

THE

NATIONAL

ARCHIVES

# American Revolution: Early conflicts

Why did war break out between American colonists and British forces during 1775-6?

Key Stages 4-5 | Empire and Industry 1750-1850  
Lesson resource

Regulars drawn up in order. 3. A Detachment destroying the Provincial  
g on an East Hill in Concord. 6. The Court and Town House. 7. The  
CORD COMMON.—[FAC-SIMILE OF AN OLD ENGRAVING.]



# Introduction

The first battles of the American Revolution took place on the 18 and 19 April 1775, at Lexington and Concord near Boston in Massachusetts, in what later became known as a 'shot heard round the world'. Despite attempts at reconciliation by the colonists, conflict continued throughout 1775 and 1776.

This lesson explores the skirmishes that happened before the Declaration of Independence was issued on 4 July 1776. Use documents from The National Archives' collections to consider why war broke out in 1775 and why hostilities continued until the colonies declared independence from Great Britain.

## Suitable for:

KS 4 - 5

## Time period:

Empire and Industry  
1750-1850

## Connections to the Curriculum:

Key Stage 4:

Edexcel GCSE History:  
British America: Empire  
& Revolution 1713-83.

Key Stage 5:

AQA GCE History:  
The origins of the  
American Revolution,  
1760-1776  
Enforcing the Colonial  
Relationship, 1763-1774  
Ending the Colonial  
Relationship, 1774-1776

Edexcel GCE History:  
Britain: losing and  
gaining an empire,  
1763-1914: The loss of  
the American colonies,  
1770-83.

OCR GCE History:  
The American  
Revolution 1740-1796:  
Causes of the American  
Revolution.

# Contents

Introduction	Page 2
Contents	Page 3
Teachers' notes	Page 4
Background	Page 9
Tasks	Page 10
Source 1a	Page 13
Source 1b	Page 15
Source 1c	Page 17
Source 2a	Page 19
Source 2b	Page 22
Source 2c	Page 24
Source 3a	Page 26
Source 3b	Page 28
Source 3c	Page 30
Source 4a	Page 32
Source 4b	Page 34
Source 5	Page 36

## Teachers' notes

All documents are provided with transcripts with difficult terms defined in square brackets. Students can work through the questions individually or in pairs and report back to the class. Alternatively, teachers may want to use this lesson in two parts owing to the large number of sources. We would encourage teachers to ask students to explore other original records available online from the links in this lesson.

Finally, although this lesson is aimed at Key Stages 4/5, teachers could use these documents and provide their own questions and/or create simplified transcripts to use with younger students.

Sources 1a and 1b relate to American justifications for the outbreak of war. They were published by the Second Continental Congress, which met to discuss the escalating tensions with Great Britain. The 'Olive Branch Petition' was a direct attempt to ease these tensions, and the 'Declaration of the Causes and Necessity for Taking Up Arms' was issued alongside this, to explain more comprehensively why the colonists felt that they would have to resort to warfare. The document asserted that a series of ministerial actions, including ongoing taxation, the closure of colonial assemblies, and overriding of colonial courts of justice had rendered the colonists 'slaves', subject to the whims of Parliament despite having no representatives in the House of Commons. Thus, whilst taking up arms was a last resort, it was something that they felt compelled to do given ongoing failures to address their grievances. This suggests that the American Revolution was not inevitable, but rather a series of escalating crises in which there was opportunity to step back, but neither side wanted to be the first to back down.

It is also significant that these sources were addressed to the King. In the decade leading up to the Declaration of Independence, the colonists believed that George III was being manipulated by a cabal of conspiring ministers. However, his lack of action and ultimate description of the colonies as being 'in rebellion' led them to believe that he had been corrupted, and that there was no alternative to independence.

The Olive Branch Petition was penned by two great intellectual minds of the Revolution: Thomas Jefferson and John Dickinson. Both men played significant roles in articulating colonial grievances to the British, including Jefferson's *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* and Dickinson's *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania*. This reveals the importance of intellectuals in the push towards Revolution. In addition, documents like those issued by the Continental Congress were circulated throughout the colonies in newspapers. The circulation of print was key to the spread of news. It allowed both the literate and non-literate public to engage in politics, as articles were often read aloud in taverns and coffee houses.

Finally, George III's proclamation was issued the following month, in response to the earlier documents. This officially described the colonists as in rebellion, allowing the British soldiers to formally oppose them as rebels, rather than subjects. The colonists themselves perceived this as a declaration of war. They realised that the King would not listen to their requests for redress. This is significant, as prior to 1775 many colonial supplications had been addressed to the King, requesting redress from the actions of a corrupt Parliament. Instead, once they saw George III as the head rather than victim of this British conspiracy, the only solution was complete independence from Great Britain.

## Teachers' notes

The terrain of the American continent was difficult for the British soldiers to navigate. The American local militia however, knew the land, and therefore could hide in woodland, mountainous areas, or even around plantations. The map (source 2a) shows how the British perceived the area around Boston, specifically during the battles at Lexington and Concord. It depicts militiamen firing behind rocks and walls, surrounding the British soldiers, and reflects the view that the British were outnumbered and overwhelmed. In addition, the areas around Boston are spread out, reflecting the rural terrain that the soldiers had to traverse between encampments, leading to both fatigue and the potential to be intercepted by the militias who knew the area better.

The difficulties of fighting local militia are further reflected in source 2b, where a British commander argues that it was against common sense to try and conquer a continent against the wishes of its inhabitants. Thomas Gage's description of the "Strong Armys attacking in various Quarters" in source 2c reflects the important role that local militias played in supporting George Washington's Continental army. Knowing local areas well, the militias were able to quickly surround British forces, divide them, or attack at close quarters. They could easily tire the soldiers out from the ongoing warfare.

