

## The Origins of the American Revolution

### Lesson 2: "Boycotting Mercantilism"

U.S. History I: Grades 9-12 (Advanced Placement)

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## Introduction to the Topic

The Stamp Act of 1765 was the first direct tax on the colonists' way of life. Legal documents, newspapers, playing cards, and even dice were taxed under the Stamp Act. Many of these goods were used by lawyers, and newspaper printers; and by placing a stamp tax on these goods, their businesses were adversely affected. To add insult to injury, the Stamp Act taxed the colonists without their consent. Instinctively, the colonists in Boston and New York rioted in the face of these unjust taxes (see Lesson 1: "Resistance is Brewing"). Although the colonists effectively pressured Parliament to repeal the Stamp Act, on the very same day, Parliament passed the Declaratory Act which reasserted Parliament's right to tax the colonies with or without their consent.

Colonists realized the gravity of the situation when in 1767, Lord Charles Townshend convinced Parliament to tax the colonists indirectly. This time raw materials such as glass, lead, and fabric would be taxed under the Townshend Acts. By now, the leaders of the Sons of Liberty and the resistance movement recognized the intimidation tactic of rioting was not effective in the long term. This time, colonists wanted to hit the British government where it would hurt the most—their pocketbook. In 1767, patriot merchants throughout the colonies were signing nonimportation agreements. In other words, they planned to boycott goods produced in the mother country—especially goods that were being taxed without the colonists' consent.

The idea was novel and brilliant. If the patriot merchants succeeded, they would severely impede the prosperity of English merchants who benefited from trade with the American colonies. Patriots believed that if revenue from the colonies dried up, the English merchants would pressure Parliament to repeal the Townshend Acts, and reestablish free trade with the colonies. The patriot merchant's scheme to derail the British administration's plan to tax the colonies seemed infallible.

But then everything went terribly wrong. Loyalist merchants of course refused to sign the nonimportation agreement, and even those that had signed the agreement were being accused of breaking it. Again, patriots in Boston fell back on their old habits, and resorted to violence to enforce the nonimportation agreement. Newspapers such as the *Boston Gazette* printed the names of all those merchants who had either not signed the nonimportation agreement, or who had signed it but were violating the terms. In this terror filled atmosphere, accusations were hurled in all directions. Even John Hancock, a patriot politician, was accused of importing luxury goods from England.

To intimidate all merchants who were not abiding by the terms of nonimportation, the more radical members of the Sons of Liberty defiled the store fronts of all merchants who continued

to import taxable goods from England. Patriots even went so far as to hang placards in front of the stores of all merchants importing from England, with warnings to the unwary consumers that might wonder up.

The attempt by the colonists to boycott English goods and the effect this had on the future of British policy will be the subject of this lesson plan. In the lesson that follows, students will read a secondary source detailing the process behind the nonimportation agreement, and the effect this had on the English economy, and future political policy. Next, your students will analyze *Letters from a Farmer in Philadelphia*, a primary source written by John Dickinson after the onset of the Townshend duties. Finally, your students will analyze a newspaper article that encouraged consumers to boycott English goods. From these readings, your students will understand the redeeming qualities of the movement for nonimportation, and how this forced Parliament to find other avenues to raise revenue in the American colonies.

## Overview of Lesson 2: “Boycotting Mercantilism”

**Brief Overview:** Students will explore the origins of the American Revolution by examining the effectiveness of the nonimportation agreement organized by patriots in Boston.

**Prior Knowledge:** Students should have an understanding of the French and Indian War, the Stamp Act, methods of colonial resistance to the Stamp Act, and how this shaped English political policy.

**Estimated Time:** 45 Minutes (1 class period)

**Content Area/ Course:** U.S. History I

**Unit:** The American Revolution

**Overview:** Students will be able to describe the causes of the American Revolution by analyzing the colonists’ means of resistance to British colonial policy.

*By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:*

Explain the purpose of boycotting English goods, and how this shaped English colonial policy in the years to come.

Describe the division the boycott created, and how these animosities fueled events such as the Boston Massacre, and the Boston Tea Party.

*Essential Question Addressed in this Lesson:*

How did the movement for nonimportation work, and was this effective in shaping English colonial policy?

