Recovering Nonviolent History

Civil Resistance in Liberation Struggles

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The United States: Reconsidering the Struggle for Independence, 1765–1775

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Stories of national origin provide conceptions of national identity for the people who share them. They celebrate the charter events of a people, enshrine particular historical episodes, and privilege specific historical interpretations. People in the United States, by eulogizing stories of violence in their national origin, have effaced or oversimplified important nonviolent parts of their country's early history. This may be due both to fascination with violence and to ignorance about nonviolent conflict, including the lack of an analytical framework to identify its strategic successes.

From invocations of "the shot heard round the world," to exclamations of "don't shoot until you see the whites of their eyes," literature and legend teach that armed resistance achieved US independence from Britain. Movies such as Mel Gibson's *The Patriot* (2000) going back to Disney's *Johnny Tremain* (1957) show that American men fought valiantly and violently to achieve their national freedom.[1]

This is compelling narrative and imagery: a discourse of national origins replete with dramatic violence, courageous patriots, and linear outcomes. It locates itself in easily identified actions, discrete male leaders, heroic rhetorical statements, and emotional commemorations of those who gave their lives for liberty.

But consider an alternative scenario, one that extends longer in time, includes more than only men, and reaches into the political, economic, and cultural reality of American life. "A history of military operations . . . is not a history of the American Revolution," warned John Adams in 1815. "The revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people, and in the union of the colonies; both of which were substantially effected before hostilities

commenced." Thus, the real revolution was in the united actions of the colonies in campaigns of resistance to British authority that took place before the war.[2]

John Adams's evaluation can be substantiated in the October 1774 Continental Association—a program of nonimportation, nonconsumption, and nonexportation combined with provisions for enforcement that utilized social ostracism and economic boycott. This was adopted by the First Continental Congress, which encouraged the formation of other extralegal committees that effectively assumed functions of government throughout the colonies. Nonimportation caused the collapse of British imports in 1774–1775: in New England their value dropped from £562,476 in 1774 to £71,625 in 1775, in Virginia and Maryland from £528,738 to £1,921, and in the Carolinas from £378,116 to £6,245. Even in New York, a Loyalist center, imports fell. By early 1775, Americans had established hundreds of committees to enforce the Continental Association in direct opposition to British authority. The balance of power shifted so that the provincial conventions and committees now in fact governed most colonies. In reality, political independence from Britain was evident before the Battles of Lexington and Concord in April 1775.[3]

This independence had its roots in the decade of nonviolent struggle from 1765 to 1775, notably in three specific campaigns: against the Stamp Act of 1765, the Townshend Acts of 1767, and the Coercive Acts of 1774. These resistance campaigns used such nonviolent means as extraordinary petitions, protest marches, demonstrations, boycotts, and refusals to work. When the British Crown levied taxes on certain imports, Americans organized campaigns to refuse to purchase them.

Other methods were also devised. Colonial merchants were ostracized if they continued to import boycotted goods. Additionally, colonial activists sometimes conducted regular business in violation of British law, by using documents without tax stamps, by settling legal disputes without courts, and by sending protest petitions to Britain without permission from the royal governor. They also formed local, county, and provincial committees to support, extend, and enforce resistance. In 1774 and 1775, many such bodies assumed governmental powers, acting as extralegal authorities with powers greater than the remnants of colonial royal government.

A Decade of Nonviolent Resistance

Until the 1774 Continental Congress, colonial nonviolent action was mainly improvised. Colonists frequently did not have a clear idea of what was involved in waging effective nonviolent struggle. They were at times confused about which steps to take if a particular method was losing impact

and often found it difficult to judge a campaign's relative effectiveness. Yet they were acutely aware that some methods were more effective than others and acted on that. A review of the three campaigns of resistance between 1765 and 1775 provides a basis for assessing the nonviolent tactics and strategies used by the resistance movement.

The Campaign Against the Stamp Act, 1765–1766

The Stamp Act, enacted in March 1765 and due to come into force in November, introduced direct taxation—a stamp duty on all legal documents and various other printed materials. This provoked an open resistance campaign that marked the beginning of the movement toward colonial self-government. Previously, complaints against British policies were voiced in petitions to Parliament from the colonial legislatures and approved by the royal governor. After the Stamp Act, opposition widened, including not only petitions without executive approval for repeal of the law but colonial refusal to pay the taxes, social and consumer boycotts against supporters of the act, and nonimportation and nonconsumption of British goods.

The Massachusetts and Virginia legislatures passed resolutions against the act while popular protests pressured Crown-appointed tax agents to resign—crowds hanged effigies of tax agents and confronted them at home. During August 1765, actions against tax officials took place in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Rhode Island, and Maryland. Philadelphia merchant Charles Thompson informed his London friends that stamp officials throughout the thirteen colonies had resigned their offices.

Meanwhile several colonies were preparing the Stamp Act Congress for October 1765. This innovative step in intercolonial cooperation produced a statement of colonial rights and the proper limits of parliamentary authority. Copies of the congressional proceedings were sent to every colony plus one set to Britain as the united appeal of the American colonies.

By the time the Stamp Act went into effect on November 1, 1765, colonial resistance was well under way. The Stamp Act Congress was meeting. Newspapers, such as the *Maryland Gazette,* the *Pennsylvania Gazette,* and the *South Carolina Gazette,* announced they would cease publication rather than be boycotted for using stamps. Other papers, such as the *New London Gazette,* the *Connecticut Gazette,* and the *Boston Gazette,* defied the Crown by continuing to publish without stamps. The *Newport Gazette, Boston Post-Boy,* and *Pennsylvania Journal* appeared anonymously without the editor or printer identified. Newspapers that remained open reported resistance activities and, thereby, provided support for opposition to the act.

