

**Give Me Liberty, or Give Me a Refund: Colonial Newspapers and the Quest for  
American Liberty**

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

Substantiating how colonial ideals towards liberty and independence altered and by what means is the primary goal of this thesis. The colonial gazettes, in the period between 1765 and 1774, expressed new transitional ideas concerning government, religion, the economy, and a host of other social issues. These new views saturated the colonial world and aided in formulating new attitudes towards attainable liberty. Validating when the ideological transformation took place and why is the secondary goal of this thesis. The available gazettes will be examined in the following reactionary phases: the Stamp Act, the Townshend Duties, the Boston Massacre, the Boston Tea Party, and the Coercive Acts. The former events achieved widespread exposure from rebel authors, forcing those colonists exposed to the declaratory and persuasive literature to take stances on issues they might not have encountered were it not for the gazettes at their disposal.

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## **Preface**

The idea behind this thesis stems from that self-induced panic that many college students find themselves in when they begin to realize that what they know is not always what is right. I must admit, however, my years as a student have not been altogether devastating. Today I am able to interpret history as more than a series of random events and dates. As a historian, I am able to interpret history through a variety of lenses. Each one provides a new image of the past and the insights gained form an interpretive stance.

My particular subjective influences and my current status in the American social hierarchy force me to evaluate history from a Progressive standpoint. Progressive historians generally view history as the result of continual struggle between social and economic forces. Examples of struggle in American history are evident at all points of American life, past and present. At any given time in American history there were numerous formative social forces woven into the fabric of American lives, sometimes diametrically opposed and often times intermingled. The American Revolution is not the only example of a critical period of American history that witnessed social and economic forces of varying degrees vying for dominance, but it is such an intricate part of the American perspective that it must be studied in its true light.

The present study has a narrow focus on the role the media played in shaping the American Revolution, but the ramifications of the study have far reaching influences. This thesis will attempt to interpret the American Revolution in light of the domestic conflict between Patriot and Tory forces. Together these two distinctly

separate social and political groupings created a wave of ideas that crashed over the entire continent. Colonists did not just choose sides in this struggle; they chose between a lifestyle of subservience or independence. Both social movements created unique stances towards the colonial issue with England. Each group gained support by enlightening their audiences on the principles and justifications of their cause. The theory is similar to sales and advertising campaigns. If you have a product that you want to sell, then you will need to advance an idea of the item that distinguishes it as something necessary to consume. Today, the most suitable method of accomplishing such a feat is through a strategic media campaign; the accepted method during the Revolution was also the media.

Advertisers and printers/editors are on equal planes. One does not have to look far to find examples of editors attempting to influence public opinion for a variety of predetermined motives. The media disseminates information and those who choose to consume it receive stimuli that directly enable them to adapt to their changing society. It is no wonder that multi-million dollar media campaigns are planned for obscure items from shoes and clothing to social organizations such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD).

Patriot propagandists conducted their media campaign with predetermined motives that were quite similar to twenty-first century appeals.<sup>1</sup> In this context, the colonial media takes on great importance as an instrument capable of increasing knowledge and exerting influence. The basic tenet that an informed populace is less likely to submit to tyranny and oppression was an accepted belief among editors, printers, journalists, and men of letters, who formed the core of the Patriot

movement. In fact, the Patriot camp from the Stamp Act resistance to the formation of the American Republic established this belief as its credo.

The colonial newspaper was a viable source of information, amusement, and influence during the critical years between 1765 to 1774 –the beginning of Stamp Act protests to the first session of the Continental Congress in Philadelphia where the independence movement institutionalized. For this reason, historians must analyze the Patriot newspaper campaign of 1765 to 1774 with the goal of establishing the media as an instrument of influence in the larger social movement for American independence. The importance of such a discovery is phenomenal. If we can establish the media as an instrument of change in the eighteenth century, then we can begin to understand our present media situation and fear its possibilities. The literature of the Revolution is extensive, far too large for one study to examine. With this in mind, one vehicle, the colonial gazette, during the Revolutionary media campaign- which included the use of other vehicles such as pamphlets, broadsides, almanacs, public oratory, sermons, and children’s literature- will be examined.

Through research I hope to uncover the answer to three questions. Did the newspaper serve as an active instrument in the Revolutionary cause? Was the colonial newspaper a formative instrument? Finally, were the ideas disseminated felt by the public at large or were they originating from a small group looking for support? Each question is inter-related. For instance, if it the colonial newspaper was an active instrument in the Revolutionary cause then one must ask if the role was formative- capable of establishing change. If the newspaper takes on a formative role

then one would have to ask if the colonists' attitudes changed uniformly or if some colonists decided to accept the idea while others rejected it.

It is a well-known fact that Patriots and Tories existed together in Revolutionary America. They were two separate and unique social movements each with distinctly different ideologies. Equally true is the belief that when two movements with contrasting ideals and goals exist, there is generally a struggle. During struggles, the value of support is enormous. No movement can survive without assistance. The method of garnering that support, then, becomes an issue of similar importance. The media, past and present, constantly exerted a changing force in society. It is for this reason that historians should devote more time to the study of the media as an institution capable of facilitating change.

I wish to express thanks in advance to Dr. Martha Pallante, Dr. Donna DeBlasio, and Dr. Frederick Blue for their assistance. I also extend thanks to the fine history faculty of Youngstown State University for holding my attention year after year.

My family also deserves more credit than I can give in a sentence; but just the same, I would like to tell them thanks for the motivation and support. Finally, I would like to express thanks to my friend, Bethany Brooks, because her unique insights are present in this paper and my life.



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<sup>1</sup> The term Patriot will be used throughout this study to represent members of the anti-British social movement and of the movement itself.

## **Introduction**

The quest for liberty in late eighteenth-century America was no easy task. The American colonists did not awake from a deep slumber and suddenly realize that their world could not coexist with the external political and economic boundaries of their lives. Colonial society was too fragmented to experience an overnight ideological transformation. The conversion from dependency to independence was the byproduct of a slow transformation of colonial ideals that began in Jamestown and culminated in the formation of the American Republic. The evolution in attitudes and ideas is hard to trace because our colonial ancestors experienced numerous influences both internally as American colonists and externally as British subjects, but it is safe to say that the evolution was a linear progression. New ideas based on continuous experiences were the fuel, time and distance from England were the timber, and adverse imperial legislation was the spark.

Life in the colonial community revolved around intimate relationships of a provincial not a national character. Living in Massachusetts was not necessarily the same as living in Virginia, and the differences astounded those colonists who ventured from their principal localities. The common links between communities were their bonds to England, their bonds to the family unit, and their populations' intense desire to find a foothold in the New World. Evidence concerning the intimacy of the relationships within the family and to the king saturated colonial documents. Token phrases such as, "Your Humble Servant," "Your Obedient Servant," and "Faithfully Yours" were not mere lip service.

The American Revolution restructured the former bonds. The gradual ideological transformation that sparked the Revolution created new ideas and beliefs that developed into an American identity; the common tie to the king broke and new bonds formed. The final result was an American community that shed its provincial nature and assumed a national character.

The transformation was not all-encompassing; for many, it never occurred. According to one source, Loyalists accounted for twenty-percent of the colonial population.<sup>1</sup> Such figures are sketchy though, as only the Loyalists who left records or voiced their views would factor in. The people outside this realm were scarcely acknowledged. It is quite possible that the number of Loyalists in the British colonies was higher. Next, we should take into consideration that a portion of society remained neutral. The neutral element aligned itself better with the Loyalists' cause, after all, Revolutions need active resistance not passive obedience. The number game would render only a slim majority to the Patriot cause- making support a major issue.

A common-sense approach to the extensive media campaign of the Patriots in comparison to the sporadic arguments of the Loyalists draws forth a simple conclusion. The prolific Patriot media campaign was a necessity. Patriots needed support in order to increase momentum. Loyalists certainly felt secure in their principles. Obedience not rebellion, after all, was the only predictable choice of a civil society.

In colonial America, the newspaper was an active instrument for garnering support. Newspapers reached large numbers of people directly through subscriptions and other first-hand exposures and indirectly through second-hand exposures such as

public readings or word-of-mouth. Newspapers also exerted influence as an accepted instrument of advice. Today, it is easy to imagine a media vehicle influencing public opinion by one method or another. Hindsight, then, would predict the same patterns at any period of American life where a media vehicle existed. After all, today's media is the product of a linear professionalization that began with the earliest sources of information dissemination.

The study of the role of the media from a historical standpoint is in short supply but gaining ground. According to The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, there is a scarcity of mass media issues covered in college textbooks. Their study indicates low media coverage in the top selling and most respected American history textbooks available. David Stebenne argues that the recent emergence of the mass media as a formative force in society is one reason for such low coverage levels.<sup>2</sup>

A meaningful historical interpretation of the media/Revolutionary relationship must attempt to compare an animate colonial society with an inanimate media. Many historians refuse to elevate institutions such as the media above human life. That is unfortunate because institutions have a way of taking on a life of their own and the media is no exception. Every value, idea, and influence that is rejected dies but accepted ideas live on and can spread by second-hand exposure. The cycle itself is endless. An idea could die one thousand times before it is accepted, but it will always come back. To simply identify the media as a source of information from which a word-picture of the past is drawn leaves much to be desired. A thorough investigation must ask more than what was said; it must also ask who said it, why, and what were the ramifications.

World War One and World War Two were watersheds for scholarship concerning the media in society. The growing use of war propaganda from World War One to World War Two substantiated the media as an instrument capable of advancing a war effort and uplifting weary nations in both North America and Europe. The concerted media efforts of the nations at war, most notably the German propaganda machine of World War Two, produced both skeptics and supporters of the media in society. Americans witnessed with horror the realities of the war and the methods that the German, English, and American power structures employed in an attempt to hide the realities from their citizenry. Horrified onlookers became aware of how easily a nation can be duped through the media. The term propaganda itself surfaced from the war tarnished beyond repair. Propaganda, once thought to be a systematic attempt to persuade a body of people to accept a certain opinion or course of action, evolved into a term disparagingly identified as an onslaught of half-truths used to bias one's judgment.<sup>3</sup>

Phillip Davidson's study, *Propaganda and the American Revolution, 1763-1783*, published in 1941 is the direct result of his view of the media during World War Two.<sup>4</sup> His title leaves little to the imagination. The thesis revolves around the idea that the colonial media was an indispensable instrument capable of disseminating Patriot propaganda. Davidson's revolution is a radical one where ideals and opinions changed significantly producing drastic results. The Patriot press, controlled by a handful of vocal anti-British Whigs and Sons of Liberty members, kept the British government under a high powered microscope through their incessant attacks on ministerial and executive corruption. According to Davidson,

the media facilitated the movement for independence through the use of anti-British propaganda of varying sorts and degrees. Davidson's work substantiates his view of the colonial media as a source of both Patriot and Loyalist propaganda pitted against each other for control of the minds of the colonists.

Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., another Progressive scholar, also established the media as a dominant force in American history. His book, *Prelude to Independence: The Newspaper War on Britain, 1764-1776*, focuses on the media during reactionary phases of the Revolutionary period.<sup>5</sup> Schlesinger also adopts the term propaganda in his study. He attempts to rid the term of its World War heritage and make it more palatable by restoring it to its original meaning. Schlesinger states, "The press...instigated, catalyzed, and synthesized the many other forms of propaganda apparent in pre-Revolutionary American society."<sup>6</sup> Schlesinger's view of the colonial newspaper as a filter of the numerous forms of pre-Revolutionary propaganda is adapted to this study.

Both of these Progressive scholars portray the Revolution in radical terms. No sudden ideological change, like that exhibited prior to the Revolution, can be anything less than radical. Their Revolution was a notion that began in the minds of colonial merchants, assemblymen, lawyers, editors, printers, and journalists - who controlled the media both directly as in Boston and indirectly through various relationships- and evolved as they spread the spirit of liberty. Their Revolution was a top-down affair, where those who stood to lose and those who stood to gain influenced those who were at a loss to decide. Such a Revolution is full of economic,

political, and social overtones. The media, in both scholars' eyes, successfully filtered each overtone into a fertile environment and stimulated change.

The changing perspectives of American life after World War Two also produced a unique interpretive school of American history. The Neo-Conservative school sought to rewrite American history as a means of advancing national solidarity during a time when America found herself in position of increasing superiority. The Neo-Conservative school attempted to mold American history into a continuous development where the force of ideas and actions were unique, not because of their struggle for dominance, but because of their relative unity amongst Americans who experienced them. After all, a unified historical perspective would enable Americans to see their struggle for democracy and free-enterprise as a continuous development of American ideals. The Neo-Conservative contrasted with the Progressive stance by implanting a new view that maximized the continuity and unity of ideas.

Intellectual historians, such as Bernard Bailyn, saw the Revolution as the result of a gradual build-up of ideas and values that distanced each colonist from their subordinate position as colonialists. The media, according to Bailyn, served a dominant position during the Revolutionary campaign, but not as an impetus for change. Bailyn argues that the ideas disseminated by the media settled into an environment where the minds of those exposed to the messages already corresponded to their intent.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the media was not a formative institution; it was a mere reflection of the ideas already established in colonial society. Bailyn's revolution, then, was a unified movement based on the colonists' similar experiences

from Jamestown to Independence. In Bailyn's interpretation the media continues to be a primary source of historical understanding but as a mirror and not a spark.

Bailyn's contributions to the study of the colonial media are substantial. He edited two books, *The Press and the American Revolution* and *Pamphlets of the American Revolution*, that offer vast insights from a variety of scholars on the media/Revolutionary relationship.<sup>8</sup> Bailyn is also active in the American Antiquarian Society, which is dedicated to the preservation of the printed word. Established in 1812 by Isaiah Thomas, this organization seeks to collect and record printed records in "the strong belief that the influence of those who controlled the printed word were the persons crucial to the formation of a revolution within the minds of Americans."<sup>9</sup> The Society's credo oversteps Bailyn's short theoretical reach by highlighting the media as a source of change.

The impact of the "new social historians" on media/Revolutionary scholarship is still developing. The "new social historians" can aid the advancement of the media/Revolutionary relationship through a selective analysis of the influence of the media in various regions with differing political, economic, and social ties. One such book entitled, *This Popular Engine: New England Newspapers During the American Revolution, 1775-1789*, written by Carol Sue Humphrey, studies the role of the colonial media in New England after Independence. Humphrey claims that New England's newspapers served two roles: a means of persuasion and public policy formation and as an educator and entertainer. She also presents the Revolutionary period as the beginning of the professionalization of the American press.<sup>10</sup> In this



light, the advancements made by the press in colonial America were largely responsible for the mass media we depend on today.

