

Julia Wood Prize 2016 Submission

To what extent do the longer-term origins of the American Revolution lie in constitutional incompatibility and uncertainty, as opposed to ideological and intellectual principles?

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“The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people; a...change in the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affections of the people was the real American Revolution.” - John Adams to Hezekiah Niles, 1818 ¹

To what extent do the longer-term origins of the American Revolution actually lie in constitutional incompatibility and uncertainty, as opposed to ideological and intellectual principles?

The American Revolution is popularly seen as a glorious break with Britain to forge a new country based on enlightened and glorious principle. Paul Revere’s famous engraving of the Boston Massacre², for instance, presents this as a struggle against an oppressive and corrupted tyranny. He portrays merciless British soldiers willingly firing against innocent colonists. Yet to attribute the longer-term origins of the Revolution solely to grand ideals for a utopian-like future may be to overemphasise the moral rhetoric of the revolutionaries. Revere’s same engraving presents the commotion occurring in front of a well-built and domineering statehouse. The fight against ‘tyranny’ in these years can also be seen as a desire to protect colonial constitutional custom and assemblies’ rights in a climate where a growth of parliamentary omnipotence in Britain had led to two divergent, incompatible interpretations either side of the Atlantic over how constitutional power should be distributed within the Empire. Further, however, socio-economic grievance of the *people* as a whole are significant in explaining why the suspicions and concerns of colonial leaders and intellectuals could actually foment into rebellion, supported by the wider population. Indeed, a recent re-interpretation of the Boston Massacre itself as arising from earlier dispute between *local seaman* and British troops, for instance, may highlight the significance of popular resistance.³ While by no means a comprehensive survey, this essay seeks to examine the *longer-term role before 1776* played by these three broad factors – intellectual, constitutional, and socio-economic – in creating a climate in the American colonies where desire for independence could take hold, and ultimately, revolutionary conflict could later arise.

It can be argued that the principle cause of the Revolution was the unestablished and unsettled nature of the British Empire’s constitution, where a lack of agreement over the locus of sovereignty precipitated the downward spiral to revolution.⁴ The distribution of authority and power between

¹ Bailyn, B. (1992). *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, Enlarged Edition*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press), p.160

² See appendix: PoliticsArchive.com (2013), *Boston Massacre Engraving by Paul Revere* [Online] Available from <http://www.politicsarchive.com/boston-massacre.html> Accessed: 23/07/2016]

³ Lemisch, J. (1968). Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America. *The William and Mary Quarterly*, [Online] 25(3), 371-407. Available from: www.jstor.org/stable/1921773 [Accessed: 22/07/2016]

⁴ Jack Greene (2011). *The Constitutional Origins of the American Revolution*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. xiv.

the metropolitan centre and the peripheral colony was at the crux of the debate. Jack Greene (2011) notes that by the 1760s two opposing views on the structure of an imperial constitution had developed. In colonists' eyes, they deserved, as 'Englishmen', the right to ancient English liberties and government by consent in representative assemblies, a belief extending from the historical colonial experience. The fact that individuals had led the sixteenth-century colonisation resulted in a higher proportion of individual land ownership, and thus a "process...of self-empowerment" and "individual independence".⁵ Colonists with land and local power expected to be consulted on government, resulting in a tradition of local governmental autonomy developing in the colonies⁶. As dissenting Englishmen they believed that traditional English rights and liberties were "a concomitant of emigration"⁷ Thus, the attempt to maintain English constitutional principles as they were in the seventeenth century, such as the ancient "Reserv'd rights"⁸ of the Magna Carta, was at the heart of colonial psyche; a psyche which remained in the 'minds of the people' until the Revolution.⁹ There was a belief that law and constitution were phenomena that developed via public consent and "Through practice and usage...would gradually acquire the sanction of custom."¹⁰ A belief in individual right to liberty from arbitrary government existed. Finally, long-held was the tradition that to enjoy 'rights and liberties' as Englishmen, colonists required a proliferation of assemblies to extend these rights from the metropolis to their peripheral societies. As a result, colonists saw liberty and the rights of assemblies as closely linked, or "identical".¹¹ This is significant as any future metropolitan infringement on autonomy of assemblies may be seen as infringement on personal liberty.

