

February 1776—The Moment of Decision

The spark of rebellion struck in Massachusetts on April 19, 1775 did not die out as many hoped. On the contrary, it spread throughout the New England colonies. In May, a joint force of Massachusetts militiamen under General Benedict Arnold and frontier settlers under Ethan Allen captured Fort Ticonderoga in upstate New York from the British. By mid-June, Boston was surrounded by nearly ten thousand minutemen. General Gage, the British commander, remained in control of Boston Harbor but lacked the forces to break through the land blockade.

When the colonial militia commanders decided to fortify two small hills overlooking the harbor, the first real battle of the rebellion resulted. On June 17, Gage ordered a naval bombardment and an infantry assault against the colonial positions. While the British succeeded in dislodging the patriots, the Battle of Bunker Hill added to their concern. In a single day, more than one thousand British troops were killed or wounded. Moreover, the colonists demonstrated their resolve and courage. The rebellion in the New England colonies seemed to be sliding toward full-scale war.

The colonists appreciated the gravity of the situation as well. In May 1775, they had convened the Second Continental Congress and called on George Washington to take charge of the colonial forces. Although Washington missed the Battle of Bunker Hill, he

gradually transformed the rag-tag collection of patriot militias in New England into an effective army.

A military stalemate developed around Boston. Without artillery, Washington could not force the British out of the city. For his part, Gage needed reinforcements to lift the siege of his forces. The only serious fighting that took place in the second half of 1775 was a failed colonial effort to seize British bases in Canada. Although the colonists captured Montreal, their surprise attack on Quebec in December 1775 was repulsed.

On the political front, positions on both sides of the Atlantic hardened. King George III proclaimed the colonies in a state of rebellion in August 1775. The Continental Congress responded by reaffirming its loyalty to the king but rejecting the authority of the Parliament. In the public squares and popular newspapers, colonists debated the consequences and objectives of the rebellion that had broken out in Massachusetts.

The lull in the fighting brought on by the winter of 1775-76 gave the colonists an opportunity to take stock of their future. They faced fundamental issues involving war and peace, and their relationship with the mother country. While a huge range of opinions existed, four principal options had emerged by February 1776.

Options in Brief

Option 1: Restore the Ties of Loyalty

Damn those rabble-rousing radicals in Boston and Philadelphia! The actions of these mad, power-hungry fools are threatening to sever the ties that bind us to our beloved mother country and our gracious king. To take up arms against Britain is both treasonous and suicidal. How short are the memories of these rebels! They have forgotten that we are here thanks to the crown and the Parliament. Consider how we have prospered within the British empire. Now, reflect for a moment on what awaits us if, God forbid, the radicals are successful in severing our ties of blood and tradition with Britain. In such circumstances, the thirteen colonies would immediately begin to squabble among themselves, much like selfish children deprived of parental guidance. Instead of the imagined tyranny of the king, we would suffer the real tyranny of the democratic mob.

Option 2: Create a More Perfect Union

Cooler heads must prevail! Certainly, there are legitimate grievances on both sides. But there is nothing that cannot be resolved if we are willing to sit down with one another and settle our differences in a spirit of brotherly compromise. We should be building bridges to our allies in London, not tearing them down through acts of rebellion. Let us find common ground on which to build a peaceful future. The foundation of the British constitution rests on the principle that no man may be taxed or deprived of his property without representation. To restore harmony between the colonies and the mother country, a British-American council should be formed with representatives from each of the thirteen colonies. Let us focus on what unites us as Englishmen.

Option 3: Defend Our Rights as Englishmen

It is with great reluctance that we have taken up arms to protect our homes and villages. As the minutemen of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill have shown, we will not put down our weapons until our rights have been restored. King George has been misled by his ministers. In following their misguided advice, he has approved measures that deprive us of liberty and prosperity. He should know that we are not rebelling against his legal authority. On the contrary, we are defending ourselves against flagrant violations of the British constitution. We hold that Parliament does not have the right to legislate over us without our consent. By taking up arms to resist tyranny, we are acting in the best English tradition. All we ask is for a return to the harmonious relationship we enjoyed with the mother country before the tragic events of the past ten years.

