

The American Revolution, 1763-1783

26. Virginia Resolutions on the Stamp Act (1765)

Source: John Pendleton Kennedy, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia 1761-1765* (Richmond, 1907), pp. lxvi-lxvii, 360.

The passage of the Stamp Act by Parliament in 1765 inspired the first major split between colonists and Great Britain. Pressed for funds because of the enormous expense it had incurred in fighting the Seven Years' War, Parliament for the first time attempted to raise money from direct taxes in the colonies rather than through the regulation of trade. The act required that all sorts of printed material produced in the colonies carry a stamp purchased from authorities.

By imposing the stamp tax without colonial consent, Parliament directly challenged the authority of local elites who, through the assemblies they controlled, had established their power over the raising and spending of money. They were ready to defend this authority in the name of liberty. Virginia's House of Burgesses approved four resolutions offered by the fiery orator Patrick Henry. The Burgesses rejected as too radical the last three resolutions that follow, including one calling for outright resistance to unlawful taxation.

WHEREAS, THE HONOURABLE House of Commons in England, have of late draw[n] into question how far the General Assembly of this colony hath power to enact laws for laying of taxes and imposing duties payable by the people of this, his Majesty's most ancient colony; for settling and ascertaining the same to all future times, the House of Burgesses of this present General Assembly have come to the following resolves.

Resolved, that the first adventurers, settlers of this his Majesty's colony and dominion of Virginia, brought with them and transmitted to their posterity, and all other his Majesty's subjects since inhabiting in this his Majesty's colony, all the privileges and immunities that have at any time been held, enjoyed, and possessed by the people of Great Britain.

Resolved, that by two royal charters granted by King James the first, the colonists aforesaid are declared and entitled to all privileges and immunities of natural born subjects, to all intents and purposes as if they had been abiding and born within the realm of England.

Resolved, that the taxation of the people by themselves, or by persons chosen by themselves to represent them, who can only know what taxes the people are able to bear, or the easiest method of raising them, and must themselves be affected by every tax laid on the people, is the only security against a burdensome taxation, and the distinguishing characteristic of British freedom, without which the ancient constitution cannot exist.

Resolved, that his Majesty's liege people of this ancient colony have enjoyed the right of being thus governed by their own Assembly in the article of taxes and internal police, and that the same have never been forfeited, or any other way yielded up, but have been constantly recognized by the king and people of Great Britain.

Resolved, therefore, that the General Assembly of this colony, together with his Majesty or his substitutes, have in their representatives capacity, the only exclusive right and power to lay taxes and imposts upon the inhabitants of this colony; and that every attempt

to vest such power in any other person or persons whatever than the General Assembly aforesaid, is illegal, unconstitutional, and unjust, and has a manifest tendency to destroy British as well as American liberty.

Resolved, that his Majesty's liege people, the inhabitants of this colony, are not bound to yield obedience to any law or ordinance whatever, designed to impose any taxation whatsoever upon them, other than the laws or ordinances of the General Assembly aforesaid.

Resolved, that any person who shall, by speaking or writing, assert or maintain that any person or persons other than the General Assembly of this colony, have any right or power to impose or lay any taxation on the people here, shall be deemed an enemy to his Majesty's colony.

Questions

1. Why do you think the Virginia House of Burgesses adopted the first four resolutions but rejected the final three?
2. What would be the difference between resting the resolutions' arguments on "British freedom" and appealing to a more universal concept of liberty?

27. New York Workingmen Demand a Voice in the Revolutionary Struggle (1770)

Source: Brutus, To the Free and Loyal Inhabitants of the City and Colony of New-York . . . (New York, 1774)

The struggle against British taxation measures of the 1760s greatly expanded the boundaries of colonial politics. The following document illustrates how ordinary workingmen in New York City claimed the right to challenge the city's prominent merchants in determining how far resistance should go. In the aftermath of the Townshend Acts, a series of taxes

imposed by Parliament on the American colonies, leaders in several colonies announced a boycott of British goods. They hoped to pressure British merchants to persuade their government to repeal the measures. By 1770, however, colonial merchants, as well as many Americans who did not want to do without British goods, decided to resume trade. In response, a New Yorker calling himself Brutus published a call for a continuation of the policy of nonimportation. He castigated the merchants as "mercantile Dons" ("Don" being a Spanish word derived from "lord" and suggesting gentry status). Mechanics (craftsman), he insisted, had a right to a voice in public policy. The letter illustrates how the struggle for colonial rights led to a democratization of politics.

