

The Road to Revolution: America 1763-1776

Richard Bell

Course Syllabus

In 1763 colonists across British North America could not have been prouder to be members of the British Empire. Fighting shoulder to shoulder with redcoat soldiers, the colonists had trounced their mutual enemies in the French and Indian War. In towns and cities across America, colonists toasted King George, his ministers, and his military. In New York City, grateful colonists erected a statue to their great king, a testament to the belief that their future lay with him.

On July 9, 1776, a crowd of American soldiers and sailors tore down this same statue, and melted down its precious lead into 42,088 musket balls to fire at the king's army. The two sides were now at war—delegates in Philadelphia had finalized the *Declaration of Independence* just five days earlier—and that war would rage for the next seven years.

In this four-part course, University of Maryland historian Richard Bell explores the tumultuous thirteen years between 1763 and 1776. These weekly sessions will examine four of the extraordinary events that turned thirteen loyal British colonies into a united confederation willing to go to war to achieve independence.

Session 1: Stamps & Mobs

The Stamp Act was not supposed to be controversial. But when the British Parliament authorized this new tax on the commercial use of paper in 1765, it sparked unprecedented protests that forged common cause between merchants and consumers.

Session 2: Redcoats & Snowballs

In 1768, Parliament sent four redcoat regiments to Boston to keep the peace. Instead, these occupying troops and the residents of this struggling port city taunted and antagonized each other. After two years of escalating provocations, the powderkeg finally exploded when, on March 5, 1770, a fistfight and a stray snowball triggered a shoot-out that left five local men dead in the street.

Session 3: Tea & Tar

The imperial crisis sprang back to life in December 1773 when a team of working men acting on behalf of leading smugglers like John Hancock threw cases of East India Company

tea into Boston's muddy harbor. Later known as the Tea Party, this act of property destruction and terrorism poisoned relations between Crown and colonies as never before.

Session 4: Hearts & Minds

In the wake of the Tea Party, most colonists still hoped for a peaceful reconciliation with the King and Parliament. But that was about to change. Focusing upon the propaganda efforts of a small group of patriots this concluding talk examines why ordinary people – not just in Boston but across twelve other mainland colonies – finally embraced armed resistance and the cause of independence.

Bell is Professor of History at the University of Maryland, College Park.

There are no required readings, but some recommended titles include:

- Allison, *The Boston Massacre* (2006)
- Archer, *As If An Enemy's Country* (2009)
- Breen, *Marketplace of Revolution* (2004)
- Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots* (2010)
- Carp, *Defiance of the Patriots* (2010)
- Foppes, 'Ebenezer Mackintosh and Crowd Action' (MA thesis, 1980)
- Frey, *The British Soldier in America* (2012)
- Hinderaker, *Boston's Massacre* (2017)
- Irvin, 'Tar and Feathers in Revolutionary America' (journal article, 2003)
- Irvin, *Clothed in the Robes of Sovereignty* (2011)
- Kachun, 'From Forgotten Founder to Indispensable Icon' (journal article, 2009)
- Larkin, *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution* (2005)
- Morgan and Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis* (1953)
- Nash, *Race, Class, and Politics* (1986)
- Nell, *Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (1855)
- Shy, *Toward Lexington* (1969)
- Ulrich, *Age of Homespun* (2001)
- Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party* (1999)
- Young, *The Liberty Tree* (2006)
- Young, *Revolutionary Founders* (1999)
- Zabin, *The Boston Massacre* (2019)

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