a say in their government that distinguished Britain from other nations. The colonists fought what Rush called the “infernally scheme” in formal meetings, in pamphlets, and on the streets. When the British government failed to back down fully, many colonists eventually decided, as Rush did later, that the only way to retain their rights was to break away from the king and Parliament. British liberties could be preserved only by resisting the British government and eventually repudiating Britain itself.

Growing Children

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur was an enthusiastic promoter of America. After serving in the French army during the Seven Years War, he settled in New York among his former enemies. When he returned to France during the Revolutionary War, he celebrated American life in a book called *Letters*

Growing Ties

The same year that Rush visited London, William Jackson left there to become a merchant in Boston. A year later, in 1769, he had Paul Revere engrave the trade card at left to advertise his business. The consumer goods that Jackson and other merchants brought into the colonies were an important part of the growing ties between Great Britain and her colonies—and an increasingly significant part of the British economy. By 1770 the mainland colonies took nearly 40 percent of the mother country’s export trade, up from only 10 percent at the beginning of the century. The range of Jackson’s merchandise suggests the wide variety of imported wares available to the colonists. Revere and others had already made such merchandise a target of the colonies’ resistance to British policies, organizing boycotts of British goods to pressure the government as early as 1765. Jackson’s later refusal to stop importing goods angered the opponents of British policies. When the war came, he was banished to Great Britain.

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In this portrait by John Singleton Copley, Nicholas Boylston rests his arm on his account books. The casual elegance of his pose and the richness of his clothing reveal his wealth and status as one of Boston's most successful merchants.

from an American Farmer, published in 1782. This letter, titled "What Is an American?" notes the differences a newcomer from England would notice upon first arriving in America, particularly the opportunities that America offered for individual success and the diversity of Europeans in the colonies. Although his descriptions stress both the relative unimportance of social standing and America's economic advantages, they ignore the difficulties faced by African Americans and Native Americans.

Here he beholds fair cities, substantial villages, extensive fields, an immense country filled with decent houses, good roads, orchards, meadows, and bridges, where an hundred years ago all was wild, woody and uncultivated! What a train of pleasing ideas this fair spectacle must suggest; it is a prospect which must inspire a good citizen with the most heartfelt pleasure. The difficulty consists in the manner of viewing so extensive a scene. He is arrived on a new continent; a modern society offers itself to his contemplation, different from what he had hitherto seen. It is not composed, as in Europe, of great lords who possess every thing, and of a herd of people who have nothing. Here are no aristocratical families, no courts, no kings, no bishops, no ecclesiastical dominion, no invisible power giving to a few a very visible one; no great manufacturers employing thousands, no great refinements of luxury. The rich and the poor are not so far removed from each other as they are in Europe. Some few towns excepted, we are all tillers of the earth, from Nova Scotia to West Florida. We are a people of cultivators, scattered over an immense territory, communicating with each other by means of good roads and navigable rivers, united by the silken bands of mild government, all respecting the laws, without dreading their power, because they are equitable. We are all animated with the spirit of an industry which is unfettered and unrestrained, because each persons works for himself. If he travels through our rural districts he views not the hostile castle, and the haughty mansion, contrasted with the clay-built hut and miserable cabbins, where cattle and men help to keep each other warm, and dwell in meanness, smoke, and indigence. A pleasing uniformity of decent competence appears throughout our habitations. The meanest of our log-houses is a dry and comfortable habitation. Lawyer or merchant are the fairest titles our towns afford; that of farmer is the only appellation of the rural inhabitants of our country. It must take some time ere he can reconcile himself

to our dictionary, which is but short in words of dignity, and names of honour. . . .

The next wish of this traveller will be to know whence came all these people? they are a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes. From this promiscuous breed, the race now called Americans have arisen.