In parallel fashion, many courts were closed because lawyers would not use stamps and judges would not proceed without them. Similarly, shipping permits were supposed to be stamped. However, if no one would distribute

or use the stamps, then ports would either have to close completely or open and operate in defiance of the law.

Actions such as these effectively nullified the Stamp Act, but without bringing about its repeal. That was achieved through nonimportation pacts agreed by merchants in the three major port cities: Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. On October 31, 1765, New York merchants pledged refusal to import British goods until the tax was repealed. Philadelphia merchants followed on November 7 and Boston on December 9. British merchants, alarmed by these pacts, petitioned Parliament to repeal the Stamp Act.

While Parliament had expected Stamp Act revenues to yield £60,000 a year, the total levied did not cover even half the expenses of printing: a mere £3,292 in early 1766. Even before its repeal in March 1766, the Stamp Act was a dead letter in the colonies. The people had discovered, in the words of Governor Francis Bernard of Massachusetts, that "they have it in their power to choose whether they will submit to this act or not." Numerous ports had reopened without using stamps while various local courts conducted business in violation of British law. Repeal brought a degree of calm to North America, but the colonists had experienced the power of noncooperation.[4]

The Campaign Against the Townshend Acts, 1767–1768

When Parliament passed the Townshend Acts in 1767, imposing duties on imports such as glass, paint, paper, and tea, colonial activists again turned to the weapon of nonimportation. For example, in Providence, Rhode Island, a nonconsumption pact listed imports to be boycotted. Anyone disregarding this was to be "discountenanced, in the most effectual, but decent and lawful Manner." Similarly in Newport, Rhode Island, local tailors charged less for work on American-made cloth but extra for imported cloth.[5]

Initially, resistance was sporadic and, unlike the Stamp Act, the Townshend Acts went into effect on November 20, 1767, with no attempt to prevent their enforcement until the following month when an essay by John Dickinson galvanized a new campaign. In January 1768, the Massachusetts House of Representatives petitioned the king for repeal of the Townshend Acts and distributed a Circular Letter to all colonial assemblies hoping they would back this call. These hopes were fulfilled. By the end of 1768, every colonial assembly had petitioned the king challenging Parliament's right to levy taxes on the colonies.

While colonial assemblies acted on the Massachusetts letter, a movement for nonimportation began. Planning commenced in Boston in March 1768, but no accord was reached until August 1. Later that month, New York merchants signed a similar pact, adding that merchants who violated it or refused to enroll should be boycotted and labeled "Enemies of Their

Country." Philadelphia merchants hesitated until February 1769, after which a number of smaller ports followed. George Washington applauded the prospect of a nonimportation campaign in Virginia. He told George Mason that "we have already . . . proved the inefficacy of the addresses to the throne and remonstrances to Parliament. How far, then, their attention to our rights and privileges is to be awakened or alarmed, by starving their trade and manufactures, remains to be tried." Mason agreed on the potential impact of nonimportation and suggested a related tactic: "It may not be amiss to let the ministry understand that, until we obtain a redress of grievances, we will withhold from them our commodities, and particularly refrain from making tobacco, by which the revenue would lose fifty times more than all their oppression could raise here."[6]

The Townshend Acts, except the duty on tea, were repealed in April 1770. When this news reached the American colonies, New York merchants reduced the requirements of their nonimportation agreement and those of Philadelphia and Boston followed suit, so ending the second major campaign of resistance to British authority. Due to uneven and late implementation, it had been more limited than the Stamp Act campaign. Yet the nonimportation agreements succeeded in sharply reducing trade with Britain and the lessons learned, such as the need for unified action to strengthen colonial leverage, were applied to the later nonintercourse agreements of 1774–1775.

The Committees of Correspondence

In the period between 1770 and 1774, one vital development was the formation of Committees of Correspondence for sharing information between the colonies. By the end of December 1772, at the suggestion of the Boston town meeting, such committees had been formed throughout Massachusetts. In March 1773, the Virginia House of Burgesses elected a standing Committee of Correspondence and requested other colonial assemblies to do likewise. An expanded network of correspondence committees throughout the colonies was firmly in place by early 1774.

In May 1773 Parliament passed the Tea Act. Aiming to reassert British imperial authority, this act essentially granted the East India Company a monopoly on tea imports. Colonists planned to nullify the act by convincing tea agents to resign. Some resisters, however, took more direct action—resulting in the Boston Tea Party of December 16, 1773—dumping dutied tea into Boston harbor.

British reaction was swift and harsh. To punish the people of Massachusetts for ten years of flaunting imperial authority, Parliament enacted a series of measures known as the Coercive Acts. News of these reached the colonies in May 1774 and immediately prompted resistance. A meeting of

the Virginia House of Burgesses, which convened in defiance of the governor's orders, called for an intercolonial congress. The Massachusetts House proposed this should take place in September in Philadelphia. By the end of August, every colony except Georgia had elected delegates, some in extralegal sessions prohibited by Crown-appointed governors.

As the congress neared, plans were readied in several colonies to reinstitute commercial sanctions. Support grew for economic resistance and various localities enacted their own nonintercourse agreements. Resistance organizations ranged from local through provincial to the intercolonial level.

The First Continental Congress met in Philadelphia from September 5 through October 22, 1774, with delegates from every colony except Georgia. It passed a series of resolutions articulating the colonies' rights and grievances and, on October 20, adopted the Continental Association, which it called the "most speedy, effectual, and peaceable" measure. It was decided that all imports from Britain, Ireland, and the West Indies should stop on December 1, 1774, and they should be replaced with American-made items. Additionally, should nonimportation not gain redress of grievances, colonists would adopt what many felt was the most forceful commercial weapon available—the nonexportation of items such as lumber, naval stores, tobacco, and other raw materials. If needed, nonexportation would begin on September 10, 1775.

The Continental Association did not simply call for economic resistance, but also designed means to organize and enforce it. These provisions were quickly implemented throughout the colonies, ostracizing those who violated the association.