## Common Core Standards Addressed in Lesson 2: “Boycotting Mercantilism”

### Standard(s) and Unit Goal(s) to be addressed in this Lesson:

#### **MA History and Social Studies Curriculum Framework**

**USI.4:** Analyze how Americans resisted British policies before 1775 and analyze the reasons for American victory and the British defeat during the revolutionary war. (H)

**USI.5:** Explain the role of Massachusetts in the Revolution, including important events that took place in Massachusetts and important leaders from Massachusetts. (H)

- A. The Boston Massacre
- B. The Boston Tea Party
- C. The Battles of Lexington and Concord and Bunker Hill
- D. **Samuel Adams, John Adams, and John Hancock.**

#### **MA English Language Arts Curriculum Framework Standards**

**ELA 9-10.RH.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/ social studies.

**ELA 6-8.RH2:** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

**ELA 9-10.SL.2:** Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g. visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

**ELA 9-10.SL.3:** Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

**ELA 9-10.SL.4:** Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

## “Boycotting Mercantilism”



### Background

**Instructions:** Have your students read the following article on the origins of the nonimportation movement in Boston. Once done, have them read the primary sources that follow, along with the Review Questions and Critical Questions.

Early settlers of Massachusetts were accustomed to living a frugal lifestyle. They emigrated from England with the expectation of enduring hardships, without the luxuries they were accorded in the mother country. But by the end of the French and Indian War in 1763, colonial society had changed. Fancy linens, porcelain tea sets, cupboards, and specialty furniture were being shipped to the colonies from England at a record pace. This was all to fill the insatiable appetites of colonial consumers who had become accustomed to luxury goods.

All of these goods allowed the colonists to display their status relative to society. The products that were coming out of England at this time were of much higher quality, and fetched more money on the market. By the mid 1760's tea was a very popular beverage, and tea imports increased exponentially with each passing year. The art of serving tea was the ultimate reflection of status for colonists.

Indeed, colonists were proud of their favorite beverage, and were even more proud of the vessels in which they served their tea. Pots, cups, and other server ware were elaborately decorated, and were brought out whenever important guests were present. This social custom was a crucial element to the colonists' way of life, and demonstrated that they too could play the part of a civilized, aristocratic, English family. When in 1767, colonists discovered that tea was to be taxed as part of the Townshend duties, the merchants of Boston decided to band together to resist the latest act of taxation.

The first response from Boston to the Townshend Acts was weak compared to their reaction to the passage of the Stamp Act (see Lesson 1). Based on their passive response to the new taxes, many in England assumed that the riots and violence had come to an end, and that the colonists were ready to pay their fair share in order to maintain the empire. But then, a politician from Philadelphia awoke Bostonians from their slumber. John Dickinson wrote a series of twelve letters and published them under the title, *Letters from a Farmer in Philadelphia*.

In the *Letters*, John Dickinson railed against the unconstitutionality of the taxes Parliament was imposing on the colonies. He cited the fact that the revenue collected from the taxes

would pay the salaries of royal officials. Previously, it had been the responsibility of each colony's legislature to raise money to pay the royal officials, now that right had been taken out of their hands. More importantly, John Dickinson's *Letters* called for immediate action. Dickinson compared the situation facing colonists in 1767 to the perilous times of the Stamp Act.

Dickinson was not original in his argument, but the publication of the *Letters* came at just the right time. They were published throughout the colonies in newspapers that were sympathetic to the patriot cause. People talked about them in taverns, and coffeehouses, and it kept people aware of the injustices committed by Parliament, and King George III.

Dickinson's call for action galvanized the patriots of Boston. The town meeting of Boston called for Americans to reduce their consumption of luxury goods from England. Bostonians responded well, and colonists throughout colonial America adopted the policy of nonimportation. In addition, colonists pushed domestic manufacturing. Instead of buying the more expensive English fabric, women throughout Massachusetts were creating homespun—a fabric produced in America. Competitions were held between neighboring towns to see who could produce the most homespun for consumption.

While this spirit of frugality helped the nonimportation movement, patriots throughout the American colonies were struggling to involve everyone in the boycott. Loyal merchants refused to sign the nonimportation agreement, and even those that signed continued to import dutiable goods from England. By March, 1768, Boston merchants held a meeting with the objective of enforcing the consumer boycott. Although most patriot merchants signed the nonimportation agreement, other loyalist importers such as the Thomas Hutchinson and Richard Clarke, refused to sign.

