

## 2 FAMILY FEUD: THE COMING OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

HISTORY 1100.3, 10-12 OCT. 2006

### 3 I. THE ACCIDENTAL POLITICAL

#### LEGACY OF ENGLISH COLONIZATION

- ◆ A. England allowed American colonists to largely govern themselves.
  - 6 of 12 early mainland colonies lived under charters, that could be used like contracts or constitutions to limit power of crown.
  - Crown took back charters when it could, but even most royal colonies had strong local governments with own rights:
    - Bicameral legislatures with elected lower houses (assemblies) and appointed upper houses (councils).
    - Governors appointed by king or proprietor, or elected.
    - Town meetings (NE) and county courts (S) ran local communities.
    - Most white property-owning colonial men were represented in a local government that had effective control of taxation & laws affecting everyday life.
- ◆ B. Result: English & royal power was heavily diluted in America.
  - Colonies enjoyed accidentally federal (distributed) system of government with a *de facto* division of British sovereignty between crown & locals.
  - Early effort to change this (The Dominion of New England) failed in 1688-89, with “Glorious Revolution” that overthrew James II & Stuarts.
    - British constitutional monarchy (dominated by Parliament) dates from 1689
  - Need for colonial cooperation in wars led to long period of “salutary neglect” by home government between 1689 & 1763
  - Colonists came to see themselves as enjoying same liberties under British constitution as the people in Great Britain itself did. Colonial assemblies were seen as little Parliaments.
    - American pride in being British revolved partly around enjoying post G.R. “British liberties” or the “rights of Englishmen”: Taxation by representative gov., trial by local jury, etc.
- ◆ C. England’s American colonies were uniquely positioned to receive & accept the most radical political & social ideas of the time
  - Entirely by accident, they had freest governments in world, for white male patriarchs anyway
  - Liberal/radical theory seemed to reflect American reality
    - “Separation of powers” theory developed by Montesquieu already existed here, unintentionally.
    - The “actual representation” that British radicals sought already existed here.

### 4 II. MASTERS OF THEIR DOMAIN?

#### AMERICAN PATRIARCHS BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

- ◆ A. A very British, very provincial & patriarchal society (clip from *Liberty!*)
- ◆ B. 18<sup>th</sup>-century economy & the growth of an American elite
  - 1. Lax enforcement of British trade regulations before 1760s allowed semi-independent economy and wealth to grow.
    - Examples: Middle Colonies wheat; New England merchants who grew wealthy smuggling sugar (an “enumerated” commodity) out of the foreign West Indies.
  - 2. In all colonies, local elites arose who controlled their colonies’ internal affairs: planters in South, merchants, lawyers & manor lords (NY) in North.
  - 3. Modelled themselves on English gentry by building mansions & importing goods
    - Southern big houses
    - Portraits of Boston merchants
    - Key part of self-image: Not renters but a working elite or “natural aristocracy”
  - 4. Colonial assemblies representing these elites gained key powers over taxation and government spending.
    - American elites resented their relative inability to break into the top offices (colonial governorships) & British elite (Washington’s military commission)
- ◆ C. Pressures facing lesser American patriarchs
  - Growing inequalities of wealth, worker unrest in colonial cities
  - Land shortages in the East threatened farmers’ control over their children, ability to provide them with patrimonies & dowries
    - Created tension in families, strong impetus for westward expansion
  - Rise of the “long hunters” & squatters: white men living Indian-like the most on the edges of European settlement
    - Example: Daniel Boone

### 5 III. BACKGROUND OF THE IMPERIAL REFORMS

- ◆ A. Legacy of the Seven Years (or French and Indian) War [Europe, 1756-1763; America, 1754-1760]
  - 1. New prime minister William Pitt’s total war beat the French but ballooned the British national debt.
  - 2. After heavy taxation during the war, British people & elite were in no mood to pay even more taxes to pay off the debt.
  - 3. In British eyes, the colonists had avoided their fair share of the war’s financial burdens by playing politics with funding & trading with the enemy.
    - Colonists did not agree, having suffered from French/Indian raids.
  - 4. Alone Together: The French defeat changed the equation and ended need for “salutary neglect.”

