



PREFACE

When in the midst of the Civil War Abraham Lincoln sought to define the significance of the United States, he naturally looked back to the American Revolution. He knew that the Revolution not only had legally created the United States, but also had produced all of the great hopes and values of the American people. The noblest ideals and aspirations of Americans—their commitments to freedom, constitutionalism, the well-being of ordinary people, and equality, especially equality—came out of the Revolutionary era. But Lincoln saw as well that the Revolution had convinced Americans that they were a special people with a special destiny to lead the world toward liberty. The Revolution, in short, gave birth to whatever sense of nationhood and national purpose Americans have had.

Such a momentous event has inevitably attracted successive generations of historical interpretation. At the outset Americans saw their Revolution as a heroic moral struggle for liberty against the evils of British tyranny, with the participants being larger-than-life heroes or villains. Then through much of the nineteenth century, largely through the work of George Bancroft, the Revolution lost some of its highly personal character and became the providential fulfillment of

the American people's democratic destiny, something preordained from the very beginning of the seventeenth-century colonial settlements. And like the nation it produced, it was exceptional. Unlike the French Revolution, which had been caused by actual tyranny, the American Revolution was seen as a peculiarly intellectual and conservative affair, as something brought about not by actual oppression but by the anticipation of oppression, by reasoning and devotion to principle, such as "no taxation without representation."

Only at the beginning of the twentieth century and the birth of professional history-writing did the Revolution become something more than a colonial rebellion and something other than a conservative intellectual event. As Carl Becker, one of the leading historians at the time, put it, the Revolution was not only about home rule; it was also about who should rule at home. And it was now seen as anything but a contest over ideas. This denigration of ideas and emphasis on class and sectional conflict dominated history-writing during the first half of the twentieth century. Then at mid-century a new generation of historians rediscovered the constitutional and conservative character of the Revolution and carried the intellectual interpretation of the Revolution to new heights of sophistication.

Although American historians had disagreed with one another over these two centuries of changing interpretations, they had rarely if ever questioned the worth of the Revolution. At present, however, the Revolution, like the nation it created, has come in for some very serious criticism. Indeed, it has become fashionable to deny that anything substantially progressive came out of the Revolution. Instead, some historians today are more apt to stress the failures of the Revolution. As one young historian recently put it, the Revolution "failed to free the slaves, failed to offer full political equality to women, . . . failed to grant citizenship to Indians, [and] failed to create an economic world in which all could compete on equal terms." Such anachronistic statements suggest a

threshold of success that no eighteenth-century revolution could possibly have attained, and perhaps tell us more about the political attitudes of the historians who make such statements than they do about the American Revolution. In some sense these present-day critical historians have simply inverted the first generation's heroic celebration of the Revolution.

The history of the American Revolution, like the history of the nation as a whole, ought not to be viewed as a story of right and wrong or good and evil from which moral lessons are to be drawn. No doubt the story of the Revolution is a dramatic one: Thirteen insignificant British colonies huddled along a narrow strip of the Atlantic coast three thousand miles from the centers of Western civilization becoming in fewer than three decades a huge, sprawling republic of nearly 4 million expansive-minded, evangelical, and money-hungry citizens is a spectacular tale, to say the least. But the Revolution, like the whole of American history, is not a simple morality play; it is a complicated and often ironic story that needs to be explained and understood, not celebrated or condemned. How the Revolution came about, what its character was, and what its consequences were—not whether it was good or bad—are the questions this brief history seeks to answer.

The origins of the Revolution necessarily lie deep in America's past. A century and a half of dynamic developments in the British continental colonies of the New World had fundamentally transformed inherited European institutions and customary patterns of life and had left many colonists believing that they were seriously deviating from the cultivated norms of European life. In comparison with prosperous and powerful metropolitan England, America in the middle of the eighteenth century seemed a primitive, backward place, disordered and turbulent, without a real aristocracy, without magnificent courts or large urban centers, indeed, without any of the attributes of the civilized world. Consequently, the colonists repeatedly felt pressed to apologize for the crudity of their society, the insignificance of their art and literature, and the triviality of their affairs.

Suddenly in the 1760s Great Britain thrust its imperial power into this changing world with a thoroughness that had not been felt in a century and precipitated a crisis within the loosely organized empire. American resistance turned into rebellion; but as the colonists groped to make sense of the peculiarities of their society, this rebellion became a justification and idealization of American life as it had gradually and unintentionally developed over the previous century and a half. Instead of being in the backwaters of history, Americans suddenly saw themselves as a new society ideally equipped for a republican future. In this sense, as John Adams later said, "the Revolution was effected before the war commenced." It was a change "in the minds and hearts of the people."

But this change was not the whole American Revolution. The Revolution was not simply an intellectual endorsement of a previously existing social reality. It was also an integral

part of the great transforming process that carried America into the liberal democratic society of the modern world. Although colonial America was already a different place from Europe in 1760, it still retained, along with powdered wigs and knee breeches, many traditional habits of monarchical behavior and dependent social relationships. The Revolution shattered what remained of these traditional patterns of life and prepared the way for the more fluid, bustling, individualistic world that followed.

The changes were remarkable, and they gave the American people as grand a vision of their future as any people have ever had. Americans saw their new nation not only leading a world revolution on behalf of republicanism and liberty but also becoming the place where the best of all the arts and sciences would flourish. What began as a colonial rebellion on the very edges of the civilized world was transformed into an earth-shaking event—an event that promised, as one clergyman declared, to create out of the “perishing World . . . a new World, a young world, a World of countless Millions, all in the fair Bloom of Piety.”

THE GROWTH AND MOVEMENT OF POPULATION

England
In 1763, Great Britain straddled the world with the greatest and richest empire since the fall of Rome. From India to the Mississippi River its armies and navies had been victorious. The Peace of Paris that concluded the Seven Years' War—or the French and Indian War, as the Americans called it—gave Britain undisputed dominance over the eastern half of North America. From the defeated powers, France and Spain, Britain acquired huge chunks of territory in the New World—all of Canada, East and West Florida, and millions of fertile acres between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River. France turned over to Spain the territory of

Louisiana in compensation for Spain's loss of Florida; and thus this most fearsome of Britain's enemies removed itself altogether from the North American continent.

Yet at the moment of Britain's supremacy there were powerful forces at work that would soon, almost overnight, change everything. In the aftermath of the Seven Years' War, British officials found themselves having to make long-postponed decisions concerning the colonies that would set in motion a chain of events that ultimately shattered the empire.

Ever since the formation of the British Empire in the late seventeenth century, royal officials and bureaucrats had been interested in reforming the ramshackle imperial structure and in expanding royal authority over the American colonists. But most of their schemes had been blocked by English ministries more concerned with the patronage of English politics than with colonial reform. Under such circumstances the empire had been allowed to grow haphazardly, without much control from London. People from different places in Europe had been allowed to settle in the colonies, and land had been given out freely.

Although few imperial officials had ever doubted that the colonies were supposed to be inferior to the mother country and dependent on it, in fact the empire had not worked that way. The relationship that had developed reflected the irrational and inefficient nature of the imperial system—the variety of offices, the diffusion of power, and the looseness of organization. Even in trade regulation, which was the empire's main business, inefficiency, loopholes, and numerous opportunities for corruption prevented the imperial authorities from interfering substantively with the colonists' pursuit of their own economic and social interests.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, new circumstances began forcing changes in this irrational but working relationship. The British colonies—there were twenty-two of them in the Western Hemisphere in 1760—were becoming 22

too important to be treated as casually as the mother country had treated them in the first half of the eighteenth century. Dynamic developments throughout the greater British world demanded that England pay more attention to its North American colonies.

The most basic of these developments were the growth and movement of population. In the middle decades of the eighteenth century, the number of people throughout the whole English-speaking world—in Britain and the colonies alike—was increasing at unprecedented rates. During the 1740s the population of England, which had hardly grown at all for half a century, suddenly began to increase. The populations of Ireland and Scotland had been rising steadily since the beginning of the eighteenth century. The population of the North American colonies was growing even faster—virtually exploding—and had been doing so almost since the beginning of the settlements. Indeed, the North American colonists continued to multiply more rapidly than any other people in the Western world. Between 1750 and 1770 they doubled in number, from 1 million to more than 2 million, and thereby became an even more important part of the British world. In 1700 the American population had been only one twentieth of the British and Irish populations combined; by 1770 it was nearly one fifth, and such farsighted colonists as Benjamin Franklin were predicting that sooner or later the center of the British Empire would shift to America.

Everywhere the expanding British population was in motion, moving from village to village and from continent to continent. In Britain growing numbers of migrants in a few decades created the new industrial cities of Birmingham, Manchester, and Leeds and made London the largest urban center in the Western world. A steady stream moved from the British Isles across the Atlantic to the New World. The migration of Protestant Irish and Scots that had begun early in the century increased after the Seven Years' War of the 1750s. Between 1764 and 1776 some 125,000 people left the British

Isles for the American colonies. From the colonial port towns, particularly Philadelphia, British immigrants and Germans from the Rhine Valley joined with increasing numbers of colonists to spread over half a continent along a variety of routes.

For nearly a century and a half the colonists had been confined to a several-hundred-mile-wide strip of territory along the Atlantic coast. But in the middle decades of the eighteenth century, the pressures of increasing population density began to be felt. Overcultivated soil in the East was becoming depleted. Particularly in the Chesapeake areas the number of tenants was visibly growing. Older towns now seemed overcrowded, especially in New England, and young men coming of age could no longer count on obtaining pieces of land as their fathers had done. Throughout the colonies more and more people were on the move; many drifted into the small colonial cities, which were ill equipped to handle them. By 1772 in Philadelphia, the percentage of poor was eight times greater than it had been twenty years earlier, and almshouses were being constructed and filled as never before. Most of these transient poor, however, saw the cities only as way stations in their endless search for land on which they might re-create the stability they had been forced to abandon.

With the defeat of the French, people set out in all directions, eager to take advantage of the newly acquired land in the interior. In 1759 speculators and settlers moved into the area around Lake Champlain and westward along the Mohawk River into central New York. Between 1749 and 1771, New York's population grew from 73,348 to 168,007. Tens of thousands of colonists and new immigrants pushed into western Pennsylvania and southward into the Carolinas along routes on each side of Virginia's Blue Ridge. Along these roads strings of towns—from York, Pennsylvania, to Camden, South Carolina—quickly developed to service the travelers and to distribute produce to distant markets. The growth of settlement was phenomenal. In Pennsylvania twenty-nine

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new localities were created between 1756 and 1765—more in these few years than in the colony's entire previous history. North Carolina increased its population sixfold between 1750 and 1775 to become the fourth-largest colony.

New frontiers appeared everywhere throughout British North America. By the early 1760s hunters and explorers such as Daniel Boone began opening up paths westward through the Appalachians. Settlers soon followed. Some moved southward to the valley of the Holston River and to the headwaters of the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers, and others spread northwest into the Ohio Valley and the Kentucky basin. Some drifted down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to join overland migrants from the southern colonies in the new province of West Florida, and thus completed a huge encirclement of the new western territory.

