

2. Philadelphia Threatens Tea Men (1773)

Parliament, faced with rebellion and a crippling commercial boycott, repealed the Stamp Act in 1766. The next year the ministry devised a light indirect tax on tea, which, being external, presumably met the colonial objections to a direct tax. Opposition to the new levy was fading when, in 1773, the London officials granted a monopoly of the tea business in America to the powerful and hated British East India Company. These arrangements would make the tea, even with the three-penny tax included, cheaper than ever. The colonists, resenting this transparent attempt to trick them into paying the tax, staged several famous tea parties. Those at Boston and New York involved throwing the tea overboard; the affair at Annapolis resulted in the burning of both vessel and cargo. At Portsmouth and Philadelphia, the tea ships were turned away. Of the reasons here given by the Philadelphians for action, which was the strongest? Was it strong enough to warrant the measures threatened?

TO CAPT. AYRES

Of the Ship *Polly*, on a Voyage
from London to Philadelphia

Sir: We are informed that you have imprudently taken charge of a quantity of tea which has been sent out by the [East] India Company, under the auspices of the Ministry, as a trial of American virtue and resolution.

Now, as your cargo, on your arrival here, will most assuredly bring you into hot water, and as you are perhaps a stranger to these parts, we have concluded to advise you of the present situation of affairs in Philadelphia, that, taking time by the forelock, you may stop short in your dangerous errand, secure your ship against the

²*Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 15 (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Historical Society, 1891): 391.

rafts of combustible matter which may be set on fire and turned loose against her; and more than all this, that you may preserve your own person from the pitch and feathers that are prepared for you.

In the first place, we must tell you that the Pennsylvanians are, to a man, passionately fond of freedom, the birthright of Americans, and at all events are determined to enjoy it.

That they sincerely believe no power on the face of the earth has a right to tax them without their consent.

That, in their opinion, the tea in your custody is designed by the Ministry to enforce such a tax, which they will undoubtedly oppose, and in so doing, give you every possible obstruction.

We are nominated to a very disagreeable, but necessary, service: to our care are committed all offenders against the rights of America; and hapless is he whose evil destiny has doomed him to suffer at our hands.

You are sent out on a diabolical service; and if you are so foolish and obstinate as to complete your voyage by bringing your ship to anchor in this port, you may run such a gauntlet as will induce you in your last moments most heartily to curse those who have made you the dupe of their avarice and ambition.

What think you, Captain, of a halter around your neck—ten gallons of liquid tar decanted on your pate—with the feathers of a dozen wild geese laid over that to enliven your appearance?

Only think seriously of this—and fly to the place from whence you came—fly without hesitation—without the formality of a protest—and above all, Captain Ayres, let us advise you to fly without the wild geese feathers.

Your friends to serve,

THE COMMITTEE OF TARRING AND FEATHERING

3. Connecticut Decries the Boston Port Act (1774)

The Boston Tea Party, which involved the destruction of three cargoes of tea by colonists thinly disguised as Indians, provoked an angry response in Parliament. Even as good a friend of America as Colonel Barré so far forgot his grammar as to burst out, "Boston ought to be punished; she is your eldest son!" Parliament speedily passed a series of punitive measures ("Intolerable Acts"), notably the act closing the port of Boston until the tea was paid for. The other colonies, deeply resentful, responded with assurances of support. Virginia raised food and money; Philadelphia contributed one thousand barrels of flour. Various groups, including the citizens of Farmington, Connecticut, passed resolutions of protest. To what extent did their resolution reflect a desire for independence?

Early in the morning was found the following handbill, posted up in various parts of the town, viz.:

³Peter Force, ed., *American Archives*, Fourth Series (Washington, D.C.: prepared and published under authority of an act of Congress, 1837), vol. 1, p. 336.

To pass through the fire at six o'clock this evening, in honor to the immortal goddess of Liberty, the late infamous Act of the British Parliament for farther distressing the American Colonies. The place of execution will be the public parade, where all Sons of Liberty are desired to attend.

Accordingly, a very numerous and respectable body were assembled of near one thousand people, when a huge pole, just forty-five feet high, was erected, and consecrated to the shrine of liberty; after which the Act of Parliament for blocking up the Boston harbor was read aloud, sentenced to the flames, and executed by the hands of the common hangman. Then the following resolves were passed, *nem. con.* [unanimously]:

1st. That it is the greatest dignity, interest, and happiness of every American to be united with our parent state while our liberties are duly secured, maintained, and supported by our rightful sovereign, whose person we greatly revere; whose government, while duly administered, we are ready with our lives and properties to support.

2nd. That the present Ministry, being instigated by the Devil, and led on by their wicked and corrupt hearts, have a design to take away our liberties and properties, and to enslave us forever.

