The Road to Revolution, 1763–1775

We cannot be happy without being free; we cannot be free without being secure in our property; we cannot be secure in our property if, without our consent, others may, as by right, take it away; taxes imposed on us by Parliament do thus take it away.

John Dickinson, 1767

Prologue: The British Empire was erected on the then-popular theory of mercantilism, which held that colonies existed for the benefit of the mother country. British regulations imposed burdens and conferred benefits, but on balance the advantages to the colonists probably outweighed the disadvantages. After the Seven Years’ War had saddled Britain with a staggering debt, the British government decided to tax the colonies for a portion of their defense upkeep. The result was the Stamp Act of 1765, which stirred up such a furore that Parliament was forced to repeal it the next year. A renewed attempt at taxation in 1773 goaded the colonists into destroying a number of tea cargoes, notably at Boston. Parliament retaliated by passing legislation directed at Massachusetts, which, among other restrictions, closed the port of Boston. The other colonies rallied to the defense of Massachusetts, tensions increased, and the first overt fighting erupted at Lexington in 1775.

A. The Burden of Mercantilism

1. Virginia Resents Restrictions (1671)

The foundation stones of British mercantilism in America were the Navigation Acts of 1651 and 1660. They decreed that all commerce with the colonies had to be carried on in English-built and English-owned ships (a blow at Dutch competitors), and

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that certain "enumerated articles," including sugar, tobacco, and indigo, could be exported only to England. To the English mainland colonies, tobacco was by far the most important enumerated product, and Virginia was especially hard hit. The Virginians, to be sure, were guaranteed a monopoly of the English market, but they were denied the profits of direct sales to Spanish and other European customers. As early as 1671 the testy Governor Berkeley of Virginia (see p. 32) lodged the following bitter protest with the London officials in response to specific questions from them. How did mercantilist restrictions hamper the development of Virginia?

What obstructions do you find to the improvement of the trade and navigation of the plantations within your government?

*Answer:* Mighty and destructive, by that severe act of Parliament which excludes us the having any commerce with any nation in Europe but our own, so that we cannot add to our plantation any commodity that grows out of it, as olive trees, cotton, or vines. Besides this, we cannot procure any skilful men for one now hopeful commodity, silk; for it is not lawful for us to carry a pipe stave, or a barrel of corn, to any place in Europe out of the King's dominions. If this were for His Majesty's service or the good of his subjects, we should not repine, whatever our sufferings are for it; but on my soul, it is the contrary for both. And this is the cause why no small or great vessels are built here; for we are most obedient to all laws, whilst the New England men break through, and men trade to any place that their interest lead them.

What advantages or improvement do you observe that may be gained to your trade or navigation?

*Answer:* None, unless we had liberty to transport our pipe staves, timber, and corn to other places besides the King's dominions.

2. **Adam Smith's Balance Sheet (1776)**

The Navigation Laws, as perfected in the eighteenth century, bore most harshly on the southern colonies, with their staple enumerated products. To strengthen the Royal Navy, the London government paid bounties for the production of pitch, tar, rosin, turpentine, hemp, masts, yards, and bowsprits, but the northern colonies came off with a lion's share of the bounty payments. The whole system was reviewed in 1776, the year the colonies declared independence, by the Scottish philosopher-economist Adam Smith in his monumental Wealth of Nations. As a declaration of independence from current mercantilist restrictions, it ranks as one of the great books of all time. Smith, who has been dubbed the father of modern economics, was a liberal-minded exponent of the greatest good to the greatest number. In the passage here reproduced from his Wealth of Nations, what

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British restrictions are viewed as most galling? Why were they tolerated as long as they were?

The most perfect freedom of trade is permitted between the British colonies of America and the West Indies, both in the enumerated and in the non-enumerated commodities. Those colonies are now become so populous and thriving that each of them finds in some of the others a great and extensive market for every part of its produce. All of them taken together, they make a great internal market for the produce of one another.

The liberality of England, however, towards the trade of her colonies has been confined chiefly to what concerns the market for their produce, either in its rude state or in what may be called the very first stage of manufacture. The more advanced or more refined manufactures, even of the colony produce, the merchants and manufacturers of Great Britain choose to reserve to themselves, and have prevailed upon the legislature [Parliament] to prevent their establishment in the colonies, sometimes by high duties, and sometimes by absolute prohibitions.

While Great Britain encourages in America the manufactures of pig and bar iron, by exempting them from duties to which the like commodities are subject when imported from any other country, she imposes an absolute prohibition upon the erection of steel furnaces and slit-mills in any of her American plantations. She will not suffer her colonists to work in those more refined manufactures, even for their own consumption; but insists upon their purchasing of her merchants and manufacturers all goods of this kind which they have occasion for.

She prohibits the exportation from one province to another by water, and even the carriage by land upon horseback or in a cart, of hats, of wools and woolen goods, of the produce of America—a regulation which effectually prevents the establishment of any manufacture of such commodities for distant sale, and confines the industry of her colonists in this way to such coarse and household manufactures as a private family commonly makes for its own use, or for that of some of its neighbors in the same province.