Yet at the metropolitan centre, by the 1760s, an opposing view of the constitution had formed – that of parliamentary supremacy and omnipotence. Extending from the legacy of the 1688-89 Glorious Revolution, Parliament saw itself as "absolutely supreme and the Dernier Resort" for all matters of state.¹² The concept of parliamentary supremacy seemed antithetical to the colonial, customary, rights-orientated constitution of government by consent, which placed limits on arbitrary power.

⁵ Greene, *Constitutional Origins*, 3

⁶ Ibid. 4

⁷ Frisch, J. (1992) Law as a Means and as an End: Remarks on the Function of European and non-European Law in the process of European Expansion. In: W.J. Mommsen and J.A. De Moor, (eds.), *European Expansion and Law: The Encounter of European and Indigenous Law in 19th and 20th Century Asia and Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 21. (In: Greene, *Constitutional Origins*, 5)

⁸ A Freeholder, *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), Feb. 10, 1748. In: Greene, *Constitutional Origins*, 59

⁹ George Dargo (1974), *Roots of the Republic: A New Perspective on Early American Constitutionalism* (New York: Praeger), 58. In: Greene *Constitutional Origins*, 8

¹⁰ Greene, *Constitutional Origins*, 25

¹¹ Ibid., 172

¹² *New York Gazette Revived in the Post-Boy*, Jan. 18, 1748. In: Greene *Constitutional Origins*, 55

The precise distribution of powers was undetermined and unsettled¹³, creating a climate of underlying suspicion and uncertainty, where supposed infringements of colonial autonomy could take place. This did not promote metropolitan-provincial engagement. In practice, and by metropolitan acquiescence, internal affairs before the 1760s were dealt with by a multitude of colonial assemblies whilst external affairs like war were managed at metropolitan level. A “double-legislature” had become entrenched. Yet by the 1760s, the crux of the issue was that Parliament now viewed their constitution of parliamentary supremacy as the constitution of the Empire, whilst the colonies still subscribed to the highly customary imperial constitution of “imperium in imperio”. This was a precarious constitutional situation.¹⁴

Thus, the disputes in the years preceding Independence can be seen through this lens of constitutional incompatibility and of a divergence of attitudes towards distribution of power. The ‘tyranny’ associated with Parliament’s imposition of the Stamp Act in 1765 extends principally from the notion that the overarching British programme was infringing on the customary right for colonial assemblies to dictate their own internal affairs, and that taxation should not be levied without constitutional representation. A colonial constitutional belief that all law was to be consented to helps explain the violence of the *Gaspee Affair* of 1772, where the ship was burned and the commander, William Dudingston, wounded. Popular resistance of this kind stemmed from an ancient tradition at play in the colonies that law, particularly taxation, was only legitimate if consented to via representation, and that the public was the main coercive force to resist acts considered in contravention to established custom, or public consensus¹⁵. Yet the metropolis viewed this as illegal insurrection. A failure to make compatible the colonial and metropolitan constitutions, in essence a failure of the British Parliament to reconcile parliamentary sovereignty with a diverse, customary “imperial constitution”, is the origin of colonial resistance. Metropolis-periphery conflict was bound to arise when Parliament failed to recognise the sanctity of colonial assemblies, and a lack of constitutional settlement meant all actions were perceived as “tyranny” by a multitude of colonial assemblies not accustomed to being challenged by metropolitan legislation.

Further, the underlying climate of constitutional dispute and unsettlement provided the crucial climate for colonists’ *intellectual* explanation of reality to become reshaped and more radical as they sought intellectual solutions to constitutional disputes, suggesting the primacy of constitutional factors in fomenting resistance. An effort to reconcile the two interpretations of sovereignty in the

¹³ Greene, *Constitutional Origins*, 19

¹⁴ Ibid. 50, 63

¹⁵ Maier, P. (1970) Popular Uprisings and Civil Authority in Eighteenth-Century America, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, [Online] 3(27), 1-35. Available from: www.jstor.org/stable/1923837 [Accessed: 25/07/2016] (Reference owed to Greene, *Constitutional Origins*)

