Origins of the American Revolution

I. Imperial Control on the Eve of Revolution
   A. In 1750, the British Empire in the Western Hemisphere comprised 8 island colonies in the Caribbean and Atlantic, and fifteen Atlantic provinces from Nova Scotia in the north to Georgia in the south.
   B. The 13 provinces of the future United States had a population of approximately 1,250,000 whites and 200,000 slaves, and was doubling its population every 25-30 years.
   C. Mercantilism on the Eve of Revolution
      1. Mercantilism sought to ensure a favorable balance of trade by the use of government intervention in the economy.
         a. Monopolies were granted
         b. Protective tariffs
         c. Shipping restrictions
         d. Regulated manufacturing  (Cummins and White 19)
      2. The purpose of colonies was
         a. To provide raw materials for the mother country
         b. To provide a market for the mother country's manufactures.
         c. Colonies must not compete with manufactures from the mother country.
      3. The **Navigation Acts** collectively required trade with the colonies to be on English vessels and for enumerated goods to be shipped only to England (where they might be re-exported). The enumerated goods included sugar, tobacco, rice, indigo, molasses and rum, copper, naval stores, furs
      4. Funneling the trade through England allowed the British to
         a. Collect customs and harbor dues
         b. Allowed British merchants to profit from the re-export trade.
      5. Some areas of colonial trade were not touched. The very important trade of lumber and foodstuffs with the West Indies for molasses was not touched. The slave trade was not touched.
      6. **Oliver M. Dickerson** argued that the Navigation Acts were a net benefit to the colonies, and he makes a very strong case. Chesapeake planters, for instance, were assured of their market for tobacco, and had access to British capital and wholesalers. Exports of tobacco dropped from 100,000,000 lbs per year in the 1770s to 51.5,000,000 lbs in 1810. The loss of the British market in rice and indigo was even steeper, with neither crop recovered from the Revolution. Cummins and White 21)
         a. Dickerson concludes that the "strangling effect" of the Navigation Acts could not have been a cause of the Revolution.
      7. Colonial shipping and ship building flourished under the Navigation Acts. A substantial portion of Great Britain's merchant marine was American.
8. Restrictions on manufacturing included:
   a. The **Wool Act** (1699)
   b. The **Hat Act** (1732)
   c. The **Iron Act** (1750), which was aimed at the growing iron manufactures of Pennsylvania.
   d. The **Molasses Act** (1733), which attempted to protect West Indian sugar planters by placing a very heavy 6 p./gallon tax on foreign (ie. French) molasses. The colonists wanted French molasses for two reasons: the British planters could not begin to supply the demand and French molasses was a lot cheaper. The colonists converted molasses into rum--a lot of rum (4,000,000 gallons in 1771, of which some went into the African trade, 234,000 gallons, some into trade with the Indians (I don't have a figure, but it seems to have been a lot), and the rest consumed domestically.

(1) Rum was such a large part of the colonial economy (at least the economy that generated economic surpluses, like money, as opposed to subsistence farming) that the Molasses Act was potentially a real problem. The colonists avoided that by bribery. The standard bribe was ½ to 1 pence / gallon (instead of the 6 pence duty). (Morgan *Stamp Act* 42) When John Robinson arrived in Rhode Island in 1765 to take up his post of Customs Collector, the merchants of Newport offered him a salary of £70,000 (colonial) per year in exchange for looking the other way.

D. Administration
   1. British administration was cumbersome and inefficient.
   2. The **Treasury** was responsible for collecting various revenues and for enforcing the Navigation Acts.
   3. The **Privy Council** instructed colonial officials, heard appeals from colonial courts, and reviewed colonial laws. It operated largely through committees, the most important of which was
      a. The **Board of Trade**

E. Colonial Government on the eve of Revolution
   1. **Charter Colonies**: Rhode Island and Connecticut retained their 17th century charter government, with the greatest degree of independence from Imperial control. Government was firmly in popular hands. Legally, the Crown could not even disallow legislation in defiance of Imperial laws.
   2. **Proprietary Colonies**: Of the original proprietary colonies, only Maryland, Pennsylvania and Delaware maintained that status (and Pennsylvania was under pressure to become a Crown colony). Here, the governor was appointed by the proprietor and acted as his agent. The legislature represented the freemen. The Crown reserved the right to
3. **Crown Colonies**: All the rest had become Crown colonies. The structure was similar to that of the Proprietary Colony, except that the Crown, acting through the Board of Trade, appointed the Governor. The governor possessed military as well as civil powers. He executed the laws, could call and dissolve the assembly, and was responsible for enforcing Imperial laws. He appointed the upper chamber of the assembly. The governor was an important source of communication with the government.

4. In every colony, the assembly had seized *de facto* political power by use of the right to agree to all taxes and legislation and the right to initiate legislation. This power of the purse left the governor and judges dependant upon the will of the assemblies, and the assemblies used that power ruthlessly at times. "Not only did the assemblies exploit this situation to coerce the governors into policies which they desired . . . but . . . they had gone further by wholesale usurpation of executive functions. . . . [A]ssemblies usurped governors' powers over Indian affairs by appointing their own agents for such business; controlled their discharge of military functions by dictating in appropriations where and when the provincial militia might be employed; and by appointing committees to supervise operations." (Christie 20-1)

Assemblies regularly maintained their own agents in England to represent their interests, with Benjamin Franklin being the most famous and effective agent.

a. Efforts to tighten imperial control, to shift power away from the assemblies into the Crown's hands, will be viewed as a deadly threat to colonial rights. The assemblies were acutely aware of their powers. Bear in mind also, that the history of English government saw a very similar process by Parliament gradually absorbing power from the Crown: "The whole structure of constitutional government had grown out of resistance to the unwise or irresponsible use of authority." (Morgan 51)

F. Parliamentary Authority

1. A fundamental constitutional disagreement had developed between the colonies and Great Britain. This disagreement was not perceived until events precipitated a constitutional debate in the colonies. Neither side really understood the other: both sides shared the same traditions and use the same vocabulary, but their course of development had diverged. The date at which the colonies were established, the distance between the colonies and the mother country, and the domestic and foreign distractions Great Britain faced which made an earlier establishment of tighter imperial control are the keys to understanding this difference.

2. In Great Britain, Parliament is sovereign. Sovereignty is not divisible. A process had begun with King John and Magna Carta by which
Parliament absorbed more and more power from the Crown; in 1750, that process was still going on.

3. The British believed that Parliament's authority over the colonies included the right to levy taxes.
   a. The levying of taxes upon the colonists might or might not be wise or expedient, but Parliament had the right to tax.

4. As we shall see, the colonists did not agree.

5. More than any other single issue, the constitutional question of "No taxation without representation." lies at the heart of the American Revolution.

6. Right to tax
   a. Locke argued that everyone should be "free from all taxes but what he consents to in person, or by his representative."
   b. "Property ought never be taken from people without their consent, not because material values transcend all others but because human liberty can never be secure when arbitrary power of any king exists" (Garraty, p. 73)

7. British position:
   a. Either Parliament is sovereign, or it isn't
   b. "virtual representation": every member in Parliament stood for the interests of the entire empire
   c. The colonists had always used direct representation and passionately rejected virtual representation as an argument
   d. Colonists called for "no taxation without representation"

8. The colonists would have refused an offer to send representatives to London
   a. Impractical
   b. Cost too much
   c. Representatives would be corrupted by the metropolis
   d. Representatives would be too few to affect decisions but our participation would bind us.

9. In 1765, Parliament provided the catalyst for unified colonial action

II. Problems Resulting from the French and Indian War
A. Diminished foreign threat to the thirteen colonies, which meant, from the British point of view, less incentive for loyalty to the Crown. (Christie 23) This was not immediately apparent.
   1. The end of the French and Indian War brought the subject of imperial reorganization to the fore.
   2. I accept the argument that the real cause of the American Revolution was a constitutional conflict that arose over British attempts to change existing conditions.
   3. Problems with Indian relations, nominally an imperial concern, are related
Conflict with the Indian policy had two dimensions:

(a) Trade
(b) Land

b. Powerful vested interests in several colonies, especially Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Connecticut, sought Western land, particularly in the Ohio Valley. You will recall that Virginia's attempt to secure the Ohio Valley precipitated the French and Indian War.

(1) These land claims often conflicted, especially in the Ohio Valley.

c. Landless frontiersmen, in a society with rapid population growth, also wanted this land.

d. The threat to their homes and way of life posed by the voracious and insatiable colonial land hunger is the fundamental reason for Indian hostility.

e. The Crown also had an interest in regulating trade with the Indians, which was another source of friction.

(1) Sir William Johnson, the Crown's representative to the Iroquois (and also a Mohawk war chief with the Iroquois name of Warrahiyageh), was authorized to regulate all trade with the Indians through licenses. Johnson's intent was to ensure fair dealings with the Indians.