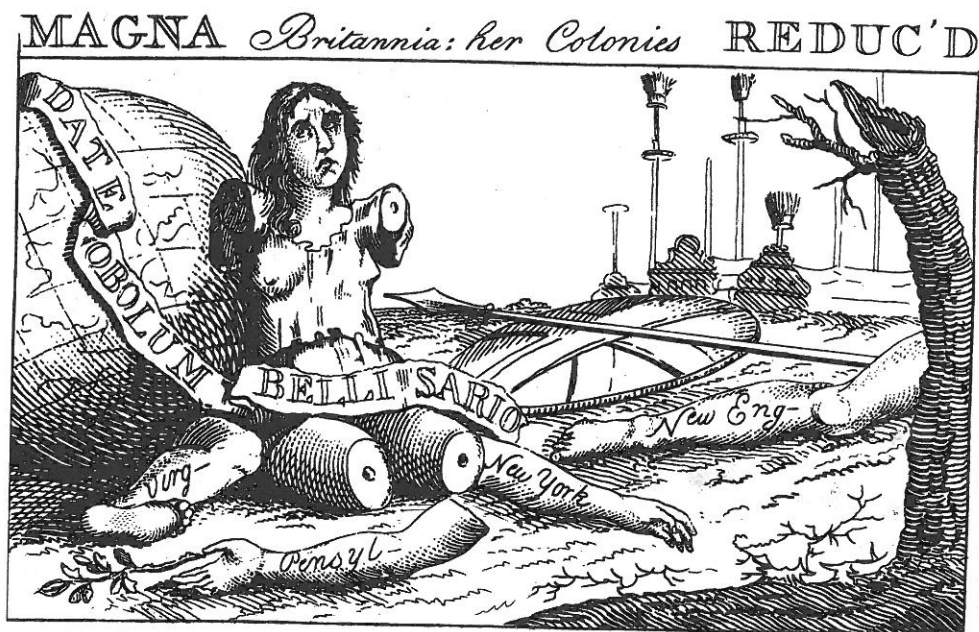
3rd. That the late Act, which their malice hath caused to be passed in Parliament, for blocking up the port of Boston, is unjust, illegal, and oppressive; and that we, and every American, are sharers in the insults offered to the town of Boston.

4th. That those pimps and parasites who dared to advise their master [George III] to such detestable measures be held in utter abhorrence by us and every American, and their names loaded with the curses of all succeeding generations.

5th. That we scorn the chains of slavery; we despise every attempt to rivet them upon us; we are the sons of freedom, and resolved that, till time shall be no more, that godlike virtue shall blazon our hemisphere.

4. Two Views of the British Empire (1767, 1775)

Benjamin Franklin played many roles in colonial America. In 1767, he commissioned the cartoon shown below, "Britannia: Her Colonies," to illustrate the importance of the North American colonies to the British Empire. Was his purpose to encourage independence or reconciliation? To whom is his cartoon principally addressed? The second cartoon, "The Wise Men of Gotham and Their Goose," is from a London magazine in 1775, after the Revolutionary War had broken out. To what audience is it addressed? What are the cartoonist's sympathies in the conflict between Britain and its American colonies? To what extent does the British cartoon of 1775 express sentiments similar to Franklin's image of 1767?



⁴"Britannia: Her Colonies," John Carter Brown Library, Brown University; "The Wise Men of Gotham and Their Goose," 1776 London Mezzotint from Stephen Hess and Milton Kaplan, *The Ungentlemanly Art*, 1968, Macmillan, courtesy Harvard College Library.

In Gotham once the Story goes
 A Set of Whimsies arose
 Skill'd in the great Politic Wheel
 Could pound a Man's Brain on a Wheel
 With many Things of wondrous Note
 At present much too long to quote
 Their District was both far and wide
 Which not a little swell'd their Pride
 But above all that they priz'd most
 Was a fine Goose, by all consent,
 A Rare Bird to behold
 Who laid each Day an Egg of Gold
 This made them grow immensely rich
 Save them an avaricious Trick
 The Case belongs to many more

They not content with their Store
 Would Abolish, vague and strange Jurors
 To make the Haruspic Bird lay Eggs
 This glorious purpose to obtain
 About her Neck they put a Chain
 And more their Folly to exemplify
 They Stamped upon her Wings a Seal
 But this had no Effect at all
 Yet made her struggle, flutter, squall
 And do what ever Course would do
 That had her Liberty in view
 When one of more distinguish'd Note
 Cry'd Deem not her let us cut her Throat
 They did, but not an Egg was found
 But Blood came pouring from the Wound



THE WISE MEN of GOTHAM and their GOOSE.

