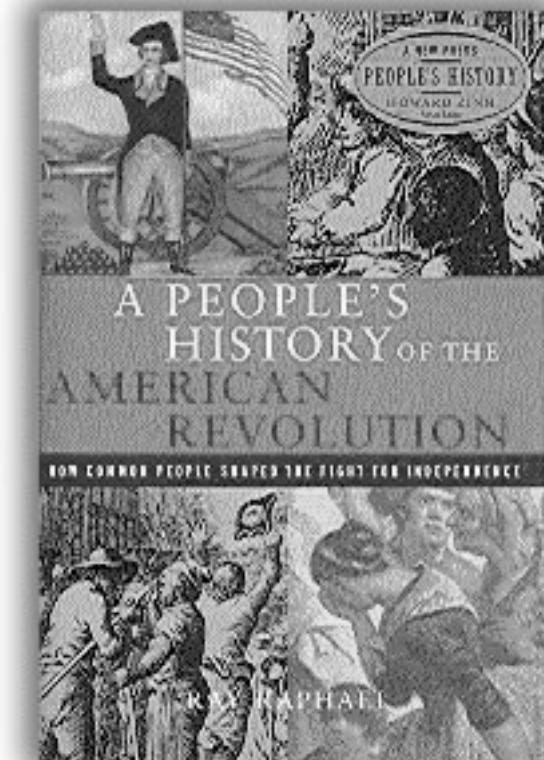


A People's History of the American Revolution:



A Guide for Teaching and Readers' Groups

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CHAPTER 1: RANK-AND-FILE REBELS

STREET ACTIONS

Review:

1. What did Bostonians protest in 1747?
2. What did the people of South Carolina, Connecticut, New York, and other colonies protest in 1765?
3. Who were the “strolling poor”?
4. (a) Who were the Whigs in England? (b) Who were the Whigs in the American colonies? (c) Who were the Tories in England? (d) Who were the Tories in the American colonies?
5. (a) What were the “Pope’s Day riots”? (b) What did the lower classes get from them? (c) How did the upper classes deal with them?
6. Who was included in “the whole body of the people” at town meetings? [Note: voting in regular elections, in those days, was limited to adult white males with property.]
7. What happened in Boston the night of December 16, 1773?

Historical Reasoning/ Discussion:

1. Pauline Maier, in *From Resistance to Revolution*, wrote: “Eighteenth-century Americans accepted the existence of popular uprisings with remarkable ease.” (For a related quotation, see footnote #2.) Do you think *all* eighteenth-century Americans accepted uprisings with ease?
2. (a) Describe the differences between Whig leaders and street protesters. (b) Despite these differences, what did they have in common?
3. Other than the Boston Tea Party, can you think of any instances in American history when elite property owners lent support to the purposive destruction of private property in an act of civil disobedience? If so, compare that event to the Boston Tea Party. If not, why do you think this happened only at the Boston Tea Party?
4. Whig leaders in Boston celebrated the anniversary of the August 14 Stamp Act protest, but not that of August 26. Alfred F. Young, in *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*, notes that the Boston Tea Party was not celebrated in the public arena until the 1830s; the anniversary of the Boston Massacre, on the other, occasioned large ceremonies in the years immediately following the event. Why the selective memory?

A SHOEMAKER’S TALE

Review:

1. How did Tories such as Oliver and Hulton explain Boston’s turmoil?
2. In 1768, how did the presence of British soldiers affect George Hewes?
3. What was Hewes’ role in the Boston Massacre?
4. What special talent helped George Hewes at the Tea Party?
5. What was Malcolm’s “modern jacket”?
6. Cite three instances in which Hewes, as an adult, got into arguments with officials or gentlemen.