Option 4: Fight for Independence

Damn the king and damn Parliament! The ties that once bound us to the mother country have been broken by British force. Now we must stand up for ourselves. Britain has not protected our interests, but its own. Trade regulations were not intended to benefit the colonies, but to enrich Britain. There is no longer good reason to remain tied to Britain. Our population is growing rapidly and in fifty years will surpass that of Britain. Our land is fertile and without limits, and our God-given resources dwarf those of the British Isles. Independence will permit us to develop along the path we have set for ourselves. A glorious future awaits us. In this New World, we can build a new nation founded on freedom, liberty, and economic opportunity. We can break the chains that link us to the corruption and strife of Europe. There is no turning back. We must strike out for freedom.

Option 1: Restore the Ties of Loyalty

Damn those rabble-rousing radicals in Boston and Philadelphia! The actions of these mad, power-hungry fools are threatening to sever the ties that bind us to our beloved mother country and our gracious king. We are at risk of losing the protection of the British constitution—the most noble effort yet produced by the minds of men to govern human affairs. To take up arms against Britain is both treasonous and suicidal.

How short are the memories of these rebels! They have forgotten that we are here thanks to the crown and the Parliament. The Britain they now despise founded our colonies, nurtured our development, and protected us from our enemies. Just a few years ago, they were praising King George and Prime Minister Pitt for Britain's glorious victories over the French and their cruel Indian allies—a triumph that opened up the entire continent to our use. At great costs, the British military has guarded our shipping and defended our frontier settlements. The meager taxes that we have been asked to pay are a small price for the benefits we receive.

The radicals have distorted history to make their case. The claim that Parliament has no legitimate authority over us ignores the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Since the final defeat of the Stuart kings, Parliament has been given greater responsibility for guaranteeing the rights of Englishmen everywhere. To argue that we can be loyal to the king and at the same time deny the authority of Parliament is to spurn the victory of 1688.

Consider how we have prospered within the British empire. Our population is now two million and doubling every twenty-five years. Our merchant ships carry cargoes to the West Indies, Europe, and Africa. Our fishermen cast their nets in Canadian waters and sell their catch locally and abroad. For more than a century and a half, our legislatures have enjoyed the right of self-government. Compared to our brothers in Britain, we pay much less in taxes. Indeed, they and the rest of the world envy our happiness and well-being.

Of course, all that we have gained would be ruined by war. Our towns would be occupied, our merchants driven into bankruptcy, and our ships sunk. With markets abroad closed, the bounty produced by our farmers and fishermen would be left to rot. Brother would be turned against brother, and neighbor against neighbor. Fire and sword would reach the smallest village. Are we willing to bring all this upon our heads rather than sit down with British officials and settle our differences?

Reflect for a moment on what awaits us if, God forbid, the radicals are successful in severing our ties of blood and tradition with Britain. In such circumstances, the thirteen colonies would immediately begin to squabble among themselves, much like selfish children deprived of parental guidance. How would the disputes over the western land claims be settled? Who would sort out disagreements over trade, or the usage of harbors and rivers? Even worse, the rabble and lower classes that have become the tools of the Boston radicals would soon turn on their betters. Do you want Sam Adams and his mob to govern you? Instead of the imagined tyranny of the king, we would suffer the real tyranny of the democratic mob. Whose property will be safe then?

Above all, let us recognize that loyalty and obedience to the king and Parliament are our sacred duties. King George is the head of our church, and he rules by

the grace of God. We must honor the words of Saint Paul to respect legitimate authority. Our lives, our liberties as Englishmen, and our prosperity depend on our obedience to God and our allegiance to our king and Parliament.

Beliefs and Assumptions Underlying Option 1

1. No society on earth enjoys greater liberty and prosperity than the American colonies. Much of our good fortune, especially with respect to trade, is due to our status within the British empire.

2. Accepting the authority of Parliament is a reasonable price to pay for Britain's protection of the colonies.

3. We are called upon by God to respect the legitimate authority of government.

Supporting Arguments for Option 1

1. The colonies will be crushed militarily and ruined economically by a full-scale war of rebellion.

2. Breaking our ties with Britain will embolden the lower classes to challenge the authority of their betters.

3. Without the unifying force of British rule and the protection of the British navy, the colonies will squabble among themselves and present an inviting target for aggressive foreign powers.

