



“THAT worst of plagues, the detested T E A”

COLONISTS RESPOND TO THE TEA ACT & THE “BOSTON TEA PARTY,” 1773-74

A Selection from Newspaper Reports, Letters & Debates,
Poetry & Song, A Cartoon, A Diary, & A History

1773_____

- May 10: TEA TAX is passed by Parliament to rescue the bankrupt British East India Company by allowing it to ship tea directly to America, and with a lowered duty (import tax). With the act, Parliament affirms its authority to tax the colonies.
- Nov.-Dec.: Resistance to the Tea Act accelerates with the impending arrival of the first ships carrying tea sold by the East India Company, peaking in Boston with numerous town meetings, resolutions, and ultimatums to merchants to renounce their permits to sell company tea, culminating in the destruction of 342 chests of tea aboard ships in Boston harbor on the night of December 16—later immortalized as the “Boston Tea Party.”

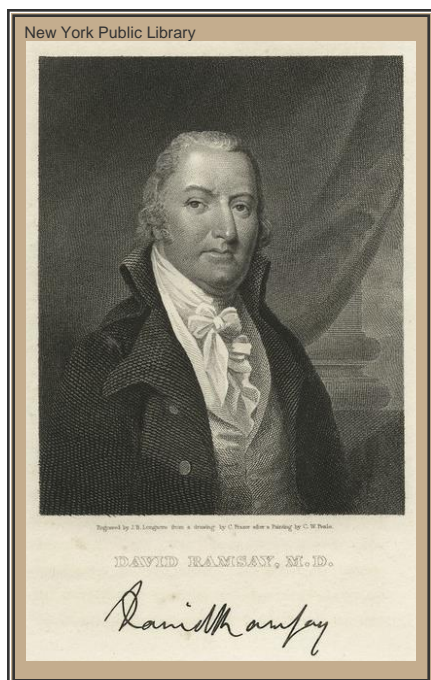
1774_____

- March: To punish the colonies, Parliament passes the Coercive Acts, soon reviled in America as the “Intolerable Acts.”

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AN AMERICAN EXPLAINS THE “NEW ERA OF THE AMERICAN CONTROVERSY”

1773

■ **DAVID RAMSAY**, *The History of the American Revolution*, 1789.

A South Carolina physician, Ramsay served as a surgeon in the Revolutionary Army. After the war, he served in the Continental Congress under the Articles of Confederation (1782-83, 1785-86), and wrote his Revolution history in the late 1780s, as the new nation was crafting its final Constitution.

For ten years [1764-1773] there had now been but little intermission to the disputes between Great Britain and her Colonies. Their respective claims had never been compromised on middle ground. The calm which followed the repeal of the Stamp Act was in a few months disturbed by the Revenue Act of the year 1767 [one of the Townsend Acts]. The tranquility which followed the repeal of five sixths of that act in the year 1770 was nothing more than a truce. The reservation of the duty on tea, made as an avowed evidence of the claims of Great Britain to tax her Colonies, kept

alive the jealousy of the Colonists, while at the same time the stationing of a standing army in Massachusetts — the continuance of a board of commissioners in Boston — the constituting the governors and judges of that province independent of the people, were constant sources of irritation. The altercations which at this period were common between the royal governors and the provincial assemblies, together with numerous vindications of the claims of America, made the subject familiar to the Colonists. The ground of the controversy was canvassed in every company. The more the Americans read, reasoned, and conversed on the subject, the more were they convinced of their right to the exclusive disposal of their property. This was followed by a determination to resist all encroachments on that palladium of British liberty. They were as strongly convinced of their right to refuse and resist parliamentary taxation as the ruling powers of Great Britain [were] of their right to demand and enforce their submission to it.

The claims of the two countries being thus irreconcilably opposed to each other, the partial calm which followed the concession of Parliament in 1770 was liable to disturbance from every incident. Under such circumstances, nothing less than the most guarded conduct on both sides could prevent a renewal of the controversy. Instead of following those prudential measures which would have kept the ground of the dispute out of sight, an impolitic scheme was concerted between the British Ministry and the East India Company, which placed the claims of Great Britain and of her Colonies in hostile array against each other.

In the year 1773 commenced a new era of the American controversy. To understand this in its origin, it is necessary to recur to the period when the solitary duty on tea was excepted from the partial repeal of the revenue act of 1767. When the duties which had been laid on glass, paper and painters colors were taken off, a respectable minority in Parliament contended that the duty on tea should also be removed. To this it was replied, “That as the Americans denied the legality of taxing them, a total repeal would be a virtual acquiescence in their claims; and that in order to preserve the rights of the Mother Country, it was necessary to retain the preamble and at least one of the taxed articles.” It was answered that a partial repeal would be a source of endless discontent, and that the tax on tea would not defray the expenses of collecting it. The motion in favor of a total repeal was thrown out by a great majority. . . .

The expected revenue from tea failed in consequence of the American association to import none on which a duty was charged. This, though partially violated in some of the Colonies, was well observed in others, and particularly in Pennsylvania, where the duty was never paid on more than one chest of that

commodity. This proceeded as much from the spirit of gain as of patriotism. The merchants found means of supplying their countrymen with tea smuggled from countries to which the power of Britain did not extend. They doubtless conceived themselves to be supporting the rights of their country by refusing to purchase tea from Britain, but they also reflected that if they could bring the same commodity to market, free of duty, their profits would be proportionably greater. . . .

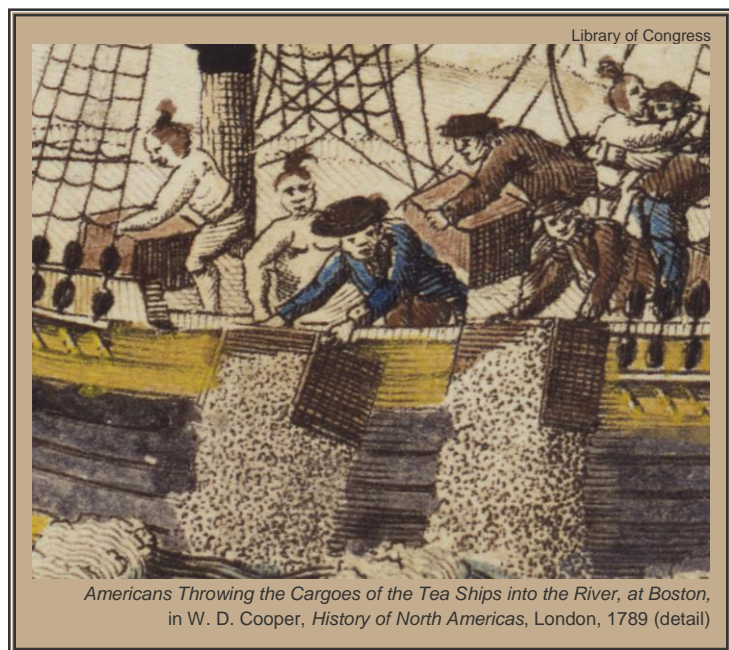
Ramsay elaborates on the dual motivation for the Tea Act of May 1773: (1) to save the near-bankrupt British import company by granting it a virtual monopoly of the American tea market, and (2) to assert British authority to tax the American colonies. The act reduced the duty on British tea, but for decades American merchants had avoided paying *any* tax on tea by smuggling lower-priced tea from French and Dutch suppliers (and bribing British officials to look away), and this the merchants did not want to end.