To prohibit a great people, however, from making all that they can of every part of their own produce, or from employing their stock and industry in the way that they judge most advantageous to themselves, is a manifest violation of the most sacred rights of mankind.

Unjust, however, as such prohibitions may be, they have not hitherto been very hurtful to the colonies. Land is still so cheap and, consequently, labor so dear among them that they can import from the Mother Country almost all the more refined or more advanced manufactures cheaper than they could make them for themselves. Though [even if] they had not, therefore, been prohibited from establishing such manufactures, yet in their present state of improvement a regard to their own interest would probably have prevented them from doing so. In their present state of improvement these prohibitions, perhaps, without cramping their industry, or restraining it from any employment to which it would have gone of its own accord, are only impertinent badges of slavery imposed upon them, without any sufficient reason, by the groundless jealousy of the merchants and manufacturers of the Mother Country. In a more advanced state they might be really oppressive and insupportable.
B. The Tempest over Taxation

I. Benjamin Franklin Testifies Against the Stamp Act (1766)

In 1765 the British Parliament undertook to levy a direct (internal) stamp tax on the American colonies to defray one-third of the expenses of keeping a military force there. The colonists had long paid taxes voted by their own assemblies, as well as customs duties (external taxes) passed by Parliament primarily to regulate trade. But they objected heatedly to paying direct or internal taxes voted by a Parliament in which they were not specifically represented. Benjamin Franklin, then in London as a prominent colonial agent, testified as follows before a committee of the House of Commons. He made a brilliant showing with his incisive answers, especially since he had “planted” a number of questions in advance among his friends on the committee. Were the Americans financially able to bear additional taxes? What defenses did they have available against the odious stamp tax?

Q. What is your name, and place of abode?
A. Franklin, of Philadelphia.

Q. Do the Americans pay any considerable taxes among themselves?
A. Certainly many, and very heavy taxes.

Q. What are the present taxes in Pennsylvania, laid by the laws of the colony?
A. There are taxes on all estates, real and personal; a poll tax; a tax on all offices, professions, trades, and businesses, according to their profits; an excise on all wine, rum, and other spirit; and a duty of ten pounds per head on all Negroes imported, with some other duties.

Q. For what purposes are those taxes laid?
A. For the support of the civil and military establishments of the country, and to discharge the heavy debt contracted in the last [Seven Years'] war....

Q. Are not all the people very able to pay those taxes?
A. No. The frontier counties, all along the continent, having been frequently ravaged by the enemy and greatly impoverished, are able to pay very little tax....

Q. Are not the colonies, from their circumstances, very able to pay the stamp duty?
A. In my opinion there is not gold and silver enough in the colonies to pay the stamp duty for one year.

Q. Don't you know that the money arising from the stamps was all to be laid out in America?
A. I know it is appropriated by the act to the American service; but it will be spent in the conquered colonies, where the soldiers are, not in the colonies that pay it....

Q. Do you think it right that America should be protected by this country and pay no part of the expense?

\[1^{\text{The Parliamentary History of England... (1813), vol. 16, pp. 138–159, passim.}}\]
A. That is not the case. The colonies raised, clothed, and paid, during the last war, near 25,000 men, and spent many millions.

Q. Were you not reimbursed by Parliament?

A. We were only reimbursed what, in your opinion, we had advanced beyond our proposition, or beyond what might reasonably be expected from us; and it was a very small part of what we spent. Pennsylvania, in particular, disbursed about 500,000 pounds, and the reimbursements, in the whole, did not exceed 60,000 pounds.

Q. Do not you think the people of America would submit to pay the stamp duty, if it was moderated?

A. No, never, unless compelled by force of arms.

Q. What was the temper of America towards Great Britain before the year 1763?

A. The best in the world. They submitted willingly to the government of the Crown, and paid, in all their courts, obedience to acts of Parliament.

Q. What is your opinion of a future tax, imposed on the same principle with that of the Stamp Act? How would the Americans receive it?

A. Just as they do this. They would not pay it.

Q. Have you not heard of the resolutions of this House, and of the House of Lords, asserting the right of Parliament relating to America, including a power to tax the people there?

A. Yes, I have heard of such resolutions.

Q. What will be the opinion of the Americans on those resolutions?

A. They will think them unconstitutional and unjust.

Q. Was it an opinion in America before 1763 that the Parliament had no right to lay taxes and duties there?

A. I never heard any objection to the right of laying duties to regulate commerce; but a right to lay internal taxes was never supposed to be in Parliament, as we are not represented there.

Q. Did the Americans ever dispute the controlling power of Parliament to regulate the commerce?

A. No.

Q. Can anything less than a military force carry the Stamp Act into execution?

A. I do not see how a military force can be applied to that purpose.

Q. Why may it not?

A. Suppose a military force sent into America; they will find nobody in arms; what are they then to do? They cannot force a man to take stamps who chooses to do without them. They will not find a rebellion; they may indeed make one.

Q. If the act is not repealed, what do you think will be the consequences?

A. A total loss of the respect and affection the people of America bear to this country, and of all the commerce that depends on that respect and affection.

