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## THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: AN APPRAISAL OF ORIGINS

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### ABSTRACT

The 1776 American Revolution was an occurrence that resulted in the separation of the North American colonies from Great Britain, giving rise to the United States of America as an independent nation. The roots of this transformative thrust have to be discerned in long term and complex causes which increased the dissent and dissatisfaction in the colonies. The colonists argued that as people they would find their best when freed from colonial trappings. The seeds of Revolution were sown as colonists shifted their identity from being British subjects to being Americans and their ideology from being affable to monarchy to revolutionary republicanism. The paper argues that the American Revolution took place due to multifaceted factors as colonists were alienated from Great Britain in favour of a stronger sense of American identity.

**Keywords:** American Revolution, Thirteen Colonies, Great Britain, Navigation Acts, Salutary Neglect, Stamp Act, Great Awakening, Boston Tea Party

The American Revolution was not an event that occurred just in a few days' time. The dissatisfaction of the people in the British North American colonies had precipitated into serious and open political conflict following almost one and a half centuries of growing estrangement between the British crown and its North American colonies. As colonists, the inhabitants of the thirteen North American colonies considered themselves British subjects, to the extent of being called loyal by the British. Since the very early beginnings of the colonization process the American colonists thought of their political rights as British rights, and their sense of liberty was nourished on the British tradition stemming from the notions of limited monarchy. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the British navigation laws fostered the prosperity of the American colonies. The British naval fleet and the British armies had even defended the colonies against the Spanish, the French and the native Indians. Yet within a period of just twelve years after 1763, the loyal British subjects were at war with their mother country, having become conscious of a heightened sense of common purpose that turned the British subjects into Americans. The Revolution of 1776 freed the American colonists from the clutches of British Imperialism and allowed them to proceed on a path that united them simply as Americans. The making of Americans and the American nation was the most significant impact of the American Revolution.

The American Revolution was the unification of the thirteen colonies which till then had their own boundaries, own armies, separate political systems and distinct foreign affairs. When they revolted against the British, the colonists placed their own interests at stake and submitted their own colonial sovereignty for a national government that was created outside the British empire and its controlling system, but, within the ambit of democracy and republicanism. The British had colonised North America when Great Britain had

begun to compete with France, Spain and Portugal which were the leading colonial powers on the continent of America ever since the beginning of the European exploration voyages. Great Britain joined in the fray late, but turned its eyes to untouched and unexplored North America, while the Portuguese concentrated on Brazil, the Spanish on central and south America and the French on Canada. The British hoped to find riches, gold and silver, from their North American territories but having failed in this, they occupied the land in their possession, then began trading in goods, brought in immigrants to serve as human resource and to make the colonial possessions productive as also profitable. The North American colonies were to serve Great Britain's needs for resources, wealth and power. This paved the way for the growth and expansion of the British empire in North America with the first permanent settlement founded at Jamestown, Virginia in 1607.

North America began to be settled by Europeans growing from a trickle of a few hundred colonists by the turn of the seventeenth century to millions of immigrants by the eighteenth century. Europeans moved to North America impelled by diverse motivations -- to escape political oppression in their homeland or to seek the freedom from religious persecution and be able to practice their own religion in peace or simply moved as adventurers and opportunists to settle on the east coast of America that came to be popularised as the Atlantic Seaboard. Dictated either by geography or demography, the southern settlements on America's eastern coastline came to be known as the Chesapeake Bay colonies, the northern region as New England and the sub-set of colonies between the north and the south as the Middle colonies. Geography decreed that Middle colonies closely resembled New England.

There were primarily two forms of settlement patterns that resulted in the colonisation of America i.e. through grants of land made by the British crown to the chartered joint stock companies and the ones made to individual proprietors. Generally believed to be enterprising private entrepreneurs, the British grantees of land fostered colonisation in America by bringing in hundreds and thousands of immigrants as colonists. By the time American Revolution took place in 1776, the population of America was counted in millions. However, when begun the process of colonisation was slow as majority colonists faced hunger, disease, famine, death and hostile Indians. But they did not abandon the settlements rather continued to scale geographical barriers and many economic and political obstacles while Imperial Britain continued to make land grants in its American territories. However, for many decades after the opening up of North American territories the mobile and transient fur traders remained dominant, discouraging permanent settlements. British colonisation of America eventually became a reality as colonists continued to move away from fur trading territories, taking possession of land along the rivers and bays that ultimately led to the growth and development of the thirteen colonies. Distinct models of settlements emerged that made the British colonies very varied in characteristics.

From the beginning, the British Imperial design focused on creating a colonial society in America with its top heavy, by favouring to bring in merchants, noblemen or the 'gentlemen' class as colonists. The rationale was apparently based on a widely held belief by the British crown that the colonies belonged to men who invested wealth in them, and who could transport new settlers to America and make the territories paying propositions so that the colonies could become self-sufficient components of the British empire. A settlement pattern of plantation aristocracy developed in the fertile Chesapeake Bay colony of Virginia as the charter company allowed few influential colonists to accumulate abundant land under the head right system of land grants. The pattern was replicated in Maryland and later further south in the North and South Carolinas as well as Georgia.

In Virginia, the large land grantees tended to till much larger units as plantations of tobacco, partly because tobacco rapidly impoverished the soil, but primarily because ownership of land was concentrated in the hands of few influential families. The Virginian land grant system enabled ordinary yeoman farmers also to farm by granting them 50 acres units of land, and allowing them to bring more of their kind. The colonists paid property tax known as the quit rent. However, it is stated that over the years attempts failed throughout the Virginia colony to bring in land reforms or raise the quit rents, as a result few large estates of the seventeenth century increased in both size and number by the eighteenth century. The idea flourished that anyone who chose to fund a 'particular plantation' was actually betting on becoming successful economically and socially in America, rather than investing shares in the Virginia joint stock company with returns to be got in England. What later became known as George Washington's Mount Vernon, a 5000 acres grant, was issued originally in the name of the proprietors Nicholas Spencer and John Washington of Westmoreland Company. It is to be

remembered that George Washington who came from Virginia's large estates was among the many well-known leaders of the American Revolution. The Virginian colonisation process had resulted in the settlement of majority Englishmen and Protestants who practised black slavery, though white indentured labour was also a feature.

There were more incentives available to Virginia's estate owners. The colonists who brought slaves either from the West Indies or from Africa directly were given 50 acres per slave as a reward. We are told that both planters and yeoman farmers either imported slaves, or purchased them directly from ship owners. The large estate owners, however, could claim large number of head rights for one shipment of slaves. For example, a plantation owner like George Menefie, the first head right claimant, had obtained 1150 acres for 23 slaves in addition to 37 other white indentures, signifying that both types of labour were introduced in the Chesapeake Bay region. But while indentured were listed as individuals, the slaves were counted collectively as a cohort. The African slavery went on to become a hereditary institution in the southern plantations prized by the planter colonist, whereas the white indentured eventually moved on to become landowner as more and more forested land was converted into farms. Being whites they could not be easily distinguished from freemen unlike the black African slaves. It was in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that large slave plantations increased in number and size. The American Revolution did not result in the eradication of African slavery but many a slaves served in the revolutionary war's non – white regiments.

Maryland, the other Chesapeake Bay colony, was in proximity to Virginia from where it profited in terms of protection and assistance in grain trade. Both the colonies were agricultural communities, with tobacco as the staple crop. There were no large towns and almost no manufacturing done in these colonies. However, Maryland began its history as a refuge for Roman Catholics as its proprietor grantee, Cecilius Calvert, Lord Baltimore, resolved to establish a colony that could bring peace to fellow Catholics. The colony was like a feudal domain of Lord Baltimore and he proved worthy of the grant as he bestowed large tracts of land, ranging from 3000 to 5000 acres to few favourite settlers who also treated the grants as their feudal domains, thus becoming the 'gentry' class. Smaller size land grants were given on lease to other colonists, who paid quit rent to Lord Baltimore, and his status remained in force until the American Revolution in 1776.

The population spread as widely as Virginia in the North and South Carolinas but the settlements in the two colonies differed sharply. North Carolina had poor harbours from which it shipped tobacco and naval stores offering much less returns in profit than South Carolina's staple plantations. Comparatively, North Carolina had few 'great' planters and could hold with 'pride' only a few aristocratic coastal centres. Moreover, white population in North Carolina grew at a faster rate than the slave population. Whereas in South Carolina 5000 slaves had been introduced by 1700 and many planters accumulated wealth on indigo and rice plantations, after the grain was introduced from Madagascar. The Planters in the South Carolina lived most of the year in their country estates in towns like Charleston where it is said they shared a social life with rich merchants, making Charleston opulent though South Carolina had few towns. It is to be noted that the southern theatre in the second half of the revolutionary war encompassed Virginia, South Carolina and Georgia.

Georgia was founded by a group of philanthropists who initially tried to control the settlements in the colony by prohibiting slavery, rum and brandy and preventing the growth of large estates. However, Georgia colonists were quick to settle on larger estates with slave labour, treating these as economic tillages and the most advantageous, and eventually becoming more and more like South Carolina. Majority slave plantations existed in the lowlands but uplands saw the spread of small yeoman farmers. The plantation economies in the south were unfavourable to an equitable social life, or cooperation, but it is said that it created a spirit of independence. Many leaders of the American Revolution came from south's large estates and they rose to prominence like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry among others. They distinguished themselves by their patriotism and courage and played a major role in winning independence. It is also to be noted that the southern theatre in the second half of the revolutionary war encompassing Virginia, South Carolina and Georgia equalled the revolutionary war theatre in the north.

New England with the colonies of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island and New Hampshire, formed the northern region of the thirteen colonies and was alike the south in having close ties with England, and also in having English as the predominant colonist population. But geography of the region was different with rocky soil, rugged terrain and dense forested zones, not suitable for plantation farming but good for fish, lumber and fur resulting in New England's diversified economy based on fishing, lumbering and subsistence farming. The region also came to be known for its ship building industry. However, the nature of colonisation shaped by religion differentiated New England from other colonies. From the beginning of the settlement process the Puritan form of Christianity, with its beliefs and morals, permeated New England. The colonists' aim was to respect the creation of a 'Holy Puritan Commonwealth'. Unlike Virginia and Maryland, land in New England was given in the form of compact settlements to immigrating groups, having fixed boundaries, on which the group was to establish towns in the form of congregational communities. Individuals couldn't buy land where they wished. Every town was to have a church in the centre and the community had to treat its pastor as the local leader. The town proprietors' boards, or town meetings, gave to colonists the land in the form of house lots surrounded by fields, common pastures and meadows. The owners of land travelled from the town centres to till their acres, something similar to English manor houses but typically without a manor lord.

The Puritan settlements in New England began with the arrival of the 'Mayflower Pilgrims' who landed in Plymouth, an unorganised territory with no legal titles to land, because their ship lost its course to reach Virginia. However, Puritans quickly obtained control over the Massachusetts Bay company charter granted to their leader John Winthrop by the British crown. The Puritans carried the charter with them to the Massachusetts colony thus making their settlement process unique. Large assemblages of Puritans soon followed with colonists moving with animated religious zeal to America. Their numbers continued to increase as conditions worsened for Puritans in England. The Puritan settlements in the Massachusetts Bay region were constructed around a divine plan with the clergy having the sole right to interpret the divine will, as Puritans put their religious ideals into practice and gave the franchise right solely to churchmen. All churchmen were considered freemen who were to encourage Puritan morality from which deviations were not permitted. The Puritans did not allow any other doctrines to prevail which they considered as false. It is informed that in 1659 – 61 few persons were put to death for practicing Quakerism or were expelled as Baptist preachers not elected through congregation. Massachusetts thus provided a different direction to settlements in New England colonies.

The expelled Puritans from Massachusetts like Roger Williams or Mrs. Hutchinson had challenged the Puritan clergy by demanding religious freedom besides raising questions about the right of Puritans to settle on the native Indian lands. Both are considered as the first great exponents of religious and intellectual freedom in America. However, as banished Puritans they had to move out of Massachusetts, and as dissenters they ended up finding the colony of Rhode Island for which they successfully obtained a charter from the English parliament. In Rhode Island they gave religious freedom to colonists, among whom were counted the Baptist preachers. Eventually the colony of Rhode Island accepted colonists from all backgrounds, thus heralding the importance of the separation of religion from the state, a principal objective that colonists attained through the American Revolution.

More colonists pilfered out of Massachusetts to neighbouring Connecticut in coastal New England, and then to New Haven, which actually remained merged with Connecticut in sharing Puritan institutions. When England was experiencing civil war, Massachusetts successfully assumed control of the whole of New England region. Puritans thus established more colonies like New Hampshire and Maine, while New Hampshire declared its independence from Massachusetts, Maine remained its part until 1820. The leading New England colonies formed the New England Confederation (1643 – 1684) as the region entered into conflict with the Dutch, the French, the Canadian fur traders and native Indians. Such a pattern of resistance assumed distinct forms when New England formed the northern revolutionary front in 1775 after entering into armed conflict with Imperial Britain in efforts to win independence for America.

The Middle colonies of New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey, popularised as the 'Bread Basket Colonies', were found in the region fertile for wheat production and came into existence after the British captured the Dutch territories from Netherlands. The Middle colonies found wealth through industry of a diverse workforce of carpenters, blacksmiths, fishermen, traders, merchants and farmers, having excellent ports in New York and Philadelphia that made the colonies good for trade. The region also succeeded, though moderately, in textile and iron production. These industrial units thrived on numerous indentured workers till this system of labour lasted, but the colonies demonstrated little use for black labour. Philadelphia became the principal city and also the largest one before the American Revolution.

It is stated that the region began to be settled because Imperial Britain desired continuous settlements of its' territories on the Atlantic Seaboard and not broken in between by the presence of a Dutch colony. The settlement process was initiated when the Duke of York was granted proprietary rights as the ruler of New York. However, he treated the former Dutch colonists settled in the region generously allowing them to retain their religion and language. But he encouraged immigration from Europe and slowly settlements expanded as the colony grew rapidly in population. In a similar manner William Penn, the proprietor grantee, founded the colonies of Pennsylvania and Delaware. It is said that Penn was a softened Quaker and he believed that all people had the light of God in them. Penn aspired to grant people of different races and different sects both political and religious freedom. He thus extended religious tolerance to all sects -- Protestants, Catholics, Jews and accepted that women could preach in churches. It is stated that he was not fond of African slavery. Such an outlook was considered incredibly radical at the time and was unmatched in the north or south.

A liberal regime began in the Middle colonies as Penn granted large parts of his Imperial domain on easy terms to newcomers offering land as free 50 acres, nominal rents for large farms and land grant of 5000 acres for just 100 pounds. As a result, an average farmer in the Middle colonies owned more land than New England though he could not be compared to Virginian planters. The distribution of wealth was such that there were mostly middling farmers, many using indentured labour, and few colonists becoming wealthy too. Alongside, softened Quakerism gave the colonies a special atmosphere, not like the strict New England where anyone not a Puritan could be executed or expelled. Religiously Middle colonies included Anglicans, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, Catholics, Jews and Quakers. It was not strange that immigrants flocked in large numbers to the Middle colonies. The region was ethnically diverse with English, Scots – Irish, Germans, French, Dutch, Swedish, Swiss and just a few African slaves. They helped the colony flourish beyond other colonies. Meanwhile New Jersey acquired a charter as a Middle colony offering generous terms to colonists through a set of 'agreements' for acquiring land along with complete freedom of conscience. Thus, in the Middle colonies, for instance in Pennsylvania, land was distributed to actual colonists on low costs alongside complete religious tolerance, while the society received encouragement to evolve as a 'melting pot', all new and emerging institutions on which America later prided itself. The Middle colonies existed as close inter - connected communities on the eve of the American Revolution -- a reflection that the region's heterogeneity had not created a 'strange disorderly world'.

