THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE OR THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION THAT WAS NO REVOLUTION: ANOTHER LOOK AT THE REASONS

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences

Florida Gulf Coast University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirement for the Degree of

Master of Arts

By

Hans G. Jansen

2013
This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
The requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History

Hans G. Jansen

Approved

Michael Epple, Ph.D.

Eric A. Strahorn, Ph.D.

Frances Davey, Ph.D.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1. REVOLUTION OR WAR OF INDEPENDENCE?</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Definition of Revolution</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are These Revolutionaries?</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Adams – Revolutionary?</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible Revolutionary Elements</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2. TOWARD INDEPENDENCE</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Puritans</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The French and Indian War / The Seven Years’ War</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Colonial Assemblies during the French and Indian War</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3. REASONS FOR THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Acts of Parliament after 1763</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4. WHY THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE SUCCEEDED</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Only Effective Government</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography and Communication</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Importance of Europe in the American War of Independence</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France and Spain</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands and the League of Armed Neutrality</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addendum</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVERALL CONCLUSION</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When, at the age of 62, I decided to study history at Florida Gulf Coast University, it was not a spontaneous decision. In my younger years, I had pursued business and languages in order to make enough money to marry and raise a family. History and politics were my true interests, even then; alas, their pursuit did not seem to guarantee a stable income. After becoming a grandfather in 2003, I felt that I had fulfilled my duty to society and could return to my old love – history.

My decision to concentrate on American history was almost pre-ordained. Growing up in Germany after World War II, it would have been difficult not to learn the history of Germany – a very negative one, indeed – and the history of the victorious Allies, which had very few blemishes – with the exception of that of the Soviet Union; I grew up in West Germany. It is needless to say that the history taught at German schools was determined by the Occupation Powers and was hardly unbiased. Of course, it was probably not unbiased before; but this was before my time. My studies of the English and French languages gave me the opportunity to look at history books of other countries. Especially among French historians, I found the occasional criticism of their own history and, to my amazement, some positive aspects in the history of Germany. For a young German in the post-war period, this was a relief. My admiration and appreciation for the historians of the Annales school continue to this day.

While the American history, presented at German schools during my Grammar school days, lacked critical elements – I believe the textbooks had to be approved by the appropriate occupying power – it was generally not questioned by teachers or students. The Marshall Plan or
European Recovery Plan had made the United States so popular among most Europeans that a criticism of their history seemed uncalled for. It was only in the 1960s, after a personal encounter with the Jim Crow Laws in the South, that I remembered statements made on the subject of African Americans and Native Americans. At the time, I had put them off as Marxist exaggerations. It became clear to me that I lacked a profound knowledge of American history. I was determined to correct this.

This appears to be the time to thank all the people who instilled and encouraged my interest in history. My father, Hans J. Jansen, had such an admiration for the languages, cultures, and histories of France and Ancient Rome that my knowledge in these areas always seemed inadequate. My concentration on the English language and America must have been a disappointment for him. However, my ability to take a critical look at any country’s history and politics must have pleased his Jesuit-trained mind. He trained every one of his eight children in the art of disciplined argument. Danke Papa.

Erich Dulisch was my history teacher for five years and encouraged me to look into history deeper than the textbooks permitted. He gave direction to my early attempts at historical research. My classmates and I still hold him in high regard for his fair way of dealing with his students. Vielen Dank Herr Dulisch.

Harper G. Stackhouse deserves a special place in my acknowledgements. We met through an English friend of mine when Harper was sent from USAREUR Heidelberg on liaison duty to HQBAOR (Headquarters of the British Army of the Rhine in Moenchengladbach, my hometown). I admired the calm way he dealt with the sometimes-not-so-kind humor of my British friends. He rekindled my interest in American history and literature and recommended
books for me to read. A few years later, I could observe him as a history teacher in Paducah, Ky. Harper was an excellent classroom teacher. Harper and his wife Loretta offered to be my sponsors when I decided to come to the United States. They assumed a responsibility I hope they did not regret. Paducah and the people I met there still have a special place in my heart. After fifty years, my bonds to the place and the people are still strong and every time I visit, it is a homecoming. Harper and Loretta, I hope you forgive me for deciding not to become a teacher, after all.

My start at Florida Gulf Coast University was an absolute disaster and it would have been the end of my American school career if Dr. Roger Green had not been such a humane and understanding individual. He will know what I mean. The following semester brought Dr. Michael Epple into my academic life and he is still keeping a critical eye on my work. Besides Dr. Epple, there are several other professors in the History Department who have suffered my often unrestrained arguments against textbooks and biased history. They took my sharp remarks with astounding grace and never used their professorial powers against me. I assure all of you that my arguments were never personal. I admire all of you.

What would a student or a professor do without librarians? I would have been lost without their kind and patient help and the quality of my work would have suffered immensely. I have used many libraries in Europe and the United States and have developed a deep regard and high esteem for all the people who assisted me in my research. This international brotherhood (or sisterhood) will always command my utmost respect.

Although graduate studies were not as much fun as undergraduate studies – where in graduate courses can you get an A for preparing a Boeuf Bourgignon for an IDS class as a work
of art – I shall surely miss the lively arguments with civilized students. Outside of the university,
I have been threatened with physical violence for making more benign statements than I make in
class. I am reluctant to leave the academic life at the age of seventy.
INTRODUCTION

To many, my thesis will appear as a criticism of the United States and our Founding Fathers. It is criticism only insofar that I approach all aspects of history with a critical mind. While doing research into the reasons for the American Revolution, I began to doubt the ones that were generally given to students in the United States and abroad. Did a tax on tea, which, absurdly enough, actually lowered the price of tea for the consumer, and the Stamp Act, which indeed inconvenienced both land speculators and their customers, upset the colonial populace enough to drive them into a revolt against their established government? Or was it the idea that these acts came from a legislative body in which they had no vote and were not represented? These reasons must have played a role because they were extensively used by the propagandists or pamphleteers. However, it quickly became clear to me that the Founding Fathers had more substantial reasons to activate the people against King and Parliament. Taking a closer look at the leading revolutionaries, our Founding Fathers, I not only found that they had more substantial reasons for their fight against Great Britain but also came to the conclusion that they were no revolutionaries. Indeed, I became convinced that the American Revolution was no revolution, at all. At best, it was a war of independence. For many of the Patriots, independence was the ultimate aim. For almost all of them, it was a struggle to retain the power that the colonial elite had established for themselves ever since the first settlers touched North American soil.

If Parliament’s attempts to wrest power from the colonial assemblies was the primary reason for the resistance of the colonial elites, economic reasons were a close second. The Tea Tax and the Stamp Act were hardly economic threats; but they threatened the power of the
assemblies to make their own decisions in all fiscal matters. This shift of power from the assemblies to Parliament in Whitehall had to be rejected. The real threats to the economic well-being of the colonial elites were the Navigation Acts and the Proclamation of 1763. The Navigation Acts hurt the merchant class, especially in New England and the mid-Atlantic colonies, and the Proclamation of 1763 hurt all the land speculators. Among the Founding Fathers, almost all belonged to one or both of these groups. However, the Tea Tax and the Stamp Act served as excellent tools for the pamphleteers to stir up resentment in the general populace.

That one third of the colonists – if you believe Benjamin Franklin – won the War of Independence against the most powerful nation of the time, still makes some people believe in divine intervention. As an historian, I had to limit myself to the more obvious reasons for this certainly surprising success of the Founding Fathers. My research has concentrated on the excellent organization of the Patriots, the geography of the colonies – compared to European standards, the thirteen colonies were vast and sparsely inhabited – and global politics. Great Britain, as the emerging global empire, felt that it had to defend more important colonies against France and Spain in other parts of the world.

How to approach my subject was not easy for me to determine. After reading different authors, I developed my own thoughts. There is an abundance of literature on the American Revolution/War of Independence which starts with William Gordon’s *History of the Rise, Progress and Establishment of the Independence of the United States of America* and David Ramsay’s *History of the American Revolution*. This was followed by George Bancroft’s *History of the United States*. Not surprisingly, these authors took an idealistic view where a young, newly established country seeks its liberty from an oppressive power which denies them their ancient
rights as Englishmen. These views were challenged by later authors. Economic interests on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as the imperial interests of Great Britain, played a larger role in their arguments. Different schools of thought developed in the twentieth century which influenced the authors I cited in my thesis. Almost all of these authors were recommended by my professors at Florida Gulf Coast University. Their writings have been most helpful to me whether they contradict my views or agree with me. When Bernard Bailyn says that the American Revolution was not undertaken as a social revolution, he is in full agreement with me. However, I cannot agree with him when he feels that the idea of propaganda does not apply to the writings of the American Revolution. Bailyn shows a bias which his students Pauline Maier and Gordon S. Wood are careful to avoid. While authors like Woody Holton, John E. Ferling, Daniel M. Friedenberg, and Gary B. Nash were very helpful in supporting my critical approach, Munro Price, Thomas E. Chávez, and Samuel Flagg Bemis opened my eyes to the importance of the support which the Patriots received from Europe. Agnes Hunt and Hugh M. Flick filled in some of the gaping holes I have in my knowledge of the committee system and that strangely named group of enforcers – the Sons of Liberty. Fred Anderson and Eugene Irving McCormac support some opinions that the War of Independence started with the French and Indian War. To my relief, I found that British authors like David Armitage and Christopher Hibbert are more critical of their own country than the American rebels. There are many other authors which I read – some are cited, others are not – but they were all helpful. In the end, I used my own mind to write this small part of history. My guide were the ideas of the Annales school and the encouraging words of the British historian Richard J. Evans: “The theory of history is too important a matter to be left to the theoreticians. Practicing historians may not have a God-given
monopoly of pronouncing sensibly on such matters, but they surely have as much right to try to think and write about them as anybody else,…” He also tells us that when we look at the past, “we really can, if we are very scrupulous and careful and self-critical, find out how it did [happen] and reach tenable conclusions about what it all meant.”

American independence was inevitable – not only because an island cannot rule a continent. Sooner or later, independence would have been achieved by military or diplomatic means. With regard to my criticisms, I can only say that I would have fought on the side of the Patriots, had I lived during the War of Independence.

In Chapter 1 I try to establish that the men who led the fight against the British almost all belonged to the colonial elite. They were used to running their own affairs and the affairs of the common colonists with very little interference from Parliament and British officials. Their struggle against British authority after 1763 was to maintain their established power and not a struggle of an underprivileged group against an oppressor. They were aiming for independence and not for social change.

In Chapter 2, I show that, at least with the New England colonies, independence from Great Britain was the aim of the first settlers. Surprisingly, the Charter of Massachusetts Bay gives them virtual independence from the mother country.

If independence was not an early aim in the mid-Atlantic and Southern colonies, the development of their assemblies during “benign neglect” led to a form of self-government. This came under threat by British authorities during the French and Indian War and the Acts of Parliament that followed. This war – and its results – showed that the interests of the colonies and the mother country no longer coincided.

Chapter 3 gives a number of reasons for the War of Independence. I try to make it clear that it was not a single reason that motivated the Founding Fathers and their supporters; but the overriding motive was the preservation of power which they had gained and exercised during the past century. A close second was the threat to their economic interests which were threatened by the Proclamation of 1763 and the Navigation Acts. If the other Acts were no real threat to the economic well-being and the liberties of the general population in the colonies, the ruling elites saw them as a threat to their power. Especially Samuel Adams recognized them as such and quickly turned them into a propaganda tool against the British.

Chapter 4 deals with a number of reasons why the War of Independence was successful. The well-run government of the Patriots, with their enforcement arms, the Sons of Liberty and the militias, who were quite effective and at times ruthless, was certainly one of the major reasons. The geography of a vast – and still wild – country with which many of the Patriots were familiar but which seemed forbidding to the Redcoats who preferred to remain in their coastal strongholds is another reason. Another reason I regard as important is the astoundingly efficient means of communication, based on Franklin’s postal system, which kept the Patriot government in touch with all local governments and their armed forces.

Without the early aid of France and Spain, who furnished the rebels with money and arms, it is unlikely that the War of Independence would have attained the momentum that left the British frustrated on the Atlantic coast. Their lack of supplies in materiel and men can hardly be explained with London’s reliance on the help of the Loyalists. London’s forces were bound in Europe and other parts of the world by the actions of France and Spain.
CHAPTER 1.

REVOLUTION OR WAR OF INDEPENDENCE?

The epic fight of the British colonies in North America against their mother country is most often referred to as the American Revolution. However, the term “War of Independence” is used by many authors almost as often. If we accept the general view that a revolution is fought by an underprivileged group against a group in power, the term “revolution” does not apply to the American Revolution. Since independence from Great Britain was intended by most of the Founding Fathers and ultimately achieved, the term “War of Independence” seems to be more appropriate.

The majority of the Founding Fathers who fought against the British were part of the colonial elites. They belonged to the political power structure, the educated elite, and the elite in material wealth. They found their positions threatened by measures taken by the Parliament in Whitehall after the French and Indian War. They had no intention to have their power curtailed by a Parliament that had been rejected by the earliest colonists. The Mayflower Compact of 1620, short and precise, does not refer to Parliament, at all, but gives virtually parliamentary powers to the “civil body politic” of the colonists.²

The colonial assemblies, whether they were called Assembly, House of Burgesses in Virginia, or General Court in Massachusetts, were these “civil bodies politic” that, by the mid-eighteenth century, had evolved as virtual parliaments. Alison G. Olson describes the pervasive power of the assemblies who made no clear distinction between legislative and judicial

² The Mayflower Compact
functions. They “wrested legislative power from the governors [and] took on executive powers of their own…”3 This power, openly exercised during the French and Indian War against the Royal Governors and British military commanders, made Parliament aware that these North American colonies had assumed the power of independent states. The actions of the different colonial assemblies during the French and Indian War that Eugene McCormac describes in his 1914 book give us an idea how frustrated the governors, military commanders and Parliament must have become.4 The Acts of Parliament that followed the war must be seen more in the light of a reminder to the colonists that king and Parliament governed the colonies and not the colonial assemblies.

THE DEFINITION OF REVOLUTION

If one denies the American Revolution the status of a revolution, it is necessary to explain what is commonly regarded as a revolution. There are the French, Russian, and Chinese Revolutions whose revolutionary status are seldom questioned. Raymond Williams in Keywords shows the evolution of the term “revolution” and finds “that the specific effects of the French Revolution made the modern sense of revolution decisive.”5 In contrast, the revolutionary quality of the American Revolution seems to be doubted by a number of scholars. Bernard Bailyn, certainly a conservative scholar, declares, “In no obvious sense was the American Revolution undertaken as a social revolution. No one, that is, deliberately worked for the

---

4 Eugene Irving McCormac, Colonial Opposition to Imperial Authority during the French and Indian War, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1914), 20-29.
5 Raymond Williams. Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 273.
destruction or even the substantial alteration of the order of society as it had been known.”

Gordon S. Wood, quite an enthusiast of the American Revolution, has to admit that “in comparison with the social radicalism of the other great revolution of history, [the American Revolution was] hardly a revolution at all.” Another student of Bailyn’s, Pauline Maier, says that “despite the undoubted emergence of socio-economic conflict, there was no conventional ‘social revolution’ in the 1770s and 1780s. Instead, in community after community, socio-economic differences that sometimes led to ‘mobs’ were channeled into emergent democratic political parties…” After Daniel M. Friedenberg gives a number of reasons why the Founding Fathers are fighting their War of Independence, he says that “The American Revolution thus cannot be compared to what happened in France.” David Armitage explains that the Declaration of Independence “…signaled to the world that the Americans intended their revolution to be decidedly un-revolutionary.” He goes on, “Least of all would it be an incitement to rebellion or revolution elsewhere in the world, rather than an inducement to reform.”

Since these statements are made by scholars who are not searching for a non-revolutionary status of the American Revolution, their comments should carry some weight. However, it is in the accepted definitions given in the international encyclopedias and dictionaries that it becomes clear that the American Revolution lacked both the reasons and the leadership to qualify as revolutionary. The following definitions, although coming from different countries and in different languages, do not differ in the essential meanings:


Merriam-Webster

Revolution

2  a: a sudden, radical, or complete change
   b: a fundamental change in political organization; especially:
      the overthrow or renunciation of one government or ruler and
      the substitution of another by the governed
   c: activity or movement designed to effect fundamental
      changes in the socioeconomic situation

Definitions & Translations

Revolution

1.
   a complete and forcible overthrow and replacement of an established
   government or political system by the people governed.

   **Category**: Government

2.
   a sudden, complete, or radical change in something

   **Category**: Sociology

Oxford Dictionaries

Revolution

1 a forcible overthrow of a government or social order in favour of a new system

Petit Robert

Revolution
II. *Plus cour,* (Changement soudain). Changement brusque et important dans l’ordre social, moral.

(Here, the French also give a definition of a form of revolution which might apply to the American Revolution):


Bundeszentrale fuer politische Bildung

Revolution

[lat.] R. bezeichnet eine schnelle, radikale (i. d. R. gewaltsame) Veränderung der gegebenen (politischen, sozialen, ökonomischen) Bedingungen. Politische R. zielen i. d. R. auf die Beseitigung der bisherigen politischen Führer und die Schaffung grundsaetzlich neuer Institutionen, verbunden mit einem Führungs- und Machtwechsel. Ziel der bewusst herbeigeführten, tief greifenden Veränderungen ist es, mit einem politischen Neuanfang die bisherigen Probleme und Machtstrukturen zu beseitigen und radikal Neues an ihre Stelle zu setzen (z. B. neue Machtstrukturen, neue Eliten, neue Eigentumsverhältnisse, eine neue [Verfassungs-]Ordnung etc.).

---


ARE THESE REVOLUTIONARIES?

Unless we are looking for a revolution after the revolution, we must look at the events and people that led to the Declaration of Independence and the Treaty of Paris. The members of the First and Second Continental Congress were delegated by the established powers in their respective colonies – powers to which they themselves belonged. It is not necessary to go into the biography of every single member; brief biographies of all members are available from reputable sources on the Internet. Reading these biographies, it becomes clear that the vast majority of these members of the Continental Congress belonged to the ruling elite of the colonies, received an excellent education – some of them in England – and had served in the legislature, judiciary, or the military of their province before becoming a delegate. Some of them had been active in these capacities during the French and Indian War and had learned to resist British demands. How these experiences will lead to a move toward independence will be shown in a later chapter. It would be rather ingenuous to look at this group as revolutionaries. John Adams, one of the most important “revolutionaries,” describes in his notes of August 29 to 31, 1774 the group of 56 delegates as being well-to-do to rich. They are certainly elite and 22 of them are lawyers. He mentions Colonel Washington as being interested in a military career and ready to raise “one thousand men at [his] own expense.”\(^8\) This shows that George Washington was not just rich in a conventional sense. In his Diary entry on October 10, 1774, Adams refers to the members of the Congress as an elite group, “each of whom has been habituated to lead and guide in his own Province…”\(^9\) Another delegate, Silas Deane, mentions the “immense fortune”

---

\(^9\) Ibid., October 10, 1774.
of Mr. Lynch and the “independent fortune” of the Rutledges. A thorough reader of the correspondence of the members of the Continental Congress quickly becomes aware that they not only were an elite but evidently felt as an elite. On September 26, 1775, the President of Congress writes to George Washington that Congress considers the pay of Privates as too high. This remark becomes truly disturbing when you learn from John Adams’s letter of November 25, 1775 to Joseph Hawley that enlisted men receive 40 shillings in comparison to a captain’s pay of 26 Dollars. Not surprisingly, Adams indicates in his letter that this elitist attitude is more prevalent among delegates from the South than among delegates from New England.