Other significant historical investigations concerning the media in history include *A History of the News: From the Drum to the Satellite*, by Mitchell Stephens; and *The Significance of the Media in American History*, by James D. Startt and William David Sloan.<sup>11</sup> Stephens explores the evolution of the media from classical times while Startt and Sloan investigate the evolution of the American media from its dim beginnings in the seventeenth-century.<sup>12</sup>

Outside of the historical realm of interpretation there are numerous scholarly works concerning the media as an institution. The colonial newspaper is a topic that garners much scholarship in fields outside of history. Three books published at various points form the foundation for colonial newspaper research. The earliest source of documentation that is widely available is Isaiah Thomas' *History of Printing in America* (1810).<sup>13</sup> This fine work studies the history of the printed word in America throughout the Revolutionary period. Thomas' work is detailed and extensive. There is an abundance of information on the origins of colonial newspapers and those responsible for its growth. *The Growth of Newspapers in the United States* (1928) by William A. Dill, and *The Development of the Colonial Newspaper* (1944) by Sidney Kobre, round out the earliest contributions to the study of colonial newspapers.<sup>14</sup>

All three studies are unique because they were written from a journalistic perspective. Thomas himself was a staunch Patriot and publisher of the *Massachusetts Spy*, while Dill and Kobre's books are products of graduate work in

the journalism departments at the University of Kansas and Columbia University respectively. Each study offers something unique. Thomas' work compiles large biographies of the movers and shakers involved in the colonial press. Kobre details the origin of colonial newspapers by colony, provides rough circulation statistics, and even attempts to analyze the role of the newspaper as a social institution. Dill provides rough circulation and publication statistics.

Investigators wanting information on the character and content of the media during periods of American history should see *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media* by Edwin and Michael Emery, *Colonial American Newspapers: Character and Content* by David Copeland, *Newsletters to Newspapers: Eighteenth-Century Journalism*, by Donovan H. Bond, and *The Early American Press, 1690-1783*, by Wm. David Sloan and Julie Hedgepeth Williams.<sup>15</sup> Edwin and Michael Emery's book is in textbook format, offering a quick glimpse at specific media related issue in America. Copeland provides a glimpse at the character of the colonial news outside of the Revolutionary realm. Bond focuses on the media in both England and America and Sloan and Williams' book contains excellent chapters on the media in Revolutionary American from a historical perspective.

Secondary scholarship concerning the media/Revolutionary relationship is still relatively scarce considering the great importance of the topic. This study will attempt to add insight to the growing field of media scholarship by validating the Patriot's Revolutionary media campaign as a byproduct of the need for support, in which an instrument- the newspaper- served a crucial role. Intercolonial forces and

experiences are examined in first, with the intent to show the emerging strains on dependency. A brief synopsis of social movements will provide background and meaning to the Patriot's movement and substantiate support as the primary goal of their media onslaught. The final two chapters on the newspaper as an institution and as a facilitator of change will also aid the analysis by validating the colonial media as an organ capable of exerting influence and persuading non-believers to accept the cause of the larger social movement for independence.

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- <sup>1</sup> Kenneth S. Lynn, *A Divided People* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977): 3.
- <sup>2</sup> David Stebenne, Seth Rachlin, and Martha Fitzsimon, *Coverage of the Media in College Textbooks* (The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, 1992): 12.
- <sup>3</sup> Phillip Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution, 1763-1783* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1941); Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Prelude to Independence: The Newspaper War on Britain, 1764-1776* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958): xiii, and
- <sup>4</sup> Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution*
- <sup>5</sup> Schlesinger, *Prelude to Independence*.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.
- <sup>7</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967).
- <sup>8</sup> Bernard Bailyn and John B. Hench eds., *The Press and the American Revolution* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1980) also Bernard Bailyn and Jane N. Garrett, *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965).
- <sup>9</sup> Bailyn, *The Press and the American Revolution*: 1. Foreword written by Marcus A. McCorison.
- <sup>10</sup> Carol Sue Humphrey, "This Popular Engine:" *New England Newspapers during the American Revolution* (Newark: The University of Delaware Press, 1992).
- <sup>11</sup> Mitchell Stephens, *A History of the News: From the Drum to the Satellite* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1988); also James D. Startt and Wm. David Sloan eds., *The Significance of the Media in American History* (Northport: Vision Press, 1994).
- <sup>12</sup> Boston, *Publick Occurrences Both Foreign and Domestic*, 25 September, 1690. Only one issue published. Benjamin Harris- printer.
- <sup>13</sup> Isaiah Thomas, *History of Printing in America*, 2 vols. (1810; New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation).
- <sup>14</sup> William A. Dill, "The Growth of Newspapers in the United States," diss., University of Kansas, 1928 and Sidney Kobre, *The Development of the Colonial Newspaper* (1944; Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1960).
- <sup>15</sup> Edwin Emery and Michael Emery, *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media* 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1978); David A. Copeland, *Colonial American Newspapers: Character and Content* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997); Donavon H. Bond and W. Reynolds McLoed eds., *Newsletters to Newspapers: Eighteenth Century Journalism* (Morgantown: The School of Journalism, West Virginia University); Wm. David Sloan and Julie Hedgepeth Williams eds., *The Early American Press, 1690-1783*, The History of American Journalism No. I (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994).

## Chapter One

In order to understand the American Revolution one must take a glimpse back and attempt to explore the ideological baggage that colonists carried to the New World. Such an analysis is a monumental task. After all, the ideological heritage, or the fundamental influences and forces that shaped the gradual evolution of America, was a byproduct of numerous ideas and attitudes that saturated the colonial environment. The North American colonies were a melting pot of ethnicity, religion, and diverse political, economic, and social aspirations that exerted influences and directed action. The Revolution and the formation of the American Republic, then, were both more than reactions to imperial legislation. They were, however, the result of an evolution in ideas stimulated by a variety of influences that transformed colonial society. In order to understand how this occurred, one must look beyond the Revolutionary period and focus on the history of colonial society and the evolution of ideas and civilizations throughout the world. The American colonists did, after all, absorb domestic influences and carry diverse universal ideals with them to the New World.

The Revolutionary movement encapsulated years of dissimilar experiences and diversity in American thought that redirected into a loosely unified path. Certainly, English, Scottish, Irish, German, Dutch, and French immigrants all carried diverse intellectual baggage on their trip to the New World, and their views on how government and society should operate and intermingle definitely continued to shape American society long after they passed. New ideas saturated the colonial

environment and endowed our colonial ancestors with a dual sense of independence and equality. Distance from the mother country allowed each colonist to feel largely independent while colonial charters and loyalty to the king provided a sense of equality with their English brethren. The scenario seems odd at first glimpse, but by accepting the separate but equal scheme one can then understand how imperial taxes sparked a movement for liberty that changed the direction of world history for years to come.

Colonial society hosted a number of contradictory and cooperative forces woven into the fabric of colonial life. From Jamestown to Plymouth and beyond, new experiences both internal and external illuminated colonial life and transformed existing patterns of thought. Historians continue today to analyze whether economic, political, religious, or a variety of other social forces lent themselves to American society and which factored in most. In the process they have identified a myriad of conflicting and supportive viewpoints. The exchange of scholarly debate does yield the assumption that influences in colonial life were too numerous to quantify their exact relation to the formation of America's early Republican ideals. The historian, then, must accept that each force played a vital part in the ideological transformation that took place between 1607 and 1789. Several forces do stand out as vital elements of the colonial ideological evolution. Population density and distribution, economic variances amongst the colonies, education, religion, a growing regional awareness, and the Enlightenment were just a few of the forces that enabled new republican ideals to develop. All the former influences combined with each of the colonists' subjective viewpoints to mold new attitudes towards liberty, which were accelerated

by Patriot propagandists revamping of the classical heritage and the colonists' ancestral dignity.

Our earliest colonial ancestors brought traditional English beliefs and values to North America. The first Puritan settlers knew the importance of liberty amongst their co-religionists and feared God in accordance with most Englishmen. They had to struggle in order to survive. Distance from the mother country, hazardous living conditions, and vulnerability to attack were just a few experiences that the first colonists adjusted to in America. These hardships and others in colonial life sponsored a great evolution in the mindset of our ancestors. We should not let the disunity amongst the colonies themselves fool us because they were all alike in their character. The preservation of life and the protection of liberty were important to each colonist because they represented symbolic outgrowths of years of domestic and international influences. The need for liberty from coercion, that essential element of the English world, and the protection of life and property that stretches back to Hammurabi were our colonial ancestors' heritage as well.

America's earliest Puritan settlers migrated to America in an attempt to establish a community that embodied the libertarian and religious themes they had gradually lost in England. The New England colonies were a haven for Puritan immigrants. Over time the density of population in the North sparked innovative advancements commercially and socially. At the end of the colonial period 675,000 people inhabited New England. Rhode Island had 45 people to the square mile, Connecticut 39, Massachusetts 35, New Hampshire 8.7, and Maine 1.5 people per square mile.<sup>1</sup>

The dense population in the North sponsored the development of commercial relations and increased the dissemination of ideas. New England was a highly literate society. According to one study, literacy in New England rose from 60% in 1660 to 85% of male inhabitants by 1760.<sup>2</sup> By 1765 New England had eleven newspapers established in six urban centers, four in Boston, two in Portsmouth, one in both Providence and Newport, and one each in New Haven, New London, and Hartford.<sup>3</sup> The outgrowth of the newspaper in New England was a factor of both high literacy and commercialism in the urban centers.

The northern colonies of Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, and Delaware and the mid-Atlantic colonies of Maryland and Virginia differed from the predominantly Puritan New England. These colonies were a melting pot of ethnic and religious backgrounds. A variety of English, Dutch, French, German, and Scots/Irish natives ventured to the former colonies. Pennsylvania consisted of a majority of English Quakers and Germans. Benjamin Franklin indicated that Quakers and Germans accounted for a third of the 160,000 total inhabitants of Pennsylvania.<sup>4</sup> New York, on the other hand, consisted of a variety of ethnic strains. By 1790 the English constituted fifty-two percent of the population with Scottish and Irish at seven and eight percent respectively.<sup>5</sup> French, Dutch, Germans, Jews, and African Americans made up the remaining thirty-three percent. The population of New York reached approximately 100,000 by 1765. New Jersey contained roughly 80,000 in 1765 and Delaware reached an estimated population of 30,000 people by 1775.<sup>6</sup>

The northern and mid-Atlantic colonies included a mixed economy of agriculture, industry, and mercantilism. By the end of the Great War for Empire, new



fertile lands west of the Appalachians provided even more opportunity for agricultural advancements. Agriculture, however, was not the only means of economic stimulation. Industry in the mid-Atlantic colonies also sparked economic advancement. Pennsylvania alone contained several iron furnaces, an assortment of mills, glass factories, tanneries, and breweries to name just a few domestic industries.<sup>7</sup>

The southern colonies from Maryland to Georgia were primarily rural in population and agriculturally oriented. The South did not lend itself to urban development, as agriculture, not commercialism, formed the backbone of the economy. Virginia was the most populated American colony, but its density of population was relatively low. The South's total population at the time of the first federal census was 1,208,417 inhabitants, falling just short of the total population of 1,298,763 people north of the Mason-Dixon line. It should be noted, however, that the North's slave population only reached 57,000 while the slave population of the South was 482,700.<sup>8</sup>

The diversity in population density coincides with the diversity of American life. The northern colonies were thickly populated, with Rhode Island and Massachusetts reigning as the leaders in colonial population density; the county of Philadelphia contained the most people; New York was the largest city.<sup>9</sup> The dense population in the North and mid-Atlantic colonies advanced commercialism, which in turn sparked educational advancements, while the South's agriculturally-oriented population remained scattered, thus decreasing community efforts at education.

The establishment of Harvard in 1636 began the evolution of higher education in New England that resulted in four new colleges by 1770: Yale, Princeton, Brown, and Dartmouth. The College of William and Mary and Washington and Lee in Virginia, in addition to Pennsylvania and King's Colleges in Pennsylvania and New York rounded out the growth of institutions of higher learning before 1780.<sup>10</sup> Education was an important factor in increasing literacy and producing consumers of the colonial news media. Higher education also advanced new theories in divinity, politics, and society that stimulated the growth of American independence.

The density of population north of the Mason-Dixon line advanced the gradual ideological transformation in colonial society. Population density produces close relations among a variety of citizens from diverse backgrounds. The subsequent intermingling of assorted ethnic citizens spreads ideas more quickly than in an environment where the population is scattered. The bustle of city life stimulates the dissemination of ideas in many forms. Word of mouth is one method by which ideas spread; another means is through formal media institutions. For example, America's earliest newspapers appeared first in cities with relatively high populations. It was not an oddity that the first newspapers originated in urban centers. The urban centers were the first to receive news from overseas, as ports were generally close-by. In time, the urban centers surfaced as the focal points of the Revolutionary movement. The newspapers found in cities from Boston to Savannah disseminated ideas that stretched outward to the less populated areas. For instance, the Stamp Act resistance in Boston spread throughout the colonies as an example of proper resistance. A gentleman from Newport, Rhode Island wrote to a friend, in

Boston, that “in following the example of your people, we had gone beyond all bounds” in rejecting the Stamp Act.<sup>11</sup>

Granted the evolution of republican ideals was not a byproduct of life in the North alone, but the concentration of population fostered new themes. Scholars argue that the institution of slavery did a great deal to advance republican ideals in the South as well. One scholar, Edmund Morgan, states that the institution of slavery in Virginia gave both large and small plantation owners a unique perspective on power in society. Their way of life depended on subjugation and their general protection depended on the legislative constraints that kept the slaves tied to the plantation. What you had, then, was the forceful use of legislation in an attempt to safeguard the liberties of plantation owners. Small farm owners looked to large plantation owners for control of existing patterns of life, and large plantation owners looked to the small farmer for support at the polls. The resulting symbiotic relationship fostered a strange sense of equality where masters were equal in that they were not slaves.<sup>12</sup> In the South, then, republican ideals were the byproduct of self-serving associations that sought to preserve the master/slave relationship in an agricultural environment.

It is easy to see the diversity in colonial life. Population distribution, commercial affiliations and ethnic and religious differences all assisted in the development of separate colonial entities. The diversity of the British colonies was a prime factor behind the disunity inside the colonial structure. Seventeenth and eighteenth-century existence rested on communal affiliations. A regional awareness was not a mandatory aspect of survival. Pre-Revolutionary newspapers reflected the general lack of interest in national matters. Newspapers prior to the mid-eighteenth

century focused their attention in matters of local and imperial themes. Intercolonial news was not a high priority.

The landscape of colonial life included differences and similarities. Life in the North, with its densely populated cities, commercial centers, colleges, and newspapers stimulated the free-flow of information and sponsored the ideological transformation responsible for the growth of Revolution. Although life in the South did not lack advancements, both the North and the South contained representative institutions, displayed only minor religious restraints, were areas with ample opportunity, and displayed an intermingling of a variety of ethnic strains. The differences in colonial life were not as noticeable as the disunity amongst the British colonies, which was a factor of slow news travel and the lack of political and social affiliations. The general disinterest of Massachusetts' natives in the lifestyles of their Georgia brethren was not based on a distaste amongst the citizens. It was, however, based on a lack of news and social ties. In the span of roughly 150 years the colonies merged, based a great deal on an increase in commerce and a strengthening of social bonds between colonies. Commercialism advanced internal improvements like road building, which sped the travel of news through the post system. The former improvements combined with many others to increase the colonists' national awareness. This same national awareness stimulated the American Revolution.

The growth of regional news coverage in colonial newspapers corresponded with the growth of a national awareness amongst the colonies. From 1735 to 1744 regional coverage, according to a study of word symbol uses in American gazettes by Richard L. Merritt, peaked at 13.2% of total news. The same evaluation states that

during the Revolutionary period-- 1765 to 1775-- regional coverage increased to 34.3%. Merritt theorizes that a distinct American community awareness was an evident factor of the growing use of American word symbols in colonial newspapers. He believes that the evolution of the American community was complete by 1763.<sup>13</sup> The figures alone do not prove much, but we can speculate that a distinct American community awareness filtered throughout the colonies prior to the Revolution. In time, this awareness stimulated the break with England.