From the Historical Record

Pamphlet by Soame Jenyns, member of Parliament, 1765

"The liberty of an Englishman cannot mean an exemption from taxes imposed by the authority of Parliament. Nor is there any charter that ever pretended to grant such a privilege to any colony in America; and [even] if they had granted it, it could have had no force since their charters are derived from the crown and no charter from the king can possibly supersede the right of the whole Parliament.... If Parliament can impose no taxes but what are equitable, and if the persons taxed are to be the judges of that equity, they will in effect have no power to lay any tax at all."

Message delivered to Parliament by Prime Minister George Grenville, January 14, 1766

"Protection and obedience are reciprocal. Great Britain protects America, America is bound to yield obedience.... When they want the protection of this kingdom, they are

always very ready to ask it. This nation has run itself into an immense debt to give them this protection; and now they are called upon to contribute a small share towards the public expense."

Pamphlet written by Thomas Whately, Secretary to the Prime Minister, 1765

"The right of the Parliament of Great Britain to impose taxes of every kind on the colonies has always been admitted.... The inhabitants of the Colonies do not indeed choose the members of that Assembly [Parliament]; neither do nine-tenths of the people of Britain.... The Colonies are in exactly the same situation: All British subjects are really in the same [situation]; none are actually represented, all are virtually represented in Parliament; for every member of Parliament sits in the House, not as a Representative of his own constituents, but as one of that august body by which all the commons of Great Britain are represented."

Sermon by Jonathan Boucher, Anglican minister in Virginia, 1775

“Obedience to government is every man’s duty, because it is every man’s interest; but it is particularly incumbent on Christians, because (in addition to its moral fitness) it is enjoined by the positive command of God; and therefore, when Christians are disobedient to human ordinances, they are also disobedient to God. If the form of government under which the good providence of God has been pleased to place us be mild and free, it is our duty to enjoy it with gratitude.”

Pamphlet published by Quakers in Philadelphia, January 20, 1776

“We are so fully assured that these principles [non-violence and Christian reconciliation] are the most certain and effectual means of preventing the extreme misery and desolations of wars and bloodshed.... The benefits, advantages, and favour we have experienced by our dependence on, and connection with the [British] kings and government, under which we have enjoyed this happy state, appear to demand from us the greatest circumspection, care and constant endeavors, to guard against every attempt to alter, or subvert, that dependence and connection.”

Letter from Gouverneur Morris, New York lawyer, May 20, 1774

“Yesterday...I beheld my fellow citizens very accurately counting all their chickens, not only before any of them were hatched but before one-half of the eggs were laid. In short, they fairly contended [argued] about the future forms of our government, whether it should be founded upon aristocratic or democratic principles.... The mob begin to think and reason. Poor reptiles!... They bask in the sunshine and were noon they will bite.... I see it with

fear and trembling, that if the present disputes with Great Britain continue, we shall be under the domination of a riotous mob.”

“Letters of a Westchester Farmer,” written by Samuel Seabury, 1774

“Can we think to threaten, and bully, and frighten the supreme government of the nation [Britain] into a compliance with our demands? Can we expect to force a submission to our peevish and petulant humours, by exciting clamours and riots in England?... A single campaign, should she [Britain] exert her force, would ruin us effectually.... The fleets of Great Britain command respect throughout the globe. Her influence extends to every part of the earth.... We have no trade but under the protection of Great Britain.... Should our mad schemes take place, our sailors, ship-carpenters, carmen, sailmakers, riggers, miners, smelters, forge-men, and workers in bar iron etc. would be immediately out of employ; and we should have twenty mobs and riots in our own country.”

Pamphlet by Daniel Leonard, Massachusetts lawyer, January 9, 1775

“The security of the people from internal rapacity and violence, and from foreign invasion, is the end and design of government....

“The British constitution, consisting of King, Lords, and Commons is recognized, both by Englishmen and foreigners, to be the most perfect system that the wisdom of the ages has produced. The distribution of powers are so just, and the proportions are so exact, as at once to support and control each other. An Englishman glories in being subject to, and protected by, such a government....If the colonies are not subject to the authority of Parliament, Great Britain and the colonies must be distinct states.”

Option 2: Create a More Perfect Union

Cooler heads must prevail! If this rebellion does not cease, our relationship with Britain, our mother country, will be forever broken. Certainly, there are legitimate grievances on both sides. But there is nothing that cannot be resolved if we are willing to sit down with one another and settle our differences in a spirit of brotherly compromise.