The letter sources 3a, 3b & 3c reflect on the tactics used by the colonists, 4a & 4b reflect British tactics, and source 5 response to these tactics.

Sources 3a and 3b reveal the British strategy through Thomas Gage's responses to the battles at Lexington and Concord and the Battle of Bunker Hill. As Commander-in-Chief of North America, Gage was responsible for the British soldiers present in the colonies. In source 3a, Gage writes to the Earl of Dartmouth, shortly after the British narrowly defeat local militias at Lexington and Concord. This source explains how the outbreak of conflict began between soldiers and militias over ammunitions. Here, Gage depicts the fight as instigated by the militias, although there is no agreement over who fired the first shot and complains that the troops were "attacked from all quarters". He tries to blame the difficulties on the fatigue of the soldiers, rather than the strength of the local militias. The final passage reveals that these early battles angered the colonists, encouraging them to continue fighting against the British. Students could link these arguments to source 2a, which shows a physical representation of Gage's arguments in map form.

Source 3b is a letter written by Gage, two months later, this time following the British attack on Breed's Hill, now known as the 'Battle of Bunker Hill'. Here, Gage reflects on the strength and organisation of the colonial militias, recognising that the British underestimated them by describing them as a mere "despicable Rabble". Instead, he notes that they know how to make best use of the terrain and have far more spirit than they did when fighting for the British in the Seven Years' War. Believing that they were fighting for their own rights and liberties, rather than on behalf of the Mother Country, this battle was far closer to home, emotionally and physically, for many colonists.

Sources 3c and 4a are letters exchanged between Josiah Martin, Governor of North Carolina, and the Earl of Dartmouth, Secretary of State for the Colonies, and reflect the conduct of the war in the Southern colonies. Source 3c reveals the perspective of a colonial officer: the Governor of North Carolina. In this source, Josiah Martin discusses the early fear that the colonists were losing the war.

## Teachers' notes

They had hoped that boycotts would lead British merchants and manufacturers to place pressure on the administration to address American grievances, but this had not been the case. Furthermore, the source also shows us that the British demanded unconditional surrender from the colonists. Nevertheless, the Americans themselves were adamant that they would not surrender, and Martin states that anyone who assumed the victory would be easy had been led astray by "profound dissimulation and falsehood". Such language reflects ongoing fears of conspiracies in London, whether in favour of the British or the Americans.

Source 4a then reflects the significance of the southern colonies to Britain's overall war effort. The British had assumed that most colonists in the South remained loyal to them, and therefore concentrating their forces there would support their war effort as they would be greeted more warmly by Southern colonists. However, as we can see in the source, despite many loyalists, they underestimated the patriotism of the South. Many did in fact rebel, undermining what became known as Britain's 'Southern Strategy'.

This document also reveals the importance of commanders on the ground to the war effort. Given the distance between Great Britain and her colonies, and the slow speed of communications across the Atlantic Ocean, the Colonial Office relied heavily on officers in place in the colonies. Hence, Dartmouth emphasises the support given to General Gage and Admiral Graves in "all such operations as they may think proper".

Source 4b is significant in revealing the role the enslaved played in the American Revolution. The British had been struggling in the South, with less support than they had initially hoped for. Therefore, John Dunmore's Proclamation aimed to gain support amongst the enslaved by offering their freedom if they joined the British Army. It was hoped that this would undermine the Patriots' war effort in the south by depriving them of their labourers. However, whilst a relatively small number joined his regiment, this proclamation had a much broader impact in encouraging them to seek safety behind British lines. It also frustrated southern enslavers and intensified their anti-British sentiments.

Finally, Source 5 explores the reception of the American Revolutionary War in Britain. It is a satirical print by Mary and Matthias Darly. It presents a woman with a 'high roll' hairstyle, worn by wealthy British and American women. The flags show a goose, monkey, and two women, perhaps criticising the luxury and opulence of Atlantic high culture. Below the flags are three redouts [forts], on which troops are fighting. It is not easy to determine which side is British or American, perhaps reflecting notions of the conflict as a 'civil war' between two groups who both saw themselves as Englishmen. Moreover, the Americans themselves were divided on the war, with 'Tories' remaining loyal to the British whilst the 'Patriots' rebelled. In addition, the fact that the troops are firing on each other might also reflect the impractical and unsustainable nature of the war, and the constant stalemate between both sides. It reflects a critical attitude towards the Revolution, including the British war effort.

The source is also important for what it tells us about women. Whilst not allowed to intervene directly in politics, as voters or representatives, they were still able to comment on the political

## Teachers' notes

events of the day. Whether through art, as Mary Daryl did, or through plays, like the American Mary Otis Warren or even the wives responsible for coordinating the boycotts against goods like tea or wool in the colonies, women were important parts of the Revolution, on both the British and American sides.

## Sources

Banner image: The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, The New York Public Library. "The British troops on Concord Common." The New York Public Library Digital Collections. 1777 - 1890. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47da-21b0-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

Source 1a: Extracts from the Olive Branch Petition, 5 July 1775 issued 8 June, Catalogue ref: CO 5/76 f.253

Source 1b: Extracts from a 'Declaration agreed to by the General Congress in Philadelphia', on the 6 July 1775. Catalogue ref: CO 5/992 f161-162.

Source 1c: Extract from a proclamation issued by King George III on the 23 August 1775, Catalogue ref: Catalogue ref: CO 5/993 f.7

Source 2a: Map showing 'A plan of the town and harbour of Boston', John De Costa, Charles Hall, 1775. Credit: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Source 2b: Extract from a letter from Edward Harvey to John Irwin, 30th June 1775, Catalogue ref: WO 3/5 p.37

Source 2c: Extract from a letter from General Thomas Gage, Commander-in-Chief, North America to the Earl of Dartmouth, 25th June 1775, Catalogue ref: CO 5/92 f.187d.