The patterns of rule and governance in the colonies catered to their colonial status. In Virginia, the Virginia joint stock company in England was empowered to appoint governors as heads of the colony, his council and other officials and the company was permitted to hold full control over them. The general assembly, the House of Burgesses, was to govern in conjunction with the governor. These positions and offices were under the control of influential plantation aristocrats. There were other restrictions. The assembly until 1636 was practically elected on male suffrage, and later too the voting right remained restricted as it was based on property qualifications. This meant that basically wealthy landowners were entitled to leadership and they strictly enforced Anglican religious observances. A compliant legislature was a feature in Maryland too where Lord Baltimore bestowed official positions to very few favourite aristocratic planters, friends and relatives and allowed very limited authority to his assembly. Though the Act of Religious Toleration was passed in 1649 in the colony that gave liberty to Protestants and Catholics, but did not grant universal freedom of worship. The Calvert family retained their feudal rights till the American Revolution. The pattern to politically facilitate the colonial rule also prevailed in the Carolinas where proprietors gave governors to the colony, and the 'gentry' controlled the government particularly in the lowlands of Georgia. The assembly called the Common House

was constituted in South Carolina and in Georgia settlers were permitted to elect their assembly. In reality here too the franchise remained restricted to wealthy planters. Colonial aristocracy prevailed in the south.

A little later after Virginia, the 'Mayflower Compact' was adopted in the Puritan colony of Massachusetts. It was a kind of agreement among the pilgrims themselves which they signed on board the ship before landing in Plymouth stipulating that they would live together in orderly discipline under the civil officers of their choice. However, when they began housing themselves, a 'church state' emerged from the first town meeting held in New England. And because the Puritans considered all churchmen as freemen, they restricted the voting rights to churchmen solely, while granting to the minister powerful authority in all civil matters.

From the beginning, the voting churchmen had the right to elect the House of Deputies which was to sit in the general court or legislature where the governor along with his assistants, decided on laws and levied taxes, while the clergy remained dominant. In its' working the 'church state' showed narrowness and harshness, falling short of democracy, but it is argued that it displayed passion for self - government, showing no allegiance to Imperial Britain or the parliament. Until 1680, all New Englanders in Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire practically ruled themselves, passed their own laws, had their own trading legislations and raised their own soldiers for defence. It is argued that their tie with England was one of sentiment as they regarded the crown as their sovereign, but they had enough opportunities to develop in full freedom. This sense provided very strong legacy to New Englanders to take lead in the American Revolution.

In the Middle colonies, New York intended to serve trade rather than colonisation, and the nature of governance remained very little under direct Imperial control. Though New York's proprietor sent over governors from England, they were instructed to show generosity towards the colonists, creating a somewhat liberal regime in New York. The proprietary control was evident when William Penn acquired control over his part of the Imperial domain in Pennsylvania and Delaware. Though of liberal disposition, and he provided for an elective council too, but the council was meant to sit with himself as government to initiate laws and pass or reject them. However colonial political moorings were weak in the Middle colonies and this became apparent because in a period of few years the assembly of Pennsylvania gained more powers and began to propose legislations by itself. In 1701, Penn acquired a new charter that remained in force till the American Revolution. Initially Delaware shared its governors with Pennsylvania, from 1702 however, they had an elective assembly. New Jersey also drew up a set of agreements for colonists largely based on Penn's liberal ideas. New Jersey also allowed generous terms for establishing a popular assembly. However, in 1702 it became a crown colony meant to be ruled directly under Imperial Britain.

Imperial Britain remained connected to American territories through political entanglements with the colonies, and, provided a rule in which American colonists remained the subjects of British monarchs. Each of the colonies were provided for direct rule by the king, the idea of self - rule for Americans from Imperial perspective was unthinkable. This meant that the colonies were to grow under British supervision. Politically, colonists were guaranteed liberties and rights of English subjects, but their scope had not been defined. It was, however, clear that in theory the colonists as Americans were not allowed to make any laws or draft any orders that went contrary to British colonial interests. It is ironical that in the 150 years of Imperial rule the American colonies developed democratic traditions of self – rule and later their experience proved great enough to refuse to recognise the British monarchy as their sovereign ruler. The political system controlled by Britain provided the grist for the revolt of thirteen colonies.

It is generally understood that tight Imperial reins on the colonies began to loosen in the late 17th century and this feature continued till early to mid - 18th century. This was the era of salutary neglect of the colonies by Great Britain, a sea change in Imperial outlook noticed particularly from the time of Robert Walpole's ascendancy as Britain's chief minister. During this time Britain enforced trade regulations with laxity on the colonies and also loosened the Imperial supervision of the internal and political affairs of the colonies. What mattered more was that as long as colonies remained useful and loyal to Great Britain and contributed to its economic profitability, the British government would wink at the operation of the regulatory laws, while British officials turned a blind eye to colonial violations. In the colonies, however, Britain's salutary neglect increased a sense of independence allowing the colonists to make their own trade and political decisions. American colonial legislatures spread their wings and their autonomy increased, as colonies became

accustomed to govern themselves. Also, American colonies began to prosper by trading with non – British powers, like the French, and then spent that wealth on British manufactured goods while continuing to provide Britain with staple products, as raw materials, meant for manufacture in British industries. The unexpected result of such developments was that colonies became richer than what Britain wanted.

The basic element in the economic relations between Britain and American colonies was that the colonies were kept within the ambit of mercantilism, restricting economic endeavours in the colonies as they were to serve the economic interests of the mother country i.e. Great Britain. It didn't matter even if the economy of the colonies shattered. The British ensured the condition by passing many Navigation Acts, the first one in 1651 through which Britain maintained complete monopoly over colonial trade. Introduced to counter other Imperial powers like the Dutch, the Act ruled that colonies could do all trade only in English or colonial ships. Overtly the promulgation appeared to be harmless, but it signified appropriation of American trade processes by Britain. Subsequently more Acts were introduced. The Act of 1660 had two major implications. Firstly, it banned imports into colonies carried in non – English ships, implying that colonies were prohibited to trade with any other country except Britain. Secondly, colonial goods like fur, sugar, indigo, rice and tobacco were placed in an enumeration list, and when the listed goods were exported from the colonies these had to be first processed in England before moving to other European markets for trading purposes. Clearly American trade had been Anglicised.

The 1663 Staples Act was meant to keep all foreign powers out of the thirteen colonies allowing Britain to exploit colonial resources to the maximum. Under this Act all goods imported in and exported off the colonies had to pass through Britain for inspection, preventing the colonies from shipping their goods anywhere and to any market. By the Act of 1696, colonial ships were liable to be forfeited if found not to trade in ships built in England or the colonies and not navigated with the masters or mariners of England or the colonies, anywhere in Asia, Africa or even America. The Navigation Acts passed by the British parliament were to promote the self - sufficiency and profits of the British empire and also increased industrial development in England, but caused resentment in the Chesapeake Bay colonies of Virginia, Maryland and the Carolinas where the Acts were more rigorously enforced. In New England the Acts were persistently violated.

American merchants and traders in the colonies were given preference in England's markets' where they could sell their goods. It is also stated that the Acts significantly contributed to the ship building and related industries in New England. However, there were two ways in which settlers responded towards the Acts, by obeying them when they benefitted the colonies and by ignoring them when they ran contrary to their trading interests. But, because the Acts benefitted Imperial Britain primarily, while the colonies continued to be taxed on their goods, traders and merchants in the colonies felt justified in violating the Acts. The colonists readily found an outlet through smuggling, even riskiest smuggling, to increase their trade benefits, to get better prices for their goods and to avoid paying taxes. Smuggling was not viewed as a crime because American colonists generally believed that Navigation Acts were unjust. Consequently, American settlers continued to load their ships with smuggled goods, fostering illegal trade with the Dutch, the Spanish and the French, particularly with the French West Indies. An illegal trade known as the "triangular trade" was also going on between West Indies, southern Europe particularly involving France and Africa. New England was also part of this. Its merchants bought molasses from the French West Indies to make rum which was then exchanged for African slaves brought to the American colonies. It is said that Britain at the time was little lenient about slaves and so did not impose the slavery bill on the colonies. But the triangle trade seemed unacceptable to Britain, especially as it involved American colonies trading with France, an arch enemy of Britain.

This resulted in the imposition of the Molasses Act, 1733 under which Britain began to tax imports of Molasses into American colonies, especially from the French West Indies. Under the monopoly of trade Britain attempted to control all other products too, particularly the ones produced for internal use by the colonies such as wool and iron. The development of manufacturing in the colonies was checked by the Wool Act of 1699 forbidding export of woollen goods, the same prohibition was applied to the hat makers through Hat Act of 1732 and the Iron Law of 1750 rigorously restricted the right of colonies to manufacture iron goods. As a result, colonies received less returns on their exports and continued to pay more for the imports. Such attempts made the settlers in the colonies extremely bitter even during the era of salutary neglect, when the enforcement of Navigation Acts was not rigorous in regions like New England. Moreover, America's eastern coast had out

of the way harbours where ships could not be easily unloaded or loaded. Illegal trade and smuggling continued to be fostered and gave rise to heightened tensions between Britain and the colonies.

The Navigation Acts grew out of British preoccupation with bullion, gold and silver, during the mercantilist era, while the most serious problem that the colonies faced at the time was the money supply. They could not import British coins nor were they permitted to mint their own coins. American colonies therefore relied on Spanish gold coins which they acquired from their West Indian trade. However, this supply was not stable as Spanish gold was used to offset the trade deficit that the colonies incurred with Britain and the bullion continued to be drained away to the mother country. The colonies found an alternative by issuing paper currency, but these had to be redeemed within a certain period and if delayed, the paper currency depreciated in value and the colonies experienced severe indebtedness to British merchantile and financial interests. English merchants in particular found paper currency troublesome when they tried to collect money from their debtors in New England, where it is said that maximum abuses relating to paper currency took place. The British government instructed its colonial governors to 'veto' all paper currency, and later exercised greater power through parliament in 1751 by forbidding New England colonies to issue any paper currency for payment of debts. In England the paper currency was worthless. However, the restrictions on paper money affected New England most seriously, even as new machinery began to be enforced to set up obedience.