Q. How can the commerce be affected?

A. You will find that, if the act is not repealed, they will take very little of your manufactures in a short time.

Q. Is it in their power to do without them?

A. I think they may very well do without them.

Q. Is it their interest not to take them?

A. The goods they take from Britain are either necessaries, mere conveniences, or superfluities. The first, as cloth, etc., with a little industry they can make at home;
the second they can do without till they are able to provide them among themselves; and the last, which are much the greatest part, they will strike off immediately. They are mere articles of fashion, purchased and consumed because the fashion in a respected country, but will now be detested and rejected. The people have already struck off, by general agreement, the use of all goods fashionable in mournings. . . .

Q. If the Stamp Act should be repealed, would it induce the assemblies of America to acknowledge the right of Parliament to tax them, and would they erase their resolutions [against the Stamp Act]?
A. No, never.
Q. Is there no means of obliging them to erase those resolutions?
A. None that I know of; they will never do it, unless compelled by force of arms.
Q. Is there a power on earth that can force them to erase them?
A. No power, how great soever, can force men to change their opinions. . . .
Q. What used to be the pride of the Americans?
A. To indulge in the fashions and manufactures of Great Britain.
Q. What is now their pride?
A. To wear their old clothes over again, till they can make new ones.

2. Philadelphia Threatens Tea Men (1773)

Parliament, faced with rebellion and a crippling commercial boycott, repealed the Stamp Act in 1766. The next year the ministry devised a light indirect tax on tea, which, being external, presumably met the colonial objections to a direct tax. Opposition to the new levy was fading when, in 1773, the London officials granted a monopoly of the tea business in America to the powerful and hated British East India Company. These arrangements would make the tea, even with the three-penny tax included, cheaper than ever. The colonists, resenting this transparent attempt to trick them into paying the tax, staged several famous tea parties. Those at Boston and New York involved throwing the tea overboard; the affair at Annapolis resulted in the burning of both vessel and cargo. At Portsmouth and Philadelphia, the tea ships were turned away. Of the reasons here given by the Philadelphians for action, which was the strongest? Was it strong enough to warrant the measures threatened?

TO CAPT. AYRES
Of the Ship Polly, on a Voyage
from London to Philadelphia

Sir: We are informed that you have imprudently taken charge of a quantity of tea which has been sent out by the [East] India Company, under the auspices of the Ministry, as a trial of American virtue and resolution.

Now, as your cargo, on your arrival here, will most assuredly bring you into hot water, and as you are perhaps a stranger to these parts, we have concluded to advise you of the present situation of affairs in Philadelphia, that, taking time by the forelock, you may stop short in your dangerous errand, secure your ship against the

rafts of combustible matter which may be set on fire and turned loose against her; and more than all this, that you may preserve your own person from the pitch and feathers that are prepared for you.

In the first place, we must tell you that the Pennsylvanians are, to a man, passionately fond of freedom, the birthright of Americans, and at all events are determined to enjoy it.

That they sincerely believe no power on the face of the earth has a right to tax them without their consent.

That, in their opinion, the tea in your custody is designed by the Ministry to enforce such a tax, which they will undoubtedly oppose, and in so doing, give you every possible obstruction.

We are nominated to a very disagreeable, but necessary, service: to our care are committed all offenders against the rights of America; and hapless is he whose evil destiny has doomed him to suffer at our hands.

You are sent out on a diabolical service; and if you are so foolish and obstinate as to complete your voyage by bringing your ship to anchor in this port, you may run such a gauntlet as will induce you in your last moments most heartily to curse those who have made you the dupe of their avarice and ambition.

What think you, Captain, of a halter around your neck—ten gallons of liquid tar decanted on your pate—with the feathers of a dozen wild geese laid over that to enliven your appearance?

Only think seriously of this—and fly to the place from whence you came—fly without hesitation—without the formality of a protest—and above all, Captain Ayres, let us advise you to fly without the wild geese feathers.

Your friends to serve,

THE COMMITTEE OF TARRING AND FEATHERING

3. Connecticut Decries the Boston Port Act (1774)

The Boston Tea Party, which involved the destruction of three cargoes of tea by colonists thinly disguised as Indians, provoked an angry response in Parliament. Even as good a friend of America as Colonel Barré so far forgot his grammar as to burst out, “Boston ought to be punished; she is your eldest son!” Parliament speedily passed a series of punitive measures (“Intolerable Acts”), notably the act closing the port of Boston until the tea was paid for. The other colonies, deeply resentful, responded with assurances of support. Virginia raised food and money; Philadelphia contributed one thousand barrels of flour. Various groups, including the citizens of Farmington, Connecticut, passed resolutions of protest. To what extent did their resolution reflect a desire for independence?

Early in the morning was found the following handbill, posted up in various parts of the town, viz.:

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To pass through the fire at six o'clock this evening, in honor to the immortal goddess of Liberty, the late infamous Act of the British Parliament for farther distressing the American Colonies. The place of execution will be the public parade, where all Sons of Liberty are desired to attend.

Accordingly, a very numerous and respectable body were assembled of near one thousand people, when a huge pole, just forty-five feet high, was erected, and consecrated to the shrine of liberty; after which the Act of Parliament for blocking up the Boston harbor was read aloud, sentenced to the flames, and executed by the hands of the common hangman. Then the following resolves were passed, *nem. con. *[unanimously]:

1st. That it is the greatest dignity, interest, and happiness of every American to be united with our parent state while our liberties are duly secured, maintained, and supported by our rightful sovereign, whose person we greatly revere; whose government, while duly administered, we are ready with our lives and properties to support.