Source 3a: Extracts from a letter from General Thomas Gage, Commander-in-Chief, North America to the Earl of Dartmouth, 22 April 1775, Catalogue ref: CO 5/92 f134-135.

Source 3b: Extracts from a letter from General Thomas Gage, Commander-in-Chief, North America to the Earl of Dartmouth, 25 June 1775. Catalogue ref: CO 5/92 f.187

Source 3c: Extracts from a letter from Governor Josiah Martin to the Earl of Dartmouth, at Fort Johnson in North Carolina, 12 November 1775, Catalogue ref: CO 5/330 f.116-117.

Source 4a: Extracts from a letter from the Earl of Dartmouth to Josiah Martin, 5 July 1775. Catalogue ref: CO 5/318 f110-112.

## Teachers' notes

Source 4b: Proclamation by John Earl of Dunmore, Lieutenant and Governor General of the Colony of Virginia, 7 November 1775, Catalogue ref: CO 5/1353 f.336

Source 5: Satirical print entitled 'Bunkers Hill or America's head dress' by Mary and Matthias Darly, Published: 39 Strand, London, 19 April 1776. Credit: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.



## Background

Following the introduction of the Intolerable Acts in 1774, representatives of each of the colonies assembled in Philadelphia in what became known as the Continental Congress to debate how best to respond to British actions. They suggested non-importation agreements to pressure the British into repealing the legislation.

At the same time as their representatives were attempting a peaceful resolution, colonists across the continent were also gathering arms and ammunition in anticipation of an escalation of the conflict. It was in Massachusetts that these tensions first descended into open fighting. The Intolerable Acts of 1774 had dissolved the Massachusetts Assembly and led to an increase in soldiers stationed in the colony, which had caused ongoing friction between the British soldiers and the American inhabitants. The colony was a powder keg ready to explode.

The British saw the gathering of munitions as a direct threat to the preservation of order. On the 18 April 1775, 800 British soldiers moved from Boston to destroy a supply of munitions being held at Concord. However, they were blocked on the way by the Lexington militia. Somewhere in the crowd, the first shot was fired. This encouraged British soldiers to open fire on the Lexington militia, pushing through the crowd and ultimately destroying the munitions at Concord. However, they faced further attacks on their return to Boston, and required reinforcements from a relief column close by.

After news of these skirmishes at Lexington and Concord, colonists across New England moved to besiege Boston and help protect the harbour from British occupation. On 17 June 1775, British soldiers attacked those colonists that had occupied a hill overlooking the city. Whilst they successfully dispersed the militias, they suffered significant casualties in what became known as the Battle of Bunker Hill, creating concerns that the war would not be an easy victory. Whilst certainly the site of many of the early conflicts, the fighting was not exclusive to Massachusetts: in May, rebels had captured Fort Ticonderoga in New York, and they pushed forward into Quebec to put pressure on the British forces.

Much like the first meeting of delegates in 1774, however, the Second Continental Congress, convening from May 1775, attempted to pursue peaceable methods even after fighting broke out. On the 5 July, they signed the 'Olive Branch Petition', in a last attempt to prevent war and assure George III that they remained his loyal subjects. This was accompanied by a 'Declaration of the Causes and Necessity for Taking Up Arms', which justified to a broader audience the need for armed resistance. However, this was met with a declaration by George III on 23 August, asserting that the colonies were in open rebellion and therefore no longer protected as British subjects. The colonists realised that reconciliation would not be possible and began to move closer to independence.

# Tasks

## Task 1

Source 1a: Extracts from the Olive Branch Petition, 5 July 1775 issued 8 June, Catalogue ref: CO 5/76 f.253

- What justification do the colonists have for taking up arms against the British?
- Comment on the language used in the document by colonists to justify their position.
- Why do you think the colonists issued this petition to George III?
- What is the significance of addressing it directly to the King?
- Why do you think this source is now held in the Colonial Office records?

Source 1b: Extracts from a 'Declaration agreed to by the General Congress in Philadelphia', on the 6 July 1775. This established "the Causes and Necessity of their taking up Arms". It was printed in a New Jersey newspaper on the 2 August 1775. Catalogue ref: CO 5/992 f161-162.

- What British actions did the Americans see as increasing the conflict?
- Why did the rebels stop petitioning to try and change their situation?
- Look at the third extract of the declaration. What kind of resolution did the colonists hope for at this stage?
- Why is it significant that this declaration is published in a newspaper?
- What can we learn about resistance to Britain from different colonies inferred by this source?

Source 1c: Extract from a proclamation issued by King George III on the 23 August 1775, Catalogue ref: CO 5/993 f.7

- Explain the difference between rebellion and sedition.
- Why do you think George III issued this proclamation?
- Why was the American Revolution seen as such a threat?
- How did the British state explain that so many American colonists rebelled?
- Discuss how this proclamation may have further provoked the colonists.

## Task 2

Source 2a: Map showing 'A plan of the town and harbour of Boston', John De Costa, Charles Hall, 1775. Credit: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

- What does the map suggest about the physical environment in which the Revolution was fought?
- How could this environment help colonial resistance to the British?
- What does this reveal about British attitudes towards the battles at Lexington and Concord?
- What use did maps serve in the British military effort do you think?