The difficulty of dating the emergence of the American community is substantial, but Merritt's date is arguably accurate. The end of the Great War for Empire in 1763 certainly produced a sense of ease in the colonies and the anticipation of life returning to normal conditions surely permeated colonial thought. One would expect a strengthening of the bonds to England after the cessation of hostilities with France, but the outcome was every bit the opposite of expectations. The war resulted in large deficits in both England and her colonies. The British Empire, in turn, instituted a series of legislative acts in the colonies with the goal of garnering revenue through taxation. Three successive acts of Parliament: the Sugar Act of 1764, the Stamp Act of 1765, and the Townshend Duties of 1767, sought revenue through imperial means. It is widely accepted that imperial taxation was the focal point of colonial resistance to imperial control. It is true that imperial taxes were key aspects of Revolutionary rhetoric, but taxes alone were not responsible for the final overt act of rebellion. Taxes only stimulated the movement for independence at a time when a distinct American community had already taken root.

At this point it is safe to examine a few underlying themes outside of the realm of colonial history that are valid when attempting to understand the American heritage. Civilizations throughout history have exhibited two unique qualities that are similar throughout the ages. The quest for liberty and the fight for equality are two forces that shaped our past and continue to mold our world today. Throughout the ages the march of liberty uncovered numerous predatorial forces that undermined the spirit of equality that all citizens strive for. The corrupting influence of power, the hoarding of property and wealth, and the growth of inequality have all succeeded in toppling empires from classical to modern times. Ironically the presence of dead empires linger long after their decline. Migration, trade, and war all spread ideas and allow the influence of dying civilizations to remain.

The evolution of society and the ideas inherent to them began with the earliest civilizations of Mesopotamia and spread throughout the Western world. In this light, the American heritage is a product of the continual evolution of society. Arnold Toynbee identifies the study of society as the fundamental aspect of history.<sup>14</sup> Toynbee's idea of universal history is adaptable to the understanding of American society because the American colonial heritage is more than a product of internal forces; it is also a result of external forces that span both time and space.

Historians often apply Charles Darwin's theories of natural selection to the evolution and continuation of society historically. Social Darwinism as a concept expounds the belief that societies evolve as forces inherent and unique to each struggle for dominance. In this light, we can begin to understand how and why the Assyrians conquered the Phoenicians, what forces led to the replacement of the

Greek empire by the Roman, and why America's colonial ties to England shattered over time. Social forces, in one form or another, are integral aspects of societies past and present and they continue to exert influence long after their objectives are met. This explains the continued evolution of the Constitution of the United States in regards to a variety of issues from territorial acquisitions to suffrage and civil rights.

When dealing with the dissemination, assimilation, and adaptation of ideas in society advanced Darwinian theories also apply. Adaptable ideas are continually chipping away at outdated values and beliefs. New ideas are formed when the experiences of life under accepted belief systems fail to adapt with the goals of society. The subsequent struggle is continual. New ideas replace old in a linear cycle, where the experiences of the past can always be drawn up when evaluating the predicaments of the present. The end result is a continual process of survival of the fittest where the fittest is constantly being replaced by stronger theories.

European and English influences combined with intercolonial experiences and stimulated the advancement of colonial society and colonial thought in a similar vein as the survival of the fittest theme previously discussed. English history alone is marked by numerous social and political revolutions that substantiated rebellions and mass mobilization as keys to societal change. In the thirteenth-century, English nobles rose in rebellion against the rising authority of the king. One substantial result of the rebellion was the codification of feudal liberties in the Magna Carta. The Magna Carta secured the belief that the relationship between king and vassal worked as a result of mutual rights and obligations between ruler and ruled. The document itself was a great step toward limiting the monarch's power. Patriot propagandists

would later use the Magna Carta as a source for their continued assaults against what they believed were arbitrary ministerial and executive powers.

We can credit the Stuarts for instigating a series of outrages that led to the peopling of America. Those Puritans who migrated to North America sought an escape from religious persecution and attempted to establish civil governments that protected the liberties of their co-religionists. The fears of ministerial authority and of popery were real to America's early emigrants. Puritans in New England established congregational churches, where the laity controlled the ministers, in an attempt to offset religious corruption. They also established charters that protected their representative form of government. Charters from New England to Virginia all protected the right of taxation by persons chosen among the community and established the entitlement to the same liberties that their English brethren enjoyed.<sup>15</sup> The theme of representation resurfaced in the Revolutionary period and provided a convincing political argument against imperial taxation.

The English Parliament was not nearly as representational as the colonial system of government. Ministers rarely spoke of regional matters. The colonial charters, on the other hand, established a new system of direct representation based on property rights and residence in the principal localities. Representatives were responsible for their regions. They took responsibility for taxing and making internal laws because they knew exactly what their constituents could afford or needed for their protection. The charter limitations on taxation later formed a source of justification for Patriot agitation throughout the Stamp Act and Towshend debates.



Religion also played a crucial role in European and colonial society. Puritan ideals in New England alone, which Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. identifies as the intellectual center of colonial America, ignited a wave of doubt and uncertainty.<sup>16</sup> Predestination taught that God pre-selected those who would attain salvation. Puritan ministers combined predestination with a belief in human depravity as a means to get their congregations to accept religion as salvation. The New Light theologians emotionally charged their audiences by conveying the full meaning of human depravity. They filled their sermons with condemnations of man and depicted the suffering that unrighteous souls would receive. The doctrine of human depravity, which flowered during the Great Awakening, proved essential to the Revolutionary cause because it led to a distrust of arbitrary power. The belief in the corruptibility of man accelerated fears of monarchical oppression and led to the formation of new political principles regarding attainable liberty.

The Enlightenment sponsored a further development of republican ideals in colonial society. The natural rights philosophies of Enlightenment thinkers found fertile ground in the colonies. From Newton to Locke, both the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment created an understanding of natural laws that dispelled the mystic and divinely ordained visions of life. Enlightenment thinkers attacked established institutions from despotic governments to slavery. According to Locke, “the natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth,” but that man consented to government in an attempt to bring order to a world lacking restraints. To Locke, any restraint that was not previously consented led to slavery.<sup>17</sup> In this light, monarchical power was not a sufficient restraint because the control of a

monarch was not representative. A truly representative government had to provide all affected by its control a proper voice. The aftershocks of Locke's ideas on government and Newton's world-machine rippled throughout colonial America. Colonists began to see that humanity's inalterable inadequacies could be contained by representative institutions and that order in the natural world was attainable through logic and reason.

It is easy to see the virtual revolution in seventeenth and eighteenth-century popular thought. New ideas on religion revamped popular piety and spread fears concerning the corruptibility of man, while Enlightenment ideals changed views on attainable liberty and sponsored natural rights as an essential goal of human nature. Colonial America absorbed and disseminated all these experiences. In time, domestic experiences and international influences fostered new views on society. The exact extent of the transformation is arguable. Scholars view the ideological transformation as either a united event or as the product of conflict amongst social forces.

According to Bernard Bailyn and Gordon S. Wood, the republicanization of American thought and the formation of American society were not overnight occurrences. The roots of Bailyn's ideological transformation were embedded in colonial life. Over time, the colonists' experiences fostered fears of a monarchical conspiracy-- nourished in corruption-- that forced oppression on the American colonial society. The Revolution, then, was a byproduct of years of influences and experiences. Unity and continuity were both factors behind the transformation. According to Wood, the ideological transformation arose due to a strange sense of republicanism that evolved in the American colonies. Wood believes that the

Revolution was not necessarily anti-monarchical; instead, he interprets it as pro-republican. The precipitates for the Revolution were a growing sense of republicanism based on an absence of a strong monarchical authority and a breakdown in the patriarchal and kinship ties in the family and governmental institutions. Both scholars differ slightly in their observance of forces responsible for the emergence of the republican ideals responsible for the emergence of the American community, but they agree on the united nature of the conversion.<sup>18</sup>

The belief in the Revolution as a unified ideological movement is steadily declining thanks to continued scholarship by revisionist historians. Progressive and New Left historians aid the study of the Revolution with their analysis of conflict amongst groups in American society. The “conflict” view of the Revolution is important because it expresses a closer relation to the realities of history. Morse Peckham, in his study of Victorian revolutionaries, states that “A culture is always in at least a mild state of crisis, for its values are never coherent and never adequate to meet the demands made on it from within and without.”<sup>19</sup> Such an interpretation of societies throughout history is easily supported and colonial life in American was no different.

Studies of the Revolutionary period as a conflict between social forces are easy to find. Phillip Davidson identifies the conflict in colonial America as a battle between social movements. Most notably, between Patriots and Tories who sought support through the colonial media. Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. explores the Revolution as an economic crisis where merchants ignited the populace in response to their own fears of burdening taxes. Alfred E. Young and a host of other New Left scholars take

the conflict view further by disputing Bailyn's ideological transformation and pitting class antagonisms as a major factor in the Revolutionary movement.<sup>20</sup> Their research together paints a picture of class friction where colonial elites stirred-up the populace in an attempt to better protect their interests.

According to Carl Becker, the Revolution restructured society in two phases. The first phase substantiated independence over subservience while the second sought to establish exactly who would rule at home.<sup>21</sup> Both phases were the result of social movements that held separate viewpoints on how to establish their goals. Tories accepted colonial subordination and a restructuring of imperial ties as the only means to revamp colonial life. They feared the uncertainty of independence seeking instead a strengthening of the ties to England. Patriots, on the other hand, willingly risked the disorder of Independence.<sup>22</sup> They forecasted their belief that natural rights and liberty could only be attained under a representative form of government. The struggle that ensued was a conflict in every sense of the word. Once the Patriots gained independence, a new phase of American history ensued. The Federalists slowly emerged as the victors and they brought with them a strong central government as the key to safeguarding the Republic.

The transformation from a dependent to an independent society was not a unified venture. In fact, the actual range of Patriot support is arguable. If the Patriot camp controlled a majority of the population it was only by a slim factor. Their incessant attacks on imperial legislation, monarchical conspiracies, and inevitable popery were all attempts to establish a foundation of support. They were not, as is generally accepted, representative of the fears of the larger population. They were,

however, the fears of a select group of men who knew how to voice their opposition. The agitation against imperial legislation emanated not from all colonists at once; rather, the pleas originated from a select group that sought to influence others by the weight of their arguments.

Patriot propagandists knew how to use history as a means to incite change. According to Bernard Bailyn, the most remarkable aspect of Revolutionary literature was its use of classical antiquity to support contemporary themes.<sup>23</sup> The Patriots defined the demise of democracy in Greece and the Republic in Rome as proof that corruption was a consistent aspect of history. It would seem at first glance that the use of classical themes in Revolutionary literature was a futile attempt to give the piece an aesthetic aura and increase the reputation of the author, but classical references served a purpose beyond self-gratification. The classical periods of human history provided the colonists with examples of power out of control; unchecked power that corrupted great civilizations like their own. Beyond a doubt, justification of the rebels' cause was the primary aim of revamping the classical heritage.

Patriot propagandists had access to a wealth of ideas that stimulated their fight against tyranny. Just a quick glance at the rhetoric and references of the Revolutionary literature would amaze most readers. Patriots used words such as "slavery" and "oppression" to express the reality of the designs of imperial taxation that pale in comparison to the taxes Americans today pay daily. The fear of ministerial and executive designs, of popery, and of the future of unchecked corruption were real fears based on the colonists' experiences with religion, the Enlightenment, and knowledge of the struggle for liberty throughout history. The

rhetoric of the Revolution itself lends support to such a theory, but the rhetoric alone should not be confused as all encompassing. The fear of corruptive designs certainly affected numerous colonists, but to say that there existed a unified fear of slavery, brought on by excessive taxation, is way off the mark. The use of rhetoric was a means to grab attention. Patriots used scare words in an attempt to persuade-- and it worked. So much so that historians today find the pre-Revolutionary rhetoric to be mere reflections, or word pictures, of the period. The fears of corruptive designs behind imperial legislation gained no more than a loose universal appeal and only when England boldly instituted successive legislation in the face of colonial apprehension.

Rhetoric was a tool used by Patriots to fuel their movement. They used the media as the principal disseminator of their ideas in a dual attempt to advance early reform measures and stimulate independence when the previous methods failed. Support was an essential element of their cause. Support always provides momentum for social movements and the Patriots' Revolutionary movement was every bit a social movement.

Charles T. Stewart identifies five stages in the development of a social movement.<sup>24</sup> The first stage is the genesis of an idea. In this stage, people begin to recognize certain inadequacies in their present social system and fear its impending possibilities. The colonial newspapers during the Stamp Act resistance demonstrated the genesis of the idea that unchecked imperial legislation could subject the colonists to a system of international slavery. Letters in the newspapers expressed fears

concerning the impending possibilities of unchecked ministerial authority and actively voiced opposition. One letter signed Northamptoniensis states:

Whoever has had the effrontery to assert that the Parliament of Great Britain can, or have constitutionally taxed America, and that America may have no right to oppose the Stamp Act, is an advocate for passive obedience, and an enemy to this country<sup>25</sup>

Northamptoniensis wrote this letter at the height of the Stamp Act resistance in April 1766. The letter offered no advice for what constituted active disobedience but the message still stands. Those colonists who chose to resist imperial legislation expressed the genesis of an idea that taxation from an external source was an unjust measure of authority.

Social unrest soon follows the genesis of an idea. During periods of social unrest the movement begins to organize and disseminate an ideology. During the Stamp Act resistance and the Townshend agitation, the Patriots successfully disseminated several ideologies. They justified their stance and voiced their concerns from political and legal perspectives. Patriots voiced concern that taxation without representation was unjust; that charter rights secured the colonial right to tax internally; and they condemned internal and external taxes, intent on revenue, that originated from an outside source. All were ideologies and all were attempts to pattern resistance.

The third and most volatile stage of a social movement is enthusiastic mobilization. The Stamp Act riots, the non-importation and exportation movements, the Boston Massacre, and the Boston Tea Party were all representative of the third stage of a social movement. The colonists who participated in these movements lost interest in institutional appeals and committed acts or rituals that expressed their

defiance of authority. According to one scholar, ritual expression in the form of protests can sponsor revolutions in the long term.<sup>26</sup> The rituals of the Revolution took many forms from the streets to the stage. Appeals in print were the norm in colonial newspapers:

AWAKE!- Awake my Countrymen, and by a regular & legal Opposition  
defeat the Designs of those who enslave us and our Posterity<sup>27</sup>

It is easy to read the urgency in such a request, but one might pass by the words “regular” and “legal” without much thought. Trueborn Sons of Liberty did not need to resort to mass violence. Regular and legal actions were the suitable means for recovery. However, not all letters appealed to the colonists’ sense of reason. Take for example the following letter printed in the *Boston Gazette* in 1765. “Rouse, then, my countrymen and let them know coercive means shall be used!”<sup>28</sup> The urgency in the appeal is similar to the former, but notice the use of the word “coercive.” It seems that this acidic letter called for a more express method of agitation other than that considered regular and legal.