Raising Money and Rising Anger

In early 1765 the British government proposed a major tax for Americans. It required the use of specially marked ("stamped") paper for all printed and official uses. As Connecticut's agent, a lobbyist who represented that colony's interests in London, Jared Ingersoll watched the Parliamentary debates about what came to be called the Stamp Act. He reported his observations to the colony's governor, Thomas Fitch, in this February 1765 letter. Like nearly all Americans, both men objected to the Stamp Act as a violation of their rights to be taxed only by the consent of their own representatives. But, as Ingersoll notes in his report, British politicians did not share this view. Even leaders sympathetic to American interests accepted the supremacy of Parliament and the idea of virtual representation, which suggested that all parts of Britain, including the colonies, were represented in Parliament whether or not they were actually able to cast votes. Although Ingersoll opposed the Stamp Act, he attempted to profit from it once it was passed and became a stamp distributor in Connecticut, which promised to bring in a great deal of money. In the end, however, Ingersoll and the other "stampmen" earned only the scorn of their fellow colonists as men who betrayed their country for the promise of "a little ungodly Gain."

The principal attention has been to the stamp bill that has been preparing to lay before Parliament for taxing America. The point of the authority of Parliament to impose such tax I found on my arrival here was so fully and universally yielded that there was not the least hopes of making any impressions that way. Indeed it has appeared since that The House would not suffer to be brought in, nor would any one member undertake to offer to the House any petition from the colonies that held forth the contrary of that

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The Stamp Act passed by Parliament in 1765 signified the first time the British government had taxed the colonies directly. It required Britain and its colonies to use paper that had been marked with revenue stamps. These are examples of revenue stamps that were marked on the paper.

doctrine. . . . I beg leave to give you a summary of the arguments which are made use of in favor of such authority.

The House of Commons, say they, is a branch of the supreme legislature of the nation, and which in its nature is supposed to represent, or rather to stand in the place of, the Commons; that is, of the great body of the people who are below the dignity of peers; that this House of Commons consists of a certain number of men chosen by certain people of certain places, which electors, by the way, they insist are not a tenth part of the people, . . . and that this House of Commons therefore is now fixed and ascertained and is a part of the supreme unlimited power of the nation, as in every state there must be some unlimited power and authority; and that when it is said that they represent the commons of England it cannot mean that they do so because those commons choose them, for in fact by far the greater part do not.

As Ingersoll notes, the argument among British politicians concentrated on the advantages or disadvantages of the proposal, not on whether the act violated American liberty.

They further urge that the only reason why America has not been heretofore taxed in the fullest manner has been merely on account of their infancy and inability; that there have been, however, not wanting instances of the exercise of this power in the various regulations of the American trade, the establishment of the post office, etc., and they deny any distinction between what is called an internal and external tax as to the point of the authority imposing such taxes. And as to the charters in the few provinces where there are any, they say in the first place the king cannot grant any that shall exempt them from the authority of one of the branches of the great body of legislation, and in the second place say the king has not done or attempted to do it. . . . In short, they say a power to tax is a necessary part of every supreme legislative authority, and that if they have not that power over America, they have none, and then America is at once a kingdom of itself.

On the other hand, those who oppose the bill say it is true the Parliament have a supreme unlimited authority over every part and branch of the king's dominions, and as well over Ireland as any other place, yet we believe a British Parliament will never think it prudent to tax Ireland. 'Tis true they say that the commons of England and of the British Empire are all represented in and by the