## Tasks

Source 2b: Extract from a letter from Edward Harvey to John Irwin, 30 June 1775. Catalogue ref: WO 3/5 p.37

- What does this letter infer about the attitude of British soldiers towards war in America?
- Why do you think it was difficult for a land force to conquer the American continent? [Refer to Sources 2a & 4 in your answer]
- John Irwin was the Commander in Chief in Ireland (1775-82). What does this reveal about communication networks between British territories in the late eighteenth-century?

Source 2c: Extract from a letter from General Thomas Gage, Commander-in-Chief, North America to the Earl of Dartmouth, 25 June 1775, Catalogue ref: CO 5/92 f.187d.

- What does this tell us about British tactics during the siege of Boston [19 April 1775 to 17 March 1776]?
- How did they respond to the difficult terrain presented in the map, Source 2a?
- What purpose would Thomas Gage have in writing this letter to the Earl of Dartmouth?

## Task 3

Source 3a: Extracts from a letter from General Thomas Gage, Commander-in-Chief, North America to the Earl of Dartmouth, 22 April 1775, Catalogue ref: CO 5/92 f134-135.

- What does this letter tell us about the causes of the early skirmishes of the Revolution?
- What can we learn about British thinking about early colonial resistance?
- What does this source infer about military tactics on both sides in the early months of the war?
- Look at the lesson illustration at the top of the page. Explain how it supports information provided by this letter from General Gage to Lord Dartmouth about events at Concord.

Source 3b: Extracts from a letter from General Thomas Gage, Commander-in-Chief, North America to the Earl of Dartmouth, 25 June 1775. Catalogue ref: CO 5/92 f.187

- What does this letter infer about stereotypes the British applied to the rebels?
- What can we conclude about the composition of the colonial armies?
- What strategies did the colonial forces use to resist the British?
- Why do you think the rebels showed more "Attention and Perseverance" than in the Seven Years' War?
- What reasons could explain why the Americans were more successful than the British expected?

Source 3c: Extracts from a letter from Governor Josiah Martin to the Earl of Dartmouth, at Fort Johnson in North Carolina, 12 November 1775 regarding 'difficulties with communications, land bought illegally from the Cherokees and land granted to new arrivals from Scotland '. Catalogue ref: CO 5/330 f.116-117.

# Tasks

- What do these extracts infer about the attitudes of colonial governors to the American Revolution?
- Why do you think the rebels underestimated how long the war would take?
- What can we learn about British terms for the end of the war?

## Task 4

Source 4a: Extracts from a letter from the Earl of Dartmouth to Josiah Martin, 5 July 1775. Catalogue ref: CO 5/318 f110-112.

- What does this letter reveal about Britain's strategy towards the Southern colonies during the American Revolution?
- Why do you think the British saw the Southern colonies as less likely to rebel than those in the North?
- What does this source infer about the role played by British commanders in directing the war effort?
- How does the language used in this source inform our understanding about British perceptions of the conflict?

Source 4b: Proclamation by John Earl of Dunmore, Lieutenant and Governor General of the Colony of Virginia, 7 November 1775, Catalogue ref: CO 5/1353 f.336

- Why has the Governor General of the Colony of Virginia published this proclamation?
- Comment on the language and tone of this proclamation.
- What does the source infer about British strategy in Virginia?
- Why did the British feel the need to appeal to the enslaved?
- Why do you think the enslaved and indentured servants might have joined the British side?
- How do you think Southern enslavers responded to this?

## Task 5

Source 5: Satirical print entitled 'Bunkers Hill or America's head dress' by Mary and Matthias Darly, Published: 39 Strand, London, 19 April 1776. Credit: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

- What does the cartoon reveal about British attitudes towards the war in America?
- What visual techniques are used in the cartoon to communicate these ideas?
- What does the source infer about the role of women in political commentary or as subjects of political satire during the eighteenth-century?
- What does this cartoon reveal about cultural life during the reign of George III?



**Source 1a: Extracts from the Olive Branch Petition, 5 July 1775  
issued 8 June. Catalogue Ref: CO 5/76 f.253**

Your Majesty's ministers persevering in their  
measures and proceeding to open hostilities for enforcing them,  
have compelled us to arm in our own defence, and have en-  
gaged us in a controversy so peculiarly abhorrent to the  
affections of your still faithful colonists, that when we con-  
sider whom we must oppose in this contest, and if it continues,  
what may be the consequences, our own particular misfor-  
tunes are accounted by us, only as parts of our distresses.

## Transcript: Source 1a

Following the outbreak of hostilities at Lexington and Concord in June 1775, the Second Continental Congress assembled to debate how best to respond to ongoing British hostilities. In July, they issued two documents, addressed to King George III of Great Britain. Firstly, on 5 July, they signed the Olive Branch Petition to prevent the growing hostilities and show George III that they were still loyal. This was sent to the King on 8 July. On 6 July they also issued a Declaration of Rights and Grievances, justifying their reasons for taking up arms against the British and outlining the grievances that they wanted to be addressed. The King did not respond directly to these petitions, but issued his own proclamation in August, criticising the colonists for their rebellion and treason. This led them to believe that there was no potential for reconciliation, and ultimately independence became the only course of action.

### Transcript

Your Majesty's Ministers, persevering in their measures, and proceeding to open hostilities for enforcing them, have compelled us to arm in our own defence, and have engaged us in a controversy so peculiarly abhorrent [strongly objected] to the affections of your still faithful Colonists, that when we consider whom we must oppose in this contest, and if it continues, what may be the consequences, our own particular misfortunes are accounted by us only as parts of our distress.