Even though scholars consider Navigation Acts as one of the direct causes of the American Revolution, colonies were at the time little disposed to revolt against the British mercantilist system. Because the Imperial political control on the colonies remained weak, the colonists continued to operate through parallel economy based on illegal trade. Yet as colonists became more numerous on the American soil their belief in the authoritarian government became weaker and the mentality that the colonist could be trusted with freedom to manage his own affairs began to take roots. New ideals and ideas penetrated the American colonies during the phase of 'Great Awakening', deeply inspired by the philosophies of the European Enlightenment. A new thinking prevailed in the American colonies that freedom could be reconciled in human society.

The 'Great Awakening' of 1720 – 1745 began in the Middle colonies and spread throughout the American colonies. Characterised by religious revival, the phase encouraged colonists to rethink and de-emphasise the church authority and make the individual more important i.e. all men were equal before God. American colonies began to experience greater religious diversity and tolerance of other religions. Baptists and Presbyterians, later known as Methodists, rose in numerical strength vis -a - vis Anglicans and Congregationalists. Quakers turned to Anglicanism. The monopoly of the Puritan church in New England broke. As colonists pursued diverse religious sects, churches were restructured, more people were involved in religious leadership spreading the overall message of equality of all, thus contributing to plant the seeds of Revolution.

The influence of revivalist thought reinforced the impulse towards education, sparking changes in the cultural and intellectual life of the colonies. Renowned educational institutions emerged including Rutgers, Princeton among others. Newspapers sprang up and newsletters and political pamphlets began to be distributed. Booksellers flourished opening book libraries for ordinary colonists while wealthier colonists developed private libraries. Among these was Franklin Benjamin, a future Revolution leader, he opened subscription libraries in many towns, including Philadelphia. The better educated began to drift away from orthodox Christianity and also began to question the colonial belief in hereditary class distinctions.

The drift towards 'Great Awakening' eroded 17th century emphasis on piety and notions of submission as the role of clergy, priests, bishops underwent change. They lost much of their political influence. Views altered not only about society at large but also about the government and the role of the government and the political life in the colonies. Ideas of equality, self - reliance and liberty were encouraged. Such was the evolving colonial society in the first half of the 18th century, sparking inspiration in the Americans colonists to stand up for their rights. The time contained seeds of potential political upheaval. As ordinary colonist responded enthusiastically to the changes, first significant attempts at political unity began to be forged with planters in the south and merchants / traders in New England taking lead in the direction. They helped the colonists to develop a sense of American distinctiveness and by addressing the ordinary colonist with the epithet 'New Man' in the 'Optimistic Age' allowed such sentiments to inspire the spirit of Revolution.



The French and the Indian war began in 1754 and ended in 1763 with the Treaty of Paris with Britain acquiring enormous territorial gains in north America from a war that became famous as the Seven Years War. The victory made Great Britain initiate New Imperial Policy under which it tried to re – establish and to tighten the royal grip and influence on the colonies. The reasons for this were political. The war had drained the coffers of the British government, it incurred crushing debt, and now looked towards economic reconstruction by exploiting its colonies. Although American colonists had been allies throughout the War, the end of the conflict saw the British making systematic attempts to assert British control over the colonies through its new imperial policy, especially as the French threat was gone. Heavy tax burden on the colonies was required in the Imperial vision to protect the vast expanse of the American territory. However, such Imperial political imperatives ended up provoking hostility in the colonies.

As a first step Britain took action to halt American colonial merchants from trading with West Indies by cracking down on the colonists smuggling with France. This they did by issuing Writs of Assistance which allowed British custom officials to enter any ship, house, storage or building, even on mere suspicion of hiding smuggled goods, without a warrant and seize illegal imported goods. From 1767 to 1773, colonial officers tried to obtain Writs in all the colonies but they could find success only in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. In New York Writs were granted but these proved unsatisfactory to New Yorkers while South Carolina was the last colony to give in to Writs. In New Jersey voices of failure emerged and other middle and southern colonies refused to honour the Writs. Leaders like Thomas Jefferson and Samuel Adams came into limelight during this time, who later emerged as the champions of freedom. George Washington declared that Writs were the British parliamentary usurpation over the colonies. In Boston, Massachusetts, where Writs had succeeded in reducing smuggling, the merchants appointed James Otis to lead the case against Writs in the courts and although Otis lost the case, his speech in the court was viewed to have given ‘breath of life’ to colonists. Otis generated the idea of the ‘unconstitutionality’ of the British measure i.e. power given to the colonial officers was not founded in law. This is termed as the ‘opening scene’ of the American resistance against Imperial Britain during the ‘purest’ period of American patriotism. The struggle against Writs showed that American Revolution took roots in the minds of Americans and the leaders began to construct speeches around ‘liberty or death’, even as Britain continued to demonstrate its sovereign authority over the colonies.

