

# The American Revolution: Experiences of Rebellion



THE  
CHOICES  
PROGRAM  
BROWN UNIVERSITY

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## Introduction: American Independence

Organized protests against taxes, violent attacks aimed at symbols of power, activists canvassing neighborhoods, and heated debates in the media about individual rights and government authority—it all sounds like news we might hear today. And yet this turmoil and upheaval describes the history of the two million people living in the original thirteen colonies during the late 1700s.

In *The American Revolution: Experiences of Rebellion*, you will read about European colonists, native people, and enslaved people at the time of colonization and revolution. You will study the political ideas, public statements, and actions that led to the creation of the United States.

You will notice that this history includes more than portraits of elderly statesmen in frock coats and powdered wigs. It also looks at the realities of life in the colonies for people from all different parts of society. These realities shaped political ideas and affected interactions—from conflict and treaties between colonists and native peoples, to the enslavement of and resistance by Africans, to colonial rebellion against the British.

***“Time has been given for the whole people maturely to consider the great question of independence... by discussing it in newspapers and pamphlets, debating it in assemblies, conventions, committees of safety and inspection, in town and county meetings, as well as in private conversations, so that the whole people, in every colony of the thirteen, have now adopted it as their own.”***

—John Adams, July 3, 1776

The American Revolutionary War lasted from 1775 to 1783. It was the result of rebellion by the people in North America against the British government that tried to rule them from afar. The war highlighted divisions in co-

### Introduction Definitions

**Founders**—The term founders, or Founding Fathers, is often used to describe a small group of wealthy, influential men who played important roles in the American Revolution. The names are familiar; George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, John and Samuel Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and John Hancock are commonly thought of as the founders. Their contributions were important. Recently, historians have also begun to call attention to the role that countless others played in the American Revolution, a role that the founders acknowledged influenced their own thinking and actions about independence.

**Independence**—Independence means the freedom from outside control. When groups of people call for independence, they intend for the territory where they live to no longer be a colony ruled by the government of another country and instead become its own country, ruled by a local national government. In the 1770s, some American colonists began to call for the separation of the colonies in North America from the British Empire to become a new, independent country.

lonial society and beyond, as different native peoples, enslaved Africans, and foreign armies joined each side for various reasons. Not all of the people of the colonies favored independence, and many fought against patriot forces in what was a brutal war that killed a greater percentage of the population than every U.S. war except the Civil War. Ultimately, the war ended in a peace treaty that recognized American independence, allowing the colonists to govern North American territory without British interference.

Independence for America was not inevitable; these readings consider the events that led to revolution as well as the disagreements

# The American Revolution: Experiences of Rebellion

## Teacher Resource Book



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# Art History and the American Revolution

## Objectives:

**Students will:** Analyze a print's portrayal of patriot rebellion.

Explore how characters, symbols, labels, and marketing are used in art.

Consider how a piece of art can provide insight into different historical perspectives.

## Required Reading:

Students should have read Part II in the student text and completed “Study Guide—Part II” (TRB 16-17) or “Advanced Study Guide—Part II” (TRB 18).

## Handouts:

“Tarring & Feathering” (TRB-30)

“Analyzing the Print” (TRB 31-32)

“Later Version of the Print” (TRB-33)

A slideshow is available to project in your classroom at <<http://www.choices.edu/revolutionmaterials>>

## Videos:

Short, free videos to accompany this lesson are available at <<http://www.choices.edu/revolutionmaterials>>.

## In the Classroom:

**1. Focus Question**—Write the question “What happened in 1774?” on the board. Invite students to recall major events from the reading. You may wish to ask them how these events were influenced by what happened in years prior to 1774. Remind students that, at this time, there was not a widespread desire among the colonists for independence. What motivated the colonists to rebel?

**2. Analysis**—Distribute “Tarring & Feathering” and “Analyzing the Print” to students. The image, “Tarring & Feathering” (also known as “The Bostonian’s Paying the Excise-Man”), was a print sold by publishers Sayer and Bennett in 1774 and for many years afterwards.

Tell students that excise is another word for tax. Have students answer the questions about the print on the worksheet. This can be done as a class, in groups, or as individuals.

**3. Speculating about the Print**—What struck students about the print? How does it depict the colonists? What labels and symbols do they see? What might these represent? Who do they think would buy this print and why?

Explain to the class that the publishers reproduced this print so many times that the plate used to print it was damaged. (You may wish to show or distribute “Later Version of the Print” and invite students to observe how much of the detail was lost.) What does this imply about the sales of the print? About people’s views of it? Does this information make them reconsider their answers to question 4? Inform students that the print was published in London. Is this surprising or expected? Considering that it was published in England, are there any elements that are unexpected?

Show the video “Why are historical objects and art important for understanding the American Revolution?” by Amy Torbert. Ask students how they think “Tarring & Feathering” might be used to better understand the events leading up to the American Revolution. What other kinds of objects do they think could be used to learn more about the Revolution?

## Extra Challenge:

Students could research art and historical objects related to the American Revolution and curate a digital exhibit. The video by Ian Alden Russell, “How do you choose art for an exhibit?” can provide guidance.

## Homework:

Students should read “The People in the Colonies Decide Their Future” in the student text.



## Tarring & Feathering



National Gallery of Art. Paul Mellon Collection. 1985.64.165.