**Source 1b: Extracts from a 'Declaration agreed to by the General Congress in Philadelphia', 6 July 1775. Catalogue Ref: CO 5/992 f161-162.**

us. We for ten years incessantly and ineffectually besieged the Throne as supplicants; we reasoned, we remonstrated with parliament in the most mild and decent language. But Administration sensible that we should regard these oppressive measures as freemen ought to do, sent over fleets and armies to enforce them.

also addressed our fellow subjects of Great-Britain. We have pursued every temperate, every respectful measure, we have even proceeded to break off our commercial intercourse with our fellow subjects, as the last peaceable admonition, that our attachment to no nation upon earth should supplant our attachment to liberty — This, we flattered ourselves, was the ultimate step of the controversy: But subsequent events have shewn, how vain was this hope of finding moderation in our enemies.

Let this declaration should disquiet the minds of our friends and fellow subjects in any part of the empire, we assure them, that we mean not to dissolve that Union which has so long and so happily subsisted between us, and which we sincerely wish to see restored.

## Transcript: Source 1b

We for ten years incessantly and ineffectually besieged the Throne as supplicants [one who petitions]; we reasoned, we remonstrated [pleaded in protest] with parliament in the most mild and decent language. But Administration sensible that we should regard these oppressive measures as freemen ought to do, sent over fleets and armies to enforce them.

...

We have pursued every temperate [reasonable], every respectful measure, we have even proceeded to break off our commercial intercourse with our fellow subjects, as the least peaceable admonition [warning], that our attachment to no nation upon earth should supplant our attachment to liberty. This, we flattered ourselves, was the ultimate step of the controversy: But subsequent events have shewn, how vain was this hope of finding moderation in our enemies.

...

Lest this declaration should disquiet [upset] the minds of our friends and fellow subjects in any part of the empire, we assure them, that we mean not to dissolve that Union which has so long and so happily subsisted between us, and which we sincerely wish to see restored.

...



Source 1c: Extract from a proclamation issued by King George III on the 23 August 1775. Catalogue Ref: CO 5/993 f.7

BY THE KING  
A PROCLAMATION,  
For suppressing Rebellion and Sedition.

GEORGE R.

WHEREAS many of our Subjects in divers Parts of our Colonies and Plantations in *North-America*, misled by dangerous and ill-designing Men, and forgetting the Allegiance which they owe to the Power that has protected and sustained them, after various disorderly Acts committed in Disturbance of the publick Peace, to the Obstruction of lawful Commerce, and to the Oppression of our loyal Subjects carrying on the same, have at length proceeded to an open and avowed Rebellion, by arraying themselves in hostile Manner to withstand the Execution of the Law, and traitorously preparing, ordering, and levying War against Us;

## Transcript: Source 1c

...

BY THE KING

A PROCLAMATION,

For suppressing Rebellion and Sedition.

WHEREAS many of our Subjects in divers Parts of our Colonies and Plantations in North-America, misled by dangerous and ill-designing Men, and forgetting the Allegiance which they owe to the Power that has protected and sustained them, after various disorderly Acts committed in Disturbance of the publick Peace, to the Obstruction of lawful Commerce, and to the Oppression of our loyal Subjects carrying on the same, have at length proceeded to an open and avowed Rebellion, by arraying themselves in hostile Manner to withstand the Execution of the Law, and traitorously preparing, ordering, and levying War against Us.

...



Credit: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.



## Transcript: Source 2a

The American Revolution was fought across many different terrains. In the early battles, guerrilla warfare was used, with the colonists taking advantage of the fact that they knew their way around the hilly, rough terrain of the countryside. This took the British by surprise, making it far more difficult to suppress the rebellion than initially expected.

### Image description

The map shows the Atlantic coastline featuring the town and harbour of Boston. The harbour contains various small islands. The coastal land has rivers, and hills. The road from Boston to Concord is shown. The British troops and the colonists are drawn in position holding muskets and there are also encampments of both armies with cannons in and about Boston. There is a key with all the locations shown on the map which is entitled: 'A plan of the town and harbour of Boston and the country adjacent with the road from Boston to Concord, shewing the place of the late engagement between the King's troops & the provincials, together with the several encampments of both armies in & about Boston. Taken from an actual survey. Humbly inscribed to Richard Wentworth Esquire, Member of Parliament for Stafford by his most Obedient Servant J. De Costa.'

### Transcript

A plan of the town and harbour of Boston and the country adjacent with the road from Boston to Concord, shewing the place of the late engagement between the King's troops & the provincials, together with the several encampments of both armies in & about Boston. Taken from an actual survey. Humbly inscribed to Richard Wentworth Esquire, Member of Parliament for Stafford by his most Obedient Servant J. De Costa.

### References

1. The Nautilus Man of War lying above Charles Town Ferry 400 yards to Boston.
2. The Lively Man of War [powerful warship]
3. Men of War before Boston
4. General Gage's Camp on the Common
5. Bacon Hill
6. Fort Hill
7. Copp's Hill
8. General Gages' Line on Boston Neck
9. The Fortification
10. South Battery [unit of artillery]
11. North Battery
12. Provincial Battery gained by Kings Troops in the Battle 17 of June 1775
13. Bunkers Hill at Charles Town
14. School Hill at Charles Town
15. Stores & cannon destroyed by Kings troops
16. The Schooner [sailboat] burnt at Noddles Island by General Putman



## Transcript: Source 2a (cont.)

- 17. Watch Boat from the Men of War
- 18. General Thomas' lines on Boston Neck
- 19. Mill Pond

London Published as the Act directs July 29, 1775, by J. De Costa Red Cross Street, Southwark.

Source 2b: Extract from a letter from Edward Harvey to John Irwin,  
30 June 1775. Catalogue Ref: WO 3/5 p.37

25 37  
That attempting to conquer A. Internally by our F<sup>d</sup> Force, is as  
wild an Idea, as ever contrived Com. Sense will see in the end  
Apparent. — Advice — See E. H.  
London 30. June 1775.