The colonies’ opposition to the Writs became valuable legacy of American resistance, but Britain continued to impinge on the colonies. In 1764, it reinforced its power by passing the Sugar Act, amending the earlier Molasses Act of 1733, the purpose being to prevent smuggling completely from the colonies. This Act generated economic concerns rather than constitutional issues for the colonists as the Sugar Act was passed in the middle of economic depression that American colonies faced. Unlike the earlier Navigation Acts that were passed to boost the economy of the empire by taxing only importers, the Sugar Act taxed every colonist. Moreover, it was an indirect tax that didn’t cover only sugar but also molasses, coffee and wine and placed effective curbs on the quantity of timber and wrought iron that colonists exported. In addition, it created a new court system whereby anyone persecuted had to travel all the way to Nova Scotia, Canada, to fight the case. Though in practice the Sugar Act did become the deterrent to illegal smuggling by curbing trade between the colonists and France and Spain during the years of economic downswing, it forced the prices of goods to be raised. Many colonists feared that they were being priced out of the colonial market. For the first time in American colonies, the colonists began to ‘openly’ protest the British parliament’s intervention in the affairs of the colonies and the idea began to float that Britain had absolutely ‘no’ right to levy taxes on the colonies. The merchants talked of it so did the assistants in the assemblies of different colonies. Thus, germinated what later became the revolutionary war cry in the colonies – ‘no taxation without representation’.

The colonists had begun to talk about the value of self – sufficiency for American colonies in response to the Sugar Act and this gave rise to the Boycott Movement with merchants in the lead and bringing up leaders like Samuel Adams and James Otis in the front line. The Massachusetts legislature was in the forefront drafting letters to the British parliament by outlining arguments and frustrations of the colonists against the Sugar Act. The colonists remained strongly persistent in their opposition to the Act and displayed overwhelming anger against it, so much so that the British government was forced to repeal it in 1765. However, this did not lead to the end of restrictive regime and very soon colonists found themselves burdened with a more rigorous Stamp Act, 1765 in the form of a direct tax. This Act required that all paper products used in the colonies had to

contain a stamp and thus made all paper products legal tender, covering all saleable paper products – newspapers, magazines, playing cards etc. For the British the Act was very lucrative as a revenue generating exercise and no enforcement for it was considered necessary. All colonists regardless of their background were to pay for the levy – industrial, rural, merchants, traders, craftsmen, farmers, rich and poor alike. The colonists were deeply angered and resentful because literary mode of readings and publishing works on paper mattered a lot to them. The fact that the Stamp Act was imposed without the sanction of colonial legislatures was another cause of concern, even for local aristocrats who were too deeply involved in controlling the colonial legislatures to ignore the issue. The Stamp Act created true rift between the British government and the American colonies.

The colonists began to see Imperial Britain as going out of control. They began to stress that they too were freeborn Englishmen, but in Britain's outlook being Englishmen the colonists were part of the mother country. It was the time when colonists became acutely conscious that they did not have the right to elect their representatives in the parliament who could play a role in determining the taxes imposed on them. As English subjects they had no voting rights in Britain. Scholars opine that the Stamp Act created widespread reaction and opposition that can be viewed as a 'storm'. New York took the lead in organising resistance by calling a Stamp Act Congress, 1765, with the participation of all colonies in the first major inter – colonial co – operation akin to forming unity. The colonists had two choices forced upon them – a) either surrender all claims of self – government or b) to confront Imperial Britain. The Stamp Act Congress passed resolutions and issued documents to the king of England and Patrick Henry became a great voice of resistance in Virginia's House of Burgesses. By the end of 1765 eight other colonial legislatures followed Virginia. The colonists also began to spill on the streets. Apart from peaceful protests, colonists indulged in mob violence to intimidate Stamp Act duty collectors responsible for the implementation and progress of the Act.

As colonists became aware of Imperial dark designs, vehement resistance arose. The revolutionary groups as the 'loyal nine' emerged first in Boston to fight the Act and then came up the 'sons of liberty' in Rhode Island, New Jersey, New York and Virginia. They were part of violent resistance that arose spontaneously. Riots took place as houses of colonial officials were destroyed in Boston, and in Rhode Island the provincial Stamp Act distributors were attacked involving merchants, seamen, sailors. As conflict intensified, Great Britain and the American colonies found their relations strained. The colonists rejected the principle of virtual representation vociferously asserting 'no taxation without representation' and resistance gathered force through the launch of boycott against British goods. Led by New York merchants, soon other cities like Philadelphia and Boston followed the example – a most successful phase of the boycott movement, causing panic among British merchants and financiers.

By July 1766 the Stamp Act was repealed still Britain remained doggedly insistent on its rights as the sovereign power to regulate the colonies and issued the Declaratory Act, 1766 that affirmed the Imperial right to legislate for the colonies being fully aware that its business had been halted. Majority Stamp Act officials had resigned or fled under popular compulsion. It was then the British parliament contemplated sending troops to the colonies. This showed that Imperial Britain was not only insensitive towards the American colonies but had actually hardened the principle to assert its complete authority. Britain was unmindful that colonies had grown in political maturity. The radical voices of leaders like James Otis, Thomas Jefferson, Samuel Adams warned the colonists that Britain wanted to deprive America of its freedom and continue to 'enslave' American colonies beneath the British tyrannical regime. Such radical expositions and political concerns provided ideological basis to the colonists to intensify their resistance movement against Great Britain.