B. The Formal Break with Britain

I. Thomas Paine Talks Common Sense (1776)

Despite the shooting at Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill; despite the British burning of Falmouth (Maine) and Norfolk (Virginia); despite the king's hiring of German (Hessian) mercenaries, the American colonists professed to be fighting merely for reconciliation. But killing redcoats with one hand and waving the olive branch with the other seemed ridiculous to Thomas Paine, a thirty-nine-year-old agitator from England who had arrived in Philadelphia about a year earlier. Of humble birth, impoverished, largely self-educated, and early apprenticed to a corset maker, he was a born rebel who had failed at various undertakings. But he rocketed to fame with a forty-seven-page pamphlet published in January 1776 under the title Common Sense. Selling the incredible total of 120,000 copies in three months, it sharply accelerated the drift toward independence. Paine urged an immediate break, not only to secure foreign assistance but also to fulfill America's moral mandate from the world. Were his views on mercantilism, isolationism, and reconciliation reasonable? Did his arguments appeal more to passion or to logic?

In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense: . . .

I have heard it asserted by some that, as America has flourished under her former connection with Great Britain, the same connection is necessary towards her fu-

¹Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1894), pp. 84–101, passim.

ture happiness, and will always have the same effect. Nothing can be more fallacious than this kind of argument. We may as well assert that, because a child has thrived upon milk, it is never to have meat, or that the first twenty years of our lives is to become a precedent for the next twenty. But even this is admitting more than is true. For I answer roundly that America would have flourished as much, and probably much more, had no European power taken any notice of her. The commerce by which she hath enriched herself are the necessities of life, and will always have a market while eating is the custom of Europe.

But she [England] has protected us, say some. That she hath engrossed [monopolized] us is true, and defended the continent at our expense, as well as her own, is admitted; and she would have defended Turkey from the same motive, viz. for the sake of trade and dominion. . . .

But Britain is the parent country, say some. Then the more shame upon her conduct. Even brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families; wherefore the assertion, if true, turns to her reproach. But it happens not to be true, or only partly so. . . . Europe, and not England, is the parent country of America. This new world hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from every part of Europe. Hither have they fled, not from the tender embraces of the mother, but from the cruelty of the monster; and it is so far true of England that the same tyranny which drove the first emigrants from home pursues their descendants still. . . .

. . . Any submission to, or dependence on, Great Britain tends directly to involve this continent in European wars and quarrels, and set us at variance with nations who would otherwise seek our friendship, and against whom we have neither anger nor complaint. As Europe is our market for trade, we ought to form no partial [preferential] connection with any part of it. It is the true interest of America to steer clear of European contentions, which she never can do while, by her dependence on Britain, she is made the makeweight in the scale of British politics. . . .

Everything that is right or reasonable pleads for separation. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature, cries, 'tis time to part. Even the distance at which the Almighty hath placed England and America is a strong and natural proof that the authority of the one over the other was never the design of Heaven. . . .

But if you say, you can still pass the violations over, then I ask, Hath your house been burnt? Hath your property been destroyed before your face? Are your wife and children destitute of a bed to lie on, or bread to live on? Have you lost a parent or a child by their hands, and yourself the ruined and wretched survivor? If you have not, then are you not a judge of those who have. But if you have, and can still shake hands with the murderers, then are you unworthy the name of husband, father, friend, or lover; and whatever may be your rank or title in life, you have the heart of a coward, and the spirit of a sycophant. . . .

Every quiet method for peace hath been ineffectual. Our prayers have been rejected with disdain. . . . Wherefore, since nothing but blows will do, for God's sake let us come to a final separation. . . .

Small islands, not capable of protecting themselves, are the proper objects for government to take under their care. But there is something absurd in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island. In no instance hath nature made the satellite larger than its primary planet; and as England and America, with respect

Chapter 8 *America Secedes from the Empire, 1775-1783*

to each other, reverse the common order of nature, it is evident that they belong to different systems. England to Europe: America to itself. . . .

No man was a warmer wisher for a reconciliation than myself before the fatal nineteenth of April, 1775 [Lexington]. But the moment the event of that day was made known, I rejected the hardened, sullen-tempered Pharaoh of England [George III] for ever; and disdain the wretch that, with the pretended title of Father of his People, can unfeelingly hear of their slaughter, and composedly sleep with their blood upon his soul. . . .

And in order to show that reconciliation now is a dangerous doctrine, I affirm that it would be policy in the King at this time to repeal the acts, for the sake of reinstating himself in the government of the provinces; in order that *he may accomplish by craft and subtlety in the long run what he cannot do by force and violence in the short one*. Reconciliation and ruin are nearly related. . . .

You that tell us of harmony and reconciliation, can you restore to us the time that is past? Can you give to prostitution its former innocence? Neither can you reconcile Britain and America. . . . There are injuries which nature cannot forgive; she would cease to be nature if she did. As well can the lover forgive the ravisher of his mistress as the continent forgive the murders of Britain. The Almighty hath implanted in us these unextinguishable feelings for good and wise purposes. . . . They distinguish us from the herd of common animals. . . .

O! you that love mankind! You that dare oppose not only the tyranny but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia and Africa have long expelled her. Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind.