

Toward Revolution: Guided Readings

READING 1

For fire and water are not more heterogeneous than the different colonies in North America. Nothing can exceed the jealousy and emulation which they possess in regard to each other. . . . In short . . . were they left to themselves there would soon be a civil war from one end of the continent to the other, while the Indians and Negroes would . . . impatiently watch the opportunity of exterminating them all together.

—Rev. Andrew Burnaby, 1760

READING 2

The revolution was effected before the war commenced. The revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people.

—John Adams, 1818

READING 3

A colonist cannot make a button, a horseshoe, nor a hobnail, but some snootly ironmonger or respectable buttonmaker of England shall bawl and squall that his honor's worship is most egregiously maltreated, injured, cheated, and robbed by the rascally American republicans.

—*Boston Gazette*, 1765

READING 4

We have called this a burthensome tax, because the duties are so numerous and high . . . that it would be totally impossible for the people to subsist under it. . . . We further apprehend this tax to be unconstitutional. We have always understood it to be a grand and fundamental principle of the constitution, that no freeman should be subject to any tax to which he has not given his own consent, in person or by proxy. . . . We take it clearly, there fore, to be inconsistent with the spirit of the common law, and of the essential fundamental principle of the British constitution, that we should be represented in that assembly in any sense, unless it be by a fiction of law.

—Resolution of the Town of Braintree, Massachusetts, opposing the Stamp Act, 1765

READING 5

If we view the whole of the conduct of the ministry and parliament, I do not see how any one can doubt but that there is a settled fix'd plan for enslaving the colonies, or bringing them under arbitrary government. . . . If the ministry can secure a majority in parliament they may rule . . . as absolutely as they do in France or Spain, yea as in Turkey or India. . . .

View now the situation of America: loaded with taxes from the British parliament, as heavy as she can possibly support under,—our lands charged with the most exorbitant quit rent,—these taxes collected by foreigners, steeled against any impressions from our groans or complaints . . . our charters taken away—our assemblies annihilated,—governors and councils, appointed by royal authority without any concurrence of the people, enacting such laws as their sovereign pleasure shall dictate . . . the lives and property of Americans entirely at the disposal of officers more than three thousand miles removed from any power to control them—armies of the soldiers quartered among the inhabitants, who know the horrid purpose for which they are stationed, in the colonies—to subjugate and beat down the inhabitants.

—Reverend Ebenezer Baldwin, 1774

READING 6

Considering the utter impracticability of their ever being fully and equally represented in parliament, and the great expense that must unavoidably attend even a partial representation there, this House thinks that a taxation of their constituents, even without their consent, grievous as it is, would be preferable to any representation that could be admitted for them there.

—Circular letter, Massachusetts House of Representatives, 1768

READING 7

The New Englanders by their canting, whinings, insinuating tricks have persuaded the rest of the Colonies that the Government is going to make absolute slaves of them.

—Nicholas Cresswell, a Tory, 1774

READING 8

I have heard it asserted by some, that as America hath flourished under her former connection with Great Britain, that the same connection is necessary toward her future happiness, and will always have the same effect. Nothing can be more fallacious than this kind of argument. . . .

Not one third of the inhabitants, even of this province [Pennsylvania] are of English descent. Wherefore I reprobate the phrase of parent or mother country applied to England only, as being false, selfish, narrow and ungenerous. . . .

The injuries and disadvantages we sustain by that connection are without number; and our duty to mankind at large, as well as to ourselves, instruct us to renounce the alliance: Because, any submission to, or dependence on Great Britain, tends directly to involve this continent in European wars and quarrels; and sets us at variance with nations, who would otherwise seek our friendship, and against whom, we have neither anger nor complaint. As Europe is our market for trade, we ought to form no partial connection with any part of it. . . .

[Continued British rule will lead to] the ruin of the continent. And that for several reasons. First. The powers of governing still remaining in the hands of the king, he will have a negative over the whole legislation of this continent. And as he hath shown himself such an inveterate enemy to liberty, and discovered such a thirst for arbitrary power; is he, or is he not, a proper man to say to these colonies, “You shall make no laws but what I please” . . . Secondly. That as even the best terms, which we can expect to obtain, can amount to no more than a temporary expedient, or a kind of government by guardianship, which can last no longer than till the colonies come of age, so the

general face and state of things, in the interim, will be unsettled and unpromising. . . .

O ye that love mankind! Yet that dare oppose, not only tyranny, but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression.

—Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, 1776

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do the quotations suggest were the fundamental causes of the American Revolution?
2. Describe the political and constitutional views of the colonists. What was their view of Parliament's right to tax the colonies?
3. Do you think colonists from different sections and different social classes shared the same political ideas?
4. Would you describe the colonists' grievances as calm and carefully reasoned or as exaggerated and paranoid?