During the decade and a half before Independence, New England throbbed with movement. By the early 1760s the number of transients drifting from town to town throughout the region multiplied dramatically, in some counties doubling or tripling the numbers of the previous decade. Many farmers gave up searching for opportunities within established communities and set out for distant places on the very edges of the expanded empire. Massachusetts and Connecticut colonists trekked not only to northern New England and Nova Scotia, but to areas as far away as the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania and the lower Mississippi River. Indeed, the largest single addition to the population of West Florida came from the settlement of four hundred families from Connecticut in 1773–74. Between 1760 and 1776 some 20,000 people from southern New England moved up the Connecticut River into New Hampshire and into what would later become Vermont. In that same period migrants from Massachusetts streamed into Maine and founded 94 towns. A total of 264 new towns were established in northern New England during the years between 1760 and 1776.

British and colonial authorities could scarcely compre-

hend the meaning of this enormous explosion of people in search of land. The colonists, one astonished official observed, were moving "as their avidity and restlessness incite them. They acquire no attachment to place: but wandering about seems engrafted in their nature; and it is a weakness incident to it that they should forever imagine the lands further off are still better than those upon which they are already settled." Land fever infected all levels of society. While Ezra Stiles, a minister in Newport, Rhode Island, and later the president of Yale University, bought and sold small shares in places all over New England and in Pennsylvania and New York, more influential figures like Benjamin Franklin were concocting huge speculative schemes in the vast unsettled lands of the West.

All this movement had far-reaching effects on American society and its place in the British Empire. The fragmentation of households, churches, and communities increased, and the colonial governments lost control of the mushrooming new settlements. In the backcountry, lawlessness and vagrancy became common, and disputes over land claims and colonial boundaries increased sharply. But the most immediate effect of this rapid spread of people—and the effect that was most obvious to imperial officials by mid-century—was the pressure that the migrations placed on the native peoples.

At the beginning of the Seven Years' War, the problems of restless and angry Native Americans in the West compelled the British government for the first time to take over from the colonies the direct control of Indian affairs. Two British officials, one each for the northern and southern regions, now had the task of pacifying tribes of Indians, whom one of the superintendents described as "the most formidable of any uncivilized body of people in the world."

Although the European invasion of the New World had drastically reduced the numbers of the native peoples, largely through the spread of disease, about 150,000 Indians remained in the area east of the Mississippi. New England had

few hostile Indians, but in New York there were 2,000 warriors, mostly fierce Senecas, left from the once formidable Six Nations of the Iroquois. In the Susquehanna and Ohio Valleys dwelled a variety of tribes, mostly Delawares, Shawnees, Mingos, and Hurons, who claimed about 12,000 fighting men. On the southern frontiers the Indian presence was even more forbidding. From the Carolinas to the Yazoo River were some 14,000 warriors, mainly Cherokees, Creeks, Chocktaws, and Chickasaws. Although these native peoples were often deeply divided from one another and had reached different degrees of accommodation with the European settlers, most of them were anxious to resist further white encroachment on their lands.

After French authority had been eliminated from Canada and Spanish authority from Florida, the Native Americans were no longer able to play one European power off against the other. Britain now had sole responsibility for regulating the profitable fur trade and for maintaining peace between whites and Indians. The problems were awesome. Not only were many whites prepared to use brandy and rum to achieve their aims, but they had conflicting interests. Some traders favored regulation of the fur trade, and others did not. But all traders favored the establishment in the West of Indian reservations that settlers would not be permitted to invade, and they drew on the support of humanitarian groups who were concerned with the Indians' fate. Land speculators, however, wanted to move the Indians westward and open more territory for white settlement. Confused, lied to, and cheated of their land and their furs by greedy white traders and land-hungry migrants, the Indians retaliated with atrocities and raids. Some tribes attempted to form coalitions and wage full-scale war.

Thus the end of the Seven Years' War did not end violence on the frontier. From the devastating Cherokee War of 1759–61 in South Carolina to the assault on the Shawnees in

1774 by Lord Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia, British officials repeatedly had to use royal troops to put down Indian revolts. The biggest Indian rebellion of the period occurred in 1763 following the British takeover of the former French forts in the West. In just a few weeks Indians from several tribes that had joined together under the leadership of an Ottawa chief named Pontiac surprised and destroyed all but three of the British posts west of the Appalachians. Before they were pushed back by British troops, the angry warriors had penetrated eastward into the backcountry of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia and had killed more than 2,000 colonists. It is no wonder that many royal authorities in the 1760s concluded that only the presence of regular troops of the British army could maintain peace in the American borderlands of the empire.

The rapid growth and spread of people in the mid eighteenth century affected more than white-Indian relations on the frontier. Thousands of migrants flowed into the backcountry, beyond the reach of the eastern colonial governments. These backcountry settlers were so distant from legal authority that sometimes vigilante groups had to impose order. In the 1760s backcountry people in South Carolina organized vigilante "Regulators" to put down roving gangs of thieves, but extralegal posses of this kind often turned into raiders themselves. Sometimes frontiersmen in these trans-Appalachian areas of the West came together to form compacts of government for their raw societies, which often consisted of little more than "stations"—primitive stockaded forts surrounded by huts.

Everywhere in the backcountry the sudden influx of people weakened the legitimacy of existing authority. In the rapidly growing interiors of Pennsylvania and North Carolina, settlers in the 1760s rose in arms against what they believed was exploitation by remote eastern governments. In western Pennsylvania, Scotch-Irish settlers led by the Paxton

Boys rebelled against the Quaker-dominated, pacifist-minded Pennsylvania assembly, in which they were grossly underrepresented. In 1763–64 they killed Indians who were under the government's protection and then marched on Philadelphia. The rebels turned back only after mediation by Benjamin Franklin and the promise of a greater voice in the eastern-controlled colonial assembly. In North Carolina not only was the backcountry underrepresented in the provincial legislature, but the local county courts were under the corrupt management of carpetbagging officials and lawyers from the eastern part of the colony. In 1767 a group of western vigilantes, assuming the familiar title Regulators, erupted in violence. They took over the county courts and petitioned the North Carolina government for greater representation, lower taxes, and local control of their affairs. Two thousand of these Regulators were dispersed by the North Carolina governor and his force of eastern militia at the so-called battle of Alamance in 1771. But royal officials could not so easily dispel the deeply rooted fears among many Americans of the dangers of unfair representation and distant political power. Indeed these westerners were only voicing toward their own colonial governments the same attitudes that Americans in general had about British power.

ECONOMIC EXPANSION

All these consequences flowing from the increased numbers of people in North America were bound to raise Britain's interest in its colonies. But population pressures were not all that were reshaping British attitudes toward the colonies and transforming American society. Equally important was the remarkable expansion of the Anglo-American economy taking place in the middle years of the eighteenth century.

By 1750 in Britain the immediate origins of what would soon become the industrial revolution were already visible.

British imports, exports, and industrial production of various sorts—all the major indicators of economic growth—were rapidly rising. Americans were deeply involved in this sudden British economic expansion, and by 1760 they were prospering as never before.

In the years after 1745, colonial trade with Great Britain grew dramatically and became an increasingly important segment of the English and Scottish economies. Nearly half of all English shipping was engaged in American commerce. The North American mainland was absorbing 25 percent of English exports, and Scottish commercial involvement with the colonies was growing even more rapidly. From 1747 to 1765 the value of colonial exports to Britain doubled from about £700,000 to £1.5 million, while the value of colonial imports from Britain rose even faster, from about £900,000 to more than £2 million. For the first time in the eighteenth century, Britain's own production of foodstuffs could not meet the needs of its suddenly rising population. By 1760, Britain was importing more grain than it exported. This increasing demand for foodstuffs—not only in Great Britain, but in southern Europe and the West Indies as well—meant soaring prices for American exports. Between the 1740s and the 1760s, the price of American produce exported to the Caribbean increased by huge percentages. Seeing the greater demand and rising prices for American exports, more and more ordinary farmers began to produce foodstuffs and other goods for distant markets. By the 1760s remote trading centers in the backcountry such as Staunton, Virginia, and Salisbury, North Carolina, were shipping large quantities of tobacco and grain eastward to the sea along networks of roads and towns. Port cities like Baltimore, Norfolk, and Alexandria grew up almost overnight to handle this swelling traffic.

Soaring prices for agricultural exports meant rising standards of living for more and more Americans. It was not just the great planters of the South and the big merchants of the

cities who were getting richer. Now ordinary Americans were also buying luxury items that traditionally had been purchased only by wealthy gentry—items that were increasingly called conveniences and that ranged from Irish linen and lace to matched sets of Wedgwood dishes. Benjamin Franklin tells us in his autobiography that his wife Deborah surprised him one morning with some new replacements for his pewter spoon and earthen bowl. By purchasing these items simply because “she thought her Husband deserved a Silver Spoon & China Bowl as well as any of his Neighbours,” she was raising her family’s status and standard of living. At the same time, she was contributing to what historians have come to call an eighteenth-century “consumer revolution.”

Although nineteen out of twenty Americans were still engaged in agriculture, the rising levels of taste and consumption drew more colonists into manufacturing—at first, mostly the production of crude textiles and shoes. Transportation and communications rapidly improved as roads were built and regular schedules were established for stagecoaches and packet boats. In the 1750s the Post Office, under the leadership of Benjamin Franklin, the colonial deputy postmaster general, instituted weekly mails between Philadelphia and Boston and cut delivery time in half, from six to three weeks. The growing population, better roads, more reliable information about markets, and the greater variety of towns all encouraged domestic manufacturing for regional and inter-colonial markets. By 1768 colonial manufacturers were supplying Pennsylvania with eight thousand pairs of shoes a year. Areas of eastern Massachusetts were becoming more involved in manufacturing: in 1767 the town of Haverhill, with fewer than three hundred residents, had forty-four workshops and nineteen mills. By this date many colonial artisans and would-be manufacturers were more than eager to support associations to boycott rival English imports.

But most colonists still preferred British goods. From the late 1740s on, Americans were importing from Britain about

£500,000 worth of goods more than they were exporting to the mother country, and thus they continued to be troubled by a trade deficit with Britain. Part of this deficit in the colonists’ balance of payments with Britain was made up by the profits of shipping, by British wartime expenditures in America, and by increased sales to Europe and the West Indies. But a large part was also made up by the extension to the colonists of large amounts of English and Scottish credit. By 1760 colonial debts to Britain amounted to £2 million; by 1772 they had jumped to more than £4 million. After 1750 a growing proportion of this debt was owed by colonists who earlier had been excluded from direct dealings with British merchants. More and more small tobacco farmers in the Chesapeake gained immediate access to British credit and markets through the spread of Scottish “factors” (store-keepers) in the backcountry of Virginia and Maryland. By 1760 it was not unusual for as many as 150 petty traders in a single port to be doing business with a London merchant company.

These demographic and economic forces undermined the customary paternalistic structure of colonial society. The ties of kinship and patronage that traditionally held people together, which had never been strong in America to begin with, were now further weakened. Even in Virginia, one of the most stable of the colonies, the leading aristocratic plantation owners found their authority challenged by small farmers who were no longer as personally dependent on them for credit and markets. These small farmers now forged more impersonal connections with the new Scottish factors and became more much independent than they had been before. They expressed this independence by becoming more involved in politics and by promoting religious dissent. During the middle decades of the eighteenth century, not only did the number of contested elections to the Virginia House of Burgesses increase markedly, but also ordinary people in Virginia began leaving the established Church of England in

growing numbers. They formed new evangelical religious communities that rejected the high style and luxury of the dominant Anglican gentry. Within a few years succeeding waves of New Light Presbyterians, Separate Baptists, and finally Methodists swept up new converts from among the common farmers of the Chesapeake region. Between 1769 and 1774 the number of Baptist churches in Virginia increased from seven to fifty-four.

