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THE BIRTH OF A NATION: THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL PAMPHLETS IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION (1763 – 1776)

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ABSTRACT

The American Revolution is undoubtedly an essential part of the history of the United States, as it led to its birth as a new nation. Although it occurred two centuries ago, most of the political principles of the Revolution remain present in the American identity. The origin of these ideals is found in the great number of political circulars that were written against the Great Britain of that time. From James Otis's timid protests against British Parliament's policies in 1763 to Thomas Paine's radical call for independence in 1776, this project will examine nine of the most influential pamphlets of the American Revolution attending to their historical context and their posterior influence in society. The main goal of this project is to show that political pamphlets were the main cause of the American Revolution, and how an army of principles can penetrate where an army of soldiers cannot, as Thomas Paine once said.

Keywords: United States, Political pamphlet, American Revolution, Stamp Act, Ideology, Thomas Paine.

RESUMEN

La Revolución Americana es indudablemente una parte esencial dentro de la historia de los Estados Unidos, pues supuso su nacimiento como nación. Aunque ya hace dos siglos que ocurrió, una gran mayoría de los principios políticos de la Revolución siguen presentes en la cultura e identidad americana. El origen de estos ideales se encuentra en la gran cantidad de panfletos políticos escritos en oposición a la Gran Bretaña de ese tiempo. Desde las tímidas protestas de James Otis contra las políticas del Parlamento inglés en 1763 al extremista llamamiento a la independencia de Thomas Paine en 1776, este trabajo examinará nueve de los panfletos más influyentes poniendo atención a su contexto histórico y a su posterior influencia en la sociedad. El objetivo es mostrar que la principal causa de la Revolución Americana fueron los panfletos políticos, y demostrar que un ejército de principios puede penetrar donde un ejército de soldados no es capaz, tal y como dijo Thomas Paine.

Palabras Clave: Estados Unidos, Panfleto político, Revolución Americana, Stamp Act, Ideología, Thomas Paine.

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1. Introduction

The United States' Constitution is based on the defined set of principles of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These ideals are part of their American identity, which have been forged over these last 240 years. The birth of this American uniqueness dates back to the American Revolution, the time when the Thirteenth Colonies stopped being the British colonies and became the United States of America.

The American Revolution can be defined as the political upheaval that took place in the British-American Thirteen Colonies between the Proclamation of 1763 and 1783, where Great Britain and the newborn United States of America stopped hostilities after the Treaty of Paris. However, it was between 1763 and 1776 when the American people changed their attitude towards Great Britain from an unconditional support of the British-American union to a desire of independence.

Thomas Paine, one of the main ideologists of the American Revolution, once said that “an army of principles can penetrate where an army of soldiers cannot” (Paine 430). The reason behind this quote by Paine is the effectiveness that the political pamphlets showed thorough the whole upheaval. During the 20 years of the Revolution, many incendiary political pamphlets were written in order to lead the colonists to an opposition first against the abusive taxes imposed by the British Parliament, and later against the military repression of Great Britain towards the Thirteen Colonies.

Authors like James Otis, whose influence is essential at the beginning of the revolution; John Adams, Thomas Paine, with his best-seller *Common Sense*; and Thomas Jefferson, among others, have been an inspiration for the majority of the revolutionaries, and the leading promoters of the moral principles of today's United States.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the impact of several of the most influential political pamphlets on the revolutionary spirit of the time. In order to do so, this paper will examine, in a chronological order, the historical and social context in which each of the papers was elaborated. It will then display the different points of the revolutionaries against the policies of the British government. Finally, it will show the different reactions of both American and British society towards these texts.

The paper is divided into four different parts that correspond to each of the most polemical acts imposed by the British Parliament. The first part will deal with the ideological background of the American Revolution; the second part with the Stamp Act and Sugar Act; the third part with the Townshend Duties; and the last part with the Tea Act and Coercive Acts, plus a brief study of the *Declaration of Independence*. These four parts will be followed by a conclusion and the bibliography used for this study.

1.2 Previous Research

The topic of the influence of political pamphlets during the American Revolution has not been exploited enough through these last centuries. There have been many publications including the original pamphlets, but these writings include neither analysis nor influence or background of these brochures. Research has been more focused on particular figures of the American Revolution rather than on the writings, as it is the case of the numerous studies regarding Thomas Paine or John Adams' influence on the birth of the United States

Pamphlets have been barely analyzed in history books such as *The American Revolution*, by Colin Bonwick or *The Limits of Liberty*, by Maldwyn A. Jones. However, there is no much specific research focused only on this topic, and there are few publications such as *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776* by Bernard Baylin, and *Pamphlets and Public Opinion During the American Revolution* by Homer L. Calkin, among few others.

Still, continued research on the influence of certain figures such as Thomas Paine has been carried out, whose influence in the birth of the United States has been summarized in 2014 by Albert Marrin in *Thomas Paine: Crusader For Liberty*.

2. Background of the Revolution

2.1. *Cato's Letters*

During the 18th century, English political literature was considered universal, as everybody agreed on the liberty-preserving constitution of Britain and its moral qualities (Bailyn 46). Revolutionaries knew that their mission was to have a proudly conscious extension of political thought of England in the colonies, as appointed by Rossiter (140). Influenced by Locke's ideals and with a solid constitution, English politics in the 18th c. were the role model for most of the nations in the world. In this line, the most important English political pamphlets to be considered as an influence for the revolutionaries are *Cato's Letters*, written between 1720 and 1723 in England by John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon. These letters were later collected in *Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious* in 1755. The initial purpose of *Cato's Letters* was to complain about the South Sea Scheme imposed by Great Britain in 1711. However, as the letters started to gain popularity, they commenced to deal with the problems of corruption and lack of moral principles of the British government of the time.

Although these letters were written 40 years before the beginning of the American Revolution, and did not deal directly with the problem of the colonies, they were used as a reference of the moral principles that a free government had to follow. The letters can be described, in words of Bailyn, as "a prototypical American treatise in defense of English liberties overseas, a tract indistinguishable from any number of publications that would appear in the Revolutionary crisis fifty years later" (43).

In order to establish a principles' source for the Revolution, copies of *Cato's Letters* were sent to the Thirteen Colonies. Some specific extracts, those which most interested the colonists, were reprinted and circulated through newspapers from Boston to Savannah (Cook 81). Moreover, it is considered that at least half of the libraries of the colonies had one copy of these documents during the 1760's and 1770's, being highly popular among the Americans (Mitchell 588).

Cato's Letters were based on several principles such the ideas of republic, constitution, liberty, pursuit of happiness, property and popular sovereignty. Regarding the idea of the pursuit of happiness, which will be one of the unalienable rights of the American

constitution, Trenchard and Gordon maintained that “every man has a right and a call to provide for himself, to attend up his own affairs, and to study his own happiness”.

In relation to property, John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon stated in their letter XXXV that “the preservation of property is the source of national happiness, whoever violates it, is an enemy to his country”. Furthermore, they also affirmed that “as happiness is the effect of independency, and independency the effect of property; so certain property is the effect of liberty” (Trenchard and Gordon). Forty years later, this defense of property would be an influence for James Otis in his 1761 speech against the Writs of Assistance.

2.2. Against Writs of Assistance

In 1761, during the Seven Years’ War between Britain and France, the colonists were suspects of smuggling and trading with the French. In order to avoid these activities, English Prime Minister William Pitt’s measure was to adopt writs of assistance, which were general search warrants that authorized customhouse-officers to look for any forbidden goods without having to obtain any special permission. This meant that these officers could investigate any private property declared suspicious whenever they wanted without the permission of their owners, as they only needed to have a general writ in hand. For the British, the benefit of these writs was the increasing of speed in the search of revenue (Farrell 7).

The Colonist response was immediate. They saw these writs of assistance as an involvement in their affairs. Protests against the constitutionality of this law began to rise in almost every colony. One of the first contrarians to this law was James Otis, who on February 1761 made a five-hour speech against the writs of assistance in the Council Chamber in the Boston Town House (Farrell 25). This speech was partially transcribed by John Adams under the name *Against Writs of Assistance* in a pamphlet-like form.

James Otis based *Against Writs of Assistance* on the rights guaranteed by English common law, making emphasis on the right to property. Property in the republican thought of the colonist was not only conceived as possessions, but also as a source of personal independence and authority. Their possessions were a reflection of their personality, as they defined and protected them from outside pressure (Wood 178). Colonists, therefore,

conceived these writs of assistance as an intrusion in their belongings, but also as a direct threat to their personality, independence, and freedom.

Otis started his pamphlet by defining the writs as “instruments of slavery” and “the most destructive of English liberty and the fundamental principles of law” . In this passage, James Otis was referring directly to the XXXIX clause of the Magna Carta, which praised that “no free man shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights or possessions...” (“Magna Carta”). In this sense, James Otis denounced that the writs were illegal, and that it was a “power that places the liberty of every man in the hands of every petty officer”.

Secondly, he added that the writs are universal, what meant that any person could enter the colonists’ property. This led them to felt like “servants of servants”, as even the menial servants related to the Crown were allowed to get a writ of assistance.

Thirdly, James Otis maintained that the writs were perpetual, as “there is no return, and a man is accountable to no person for his doings”. That is to say, once a writ of assistance was issued it did not expire, and the official was not required to account for how the warrant was used (Farrell 20-21).

While the first part of this pamphlet was a transcribed part of James Otis’ speech, the reminder of the speech that exists is only a summary by John Adams. In this summary, according to Adams, James Otis stated that the right to life, liberty and property are inherent and inalienable rights conferred by God and wrought into the English constitution as fundamental laws, and therefore any human-made law could violate these divine rights (Otis). The fact that these rights proceed from nature and God will be a very common resource in future political pamphlets.

