

THE RADICAL REVOLUTION, 1774-76

I. Introduction

- A. The colonial response to the British government's acts changed in 1774. Opposition that had once been conservative became increasingly radical.
- B. In 1774, the colonials continued to argue that they were Englishmen and had rights under the English Constitution. However, they repudiated the power of Parliament over their internal affairs. They also began a call for military preparedness.
- C. In 1775, when fighting began there was little chance of turning back.
- D. In 1776, the last link between the colonials and the British government - the Crown - was attacked. First, Thoms Paine went after Monarchy in general in his work *Common Sense*. And, then, Jefferson attacked the wrongs of the King in his Declaration of Independence.
- E. With the last link gone, Independence was based not on English rights, but on Natural Rights and the Social Contract.

II. Response to the Coercive or Intolerable Acts: First Continental Congress September 5-October 27 1774

- A. 12 of 13 colonies sent delegates: Georgia sent delegates, but they did not arrive in time.
- B. Meets in Philadelphia.
- C. Reassessment of the relationship the colonies had to the British government. in which the radical elements prevails.
 - 1. The First Continental Congress approved the Suffolk Resolves.
 - 2. Based on a widely circulated pamphlet by Thomas Jefferson: *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*.
 - 3. Jefferson discarded royal colonial charters and said Americans had a natural right to govern themselves. (the final Suffolk Resolves not so radical)
 - a. Earned that right by creating a society out of the wilderness.
 - b. Parliament had no right to pass the Intolerable Acts, hence, they need not be obeyed.
 - c. Still recognized George III as king.
 - 4. Repudiates ALL Parliamentary authority over colonies: in either legislation or taxation. Trade regulation would be allowed however, (Resolution October 14, John Adams):

“That the foundation of English liberty, and of all free government, is a right in the people to participate in their legislative council: and as the English colonists are not represented, and from their local and other circumstances, cannot properly be represented in the British Parliament, they are entitled to a free and exclusive power of legislation in their several provincial legislatures, where their right of representation can alone be preserved, in all cases of taxation and internal polity, subject only to the negative of their sovereign, in such manner as has been heretofore used and accustomed. But, from the necessity of the case, and a regard to the mutual interst of both countires, we cheerfully consent to the operation of such Acts of the British Parliament, as are bona fide restrianed to the regulation of our external commerce, for the purpose of securing the commercial advantages of the whole empire to the mother country, and the commercial benefits of its respective members, excluding every idea of taxation, internal or external, for raising a revenue on the subjects in America without their consent.”
 - 5. Said Parliament was simply the legislature of the British home islands.

6. NOT an Imperial Parliament.
7. Non-importation, non-exportation, non-consumption agreement (Oct 20)
8. First Continental Congress urged Massachusetts to repudiate General Thomas Gage as Governor
9. Told Massachusetts to create their own government - a revolutionary step.
10. Urged all colonies to take control of their militia away from royal governors.

III. Crisis Develops after adjournment of 1st Continental Congress

- A. Virginia: Royal Governor Lord Dunmore seizes the colonial armory.
 1. Known as the "Powderhorn": wants to prevent its falling into the hands of locals.
 2. Dunmore had dissolved the House of Burgesses, but it had continued to meet in defiance of Dunmore.
 3. Patrick Henry, member of the Burgesses and a captain of the Hanover Militia, threatens to march on Williamsburg and take the arms back.
 4. Dunmore backs down and flees with his family to a British man-o-war.
 5. House of Burgesses assumes full authority of governing.
- B. Massachusetts: Militia units in Massachusetts organize themselves independently of the Royal Governor
 1. Establish arsenals in countryside.
 2. One of these is in Concord, Massachusetts
 3. General Gage decides to seize these arms, which leads to the Battles of Lexington and Concord.

IV. Battles of Lexington and Concord (18-19 April 1775)

- A. Gage sent 700 troops led by Lt-Col. Francis Smith to seize the arsenal at Concord.
- B. Paul Revere, William Dawes, Dr. Sam Prescott ride to warn the minutemen, Patriot leaders, so the colonists knew they were coming.
- C. 2 companies of British regulars had to pass through Lexington, Massachusetts
- D. Approx. 70 minutemen had gathered in Lexington.
- E. Shot rang out (no one knows who fired), but 8 Americans are killed, 8 more wounded.
- F. Minutemen forced to retreat.
- G. After destroying the supplies in Concord, British are met by a larger, better organized force of minutemen.
- H. British forced to retreat, and 2 more companies are sent out to rescue them.
- I. Lexington and Concord trigger a spontaneous uprising in the countryside around Boston.
- J. Minutemen begin siege of Boston

K. 17 June 1775: **Battle of Bunker Hill** (Breed's Hill).

1. British force Colonials to abandon the position but at a heavy cost.
2. British: 1150 killed and wounded
3. Colonists: 441 killed and wounded.