The final stages of a social movement are maintenance and termination. During the maintenance stage the conservative element seeks to redirect the activities of splinter groups into a defined objective. The formation of the Committees of Correspondence was one measure of maintenance during the Revolutionary phase. The goal was to increase the movements’ momentum by increasing the national awareness of the problem. Each committee acted as a line of communication from colony to colony.

The Continental Congress of 1774 was the highlight of the maintenance stage of Revolutionary activity. Granted, independence was not the motive behind the



Congress. In fact, a majority of the delegates preferred reconciliation with England, but the institutionalization of the movement was essential to its survival. Congress symbolized the unity in the colonists' resolves and chartered the path to Independence once hostilities erupted in Concord and Lexington.

The final stage of a social movement results in a counter-revolution by conservative elements that fear the impending volatility of an inspired population. Thus, men like Samuel Adams used force to quench Shay's Rebellion and John Adams instituted Alien and Sedition laws that muzzled the Republican press. Both acts were in direct opposition to the goals of the Revolutionary movement that they previously sponsored.

Social movements must be organized in order to grow. The Patriots' Revolutionary movement was only loosely organized until 1772, with the establishment of the Committees of Correspondence. In addition, the movement lacked independence as an objective until late in the Revolutionary period and was instead a loosely organized movement with diverse and conflicting goals. These elements alone do not necessarily conflict with labeling the Patriots' movement as a social movement. Social movements rarely begin with objectives set in stone, and if they do they generally evolve throughout the existence of the movement. The Patriot leaders of the Revolutionary movement only sought independence once they exhausted all other possibilities. Independence was not the goal of the Patriots in 1765 but by 1776 it was the only option left. Such a transformation in ideals, like that witnessed in Revolutionary America, is typical of social movements.

The Patriots' Revolutionary movement, then, was a social movement that began as a loose collaboration amongst disaffected elites in the Stamp Act period. The movement grew as those who stood to lose and those who stood to gain influenced those who were at a loss to decide. Patriot propagandists justified their anti-imperial rhetoric by dusting off the past and advancing fears of corruption in light of the colonists own experiences with religion, politics, the natural rights principles of the Enlightenment, and universal history. The movement was not homogenous. Varying degrees of colonial influences and experiences facilitated the splintering of Revolutionary America. Patriot supporters only constituted a slim majority of the colonial population at best, so support was a major issue.

The colonial newspaper garnered Patriot support and as a result evolved into an instrument capable of inciting change. The newspaper successfully opened the lines of communication in colonial society and purveyed an appearance of unity in the Revolutionary resolves. The newspapers were an essential component of the movement. Without them the movement could not have gained the momentum it did in such a short time.

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- <sup>1</sup> Stella H. Sunderland, *Population Distribution in Colonial America* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1766): 36, 37.
- <sup>2</sup> Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1974): 13.
- <sup>3</sup> Carol Sue Humphrey, *"This Popular Engine:" New England Newspapers during the American Revolution, 1775-1789* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992): 20.
- <sup>4</sup> Benjamin Franklin, "Examination before the House of Commons," *Writings of Benjamin Franklin* vol. IV: 415-416. Reprinted in Evarts B. Greene and Virginia D. Harrington, *American Population Before the Federal Census of 1790* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1932): 116.
- <sup>5</sup> *Report of the Committee on Linguistic and National Stocks in the Population of the United States* (Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1931): 124. Reprinted in Sunderland, *Population Distribution in Colonial America*, 87.
- <sup>6</sup> Greene, *American Population Before the Federal Census of 1790*: 116, 91, 107, and 121.
- <sup>7</sup> Proud, *History of Pennsylvania* vol. II: 268. Reprinted in Sutherland, *Population Distribution in Colonial America*: 165-168.
- <sup>8</sup> Sunderland, *Population Distribution*, 271.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.
- <sup>10</sup> Nicholas Murray Butler, *Education in the United States* (New York: American Book Company, 1910) and Kobre, *The Development of the Colonial Newspaper*, 101.
- <sup>11</sup> Unsigned, *Boston Gazette*, 2 September 1765.
- <sup>12</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1975)
- <sup>13</sup> Richard L. Merritt, *Symbols of American Community* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).
- <sup>14</sup> Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947): 11.
- <sup>15</sup> Edmund S. Morgan ed., *Prologue to Revolution: Sources and Documents on the Stamp Act Crisis, 1764-1766* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1959): 44-69.
- <sup>16</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. and Morton White eds., *Paths of American Thought*
- <sup>17</sup> John Locke, *Of Civil Government: Two Treatises by John Locke* (London: JM Dent & Sons): 127.
- <sup>18</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967) and Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992).
- <sup>19</sup> Morse Peckham, *Victorian Revolutionaries: Speculations on Some Heroes of a Culture Crisis* (New York: George Braziller, 1970): 2.
- <sup>20</sup> Phillip Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution, 1763-1783* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1941), Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (New York, 1918), and Alfred E. Young, *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993).
- <sup>21</sup> Carl Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760-1776* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1909.)
- <sup>22</sup> Gary J. Kornblith and John M. Murrin, "The Making and Unmaking of the American Ruling Class," in Alfred E. Young, *Beyond the American Revolution*, 47.
- <sup>23</sup> Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* 23.
- <sup>24</sup> Charles T. Stewart, Craig Allen Smith, and Robert E. Denlan, Jr., *Persuasion and Social Movements* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press Inc., 1984): 37-42.
- <sup>25</sup> Northamptonensis, *Virginia Gazette* 4 April 1766.
- <sup>26</sup> Peter Shaw, *American Patriots and the Rituals of Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981): 228.
- <sup>27</sup> Letter signed B.W. *Boston Gazette*, 7 October 1765.
- <sup>28</sup> Unsigned, *Boston Gazette*, 28 October 1765.

## Chapter Two

The first colonial newspapers originated from obscure printing houses scattered throughout the colonies. At the time of the outbreak of hostilities in 1775 there were, according to Isaiah Thomas, fifty printing houses in the British colonies. Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1639 under the supervision of Stephen Daye, was the first colony to house a printing press. William Bradford, in Philadelphia, and William Nuthead, in Jamestown, both followed suit in 1685 and 1692 respectively. The first printing houses published sporadically. According to Thomas' list of ante-Revolutionary documents, almanacs, religious dissertations, sermons, and general laws and orders were the normal items printed.<sup>1</sup> Thomas' list of publications lacks complete validity, but it does offer a glimpse into what printers thought appropriate to publish and circulate. The brief background in Chapter One substantiates the former publications as vital to colonial survival, most notably the almanac, but religious and political dissertations were also important because they sponsored the further development of religion and kept the spirit of liberty alive. The scarcity of early publications was largely a factor of the shortage of presses, but by the turn of the eighteenth century publications increased as new presses appeared.

The first American gazette was not an enterprising venture. The *Journal of Publick Occurrences Both Foreign and Domestic*, published by Benjamin Harris in Boston in 1690, only appeared once before Governor Phipps of Massachusetts prohibited it due to Harris' failure to get prior approval for circulation. In 1704 another newspaper, entitled *The Boston News-Letter*, emerged in Boston, this time by the local postmaster, John Campbell, who managed to get prior approval and

succeeded in establishing the first steady newspaper in the British colonies. Within a span of seventy-one years (1704 to 1775) one newspaper increased to forty-eight. During this time, the gazettes emerged as a vital factor of colonial life and the news found within their pages exerted influence on those who read them.

The reasons for the rapid evolution of the colonial gazettes are found in several different areas. The growth of the colonial economy and population are two primary reasons behind the rise in newspapers. One would expect that as the economy and population increased, the need for news would also expand. Newspapers served the general needs of commerce and the public in a variety of ways through commercial ads, editorials, and sporadic letters covering a variety of interests. A colonist could pick up a gazette and find out what was recently imported, what was going on in England, and keep abreast of the activities and views of their neighbors. A letter in the *Providence Gazette* of 1765 attested to the value of the gazettes, “it is needless to speak of the general utility of a newspaper” to the “busy part of mankind as well as to the gentlemen of leisure and curiosity.”<sup>2</sup> Notice the two different demographics of consumers mentioned. The “busy part of mankind” surely referred to the variety of workers ranging from apprentices to mechanics found in the urban centers, while the men of “leisure and curiosity” referred to the gentlemen in colonial society who stimulated the intellectual and theoretical arguments found in Revolutionary America.

The gazettes were also useful to a population that could read, but might not have the time and money to invest in public schooling or supporting a library. In this sense, the newspapers took the place of educators. This theme is apparent in many

letters written to the editors of gazettes across the continent. For instance one gentleman wrote:

My favorite reading, ever since I could read, has been the newspaper, and to them I am indebted for all my knowledge, and the greatest part of my amusement<sup>3</sup>

Those colonists that read the gazettes never disputed the utility of newspapers.

However, not all colonists encouraged the media's enlightenment of the populace.

John Adams, writing about the inadequacies of cannon and feudal laws, stated that the populace "has been known, by the great, to be the temper of mankind, and they have laboured, in all ages, to wrest from the populace... the knowledge of their rights and wrongs."<sup>4</sup> The "great men" that Adams referred to were the equivalent of kings and ministers in Parliament and governors or other appointed officials in the colonies. These men worked diligently to obstruct the growth of the press, and many printers felt their influence throughout the early colonial period. One printer, John Zenger, tested the limitations of the governor of New York's control and won. The Zenger trial of 1735 was, perhaps, the greatest victory in the history of the colonial press. Zenger published, in his *New-York Gazette*, a series of articles attacking Governor William Cosby. Cosby issued a warrant for Zenger, claiming that the attacks were libelous. Under English common law printed truths, which Zenger claimed he printed, were still libelous. Fortunately for Zenger, a jury of his peers found him not guilty. Unfortunately, the case did not set a precedent, but it did serve as a victory for the press, one that many printers would use as justification for their attacks against Parliament during the Revolutionary period.<sup>5</sup>

The benefits of the colonial newspapers certainly outweighed the difficulty in publishing them, but not by a substantial margin. Printing in the British colonies was no easy task and the life of the colonial printer was far from illustrious. William Goddard and John Holt, printers of the *Providence Gazette, and Country Journal* and the *New-York Journal or General Advertiser* respectively, ended their lives in complete financial ruin due to their lifelong pursuit of a career in printing. Most printers took additional jobs to secure income. Benjamin Franklin and William Hunter, publisher of the *Virginia Gazette*, were both printers and served together as Postmaster General in the mid- eighteenth century. Other newspaper printers also took the position of postmaster in their respective towns. James Parker of the *New York Gazette*, John Holt of the *Connecticut Gazette*, and Peter Timothy of the *South Carolina Gazette* all served as postmasters during their stints as newspaper printers.<sup>6</sup> The position of postmaster was a useful office for a newspaper printer to hold. Postmasters received the mail first, so they were the first to see the internal news and word coming from abroad. Postmasters could also discriminate against other papers by disallowing circulation along routes that they controlled. Such control proved vital to the competitiveness of colonial papers.

Newspapers did manage to travel outside their principal points of origin despite adverse attempts by postmasters to limit the passage of rival papers. Benjamin Franklin, acting as Postmaster General, issued a statement regarding the movement of newspapers in the mid-eighteenth century:

...the News-Papers of the several Colonies on this Continent, heretofore permitted to be sent by the Post free of charge, are of late Years so much increased as to become extremely burthensome to the Riders...<sup>7</sup>

Newspapers circulated wide distances from their points of origin, so much so that they became a burden to the post riders who carried them. Franklin's quote is only a short excerpt from a longer decree that establishes a tax set at fifty and one hundred mile increments for papers traveling along the post roads. The necessity of setting up a tax at such large increments confirms the theory that newspapers traveled tremendous distances to subscribers outside the papers' principal points of exposure.

Taxes on circulation were only one element of cost that went into getting the newspaper from the printer to the consumer. Printers also faced difficulties in acquiring the necessities needed to operate their print shops. Printing presses alone had extremely large price tags and printers had to import them from England, which meant that they faced additional taxes. By 1769, Isaac Doolittle successfully produced and sold the first American printing press in New Haven, Connecticut.<sup>8</sup> Doolittle's press solved the importation problem that printers faced during the non-importation movements of the late Revolutionary movement. Once hostilities erupted, importation from England ceased, making acquiring presses virtually impossible. There was, then, a substantial need for American press foundries. Two foundries later emerged in Philadelphia and Hartford, alleviating the difficulty of acquiring presses after 1775.<sup>9</sup>

Typeface was another costly aspect of printing. The type was extremely burdensome because, unlike printing presses, when type wore down it had to be replaced. Printers always imported typefaces from overseas, but by 1772 Christopher Sower established the first American typeface foundry.<sup>10</sup> Again, non-importation of European goods, most notably English goods, limited the availability of type after



Townshend. The importance behind the domestic production of paper and ink also increased with the non-importation movements. Paper and ink were both generally imported, but by the eve of Revolution, printers began producing their own ink out of lampblack and flaxseed or linseed oils. Domestic production of paper increased as early as the Stamp Act period, when Parliament applied taxes to imported papers, and especially after paper remained on the list of taxables during Townshend. Colonial paper mills needed clean, white, linen rags and plenty of fresh water in order to make paper. Ads often appeared in the gazettes looking for possible linen donations and offering monetary payments. Printing mills emerged throughout the Revolutionary period and by 1810, according to the calculations of one source, there were 195 mills in the United States.<sup>11</sup>

Broken presses, worn out typefaces, or the unavailability of ink rarely stopped the presses, but lack of paper often perplexed many printers. Other aspects of the printing process that slowed the presses were lack of news and labor shortages. News traveled slowly in the colonies, due to inadequate internal road systems and sporadic inclement weather that made these roads impassable. Labor shortages also produced printing problems. Apprentices were not easy to find or easy to keep. Long terms of service and hard work kept many suitable apprentices from indenturing under a printer. Those who did enter the printing profession usually indentured themselves from anywhere between one to more than ten years of service. Once the apprentices fulfilled their obligations they often went on to run their own print shops or produce their own newspaper. According to one study, of the forty-nine printers' known to have indentured themselves, thirty-seven served indentures in Boston or under

someone from the Boston circle of printers.<sup>12</sup> What exists, then, is a tight network of printers originating from the seed bed of printing in Boston and filtering outwards. The ties stimulated the flow of information and aided those printers who found themselves in times of trouble. Printers often shared, lent, rented, or sold various implements from presses to typefaces and few frowned upon the sharing of news articles that rampantly occurred.

The newspapers that did manage to make it through the difficult printing process were not all that bad. They ranged from one to two sheets folded in half. The normal newspaper produced was a single sheet folded in half lengthwise with print on each of its four sides. It is a rarity to actually get a chance to view an original gazette, since most are copied to microfilm. If you were to hold an original colonial gazette in your hands you could find a number of differences between the newspapers of today and those of the eighteenth-century. The paper used in the eighteenth-century was thicker than today's standards. The heavy feel resembles the thickness of a piece of manila artist's paper. The size of the gazettes also pale in comparison to today's bulky papers. Their height was about two-thirds the height of today's and their width was approximately half. One could fold a colonial newspaper and stuff it into a pocket or satchel with relative ease.