Empire present in the 1760s – *imperium in imperio* and parliamentary supremacy – saw an increasingly radical trajectory of thought. Otis in 1763 stated, echoing seventeenth-century concepts, that Parliament should have indivisible power but that “omnipotency cannot do it” as Parliament was “fixed in judgement, righteousness, and truth.”¹⁶ However, by 1774, James Wilson commented, on the extent of parliamentary sovereignty, that “in prosecution of my enquiries, I became fully convinced...that there can be no medium between *acknowledging* and *denying* that power in all cases.”¹⁷ Thus, in efforts to reach a solution on constitutional issues, application of intellectual thought, had in a short time led to a complete transformation in view. Only in the absence of a codified metropolis-colony distribution of power were intellectual arguments and new radical analyses able to develop to the point where they had any impact in pushing colonial leadership away from metropolitan engagement. The radical frenzy associated with the year 1776, in particular that of Thomas Paine, was “a transformed as well as a transforming force”, a transformation only facilitated by a need to find a solution to the new constitutional incompatibility in the Empire resulting from a resurgent Parliament. Bailyn acknowledges “the ideas, the terminology, had to be invented”¹⁸ suggesting the primacy of constitutional ambiguity in stimulating what become revolutionary rhetoric.

Yet the ideological interpretation of the Revolution’s origins deserves closer examination. The Neo-Whig school have transformed the historiography of the Revolution by revealing a high level of intellectual, historical and ideological awareness present in the colonies. They have focussed on the primacy of republican, or “civic humanist”, ideas. Among colonists, comparisons were made between the virtue of classical, republican Rome, drawing on the work of Sallust, Livy and Cicero, and their perceived eighteenth century corruption. Britain was to America “what Caesar was to Rome”.¹⁹ Mullett (1939) notes that it was unusual for a pamphlet not to draw reference to the classical age.²⁰ Yet an awareness of this literature, as well as the Enlightenment reason of Montesquieu and Beccaria, for instance, and political and legal history of Civil War era England, was surpassed by and is less significant than, according to the Neo-Whig argument, the inheritance of anti-authoritarian, oppositionist, ‘country’ literature of the 1720s and 1730s.²¹ Trenchard and

¹⁶ Otis, J. (1764), *Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved* (Boston: JHL Pamphlet 7), 47-48 in Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 205-208

¹⁷ Wilson, J. (1774), *Considerations on the Nature and the Extent of the Legislative Authority of the British Parliament* (Philadelphia: JHL Pamphlet 44), iii, 31 In: Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 225

¹⁸ Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 161, 205

¹⁹ Trevor Colbourn, H. (1962), ed., *A Pennsylvania Farmer at the Court of King George: John Dickinson’s London Letters, 1754-1756*, Pa. Mag., 86, p.268 in Bailyn, *Intellectual Origins*, 26

²⁰ Mullett, C.F. (1939-40) Classical Influences on the American Revolution, *Classical Journal*, 35, p. 93-94 in Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 24

²¹ Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 34

Gordon, who wrote *The Independent Whig* and *Cato's Letters*, alongside Bolingbroke's *The Craftsman* were prime influences on America. This literature was in essence republican, or civic humanist, given it, in extending the rhetorical tradition of the Civil War era, condemned the corruption, a lack of virtue, and despotic encroachment on parliamentary authority in the Walpole ministry. Colonists engaged with these ideas to a greater extent than England in part due to their own society where civic participation in the checking of representative assemblies, a republican ideal, was already firmly entrenched.