The cry of endangered liberty once more excited an alarm from New Hampshire to Georgia. . . . Though the opposition originated in the selfishness of the merchants, it did not end there. The great body of the people, from principles of the purest patriotism, were brought over to second their wishes. They considered the whole scheme as calculated to seduce them into an acquiescence with the views of Parliament for raising an American revenue. Much pains were taken to enlighten the Colonists on this subject and to convince them of the imminent hazard to which their liberties were exposed.

The provincial patriots insisted largely on the persevering determination of the Parent State to establish her claim of taxation by compelling the sale of tea in the Colonies against the solemn resolutions and declared sense of the inhabitants, and that at a time when the commercial intercourse of the two countries was renewed and their ancient harmony fast returning. The proposed venders of the tea were represented as revenue officers, employed in the collection of an unconstitutional tax imposed by Great Britain. The Colonists reasoned with themselves that, as the duty and the price of the commodity were inseparably blended, if the tea was sold, every purchaser would pay a tax imposed by the British parliament, as part of the purchase money. To obviate this evil, and to prevent the liberties of a great country from being sacrificed by inconsiderate purchasers, sundry town meetings were held in the capitals of the different provinces, and combinations were formed to obstruct the sales of the tea sent by the East India Company. [Ramsay inserts the Philadelphia resolves; see p. 4].

As the time approached when the arrival of the tea ships might be soon expected, such measures were adopted as seemed most likely to prevent the landing of their cargoes. The tea consignees, appointed by the East India Company, were in several places compelled to relinquish their appointments, and no others could be found hardy enough to act in their stead. The pilots in the river Delaware, were warned not to conduct any of the tea ships into their harbor. In New York, popular vengeance was denounced against all who would contribute in any measure to forward the views of the East India Company. The captains of the New York and Philadelphia ships, being apprised of the resolution of the people, and fearing the consequences of landing a commodity charged with an odious duty in violation of their declared public sentiments, concluded to return directly to Great Britain, without making any entry at the custom house.

It was otherwise in Massachusetts. ____



— CITIZEN RESOLUTIONS ON THE TEA ACT, 1773 —

■ **CITIZENS of PHILADELPHIA**, Pennsylvania, assembled at the State House, 18 October 1773, resolutions for the boycott of East India Company tea; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 20 October 1773.

1. THAT the Disposal of their own Property is the inherent Right of Freemen; that there can be no Property in that which another can, of Right, take from us without our Consent; that the Claim of Parliament to tax America is, in other Words, a Claim of Right to levy Contributions on us at Pleasure.
2. That the duty imposed by Parliament upon Tea landed in America is a Tax on the Americans, or levying Contributions on them without their Consent.
3. That the express Purpose for which the Tax is levied on the Americans, namely, for the Support of Government, Administration of Justice, and Defense of his Majesty's Dominions in America, has a direct Tendency to render Assemblies useless, and to introduce arbitrary Government and Slavery.
4. That a virtuous and steady Opposition to this Ministerial Plan¹ of governing America is absolutely necessary to preserve even the Shadow of Liberty, and is a Duty which every Freeman in America owes to his Country, to himself, and to his Posterity.
5. That the Resolution lately entered into by the East India Company to send out their Tea to America, subject to the Payment of Duties on its being landed here, is an open Attempt to enforce this Ministerial Plan and a violent Attack upon the Liberties of America.
6. That it is the Duty of every American to oppose this Attempt.
7. That whoever shall directly or indirectly countenance this Attempt, or in any wise aid or abet in unloading, receiving, or vending [selling] the Tea sent, or to be sent out by the East India Company, while it remains subject to the Payment of a Duty here, is an Enemy to his Country.
8. That a Committee be immediately chosen to wait on those Gentlemen who, it is reported, are appointed by the East India Company to receive and sell said Tea, and request them, from a Regard to their own Character, and the Peace and good Order of the City and Province, immediately to resign their Appointment.

That it is the Duty of every American to oppose

■ **CITIZENS of PLYMOUTH**, Massachusetts, 7 & 13 December 1773, resolutions for and against supporting the Philadelphia resolves; *Boston News-Letter*, 23 December 1773. EXCERPTS.

The inhabitants of this town, ever attentive to the rights and interest of their country, having been repeatedly alarmed with the measures of late years adopted and pursued by the British administration under various forms, evidently repugnant to every principle of our constitution, and after flattering ourselves from time to time with hopes that, from a change of men or some other happy circumstance, such new measures might be adopted as would put an end to the unhappy contest between Britain and the colonies and leave us in the full enjoyment of those rights which no power on earth can reasonably dispute, much less pretend to deprive us of, have yet the misfortune to find the British ministry so far from relaxing that they are still pursuing with assiduity the same destructive measures . . . do think it our duty on this, as on several other similar occasions, to express our firm resolution not only to oppose this step as dangerous to the liberty and commerce of this country, but also to aid and support our brethren in their opposition to his, and very other violation of our rights, and therefore RESOLVE.

- I. That the dangerous nature and tendency of importing teas here by any person or persons, especially by the India Company, as proposed, subject to a tax upon us without our consent . . . are extremely well expressed by the late judicious resolves of the worthy citizens of Philadelphia.

¹ I.e., of the king's cabinet under the Prime Minister (not referring to the clergy).

- II. That the persons to whom the said India Company have consigned the tea they propose to send to Boston have, by their wickedness and obstinacy . . . forfeited that protection every good citizen is entitled to and exposed themselves and their abettors to the indignation and resentment of all good men.
- III. That it is an affront to the common sense and understanding of mankind . . . to assert that any meeting of the people to consult measures for their common security and happiness, on very extraordinary and alarming occasions, is either unlawful or irregular
- IV. That the late [recent] meeting of a very large and respectable body of the inhabitants of Boston and the adjacent towns . . . relative to the importation and reshipping any teas that have or may be sent here subject to a duty on importation, was both necessary and laudable, and highly deserving the gratitude of all who are interested in or with the prosperity of America
- V. That we are in duty and gratitude bound not only to acknowledge our obligations to the body who composed that meeting for their noble, generous, and spirited conduct in the common cause, but also to aid and support them in carrying their votes and resolves into execution, and that we will not only aid and support them in executing the said votes and resolves, but at the hazard of our lives and fortunes we will exert our whole force to defend them against the violence and wickedness of our common enemies.
- VI. That the Town Clerk immediately record these votes and resolutions and deliver a fair copy of them to the committee of correspondence of this town, to be by them transmitted to the committee of correspondence for the town of Boston.

Then a vote was called to know if the town would accept said report. It was passed in the affirmative unanimously. . . .

At a meeting of the town of Plymouth . . . on Monday the 13th day of December, Anno Domini 1773—by adjournment from the 7th current.

A vote was called to know if the town would reconsider those votes and resolves they came into last town meeting. It passed in the negative, 20 for it, and 52 against it.

Then Edward Winslow, Esq. informed the town he had in his hand a Protest against the resolves of the last town meeting, signed by himself and a number of others, the inhabitants of this town, which he desired to read. A vote was called to know if said Protest should be read; it passed in the negative. . . .