Aside from the general look, feel, and portability of the gazette, its contents also varied from today's standards. Print ranged in size and style from colony to colony. Printers used an assortment of typefaces so each newspaper generally varied in its outer appearance. One similarity amongst the gazettes was their use of a variety of printing techniques. Words that needed emphasis always jumped off the page due

to the use of stylization. Words like SLAVERY and Oppression rarely appeared in lower case or without their first letters capitalized. Other times a word might be *italicized* or **BOLDFACED**, depending on the printer. Certainly, emphasis was the goal behind such methods of stylization and it worked. One can easily look at a page in the colonial gazettes, during the Revolutionary period, and find a word like SLAVERY and follow it into a vitriolic response to imperial legislation, corruption of power, or other adverse themes that effected colonial liberty.

Colonial newspapers were not as readable as their twenty-first century counterparts. Often times, it is difficult to decipher where one idea ends and another begins. Columns often held more than one idea without definite separations or headings. Printers did not always use titles to identify new topics, so the reader must be extremely careful. There were no eye-catching headlines or emotion arousing pictures. In fact, the repeal of the Stamp Act and the Townshend Duties and the Boston Massacre and Tea Party were often delegated to second, third, and fourth page news in a variety of gazettes. There was generally no reliability behind news placement in the colonial gazettes. Ads were found on all of the four pages. Sometimes, due to a lack of news, the papers carried mainly ads with just a sprinkling of news, giving the paper an appearance similar to a commercial rag. Despite the haphazard placement of news topics, one can expect to find some aspect of imperial, national, or local news in almost every paper published during the Revolutionary period.

The gazettes did stand out when printers properly mixed commercial with social and political news. The adequate mixture of news topics was usually the norm,

making the gazette an informative and persuasive medium. The dual role of the newspaper as both an informative/persuasive and amusing medium made it easier to read than the more learned political and social arguments often found in pamphlets. Any colonist who read the gazettes could find brief news bits from London, find out the latest items imported, and get an idea of the current issues they and their neighbors faced. The commercial quality of the newspapers, with its abundance of advertisements, enabled the printers to pay for their paper's circulation and gave consumers an idea of what goods were to be had and where they could be found. Prior to Revolutionary agitation, the commercial component was the gazettes' most noticeable quality. This certainly kept circulation small and delegated to the urban centers, but as time passed and the colonial ties to England reached a critical juncture, the editorial quality of the newspapers increased. During the Revolutionary movement, colonists outside the urban centers also looked to the gazettes as a medium of information capable of keeping them abreast of the daily events in the city. A country gentleman reflected on the importance of the newspaper during critical times:

I live in the Country, and am a constant Reader of your Paper, and I with my Neighbors and others, were more generally dispos'd to read the Prints; especially at a Season when so much is to be seen relating to the true Nature of English Liberty.<sup>13</sup>

Philoletes, the author of the passage, was a country gentleman, separated from the bustle of city life in Boston, yet he and his neighbors read the *Boston Gazette* during the Stamp Act crisis. Philoletes did state that he was a constant reader of the paper, but he also implied that during times of crisis his neighbors and others were more apt to read. The passage advances two points. That colonists read the papers more during

times of trouble in an attempt to stay informed and that the gazettes circulated beyond their original points of publication. After all, country gentlemen were not always directly involved in the commercial legislation directed at the port cities, but they were interested in obtaining information on obstacles to colonial liberties, something that they would always have a stake in.

Common sense warrants the conclusion that newspaper readership increases during times of trouble, but circulation statistics can provide evidence that supports the theory. For instance, it is not enough to say that the colonists read the papers, one also needs to exhibit exposure levels. Circulation figures roughly correspond to direct exposures; unfortunately second-hand exposure are not as easy to estimate. According to William A. Dill, the average circulation of a newspaper in 1775 reached 485.4. However, the *Boston News-Letter* had approximately 300 readers as early as 1704 and the *Boston Spy*, published by Isaiah Thomas, claimed 3,000 readers during the same time-frame studied by Dill.<sup>14</sup> Judging from the above quotes, it is easy to see that Dill's figure is sketchy. Although, for the purpose of this essay the use of Dill's figure, rounded down to 485, will allow a few approximate circulation calculations based on population in the urban centers.

On the eve of Revolution, the British colonies' population reached an estimated 2,803,000.<sup>15</sup> According to a census taken in 1777, Boston estimated that 2,664 white males lived within her boundaries. Taking the circulation figure of 485, by one newspaper, in a town with a white male population of 2,664 yields an approximate figure of eighteen percent. What this figure means is that one newspaper, in a town with four Patriot gazettes by 1775, had a circulation large

enough to reach eighteen percent of the population responsible for voting. Such a figure seems low, but when you consider that there were three other Patriot newspapers in Boston, and if you take into consideration the possibility that one paper passed through several different hands, the figure increases significantly.

An earlier census in South Carolina estimated that a total of 5000 to 6000 whites lived in the city of Charleston.<sup>16</sup> Taking the higher estimate of 6000 yields a lower percentage of eight percent of the total white population exposed-- based on the same calculations as before. Granted, the percentage is low, but it is an exposure level based on all whites in Charleston, including women and children who did not constitute the voting public. Again, there were two Patriot gazettes in Charleston during the Revolutionary period, and second-hand exposures are difficult to quantify, so the possibility of the percentage actually peaking at a much higher plateau is substantial. The former estimates are rough, but they substantiate the belief that the gazettes had a circulation large enough to reach a substantial portion of the voting public. Since towns often had more than one gazette and these papers possibly passed through several different hands or were read at public meetings, taverns, and the town-square, then the percentage of the population actually exposed probably surpassed the former figures. What this all proves is that a large percentage of the population came into contact with the gazettes. These same papers grew increasingly persuasive, during the Revolutionary period, so what you have is a large percentage of the voting population exposed to a medium intent on gaining their support.

Next, we must gain an idea of what printers printed during the period of Revolutionary resistance between 1765 and 1774. According to William Kobre,

there were thirty-nine Patriot and twenty-nine Tory papers published in the colonies between 1765 and 1783. (Thirty Patriot papers in comparison to twelve Tory papers circulated during the period studied here.) Of the thirty-nine Patriot gazettes, at least nine had a continuous publication for a period of twenty years prior to the Stamp Act, while only two Tory papers met the same qualifications. Readership of the older papers, with an established subscription list, certainly either remained steady or increased during agitation, so it is possible that the Patriot papers with a long circulation history kept a substantial portion of their subscribers. Most of the Patriot papers emerged before the Stamp Act of 1765 and during or after the passage of the Townshend Duties of 1767. In fact, nine have publication dates starting between 1764 and 1768. It seems odd that the gazettes sprung up during a period when Parliament levied excessive taxes on imported paper, but the newspapers did emerge during this period despite the extra costs.

There was an abundance of Patriot gazettes (thirty) in comparison to Tory papers (twelve) in the colonies between 1765 and 1774. Such figures yield a simple conclusion. More Patriot papers circulated because colonists read them more than any other periodical, including those sponsored by Tory printers. After all, if the papers were not popular, then an increase in their numbers would not have occurred. Other evidence points to the popularity of the Patriot papers, Tory papers were often boycotted, and those printers who remained neutral often did so at the risk of their own lives or in the face of danger to their property by mob violence. The Revolutionary period called for active resistance not passive obedience and those colonists involved preferred the active stance of the Patriot papers compared to the

passive and neutral stances of the Tory press. A Tory in Boston surely believed the former sentiment when he stated:

The temper of the people may be surely learnt from that infamous paper (the *Boston Gazette*)... for if they (the colonists) are not in the temper of the writer at the time of publication, yet it is looked upon the ORACLE, and they soon bring their temper to it.<sup>17</sup>

According to Andrew Oliver, the author of the passage, Patriot gazettes exerted extreme influence on the minds of both active and neutral colonists, so much so that a single newspaper gained the label of an “oracle.”

Patriot printers stuffed their newspapers with a variety of attempts to gain support for their larger cause. The active resistance exerted by the newspaper printers and those who sent letters to be published raised many Tory eyebrows. New York’s lieutenant governor, Cadwallader Colden, complained that printers used “every falsehood that malice could invent to serve their purpose of exciting the People to disobedience of the Laws & to Sedition.”<sup>18</sup> Colden’s response was in regard to John Holt’s *New-York Gazette*, which was a paper that actively voiced Patriot concerns and supported the Patriot cause. John Hughes, a Stamp Agent ousted from Pennsylvania during the Stamp Act resistance, wrote:

...the printers in each Colony, almost without exception, stuffed their papers weekly...with the most *inflammatory pieces* that they could procure, and *excluded everything that tended to cool the minds of the people*<sup>19</sup>

No doubt, Hughes felt the pressure as a Stamp Distributor, but his view was correct. Patriot printers had editorial control and could exclude news that strayed from their viewpoints or that appeared neutral. They also printed and reprinted material collected from the posts that was not meant for public consumption. For example,



Hughes' letter was later found and republished in the *Pennsylvania Journal* 4 September 1766.

There should be no doubt that Patriot printers published everything within their means from the Stamp Act to the Declaration of Independence and beyond to support the forward momentum of the Revolutionary movement. Boston was the seed bed of the newspaper movement. Benjamin Edes' and John Gill's *Boston Gazette* and Isaiah Thomas' *Massachusetts Spy* were the most active papers during the Revolutionary period. The *Boston Gazette* served as the archetype for the gazettes that followed. News from Boston normally circulated from Edes and Gill's office on King Street, which was also the site of numerous meetings attended by the likes of Samuel Adams, John Adams, Thomas Hancock, James Otis, and others, where many of the opposition measures to imperial legislation originated.<sup>20</sup>

Outside of Boston, there were several newspapers that actively supported the Patriot cause throughout the entire Revolutionary movement. *The Pennsylvania Journal, and the Weekly Advertiser*, under the watchful eyes of William and Thomas Bradford, was second only to the *Boston Gazette* in its responses to imperial designs. Peter Timothy's *South Carolina Gazette* was also a strong advocate of Revolutionary principals. Other papers that remained loyal to the Revolutionary cause were: *The Providence Gazette, and Country Journal* (William Goddard- Providence), *The Maryland Gazette* (Jonas Green- Annapolis), *The Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon- Williamsburgh), *The Virginia Gazette* (William Rind- Williamsburgh), *The North Carolina Gazette* (James Davis- Newburn), *The Cape-Fear Mercury* (Wilmington), and *The South Carolina Gazette, and Country Journal* (Charles

Crouch- Charles Town). The former papers printed a variety of Patriotic items including learned discussions, political dissertations, editorials from other gazettes, and resolutions from town meetings and resolves of General Assemblies across the continent. Each paper differed in its consistency, but all dedicated themselves to the ideals of a good Patriot.

The opposition letters and editorial news from the active papers circulated to the more passive gazettes through a practice known as copying. News was and is today a vital component of the newspaper. During the Revolutionary period, news did not always travel in a timely manner. So printers, in an attempt to fill their newspapers, would clip excerpts from other gazettes and paste them in their own. This practice of copying filled the gaps left by slow-moving news and gave the gazettes a semblance of unity. The practice of copying was such a vital part of the colonial newspaper that Purdie felt it necessary to comment on it:

I take this opportunity to acquaint all my fellow printers that I shall expect them to send me their several news papers weekly, as they may expect the same piece of complacence from me.<sup>21</sup>

Purdie knew the importance of obtaining gazettes from other colonies. His plea was not an attempt at finding out what other printers were doing; it was a means of procuring news in an environment where information moved slowly. Examples of copying are abundant. For instance, the printers of the *Pennsylvania Journal* republished a letter on 24 October 1765 by B.W., from the 7 October 1765 issue of the *Boston Gazette*, and one can find in the *Virginia Gazette* of 25 October 1765, Governor Bernard's speech in reply to the Massachusetts' General Assembly's resolves, which Edes and Gill previously published in the *Boston Gazette* 30

September 1765. Examples of copying similar to the former are prevalent throughout the Revolutionary period. News of the Townshend Duties, which directly affected the urban port cities of the North, spread to the South in this manner, so much so that one Tory referred to it as “that dirty trade of copying.”<sup>22</sup>

The method of copying served two purposes. It gave the gazettes an aura of unity and it stimulated similar resistance efforts throughout the colonies. Printers often reprinted resolutions from general assemblies and instructions from town meetings as a measure of influencing their own subscribers in the proper resistance methods used outside their own colonies. Such techniques proved advantageous because they spread proper methods of resistance. Take for example the instructions from the town of Boston to their General Assembly members James Otis, Thomas Cushing, and Thomas Gray:

At a time when the British American Subjects are every where loudly complaining of arbitrary and unconstitutional Innovations, the Town of Boston cannot any longer remain silent.<sup>23</sup>

This brief excerpt is the first sentence of the instructions. It implies two direct themes: the citizens of Boston knew other citizens outside of Boston were “loudly complaining” about the inadequacies of the Stamp Act, and that Bostonians were going to follow suit. Bostonians knew that other colonists resisted the Stamp Act because the evidence was in the *Boston Gazette*. In fact, less than three weeks before Boston’s town meeting Edes and Gill republished the instructions given by the inhabitants of Providence to their General Assembly members.<sup>24</sup> Reprinting instructions and the subsequent resolves succeeded in stimulating similar acts of resistance. The fact that republication efforts influenced subscribers across the

continent is easy to prove. One only has to look at the resolves of the General Assemblies during the Stamp Act and Townshend debates in order to see the general similarities in wording and themes.

Another theme sponsored by copying was the appearance of widespread unrest regarding imperial taxation. Intercolonial news bits and republication of resistance measures provided every colonist exposed to them evidence of proper restraint. A colonist in the South, who opposed arbitrary imperial control, could thus see that his northern neighbors shared his belief. The resulting product, then, is an appearance of widespread dissatisfaction. However, the actual extent of the angst was certainly less all-encompassing, and one can be more certain that the examples forecasting the possible misery of imperial control originated from only a handful of pens. The result then was an appearance of unity, one capable of sponsoring a community awareness.

Patriot agitators stimulated news dissemination in a similar vein as newspaper printers. Writers often assumed several pen names and distributed their letters to different gazettes in an attempt to sponsor agitation in various locales. Many Patriot agitators used this method. In fact, Benjamin Franklin commented on the practice in a letter of his own:

These odd ways of presenting Matters to the publick View sometimes occasion them to be more read, talk'd of, and more attended to.<sup>25</sup>

Franklin's odd method of presenting information to the public was a premeditated attempt to influence opinion in different locales. His view, alone, substantiates the belief that rebel authors wanted to influence public opinion. If this were not the case,

Franklin certainly would not care if his ideas were read, talked of, or attended to by the general public.

The colonial newspapers stimulated an American community awareness in a way that no other instrument could. The gazettes' high circulation, low cost, readability, and ability to react increased the dissemination of republican principles in a way that other colonial media vehicles could not. The newspapers provided a short format that proved adaptable to a busy public, and their pages offered ample opportunity for men of letters to flaunt their prose. Their high circulation estimates substantiated the great importance of a gazette in communities both big and small, while the possibility of second-hand exposure rendered them completely invaluable. The printers of the Revolution and the gazettes themselves spread a web of information across the continent that succeeded in influencing a percentage of the population large enough to sponsor Revolution.