2nd. That the present Ministry, being instigated by the Devil, and led on by their wicked and corrupt hearts, have a design to take away our liberties and properties, and to enslave us forever.

3rd. That the late Act, which their malice hath caused to be passed in Parliament, for blocking up the port of Boston, is unjust, illegal, and oppressive; and that we, and every American, are sharers in the insults offered to the town of Boston.

4th. That those pimps and parasites who dared to advise their master [George III] to such detestable measures be held in utter abhorrence by us and every American, and their names loaded with the curses of all succeeding generations.

5th. That we scorn the chains of slavery; we despise every attempt to rivet them upon us; we are the sons of freedom, and resolved that, till time shall be no more, that godlike virtue shall blazon our hemisphere.

C. Britain at the Crossroads

I. Dean Josiah Tucker Advises a Divorce (1774)

Josiah Tucker, a British clergyman-economist, was a born controversialist who for fifty years penned numerous pamphlets on varied subjects. A man of prodigious energy, he was, as a student at Oxford, regularly walked the 150 miles between the university and his native Wales. Regarding Britain as underpopulated, he doubted the utility of colonies and criticized many aspects of mercantilism. After a crisis over taxation again developed with America in 1774, he examined, in a pamphlet, four possible courses: (1) let affairs drift; (2) persuade the colonies to accept representation in Parliament; (3) crush the colonies with arms; (4) separate peacefully from the colonies, with an offer of protection against foreign foes. In the following passage he develops the theme that the British Empire would actually be strengthened by the expulsion of its most valuable part. In the light of subsequent history, was he more right than wrong?

The first and capital supposed [dis]advantage is that if we separate from the colonies, we shall lose their trade. But why so? And how does this appear? The colonies, we know by experience, will trade with any people, even with their bitterest enemies, during the hottest of a war, and a war [French and Indian War] undertaken at their own earnest request, and for their own sakes—the colonies, I say, will trade even with them, provided they shall find it their interest so to do. Why then should any man suppose that the same self-interest will not induce them to trade with us? . . .

The second objection against giving up the colonies is that such a measure would greatly decrease our shipping and navigation, and consequently diminish the breed of sailors. But this objection has been fully obviated already. For if we shall not lose our trade, at least in any important degree, even with the northern colonies (and most probably we shall increase it with other countries), then it follows that neither the quantity of shipping nor the breed of sailors can suffer any considerable diminution; so that this supposition is merely a panic, and has no foundation. Not to mention that in proportion as the Americans shall be obliged to exert themselves to defend their own coasts in case of war, in the same proportion shall Great Britain be exonerated from that burden, and shall have more ships and men at command to protect her own channel trade, and for other services.

The third objection is that if we were to give up these colonies, the French would take immediate possession of them. Now this objection is entirely built on . . . very wild, very extravagant, and absurd suppositions. . . .

The manifold advantages attendant on such a scheme:

And first, a disjunction from the northern colonies would effectually put a stop to our present emigrations. . . .

Secondly. Another great advantage to be derived from a separation is that we shall then save between £300,000 and £400,000 a year, by being discharged from the payment of any civil or military establishment belonging to the colonies; for which generous benefaction we receive at present no other return than invectives and reproaches.

Thirdly. The ceasing of the payment of bounties on certain colony productions will be another great saving, perhaps not less than £200,000 a year. And it is very remarkable that the goods imported from the colonies, in consequence of these bounties, could not have been imported into any other part of Europe, were there a liberty to do it, because the freight and first cost would have amounted to more than they could be sold for. So that, in fact, we give premiums to the colonies for selling goods to us which would not have been sold at all anywhere else. . . .

Fourthly. When we are no longer connected with the colonies by the imaginary tie of an identity of government, then our merchant-exporters and manufacturers will have a better chance of having their debts paid than they have at present. For as matters now stand, the colonists choose to carry their ready cash to other nations, while they are contracting debts with their mother country, with whom they think they can take greater liberties. . . .

Fifthly. After a separation from the colonies, our influence over them will be much greater than ever it was since they began to feel their own weight and importance. For at present we are looked upon in no better a light than that of robbers
and usurpers; whereas we shall then be considered as their protectors, mediators, benefactors. The moment a separation takes effect, intestine quarrels will begin. For it is well known that the seeds of discord and dissension between province and province are now ready to shoot forth; and they are only kept down by the present combination of all the colonies against us, whom they unhappily fancy to be their common enemy. When, therefore, this object of their hatred shall be removed by a declaration on our parts that, so far from usurping all authority, we, from henceforward, will assume none at all against their own consent, the weaker provinces will entreat our protection against the stronger, and the less cautious against the more crafty and designing. So that, in short, in proportion as their factious, republican spirit shall intrigue and cabal, shall split into parties, divide, and subdivide—in the same proportion shall we be called in to become their general umpires and referees.