The Virginia gentry blamed the growth of religious dissent on the long-claimed incompetence of the Anglican ministers. In turn the ministers accused the lay vestries, which were composed of Anglican gentry, of not supporting them. Amid these mutual accusations the Virginia House of Burgesses passed acts in 1755 and 1758 that fixed at twopence a pound the standard value of tobacco used to meet debts and public obligations. Since tobacco prices were rising rapidly, these so-called Two-Penny Acts penalized creditors and those public officials (including ministers) who were used to being paid in tobacco. British merchants and the ministers of Virginia's established Anglican Church protested and were able to get the king's Privy Council in England to disallow the Burgesses' 1758 act. In 1763 a rising young lawyer, Patrick Henry, first made his reputation as a powerful popular orator in a court battle over one of the Virginia ministers' legal suits for the recovery of wages lost by the now illegal Two-Penny Act. In his defense of the Virginia planters against this "Parson's Cause," Henry went so far as to claim that, because the king had vetoed the act, he "from being the father of his people [has] degenerated into a Tyrant, and forfeits all rights to his subjects' obedience." That Henry could be celebrated for such histrionic (and seditious) remarks was a measure of how tenuous and brittle traditional relationships had become. Everywhere in the colonies, nerves were on edge and men were quick to blame all authority, including that of the king three thousand miles away, for the rapidly changing circumstances of their lives.

It is doubtful whether anyone anywhere in the mid eighteenth century knew how to control the powerful social and economic forces at work in the Anglo-American world. Certainly the flimsy administrative arrangement that governed the British Empire seemed scarcely capable of managing this incredibly dynamic world. No doubt by mid-century many British officials had come to realize that some sort of overhaul of this increasingly important empire was needed. But few understood the explosive energy and the sensitive nature of the people they were tampering with. The British Empire, Benjamin Franklin warned, was like a fragile Chinese vase that required delicate handling indeed.

REFORM OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

After 1748 various imperial reforms were in the air. The eye-opening experience of fighting the Seven Years' War amid the colonists' evasion and corruption of the navigation laws had provoked William Pitt and other royal officials into vigorous, though piecemeal, reforms of the imperial system. But these beginnings might have been suppressed, as others earlier had been, if it had not been for the enormous problems that were created by the Peace of Paris, which ended the Seven Years' War in 1763.

The most immediate of these problems was the reorganization of the territory that had been acquired from France and Spain. New governments had to be organized, the Indian trade had to be regulated, land claims had to be sorted out, and something had to be done to keep the conflicts between land-hungry white settlers and angry Native Americans from exploding into open warfare.

Even more disturbing was the huge expense confronting the British government. By 1763 the war debt totaled £137 million; its annual interest alone was £5 million, a huge figure when compared with an ordinary yearly British peacetime budget of only £8 million. There was, moreover, little

prospect of military costs declining. Since the new territories were virtually uninhabited by Englishmen, the government could not rely on its traditional system of local defense and police to preserve order. Lord Jeffrey Amherst, commander in chief in North America, estimated that he would need 10,000 troops to keep the peace with the French and Indians and to deal with squatters, smugglers, and bandits. Thus at the outset of the 1760s the British government made a crucial decision that no subsequent administration ever abandoned—the decision to maintain a standing army in America. This peacetime army was more than double the size of the army that had existed in the colonies before the Seven Years' War, and the costs of maintaining it quickly climbed to well over £300,000 a year.

Where was the money to come from? The landowning gentry in England felt pressed to the wall by taxes; a new English cider tax of 1763 actually required troops in the apple-growing counties of England to enforce it. Meanwhile, returning British troops were bringing home tales of the prosperity Americans were enjoying at the war's end. Under the circumstances it seemed reasonable to the British government to seek new sources of revenue in the colonies and to make the navigation system more efficient in ways that royal officials had long advocated. A half century of what Edmund Burke called "salutary neglect" had come to an end.

The delicate balance of this rickety empire was therefore bound to be disrupted. But the coming to the throne in 1760 of a new monarch, the young and impetuous George III, worsened this changing Anglo-American relationship. George III was only twenty-two years old at the time, shy and inexperienced in politics. But he was stubbornly determined to rule personally, in a manner distinctly different from that of the Hanoverians George I and George II, his German-born great-grandfather and grandfather. With the disastrous failure of the Stuart heir, "Bonnie Prince Charlie," to reclaim the English throne in 1745–46, George, who was the first of

the Hanoverian kings to be British-born, was much more confident of his hold on the throne than his Hanoverian predecessors had been. Hence he felt freer to ignore the advice of the Whig ministers, who had guided the first two Georges, and to become his own ruler. Influenced by his inept Scottish tutor and "dearest friend," Lord Bute, he aimed to purify English public life of its corruption and factionalism. He wanted to replace former Whig-Tory squabbling and party intrigue with duty to crown and country. These were the best of intentions, but the results of them were the greatest and most bewildering fluctuations in English politics in a half century—all at the very moment the long-postponed reforms of the empire were to take place.

Historians no longer depict George III as a tyrant seeking to undermine the English constitution by choosing his ministers against Parliament's wishes. But there can be little doubt that men of the time felt that George III, whether he meant to or not, was violating the political conventions of the day. When he chose Lord Bute, his Scottish favorite, who had little strength in Parliament, to head his government, thereby excluding such Whig ministers as William Pitt and the Duke of Newcastle, who did have political support in Parliament, the new king may not have been acting unconstitutionally, but he certainly was violating customary political realities. Bute's retirement in 1763 did little to ease the opposition's fears that the king was seeking the advice of Tory favorites "behind the curtain" and was attempting to impose decisions on the leading political groups in Parliament rather than governing through them. By diligently attempting to shoulder what he thought was his constitutional responsibility for governing in his own stubborn, peculiar way, George III helped to increase the political confusion of the 1760s.

A decade of short-lived ministries in the 1760s contrasted sharply with the stable and long-lasting Whig governments of the previous generation. It almost seemed as if the stubborn king trusted no one who had Parliament's support. After Pitt

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Summary

and Newcastle had been dismissed, and after Bute had faded, the king in 1763 turned to George Grenville, Bute's protégé, only because he found no one else acceptable to be his chief minister. Although Grenville was responsible for the first wave of colonial reforms, his resignation in 1765 resulted from a personal quarrel with the king and had nothing to do with colonial policy. Next, a government was formed by Whigs who were connected with the Marquess of Rockingham and for whom the great orator and political thinker Edmund Burke was a spokesman; but this Whig coalition never had the king's confidence, and it lasted scarcely a year. In 1766, George at last called on the aging Pitt, now Lord Chatham, to head the government. But Chatham's illness (gout in the head, critics said) and the bewildering parliamentary factionalism of the late 1760s turned his ministry into such a hodgepodge that Chatham scarcely ruled at all.

By 1767 no one seemed to be in charge. Ministers shuffled in and out of offices, exchanging positions and following their own inclinations even against their colleagues' wishes. Amid this confusion only Charles Townshend, chancellor of the exchequer, gave any direction to colonial policy, and he died in 1767. Not until the appointment of Lord North as prime minister in 1770 did George find a politician whom he trusted and who also had Parliament's support.

Outside of Parliament, the huge portion of the British nation that was excluded from active participation in politics was stirring as it never had before. Not only was Ireland becoming restless under Britain's continual interference in its affairs, but political corruption in Britain and Parliament's failure to extend either the right to vote or representation to large numbers of British subjects created widespread resentment and led to many calls for reform. Mob rioting in London and elsewhere in England increased dramatically in the 1760s. In 1763, George III noted that there were "insurrections and tumults in every part of the country." By the end of the decade the situation was worse. Lord North was attacked

on his way to Parliament; his coach was destroyed and he barely escaped with his life.

Rioting had long been common in England, but many of the popular uprisings of the 1760s were different from those in the past. Far from being limited to particular grievances such as high bread prices, much of the rioting was now directed toward the whole political system. The most important crowd leader was John Wilkes, one of the most colorful demagogues in English history. Wilkes was a member of Parliament and an opposition journalist who in 1763 was arrested and tried for seditiously libeling George III and the government in No. 45 of his newspaper, the *North Briton*. Wilkes immediately became a popular hero, and the cry "Wilkes and Liberty" spread on both sides of the Atlantic. The House of Commons ordered the offensive issue of the newspaper publicly burned, and Wilkes fled to France. In 1768 he returned and was several times elected to the House of Commons, but each time Parliament denied him his seat. London crowds, organized by substantial shopkeepers and artisans, found in Wilkes a symbol of all their pent-up resentments against Britain's corrupt and oligarchic politics. The issue of Wilkes helped to bring together radical reform movements that shook the foundations of Britain's narrow governing class.

Thus in the 1760s and early 1770s the British government was faced with the need to overhaul its empire and gain revenue from its colonies at the very time that the political situation in the British Isles themselves was more chaotic, confused, and disorderly than it had been since the early eighteenth century. No wonder that it took only a bit more than a decade for the whole shaky imperial structure to come crashing down.

The government began its reform of the newly enlarged empire by issuing the Proclamation of 1763. This crown proclamation created three new royal governments—East Florida, West Florida, and Quebec—and enlarged the province of Nova Scotia. It turned the vast trans-Appalachian area

into an Indian reservation and prohibited all private individuals from purchasing Indian lands. The aim was to maintain peace in the West and to channel the migration of people northward and southward into the new colonies. There, it was felt, the settlers would be in closer touch with both the mother country and the mercantile system—and more useful as buffers against the Spanish in Louisiana and the remaining French in Canada.

But circumstances destroyed these royal blueprints. Not only were there bewildering shifts of the ministers in charge of the new policy, but news of Pontiac's Indian rebellion in the Ohio Valley in 1763 forced the government to rush its program into effect. The demarcation line along the Appalachians that closed the West to white settlers was hastily and crudely drawn, and some colonists suddenly found themselves living in the Indian reservation. The new trading regulations and sites were widely ignored and created more chaos in the Indian trade than had existed earlier. So confusing was the situation in the West that the British government could never convince the various contending interests that the proclamation was anything more than, in the words of George Washington, who had speculative interests in western lands, "a temporary expedient to quiet the minds of the Indians." Scores of land speculators and lobbyists pressured the unsteady British governments to negotiate a series of Indian treaties shifting the line of settlement westward. But each modification only whetted the appetites of the land speculators and led to some of the most grandiose land schemes in modern history.

In the Quebec Act of 1774, the British government finally tried to steady its dizzy western policy. This act transferred to the province of Quebec the land and control of the Indian trade in the huge area between the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and allowed Quebec's French inhabitants French law and Roman Catholicism. As enlightened as this act was toward the French Canadians, it managed to anger all Ameri-

can interests—speculators, settlers, and traders alike. This arbitrary alteration of provincial boundaries threatened the security of all colonial boundaries and frightened American Protestants into believing that the British government was trying to erect a hostile Catholic province in the Northwest.