## Transcript: Source 2b

That attempting to conquer A[merica] Internally by our L[an]d Force is as wild an Idea as ever controverted [denied] Comm. [common] Sense will be in the end apparent.

Adieu [goodbye] & etc. E.H. [Edward Harvey]

London 30th June 1775.

Source 2c: Extract from a letter from General Thomas Gage to the Earl of Dartmouth, 25 June 1775. Catalogue Ref: CO 5/92 f.187d

Your Lordship will perceive that the conquest of this country is not easy, and can be effected only by time and perseverance, and strong armies attacking in various quarters, and dividing their forces, confining your operations on this side only is attacking in the strongest part, and you have to cope with vast numbers.



## Transcript: Source 2c

Your Lordship will perceive that the conquest of this country is not easy, and can be effected [affected] only by Time and Perseverance, and Strong Armys [armies] attacking in various Quarters, and dividing their Forces. Confining your operations on this Side only is attaching in the strongest part, and you have to cope with vast numbers.

### Source 3a: Extracts from a letter from General Thomas Gage to the Earl of Dartmouth, 22 April 1775. Catalogue Ref: CO 5/92 f134-135

I am to acquaint your Lordship that having received Intelligence of a large quantity of military stores being collected at Concord, for the avowed Purpose of supplying a Body of Troops to act in opposition to His Majesty's Government, I got the Grenadiers and Light Infantry out of Town under the command of Lieu<sup>t</sup>. Col<sup>l</sup>. Smith of the 10<sup>th</sup> Reg<sup>t</sup> and Major Pitcairne of the Marines with as much secrecy as possible, <sup>on the 18<sup>th</sup> at night</sup> and with orders to destroy the <sup>said</sup> military stores, and supported them the next morning by eight companies of the 4<sup>th</sup>, the same number of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 44<sup>th</sup> and Marines, under the command of Lord Percy.

ble Earl of Dartmouth.

the firing of alarm guns and ringing of Bells that the march of Lieutenant Colonel Smith was discovered, and he was opposed by a Body of men within six miles of Concord, some few of whom first began to fire upon his advanced <sup>company</sup>, which brought on a fire from the troops that dispersed the Body opposed to them, and they proceeded to Concord where they destroyed all the military stores they could find, on the return of the troops they were attacked from all quarters where any cover was to be found from whence it was practicable to annoy them, and they were so fatigued with their march that it was with difficulty they could keep out their flanking parties to remove the enemy to a distance so that they were at length a good deal pressed. Lord Percy

Great. The whole Country was assembled in Arms with surprising Expedition, and several Thousands are now assembled about this Town threatening an attack, and getting up Artillery. And we are very busy in making Preparations to oppose them.

## Transcript: Source 3a

From 18 and 19 April 1775, the battles of Lexington and Concord broke out, which were the first clashes between British and American fighters in the War of Independence. The British attempted to disperse Massachusetts militiamen who had assembled around Boston to protect the harbour from being seized. For the British, Boston with its access to the sea was essential for the re-supply of men and munitions however difficult, by the threat of American ships.

### Transcript

I am to acquaint your lordship that having received intelligence of a large quantity of military stores being collected at Concord, for the avowed purpose of supplying a body of troops to act in opposition to his Majesty's government, I got the grenadiers and light infantry out of town under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Smith of the 10th Regiment, and Major Pitcairne of the marines, with as much secrecy as possible, on the 18th at night, and with orders to destroy the said military stores; and supported them the next morning by eight companies of the 4th, the same number of the 23rd, 47th, and marines, under the command of Lord Percy."

...

It appears from the firing of alarm guns and ringing of bells that the march of Lieutenant-Colonel Smith was discovered, and he was opposed by a body of men within six miles of Concord, some few of whom first began to fire upon his advanced companies which brought on a fire from the troops that dispersed the body opposed to them; and they proceeded to Concord, where they destroyed all the military stores they could find. On the return of the troops they were attacked from all quarters where any cover was to be found, from whence it was practicable to annoy them, and they were so fatigued with their march that it was with difficulty they could keep out their flanking parties to remove the enemy to a distance, so that they were at length a good deal pressed.

...

The loss sustained by those who attacked is said to be great. The whole country was assembled in arms with surprising expedition, and several thousand are now assembled about this town, threatening an attack and getting up artillery. And we are very busy in making preparations to oppose them.

...



**Source 3b: Extracts from a letter from General Thomas Gage to the Earl of Dartmouth, 25 June 1775. Catalogue Ref: CO 5/92 f.187**

The Number of the killed and wounded is greater than our Force can afford to lose, the officers who were obliged to exert themselves have suffered very much, and we have lost some extraordinary good officers. The Troops we have had shew that the Rebels are not the despicable Rabble too many have supposed them to be, and I find it owing to a military spirit encouraged amongst them for a few years past, joined with an uncommon Degree of Zeal and Enthusiasm that they are otherwise. Wherever they find cover they make a good stand, and the Country, naturally strong, affords it them, and they are taught to assist its natural strength by Art, for they entrench and raise Batteries.

In all their wars against the French they never shewed so much Conduct Attention and Perseverance as they do now.

## Transcript: Source 3b

The number of the killed and wounded is greater than our force can afford to lose, the officers who are obliged to exert themselves have suffered very much and have lost some extraordinary good officers. The Tryals [trials] we have had shew [show] that the Rebels are not the despicable Rabble too many have supposed them to be and I find it owing to a military spirit encouraged amongst them for a few years past, joined with an uncommon Degree of Zeal and Enthusiasm that they are otherwise. Wherever they find cover they make a good stand, and the country, naturally strong, affords it them, and they are taught to assist its natural strength by art, for they entrench and raise Batterys. [tactical units of artillery]

...