2. Adam Smith Criticizes Empire (1776)

Like Dean Tucker and British officialdom, Adam Smith was concerned about the expense of mercantilism. When serious friction developed with America, he advocated colonial membership in Parliament, with representation based on taxes paid. If the American tax revenues should ultimately exceed those of Britain, as was not unlikely, the capital of the empire might be moved from London to the New World. Such views were not popular in the mother country. Smith here examines the alternatives in the concluding passage of his Wealth of Nations. Did he regard the colonies as a burden or an asset?

The expense of the peace establishment of the colonies . . . , though very great, is insignificant in comparison with what the defense of the colonies has cost us in time of war. The last war [Seven Years’ War], which was undertaken altogether on account of the colonies, cost Great Britain, it has already been observed, upwards of ninety millions [of pounds]. The Spanish war of 1739 [War of Jenkins’ Ear] was principally undertaken on their account; in which, and in the French war [King George’s] that was the consequence of it, Great Britain spent upwards of forty millions, a great part of which ought justly to be charged to the colonies.

In those two wars the colonies cost Great Britain much more than double the sum which the national debt amounted to before the commencement of the first of them. Had it not been for those wars, that debt might, and probably would, by this time, have been completely paid. And had it not been for the colonies, the former of those wars might not, and the latter certainly would not, have been undertaken. It was because the colonies were supposed to be provinces of the British empire that this expense was laid out upon them.

But the countries which contribute neither revenue nor military force towards the support of the empire cannot be considered as provinces. They may perhaps

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be considered as appendages, as a sort of splendid and showy equipage of the empire. But if the empire can no longer support the expense of keeping up this equipage, it ought certainly to lay it down. And if it cannot raise its revenue in proportion to its expense, it ought, at least, to accommodate its expense to its revenue. If the colonies, notwithstanding their refusal to submit to British taxes, are still to be considered as provinces of the British empire, their defense in some future war may cost Great Britain as great an expense as it ever has done in any former war.

The rulers of Great Britain have, for more than a century past, amused the people with the imagination that they possessed a great empire on the west side of the Atlantic. This empire, however, has hitherto existed in imagination only. It has hitherto been, not an empire, but the project of an empire; not a gold mine, but the project of a gold mine—a project which has cost, which continues to cost, and which, if pursued in the same way as it has been hitherto, is likely to cost, immense expense, without being likely to bring any profit. For the effects of the monopoly of the colony trade, it has been shown, are, to the great body of the people, mere loss instead of profit.

It is surely now time that our rulers should realize this golden dream, in which they have been indulging themselves, perhaps, as well as the people; or that they should awake from it themselves, and endeavor to awaken the people. If the project cannot be completed, it ought to be given up. If any of the provinces of the British empire cannot be made to contribute toward the support of the whole empire, it is surely time that Great Britain should free herself from the expense of defending those provinces in time of war, and of supporting any part of their civil or military establishments in time of peace, and endeavor to accommodate her future views and designs to the real mediocrity [moderateness] of her circumstances.

3. Samuel Johnson Urges the Iron Fist (1775)

The conservative Samuel Johnson, famed for his English dictionary, was no friend of Americans, who, he wrote, “multiplied with the fecundity of their own rattlesnakes.” In 1762 he accepted a pension of £300 annually from the crown; in 1775 he repaid his royal master by publishing a pamphlet, Taxation No Tyranny, in which he proved himself to be a political babe in the woods. He privately admitted that his manuscript was revised and shortened by the royal officials. Which of his proposals would be most likely to arouse the American frontier? Which the South? Which would be most likely to stir up renewed rebellion generally? Which proposals have real merit, and which are the most fantastic?

The Dean of Gloucester has proposed, and seems to propose it seriously, that we should, at once, release our claims, declare them [the Americans] masters of themselves, and whistle them down the wind. His opinion is that our gain from

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them will be the same, and our expense less. What they can have most cheaply from Britain, they will still buy; what they can sell to us at the highest price, they will still sell.

It is, however, a little hard that, having so lately fought and conquered for their safety, we should govern them no longer. By letting them loose before the [Seven Years'] war, how many millions might have been saved? One wild proposal is best answered by another. Let us restore to the French what we have taken from them. We shall see our colonists at our feet, when they have an enemy so near them [Canada]. Let us give the Indians arms, and teach them discipline, and encourage them, now and then, to plunder a plantation. Security and leisure are the parents of sedition.

While these different opinions are agitated, it seems to be determined by the legislature that force shall be tried. Men of the pen have seldom any great skill in conquering kingdoms, but they have strong inclination to give advice. I cannot forbear to wish that this commotion may end without bloodshed, and that the rebels may be subdued by terror rather than by violence; and, therefore, recommend such a force as may take away not only the power but the hope of resistance, and, by conquering without a battle, save many from the sword.

If their obstinacy continues, without actual hostilities, it may, perhaps, be mollified by turning out the soldiers to free quarters, forbidding any personal cruelty or hurt. It has been proposed that the slaves should be set free, an act which, surely, the [American] lovers of liberty cannot but commend. If they are furnished with firearms for defense, and utensils for husbandry, and settled in some simple form of government within the country, they may be more grateful and honest than their masters.