FRIENDS, FELLOW CITIZENS, fellow Countrymen, and fellow Freeman,

Nothing can be more flagrantly wrong than the assertion of some of our mercantile Dons, that the mechanics have no right to give their sentiments about the importation of British commodities. For who, I would ask, is the member of community, that is absolutely independent of the rest? Or what particular class among us, has an exclusive right to decide a question of general concern? When the Non-Importation Agreement took place, what end was it designed to answer? Not surely the private emolument of merchants, but the universal weal of the continent. It was to redeem from perdition, from total perdition, that stock of English Liberty, to which every subject, whatever may be his rank, is equally entitled. Amidst all the disparity of fortune and honors, there is one lot as common to all Englishmen, as death. It is, that we are all equally free. Sufficient is it therefore, to show the matchless absurdity of the exclusive claim, of which a few interested merchants have lately attempted, in a most assuming manner, to avail themselves, in determining on the question, whether the Non-Importation Agreement shall be rescinded, to observe, that it was not solemnly entered into for the good of the merchants alone, but for the salvation of the Liberties of us all.

Of this the trading interest of this City were convinced, when, after forming themselves into a Society for executing that Agreement, they not only requested a similar Association of the Mechanics, but by frequent meetings, conspired with them in support of the important Company. When the parties engaged in it, none doubted the necessity of so salutary a measure: every man saw, that between an importation of goods, which stern virtue ought ever to despise as a means to encourage luxury, and the sacrifice of our inestimable Rights as Englishmen, there was no medium. This view of the subject begat and brought to perfection, the important resolution, which has inspired the enemies of our Liberty on the other side of the Atlantic, with fear and astonishment. . . . Has not our Mother Country, by solemn Act of Legislation, declared that she has a right to impose internal Taxes on us? And is not such an imposition incompatible with our Liberty? But this law is a mere dead letter, unless it be carried into exercise by some future Act. For this Purpose was the Law devised, imposing a Duty upon Tea, Paper, Glass, Painters Colors, etc. the very articles which our Egyptian task-masters thought were most essential to us, as being not hitherto the produce of this country. And shall we not, for our own sakes, show that we can live without them? What are all the riches, the luxuries, and even the conveniences of life, compared with that liberty wherewith God and Nature have set us free, with that inestimable jewel which is the basis of all other enjoyments? . . . Rouse then my fellow citizen, fellow countrymen, and fellow Freemen, of all ranks, from the man of wealth, to the man whose only portion is Liberty.

Questions

1. What social divisions in the colonies are apparent in this broadside?
2. In what respect does the author believe that all colonists are equal?

28. Association of the New York Sons of Liberty (1773)

Source: Hezekiah Niles, Principles and Acts of the Revolution in America (Baltimore, 1822), pp. 169-70.

The Sons of Liberty of New York City was one of many such groups that sprang up during the Stamp Act crisis of 1765. It was led by talented and ambitious lesser merchants who enjoyed no standing among the colony's wealthy but commanded a broad following among the city's craftsmen, laborers, and sailors. The Sons took the lead in enforcing the boycott of British imports that led to Parliament's repeal of the act and a second boycott directed against the Townshend Duties of 1767.

In 1773, when Parliament passed the Tea Act, another taxation measure, the Sons again organized resistance. On December 15, the Sons of Liberty announced an agreement or association to resist the Tea Act. Signed by "a great number of the principal gentlemen of the city, merchants, lawyers, and other inhabitants of all ranks," the agreement forthrightly accused Britain of trampling on the freedom of the colonists and threatening to reduce them to "slavery."

THE FOLLOWING ASSOCIATION is signed by a great number of the principal gentlemen of the city, merchants, lawyers, and other inhabitants of all ranks, and it is still carried about the city to give an opportunity to those who have not yet signed, to unite with their fellow citizens, to testify their abhorrence to the diabolical project of enslaving America.