(2) Johnson's goal conflicted with numerous commercial interests competing for the fur trade of the Ohio, Great Lakes and Mississippi region.

4. Pontiac's Conspiracy (1763) hammered home the lesson.

(a) Pontiac was a charismatic Ottawa war chief, one of the leaders at Braddock's Defeat, who never reconciled himself to British victory.

(b) Gen. Jeffrey Amherst, the British commander-in-chief, was particularly arrogant and insensitive (to colonists and Indians alike); his handling of the situation was especially inept.

(c) For the first time in colonial experience, a viable coalition of Indian tribes, normally hereditary enemies, was put together by Pontiac. The coalitions stretched from the Great Lakes to Pennsylvania and New York. It was a remarkable feat of personal diplomacy.

(d) The Indians attacked every fort on the frontier simultaneously. Only Detroit and Fort Pitt held out. The entire frontier was ravished, with perhaps 2,000 settlers killed (Christie 41)

(e) Pontiac's object was the drive the European settlers back and away.

(f) Amherst's Regulars proved ineffective in defeating the Indians, and...
he had to turn to the hitherto despised Rangers organized by **Robert Rogers**.

**g.** Under the leadership of Robert Rogers, Detroit was relieved and the Conspiracy eventually collapsed. Politically, the Indians simply did not have enough cohesion to maintain a lengthy war.

**h.** It was not lost on the colonists at all that the British Regulars had had to rely on colonial forces for success against Pontiac. Therefore, British arguments that 10,000 Regulars were necessary to defend the colonies (when no more than 3,200 had been stationed prior to the war, when the French were still a powerful threat) did not seem very convincing. If the French were no longer a threat, and the colonists could handle the Indians themselves (as they had always done), against whom were the 10,000 Regulars aimed? They concluded that they were there to coerce them. (Cummins and White 53) Since Regulars were frequently used as a police force to quell popular disturbances, this was not an unreasonable conclusion. But I am getting ahead of myself.

**B. Problems with colonial currency now had to be dealt with.**

1. The colonies simply did not have enough specie to run their economy with a metallic currency.
   a. This is over and above the fact that much of the farming economy, which was 95% of the population, was run on barter.

2. The colonies had responded with various paper currencies, usually interest bearing bills of credit. Such currency could easily be mishandled, resulting in serious inflation. Rhode Island (which will have a long history of this) was particularly notorious.
   a. Such inflation of the currency hurt British merchants if the bills of credit were allowed as payment for debts owed them by Americans. Not unnaturally, British merchants wanted to be paid back in sterling.

3. The war had brought such need for some way to finance the heavy expenditures that the colonies expanded their paper money substantially, over the objections of the British merchants. (Christie 28)
   a. The lawsuit in 1763 known as the **Parson's Cause**, in which Patrick Henry first became known for defending the colony against the Anglican clergy and the British government, arose out of legislation that attempted to deal with the currency problem.
   b. The crux of the case is that Virginia was attempting to pursue "an independent monetary policy." (Christie 30)

**C. The most pressing and decisive problem were the intertwined issues of imperial defense and finance.**

1. The Crown decided to increase their standing military garrison from 3,200
before the war (Cummins and White 52) to 10,000 men (at an estimated annual cost of £220,000. (Morgan 37)

2. The traditional method of paying for defense, requisitions from the colonies, had simply not worked adequately.

3. The colonists were more than skeptical that these troops were needed (cf my discussion above) and shared the traditional British horror of a standing army in time of peace. British history and European history gave abundant evidence that such standing armies were frequently instruments of oppression rather than protection. The colonial attitude was thoroughly British. Furthermore, events seem to have proved that they were correct.

4. Not only was the costs of administering and defending the Empire increased, but Britain's indebtedness had doubled
   a. 1755: £ 72,289,673
   b. 1764: £129,586,789 (Morgan 36)

5. The people of Great Britain were already taxed as heavily as they would bear; an attempt to impose a cider tax had led to riots.

6. The colonists were, by contrast, lightly taxed. The British, according to Lord North, were taxed 50 x more heavily per capita (Degler 83)

7. The customs duties collected in the colonies produced only £1,800 per year. (Morgan 38)

8. **More than any other issue, the need to increase revenue from the colonies is the driving force behind the changes in British policies!**

9. The introduction of *writs of assistance* to the colonies are the last problem that should be mentioned.
   a. Colonists maintained a substantial (evidently, a very substantial) trade with the French despite the war.
   b. In frustration, the British introduced writs of assistance to the colonies in 1760.

   (1) A *writ of assistance* is a general search warrant, empowering customs officials arbitrarily to enter and search premises for smuggled goods. No grounds for suspicion were required. Issued in England since Charles II.

   (2) *James Otis* of Massachusetts sprang to fame as a result of his fiery assault on writs.

   (3) Writs were attacked as "instruments of slavery" and Otis developed the common law principle "a man's house is his castle."

   (4) Argued the case for Natural Rights (Enlightenment idea) and that Parliament was not omnipotent and restrained by a higher law and an unwritten constitution

   (5) Otis lost his case, despite its enormous impact on auditors
In a classic example of how the assembly could influence the course of justice, the Massachusetts General Court halved pay for the judges, except for chief judge, Thomas Hutchinson, who lost all salary.

In 1766, a case from Connecticut went before the British Attorney General William de Grey, who ruled they were illegal in the colonies!

Controversy over them continued up to Revolution, with Americans attempting to define personal rights that were not firmly enshrined even in England (Morris 126)

It is worth noting that English practice was diverging from colonial ie: the colonial position was more traditional (Degler 65)

III. The Grenville Ministry
A. George Grenville became Prime Minister in 1763.
   1. His chief policy was to increase revenue and reduce spending

B. The Proclamation of 1763
   1. Forbade settlement beyond crest of Appalachian Mountains.
      a. Its purpose was to avoid further friction with Indians, at least temporarily.
      b. Protect the fur trade by placing all trade under Crown license.
         (1) cf influence of William Johnson
      c. The intent was to provide for orderly, gradual, and supervised settlement of the west.
   2. Came to be seen as a means of keeping colonies in "due subordination" as a market for manufactures. There were some--both British and colonists--who feared (or hoped) that expansion beyond the mountains would force the colonies to develop their own manufactures and so be less dependent upon the mother country. To the extent that this influenced anyone's thinking, it was a very secondary reason.
   3. Angered speculators (who were politically very influential in colonies such as Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania) and settlers.

C. The Sugar Act (1763)
   1. Avowed purpose: raise revenue
   2. Tariff on sugar, coffee, wines, and other products
   3. Tax on imported molasses reduced from 6 pence per gallon to 3 pence per gallon.
   4. Enforcement stepped up sharply!
   5. Imposed complex paper-work which applied not only to trans-Atlantic trade but also coastal and even river trade. This was probably the worst aspect of the act.
   6. Harassed trade by bureaucratic control. If a ship captain failed to comply
with the complicated rules, even in very slight details, his vessel and cargo could be seized for smuggling.

7. **Established Admiralty Courts to try smuggling cases:**
   a. Provided means by which property could be confiscated over a technical error. *Burden of proof shifted to the defendant; non jury trial; traditional scope of Admiralty Courts was on the high seas, not land; if the captain were convicted, 1/3 of profits went to customs official, 1/3 to the Court, and 1/3 to the Governor. Royal Navy captains and crews had a direct financial interest in catching smugglers, since profits went directly to them as prize money.*
   b. It was not unknown for a customs official to deliberately become lax in some details and then suddenly crack down. It earned him more money that way.

8. James Otis begins to enunciate the colonial position in "The Rights of the English Colonies Asserted and Proved": "But let the origin of government be placed where it may, the end of it is manifestly the good of the whole. . . . Every British Subject born on the continent of America, or in any other of the British dominions, is by the law of God and nature, by the common law, and by act of parliament, . . . entitled to all the natural, essential, inherent and inseparable rights of our fellow subjects in Great Britain. . . . I can see no reason to doubt, but that the imposition of taxes, whether on trade, or on land, or houses, or ships, on real or personal, fixed or floating property, in the colonies, is absolutely irreconcilable with the rights of the Colonists, as British subjects and as men. I say men, for in a state of nature, no man can take my property from me without my consent: If he does, he deprives me of my liberty, and makes me a slave. If such a proceeding is a breach of the law of nature, no law of society can make it just. --The very act of taxing, exercised over those who are not represented, appears to me to be depriving them of one of their most essential rights." (Otis 28-33)

9. The New York Assembly enunciated the basic colonial position in 1764 in a petition to Parliament: "But an Exemption from the Burthen on ungranted, involuntary Taxes, must be the grand Principle of every free State--Without such a Right vested in themselves . . . there can be no Liberty, no Happiness, no Security; it is inseparable from the very idea of Property, for who can call that his own, which may be taken away at the Pleasure of another? And so evidently does this appear to be the natural Right of Mankind. . . . The Authority of the Parliament of Great-Britain, to model the Trade of the whole
Empire, so as to subserve the Interest of her own, we are ready to recognize . . . But a Freedom to drive all Kinds of Traffick in a Subordination to, and not inconsistent with, the British Trade; and an Exemption from all Duties in such a Course of Commerce, is humbly claimed. . . For, with Submission, since all Impositions, whether they be internal Taxes or Duties paid, for what we consume, equally diminish the Estates upon which they are charged; what avails it to any People, by which of them they are impoverished? . . . the whole Wealth of a Country may be as effectually drawn off, by the Exaction of Duties, as by any Tax upon their Estates."