Colonial noncooperation throughout the resistance to the Coercive Acts was not limited to a refusal to buy British goods, but extended to all royal laws. Courts were closed, taxes refused, governors openly defied. Throughout the colonies, extralegal provincial congresses were convened in 1774 and early 1775 to oversee enforcement of the Continental Association. These "illegal" assemblies at the local, county, and provincial levels often assumed legislative and judicial functions in executing the wishes of the Continental Congress. As the conservative *Rivington's New York Gazetteer* wrote in February 1775, the association took "Government out of the hands of the Governor, Council, and General Assembly; and the execution of laws out of the hands of the Civil Magistrates and Juries."[7]

Naturally, the Crown tried to counter. On November 18, 1774, George III told Prime Minister Lord North that "the New England Governments are in a State of Rebellion; blows must decide whether they are to be subject to this Country or independent."[8] The issue for Parliament and George III was no longer redress of grievances; the colonists had demonstrated the eclipse of British authority and the Crown needed to restore its power. Consequently, in

January 1775, Colonial Secretary Lord Dartmouth directed General Thomas Gage to quell the heretofore nonviolent rebellion by arresting and imprisoning leaders in Massachusetts. Gage took the offensive by attempting to seize military stores at Concord where he clashed with colonists on April 19, 1775.

Organizations throughout the colonies were immediately confronted with a decision: whether to follow the Massachusetts example and shift strategy from nonviolent resistance to military force. Only seven colonies—New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut in the north; Virginia, Maryland, and South Carolina in the south—had authorized the organization of local militias prior to Lexington and Concord. And at that, these militia groups were poorly trained and equipped and seen more as protection against Indians and escaped slaves than as a defense against the British. Nevertheless, in May 1775 the Second Continental Congress assumed direction of the quickly developing military struggle, appointing George Washington as commander in chief of the newly created Continental Army and requisitioning military supplies. Nonviolent methods were superseded by violence as the primary means of struggle and the colonists embarked on a military war that would last eight years.

Dynamics of the Nonviolent Struggle

In identifying the emergence and assessing the tactics and strategies of resistance prior to May 1775, attention must be given to the movement's political and social dynamics. The gradual transformation of British North America from colonies to an independent state involved five factors:

1. The collective expression of American political differences with Britain and a concomitant sense of American identity;
2. The growth of organizations and institutions that articulated colonial interests and argued against new British powers and controls;
3. Open resistance to specific acts of the British government;
4. Mass political and economic noncooperation with British authority; and
5. The development of parallel institutions, particularly institutions of government.[9]

Each of these factors was essential for effective opposition to the Crown and instrumental in the revolutionary break from Britain. Collectively, they also contributed to the development of the eventual governing structures in the new United States. All of the components existed simultaneously throughout the decade of resistance, though each developed to varying degrees at

different times. All five could be seen in the resistance to the Stamp Act, for example, yet they were not fully maintained after that campaign. The growth of organizations expressing American interests and the formation of new parallel institutions was not rapid until after 1770. Thus, the constituent parts of the process leading to independence were themselves developed and transformed in successive struggles, just as they contributed to the final achievement of independence. Space only allows for illustrative examples.

Political awareness of differences with Britain was crucial for the independence movement. Colonists with diverse personal interests and backgrounds slowly found themselves developing similar attitudes about the governance of their colony and the larger relationship of the American colonies to Britain. Common grievances and goals were identified in the Stamp Act and later the Townshend Acts campaign, as British taxation was considered an attack on colonial rights. In both cases, it was believed that members of Parliament had either been duped by bad advice or were using their powers improperly. Colonial Americans had no direct representatives in Parliament, hence, the slogan "No taxation without representation." By 1774–1775 colonial experience with parallel American institutions and increasing suspicion about the depth of British opposition moved many colonial Americans from seeking reform of British laws to seeking complete independence. This experience shaped their identities as Americans who shared common traditions with the British but, through their involvement in a decade of nonviolent resistance, had learned that they were a separate nation.

The second factor, institutions and organizations expressing colonial grievances, was critical in gaining independence and building democratic power-sharing governance structures. Colonial resistance was largely improvised, with new leaders who emerged that were capable of expressing grievances while successfully organizing protest actions. Intercolonial organizations sporadically arose, as with the Stamp Act Congress or the merchants' boycott agreements against the Townshend Acts. Not until the First Continental Congress in 1774 did measures materialize that were strategically conscious, applied throughout the colonies, and equipped with political and economic sanctions for noncompliance.

Popular resistance to British authority, the third factor, could take many forms. For example, methods of protest and persuasion included demonstrations and parades on behalf of a resistance campaign, the development of political symbols such as the Liberty Tree, and the publication of papers naming supporters or opponents of the resistance. A mock funeral in Wilmington, North Carolina, in October 1765 illustrated many of these methods. The *North Carolina Gazette* reported that some 500 Wilmingtonians (out of a total population of 800–1,000) met to protest against the Stamp Act. They paraded an effigy of Liberty, symbolizing the rights of colonists under attack

by the British Parliament. The crowd put the effigy "into a Coffin, and marched in solemn procession with it to the Church-yard, a Drum in Mourning beating before them, and the Town Bells muffled ringing a doleful Knell at the same time." Just before the crowd interred the coffin, they checked the pulse of Liberty, and discovering she was still alive, "concluded the Evening with great Rejoicings, on finding that Liberty still had an Existence in the Colonies." The newspaper account observes "not the least Injury was offered to any Person." Here religious ritual, political protest, and mass action were conjoined within a nonviolent method of resistance. Urban political theater, such as this mock funeral, dramatized resistance issues, enlisted participation, and pressured royal officials. For onlookers, it raised awareness of the controversy and identified their neighbors and friends as supporters of the resistance. It encouraged all to support the resistance goals in a context that was not particularly threatening for the participants and witnesses, though the meaning of the episode was clear.[10]