The following is a PROTEST of some of the inhabitants of the town of PLYMOUTH against the foregoing RESOLVES, viz. [namely]

. . . We who are inhabitants of the town of Plymouth, neither captivated by sounds and declamations, nor deceived by the cunning stratagems of men who, under the specious mask of patriotism, have attempted to delude an innocent and loyal people, but firmly and steadily fix'd and determin'd to defend our rights and privileges, and to endeavor to hand to our posterity the blessings of peace and good government which were procured by our fathers and transmitted to us—Having taken into serious consideration the dangerous and fatal consequences which may arise from the late resolves passed at a meeting of this town . . . Fearing that they may bring upon us the vengeance of affronted Majesty and his insulted authority: We cannot answer it to our God and our consciences unless we protest against the proceedings of said meeting and publish to the world that we were not instrumental in procuring those mischiefs which may naturally be expected from such conduct. — And we do by these resolves solemnly protest against the whole of said resolves as being repugnant to our ideas of liberty, law and reason. . . . In witness of all which we set our hands at Plymouth, the 13th day of December, A.D. 1773.

[The names of forty men of Plymouth are listed.²]

² A retraction by one of the forty men, Barnabas Hedge, was printed in *Rivington's New-York Gazetteer* of 20 January 1774, in which both sets of Plymouth resolutions were reprinted. Hedge writes: ". . . I signed [the protest] without a due attention to its contents, and having since perus'd the said protest . . . I freely acknowledge that I was guilty of a great error in fixing any signature to it I therefore hope that the candid public . . . will overlook my precipitation and folly and replace me in their favor."

NEWSPAPER DEBATE ON THE TEA ACT, 1773

AND THE NATURE OF PATRIOTIC OPPOSITION

- “POPLICOLA” & “AN OLD PROPHET,” Letters to *Rivington’s New-York Gazetteer*, Nov.-Dec. 1773, for and against opposing the Tea Act. EXCERPTS.

“Poplicola,” *New York-Gazetteer*, 12 Nov. 1773

To the worthy Inhabitants
of the City of NEW YORK.

Every good citizen will be inclined from duty as well as interest to love his country, and to be zealous in advancing its welfare. ’Tis to the exertion of the common wisdom and power in the pursuit of a common good that he owes the security of his life, liberty and property, and he will, of course, feel himself under an obligation of contributing his share to the promotion of public happiness. The man who makes the general interests of the society, of which he is a member, the prevailing object of his actions justly merits the honorable title of a patriot. . . .

With what countenance then, fellow citizens, can they assume the character of patriots who endeavor to separate (what in nature can never be disjoined) the good of particular branches of the community from the good of the community itself? Can they have any title to public spirit who, while they are acknowledged subjects of Great Britain, would teach you to distinguish between your own interests and hers? . . .

Poplicola defends Britain’s right as a commercial empire to legislate for the success of British trade, in this case by providing to the bankrupt East India Company a monopoly on the sale of tea in America. He accuses the pro-boycott Boston Patriots of fomenting dangerous public unrest not to defend colonists’ liberties but to protect their own business interests.

But notwithstanding the insidious arts which have been used to bias your minds, I am convinced that no honest man who is fully acquainted with the infinite importance of the Company to the commercial interests of his country, and who is also sensible of his duty as a member of society to study its welfare, can be at a loss what course he ought to pursue.

The British Company is at this time in extreme distress, tottering on the verge of ruin. Its fall would be fatal to our trading interest. In this season of danger, the Legislature [Parliament], among other methods of assistance, has granted the liberty of

“An Old Prophet,” *New York-Gazetteer*, 2 Dec. 1773

Q U E R I E S

Respecting the TEA ACT, submitted to the most serious consideration of every person in AMERICA.

QUERY. As there is an act of the British Parliament in being that would subjugate America to *three pence sterling duty* on every pound weight of tea imported from *Britain*, and as this duty is *voted* independent of and without the sanction of any of *our* American Parliaments, what ought to be done unto every one of those *traitorous* persons who shall aid or abet the importation of or *landing* the said tea in any part of America till that act is totally repealed *jointly* by *King, Lords, and Commons*?

ANS: Such base *traitors* to this country, without exception, should immediately and resolutely be dragged from concealment; they should be transported [i.e., sent to Britain] or forced from every place in America, loaded with the most striking badges of disgrace; particularly, we ought not to forget, *Jack on both sides*, VIZ. [namely] the *deceitful*, LYING, *infamous* POPLICOLA; for in this case, all such may absolutely and justly be deemed as *public robbers* of our LIBERTY, PROPERTY, and PEACE.

QUERY. What will be the most effectual methods of proceeding to obtain a repeal of the said oppressive, unconstitutional act?

ANS: TO USE NO TEA, *at least for the present*, for if any person should give to the sellers more than the usual price for tea, he ought to be held up as a mortal enemy to *American freedom*. And—*brave Americans*,

ASSOCIATE WITHOUT DISTINCTION.

O ye *brave men*, in whom we still may find,
A love of virtue, FREEDOM, and mankind,
Go forth—in Majesty of WOE array’d,
See, at your feet your COUNTRY kneels for aid,
Be, as *one man*—CONCORD success ensues—
There’s not an HONEST HEART but is yours,

exporting some of that immense quantity of teas which they have on hand, free from all duties to their fellow subjects in America. At the same time, a few of your merchants have their stores crowded with [smuggled] teas from the Dutch Company, the sale of which would be injur'd by the sale of the English, which is better in quality and can be afforded at a much cheaper rate.

In this dilemma, can it be a matter of doubt to a *lover of his country*, to an *honest man*, whether he should encourage the *illicit trader* [smuggler] who crams his coffers with wealth at the expense of the consciences of numbers of deluded dependents, and to the support and exaltation of a foreign Company, which is a rival to that of his own country; or by purchasing from the *fair trader* to assist in the extremity [financial hardship] an institution on which the commercial interest of the state so greatly depends? . . .

But it is said that your liberties are in danger, that if you *touch a grain of the accursed English teas you are undone*. A small attention to the act of Parliament, and the reason of the law, will show the fallacy of such affections. . . .

But every measure of the cabal, fellow citizens! is an undoubted proof that not your liberties but their private interest is the object. To create an odium against the British company is the main point at which they have labored. . . . To liberty they can pretend no friendship. Every step they have hitherto taken has been introductive of the most fatal tyranny: a tyranny of so high a nature as not to permit a fellow citizen even to think differently from them without danger. . . . But among U S the crude decrees of a small cabal who are actuated by self interest are to be binding on the whole community, and whoever ventures to contradict them, or even express a doubt of their validity and propriety, must be exposed to violence and, unheard, without a trial, must be condemned to infamy and disgrace.

Every friend to *liberty* must be alarmed at such procedures, and even the promoters of such measures should tremble lest they kindle a civil conflagration which, becoming ungovernable, may end in the destruction of their own property. Your own house is in danger when your neighbor's is in flames. . . .

POPLICOLA.

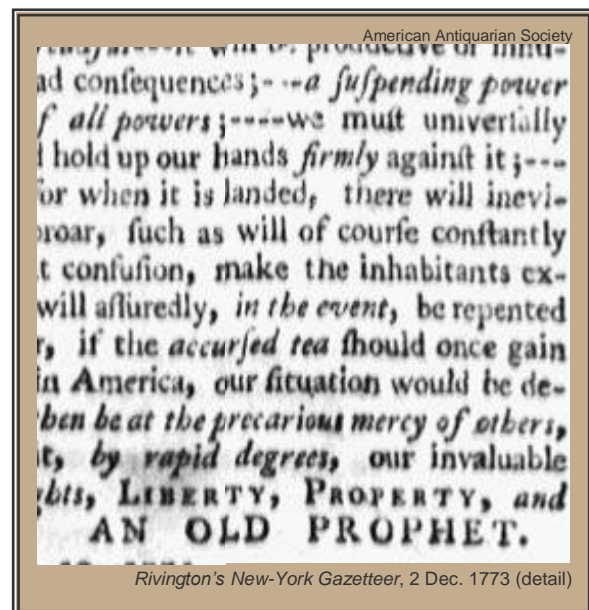
Go forth you must—ye cannot be withstood—
Be your hearts honest, as your CAUSE is GOOD.