THE ASSOCIATION OF THE SONS OF LIBERTY OF NEW YORK

It is essential to the freedom and security of a free people, that no taxes be imposed upon them but by their own consent, or their representatives. For "What property have they in that which another may, by right, take when he pleases to himself?" The former is the

undoubted right of Englishmen, to secure which they expended millions and sacrificed the lives of thousands. And yet, to the astonishment of all the world, and the grief of America, the Commons of Great Britain, after the repeal of the memorable and detestable Stamp Act, reassumed the power of imposing taxes on the American colonies; and insisting on it as a necessary badge of parliamentary supremacy, passed a bill, in the seventh year of his present Majesty's reign, imposing duties on all glass, painters' colours, paper, and teas, that should, after the 20th of November, 1767, be "imported from Great Britain into any colony or plantation in America". This bill, after the concurrence of the Lords, obtained the royal assent. And thus they who, from time immemorial, have exercised the right of giving to, or withholding from the crown, their aids and subsidies, according to their *own free will and pleasure*, signified by their representatives in Parliament, do, by the Act in question, deny us, their brethren in America, the enjoyment of the same right. As this denial, and the execution of that Act, involves our slavery, and would sap the foundation of our freedom, whereby we should become slaves to our brethren and fellow subjects, born to no greater stock of freedom than the Americans—the merchants and inhabitants of this city, in conjunction with the merchants and inhabitants of the ancient American colonies, entered into an agreement to decline a part of their commerce with Great Britain, until the above mentioned Act should be totally repealed.

This agreement operated so powerfully to the disadvantage of the manufacturers of England that many of them were unemployed. To appease their clamours, and to provide the subsistence for them, which the non-importation had deprived them of, the Parliament, in 1770, repealed so much of the Revenue Act as imposed a duty on glass, painters' colours, and paper, and left the duty on tea, as *a test of the parliamentary right to tax us*. The merchants of the cities of New York and Philadelphia, having strictly adhered to the agreement, so far as it is related to the importation of articles subject to an American duty, have convinced the ministry, that some other measures must

be adopted to execute parliamentary supremacy over this country, and to remove the distress brought on the East India Company, by the ill policy of that Act. Accordingly, to increase the temptation to the shippers of tea from England, an Act of Parliament passed the last session, which gives the whole duty on tea, the company were subject to pay, upon the importation of it into England, to the purchasers and exporters; and when the company have ten millions of pounds of tea in their warehouses exclusive of the quantity they may want to ship, they are allowed to export tea, discharged from the payment of that duty with which they were before chargeable.

In hopes of aid in the execution of this project, by the influence of the owners of the American ships, application was made by the company to the captains of those ships to take the tea on freight; but they virtuously rejected it. Still determined on the scheme, they have chartered ships to bring the tea to this country, which may be hourly expected, to make an important trial of our virtue. If they succeed in the sale of that tea, we shall have no property that we can call our own, and then we may bid adieu to American liberty. Therefore, to prevent a calamity which, of all others, is the most to be dreaded—slavery and its terrible concomitants—we, the subscribers, being influenced from a regard to liberty, and disposed to use all lawful endeavours in our power, to defeat the pernicious project, and to transmit to our posterity those blessings of freedom which our ancestors have handed down to us; and to contribute to the support of the common liberties of America, which are in danger to be subverted, *do*, for those important purposes, agree to associate together, under the name and style of the *sons of New York*, and engage our honour to, and with each other faithfully to observe and perform the following resolutions, viz.

1st. Resolved, that whoever shall aid or abet, or in any manner assist, in the introduction of tea from any place whatsoever, into this colony, while it is subject, by a British Act of Parliament, to the payment of a duty, for the purpose of raising a revenue in America, he shall be deemed an enemy to the liberties of America.

2d. Resolved, that whoever shall be aiding, or assisting, in the landing, or carting of such tea, from any ship, or vessel, or shall hire any house, storehouse, or cellar or any place whatsoever, to deposit the tea, subject to a duty as aforesaid, he shall be deemed an enemy to the liberties of America.

3d. Resolved, that whoever shall sell, or buy, or in any manner contribute to the sale, or purchase of tea, subject to a duty as aforesaid, or shall aid, or abet, in transporting such tea, by land or water, from this city, until the 7th George III, chap. 46, commonly called the Revenue Act, shall be totally and clearly repealed, he shall be deemed an enemy to the liberties of America.

4th. Resolved, that whether the duties on tea, imposed by this Act, be paid in Great Britain or in America, our liberties are equally affected.

5th. Resolved, that whoever shall transgress any of these resolutions, we will not deal with, or employ, or have any connection with him.

Questions

1. How do the Sons of Liberty explain Britain's motivations for passing the Tea Act?
2. What do they consider the relationship between property and liberty?