("Exemption from Parliamentary" 33-39) Parliament has no right in law or custom to lay taxes upon the colonies for revenue purposes. The colonies never deviated from this position. (Degler 82)

10. Government exists to protect life, liberty, and property. Without protection to property, neither life nor liberty are secure. The right to tax is the power to take away property; therefore no man is free if he is taxed without his consent.

D. The Currency Act
1. Forbade use of paper money in colonies through fear of colonial manipulation of rate of exchange
2. Paper issued by colonies due to a chronic shortage of coin.
3. Post war depression as British reduced spending made things seem worse

IV. The Stamp Act Crisis
A. Quartering Act of 1765
1. This bill is actually passed a month after the Stamp Act, but I mention it here due to the length of the discussion on the Stamp Act.
2. Any colony in which troops are stationed must provide living quarters and some provisions
3. Traditional hatred of standing armies in peacetime. Derived from British Whig tradition, deeply ingrained, and will appear in post-Revolutionary period (cf Amendment II)
4. Colonists believed that "there was a sinister plot against liberty in both England and America . . . . From the American point of view, then, the British measures after 1763 were nothing less than a widespread plot to rob all Englishmen of their liberties at home and abroad." (Grob and Billias 113; part of Bailyn thesis)

B. The Sugar Act had hinted at a stamp tax. Action on such a tax was delayed to allow the colonies to respond. In the event, however, Parliament refused to read the petitions that were sent. Edmund S. Morgan demonstrates that Grenville did not act in good faith when he solicited responses and alternatives. (80-91)

C. Stamp Act (1765)
1. The Act laid an excise tax on virtually all printed matter; only special
stamped paper could be used. This paper was to be shipped to the colonies and distributed through special agents. (Some of these agents were not aware that they had been appointed, and actually learned of this from Whigs first)

a. Newspapers
b. Legal contracts such as mortgages, deeds, leases, bills of sale, articles of apprenticeship, etc.
c. Bills of lading
d. Professional licenses and diplomas
e. Playing cards

2. **The money raised was to be spent in the colonies for the maintenance of troops, and to pay the salaries of governors and judges.**

3. **Admiralty Courts.** which used Roman law and therefore placed the burden of proof upon the accused and which did not require a jury, were given authority to judge cases arising from the Stamp Act. While the Sugar Act could conceivably fall under Admiralty jurisdiction (traditionally, cases on the high seas or below the first bridge of a navigable river), the Stamp Act could not possibly fall under Admiralty jurisdiction. The colonists' right to common-law trial was being deliberately abridged. (Morgan 98)

4. Stamp Act was an innovation for the colonies
   a. Sugar Act was an *indirect tax* and involves adapting trade regulations for the purposes of revenue.
   b. Stamp Tax was *direct tax* or internal tax levied on the colonies.

5. Grenville expected to raise £60,000 per year. (Christie 53)

6. Grenville believed that Parliament had the constitutional authority to levy such a tax as a result of *virtual representation*. According to this theory, Parliament was not a collection of representatives from particular places but representative of the Empire as a whole. (Christie 50-1) Grenville's Secretary, **Thomas Whately**, who actually wrote the bill, argued, "All British Subjects are really in the same [Situation]; none are actually, all are virtually represented in Parliament; for every Member of Parliament sits in the House, not as Representative of his own Constituents, but as one of that august Assembly by which all the Commons of Great Britain are represented. . . . [The colonists] are represented in Parliament, in the same manner as those inhabitants of Great Britain are, who have not Voices in Elections." (Whately 49, 51)

7. The Maryland lawyer **Daniel Dulany** provided one of the first replies to this theory in a pamphlet that was widely read with approval. Dulany noted that Grenville tacitly agreed that the colonists could not be taxed without their representation (Grenville later dropped this concession, and
based his argument on the naked sovereignty of Parliament. He destroyed the entire legal defense of virtual representation while working strictly within the confines of British law.

a. In one respect, Dulany was more conservative than the claims of Otis and the New York assembly. He drew a sharp distinction between taxation and legislation. He accepted Parliament's power to legislate (including the Navigation Acts) but not to tax.

(1) Dulany noted that, according to Grenville, the revenue from duties had averaged £2,000 annually and cost £7,600 to collect. (Morgan 117)

8. **Patrick Henry** and the **Virginia Resolves**

a. Fresh from the Parson's Cause case, he had just been elected to the Burgesses.

b. His introduction of the Resolves and his defense have been shrouded in legend. One source for what happened, for instance, was Thomas Jefferson, who was there. However, Jefferson's version was written 40 years after the event. In 1921, the only contemporary eyewitness report was found, taken by a visiting Frenchman. (Morgan 122)

c. Four Resolves were actually passed. These were relatively mild, re-stating that the colonists possessed the rights of Englishmen.

d. A Fifth Resolution passed by one vote after "bloody" debate (Jefferson's word). However, it is missing from the official records.

e. The newspapers printed from 5 to 7 resolutions, with the extra resolutions being more radical than the four on record.

f. The resolutions insisted that taxes could only be laid on Virginia by "Persons chosen by themselves to represent them." (Virginia Resolves 61)

9. **Stamp Act Congress** (1765)

a. Probably at the instigation of James Otis, an inter-colonial meeting was Proposed by the Massachusetts General Court.

b. Nine of the 13 colonies were represented (Virginia, North Carolina and Georgia could not attend because their governors refused to convene the assembly in order to elect delegates; New Hampshire did not set delegates but ratified the results). (Morgan 139)

c. The **Stamp Act Declaration** is carefully phrased. It promised "all due subordination" to Parliament.

d. Second Resolution: "That his majesty's liege subjects in these colonies are entitled to all the inherent rights and privileges of his natural born subjects within the kingdom of Great
Britain."

e. Third Resolve:  "That it is inseparably essential to the freedom of a people, and of the undoubted rights of Englishmen, that no taxes should be imposed on them, but with their own consent, given personally or by their own representative."

f. Fourth Resolve:  "That the people of these colonies are not and . . . cannot be represented in the house of commons to Great Britain."

g. Seventh Resolve:  "That trial by jury is the inherent and inviolable right of every British subject in these colonies."  
("Stamp Act Congress" 63-65)

h. The 7th resolve begins to develop an argument based on the natural rights of man rather than the rights of Englishmen. The colonists saw the one as the underpinning of the other. Eventually, independence will require them to base their arguments more universally.

i. The great Progressive historian Carl Becker believed that the Stamp Act Declaration confined its rejection of Parliament's power to tax to internal taxes only, such as the Stamp Tax, but accepted external taxes, such as the Sugar Act. This point of view was (mistakenly) taken by the British government, and has been echoed by many historians since (It is what I was taught in high school.) Morgan argues convincingly that Becker is wrong. The New York Assembly had already taken a stand on the issue. William Pitt would agree with them (but be misinterpreted). Benjamin Franklin would deliberately evade the point before Parliament. But John Dickinson, the author of the Resolves, rejected any Parliamentary power to tax, and, in 1767 in Letters From a Farmer, makes this point explicitly with respect to the Stamp Act Resolves. (Morgan 152-4) Be aware of this distinction--a lot of text books still echo Becker.

j. The Stamp Act Congress also called for non-importation agreements.

(1) Trade with the colonies was a very important part of Great Britain's economy. The enforcement of the non-importation agreements seriously hurt London merchants, and the pressure they applied to Parliament is the real reason the Stamp Act was repealed.

10. Sons of Liberty acted as the enforcement arm of the Whigs.

a. The term Whigs will be used here to refer to those who opposed the Crown's policies. They might also be termed "Patriots" since
we won the war. (Had we lost, they would have been termed "traitors" or "rebels.") This will distinguish them from the term Tory, which refers here to Americans who remained loyal to the crown (Thomas Hutchinson is an example). The terms are taken from British politics, where the Whig party generally favored Parliamentary power and the Tory party generally favored Crown authority (it is not really as simple as that, but this will do for now.)

b. Originated in Boston

(1) A committee of artisans organized themselves as the **Loyal Nine**.