Allied to popular resistance was the fourth factor—noncooperation. The varied methods of noncooperation all involved refusing to do what was ordered or expected, thereby breaking the habits of obedience and the bonds of cooperation. Social boycotts of individuals opposed to resistance are well documented. For example, the freemen of Essex, New Jersey, met in October 1765 to declare the Stamp Act unconstitutional and assert that they would

> detest, abhor, and hold in utmost contempt, all and every person or persons who shall meanly accept of any employment or office relating to the said Stamp Act, or shall take any shelter or advantage from the same . . . and they will have no communication with any such persons, nor to speak to them on any occasion, unless it be to inform them of their vileness.[11]

Similarly, a number of women in Providence and Bristol, Rhode Island, agreed not to accept the addresses of any man who favored the Stamp Act. Clearly, social boycotts exerted pressure on individuals, yet any offender who mended their ways was quickly restored to the good graces of the community.[12]

Economic forms of noncooperation provided more powerful sanctions. Organized campaigns of nonimportation of British goods imposed an economic cost on the British. Between October 31 and December 8, 1765, most merchants along the eastern seaboard cities boycotted British goods.

Nonconsumption of British goods also involved promotion of American-made items. In 1766 Thomas Hutchison, lieutenant-governor of Massachusetts, had to admit,

> When I first saw the proposals for lessening the consumption of English manufactures, I took them to be mere puffs. The scheme for laying aside

> mourning [English funeral wear] succeeded to my surprise, and scare anybody would now dare to wear black for the nearest relative . . . the humour for being clothed in homespun spreads every day not so much for economy as to convince the people of England how beneficial the Colonies have been to them.

In 1769 the students and president of the Baptist Rhode Island College (later Brown University) appeared at commencement dressed in American homespun, not imported English, formal gowns. So too, the colonialists expanded production of scythes, spades, wallpaper, and liquor rather than purchasing them from British merchants. Thus, even if the campaign's primary impact was political, another consequence was a fledgling move toward economic self-reliance.[13]

In 1769 an account in the *Boston Newsletter* described seventy-seven young women assembling at the house of the Reverend John Cleveland with their spinning wheels to make homespun yarn. When they finished, Cleveland observed how the women might recover to this country the full and free "enjoyment of all our rights, properties, and privileges . . . by living upon, as far as possible, only the produce of this country; and to be sure to lay aside the use of all foreign teas. Also by wearing as far as possible, only clothing of this country's manufacturing." Similarly, in Newport, Rhode Island, Congregational minister Ezra Stiles hosted ninety-two "Daughters of Liberty" who spent the day spinning yarn as their contribution to the resistance.[14]

A variation on these nonconsumption actions took place in Edenton, North Carolina, in October 1774 when fifty-one women signed this declaration: "We the Ladys of Edenton do hereby Solemnly Engage not to Conform to that Pernicious Custom of Drinking Tea, & that we the aforesaid Ladys will not promote ye wear of any Manufacture from England until such time that all Acts which tend to Enslave this our Native Country shall be Repealed." Even children got involved. When Susan Boudinot, the nine-year-old daughter of a New Jersey patriot, was offered a cup of tea while visiting the royal governor, she curtsied, raised the cup to her lips, and tossed the tea out the window.[15]

These various actions point to the significant involvement of women in civil resistance. The nature of the civil resistance created a gendered space for various forms of participation by women. This space could be private—the decision not to consume British goods in the household. It could also be public space—participating in spinning at a church or openly protesting British policy. Sometimes, as in Edenton, women were lampooned in the British press for supposedly stepping outside their prescribed gender roles. However, such a parody itself suggests that British observers took women's actions seriously.

Although absolute numbers are unknown, women played an essential role in many local campaigns. Within their culturally prescribed domestic spheres, women made the decisions about household and family purchases, therefore bringing about the success of boycott campaigns. When women ventured into the public arena—a move that contemporary gender conventions did not endorse—their actions not only expressed open approval for the goals of resistance, but also had the unintended consequences of subverting gender conventions. Nevertheless, women could justify actions such as spinning wool as remaining within their domestic sphere while choosing domestic over imported goods as simply shopping frugally. Participation in various aspects of the colonial resistance increased these women's awareness of the relevant political issues; it involved them with wider assemblages of fellow citizens and unintentionally challenged the prevailing gender conventions.

In addition to shunning British goods and substituting American-made counterparts, a late form of colonial noncooperation involved the refusal to export American raw materials such as lumber and naval stores. This plan was mandated by the Continental Association, but went into effect only after the war had started (September 1775) and thus was not tested in its own right.

Here then was the real work of civil resistance: it was carried out in villages and towns, in the countryside as well as the city, by forgotten patriots, female and male. These now nameless men and women spun, wove, and wore homespun cloth; united in the boycott of British goods; and encouraged their neighbors to join them and stand firm. Many came together in crowd actions and mass meetings to protest and served on or supported local resistance committees. They refused to obey the statutes and officers of the British Crown, which so recently had been the law of the land. It was these acts of resistance and noncooperation that struck most openly at the Crown's authority.

The fifth factor, development of parallel institutions, began with the refusal to use existing royal political, judicial, and legislative institutions as well as refusing to dissolve colonial assemblies or intercolonial bodies such as the Continental Congress. It could also involve settling legal cases in courts or clearing incoming or outgoing ships without the required stamps as in the Stamp Act campaign. Ultimately, it involved the creation of new political institutions, such as the Stamp Act Congress (1765), the Committees of Correspondence (1772–1775), and the First Continental Congress (1774–1775). These extralegal political bodies corresponded to extralegal judicial and legislative colonial organizations that also developed during the decade of resistance. If the Stamp Act Congress was ad hoc and dissolved itself, gradually these institutions became continuous and self-sustaining—with the

standing committees of correspondence and then later the First Continental Congress being recognized by colonists as fully functional American replacements for organs of British authority. Taken together, these new colonial political institutions embodied the parallel government that emerged most forcefully and visibly in 1774 and 1775.

