



...Bringing History To Life

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America's Revolution (61) – Colonial Non-Importation of British Goods – II

Lead: In the 1700s the United States broke from England. No colony in history had done that before. This series examines America's Revolution.

Intro: *A Moment in Time with Dan Roberts*

Content: In the aftermath of the Parliamentary passage of the Townshend revenue acts in 1767, the American colonies were slow to react even though increasingly

offended by what many felt were continued violations of the British Constitution. One of the tools available to the colonists was the non-importation of British goods. It seemed this had worked to secure the repeal of the Stamp tax three years before, perhaps it would work against the Townshend duties as well.

The problem with wielding an economic weapon such as cutting off trade is that it cuts both ways. Many American importers and merchants may have been philosophically opposed to British revenue schemes, but their business model was to move material goods back and forth between the colonies and the home country. Cutting off trade seriously affected their bottom line, therefore the non-importation movement of 1768-1770 was slow in getting off the ground with even some of its most vigorous advocates not certain that it would work to

transform British public opinion or public policy.

Boston radicals took the lead, but even in this hotbed of anti-British sentiment, they could only secure a voluntary non-consumption agreement. Out in the provincial towns there seemed to be greater willingness to cut back on the use of luxury goods. All over New England towns and cities passed resolutions refusing to import British merchandise and nearly everywhere people seemed to respond to the idea that Americans must develop their own industrial base through the local manufacture of commodities such as paper and glass.

There was a real hesitation to be in the lead on non-importation because trade can shift from region to region. There was a fear that if Boston cut off trade, the traffic would simply shift to New York or Philadelphia.

Nearly every city, including Boston, held back until their competitors got on board and assumed at least part of the pain. Though by April 1768 nearly all New York merchants had signed onto an agreement to ban British trade, that summer Philadelphia importers flatly refused to even consider such a scheme. Next time: colonial economic unity.

At the University of Richmond's School of Professional and Continuing Studies, I'm Dan Roberts.

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