Since the Americans have made it necessary to subdue them, may they be subdued with the least injury possible to their persons and their possessions! When they are reduced to obedience, may that obedience be secured by stricter laws and stronger obligations!

Nothing can be more noxious to society than that erroneous clemency which, when a rebellion is suppressed, exacts no forfeiture and establishes no securities, but leaves the rebels in their former state. Who would not try the experiment which promises advantage without expense? If rebels once obtain a victory, their wishes are accomplished. If they are defeated, they suffer little, perhaps less than their conquerors. However often they play the game, the chance is always in their favor. In the meantime they are growing rich by victualing the troops we have sent against them, and, perhaps, gain more by the residence of the army than they lose by the obstruction of their post [Boston].

Their charters, being now, I suppose, legally forfeited, may be modeled as shall appear most commodious to the Mother Country. Thus the privileges [of self-government] which are found, by experience, liable to misuse will be taken away, and those who now bellow as patriots, bluster as soldiers, and domineer as legislators will sink into sober merchants and silent planters, peaceably diligent and securely rich.

We are told that the subjection of Americans may tend to the diminution of our own liberties—an event which none but very perspicacious politicians are able to
foresee. If slavery be thus fatally contagious, how is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the [American] drivers of Negroes?

4. Two Views of the British Empire (1767, 1775)

Benjamin Franklin played many roles in colonial America. In 1767, he commissioned the cartoon shown below, "Britannia: Her Colonies," to illustrate the importance of the North American colonies to the British Empire. Was his purpose to encourage independence or reconciliation? To whom is his cartoon principally addressed? The second cartoon, "The Wise Men of Gotham and Their Goose," is from a London magazine in 1775, after the Revolutionary War had broken out. To what audience is it addressed? What are the cartoonist's sympathies in the conflict between Britain and its American colonies? To what extent does the British cartoon of 1775 express sentiments similar to Franklin’s image of 1767?

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Daniel Leonard, of an aristocratic Massachusetts family, was the cleverest Tory pamphleteer in America. His writings, declared his pen adversary John Adams, "shone like the moon among the lesser stars." Forced to flee from Boston when the British troops withdrew in 1776, he subsequently became chief justice of Bermuda and dean of the English bar. He is best known in America for a series of seventeen newspaper articles, published in 1774-1775 over the signature "Massachusetts." He warned his readers that rebellion was "the most atrocious offense" and that it would open the doors to anarchy. Legal punishment for the rebel was that he be dragged to the gallows; "that he be hanged by the neck, and then cut down alive; that his entrails be taken out and burned while he is yet alive; that his head be cut off; that his body be divided into four parts; that his head and quarters be at the king's disposal." As the clash neared between the American Patriots (Whigs) and the British troops in Massachusetts, Leonard issued this final appeal to his countrymen two weeks before the bloodshed at Lexington. What were his most convincing and least convincing arguments in support of the view that the colonists could not win?

Do you expect to conquer in war? War is no longer a simple, but an intricate science, not to be learned from books or two or three campaigns, but from long experience. You need not be told that His Majesty's generals, Gage and Haldimand, are possessed of every talent requisite to great commanders, matured by long experience in many parts of the world, and stand high in military fame; that many of the officers have been bred to arms from their infancy, and a large proportion of the army now here have already reaped immortal honors in the iron harvest of the field.

Alas! My friends, you have nothing to oppose to this force but a militia unused to service, impatient of command, and destitute of resources. Can your officers depend upon the privates, or the privates upon the officers? Your war can be but little more than mere tumultuary rage. And besides, there is an awful disparity between troops that fight the battles of their sovereign and those that follow the standard of rebellion.

These reflections may arrest you in an hour that you think not of, and come too late to serve you. Nothing short of a miracle could gain you one battle; but could you destroy all the British troops that are now here, and burn the men-of-war that command our coast, it would be but the beginning of sorrow. And yet without a decisive battle, one campaign would ruin you. This province [Massachusetts] does not produce its necessary provision when the husbandman can pursue his calling without molestation. What then must be your condition when the demand shall be increased and the resource in a manner cut off? Figure to yourselves what must be your distress should your wives and children be driven from such places as the

King's troops shall occupy, into the interior parts of the province, and they, as well as you, be destitute of support.

I take no pleasure in painting these scenes of distress. The Whigs [rebels] affect to divert you from them by ridicule; but should war commence, you can expect nothing but its severities. Might I hazard an opinion, but few of your leaders ever intended to engage in hostilities, but they may have rendered inevitable what they intended for intimidation. Those that unsheathe the sword of rebellion may throw away the scabbard; they cannot be treated with while in arms; and if they lay them down, they are in no other predicament than conquered rebels. The conquered in other wars do not forfeit the rights of men, nor all the rights of citizens. Even their bravery is rewarded by a generous victor. Far different is the case of a routed rebel host.

My dear countrymen, you have before you, at your election, peace or war, happiness or misery. May the God of our forefathers direct you in the way that leads to peace and happiness, before your feet stumble on the dark mountains, before the evil days come, wherein you shall say, we have no pleasure in them.