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- <sup>1</sup> Isaiah Thomas, *The History of Printing in America*, vol. I (1874; New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1971): 29-42.
- <sup>2</sup> Unsigned, *Providence Gazette*, 11 May 1765.
- <sup>3</sup> Papyrus Cursor, *Virginia Gazette*, (Purdie and Dixon) 2 April 1767.
- <sup>4</sup> John Adam, "A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Laws," *The John Adams Papers: Papers of John Adams*, Robert J. Taylor, eds. Vol I.
- <sup>5</sup> Mitchell Stephens, *A History of the News: From the Drum to the Satellite* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1988) 185-186.
- <sup>6</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, *Prelude to Independence: The Newspaper War on Britain, 1764-1776* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958): 54-55.
- <sup>7</sup> Francis G. Wallet, "The Impact of the Stamp Act on the Colonial Press," in Donavon H. Bond and W. Reynolds McLoed eds., *Newsletters to Newspapers: Eighteenth-Century Journalism* (Morgantown: The School of Journalism, West Virginia University): 153.
- <sup>8</sup> Carol Sue Humphrey, "*This Popular Engine: New England Newspapers during the American Revolution, 1775-1789*" (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992): 28.
- <sup>9</sup> Thomas, 35.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.
- <sup>12</sup> Humphrey, 47.
- <sup>13</sup> Philoletes, *Boston Gazette*, 11 November 1765.
- <sup>14</sup> Sidney Kobre, *The Development of the Colonial Newspaper* (1944; Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1960): 165.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 97 and Dill, 10.
- <sup>16</sup> Everts B. Greene and Virginia D. Harrington, *American Population Before the Federal Census of 1790* (New York: Columbia University, 1932):31, 178. Figures for Boston found on page 31, while Charleston figures are footnoted on page 178.
- <sup>17</sup> Letter of Andrew Oliver 11 May 1768. Thomas Hutchinson and Andrew Oliver, *Letters* (London:1774): 77. Reprinted in Schlesinger, *Prelude to Independence*, 97.
- <sup>18</sup> Cadwallader Colden, Letters to Seymour Conway, 23 September 1765. In "Colden Papers," New York Historical Society Collection X (1877): 33. Reprinted in Schlesinger, 72; and Mitchell Stephens, *A History of the News: From the Drum to the Satellite* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1988): 187.
- <sup>19</sup> John Hughes, John Hughes to the Commissioner of Stamps in London, 12 October 1765. Reprinted in Schlessinger, 76.
- <sup>20</sup> Thomas, *History of Printing in America*, vol. II, 53-56.
- <sup>21</sup> Purdie, *Virginia Gazette*, 4 March 1766.
- <sup>22</sup> Johathen Walts, Letter to Lionel Monckton, 23 January 1768, Massachusetts Historical Society *Collections* ser. 4, vol. X (1871): 600. Reprinted in Stephens, 90.
- <sup>23</sup> Instructions from the town of Boston to James Otis, Thomas Cushing, and James Gray, *Boston Gazette*, 23 September 1765.
- <sup>24</sup> Instructions given by the town of Providence, *Boston Gazette*, 19 August 1765.
- <sup>25</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin* vol. VI: 125, 137.

## Chapter Three

The most invaluable aspect of the newspaper war on England was the editorial control behind each issue. From the Stamp Act to the Coercive Acts, Patriot printers succeeded in maximizing anti-imperial rhetoric and minimizing the appearance of anything that tended to calm the growing passions of the American public. Editorial control, not freedom of the press, as many assume, was the key component of the newspaper's Revolutionary assault against England. Granted, Patriot printers adamantly supported freedom of the press, but only when it served their general interests. For instance, if a printer published a vitriolic, yet patriotic, letter and went to jail as a result, he would appeal to his rights to a free press. If a Tory wrote a rebuttal that decreased the weight of the argument, however, it probably would not appear in a later issue. Again, freedom of the press served as justification behind the elimination. The result, then, was a double-sided coin. On the one side was the printer's belief that he could publish anything he wanted, and on the other was his own subjective influence that determined what he printed.

In order to understand the controversy one must empathize with the attitudes colonists held concerning a free press. Freedom of the press was a vital component of colonial life. This was due to the virtual explosion of the press in the eighteenth century, and the growing realization that a free press served the interests of the populace. Newspapers alone, due to their wide circulation, weekly publication, and reactionary nature, forced colonists to read and think about topics that they might not have encountered were it not for the gazettes at their disposal. To the general public who valued the newspaper, freedom of the press virtually absolved a printer, as long

as that printer published news that educated his/her readers. Take for example the following extract of a letter in the *Boston Gazette*:

There is no Liberty in the Country, which is held more dear than that of the Press...Arbitrary ministers are enemies to this Liberty, because it has ever been a check on their Tyranny<sup>1</sup>

The colonial press was more than a simple carrier of ideas that served the general interests of its consumers; it also acted as a check against arbitrary power. In light of the passage, one can see that a press, exempt from the arbitrary control of ministers, served the general public because it protected their social, economic, and political interests. Such a press, however, is not always free. The colonial American gazettes in particular did not always contain every argument or rebuttal; rather, they were representative of the subjective influence of each printer.

Colonial minds understood freedom of the press as an ideal. In their eyes, the press was a disseminator of valued information and an instrument of influence when concerned with political matters. To these colonists, freedom of the press was a liberty that protected printers from government control. The issue involved a great deal of controversy in Revolutionary America because the topic of concern and the issues that interested the colonists most were increasingly anti-imperial. Printers on the other hand, valued a free press because it allowed them to publish the anti-imperial news bits and letters that their subscribers wanted, while it also enabled them to avoid printing anything that might extinguish the Revolutionary flame. Such an action is better labeled editorial control. Granted, Patriot printers did sporadically published a Tory appeal or rebuttal, but the general nature of the pieces chosen



tended to increase anti-imperial sentiments, due to their biased and often times haughty conclusions.

The extent of editorial control exhibited by newspaper printers throughout the Revolutionary campaign increased as the crisis between England and America heightened. The arguments of the late-Revolutionary period exhibited an abundance of independent thought and contained numerous appeals for action. Such rhetoric was not possible during Stamp Act resistance because tensions had not completely surfaced. The changing nature of news in the gazettes was also a product of the influence that each printer maintained over his paper. Patriot gazettes in the late-Revolutionary period were not indicative of the general attitudes of all colonists. The make-up of the papers was just an expression of the editorial control each printer enforced. After 1774, the Patriot gazettes expressed biases towards England in a manner unlike that of their earlier appeals, but this should not be confused as all-encompassing.

Not all colonists desired resistance, and many found parliamentary legislation justified. In the period between 1773 and 1783, eleven Tory papers emerged. Such an increase was the product of the same forces that enlarged the Patriot press between 1765 and 1768. Revolutionary sentiments saturated the colonies after Parliament passed the Coercive Acts, and Tory printers attempted to extinguish the Revolutionary flame by appealing to the reason of their subscribers. The late Tory resistance confirms that mixed views existed. Not every colonist saw the influx of imperial legislation as arbitrary. For many, their station in life demanded a due regard for submission.

The emergence of eleven Tory papers, at a time when Revolutionary sentiments were at their peak, proves that the American Revolution was not a unified movement. Patriot and Tory gazettes were both indicative of a struggle in the colonies and both demonstrated a need for support. Support was the goal behind both media campaigns. In time support leaned favorably to the Patriot side. As support grew, resistance measures changed from colonial petitions and non-importation movements to a variety of ritual expressions that stimulated independence as the sole measure capable of reestablishing colonial liberties.

The Patriot gazettes fueled the evolution of the Revolution because they consistently maintained a spirited dispute amongst the colonists that tended to merge with the predetermined goals behind the printer's editorial control. Printers like Benjamin Edes, Isaiah Thomas, Timothy Green, and William Bradford were all staunch Patriots. Edes, Thomas, and Bradford were members of the Sons of Liberty, a group known for maintaining connections amongst disaffected colonists, while Edes was a member of the Loyal Nine, a group in Boston that directed the Sons of Liberty. Their respective papers each displayed their general biases against England. The resulting product appealed to subscribers because the news found within them was controversial. Patriot printers won support by attacking Parliament and denouncing imperial legislation, which were both seen as obstacles in the path of liberty. Their victory enabled a loosely organized social movement to evolve. Winning the minds of the colonists was the first crucial step towards recognizing independence. Without an informed populace, the American Revolution would have failed completely. Patriot printers knew this, so they used their presses to combat

arbitrary power by educating the public on the issues at hand. From the Stamp Act to the Coercive Acts, the gazettes typified the influential nature of the press in a way unlike that of other printed materials because of their biased news content, reactionary nature, and continuous publication.

The Stamp Act, which Parliament approved on 22 March 1765 and became effective on 1 November 1765, was the first legislative effort intent on raising revenue for maintaining the economic and strategic characteristics of England's colonial enterprise. The Stamp Act attempted to raise revenue by taxing legal documents and other printed materials, which included the paper needed to print the gazettes. Parliament enforced the Act by appointing a Stamp Distributor in each of American colonies. The Distributor made sure that the official papers reached their destinations safely and that they were used in accordance with the Act. By the first of November, Parliament ordered colonial printers to use stamped paper for their gazettes, which in turn added additional costs to the paper's market price. Printers everywhere protested the Act by publishing their gazettes on unstamped paper or ceasing publication altogether. The *Providence Gazette* and the *Pennsylvania Journal* both quit printing their gazettes in protest to the Stamp Act. On 31 October 1765, William Bradford used a dark black border as an outline for his last *Pennsylvania Journal*. He also rewrote the subtitle as, "Expiring in Hopes of a Resurrection to LIFE AGAIN," which expressed his hopes of a parliamentary repeal of the Act.<sup>2</sup> Due to pressure from Bradford's subscribers, the *Pennsylvania Journal* reemerged a month later. William Goddard's *Providence Gazette* also ceased

publication before the Act went into effect. However, Goddard published one supplement on unstamped paper entitled *Vox Populi, Vox Dei* on 24 August 1765.<sup>3</sup>

The *Boston Gazette* printed an early notice that detailed the possibilities of a new tax as early as June 1764. The letter, forwarded from London, expressed the inability of “well wishers to America” to lower the proposed taxes on sugar and molasses and of the probability of a Stamp Tax passage if the colonies were unable to better tax themselves.<sup>4</sup> Within months, Edes and Gill began publishing letters that fueled the growing alarm in Boston:

I know not what measure Mr. G—nv—ls *political* genius may suggest *for the benefit of the colonies*: but I might whisper in his ear, that there are millions of British subjects in America who have a sense of liberty ... and have acquired as thorough a knowledge of the British constitution as he...<sup>5</sup>

The former quote was the end of an urgent letter published in September 1764, approximately six months before Parliament passed the Stamp Act. The quote exhibits two important qualities. It displays exactly how well informed the colonists were. The colonists knew of the probability of a Stamp Tax at least a year before its actual passage. The quote was also an early warning for two distinct sets of people, the colonists and Parliament. It urged the colonists to take note of a new legislative attempt that could possibly go against what they understood of the British constitution, while it also warned Parliament that any act that subverted English rights would garner strong resistance in the colonies.

The *Providence Gazette* of 11 May 1765, the only issue William Goddard printed during the Stamp Act resistance, reflected a similar resentment to the act in a satire:

Able Jockies give it as their Opinion, that the American Horses are of too mettlesome a breed to stand still under the Operation of Branding, and that whoever should attempt to apply a hot S to the Buttock, would be in no small Danger from their hind Legs; For faith one wittily, *Sure non but Asses will stand still to be branded.*<sup>6</sup>

The *Pennsylvania Gazette* reprinted the same satire on 5 September 1765. Such humorous anecdotes were a common component of Stamp Act resistance. One subscriber in Boston wrote a poem to Mr. Grenville:

To make us all slaves, now you've lost sir! the Hope,  
You've but to go hang yourself- We'll find the Rope.<sup>7</sup>

Both the satire and the poem mixed light-hearted comedy with intense predictions. Certainly all colonists knew the larger meaning behind the phrases “no small Danger from their hind Legs” and “We’ll find the Rope.” Both phrases expressed the likelihood of resistance and both denounced the Stamp Act.

Not all Stamp Act resistance was as light-hearted. An Independent Whig wrote a letter in Alexander Purdie’s *Virginia Gazette* that posed the probability of forceful resistance:

There are in North America above 200,000 men able to carry arms, and can it be imagined that they will tamely give up a privilege they derive from their ancestors, that of taxing themselves?<sup>8</sup>

The letter went on, “If we (Britons) fail to protect them (Americans) from oppression then they will naturally defend themselves.”<sup>9</sup> Expressions of retaliation were common themes throughout the Stamp Act resistance, but it was not the ideology of the movement. The ideology behind the Stamp Act resistance was not a hostile promise; it was, however, a natural extension of the rights that colonists felt they earned and controlled. Colonists felt that their colonial charters guaranteed the right to internally tax themselves and they also believed that the British constitution

entitled them to representation as a byproduct of taxation emanating from abroad. The ideology itself was based purely on legal priorities, a sound understanding of colonial charters, and a utopian vision of English rights. After all, tax-paying English citizens were not necessarily represented by their Parliamentary officials.

The legal and political nature of resistance to the Stamp Act was an outgrowth of the conservative intent of the movement itself, such appeals to Parliamentary reason were not the product of a mob. The principles of charter rights and denunciation of taxation without representation were learned arguments. They originated not on the street, but in the town meetings, the General Assemblies, and in the dens or studies of men of leisure. The ideas made it to the street through the publication efforts of colonial printers. The leadership of the resistance was small and the ideas originated from those affected most, printers, lawyers, and assemblymen. A Tory letter in Purdie's *Virginia Gazette*, referred to five writers and three printers who motivated Virginians in their resistance efforts. The fact that he identified only five writers confirms the limited extent of resistance leadership.

Patriot printers did, however, manage to increase the size and unity of resistance by printing the instructions of town members to the representatives in the various General Assemblies. Charter rights formed the cornerstone of many of the instructions printed, while the sub-theme of taxation and representation was also widespread. Other issues included the assertion belief that the Stamp Act went against the colonists' rights as Englishmen and other various vocal grievances towards Parliament for not hearing their pleas. The instructions from numerous towns appeared in gazettes local to their area and were also reprinted in those outside

their provinces. The subsequent resolves of the General Assemblies were also printed and reprinted. Each separate resolve appeared in a similar format and contained comparable views. The general similarities between each resolve certainly was a byproduct of the publication efforts of colonial printers, who used the instructions and the resolves as a means of increasing the solidarity of resistance.

The Virginia Resolves set the tone for solidarity:

...Any Person, who shall, by speaking or writing, assert or maintain, that any Person or Persons, other than the General Assembly of this Colony, have a Right or Power to impose or lay any Taxation on the people here, shall be deemed an Enemy to his Majesty's Colony.<sup>10</sup>

Notice the strict guidelines set forth in the resolve. Virginians maintained their charter rights to taxation, while denouncing Parliamentary rights to the same.

Granted, the resolve did not mention Parliament, but the words "Person or Persons" certainly referred to King and Parliament. One additional aspect of the resolve was loyalty. Virginians, despite the fact that they denounced Parliament's right to tax, still maintained their loyalty to England. This was a significant component of the Stamp Act resistance. The colonists were not asserting independent notions; they were merely proclaiming their rights as Englishmen.