The new colonial trade policies were more coherent than Britain's western policy but no less dangerous in American eyes. The Sugar Act of 1764 was clearly a major successor to the great navigation acts of the late seventeenth century. The series of regulations that it established were designed to tighten the navigation system and in particular to curb the colonists' smuggling and corruption. Absentee customs officials were ordered to return to their posts and were given greater authority and protection. The jurisdiction of the vice-admiralty courts in cases of customs violation was broadened. The navy was granted greater power in inspecting American ships. The use of writs of assistance (or search warrants) was enlarged. To the earlier list of "enumerated" colonial products that had to be exported directly to Britain, such as tobacco and sugar, were added hides, iron, timber, and others. And finally so many more American shippers were required to post bonds and obtain certificates of clearance that nearly all colonial merchants, even those involved only in the coastwise trade, found themselves enmeshed in a bureaucratic web of bonds, certificates, and regulations.

To these frustrating rigidities that were now built into the navigation system were added new customs duties, which raised the expenses of American importers in order to increase British revenue. The Sugar Act imposed duties on foreign cloth, sugar, indigo, coffee, and wine imported into the colonies. More important, the Sugar Act reduced the presumably prohibitory duty of sixpence a gallon on imported foreign West Indian molasses, set by the Molasses Act of 1733, to threepence a gallon. The British government expected that a lower duty on foreign molasses, rigidly enforced, would stop smuggling and lead to the legal importation

Stamp
Act

of foreign molasses and earn money for the crown. The colonists thought otherwise.

These British reforms, which threatened to upset the delicately balanced patterns of trade that had been built up in previous generations, could be regarded as part of Britain's traditional authority over colonial commerce. But the next step in Britain's new imperial program could not be thus regarded; it was radically new. Grenville's ministry, convinced that the customs reforms could not bring in the needed revenue, was determined to try a decidedly different method of extracting American wealth. In March 1765, Parliament by an overwhelming majority passed the Stamp Act, which levied a tax on legal documents, almanacs, newspapers, and nearly every form of paper used in the colonies. Like all duties, the tax was to be paid in British sterling, not in colonial paper money. Although stamp taxes had been used in England since 1694 and several colonial assemblies had resorted to them in the 1750s, Parliament had never before imposed such a tax directly on the colonists.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Stamp Act galvanized colonial opinion as nothing ever had. "This single stroke," declared William Smith, Jr., of New York, "has lost Great Britain the affection of all her Colonies."

The atmosphere in the colonies could not have been less receptive to these initial efforts by the British government to reorganize the empire. In the early 1760s, with the curtail-
ing of wartime spending, the earlier commercial boom col-
lapsed. Between 1760 and 1764, American markets were
glutted with unsold goods. At the same time, bumper tobacco
crops (in part the result of new independent producers) drove
tobacco prices down by 75 percent. This economic slump
threatened the entire Atlantic credit structure, from Lon-
don and Scottish merchant houses to small farmers and shop-
keepers in the colonies. As a result, business failures and
bankruptcies multiplied everywhere.

It is not surprising that the victims of the collapse sought
to blame their shifting fortunes on the distant government in
England. In fact, the British government's response to the fi-
nancial crisis could not have been more clumsy and irritating
to the Americans. In 1764, Parliament passed a new Currency
Act, which prohibited the colonies from issuing paper money
as legal tender. This sweeping and simpleminded attempt to
solve a complicated problem was only one of the many ways
in which British power in these years brought to the surface
many deep-rooted antagonisms between the colonies and En-
gland.

The Sugar Act, coinciding with this postwar depression,
created particularly severe problems for all those who de-
pended on trade with the French and Spanish West Indies.
The colonists feared that enforcement of the duty on foreign
molasses would ruin the northern rum industry, which in turn
would curtail the export trade in fish, foodstuffs, and African
slaves to the Caribbean and endanger America's ability to pay
for its British imports. These fears, together with hostility to

Blackburn
V. Henry

all the new trade regulations accompanying the Sugar Act, stirred up opposition and provoked the first deliberately organized intercolonial protest. In 1764 the assemblies of eight colonies drew up and endorsed formal petitions claiming that the Sugar Act was causing economic injury and sent them to the royal authorities in England.

Not only did royal authorities ignore these petitions, but they went ahead with the Stamp Act of 1765 in the face of mounting colonial objections. This action excited not simply a colonial protest, however, but a firestorm of opposition that swept through the colonies with amazing force. This parliamentary tax, however justifiable it may have been in fiscal terms, posed such a distinct threat to Americans' liberties and the autonomy of their legislatures that they could no longer contain their opposition within the traditional channels of complaints and lobbying.

When word reached America that Parliament had passed the Stamp Act without even considering any of the colonial petitions against it, the colonists reacted angrily. Merchants in the principal ports formed protest associations and pledged to stop importing British goods in order to bring economic pressure on the British government. Newspapers and pamphlets, the number and like of which had never appeared in America before, seethed with resentment against what one New Yorker called "these designing parricides" who had "invited despotism to cross the ocean, and fix her abode in this once happy land." At hastily convened meetings of towns, counties, and legislative assemblies, the colonists' anger boiled over into fiery declarations.

This torrent of angry words could not help but bring the constitutional relationship between Britain and its colonies into question. In the spring of 1765, the Virginia House of Burgesses adopted a series of resolves denouncing the parliamentary taxation and asserting the colonists' right to be taxed only by their elected representatives. These resolves were introduced by Patrick Henry, who at age twenty-nine had just

Patrick Henry Va.

been elected to the legislature. In the dignified setting of the House of Burgesses, Henry dared to repeat his challenge to crown authority that he had earlier made in the Parson's Cause. Just as Julius Caesar had had his Brutus and King Charles I his Oliver Cromwell, so he did not doubt that some American would now stand up for his country against this new tyranny. Henry was stopped by the Speaker of the House for suggesting treason; and some of his resolves (including one proclaiming the right of Virginians to disobey any law that had not been enacted by the Virginia assembly) were too inflammatory to be accepted by the legislature. Nevertheless, colonial newspapers printed the resolves as though the Virginia assembly had endorsed them all. Many Americans became convinced that Virginians had virtually asserted their legislative independence from Great Britain.

Henry's boldness was contagious. The Rhode Island assembly declared the Stamp Act "unconstitutional" and authorized the colony's officials to ignore it. In October 1765 thirty-seven delegates from nine colonies met in New York in the Stamp Act Congress and drew up a set of formal declarations and petitions denying Parliament's right to tax them. But as remarkable as this unprecedented display of colonial unity was, the Stamp Act Congress, with its opening acknowledgment of "all due Subordination to that August Body the Parliament of Great Britain," could not fully express American hostility.

Ultimately it was mob violence that destroyed the Stamp Act in America. On August 14, 1765, a crowd tore apart the office and attacked the home of Andrew Oliver, the stamp distributor for Massachusetts. The next day Oliver promised not to enforce the Stamp Act. As news of the rioting spread to other colonies, similar violence and threats of violence spread with it. From Newport, Rhode Island, to Charleston, South Carolina, local groups organized for resistance. In many places fire and artillery companies, artisan associations, and other fraternal bodies formed the basis for these emerging local organizations, which commonly called themselves

repeal of
Stamp Act

Sons of Liberty. Led mostly by members of the middle ranks—shopkeepers, printers, master mechanics, small merchants—these Sons of Liberty burned effigies of royal officials, forced stamp agents to resign, compelled businessmen and judges to carry on without stamps, developed an intercolonial network of correspondence, generally enforced nonimportation of British goods, and managed antistamp activities throughout the colonies.

BRITISH REACTION

In England the Rockingham Whigs (who had been critical of the policies of George III and Grenville) were now in charge of the ministry, and the government was prepared to retreat. Not only were these Whigs eager to disavow Grenville's policies, but they had close connections with British merchants who had been hurt by American economic boycotts. In February 1766, Parliament repealed the Stamp Act.

Despite the British government's attempt to offset its repeal of the Stamp Act by a declaration that Parliament had the right to legislate for the colonies "in all cases whatsoever," after 1765 the imperial relationship and American respect for British authority—indeed, for all authority—would never be the same. The crisis over the Stamp Act aroused and unified Americans as no previous political event ever had. It stimulated bold political and constitutional writings throughout the colonies, deepened the colonists' political consciousness and participation, and produced new forms of organized popular resistance. In their mobs the people learned that they could compel both the resignation of royal officials and obedience to other popular measures. Through "their riotous meetings," Governor Horatio Sharpe of Maryland observed in 1765, the people "begin to think they can by the same way of proceeding accomplish anything their leaders may tell them they ought to do."

The British government could not rely on a simple decla-

Seventy
1765

ration of parliamentary supremacy to satisfy its continuing need for more revenue. Since the colonists evidently would not stomach a "direct" and "internal" tax like the stamp tax, British officials concluded that the government would have to gather revenue through the more traditional "indirect" and "external" customs duties. After all, the colonists were already paying duties on molasses, wine, and several other imported products as a result of the Sugar Act. Consequently, in 1767, led by Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Townshend, Parliament imposed new levies on glass, paint, paper, and tea imported into the colonies. Although all the new customs duties, particularly the lowered molasses duty of 1766, began bringing in an average yearly revenue of £45,000—in contrast to only £2,000 a year collected before 1764—the yearly sums that were raised were scarcely a tenth of the annual cost of maintaining the army in America.

Convinced that something more drastic had to be done, the British government reorganized the executive authority of the empire. In 1767–68 the government created the American Board of Customs, located in Boston and reporting directly to the Treasury. It also established three new superior vice-admiralty courts—in Boston, Philadelphia, and Charleston—to supplement the one already in operation in Halifax, Nova Scotia. In belated recognition of the importance of the colonies, it created a new secretaryship of state exclusively for American affairs, an office that would cap the entire structure of colonial government. At the same time, the government decided to economize by pulling back much of its army from its costly deployment in the West and by closing many remote posts. The army was now to be stationed in the coastal cities, where, according to Parliament's Quartering Act of 1765, the colonists would be responsible for its housing and supply. Not only did this withdrawal of the troops eastward away from the French and Indians contribute to the chaos in the western territory, but the concentration of a standing army in peacetime amid a civilian population

blurred the army's original mission in America and raised the colonists' fears of British intentions.

By 1768 there was a new determination among royal officials to put down the unruly forces that seemed to be loose everywhere. Amid the ministerial squabbling of the late 1760s, some officials were suggesting that British troops be used against American rioters. Revenue from the Townshend duties was earmarked for the salaries of royal officials in the colonies so that they would be independent of the colonial legislatures. The colonial governors were instructed to maintain tight control of the assemblies and not to agree to acts that would increase popular representation in the assemblies or the length of time the legislatures sat. Royal officials toyed with more elaborate plans for remodeling the colonial governments: Some proposed that the Massachusetts charter be revoked; others, that royal councils, or upper houses, be strengthened. Some even suggested introducing a titled nobility into America to sit in these colonial upper houses.