## Analyzing the Print

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1. **Characters:** *Some artists use exaggerated depictions of people in their work.*

a. Describe two of the people in the print. For example, you may include descriptions of their facial expressions, body language, or clothing. Are they Englishmen or colonists?

b. Describe the actions taking place in the print.

2. **Symbols:** *Artists use simple objects to represent or symbolize larger ideas or concepts in their art.*

a. Describe two places in the print in which tea is shown.

b. What do you think tea symbolizes in the print? (It may be useful to refer to events from the reading.)

3. **Labels:** *Artists use labels to identify or name certain things in their work so that it is apparent what the things represent.*

a. How has the tree been labeled in the print?

b. Why do you think the artist chose to use this label?

c. Do you think the label aligns or contrasts with the actions depicted in this scene?

4. **Marketing:** *Prints like “Tarring & Feathering” were produced to be sold. Because of this, commercial prints often tell us more about the people who buy them than the artists who create them. In fact, historians do not know for certain who the artist of “Tarring & Feathering” is, although the print was sold widely for many years.*

a. What might have been the political viewpoint, nationality, ethnicity, or other characteristics of a person who bought this print? Explain your reasoning.

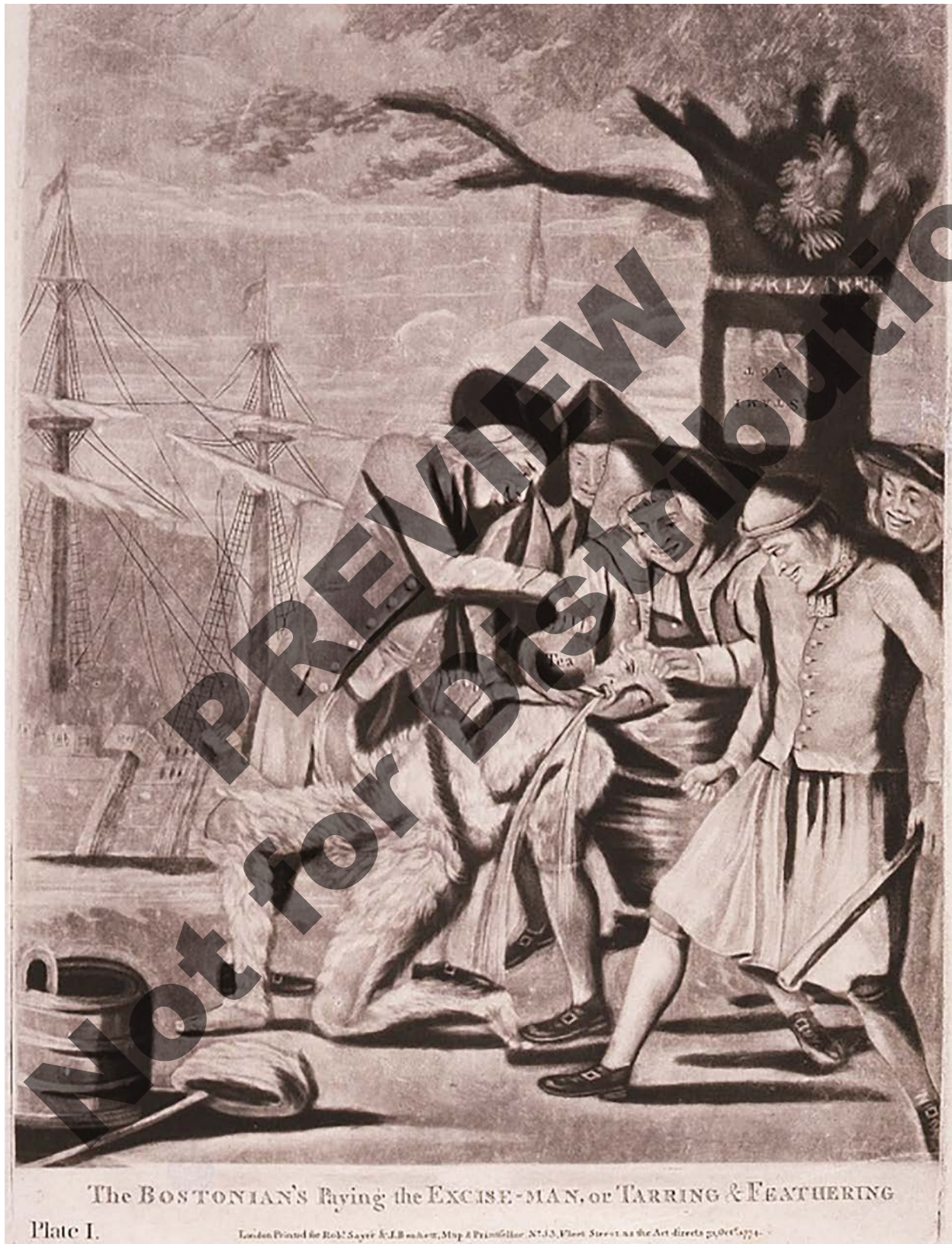
b. How do you think the buyer of this print would interpret the portrayal of the colonists at the front of the picture?

c. How do you think the buyer of this print would interpret the portrayal of the colonists on the ship?

d. How do you think the buyer of this print would interpret the portrayal of the person being tarred and feathered in this picture?



## Later Version of the Print



Library of Congress. LC-USZC4-14078.