(2) These men were respectable and serious. They formed a bridge between political leaders such as James Otis and Samuel and John Adams (who were not members) and the lower classes, who did the dirty work.

(3) The Boston Sons of Liberty were led by **Ebenezer McIntosh**, a shoemaker and leader of the South End rowdies.

(4) What is very striking about the Sons of Liberty and men like McIntosh is that, with few exceptions, the Sons of Liberty stayed under tight control. They rioted on order, and stopped on order as well.

(5) Some historians, such as **Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr.**, see in the Sons of Liberty a deeper social revolution brewing, between the haves and have-nots of colonial society. There are certainly some elements of this in New York, Boston, and Newport--using mob violence for limited political purposes is inherently risky. But the leadership certainly did not wish to overthrow property, and most Whigs owned some property. Becker and Schlesinger see the Revolution as primarily economic in origin--I see it as political and constitutional.

c. Resignation of the Stamp Collector in Boston

(1) Led by McIntosh, the Sons of Liberty began by hanging **Andrew Oliver**, the Boston Stamp Collector, in effigy. They then went on to demolish his warehouse, and wrecked part of his house.

(2) A few weeks later, the Sons of Liberty largely wrecked the houses of three other officials, including **Thomas Hutchinson**, then Lieutenant Governor and Otis' bitter enemy. Hutchinson was the most notorious Tory in Massachusetts.

(a) His case is sad. A man of intelligence and integrity,
he opposed both the Sugar Act and the Stamp Act. He was in complete agreement with Otis that both were unconstitutional. He was, however, a deeply conservative man, and he stood for law and order, even if the laws passed by Parliament were unjust. The Revolution ruined him.

(3) This riot caused the Loyal Nine to retrench, since it did indeed appear as if a "leveling revolution" might be brewing. (Morgan 167)

(4) The Sons of Liberty accepted this discipline.

d. Sons of Liberty sprang up in every other colony, and the scenes in Boston were repeated in every other colony. In every case, the Sons had the backing if not participation of the "better classes." Morgan 232) Systematically, Stamp Tax collectors were forced, upon threat of harm to person and property, to resign.

(1) Jared Ingersoll of Connecticut, who had remonstrated in person with Grenville against the Stamp Act, and had predicted the response, was confronted by a mob of 500 at Wethersfield, and forced to resign. Like Hutchinson, he was ruined.

(2) Things got especially ugly in Rhode Island, which seems to have been particularly unruly and radical. The destruction of three houses in Newport is grist for Schlesinger and Becker.

e. Having forced the collectors to resign, the Sons then forced the ports to open, one by one (that is, to clear harbor without the requisite papers).

f. The Sons also forced the civil courts to close, since they were required to use the stamped paper.

(1) Closure of the civil courts was of material benefit to debtors, since debts could not be collected. This is seen by Schlesinger as a radical element in the Revolution, and this is likely the case. British merchants were big losers here, since the colonists owed them a lot of money.

g. The Sons of Liberty enforced the non-importation agreements.

11. By the end of 1765, the Sons of Liberty had established practical control of the colonies, operating as a kind of shadow government. (Morgan 255)

12. Widespread, grass-roots defiance of the Stamp Act turned the issue into one of whether Parliament could enforce the power it claimed. Moderates in the colonies (like Hutchinson or Ingersoll) were discredited. The movement becomes much more radicalized.

V. The Rockingham Ministry
A. Repeal of the Stamp Act

1. Grenville's government fell for reasons totally unrelated to the Stamp Act (he insulted the King's mother).
2. The new Prime Minister was the Marquis of Rockingham, who had voted against the Stamp Act.
3. Rockingham was under heavy pressure from London merchants to repeal the measure.
4. Parliament however, was reluctant to back down on the issue of principle.
5. William Pitt finally makes his position known: "It is my opinion, that this kingdom has no right to lay a tax upon the colonies. At the same time, I assert the authority of this kingdom over the colonies, to be sovereign and supreme, in every circumstance of government and legislation whatsoever. . . . Taxation is no part of the governing or legislative power [Pitt had evidently read Dulany, and is echoing his distinctions] The idea of a virtual representation of America in this House, is the most contemptible idea that ever entered into the head of a man; it does not deserve serious refutation . . . . [Mr. Grenville next stood up:] I cannot understand the difference between external and internal taxes. They are the same in effect, and only differ in name. . . . America is bound to yield obedience. If not, tell me when the Americans were emancipated? [Mr. Pitt then answered]: If the gentleman does not understand the difference between internal and external taxes, I cannot help it; but there is a plain distinction between taxes levied for the purposes of raising revenue, and duties imposed for the regulation of trade . . . The gentleman asks, when were the colonies emancipated? But I desire to know, when they were made slaves? . . . . Upon the whole, I will beg leave to tell the House what is really my opinion. It is, that the Stamp Act be repealed absolutely . . . . That the reason for the repeal . . . it was founded on an erroneous principle. . . . At the same time, let the sovereign authority of this country over the colonies, be asserted in as strong terms as can be devised, and be made to extend to every pint of legislation whatsoever. That we may bind their trade, confine their manufactures, and exercise every power whatsoever, except that of taking their money out of their pockets without their consent." ("William Pitt versus George Grenville" 68-72)

6. Benjamin Franklin blurred the colonial position on taxes in his testimony—deliberately it seems. Evidently, he wanted to secure repeal of the Stamp Tax, but in so doing he helped create an impression that the colonies would accept external taxes but not internal ones. Parliament failed to understand the distinctions made by Dulany, echoed by Pitt, and
later repeated by Dickinson (who quoted the passage from Pitt above):
"Q: Was it an opinion in America before 1763, that the parliament had no right to lay taxes and duties there?--I never heard any objection to the right of laying duties to regulate commerce; but a right to lay internal taxes was never supposed to be in parliament, as we were not represented there. . . . But the payment of duties laid by act of parliament, as regulations of commerce, was never disputed. . . . Q: Does the distinction between internal and external taxes exist in the words of the charter?--No, I believe not. Q: Then may they not, by the same interpretation, object to the parliament's right of external taxation?--They never have hitherto. [note that this is evasive; there was no occasion] Many arguments have been lately used there to shew them that there is no difference, and that if you have no right to tax them internally, you have none to tax them externally, or make any other law to bind them. At present they do not reason so, but in time they may possibly be convinced by these arguments." Elsewhere, asked if military force could ensure compliance, Franklin told them no, and added, "They will not find a rebellion; they may indeed make one." (Franklin 72-78)

7. Rockingham used a speech by William Pitt to try to finesse the matter. He introduces the Declaratory Act, using language modeled on Pitt, but carefully omitting an important qualifier. The bill was a flat statement of authority, but Rockingham believed that it would not be correctly read by the colonists. He was right.
   a. "That the said colonies . . . in America have been, are, and of right ought to be, subordinate unto . . . the imperial crown and parliament of Great Britain . . . and that the King's majesty . . . by and with the consent of the lords . . . and commons of Great Britain . . . in parliament assembled had, hath, and of right ought to have, full power and authority to make laws and statutes of sufficient force and validity to bind the colonies and people of America, subjects of the crown of Great Britain, in all cases whatsoever." (Declaratory Act 84-85)

B. Rockingham was prepared to ease tensions, but the political weakness within England soon brought his government down.

C. The new Prime Minister was William Pitt.
   1. This should have been wonderful news. But Pitt was politically too weak to choose his own cabinet. His Chancellor of the Exchequer was Charles Townshend, a vain and silly man.
   2. Pitt then went insane, leaving the government effectively in the hands of Townshend.
VI. The Townshend Ministry

A. The New York Assembly refused to pay for the services required by the Quartering Act in December 1766. They regarded the act as a form of taxation, which it was.

B. Parliament suspended the New York Assembly from meeting in July 1767 until they submitted.

C. The **Townshend Acts** 1767
   1. The garrisons in America were costing more than originally estimated: £700,000. (Chrisie 70)
   2. Townshend used Franklin's testimony to assume that the colonists would not object to an external tax. He even chided the colonists about the distinction in Parliament. He must not have been paying much attention to colonial declarations.
   3. The Townshend Acts placed duties on
      a. Tea
      b. Paint
      c. Glass
      d. Lead
      e. Paper
   4. These were foolish duties by any standard.
      a. First, they encouraged the colonists to produce their own paper, glass, and paint, rather than purchase them from British merchants. This is the opposite of mercantilism
      b. Second, only tea would provide any substantial income. (Christie 70)
   5. Although the supposed need for the taxes was based upon the cost of military garrisons, Townshend designated the £40,000 (Greene 114) in expected revenue to be applied to paying the salaries of officials appointed by the Crown and governors, that is judges, customs officials, etc. This is a direct attack on the fundamental basis of the power wielded by colonial assemblies. **Townshend** "wanted the governors to be unfettered by financial dependence upon their assemblies in their task of executing and enforcing imperial policy. From the colonial viewpoint, if this plan were successful the one lever by which they enforced the will of the province upon the governor would be destroyed. What Parliament had won form the Stuarts would be denied to them. So far as they were concerned the constitutional progress of the last hundred years (which conformed with the British pattern) would be reversed." (Christie 71)

D. Townshend also created a separate **Board of Customs** for the colonies, which would be based in Boston.

E. Three new **Admiralty Courts** were created, in Boston, Philadelphia and Charleston, to hear cases arising from the duties.