QUERY. What will be the consequence of a *ministerial illegal suspension* of the TEA ACT, or of receiving or storing the said *tea* in any way or manner whatever, until the British Parliament shall be pleased to recognize the matter?

ANS: It will be *dreadful*—it will be productive of innumerable and excessive bad consequences;—*a suspending power is the most dangerous of all powers*;—we must universally bear our testimony and hold up our hands *firmly* against it—*reject the tea firmly*—for when it is landed, there will inevitably be an incessant uproar, such as will of course constantly keep our towns in great confusion, make the inhabitants extremely unhappy, and will assuredly, *in the event*, be repented of *most severely*;—for, if the *accursed tea* should once gain such a footing as this, in America, our situation would be deplorable, *as we should then be at the precarious mercy of others*, and incontestably forfeit, *by rapid degrees*, our invaluable blessings, our *Birthrights*, LIBERTY, PROPERTY, and PEACE.

A N O L D P R O P H E T.

New-York, Nov. 30, 1773.



PUBLIC PROTESTS AGAINST THE TEA ACT: BOSTON, 1773

In a move to save the near-bankrupt British East India Company—and to assert its taxation authority over the American colonies—Parliament passed the Tea Act in May 1773. It granted a virtual monopoly of the American tea market to the East India Company, even reducing the previous duty (import tax) on tea. The problem was that American merchants had for many years avoided paying any tax on tea by smuggling lower-priced tea from French and Dutch suppliers.

The uproar over this new instance of “taxation without representation” grew to a crisis in late 1773; the crisis reflected the colonists’ genuine fear for their liberties as English subjects as well as the merchants’ fears for their profits—all enflamed by political activists whose ultimate goal was American independence and the triumph of democracy. In November, shortly before the arrival of the first shipments of East India Company tea, Bostonians demanded that the seven merchants assigned to sell the tea resign their consignments: they refused. On November 28 the first shipment of East India Company tea arrived in Boston harbor.

■ *The Massachusetts Spy, or, Thomas’s Boston Journal*, 4 November 1773.

Yesterday there was a numerous assembly of the inhabitants of this and the neighboring towns at Liberty Tree, agreeable to a notification that had been the day before issued, “To hear the persons to whom the tea shipped by the East India Company is consigned, make a public resignation of their office as consignees, upon oath — and also swear that they will reship any teas that may be consigned to them by said company by the first vessel sailing for London.” The assembly, having waited till twelve o’clock, the time set [for the merchants to meet the assembly], then appointed a committee of respectable inhabitants of this town to wait on Mr. [Richard] Clark and Son, the two Messrs. Hutchinsons and Mr. Faneuil, reported to be the consignees, who were together at Mr. Clark’s store, and acquaint them that, as they had neglected to attend, they should think themselves warranted in looking upon them as the enemies of the people; and having read the message to them, were peremptorily answered that they should pay no regard to it, which the people (who were waiting in the street), being informed of by the committee, they were returning back to Liberty Tree, there to consult what steps were proper further to be taken. But some of them, being irritated with the haughty manner with which the answer was said to be given, turned back and showed some marks of their resentment and then dispersed.

■ *The Boston News-Letter*, 18 November 1773.

Last Evening a Number of Persons assembled in School Street. They broke the Windows and did other considerable Damage by throwing large Stones into the House of the late Middlecot Cook, Esq., near King’s Chapel, now belonging to Dr. Saltonstall of Haverhill, and occupied by Richard Clarke, Esq. [one of the seven Boston merchants assigned by the East India Company to sell its imported tea].

■ *The Massachusetts Spy, or, Thomas’s Boston Journal*, 2 December 1773.

Last Saturday arrived Capt. Clark in a Brig from London, which he left the latter end of August — And yesterday morning Capt. Hall, in the ship *Dartmouth*, came to an anchor near the Castle, in about 8 Weeks from the same place [London]; on board of whom, it is said, are 114 chests of the so much detested East India Company’s tea, the expected arrival of which pernicious article has for some time past put all these northern colonies in a very great ferment — And this morning the following notification was posted up in all parts of the town, viz. [namely]

“Friends! Brethren! Countrymen!

THAT worst of plagues, the detested T E A 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. Every friend to his country, to himself and posterity, is now called upon to meet at Faneuil Hall at nine o’clock THIS DAY (at which time the bells will ring) to make a united and successful resistance to this last, worst and most destructive measure of administration.

■ *The Boston Gazette*, 20 December 1773.

On Tuesday last the body of the people of this and all the adjacent towns, and others from the distance of twenty miles, assembled at the old south meeting-house to inquire the reason of the delay



in landing the ship *Dartmouth* with the East India Tea back to London; and having found that the owner had not taken the necessary steps for that purpose, they enjoin'd him at his peril to demand of the collector of the customs a clearance for the ship, and appointed a committee of ten to see it perform'd; after which they adjourn'd to the Thursday following ten o'clock.

They then met, and being inform'd by Mr. Rotch that a clearance was refus'd her, they enjoin'd him immediately to enter a protest and apply to the governor for a pass port by the castle,³ and adjourn'd again till three o'clock for the same day. At which time they again met and after waiting till near sunset Mr. Rotch came in and inform'd them that he had accordingly enter'd his protest and waited on the governor for a pass, but his excellency told him he could not, consistent with his duty, grant it until his vessel was qualified.

The people, finding all their efforts to preserve the property of the East India Company and return it safely to London, frustrated by the tea consignees, the collector of the customs and the governor of the province, DISSOLVED their meeting. —

But, BEHOLD what followed! A number of brave & resolute men, determined to do all in their power to save their country from the ruin which their enemies had plotted, in less than four hours emptied every chest of tea on board the three ships commanded by the captains Hall, Bruce, and Coffin, amounting to 342 chests, into the Sea ! ! without the least damage done to the ships or any other property. The masters and owners are well pleas'd that their ships are thus clear'd, and the people are almost universally congratulating each other on this happy event.

- ***The Boston Evening-Post & The Boston Gazette, 20 December 1773.*** Letter from “An Impartial Observer” in Rhode Island.

. . . Previous to the dissolution [of the town meeting], a number of Persons, supposed to be the Aboriginal Natives from the complexion, approaching near the door of the assembly, gave the War-

³ Castle William, a British fort on an island in Boston harbor.