29. Farmington, Connecticut, Resolutions on the Intolerable Acts (1774)

Source: Peter Force, *American Archives (Washington, D.C., 1837-1853), Series 4, Vol. I, p. 336.*

Parliament responded to the Boston Tea Party by passing a series of coercive laws. These closed the port of Boston to all trade until the tea had

been paid for, radically altered the Massachusetts Charter of 1691 by curtailing town meetings and authorizing the governor to appoint previously elected members of the council, and empowered military commanders to lodge soldiers in private homes. These measures, which Americans called the Intolerable Acts, destroyed the legitimacy of the imperial government in the eyes of many colonists. Opposition now spread to small towns and rural areas that had not participated actively in previous resistance. A gathering of 1,000 residents of Farmington, Connecticut in May 1774 erected a liberty pole and adopted resolutions proclaiming that they were "the sons of freedom," who "scorn the chains of slavery" Britain had fashioned for America. The Farmington resolutions accused the British ministry of being "instigated by the devil." Especially in New England, the cause of liberty had become the cause of God.

PROCEEDINGS OF FARMINGTON, Connecticut, on the Boston Port Act, May 19, 1774.

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

To pass through the fire at six o'clock this evening, in honour 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 harbour was read aloud, sentenced to the flames and executed by the hands of the common hangman; then the following resolves were passed, *nem.con.*:

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.

2d. 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*.

3d. 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 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, godlike virtue shall blazon our hemisphere.

Questions

1. How does the language of the resolutions suggest that feelings toward Great Britain have hardened in the colonies?
2. How do the resolutions qualify or limit Americans' sense of loyalty to the British government?

30. Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776)

Source: Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (2nd ed.: Philadelphia, 1776), pp. 1, 6-12, 15-30.

Ironically, a recent emigrant from England offered the most persuasive argument for American independence. Thomas Paine arrived in Philadelphia late in 1774 and quickly became associated with a group of advocates of the American cause. His pamphlet, *Common Sense*, appeared in January

1776. It began not with a recital of colonial grievances but with an attack on the principles of hereditary rule and monarchical government. Paine then drew on the colonists' experiences to make his case for independence. Within the British empire, America's prospects were limited; trading freely with the entire world, its future prosperity was certain. With independence, moreover, the colonies could for the first time insulate themselves from involvement in the endless imperial wars of Europe. But more than such practical considerations, Paine outlined a stirring vision of the historical importance of the American Revolution. The new nation would become the home of freedom, "an asylum for mankind."

Previous political writings had generally been directed toward the educated elite. Paine pioneered a new style of political writing, one designed to expand dramatically the public sphere where political discussion took place. *Common Sense* quickly became one of the most successful and influential pamphlets in the history of political writing.

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the sentiments contained in the following pages, are not yet sufficiently fashionable to procure them general Favor; a long Habit of not thinking a Thing *wrong*, gives it a superficial appearance of being *right*, and raises at first a formidable outcry in defence of Custom. But the Tumult soon subsides. Time makes more Converts than Reason.

As a long and violent abuse of power is generally the means of calling the right of it in question, (and in matters too which might never have been thought of, had not the sufferers been aggravated into the inquiry,) and as the King of England hath undertaken in his *own right*, to support the Parliament in what he calls *Theirs*, and as the good People of this Country are grievously oppressed by the Combination, they have an undoubted privilege to enquire into the Pretensions of both, and equally to reject the Usurpation of *either*.

In the following Sheets, the Author hath studiously avoided every thing which is personal among ourselves. Compliments as well as censure to individuals make no part thereof. The wise and the

worthy need not the triumph of a Pamphlet; and those whose sentiments are injudicious or unfriendly will cease of themselves, unless too much pain is bestowed upon their conversions.

The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind. Many circumstances have, and will arise, which are not local, but universal, and through which the principles of all lovers of mankind are affected, and in the event of which their affections are interested. The laying a country desolate with fire and sword, declaring war against the natural rights of all mankind, and extirpating the defenders thereof from the face of the earth, is the concern of every man to whom nature hath given the power of feeling.

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OF MONARCHY AND HEREDITARY SUCCESSION

Mankind being originally equals in the order of creation, the equality could only be destroyed by some subsequent circumstance; the distinctions of rich, and poor, may in a great measure be accounted for, and that without having recourse to the harsh ill sounding names of oppression and avarice. Oppression is often the *consequence*, but seldom or never the *means* of riches; and though avarice will preserve a man from being necessitously poor, it generally makes him too timorous to be wealthy.