F. The colonies soon imposed a new set of non-importation agreements.
G. The Massachusetts General Court adopts the *Massachusetts Circular Letter*, which was written by Samuel Adams and which restated the colonists' position that Parliament had no power in law or custom to levy taxes on the colonists, whether direct or indirect.

H. **John Dickinson**, who produced the draft of the Stamp Act Congress Resolutions, writes "*Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania*": "An act of parliament, commanding us to do a certain thing, if it has any validity, is a tax upon us for the expense that accrues in complying with it . . . [he is referring to the refusal of the New York Assembly to obey the Quartering Act of 1765] In fact, if the people of New-York cannot be legally taxed but by their own representatives, they cannot be legally deprived of the privilege of legislation, only for insisting on that exclusive privilege of taxation. . . . [W]hy may not every colony be treated in the same manner, when any of them shall dare to deny their assent to any imposition . . . ? *To divide and thus to destroy*, is the first political maxim in attacking those who are powerful by their union . . . when the slightest point, touching upon the freedom of one colony, is agitated, I earnestly wish, that all the rest may, with equal ardor, support their sister . . . The parliament unquestionably possesses a legal authority to regulate the trade of Great-Britain and all her colonies . . . The raising a revenue thereby was never intended. . . . [Dickinson quotes William Pitt] 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 article which she prohibits us to manufacture--and the tragedy of American liberty is finished. . . . There is,' say these objectors, 'a difference between the Stamp Act and [the Townshend Acts] . . . The duties imposed by the Stamp Act were internal taxes, but the present are external, and therefore the parliament may have a right to impose them.' To this I answer, with a total denial of the power of parliament to lay upon these colonies any 'tax' whatever. . . . I am convinced that the authors of this law would never have obtained an cat to raise so trifling a sum as it must do, had they not intended by it to establish a precedent for future use. . . . Those who are taxed without their own consent, expressed by themselves or their representatives, are slaves. We are taxed without our own consent, expressed by ourselves or our representatives. Wee are therefore--SLAVES." (Dickinson 122-133)

I. In April, 1768, the new Secretary of State of the Colonies, **Lord Hillsborough**, ordered the Massachusetts General Court to rescind the Massachusetts Circular Letter, or be dissolved. The General Court voted 92-17 not to rescind.

J. John Hancock's ship, the *Liberty*, was seized by customs inspectors for smuggling, but mobs rescued the vessel and forced the inspectors to flee to a British warship
for safety.

K. Conflict in Boston with the new Board of Customs Commissioners led Gen. Thomas Gage, commander in chief of the British forces in America, to station 4 regiments of regulars in Boston itself, to the outrage of the population.

L. The Boston Massacre March 5, 1770
1. Boston was a small city, only 15,000, with a proud and determined population that hated and feared the presence of regular soldiers amongst them.
2. Professional soldiers were recruited in the 18th century from the dregs of society. They were kept in line only by savage discipline. One of the regiments sent to Boston was noted as being particularly badly disciplined.
3. Under these circumstances, Boston was a bomb waiting to explode.
4. Samuel Adams emerges in this period as one of the truly revolutionary leaders. He was already quite radical--much more radical than Dickinson, for example--and he used his considerable talents to keep tension high and to publicize every conflict.
5. The origin of the Boston Massacre began two days earlier with a quarrel at a ropewalk between a soldier and a Negro (Crispus Attucks?) The soldier was looking for extra work, and felt insulted by the townsman. The fight was broken up by the foreman, who told the soldier to return to his barracks. The soldier started a fight with the foreman. Beaten up, the soldier retreated to his barracks, and returned with 70 comrades, armed with clubs. A melee ensued in which the townsman once again beat the soldiers (Boston townsmen practiced street brawling every year on Guy Fawkes Day; obviously, they were good at it). The soldiers returned a third time, with about 300 men. They were beaten off again. (where were the officers???) The British commander protested to Lt. Gov. Hutchinson. The foreman of the ropewalk (evidently) fired the townsman who was first involved (the Negro?) At this point, versions of what happened on the 5th vary substantially, and I don't know enough to try to guess. One version has a large group of soldiers going through the town beating up townsmen, resulting in town boys throwing snowballs at a sentry, who asked for help, which led to the shooting. Another version (which makes more sense to me) has a mob of townsmen rushing the squad of soldiers that came to help the sentry. At their head, apparently, was Crispus Attucks (who, if he had been fired from the ropewalk, was likely pretty angry). Attucks clubbed the officer, clubbed a grenadier, seized a bayonet and tried to club the man who held it. At about this point someone shot him. More shots were fired into the crowd (from the wounds, I suspect that someone fired, reloaded, and fired again). Five men were killed and six wounded. (Cummins and White 75-9, "Boston Massacre" 166-172)
6. Samuel Adams used the Boston Massacre to whip public outrage to a fever
pitch. Paul Revere contributed an engraving (he evidently was there).

7. The troops were withdrawn from the town to Castle William, on an island.
8. In a testimony to British law, 7 soldiers were charged and tried by civil authorities. This alone proves that British rule was not as despotic as the colonists made out.

a. It proved difficult to find counsel for the defense. Finally, John Adams and Josiah Quincy defied public pressure and defended the soldiers. Their reason was ideological: every man is entitled to counsel, and if these soldiers were to be denied a defense then everything the colonists claimed by right would be hypocrisy. Significantly, a Boston jury found 5 men innocent and 2 guilty of manslaughter, with sentences suspended.

M. Ironically, Champagne Charlie Townshend had died, and the Townshend Acts were repealed on the same day that the Massacre occurred.

1. As was the case with the Stamp Act, there was a change of ministry.
2. Note that the rapid changes of ministry (for purely internal reasons) meant that a truly coherent imperial policy was impossible.
3. The Townshend duties had collected just £3,500 but had cost English merchants £7,250,000 in losses. (Cummins and White 34)
4. The tax on tea was left in place as a symbol of Parliament's authority to tax the colonies.
5. The boycotts die out (in part due to very successful smuggling of Dutch tea)

VII. A "Quiet Period"
A. The relative calm of the next few years was more apparent than real.
B. The tax on tea caused no problem, but smuggling of Dutch tea was very widespread.

C. On June 9, 1770, the revenue cutter Gaspee, which had run aground off Rhode Island, was boarded by several boatloads of colonists (evidently led by a leading Newport merchant) (Greene 188) and burned.

1. Attempts to apprehend the culprits met with no success, and in despair at ever receiving justice from a Rhode Island jury, the government established a special commission to investigate the crime with authority to send anyone accused to Britain for trial—a violation of the common-law right to a trial by a jury of one's peers.

D. In the meantime, the Massachusetts General Court continued its feud with the governor (originally Gov. Bernard, then Thomas Hutchinson).

1. In 1771, the government announced that the Crown would pay the governor's salary in Massachusetts.
2. In 1772, the government announced that the Crown would also pay the judges' salaries.

E. In March, 1773, the House of Burgesses, at the prodding of the radicals Patrick
Henry and Thomas Jefferson, created a Committee of Correspondence and urged other colonies to do the same.
1. The specific reason was the Gaspee commission.
2. The Committees of Correspondence constituted the mechanism for united effort.
3. All of the other colonies accepted this idea.