V. Reaction to Fighting

A. 10 May 1775: **Second Continental Congress** meets in Independence Hall in Philadelphia (John Hancock the President).

1. Armed conflict had begun.
 - a. Want to create a Continental Army
 - b. Authorized to make long-term enlistments.
 - c. Could draw upon all colonies.
2. Key step: appointing a commander-in-chief.
 - a. Logical place to look was Massachusetts: it had several excellent candidates.
 - b. Massachusetts's John Adams suggested George Washington.
 - c. Massachusetts was bearing the brunt of British anger and needed help.
 - d. Massachusetts recommends Washington, a Virginian.
3. 1st Continental Congress was an ad-hoc body, but the second Continental Congress begins to function as a National Government
 - a. Authorizes the raising of an army.
 - b. Requisitions money and supplies for that army.
 - c. Issues currency.
 - d. Has relations with other countries.
4. All are attributes of sovereignty: Had no charter; No grant of power given.

B. 23 Aug. 1775: George III formally proclaims the colonies in a state of open rebellion and authorizes the British Army and Navy to take all steps necessary to enforce obedience to British rule.

C. Sept. 1775: Second Continental discards the Navigation Acts and declares free trade with the rest of the world.

D. Colonials see themselves declared rebels by George III.

1. American Revolution NOT a product of nationalism. Instead, you see a slowly growing sense of common identity on the part of the colonies based on shared common values, common beliefs.
2. Colonies realize for revolution to succeed they must work together: Ben Franklin said, "We must hang together or we will hang separately."

3. Colonists begin - in 1775 - to see themselves more and more as Americans, not as simply Marylanders or Pennsylvanians.

VI. Changing from Colonial to Revolutionary Mindset

A. Spring 1775: War and Rebellion under way.

B. However, the colonists needed something to spark unity and a desire to be independent.

C. Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (9 Jan. 1776 1st published).

1. Paine a professional agitator.
2. Paine rejected the Divine Right of Kings. Said Kings had gotten to their position NOT by Divine Right, but by tyranny and taking liberty from their subjects.
3. Denounced George III as a brute.
4. Paine showed how the policy of the British Ministry was the policy of George III.
5. Most colonists did not initially blame George III.
6. Paine said a free America would be at peace and more prosperous than ever before without a king.
7. America would not be dragged into ancient European blood feuds.
8. Paine envisions an America free from the restrictions of the British mercantilist system.
9. *Common Sense* a catalyst: It helped crystallize public opinion in favor of independence.

VII. The Break with Britain

A. April 1776: VA House of Burgesses told its delegation to the Second Continental Congress to introduce a bill to dissolve ties with Britain.

1. 7 June 1776: Richard Henry Lee introduces a bill to Second Continental Congress proposing independence.
2. Committee of John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Roger Sherman (Conn.), Ben Franklin and R.R. Livingston appointed to prepare the Declaration of Independence.
3. 2 July 1776: Colonies formally declare their independence.
4. 12 of 13 colonies: New York's delegation had been told to abstain.
5. 4 July 1776: Congress formally adopts Declaration of Independence.
6. The Declaration of Independence ranks with US Constitution as the most important state paper in US history.
7. How did Jefferson justify revolution? He used John Locke's argument for natural rights and revolution in the *Second Treatise on Government*
 - a. There are natural laws that govern the world and human beings have natural rights
 - b. Three principle basis on which natural law is based.

1. Duty of man to “praise, honour, and glory” God
2. Man “has not the Liberty to destroy himself. . . . For Men being all the Workmanship of one Omnipotent.”
3. Man, being obliged by nature to live in society, without which he cannot survive, is obliged to preserve society to preserve himself.

c. From the State of Nature to the Formation of Political Society

1. The state of nature does not mean men living outside society – in some individualistic sense – which is contrary to the state of nature
2. Rather, it meant the absence of organized political society and government.
3. That such a circumstance existed in all society Locke did not doubt.
4. In a state of nature, all men are free and equal
5. Locke argues that humans, realizing their equality, recognize the rights of others to be secure in life, liberty, and possessions. Only evil men will invade the rights of others.
6. Locke argues that men in the state of nature will work to make their own property. For an individual to make the fruit of the earth his own property requires him to labor. When he picks fruit, or cuts down a tree and builds a house, it becomes his property. If an individual picks more than he and his family can use, then he can trade it for other goods.
7. It is not right to hoard perishable items (like foodstuffs) until they rot, however, and so non-perishable items, like stones and bright metals become money in the state of nature.
8. Money works against natural equality (whoever has more in this system can acquire more goods), but it also gives men something to work for.
9. The introduction of money leads to covetousness and ambition, and these evil desires – the root of all evil – replace a desire to act for the general good.
10. The evil desires of covetousness and ambition lead to corruption, and this corruption is what leads man to surrender his natural freedom and equality by entering into a political society and agreeing to submit to its authority.
11. People therefore join together to form civil society so that the preservation of their own life, liberty, and property will be secure.
12. To accomplish this goal government must establish settled known law, which must be in accord with the law of nature.
13. Locke's version of the social contract between members of the society holds that individuals do not give up their natural rights, but only enter into agreement to secure those rights that already existed.
14. The power of the government is therefore derived from the consent of the governed, who retain their absolute and natural rights to life, liberty, and property.
15. Thus constituted, government can have no powers except such as are compatible with the end for which it is established; and it cannot act arbitrarily, depart from its own laws, take from any man his property without his consent, or delegate the law-making power to other hands.

16. If the government violates these strictures, then the people may rebel against that government and set up a new one.

d. This was Jefferson's argument in the introduction to the Declaration of Independence:

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.