Historical Reasoning/Discussion:

1. Why do you think Oliver and Hulton resisted the notion that common people could act on their own?
2. Alfred Young, in reconstructing Hewes' story, confronted two problems: "separating [Hewes] from his biographers and sifting the memories of a man in his nineties." (See footnotes #34 and #39.) (a) Can you cite examples from your own readings in which biographers forced their own agendas on their subjects? (b) In your own experience, how can memory distort reality?
3. Imagine that five people are killed by officials with guns, four of whom you know, and one falls into your arms when shot. How might this event affect your political beliefs and behavior?
4. Raphael contends that common people "tend to pursue, of their own volition, their own personal interests and the interests of their communities." But do people always make up their own minds? Compare the extent to which people's opinions and actions have been affected by (a) newspapers and pamphlets during the American Revolution (b) state controlled media in a totalitarian society (c) politicians in contemporary American society (d) television news and advertisements (e) the Internet.

COUNTRY REBELLIONS***Review:***

1. What were the objectives of pre-revolutionary protesters in (a) New Jersey, 1746; (b) New York, 1766; (c) Pennsylvania, 1764; (d) South Carolina, 1767; (e) North Carolina, 1771?
2. (a) Which of these protests involved the greatest number of people? (b) What was the outcome of that event?
3. (a) Did any of these protests involve a direct challenge to the authority of the British Parliament? (b) How can these protests be viewed as "preludes" to the American Revolution?
4. Why do you think land rioters in New Jersey and New York were called "Levellers"?

Historical Reasoning/Discussion:

1. Edward Countryman claimed that country rebels were "more likely to be armed" and "more likely to attack the symbols of authority" than city rebels. Yet cities housed the seats of government. Which do you think posed a bigger threat to established authority, urban or rural unrest?
2. (a) State Gilje's definition of "riot." Do you agree with it? If not, how would you alter it? (b) How does his (or your) definition of "riot" differ from that of "rebellion" and "revolution"? (c) Try to characterize each event, or series of events, in this chapter as a "riot," a "rebellion," or a "revolution" according to definitions you accept.
3. Raphael maintains that "the repeated resistance to civil authority tilled the soil for the Revolution which followed." What other periods in United States history can be characterized by "the repeated resistance to civil authority"? Did any of these carry a threat of revolution?

4. Bernard Bailyn, in *Pamphlets of the American Revolution*, said that revolutionary ideas gave meaning to the “diffuse and indeliberate anti-authoritarianism” of earlier protesters. Marcus Rediker, on the other hand, has claimed that the “self-activity” of common people “produced a major breakthrough in libertarian thought that would ultimately lead to revolution.” (Citation in footnote #1.) Did ideas trigger events, or did events lead to the development of revolutionary ideas? Discuss these differing perspectives with respect to the Knowles riot, the rent strikes of tenant farmers, the Regulator movements, the various Stamp Act riots, the Boston Massacre, and the Boston Tea Party.

FRONTIER SWAGGER

Review:

1. Ethan Allen showed “no deference whatsoever” to any government officials. Give at least five examples of things he did in defiance of authority.
2. (a) Where did the Green Mountain Boys conduct their trials? (b) How do you think the location affected the proceedings?
3. What did the Green Mountain Boys do to humiliate Dr. Samuel Adams (not to be confused with Sam Adams, the revolutionary)?
4. What was the original goal of the Green Mountain Boys?
5. When the Revolutionary War broke out, which side did the Green Mountain Boys join?

Historical Reasoning/ Discussion:

1. How effective were the techniques used by the Green Mountain Boys? If you were a resident of the area with a deed granted from New York, could you have resisted the Green Mountain Boys?
2. Were the Green Mountain Boys freedom fighters or vigilantes?
3. Although most of the Green Mountain Boys eagerly embraced the American Revolution by joining on the side of the patriots, Justus Sherwood became an active loyalist (see Chapter 4 below, “Choosing Sides”). (a) Discuss his reasoning, and contrast it with that of the majority of the Green Mountain Boys. (b) Which side, if any, do you think the Green Mountain Boys should have joined in order to further their primary goal: independence from New York?
4. Ethan Allen himself toyed with the notion of siding with the British towards the end of the war. Would this have made him a “traitor”?