The colonists were further alarmed when Townshend duties were instituted in 1767 in the form of four acts which introduced more taxes on 'all' goods imported in the colonies. Scholars treat the Townshend duties as the necessary prelude to the Revolution because passing of these regulations added to the fears of the affected colonists that Britain, and its parliament, were a threat to the well - established self – government in the colonies. The duties were meant to put up a system of using the revenue collected in the colonies to pay the salaries of colonial officials such as the governors and the judges or magistrates, so that they were no more dependent on colonial legislatures. This once again resulted in the colonial merchants retaliating by banning colonial imports in 1768 particularly in Boston, Philadelphia and New York, for the ultimate benefit of the colonies. The New England manufacturers now openly supported domestic production. The southern planters too joined in the fray. But British government continued its confrontationist policy up to 1773, further eroding

the trust of the colonists who were alienated when Imperial Britain actively pursued on the 1765 Mutiny Act. This law provided that the thirteen colonies had to pay for the maintenance of British soldiers stationed in America and wanted the colonial assemblies to raise money in support of British soldiers. New York was the first to resist this law, creating a counter reaction in New England to the British demand. Britain threatened to nullify such actions as its parliament grew more resentful towards the colonies, and the result was the passing of the Townshend duties.

The colonists in America saw British role in promulgating Townshend duties on the colonies as 'abuse of power'. And when Britain sent its troops to ensure enforcement of the unpopular duties, this intensified the rage in American colonists in the run up to the Revolution. This period saw the rise of leaders like Benjamin Franklin who became prominent for having boldly informed the British parliament that colonies would start making their own manufactured goods. By that time two widely circulated revolutionary pamphlets, the essays written by John Dickenson of Pennsylvania and the statements written by Samuel Adams and James Otis of Massachusetts had contributed to unite the American colonists by raising the fervour of resistance which was reflected when twenty - four towns in New England colonies of Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut, agreed to boycott British goods. New York had joined by initiating far more restrictive boycott movement. But the British remained intractable despite widespread protests and boycotts. Troops were then sent by the Imperial government to occupy Boston, one of the most important colonial trading ports. But skirmishes between Patriot colonists and British soldiers became increasingly common. Patriots often vandalised stores that were still selling British goods. Tensions finally boiled over between the colonists and the British troops over the Boston Massacre, 1770 when the British soldiers killed American colonists. The incident became an ardent symbol of the American resistance. The same day Britain repealed the Townshend duties, but retained the tax on colonial tea. This became the flashpoint and the crucial contributing factor to the incident of Boston Tea Party when the entire shipment of tea was destroyed by the colonists in 1773 in an act of heightened tensions with Great Britain.

By then a sense of common purpose, identity and unity had been forged among the American colonists. It gave them a sense of belonging as fellow Americans who were now vociferous in their resistance. Colonists began to mobilise in the north in Massachusetts and in the south in Virginia. These two states were in the lead urging all the colonists to oppose the Imperial power and its policies. This involved mobilisation of opinion too as leaders like Thomas Jefferson, Samuel Adams, Benjamin Franklin became prime motivators, and pursuers, to the cause of independence. Political pamphlets, political speeches, and public demonstrations began to take shape. Even the clergy responded as the preachers furthered the theme of 'stand up for God and liberty'. Non - consumption of tea agreements rapidly became popular and were extended to textiles, clothing, along with other British goods - all evidences of American determinism to fight against Imperial Britain and its parliamentary control, and underlying political problems as well as consternations. These developments were a growing feature in all the three regions - Chesapeake Bay, New England and the Middle colonies.

Still, Imperial Britain continued its retribution. More regulatory measures were passed which Americans now viewed as Intolerable and Coercive Acts under which the Imperial government wanted refunding of the full price of the thousands of tonnes of tea dumped in the ocean by the colonists, Britain revised the Massachusetts charter to prevent town meetings, governors were allowed the authority to reappoint council members and permitted the military commanders to lodge British soldiers in the colonies. American colonists considered these acts so threatening that they organised the First Continental Congress, 1774, in Philadelphia which called for the creation of 'American Grand Council'. The Congress endorsed the Suffolk Resolves, announced the Coercive Acts as unconstitutional, made calls for economic sanctions against Britain, and most importantly, and colonists became ready to arm themselves. As colonists became polarised, they casted themselves as champions of liberty. The fighting broke out against the British in 1775 in Massachusetts. Soon New Englanders were besieging the British garrison in Boston. By then the second Continental Congress had been convened in Philadelphia as Britain declared all colonies and the colonists rebellious.

American colonists rose in rebellion against Imperial Britain and finally joined the Revolution. They stood up against British encroachments on colonial rights and voted to establish an 'American' continental army and appointed George Washington its military commander. In January 1776, the Americans rejected monarchy as a dangerous institution to liberty. On July 2nd 1776, the American Continental Congress voted

for independence and officially adopted Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776 though the revolutionary war ended in 1783 with the Treaty of Paris. America thus became a nation rooted in democracy and republican ideals.

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