There are other indications that we are not dealing with a band of revolutionaries but an elite group “habituated to lead and guide.” In letters between 1774 and 1776, the Continental Congress shows that it assumed executive and legislative functions from the beginning and well before independence was declared. It regulates the raising of a Continental Army, the financing, and the appointment of officers. There are early contacts to foreign governments. One could say that American diplomacy started with the establishment of the Committee of Secret Correspondence on November 29, 1775. John Hancock, as President of Congress, clearly regards himself as a head of state and government. The delegates to the Continental Congress are doing on a national scale – if we dare call the thirteen colonies a nation – what they are used to doing in their respective colonies. They govern; and they do this very effectively. Their executive and judicial powers even reach into areas occupied by the British. The Sons of Liberty were an effective law enforcement tool which was used to intimidate the Loyalists or the undecided, everywhere.

10 Silas Deane to Mrs. Deane, September 7, 1774.
11 The President of Congress to George Washington, September 26, 1775.
John Adams to Joseph Hawley, November 25, 1775.
It is tempting to consider the Sons of Liberty true revolutionaries, especially since they were apparently established and brought into action against the British and Loyalists by Samuel Adams who comes closest among the Founding Fathers to qualify as a revolutionary. However, upon closer scrutiny, this revolutionary image starts to fade. Pauline Maier sees the origin of the Sons of Liberty in the “Loyal Nine,” a Boston social club of “respectable merchants and tradesmen that later became the town’s organized Sons of Liberty.” During the Stamp Act Riots of 1765, their task was to limit violent actions of the mob. Another indication that the Sons of Liberty were more part of the establishment than an underprivileged group is the fact that their “officers and committee members… were drawn from the middle and upper ranks of colonial society.” For lack of evidence to the contrary, it is safe to regard Samuel Adams as the founder of the Sons of Liberty and the committees of correspondence. He wanted them established throughout the colonies. As an astute politician, Adams left it to his friend, Richard Henry Lee, to spread the establishment of the committees of correspondence in the other colonies. He was fully aware that aristocratic Virginia could influence them more than mercantile New England.  

In his *The Unknown American Revolution*, Gary B. Nash writes about the potential revolutionaries – the people or better known as the mob – and the use of the Sons of Liberty to control them once they were set into action by “’[T]he richer folks’ [who] were terrified… by a mob ‘spirit which [they] themselves had conjured up…’” In Boston, Samuel Adams directed the [politically powerful] caucus. But who controlled the streets? The Loyal Nine of the Boston Caucus… did their best to control the rank and file beneath them… and agreed to form a

---

Ibid., 86. 
‘military watch, till the present unruly spirit shall subside’.” When with the shoemaker MacIntosh a leader of Boston’s workingmen emerges, the question arises, “Could the resentments and physical strength of the street rioters be harnessed by the better-to-do Sons of Liberty?”

The Sons of Liberty turned out to be a very effective police force of the colonial assemblies and the Continental Congress. Rather than being revolutionaries, they were counter-revolutionaries. If you find such “oppressive Hudson River landlords” like John van Cortlandt and Peter R. Livingston among the “active leaders of the Sons of Liberty,” you may well give up in despair looking for revolutionaries among the Sons of Liberty. However, Samuel Hopkins might go too far with his statement: “Our so-called Sons of Liberty: what are they but oppressors of thousands…”

SAMUEL ADAMS – REVOLUTIONARY?

Knowing about the more than doubtful revolutionary credentials of the Sons of Liberty, can we at least regard their political leader, Samuel Adams, as a true revolutionary? He certainly stands apart from the other Founding Fathers – even from his cousin and close collaborator, John Adams. Although he did not come from a poor background, Samuel Adams was poor during most of his adult life and never tried to enrich himself. In this, he remarkably differed from almost every one of the other delegates to the Continental Congress. He did not seek power for himself and did not look for special privileges. All this points to a true revolutionary, and not only Mark Puls regards him as Father of the American Revolution, who thought “about breaking

---

14 Bailyn, 244.
with the British Empire in 1743.” Pauline Maier mentions the French Marquis de Chastellux, a member of the French support forces under Rochambeau and a personal friend of George Washington, who stated about Samuel Adams that “everybody in Europe knows that he was one of the prime movers of the late revolution.” Another Frenchman, Brissot de Warville, less noble but more revolutionary than Chastellux, “recognized in Adams [those qualities that] were ‘Republican virtues’ brought into the eighteenth century from the ancient world, via Machiavelli and the Renaissance.” Republican virtues are not necessarily revolutionary and Machiavelli, although he is not the supporter of ruthless power he is often made out to be, was certainly not a revolutionary. Maier does not see revolutionary qualities in Samuel Adams that drive him but Puritan ethics and she agrees with Edward Everett that Adams was “the last of the Puritans.” If the Puritans ever had a revolutionary status, they lost it when they left England. In their colony in New England, they established their own power base which for some of the colonists became oppressive enough to seek refuge in other colonies. In New England, the Puritans governed and taxed themselves, a power which Adams sees endangered by the British Parliament in Whitehall. “Samuel Adams was desperate to prevent the loss of home rule,” and he had no less a person than Adam Smith to concur with his view. For Smith, Parliament’s taxing the colonies without the consent of the colonial assemblies meant the end of these assemblies. Although Samuel Adams does not seem to share the motives for personal gain of most of his fellow delegates to the Continental Congress, he shares their fear of the loss of power of the colonial assemblies. Samuel Adams did not want to change society. He wanted to return to the status quo ante, the political situation that existed before the French and Indian War. To secure this on a permanent basis, he saw the only solution in a complete independence from Great Britain. Russell Kirk does
not see Samuel Adams’ full importance when he dismisses him as a “well-born demagogue.”

He was a very accomplished demagogue and politician.

POSSIBLE REVOLUTIONARY ELEMENTS

There is no doubt that during the fight against Great Britain revolutionary elements developed in the population and tried to change the colonial power structure at least on a local or provincial level. We have seen how the colonial elite – the Founding Fathers – employed the Sons of Liberty to take advantage of the fighting potential of the “mob” without giving up their own power. The state constitutions which appeared after the Declaration of Independence show in their wording an approach to satisfy the desires of the non-elite groups. Unfortunately, the words were not followed up by revolutionary deeds during – or shortly after the War of Independence. The Constitution of Pennsylvania of 1776 or the Constitution of Massachusetts of 1780 could be regarded as revolutionary if they had resulted in liberating the slaves and the right to vote for all men and women – including African-Americans. For these revolutionary actions, the country had to wait many decades. Indeed, the freeing of slaves and universal voting rights were achieved in other countries – mostly without a revolution – long before they were achieved in the United States.

Whatever revolutionary potential there was in the state constitutions, it was mitigated by the Constitution of 1787. It caused Samuel Adams to warn against it. “If ratified [it] would accomplish what the British attempted without success; it would destroy the powers of the

---

15 Puls, Samuel Adams, 27.
Puls, 70, 16.
separate states…” Henry Richard Lee had an even darker view of the Constitution of 1787 which would “put Civil Liberty and the unhappiness of the people at the mercy of the Rulers [who held] great unguarded powers.” He sees it as “elective despotism…” and “the work of ambitious lawyers who sought personal power.” Bailyn, who is not an opponent of the Constitution, sees the intended purpose of it: “The Constitution created, of course, a potentially powerful central government, with powers that served certain economic groups particularly well,…”16 The Constitution of 1787 did away with most of the democratic or revolutionary elements of the Articles of Confederation. Merrill Jensen regards “the Articles of Confederation [as] the constitutional expression of the philosophy of the Declaration of Independence.” However, “… once independence was won, the conservatives soon united in undoing... such political and economic democracy as had resulted from the war” and “[w]hen they gained control of the state… they united with fellow conservatives of other states in overturning the Articles of Confederation.”17

Wood in his book The Radicalism of the American Revolution talks about radical or revolutionary developments; but they seem to have taken place either before the American Revolution or after it. If “the colonists knew they were freer, more equal, more prosperous [and they were] in fact a new society unlike any that had ever existed anywhere in the world,” they had no reason to fight a revolution. However, they had every reason to defend such blissful conditions against any attack. Wood does not subscribe to the view of some historians that the

Bailyn, viii
American Revolution was “in comparison with the social radicalism of the other great revolutions of history, hardly a revolution at all.”\textsuperscript{18} For him, “the American Revolution was not conservative at all; on the contrary: it was radical and as revolutionary as any in history.” Wood sees “the visions of the revolutionary leaders as breathtaking” and for them “America became the Enlightenment fulfilled.”\textsuperscript{19} Marx and other revolutionaries were certainly influenced by Montesquieu and the Enlightenment, but the writings of Montesquieu were hardly a \textit{Manifesto}. Montesquieu himself would have been very astounded at some of the later interpretations of his writings. The writings of Locke, Montesquieu, and Vattel were known to the Founding Fathers and must have been helpful in justifying the removal of their ties to a monarch and establishing a republic. This was neither radical nor revolutionary. Wood confirms this more or less with the statement that “[a]t the height of the patriot frenzy in 1774-76 many of the revolutionaries wanted nothing less than a reconstruction of American society. But they had no desire to overturn one class and replace it with another.” Do revolutionaries want to reconstruct – bring something back to its original and complete form? Even if “enlightened morality lay at the heart of republicanism” and later brought radical and revolutionary changes to the American society, Wood does not show any proof of revolutionary qualities or intentions in the Founding Fathers. On the contrary; the revolutionary tendencies that developed during the War of Independence, they countered with the Constitution of 1787 which was “certainly meant to temper popular majoritarianism…” Wood actually admits that his “American Revolution” took place after the Revolution. “For a half century following the Revolution these common ordinary men stripped the northern gentry of their pretensions… Here in this destruction of aristocracy, including

\textsuperscript{18} Wood, \textit{The Radicalism of the American Revolution}, 4, 6.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 5, 189, 191.
Jefferson’s ‘natural aristocracy,’ was the real American Revolution.”

**CONCLUSION**

There is no indication that our Founding Fathers were seeking a change of their society. On the contrary, they fought against British attempts to change the established colonial power structure and subject the North American colonies to the same restrictions under which Ireland suffered. This was not acceptable to an elite which had been exercising political, social, and economic dominance in the colonies for over a century. Home Rule, as it had been exercised by the colonial assemblies, was to be maintained as a minimum aim. However, as pressures increased from Great Britain and some of the non-elite groups in the colonies were seeking some real social or, at least, economic changes, an increasing number of the Founding Fathers started considering independence from Britain as the only permanent solution. Woody Holton bases his book *Forced Founders* on the pressures that smallholders, black slaves, and Native Americans exerted on Virginia’s elite. These pressures, rather than differences with Great Britain, forced some of the Founding Fathers to seek independence. The potentially revolutionary elements were dealt with during the struggles for independence – sometimes by coercion through the Sons of Liberty, sometimes in actions of a civil war, and finally by the Constitution of 1787. Nash “can see that the American Revolution was not only a war of independence but a many-sided struggle to reinvent America. It was a civil war at home as well as a military struggle for national liberation.” Since the elite Founding Fathers were ultimately successful and “no social group in the colonies except British officialdom was eliminated by the Revolution,” we cannot really speak of a revolution. It was a war of independence, at best, and, unfortunately, a civil war. In

---

20 Wood, 213, 192, 230, 276.
some aspects it resembles the French *Coup d’Etat* or a palace revolution. Outside of the civil war activities, popular support was lacking. Washington and the Continental Congress could barely gather enough recruits for the Continental Army and had to promise land and slaves as an inducement.

Wood’s arguments for radical and revolutionary elements in the War of Independence are appealing; but upon closer scrutiny, they are not convincing. There would be at least some revolutionary element if “universal white manhood suffrage” had been achieved by 1783 instead of 1825.\(^{22}\) The radical element among the Founding Fathers was not revolutionary, and Joseph Galloway makes a fairly accurate distinction between the radicals and the moderates in the Continental Congress: “The [radicals] consisted of persons, whose design… was to throw off all subordination and connection with Great Britain… and… to establish American Independence.” He describes the moderates as possessing the greatest fortunes and the radicals as “men of bankrupt fortunes, overwhelmed in debt to British merchants.” Wood’s mentor Bailyn more or less confirms the radical element of our Founding Fathers while denying the revolutionary element: “The leaders of the Revolutionary movement were radicals – but… not with the need to recast the social order…” Merrill Jensen concurs: “It seems that the radicalism of such men as Sam Adams, John Adams, and James Bowdoin extended only to independence.”\(^{23}\)


\(^{23}\) Puls, *Samuel Adams*, 163.

Bailyn, 283.

Jensen, 52.
CHAPTER 2

TOWARD INDEPENDENCE

The idea of independence from Great Britain was not born during the disputes that developed between the North American colonies and the Parliament in Whitehall after the French and Indian War. It was not born when frictions developed between the colonists and British authorities during that war. It was merely revived. It was born in England and brought over by the Puritan settlers to New England.

THE PURITANS

The Mayflower Compact of 1620, a very brief document, declares simply that the new arrivals to the shores of New England intend, through their “civill body politick… to enacte, constitute, and frame such just and equall laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meete and convenient for the generall good of the Colonie unto which we promise all due submission and obedience.” The English Parliament is not mentioned, at all, and King James is formally recognized as their “dread Sovereigne Lord.”24 Not long after that, their brethren in England showed the world what should be done with a king who did not meet the expectations of his subjects. They beheaded him.

The Mayflower Compact is a short and precise declaration of independence signed by such English Separatists as John Carver, William Bradford, and Edward Winslow. Among the settlers who returned to England, aiding Oliver Cromwell’s efforts to overthrow the king, was

---

24 The Mayflower Compact
Edward Winslow. Winslow, who returned to England in 1646 to work for Cromwell, died in 1655 while in Cromwell’s service.

A considerably longer document, *The Charter of Massachusetts Bay: 1629*, exceeds *The Mayflower Compact* not only in length but also in importance since it is a Royal Charter. Here, King Charles I gives to the “Councell established at Plymouth” a practically free reign over a territory extending “from Forty Degrees of Northerly Latitude from the Equinoctiall Lyne to forty eight degrees Of the saide Northerly Latitude inclusively, and in Length, of and within the Breadth aforesaid throughout the Maine Landes from Sea to Sea…” For himself, Charles reserves the rights to twenty percent of all discovered minerals. This document might explain the astounding claim that the Continental Congress made on Canada. Of course, the Charter included the provision that, if any of this territory was “possessed or inhabited by any other Christian Prince or State, … aforesaid shal be ytterlie voyd.” However, since the Canadian parts were claimed by the king of France and “Charles [was] BY THE GRACE OF GOD, King of England, Scotland, Fraunce, and Ireland,” it made Louis XIII in France a mere usurper.\(^25\)

John G. Palfrey describes the men who headed the Council of Plymouth – later known as the Council of New England. Sir Henry Roswell and Sir John Young were knights, and Thomas Southcote, John Humphrey, John Endicott, and Simon Whitcomb were gentlemen. They enlarged the Charter with associates both in England and in New England. This enlarged company – the original six patentees and twenty other people – asked for and obtained a new royal charter “creating a corporation under the name of the ‘Governor and Company of the

---

Massachusetts Bay in New England’.” The freemen of this company could elect from their midst a governor, deputy-governor, and eighteen assistants “to make laws and ordinances, not repugnant to the laws of England, for their own benefit and the government of persons inhabiting their territory.” These elected officials had a seemingly unlimited authority including “to encounter, repulse, repel, and resist by force of arms, as well as by sea as by land, and by all fitting ways and means whatsoever, all such person and persons as should at any time thereafter attempt or enterprise the destruction, invasion, detriment, or annoyance to the said plantation or inhabitants.” The aim of the Massachusetts Bay Company was not to govern the settlements in New England by a commercial corporation in England but, as Matthew Cradock, the first Governor of the company, put it, “to transfer the government of the plantation to those that shall inhabit there, and not to continue the same in subordination to the company here, as now it is.” Cradock, who never went to America himself, thus enabled the colony to govern itself practically from the beginning. After the legal transfer of the charter to New England, the newly elected governor, the deputy-governor, and the eighteen assistants embarked for New England. They “were English country gentlemen of no inconsiderable fortunes; of enlarged understandings, improved by liberal education; of extensive ambition, concealed under the appearance of religious humility.”

26 It might be surprising that men of such social standing in England should risk their lives in a long and dangerous sea voyage to settle in the American wilderness. This can only be understood by the political situation in England. The Puritans were a considerable political and social influence in England during the first half of the seventeenth century. They aimed at a religious and political reform. Should their efforts fail in England, they could

withdraw to their virtually independent colony in North America.

The accomplishments of the Puritans in England, Cromwell and his republic – albeit short-lived – must have been a shining example for “the last Puritan,” Samuel Adams, and his fellow Patriots, and encouraged them to fight against another Parliament and king to preserve their established self-government and independence. They did not intend to change their society; they aimed at preserving a society that their ancestors had created after arriving in New England. The best guaranty for its preservation was a complete separation from Great Britain.

While self-government was an established practice in New England and became a practice in other colonies, a formal separation from the “dread Sovereigne Lord” was not attempted – if one disregards the number of Puritans who went back to England to help Cromwell establish his Commonwealth. A formal disengagement from the sovereign and the mother country did not seem necessary during the practice of “benign neglect.” On the contrary, English claims to North America kept other Europeans powers at bay and help from the mother country against the French and the Spaniards must have been welcomed.

THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR / THE SEVEN YEARS’ WAR

The French and Indian War or as it is known in Europe, the Seven Years’ War, is regarded by many as a precursor of the War of Independence. Fred Anderson is convinced that “[W]ithout the Seven Years’ War, American independence would surely have been long delayed, and achieved (if at all) without a war of national liberation.”27 That this war had a different meaning for the American colonists than for the British can be seen by the two designations.

While the colonists regarded it as a war to eliminate the threat of the French and their Indian allies and gain land north and west of their own settlements, the British were fighting a global war against the French and the Spaniards in Europe, Asia, the West Indies, and North America. As British subjects, the colonists were expected by the British government to make their financial and military contribution like the rest of the British Empire. For the colonists, the fight against the French and the Indians was the main event while “[T]o European statesmen … the fighting in the New World was so much sideshow.”28 This difference in expectations was exacerbated by the British commanders in the early years of the war. Neither General Edward Braddock nor the Earl of Loudon had any experience with the colonists or the Indians and managed to alienate both. The Indians offered their allegiance to the French and the colonists turned so uncooperative that Loudon “had to use armed force to secure quarters for his men and officers.”29

Loudon’s inexperience is only partly to blame for his negative attitude toward the colonists. When he found that merchants were trading with the enemy in Canada and the West Indies and the “governors, under the influence of their assemblies, were unlikely to arrest these guilty of trading with the enemy when the offenders included some of the most prominent merchants – and assemblymen – in the colonies,” he declared a general embargo – an unpopular move that he was later forced to abandon by the governors and legislators of Virginia and Maryland.30 “From 1755 through early 1758, British attempts to subject the colonists to what amounted to the viceregal command of Braddock and Loudon had virtually destroyed the

28 Anderson, 11.
29 Ibid., 94-96, 147.
30 Ibid., 182, 183.
willingness of the colonists to cooperate.”  

The disastrous military results during these years forced both the colonists and the British government to change their policies. Prime Minister William Pitt’s new policy to treat the American colonists as allies brought more cooperation and finally the desired military results. However, the colonists did not forget the attitudes the British commanders showed toward them. Even a capable and successful commander like Lord Jeffrey Amherst “despised the Americans who always arrived late…” He detested “the poor character of the colonists and the self-interest of their governments, features of American life he had come to expect – “

Good-will and understanding could hardly be expected to develop between colonists and British regulars when Brigadier James Wolfe voiced his disdain of the Americans as being “in general the dirtiest most contemptible cowardly dogs that you can conceive. There is no depending on them in action. They fall down in their own dirt and desert by battalions, officers and all. Such rascals as those are rather an encumbrance than any real strength to an army.”

Apparently, the colonists, used to fighting a guerrilla-type war, did not find it appealing to walk straight into the musket-fire of the French. It is more difficult to explain the opinion of an experienced soldier like General John Forbes after inspecting his new American troops: “… a few of their principal officers excepted, all the rest are an extremely bad collection of broken innkeepers, horsejockeys, and Indian traders, and … the men under them, are a direct copy of their officers.”

If one considers that the Virginia House of Burgesses did not allow the governor to enlist men who were gainfully employed or were entitled to vote for members of the House of Burgesses, Forbes might not have been completely wrong with his assessment of American

---

31 Anderson, 454.
32 Ibid., 519.
33 Ibid., 123.
34 Ibid., 155, 156.
troops sent to him. The demonstration of power by the colonial assemblies and the “indifference if not hostility to British interests” shown by some colonists was not only the result of a well-developed sense of self-determination of people who had conquered a wilderness. The British troops and their commanders, with their imperialistic attitudes, were often found intolerable by the men of the colonial militia and their officers.

The disdain shown toward the colonists by British commanders and British regulars during the French and Indian War made many of them turn from enthusiastic British subjects to conscious descendants of independent conquerors of the American wilderness with all the natural rights of man. It is, therefore, not surprising that the five hundred Sons of Liberty from eastern Connecticut who forced stamp-master Jared Ingersoll to resign in 1765 were “primarily veterans led by former provincial officers — …”\textsuperscript{35}

\textbf{THE COLONIAL ASSEMBLIES DURING THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR}

During the French and Indian War, better known in Europe as the Seven Years’ War, the colonial assemblies demonstrated the power and independence they had obtained – or it might be better to say the power and independence they had developed under the “benign neglect” of the British colonial authorities. New England had experienced a relatively short-lived interruption of “benign neglect” with a revocation of the Massachusetts charter and the establishment of the Dominion of New England in 1684. James II intended to run the Dominion like a Spanish viceroyalty. The colonists had the good fortune that the Glorious Revolution of 1688 removed James II and, by 1688, the assemblies had regained their previous power.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35} Anderson, 674.
With the development of British Imperialism and fighting a global war – the Seven Years’ War was probably the first truly global war fought in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas – “benign neglect” of their North American colonies became anathema for the Tories in Whitehall. Their opponents, the Whigs, supported constitutional liberty both at home and in the colonies. These conflicting ideologies had led to a prolonged civil war in England.37 Cromwell and the Whigs were still alive in the memories of their New England brethren when British forces started to demonstrate their ideas of Empire. Since the British were fighting the French and the Indians – both a serious threat to the colonists – the colonial assemblies maneuvered carefully. However, it did not prevent them from demonstrating their power against the British authorities. McCormac expresses the British reaction very well when he maintains “that the Stamp Act and others which followed it were the result of disputes which arose in connection with every phase of the war with France.”38 Although British assistance was needed most by the New England and mid-Atlantic colonies, they all demonstrated their wish to stay in control of financial matters.39 In New York, it went so far that the assembly “had taken the control of money disbursements entirely into their own hands.” McCormac comes to the logical conclusion that “[I]t was certainly true that in New York and other colonies the assemblies had assumed executive powers.” Most other colonial assemblies, which controlled only the legislative branch of government, followed New York’s example.40 In Pennsylvania, “indifference if not hostility to British interests is shown…” Pennsylvanians refuse “to furnish

38 McCormac, Colonial Opposition, 1, 2.
39 Ibid., 20.
40 Ibid., 26, 27, 29.
conveyances to British troops, even for pay…” The assembly takes almost all powers out of the Governor’s hands and denies him the right to send troops outside the colony without their approval.\(^{41}\) Maryland, watching the developments in Pennsylvania closely, made the same demands with regard to the control of their troops and raising taxes. It is not surprising that the British regarded Pennsylvania as the source of all evil.\(^{42}\) Considering Virginia’s interest in land across the Appalachian Mountains and its loss if the French and Indians were not decisively defeated, the behavior of the House of Burgesses is somewhat astounding. Like most colonial assemblies, the House of Burgesses controlled the finances and without their cooperation the governor was powerless. Not only did the House of Burgesses refuse to cooperate with the governor in financial matters, it would only allow the enlistment of men who were not employed “or have some other lawful and sufficient support or maintenance.” Furthermore, “all who were entitled to vote for members of the house of burgesses were exempted from service.”\(^{43}\) This must have been utterly frustrating for the governor and the British who were fighting a war – not only in North America. There was little action but much dispute in the Carolinas. Georgia had only become a royal colony in 1755 and requested help from the king.\(^{44}\)

The French and Indian War can be regarded as an apprenticeship for a number of colonial assemblies to assert their power against and independence of the British king and Parliament. As McCormac sees it, their demands could only lead to “virtual independence [and] England recognized this fact more clearly than the colonies did and was preparing to check these independent tendencies.”\(^{45}\) It seems certainly true that the American “independent ideas”

\(^{41}\) McCormac, 46, 53, 55. 
\(^{42}\) Ibid., 63, 64, 69, 70. 
\(^{43}\) Ibid., 74, 79, 80. 
\(^{44}\) Ibid., 88-90.
predated the war. “That a declaration of independence and a separation did not come in an earlier period was due more to the want of a well-defined policy on either side of the Atlantic than an absence of independent ideas in the colonies.”

When during and after the war it became clear for the British authorities that the colonists “desired all the rights of Englishmen, but comparatively few of the duties…” it was “… the policy of England, not that of the colonies, [that] changed.”

CONCLUSION

*The Mayflower Compact of 1620 and the Charter of Massachusetts Bay: 1629* are evidence that the idea of independence from Great Britain was brought to America by the first settlers. When in 1684 an English court revoked the Massachusetts charter and James II established the Dominion of New England, the eight northern colonies lost the independence which they assumed was naturally theirs. “The Dominion dispensed with assemblies [and] radically reversed the previous trend toward greater colonial autonomy defended by powerful elected assemblies dominated by the wealthiest colonists.” This unfortunate situation did not last very long and the Glorious Revolution of 1688 reestablished the colonial assemblies in – almost – their old power. However, it is likely that the memories of 1684 contributed to the sometimes extreme reactions of the colonial assemblies to British demands during the French and Indian War. The actions of the assemblies in New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and other colonies show that the desire for independence and self-government was not only alive in New

---

45 McCormac, 92, 93.
46 Ibid., 2.
47 Ibid., 94, 95.
48 Taylor, 276.
England. The practice of self-government was of sufficient long-standing to be regarded as an inherent right.

It is also easy to imagine that, even without the established tradition of colonial independence, the abrasive behavior of British commanders would have incited the colonists to consider a separation from Great Britain. Of course, then it would have been a true revolution.
CHAPTER 3

REASONS FOR THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

As Chapter 2 demonstrates the move toward independence was not forced upon the Continental Congress by an autocratic British government; it was envisioned and progressively put into practice by the colonists. The increasing powers of the colonial elite, represented in the colonial assemblies, ensured a virtual independence from the British power structure. It was only when their colonial institutions came under the threat of being pushed aside by the British institutions – Parliament, military, and jurisdiction – that the colonial elite considered an open declaration of independence necessary to preserve their power. The preservation of the elite power structure was never a declared aim; other reasons for the fight against the mother country had to be found in order to engage as many in the general population as possible who did not share in the power of the elite. All the reasons, whether stated by the colonial elite or later uncovered by historians, necessitated the preservation of the colonial power structure and led to independence.

The first two chapters show that the colonial elite possessed real power and that the wish for independence existed from the beginning of settling North America, at least in the British part. That it was not declared openly had certainly to do with “benign neglect” which seemed to make it unnecessary and the threat of other European powers, like France and Spain, and the Native Americans. The protection by an emergent global empire like Great Britain was not only desirable but necessary. This situation changed after the French and Indian War. For the colonies
the threat was greatly diminished and for Great Britain “benign neglect” became too costly. For the colonies, the end of the war brought heightened expectations of conducting business with all their old customers as well as new ones and to move into newly acquired territories. For Great Britain, which ended the war with a crushing load of debts, it meant that it had to consolidate its hold on all its colonies, including the ones in North America, and make all of them share in diminishing the debt. The measures that were taken by a succession of Prime Ministers and Parliament were designed to increase revenue as well as London’s control in the colonies.

When a royal proclamation was issued in October of 1763, which drew a line across the Appalachian Mountains from South to North and precluded settlement by Europeans west of it, hardly anybody gave it serious attention. This would change. It became a major reason for the War of Independence. While the Proclamation Line of 1763 was meant to guarantee a lasting peace with the Indian tribes and make the maintenance of large British forces in North America unnecessary, George Grenville, who was Prime Minister from 1763 to 1765, introduced measures which were designed to eliminate smuggling and increase British revenues. Neither the colonial elite nor the general population took the Proclamation Line serious and decided to ignore it. Grenville’s measures were understood immediately by the colonial elite as a threat to their commercial practices and the power of their assemblies. These measures also lent themselves to some intensive propaganda to activate the general population against the British.

THE ACTS OF PARLIAMENT AFTER 1763

If the Proclamation of 1763 was, at first, ignored by the colonists – mainly because it was not clear and nobody thought it would be enforced, it became a serious issue with many of
the Founding Fathers, although it is still largely ignored by most historians as a major reason for
the War of Independence. The Proclamation Line, as a limit to white settlement, only emerged as
a threat to the plans of the colonial elite with some delay. The territory covered by the
Proclamation and its intention to protect the Indian tribes from encroachment by white settlers
seem to be clearly defined. However, there are three evident loopholes in this royal proclamation
that may have led people – like George Washington – to believe that it was merely an
interruption in their plans for western settlements but not the cause for an abandonment of these
plans. One such loophole enjoins Governors or Commanders in Chief not to “presume for the
present, and until our further Pleasure be known, to grant Warrants of Survey, or pass Patents for
any Lands beyond the Heads or Sources of any of the Rivers which fall into the Atlantic Ocean
from the West and North West…” Royal “Pleasure” was a fickle thing – as Washington and his
fellow-land speculators knew – and was apt to change. Another paragraph of the Proclamation
states:

“And we do hereby strictly forbid, on Pain of our Displeasure, all our loving Subjects
from making any Purchases or Settlements whatever, or taking Possession of any of the
Lands above reserved, without our especial leave and Licence for that Purpose first
obtained.”

The attempts to obtain this royal “leave and Licence” through the Privy Council were made
repeatedly as will be shown later.

The third loophole is not quite as evident, but while forbidding private citizens to
purchase land from the Indians the King may do so.
“if at any Time any of the Said Indians should be inclined to dispose of the said Lands, the same shall be Purchased only for us, in our Name, at some public Meeting or Assembly of the said Indians…”\textsuperscript{49}

Who would prevent the King from passing on to his beloved American subjects land that was purchased for him and in his name?

The purpose of the British for establishing the Proclamation Line is simple. The continuous push of white settlers into Indian territory would lead to repeated wars with the tribes west of the Appalachian mountains. Britain was not willing to face the cost associated with Indian wars after the horrendous debts incurred during the French and Indian War. On the other hand, the land speculators among the colonial elite wanted the Proclamation Line removed. Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, along with many other members of the Virginia House of Burgesses, had claims or an interest in western land which they regarded as a guarantee for their future fortunes.\textsuperscript{50} How important western lands were to many of our Founding Fathers can be seen from different sources. Holton says that “Arthur Lee spent much of the 1760s searching Westminster for a British official willing to approve a 2,500,000-acre, trans-Appalachian grant to the Mississippi Land Company, which he had formed along with four of his brothers and thirty-eight other Virginia gentlemen.” One of these gentlemen was George Washington. The people involved in land speculation and the vast amounts of land as shown in the Mississippi Land Company, and later, in 1768, the Treaty of Fort Stanwix, indicate the importance of western lands to the colonial elite. George Washington was so sure that the British

\textsuperscript{49} A Royal Proclamation, October 7, 1763, \url{http://ushistory.org/declaration/related/proc63.htm} (accessed February 4, 2013).

\textsuperscript{50} Holton, 3-5.
government would ratify the Fort Stanwix cession and repeal the Proclamation of 1763 that he began to buy up the bounty rights in land from his fellow veterans. If the British government disappointed Washington, he stood not alone. “The abolition of land grants was surely a major complaint for Virginia’s leading revolutionaries, because it hurt almost all of them.” Anderson also states that George Washington was convinced “that his fortunes would be tied to the development of the West,” but was not greatly upset until he realized that the British were serious with their Proclamation Line. Ferling states that by 1769, Washington was prepared to sever all ties to Great Britain. “Washington spoke to Mason in 1769 of arming against British tyranny. He, like some other activists, had begun to contemplate moving from remonstrating to the use of force to achieve greater, provincial autonomy. He was coming to understand that his ends could be realized only by gaining independence from Great Britain. Talk of taking up arms was in the air.” Friedenberg – another proponent for the importance of land speculation as a reason for the War of Independence – mentions the second blow to the plans of the speculators: “The Quebec Act of 1774, which nullified all of his [Washington’s] western patents aside from those for veterans, must have been the last straw.” At least, Friedenberg does not point his finger at Washington, alone: “Patriotism and land thirst were blood brothers in the Virginia planter aristocracy.” Southern gentlemen were not the only ones involved in land speculation. “Many of the great American revolutionary leaders were involved, especially George

---

51 Holton, 10, 11.
52 Ibid., 36.
55 Friedenberg, 175.
56 Ibid., 116.
Washington, Patrick Henry, and Benjamin Franklin.”\textsuperscript{57} How deeply involved Franklin was in land speculation, Friedenberg indicated earlier: “Franklin was sent to England in 1764 by the assembly to ask for the abolition of the proprietary system; less known was his role as agent to promote land speculation in western Indian territory.”\textsuperscript{58} It appears that, only after their repeated failures to have their claims recognized by the British government, the Southern land speculators, along with their partners in the mid-Atlantic and New England colonies, joined the group of Patriots which had been working toward independence for a number of years. Holton does not agree with “[m]ost historians [who] deny that the so-called Proclamation of 1763 was a cause of the American Revolution.”\textsuperscript{59} They regard it as a “paper blockade” which did not keep settlers from moving into Indian territory. Holton points out, correctly, that the interests of settlers and speculators did not coincide. The settlers did not pay anything to the speculators unless these had a clear title to the land. It must have been greatly disturbing to people like George Washington, the Lees, George Mason, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, et al. to see settlers on land that they could not obtain a clear title to unless the colonies gained their independence from Great Britain.\textsuperscript{60} While “the Proclamation of 1763 was anathema to every Virginia land speculator,” settlers moved across the Line “relieved of the burden of supporting gentry surveyors, speculators, and the landlords…”\textsuperscript{61} Since the names of many speculators also appear as Patriots in the War of Independence, it must be allowed to assume that land speculation and the Proclamation of 1763 played a much larger role in the American Revolution than commonly ascribed to them.

\textsuperscript{57} Friedenberg, 96.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{59} Holton, 7.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 7, 29.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 30.
Grenville’s acts that followed were taken seriously. Grenville’s intentions – to generate revenue and curtail the power of the colonial assemblies – were immediately recognized by the colonial elite; and they decided to fight against their loss of power.

The American Revenue Act of 1764 – better known as The Sugar Act – was passed by Parliament on April 5, 1764. It merely revived and modified the Sugar and Molasses Act of 1733 which had been ignored or evaded by the colonists. To make sure that the Act of 1764 would not suffer the same fate, it was accompanied by an increase in naval patrols and the establishment of an admiralty court in Nova Scotia which would try cases of smuggling. Although there was no immediate reaction to the Act among Bostonians, whose extensive smuggling and rum trade would be affected, it was a Bostonian who realized that the Act was directed against the power of the self-governing legislatures. Samuel Adams, who was not in an elective office, spoke in the Boston town meeting in the spring of 1764 alerting people to the loss of freedom which a taxation by anybody outside their own, elected assembly would entail. Samuel Adams’s voice, and especially his writings, would prove an invaluable asset in the fight for independence.

The Currency Act of September 1, 1764 was another “simpleminded attempt to solve a complicated problem … and … brought to the surface many deep-rooted antagonisms between the colonies and England.” Without a significant number of gold or silver mines, hard currency – or specie – in the colonies had to be obtained by trade and was always in short supply. The colonies tried to alleviate this problem by printing their own paper money. Since Parliament had already forbidden trade with other countries except England and the trade with England resulted mostly in a deficit for the colonies, the Currency Act created a huge problem not only for the

---

62 Puls, 38, 39.
merchants. The Act declared colonial paper money as not-legal-tender. Sterling was in short supply which forced even well-to-do people to buy on credit. As Holton explained for Virginia – and probably this applied to other colonies as well – there were “two prices: one for cash customers and a significantly higher one for those who bought on credit.”\textsuperscript{64} In his article, “Imperial Regulation of Colonial Paper Money, 1764-1773,” Sosin gives a very informative account of the necessity for paper money in the colonies and the reasons for British merchants to reject it. Besides, the practice of colonial legislatures to issue paper money for political reasons caused devaluation and had “devastating effects upon the price and credit structure … with repercussions on the whole money market.”\textsuperscript{65} The representatives of the colonies and the representatives of the merchants of London, Glasgow, and Liverpool tried to work out a solution. However, the act of Parliament that emerged was not satisfactory to either the merchants or the colonies.\textsuperscript{66} The Currency Act of 1764 was not exactly new; it followed the Currency Act of 1751 but was less severe. It “did not abolish paper money [it] merely prohibited further legal tender laws and required the colonies to retire existing legal tender currency at the proper expiration date.”\textsuperscript{67} Since individual colonies found ways of getting separate permissions to issue paper money, the Currency Act of 1764 proved to be less of a hardship than sometimes assumed. The hardship was giving up principles on the side of the colonial legislatures. Every time that Parliament made a concession on the issuance of paper money, it made sure that it “maintain[ed] its supreme authority.” When the Currency Act of 1764 was amended in 1773 and the colonial

\textsuperscript{64} Holton, 63.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 176.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 185.
agents “secured a paper currency for the provinces … the Americans had tacitly, if not implicitly, acknowledged the authority of Parliament. And in the final analysis this was all the imperial government wanted.”⁶⁸

The **Stamp Act of March 22, 1765** along with the **Tea Tax** is most often cited as the reason for the American Revolution. Although the Stamp Act applied to a wide range of products and procedures and touched almost every colonist, Grenville – and after him Charles Watson-Wentworth, Marquess of Rockingham – did not expect any significant resistance to it. It would be “‘an easy one to execute’ since ‘bonds, conveyances, law proceedings, etc.,’ that were not on stamped paper were not legally binding on the parties involved.” Violations would not be dealt with by colonial courts but by the Court of Admiralty in Halifax. “Their decisions could only be appealed to English courts.”⁶⁹ However, the Stamp Act met with fierce resistance – even before its effective date of November 1, 1765 – and this warrants a closer look at it.

To the British it seemed innocuous enough. Stamp Acts were used in Britain and had even been used by “several colonial assemblies … in the 1750s.”⁷⁰ Wood sees this tax as justifiable in fiscal terms, but it “posed such a distinct threat to American liberties and the autonomy of their legislatures that they could no longer contain their opposition within the traditional channels of complaints and lobbying.” It is astounding that the short-lived Stamp Act elicited such “a firestorm of opposition.”⁷¹ Among the colonial elite, Benjamin Franklin and Richard Henry Lee had eagerly applied for the position of stamp distributor.⁷² They quickly

---

⁶⁸ Sosin, 196, 198.
⁷¹ Ibid., 28.
⁷² Puls, 46.
Holton, 83.
changed their minds, though. The first protests did actually come from the London merchants. Their representative, Barlow Trescothick, had excellent connections to the Rockingham government and managed to have the Stamp Act repealed in 1766. On the American side, ministers spoke against the Stamp Act from their pulpits and residents complained about it in town meetings. In comparison to the Sugar Act, the people’s response was almost instantaneous and Puls credits Samuel Adams with this “change in public temper.” “His arguments were published across the continent [and] residents were no longer indifferent.” Against considerable odds, Adams managed to have the Massachusetts House call the other colonies to a Stamp Act Congress. Nine other colonies agreed to meet in New York; and there they “hammered out a series of resolutions and the first-ever united petition to the King of England and Parliament.”

The united protests of the colonies were unexpected in London and probably did more to lead to the repeal of the Stamp Act in February 1766 than the violent actions of mobs in Boston and New York did. The merchants and governing Whigs in London had – early on – considered a repeal for practical and commercial reasons. The mob actions, however, made them averse to reward colonial resistance to British authority. This demanded a formal censure of the colonial assemblies, who had encouraged the mob actions. Thus, an Act, difficult to enforce, was repealed but was followed by the Declaratory Act which asserted British authority over America. The Stamp Act was no great financial threat to the colonial elite. It was the proclaimed authority of King and Parliament and its link to the admiralty courts which made this Act unacceptable. Again, it was Samuel Adams who worked against this threat before it was

---

73 Bullion, 100.
74 Puls, 46, 47.
75 Ibid., 53.
76 Bullion, 102, 106.
enacted.

The American Colonies Act 1766, generally known as the Declaratory Act, was a direct result of the colonies’ open resistance to British authority during the Stamp Act riots. While Parliament was willing to repeal the Stamp Act for economic reasons, it was not willing to concede any ground on the constitutional issues. The Declaratory Act made it very clear that Parliament had “the full power and authority … to make laws and statutes … to bind the colonies and people of America … in all cases whatsoever.” This denial of any self-determination to the colonies should have created more of an uproar than the Stamp Act did. That it did not has to do with colonial reality in 1765/66. The colonists were used to their local government, police, and courts. Taxes which could not be avoided were determined by the colonial assemblies. Navigation and trade with the outside world were determined by British authorities and were of no immediate concern to most of them. British military power, although it became a nuisance to some colonists during the French and Indian War, had been welcome as a help against external foes. “Disillusionment with Britain did not immediately follow the Declaratory Act of 1766…” Many, like John Dickinson, continued to regard Great Britain as their “excellent prince” and “humane nation.” It was a “Providence Son of Liberty Silas Downer who viewed British actions pessimistically already in 1766.” He saw that their “boasted Tenderness” would disappear if it “interfere[d] in the least with their Systems of Wealth.” Samuel Adams, William Goddard, and Christopher Gadsden joined in Downer’s negative views. It took Samuel Adams

78 Bailyn, 202-204.
79 Maier, From Resistance to Revolution, 145.
80 Ibid., 146, 147.
a while to formulate his thoughts on the Declaratory Act; but by 1771 he could confidently tell his readers: “We cannot have forgotten, that at the very time when the Stamp Act was repealed, another was made which the Parliament of Great Britain declared that they had the right and authority to make any laws whatever binding on his majesty’s subjects in America. How far this declaration can be consistent with the freedom of his majesty’s subjects in America, let any one judge who pleases.” By 1771, there were an appreciable number of Americans who no longer believed in their mother country as being an “excellent prince” or “humane nation.”

If Grenville and his acts had tried to get Britain out of its financial difficulties with the help of the American colonies – and at the same time remind these obstinate colonies that King and Parliament had the authority that colonial assemblies were assuming for themselves – Rockingham was definitely more hesitant to upset the colonists and their trading partners in Great Britain. Although he managed to have Parliament repeal the Stamp Act, he had to agree to the Declaratory Act of 1766. What this act really meant and what its intentions were was shown by Charles Townshend when Parliament passed the Townshend Revenue Act on June 29, 1767. This Act has been looked at by historians in many different ways but it was clearly not intended to balance Great Britain’s budget. There is some argument for the Act’s intended purpose to get the East India Company out of financial trouble. After all, many of Britain’s politicians “were shareholders, speculators, or otherwise financially involved” in this company. The main purpose, however, seems to have been an emphatic demonstration of British authority … “and for more effectually preventing the clandestine running of goods in the said colonies and

81 Puls, 115.
83 Ibid., 34.
plantations.”

To make British authority in the colonies more effective, judges and civil government were to be paid out of the expected revenues. Charles Garth, agent for South Carolina, saw that this arrangement would curtail the power of the colonial assemblies. He warned about Townshend’s intentions in his trans-Atlantic report. “This step would remove the financial basis of the constitutional powers and claims of the colonial assemblies.”

Garth expected that it would “render the Assembly rather insignificant.” Townshend’s motives were not revenues, “unless [he] was an extraordinarily bad chancellor of the exchequer.” His motives were the principles of colonial taxation as stated in the preamble of his Act and the elimination of the power of the colonial assemblies. It does not greatly matter whether Townshend had his idea of financing the judges and civil government already in 1754 or that it came to him in 1767. Even in 1754, it was not a new idea. “In 1732 … Speaker Arthur Onslow made the following observations on the American colonies … to Queen Caroline at Court. ‘That ‘tis to be feared they will one day withdraw their allegiance, growing to be so headstrong. That ‘tis a great misfortune the King has not the payment of all the American Governors, not to be a charge on the King, but money should be raised on the Provinces to given the King for that purpose.’”

From Onslow’s idea, it was a short step further to arrive at Townshend’s ideas. Charles Garth had warned the South Carolina assembly early on; but it was Samuel Adams who – with some astute political maneuvering – managed to convey his ideas on the Townshend Revenue Act to

---

85 Thomas, 33.
Puls, 67, 68.
86 Thomas, 44, 45.
87 Ibid., 49.
88 Ibid., 50.
89 Ibid., 49.
90 Ibid., 51.
the Massachusetts House. A petition of the House was sent to the King and Adams’ ideas reached all the other colonies as a circular letter. They made a deep impression in London and in the colonies. “America accepted his arguments. This fact was not lost on London. A battleship was on its way to Boston.”91

“The cohesiveness of the American resistance movement … increased between 1768 and the early 1770s.”92 And the “true patriots” kept the attention to their grievances awake in their fellow-citizens until these were removed. British actions had to be publicized through the newly-established committees of correspondence. Samuel Adams expected more oppression from the British and was ready to alert the colonists whenever the British introduced a new act of oppression. He was sure that the British government would “condemn itself by its actions.” He advised his fellow-correspondents: “We cannot make Events. Our Business is wisely to improve them.”93 Parliament obliged him with the Tea Act of 1773.

The Townshend Revenue Act did go through some changes after the Boston Massacre of 1770, but it was not repealed. The Tea Act of 1773, passed by Parliament on May 10, 1773, is simply an amendment to the tea tax in the Townshend Revenue Act. The main change to its previous form seems to be that it granted the East India Company the right to ship the tea directly to the American colonies. There the company would sell the tea through its own consignees. The new provisions allowed the East India Company to bypass wholesalers in England and merchants in America. “As a result, the tea could be sold at a discount rate that even smugglers could not match.”94 The new Tea Act had some resemblance to the Stamp Act and Samuel

91 Puls, 70-75.
92 Maier, From Resistance to Revolution, 221.
93 Ibid., 224, 225.
94 Puls., 140.
Adams, for whom the colonists had become too complacent after the Boston Massacre, saw it as an opportunity to warn the other committees in the colonies in his circular letter of October 21, 1773 about the tea tax: “It is easy to see how aptly this scheme will serve both to destroy the trade of the colonies & increase the revenue. How necessary then is it that each colony should take effectual methods to prevent this measure from having its designed effects.” Adams proceeded to do his part in inciting the colonists – and the British. “He met with the Sons of Liberty in secrecy. Many of the details of their plans were not recorded and can only be imagined.” The results of the meetings are visits to the Boston agents of the East India Company during the night. The unidentified visitors leave “a written demand for the consignees to appear at the Liberty Tree on Wednesday and resign their commissions.” The agents do not appear at the Liberty Tree, and in a town meeting on October 5, 1773, overseen by Adams, they refuse to resign their commissions. A few days later – upon learning that the first loads of tea were due to arrive in Boston shortly – mob violence begins. Adams probably did not want riots – at least, no uncontrolled mob actions. However, “if Boston failed to turn the tea back, the city’s credibility for patriotism would be destroyed, and Adams’ leadership would be crippled.” After some ships with tea arrive in Boston, Adams demands that they return their loads of tea to England. British warships prevent them from leaving the port and Adams seems to be left with his only option – unleash the mob that would destroy the three ships carrying the tea of the East India Company or concede defeat. It appears that Adams shrinks from the consequences of making himself an outlaw under British law when he sends the potential mob home with the words: “This meeting can do nothing more to save the country.” Puls regards this as “a coded command.

95 Puls, 113, 141.
96 Ibid., 141, 142.
A covert plan had been in the works for weeks.” The not-so-spontaneous Boston Tea Party was set in motion. While Adams regarded the Boston Tea Party as “a proud moment in Boston,” Governor Hutchinson saw it as Adams’ deliberate move that made war inevitable.97 Puls agrees with Hutchinson on this point. “[Adams] engineered the Boston Tea Party, which made the war with England inevitable.”98 Schlesinger confirms that Samuel Adams’ “This meeting can do nothing more to save the country” was a “prearranged signal” for the Boston Tea Party.99 Ferling also points at Samuel Adams as the likely organizer of the Boston Tea Party and his motives: “There was an alternative to the Boston Tea Party that followed … The time had arrived to goad London into violent retaliatory measures by destroying the East India Company’s property … The defiant act of the night of December 16 was not spontaneous.”100 If Samuel Adams was really behind the Boston Tea Party and intended to goad the British into severe retaliatory measures, he did achieve his aims. “In 1774, Parliament passed a succession of laws that came to be known as the Coercive Acts.”101

The **Intolerable or Coercive Acts 1774** were a direct response to the Boston Tea Party and the colonists’ refusal to indemnify the East India Company for the destruction of their property. The Boston Port Act of March 31, 1774 discontinued “the landing and discharging, lading or shipping of goods, wares, and merchandise, at the town, and within the harbor of Boston, in the province of Massachusetts Bay, in North America.”102 By preventing all

---

97 Puls, 145, 146, 147.
98 Ibid., 235.
102 The Boston Port Act of March 31, 1774
commercial activities, Great Britain intended to force a rebellious Boston to its knees. Benjamin Franklin cautioned Samuel Adams and advised him and Boston’s Whig leaders to pay for the destroyed tea. Samuel Adams was not inclined to retreat and the Boston Port Act only confirmed his long-held convictions. In his letter of April 4 to Arthur Lee, he states: “If the British administration and government do not return to the principles of moderation and equity, the evil which they profess to aim at preventing by their rigorous measures, will the sooner be brought to pass, THE ENTIRE SEPARATION AND INDEPENDENCE OF THE COLONIES.” His main concern was whether the other colonies would support Massachusetts or side with the British.\(^\text{103}\) He wrote letters to the other committees for support of Boston, and the accomplished equestrian Paul Revere “took to horseback to bring Adams’ letters to the correspondence committees in Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, and Philadelphia…” These obliged by “officially propos[ing] an intercolonial congress…” and Virginia followed by appointing deputies to this Continental Congress. Virginia’s royal governor probably did a favor to the radicals by dissolving the House of Burgesses. “With its legislature closed, Virginia’s committee of correspondence stepped in to provide leadership in its absence.”\(^\text{104}\) In the meantime, Parliament was busy supplying Samuel Adams with more ammunition. On May 20, 1774, the Administration of Justice Act and the Massachusetts Government Act were passed followed by yet another Quartering Act on June 2, 1774. They did not break the back of colonial resistance and did not prevent Samuel Adams from having delegates appointed to the all-important First Continental Congress. Adams himself was to be one of the delegates. When General Gage attempted to bribe him with the offer of “a yearly salary of 2,000 guineas and a patent of

---

\(^{103}\) Puls, 150.
\(^{104}\) Ibid., 152, 153.
nobility,“ he advised Gage “[to] no longer… insult the feelings of an exasperated people.”

Pauline Maier also sees a connection between the Boston Port Act and the colonies’ move toward unity: “Thus in the revolutionary struggle America’s enemies proved far more effective than her friends in effecting American unity.” As John Dickinson and Samuel Adams had expected all along, the reasons for a revolt would be supplied by the actions of London. “These expectations were amply fulfilled with the Tea Act of 1773, followed in 1774 by the ‘Intolerable Act’.” For Wood, the Coercive Acts did more than fulfill the expectations of some radicals: “The 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.”

Wood’s Americans could hardly be the same that Philip Fithian mentions in his journal entry of May 31, 1774: “The lower Class of People here are in tumult on account of Reports from Boston, many of them expect to press’d and compelled to go and fight the Britains!” Fithian’s statement agrees more with the scanty numbers of volunteers to Washington’s Continental Army. For Bailyn, there seems to be no doubt that Parliament was acting outside the law: “Faced with this defiant resistance to intimidation, the powers at work in England… gave up all pretense to legality… In a period of two months in the spring of 1774 Parliament took its revenge in a series of coercive actions no liberty-loving people could tolerate…”

The Intolerable or Coercive Acts – along with the Stamp Act – are still regarded as the main reason for the revolt of the North American colonies against their mother country.

105 Puls, 156.
106 Maier, The Old Revolutionaries, 21.
107 Maier, From Resistance to Revolution, 225.
110 Bailyn, 118.
However, there is little evidence that all these Acts made a significant impression on the general populace. Neither did they have much of an economic effect on the colonial elite except where they strengthened the Navigation Acts and interfered with the smuggling and trading of the colonists with countries outside of Great Britain. It appears that the Intolerable or Coercive Acts were important for the colonial elite for two different reasons. They had to be fought because the British tried to exert their dominance over the colonial assemblies with these Acts – and they were welcome as excellent propaganda tools, albeit with limited success. They could be called upon as threats against ancient liberties and had to be fought by every colonist by the means of non-importation and domestic manufacturing. Breen explains why domestic manufacturing and non-importation did not work. He tells his readers that “domestic manufacturing … never achieved the intended results.” The primary obstacle was “an utter lack of enthusiasm by ordinary colonists.””\(^{111}\) With regard to non-importation, Breen, who must have put in an enormous amount of research for his book, simply said that it did not work: “The predictable question to ask about non-importation is whether it actually worked … The answer is no. The trade statistics show no appreciable drop in the value of British imports shipped to the American ports during this period.”\(^{112}\) Later, Breen gives us a hint what the real importance of non-importation was for the colonial elite: “The delegates [to the Continental Congress] had also learned from the failure of earlier appeals for non-importation that enforcement held the key to success. Voluntary measures had not worked; the consumer marketplace held too many temptations for too many people.”\(^{113}\) If a reduction of British imports was not achieved, then


\(^{112}\) Ibid., 234.

\(^{113}\) Ibid., 325.
success must have been the act of enforcement itself. One can only hope that Samuel Seabury’s statements about “these patriotic busybodies” who declared “purchasers of British goods” as “Outlaws, unworthy of the protection of civil society … to be tarred, feathered, hanged, drawn, quartered, and burnt” were an exaggeration.\textsuperscript{114} With regard to the intentions of some delegates of the Continental Congress, Seabury cannot have been too far off in his statements. The entry that Richard Smith, delegate from New Jersey, made in his diary on January 1, 1776 is both informative and scary: “much was said upon that Part of it relative to disarming and securing the Tories in N Jersey and in case persons ordered to be Secured by Authority would not surrender, then to put them to Death. during the Debate Wilson moved that all Persons in the 13 United Colonies who would not sign the Association should be disarmed and several written Propositions were made about disarming, securing and destroying such Tories as resisted an Arrest ordered by the present Authority.”\textsuperscript{115} In Chapter 4, it will be shown in more detail how the Intolerable or Coercive Acts were not so much a reason for the War of Independence but more a successful tool to gain control over the population.

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

We are used to considering the Stamp Act and the Tea Tax as the main reasons for the colonists to revolt against the mother country who was levying taxes against the American colonies without granting them a proper representation in Parliament. When you learn that the majority of the American colonists could not even vote in any of their local elections, you have to wonder if they were really so unhappy about not being represented in London.\textsuperscript{116} The

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{114} Breen, 327.
  \item \textsuperscript{115} Richard Smith, \textit{Diary}, January 1, 1776.
  \item \textsuperscript{116} Ferling, 44.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
privileged class of New England merchants and Southern plantation aristocracy had plenty of reasons to be unhappy with Great Britain’s attempt to establish Imperial rule in the North American colonies. During “benign neglect” the colonial elite had established their own de facto Parliaments. The colonial assemblies evolved into even more than parliaments as described in Chapter 1. To this powerful elite, it would have been rather embarrassing had Great Britain offered a representation in Whitehall. This makes it almost certain that, for the colonial elite, the primary reason for the rebellion against the British was the maintaining of power through their assemblies. Insofar that the British intended them as a leverage to dismantle the colonial assemblies, the Intolerable or Coercive Acts played an important part. Their “taxation without representation” angle played, at best, a supporting role. It is difficult to imagine a severe reaction of the common people to the new Acts of Parliament when you learn what they were used to suffer from their own assemblies: “Unresponsive to their constituents, the assemblymen levied heavy and inequitable taxes to sustain an especially expensive colonial government that benefited the official elite.” It becomes evident why men like the Lees, Washington, and Jefferson were seeking public office when you read: “While reaping large incomes from the public revenues, the official elite exempted themselves from the onerous poll tax and minimized the tax on large landholdings.” As a crown official reported: “A poor man who has only his labour to maintain himself and his family pays as much as a man who has 20,000 acres.”\textsuperscript{117} Admittedly, Taylor is writing about Virginia and the seventeenth century. However, conditions were not fundamentally different in the eighteenth century and in the other colonies.

The Navigation Acts with the Admiralty Courts not only threatened free trade (or

\textsuperscript{117} Taylor, 147.
smuggling) but the persons directly who were engaged in it. “[A]n accused smuggler stood a far greater likelihood of conviction by a panel of naval officers than by a jury of his peers at home.” Sentenced by an Admiralty Court, prominent merchants like John Hancock could have been hanged.

The Proclamation of 1763 is seldom mentioned as an important reason for the colonies’ revolt. However, it should be ranked with the threat to the power of the assemblies and the Navigation Acts and Admiralty Courts as a prime mover of the colonial elite’s wish for independence. It is not easy to rank the individual Acts of Parliament or royal proclamations according to their importance for causing the American Revolution. They all had an equal importance to the colonial elite where they threatened their power. The increased enforcement of the Navigation Acts and the establishment of Admiralty Courts threatened many of the elite in their persons and their wealth. The Proclamation of 1763 only threatened the aspired wealth of an astounding number of the colonial elite – but, by many, a threat against your wealth is regarded as a threat against your person. By 1776, the most influential leaders of the colonial elite had realized that a solution to their problems lay in a separation from the mother country.

\[118\] Ferling, 31.
CHAPTER 4.

WHY THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE SUCCEEDED

Historians quite often wonder why a newly established republic in the American wilderness succeeded in its struggle for independence against the British Empire with its formidable naval power and armies which could only be beaten because of their divided or poor leadership. Without negating the bravery and power of endurance of George Washington and his Continental Army, it is not difficult to agree with Daniel Friedenberg’s conclusion: “Anyone with the patience and the iron stomach to read details … must come to the objective conclusion that Americans did not win the Revolution so much as the British lost it.”119 But how did the British lose the war with their overwhelming naval and military power? There are plenty of reasons, as we shall see.

The British indecision to establish a strong government to pursue their imperial ambitions in North America and back it with military forces under a unified command played into the hands of the Patriots. Their local Committees of Correspondence were virtual shadow governments that took over the functions of the colonial legislatures whenever these were disbanded by royal officials. The Committees of Correspondence were instrumental in sending delegates to the Continental Congress which functioned as the government of the thirteen colonies. The British could not even undo the influence of the Continental Congress in areas where they had full military control. With Congress’s influence on the local Committees and the use of the Sons of Liberty as an arm of law enforcement, the British were never in control of the colonial population. They could not even protect the substantial number of Loyalists in the areas

---

119 Friedenberg, 178, 179.
occupied by their military forces.

The geography and the means of communication in the colonies worked for the Patriots and against the conventional armies of the British. The early experiences in the battles of Concord and Lexington in 1775 showed that the colonists could be successful against experienced British forces only with guerrilla tactics. Hibbert gives us an idea why the British won battle after battle and, in the end, lost the war: “The last battle in Carolina was over. Nathanael Greene had won none of them. Yet, as he wrote to the French Minister, the Chevalier La Luzerne, ‘We fight, get beat, rise, and fight again’.”

Hibbert, 34.

Ibid., 313.

hope of Vergennes to isolate England completely.” Armed Neutrality did not only please France, it also pleased the Patriots so much that – in a somewhat idiosyncratic move – they tried to join it.

**THE ONLY EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT**

One of the surprising realities of the War of Independence is the absence of any serious attempt of the British to establish a functioning government in their North American colonies. They seemed to be content with their many attempts to control the colonial assemblies and govern through them. When this failed, they simply declared them illegal but put no new organs of government in their place. This gave the Committees of Correspondence the opportunity to step into the breach and take over the functions of the assemblies. This was not a difficult task for them because most of them had been assemblymen before.

When after the Boston Tea Party the British answered with the Coercive Acts of 1774, they apparently had no plans to replace any colonial assembly unwilling to bow to British demands. Instead of making a determined effort to put Loyalists in the place of recalcitrant Patriots and then backing them up with their military, they allowed the Patriots to govern through their Committees of Correspondence and the Sons of Liberty. The Sons of Liberty showed their usefulness first during the Stamp Act Riots. As Puls points out: “The Sons of Liberty, a secret Whig society, formed to pressure stamp masters into resigning.” … “Soon Sons of Liberty chapters were established in several colonies, gathering thousands of members.”

---

124 Puls, 51, 52.
Committees of Correspondence and the Sons of Liberty developed at the same time and their importance in the struggle for independence is mentioned by several authors. Puls mentions that: “Across America, leaders in committees of correspondence were raising militias and taking over the reins of government from royal officials,” and quotes Lord Dunmore who “reported to London that by the end of 1774, every county was ‘arming a company of men for the avowed purpose of protecting their committees.’”¹²⁵ For Puls it is clear that “[Samuel] Adams created a committee-of-correspondence network that coordinated colonial resistance, which became a powerful engine for revolution while laying the seeds for the Continental Congress as well as the state governments to form with the collapse of royal power in America.”¹²⁶ Pauline Maier also sees the development of the Sons of Liberty after the Boston Committee of Correspondence was established. She places the beginning of the American republic with the Sons of Liberty who “in some measure, as royal officials recognized, took powers of government into their own hands.” And “They grew along with colonial resistance in 1768-70, and then again in greater measure after 1773, as royal government collapsed and its authority passed to the committees, conventions, and congresses…” She observes their “willingness to obey those institutions.”¹²⁷ Maier should not have been surprised at that willingness. The Sons of Liberty had been led by these institutions from their very beginning. She describes their origin on page 16 of her book *From Resistance to Revolution*. Their origin in the *posse comitatus* and the militia does much to explain their willingness to obey their local leaders.¹²⁸ In Chapter Three, Maier shows how effectively the Sons of Liberty were controlled and directed – and where their leaders came

---

¹²⁵ Puls, 163.
¹²⁶ Ibid., 235.
¹²⁷ Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*, viii, ix.
¹²⁸ Ibid., 16.
from: “the ‘Loyal Nine,’ a social club of respectable merchants and tradesmen that later became the town’s organized Sons of Liberty.”  

The leaders realized that “directives were required not only as to when, but how limited forceful resistance ought to be exerted.” There is no doubt that Maier is not referring to the British government when she says: “The greatest care was necessary ‘to keep an undisciplined irregular Multitude from running into mischievous Extravagancies.’” Finally, the leaders and members of mass assemblies were advised that ‘as soon as the grand Design of their Meeting’ was ‘fully answer’d and security given that the Stamp Act shall not be executed,’ they were ‘immediately to dissolve – and let Government go on in its usual Forms’.”

For people like Samuel Adams and John Hancock, the Stamp Act was an early opportunity to learn how to handle “mobs” through the Sons of Liberty – a task which could not have been too difficult: “The Boston mob was so domesticated that it refused to riot on Saturday and Sunday night, which were considered holy by New Englanders.” Maier lets her readers guess to whom these refusals were addressed. Neither does she say who “carefully organized beforehand” these moderate crowds “into a volunteer army…” Along with Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson, we can “well wonder ‘if such a public regular assembly can be called a mob’.”

While the previous authors portray the Sons of Liberty and the various provincial and local committees as an effective tool of law enforcement for the Continental Congress and the provincial governments, Agnes Hunt in her book *The Provincial Committees of Safety of the American Revolution* shows a much darker side of the committees and the Sons of Liberty. The councils or committees were not established in a democratic process. What Hunt says about the

---

129 Maier, 58.
130 Ibid., 65, 66.
131 Ibid., 13.
132 Ibid., 66, 67.
Council of Safety in Vermont seems to be applicable to other colonies: “The people had not chosen and could not dismiss it.” She insinuates that “New York, as a whole, did not enter the Revolution willingly… The opposition was organized and managed largely by the merchants of New York,…” It is astounding what powers were assumed by these committees: “An absolute authority was thus granted over those inhabitants of the State, whose only fault was a difference of opinion which might have found expression in no overt act. Such persons might be arrested at the will of the Governor and Council of Safety and imprisoned indefinitely.” Hunt indicates a lack of democratic processes: “These committees regulated the affairs of their districts and treated harshly any who dared raise a voice in opposition.” If one wonders how a relatively small group could exercise such powers, Hunt explains: “As protection against the possible ill-will of the inhabitants they were authorized to call on the militia for support.” If we have not recognized the importance of the Provincial Committees, Hunt lets her readers know toward the end of her remarkable book: “The success of the Revolution is to a much larger degree than is often realized the work of these Committees.”

While Hunt’s book is critical but not condemnatory, it does give the reader a mostly negative view of the committees and the Sons of Liberty. Hugh M. Flick, a Sometime Supervisor of Public Records State of New York, is not critical of The Revolutionary Committee System. It is, therefore, surprising that his findings quite often agree with Hunt’s views. Flick sees “new agencies” develop when royal authority declines. “The most influential of these temporary

134 Ibid., 80, 81.  
135 Ibid., 119.  
136 Ibid., 136.  
137 Ibid., 156.
expedients was the revolutionary committee system.”138 These “extralegal committees” treated loyalists harshly and “these same groups of business men organized larger and stronger committees which for a time assumed governmental control of the metropolis and the province.”139 Flick describes the Sons of Liberty as a society that “ignored constituted authority [and] sought to ‘intimidate’ the Assembly, carried on a vigorous propaganda and correspondence with other colonies.”140 Flick sees the rise of these committees simply as a development of existing practices: “To the extreme champions of law and order, control by self-appointed groups, representing the champions of American rights, may have seemed anarchistic and indefensible, but to the masses of the people the rise of the extralegal committee system was an orderly and logical solution of a crucial problem.”141 Apparently, not only the Loyalists regarded the Sons of Liberty as Sons of Violence.142 Flick confirms that “Throughout this struggle over nonimportation, the Sons of Liberty advocated more or less violent methods, while the conservatives counseled moderation.” He also states that “… these various improvised committees… had created and organized popular sentiment, directing it against the objectionable measures of Parliament by newspaper publicity and mass meetings.” This is clearly in contradiction to other authors who like their readers to believe that all these letters published during that pre-revolutionary period were the spontaneous outbursts of the general public. It is furthermore of interest to see that Flick regards the close contact of the Sons of Liberty and the committees with their counterparts in the other colonies as a foundation for the future

139 Ibid., 215.
140 Ibid., 215, 216.
141 Ibid., 216.
142 Bailyn, 263.
government: “Machinery was created which, if the need should arise, might be made the vehicle of judicial and administrative functions.”\textsuperscript{143} While Flick regards these local committees as “the backbone of the Revolution,” and the birth of the patriotic party, he does not neglect to give us Seabury’s negative view of these committees: “It is notorious that in some districts only three or four met and chose themselves to be a committee on this most important occasion.”\textsuperscript{144} Flick has to admit that “In speaking for the people, active minorities were usurping the functions of local government and, for the most part, without hindrance by the more passive conservative majorities.”\textsuperscript{145} Flick describes the situation in the summer of 1775: “By this time, it will be observed, the local committees, reflecting the wishes of the patriots and unauthorized by any law except the recommendations of the New York City committee and the first Continental Congress, were functioning as a regular form of government for the Revolutionary party.”\textsuperscript{146} And “… the necessities of the situation now forced them to assume legislative, executive and judicial functions.”\textsuperscript{147} Flick also shows how that government worked: “While most local committees acted under orders received from some higher authority, they were capable of independent action on their own initiative.” However, “… the ultimate source of authority was vested in the Continental Congress.”\textsuperscript{148} Flick sees the value of the extralegal local committees “prior to the erection of an orderly civil government, in such matters as the enactment and enforcement of local ordinances, the performance of judicial and police duties,

\textsuperscript{143} Flick, 219.  
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 230.  
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 232.  
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 236, 237.  
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 237.  
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 241.
the suppression of the disaffected, the raising of funds, the recruiting of soldiers and the furnishing of military supplies…” No wonder he comes to the conclusion that “The importance of the committee machinery, as a Revolutionary instrument, can be scarcely overemphasized.”

It becomes obvious that more than ten years before the Declaration of Independence people like Samuel Adams and his correspondents in other provinces were preparing to continue their idea of colonial government when the final break with Great Britain would – inevitably – occur. It cannot have been to Samuel Adams’s liking to see the Sons of Liberty movement dissolve after the repeal of the Stamp Act. He did not have to wait long for a revival. With the Townshend Revenue Act of 1767, the British fulfilled his expectations that they would condemn themselves by their actions, and he was ready to “wisely … improve them.” Adams was convinced that the Townshend Acts were intended by London to install “a puppet government… to rule over America.” Contrary to Josiah Quincy, he thought that armed resistance to the Acts was unwise and preferred economic means to fight against British attempts to assume power in the colonies. By then, Adams had a sufficient number of contacts in the various Committees of Correspondence who had come to realize that the Tories in London were serious in their intentions to wrest power away from the colonial assemblies. However, many of them believed that with the help of their Whig friends in London, and a united front at home, they could resist the Tory efforts. The non-importation agreements were a means to present such a united front. A more or less united front was presented by the colonies; but the non-consumption and non-importation agreements were not an overwhelming success for the Patriots. Participation by the

---

149 Flick, 249.
150 Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*, 111.
151 Ibid., 225.
152 Puls, 68.
merchants and consumers was reluctant and, after the repeal of the Townshend Acts, “the non-importation movement quickly collapse[d].” More successful was Samuel Adams’s “Circular Letter.” Although carefully worded, it had the impact undoubtedly desired by Adams. “The publication made a deep impression on readers in Britain and America…” “British leaders were alarmed at the impact, especially at the threat of a united America.” For Adams, the results must have been gratifying: “America accepted his arguments.” And the British, once again, continued to condemn themselves: “A battleship was on its way to Boston.” The British understood this carefully worded letter apparently for what it was: a declaration of independence. It clearly states that an allegiance to England is of their own free will and that a representation in Parliament – in whatever way – is impossible for the colonies. After all, “his Majestys Royal Predecessors” had recognized this impossibility and granted the colonists “the unalienable Right of a Representation” through their own legislatures. Adams’s wordings and their meanings are reminiscent of Vattel’s *The Law of Nations*. An English translation of Vattel’s book had been available since 1760; but we do not know how widely read it was in the colonies. However, we do know that Benjamin Franklin received three copies of the newest edition in French in 1775 from Charles W. F. Dumas. In his letter to Dumas, Franklin states that his personal copy found great use among the other members of Congress. In any case, Vattel’s book, with its fitting arguments, must have greatly encouraged the authors of the Declaration of Independence.

Vattel’s ideas about “free persons living together in the state of nature” and “that all men being

153 Coming of the American Revolution: Non-consumption and Non-importation
154 Puls, 73, 74, 75.
naturally free and independent, they cannot lose these blessings without their own consent” found their expression in the Declaration of Independence.\(^{157}\) Vattel shows what the people governed can expect a proper government to do and what a prince’s limitations of power are.\(^{158}\) When that prince “commands without any rights… the nation then is not obliged to obey him…” He becomes “a usurper who would load them with oppression.”\(^{159}\) The prince who does not assist but abandons his people gives them the “liberty to provide for their own security and safety, in a manner most agreeable to them, without shewing the least regard to those who fail to assist them.”\(^{160}\)

We can safely assume that Samuel Adams – this astute politician – had carefully planned the role of the Committees and the Sons of Liberty ahead of the measures the British took to wrest power from the colonial assemblies. Maier saw Adams for what he probably was most of all: “He had made politics his life’s work before there was an accepted profession of politics.”\(^{161}\) When the First Continental Congress was convened in Philadelphia on September 5, 1774, it must have surprised even Samuel Adams that this body became, within a short time, the only effective government in the colonies and “the former ruler could no longer appoint even the lowliest administrative officers because he had long since lost effective control.”\(^{162}\) It is indeed surprising to see the British give up, almost at the very beginning, important positions like the postal system and the local courts – instruments of government that mattered to the general population. The indecisive attitude of the British government and the military commanders in


\(^{158}\) Ibid., 67-72.

\(^{159}\) Ibid., 74.

\(^{160}\) Ibid., 155.

\(^{161}\) Maier, *The Old Revolutionaries*, 17.

\(^{162}\) Armitage, 84.
North America has General Clinton express his worries about “the evident inability of either the Commander-in-Chief or the government to form any coherent plan to suppress a rebellion which was now spreading over ‘the whole country’.”\footnote{Hibbert, 58.} An important center like Boston is given up by the British after an American attack on March 2, 1776 – well before independence is declared.\footnote{Ibid., 73, 74.} Hibbert sees a substantial number of the colonists remaining loyal – at least in sentiment. They do not dare to declare their loyalty openly because they are “intimidated by the more violent Sons of Liberty and the mobs called out in the name of patriotism.” Hibbert discovered loyalists “in all classes of society” and finds their failure not in themselves: “The mass of the population would side with the King if given proper encouragement and capable leaders to help them escape from ‘Congress’s tyranny’.”\footnote{Ibid., 78, 79, 80.} It is not surprising that the Continental Congress with the local committees could maintain a firm hold on almost all parts of the colonies when a British government in London believes that the – assumed – great number of Loyalists could subdue the rebels with the help of a few British regulars. Their military commanders in North America quarrel with each other or would rather go home to their wives in England. A British success might have been achieved had the British commanders pursued a policy expressed by General James Robertson: “I never had an idea of subduing the Americans; I meant to assist the good Americans to subdue the bad.”\footnote{Ibid., 123, 124.} Robertson had a wealth of experience with the Americans but was not among the British decision makers until 1780. Even then, his influence on the war was limited in his position as Governor of New York.\footnote{James Robertson, \url{http://famousamericans.net/jamesrobertson/} (accessed October 3, 2013).} The array of British Commanders-in-Chief were lacking in the necessary knowledge of the Americans they confronted and the American
terrain – or they simply did not get the men and supplies they needed from London. Hibbert might be right in his assumption that the British generals regarded America as a lost cause and fought more among themselves than against the American rebels.\textsuperscript{168} However, in all fairness it must be recognized that they were up against a vast, thinly populated country with an insufficient number of troops only augmented by a loyalist militia which was inefficient and unreliable – yet served as an excuse for London not to send the needed reinforcements.\textsuperscript{169} The British achieve more victories than the Americans. But just like Pyrrhus against the Romans, their victories “destroy the British army,” and Nathanael Greene “get[s] beat, rise[s] and fight[s] again.”\textsuperscript{170} Without a viable government in the colonies, insufficient support from the Loyalists and London, and confronted by the vastness of the country, General Cornwallis realizes the dangers for a small army to operate in a country with too “few committed loyalists and so many determined rebels…”\textsuperscript{171}

While the British kept moving their experienced – but insufficient – troops from one colony to the next, the Continental Congress was passing instructions to the local committees and provincial assemblies, as well as the military commanders. The correspondence from the Continental Congress shows clearly who was in command in the colonies and intended to stay in command. Correspondence from delegates to the Continental Congress and from the President of the Continental Congress to individuals or committees is too extensive to show as a footnote. It is added as an addendum to Chapter 4. It will clearly show that the Continental Congress was acting as the Federal Government of the colonies which included negotiations with foreign

\textsuperscript{168} Hibbert, 249, 253.  
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 274, 279.  
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 304-313.  
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 308.
countries well before the Declaration of Independence. Jonathan R. Dull is quite correct with his statement: “During the months following the Battles of Lexington and Concord [April 19, 1775] the Continental Congress assumed the character of a working government and began to treat Britain as a hostile foreign power.”

GEOGRAPHY AND COMMUNICATION

We rightly admire the tenacity of the colonists who held out against the greatest naval and military power of the late eighteenth century – and, in the end, attained their independence from Great Britain. To gain a better understanding of such an achievement, it is necessary to take a look at the terrain the opposing armies had to deal with and their means of communication.

Of course, George Washington was not the incompetent general that his foes made him out to be; he was a brilliant strategist who used guerrilla-type hit-and-run tactics to wear out his enemy and waited for the moment to join with his French allies to deal a decisive blow to the British forces. On a governmental level, the Continental Congress kept a tight control on the colonists through the Committees of Correspondence who operated through diverse local committees and the Sons of Liberty so effectively that 1/3 of the population – the Patriots – controlled the other 2/3 of Loyalists and undecided.