But there is another and greater distinction for which no truly natural or religious reason can be assigned, and that is, the distinction of men into KINGS and SUBJECTS. Male and female are the distinctions of nature, good and bad the distinctions of heaven; but how a race of men came into the world so exalted above the rest, and distinguished like some new species, is worth enquiring into, and whether they are the means of happiness or of misery to mankind.

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All men being originally equals, no *one* by *birth* could have a right to set up his own family in perpetual preference to all others for ever, and though himself might deserve *some* decent degree of honors of

his contemporaries, yet his descendants might be far too unworthy to inherit them. One of the strongest *natural* proofs of the folly of hereditary right in kings, is, that nature disapproves it, otherwise she would not so frequently turn it into ridicule by giving mankind an *ass for a lion*.

As to usurpation, no man will be so hardy as to defend it; and that William the Conqueror was an usurper is a fact not to be contradicted. The plain truth is, that the antiquity of English monarchy will not bear looking into.

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THOUGHTS ON THE PRESENT STATE OF AMERICAN AFFAIRS

In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense: and have no other preliminaries to settle with the reader, than that he will divest himself of prejudice and prepossession, and suffer his reason and his feelings to determine for themselves: that he will put on, or rather that he will not put off, the true character of a man, and generously enlarge his views beyond the present day.

Volumes have been written on the subject of the struggle between England and America. Men of all ranks have embarked in the controversy, from different motives, and with various designs; but all have been ineffectual, and the period of debate is closed. Arms as the last resource decide the contest; the appeal was the choice of the King, and the Continent has accepted the challenge.

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The Sun never shined on a cause of greater worth. 'Tis not the affair of a City, a County, a Province, or a Kingdom; but of a Continent—at least one eighth part of the habitable Globe. 'Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected even to the end of time, by the proceedings now. Now is the seed-time of Continental union, faith and honour. The least fracture now will be like a name engraved

with the point of a pin on the tender rind of a young oak; the wound would enlarge with the tree, and posterity read it in full grown character.

...

As much hath been said of the advantages of reconciliation, which, like an agreeable dream, hath passed away and left us as we were, it is but right that we should examine the contrary side of the argument, and enquire into some of the many material injuries which these Colonies sustain, and always will sustain, by being connected with and dependent on Great-Britain. To examine that connection and dependence, on the principles of nature and common sense, to see what we have to trust to, if separated, and what we are to expect, if dependant.

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 future 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, that 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 necessaries of life, and will always have a market while eating is the custom of Europe.

But she has protected us, say some. That she hath engrossed 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.

Alas! we have been long led away by ancient prejudices and made large sacrifices to superstition. We have boasted the protection of Great Britain, without considering, that her motive was *interest* not *attachment*; and that she did not protect us from *our enemies* on *our account*; but from *her enemies* on *her own account*, from those who had no quarrel with us on any *other account*, and who will always be our

enemies on the *same account*. Let Britain waive her pretensions to the Continent, or the Continent throw off the dependence, and we should be at peace with France and Spain, were they at war with Britain.

...

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, and the phrase *parent* or *mother country* hath been jesuitically adopted by the King and his parasites, with a low papistical design of gaining an unfair bias on the credulous weakness of our minds. 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.

...

Our plan is commerce, and that, well attended to, will secure us the peace and friendship of all Europe; because it is the interest of all Europe to have America a free port. Her trade will always be a protection, and her barrenness of gold and silver secure her from invaders.

I challenge the warmest advocate for reconciliation to show a single advantage that this continent can reap by being connected with Great Britain. I repeat the challenge; not a single advantage is derived. Our corn will fetch its price in any market in Europe, and our imported goods must be paid for by them where we will.

But the injuries and disadvantages which we sustain by that connection, are without number; and our duty to mankind at large, as well as to ourselves, instruct us to renounce the alliance: because, 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 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.

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'Tis repugnant to reason, to the universal order of things, to all examples from former ages, to suppose that this Continent can long remain subject to any external power. The most sanguine in Britain doth not think so. The utmost stretch of human wisdom cannot, at this time, compass a plan, short of separation, which can promise the continent even a year's security. Reconciliation is *now* a fallacious dream. Nature hath deserted the connection, and art cannot supply her place. For, as Milton wisely expresses, "never can true reconciles grow where wounds of deadly hate have pierced so deep."