VIII. The North Ministry

A. The Tea Act 1773

1. The intent of the Tea Act was simply to save the East India Company.
2. The East India Company had 17,000,000 lbs of surplus tea. (Greene 196)
3. Current law required the East India Company to sell tea to wholesalers in England, who then sold to retailers in the colonies.
4. The Tea Act permitted the East India Company to sell tea directly in the colonies through its agents.
   a. Cutting out the middle-man in England enabled the Company to lower the price
   b. Duties paid on the tea entering England were also remitted. This allowed a further reduction in the price of tea.
   c. The Townshend Duty on tea entering the colonies remained in place.
   d. Please note that the price of tea dropped.
   e. The Company quickly designated agents in each major port and arranged to ship 600,000 lbs of tea. (Greene 196)
5. "The ministers hoped that more tea sold in America would provide a larger American revenue, and the would not give up the remaining token of parliamentary authority over the colonies. Not only did they fail to appreciate the degree to which this attempt to undermine principle by economic inducement affronted men of deep conviction among the colonies, they failed also to see that the concession of the right to the Company to establish a monopoly in the sale of tea in the hands of a few agents would offend important mercantile interests. Nor did they properly weigh the consequences of the discontent which would be aroused by the prospect, which they welcomed, of driving out of business the many merchants who dealt in smuggled tea. In all the chief American ports the Act drove merchants to co-operate with radical politicians in further defiance of British authority." (Christie 81-2)
6. Tea ships were ordered to return at New York and Philadelphia.
7. Charleston stored the tea in a warehouse and left it there to rot.
8. The Boston Tea Party 12/16/1773
   a. The East India agents in Boston were Gov. Hutchinson's sons.
   b. The tea could not be landed but the Governor refused to allow the vessels to clear for England without paying the duty. After 20
days, the vessels and tea were subject to forfeiture, which would put the tea up for auction.

c. Before this could occur, 200 men dressed as Indians marched two by two to the harbor, urged on by 8,000 spectators, boarded the ships, and threw 342 chests of tea worth about £9,000 into the harbor. They were careful not to damage any other property nor to harm anyone.

IX. **The Intolerable Acts/ Coercive Acts** (1774)
A. Parliament's response was furious. Lord North and Parliament were in full agreement.
B. **Boston Port Act**—closed Boston harbor until restitution was made. Closing Boston harbor meant financial ruin to every inhabitant.
C. **Massachusetts Government Act**—Governor's council made appointed by king, not elected; town meetings were limited to once/yr.
D. **Administration of Justice Act**—provided for persons accused of capital crimes arising out of attempting to enforce imperial law to be transferred from Massachusetts to England. The colonists interpreted this as an incitement to officials to use violence, and called it the "Murder Act."
E. **Quartering Act**—authorized quartering of troops in town, not in barracks
F. **Quebec Act**—an unrelated measure but the timing fanned paranoia
   1. This bill was well-intended, and with one exception, was a good piece of legislation.
   2. Gave Canada a permanent government but without an assembly. The French population had never had an assembly, so this did not matter to them.
   3. Established French civil law, not English common law, also a wise provision since the population had always lived under French civil law.
   4. Special protection for Catholic Church, recognizing that the population was Catholic (in Great Britain, a Catholic could not vote, serve on a jury, or hold office.)
   5. Annexed everything West of Appalachians and North of Ohio to Quebec. This was unwise, although a logical development from the Proclamation Line. It would surely alarm the colonies with claims to the Ohio River Valley.
   6. Lack of assembly felt to be ominous
   7. Territorial annexation aroused ire; new settlers would be under Canadian law
   8. Congregationalists and Presbyterians saw protection of Catholic church as a step toward establishing Anglican church throughout colonies
      a. There was a rumor that the Anglican Church intended to establish a bishop and ecclesiastical courts in the colonies, a prospect that infuriated the descendants of Puritans. This was not true but was
widely believed.

G. General Thomas Gage sent to replace Hutchinson as Governor of Massachusetts in addition to his duties as Commander in Chief.
   1. In point of fact, the Coercive Acts followed recommendations made by Gage himself to the King.

H. Unwise and unjust laws
   1. Cost an empire
   2. By subjecting Massachusetts to direct Parliamentary control, and backing it up with troops, the government indicated that Parliamentary control meant loss of liberty
   3. Laws were flagrant violations of English principals of justice.

I. The severity and injustice of the acts gave credence to the view that "No longer could there be much serious doubt that a malignant conspiracy among the ministers and a corrupt majority in Parliament was intent upon establishing an 'arbitrary power' in the colonies." (Greene 211) This is the essence of the Bailyn Thesis.

J. James Wilson of Pennsylvania wrote an influential pamphlet in which he tried to shift the basis of the colonial protest. The reason was that the Coercive Acts were not tax measures but were as destructive of colonial rights as if they were. "Wilson stated categorically that the colonies were 'not bound by the acts of the British Parliament.'" at all. (Greene 212) [Aren't you glad I didn't give you a long quote from this???

K. Thomas Jefferson was even more radical in "A Summary View of the Rights of British America." "Like Wilson, he concluded as well that the colonies were distinct and independent governments bound to Britain only through their mutual allegiance to a common monarch [the Commonwealth idea] and that the British Parliament had therefore 'no right to exercise authority' over them. [In other words, a radicalization of the American position--all Parliamentary authority is rejected] But Jefferson went significantly farther than . . . Wilson in pointing out that not just Parliament but George III acting in his executive capacity had been guilty of a 'wanton exercise of . . . power' in the colonies." (Greene 212)

L. Joseph Galloway represented a conservative [!!] colonial position when he proposed a compromise solution involving an inter-colonial American parliament. The President-General of the Parliament would be appointed by the King; the delegates would be elected by the various colonies. This Parliament would have jurisdiction over all matters involving all general issues involving Great Britain and the colonies, or two or more colonies. Internal affairs would be left to each colony. This Parliament would have a veto over any laws passed by Parliament in Great Britain affecting the colonies. [!!!!!]
   1. This proposal resembles Franklin's Albany Plan of Union, and is a half-way step to a united and independent country built on federal principles.
   2. Consider that this conservative colonial position could never have been
accepted by Parliament, and one sees how far matters have gone.

3. Note that Galloway, like most colonists, did not desire independence. They desired a workable solution to their grievances within the British Empire.

M. It is my view that, from this point on, an outbreak of fighting was probably inevitable.

X. **Lexington and Concord**

A. New England was clearly a powder keg on the eve of revolution. By this point in time, David Hackett Fischer believes, large numbers of colonists had decided that open conflict was inevitable.

B. I am going to describe this in some detail, using David Hackett Fischer's fascinating Paul Revere's Ride as a source. My chief reason (aside from its interest) is to illustrate the process by which actual fighting erupted. Notice the interaction of attitudes, choices and events, especially after actual shooting takes place. Especially, there is a dynamic to violence. This is the sort of thing that tends to happen whenever there is a chaotic and tense situation.

C. The New Englanders had no warrior ethic and no love of fighting for its own sake. They were farmers, seamen and merchants. But they were utterly determined to defend their homes and way of life, and to prevent others from ruling their lives.

D. Although not "warriors," they were by no means ignorant of war. New England had been involved in war during every generation.

1. The *Minute Men* were not a new invention. These segments of the Puritan "training bands" militia originated during the wars with the French.

2. Military service in the militias were expected of every able bodied male between 16 and 50. Many men who fought at Concord were older than 50.
   a. Interestingly, the Puritans and Yankees recognized conscientious objectors.
   b. The majority of them were not, however, pacifists. Once convinced of the righteousness of their cause, they could be implacable.
   c. War for the New England colonists was not a game, a pursuit of glory, a test of individual prowess, or a means of proving one's manhood. War was an ugly but necessary job, to be accomplished as quickly and rationally as possible so that everyone could go home. (Fischer 153-4) This is really the American way of war through most of our history.
   d. Once aroused, soldiers like this can be terrible opponents--ruthless, rational, and almost impossible to discourage.
   e. Many militia leaders were veterans of the French and Indian Wars. (1) Captain John Parker of Lexington (the grandfather of Theodore Parker) is an example, having served in campaigns against Louisberg and Quebec, and probably in
Rogers' Rangers. (He was also dying of tuberculosis, which did not keep him from the fighting.) (Fischer 154)

(2) In point of fact, few of the British troops engaged at Lexington and Concord had ever been in combat (and their fighting showed it).

(3) In all likelihood, more Americans that day were combat veterans than the British.

3. Fischer emphasizes an important point: the New England militia, down to the last man, was very clear about what they were fighting for. They were no sheep led to slaughter. They elected their own officers, made their own rules, and expected to participate in military decisions. This is grass-roots democracy of a fundamental kind.

4. A famous interview expresses these reasons to fight in stark, simple terms. I quote it as Fischer records it: "Many years later, Captain Levi Preston of Danvers was asked why he went to war that day. At the age of ninety-one, his memory of the Lexington alarm was crystal clear, and his understanding very different from academic interpretations of this event. An historian asked him, "Captain Preston, what made you go to the Concord Fight?" "What did I go for?" the old man replied, subtly rephrasing the historian's question to drain away its determinism. [a very good point!!!!! Men make choices; those choices make history; human beings are not rats and history is not a Skinnerian experiment; it is not 'determined.' ] The interviewer tried again, ' . . . Were you oppressed by the Stamp Act?' he asked. 'I never saw any stamps,' Preston answered, 'and I always understood that none were ever sold.' 'Well, what about the tea tax?' 'Tea tax, I never drank a drop of the stuff, the boys threw it all overboard.' 'But I suppose you have been reading Harrington, Sidney, and Locke [Whig political philosophers] about the eternal principle of liberty?" 'I never heard of these men. the only books we had were the Bible, the Catechism, Watts' psalms and hymns and the almanacs.' 'Well, then, what was the matter?' 'Young man, what we meant in going for those Redcoats was this: we always had governed ourselves and we always meant to. They didn't mean we should.'" (Fischer 163-4) (emphasis added)

E. Systematic efforts were made to prepare the colony for defense of its liberties--the fighting is not some spontaneous eruption.