The spread of anti-authoritarian literature helped exacerbate relations with Britain as intellectual debates over relative constitutional powers were now inflamed by a "belief that what lay behind every political scene...was the disposition of power."²² With a linguistic-turn-orientated approach, Bailyn argues that an awareness of such literature resulted in colonial leaders applying language and concepts from the past to 1760s metropolitan actions; like the Coercive Acts or the 1768 stationing of British troops. Interpreted through an intellectual prism, metropolitan actions took on greater levels of significance, as colonists related their own affairs to episodes of supposed oppression of liberty in the past. This brought greater significance to political events of the 1760s and "added an inner accelerator to the movement of opposition."²³ Great suspicion of metropolitan plotting evolved as they fitted the corruption and despotism of their reading into their own narrative. Issues of constitutional grievance were thus *elevated* to a fight to maintain a virtuous society against despotic, unchecked tyranny and immoral greed. Indeed, a Boston Town Meeting, to its Assembly Representatives, in 1770 exclaimed that "many recent events...afford great reason to believe that a *deep-laid...plan* for imperial despotism has been laid...for the extinction of *all civil liberty*".²⁴ Edmund Burke illuminates this situation in his contemporary analysis:

*The Americans have made a discovery, or think they have made one, that we mean to oppress them...We know not how to advance; they know now how to retreat. Some party must give way.*²⁵

Whilst constitutional incompatibility may have provided the original dispute, it was these intellectual ideas which exacerbated the situation to the point where severance from the Empire became a possible consequence of this tension.

²² Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, Ibid., p.55

²³ Ibid., p.95

²⁴ Ibid, p.94 (Italics inserted for emphasis of argument – "Boston Town Meeting to its Assembly Representatives, 1770)

²⁵ Wright, J. (1841-3), ed., *Sir Henry Cavendish's Debates of the House of the Commons* (London), Volume I, p.398-99. In: Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, p.158-9

It is also arguable that an awareness and application of anti-authoritarian republican ideas, combined with a tradition of New England Puritanism, helped generate a feeling of exceptionalism in colonial America. New English Puritanism rested on covenant theology - the colonies, as it was believed, were colonized to fulfil God's aims of a pure society, and had a preordained special place. The political events of the 1760s were cast in new light, whereby colonists were actually fighting for a higher purpose in protecting liberty, which had elsewhere been expunged. Andrew Eliot wrote in 1765 that "submission is a crime" when tyranny is present.²⁶ Indeed, George Bancroft's nineteenth-century analysis reflects how the revolutionaries came to see themselves;

The men of Boston...were more than of a noble blood, proving by their spirit that they were of race Divine...their action was the slowly ripened fruit of Providence and of time. The light that led them on was combined of rays from the whole history of the race from the example of Him...²⁷

In short, the interpretation of all events in the 1760s as conspiratorial, through a lens of intellectual and historical determinism in the colonies, shows that what was perceived in the intellectual "minds of the people" was an important source of the American Revolution. With new meaning to their struggle, Pocock has posited the view that the Revolution was a "Machiavellian Moment" where the colonists' defence of civic virtue marked the last great act of the Renaissance.²⁸

The socio-economic interpretation of the Revolution's origins can be divided into two strands. The first, a 1970s revisionist argument, gives place to liberalism, as opposed to republicanism, in the Revolution's origins. It argues that the Revolution extended from increasing economic constraints on a society which broadly followed liberal economic practices, in effect early capitalism. Louis Hartz, a post-war 'consensus' historian, noted that the lack of feudalism in the American colonies led to a situation whereby pursuit of individual goals – liberty, property and wealth – was central to the colonial experience, commenting that liberalism was a 'natural phenomenon'.²⁹ Whilst *republican* ideals may have been dominant in the anti-authoritarian literature of the colonial leaders, socio-economic forces helped shape a society that eventually came to be "committed to the primacy of

²⁶ Eliot A. (1765), *A Sermon Preached before His Excellency Francis Bernard...* (Boston: JHL Pamphlet 15), 47-48 in Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 93

²⁷ Bancroft, G. (1890)., *History of the United States of America from the Discovery of the Continent* (New York) Volume III, p.382-83

²⁸ Pocock, J. (1975, 2003), *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press)