The refusal of loyalist merchants to sign the agreement derailed the effort to boycott English goods. Patriot merchants were not satisfied with the results, so in August 1768, they took it one step further. They agreed to not import any goods manufactured in England starting January 1, 1769, and especially those goods taxed under the Townshend Acts. To ensure the success of the new nonimportation agreement, the Sons of Liberty published the names of those merchants who didn't sign the boycott in patriot newspapers. In addition, they printed handbills and posted them throughout the province with the cryptic message that any violators would be labeled "enemies of the people."

The threats of retaliation to the merchants who violated the boycott enforced the nonimportation agreement. Because of this initial success, patriot merchants decided to extend the reach of their movement. They wanted all taxes to be repealed, and the assurance from Parliament that new taxes would not be imposed on the British North American colonies again.

While the nonimportation movement continued its success, the ultimate goal of the boycott was, at least in the short-term, impractical. Parliament was not thrilled with the boycott, and if anything, the movement's success only strengthened their resolve to reinforce British laws. Moreover, the far-reaching goals of the nonimportation agreement encouraged loyalist merchants in Boston to fight back.

In January of 1769, John Mein, a Tory merchant, printed the names of all the patriot merchants who signed the nonimportation agreement, but continued to violate the boycott in the *Boston Chronicle*—a loyalist newspaper. This created divisions among the patriots, and many of the signers were suspicious that their neighbors were secretly importing, and selling English goods. To combat this, patriot merchants confiscated English goods that were still arriving in Boston, and stored them in a public warehouse. By the spring of 1770, patriot merchants in Boston adopted Philadelphia's tactic of nonimportation. Instead of holding onto the undesirable goods, merchants sent them back to London from where they were shipped.

This method of resistance was really effective. Not only were English merchants exporting less due to the nonimportation agreement, but they were seeing their goods wash back up on their shore. English merchants could no longer export their goods to the American colonies. Since the onset of the boycott in 1768, English merchants had lost a lot of money. For this reason, they started to lobby Members of Parliament to repeal the unpopular Townshend Acts.

In spite of this success, the colonists still struggled to go without their favorite refreshment, tea. It was the most popular beverage at the time, and the East India Company was the largest exporter of teas. Of all the American colonies, Boston in particular, continued to import large quantities of dutiable East India tea. The Sons of Liberty, recognizing that tea had become an unsavory habit for most Bostonians, proposed alternative teas.

Labradore tea was a locally grown variety that patriot merchants advertised to their thirsty customers. Patriots Benjamin Edes and John Gill, the two printers of the *Boston Gazette*, publicized that they were selling the alternative tea in their print shop. Others tried to cultivate Chinese tea, but with little success. In January of 1770, the Boston town meeting resolved that an outright boycott on all teas would be the most effective method to implement if they wished to derail the Townshend duties.

By March 5, 1770, most the Townshend duties were repealed, but the tax on tea remained. Since colonists could not kick their tea drinking habit, Parliament saw no reason to eliminate the tax. To an extent, the nonimportation agreement worked. Most of the taxes from the Townshend Acts were repealed, and eventually, the duty on tea was reduced from six pennies per pound to three. In addition, the success of the boycott demonstrated that the colonists could achieve their aims by peacefully protesting against the unjust taxes. But the true success

of the movement was in that it forced the colonies to come together on their resistance strategy to Parliament and King George III.

Over the course of the nonimportation movement, the Sons of Liberty in New York kept their counterparts in Boston abreast of the success of their boycott. Eventually, the Sons of Liberty in Boston did the same. These networks allowed the Sons of Liberty to communicate with each other during times of crises, and eventually led to the formation of committees of correspondence. On November 2, 1772, the Boston Selectmen successfully formed the Boston Committee of Correspondence. This was just in time for the onset of Tea Act which was passed on May 10, 1773. In the months that followed, the Boston Committee of Correspondence communicated with committees in New York and Philadelphia in order to reach a joint resolution on how to handle the arrival of the East India tea in November, 1773.

## Primary Source Material from the Nonimportation Movement

**Instructions:** Have your students read the primary sources below, and answer the questions that follow each of the primary sources.

*Document 1:* Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies

By John Dickinson, ESQ.

Beloved Countrymen,

I am a farmer, settled after a variety of fortunes, near the banks of the river Delaware in the province of Pennsylvania. I received a liberal education, and have been engaged in the busy scenes of life. But [I] am now convinced that a man may be as happy without bustle, as with it. My farm is small, my servants are few, and good; I have little money at interest; I wish for no more; my employment in my own affairs is easy, and I am completing the number of days allotted to me by divine goodness.