This new American government, parallel in function to the British government, provided the basis for de facto independence and formed the foundation for new government once the country finally became independent. In fundamental ways, the decade of resistance contributed to this foundation through the politicization of American society. Politicization meant the increased recognition by merchants, lawyers, and others to increase their political participation. John Adams, Samuel Adams, Benjamin Franklin, John Hancock, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington all supported the resistance campaigns and went on to serve the new United States. Politicization also meant the growing awareness that this political sphere extended in crucial ways to London as much as it included America.

The ability of the American colonies to dispense with royal direction of their political institutions and, simultaneously, to develop replacement institutions to fulfill the functions of government represented a major political accomplishment of civil resistance and the beginning of American independence. Self-government in the colonies was not gained by the war, as is so often assumed; it was actually established much earlier. Nonviolent methods probed specific British imperial vulnerabilities. They challenged Britain on ideological grounds, proclaiming to an American, British, and international audience that the British were suppressing American liberty. They leveraged their particular economic power through campaigns of nonconsumption, nonimportation, and nonexportation directed at the British mercantile establishment. Finally, they undermined the social and political foundations of the imperial system in America by withdrawing cooperation from British institutions and authorities and replacing them with parallel American institutions.

A Shift in Strategy

Although Americans achieved substantial political accomplishments during their nonviolent struggle, these gains were eventually defended by military force. Examination of this shift in strategy, if only on a preliminary basis, sheds light on important issues. Some might argue that violence was used throughout the resistance campaign, and that the shift to military means was necessary if not inevitable. However, could it be that many American colonists understood what they had achieved by this point, but did not understand what could have been further achieved through continued nonviolent resistance?

During this decade of resistance, American colonists used many types of resistance. These did include violent actions, but they have been greatly overemphasized and were of questionable value in altering parliamentary policy between 1765 and 1775. The 1773 Boston Tea Party did not endanger physical safety. However, its destruction of property may have been counterproductive: if some people found it symbolically or emotionally satisfying, without doubt it infuriated the British government, which introduced the Coercive Acts. Tarring and feathering of opponents is often cited as an example of the colonial use of violence against persons. Yet fewer than a dozen cases of this actually occurred between 1765 and April 1775, usually involving customs informers and being seen as private grudges rather than elements of political resistance. In 1769 several Sons of Liberty protected the Loyalist James Murray from an angry Boston crowd: they called out "No violence, or you'll hurt the cause." Even Samuel Adams, often considered an advocate of violence, warned in 1774, "Nothing can ruin us but our violence." Consequently, it is clear that the civil resistance movement was overwhelmingly nonviolent. Examples of property destruction and still less personal violence played no important role in the three resistance campaigns.[16]

Did the colonists understand that they were employing a specific type of resistance, namely, nonviolent action? Certainly, they did not use a twenty-first-century vocabulary. Yet in 1767 John Dickinson realized that boycotts meant "withholding from Great Britain all the advantages she has been used to receiving from us,"[17] and many other historical records document conscious support for the programs of social, economic, and political noncooperation. One thing is clear—colonial leaders did not adopt this technique in order to remain morally pure or because they had a principled objection to the use of violence. Rather their commitment was to resist Crown authority effectively and their choice of technique was based on a strategic judgment of the most effective means of resistance. That they did not have a thorough understanding of the nature, dynamics, and scope of this technique is clear. So too is that they underestimated or misunderstood the gains that the nonviolent resistance had achieved.

Likewise, there was little or no strategic consideration given to the implications of the shift from nonviolent action to military force. For example, from 1765 to 1775, British merchants had often supported campaign goals of overturning various British taxes and duties. Indeed, it was a measure of success of noncooperation campaigns that British merchants used their influence on Parliament. A strategic strength of the American colonies was their economic importance to Britain, both as a market for goods and as a source of raw materials. The choice of nonviolent means facilitated accommodation to, if not acceptance of, colonial demands by significant elements in the British mercantile and political communities much more than violent colonial opposition would have allowed. The widespread effectiveness of

the nonimportation and nonconsumption movements during the Stamp Act campaign decreased British profits so much that these influential merchants complained to their parliamentary representatives and demanded policy change. With profits down, British workers were laid off, thus raising the specter of additional social and political trouble. In this context, Parliament's repeal of the Stamp Act is clearly attributable to these campaigns of American civil resistance, notwithstanding any face-saving statements to the contrary by British politicians.

Parallel attempts during the Townshend and Coercive Acts resistance campaigns also sought to pressure British merchants to influence Parliament. In each campaign other groups, such as Protestant Dissenters (non-Anglican Protestants), were also lobbied for their support. In such ways, the nonviolent resisters exerted important pressure on third parties.

Once military hostilities broke out, these efforts at third-party persuasion ceased to be effective. British mercantile encouragement eroded quickly once supporting the colonists became tantamount to sedition. Even in the early 1780s, when France had sided with the Americans and the British Army had suffered defeats, British calls for an end to the war aimed to cut their country's losses, not to concede the justice of the American cause. Moreover, the Second Continental Congress actively recruited several Europeans—Marquis de Lafayette, Johann DeKalb, Casimir Pulaski, Thaddeus Kosciusko, and Friedrich von Steuben—who drew on their experience to forge a military strategy. None of them were familiar with the decade of nonviolent resistance and its accomplishments; instead all had training in armed struggle. Their military appointments helped reinforce the shift from civil resistance to military action.