POLITICS “OUT-OF-DOORS”

Review:

1. What type of goods were boycotted in the non-importation movement of 1764-5?
2. How did the non-importation movement change in 1769?
3. Did non-importation succeed in getting the Townshend Acts repealed?
4. What was the “Association” of 1774?

5. (a) In your own words, describe tarring and feathering. (b) What was its political function?
6. What was meant by “out-of-doors” politics?
7. According to Raphael, what were the two “most important venues in the social lives of the colonists”? How did each figure in the activities building towards revolution?

Historical Reasoning/ Discussion:

1. Raphael states, “If governments were indeed social contracts as John Locke maintained, the associations could lay a stronger claim to legitimacy than the British Crown.” Explain and argue for or against this statement.
2. Debate this resolution: “The wording of section 11 of the Continental Association gave official sanction to mob actions.”
3. The First Continental Congress, when creating the Association, also banned “all horse-racing, and all kinds of gaming, cock-fighting, exhibitions of shews, plays, and other expensive diversions and entertainments,” as well as fancy funerals. Was this due to economic frugality caused by the boycott of British goods, antagonism towards the upper classes, a wave of pious morality, or any other reasons? Discuss and weigh all possible motivations.
4. According to Richard Maxwell Brown, “the majoritarian concept of popular sovereignty” bestowed “an awesome dignity to the brutal physical abuse or killing of men that tarring and feathering, vigilantism, and lynching came to embody.” Explain what he means, then respond: Is this an inevitable by-product of any government in which the majority rules? Can there be safeguards?
5. During the 18th century the threat of ostracism served to enforce community values, in this case proper revolutionary behavior. (a) Do you think the threat of ostracism worked as well in cities as in small towns? (b) Do you think it would be as effective today as it was back then?

YANKEES ‘WITH STAVES AND MUSICK’***Review:***

1. What were the basic provisions of the Massachusetts Government Act?
2. What were the farmers of Massachusetts afraid might happen if this act went into effect?
3. What did the farmers do to close the courts? Explain what happened at Worcester and Springfield.
4. How did the farmers get the crown-appointed counsellors to resign? Cite at least three incidents.
5. What did the people of Marblehead, Danvers, and Salem do about the prohibition against town meetings?
6. Why didn’t General Gage force a military confrontation with the farmers?
7. With the Crown-appointed officials gone, who wound up governing rural Massachusetts?

Historical Reasoning/ Discussion:

1. Why did the people of Worcester insist that the judges and Timothy Paine read their resignations in public, several times, with their hats off?
2. On the evening of September 1, 1774, a crowd broke several windows in Cambridge in response to the movement of British troops. The following day a much larger crowd disavowed the actions of the preceding evening. After they had forced the resignation of Lee and Danforth, some demonstrators asked the counsellors whether they had been treated respectfully. Lee responded: they were “the most extraordinary People that he ever saw for Sobriety and Decency.” (See footnotes #119 and #138 for related incidents.) (a) Why were the insurgents so concerned about their image? (b) Were the people who forced Israel Williams to choke on smoke a “mob”? (c) Were the people who forced judges to read their resignations a “mob”? (d) Discuss the differences, if you see any, between mob action and revolution.
3. Raphael claims the 1774 court closures and forced resignation of counsellors conform to the definition of a “political revolution.” (a) Do you agree with the definition cited in the text? If not, how would you alter it? (b) Explain why the events discussed in this section do or do not conform to whatever definition of “political revolution” you accept. (c) On the basis of your answers to (a) and (b), do you agree or disagree that the farmers’ actions constituted the true beginning of the American Revolution?
4. (a) There were no acknowledged leaders of the court closure movement. There was also a paucity of attention given to rural areas by the newspapers. Are these two facts interconnected? Are the so-called “leaders” of popular movements sometimes created the media? (b) The official government could not find any ring-leaders to punish. Are so-called “leaders” of popular movements sometimes created by the government as it tries to repress the people?