In all their wars against the French they never shewed so much Conduct Attention and Perseverance as they do now.

...



### Source 3c: Extracts from a letter from Governor Josiah Martin to the Earl of Dartmouth, 12 November 1775. Catalogue Ref: CO 5/330 f.116-117

I have heard  
that one of the principal and most  
guilty of the Rebels here has  
lately declared he never expected to see  
Matters in the present state, that  
the Americans' hopes of their  
opposition to the Claims of  
Parliament proving successful  
were formed upon the belief

that Britain would recede  
from her pretensions on some  
Expediency arising out of the  
Abridgment of her Commerce, the  
Grievances of her Manufacturers,  
Her Averseness to Rigor towards  
the Colonies, or from the discontents  
caited in her own bosom by  
the Partizans of America or  
the prevalence of Opposition in  
Parliament,

America after all their  
boasting was in no Condition  
to wage War against the Power  
of Britain and that he would  
gladly for his part sacrifice  
four fifths of his Fortune to  
bring about an Accommodation.  
This, my Lord, however was the  
Language of a most unprincipled  
Man of notorious & profound  
dissimulation & falsehood and  
held before an Officer in the  
King's service possibly only with  
design to beguile and deceive

no professions  
should be regarded, or Advances  
received, other than unconditioned  
submission, and that any  
certain passages of their desires  
of Reconciliation should in no  
sort abate the Vigour of Britain's  
Resolutions and preparations to  
assert her Supreme Authority

## Transcript: Source 3c

...

I have heard that one of the principal and most guilty of the Rebels here has lately declared he never expected to see matters in this present state, that the Americans' hopes of their opposition to the claims of Parliament proving successful were formed upon the belief that Britain would recede [retreat] from her pretensions [claims] on some expediency [necessity] arising out of the abridgement [lessening] of her Commerce [trade] the clamours of her Manufacturers her aversion to rigour towards the Colonies or from the discontents excited in her own bosom by the Partisans of America or the prevalence of opposition in Parliament.

...

America after all their boasting

was in no condition to wage war against the Power of Britain and that he would gladly for his part sacrifice four fifths of his fortune to bring about an accommodation. This My Lord however was the language of a most unprincipled man of notorious and profound dissimulation [concealment] and falsehood and held before an Officer in the King's service possibly only with design to beguile [win over] and deceive.

...

no professions should be regarded or advances received other than unconditional submission and that any less certain presages [signs] of their desire of reconciliation should in no sort abate [ease] the vigor of Britain's resolutions and preparations to assert Her supreme authority.

...



Source 4a: Extracts from a letter from the Earl of Dartmouth to Josiah Martin, 5 July 1775. Catalogue Ref: CO 5/318 f110-112

consequence of the Advice  
received from all Quarters,  
that not only the four New  
England Governments are  
in Arms, but that almost  
every other Colony has caught  
the Flame, and a Spirit of  
Rebellion has gone forth  
that menaces the Subversion  
of the Constitution, it is the  
King's firm Resolution, that  
the most vigorous Efforts  
should be made, both by Sea  
& Land, to reduce His rebellious  
Subjects to Obedience; and the  
proper Measures are now  
pursuing, not only for  
augmenting the Army under  
General Gage, but also for  
making such Addition to our  
Naval Strength in North  
America, as may enable  
Admiral Graves to make  
such a Disposition of His  
Fleet,

There is still some Room  
to hope that the Colonies to the  
Southward may not proceed to  
the same lengths with those of  
New England; it is however His  
Majesty's Intentions, that the  
Commanders of the separate  
Squadrons I have mentioned  
should be instructed, to prevent  
all Commerce between the  
Colonies within their respective  
Stations,

With regard to the Plan  
of Operations to be adopted by  
General Gage, it must depend  
upon his own Judgment,  
and the Opinions of the able  
Generals with him; and  
therefore I have only to add,  
that it is His Majesty's  
express Command, that you  
do exert every Endeavour, and  
employ every Means in your  
Power to aid and support  
him & Admiral Graves, in  
all such Operations as they  
may think proper to  
undertake, for carrying the  
King's Orders into full  
execution, and restoring the  
Authority of His Majesty's  
Government.

## Transcript: Source 4a

Josiah Martin, British officer, and last British Governor of North Carolina (1771- 1776.)

### Transcript

In consequence of the Advices received from all Quarters, that not only the four New England Governments are in Arms, but that almost every other Colony has caught the flame, and a spirit of Rebellion has gone forth that menaces the subversion of the Constitution, it is the King's firm resolution, that the most vigorous efforts should be made, both by sea and land to reduce his Rebellious Subjects to obedience, and the proper Measures are now pursuing not only for augmenting the Army under General Gage, but also for making such addition to our Naval strength in North America as may enable Admiral Graves to make such a Disposition of His Fleet

...

There is still some room to hope that the Colonies to the Southward may not proceed to the same lengths with those of New England, it is however His Majesty's Intention, that the Commander of the separate Squadrons I have mentioned should be instructed to prevent all Commerce between the Colonies within their respective stations.

...

With regard to the plan of operations to be adopted by General Gage, it must depend upon his own Judgment, and the opinion of the able Generals with him, and therefore I have only to add, that it is His Majesty's express Command, that you do exert every Endeavour, and employ every means in your power to aid and support him and Admiral Graves, in all such operations as they may think proper to undertake for carrying the King's orders into full execution, and restoring the Authority of His Majesty's Government.

...