2. **Patrick Henry Demands Boldness (1775)**

Daniel Leonard's well-justified lack of confidence in the ill-trained colonial militia was more than shared by the earl of Sandwich. In the House of Lords he scorned the colonists as "raw, undisciplined, cowardly men" and hoped that they would assemble 200,000 "brave fellows" rather than 50,000, for they would thus starve themselves out and then run at the first "sound of cannon." But the great William Pitt (now Lord Chatham), also speaking in Parliament, warned against "an impious war with a people contending in the great cause of public liberty." "All attempts to enforce servitude upon such men must be vain, must be futile." A few weeks later Patrick Henry, the flaming young lawyer-orator, urging warlike preparations before the Virginia Assembly, spelled out the reasons for action in his famous speech ending with the immortal words, "Give me liberty or give me death!" Which of his several arguments is the strongest?

They tell us, sir, that we are weak; unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week, or the next year? Will it be when we are totally disarmed, and when a British guard shall be stationed in every house? Shall we gather strength by irresolution and inaction? Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance by lying supinely on our backs and hugging the delusive phantom of hope, until our enemies shall have bound us hand and foot?

Sir, we are not weak if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power. Three millions of people armed in the holy cause of liberty, and in such a country as that which we possess, are invincible by any force which our enemy can send against us. Besides, sir, we shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations and who

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will raise up friends to fight our battles for us. The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave.

Besides, sir, we have no election. If we were base enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest. There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable—and let it come! I repeat, sir, let it come!

It is vain, sir, to extenuate the matter. The gentlemen may cry, Peace, peace! but there is no peace. The war has actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that the gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, almighty God. I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!

### 3. New Yorkers Abuse Tories (1775)

In 1773 James Rivington, a former London bookseller who had emigrated to New York after losing his fortune in racetrack gambling, launched one of the best colonial newspapers, Rivington’s New York Gazetteer. Its columns at first were open to both sides in the increasingly bitter war of words between Loyalists (Tories) and Patriots (Whigs). But American Patriots (Sons of Liberty), resenting additional criticisms about to be published, wrecked Rivington’s plant in November 1775. The pro-Loyalist publisher then fled to England. What did the ill will between Loyalists and Patriots portend for the course of the Revolutionary War?

This afternoon, at New York, as William Cunningham and John Hill were coming from the North River, they stopped near the liberty pole to see a boxing match, but had not stood long when Cunningham was struck at by Smith Richards, James Vandyke, and several others; called Tory; and used in a most cruel manner by a mob of above two hundred men. Mr. Hill, coming up to his assistance, was beaten and abused most barbarously, though neither of them gave the least offense, except being on the King’s side of the question at the meeting this morning.

The leaders of this mob brought Cunningham under the liberty pole, and told him to go down on his knees and damn his Popish King George, and they would then set him free. But, on the contrary, he exclaimed, “God bless King George!” They then dragged him through the green, tore the clothes off his back, and robbed him of his watch. They also insisted on Hill’s damning the King, but he, refusing, was used in the same manner, and were it not for some of the peace officers, viz., Captain Welsh, John Taylor, William Dey, and Joseph Wilson, together with ____ Goldstream, who rescued them from the violence of this banditti and brought them to the jail for the security of their persons from further injuries, they would inevitably have been murdered.

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E. The Clash of Arms

I. Conflicting Versions of the Outbreak (1775)

British troops from Boston, seeking secret military stores and presumably rebel leaders, clashed with the colonists at Lexington and then at Concord, on April 19, 1775, in the first bloodshed of the American Revolution. Among the numerous conflicting accounts that exist, these two excerpts, representing an American version and an official British version, are noteworthy. To this day scholars have not proved who fired the first shot. What undisputed and what probable facts emerge from these accounts? How can historians extract truth from conflicting contemporary testimony?

American Version

At Lexington... a company of militia... mustered near the meeting house. The [British] troops came in sight of them just before sunrise; and running within a few rods of them, the Commanding Officer [Pitcairn] accosted the militia in words to this effect: "Disperse, you rebels—damn you, throw down your arms and disperse"; upon which the troops huzzaed, and immediately one or two officers discharged their pistols, which were instantaneously followed by the firing of four or five of the soldiers, and then there seemed to be a general discharge from the whole body. Eight of our men were killed and nine wounded...

In Lexington [the British]... also set fire to several other houses.... They pillaged almost every house they passed.... But the savage barbarity exercised upon the bodies of our unfortunate brethren who fell is almost incredible. Not contented with shooting down the unarmed, aged, and infirm, they disregarded the cries of the wounded, killing them without mercy, and mangling their bodies in the most shocking manner.

British Version

... Six companies of [British] light infantry... at Lexington found a body of the country people under arms, on a green close to the road. And upon the King's troops marching up to them, in order to inquire the reason of their being so assembled, they went off in great confusion. And several guns were fired upon the King's troops from behind a stone wall, and also from the meetinghouse and other houses, by which one man was wounded, and Major Pitcairn's horse shot in two places. In consequence of this attack by the rebels, the troops returned the fire and killed several of them....

On the return of the troops from Concord, they [the rebels]... began to fire upon them from behind stone walls and houses, and kept up in that manner a scattering fire during the whole of their march of fifteen miles, by which means several were killed and wounded. And such was the cruelty and barbarity of the rebels that they scalped and cut off the ears of some of the wounded men who fell into their hands.