Whoop, which was answered by a few in the galleries of the house where the assembly was convened. Silence was commanded, and a prudent and peaceable deportment again enjoined. The Savages repaired [left to go] to the ships which entertained [held] the pestilential Teas, and had began their ravage previous to the dissolution of the meeting. They applied themselves to the destruction of this commodity in earnest, and in the space of about two hours broke up 342 chests and discharged their contents into the sea. A watch, as I am informed, was stationed to prevent embezzlement, and not a single ounce of Tea was suffered to be purloined by the populace. One of two persons being detected in endeavoring to pocket a small quantity were

stripped of their acquisitions and very roughly handled. — It is worthy [to] remark that, although a considerable quantity of goods of different kinds were still remaining of board the vessels, no injury was sustained. Such attention to private property was observed that a small padlock belonging to the Captain of one of the Ships being broke, another was procured and sent to him. — I cannot but express my admiration at the conduct of this People! Uninfluenced by party or any other attachment, I presume I shall not be suspected of misrepresentation. — The East India Company must console themselves with this reflection, that if they have suffered, the prejudice they sustain does not arise from enmity to them: a fatal necessity has rendered this catastrophe inevitable — the landing of the tea would have been fatal, as it would have saddled the colonies with a duty imposed without their consent, & which no power on earth can effect. . . . That American virtue may defeat every attempt to enslave them is the warmest wish of my heart. I shall return home doubly fortified in my resolution to prevent that depeccated calamity, the landing the teas in Rhode Island, and console myself with the happiest assurances that my brethren have not less virtue, less resolution than their neighbors.

■ ***The Massachusetts Spy*, 23 December 1773.** Letter from “A Woman.”

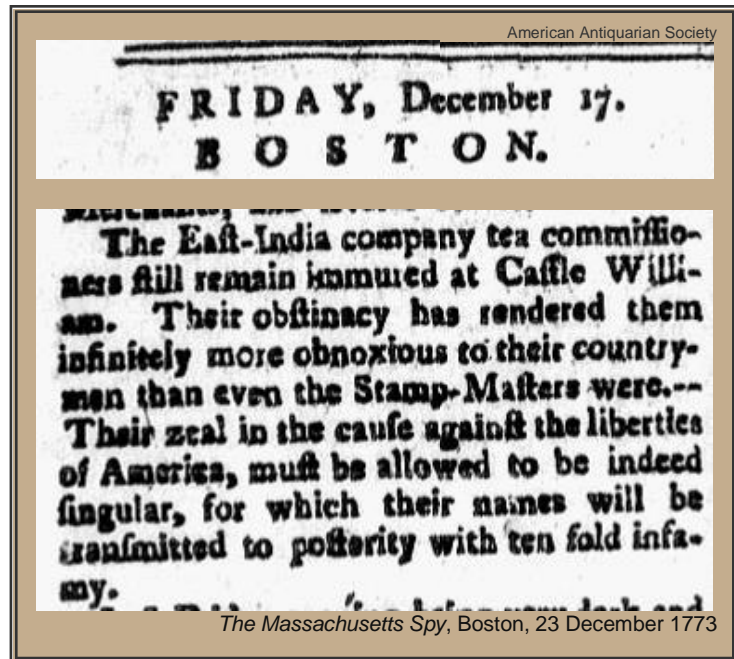
Mr. Thomas [Isaiah Thomas, printer]

As it appears to be universally thought by the patrons of liberty in this country that we ought to discontinue the use of Tea, so we find continually in the public papers a great number of arguments used to persuade the ladies to leave off the use of it — We are told that it greatly injures our health, it is called a poisonous draught, a baneful weed, accursed tea. They tell us frightful stories of breeding insects like fleas, which will do us I know not what mischief . . .

If Tea has been really known to be a baneful weed, a poisonous draught, &c., why were not these arguments used against the use of it in former times, before it was thought a political evil? There is no doubt but the abuse of this as well as of any other thing may be attended with bad consequences, but that it is evil in itself and in all cases is not proved from its having been sometimes used imprudently . . .

I imagine that if the gentlemen who are fully acquainted with all the political reasons for discarding the use of Tea were to publish a full and plain narrative of matters of fact, so that we might see how it comes to pass that the use of Tea is a political evil in this country, and instruct us in all they know about it, that it would be a much more probable method to make us leave off the use of it than the calling it hard names and telling us scarecrow stories about it.

A W O M A N.



POETRY & SONG IN OPPOSITION TO THE TEA ACT, 1773

- “TEA, DESTROYED BY INDIANS,” broadside song, Boston, December 1773, after the Boston Tea Party.

YE GLORIOUS SONS OF FREEDOM, brave and bold,
That has stood forth—fair LIBERTY to hold;
Though you were INDIANS, come from distant shores,
Like MEN you acted—not like savage Moors.

CHORUS.

*Bostonian's SONS keep up your Courage good,
Or Die, like Martyrs, in fair Free-born Blood.*

Our LIBERTY, and LIFE is now invaded,
And FREEDOM's brightest Charms are darkly shaded;
But, we will STAND—and think it noble mirth,
To DART the man that dare oppress the Earth.

*Bostonian's SONS keep up your Courage good,
Or Die, like Martyrs, in fair Free-born Blood.*

How grand the Scene!—(No Tyrant shall oppose)
The T E A is sunk in spite of all our foes.
A NOBLE SIGHT—to see th' accursed T E A
Mingled with MUD—and ever for to be;
For KING and PRINCE shall know that we are FREE.

*Bostonian's SONS keep up your Courage good,
Or Die, like Martyrs, in fair Free-born Blood.*

Must we be still—and live on Blood-bought Ground,
And not oppose the Tyrants cursed sound?
We Scorn the thought—our views are well refin'd
We Scorn those slavish shackles of the Mind,
“We've Souls that were not made to be confin'd.”

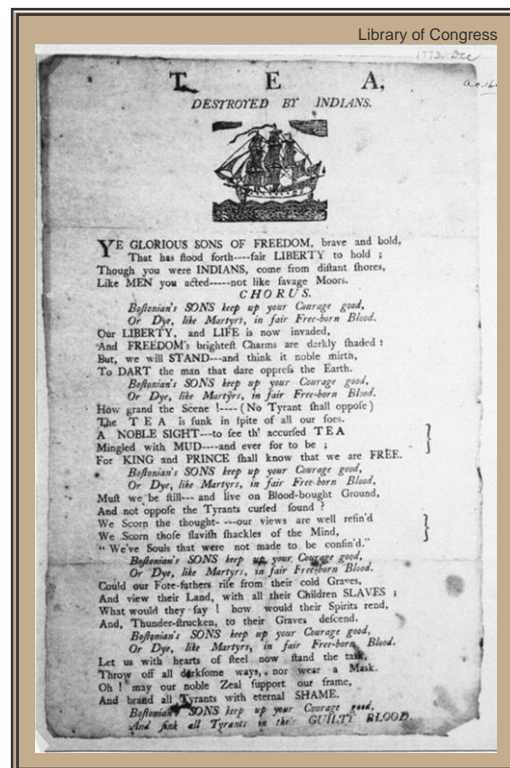
*Bostonian's SONS keep up your Courage good,
Or Die, like Martyrs, in fair Free-born Blood.*

Could our Fore-fathers rise from their cold Graves,
And view their Land, with all their Children SLAVES;
What would they say! how would their Spirits rend,
And, Thunder-strucken, to their Graves descend.

*Bostonian's SONS keep up your Courage good,
Or Die, like Martyrs, in fair Free-born Blood.*

Let us with hearts of steel now stand the task,
Throw off all darksome ways, nor wear a Mask.
Oh! may our noble Zeal support our frame,
And brand all Tyrants with eternal SHAME.

