American “Revolution”: A Message From Below
Economic Foundations of British Empire

Mercantilism—Assumptions and Implementation:

—Navigation Acts—cornerstone of mercantilist system

—ships manned by British; English-owned ships; enumerated items to be shipped to England first

—staples—tobacco, sugar (W.Ind.), indigo, navel stores (tar, turpentine), rice molasses

Impact Oppressive?:

—argument that colonies derived benefits from the Acts and their relationship to Britain
--protection of British Navy
--massive expansion of New England shipbuilding industry
--colonists are British subjects and own ships
--specific (enumerated) industries singled out, foreign competitors at a disadvantage when competing with colonials
--mercantilist system offered degree of security/stability by providing wider markets/network of trade through London
--navigation laws may have been the cement of the Empire
Sovereignty--definition:
English position: assumption that sovereignty "unitary," "indivisible," located in central institution/individual (king)

Colonial Expectations
Urbanization--growth encouraged by colonial policies
--important mercantile classes develop in urban centers
--increased sense of confidence--in ability to run political/cultural institutions
--parent/child metaphor waning
--by 1760/70s colonialists talk of mutuality, contractual understanding, reciprocity
Colonials expect a certain degree of political autonomy powers over financial matters--frame financial bills, issue paper money, appoint judges

--wealthy urban classes expect to be allowed to freely participate in social, governmental and economic affairs

--expect personal independence

--only truly virtuous people are independent

--taxation taken out of local hands--violation

--taxed without personal consent--servile being
Aftermath of Fr. and Indian War

War debts:
--costs of victory:
--huge empire potentially a huge benefit or a drain b/c administrative costs

huge debt → domestic taxes → larger empire

War economy:
--economic boom encouraged by military spending
--wages go up
--many colonials benefit
--post-war depression
--inefficient tax collecting system
unemployment goes up; food production drops; food prices go up

Imperial Action:
Options

1) appeal to patriotism--ask people to help requisitioning
   --not effective b/c individual colonies refused b/c war did not affect them

2) tax the colonists--tell them that you're paying for your own defense to assuage hot spots
   --reformed system to get rid of absentee tax collectors
   --paperwork for colonists to curb smuggling
Revenue Act, 1764 (Sugar Act):
Colonial Reaction
"Does England have the right to do this?"
The "sacred right of Englishmen is to be taxed only at our consent."
Result of protest:
Talk of rights of Englishmen
--colonials afraid this will set precedent for future actions by K and P.
Stamp Act, 1765
--colonialists send out petitions to Parliament, but get no hearing

Provisions of Stamp Act:
--every form of paper taxed (newspapermen, lawyers, especially aggrieved)

--violators would be tried in vice admiralty courts

British Rationale:
--measure needed to pay off war debts
--colonists could afford it
--Constitutional right--Grenville says yes, you can only be taxed with your consent, but you are represented in Parliament
"none actually represented, all are virtually represented"
Colonial response: Virginia Resolutions
--colonists brought with them the rights of Englishmen
--Royal charter guaranteed/endorsed this notion
--consent to be taxed most important right, cannot be taxed without committing gross violation of rights of Englishmen

Implications/conclusions:
--becomes a constitutional contest over rights and sovereignty
--clarification of concept of representation--interest-group politics become more important
--Stamp Act would subvert representative government in colonies
--radicalization of colonial position
Colonial Reaction to Stamp Act--Formal: Stamp Act Congress (Oct., 1765)

Resolutions:
--reiterate position voiced by Dulany (no rep./consent→no right to tax)
--declare loyalty to King, but have innate distrust

Significance:
--meeting itself significant
--SA a measure with no connection to trade
--moderate voices seem to prevail
--more radical element exists--talk extends beyond "rights of Englishmen," to "essential freedom of a people"--natural rights.
Informal:
--Sons of Liberty--widespread intimidation of Stamp Act agents

Why was popular uprising effective?:
--many led by more prominent members of society
--Ams. more naturally violent
--reveals weakness on part of colonial governments--institutional weakness
--18 cen. colonists distrusted power
--human nature week
--power in hands of weak humans is dangerous
--transition toward democratic politics: formal participation limited, but crowd action a step toward influencing representatives
Repeal:
--London merchants hurt by colonial boycott

Declaratory Act, 1766--King and Parliament are sovereign "in all cases whatsoever"

Polarization: hardening of positions taken by crown and colonists

Townshend Program
--wanted to make royal officials independent of popular control
--Suspending Act
--Quartering Act, 1765--1/4ing of Brit. troops
Revenue Act, 1767 (Townshend)
--tax on enumerated items

Boston Massacre
--notion that you could situate a standing army during peacetime intolerable to local population
--unskilled/semi-skilled especially aggrieved b/c jobs being taken by British regulars
--pattern of escalation
--P has no right to raise revenue internally; before trade was taxed to benefit the whole
British response to Tea Party
--Coercive Acts
--have widespread support
--Boston Port Act

--Lord North proposes that Port of Boston be closed
Massachusetts Government Act
--curtail town meeting
--council to be elected by King instead of nominated by lower house then voted on by people

Administration of Justice Act:
--allowed for changes of venue for impartial jury

Quartering Act:
--tightened '65 Act

Motivation:
--firmness had to be expressed
--English sovereignty in question
--violators must be punished
Colonial Reaction
--George Washington thought destruction of property foolish
--widespread and increasing support for non-importation and non-consumption
"Rights"
Thomas Jefferson, "Summary View of the Rights of British Americans"

Position: re-articulates familiar colonial position

--colonists retained such rights as "nature has given to all men."