CLASS ACTIVITIES FOR CHAPTER 1: RANK-AND-FILE REBELS

1. Stage a group simulation of a court closure. Characters can include a few judges, many crowd participants, and some observers who might be either impressed or frightened by the proceedings. Before starting, each student should prepare a background sketch for his/her character. Be sure to keep the final goal in mind: the judges must resign. But how willingly will they do this? How will they issue their resignations? You will work these issues out in the simulation. After the drama is over, de-brief: how did it feel to be one of a large and powerful crowd? How did it feel to intimidated by the crowd?
2. Stage one of Ethan Allen’s trials. Where will it be? Who is the “jury”? What is the crime? Who are the witnesses? What will you decide upon for a punishment? Again, be sure to de-brief: did the defendant feel that justice was done? Did the jury?
3. Write a dramatic script for the any of the crowd actions discussed in this chapter: the Knowles riot, one of the Stamp Act riots, the Boston Massacre, a tarring-and-feathering, the Boston Tea Party, the court closures, etc. Then perform the script as “readers’ theater.”
4. Broadcast the TV evening news of September 2, 1774. Cover the events of the preceding evening as well as the resignations in Cambridge. Look ahead to the first few pages of the next chapter for further discussion of this “powder alarm,” and send reporters to the outlying towns to cover the massive mobilization.

5. Simulate a radio talk show. The topic: the tarring-and-feathering of Malcolm. Listeners call in with their views of this incident, patriotism, the “mob,” aristocratic “gentlemen,” tarring-and-feathering, etc. Since so much of the tone of talk radio is determined by the host, repeat this show more than once. Have different hosts be more or less sympathetic to the crowd, and see how that changes the dynamic of the show.

6. Prepare two newspapers of the times, each including articles covering various events from this chapter. (You can include several events, even though they didn't actually occur on the same date.) Since the editors of most newspapers were partisan to one side or the other, have one newspaper come from a patriot perspective, the other from a loyalists perspective.

7. Prepare a petition to Governor Shirley in 1747. The object: to gain the release of the sailors impressed by Commodore Knowles.

8. Create a character from the times. Be specific as to age, gender, marital status, location, class, occupation, etc. Then write a diary/journal in which your character observes some of the events discussed in this chapter. Be sure to make the observations appropriate for the particular character you have created.

9. Conduct an in-depth interview with George Robert Twelves Hewes the night after the Boston Massacre.

10. Prepare a diorama depicting any of the crowd actions.

11. Draw two political cartoons, one favoring crowd actions, the other mocking them.

12. Draft a chapter for a 5th grade textbook covering the crowd actions leading up to the Revolutionary War. Make your text understandable for elementary students, but try to give enough sense of the complexities so as not to constitute an over-simplification of history.

UNIT PROJECTS FOR CHAPTER 1: RANK-AND-FILE REBELS

1. After the Knowles riot, government officials arrested eleven so-called “ringleaders” whom they claimed were responsible for the disturbances. (a) By blaming the affair on “ringleaders,” what were they saying about the power of the people to act on their own? (b) Throughout United States history, officials have responded to popular unrest by trying to find and punish “ringleaders.” The 1886 riot in Chicago’s Haymarket Square is an excellent example. Study and discuss the Haymarket affair and any other examples of this dynamic. (c) During the Boston Tea Party participants wore disguises, while well-known revolutionary leaders made themselves conspicuously present in other locations. How did the failure to find “ringleaders” contribute to the frustration of British officials and their repressive response?

2. (a) Consult any books you can find which tell about the American Revolution. Which ones address the 1774 farmers’ revolution in Massachusetts? What kind of play, if any, do they give to it? (b) Try to work the story of the farmers’ revolution into the narratives you read. Where would you put it? Does it fit in cleanly, or would you have to re-adjust the focus of these other texts?