1. Arms and powder were collected, in defiance of a British interdiction.
2. Militia companies increased and drilled.
3. Networks of communication were strengthened.
   a. One of the revelations from Fischer's Paul Revere's Ride is to destroy the myth of the solitary rider (of little importance).
Revere's Ride was a collective effort and well-organized. That organization required forethought and determination.

F. Gage's orders were explicit about arresting the ringleaders and seizing the powder (which would deny the colonists the power to resist).
1. Gage was not the tyrant he was made out to be. He was scrupulous to stay within the law.
   a. He refused to arbitrarily arrest men like John Hancock, Samuel Adams, or Paul Revere.
2. Gage may have understood that resistance was not the result of a small coterie of revolutionary leaders, like the Bolsheviks. The conspiracy was very open ended and widespread.
   a. A study of 7 groups of Boston Whigs, comprising 255 men (of a population of 15,000) showed that 81% were members of only one group. No one was a member of more than 5. Only two men were members of 5: they were Dr. Joseph Warren and Paul Revere. (Fischer 27)
3. There were several attempts to seize powder that year. The first was successful, but the second two were thwarted.
   a. Revere gave the warning both times.
   b. At Portsmouth, the militia stormed a British fort (held by a few invalids), disarmed the soldiers (who resisted) and hauled down the British colors. (Fischer 52-57)
   c. In February, an attempt to seize powder at Salem could easily have begun the fighting. Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed and the British commander had his men under good control.

G. **Paul Revere's Ride**
1. Under direct orders, Gage planned a secret mission to seize powder at Concord.
2. He did not order the force to arrest Hancock and Adams, although his own orders insisted upon it.
3. He assembled a picked force of his best troops--grenadiers and light infantry--about 900 in all, led by Lt. Col. Francis Smith. (Fischer 114)
4. In a small town like Boston, the preparations could not remain secret.
   a. When Revere was captured, he was able to tell his captors more about the mission than his captors knew!
5. Yes, on April 18, 1775, Paul Revere did in fact elude the British watch in Boston harbor and row across while two lanterns shone in the Old North Church steeple. He then borrowed a horse and started for Lexington.
6. On the way, he systematically warned leaders in each town. He eluded British patrols and recruited more messengers. Numerous horsemen radiated out from the Boston environs that night.
7. Revere warned Hancock and Adams to flee at Lexington. Then he went
on to Concord in the company of William Dawes (who took a different route from Boston) and Dr. William Prescott, whom he had met on the way.
a. He was captured, but later released. Dawes was captured but escaped. Prescott escaped and went on to warn the countryside.

H. **Lexington**

1. By the time the British vanguard reached Lexington, the countryside was fully aroused.

2. The Lexington militia had been standing to arms much of the night, had been told that it was a false alarm, and ordered to disperse. There were only about 70 of them present when the British arrived.

3. As Maj. John Pitcairn's advance guard of 238 men approached Lexington, Pitcairn ordered the men to load.

4. The road at Lexington branches. The left fork takes one to Concord, Pitcairn's destination. The right fork takes one through the town and then north. The militia--60 or 70 men--was drawn up on the common near the meeting house. It was not necessary for the British to march through town or to directly confront the militia.

5. The officer in the lead evidently did not wish to leave militia on his flank. He directed the lead companies into the town, advancing at double time.

6. Capt. Parker's instructions were clear, and repeated: the Americans were not to fire unless fired upon.

7. The British deployed into battle order at 70 yards, the men giving their battle cries (which made it very difficult for them to hear spoken orders) It is a chaotic situation.

8. The British officer on the spot ordered the militia to disperse in highly provocative language.

9. Parker decided that the odds were not good, and in fact ordered the militia to disperse. Most of them were obeying when the shooting started.
a. Only two Americans were killed in the line; everyone else was killed while trying to disperse. There is little evidence that many Americans fired at all.

10. No one knows who fired the first shot. American witnesses were sure it was a British soldier, the British equally sure it was an American. Both agree that no one from the militia line or the British line fired the first shot.
a. Fischer offers three explanations, any of which could be the truth: two drunken colonists in the tavern; the British officer on the spot (known to be hot-headed and intemperate) or the accidental discharge of a musket (which is perhaps the most likely of all).

11. Whoever fired first, the British line opened up with volley fire without orders from any officers. They poured volley after volley in (there was no
order to "aim" in the British manual of arms; load, present, fire and reload as fast as possible) and then, also without orders, charged with the bayonet.

12. The militia broke. The soldiers broke ranks and began ransacking houses and buildings. It was only with grave difficulty that Lt. Col. Smith, arriving personally, brought them back to order.
   a. In other words, the British professional soldiers were very poorly disciplined and their officers repeatedly lost control of them.
   b. Putting myself in their shoes, I understand how this happened. Those men were tired, hungry, frustrated, and afraid. On the other hand, it is easy to see why the Americans did not want professional soldiers in their midst.

13. Captain Parker regrouped his militia, and would meet the British again later that day--from ambush.

I. Concord

1. The militia at Concord decided to pull out of the town itself onto defendable ground beyond a bridge.

2. The military stores in the town had already been removed.

3. Smith deployed his men to control the bridges, seize powder believed to be beyond the town, and ransack the town for stores (without search warrants).

4. Trouble began again when the British set fire to some wooden gun carriages; the fire spread to the town house. British troops assisted townsmen in trying to save the building.

5. From the bridge however, the militia could see smoke rising from the town, and believed the British were torching the town.

6. The militia shook out into a column and advanced on the soldiers guarding the bridge. They were not in battle line.

7. Again, without orders, British soldiers opened fire. Most of their first volley went high—a sign of inexperience. The militia deployed into line of battle and replied. Since they lapped the position on the bridge, and were firing into them from three sides, the effect may be imagined.
   a. The Americans here began a custom that continued throughout the Revolutionary War: they shot the officers first.
   b. The casualty rate of officers at Lexington and Concord was murderous. Here, half of the officers were hit at the first fire. The effect on control of the British troops, who were trained to respond like automatons, was bad.
   c. Targeting officers was not sporting, but then the Americans were not interested in fighting fair.

8. The British line broke and ran. A "raw" militia had broken the famed British infantry.
a. As they left, an American tomahawked a wounded soldier on the bridge. Word of that atrocity spread, contributing to British atrocities later on. Violence tends to escalate. Once the killing starts, it is hard to stop.

9. With more and more militia appearing, and from their steady behavior, Lt. Col. Smith prepared for a fighting withdrawal.

10. Militia companies now set a series of ambushes along the approach route, using the terrain with skill, and forcing the British to storm the positions one by one. When pressured too heavily, the Americans would withdraw; the British just wanted to leave.

11. The continued loss of officers, coupled with exhaustion (they hadn't eaten for over a day), and fear began to break down the column's discipline. By the time they reached Lexington, they were a mob.

12. A relief column under Lord Hugh Percy (one of England's richest men and a soldier of wide experience and great skill) met them at Lexington.

13. Percy had now about 1900 men (Fischer 245) and deployed them in a lozenge, prepared to fight in any direction.

a. His chief problems were limited ammunition, difficult terrain, and the skilled tactics of his opponents.

(1) An ammunition wagon escorted by 14 men was captured by 6 elderly New England men (led by a man described as a "mulatto," David Lamson (Fischer 243) Six of the grenadiers, running away, surrendered to an old woman. This led to the Whig quip "If one old Yankee woman can take six grenadiers, how many soldiers will it require to conquer America?" (Fischer 244)

(2) Between Concord and Lexington, American militia offered battle 8 times in a regular, European fashion. The British accepted battle 6 times, 4 times at close range. British regulars were broken twice. This is not a "rabble" nor farmers fighting as individuals.