On the domestic front too, the shift in strategy had several implications. For example, when the Second Continental Congress decided to form an army, political decisionmaking moved from the popular assemblies and broad-based committees in each colony to a command structure more responsive to military exigencies. This realignment away from more popularly based decisionmaking certainly played a role in the conflicts over democracy in the postwar early American republic. Women, so vital to the success of boycott and other resistance campaigns, were now relegated to secondary roles of support for all-male armies. Finally, opponents of the colonial cause were treated differently. During the previous decade, colonists who disagreed with civil resistance were boycotted. While some were threatened, few were actually attacked. After the Battles of Lexington and Concord, fear of Loyalist opposition grew and some committees proposed violence against Loyalists to intimidate them into submission.

Also worthy of consideration are the effects of strategy shift on mobilization of the people. By its very nature civil resistance aims to enlist the participation of a large proportion of the population, people willing to act

even under the threat of repression. As already noted, this participation included men, women, and even children. Moreover, it was not only widespread, but also well organized. All the colonies involved in the First Continental Congress endorsed the provisions of the Continental Association with the exception of New York and, even there, local committees enforced nonimportation. Except in Georgia and the occupied city of Boston, David Ammerman notes, "purchases from Great Britain stopped entirely. The most outspoken critics of the measure [the Continental Association's call for noncooperation] were forced to admit that the boycott had the force of law throughout the colonies." Ammerman concludes that, because enforcement of the association was placed in the hands of local groups rather than provincial assemblies or congresses, "these committees became the regulatory agencies of the First Continental Congress." Lessons about organizing campaigns so as to maximize unity, increase participation, and reinforce timing had been learned from earlier campaigns. Here in the Continental Association, comprehensive and coordinated strategies of nonimportation and nonexportation carried out by dedicated, disciplined, and united men and women were widely and effectively enforced.[18]

Levels of participation dropped or changed dramatically once the strategy shifted to violence. Women and older men, having no place in armies, became tangential sources of support. The various strategic levels of resistance from individual through local committees and provincial congresses, up to the Continental Congress, were fundamentally weakened in favor of the military's demands. Once the war began, Robert Calhoon observes, approximately 50 percent of the colonists of European ancestry (including the Loyalist contingent) tried to avoid any involvement in the conflict or supported the British. Perhaps only 40 percent to 45 percent of the white populace actively supported the patriot cause, Calhoon concludes. Beyond that, while critics of civil resistance claim that some merchants did not observe the nonimportation agreements, Don Higginbotham's estimate of the desertion rate from the Continental Army at 20 percent suggests that armed resistance was more polarizing and weakened American social unity. Consequently, despite the nostalgic rhetoric about the minutemen and the Continental Army, surprisingly large numbers avoided and opposed participation or deserted once the strategy shifted to military struggle.[19]

To be sure, had the resistance remained nonviolent, further sacrifices would have been exacted. Though by 1775 morale was high and the resistance movement was well organized with competent leadership in colony and modes of communication between the colonies in place, confronting the British Army would have been daunting. At the same time, protracted occupation in the face of active nonviolent resistance would have been extremely costly for the Crown. Furthermore, it is doubtful that casualties from nonviolent resistance would have reached 4,435, the number of American military

deaths in the War for Independence. In short, the shift to military strategy had many disadvantages, both domestically and internationally. It had not been thought out strategically but rather reflected the emotions of the moment.[20]

Perhaps US citizens and others looking back at their national origins should ponder this alternative to the familiar narrative of military struggle. The result of the decade of American nonviolent resistance between 1765 and 1775 was de facto independence. Allegiances had shifted and the functions of government passed from royal to colonial institutions—and all this before the Battles of Lexington and Concord. Indeed, regarding the development of political and social institutions, one could even claim that the war achieved little that had not already been gained by the parallel governments.

These campaigns of civil resistance spanning ten years displayed impressive self-discipline, used largely improvised strategies until the very end, and achieved serious gains. They cultivated third-party support in Britain as well as neutralized domestic opponents without shedding blood. Their broadly democratic nature was matched by new extralegal political institutions that wrested control out of the hands of British authorities. Making legislative policy, enforcing judicial decisions, even collecting taxes in some cases was carried out by colonists on their own and outside the imperial orbit. Beyond that, although the campaigns were largely improvised, the colonists showed in the implementation of nonimportation and nonexportation as part of the Continental Association a conscious level of strategic planning. In hindsight, perhaps they were mistaken to delay the implementation of nonexportation; nevertheless, the very fact of deliberate strategic decisionmaking is significant. Finally, the tactics of the resistance campaign and the enforcement of their policies were carried out nonviolently—not as a matter of principled opposition to violence, but rather as a pragmatic response to the need to resist perceived injustice. That the participants in these successful nonviolent campaigns had so little prior training, that their leaders knew little of strategic precedents, and that their applications of nonviolent struggle were so often improvised make their accomplishments all the more remarkable.

Reasons for the Lack of Attention to Civil Resistance

In 2009 crowds celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Minute Man National Historical Park in Concord, Massachusetts, witnessing the reenactment of the Battles of Lexington and Concord, events described by the National Park Service as "the opening battle of the American Revolution."[21]

Why are these events of the war celebrated and the sacrifices of its participants eulogized while the decade of civil resistance is largely ignored? What is the relation of history to memory in this case? Americans are not

an innately violent people, despite the alarming levels of violence in American society, both historical and contemporary. Rather, it is because of cultural influences, social factors, and historical experience. Consequently, while scholarly debate shows no signs of achieving unanimity, several factors provide grounds for suggestive speculation.[22]

One reason for the lack of attention to the decade of civil resistance is simply ignorance. Thousands of school children in the United States are drilled on the sacrifices of soldiers. Few learn of the defeat of the Stamp Act by nonviolent resistance, the effects of the Continental Association, or the achievement of de facto political independence before the outbreak of the war.