**Source 4b: Proclamation by John Earl of Dunmore, 7 November 1775.**

Catalogue Ref: CO 5/1353 f.336

By His Excellency the Right Honorable JOHN Earl of DUNMORE, His  
MAJESTY'S Lieutenant and Governor General of the Colony and Dominion of  
VIRGINIA, and Vice Admiral of the same.

## A P R O C L A M A T I O N.

AS I have ever entertained Hopes, that an Accommodation might have taken Place between GREAT-BRITAIN and this Colony, without being compelled by my Duty to this most disagreeable but now absolutely necessary Step, rendered so by a Body of armed Men unlawfully assembled, firing on His MAJESTY'S Tenders, and the formation of an Army, and that Army now on their March to attack His MAJESTY'S Troops and destroy the well disposed Subjects of this Colony. To defeat such treasonable Purposes, and that all such Traitors, and their Abettors, may be brought to Justice, and that the Peace, and good Order of this Colony may be again restored, which the ordinary Course of the Civil Law is unable to effect; I have thought fit to issue this my Proclamation, hereby declaring, that until the aforesaid good Purposes can be obtained, I do in Virtue of the Power and Authority to ME given, by His MAJESTY, determine to execute Martial Law, and cause the same to be executed throughout this Colony: and to the end that Peace and good Order may the sooner be restored, I do require every Person capable of bearing Arms, to resort to His MAJESTY'S STANDARD, or be looked upon as Traitors to His MAJESTY'S Crown and Government, and thereby become liable to the Penalty the Law inflicts upon such Offences; such as forfeiture of Life, confiscation of Lands, &c. &c. And I do hereby further declare all indented Servants, Negroes, or others, (appertaining to Rebels,) free that are able and willing to bear Arms, they joining His MAJESTY'S Troops as soon as may be, for the more speedily reducing this Colony to a proper Sense of their Duty, to His MAJESTY'S Crown and Dignity. I do further order, and require, all His MAJESTY'S Leige Subjects, to retain their Quitrents, or any other Taxes due or that may become due, in their own Custody, till such Time as Peace may be again restored to this at present most unhappy Country, or demanded of them for their former salutary Purposes, by Officers properly authorised to receive the same.

GIVEN under my Hand on board the Ship WILLIAM, off NORFOLK,  
the 7th Day of NOVEMBER, in the SIXTEENTH Year of His MAJESTY'S Reign.

DUNMORE.

(GOD save the KING.)



## Transcript: Source 4b

[Please note that some of this language will be considered offensive. However, we think it important to show an accurate representation of the record to help understand the past.]

BY His Excellency the Right Honorable John Earl of DUNMORE, His MAJESTY'S Lieutenant and Governor General of the Colony and Dominion of VIRGINIA, and Vice Admiral of the same.

### A PROCLAMATION

As I have ever entertained Hopes, that an Accommodation might have taken Place between GREAT-BRITAIN and this colony, without being compelled by my Duty to this most disagreeable but now absolutely necessary Step, rendered so by a Body of armed Men unlawfully assembled, firing on His MAJESTY'S Tenders, and the formation of an Army, and that Army now on their March to attack His MAJESTY'S Troops and destroy the well disposed Subjects of this Colony. To defeat such treasonable Purposes, and that all such Traitors, and their Abettors, may be brought to Justice, and that the Peace, and good Order of this Colony may be again restored, which the ordinary Course of the Civil Law is unable to effect; I have thought fit to issue this my Proclamation, hereby declaring, that until the aforesaid good Purposes can be obtained, I do in Virtue of the Power and Authority to ME given, by His MAJESTY, determine to execute Martial Law, and cause the same to be executed throughout this Colony: and to the end that Peace and good Order may the sooner restored, I do require every Person capable of bearing Arms, to resort to His MAJESTY'S STANDARD, or be looked upon as Traitors to His MAJESTY's Crown and Government, and thereby become liable to the Penalty the Law inflicts upon such Offences; such as forfeiture of Life, confiscation of Lands, &c. &c. And I do hereby further declare all indented Servants, Negroes, or others, (appertaining to Rebels,) free that are able and willing to bear Arms, they joining His MAJESTY'S Troops as soon as may be, for the more speedily reducing this Colony to a proper Sense of their Duty, to his MAJESTY'S Crown and Dignity. I do further order, and require, all His MAJESTY'S Leige Subjects, to retain their Quitrents, or any other Taxes due or that may become due, in their own Custody, till such Time as Peace may e again restored to this at present most unhappy Country, or demanded of them for their former salutary Purposes, by Officers properly authorised to receive the same.

GIVEN under my Hand on Board the Ship WILLIAM, off Norfolk, the 7th Day of NOVEMEBER, in the SIXTEENTH Year of His MAJESTY'S Reign.

DUNMORE.

(GOD save the KING.)

## Source 5: Satirical print 'Bunkers Hill or America's head dress', 1776.

Credit: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.



BUNKERS HILL  
*or America's Head Dress*

## Image description: Source 5

The American Revolutionary War received much coverage, both in the colonies and the Mother Country. Many political satires were produced commenting on the futility of the war and the poor British effort. This source is one example of the political commentary that the British administration faced throughout the war effort.

### Image description

Image shows a half-length portrait of a woman, right profile, with exaggerated coiffure supporting three redoubts [fortresses] and flags. The infantry and artillery firing are firing at close range, tents, an artillery train, and a sea battle involving two or three ships; large flags flying over the redoubts are decorated with a monkey, two women with arrows, and a goose.





## Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

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Our [Online Workshops](#) allow our Education Officers to teach through your projector, leading discussions and guiding students through activities based around original documents. All you need is a computer with a projector, webcam and microphone. We'll arrange a test call before your session to check the tech is working.

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