First, we must recognize that the colonies belong to Britain. Ninety percent of the free men here trace their origins to the British Isles. Relations with our mother country have been strained lately, but that does not mean that we should disavow our English blood and heritage. Parliament contains many members who have shared our concerns in the past. We should be building bridges to our allies in London, not tearing them down through acts of rebellion.

Second, we must shoulder our share of the blame for the current crisis. Colonial legislatures have occasionally behaved irresponsibly. During the French and Indian War, several legislatures contributed nothing to the war effort. When Parliament gave the colonies an opportunity to propose an alternative to the Stamp Tax, many of our legislative leaders refused to suggest another means to raise revenue. On the contrary, they responded with the outrageous claim that Parliament has no right to tax the colonies, and even argued that the colonies owe allegiance only to the king.

But enough pointing fingers. Let us instead find common ground on which to build a peaceful future. The foundation of the British constitution rests on the principle that no man may be taxed or deprived of his property without representation. In this matter, we in the colonies have been in the right. Gone is the day when the interests of the colonies could be determined in London or ignored altogether. We are now a thriving community of two million Englishmen, nearly one-third the population of Britain herself.

To restore harmony between the colonies and the mother country, a British-American council should be formed with representatives from each of the thirteen colonies. Under such an arrangement, each colony would retain existing powers to regulate its internal affairs, while the council would have the authority to pass laws and impose taxes for the colonies as a whole. To take effect, the decisions of the council would need the approval of Parliament. Finally, the king should appoint a president in the colonies who would be responsible for enforcing the rule of law.

The establishment of a colonial council would address the complaint that we in the colonies are being taxed by a body in which we are not represented. Moreover, it would renew our union with the mother country and allow us to again pledge our allegiance to the king with enthusiasm and pride.

If we reject compromise, consider where the road of rebellion will lead. Our ports would be blockaded and our trade with the British empire would come to a halt. Without the mother country to act as a mediator, the disputes among the colonies would break out into open hostilities, and we would be plunged into civil war.

May God protect us from the reckless lunacy of Sam Adams, Patrick Henry, and their rabble followers, and from the pig-headed stubbornness of Lord North and his ministry. Compromise is the only solution for settling differences among brothers. We must put down our guns and immediately open negotiations with our friends in Parliament. Let us focus on what unites us as Englishmen.

Beliefs and Assumptions Underlying Option 2

1. The legitimacy of Britain's authority over the colonies is grounded in the mother country's discovery, settlement, and continuous protection of America.

2. The colonies should be required to contribute their fair share to the defense

of the British empire in North America.

3. Under the British constitutional system, the citizens of the colonies should have a voice in making the laws that govern them, especially in the area of taxation.

Supporting Arguments for Option 2

1. Establishing a joint British-American council—on equal footing with Parliament—to govern the colonies will protect both the rights of the colonists and the legitimate authority of Britain.

2. Resistance to British rule will bring economic disaster to the colonies.

3. Without British authority over them, the individual colonies will turn against one another and plunge into civil war.

From the Historical Record

"The Albany Plan of Union," authored by Pennsylvania delegate Benjamin Franklin, 1754

"It is proposed that humble application be made for an act of Parliament of Great Britain by virtue of which one general government may be formed in America, including all the said colonies, within and under which each colony may retain its present constitution.... That the said general government be administered by a president general, to be appointed and supported by the Crown; and a grand council, to be chosen by the representatives of the people of the several colonies met in their respective assemblies....

"That the assent of the president general be requisite to all acts of the Grand Council, and that it be his office and duty to cause them to be carried into execution.... That they raise and pay soldiers and build forts for the defense of any of the colonies and equip vessels of force to guard the coasts and protect the trade on the oceans, lakes or great rivers....

That for these purposes they have power to make laws and lay and levy such general duties, imposts, or taxes as to them shall appear most equal.... Yet no money [is] to be issued but by joint orders of the president general and Grand Council.

"That the laws made by them for the purposes aforesaid shall not be repugnant but agreeable to the laws of England and shall be transmitted to the King in Council for approbation [approval] as soon as may be after their passing."