George Washington’s rapid movements of men and materiel required the existence of a road system that his troops did not have to hack out of the wilderness. He had experienced the effects of such a strategy when he served under the command of General Braddock in the French and Indian War. Washington could mostly rely on an infrastructure established by the colonists –

and the British army – in the previous 150 years. The Continental Congress and the Committees of Correspondence could communicate with each other through an efficient postal service. It is necessary to take a closer look at the colonial infrastructure and how it was established.

Coming across the Atlantic Ocean, the first European settlers of North America established their settlements along the coast. Ships and boats were used to establish and maintain contact with the other settlements along the coast. The first forays into the interior were made along the rivers; and major settlements, like Philadelphia and Albany, were established on rivers with access to the ocean by seagoing vessels. The relative ease of movement on waterways created a string of settlements along the Atlantic coast and along the major rivers. As Seymour Dunbar says: “The five principal localities from which radiated the first travel movements of the country were the Chesapeake Bay region, eastern Massachusetts, New York Bay and [the Hudson, the Connecticut River, Long Island Sound, Delaware Bay and River and Susquehanna].”173 The vessels used for communicating between settlements and with the mother country ranged from seagoing sailing ships to Indian canoes. While sailing ships could carry human beings, livestock, and goods in bulk, their usefulness ended where rivers became too shallow or too narrow which made a transfer to smaller vessels necessary. The array of vessels on colonial waterways – bays, lakes, and rivers – was remarkable. The Durham boats, carrying more than ten tons, were used on Chesapeake Bay mainly, but boats of varying size, equipped with sails and oars – or simply being poled or towed – could be found further inland. Different needs led the people of different areas to the construction of different watercrafts. Ocean-going vessels and coastal fishing boats were built in New England. The tobacco boat, double dugout canoes carrying up to ten hogsheads of tobacco, were developed in the Chesapeake Bay

region.\textsuperscript{174} New York and the Hudson Valley had the \textit{bateau}, “a flat-bottom, double-ended, shallow draft, all-purpose cargo boat.”\textsuperscript{175} Depending on the size of the boat, they were called “Albany boats” (about 24 ft. long) or “Schenactady boats” (up to 45 ft. long). These \textit{bateaux} were used also for military purposes in all the campaigns against the French – and later the British – in Canada. The colonies had an abundance of raw materials for boat and ship building. These raw materials were not only shipped to the mother country; in New England, ship building grew into an industry and “Of the over 7,000 vessels known to \textit{Lloyd’s Register} in 1775, about 32 percent were built in the American colonies,…”\textsuperscript{176}

Along with the waterways, land-routes were developed – often following established Indian trails. As Seymour Dunbar expresses it: “Practically the whole present-day system of travel and transportation in America east of the Mississippi River, including many turnpikes, is based upon, or follows, the system of forest paths established by the Indians hundreds of years ago.”\textsuperscript{177} These forest paths, which were really just footpaths, had to be widened to accommodate travel by horse and oxcart. Hannah J. McKinney describes this development in Middletown, Connecticut. We can safely assume that the development in Middletown was typical for other communities throughout New England.\textsuperscript{178} If local roads were built as a means of access to the fields and the church, the need for access to trading centers was contemporaneous, at least for colonists who wished to maintain a connection with their mother country. Road construction was

\textsuperscript{177} Dunbar, 19.
not of equal interest to every citizen. A subsistence farmer lacked the interest in long distance roads that a farmer had who moved his surplus produce to the next marketplace. “Politicians look[ed] at roads as economic tools,” and traders were always eager to support more and faster access to their customers.\textsuperscript{179} In New England, the General Court passed on the responsibility of road construction to each town. This was not limited to road construction. Where rivers had to be crossed, a ferry or a bridge had to be established and maintained. Not every citizen or community can have approached this task with the same enthusiasm. Nevertheless, Yankees always knew how to make money and “… enterprising farmers engaged in the routine of local trade further improved the region’s transportation capabilities.”\textsuperscript{180} If we can believe Breen, these traders were also enthusiastic consumers who had their “dreams easily fulfilled by the consumer market.”\textsuperscript{181} Breen has a tendency to exaggerate and jump to conclusions; but he has, at least on this point, some support from McWilliams with his: “Without a doubt, big merchant warehouses motivated hundreds of colonists to improve transportation facilities from the hinterlands to the coast.”\textsuperscript{182} McWilliams, of course, is referring to serious New Englanders; and we can assume that the business of farmer and merchant was a two-way business. In any case, it is a remarkable development that “by the last quarter of the seventeenth century the once treacherous task of transporting commodities and labor throughout the Bay colony had eased considerably.”\textsuperscript{183} However, this development was not confined to New England. Backcountry businesses in North Carolina “were an important link in the long chain by which local products moved out of the county and imported goods moved in … the wagons that carried deerskins to the coast came

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{179} McKinney, 71.
\bibitem{180} James E. McWilliams, \textit{Building the Bay Colony}, (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 105.
\bibitem{181} Breen, 71.
\bibitem{182} McWilliams, 110.
\bibitem{183} Ibid., 105.
\end{thebibliography}
back loaded with goods for sale. As early as 1755, if not before, stores and taverns in Rowan brought a wide variety of goods from elsewhere in the colonies or from Europe into the backcountry economy. Not only does this tell us that there were roads in the backcountry in 1755 but that they were good enough to allow wagon traffic. Moreover, it tells us that trade was conducted not only with Europe but with other colonies, as well.

The road connections between the hinterlands and the coastal trade centers are a remarkable development. The land connections between the centers of the different colonies are even more remarkable. A land connection along the Atlantic coast must have followed existing Indian trails. It was probably first used by people averse to an ocean voyage or people traveling during the season when an ocean voyage was too dangerous. Whatever the reasons, by 1684 “continuous horseback journeys between Boston and Philadelphia” were possible. Roads between colonial centers like Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and on to Baltimore, Alexandria, and Charleston certainly served for the movement of people, goods, and the mails. There was, however, road construction going on away from the major settlements into the “wilderness” for different purposes. Trading with Native Americans was not only the business of enterprising traders or their agents, it became increasingly a policy for colonial governments to establish trading posts in remote areas. These trading posts attracted the tribes who became more and more dependent on European goods. In payment for these goods, they delivered furs, slaves, and their aid in military operations against the French and Spaniards. Of course, whenever this trade became unsatisfactory to the Native Americans, they could turn to and make a better deal with the enemy. Good connections with the Native American tribes were therefore an economic as

185 Dunbar, 53.
well as a military necessity. These roads, leading into the interior, had to be good enough to enable the movement of people, goods, and military equipment.

There was another reason for building roads into the interior: Land speculation, such an important business for the Founding Fathers, was probably also the main interest of early British investors in North American colonies. The connection between land surveying, politics, land grants, profiteering, betrayal of the Native American tribes, and road construction is a subject for more than one book. Sara Stidstone Gronim refers to the political, profiteering and betrayal, and military aspects of road construction. She also shows that investors in colonial property and business could not be fooled by arbitrarily drawn maps. She quotes from Klinefelter’s *Lewis Evans and His Maps*: “‘Tis easy, Sir, to cut Roads on a Map, and the Stroke of a Brush or Pen can, in an instant, set Bounds on an Empire, but is your Portage passable by an Army, and Train of Artillery, or only by Indians?” Braddock, whose troops and heavy cannons got stuck and ultimately slaughtered on narrow Indian trails, should have been that critical before setting out for Fort Duquesne. His successors did better and brought the French and Indian War to a successful conclusion. Guy Chet praised the “elaborate, centralized logistical support system” that Amherst, Forbes, and Loudon had established by 1758, which enabled them to conduct a European-type war in the wilderness.

Where the needs of the settlers and the political will coincided, the development of the infrastructure in the British colonies in North America was astoundingly swift. The development

---

186 Friedenberg, 96.
188 Ibid., 400.
in the New England and Mid-Atlantic colonies was faster than in the southern colonies due to a higher birthrate and number of immigrants in the North. With increased population density, the number and quality of the roads increased. The plantation economy of the South that concentrated its inland expansion along rivers resulted in a much slower development of the road system. This would have a significant influence on the development of the postal service in the colonies.

It could be said that William III established the first postal system in the North American colonies when he granted a patent to Thomas Neale in 1691. Of course, mail was exchanged by the colonists and the colonies with each other and the mother country long before that. Private individuals and trading vessels made arrangements and carried mail to designated places. Needless to say that this system was as reliable as the individual who agreed to make the delivery. In the absence of a post office, it was left to each individual to find a way to get his mail to a vessel or traveler that would take his letter to its ultimate destination. Sending or receiving mail was more a game of chance than the established routine of today. With the growing number of people in the colonies who sought contact with each other by mail, the pressure on the colonial governments must have grown to find “a remedy for these inconveniences.” As early as “November 5, 1639, the general court of [Massachusetts Bay] colony issued an ordinance directing that all letters arriving at Boston from beyond seas should be taken to Richard Fairbank’s tavern.” This must have been a great improvement over running from one vessel to the other to find out about a possible letter.

A war with the Dutch in 1672 caused “Governor Lovelace, at the direction of the king,

---

191 Ibid., 258.
[to] set on foot inquiries as to what could be done towards establishing regular postal service throughout the colonies.” A monthly courier service was established between Boston and New York. Another war in 1684, this time with the French and their Indian allies, rekindled the interest in “a line of post-houses along the coast from the Acadian boundary to Carolina.”192 This plan did not become a reality until much later. After New England and New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Maryland established a postal system in the 1680s. Virginia and the Carolinas left the transport and delivery of the mail to the ingenuity of private individuals. For a number of years, the inter-colonial postal service, originating in Boston, stopped in Baltimore.

Neale’s patent of 1691 authorized him “to establish a postal system throughout the British possessions in America.”193 In 1692, Neale appointed Andrew Hamilton, governor of New Jersey, as his deputy postmaster-general. Hamilton combined ability and energy with diplomatic skills which made him a successful negotiator – at least in the northern colonies. Maryland and Virginia, more or less, ignored Neale’s royal patent and set up their own postal systems which remained mostly private. Since the income did not cover the expenses of the postal service even in the North, Hamilton did not pursue the issue with Maryland and Virginia where he expected very little correspondence with the northern colonies.194 It was not until 1717 that postmasters were appointed in Maryland and Virginia. Not pleased with the postal rates and the monopoly of the postal system, Virginia, forever the champion of states’ rights, imposed conditions on the postmasters which they could not fulfill. Although the governor disallowed the bill, the deputy postmaster-general was discouraged from opening a post-office in Virginia. “It was not until 1732, when [Virginia] governor, Alexander Spotswood, became deputy postmaster-
general, that Virginia was included in the American postal system.”

The American postal system had its ups and downs and until 1753, the downs predominated. When in 1753 Benjamin Franklin was appointed deputy postmaster-general for the northern colonies – William Hunter was appointed for Virginia – a trip from Philadelphia to Boston and back took six weeks. Franklin cut the time in half and increased the number of trips. The public was pleased with the vastly improved service and the treasury was pleased with Franklin’s business acumen. By 1760, he had wiped out the customary debts and in 1764, he transmitted the first surplus to the general post-office in London. Franklin’s achievements should prove of incalculable value for the Patriots during the War of Independence.

When in 1774 Franklin was dismissed as deputy postmaster-general for his involvement in the Hutchinson affair, the Continental Congress, assuming the powers of a de-facto government for the colonies, appointed him postmaster-general of their own postal service and declared the use of the king’s post-office as unconstitutional. They disrupted service so effectively that in December 1775, the royal post-office in the colonies was closed. It is surprising that the British gave up such a valuable link between the colonies so quickly. The Continental Congress, by means of their own couriers, could use Franklin’s efficient postal service to issue directives to every local Committee of Correspondence and in turn be advised of the conditions in all parts of the colonies. Newspapers, broadsides, and other means of propaganda could be widely distributed while anything the British attempted could be stopped soon after it left their vessels. Washington could retain constant contact with the different groups of his Continental Army and the militias in all the colonies. Movements of the British forces

---

195 Smith, 269.
196 Ibid., 270.
197 Ibid., 275.
could often be made known to the rebels with enough advance notice for them to make a strategic withdrawal or set up an ambush. This line of communication, established by the colonies and perfected by Benjamin Franklin, must rank in value for achieving the ultimate victory of the rebels along with Dutch money and French arms.

The vastness of a country with a road-system which was familiar and controlled by the rebels made the British hesitate—after some initial set-backs—to venture away from their coastal strongholds. Even there, the rebels, with their excellent communications and ability to move rapidly, harassed the British locally. There is some truth to Colonel William Phillips’ statement to General Clinton: “You may be lions, but you are lions confined to a den; and the provincial rebels are your keepers.”

THE IMPORTANCE OF EUROPE IN THE AMERICAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Europe had a much larger influence on the outcome of the American War of Independence than our history books tell us. They tell us about a French contribution by mentioning the Marquis de La Fayette, the artillery of Rochambeau, and the naval squadron of de Grasse. Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes, whose influence on the American War of Independence was certainly more important than all the afore-mentioned combined, is mostly forgotten. Spain, as an ally of France and later the newly declared United States of America, is put off as insignificant. The Netherlands’ importance as a financier of the American Revolution and an inspiration for a republican form of government is possibly getting too much attention while their role as a serious rival for British claims to empire and naval superiority finds hardly any mention in our history books. It should not be forgotten that Great Britain had to attain and

---

198 Hibbert, 62.
maintain a dominant position in Europe before it could assume its position as the dominant global power. Denmark-Norway, Sweden, Prussia, and Russia all played a role in the creation of that “brilliant apparition, the Armed Neutrality of 1780,” which bound British finances and naval power to Europe and diminished the British presence in the North American colonies.  

Prussia’s Frederick the Great played a dual role. Thoroughly disliking George III, he supported the diplomacy of Armed Neutrality while accepting British money to have his country function as a barrier to Russia’s influence in Europe.  

The supply of money and arms was of an absolute necessity for the survival of the Patriots in their struggle for independence. The concentration of British finances and arms to maintain Britain’s dominance in Europe, India, and the West Indies was what made American independence possible.

**FRANCE AND SPAIN**

France and Spain were allies through the Family Compact of the Bourbons and shared a mutual desire for revenge against the British. There were, of course, other reasons – like commercial exchange with a fast-growing economy in North America – but for both, France and Spain, revenge for the Seven Years’ War and the insulting peace treaty of 1763 – along with Britain’s attempts to gain absolute superiority in Europe and around the globe – were the overriding factors for siding with the American rebels.

Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes, is an unlikely supporter of the Patriots and their War of Independence. He was “committed to the doctrines of the absolute monarchy [and] was a

---

199 Bemis, 113.  
200 Bemis, 114.  
Chavez, 7, 8.
bitter foe of the Enlightenment.” Yet, as the man in charge of French foreign policy during the entire period of the American War of Independence, he supplied money and arms to the Patriots, influenced other countries to move against Great Britain, and brought his country and its monarchy to the brink of collapse. His prime motive in all his actions seems to have been a desire for revenge against the British – a desire he shared with many other Frenchmen.

Vergennes’ involvement with the American War of Independence was early, if tentative. In September of 1775, Vergennes sent a secret observer, Achard de Bonvouloir, to confer with the colonial leaders. Bonvouloir meets with the Secret Committee of Correspondence which was created by the Continental Congress on November 29, 1775. On March 3, 1776, The Committee of Secret Correspondence dispatches Silas Deane to France assuring him that: “With the assistance of Monsieur Dubourg … you will make immediate application to Monsieur de Vergennes, ministre des affaires étrangères, either personally or by letter…” Deane was received well by Vergennes and referred to Beaumarchais who drew up an agreement with him which was later signed by Congress. “Beaumarchais supplied goods to the Colonies on credit many times the value of the two million livres” (a subsidy from the kings of France and Spain). If this looks like a generous gesture of the King and his minister, Congress had agreed to pay in produce or money at a later date – which, of course, might never come – and for the French it was simply a part of their policy of secret assistance. In simple terms – a repayment was not really expected. As Bemis puts it: “the commercial contract was meant only for the

---

202 Bemis, 22.
203 Ibid., 32.
204 Letter of The Committee of Secret Correspondence to Silas Deane, 3-3-1776.
205 Bemis, 37.
206 Ibid., 37.
purpose of hiding French violations of neutrality.”207 It is interesting to see that Spain was substantially involved in this aid to the rebels from the very beginning – and Spain stayed involved. “It was the first of a series of loans and subsidies from both powers which enabled the United States to go forward with the rebellion.”208 Both France and Spain wanted a war with Great Britain – a war that they would have to wage jointly. However, in 1776, they could not agree on the time to start that war. While waiting for the propitious moment to start, both countries were in agreement to keep the American rebels fighting against the British.209 Even after Washington’s defeat against Howe in the battle of Long Island (August 27, 1776), Vergennes continued his “secret assistance and verbal encouragement to the Americans.”210 By 1777, Deane and Franklin had not quite achieved a formal recognition of the United States by France, but “Vergennes unofficially received Franklin and his colleagues and allowed them to ship out cargoes of munitions in French and American bottoms. The ports of France – and of Spain – remained open to ships of commerce flying the American flag.” In Spain, Grimaldi (principal minister) made promises of secret aid to Arthur Lee – “promises which were subsequently carried out.”211 When France and the United States signed the treaty of amity and commerce on February 6, 1778, Vergennes had to accept the dreaded risk of facing Great Britain alone in a war. Spain did not follow France’s example. Spain declared war on Great Britain on June 21, 1779 but did not recognize the United States officially until the 1783 Treaty of Paris.212

French and Spanish aid in the form of money and arms were vital for the survival of the
Patriot cause. However, the actions of France and Spain in Europe, the West Indies, and Central America were of, at least, equal value. These actions kept British forces and finances tied up in different parts of the globe and away from their North American colonies. Although Franco/Spanish plans to invade either Ireland or England did not come to being fully executed, the mere existence of a Franco/Spanish fleet in the Channel was enough to worry the British more than the skirmishes taking place in their North American colonies.\textsuperscript{213} In July of 1779, French forces joined a Spanish force which had laid siege to Gibraltar. This siege “lasted until the end of the war.”\textsuperscript{214} The importance of Gibraltar for the British Empire and its access to the Mediterranean does not have to be elaborated upon. A British fleet, sent to Gibraltar to provide the garrison with sorely needed supplies, made it through a Spanish fleet but was severely damaged. Another British fleet “conveying supplies to British ports in the East and West Indies” was captured by a Spanish fleet off the Azores. The time, needed by Great Britain to refit and organize their American and European fleets, was used by France and Spain to transfer ships and troops to the Americas making the victory at Yorktown possible.\textsuperscript{215} There is another remarkable aspect of Spain’s role in the American War of Independence. The Peace of 1763 had given Canada and the Floridas to the British and Louisiana to the Spaniards. The rights of navigation on the Mississippi River were given to both. After the start of the American rebellion, the Spanish governors of Louisiana, Luis de Unzaga and his successor Bernardo de Gálvez, aided the American rebels to smuggle arms and money through New Orleans which supplied “the successful campaigns of George Rogers Clark, who fought the British in the trans-Allegheny regions. Supplies originating in New Orleans under Gálvez even reached Washington’s army.”\textsuperscript{216}

\textsuperscript{213} Chavez, 138.
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 139.
\textsuperscript{215} Ibid., 143.
Gálvez was in the happy position to follow his personal feelings and his government’s policies by clandestinely aiding the American rebels. Even before Spain entered the war in 1779, Gálvez made plans to take all British forts on the eastern banks of the Mississippi. He promptly did so in 1779/1780 and in March 1780, he also took Mobile from the British, and in May 1781, after some long delays, he took Pensacola. The loss of Pensacola ended Great Britain’s plans to encircle “the rebelling North American colonies in a pincers movement in the west.”