House of Commons, but this representation is confessedly on all hands by construction and virtually only as to those who have no hand in choosing the representatives, and that the effects of this implied representation here and in America must be infinitely different in the article of taxation. Here in England the member of Parliament is equally known to the neighbor who elects and to him who does not; the friendships, the connections, the influences are spread through the whole. If by any mistake an Act of Parliament is made that prove injurious and hard, the member of Parliament here sees with his own eyes and is moreover very accessible to the people; not only so, but the taxes are laid equally by one rule and fall as well on the member himself as on the people. But as to America, from the great distance in point of situation, from the almost total unacquaintedness, especially in the more northern colonies, with the members of Parliament, and they with them, or with the particular ability and circumstances of one another, from the nature of this very tax laid upon others not equally and in common with ourselves, but with express purpose to ease ourselves, we think, say they, that it will be only to lay a foundation of great jealousy and continual uneasiness, and that to no purpose, as we already by the regulations upon their trade draw from the Americans all that they can spare. At least they say this step should not take place until or unless the Americans are allowed to send members to Parliament; for *who of you*, said Col. [Issac] Barré nobly in his speech in the House upon this occasion; *who of you reasoning upon this subject feels warmly from the heart* (putting his hand to his own breast) *for the Americans as they would for themselves or as you would for the people of your own native country?*

The Virginia Resolves, passed by the Virginia House of Burgesses on May 30, 1765, outlined the colonists' arguments against the Stamp Act. They were sponsored mainly by Patrick Henry, a new legislator who was already well known for his oratory (according to a later biographer, Henry proclaimed the phrase "Give me liberty or give me death" in 1775). The intercolonial Stamp Act Congress that met the following October made similar points.

Resolved, That the first Adventurers and Settlers of this his Majesty's Colony and Dominion of *Virginia* brought with them, and transmitted to their Posterity, and all other his Majesty's Subjects since inhabiting in this his Majesty's said Colony, all the Liberties,

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An American owner of this tea pot, which proclaims opposition to the Stamp Act, would soon have to decide whether to participate in boycotts of British goods. After 1767, these non-importation agreements would include the tea that might be served in this pot.

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When the Stamp Act went into effect, the Boston-born Isaiah Thomas was a sixteen-year-old printer in British Canada. Thomas found a unique way to dramatize his opposition. In printing *The Nova-Scotia and Halifax Gazette*, he bordered the revenue stamp with an image of the devil "clear[ing] the Way for . . . STAMPS."

Awake! Awake, my
Countrymen, and, by a
regular & legal Opposition,
defeat the Designs of those
who enslave us and our
Posterity. Nothing is wanting
but your own Resolution.

—*Boston Gazette*,
October 7, 1765

Privileges, Franchises, and Immunities, that have at any Time been held, enjoyed, and possessed, by the people of *Great Britain*.

Resolved, That by two royal Charters, granted by King *James* the First, the Colonists aforesaid are declared entitled to all Liberties, Privileges, and Immunities of Denizens and natural Subjects, to all Intents and Purposes, as if they had been abiding and born within the Realm of *England*.

Resolved, That the Taxation of the People by themselves, or by Persons chosen by themselves to represent them, who can only know what Taxes the People are able to bear, or the easiest Method of raising them, and must themselves be affected by every Tax laid on the People, is the only Security against a burthensome Taxation, and the distinguishing Characteristic of *British* Freedom, without which the ancient Constitution cannot exist.

Resolved, That his Majesty's liege People of this his most ancient and loyal Colony have without Interruption enjoyed the inestimable Right of being governed by such Laws, respecting their internal Polity and Taxation, as are derived from their own Consent, with the Approbation of their Sovereign, or his Substitute; and that the same hath never been forfeited or yielded up, but hath been constantly recognized by the Kings and People of *Great Britain*.

The protests against the Stamp Act went beyond petitions and arguments that called for public action. In American cities, mobs pressured the stamp tax collectors to resign. In Boston, the opposition to the Stamp Act turned particularly violent. Less than two weeks after the forced resignation of a stamp distributor, a crowd attacked the houses of two other people who had seemingly supported the Stamp Act—and then went on to destroy the mansion of the colony's lieutenant governor, Thomas Hutchinson. The mob suspected (wrongly) that the unpopular Hutchinson had helped to prepare the Stamp Act. The wealthy young Josiah Quincy, Jr., recorded this incident in his diary on August 27, 1765. Like many colonial leaders, Quincy opposed the Stamp Act and feared violent protests against it.