A government of our own is our natural right: and when a man seriously reflects on the precariousness of human affairs, he will become convinced, that it is infinitely wiser and safer, to form a constitution of our own in a cool deliberate manner, while we have it in our power, than to trust such an interesting event to time and chance.

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O! ye that love mankind! Ye 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.

Questions

1. Why does Paine begin his argument for independence with an attack on the principle of monarchy and hereditary succession?
2. What passages illustrate Paine's effort to write in language ordinary readers can understand?

31. James Chalmers, *Plain Truth* (1776)

Source: James Chalmers, *Plain Truth: Addressed to the Inhabitants of America* (Philadelphia, 1776), pp. 1-3, 28, 33, 63-66.

Common Sense inspired a wide-ranging debate about whether American freedom would be more secure inside or outside the British empire. James Chalmers, a Maryland plantation owner, made the case for the Loyalists, as those who opposed American independence were called. In *Plain Truth, Addressed to the Inhabitants of America*, published in March 1776, he defended the British system of government against Paine's attack, related the many benefits he believed the colonists received from their association with Great Britain, and predicted that independence would unleash continuous strife within the new nation. Chalmers appealed to men of property, warning that the democratic government Paine proposed would allow the poor to pass laws interfering with the collection of debts. Chalmers went on to serve in the British army during the War of Independence

IF INDIGNANT AT the doctrine contained in the pamphlet entitled *Common Sense* I have expressed myself in the following observations with some ardor . . . [it is because] I adore my country. Passionately devoted to true liberty, I glow with the purest flame of patriotism [and have an] abhorrence of Independency, which if effected, would inevitably plunge our once preeminently envied country into ruin, horror, and desolation. . . .

Our Political Quack [attempts] to cajole the people into the most abject slavery under the delusive name of independence. His first indecent attack is against the English constitution; which with all its imperfections is, and ever will be the pride and envy of mankind. . . .

Can a reasonable being for a moment believe that Great Britain, whose political existence depends on our constitutional obedience, who but yesterday made such prodigious efforts to save us from France, will not exert herself as powerfully to preserve us from our frantic schemes of Independency. . . . We remember with unfeigned gratitude, the many benefits derived through our connections

with Great Britain, by whom but yesterday we were emancipated from slavery and death . . . We venerate the constitution, which with all its imperfections (too often exaggerated) we apprehend almost approaches as near to perfection as human kind can bear. . . .

His scheme of independency would soon, very soon give way to a government imposed on us, by some Cromwell of our armies. . . . A failure of commerce [would] preclude the numerous tribe of planters, farmers and others, from paying their debts . . . A war will ensure between the creditors and their debtors, which will eventually end in a general abolition of debts. . . .

Volumes were insufficient to describe the horror, misery and desolation, awaiting the people at large in the form of American independence. In short, I affirm that it would be most excellent policy in those who wish for True Liberty to submit by an advantageous reconciliation to the authority of Great Britain. . . . Independence and Slavery are synonymous terms.

Questions

1. Why does Chalmers equate independence with slavery?
2. Which Americans would most likely be persuaded by Chalmers's arguments?

CHAPTER 6

The Revolution Within

32. Exchange between Jewish Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island, and George Washington, on Religious Toleration (1790)

Source: Philander D. Chase et al., eds., The Papers of George Washington, Presidential Series (Charlottesville, 1996-), vol. 6, 284-86.

As remarkable as the expansion of political freedom was the Revolution's impact on American religion. During the Revolution, many Americans came to see religious toleration as an essential element of freedom. Throughout the new nation, states disestablished their established churches, that is, deprived them of public funding and special legal privileges. Catholics and Jews gained the rights to worship without persecution and to hold public office. The Bill of Rights, a series of constitutional amendments introduced by James Madison in 1789 and ratified in 1791, prohibited Congress from creating "an establishment of religion."

When George Washington, the first president, visited Newport, Rhode Island in 1790, the city's small Jewish community presented him with an address celebrating the establishment of a government that guaranteed "liberty of conscience" to all. Washington's reply made the important distinction between religious "toleration"—something granted by a dominant group to others—and genuine religious liberty, a recognition that all should enjoy the same "natural rights."