*Bostonian's SONS keep up your Courage good,
Or Die, like Martyrs, in fair Free-born Blood.*



- “A ZEALOUS DAUGHTER OF LIBERTY,” poem, *The Massachusetts Spy*, 2 Dec. 1773

Mr. THOMAS [printer],

Sir, an aged and very zealous Daughter of Liberty, Mrs. M——s, a Tailor by trade, not being able to attend her brethren and townsmen [at town meetings] the last Monday and Tuesday, delivered the following lines extempore [impromptu] by way of caution to her countrymen.

PARLIAMENT an act has made
That will distress and ruin trade.
To raise a tax as we are told
That will enslave both young and old.
Look our poor Boston, make a stand,
Don't suffer [allow] any Tea to land;
For if it once gets footing here,
Then Farewell Liberty most dear.

AN AMERICAN CARTOON after the BOSTON TEA PARTY, 1774



“LIBERTY TRIUMPHANT, or the Downfall of OPPRESSION”

Engraving, Philadelphia or New York, January-April 1774 (app.10x13 in.)

This anonymous cartoon (published as a large engraving, not in a newspaper) is one of the few American political cartoons of the Revolutionary period. The eighteen numbered persons, objects, and allegorical figures illustrate the mounting British-American discord in early 1774 after the virulent protests—including the Boston Tea Party—against the Tea Act of 1773. (The viewer's perspective is from the north southward: Britain at left and America at right).

British officials and others in Great Britain (left of image, from right to left):⁴

1. *Lord N—th*. Lord North [Prime Minister], holding out a sword and a chain toward America, says, “We must manage this business with a great deal of Art [skill/finesse]; Or I see we shall not succeed.”
2. *Lord B—te*. Bute [former Prime Minister, from Scotland], wearing a waistcoat of plaid, says “God’s curse, Mon, ye mon act wie meikle Spirit upon this occasion, or ane’s lost I assure ye.”
3. *An East India [Company] Director* says “I wish we may be able to establish our Monopoly in America.”
4. *The infamous K—y* says “Gov T—n [William Tryon, governor of new York] will cram the Tea down the Throat of the New Yorkers.” Dr. John Kearsley, Jr., of Philadelphia, was an outspoken Loyalist. . . . In August 1775 Kearsley was mobbed after firing his pistol from his window at a mob hauling Isaac Hunt in a cart through the streets of the city. The associators, angered by Hunt, a lawyer, for defying the authority of the Committee of Safety, determined to make an example of him; but on Kearsley’s intervention, Hunt was set free and Kearsley put in his place.

⁴ Transcriptions of the eighteen text balloons from E. P. Richardson, “Four American Political Prints,” *The American Art Journal* 6:2 (November 1974), 36-44; permission pending. Commentary in brackets and footnotes from NHC. Image courtesy of the New York Public Library, digital ID 419896.

5. *Belzebub, the Prince of Devils, whispering to K—y*, “Speak in favor of ye [the] Scheme Now’s the time to push your fortune.”
6. *The writer of the Papers (signed Poplicola) in favor of the Tea* who is dressed in clerical gown and bands, gestures toward No. 7, saying “I have prostituted my reason and my Conscience to serve You, and am therefore entitled to some reward.” *Poplicola* was the name signed to three articles appearing in *Rivington’s New York Gazetteer*, November 18, December 2 and 23, and republished as pamphlets, attempting to defend the government and the East India Company. . . . [see excerpts, pp. 6-7 of this compilation]
7. *The Chairman of the India Company* replies “If we had succeeded, you should have been provided for.” Standing behind the Director are:
 8. *A Group of India Directors*, who say to one another, “We have just now received the disagreeable intelligence [news] that the Bostonians have destroyed the Tea”; “and that the Philadelphians have compel’d the Ship for their Port to return with the Tea”; “and likewise that the People of New York, are determined to act in the same spirited manner.” . . .
 9. *The Patriotic Duke of Richmond* [sympathetic to Americans’ grievances] standing in the background, observes “Had my advice been follow’d, you would not have met with this loss and disappointment.”

At the feet of this group are several boxes of tea. One, labeled “Tea for America” has resting on it a paper inscribed, “Plan for an India Warehouse in America.” Nearby are three boxes labeled “Tea from America.” Above this group on the banks of the Thames [River in London], are two allegorical figures.
10. *The Genius of Britain* asks “Britannia why so much distress’d”; to which
11. *Britannia* replies, “The conduct of those my degenerate Sons will break my Heart.”

In contrast to the grief-stricken Britannia, and the ship *From Philadelphia* just entering the Thames, is the scene on the other side of the ocean [America].
12. *America represented by a Woman* is an Indian queen, with drawn bow about to loose an arrow at Lord North. Behind her are six Indian warriors. They are:
13. *The Sons of Liberty, represented by the Natives of America, in their savage garb*. They emerge from the forest, armed with bows and spears, saying “We will secure our freedom, or die in the Attempt”: “Lead us to Liberty or Death”; “Lead on, Lead on.”

Above them the shores of America stretch out from Boston to the Delaware. Seated in comfort on these shores, holding a liberty cap on her staff, a tabby cat curled somewhat incongruously at her feet, is:
14. *The Goddess of Liberty, addressing herself to Fame and pointing To her Sons*, saying proudly “Behold the Ardor of my Sons and let not their brave Actions be buried in Oblivion.”
15. *Fame*, resting on a cloud and holding a trumpet and laurel wreath, replies “I will trumpet their Noble Deeds, from Pole to Pole.”
16. *A View of the Tea Ships in the Harbour of Boston*
17. *Capt. Loring’s Vessel with the Tea, Shipwrecked on Cape Cod* [Massachusetts]. The Boston letter of Dec. 27 to the *Pennsylvania Gazette* reported the wreck, adding “We have not yet heard what has become of the detested Tea.” Two weeks later, it was reported that the tea had been brought to the Castle [Castle William, a British fort on an island in Boston harbor] by order of the Customs officials. The letter added, “It is reported that the Tea Consignees had better have had a Millstone tied round their necks, than suffered [allowed] the Tea, saved out of the Wreck of Capt. Loring, to be landed at the Castle.”
18. *A Group of Disappointed Americans, who were for landing the Tea; in hopes of sharing in the Plunder of their Country*. These eight figures in the foreground wear mourning crepes on their hats.
 - The first, at the left laments, “The People have discovered our design to divide them, & we shall never be able to regain their confidence.”
 - Next to him stands a two-faced man, saying, “I am ready to die with grief and vexation, at our Disappointment, As it will blast my hopes of preferment.”
 - The third man exclaims, “Damn the Bostonians, they have been a great means of frustrating our design.”

Finally there are a group of four.

 - The first says, “We must now make a Virtue of necessity & join against landing the Tea.”
 - His companion answers, “I approve of your Scheme as it will save appearances with the people who are easily deceived.”
 - “Agreed.” “Agreed” say the last two.

FOUNDING FATHERS ON THE BOSTON TEA PARTY, 1773-74

■ **JOHN ADAMS**, Diary, Braintree, Massachusetts, 17 December 1773, EXCERPT.⁵

1773. Dec^r. 17th. Last Night 3 Cargoes of Bohea Tea⁶ were emptied into the Sea. This Morning a Man of War sails.

This is the most magnificent Movement of all. There is a Dignity, a Majesty, a Sublimity, in this last Effort of the Patriots, that I greatly admire. The People should never rise, without doing something to be remembered — something notable And striking. This Destruction of the Tea is so bold, so daring, so firm, intrepid and inflexible, and it must have so important Consequences, and so lasting, that I cant but consider it as an Epocha in History.