Speech by Joseph Galloway, speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly, to the First Continental Congress, September 1774

"There is no statute which has been passed to tax or bind the colonies since the year 1763 which was not founded on precedents and statutes of a similar nature before that period.... [The proposal to boycott British imports] is undutiful and illegal: it is an

insult on the supreme authority of the State; it cannot fail to draw on the Colonies the united resentment of the Mother Country. If we will not trade with Great Britain, she will not suffer us to trade at all. Our ports will be blocked up by British men of war, and troops will be sent to reduce us to reason and obedience. A total and sudden stagnation of commerce is what no country can bear.

“[During the French and Indian War] it was not unreasonable to expect that Parliament would have levied a tax on the colonies proportionate to their wealth, and the sums raised in Great Britain. Her ancient right, so often exercised, and never controverted, enabled her, and the occasion invited her, to do it. And yet, not knowing their wealth, a generous tenderness arising from the fear of doing them injustice induced Parliament to forbear [reject] this.... You all know there were Colonies which at some times granted liberal aids, and at others nothing; other Colonies gave nothing during the war.

“Instead of proposing some remedy [to the Stamp Act] by which that authority should be rendered more equitable and more constitutional over the colonies, the Colonial petitions rested in a declaration that the Colonies could not be represented in that body [Parliament]. This was thought and called by the ablest men and Britain a clear and explicit declaration of the American Independence and compelled the Parliament to pass the Declaratory Act in order to save its ancient and incontrovertible right of supremacy over all parts of the empire.

“The discovery of the Colonies was made under a commission granted by the supreme authority of the British State. They have been settled under that authority and therefore are truly the property of that State. The Colonists have ever sworn allegiance to the British State, and have been considered both by the State and by themselves as subjects of the British Government. Protection and allegiance are reciprocal duties. The Colonies cannot claim the protection of Britain upon any principle of reason or law while they deny its supreme authority.

“In regard to the political state of the Colonies, you must know that they are so many inferior societies, disunited and unconnected in polity. While they deny the authority of Parliament, they are in respect to each other in a perfect state of nature [lawlessness].... The seeds of discord are plentifully sowed in the constitution of the Colonies; that they are already grown to maturity, and have more than once broke out into open hostilities [among themselves.] They are at this moment only suppressed by the authority of the Parent State; and should that authority be weakened or annulled, many subjects of unsettled disputes can only be settled by an appeal to the sword which must involve us in all the horrors of civil war.

“Representation or a participation in the supreme councils of the State is the great principle upon which the freedom of the British Government is established.... [It is not particular taxes] but it is the lack of constitutional principle in the authority that passed it which is the ground for complaint. This and only this is the source of American grievances.... If this defect were removed a foundation would be laid for the relief of every American complaint....

“We propose a British and American legislature for regulating the administration of the general affairs of America be established, including all the colonies; within and under which each colony shall retain its present constitution and powers of regulating and governing its own internal [affairs]. That the said government be administered by a president general to be appointed by the King and a Grand Council to be chosen by the representatives of the people of the several colonies in their respective assemblies.... That the president general shall hold his office during the pleasure of the King and his assent shall be requisite to all acts of the Grand Council, and it shall be his office and duty to cause them to be carried into execution.

“That the president general by and with the advice and consent of the Grand Council hold and exercise all the legislative

rights, powers, and authorities necessary for regulating and administrating all the affairs of the colonies in which Great Britain and the colonies, or any of them, the colonies in general, or more than one colony are in any manner concerned, as well civil and criminal as commercial.... The said president general and the Grand Council be an inferior and

distinct branch of the British legislature.... Regulations may originate and be formed and digested either in the Parliament of Great Britain or in the said Grand Council and being prepared, transmitted to the other for their approbation [approval] or dissent; and that the assent of both shall be necessary to the validity of all such general acts and statutes.”

Option 3: Defend Our Rights as Englishmen

As Englishmen, we will give our lives to defend the rights that make us free men. We hold sacred the principles of the British constitution and consider ourselves loyal subjects of King George. We are not among the handful of radicals who wish to separate the colonies from our mother country and from our fellow Englishmen. Thus, it is with great reluctance that we have taken up arms to protect our homes and villages. As the minutemen of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill have shown, we will not put down our weapons until our rights have been restored.

Ever since our colonies were founded, we have enjoyed the same rights and privileges as our fellow Englishmen in the mother country. Our colonial charters were granted by the crown, and it is to the crown that we remain morally and legally bound. For the past century, the crown has recognized the wisdom of allowing the colonies a large measure of self-government. The responsible citizens in each colony have elected legislatures that have passed the laws and taxes necessary for the well-being of their fellow colonists. Even the royal governors have realized that imposing on us laws and taxes passed by Parliament has brought undue hardship to the colonies.