DEEPENING OF THE CRISIS

In the atmosphere of the late 1760s, these measures and proposals were not simply irritating; they were explosive. After the Stamp Act crisis, American sensitivities to all forms of English taxation were thoroughly aroused. With the passage of the Townshend duties, the earlier pattern of resistance reappeared and expanded. Pamphleteers and newspaper writers again leaped to the defense of American liberties. The wealthy, cultivated Philadelphia lawyer John Dickinson, in his *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* (1767–68), the most popular pamphlet of the 1760s, rejected all parliamentary taxation. According to Dickinson, Parliament had no right to impose either “internal” or “external” taxes levied for the sole purpose of raising revenue. He called for the revival of the nonimportation agreements that had been so effective in the resistance to the Stamp Act.

homespun

Sam Adams

Following Boston's lead in March 1768, merchants in colonial ports again formed associations to boycott British goods. Despite much competition among different groups of merchants and jealousy among the ports, by 1769–70 these non-importation agreements had cut British sales to the northern colonies by nearly two thirds. The colonists encouraged the wearing of homespun cloth, and in New England villages “Daughters of Liberty” held spinning bees. By now more Americans were involved in the resistance movement. Extra-legal groups and committees, usually but not always restrained by popular leaders, emerged to intimidate tobacco inspectors in Maryland, punish importers in Philadelphia, mob a publisher in Boston, and harass customs officials in New York.

Nowhere were events more spectacular than in Massachusetts. There the situation was so inflammatory that every move triggered a string of explosions that widened the chasm between the colonists and royal authority. Forty-six-year-old Samuel Adams, with his puritanical zeal, organizational skill, and deep hatred of crown authority, emerged as a dominant political figure. It was later said that 1768 was the year Adams decided on independence for America. Given the events in Massachusetts during that year, it is easy to see why.

In February 1768 the Massachusetts House of Representatives issued to the other colonial legislatures a “circular letter” that denounced the Townshend duties as unconstitutional violations of the principle of no taxation without representation. Lord Hillsborough, the secretary of state of the newly created American Department and a hard-liner on controlling the colonies, ordered the Massachusetts House to revoke its circular letter. When the House defied this order by a majority of 92 to 17 (thereby enshrining the number 92 in patriot rituals), Governor Francis Bernard dissolved the Massachusetts assembly. With this legal means for dealing with grievances silenced, mobs and other unauthorized groups in the colony broke out in violence. Boston, which was rapidly

becoming a symbol of colonial resistance, ordered its inhabitants to arm and called for a convention of town delegates—a meeting that would have no legal standing. Attacked by mobs, customs officials in Boston found it impossible to enforce the navigation regulations and pleaded for military help. When a British warship arrived in Boston in June 1768, emboldened customs officials promptly seized John Hancock's ship *Liberty* for violating the trade acts. Since the wealthy Hancock was prominently associated with the resistance movement, the seizure was intended to be an object lesson in royal authority. Its effect, however, was to set off one of the fiercest riots in Boston's history.

Hillsborough, believing that Massachusetts was in a state of virtual anarchy, dispatched two regiments of troops from Ireland. They began arriving in Boston on October 1, 1768, and their appearance marked a crucial turning point in the escalating controversy: For the first time the British government had sent a substantial number of soldiers to enforce British authority in the colonies. By 1769 there were nearly 4,000 armed redcoats in the crowded seaport of 15,000 inhabitants. Since the colonists shared traditional English fears of standing armies, relations between townspeople and soldiers deteriorated. On March 5, 1770, a party of eight harassed British soldiers fired on a threatening crowd and killed five civilians. The "Boston Massacre," especially as it was depicted in Paul Revere's exaggerated engraving, aroused American passions and inspired some of the most sensational rhetoric heard in the Revolutionary era.

This resort to troops to quell disorder was the ultimate symptom of the ineffectiveness of the British government's authority, and many Britons knew it. The use of force, it was argued in Parliament and in the administration itself, only destroyed the goodwill on which the colonists' relation to the mother country must ultimately rest. Indeed, throughout the escalation of events in the 1760s, many British ministers remained confused and uncertain. "There is the most urgent

reason to do what is right, and immediately," wrote Secretary at War Lord Barrington to Governor Bernard in 1767, "but what is that right and who is to do it?" English officials advanced and retreated, pleaded and threatened, in ever more desperate efforts to enforce British authority without aggravating the colonists' hostility. In the winter of 1767–68 the British responded to the disorder in Massachusetts with a series of parliamentary resolutions in which they condemned Massachusetts's denial of parliamentary supremacy and threatened to bring the colonial offenders to England for trial. Yet strong minority opposition in the House of Commons and the ministry's unwillingness to bring on further crises made these resolutions empty gestures: The government was now only waging what one Englishman called "a paper war with the colonies."

By the end of the 1760s, British plans for reorganizing the empire were in shambles. Colonial legislatures and royal governors were at loggerheads. Colonial papers daily denounced Britain's authority, and mobs were becoming increasingly common in the countryside as well as in city streets. Customs officials, under continual intimidation, quarreled with merchants, naval officers, and royal governors. The customs officials' entanglement in local politics made efficient or evenhanded enforcement of the trade acts impossible. What enforcement there was thus appeared arbitrary and discriminatory, and drove many merchants, such as the wealthy South Carolinian Henry Laurens, who had earlier been contemptuous of the Sons of Liberty, into bitter opposition.

The financial returns to the British government from the customs reforms seemed in no way worth the costs. By 1770 less than £21,000 had been collected from the Townshend duties, while the loss to British business because of American nonimportation movements during the previous year was put at £700,000. It was therefore not surprising that the British government now abandoned the hope of securing revenue from the duties and labeled the Townshend program, in Lord

Hillsborough's words, "contrary to the true principles of commerce." In 1770, after years of chaos in the British government, the reorganization of the king's ministry under Lord North prepared the way for repeal of the Townshend duties. Only the duty on tea was retained, to serve, as Lord North said, "as a mark of the supremacy of Parliament, and an efficient declaration of their right to govern the colonies."

Yet the stabilization of English politics that came with the formation of North's ministry and the repeal of the Townshend duties could scarcely undo what had already been done. Whatever ties of affection had earlier existed between the colonists and Great Britain were fast being destroyed by irritation and suspicion. Many Americans were coming to believe that their interests and their hopes, their rights and their liberties, were threatened by British power. Although politicians on both sides of the Atlantic were by the early 1770s calling for a return to the conditions that had existed before 1763, going back was clearly no longer possible.

For two years there was a superficial tranquility. Then the struggle began again. In 1772, Rhode Islanders, angry at the heavy-handed enforcement of the navigation acts, boarded the British naval schooner *Gaspée*, which had run aground in Narragansett Bay, sank it, and wounded its captain. A royal commission, empowered to send all suspects to England for trial, was dispatched from England to inquire into the sinking. This authority seemed to fulfill earlier British threats to bypass regular judicial procedures, and it provoked Virginia into calling for the creation of intercolonial committees of correspondence, to which five assemblies responded.

Under Boston's and particularly Samuel Adams's leadership, Massachusetts towns had already begun organizing committees of correspondence. In the fall of 1772, Bostonians published a fiery document, *The Votes and Proceedings* of their town meeting, which listed all the British violations of American rights. These included taxing and legislating for the colonists without their consent, introducing standing

armies in peacetime, extending the powers of vice-admiralty courts (which did not use jury trials), restricting colonial manufacturing, and threatening to establish Anglican bishops in America. The publication was sent to the 260 towns of Massachusetts, and more than half responded positively in the greatest outpouring of ordinary local opinion the resistance movement had yet seen. By the end of 1773, independence was being discussed freely in colonial newspapers. Since the North government was determined to uphold the sovereignty of Parliament, an eventual confrontation seemed unavoidable.

In 1773, Parliament provided the occasion for a confrontation by granting the East India Company the exclusive privilege of selling tea in America. Although the North government intended this Tea Act only to be a means of saving the East India Company from bankruptcy, it set off the final series of explosions. For the act not only allowed colonial radicals to draw attention once again to the unconstitutionality of the existing tax on tea, but it also permitted the company to grant monopolies for selling tea to favored colonial merchants—a provision that angered those American traders who were excluded. The Tea Act spread an alarm throughout the colonies. In several ports colonists stopped the ships from landing the company's tea. When tea ships in Boston were prevented from unloading their cargoes, Governor Thomas Hutchinson, whose merchant family had been given the right to sell tea, refused to allow the ships to leave without landing the tea. In response, on December 16, 1773, a group of patriots disguised as Indians dumped about £10,000 worth of tea into Boston Harbor. "This is the most magnificent movement of all," exulted John Adams, an ambitious young lawyer from Braintree, Massachusetts. "This destruction of the tea is so bold, so daring, so firm, intrepid, and inflexible, and it must have so important consequences, and so lasting, that I can't but consider it an epocha in history."

Adams was right. To the British the Boston Tea Party was

Coercive Acts

the ultimate outrage. Angry officials and many of the politically active people in Great Britain clamored for a punishment that would squarely confront America with the issue of Parliament's right to legislate for the colonies. "We are now to establish our authority," Lord North told the House of Commons, "or give it up entirely." In 1774, Parliament passed a succession of laws that came to be known as the Coercive Acts. The first of these closed the port of Boston until the destroyed tea was paid for. The second altered the Massachusetts charter and reorganized the government: Members of the Council, or upper house, were now to be appointed by the royal governor rather than elected by the legislature, town meetings were restricted, and the governor's power of appointing judges and sheriffs was strengthened. The third act allowed royal officials who had been charged with capital offenses to be tried in England or in another colony to avoid hostile juries. The fourth gave the governor power to take over private buildings for the quartering of troops instead of using barracks. At the same time, Thomas Gage, commander in chief of the British army in America, was made governor of the colony of Massachusetts.

These Coercive Acts were the last straw. They convinced Americans once and for all that Parliament had no more right to make laws for them than to tax them.

THE IMPERIAL DEBATE

The colonists had been groping toward this denial of Parliament's power from the beginning of the controversy. For a decade they had engaged in a remarkable constitutional debate with the British over the nature of public power, representation, and the empire. This debate exposed for the first time just how divergent America's previous political experience had been from that of the mother country.

With the passage of the Stamp Act, Parliament's first unmistakable tax levy on Americans, American intellectual

Who had right to vote?

resistance was immediately raised to the highest plane of principle. "It is inseparably essential to the freedom of a people, and the undoubted rights of Englishmen," the Stamp Act Congress declared in 1765, "that no taxes should be imposed on them, but with their own consent, given personally, or by their representatives." And since "the people of these colonies are not, and from their local circumstances, cannot be represented in the House of Commons in Great Britain," the colonists would be represented and taxed only by persons who were known and chosen by themselves and who served in their respective legislatures. This statement defined the American position at the outset of the controversy, and despite subsequent confusion and stumbling, the colonists never abandoned this essential point.

Once the British ministry sensed a stirring of colonial opposition to the Stamp Act, a number of English government pamphleteers set out to explain and justify Parliament's taxation of the colonies. Although the arguments of these writers differed, they all eventually agreed that Americans, like Englishmen everywhere, were subject to acts of Parliament through a system of "virtual" representation. These writers argued that it was this concept of virtual representation, as distinct from actual representation, that gave Parliament its supreme authority—its sovereignty. One government pamphleteer wrote that even though the colonists, like "ninetenths of the people of Britain," did not in fact choose any representative to the House of Commons, they were undoubtedly "a part, and an important part of the Commons of Great Britain: they are represented in Parliament in the same manner as those inhabitants of Britain are who have not voices in elections."