The Stamp Act resistance began as a loosely organized collaboration between men of leisure and those exposed to their ideas. The movement culminated in the various resolves of each colony, which asserted the fundamental principles of the faction. The saturation of the gazettes with critical examinations of Parliament and the subsequent resolves succeeded in establishing an aura of unity behind the movement. However, not every colonist subscribed to the principles of resistance. In fact, many Tory arguments established subordination as the principal duty of a good

citizen, but they failed to win the minds of those colonists who feared the possibilities of unchecked power. On 18 March 1766, Parliament repealed the Stamp Act. Widespread grief turned to jubilation, as a hard fought victory appeared on the horizon. The victory, however, proved fleeting.

In July of 1766, Charles Townshend became the new Prime Minister of England. Shortly after taking office, he began work on a system of external taxation that would also raise revenue from trade. Townshend, and every other minister in Parliament, knew colonial views towards internal taxation, so they devised a method of taxing the colonies by applying duties to tea, glass, paper, painter's colors, and a variety of other imported goods. In order to ensure colonial compliance, Townshend set up a Customs Board in Boston, which monitored trade in the colonies and stood guard against smuggling. The American Board of Customs took control over the relations of all ports in America. Officials were appointed and regulated under the approval of Parliament, which directly undermined the autonomy of port officials and restricted their ability to shirk the Townshend Duties. The last and most important facet of the Townshend duties was the separation of royally-appointed executive and judicial officials from the legislative branches of colonial government. The Assemblies, prior to Townshend, paid the salaries of the executive and judicial officials, which gave them a small measure of control. However, Townshend subverted the Assemblies by paying appointed officials out of Parliaments' purse, thus limiting the power of the Assemblies over governors and judges and increasing Parliamentary control.



The methods of protest that flourished during the Stamp Act proved beneficial to the resistance efforts aimed at the Townshend Duties. The newspapers filled with new accounts of the repressive tendencies of Parliament. A letter signed Brittanus Americanus, found in the *Virginia Gazette*, adequately stated the concerns many colonists had with the Townshend Duties:

When you repealed the Stamp Act we were satisfied; content was in every heart, and every countenance was serene; and the tranquillity was undisturbed until we were impudently told to our faces what we are slow to believe, that it was your fixed determination to enslave us.<sup>11</sup>

Townshend, as implied by the former quote, established justification for colonial anxieties by inventing the duties that bore his name. He single-handedly proved to many, what only a few attempted to establish during the Stamp Act debates, that Parliamentary legislation was a predetermined effort aimed at establishing colonial subordination.

One author advanced the inconsistency of the Townshend Duties and the anxieties surrounding Parliamentary legislation more than all authors of anti-Stamp Act literature combined. John Dickinson's *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies*, was a compilation of twelve letters, published by David Hall and William Sellers of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, which appeared in book form and in newspapers throughout the colonies. Hall and Sellars began publishing Dickinson's *Letters* on 3 December 1767, while the *Pennsylvania Journal*, *Providence Gazette*, *Maryland Gazette*, and Rind's *Virginia Gazette* followed suit at intervals in December. Purdie's *Virginia Gazette* began its publication effort later in January 1768, with the *Boston Gazette* following suit a few weeks later.

Dickinson's *Letters* were clear and concise exposes of the authority of Parliament, the nature and imposition of taxes, the differences between internal and external taxes, proper methods of resistance, and the extent of the problem with England. Each letter appeared in the gazettes sequentially, and each followed the argument of its predecessor. Dickinson's *Letters* were the most informative pieces of literature during the Townshend debate. They formed the bulk of agitation and the manner in which Dickinson wrote appealed to men of all degrees.

Letter One dealt with the Parliament's suspension of New York's legislature in 1767. Dickinson expressed amazement that the move occurred without any resistance. According to Dickinson, the suspension of New York's legislature was an act aimed at destroying the liberties of not just New York, but of all the colonies combined because:

If parliament may lawfully deprive *New York* of any of *her* rights, it may deprive any, or all the other colonies of *their* rights; and nothing can possibly so much encourage such attempts, as a mutual inattention to the interests of each other.<sup>12</sup>

Dickinson feared that a general inattention to the interests of one colony by all the colonies combined could only lead to a subversion of the rights of all. Letter One established the need for a union amongst the colonies in order to safeguard colonial liberties.

Letter Two dealt specifically with the inconsistency of the Townshend Duties. According to Dickinson, the Duties were second to the Stamp Act in a series of legislation that broke taxing precedents, because all previous statutes identified taxes as a necessity of trade that produced order and proper intercourse between importer and exporter. The Stamp Act and the Townshend Duties were not mutually

beneficial because they took money from America and raised revenue in England alone. Previous legislation enacted towards trade combined the interests of both England and America, but the Stamp Act and Townshend Duties sought revenue only. Dickinson felt that taxes, set in motion for the sole purpose of raising revenue, were inconsistent with the nature of previous legislation, and as such, imposed upon the liberties of the colonists. Dickinson warned his countrymen of the impending doom and urged resistance:

If you ONCE admit, that *Great Britain* may lay duties upon her exportations to us, for the purpose of levying money on us only, she then will have nothing to do, but to lay those duties on the articles she prohibits us to manufacture- and the tragedy of *American* liberty is finished.<sup>13</sup>

The impending doom that Dickinson forecasted was a possibility if only one tax intent on revenue slipped through the cracks. He commended the Stamp Act protesters, but expressed amazement at the scarcity of similar resistance efforts aimed at Townshend. He lambasted those who ignored the Townshend Duties because they were external taxes, arguing that taxes applied to tea, glass, paper, and painter's colors were just as internal as the Stamp Act duties. This was because colonists could not manufacture the goods controlled by Townshend and were forced to import. The Duties were internal, then, because they were applied to necessities acquirable only through importation.

Not all of Dickinson's *Letters* dealt with Townshend alone. Letter Three was a rebuttal to those who did not share his thoughts:

Sorry I am to learn, that there are some few persons, who shake their heads with solemn motion, and pretend to wonder, what can be the meaning of these letters.<sup>14</sup>

The phrase “pretend to wonder” implied that no one truly doubted the intent behind the letters. Dickinson goes on in a latter passage and revealed that the real purpose of his letters was:

...to convince the people of these colonies, that they are at this moment exposed to the most imminent dangers; and to persuade them immediately, vigorously, and unanimously, to exert themselves, in the most firm, but most peaceable manner, for obtaining relief.<sup>15</sup>

Dickinson was a true Patriot. He cared immensely about the liberties that he and his countrymen enjoyed. His disdain over the Townshend Duties inspired the colonies in a way unlike that of his predecessors. His arguments were simply orchestrated and largely appealing. More importantly, he instilled in his countrymen the need to fight taxes at every corner and to do so as good citizens, not disloyal subjects. Dickinson succeeded in redirecting the ideology of resistance by stigmatizing all taxes intent on revenue.

Patriot printers made Dickinson’s *Letters* widely available. Generally, the public comments favored the author’s work, although there were a few who frowned upon the arguments. One response, written by a Citizen, that appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and later in the *Maryland Gazette* stated:

I am one of those who think the Public greatly obliged to you... The Importance of the Subject, and the Manner in which you have treated it, cannot but command our attention.<sup>16</sup>

The acceptance of Dickinson’s *Letters* was a result of their wide circulation. A number of gazettes published all the letters, while a few started late or ended the series early. The *Letters* appeared at a time when Townshend resistance had not blossomed, so printers willingly printed them as a means of stimulating debate. Printer’s publication efforts succeeded in spreading the *Letters* throughout the North

and the South. Republication efforts enabled Dickinson's *Letters* to connect the northern port cities, and the merchants found within them, with the southern farmers. The title itself suggests that Dickinson predetermined his target audience. It was important that he become a farmer in order to reach the agriculturally based South; it was also a ploy to symbolize the simplicity of his appeals.

The non-importation movements that began to appear in Boston and New York after 1768 were one example of unified movements that began to emerge after Dickinson published his *Letters*. The non-importation movements of the Townshend period were a vital component of colonial resistance, but in the end they proved cumbersome and difficult to enforce. The problem with non-importation was that the colonists depended on British goods in order to maintain their standard of living. The American colonies, were, after all, a dominion of England, and as such, they were responsible for importing England's manufactured goods and exporting the raw materials necessary to make those goods as well as other items not found in England. The American colonies were not a manufacturing entity. In fact, England regulated the colonies' manufacturing in order to insure importation levels. Colonists were not only unable to go without the goods listed on non-importation agreements, they were also unable to manufacture a variety of them. The inability to go without imports was a major obstacle in the path of non-importation.

One vital result of the non-importation agreements was that they sent a message to England, especially to the merchants whose livelihood depended on exporting manufactured items to America. These same merchants petitioned Parliament and were largely responsible for the repeal of the Townshend Duties on

all goods except tea. The non-importation movements in the North, especially in New England, New York, and Pennsylvania, during the years between 1767 and 1769 were largely responsible for frightening English merchants. During these years New York alone decreased her imports from 482,930 pounds to 74,918 pounds. Such commendable efforts did not continue throughout the entire non-importation movement, but they did help bring about repeal.<sup>17</sup>

Colonial merchants who failed to adhere to the non-importation agreements often did so at the risk of their lives and property. Mobs were an essential component of the non-importation movement because they exerted fear on merchants when reason failed. The colonial gazettes were also an active instrument for spreading the principles of non-importation. Printers could, and did, print the names of merchants who failed to comply, although such measures often backfired. John Mein, printer of the Tory *Chronicle* in Boston, printed the names of Patriot merchants who failed to adhere to the agreements. Mein reprinted Custom House import records that contained the names of many Patriot merchants who claimed to be the standard bearers of the movement. Mein published a total of fifty-five lists in his attempt to uncover the inconsistency of the agreements, but his method failed miserably. Mob violence nearly took his life and eventually drove him out of Boston. The irony of the outcome was indicative of the momentum of the resistance. Mein correctly identified traitors to the cause, but the mob hated informers, especially those that fingered Patriots.

Printers did not use their gazettes to actively support mob violence, but they only rarely spoke out against it. True Patriots did not have to resort to such measures

because they could use their reason and intelligence to overcome oppression. Mobs, however, were useful when reason failed, as with the case of Mein and later with the Boston Tea Party. Boston, due to the publicity caused by men like Edes and Gill and Isaiah Thomas, became the focal point of mob activity, but these men were not alone in their actions. Mob violence appeared throughout the colonies. It was, however, the actions of Bostonians that caused the most grief in Parliament.

Both the Boston Massacre and the Tea Party were mob activities, the former under no direction and the latter a supervised reaction. The Boston Massacre was an accident waiting to happen from the first day that Parliament quartered troops in Boston. For years, news of atrocities committed by quartered troops filtered out of Boston at an alarming rate. The “Journal of Occurrences,” printed in Boston and reprinted in the *Pennsylvania Journal* and the *New-York Journal* from late 1768 to the early months of 1769, detailed the disorderly and distasteful relations between soldiers and Bostonians:

The unhappy consequences of quartering troops in this town, daily visible in the profaness, sabbath breaking, drunkenness, and other debaucheries and immoralities, may lead us to conclude, that our enemies are waging war with the morals as well as the rights and privileges of our poor inhabitants.<sup>18</sup>

Fears that quartered troops would lower the moral base of the citizens of Boston formed the cornerstone of the reporting in the “Journal of Occurrences.” Examples of incidents that Bostonians endured were often used to express the difficulty of life in Boston:

A Married Lady of this Town was the other Evening, when passing from one House to another, taken hold of by a Soldier; who otherways behaved to her with great rudeness<sup>19</sup>

Much later a similar correspondence appeared in the *New-York Journal*:

A young woman...was stopped and very ill treated by some soldiers...  
another woman...who for daring to epostulate with the ruffians, received  
a stake from one of them...<sup>20</sup>

There were numerous examples of correspondence found in the “Journal of Occurrences” that bore similar experiences under familiar circumstances. Perhaps, the main problem with the Journal as a source of inquiry into the life of Bostonians, prior to the Boston Massacre, is its reliability. Thomas Hutchinson, the new Governor of Massachusetts in 1769, wrote, “Nine-tenths of what you read in the Journal of Occurrences in Boston is either absolutely false or grossly misrepresented.”<sup>21</sup> Hutchinson, as both Lieutenant Governor, under Bernard, and Governor, was a party to many of the disturbances in Boston, and he found that the “Journal of Occurrences” misrepresented facts in order to draw attention to the cruelties that Bostonians allegedly suffered. Hutchinson was certainly accurate in his opinion. The “Journal of Occurrences” was a ploy. Most of the news correspondence was unreliable. This is seen in the former quotes and the inability of the correspondent to name the women involved or the location of either event with any real accuracy. Such practices were uncommon reporting. In fact, names were commonly apparent in intercolonial and regional news bits.

Despite the unreliability of news bits filtering out of Boston, the correspondence did succeed in uniting colonists outside of New England, especially those colonists in the South, with a resistance effort spreading in the North. News of the Boston Massacre, which came primarily from Boston or sister cities like New York and Philadelphia, exhibited the cruelty of the incident in a manner that



decreased the responsibility of the mob and increased the culpability of the soldiers who discharged their weapons. Edes and Gill printed their *Boston Gazette*, of 12 March 1770, on paper with heavy black borders as a sign of mourning. Four coffins adorned page two with the initials of the deceased Samuel Gray, Samuel Maverick, James Caldwell, and Crispus Attacks. Correspondence reached the printing offices of other gazettes by late March and early April 1770. All news concerning the incident was vaguely similar. The phrase “fired upon the Inhabitants...without the least warning,” appeared in an article found in Holt’s *New York Journal* of 5 April 1770, with a similar reference in the *Pennsylvania Journal* the same day. The article went on and reiterated the absolute innocence of the mob by demonstrating the psychology of the troops quartered in Boston:

The Soldiers, ever since the fatal Day of their arrival, have treated us with an Insolence which discovered in them an early Prejudice against us, as being that rebellious People which our implacable Enemies had maliciously represented us to be.<sup>22</sup>

Patriots, in Boston, used the previous difficulties that they encountered and portrayed in the “Journal of Occurrences” as justification of the town’s innocence.

Accordingly, the story they disseminated was that it was the soldiers’ demeanor and bias that caused the incident, not a volatile mob. Not only did Bostonians succeed in disseminating their own story, they also successfully molded that story in a way to decrease criticism from neighboring Patriots.

Most printers failed to print the news of the Massacre. The *Virginia Gazettes* contained no immediate references, only excerpts of approval or disapproval in letters that appeared much later. One possible reason for the sporadic appearance of details concerning the Massacre south of Maryland is the time it took to receive the

news. The *New York Journal* and the *Pennsylvania Journal* both printed news of the Massacre on 5 April 1770, nearly a month after the incident. It is quite possible that by the time southern printers received word the incident had lost its urgent nature. After all, Parliament repealed the Townshend Duties on 12 April 1770, and printers throughout the continent knew of the debates months before. The sporadic coverage of the event was certainly due to its decreased importance, although Edes, Gill, and Thomas refused to let Bostonians forget the incident. The *Boston Gazette* continued their attack on the soldiers well into 1771. Samuel Adams published nine articles, under the pseudonym of Vindex, that concerned the soldiers' trials from December 1770 to January 1771. The bulk of the articles emphasized the mob's innocence and downplayed signs of a colonial conspiracy.