“The Spanish had broken – in fact eliminated – the British hold and influence on the Mississippi Valley and the Gulf Coast.” Chávez makes a good point when he claims that Spain’s actions in Gibraltar and Minorca, along with the threat of an invasion by a combined French and Spanish fleet, “forced Great Britain to freeze its European fleet, thus sacrificing its naval parity in the Americas. This parity had been the strength of the British military, which now had the additional problem of facing more French and Spanish troops. This change would result in the pivotal defeat of Cornwallis at Yorktown.”

THE NETHERLANDS AND THE LEAGUE OF ARMED NEUTRALITY

The role of the Netherlands as a financier of the American War of Independence is well-known and the Dutch Republic was doubtless an inspiration for our Founding Fathers when they started to think about a republican form of government for the united colonies. The Netherlands’ importance certainly did not end there.

As a trading nation, the Netherlands were a serious competitor to Great Britain and, as a

216 Chavez, 11.
217 Ibid., 166.
218 Ibid., 194.
219 Ibid., 148, 149.
naval power, they had been a serious threat to Great Britain’s ambitions in the previous century. Since the three Anglo-Dutch Wars of the seventeenth century, Great Britain and the Netherlands had made several mutual assistance agreements which made the Netherlands assume a neutral position at the time of the American Declaration of Independence. In a nation where even “the Dutch Admiralty officers were traders,” ways were sought and found to conduct a lucrative trade with the rebellious colonies. At the same time, the Netherlands avoided an open recognition of the United States of America. An open breach of neutrality against the powerful British could be disastrous for the Dutch – especially for the bankers in Amsterdam who had become “the world’s greatest international bankers.” When Vergennes and Floridablanca approached Empress Catherine of Russia “to take the lead in forming a League of Armed Neutrality” that would join together neutral European countries like Russia, Denmark-Norway, Sweden, Prussia, and the Netherlands, the Dutch were hesitant to join because they feared British attacks on their exposed seaports. The countries of the League intended to determine themselves what goods they could carry in their ships and not leave that decision to the belligerent nations. The British kept a wary eye on these developments. “In November 1780, Holland [a province of the Netherlands] joined Russia, Prussia, Denmark, and Sweden in the League of Armed Neutrality. Great Britain saw Holland’s act as a betrayal and prepared for war against the neutral country.” Bemis sees a connection of the American Revolution to these European events only as an indirect one. He is correct when he declares: “It was a European situation produced and manipulated by French diplomacy which brought war to the Netherlands.” French diplomacy was certainly successful and “… Armed Neutrality.. fulfilled the hope of Vergennes to isolate England completely.”

220 Bemis, 121.
221 Ibid., 119-129.
222 Chavez, 145.
alone made it a success, even if, as a real force it was an “Armed Nullity,” as Empress Catherine described it.\textsuperscript{223} It could not have been such a great “Nullity.” The Netherlands and the other League members kept France and Spain supplied with needed goods which also benefited the American rebels. It brought enough money to the Dutch to make them the major bankers of the American War of Independence. And, last not least, it bound enough British resources in European waters to make a joint American, French, and Spanish victory in the Americas possible.

**CONCLUSION**

With the establishment of the Committees of Correspondence and various other committees throughout the colonies, the Patriots had created a ready tool to form local and provincial governments and, most importantly, the Continental Congress as the final authority. With the Sons of Liberty and the militias, they could protect themselves and enforce their directives. Their taking over governmental authority was made relatively easy by the astounding British reluctance to establish new governments of their own when they disbanded the recalcitrant provincial assemblies. The committees, mostly consisting of former assemblymen, stepped into the breach and continued their old jobs without royal approval. By sending their delegates to the Continental Congress, they established a common government.

The influence of geography and communication on military operations does not have to be elaborated on. The French and Indian War was decided in favor of the British after they improved the roads and communications. During the War of Independence, the colonies in North America might still have been a “howling wilderness” for Europeans – like the British troops

\textsuperscript{223} Bemis, 161, 162.
who seldom ventured into the interior and then never for long periods. They felt safer as the “caged lions with the rebels as their keepers.” On the other hand, the Patriots moved in their wilderness on a familiar network of roads and waterways utilizing a variety of vehicles and vessels to quickly shift men and materiel, thus accomplishing their recoveries and ability to fight after every defeat, as mentioned by Nathanael Greene. When the British gave up the postal system perfected by Benjamin Franklin, they left an excellent tool of communication to the Patriots. The steady flow of correspondence between the Continental Congress and the provincial committees and military commanders stands in contrast to the lack of communication between the British.

There can be little doubt that the American struggle for independence would not have gotten off the ground if the French and the Spaniards had not supplied the rebels with money and arms which kept coming throughout the War of Independence. Neither is there any doubt that, if the British forces, bound in Europe and elsewhere by France, Spain, and the members of Armed Neutrality, had been employed in North America, the results would have been decidedly different. This thesis is not the place to apportion the credits that various countries and persons earned with their assistance to obtain American independence. However, Spain seems to have played a larger role than it has commonly been attributed, and Vergennes’ diplomacy to keep the British isolated and in a defensive position needs to be further explored.
ADDENDUM TO CHAPTER 4
THE ONLY EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT

In this Addendum, I am using *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress* edited by Edward C. Burnett to show that the Continental Congress was acting as a well functioning government at a time when whatever little royal government there was in the colonies was quickly deteriorating. I am limiting the correspondence shown to the period from May 21, 1775 to July 4, 1776. This will clearly show that the Continental Congress was a government of and for the thirteen colonies before independence was declared and their role became official.

John Adams to James Warren May 21, 1775

Describing the Continental Congress: “Our unwieldy Body moves very slow. … But I can guess that an army will be posted in New York, and another in Massachusetts, at the Continental Expence.”

The New Hampshire Delegates to the New Hampshire Provincial Committee May 22, 1775

Advising the Committee of the Congress’s orders to destroy Ticonderoga and Crown Point, remove “the warlike Stores” and erect and maintain “another Fort.”

William Hooper to Samuel Johnston May 23, 1775

“a resolve has passed the Congress … that no vessel shall be suffered to load for Newfoundland, St. John’s, or Nova-Scotia, to supply the British fisheries there, or anywhere else along the coast of America.”

(This is more or less repeated in Joseph Hewes’ letter of the same date to Samuel Johnston)
The New York Delegates to the Provincial Congress  
May 30, 1775

Congress approves of how its orders were executed and entrusts “the Appointment of 
Officers” to the “Prudence” of the Provincial Congress.

The Connecticut Delegates to William Williams  
May 31, 1775

“[Congress] have orderd the Provincial Congress att New York to see that Battoes and 
Boats are prepared on the lakes…”

The New York Delegates to the Provincial Congress  
June 3, 1775

“General Officers will… be… appointed by this [Continental] Congress…” but the 
Provincial Congress can make recommendations.

The President of Congress to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress  
June 10, 1775

John Hancock will “lay [their dispatches] before the Congress, and when Considered by 
Congress, their Determinations shall be immediately transmitted to you.”

John Adams to Mrs. Adams  
June 10, 1775

“… ten thousand men will be maintained in the Massachusetts, and five thousand in New 
York, at the Continental expense.”

Thomas Cushing to Joseph Hawley  
June 10, 1775

“… the regulation of the Army at or near Boston it will be determined upon very soon. I 
hope in a few days you will have the determinations of Congress upon these heads. It will 
therefore in my opinion be best to suspend any farther organization of the army till you hear 
further.”

Thomas Cushing to Elbridge Gerry  
June 10, 1775

Cushing speaks of “regulating the Army, you will hear further from the Congress soon.
The bearer carries a recommendation to the other Colonies to supply you with all the powder
they can safely spare.”

Interesting: Cushing refers to his province as “my dear Country.”

The President of Congress to the New York Provincial Congress June 10, 1775

John Hancock passes on a resolution of Congress concerning the landing of flour with
“the least risk of interruption from the ships-of-war.” The flour is to be distributed to the Army
by “the Committee of Correspondence in each place.”

The President of Congress to the Governor of Connecticut (Jonathan Trumbull) June 10, 1775

Resolutions of Congress “respecting the supply of powder to the army” require “a speedy
compliance.”

Samuel Adams to James Warren June 10, 1775

Samuel Adams refers to the members of Congress who are anxious “to relieve the
Necessities of and yield a full Supply to the ‘American Army before Boston’.” He also mentions
“the procuring of Gunpowder from abroad and setting up the Manufacture of it in America…”

James Duane to the New York Provincial Congress June 17, 1775

“… the Congress have thought fit that the posts directed to be taken in our Government
should immediately be occupied by the Troops of Connecticut, which are ready for service, and
unemployed. We enclose you, by order of the Congress, a certified copy of their Resolution on
that head.” Duane continues with Congress’s resolution regarding finances and raising “at the
Continental expense, a body of fifteen thousand men…”

John Adams to Mrs. Adams June 18, 1775

“We shall have a redress of grievances or an assumption of all powers of government,
legislative, executive, and judicial, throughout the whole continent, very soon.”

The New Hampshire Delegates to Matthew Thornton  
June 20, 1775

“We are at liberty to inform you that the Committee of the whole Congress have agreed to Report a Continental Currency, which no doubt will be Emitted immediately and forwarded for the payment of the Troops. The Congress have appointed General Washington to the Command of the American forces... have also agreed upon a Continental army.”

Roger Sherman to David Wooster  
June 23, 1775

“The Congress having determined it necessary to keep up an army for the defence of America at the charge of the united colonies, have appointed the following general officers.”

John Adams to James Warren  
June 27, 1775

“We have passed some Resolutions concerning North Carolina which will do a great deal of good. We have allowed them to raise 1000 Men, and to take Care of Traytors, if necessary. This must be kept secret...”

Roger Sherman to Joseph Trumbull  
July 6, 1775

“... I hope every Colony will take Government fully into their own hands until matters are settled.”

John Dickinson to Arthur Lee  
July 7, 1775

“Our Rights [have] been already stated – our Claims made – W[ar] is actually begun, and we are carrying it on Vigor[ously].”

The New York Delegates to the Committee of Safety  
July 18, 1775

“We can give you no Assurances of a Supply of Arms and Ammunition from this Quarter. Every scheme which could be devised to procure them from abroad has been pursued.”
John Adams to James Warren
July 24, 1775

“We are lost in the Extensiveness of our Field of Business. We have a Continental Treasury to establish, a Paymaster to chose and a Committee of Correspondence or Safety, or Accounts, or something, I know not what, that has confounded Us all Day…”

John Adams to James Warren
July 27, 1775

John Adams advises James Warren that he, James Warren, was unanimously appointed Paymaster General of the Army by Congress.

Richard Smith Diary
Sept. 18, 1775

“Motion to appoint a Com’ee to procure 500 Ton of Gunpowder from abroad, together with 10,000 Stand of Arms 20,000 Gun-Locks etc with power to draw on the Continental Treasury for the Amount…”

Richard Smith Diary
Sept. 21, 1775

Congress deals with the appointments of Brigadier Generals, provisions for General Washington, and raising Judge Advocate Tudor’s wages from 20 to 50 Dollars per month.

The President of Congress to George Washington
Sept. 26, 1775

This is a lengthy letter where John Hancock transmits Congress’s instructions to General Washington. Of special interest is the following: “The Congress desire you will give them your Opinion, whether the Pay of the Private Men, which is consider’d as very high, may not be Reduc’d and how much.” Three paragraphs further, the spectacular pay raise to Judge Advocate Tudor is confirmed – and that retroactively.

Richard Smith Diary
Sept. 30, 1775

“McKean and Willing moved for us to interfere in the Dispute between Connecticut and
Penns. for there is immediate Danger of Hostilities between them on the Susquehannah – “

John Adams to James Warren Oct. 7, 1775

In a long letter, Adams is contemplating the trade with foreign countries and sending ambassadors to various courts in Europe.

The President of Congress to the New York Convention Oct. 9, 1775

John Hancock gives detailed instructions about the distribution and importation of gunpowder, and erecting a fort on the North River.

The President of Congress to Philip Schuyler Oct. 11, 1775

“What they (Congress) expect of your Endeavours is, that the Canadians be induced to accede to an Union with these Colonies… and send Delegates to this Congress… You may assure them that we shall hold their Rights as dear as our own…”

“And you may further declare that we hold sacred the Rights of Conscience, and shall never molest them in the free Enjoyment of their Religion.”

Silas Deane to Thomas Mumford Oct. 15, 1775

Congress has to deal with a serious border dispute between Connecticut and Pennsylvania that threatens the Union. They also seem to be well on the way to establish an “American Navy.”

Samuel Adams to James Warren Nov. 4, 1775

“We shall by the Spring know the full Effect of our Non-exportation Agreement in the West Indies. Perhaps Alliances may then be formed with foreign Powers, and Trade opened to all the World Great Britain excepted.”

John Adams to Elbridge Gerry Nov. 5, 1775

John Adams is obviously engaged in investigating - for Congress – the possibilities to
establish a Navy.

Joseph Hewes to Samuel Johnston
Nov. 9, 1775

“The Congress exert every Nerve to put the Colonies into a proper state of defence; four Regiments are ordered to be raised on Continental Pay for the defence of South Carolina and Georgia; …”

“… we have but little expectation of reconciliation.”

Richard Henry Lee to George Washington
Nov. 13, 1775

“The Continental and Virginia Commissioners have just concluded a treaty of firm friendship with the Ohio Indians, and those of the Six nations that inhabit near that Quarter.”

Josiah Bartlett to the New Hampshire Committee
Nov. 13, 1775

“I am Directed by the Congress to send you the Inclosed Resolves for making salt petre, and I would earnestly Recommend the putting them in practice.”

Joseph Hewes to Samuel Johnston
Nov. 26, 1775

Hewes tells Johnston not to discharge his two regiments. Congress intends to keep them “in continental pay till Decr. 1776, unless discharged [by order] of Congress:”

“… you Must prevent the disbanding of your soldiers. I ought not to call them your soldiers. The Congress considers them theirs and the Congre[ss intends] to give orders accordingly.”

John Adams to Mrs. Adams
Dec. 3, 1775

“The whole Congress is taken up almost, in different committees, from seven to ten in the morning. From ten to four or sometimes five, we are in Congress, and from six to ten, in committees again.”
Francis Lightfoot Lee to Landon Carter  
Dec. 12, 1775

“The Congress are giving the greatest attention to a Navy and I hope we shall have ships enough by spring to oblige the Ministerial fleet to consult their safety by keeping close together, and of course will not be able to do us much injury.”

Samuel Adams to John Adams  
Dec. 22, 1775

“... Congress have orderd the Building of thirteen Ships of War viz five of 32 Guns five of 28 and three of 24.”

Richard Smith Diary  
Dec. 22, 1775

“... the Vote passed for directing Gen Wash[ington] to destroy the Army and Navy at Boston in any Way He and a Council of War shall think best, even if the Town must be burnt.”

The President of Congress (John Hancock) to George Washington  
Dec. 22, 1775

“It is expected the several Colonies will erect courts of admiralty, and that the judges in those courts will regulate their decisions by the law of nations...”

“You will Notice the last Resolution relative to an attack upon Boston. This pass’d after a most serious debate in a committee of the whole house...”

Richard Smith Diary  
Dec. 27, 1775

“This Day, it is said, the King’s Post finally stopt and the Postmasters shut up the Office.”

Richard Smith Diary  
Dec. 30, 1775

“Another letter was recd from Wash[ington] recom’g 2 French Gent[lemen] who offered to supply this Continent with Powder and these Gent[lemen] being in Town our Secret Com[mittee] were desired to treat with them.”
The Massachusetts Delegates to the Massachusetts Assembly

Jan. 1, 1776

A Committee of Congress cannot pass upon the accounts of the General Court since “the vouchers did not Come with them. However they have voted to advance to the Colony in part of their Accounts the sum of Four hundred and forty three Thousand three hundred and thirty three Dollars and third of a Dollar which we have received and have hired a light Waggon to Convey it to Watertown, under the care of Mr. Cushing.”

Richard Smith Diary

Jan. 1, 1776

“much was said upon that Part of it relative to disarming and securing the Tories in N Jersey and in case persons ordered to be Secured by Authority would not surrender, then to put them to Death. during this Debate Wilson moved that all Persons in the 13 United Colonies who would not sign the Association should be disarmed and several written Propositions were made about disarming, securing and destroying such Tories as resisted an Arrest ordered by the present Authority.”

Richard Smith Diary

Jan. 3, 1776

“Col. Nat Heard of the Minute Men at Woodbridge and Col. Warterbury of Connecticut are ordered to take each a large Body of their Men and meet at a Day agreed on in Queens County Long Island and there disarm the Tories and secure the Ringleaders who it is said are provided with Arms and Ammunition from the Asia Man of War.”

Richard Smith Diary

Jan. 4, 1776

“a Vessel or Two of War are now fitting out in Maryland on Acco’t of the Congress. I recd. from the Continental Treasury the 1000 Dollars lately advanced to our Com’ee of Safety for purchasing Arms for the Use of the Continental Troops raised here.”
Richard Smith Diary Jan. 5, 1776

“Our Secret Com’ee have sent to Europe for some able Engineers much wanted now in America.”

The President of Congress (John Hancock) to George Washington Jan. 6, 1776

“The French gentlemen are arrived and referred to the secret committee.”

Richard Smith Diary Jan. 9, 1776

“Several Members said that if a Foreign Force shall be sent here, they are willing to declare the Colonies in a State of Independent Sovereignty.”

Richard Smith Diary Jan. 10, 1776

“the Resolution for subduing the Tories on Queens County was now altered so that no Troops are to go from Connecticut. But Heard is to call on Ld. Stirling for 3 of his Companies.”

“Foreign Goods begin now to come in.”

Richard Smith Diary Jan. 11, 1776

“… a Proposition of Duane’s took Place implying that all who refuse to take the Continental Curr’y shall be treated as Enemies to their Country. A subsequent Resolution was voted out importing that the several Assemblies, Conventions and Committees of Safety shall take Care to put this Resolve in Execution.”

The President of Congress (John Hancock) to the New York Convention Jan. 12, 1776

“To counteract their designs, and prevent this calamity, the Congress have resolved to employ nine battalions, the present year, for the defence of Canada.”

Thomas Lynch to George Washington Jan. 16, 1776

“our President assures me he has sent you the determination of Congress concerning the
Trial of Captures. Courts of Admiralty have been appointed in the Colony for that purpose.”

Lynch also mentions the number of battalions raised in the different colonies and the amount of powder sent to George Washington.

The President of Congress (John Hancock) to the New Hampshire Convention  Jan. 20, 1776

“There the money for defraying the expence of the battalion will be forwarded by your delegate with all dispatch.”

“… the battalion is to consist of eight companies, each company of a captain, two lieutenants, one ensign, four sergeants, four corporals, a drum and fife and 76 privates. The staff officers, a surgeon, a quarter master, an adjutant and a chaplain for every two battalions with the pay of 33 1/3 dollars.”