This however is but an Attack upon Property. Another similar Exertion of popular Power, may produce the destruction of Lives. Many Persons wish, that as many dead Carcasses were floating in the Harbour, as there are Chests of Tea: — a much less Number of Lives however would remove, the Causes of all our Calamities.

The malicious Pleasure with which Hutchinson the Governor, the Consignees of the Tea, and the officers of the Customs, have stood and looked upon the distresses of the People, and their Struggles to get the Tea back to London, and at last the destruction of it, is amazing. Tis hard to believe Persons so hardened and abandoned.

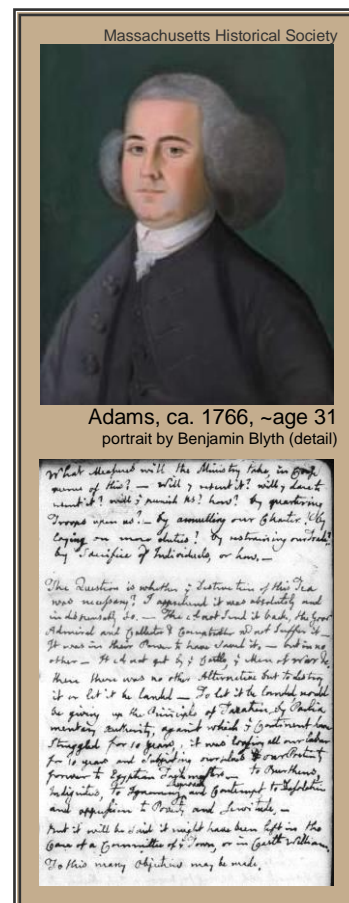
What Measures will the Ministry take, in Consequence of this? Will they resent it? will they dare to resent it? will they punish us? how? by quartering Troops upon us? by annulling our Charter? by laying on more duties? by restraining our Trade? by Sacrifice of Individuals, or how.

The Question is whether the Destruction of this Tea was necessary? I apprehend it was absolutely and indispensably so. They could not send it back, the Gov^r Admiral and Collector & Comptroller would not suffer [allow] it. It was in their Power to have saved it, but in no other. It could not get by the Castle, the Men of War⁷ &c. Then there was no other Alternative but to destroy it or let it be landed. To let it be landed, would be giving up the Principle of Taxation by Parliamentary Authority, against which the Continent have struggled for 10 years, it was loosing all our labour for 10 years and subjecting ourselves and our Posterity forever to Egyptian Taskmasters — to Burthens [burdens], Indignities, to Ignominy, Reproach and Contempt, to Desolation and oppression to Poverty and Servitude.

But it will be said it might have been left in the Care of a Committee of the Town, or in Castle William. To this many Objections may be made.

Deacon [Joseph] Palmer and Mr. Is[rael]. Smith dined with me, and Mr. Trumble came in. They say, the Tories blame the Consignees, as much as the Whiggs do — and say that the Gov^r will loose [lose] his Place, by for not taking the Tea into his Protection before, by Means of the Ships of War, I suppose, and the Troops at the Castle.

I saw him this Morning pass my Window in a Chariot with the Secretary. and by the Marching and Counter-marching of Councillors, I suppose they have been framing a Proclamation, offering a Reward to discover the Persons, their Aiders, Abettors, Counsellors and Consorters, who were concerned in the Riot last Night.



Adams, ca. 1766, ~age 31
portrait by Benjamin Blyth (detail)

⁵ John Adams diary 19, 16 December 1772 - 18 December 1773 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society. www.masshist.org/digitaladams/. Reproduced by permission.

⁶ Chinese black tea, as differentiated from green tea.

⁷ Castle William: British fort on an island in Boston harbor. Men of War: warships.

■ **BENJAMIN FRANKLIN**, letter⁸ on Parliament's deliberations on punishment for the Boston Tea Party, *The Public Advertiser*, London, 2 April 1774. EXCERPTS.⁹

When I mentioned a few of the Consequences that might arise from blocking up the Harbors in North America, and promised to make some Remarks upon other Schemes that had been projected for humbling the Colonists, I did not intend to trouble your Lordship or the Public by stooping to remark upon that Farrago [motley assortment] of Reproaches which are daily thrown out against the miserable inhabitants of that Country by People who appear to be no better acquainted with their History or Constitution than they are with the Inhabitants of the Moon. My Intention was to take Notice of such Schemes as were frequently mentioned in public, and such as it seemed probable the Minister might adopt, because they were of the same Species with some that have already been adopted.

But we are no longer to form Conjectures about what Manner in which Great Britain is to punish the Americans. We now see the Course in which she is to proceed, though we are not certain how long she may continue in that Course. The Port of Boston is to be shut up; its Trade is to be utterly destroyed; the Inhabitants, about twenty-five thousand in Number, are devoted [focused] to Poverty, Hunger and Death. We have been told by Governor Hutchinson that the Men of Property and a great Majority of the better Sort of People are steady Friends to Government; the late Riots were certainly committed by a small Mob. Now it is discovered that the most equitable and merciful Way of obtaining Redress for the Outrages committed by a wrong-headed Mob is by destroying Trade, punishing Men of Fortune, and bringing Thousands of innocent Families to Ruin.

Doubtless there were other Methods of obtaining Redress. In former Cases, when a House has been pulled down or a Citizen's Goods destroyed by a Riot, the Provincial Assemblies have been applied to and have paid the Damages: The Assembly of Massachusetts Bay would doubtless have paid for the Tea, had it been required of them in the usual Form. It is well known that the Father of this City and several other Gentlemen were willing to give Security for the Payment of the Tea on those Terms. But that would have been a trifling Scheme, by which we could hardly expect the Pleasure of making a single Woman or Child shed a Tear; whereas the present Plan perfectly agrees with our Ideas of governing a distant Colony; it affords the pleasing Prospect of starving at least a Thousand of them to Death, and reducing Half of the Remainder to Beggary, to say nothing of the Motion that it must give to the Wheels of Trade on this Side of the Water. By this Plan also we are certain of securing the Affections of the Colonists: After this *signal* Proof of Lenity [leniency] and Kindness, they will never forget us: If we should ever need their Assistance in the Time of Danger, they will certainly embrace the first Opportunity of showing their Gratitude and returning our Favors in kind. Such are the Observations that are often made in Favor of the Measures that are now adopted for punishing the Colonies. . . .

. . . Now, my Lord, if the Port of Boston is to remain shut till the People in that Province acknowledge the Right of Parliament to impose any Taxes or Duties whatever, except for the Regulation of Commerce, it must remain shut till the very Name of a British Parliament is forgotten among them. You may shut up their Ports, one by one, as the Minister has lately threatened. You may reduce their Cities to Ashes, but the Flame of Liberty in North America shall not be extinguished. Cruelty and Oppression and Revenge shall only serve as Oil to increase the Fire. A great Country of hardy Peasants is not to be subdued. In the Grave which we dig for the Inhabitants of Boston, Confidence and Friendship shall expire, Commerce and Peace shall rest together. I have the Honor to be, &c.

Fabius.



⁸ Published as an open letter to the Earl of Buckinghamshire, Francis Dashwood, whom Franklin had befriended while living in London.

⁹ The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, Yale University Press & the American Philosophical Society, www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/; documents 626485 and 626493; permission request submitted. Some spelling and punctuation modernized by NHC for clarity.