The destructions, demolitions, and ruins caused by the rage of the Colonies in general—perhaps too justly inflamed—at that singular and ever-memorable statute called the Stamp Act, will make the present year one of the most remarkable eras in the

annals of North America. And that peculiar inflammation, which fired the breasts of the people of New England in particular, will always distinguish them as the warmest lovers of liberty; though undoubtedly, in the fury of revenge . . . they committed acts totally unjustifiable.

The populace of Boston, about a week since, had given a very notable instance of their detestation of the above unconstitutional Act, and had sufficiently shown in what light they viewed the man who would undertake to be the stamp distributor. But, not content with this, the last night they again assembled in King's Street; where, after having kindled a fire, they proceeded, in two separate bodies, to attack the houses of two gentlemen of distinction, who, it had been suggested, were accessories to the present burthens; and did great damage in destroying their houses, furniture, &c., and irreparable damage in destroying their papers.

Both parties, who before had acted separately, then unitedly proceeded to the Chief-Justice's house. . . . This rage-intoxicated rabble . . . beset the house on all sides, and soon destroyed every thing of value. . . . The destruction was really amazing; for it was equal to the fury of the onset. . . .

The distress a man must feel on such an occasion can only be conceived by those who the next day saw his Honor the Chief-Justice come into court, with a look big with the greatest anxiety, clothed in a manner which would have excited compassion from the hardest heart. . . . What must an audience have felt, whose

The violence in King's Street was against two customs officials, Benjamin Hallowell, comptroller, and William Storey, deputy registrar of the Admiralty.

A crowd protests the Stamp Act by attacking an effigy, or an image, of New Hampshire's stamp distributor. In the foreground, a man picks up a stone to throw at the figure.

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compassion had before been moved by what they knew he had suffered, when they heard him pronounce the following words in a manner which the agitations of his mind dictated?

GENTLEMEN,—There not being a quorum of the court without me, I am obliged to appear. Some apology is necessary for my dress: indeed, I had no other. Destitute of every thing,—no other shirt; no other garment but what I have on; and not one in my whole family in a better situation than myself. The distress of a whole family around me, young and tender infants hanging about me, are infinitely more insupportable than what I feel for myself, though I am obliged to borrow part of *this* clothing

Sensible that I am innocent, that all the charges against me are false, I can't help feeling: and though I am not obliged to give an answer to all the questions that may be put me by every lawless person, yet I call God to witness,—and I would not, for a thousand worlds, call my Maker to witness to falsehood,—I say, I call my Maker to witness, that I never, in New England or Old, in Great Britain or America, neither directly nor indirectly, was aiding, assisting, or supporting—in the least promoting or encouraging—what is commonly called the Stamp Act; but, on the contrary, did all in my power, and strove as much as in my lay, to prevent it. This is not declared through timidity; for I have nothing to fear. They can only take away my life, which is of but little value when deprived of

all its comforts, all that was dear to me, and nothing surrounding me but the most piercing distress.

I hope the eyes of the people will be opened, that they will see how easy it is for some designing, wicked men to spread false reports, to raise suspicions and jealousies in the minds of the populace, and enrage them against the innocent: but, if guilty, this is not the way to proceed. The laws of our country are open to punish those who have offended. This destroying all peace and order of the community,—all will feel its effects; and I hope all will see how easily the

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Bostonians first heard of the repeal of the Stamp Act through a newspaper brought by a ship from London. A local printer published the account as a single sheet called a broadside. It helped give Bostonians the mistaken impression that colonial taxation was as unpopular in Britain as it was in America.

people may be deluded, inflamed, and carried away with madness against an innocent man.

I pray God give us better hearts!