The New York Delegates to the New York Committee of Safety  Jan. 27, 1776

“The Congress this day receiv’d a letter from General Lee apprizing us of his intended march into New York, in obedience to orders from General Washington:…”

“… and that you thought such a Measure dangerous to the Lives of the Inhabitants, and, in other Respects, unseasonable;…”

The President of Congress (John Hancock) to George Washington  Jan. 29, 1776

“The Congress highly approve your sending general Lee to the assistance of New York as a measure judicious and necessary…”

Richard Smith Diary  Jan. 29, 1776

“a Report was made on the Inlistment of Apprentices and Debtors, objected to and recommitted.”
Oliver Wolcott to Samuel Lyman  
Feb. 3, 1776

“The Congress have Resolved that after the first of next March they will carry on Trade with every Nation and People, except England, Ireland, the british West India; etc…”

Thomas Nelson, Jr. to Thomas Jefferson  
Feb. 4, 1776

The letter is about Washington sending Lee to New York and the New York Committee of Safety objecting to this:

“The letter and remonstrance being read, a violent debate arose, on one side as to the propriety of an armed force from one province entering another without permission of the civil power of that province, or without express orders of Congress.”

John Penn to Thomas Person  
Feb. 14, 1776

“It will be necessary to keep up a certain number of Battalions in the Southern Colonies, to be ready to prevent our enemies from landing and penetrating into the Country.”

“The consequence of making alliances is perhaps a total separation with Britain…”

James Duane to the New York Convention  
Feb. 25, 1776

Congress appears to be worried that New Yorkers are not doing enough for their own defense:

“Apprehensive that you might be distressed to maintain the Army now in our Capital, from the lowness of your Finances, we thought it advisable to obtain a warrant in your favour for 35000 Dollars; which Mr. Lewis receiv’d and will deliver you.”

Richard Smith Diary  
Feb. 29, 1776

“by a former Resolve Trade opens Tomorrow under the Restrictions of the Association.”
The Secret Committee to Silas Deane

March 1, 1776

These are instructions to Silas Deane to ship goods to France and acquire “from France certain articles suitable for the Indians.”

The Committee of Secret Correspondence to Silas Deane

March 2, 1776

This is a certificate confirming that Silas Deane “is appointed by us to go into France, there to transact such Business, commercial and political, as we have committed to his Care, in Behalf and by Authority of the Congress of the thirteen united Colonies.”

The Committee of Secret Correspondence to Silas Deane

March 3, 1776

Instructions to Silas Deane to approach “Monsieur de Vergennes, ministre des affaires étrangère” and ask him for a “quantity of arms and ammunition.”

“… if we should, as there is a great appearance we shall, come to a total separation from Great Britain, France would be looked upon as the power whose friendship it would be fittest for us to obtain and cultivate.”

Richard Smith Diary

Mar. 13, 1776

“R. Morris informed Congress that a Tender was sent from New York to cruise at our Capes; whereupon it was agreed that our Marine Committee should purchase for the Continent a Maryland armed Brig now at Philada. and send her immed’y to fight the Tender and to keep this Matter secret for the present.”

William Hooper to Joseph Trumbull

Mar. 13, 1776

(Lord Howe and General Amherst): “It is said that they have instructions to bring about a negociation with the several assemblies of the provinces, nay to condescend to treat with
Counties, Towns... but to avoid if possible any Correspondence with the continental Congress, lest by any act of theirs they should recognize the legality of that body. We are told however that rather than return re infecta they are to make propositions to the Continental Congress.”

Richard Smith Diary  
Mar. 14, 1776

“much Time was spent in a Resolution to disarm the Tories generally.”

The President of Congress to Colonels Shea, Magaw, Irvine, and Dayton  
Mar. 14, 1776

“The state of New York Requiring an immediate Reinforcement, I have it in Command from Congress to direct you immediately to march your Battalion to New York, and put yourself under the Commanding officer of the Continental Troops there.”

Richard Smith Diary  
Mar. 19, 1776

“Johnson threw out for Consideration the Propriety of establishing a Board of Treasury, a War Office, a Board of Public Accounts and other Boards to consist of Gent’n not Members of Congress.”

Joseph Hewes to Samuel Johnston  
Mar. 20, 1776

“Several Merchants and others have petitioned Congress for leave to fit out privateers to Cruize against British Vessels. It was granted yesterday.”

The Maryland Delegates to the Maryland Council of Safety  
Mar. 20, 1776

“Powder ia an article that cannot be purchased in this City. Mr. Johnson had a sum of Money lodged in his Hands by Col Hollingsworth of Cecil County to purchase a small Q’ty of powder for that County, the Money being raised by Subscription for that Purpose. This he could not accomplish; and at the pressing Instance of that C’ty, We procured from Congress 5 Barrels, which is sent down.”
Robert Morris to Horatio Gates  
Apr. 6, 1776

“We are plagued for hard Money to support the Warr in that Country (Canada) and must by some Means or other bring them to take our paper.”

“Where the plague are these Commissioners… It is time we should be on a certainty and know positively whether the liberties of America can be established and secured by reconciliation, or whether we must totally renounce connection with Great Britain and fight our way to a total independence.”

The Maryland Delegates to the Maryland Council of Safety  
Apr. 12, 1776

“There having been an Arrival of Powder lately on account of the Congress We… borrowed a Ton and shall send it to Chester Town to wait your Order in the distribution thereof. Every other Colony has been supplied from the Continental Magazine and this was spared to us without Hesitation.”

The President of Congress to Israel Putnam  
Apr. 16, 1776

Washington is moving the greatest part of his Continental Army to New York and Congress tells Putnam to discharge the whole or part of his Militia of New York and Connecticut which are in the pay of the Continent and also discharge the whole of the New Jersey Militia.

The President of Congress to the Maryland Council of Safety  
Apr. 16, 1776

And the Baltimore Committee (two separate letters)

Congress orders the seizure of Governor Eden, who carries “on a dangerous Correspondence with the Ministry of Great Britain” and “one Alexander Ross … represented as a dangerous Partisan of the British Administration…”
John Adams to James Warren

Apr. 16, 1776

“You say the Sigh’s for Independence are universal… As to the Sighs, what are they after? Independence? Have We not been independent these twelve Months, wanting Three days?”

“Have you seen the Privateering Resolves? Are not these Independence enough for my beloved Constituents? Have you seen the Resolves for opening our Ports to all Nations? Are these Independence enough? What more would you have?”

The President of Congress (John Hancock) to George Washington

Apr. 23, 1776

Apparently the Canadians are not cooperating as expected which “makes it necessary that the most vigorous Measures should be adopted, as well to defend our Troops against the Canadians themselves, as to insure Success to the Expedition. The Congress being determined on the Reduction of Quebec and the Security of that Country, for Reasons to obvious to be mentioned, have left Nothing undone, which can any Ways contribute to that End.”

John Adams to Mrs. Adams

Apr. 28, 1776

Adams refers to the success of the Admiral and his fleet: “I have vanity enough to take to myself a share in the merit of the American navy.” It is remarkable that an actively fighting Navy was established before Independence.

The President of Congress to Esek Hopkins

May 7, 1776

“The Congress… agreed to lend twenty of the heaviest cannon taken at Providence and carried to Rhode Island, to the Committee of Safety of Pennsylvania, for the defence of this city,…”
William Floyd to John McKesson  
May 9, 1776

“I think it cannot be long before our Provincial Congress will think it necessary to take up some more stable form of Government than what is now Exercised in that provence. The two Carolinas have done it, and Virginea I expect will soon do the same.”

James Duane to John Jay  
May 11, 1776

“A Resolution has passed a Committee of the whole Congress, recommending it to the Colonies to assume all the powers of government. It waits only for a preface and will then be ushered into the world.”

The President of Congress (John Hancock) to Joseph Trumbull  
May 11, 1776

Congress deals with details like barrels of pork for General Schuyler’s troops and compensation for a “Rvd. Mr. Leonard.”

And in the following letter:

Samuel Adams to James Warren  
May 12, 1776

“It was agreed that the Troops in Boston should be augmented to 6000.”

And:

The President of Congress (John Hancock) to George Washington  
May 13, 1776

“I have delivered in Charge to Captn. Lenox and Co. four Hundred Thousand Dollars, contained in six Boxes, for the Use of the Troops in New York, and Massachusetts Bay.”

The following two letters point to a Declaration of Independence in the near future:

John Adams to James Warren  
May 15, 1776

Stephen Hopkins to the Governor of Rhode Island (Nicholas Cooke)  
May 15, 1776
The President of Congress (John Hancock) to George Washington  
May 16, 1776

Congress requests Washington’s appearance in Philadelphia: “… that you will repair to Philada. as soon as you can conveniently, in order to consult with Congress, upon such Measures as may be necessary for the carrying on the ensuing Campaign.”

John Adams to Mrs. Adams  
May 17, 1776

“Great Britain has at last driven America to the last step, a complete separation from her; a total absolute independence, not only of her Parliament, but of her crown, for such is the amount of the resolve of the 15th.”

Carter Braxton to Landon Carter  
May 17, 1776

“… to convey you a very important declaration and recommendation from the Congress, which you will say falls little short of Independence.”

“The assumption of Governt. was necessary and to that resolution little objection was made…”

Joseph Hewes to James Iredell  
May 1, 1776

“We resolve to raise regiments, resolve to make Cannon, resolve to make and import muskets, powder and cloathing, but it is a melancholy fact that near half our men, Cannon, muskets, powder, cloathes, etc., is to be found nowhere but on paper.”

The President of Congress to John Thomas  
May 24, 1776

Congress seems to be determined not to give up Canada and will employ the resources of the other colonies to do so: “The Congress having tried every method to collect hard money for the Army in Canada, without success, are determined not to relinquish the expedition or give it up. They have therefore resolved to supply our troops there with provisions and clothing from the other Colonies…”
The New Hampshire Delegates to the President of New Hampshire

May 28, 1776

“The Convention of Virginia have instructed their Delegates… that Congress sho’d declare the United Colonies a Free independent state. North Carolina have signified the same desires, S. Carolina and Georgia will readily accede. The Proprietary Govnts will be the last to agree to this necessary step.”

William Whipple to John Langdon

June 2, 1776

(Are our Founding Fathers revolutionaries or elitists?)

“I think I mentioned to you in a former letter that I supposed there would be a considerable alteration in the wages of the officers in the naval services: the principal officers higher, and the warrant and petty officers considerably lower.”

Josiah Bartlett to John Langdon

June 3, 1776

“The Generals Washington, Gates, and Mifflin, are here, to consult on the operations of the war for this year. Congress have resolved that eight regiments of Militia… be forthwith raised and sent into Canada… I expect twenty-five thousand men more will be ordered to be raised for the same time for the defence of the sea-coasts from New Hampshire to Maryland inclusive.”

“If that can be done, I think the day will be our own, and we be forever delivered from British tyranny.”

John Adams to Patrick Henry

June 3, 1776

Adams writes about independence and “to form treaties with foreign powers.”

“The importance of an immediate application to the French court, is clear, and I am very much obliged to you for your hint of the route by the Mississippi.”
The President of Congress to the New Hampshire Convention, Assembly of Massachusetts Bay, Governor Trumbull, Convention of New York, Convention of New Jersey, Assembly of the Govt of New Castle Kent and Sussex on Delaware, Convention of Maryland June 4, 1776

This is a lengthy “call-to-arms” letter.

The President of Congress to George Washington June 14, 1776

Congress is establishing a War Office. They are dissatisfied with the “shameful Inactivity of our Fleet” and are calling Commodore Hopkins and Captains Saltonstal and Whipple to Philadelphia.

John Adams to Samuel Chase June 14, 1776

Our Founding Fathers quite apparently belonged to the elite: “I seconded the motion, with a trifling amendment, that the resolution should be, that no member of Congress should hold any office, civil or military, in the army or in the militia, under any government, old or new. This struck through the assembly like an electric shock, for every member was a governor, or general, or judge, or some mighty thing or other in the militia, or under the old government or some new one. This was so important a matter that it required consideration, and I have never heard another word about it.”

Josiah Bartlett to John Langdon June 17, 1776

“The affair of a Confederation of the Colonies is now unanimously agreed on by all the members of all the Colonies. A Committee of one from each Colony are to draw up the Articles of Confederation, or a Continental Constitution, which, when agreed on by the Congress, will be sent to be confirmed by the Legislatures of the several Colonies.”
John Adams to Horatio Gates  
June 18, 1776

“We have ordered you to the Post of Honour, and made you Dictator in Canada for Six Months, or at least until the first of October.”

John Adams to Zabdiel Adams  
June 21, 1776

“They (the British people) know that parliament have in effect declared us independent, and that we have acted thirteen months to all intent and purposes as if we were so.”

John Adams to Samuel Chase  
June 24, 1776

“A declaration of independence, confederation, and foreign alliances, in season, would have put a stop to that embarrassing opposition in Congress, which has occasioned us to do the work of the Lord deceitfully in Canada and elsewhere.”

William Whipple to John Langdon  
June 24, 1776

“Next Monday being the 1st of July, the grand question is to be debated, and I believe determined unanimously. May God unite our hearts in all things that tend to the well-being of the rising empire.”

Elbridge Gerry to Horatio Gates  
June 25, 1776

“… and Congress having yesterday passed resolves for capitally punishing spies that shall be found in or about any of the camps or fortifications of the United Colonies, and recommended to the Assemblies to make provision for punishing all inhabitants and other persons receiving protection in any of the Colonies, who shall be found affording aid or comfort to the King of Great Britain, or other enemies of the United States of America…”

Edward Rutledge to John Jay  
June 29, 1776

Rutledge’s elitism is clearly showing: “… in other Terms to say that these Colonies must
be subject to the Government of the Eastern Provinces. The Force of their Arms I hold exceeding
Cheap, but I confess I dread their overruling Influence in Council. I dread their low Cunning, and
those levelling principles which Men without Character and without Fortune in general possess,
which are so captivating to the lower Class of Mankind…”

Abraham Clark to Elias Dayton

July 4, 1776

Clark describes the misfortunes in Canada and General Howe’s threat to New York; but he is looking ahead:

“Our Congress Resolved to Declare the United Colonies Free and independent States. A
Declaration for this Purpose, I expect, will this day pass Congress, it is nearly gone through, after
which it will be Proclaimed with all the State and Solemnity circumstances will admit. It is gone
so far that we must now be a free independent State, or a Conquered Country…

I am among a Consistory of Kings as our Enemy says. I assure you Sir, Our Congress is an
August Assembly, and can they Support the Declaration now on the Anvil, they will be the
greatest Assembly on Earth.”
OVERALL CONCLUSION

There are no conclusive arguments which support the idea that the American War of Independence was a revolution. Even the proponents of this idea speak in terms of: “In no obvious sense was the American Revolution undertaken as a social revolution. No one, that is, deliberately worked for the destruction or even the substantial alteration of society as it had been known.” Bailyn’s students, Gordon S. Wood and Pauline Maier, agree with him. Of course, even if it was not undertaken as a social revolution, it could have turned into one during the prolonged fight for independence. The Founding Fathers made sure that this did not happen. Their enforcers, the Sons of Liberty, stayed in control of the “mob.” The concessions that were made to the people during the War of Independence were largely undone by the Constitution of 1787. Ambrose Bierce is a satirist and not a historian. However, his remarks on the American Revolution appear to be close to the historical facts: “Revolution, n. In politics, an abrupt change in the form of misgovernment. Specifically, in American history, the substitution of the rule of an Administration for that of a Ministry, whereby the welfare and the happiness of the people were advanced a full half-inch.”

The Founding Fathers were undoubtedly members of the colonial elite who found themselves in a struggle for a power that the early settlers had gained after arriving on the American continent. More or less, it was a struggle among equals, i.e. the Patriots or Whigs against the Loyalists in the colonies and the Tories in Great Britain. The more radical part of the Founding Fathers might have belonged to the second tier of their class, but their aspirations were upward. We know of Benjamin Franklin’s and George Washington’s attempts to be included in

224 Bailyn, 302.
the British upper classes. Their failure to gain entrance did not turn them into revolutionaries. However, the often open disdain that the British showed toward the colonials – especially during the French and Indian War – turned many of them against the British.

The struggle was for independence, and the correspondence of the delegates to the Continental Congress is the best evidence for this. It is also a clear indication that they were no revolutionaries. While some kind of independence was intended and established in the New England colonies from the beginning, a kind of self-government had evolved in most of the other colonies. The desire for independence varied among the colonies and the delegates; but in the end, the desire to maintain their positions of power made independence a necessity.

The wish to retain their positions of power, which made the fight for independence necessary, seems to have been the one common denominator for the elites in all of the colonies. The acts of Parliament after 1763 were rejected because they infringed on the power of the colonial assemblies. Their economic impact was mostly negligible. That was not true for the Proclamation of 1763 and the Navigation Acts. These threatened not only the personal wealth of the colonial elite but also, at least in the case of the Navigation Acts, their personal freedom. In this connection, the cases of the Lees, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson stand out; but they are by no means exceptions – even Benjamin Franklin was involved in land speculation. If the acts of Parliament after 1763 had little effect on the general populace, as Breen indicates, the Proclamation of 1763 had even less, according to Holton.

If the people showed some reaction to the Stamp Act, it was because it had a direct effect on everybody’s life. The Declaratory Act had very little effect on the general populace. Even the colonial elite took a while to realize that it threatened the power of their assemblies. Samuel
Adams’ reaction might have been delayed, but it was effective.

A representation in Parliament, on the same terms which applied to Englishmen, would not have had any effect on the American colonists – only about ten percent of the male white population could vote in any election. For the Founding Fathers, any representation in Parliament would have had very little effect on their fight for maintaining power in the colonies. On the contrary, it would have legitimized Parliament’s claim to have a right to interfere in all colonial decisions. The Patriots would have lost not only the power of their assemblies, they would have lost a powerful tool of propaganda against the British.

With the Continental Congress, as the only effective government in the colonies, running all administrative and military affairs, except in a few areas which were under the control of the British armed forces, the Patriots had an excellent chance to win their independence. However, without the early help of France and Spain, the American War of Independence could not have gained momentum and sustained the fight against the British. This fight was not an easy one for either side. The successes of the Patriots were few and never decisive – at least not before Yorktown. If the fight against the limited forces which the British deployed in North America was so arduous, it is easy to imagine a defeat of the Patriots against the full power of the British army and navy. With most of the British forces bound by the French, the Spaniards, and the League of Armed Neutrality in Europe, the West Indies, Central America, and other parts of the world, the main reasons for the success of the Patriots lie outside of the united colonies.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources


John Adams, Diary, August 29 to September 3, 1774.

John Adams, Diary, October 10, 1774.

John Adams to Joseph Hawley, November 25, 1775.

Deane, Silas to Mrs. Deane, September 7, 1775.


The Boston Port Act of March 31, 1774


The Charter of Massachusetts Bay: 1629

http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/mass03.asp (accessed May 19, 2011).

Circular Letter to the Colonial Legislatures, Massachusetts House of Representatives, February 11, 1768 S. Adams Writings 1:84—86.


The Declaration of Independence

The Declaratory Act, March 18, 1766.


The Mayflower Compact


The Olive Branch Petition, July 8, 1775.


The Townshend Revenue Act, June 29, 1767.


Washington, George to George Mason, April 5, 1769.


Secondary Sources

Books and Articles


Palfrey, John G. “Great Puritan Exodus To New England, Founding Of Boston 1630.”


**Internet Sources**

Bpb: Bundesarchiv fuer politische Bildung. „Revolution.“


Coming of the American Revolution. “Non-consumption and Non-importation.”


Natural Born Citizen – A Place to Ask Questions and Get the Right Answers: Benjamin F…