²⁹ Hartz, L. (1955), *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Thomson Learning), 5-6, 35 (Reference owed to Morgan, G. (2007), *The Debate on The American Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p.60

private rights”.³⁰ Joyce Appleby argues that social disjuncture in the earlier 18th century transformed colonial society from being community-orientated to becoming “more atomized”.³¹ Rapid population growth – for example a 380% increase between 1700 and 1730, with consistent immigration from Germany and Ireland – meant greater pressures on land. Landowners had to establish the independence of their land more effectively, removing themselves from the community. Economic growth also occurred, in part due to higher land values and the possibilities for enterprise this brought, but also due to economically modernized and commercialized Atlantic trading of timber, for instance. The increased possibilities for individual economic growth created competition and reduced a sense of solidarity.³² The atomization these changes brought meant that to be “free and unfree, dependent and independent, came to represent stark alternatives” when to be dependent in a society with little interdependence was a wholly inadequate notion.³³ Liberty, or in effect freedom to secure greater wealth in what was effectively an early capitalist system, became the totally dominant goal. By the start of the Revolutionary Era, socio-economic trends had brought new focus on, and higher levels, of, individual economic freedom.³⁴ Appleby quotes De Tocqueville; that when the qualities of a broadly ‘liberal’ society take hold,

“...the number of persons increases who... have nevertheless acquired or retained sufficient education and fortune to satisfy their own wants. They owe nothing to any man...and they are apt to imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands.”³⁵

For successful landowners, British internal interference would therefore be seen as threatening to this individualist freedom. Arguably, a desire to preserve this particular tradition of liberty that had become so entrenched can explain resistance and protest to the Proclamation of 1763, or actions of the Sons of Liberty towards the Tea Act of 1773. Indeed, contemporary revolutionary literature often proclaimed a binary, emotive choice between freedom and slavery. This implies colonists’ saw British action as a genuine, magnified threat to their wealth that they were determined to resist, hinting at perhaps a tangible motive for popular revolt on material grounds.³⁶ Appleby nicely

³⁰ Gerber, S.D. (1993), Whatever Happened to the Declaration of Independence? A Commentary on the Republican Revisionism in the Political Thought of the American Revolution, *Polity*, [Online] 26(2), p.207-231 Available from: www.jstor.org/stable/3235029 [Accessed: 20.07.2016]

³¹ Appleby, J. (1976), Liberalism and the American Revolution, *The New England Quarterly*, [Online] 49(1), p.3-26 Available from: www.jstor.org/stable/364554 [Accessed: 19.07.2016]

³² *Ibid.*, 14

³³ *Ibid.*, 7

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 19

³⁵ De Tocqueville, A., *Democracy in America*, Richard D. Heffner, (ed.) (New York, 1956), 194 in Appleby, *Ibid.*, 20

³⁶ See writings of Mayhew: “Resistance was absolutely necessary in order to preserve from slavery, misery and ruin.” in Appleby, *Liberalism*, 22 (see citation 31)

summarizes that “frenzied concern for individual liberty makes little sense unless the meaning of freedom is related to the specific social context which gives it preeminent importance.”³⁷ The writings of John Locke presented colonists with an ideology to which they could wholeheartedly subscribe, and use to justify their rebellion. It is this idea that “personal ambition was elevated to a fundamental right”³⁸ via societal changes, not an idealist attraction to Locke’s principles, which might lay behind his famed place in origins of the Revolution. The nature of American society may explain the link between Locke’s principles and the revolutionaries’ cause as illuminated in the comparison of the Declaration of Independence’s “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal” and Locke’s ““Men, as has been said, by nature, all free, equal and independent.”³⁹

The second socio-economic interpretation, first argued by the early-twentieth century Progressive School, viewed events as a “social movement”⁴⁰. Whilst elites in the colonies may have engaged with a desire for “civic humanist” ideals, for lower and middle class residents, it was a desire to alter the nature of provincial government that raised them from political apathy to revolutionary actors⁴¹. Carl Becker noted that motives differed in opposition to the Stamp Act, and that for the less elite the real issue at hand in the revolutionary era was not necessarily home rule but the nature of that rule at home.⁴² Indeed, it would seem invalid to promote the view that the Revolution would have taken the form it did without the participation of, and strength added by, the ‘masses’. New Left historians influenced by the Annales School of Bloch and Febvre as well as the English Marxist tradition of Hill and Hobsbawm, opened important discussion into the grievance of the ‘ordinary man’, or history ‘from the bottom up’ in the origins of the American Revolution.⁴³ One famous study by Jesse Lemisch, entitled ‘Jack Tar in the Streets’⁴⁴, explores the role of merchant and naval seamen in the Revolutionary Era. Seamen were subjected to mistreatment, with whipping for disobedience and, more significantly, impressment by the British Navy, to the extent that “the society that wanted Jack