Another more psychosocial factor is the emotional ethos associated with the dramatized, glamorized, and often antisepticized image of war versus the view that nonviolent resistance is submissive and passive. Put simplistically, soldiers fight and do things; nonviolent resisters just refuse to do things. US culture celebrates a connection between male honor and violence. But while the bandit, cowboy, and detective often employ violence, it usually is for a good cause and therefore is legitimated, just as going to war is sanctioned by supposedly legitimate ends. Gaining national independence is routinely taken as justifying violence and those involved in it regarded as heroic patriots. If Americans have a penchant for identifying the war for independence with the achievement of independence, John Adams's statement at the beginning of this chapter reminds us that not all narratives arrive at this conclusion.

Finally, there is the well-established use of violence in US history, and its subsequent cultural familiarity and acceptance—from white-Indian and white-black through agrarian and urban to vigilante violence. Add to this that nearly 200 million Americans today own firearms and it is clear that many Americans view violence as a crucial and appropriate means for securing their lives and property.

In such a situation, eulogizing past armed struggle and commemorating its participants becomes an all-too-familiar expression of US social logic. It is a construct, however, that can and needs to be challenged by a fuller appreciation of the historical record: not erasing the stories of nonviolent civil resistance from US collective memory, but recognizing their existence, significance, and power.

Notes

1. *The Patriot,* directed by Roland Emmerich (Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures, 2000); *Johnny Tremain,* directed by Robert Stevenson (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Productions, 1957).

2. John Adams to Dr. Jedediah Morse, November 29, 1815, *The Works of John Adams,* vol. 10, ed. Charles F. Adams (Boston: Little Brown, 1850–1856), 182. When not otherwise cited, this chapter draws on material documented in Walter H. Conser Jr., Ronald M. McCarthy, David J. Toscano, and Gene Sharp, eds., *Resistance, Politics, and the American Struggle for Independence, 1765–1775* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1986).

3. David Macpherson, *Annals of Commerce, Manufacturing, Fishing, and Navigation,* vol. 3 (London: Nicols and Sons, 1805), 564–585. By the beginning of the Second Continental Congress in 1775, even Georgia had overcome its misgivings and sent delegates to this interprovincial extralegal assembly.

4. This figure for income includes colonies that did not become part of the United States and where cooperation was greater (e.g., Grenada, the West Indies, Quebec, and Nova Scotia). See Lawrence Gipson, *British Empire Before the Revolution,* vol. 10 (New York: Knopf, 1961), 328, 391; Francis Bernard to Richard Jackson, August 23, 1765, "Bernard Papers," vol. 4, The Houghton Library, Harvard University, 19.

5. *Pennsylvania Gazette,* December 24, 1767; *Pennsylvania Gazette,* March 24, 1768.

6. George Washington to George Mason, April 5, 1769, in Kate Mason Rowland, *Life of George Mason, 1725–1792,* vol. 1 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1892), 139; George Mason to George Washington, April 5, 1769, in ibid., 141–142.

7. *Rivington's New York Gazetteer,* February 18, 1775.

8. Sir John Fortescue, ed., *The Correspondence of King George the Third,* vol. 3 (London: Macmillan, 1927–1928), 153.

9. See Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1965); and Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

10. William L. Saunders, ed., *Colonial and State Records of North Carolina,* vol. 7 (Raleigh: Trustees of the Public Libraries, 1886), 124.

11. *Newport Mercury,* November 18, 1765.

12. Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763–1775* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 77.

13. Thomas Hutchinson to Thomas Pownall, March 8, 1766, "Hutchison Correspondence," vol. 26, The Houghton Library, Harvard University, 200–206; Reuben A. Guild, *Early History of Brown University Including the Life, Times, and Correspondence of President Manning, 1756–1791* (Providence: Snow and Farnum, 1897), 82–87.

14. *Boston Newsletter,* July 6, 1769; Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic* (New York: Norton, 1986), 38.

15. Kerber, *Women of the Republic,* 39–41.

16. Bernhard Knollenberg, *The Growth of the American Revolution, 1765–1775* (New York: Free Press, 1975), 361, n. 64; Samuel Adams to James Warren, May 21, 1774, "Warren-Adams Letters," Massachusetts Historical Society Collections, vol. 7 (1917); Nina Moore Tiffany, ed., *The Letters of James Murray, Loyalist,* reprint ed. (Boston: Gregg Press, 1972 [1901]), 159–160.

17. John Dickinson, *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies* (New York: Outlook, 1903 [1767–1768]), 29–30.

18. See David Ammerman, "The Continental Association," in *Resistance, Politics, and the American Struggle for Independence, 1765–1775,* ed., Walter H. Conser Jr., Ronald M. McCarthy, David J. Toscano, and Gene Sharp (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1986), 246–247.

19. See Robert M. Calhoon, "Loyalism and Neutrality," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the American Revolution,* ed. Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991), 247; Don Higginbotham, "The War for Independence, After Saratoga," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the American Revolution,* ed. Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991), 317.

20. Ann Leeland and Maria-Jones Oboroceanu, *American War and Military Operations, Casualties: Lists and Statistics* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2009), 2.

21. See the Minute Man National Historical Park website, www.nps.gov/mima, accessed July 28, 2010.

22. For the following discussion I have drawn on several sources, notably Robert B. Toplin, *Unchallenged Violence: An American Ordeal* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975); Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A History* (New York: Free Press, 1996); David Courtwright, *Violent Land* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1996); Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strain of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Hugh Graham and Ted Roberts Gurr, eds., *Violence in America,* rev. ed. (London: Sage, 1979); Philip Cook and Jens Ludwig, "Guns in America: National Survey on Private Ownership and Use of Firearms," National Institute of Justice and US Department of Justice Research in Brief (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice; US Department of Justice, May 1979).

Appendix: Conflict Summaries

This appendix has been compiled by the book's editor, Maciej Bartkowski, based on the information presented in the corresponding chapters of the book. Cases are arranged alphabetically. (Any omissions in the tables are either of the editor's own making or the information was not available.)