King George has been misled by his ministers. In following their misguided advice, he has approved measures that deprive us of liberty and prosperity. We do believe, however, that in time his majesty will realize the errors of his government. He should know that we are not rebelling against his legal authority. On the contrary, we are defending ourselves against flagrant violations of the British constitution.

The principles for which we stand are the cornerstone of the constitution. We hold that Parliament does not have the right to legislate over us without our consent. Until the conclusion of the French and Indian War, we were willing to accept the right of Parliament to regulate the trade of the British empire. In recent years, however, Parliament has lost our trust. Ruinous taxes, unreasonable trade restrictions, unconstitutional searches and trials, and the decision to take away the right of self-government from the Massachusetts colony reveal a pattern of tyranny. We will not allow ourselves to be reduced to the status of slaves.

By taking up arms to resist tyranny, we are acting in the best English tradition. No less than John Locke asserted that citizens have the right to rise up when the government ceases to protect and promote their God-given rights of life, liberty, and property. Our Whig friends in Parliament sympathize with our grievances. They admire our devotion to the cause of liberty. We must avoid antagonizing them by actions that go beyond asserting our rights and protecting our homes.

Those who demand complete separation from the mother country have not considered the consequences of their actions. While we have shown our bravery on the battlefield, do they imagine that we can defeat the British army and navy in a long war? Do they expect the most powerful country on earth to turn over meekly the colonies it founded? No other nation would dare help us in such a struggle. We would be alone in uncharted waters.

We must not deviate from principle or lose our faith in the rightness of our cause. We will continue to resist efforts to deny our rights by brute force, and we will remain steadfast in

our belief that the wisdom and justice of the British constitution will prevail. All we ask is for a return to the harmonious relationship we enjoyed with the mother country before the tragic events of the past ten years. We must hang together to fight for what is just.

Beliefs and Assumptions Underlying Option 3

1. Taxation without representation is tyranny, reducing the colonists to the status of slaves.

2. In principle, Parliament has no authority over the colonies. Moreover, colonial representation in Parliament

is impractical due to the vast distance separating the colonies from Britain.

3. The colonists should be willing to provide the mother country funds for the defense and administration of the colonies.

Supporting Arguments for Option 3

1. Our decision to take up arms against tyranny will be supported by members of the Whig Party in Parliament. They will recognize that we are acting in accord with English tradition.

2. By demonstrating our courage and commitment, we will force British officials to

back away from their dangerous course and restore the rights to which we are entitled.

3. By rejecting arguments to seek independence, we will avoid the serious harm to colonial commercial interests that would result from a complete break with Britain.

From the Historical Record

“Address to the People of Great Britain,” delivered by New York delegate John Jay at the First Continental Congress, October 1774

“We who are descended from the same common ancestors, whose forefathers participated in all the rights, the liberties, and the constitution you [the people of Britain] so justly boast of, and who have carefully conveyed the same fair inheritance to us refuse to surrender them.... We consider ourselves and do insist that we are and ought to be as free as our fellow subjects in Britain, and that no power on earth has a right to take our property from us without our consent. We claim all the benefits secured to the subject by the British constitution. Prior to this era [1765] you were content with drawing from us the wealth produced by our commerce.... We looked up to you as to our parent state, to which we were bound by the strongest ties; and we were happy in being instrumental to your prosperity and grandeur.... To what causes are we to attri-

bute the sudden changes in treatment, and that system of slavery which was prepared for us?

“For the necessary support of government here, we ever were and ever shall be ready to provide. And whenever the exigencies of the state may require it, we shall as we have hitherto done, cheerfully contribute our full proportion of men and money. To enforce this unconstitutional and unjust scheme of taxation, every fence that the wisdom of our British ancestors had carefully erected against arbitrary power has been violently thrown down in America.

“We believe there is yet much virtue, much justice, and much spirit in the English nation. To that justice we now appeal.... Permit us to be as free as yourselves and we shall ever esteem a union with you to be our greatest glory, and our greatest happiness; we shall ever be ready to contribute all in our power to the welfare of the empire; we shall consider

your enemies as our enemies and your interest as our own.”