Being master of my time, I spend a good deal of it in a library, which I think the most valuable part of my final estate, being acquainted with two or three gentlemen of abilities and learning, who honor me with their friendship, I believe I have acquired a greater share of knowledge in history, and the laws and constitution of my country, that is generally attained by men of my class, many of them not being so fortunate as I have been in the opportunities of getting information.

From infancy, I was taught to love humanity and liberty. Inquiry and experience have since confirmed my reverence for the lessons given to me, by convincing me more fully of their truth and excellence. Benevolence towards mankind excites wishes for their welfare, and such wishes endear the means of fulfilling them. Those can be found in liberty alone, and therefore her sacred cause ought to be espoused by every man, on every occasion, to the utmost of his power: as a charitable but poor person does not withhold his mite, because he cannot relieve all the distresses of the miserable, so let not any honest man suppress his sentiments concerning freedom, however small their influence is likely to be.

These being my sentiments, I am encouraged to offer you, my countrymen, my thoughts on some late transactions [Townshend Acts], that in my opinion are of the utmost importance to you. Conscious of my defects, I have waited some time, in expectation of seeing the subject treated by persons much better qualified for the task; but being therein disappointed, and apprehensive that longer delays will be injurious, I venture at length to request the attention of the public, praying only for one thing,--that is, that these lines may be read with the same zeal for the happiness of British America, with which they were [written].

With a good deal of surprise I have observed, that little notice has been taken of any act of Parliament as injurious in its principle to the liberties of these colonies, as the Stamp Act was: I mean the act for suspending the legislation of New York.

The assembly of that government complied with a former act of Parliament, requiring certain provisions to be made for the [English soldiers] in America, in every particular, I think, except the articles of salt, pepper, and vinegar. In my opinion they acted imprudently, considering all circumstances, in not complying so far, as would have given satisfaction, as several colonies did: but my dislike of their conduct in that instance, has not blinded me so much, that I cannot plainly perceive, that they have punished in a manner pernicious to American freedom, and justly alarming to all the colonies.

If the British Parliament has a legal authority to order, that we [the colonies] shall furnish a single article for the [English soldiers] here, and to compel obedience to that order; they have the same right to order us to supply those [soldiers] with [weapons], clothes, and every [necessity], and to compel obedience to that order also, in short, to lay any burdens they please upon us. What is this but taxing us a certain sum, and leaving to us only the manner of raising it? How is this mode more tolerable than the Stamp Act? Would that act have appeared more pleasing to the Americans, if being ordered thereby to raise the sum of the total taxes, the mighty privilege had been left to them, of saying how much should be paid for an instrument of writing on paper, and how much for another on parchment.

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, and for this reason, I believe, every colony on the continent, that chose to give a mark of respect for Great Britain, in complying with the act relating to the troops, cautiously avoid the mention of that act, least their conduct should be attributed to its supposed obligation.

The matter being thus stated, the assembly of New York either had, or had not a right to refuse submission to that act. If they had, and I imagine no American will say, they had not, then the Parliament had no right to compel them to execute it. If they had not that right, they had no right to punish them for not executing it; and therefore had no right to suspend their legislation, which is a punishment. In fact, if the people of New York cannot be legally taxed but by their own representatives, they cannot be legally deprived of the privileges of making laws, only for insisting on that exclusive privilege of taxation. If they may be legally deprived in such a case of the privilege of making laws, why may they not, with equal reason, be deprived of any other privilege? Or why may not every colony be treated in the same manner, when any of them shall dare to deny their assent to any impositions that shall be directed? Or what signifies the repeal of the Stamp Act, if these colonies are to lose their other privileges, by not tamely surrendering that of taxation?

There is one consideration arising from this suspicion, which is not generally attended to, but [shows] its importance very clearly. It was not necessary that this suspension should be caused by an act of Parliament. The crown might have restrained the Governor of New York, even from calling the assembly together, by its prerogative in the royal governments. This step, I suppose; would have been taken, if the conduct of the assembly of New York, had been regarded as an act of disobedience to the Crown alone: but it is regarded as an act of "disobedience to the authority of the British legislature." This gives the suspension a consequence vastly more affecting. It is a Parliamentary assertion of the supreme authority of the British legislature over these colonies in the part of taxation: and is intended to compel New York unto a submission to that authority. It seems therefore to be as much a violation of the liberty of the people of that province, and consequently of all these colonies, as if the Parliament had sent a number of regiments to be quartered upon them till they should comply. For it is evident, that the suspension is meant as compulsion; and the method of compelling is totally indifferent. It is indeed probable, that the sight of redcoats, and the beating of drums would have been most alarming, because people are more generally more influenced by their eyes and ears than by their reason: But whoever seriously considers the matter, must perceive, that a dreadful stroke is aimed at the liberty of these colonies: For the cause of one is the cause of all.