³⁷ Appleby, *Liberalism*, Ibid., 25-26

³⁸ Ibid., 20; Ibid., 26

³⁹ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. Thomas Peardon (New York: Macmillan, 1952), sec.95

⁴⁰ Morgan, G., *The Debate on The American Revolution*, 53; Jameson, J.F (1926), *The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press) in Morgan, G., *The Debate*, p.57

⁴¹ Gough, R. (1981), Charles H. Lincoln, Carl Becker, and the Origins of the Dual-Revolution Thesis, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3(38), pp.97-109, 99 in Morgan G., *The Debate on the American Revolution*, p.54

⁴² Becker, C. (1909), *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760-1776* (Madison, WI), 22 (Quote referenced in Gwenda Morgan, *The Debate*, 54)

⁴³ Lemisch, J., The American Revolution seen from the Bottom up, in Bernstein (ed.), *Towards A New Past*, pp.3-45 (Reference owed to Gwenda Morgan, *The Debate on the American Revolution*, 82)

⁴⁴ Lemisch, J. (1968), “Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America.” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, [Online] 3(25), 371-407, Available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1921773> [Accessed: 26/07/2016]

dependent made him that way.”⁴⁵ Soldiers often took up civilian employment at their expense. Lemisch argues this impressment, which created a common grievance among many lower classes indirectly effected, was the root of much popular resistance after 1763 which was in turn so destabilising to the metropolis-colony relationship. The popular force which drove the *Liberty* riot of 1768 has been seen as arising from impressment, not just the desire to seize of Hancock’s sloop.⁴⁶

Popular grievance can be seen as significant in two ways. Firstly, treating Jack Tar as an example, it accentuated feelings of alienation and resentment towards the mother country for those less engaged in the constitutional debate. It is important to note that threats to material interests, via the Sugar, Townshend and the Tea Acts caused urban people, in a similar way to landowners described above, to become revolutionarily active. Countryman has described the seaports as “crucibles of revolutionary agitation.”⁴⁷ Uprisings were often “sub-political”, with lower classes now uniting behind a commonly organized goal to undermine activity in the ports with a more direct, often violent, antiauthoritarian sentiment than colonial leaders.⁴⁸ Secondly, the presence of popular, material grievance was further significant as it created an undercurrent of discontent that intellectuals could use to support their claims of constitutional infringement. Franklin wrote in response to impressment “that the constitution is yet imperfect, since in so general a case it doth not secure liberty, but destroys it.”⁴⁹ Without a level of popular antagonism, the claim that Britain was infringing on their traditional constitutional ‘rights and liberties’ would not have had the same weight or been as justified. Nor would ideological principles have had the same effect on the Revolution, for abstract ideals became more influential as they could be dissipated to the broader population in times of popular discontent. Lemisch notes that the availability of basic Lockean ideas of ‘natural right’ to life and liberty caused seamen, in this instance, to rise “from vindictiveness to a somewhat more complex awareness that certain values larger than himself” were at stake.⁵⁰ That socio-economic grievances provided colonial leaders with avenues to shape popular feeling was important in inciting the overall colonial resistance against Britain. Indeed, in *Common Sense*, Paine noted “in impressment a reason for rejecting monarchy.”⁵¹ His ability to incite popular support for Revolution through a particular political language that would ignite ‘ordinary men’ around moral

⁴⁵ Lemisch, *Jack Tar*, 379-380

⁴⁶ Ibid. 383, 392

⁴⁷ Nash, G. (1979), *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA and London), viii, (Referenced owed to Morgan, *The Debate*, p.85)

⁴⁸ The term “sub-political”, or “pre-political” expressed by Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, p. 2, 7, 10 and Thompson *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 55, 59, 78 (Reference owed to Lemisch, *Jack Tar in the Streets.*, p.407)