A SERMON on JUSTIFIABLE WAR TO DEFEND LIBERTY, 1773

■ **REV. SIMEON HOWARD** (Methodist), *A Sermon Preached to the Ancient and Honorable Artillery-Company, in Boston, New-England . . .*, West Church, Boston, 7 June 1773 (one month after the passage of the Tea Act). EXCERPTS.

Galatians 5:1. *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.*

. . . [I]t is the duty of all men to stand fast in such valuable liberty as providence has conferred upon them. This observation I shall endeavor, by the help of God, to illustrate and improve: In order to which, I shall show:

- I. WHAT I intend by that liberty in which men ought to stand fast.
- II. IN what way they ought to stand fast in this liberty, or what they may and ought to do in defense of it.
- III. THE obligations they are under to this duty.

[II.] But since it has been supposed by some that Christianity forbids all violent resisting of evil, or defending ourselves against injuries in such a manner as will hurt or endanger those who attack us, it may not be amiss to inquire briefly whether defensive war be not allowed by the gospel of Christ, the Prince of peace.

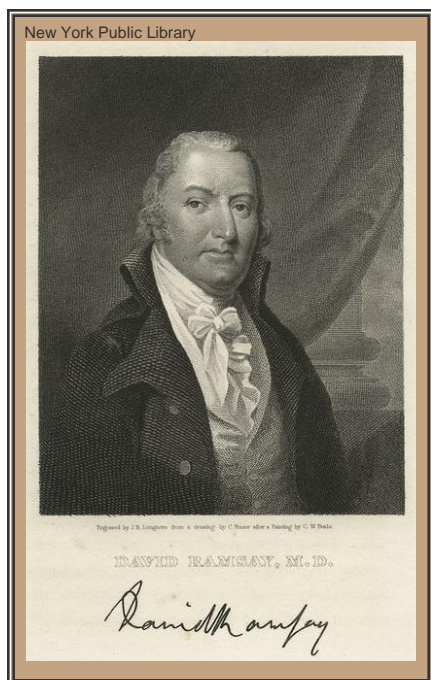
And there are, if I mistake not, several passages in the New Testament which show that it was not the design of this divine institution to take away from mankind the natural right of defending their liberty, even by the sword. . . .

But it is only defensive war that can be justified in the sight of God. . . . Even when the injury offered is great in itself, or big with fatal consequences, we should, if there be opportunity, endeavor to prevent it by remonstrance or by offering to leave the matter in dispute to indifferent judges, if they can be had. If these endeavors are unsuccessful, it then becomes proper to use more forceable means of resistance.

A people may err by too long neglecting such means and shamefully suffer the sword to rust in its scabbard when it ought to be employed in defending their liberty. The most grasping and oppressive power will commonly let its neighbors remain in peace if they will submit to its unjust demands. And an incautious people may submit to these demands, one after another, till its liberty is irrecoverably gone, before they saw the danger. . . . War, though a great evil, is ever preferable to such concessions as are likely to be fatal to public liberty. . . .

. . . Since the preservation of public liberty depends so much upon a people's being possessed of the art of war, those who exert themselves to encourage and promote this art act a laudable part, and are entitled to the thanks of their brethren. . . .

We are not, I hope, insensible that peace is a great blessing and in itself ever to be preferred to war . . . But we have little reason to expect, however ardently we may wish, that this country will always be the habitation of peace. Ambition, avarice, and other unruly passions have a great hand in directing the conduct of most of the kingdoms of this world. . . . [W]e have the utmost reason to expect that the time will come when we must either submit to *slavery* or defend our liberties by our own sword. And this perhaps may be the case sooner than some imagine. No one can doubt but there are powers on the continent of Europe that would be glad to add North America to their dominions and who, if they thought the thing practicable, would soon find a pretense for attempting it. The naval power of Great Britain has been hitherto our chief security against invasions from that continent. But everything belonging to the present state is uncertain and fluctuating. Things may soon be in such a situation with great Britain that it will be no longer proper for us to confide in her power for the protection of our liberty. Our greatest security, under God, will be our being in a capacity to defend ourselves. Were we, indeed, sure that Great Britain would always be both *able* and *willing* to protect us in our liberty, which, from present appearances, we have little reason to expect, it would be shameful for so numerous a people as this, and a people of so much natural strength and fortitude, to be, through inattention to the art of war, incapable of bearing a part in their own defense. Such weakness must render them contemptible to all the world.



AN AMERICAN LOOKS BACK AT THE BOSTON TEA PARTY, 1773

■ **DAVID RAMSAY**, *The History of the American Revolution*, 1789.

A South Carolina physician, Ramsay served as a surgeon in the Revolutionary Army. After the war, he served in the Continental Congress under the Articles of Confederation (1782-83, 1785-86), and wrote his Revolution history in the late 1780s, as the new nation was crafting its final Constitution.

The [resistance to the Tea Act] was very different from what had been expected in England. The Colonists acted with so much union and system that there was not a single chest of any of the cargoes sent out by the East India company, on this occasion, sold for their benefit.

It was well known that the throwing of the tea into the river did not originate with the persons who were the immediate instruments of that act of violence — that the whole had been concerted at a public meeting and was, in a qualified sense, the act of the town.

The universal indignation which in Great Britain was excited against the people of Boston pointed out to the Ministry [British cabinet officials] the suitableness of the present moment for humbling them. Though the ostensible ground of complaint was nothing more than a trespass on private property, committed by private persons, yet it was well known to be part of a long digested plan of resistance to parliamentary taxation. Every measure that might be pursued on the occasion seemed to be big with the fate of the empire. . . .

The violence of the Bostonians in destroying an article of commerce, was largely insisted upon, without any indulgence for the jealous spirit of liberty in the descendants of Englishmen. The connection between the tea and the unconstitutional duty imposed thereon was overlooked, and the public mind of Great Britain solely fixed on the obstruction given to commerce by the turbulent Colonists. The spirit raised against the Americans became as high and as strong as their most inveterate enemies could desire. This was not confined to the common people, but took possession of legislators, whose unclouded minds ought to be exalted above the mists of prejudice or partiality. Such, when they consult on public affairs, should be free from the impulses of passion, for it rarely happens that resolutions adopted in anger are founded in wisdom. The Parliament in Great Britain, transported with indignation against the people of Boston, in a fit of rage resolved to take legislative vengeance on that devoted town.

Disregarding the forms of her own constitution by which none are to be condemned unheard or punished without a trial, a bill was finally passed, on the 17th day after it was first moved for, by which the port of Boston was virtually blocked up, for it was legally precluded from the privilege of landing and discharging, or of lading and shipping of goods, wares and merchandise. The minister who proposed this measure stated in support of it that the opposition to the authority of Parliament had always originated in that Colony, and had always been instigated by the seditious proceedings of the town of Boston: that it was therefore necessary to make an example of that town, which by an unparalleled outrage had violated the freedom of commerce; that Great Britain would be wanting in the protection she owed to her peaceable subjects if she did not punish such an insult in an exemplary manner. . . . The abettors of parliamentary supremacy flattered themselves that this decided conduct of Great Britain would, forever, extinguish all opposition from the refractory Colonists to the claims of the Mother Country; and the apparent equity of obliging a delinquent town to make reparation for an injury occasioned by the factious spirit of its inhabitants silenced many of the friends of America. The consequences resulting from this measure were the reverse of what were wished for by the first, and dreaded by the last.