New York, of any of its rights, it may deprive any, or all the other colonies of their rights; and nothing can possibly so much encourage such attempts, as a mutual inattention to the interests of each other. To divide, and thus to destroy, is the first political maxim in attacking those who are powerful by their union. He certainly is not a wise man, who folds his arms and reposes himself at home, seeing with unconcern the flames that have invaded his neighbor's house, without any endeavors to extinguish them. When Mr. Hampden's ship money cause, for three shillings and four pence, was tried all the people of England, with anxious expectation, interested themselves in the important decision; and when the slightest point touching the freedom of a single colony is agitated, I earnestly wish, that all the rest may with equal ardour support their sister. Very much may be said on this subject, but I hope, more at present is unnecessary.

With concern I have observed that two assemblies of this province have sat and adjourned without taking any notice of this act. It may perhaps be asked, what would have been proper for them to do? I am

by no means fond of inflammatory measures. I detest them. I should be sorry that anything should be done which might justly displease our sovereign or our mother country. But a firm, modest exertion of a free spirit, should never be wanting on public occasions. It appears to me, that it would have been sufficient for the assembly, to have ordered our agents to represent to the King's ministers, their sense of the suspending act, and to pray for its repeal. Thus we should have borne our testimony against it; and might therefore reasonably expect that on a like occasion, we might receive the same assistance from the other colonies.

### Review Questions

1. How did John Dickinson question Parliament's authority? Cite specific quotes from the text.
2. What do you believe was John Dickinson's goal when he wrote this document?

### Critical Questions

1. Who was the John Dickinson's intended audience? Why do you think Dickinson wrote the *Letters* when he did?
2. How does John Dickinson frame his position relative to the rest of society? Why do you think he chose the title *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania*?

### *Document 2: "Ladies of the First Quality"*

We hear that there was held two or three evenings ago, an assembly of ladies of the first quality, in a very respectable alley in town, who have not worn ribbons for many years past, and who throw a resolution to encourage to the most of their power the manufactures of this country, have made spinning their only employment, and drink nothing at their meetings but New England rum, the best part of their lives; and the patriotism of the above ladies is more illustrious and worthy of imitation, as rum is the principal and almost only manufacture of this country—except a few shoes, (about 40,000) made annually at Lynn, and salt-fish, which we recommended to the Ladies who are desirous of following the example of the above patriots, as the best thing they can take morning and evening by way of bread and butter with the home manufacture substituted to that pernicious and enervating thing called tea. In order to encourage those that are willing to follow the above example we have the pleasure to inform our readers that a very patriotic gentleman in the town has written over his chimney piece the following words: "No tea, but as much New England rum as you please."

We are assured from very good authority, that there were made at Shirley within the last year no less than forty thousand watches, which will convince the [naysayers] against the list of proscribed articles

that it was not without good grounds that that necessary implement for 'em [sic] of business was numbered among the articles not to be imported, when we can make it so easily ourselves: Nay we may perhaps next year send watches to Europe, and how much better a return will they than salt fish, skins, and boards.

If the true patriot or anyone else doubts of this, or attempts to assert the contrary in order to deceive the ignorant, we will in the next paper, to silence these wretched [naysayers], give an account of the workmen, and how many watches each of [them] makes in a day.

### Review Questions

1. How does the author of this text describe the boycott conducted by the patriotic women? Would you classify the boycott as non-consumption, or nonimportation?
2. List two items or "manufactures" that the patriotic women are consuming as alternative to English produced goods?

### Critical Questions

1. Who do you believe this newspaper article was intended for? Why do you think this article was written, and for what purpose?
2. Which method of resistance do you believe was most effective in forcing the repeal of the Townshend Acts? John Dickinson's attempt to call the actions conducted by the British ministry unconstitutional? Or the non-consumption boycott by the patriotic women? Cite specific examples to reinforce your argument.