⁴⁹ Lemisch, *Jack Tar in the Streets.*, p. 394

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.407 (see citation 45)

⁵¹ Ibid., p.394

notions of “asylum for mankind” touched their sense of grievance⁵², helping to engage them with revolutionary struggle, and arguably gaining the support of the ‘masses’ needed for any great uprising. Hence, it can be argued the spread of intellectual thought *and* popular discontent worked synergistically in the 1760s and 1770s to initiate a revolutionary climate; the neo-Whig republican synthesis is by no means absolute or freestanding. Brinton (1965) nicely summarises this synergy as he sees the Revolution as crafted by a “far from infinitesimal minority working on a substantial group” with grievances that could be “stirred up effectively when the right time came.”⁵³

In conclusion, it is clear that the incompatibility of the colonial and metropolitan constitutional interpretations lies at the heart of the Revolution’s origins. Whilst colonists felt their customary constitution and autonomy had no right to be infringed, those in the metropolitan centre advocated parliamentary omnipotence and supremacy. This constitutional struggle acts as a stimulus, and is significantly linked, to both the intellectual and socio-economic arguments. The neo-Whig argument follows that an awareness of *anti-authoritarian* literature of the English ‘country’ tradition led colonists to apply past language to their own events, generating through this intellectual prism paranoia of a corrupt and evil plot to encroach on their autonomy. Thus, events took on a greater significance and their resistance a degree of exceptionalism. Yet the prevalence and application of *anti-authoritarian* thought can be seen, perhaps, as the colonists’ way of articulating their defence of their own *constitutional* autonomy. It was the divergence of constitutional interpretation either side of the Atlantic – parliamentary supremacy versus customary, rights-orientated autonomy – that created the climate for intellectual ideas of antiauthoritarianism to flourish. Only due to the notion that Parliament was exceeding its constitutional authority did antiauthoritarian ideas have the same meaning. Further, one socio-economic argument follows that individuals were willing to oppose the metropolitan centre when their societal norms, in which liberty – the ability to pursue wealth – was entrenched, came under threat from Britain. The idea that material grievance triggered resistance, both by landowners but also the lower classes like the urban seamen, is persuasive. Yet perhaps this reasoning can also be reconciled with the constitutional argument. Firstly, the notion discussed above that individual English liberties were seen as bound up and protected by the rights of the local government suggests that perhaps constitutional infringement on the colonies’ multitude of assemblies led to exacerbated fears that their individualist economic autonomy was also to come under threat. This aside, it is certainly the case that the notion of parliamentary sovereignty underlay

⁵² Foner, E. (1976, new preface 2005), *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press), xiii-xiv in Morgan, G., *The Debate*, p. 85 (see citation 28 for Morgan *The Debate on the American Revolution*)

⁵³ Brinton, C. (1965), *The Anatomy of Revolution*, Revised and Expanded Edition (New York: Random House), p.85

the British justification for increased taxation and land through legislations, which the middle-classes and merchants felt they had to actively resist to “preserve from slavery, misery and ruin.”⁵⁴

Ultimately, it is clear, in the words of a contemporary publicist, that “not adverting to the natural and necessary difference between national, and provincial legislation and government” had “been the principal cause of the difference in opinion.”⁵⁵

In light of the constitutional argument which places an emphasis on the distinct difference between the colonial constitution and its metropolitan counterpart, the best way to view the origins of the Revolution is that they stemmed from an overarching desire to maintain the traditions and makeup of colonial life as had developed since settlement. In the last analysis, this was therefore, paradoxically, a ‘conservative revolution’. In a climate of political tension, examination took place of colonial society as it had long existed in practice, and a desire to maintain this society in the face of parliamentary interference provided the longer term motivation behind resistance. Intellectuals relied on adherence to ideas of civic virtue and antiauthoritarianism in the literature they read to *defend* local assemblies’ rights to autonomy against the corruption of Parliament whilst landowners sought to *defend* their individualist economic liberty under threat from parliamentary taxation and infringement. Related to this, if one accepts the idea of the Revolution as a “social movement”, then, for lower classes, the Revolution was an opportunity *not to maintain but to shape* a new version of their idea of colonial society. In short, British interference, intensified from 1763, led to a conceptualization of American life for which colonists later became prepared to fight.⁵⁶

Thus, it was in a sense the “minds of the people” that caused the Revolution, not in the sense that they were buoyed by adherence to abstract ideological principle. Rather, they were motivated to resist the British through a determination to protect what they *believed*, in their “minds and hearts”, to be the nature of colonial life.