During the eighteenth century the British electorate made up only a tiny proportion of the nation; probably only one in six British adult males had the right to vote, compared with two out of three in America. In addition, Britain's electoral districts were a confusing mixture of sizes and shapes left

over from centuries of history. Some of the constituencies were large, with thousands of voters, but others were small and more or less in the pocket of a single great landowner. Many of the electoral districts had few voters, and some so-called rotten boroughs had no inhabitants at all. One town, Dunwich, continued to send representatives to Parliament even though it had long since slipped into the North Sea. At the same time, some of England's largest cities, such as Manchester and Birmingham, which had grown suddenly in the mid eighteenth century, sent no representatives to Parliament. Although radical reformers, among them John Wilkes, increasingly criticized this jumbled political structure, parliamentary reform was slow in coming and would not begin until 1832. Many Englishmen, as did Edmund Burke in 1774, justified this hodgepodge of representation by claiming that each member of Parliament represented the whole British nation, and not just the particular locality he came from. According to this view, people were represented in England not by the process of election, which was considered incidental to representation, but rather by the mutual interests that members of Parliament were presumed to share with all Englishmen for whom they spoke—including those, like the colonists, who did not actually vote for them.

The Americans immediately and strongly rejected these British claims that they were "virtually" represented in the same way that the nonvoters of cities like Manchester and Birmingham were. In the most notable colonial pamphlet written in opposition to the Stamp Act, *Considerations on the Propriety of Imposing Taxes* (1765), Daniel Dulany of Maryland admitted the relevance in England of virtual representation, but he denied its applicability to America. For America, he wrote, was a distinct community from England and thus could hardly be represented by members of Parliament with whom it had no common interests. Others pushed beyond Dulany's argument, however, and challenged the very idea of virtual representation. If the people were to be properly rep-

resented in a legislature, many colonists said, not only did they have to vote directly for the members of the legislature, but they also had to be represented by members whose numbers were proportionate to the size of the population they spoke for. What purpose is served, asked James Otis of Massachusetts in 1765, by the continual attempts of Englishmen to justify the lack of American representation in Parliament by citing the examples of Manchester and Birmingham, which returned no members to the House of Commons? "If those now so considerable places are not represented, they ought to be."

In the New World, electoral districts were not the products of history that stretched back centuries, but rather were recent and regular creations that were related to changes in population. When new towns in Massachusetts and new counties in Virginia were formed, new representatives customarily were sent to the respective colonial legislatures. As a consequence, many Americans had come to believe in a very different kind of representation from that of the English. Their belief in "actual" representation made the process of election not incidental but central to representation. Actual representation stressed the closest possible connection between the local electors and their representatives. For Americans it was only proper that representatives be residents of the localities they spoke for and that people of the locality have the right to instruct their representatives. Americans thought it only fair that localities be represented more or less in proportion to their population. In short, the American belief in actual representation pointed toward the fullest and most equal participation of the people in the process of government that the modern world had ever seen.

Yet while Americans were denying Parliament's right to tax them because they were not represented in the House of Commons, they knew that Parliament had exercised some authority over their affairs during the previous century. They therefore tried to explain what that authority should be. What

was the “due subordination” that the Stamp Act Congress admitted Americans owed Parliament? Could the colonists accept parliamentary legislation but not taxation? Could they accept “external” customs duties for the purpose of regulating trade, but not “internal” stamp taxes for the purpose of raising revenue? In his famous *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania*, John Dickinson rejected the idea that Parliament could rightly impose “external” or “internal” taxes and made clear that the colonists opposed all forms of parliamentary taxation. But Dickinson recognized that the empire required some sort of central regulatory authority, particularly for commerce, and conceded Parliament’s supervisory legislative power so far as it preserved “the connection between the several parts of the British empire.” The empire, it seemed to many colonists, was a unified body for some affairs but not for others.

To counter all these halting and fumbling efforts by the colonists to divide parliamentary authority, the British offered a simple but powerful argument. Since they could not conceive of the empire as anything but a single, unified community, they found absurd and meaningless all these American distinctions between trade regulations and taxation, between “external” and “internal” taxes, and between separate spheres of authority. If Parliament even “in one instance” was as supreme over the colonists as it was over the people of England, wrote a subcabinet official, William Knox, in 1769, then the Americans were members “of the same community with the people of England.” On the other hand, if Parliament’s authority over the colonists was denied “in any particular,” then it must be denied in “all instances,” and the union between Great Britain and the colonies must be dissolved. “There is no alternative,” Knox concluded. “Either the colonies are part of the community of Great Britain or they are in a state of nature with respect to her, and in no case can be subject to the jurisdiction of that legislative power

which represents her community, which is the British Parliament.”

What made this British argument so powerful was its basis in the widely accepted doctrine of sovereignty—the belief that in every state there could be only one final, indivisible, and uncontestable supreme authority. This was the most important concept of eighteenth-century English political theory, and it became the issue over which the empire was finally broken.

This idea that, in the end, every state had to have one single supreme undivided law-making authority had been the basis of the British position from the beginning. The British expressed this concept of sovereignty officially in the Declaratory Act of 1766, which, following the repeal of the Stamp Act, affirmed Parliament’s authority to make laws binding the colonists “in all cases whatsoever.” It was natural for the British to locate sovereignty in Parliament, for it was the institution to which they paid the greatest respect. Indeed, it would be difficult to exaggerate the veneration felt by metropolitan Britons toward their Parliament. All good Britons could be suspicious of crown power but not of Parliament. Parliament had always been the bulwark of their liberties, their protector against crown abuses.

The colonists could never share this traditional reverence toward Parliament, and on this issue they inevitably parted from their fellow Englishmen, not by rejecting the doctrine of sovereignty but by relocating it. In 1773, Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson was provoked into directly challenging the radical movement and its belief in the limited nature of Parliament’s power. In a dramatic and well-publicized speech to the Massachusetts legislature, Hutchinson attempted once and for all to clarify the central constitutional issue between America and Great Britain and to show the colonists how unreasonable their views were. “I know of no line,” he declared, “that can be drawn between the supreme authority of

Parliament and the total independence of the colonies, as it is impossible there should be two independent legislatures in one and the same state."

By 1773 many Americans despaired of trying to divide what royal officials told them could not be divided. The Massachusetts House of Representatives had a simple answer to Hutchinson's position. If, as Governor Hutchinson had said, there was no middle ground between the supreme authority of Parliament and the total independence of the colonies from Parliament, the House members felt that there could be no doubt that "we were thus independent." The logic of sovereignty therefore forced a fundamental shift in the American position.

By 1774 the leading colonists, including Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, were arguing that only the separate American legislatures were sovereign in America. According to this argument, Parliament had no final authority over America, and the colonies were connected to the empire only through the king. The most the colonists would concede was that Parliament had the right to regulate their external commerce only "from the necessity of the case, and a regard to the mutual interest of both countries," as the *Declarations and Resolves of the First Continental Congress* put it. But the British government remained committed to parliamentary sovereignty embodied in the Declaratory Act, which no American leader could any longer take seriously.

It was now only a matter of time before these irreconcilable positions led to armed conflict.

III

REVOLUTION

By 1774, within the short span of a decade following the introduction of the imperial reforms, Americans who had celebrated George III's coronation were in virtual rebellion against Great Britain. During the two years after the Coercive Acts of 1774, events moved rapidly, and reconciliation between Britain and its colonies became increasingly unlikely. By this time the crisis had become more than a simple breakdown in the imperial relationship. The colonists' extraordinary efforts to understand what was happening transformed their resistance and ultimately their rebellion into a world-historical revolution. The Americans' Declaration of Independence in 1776 turned their separation from Britain into an event that many Americans and some Europeans believed was unprecedented in human history. Americans saw themselves striving not only to make themselves free, but also to bring freedom to the whole world.

THE APPROACH TO INDEPENDENCE

The Coercive Acts of 1774 provoked open rebellion in America. Not only had the abuses of the English government aroused the Americans' principles, but repeated expressions of English arrogance had finally worn out their tempers. Whatever royal authority was left in the colonies now dissolved. Many local communities, with a freedom they had not had since the seventeenth century, attempted to put together new popular governments from the bottom up. Mass meetings that sometimes attracted thousands of aroused colonists endorsed resolutions and called for new political organizations. Committees of different sizes and names—committees of safety, of inspection, of merchants, of mechanics—competed with one another for political control.

In the various colonies royal government was displaced in a variety of ways, depending on how extensive and personal previous royal authority had been. In Massachusetts, where the crown's authority had reached into the villages and towns through the royally appointed justices of the peace, the displacement was greater than in Virginia, where royal influence had scarcely touched the control of the counties by the powerful landowners. But everywhere there was a fundamental transfer of authority that opened new opportunities for new men to assert themselves.

By the end of 1774, in many of the colonies local associations were controlling and regulating various aspects of American life. Committees manipulated voters, directed appointments, organized the militia, managed trade, intervened between creditors and debtors, levied taxes, issued licenses, and supervised or closed the courts. Royal governors stood by in helpless amazement as new informal governments gradually grew up around them. These new governments ranged from town and county committees and the newly created provincial congresses to a general congress of the colonies—the First Continental Congress, which convened in Philadelphia in September 1774.

In all, fifty-five delegates from twelve colonies (all except Georgia) participated in the First Continental Congress. Some colonists, and even some royal officials, hoped that this Congress might work to reestablish imperial authority. Those who were eager to break the bond with Great Britain, however, won the first round. Led by the cousins Samuel and John Adams from Massachusetts, and by Patrick Henry and Richard Henry Lee from Virginia, the Congress endorsed the fiery Resolves of Suffolk County, Massachusetts, which recommended outright resistance to the Coercive Acts. But the Congress was not yet ready for independence. It came very close—failing by the vote of a single colony—to considering further and perhaps adopting a plan of union between Britain

and the colonies proposed by Joseph Galloway, leader of the Pennsylvania assembly and spokesman for the conservative congressional delegates from the middle colonies. Galloway's plan was radical enough: It called for the creation of a grand colonial council composed of representatives from each colony. Laws passed by either the American grand council or the British Parliament were to be subject to mutual review and approval.

By 1774, however, it was unlikely, even if Galloway's plan had been adopted, that the Congress could have reversed the transfer of authority that was taking place in the colonies. In the end, the Continental Congress simply recognized the new local authorities in American politics and gave them its blessing by establishing the Continental Association. This continentwide organization put into effect the nonimportation, nonexportation, and nonconsumption of goods that the Congress had agreed on. Committees in all the counties, cities, and towns were now ordered by the Congress "attentively to observe the conduct of all persons," to condemn publicly all violators as "enemies of American liberty," and to "break off all dealings" with them.

Thus with the Congress's endorsement of the Continental Association, local committees, speaking in the name of "the body of the people," carried on the political transformation. Groups of men, from a few dozen to several thousand, marched through villages and city streets searching out enemies of the people. Suspected enemies, under threat of being tarred and feathered, were often forced to take back unfriendly words or designs against the public, to sign confessions of guilt and repentance, and to swear new oaths of friendship to the people. In all the colonies there were signs of an emerging new political order.