2. Pennsylvania Prepares for War (1775)

In the summer of 1775, as relations with Great Britain continued to deteriorate, the Pennsylvania Assembly created a “Committee of Safety,” charged with the unenviable task of preparing the Quaker colony to defend itself against the most formidable military power in the Western world. What do the committee’s recommendations suggest about the challenges colonial governments faced in readying the American people for war?

Phila’d., 26th, Aug’t, 1775.

It has been regretted by some great Soldiers, particularly by Marshal Saxe, that the use of Pikes was ever laid aside, and many experienced Officers of the present Times agree with him in opinion that it would be advantageous, in our modern wars, to resume that weapon; its length reaching beyond the Bayonet, and the compound Force of the Files (every Man laying hold of the presented Pikes) rendering a charge made with them insupportable by any Battalion armed only in the common manner. At this time, therefore, when the spirit of our People supplies more Men than we can furnish with Fire Arms, a Deficiency which all the Industry of our ingenious Gunsmiths cannot suddenly supply; and our Enemies having, at the same time they were about to send regular Armies against undisciplined & half-arm’d Farmers and Tradesmen, with the most dastardly Malice, endeavour’d to prevail on the other Powers of Europe not to sell us any Arms or Ammunition, the use of Pikes in one or two Rear Ranks is recommended to the Attention & Consideration of our Battalions. Every Smith can make these, and, therefore, the Country may soon be suppliant with Plenty of them. Marshal Saxe’s Direction is, that the staff be 14 feet in Length and the spear 18 Inches, thin & light; the staff to be made of Pine, hollowed for the sake of lightness, & yet to retain a degree of stiffness, the whole to weigh not more than 7 or 8 pounds. When an Army is to encamp they may, he observed, be used as Tent poles, and save the Trouble of carrying them. The Committee of Safety will supply samples to those Battalions who are dispos’d to use them. Each Pikeman to have a cutting sword, and where it can be procur’d, a Pistol.

3. Why an Old Soldier Fought (1898)

Many years after the bloodshed at Lexington, Mellen Chamberlain, a prominent Massachusetts lawyer-politician-historian-librarian, published the following account of an interview with a veteran participant, Levi Preston. Why did Preston fight? What did his reasons have to do with traditional historical accounts?

When the action at Lexington, on the morning of the 19th [of April], was known at Danvers, the minute men there, under the lead of Captain Gideon Foster, made

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that memorable march—or run, rather—of sixteen miles in four hours, and struck Percy’s flying column at West Cambridge. Brave but incautious in flanking the Redcoats, they were flanked themselves and badly pinched, leaving seven dead, two wounded, and one missing. Among those who escaped was Levi Preston, afterwards known as Captain Levi Preston.

When I was about twenty-one and Captain Preston about ninety-one, I “interviewed” him as to what he did and thought sixty-seven years before, on April 19, 1775. And now, fifty-two years later, I make my report—a little belated perhaps, but not too late, I trust, for the morning papers!

At that time, of course, I knew all about the American Revolution—far more than I do now! And if I now know anything truly, it is chiefly owing to what I have since forgotten of the histories of that event then popular.

With an assurance passing even that of the modern interviewer—if that were possible—I began: “Captain Preston, why did you go to the Concord fight, the 19th of April, 1775?”

The old man, bowed beneath the weight of years, raised himself upright, and turning to me said: “Why did I go?”

“Yes,” I replied; “my histories tell me that you men of the Revolution took up arms against ‘intolerable oppressions.’ What were they?”

“Oppressions? I didn’t feel them.”

“What, were you not oppressed by the Stamp Act?”

“I never saw one of those stamps, and always understood that Governor Bernard [of Massachusetts] put them all in Castle William [Boston]. I am certain I never paid a penny for one of them.”

“Well, what then about the tea-tax?”

“Tea-tax! I never drank a drop of the stuff; the boys threw it all overboard.”

“Then I suppose you had been reading Harrington or Sidney and Locke about the eternal principles of liberty.”
"Never heard of 'em. We read only the Bible, the Catechism, Watts' Psalms and Hymns, and the Almanack."

"Well, then, what was the matter? and what did you mean in going to the fight?"

"Young man, what we meant in going for those Redcoats was this: we always had governed ourselves, and we always meant to. They didn't mean we should."

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Thought Provokers

1. It has been said that the American colonists attempted to reverse the maxim and have it read, "Mother countries exist for the benefit of their colonies." Comment on the reasonableness of such a position. Has mercantilism disappeared as an economic philosophy?

2. Is it justifiable for the people to take mob action against lawful measures that they deem harmful or illegal? Comment critically on the following propositions in the light of the American Revolution: (a) He who strikes a king must strike to kill. (b) Rebellion is a great crime—unless it succeeds.

3. Following the Boston Tea Party, what possible courses were open to Britain, and which one would have been most likely to keep the colonies in the empire?

4. If you had been a wealthy citizen in Massachusetts in 1776, would you have remained loyal to the king? Explain.

5. Why did each side blame the other for the first shot at Lexington? Are the people who fight in a war the best judges of its causes and significance?