"We Are Therefore—SLAVES"

Protest against British policy involved not only action in the streets but also political discussions in newspapers and pamphlets. The most widely read and reprinted of all statements of the emerging Patriot position was John Dickinson's *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania*. Dickinson wrote them to oppose the 1767 Townshend Acts, laws that imposed duties, or taxes, on a number of common imports such as paper, glass, paint, and tea. His twelve essays were originally published in a Philadelphia newspaper in late 1767. They were reprinted in almost every American city the following year. Identifying himself as a farmer, an occupation often viewed as morally virtuous, Dickinson—who was actually a lawyer—refined and popularized the arguments against British actions that had been developed during the Stamp Act crisis and from a long tradition of British and American political argument. The new British measures, Dickinson argues, means that Americans are in danger of falling into slavery.

There is an another late act of parliament, which appears to me to be unconstitutional, and as destructive to the liberty of these colonies, as that mentioned in my last letter; that is, the act for granting the duties on paper, glass, etc.

The parliament unquestionably possesses a legal authority to regulate the trade of *Great-Britain*, and all her colonies. Such an authority is essential to the relation between a mother country and her colonies; and necessary for the common good of all. He, who considers these provinces as states distinct from the *British Empire*, has very slender notions of *justice*, or of their *interests*. We are but parts of a *whole*, and therefore there must exist a power somewhere to preside, and preserve the connection in due order. This power is lodged in the parliament; and we are as much dependent on *Great-Britain*, as a perfectly free people can be on another.

I have looked over every *statute* relating to these colonies, from their first settlement to this time; and I find every one of them founded on this principle, till the *Stamp-Act* administration. All before, are calculated to regulate trade, and preserve or promote a mutually beneficial intercourse between the several constituent

After the Wilmington, North Carolina, Stamp collector agreed to resign, "a large Bonfire was made, and no Person appeared in the Streets without having LIBERTY, in large Capital Letters, in his Hat."

—*Pennsylvania Gazette*, January 2, 1766

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John Dickinson gained fame as the author of Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania. But his role in the Revolution went much further than as an author. Although he opposed independence in 1776, he fought on the American side during the war, held the highest government office in both Delaware and Pennsylvania, and served in the Constitutional Convention, where he was a strong supporter of the small states. This image, which first appeared in a 1772 Boston almanac, may have been engraved by Paul Revere.

parts of the empire; and though many of them imposed duties on trade, yet those duties were always imposed *with design* to restrain the commerce of one part, that was injurious to another, and thus to promote the general welfare. The raising a revenue thereby was never intended.

Dickinson continues, arguing that the 1764 Sugar Act, which included a revised tax on foreign molasses, is the first British legislation that speaks of using customs duties not to regulate trade but to raise money ("raising a revenue").

A few months after came the *Stamp-Act*, which reciting this, proceeds in the same strange mode of expression, thus—"And whereas it is just and necessary, that provision be made FOR RAISING A FURTHER REVENUE WITHIN YOUR MAJESTY'S DOMINIONS IN AMERICA, *towards defraying the said expences*, we your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the COMMONS OF GREAT-BRITAIN &c. GIVE and GRANT, &c." as before.

The last act, granting duties upon paper, &c. [the Townshend Acts] carefully pursue these modern precedents. The preamble is, "Whereas it is expedient THAT A REVENUE SHOULD BE RAISED IN YOUR MAJESTY'S DOMINIONS IN AMERICA, *for making a more certain and adequate provision for defraying the charge of the administration of justice, and the support of civil government in such provinces. . . .*"

Here we may observe an authority *expressly* claimed and exerted to impose duties on these colonies; not for the regulation of trade; not for the preservation or promotion of a mutually beneficial intercourse between the several constituent parts of the empire, heretofore the *sole objects* of parliamentary institutions; *but for the single purpose of levying money upon us.*

This I call an innovation; and a most dangerous innovation.

Dickinson went on in later letters to argue that, as Americans could not do without the British paper and glass that were taxed by the Townshend duties, they had no choice but to pay the taxes. His seventh letter picks up his discussion on this point.