These remarkable political changes were not simply the product of the colonists' resistance to British imperial reform. Britain's attempts to reorganize its empire took place not in a

vacuum, but in complicated, highly charged situations existing in each colony. In some cases these local political conditions had as much to do with the escalation of the controversy between the colonies and the mother country as did the steps taken by the British government three thousand miles away. Everywhere in the 1760s various groups in the colonies were eager to exploit popular resentment against the British reforms in order to gain local political advantage—with, however, little understanding of the ultimate consequences of their actions.

In New York, for example, political factions that were led by the well-to-do Livingston and De Lancey families vied with each other in whipping up opposition to the imperial legislation and in winning the support of popular extralegal groups such as the Sons of Liberty. Thus these gentry generally helped expand the rights and participation of the people in politics—not with the aim of furthering electoral democracy, but only for the tactical purpose of gaining control of the elective assemblies. While this sort of unplanned popularization of politics had gone on in the past, particularly in urban areas, the inflamed atmosphere generated by the imperial crisis gave it a new explosive power with unpredictable implications.

In colony after colony local and often long-standing quarrels became so entangled with imperial antagonisms that they reinforced one another in a spiraling momentum that brought all governmental authority into question. Even authorities in those colonies that were not ruled by royal governors, such as the proprietary governments of Pennsylvania and Maryland, were victimized by the imperial crisis. Thus in Maryland in 1770 a proclamation by the proprietary governor setting the fees that were paid to government officials seemed to violate the principle of no taxation without representation that had been made so vivid by the imperial debate. This executive proclamation provoked a bitter local struggle that forced Daniel Dulany, a wealthy member of the colony's council and

former opponent of the Stamp Act, into defending the governor. In the end, the controversy destroyed the governor's capacity to rule and made Dulany a loyalist to the British cause.

By the 1770s all these developments, without anyone's clearly intending it, were creating a new kind of popular politics in America. The rhetoric of liberty now brought to the surface long-latent political tendencies. Ordinary people were no longer willing to trust only wealthy and learned gentlemen to represent them in government. Various artisan, religious, and ethnic groups now felt that their particular interests were so distinct that only people of their own kind could speak for them. In 1774 radicals in Philadelphia demanded that seven artisans and six Germans be added to the revolutionary committee of the city.

Americans today are used to such "coalition" and "interest-group" politics, but their eighteenth-century counterparts were not. Educated gentlemen such as the prominent Oxford-trained landowner William Henry Drayton of South Carolina complained of having to participate in government with men who knew only "how to cut up a beast in the market" or "to cobble an old shoe." "Nature never intended that such men should be profound politicians, or able statesmen." In 1775 the royal governor of Georgia noted in astonishment that the committee in control of Savannah consisted of "a Parcel of the Lowest People, chiefly carpenters, shoemakers, Blacksmiths etc. with a Jew at their head." In some colonies politicians called for an expanded suffrage, the use of the ballot rather than the customary oral voting, the opening of legislative meetings to the public, the printing of legislative minutes, and the recording of votes taken in the legislatures. All these proposals enlarged the political arena and limited the power of those who clung to the traditional ways of private arrangements and personal influence.

Everywhere in the colonies "incendiaries" (as royal officials called them) used fiery popular rhetoric and competed openly for political leadership. More and more "new men"

took advantage of the people's resentments of the British regulations and actively campaigned for popular election in order to bypass the traditional narrow and patronage-controlled channels of politics. The political atmosphere in America was now charged as never before with both deep animosities and new hopes for bettering the world. Americans told themselves they were "on the eve of some great and unusual events," events that "may form a new era, and give a new turn to human affairs."

Men who, like Thomas Hutchinson, had been reared in the old ways and had benefited from them stood bewildered and helpless in the face of these popularizing developments. They possessed neither the psychological capacity nor the political sensitivity to understand—let alone to deal with—this popular politics and the moral outrage and fiery zeal that lay behind it. They intrigued and schemed, and they tried to manipulate those who they thought were the important people in the opposition. (In 1768, for example, John Adams was offered the office of advocate-general in the Massachusetts admiralty court.) When they could not buy them off, they accused those individuals of demagoguery or ridiculed them as upstarts. Frightened by the increased violence, they struck out furiously at the kinds of popular politics they believed were undermining authority and causing the violence. Traditional and prudent men of this sort could not accept a new and different world, and soon they either fell silent or became loyalists, determined to remain faithful to the king and to support the hierarchical society that had bred them.

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

By the beginning of 1775 the British government was already preparing for military action. By this time North's supporters and the king himself saw no choice but force to bring the colonists back into line. As early as November 1774, George III had told North that "blows must decide whether

they are to be subject to the Country or Independent." The British government thus built up its army and navy and began restraining the commerce first of New England and then of the other colonies.

In May 1775 delegates from the colonies met in Philadelphia for the Second Continental Congress, to take up where the first Congress had left off. Outwardly the Congress continued the policy of resolves and reconciliation. In July, at the urging of John Dickinson, the Congress approved the Olive Branch Petition, which claimed loyalty to the king and humbly asked him to break with his "artful and cruel" ministers, whom the Congress blamed for the oppressive measures. At the same time, the Congress issued a Declaration of the Causes and Necessities of Taking Up Arms (largely written by Dickinson and Thomas Jefferson) in which it denied that Americans had any "ambitious design of separating from Great Britain, and establishing independent states." As this superb summary of the American case against Britain demonstrated, the time for paper solutions had passed.

In April 1775 fighting had broken out in Massachusetts. Since the British government had long assumed that Boston was the center of the disturbances in America, it believed that isolating and punishing that port city would essentially undermine all colonial resistance. The Coercive Acts of 1774 had rested on this assumption, and the British military actions of 1775 were simply a logical extension of the same assumption. The British government, thinking that it was dealing only with mobs led by a few seditious instigators, therefore ordered its commander in Massachusetts, General Gage, to arrest the rebel leaders, to break up their bases, and to reassert royal authority in the colony. On April 18–19, 1775, Gage's army attempted to seize rebel arms and ammunition stored at Concord, a town northwest of Boston. Colonial scouts, including the silversmith Paul Revere, rode ahead of the advancing redcoats, warned patriot leaders John Hancock and Samuel Adams to flee, and roused the farmers of the

Lex
Wood

Bunker
Hill

countryside—the minutemen—to arms. No one knows who fired first at Lexington, but shots between the colonial militia and British troops were exchanged there and later at nearby Concord, where the British found only a few supplies.

During their long march back to Boston, the strung-out British columns were repeatedly harassed by patriot militia. By the end of the day, 273 redcoats and 95 patriots had been killed or wounded, and the countryside was aflame with revolt. From positions in Charlestown and Dorchester, the colonists quickly surrounded the besieged British in Boston and thus raised doubts among the British authorities that police action would be enough to quell the rebellion.

Two months later, in June 1775, British soldiers attempted to dislodge the American fortification on a spur of Bunker Hill in Charlestown, overlooking Boston. The British assumed, as one of their generals, John Burgoyne, put it, that no numbers of “untrained rabble” could ever stand up against “trained troops.” Under General William Howe, British forces attempted a series of frontal assaults on the American position. These attacks were eventually successful, but only at the terrible cost of 1,000 British casualties—more than 40 percent of Howe’s troops. At Bunker Hill—the first formal battle of the Revolution—the British suffered their heaviest losses in what would become a long and bloody war. “Never had the British Army so ungenerous an enemy to oppose,” declared a British soldier in the aftermath of Bunker Hill. The American riflemen “conceal themselves behind trees etc till an opportunity presents itself of taking a shot at our advance sentries, which done they immediately retreat. What an unfair method of carrying on a war!”

When news of the fighting reached Philadelphia, the Second Continental Congress had to assume the responsibilities of a central government for the colonies. The Congress created the Continental Army, appointed George Washington of Virginia as commander, issued paper money for the support

Common
Sense

of colonial troops, and formed a committee to negotiate with foreign countries. The Americans were preparing to wage war against the greatest power of the eighteenth century.

By the summer of 1775 the escalation of actions and reactions was out of control. On August 23, George III, ignoring the colonists’ Olive Branch Petition, proclaimed the colonies in open rebellion. In October he publicly accused them of aiming at independence. By December 1775 the British government had declared all American shipping liable to seizure by British warships. As early as May 1775, American forces had captured Fort Ticonderoga at the head of Lake Champlain. In an effort to bring the Canadians into the struggle against Britain, the Congress ordered makeshift forces under Richard Montgomery and Benedict Arnold to invade Canada, but the colonists were badly defeated in Quebec in the winter of 1775–76. With all this fighting between Britain and its colonies taking place, it was only a matter of time before the Americans formally cut the remaining ties to Great Britain. Although no official American body had as yet endorsed independence, the idea was obviously in the air.

It was left to Thomas Paine, a former English corset-maker, schoolmaster, and twice-dismissed excise officer who had only arrived in the colonies in late 1774, to express in January 1776 the accumulated American rage against George III. In his pamphlet Common Sense, Paine dismissed the king as the “Royal Brute” and called for American independence immediately. “For God’s sake, let us come to a final separation . . .,” he implored. “The birthday of a new world is at hand.”

Common Sense was the most incendiary and popular pamphlet of the entire Revolutionary era; it went through twenty-five editions in 1776 alone. In it Paine rejected the traditional and stylized forms of persuasion designed for educated gentlemen and reached out for new readers among the artisan- and tavern-centered worlds of the cities. Unlike

Slavery

more genteel writers, Paine did not decorate his pamphlet with Latin quotations and learned references to the literature of Western culture, but instead relied on his readers knowing only the Bible and the *Book of Common Prayer*. Although Paine was criticized for using ungrammatical language and coarse imagery, he showed the common people, who in the past had not been very involved in politics, that fancy words and Latin quotations no longer mattered as much as honesty and sincerity and the natural revelation of feelings.

In the early spring of 1776 the Congress opened America's ports to all foreign trade, authorized the outfitting of privateers to prey on America's enemies, and prepared for independence. On July 4, 1776, the delegates formally approved the Declaration of Independence, a thirteen-hundred-word document largely written by the graceful hand of Thomas Jefferson of Virginia. In the Declaration the king, who was now regarded as the only remaining link between the colonists and Great Britain, was held accountable for every grievance that the Americans had suffered since 1763. The reign of George III, Americans declared "to a candid world," was "a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States."

Congress removed a quarter of Jefferson's original draft, including a passage that blamed George III for the horrors of the slave trade. As Jefferson later recalled, South Carolina and Georgia objected to the passage, and some northern delegates were also a "little tender" on the subject, "for though their people have very few slaves themselves yet they had been pretty considerable carriers."

Indeed, all the colonists had long been implicated in African slavery. Of the total American population of 2.5 million in 1776, one fifth—500,000 men, women, and children—was enslaved. Virginia had the most slaves—200,000, or 40 percent of its population. Although most of the slaves were held by southerners, slavery was not inconsequential in

the North. Fourteen percent of New York's population was enslaved. New Jersey and Rhode Island held 8 percent and 6 percent of their populations, respectively, in lifetime hereditary bondage. Slavery was a national institution, and nearly every white American directly or indirectly benefited from it. By 1776, however, nearly every American leader knew that its continued existence violated everything the Revolution was about.