3. Why do you think the 1774 revolution in rural Massachusetts has failed to receive much attention? Evaluate and weigh the following factors, and add more if you wish: (a) *The dearth of well known personalities.* No high-profile leaders instigated the

proceedings, and no fame accrued to any of the participants. Since all actions were taken by “the body of the people,” there could be no tales of individual heroism, so pervasive in the telling of history. (b) *The absence of a single event worthy of being mythologized.* There was no Paul Revere’s ride, no shot heard ‘round the world. This was a revolution that happened anywhere and everywhere, erupting spontaneously throughout the countryside. (c) *The absence of a linear form, a clear chronological order.* There was no chain of events leading neatly from A to Z, just ordinary people acting in concert whenever they glimpsed an opportunity to help shut down the government. (d) *The rural setting.* The hinterlands, where most of the action occurred, were not major media markets; the spread of print information had to flow through urban newspaper editors and pamphleteers. (e) *The middle-class status of many of the revolutionaries.* These were not exploited tenants overthrowing their rich landlords; they were freeholders scared of losing the modest property they already possessed. (For a discussion of the “middle-class revolution,” see Robert E. Brown, *Middle-Class Democracy and the Revolution in Massachusetts, 1691-1780.*) (f) *The lack of bloodshed.* When the British staged their counter-revolution at Lexington and Concord the following year, people lost their lives. That was the beginning of the *war*, but the initial *revolution* occurred without a body count. (You might want to compare this revolution with the “Glorious Revolution” in England in 1688, which was also bloodless.) (g) *Public relations.* At Lexington, professional British soldiers fired at a handful of plain farmers hastily assembled on the village green; at Worcester and Springfield, thousands of angry and vengeful patriots, muskets in tow, tormented and humiliated a few unarmed judges. Who was the “victim” in each case? Which story makes better press for the Americans?

4. The American Revolution, most historians have assumed, radicalized the former colonists. People who once bowed to their social “betters” refused to do so. But had colonial Americans ever displayed much deference? Michael Zuckerman thinks not. After studying the handful of writings left by common laborers in colonial times, Zuckerman concludes: “Their stories … do not tell of a deferential mentality among the lower orders of Early America.” Perhaps, he suggests, a “bumptious egalitarianism and antiauthoritarianism” which already existed in colonial America was more a cause than an effect of the Revolution. (a) Read Michael Zuckerman, “Tocqueville, Turner, and Turds: Four Stories of Manners in Early America,” *Journal of American History* 85:1 (June 1998), 13-42. Read also the articles and critiques that follow (pp. 43-97), then posit your own conclusion. (b) Comment on Raphael’s critique of Young’s treatment of deference (see footnote #40).

5. Most Americans have been taught to believe that the Revolution was a fight for liberty by a principled people. The ideas of great men like Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Sam Adams, and Tom Paine were embraced by the majority of the population; under the leadership of George Washington, the people stood up for their beliefs.

This is only one interpretation of what happened. In *Smugglers and Patriots: Boston Merchants and the Advent of the American Revolution*, John W. Tyler maintained that smugglers held a “favored position in the Whig hierarchy” and that they stirred up rebellion to suit their special interests. In *Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Land: The Plunder of Early America*, Daniel M. Friedenberg suggested that speculators in western lands — men such as Ben Franklin, Patrick Henry, and George Washington — had vested

interests at stake in the Revolution. On the other hand, Gary Nash, Alfred F. Young, and others have suggested that urban crowds had their own reasons for rebelling (see footnotes in the text for references). Raphael, in this book, shows how ordinary farmers staged a revolution for their own special reasons.

How can we account for the “real” American Revolution? Was it a single revolution, or was it an alliance of disparate groups with interests which happened to coincide? If it was several fights rolled into one, how did they mesh? What was their common language? Did some eventually dominate the picture?

After consulting at least two texts with differing slants, address the questions above in a brief essay. As you read this book, and hopefully others as well, revisit your initial assessment and test it against new information.