Some persons may think this act of no consequence, because the duties are so *small*. A fatal error. *That* is the very circumstance most alarming to me. For I am convinced, that the authors of this law would never have obtained an act to raise so trifling a sum as

it must do, had they not intended by *it* to establish a *precedent* for future use. . . .

The late act is founded on the destruction of this constitutional security. If the parliament have a right to lay a duty of Four Shillings and Eight-pence on a hundred weight of glass, or a ream of paper, they have a right to lay a duty of any other sum on either. They may raise the duty, as the author before quoted says has been done in some countries, till it "exceeds seventeen or eighteen times the value of the commodity." In short, if they have a right to levy a tax of *one penny* upon us, they have a right to levy a *million* upon us: For where does their right stop? At any given number of Pence, Shillings or Pounds? To attempt to limit their right, after granting it to exist at all, is as contrary to reason—as granting it to exist at all, is contrary to justice. If *they* have any right to tax *us*—then, whether *our own money* shall continue in *our own pockets* or not, depends no longer on *us*, but on *them*. "There is nothing which" we can call our own; or, to use the words of Mr. *Locke*—"WHAT PROPERTY HAVE WE IN THAT, WHICH ANOTHER MAY, BY RIGHT, TAKE, WHEN HE PLEASES, TO HIMSELF?"

These duties, which will inevitably be levied upon us—which are now levying upon us—are *expressly* laid FOR THE SOLE PURPOSES OF TAKING MONEY. This is the true definition of "taxes." They are therefore *taxes*. This money is to be taken from *us*. We are therefore *taxed*. Those who are *taxed* without their own consent, expressed by themselves or their representatives, are *slaves*. *We are taxed* without our own consent, expressed by ourselves or our representatives. *We are therefore—SLAVES.*

Miserable vulgus

A miserable tribe.

Violence in the Streets

William Shepard experienced the opposition to British policies at first hand. As a customs official in Philadelphia, Shepard had to enforce regulations that growing numbers of Americans saw as unfair. In this April 1769 letter to his superiors, the customs commissioners in Boston, he explains the difficulties he had endured.

On Saturday 1st instant, about ten o'clock in the morning, a seizure was made by the collector in consequence of an order from the inspector general, of near fifty pipes [casks] of Madeira wine, which was lodged in a store belonging to Mr. Andrew

John Locke

John Locke was a seventeenth-century English writer whose writings on philosophy, education, and government were highly influential in America as well as in England. This quotation refers to Locke's argument that governments were created by people to defend "life, liberty, and property." Thomas Jefferson would use a form of that phrase in the Declaration of Independence.

A German trained in England as a historian of the British Empire, Hoock trumpets the novelty of his angle of vision in what he calls the "first book on the American Revolution and the Revolutionary War to adopt violence as its central analytical and narrative focus." He marshals a good deal of startling new evidence, the fruits of prodigious research in British archives too rarely used by historians of colonial America and the early United States. But conceptually, "Scars of Independence" also owes a large debt to other scholars' efforts to reframe the revolutionary era. Primary Documents of American History (Virtual Services and Programs, Digital Reference Section, Library of Congress). Primary Documents in American History. The American Revolution and The New Nation, 1775-1815. A View of the Federal Hall of the City of New York, as Appeared in the Year 1797. Henry R. Robinson, Lithograph, 1847. Prints & Photographs Division. Reproduction Number: LC-USZC4-1799. George Washington's Commission as Commander in Chief (1775). Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776). Lee Resolution (1776). Explore the American Revolution using this rich collection of sources and documents that tell the history of a new nation. Sources in U.S. History Online: The American Revolution is a digital archive documenting the revolution and war that created the United States of America, from the Paris peace treaty in 1763 through the early protests in 1785 to the Paris peace treaty of 1783. The collection examines the political, social, and intellectual upheaval of the age, as well as the actual war for American independence through its eight long years of conflict. The archive provides a rich sense of the causes and consequences of one of the great turning points in history. The American Revolution is one of the cornerstone events in modern history.