Key

Method and Type of Nonviolent Action

Nonviolent intervention
- *Disruptive*
- *Creative*

Noncooperation
- *Political*
- *Economic*
- *Social*

Protest and persuasion

Length of the Campaign

Short: 1 day up to 4 weeks
Medium: 1 month up to 1 year
Long: More than 1 year

Level of Participation of People

Low: 1–100 people or less than 20 percent of the population
Medium: 100–1,000 people or between 20 percent and 50 percent of the population
High: More than 1,000 people or more than 50 percent of the population

United States

Main Campaigns	Action	Method/*Type*	Date	Length	Level of Participation	Direct Impact	Long-Term/Overall Impact of Civil Resistance
Campaign against the Stamp Act, 1765–1766	People hanged effigies of tax agents and confronted them at home	Protest and persuasion	1765–1766	Medium	High	Stamp officials throughout the 13 colonies had resigned their office	Collective expression of differences with Britain raised the political awareness of Americans Through civil resistance, people learned that they were a separate nation Civil resistance formed a sense of American identity Development of parallel institutions to the British government led to a de facto independence and laid the foundation for a new government of the United States
	Colonial legislatures' petitions against Stamp Act	Protest and persuasion	1765–1766	Medium		Articulated colonial grievances	
	Mock funeral of effigy of Liberty	Protest and persuasion	October 1765	Short	Medium	Dramatized resistance Enlisted participation Pressured royal officials Raised awareness and identified people as supporters of the resistance	
	Social and consumer boycotts against supporters of the act	Noncooperation/ *Social, Economic*	1765–1766	Medium	High	Widened opposition beyond legislative actions	
	Tax refusal	Noncooperation/ *Economic*	1765–1766	Medium	High	Broke habits of obedience to British authority	
	Nonconsumption of British goods	Noncooperation/ *Economic*	1765–1766	Medium	High	Promotion of American-made goods and economic self-reliance	
Campaign against the Stamp Act, 1765–1766	Nonimportation by merchants in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia	Noncooperation/ *Economic*	1765–1766	Medium	Medium	Stamp Act was to yield £60,000 a year, but it generated only £3,292 in early 1766, not even covering the cost of printing	Collective expression of differences with Britain raised the political awareness of Americans Through civil resistance, people learned that they were a separate nation Civil resistance formed a sense of American identity Development of parallel institutions to the British government led to a de facto independence and laid the foundation for a new government of the United States before the war broke out
	Newspapers ceased publication or defied the British Crown by continuing to publish without stamps	Noncooperation/ *Political*	1765–1766	Medium	Low	Effectively nullified the Stamp Act, but without bringing about its repeal	
	Lawyers did not use stamps while judges did not proceed without them	Noncooperation/ *Political*	1765–1766	Medium	Medium		
	Setting up and workings of Stamp Act Congress	Nonviolent intervention/ *Creative*	1765–1766	Medium	High	Coordinated intercolonial cooperation Helped produce a statement of colonial rights and limits of parliamentary authority Leveraged pressure on British merchants who insisted on repeal by British politicians Stamp Act repealed	
Campaign against the Townshend Acts, 1767–1768	Massachusetts House of Representatives distributed a Circular Letter to all colonial assemblies to petition the king for repeal of the Townshend Acts	Protest and persuasion	1767–1768	Medium	Medium	By the end of 1768, every colonial assembly had petitioned the king challenging Parliament's right to levy taxes on the colonies	
	Social boycott of those who did not participate in the nonconsumption campaign of British goods	Noncooperation/ *Social*	1767–1768	Medium	High	Renewed collective civil resistance to British authority	
	Local tailors charged less for work on American-made cloth, but extra for imported cloth	Nonviolent intervention/ *Creative, Disruptive*	1767–1768	Medium		Illustrated local expression of wider American resistance	
	Nonimportation agreement among merchants	Noncooperation/ *Economic*	1767–1768	Medium		Merchants who violated it or refused to enroll were boycotted and labeled as enemies of the country Townshend Acts, except the duty on tea, were repealed in April 1770	
	Setting up of Committees of Correspondence	Nonviolent intervention/ *Creative*	1770–1774	Long		They became fully functional American replacements for organs of British authority and embodied the parallel government	
Campaign against the Coercive Acts of 1774	The Boston Tea Party, dumping dutied tea into Boston harbor in defiance of the 1773 Tea Act	Nonviolent intervention/ *Disruptive*	December 16, 1773	Short	Medium	Britain enacted a series of measures known as the Coercive Acts, but they backfired and immediately prompted resistance	
	Resolutions articulating the colonies' rights and grievances	Protest and persuasion	September–October 1774	Long	High	Stated the shared issues and expressed a growing common identity of Americans	
	Nonimportation of British, Irish, and West Indian goods	Noncooperation/ *Economic*	October 20, 1774	Medium	High	Promotion of American-made goods and economic self-reliance	
	Formation and workings of the First Continental Congress	Nonviolent intervention/ *Creative*	September–October 1774			Adopted resolutions articulating the colonies' rights and grievances Enacted decision to stop imports from Britain, Ireland, and the West Indies	
	Threat of nonexportation of items such as lumber, naval stores, tobacco, and other raw materials	Protest and persuasion	October 1774			To be in force by September 10, 1775 Demonstrated other methods of resistance and potential for additional pressure on the British	
Campaign against the Coercive Acts of 1774	Convening extralegal provincial congresses	Nonviolent intervention/ *Creative*	1774 and 1775	Medium	Medium	Provincial congresses often assumed legislative and judicial functions in executing orders of the Continental Congress	Development of parallel institutions to the British government led to a de facto independence and laid the foundation for a new government of the United States before the war broke out
	Colonial noncooperation extended to all royal laws	Noncooperation/ *Political*	1775	Medium	High	Courts were closed Colonists refused to pay taxes Governors defied royal laws	