Despite the failure of the Declaration of Independence to say anything about slavery, it nevertheless remained a brilliant expression of Enlightenment ideals—ideals that still reverberate powerfully in the lives of Americans and other peoples today. "That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"—these "truths" seemed "self-evident," even to eighteenth-century Americans divided by great distinctions of status and confronted with the glaring contradiction of black slavery. The Declaration of Independence set forth a philosophy of human rights that could be applied not only to Americans, but also to peoples everywhere. It was essential in giving the American Revolution a universal appeal.

AN ASYLUM FOR LIBERTY

It was a strange revolution that Americans had begun, one that on the face of it is not easily comprehended. A series of trade acts and tax levies do not seem to add up to a justification for independence. There was none of the legendary tyranny of history that had so often driven desperate peoples into rebellion. Yet by 1776 most Americans agreed with John Adams that they were "in the very midst of a Revolution, the most compleat, unexpected, and remarkable of any in the History of Nations." How then was it to be explained and justified?

Those Americans who looked back at what they had been

through could only marvel at the moderation and rationality of their Revolution. It was, said Edmund Randolph of Virginia, a revolution "without an immediate oppression, without a cause depending so much on hasty feeling as theoretic reasoning." Because the Americans, as Edmund Burke pointed out in one of his famous speeches in 1775, "augur misgovernment at a distance and snuff the approach of tyranny in every tainted breeze," they anticipated grievances even before they actually suffered them. Thus the American Revolution has always seemed to be an unusually intellectual and conservative affair—carried out not to create new liberties but to preserve old ones.

Throughout the imperial crisis American patriot leaders insisted that they were rebelling not against the principles of the English constitution, but on behalf of them. In order to express continuity with the great struggles for political liberty in England, they invoked historic English party designations and called themselves "Whigs," and branded the supporters of the crown "Tories." By emphasizing that it was the letter and spirit of the English constitution that justified their resistance, Americans could easily believe that they were simply protecting what Englishmen had valued from the beginning of their history.

Yet the colonists were mistaken in believing that they were struggling only to return to the essentials of the English constitution. The principles of the constitution that they defended were not those that were held by the English establishment in the mid eighteenth century. In fact, the Americans' principles were, as the Tories and royal officials tried to indicate, "revolution principles" outside the mainstream of English thought. Since the colonists seemed to be reading the same literature as other Englishmen, they were hardly aware that they were seeing the English tradition differently. Despite their breadth of reading and references, however, they concentrated on a set of ideas that ultimately gave them a peculiar conception of English life and an extraordinarily

radical perspective on the English constitution they were so fervently defending.

The heritage of liberal thought that the colonists drew on was composed not simply of the political treatises of notable philosophers like John Locke but also of the writings of such eighteenth-century coffeehouse pamphleteers as John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon. Indeed, during the first half of the eighteenth century many of England's leading literary figures, such as Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, wrote out of a deep and bitter hostility to the great political, social, and economic changes they saw taking place around them. These critics thought that traditional values were being corrupted and that England was being threatened with ruin by the general commercialization of English life, as seen in the rise of such institutions as the Bank of England, powerful stock companies, stock markets, and the huge public debt. Believing that the crown was ultimately responsible for these changes, many of these writers championed a so-called "country" opposition to the deceit and luxury of the "court," which they associated with the crown and its networks of influence.

This 'country opposition' had a long and complicated history in England. It stretched back at least to the early seventeenth century, to the Puritan opposition to the established church and the courts of the early Stuart kings, James I and Charles I. The English Civil War of the mid seventeenth century can in part be understood as an uprising of the local gentry, representing the counties or the "country" of England in the House of Commons, against the "court" surrounding the Church of England and the king. Such localist and grassroots opposition to far-removed central authorities was a recurring theme in English history as it would continue to be in American history.

In the eighteenth-century Anglo-American world, writers in this country-opposition tradition were especially fearful that executive power—particularly as it operated under the ministries of Sir Robert Walpole—was corrupting Parliament

and English society in order to erect a fiscal-military state for the waging of war. Throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, these defenders of political liberty made ringing proposals to reduce and control what seemed to be the enormously expanded powers of the crown. Their goal was to recover the rights of the people and the original principles of the English constitution.

Many of the reforms they proposed were ahead of their time for England—reforms that advocated the right to vote for all adult males and not just the well-to-do property-holders, more liberty for the press, and greater freedom of religion. Other suggested reforms aimed at prohibiting salaried government “placemen” from sitting in the House of Commons, at reducing the public debt, and at obtaining such popular rights as equal representation for more people, the power to instruct members of Parliament, and shorter Parliaments. All these reform proposals combined into a widely shared conception of how political life in England should ideally be organized. In this ideal nation the parts of the constitution would be independent of one another, and members of Parliament would be independent of any “connection” or party. In other words, there would exist a political world in which no man would be beholden to another.

The Americans had long felt the relevance of these “country” ideas more keenly than the English themselves. These ideas had helped to explain the simple character of American life in contrast with the sophistication of England. But these opposition ideas had also justified the colonists’ habitual antagonism to royal power. In the conflicts between the colonial assemblies and the royal governors in the first half of the eighteenth century, Americans had invoked these ideas off and on. Now, however, in the years after 1763, the need to explain the growing controversy with Britain gave this country-opposition ideology a new and comprehensive importance. It not only prepared the colonists intellectually for resistance, but also offered them a powerful justification of their many

differences from what seemed to be a decayed and corrupted mother country.

These inherited ideas contained an elaborate set of rules for political action by the people. How were the people to identify a tyrant? How long should the people put up with abuses? How much force should they use? The answers to these questions came logically as events unfolded, and led the colonists almost irresistibly from resistance to rebellion. Step-by-step the colonists became convinced that the obnoxious efforts of crown officials to reform the empire were not simply the result of insensitivity to unique American conditions or mistakes of well-meant policy. Instead, Americans saw these as the intended consequences of a grand tyrannical design. In Thomas Jefferson’s words the British reforms were nothing less than “a deliberate systematical plan of reducing us to slavery.”

America, the colonists believed, was the primary object of this tyrannical conspiracy, but the goals of the conspiracy ranged far beyond the colonies. Americans were involved not simply in a defense of their own rights, but in a worldwide struggle for the salvation of liberty itself. When they looked over the past several centuries of European history, all they could see were the efforts of monarchs everywhere to build up state power in order to extract money from their subjects for the waging of war. By the late 1760s royal tyranny seemed to be gaining more ground, even in England itself. Americans earlier had read of the prosecution of the English radical John Wilkes for criticizing His Majesty’s government in his *North Briton*, No. 45, and had made Wilkes and the number 45 part of their political symbolism. Then in 1768, Wilkes’s four successive expulsions from a corrupt House of Commons, despite his repeated reelection by his constituents, marked for many Americans the twilight of representative government in Great Britain. Everywhere liberty appeared to be in retreat before the forces of tyranny. The struggles of “sons of liberty” in Ireland to win constitutional concessions were

suppressed. The attempts of the freedom fighter Pascal Paoli and his followers to establish the independence of Corsica from France in the 1760s ended in failure. As Americans learned of these setbacks, they became convinced that America was the only place where a free popular press still existed and where the people could still elect representatives who spoke for them and them only.

By 1776 their picture of the immense struggle they were involved in was complete. And they could respond enthusiastically, as lovers of humanity and haters of tyranny, to the passionate appeal of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* to stand forth for liberty:

Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia and Africa have long expelled her. Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind.

CHRONOLOGY

1763

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| February 10 | The French and Indian War ends with the Peace of Paris |
| October 7 | The Proclamation of 1763 bans all westward migration in the colonies |
| May–November | Chief Pontiac leads an Indian rebellion in the Ohio Valley |

1764

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| April 5 and 9 | Parliament passes the Sugar and Currency Acts |
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1765

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| March 22 | Parliament passes the Stamp Act |
| May 15 | Parliament passes the Quartering Act of 1765 |
| October 7 | The Stamp Act Congress convenes |

1766

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| March 18 | Parliament repeals the Stamp Act and passes the Declaratory Act |
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1767

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| June 29 | Parliament passes the Townshend Acts |
| November 5 | John Dickinson's <i>Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania</i> begins publication |

	1768
February 11	Samuel Adams composes the Massachusetts "circular letter"
June 8	British troops are sent to Boston
	1770
March 5	Boston Massacre
April 12	The Townshend duties are repealed, except for the duty on tea
	1772
June 9	The British ship <i>Gaspée</i> burned off Rhode Island
November 2	Bostonians publish <i>The Votes and Proceedings</i> , enumerating British violations of American rights
	1773
January 6	Massachusetts governor Hutchinson argues the supremacy of Parliament before the General Court
May 10	Parliament passes the Tea Act
December 16	Boston Tea Party
	1774
March 31–June 22	Parliament passes the Coercive Acts and the Quebec Act
September 5–October 26	First Continental Congress meets in Philadelphia
	1775
April 18	Paul Revere's ride
April 19	Battles of Lexington and Concord
May 10	American forces capture Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain

May 10	Second Continental Congress convenes
June 15	George Washington is appointed commander of the Continental Army
June 17	Battle of Bunker Hill
August 23	King George III declares the colonies in open rebellion
December 31	Colonists are defeated at Quebec
	1776
January 10	Thomas Paine publishes <i>Common Sense</i>
March 17	British troops evacuate Boston
July 4	Continental Congress approves the Declaration of Independence
August 27	Battle of Long Island, New York; British take New York City
December 25–26	Washington crosses the Delaware River; battle of Trenton
	1777
January 3	Battle of Princeton
September 11	Battle of Brandywine
October 4	Washington is defeated at Germantown; his army retires to Valley Forge for winter
October 17	British general Burgoyne surrenders at Saratoga
November 15	Articles of Confederation are approved by Congress and sent to states for ratification
	1778
February 6	France and the United States form an alliance
	1780
May 12	British capture Charleston, South Carolina

September 25	Benedict Arnold flees to the British after spying for them for more than a year
October 7	British general Cornwallis's troops are forced to retreat from North Carolina
1781	
January 17	Battle of Cowpens, South Carolina
March 1	Articles of Confederation are ratified
March 15	Battle of Guilford Courthouse, North Carolina
October 19	Cornwallis surrenders to Washington at Yorktown, Virginia
1783	
September 3	Treaty of Peace between the Americans and British is signed
1786	
August	Shays's Rebellion in western Massachusetts
September 11	Annapolis Convention
1787	
May 25	Constitutional Convention opens in Philadelphia
July 13	Northwest Ordinance is enacted by Congress
September 17	Constitutional Convention approves the newly drafted Constitution and sends it to Congress
October 27	First of Hamilton, Madison, and Jay's <i>Federalist Papers</i> appears

1788	
January–August	Ratification of U.S. Constitution by all states except Rhode Island and North Carolina
1789	
March 4	First U.S. Congress under the Constitution convenes in New York
April 30	George Washington is inaugurated first president of the United States
1791	
December 15	First ten amendments to Constitution (the Bill of Rights) are adopted