### 6 III. BACKGROUND OF THE IMPERIAL REFORMS

- ◆ B. Aftermath
  - 1. Pontiac’s Rebellion, unsuccessful yet expensive & frontier-wide Indian war.
  - 2. Brought on Proclamation of 1763, restricting western settlement and thwarting colonial ambitions (high & low).
    - To colonists, this defeated the purpose of the war.
      - F&I War had started had started with George Washington’s expedition on behalf of colonial land companies.
  - 3. British military recalled to cities where trouble later started, money to be saved through Quartering Act (1765).

### 7 IV. IMPERIAL REFORM AND THE OUTBREAK OF COLONIAL RESISTANCE

- ◆ A. British view of colonial rights: not many
  - Colonies were under the direct sovereignty of the “King-in-Parliament.”
  - Colonists did *not* have all the “rights of Englishmen.”
- ◆ B. Prime Minister George Grenville’s reforms of the empire, designed to make American colonies pay their share of imperial expenses and better integrate them into the empire.
  - 1. Reform of the customs service
    - a) Cleared out corrupt custom officers, hired new British-born ones, prohibited absentee officials.
    - b) New vice-admiralty court in Halifax, Nova Scotia.
    - c) The Molasses Act, or Sugar Act (1764) – rates lowered, enforcement tightened
  - 2. The Stamp Act (1765) – document tax that had long been paid, at much higher rates, in England.
    - Townshend-Barré debate

8  **IV. IMPERIAL REFORM AND THE OUTBREAK OF COLONIAL RESISTANCE (CONT.)**

- ◆ C. Colonial resistance to the Stamp Act and other reforms.
  - 1. American fears of “slavery” & a conspiracy to take away their rights.
  - 2. Intimidation, disobedience, and violent protests, worst in Boston, rendered the law unenforceable by terrorizing stamp distributors.
    - Partly orchestrated by smuggler-merchants and the “Sons of Liberty,” led by lawyers and printers most affected by the law.
  - 3. Non-importation movement: boycotting British imports to put economic pressure on Britain.
    - Women involved in this, trying to change fashions and social values.
  - 4. Stamp Act repealed, as demanded by British merchants, but Parliament asserts its rights at the same time.
    - Declaratory Act (1766) expressed Parliament’s unchanging underlying position: could legislate for colonies “in all cases whatsoever.”
  - 5. Controversies and riots in NY over the Quartering Act. NY Assembly suspended for refusing \$ for troops.

9  **V. WORKING ON THEIR RELATIONSHIP**

- ◆ A. American confusion about just where they stood & wanted to stand in the British empire:
  - Was the problem “internal taxes” or any British taxes? Did they want representation in Parliament or was that impossible?
- ◆ B. Growing apart
  - Townshend Acts (1767-70): “External taxes” on glass, paint, tea & other imports:
  - Quiet period in early 1770s interrupted by Boston “Massacre” (1770), Sam Adams efforts (committees of correspondence) to renew crisis, make bolder statements about American rights.
  - Dysfunctional family feelings: America as disobedient, ungrateful child, Britain as abusive parent
    - Not to be taken too literally, the metaphor of the empire as a family gave great emotional power to both sides of the argument, esp. British & loyalists
    - Empire was also seen as a body, a metaphor that upheld traditional views of the indivisibility of sovereignty
    - The King’s own body was still sacrosanct: criticizing him would have been treasonous & a signal for rebellion & independence.

10  **VI. THE IMPERIAL DEBATE: WINNING THE ARGUMENT, LOSING THE EMPIRE**

- ◆ A. Last round of the Imperial Debate: Gov. Thomas Hutchinson vs. Sam Adams & Mass. Assembly, 1773
  - 1. Issue: Hutchinson’s new salary, paid by king.
  - 2. Mass. House & Benjamin Franklin position: “distinct and separate states” with “one head and common sovereign.”
  - 3. Hutchinson’s position: choice was total submission to British sovereignty or total independence, no meaningful line could be drawn between the two.
  - 4. Ultimate conclusion: If Hutchinson was right, Americans were “slaves” and had to sever the connection with Britain.
- ◆ B. Symbolic Crisis: Tea Act and Boston Tea Party (1773)
  - Tea Act was actually a tax cut that played long with another American theory of the empire, revenue vs. regulatory taxes
- ◆ C. Non-Symbolic Response, bringing real tyranny: The Coercive Acts, 1774 (Boston Port Bill, Admin. Of Justice Act, Mass. Government Act)