(3) Now, the militia changed tactics. The deployed in skirmish formation, "dispers'd but adhering," (Fischer 250) This style of fighting forced the British into a battle of attrition (which they couldn't win). It also requires a high order of personal resolve and initiative from the men and especially the officers who executed it. Losses among militia officers were high (indicating their involvement in the fighting) The militia earned Lord Percy's professional respect and praise that day. (Fischer 254)

b. At some points the fighting was house to house, as colonists near the road defended their homes.
80 year old Jason Russell barricaded himself in his home, saying "An Englishman's home is his castle." He was found dead in the doorway with many bayonet wounds. (Fischer 256)

78 year old Samuel Whittemore fired 5 shots from his yard until flushed by a squad. He shot 3 soldiers before shot in the face and bayonetted. He suffered 14 wounds, but survived another 18 years. Fischer 257)

55 year old Hezekiah Wynan continually rode within range of the British, dismounted, picked off a soldier, then mounted to find another position. He was easily recognizable and grew to be greatly feared. (Fischer 254-5)

Percy lost control of his men in the house to house fighting in the town of Menotomy. It is clear that his men were not much better disciplined than Smith's had been. By now, his men must have been maddened.

c. Percy was able to break out of the ring (due to the reluctance of the Salem militia commander to engage; he had been forced by his men to march to the battle in the first place; I suspect Salem found a new captain soon) and finally reach Boston safely.

14. Thomas Gage now found himself penned up in Boston by an aroused, angry, and armed populace. War had begun.

XI. Historians' Interpretations of the American Revolution

A. Having covered the events chronologically, I want you to familiarize yourself with the major interpretations of the American Revolution. The issue of "What caused the American Revolution?" is a pretty obvious essay question.

B. Interpretations of Mercantilism

1. **George Beer** (1907) Stresses mutual reciprocity
2. **Charles Andrews** (1930s) Supervision and administration of the empire weak and ineffective
3. **Louis Hacker** (1936) [The American Revolution] had as its function the release of American merchant and planting capitalism from the fetters of the English Mercantile System." (Grob and Billias 69)
4. **Lawrence Harper** (1942) "An analysis of the economic effects of British mercantilism fails to establish its exploitive features as the proximate cause of the Revolution." (Grob and Billias 70)
5. **Oliver M. Dickerson** (1951) Attacks economic interpretation of the Revolution. "It was only after 1763 . . . when the British altered their mercantilist system to raise revenue rather than to control trade within the empire that the colonists began protesting. In the period after the French and Indian War, the dominant motive of British imperialism changed from regulation of trade and commerce to regulation for the sake of revenue and
political exploitation." (71)

6. **Lawrence H. Gipson** (1936-70) "The mother country was perfectly justified in levying taxes to pay part of the costs of administering the empire in America. . . . [I]n view of the protection Britain had provided, the taxes imposed upon the American colonists after 1763 were neither excessive nor oppressive." (72)

7. **Lewis Namier** "Parliament's outlook was narrow-minded, factious, and provincial, and its workings were organized around material interests, family connections, and patronage. This situation made it impossible for Parliament to achieve the kind of broad minded, imperial view required for sound policies of empire . . . . Britain could not have produced a viable imperial policy, resolved her quarrel with the colonies, or prevented the loss of her empire." (74)

8. **Robert Paul Thomas** (1965) "Neither the navigation acts nor the new British imperial regulations applied after 1763 imposed any significant economic burden upon America." (76)

C. **Interpretations of the American Revolution**

1. **George Beer, Charles Andrews, Lawrence H. Gipson** Imperial School 1893-1960s "All three historians believed that constitutional issues lay at the bottom of the dispute between the colonies and the mother country . . . . By the eve of the Revolution, the colonists had arrived at a new concept of empire--colonies as self-governing units within an empire held together only by a common allegiance to the king." (105)

2. **Progressive School**
   a. "**[Carl] Becker** . . . took the position that the American Revolution should be considered not as one revolution but two. The first was an external revolution . . . caused by a clash of economic interests between the colonies and mother country. The second was an internal revolution--a conflict between America's social classes--to determine whether the upper or lower classes would rule once the British departed . . . . the 'question of home rule' and the 'question . . . of who should rule at home'" (106-7)
   b. **Charles Beard**, "[a]fter an examination of the economic holdings of the framers of the Constitution, advanced his now-famous hypothesis that the events leading to the convention of 1787 mirrored a split in American society--a conflict between the rich and the poor, farmers and merchants, debtors and creditors, and holders of real and paper wealth. More than any other single work written in the Populist-Progressive era, Beard's book caused Progressive historians to view the period between the 1760s and the 1780s as one of continuous conflict between social classes in America over economic matters." (107)
c. **Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr.** "went on to comment about the increasing dread of class conflict once independence was declared. . . . [T]he merchants drew together again in the late 1780s to found a new government that would safeguard their class interests. Once united the merchant class became . . . 'a potent factor in the conservative counterrevolution that led to establishment of the United States Constitution.' To Schlesinger, the Constitution was the antithesis of the Revolution." (107-8)

3. **Neoconservative School**  "The Revolution was basically a conservative movement . . . in order to preserve a social order that was already democratic in colonial days. When British reforms after 1763 threatened to upset the existing democratic social order in America, the colonists rose in rebellion." (109)

   a. **Robert E. Brown** . . . set out specifically to challenge the thesis of the Progressive school of historians that the Revolution was, in part, a class conflict over the question of who should rule at home. One of the starting assumptions of the Progressive scholars . . . was that the structure of American society was undemocratic because property qualifications for suffrage prevented many persons from voting. After studying the structure of society in Massachusetts, Brown concluded that the vast majority of adult males in that colony were farmers whose real estate holdings were sufficient to meet the necessary property qualifications for voting. Middle class democracy in Massachusetts before the war was an established fact." (109)

   b. **Daniel Boorstin** "Americans were fighting to retain traditional rights and liberties granted to them under the British constitution. . . . In refusing to accept the principle of no taxation without representation [sic], . . . the patriots were insisting upon an old liberty, and not a new right.." (109-10)

   c. **Bernard Bailyn** (1967) "The colonists . . . were convinced that there was a sinister plot against liberty in both England and America . . . . From the American view, then, the British measures after 1763 were nothing less than a widespread plot to rob all Englishmen of their liberties at home and abroad." (112-13)

XII. An Interpretation of the American Revolution

A. By now, it must be obvious to you that my interpretation is essentially Neoconservative. The Progressive interpretation, while very influential in textbooks, simply cannot stand up to close scrutiny. Re-reading the debates while I typed this has re-confirmed that belief.

B. British government unable to cope with problems

1. While Parliament acquired more and more power (one result of the
Revolution was George's loss of power to appoint executives), and which now wanted to directly legislate in the colonies, while colonial belief and practice was a loose confederation of colonies all subject to the monarch through his ministers [colonial assemblies -> king ← Parliament]. Idea is similar to today's Commonwealth. By 1763, all colonial assemblies had seized a dominant role. When Parliament attempted to extend its imperial control, they had to challenge colonial assemblies. That contest forced colonists to spell out their political philosophy. They developed it fast, and stuck with it. The ensuing political confrontation escalates demands and polarizes positions.

C. The colonists were very "liberal minded," very concerned with potential tyranny. The colonists gradually became convinced that there was a conspiracy (led by George III's ministers) to systematically deprive them of liberties. It was a struggle for political survival in the sense of "will the colonies be self-governing"? [the Bailyn Thesis]

D. Colonial position: King and Parliament had undisputed control over foreign affairs; and overseas trade; Parliament could direct trade into channels profitable to empire; in all other things, colonies had home rule.

E. Upcoming Revolution was not fought to obtain freedom but to preserve the freedom they already had. Independence was reluctantly arrived at.
   1. [cf Degler 83] "Colonies had arrived at Commonwealth idea of Empire: colonies as self-governing units held together only by common allegiance to the king. (Grob and Billias 105)
   2. [cf Degler 88] "Americans fought the Revolution... in order to preserve a social order that was already democratic in colonial days." (109)
   3. "Stress concept of a consensus "among Americans rather than class struggle [Boorstin; Degler, Robert E. Brown; Rossiter] "One important element in this American consensus was the widespread belief among all social classes that the liberties of the people were based upon certain fundamental principles of self-government which could not be change without their consent."
   4. Bailyn--radical Whig ideology, a plot against liberty
   5. Wallace Brown: Tories = 7.6-18% of white population
   6. Boorstin "ours was one of the few conservative colonial rebellions of modern times. (124)
   7. "From the colonists' point of view, until 1776, it was Parliament that had revolutionary, by exercising a power for which there was no warrant in England constitutional precedent." (125) "It is my view the major issue of the American Revolution was the true constitution of the British Empire." (Degler 81-113)
   8. "... the whole corpus of Revolutionary rhetoric... was conservative, expressive of the wish to retain the old ways... One needs only to run
through the list of grievances in the Declaration of Independence to be forcefully reminded that what these revolutionaries wanted was nothing but the status quo ante bellum. . . . These men had been satisfied with their existence, they were not disgruntled agitators or frustrated politicians; they were a strange new breed—contented revolutionaries" (Degler 88)
Works Cited