*“A Summary View of the Rights of British America,”
written by Thomas Jefferson, Virginia landowner, July
1774*

“It is neither our wish nor our interest to separate from her [Great Britain]. We are willing on our part to sacrifice every thing which reason can ask to the restoration of that tranquility for which all must wish. On their part let them be ready to establish union on a generous plan. Let them name their terms, but let them be just. Accept of every commercial preference it is in our power to give, for such things as we can raise for their use, or they make for ours. But let them not think to exclude us from going to other markets, to dispose of those commodities which they cannot use, nor to supply those wants which they can not supply. Still less let it be proposed that our properties within our territories shall be taxed or regulated by any power on earth but our own.”

*Letter to the editor of a Boston newspaper, written by
John Adams, Massachusetts lawyer, February 6, 1775*

“America has all along consented, still consents, and will ever consent that Parliament, being the most powerful legislature in

the dominions.... I contend that our provincial legislatures are the only supreme authorities in our colonies; our charters give us no authority over the high seas. Parliament has our consent to assume a jurisdiction over them... That a representation in Parliament is impracticable we all agree; but the consequence is that we must have a representation in our supreme legislatures here. This was the consequence that was drawn by kings, ministers, our ancestors, and the whole [British] nation more than a century ago when the colonies were first settled.”

Letter to Parliament authored by the Second Continental Congress, July 1775

“Our cause is just. Our union is perfect. Our internal resources are great, and, if necessary, foreign assistance is undoubtedly available.... The arms we have been compelled by our enemies to assume, we will employ for the preservation of our liberties; being with one mind resolved to die freemen rather than live slaves.... We mean not to dissolve that union which has so long and happily subsisted between us.... We have not raised armies with ambitious designs of separating from Great Britain and establishing independent states.”

Option 4: Fight for Independence

Damn the king and damn Parliament! They have murdered our fathers and brothers, burned our homes, and stolen our property. Is this how a loving parent treats her children? The ties that once bound us to the mother country have been broken by British force. Now we must stand up for ourselves.

We in the colonies have grown up. The brave souls who came here to find the religious freedom and economic opportunity they were denied in England have built a new society. By right, we are entitled to independence. Even the English philosopher James Harrington recognized that the colonies would eventually wean themselves from the mother country. It is natural that the cord be cut now.

Feelings of gratitude and obligation toward Britain are misplaced. Britain has not protected our interests, but its own. Trade regulations were not intended to benefit the colonies, but to enrich Britain. Moreover, this conflict was started by British officials, not by us. The British took it upon themselves to close our ports, ban our assemblies, take away our property, and fire upon our citizens.

There is no longer good reason to remain tied to Britain. Our population is growing rapidly and in fifty years will surpass that of Britain. Our land is fertile and without limits, and our God-given resources dwarf those of the British Isles.

As an independent country, our trade would expand. Without the restrictions imposed by London, new markets in Europe would be open to American goods. Our merchants would be free to import products from France, Spain, Holland, or any other nation. Even the British would soon be eager for our trade. After all, will they go naked rather than purchase our flax, furs, cotton, and indigo? Independence will be a boon to our economy.

Independence will also permit us to develop along the path we have set for ourselves. From all over Europe, freedom-loving men who wish to be judged by their abilities and not by their birth would be attracted to our shores. Our foreign relations would be of our choosing. No longer would we be drawn into London's distant wars.

Of course, there are doubters among us who question our ability to succeed by force of arms. Rest assured that after the battles at Concord and Bunker Hill the British have no doubt about the determination and valor of our citizens. The British cannot wage war in the colonies for long. London's supply lines stretch to the other side of the Atlantic. Moreover, the French and the Spanish will see an opportunity to weaken their rival by supporting our cause. Even now, there are reports that French aid is on the way.

God gave each of us the sacred natural rights of life, liberty, and security in our property. No power on earth can take these away without our consent. As John Locke asserted, we have an obligation to overthrow a government that violates its duty to protect our fundamental rights. Rather than endure tyranny, we have the moral authority to establish a government that will promote our well-being. Past divisions among the colonies will fade away once a continental government of our own replaces British rule.

A glorious future awaits us. In this New World, we can build a new nation founded on freedom, liberty, and economic opportunity. We can break the chains that link us to the corruption and strife of Europe. If we fail to strike out for independence, God protect us! Last year, it was the farmers of Lexington who were massacred. Who will be next? There is no turning back. We must strike out for freedom.