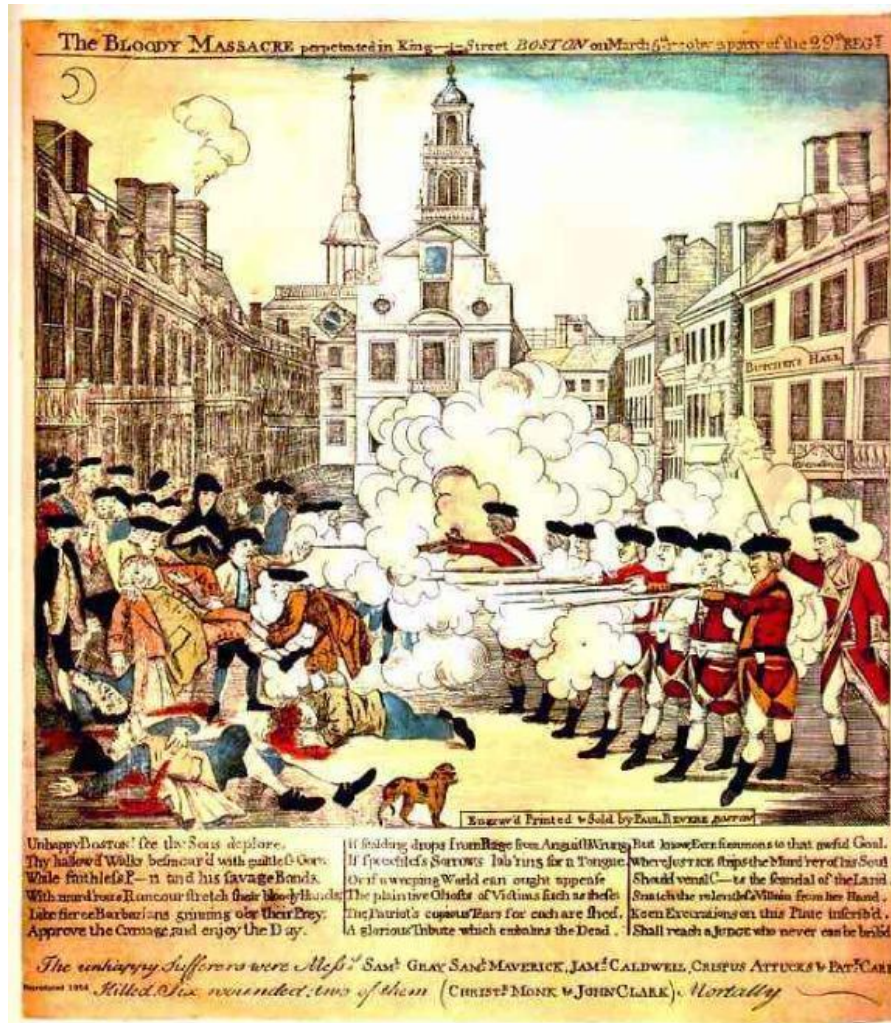
⁵⁴ See again the writings of a contemporary named Mayhew, found in Appleby, *Liberalism*, p.22, see citation 36

⁵⁵ Anonymous, *The Constitutional Rights of the Legislature of Great Britain to Tax the British Colonies in America, Impartially Stated* (London, 1768), 11 in Greene, *Constitutional Origins*, 112-3

⁵⁶ Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, vi-vii, p.61

Appendix

Paul Revere's Boston Massacre Engraving⁵⁷



⁵⁷ Paul Revere, *The Bloody Massacre Perpetrated in King Street, Boston on March 5th, 1770*, (Massachusetts State Archive) in Robert Allison (2015), *The American Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP), p.15. See also citation 2, page 1

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