The repeal of the Townshend Duties carried with it a wave of calm that spanned the entire continent. The excitement in Boston slowly died to a point of alarming interest. John Adams wrote a journal entry that "The melodious Harmony...that seems to be restored greatly suprizes me."<sup>23</sup> Samuel Adams's hopes were greater than his cousin's, as he stated in 1772 that "All are not dead; and where there is a Spark of patriotick fire, we will enkindle it."<sup>24</sup> Adams's prophecy proved itself in December 1773. The Boston Tea Party symbolized that patriotic fire that Adams spoke of, while the tossing of the tea was the first overt act of rebellion.

The significance of the Boston Tea Party was immense. Not only were Bostonians acting out, they were also changing the course of the resistance movement. Previously, resistance centered on colonial rights as Englishmen. The Boston Tea Party was an overt and expensive act of rebellion. Bostonians who

participated were not doing so in an attempt to exert English rights; they did so in an attempt to exhibit their autonomy. Their refusal to accept the ministerial tea was a symbolic gesture; it was premeditated, directed, and controlled. As such, it was a ploy to raise the spirit of liberty to a new level. The Boston Tea Party was completely predictable. News concerning the arrival of the tea from the East India Company filtered out of Boston at a noticeable rate. Purdie and Dixon's *Virginia Gazette* of 23 December 1763 contained an account, found posted at all the ports of Boston in November, that urged Bostonians to refuse the tea:

That worst of Plagues, the detested Tea, shipped for this port by the East India Company, is now arrived in this harbor. The Hour of Destruction, or manly Opposition to the Machinations of Tyranny, stares you in the Face.<sup>25</sup>

The notice encouraged "manly opposition" and called upon colonists to rise in the "Hour of Destruction." Such phrasing predicted the possibility of open rebellion. So Virginians too, certainly knew the probability of some sort of active resistance in Boston.

Those colonists unaware of the open resistance in Boston found themselves well-aware of the repercussions as early as May 1774. The Coercive Acts were Parliament's response to the Tea Party. These Acts included orders that closed Boston's ports, dissolved their legislature, and outlawed town meetings. The Coercive Acts, since they applied only to Boston, proved that Parliament saw colonial resistance emanating solely from Boston. Parliament hoped that once Bostonians acquiesced, the other colonies would follow suit. Instead, the Acts significantly increased the resolves of the colonists, as Bostonians found themselves embroiled in a conflict that would change the course of American history.

The Coercive Acts failed in their primary intent to control Bostonians, but a secondary result proved invaluable to the momentum of the resistance movement. A letter, signed B.D. in the *Virginia Gazette*, touched on the unity that the Coercive Acts stimulated:

The Colonies will no doubt look upon the violent and arbitrary proceedings of the British Parliament, with regard to the Bostonians, as leveled at the liberty of America in general, and unite in their utmost endeavors by all means in their power to prevent the ruin they are threatened with.<sup>26</sup>

Another piece that originated from New York also established the Coercive Acts as the impetus for solidarity amongst the unaffected:

We can with great truth assure you, that many timid People in this City, who have interested themselves but very little in the Controversy with Great Britain, express the greatest Resentment and Indignation at the Conduct of the Ministry to your Town.<sup>27</sup>

Both excerpts significantly advanced solidarity as a result of the Coercive Acts, not as a factor behind their passage. The Coercive Acts leveled the liberties of Bostonians in a manner unlike that of previous legislation. The measures were severe and biased. Their irrational nature changed the controversy substantially.

Participants in town meetings began promoting the necessity of a strong union amongst the colonies. The urgency of the situation called for drastic measures. Citizens of Providence, Rhode Island took the first step by calling for a Grand Congress in mid May 1774. The citizens of Providence urged their representatives to:

...use their Influence, at the approaching session of the General Assembly of this Colony, for promoting a CONGRESS, as soon as may be, of the Representatives of the General Assemblies of the several colonies and Provinces of North America, for establishing the firmest Union...<sup>28</sup>

That town meeting on 17 May 1774 was the first open declaration for a congress in the United States. Subsequent resolves, from other colonies, all included the necessity of a Congress in solidifying the American continent. Holt published the resolves of the New York House of Representatives that stated a congress was “highly expedient and necessary.”<sup>29</sup> The colonies of Virginia and Maryland followed suit later in August.

The year 1774 was a transition point in the resistance movement. The Coercive Acts adequately proved to Patriots and those unconcerned that the ramblings of rebel authors and the fears they instilled were real. The Coercive Acts proved that subordination (i.e. slavery) was the true intent of Parliamentary legislation. Ironically, independence was still not on the minds of all the colonists; realistically, it was only a notion in a few minds. However, the first Continental Congress of 1774, despite its lack of independence as a goal, was the first step in institutionalizing a loose social movement. Those delegates involved may not have known the actual possibilities they controlled. In fact, a reemergence of non-importation coupled with non-exportation agreements secured a passive stance immediately. Passive resistance measures, however, did not derail the momentum of the movement, or exhibit a general positive attitude amongst the delegates. The delegates would later identify their pessimism in a statement to the American public:

...we think ourselves bound in duty to observe to you that the schemes agitated against these colonies have been so conducted, as to render it prudent, that you should extend your views to the most mournful events, and be in all respects prepared for every contingency.<sup>30</sup>

The passage related the hidden distress of the delegates and their belief that nothing short of the “most mournful events” could erase their troubles. Those mournful events followed within six months of this message. Lexington and Concord of April 1775 and the subsequent Declaration of Independence of July 1776 were both symbolic of the events and contingencies foreshadowed.

The general alarm of the colonists, in regard to the Coercive Acts, grew into anxiety during the Continental Congress. Anxiety stimulated solidarity. Newspapers across the continent displayed a general approval of Congress and urged colonists to follow its advice. The solidarity of the movement became so strong that individuals often found themselves stigmatized as un-patriotic. Thomas C. Williams, a New York native, found himself in a similar predicament in 1774. He warned his fellow countrymen that:

At a time when regard to the public welfare renders an examination of the character and conduct of an individual necessary, and every man is to be considered either as a friend or enemy to his country, care should be taken, that the opinion of the public be founded on truth.<sup>31</sup>

Williams went on, declaring that he would “implicitly obey the instructions of Congress.” Williams, and others, knew that a proper submission to Congress was a good sign of a true Patriot, because Congress symbolically represented resistance. Since townspeople elected their delegates, they virtually placed their fate in the hands of those chosen. Congress’s directives were to be followed with the utmost accuracy. The difference between the organization of the Continental Congress and

other organized forms of resistance rested in Congress' representative nature. The men chosen represented the interests of their constituents and the nation, and as such colonists looked upon them as leaders. The delegates were all men of modest means, intelligence, and good community standing. They were leaders in every sense of the word and they took the helm of American politics at a time when leaders were desperately needed.

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- <sup>1</sup> Unsigned, *Boston Gazette*, 10 June 1765.
- <sup>2</sup> *Pennsylvania Journal*, 31 October 1765.
- <sup>3</sup> *Vox Populi, Vox Dei (Providence Gazette)*, 24 August 1765.
- <sup>4</sup> "A letter from London," *Boston Gazette*, 11 June 1764.
- <sup>5</sup> Brittanus Americanus, *Boston Gazette*, 24 September 1764.
- <sup>6</sup> *Vox Populi, Vox Dei (Providence Gazette)*, 24 August 1765.
- <sup>7</sup> Bostoniensis, *Boston Gazette*, 2 December 1765.
- <sup>8</sup> Independent Whig, *Virginia Gazette (Purdie)*, 11 March 1766.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> Resolves of the Virginia House of Burgesses, *Boston Gazette*, 1 July 1765.
- <sup>11</sup> Brittanus Americanus, *Virginia Gazette (Purdie)*, 1 October 1767.
- <sup>12</sup> John Dickinson, *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies* (Philadelphia: David Hall and William Sellers, 1768) Reprinted in Paul Leicester Ford ed., *The Political Writings of John Dickinson, 1764-1774* (New York: De Capo Press, 1970): 311.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.
- <sup>16</sup> Citizen, *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 17 December 1767. *Maryland Gazette*, 7 January 1768.
- <sup>17</sup> Ford, *The Political Writings of John Dickinson*, 437.
- <sup>18</sup> "Journal of Occurrences," *Pennsylvania Journal*, 16 February 1769.
- <sup>19</sup> "Journal of Occurrences," *New York Journal*, 20 December 1768.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 June 1769.
- <sup>21</sup> Andrews, C.M., "Boston Merchants and the Non-Importation Movement," Colonial Society of Massachusetts, *Publications XIX*: 159-259. Reprinted in Phillip Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution, 1763-1783* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1941): 237.
- <sup>22</sup> *New York Journal*, 5 April 1770.
- <sup>23</sup> John Adams, 13 June 1771. Reprinted in *The Adams Papers: Diary and Autobiography of John Adams* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961): 35.
- <sup>24</sup> Samuel Adams, *Warren-Adams Letters*, Reprinted in Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution*, 5.
- <sup>25</sup> B.G., *Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon)*, 23 December 1773.
- <sup>26</sup> B.D., *Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon)*, 4 August 1774.
- <sup>27</sup> *Boston Gazette*, 23 May 1774.
- <sup>28</sup> *Boston Gazette*, 30 May 1774.
- <sup>29</sup> *New York Journal*, 30 June 1774.
- <sup>30</sup> "To the Inhabitants of the Colonies..." Reprinted in *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. II (Johnson Reprint Company, 1968): 101.
- <sup>31</sup> Thomas C. Williams, *New York Journal*, 1 December 1774.



## **Conclusion**

The American Revolution was more than a culmination of overt resistance to imperial legislation; it surpassed a constitutional crisis and it was not the byproduct of purely economic and political aspirations; it was, however, a social movement that succeeded in uniting a majority of the population behind a theory of American autonomy. The forces behind Revolutionary resistance were not characteristic of the period between 1765 and 1776 alone; they were apparent during all periods of early American life. Increased imperial legislation only accelerated the surfacing of an American consciousness; a consciousness that had already emerged prior to England's legislative onslaught.

The anti-imperial rhetoric found within colonial America's Revolutionary publications was not all-encompassing; in fact, many colonists failed to understand the complexity of the issue between England and America until the Coercive Acts spread a wave of discontent. The rhetoric of the American Revolution was not premeditated, because the totality of possibilities behind the ideas disseminated was never known. Patriot propagandists certainly did not know the power of the words and ideas that they circulated. They surely failed to recognize the possibility that America might never attain the ideals they spread. The tenets of liberty that they did disseminate, however, revamped the complacency that many colonists felt toward England and paved the road toward independence. The American Revolution, then, was the result of a movement directed by disaffected elites, who garnered the support of the unaffected by educating them on the seriousness of the situation. The most

suitable method for the Patriot camp to gain support was through a consistent media campaign, one which advanced anti-imperialism through the use of a stringent pattern of editorial control and gained the appearance of unity due to a tightly knit web of printers.

The forces of Revolution flourished throughout early American life. From Jamestown and beyond, the influences responsible for American independence altered the mindset of generations of British colonists. The resulting American consciousness was the byproduct of a number of factors. Distance from the mother country, a growing sense of autonomy and republicanism in both the North and the South, and fears of conspiratorial designs were just a few components of early American life. Education, religion, and the Enlightenment were also all vital elements of America's road to independence. The American colonies were far too diverse to experience an overnight ideological transformation like that found in the Revolution. The transformation was the product of years of internal and external experiences and influences.

The factors responsible for the growing sense of autonomy and republicanism in colonial America are numerous and varied, but the American consciousness was the byproduct of dual influences both internal and external. Internally, the American colonists faced numerous forces; population density and dispersal, economic variances between colonies, education, and religion were just a few components of colonial America that succeeded in advancing distinct ideals towards attainable liberty, republicanism, and independence based on the differing geographic placement and social aspirations of each colonist. Every force carried significant

influences. Densely populated commercial regions, like those found in the North, experienced political, economic, and social issues that Southerners never imagined, while the agriculturally oriented South experienced influences missing in the North.

American colonists also experienced and absorbed external influences.

Colonists knew of the rise and fall of civilizations; they held a historical consciousness, carried with them the principles of English rights, and acknowledged the plight of their ancestors and they applauded their gains. The knowledge of classical antiquity, English history, and Enlightenment principles gave the colonists an awareness of liberty, one that acknowledged subservience as an active element of good government, but also led to a distrust of any power that sought to restrict their freedom. Patriot propagandists used evidence from the past in an attempt to draw a correlation between the fall of great civilizations, like Greece and Rome, and the demise of their own. Unchecked power, arbitrary government, and increased decadence, were the influences that dismantled past civilizations, and, according to the Patriot's Revolutionary rhetoric, these were the same influences that would destroy America.

American printers operated under harsh conditions. Minimal pay, heavy costs, lacking tools, and governmental restrictions were burdens that colonial printers had to overcome. Despite these conditions, gazettes emerged and colonists enjoyed the news they received. This elevated the gazette to a position of supreme importance in early America. Colonists regarded a free press as an important liberty, because it served as a check against arbitrary power, kept them informed of activities in the commercial, political, and social realms, and continually exerted a persuasive

influence in one form or another. The practices of copying and reprinting editorials, town meeting instructions, and General Assembly resolves from various colonies, succeeded in persuading those colonists who had not taken a stance and created an aura of unity in the resistance movement. The similarity between the forms of organizational resistance, such as petitioning and non-importation movements, was the direct result of a continuous, unified media campaign.

Patriot propagandists used anti-imperial rhetoric from the Stamp Act resistance to the Coercive Acts as a premeditated attempt to evoke resistance. It was not a premeditated attempt seeking independence, because independence was not an accepted option until late in the Revolutionary period, but it was premeditated because Patriot printers expected that the pieces they chose would exert influence. Printers used their editorial control as a method of increasing rhetoric aimed at Parliament and decreasing anything that tended to calm the growing passions of their reading public.

The American Revolution was a social revolution. Lifestyles changed, values and beliefs evolved, power structures shifted, the economy gained new outlets, and British colonists became American citizens, such a transformation is completely social. Social movements need support in order to survive, so the gazettes were an active component of the Revolutionary effort. Newspapers forced many colonists, who found themselves exposed to their messages, to think about topics they might have ignored and take stances on issues that did not directly effect them. Such a result made the colonial gazette a formative instrument in the Revolutionary cause. The colonial media exerted significant influence over early America. It was

responsible for accelerating the formation of an American community awareness, it was largely responsible for uniting the colonial structure, and it succeeded in drawing support large enough to carry a resistance movement to independence.

The ideals disseminated in colonial newspapers and other forms of early media originated from a small group of men. These same men, for the most part, went on to lead the nation by institutionalizing the movement in a congress. By 1775, the Patriot media campaign had served its purpose. The colonies united in a Continental Congress and the colonists adamantly supported its conclusions. Without the colonial media, the American Revolution would not have gained the momentum it did in such a short time, and minuscule taxes, that pale in consideration to taxes American today pay daily, would never have sparked a rebellion that ended in independence. The colonial media changed the course of American history and without it the Revolution would have failed miserably.

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