Beliefs and Assumptions Underlying Option 4

1. America is strong enough to stand on its own—without the false protection of Britain’s distant power. Logic and nature dictate that the colonies govern themselves.
2. Disputes among the American

colonies will fade away once we are responsible for governing ourselves.

3. Britain has rejected attempts at compromise, especially since blood has been shed.

Supporting Arguments for Option 4

1. An independent America will be free of Britain’s senseless wars and will enjoy unrestricted trade relations with the other nations of Europe.
2. Without the burdens of British

imperial policy, American industry and commerce will be free to grow and prosper.

3. An independent America will be able to draw on the services of capable leaders ready for the responsibilities of self-government.

From the Historical Record

Pamphlet by Richard Wells, Philadelphia writer, 1774

“We look to manhood—our muscles swell out with youthful vigor; our sinews spring with elastic force; and we feel the marrow of Englishmen in our bones. The day of independent manhood is at hand—we feel our strength; and with filial grateful sense of proper obedience, would wish to be esteemed the friend as well as the child of Britain.”

Common Sense, written by Thomas Paine, January 10, 1775

“We have boasted the protection of Great Britain without considering that her motive was interest, not attachment; that she did not protect us from our enemies on our account, but from her enemies on her own account.... Let Britain wave her pretensions to the continent [America], or the continent, throw off the dependence and we should be at peace with France and Spain were they at war with Britain.

“America would have flourished as much,

and probably much more had no European power taken any notice of her. The commerce by which she hath enriched herself are the necessaries of life, and will always have a market while eating is the custom of Europe.... I challenge the warmest advocate of reconciliation to show a single advantage that this continent [America] can reap by being connected with Great Britain.... The injuries and disadvantages we sustain by that connection are without number because any submission to or dependence on Great Britain tends directly to involve this continent in European wars and quarrels. As Europe is our market for trade we ought to form no political connection with any part of it.... Europe is too thickly planted with kingdoms to be long at peace and whenever a war breaks out between England and any foreign power, the trade of America goes to ruin because of her connection with Britain.

“But Britain is the parent country say some. Then the more shame upon her con-

duct. Even brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families.... Europe and not England is the parent country of America. The New World hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from every part of Europe....

“Even the distance at which the Almighty hath placed England and America is a strong and natural proof that the authority of the one over the other was never the design of heaven.... There is something very absurd in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island. In no instance hath nature made the satellite larger than its primary planet and as England and America with respect to each other reverse the common order of nature, it is evident they belong to different systems. England to Europe; America to itself.

“Men of passive tempers look somewhat lightly over the offences of Britain and still hoping for the best are apt to call out ‘Come, come we shall be friends again for all this’.... Can you hereafter love, honour, and faithfully serve the power that hath carried fire and sword into your land? Your future connection with Britain whom you can [no longer] neither love nor honour will be forced and unnatural.... Reconciliation is now a fallacious dream.... Every quiet method for peace hath been ineffectual.... As Britain hath not manifested the least inclination towards a compromise, we may be assured that no terms can be obtained worthy the acceptance of the continent, or in any ways equal to the expense of blood and treasure we have already put in.

“No man was a warmer wisher for reconciliation than myself before the fatal 19th of April 1775 [the day of the battles of Lexington and Concord], but the moment the event of that day was made known I rejected the hardened, sullen tempered Pharaoh of England for ever.... Is the power who is jealous of our prosperity a proper power to govern us?... Even the best terms which we can expect to obtain can amount to no more than a temporary expedient, or a kind of guardianship which can last no longer than ‘til the colonies come of age.

“Nothing but independence, i.e. a continental form of government, can keep the peace of the continent and preserve it from civil wars.... There are ten times more to dread from a patched up connection than from independence. I protest that if I were driven from house and home, my property destroyed, and my circumstances ruined I could never relish the doctrine of reconciliation.

’Tis not in the power of Britain to do this continent justice: the business of it will soon be too weighty and intricate to be managed with any tolerable degree of convenience by a power so distant from us and very ignorant of us. A government of our own is our natural right. The last chord now is broken. There are injuries which nature cannot forgive. Every spot of the old world is over-run with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the Globe. England hath given her warning to depart. Receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind.”