Finally, James Otis also criticized the Acts of Trade¹. He compared them with the writs of assistance in the sense that both of them “destroyed all our security of property, liberty and life”. He finally added that the law was not executed because of its unconstitutionality, giving out the signal that the same would happen regarding the writs of assistance.

¹ Between 1651 and 1673, Navigation Acts were designed in order to establish an English monopoly of the colonial carrying trade, the colonial market, and certain valuable colonial products. Moreover, certain products could only be exported direct from the colonies to England. (Jones 15)

This speech and later pamphlet was of utmost importance for the Revolutionary spirit. In words of John Adams, second President of the United States, James Otis demonstrated the illegality of the writs so clearly “that every man appeared to me to go away ready to take arms against it. No harangue of Demosthenes or Cicero ever had such effects upon this globe as that speech” (233). By other side, academics such as John Clark Ridpath have defined this speech as “the greatest and most effective oration delivered in the American colonies before the Revolution” (23); while George Bancroft states that it is the “the opening scene of American resistance” (414).

The importance of the pamphlet lied in the fact that it was one of the first acts of opposition against Parliament’s policies in the colonies. This pamphlet was the child independence, a child independence that would become a man in 1776 and would declare himself free (Adams 248).

3. The Stamp Act and Sugar Act Controversy

Parliament did not take these protests seriously, and Great Britain continued passing Acts on the colonies. Before 1763, hardly any American had intentions of independence, but things started to change after the end of the Seven Year's War (1756 - 1763) between Great Britain and France.

In October 7, 1763 a royal proclamation prohibited settlement beyond the Alleghenies, in the Appalachian Mountains, as a consequence of Pontiac's rebellion of May 1763². The Proclamation of 1763 was immediately protested by the colonists, who ignored the restrictions and expanded westwards. In order to avoid this expansion, the Parliament's measure was to station a standing army of 10,000 British soldiers next to the frontier, in order to avoid Indian attacks and to control the expansion. The negative point of this standing army was that it had to be paid by the colonists. Rather than paying for their protection, this payment was a way of getting colonial revenue in order to cover the national debt originated after the Seven Years' War (Jones 38). It seemed that, after 1763, British policies were aimed to threaten the colonists' expansion of the republican ideas of liberty and independence. (Wood 174)

Although there was no significant pamphlet during this period, there were many protests within the colonies. The prospect of a British standing army in their territories was something that colonists did not like, seen as a symbol of oppression. The previous war gave the colonists enough confidence and ability to manage their affairs by themselves, so they were ready for less imperial control. Furthermore, the influence of English pamphlets, such as the already mentioned *Cato's Letters*, influenced the colonists to oppose against oppressive governments (Jones 39).

Another cause of protests was the lack of Colonial representation in the British Parliament. In 1764, 200 armed men marched along Philadelphia in order to demand more representation in Britain. These protests were aggravated when the British Parliament,

² Pontiac, an Indian-native leader, rose in revolt and destroyed every British post west of Niagara, in exception of Detroit. (Maldwyn 1983,38)

during George Grenville's mandate, imposed the Sugar Act³ in 1764 without the consent of the colonists (Bonwick 69)

3.1. Rights of the British Colonies

One of the main contrarians to the Sugar Act was James Otis, the same man who opposed to the Writs of Assistance two years before. In 1764 he published his political pamphlet *Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*.

Rights of the British Colonies addressed, in first instance, to the divine rights given to men by God. James Otis wrote that "tyranny of all kinds is to be abhorred" (Otis) in reference to the power of Parliament. In this line, he declared that God was the only monarch in the universe, as he had the "right to absolute power because he is the only one who is omniscient as well as omnipotent" (Otis).

Secondly, Otis claimed that every British born in America was, by the British constitution, entitled to the same rights as their equals in Great Britain. He then went on to enumerate and comment on the rights that the British subjects had according to their constitution. He made an emphasis on the fact that the subjects of a subordinate government could not be reduced to a state of slavery, or be under the despotic rule of others. Therefore, he continued, "the colonists will have an equitable right [...] to be represented in parliament". (Otis)

The complaint about the lack of representation in parliament was a constant thorough the second part of his pamphlet. However, this matter had been previously discussed between English ministers and Colonial Assemblies in The General Assembly of Massachusetts in 1763. While the Americans claimed their right as Englishmen to tax themselves, their British counterparts replied that the Parliament was the one to vote taxes in any part of the British Empire (Ridpath 32). In his pamphlet, Otis argued that "taxes are not to be laid on the people, but by their consent in person or by deputation". He

³ The Sugar Act was passed on April 1764 by George Grenville. It increased duties on various colonial imports, while reducing the duty on foreign molasses from six-pence a gallon to three pence. However, it only affected merchants in New England (Jones 1983, 38-40).

commented that the act of taxing over those who are not represented deprived people from their liberty and turned them into slaves.

Although James Otis has been considered an example for the revolutionists, the third and almost last part of *Rights of the British Colonies* was much criticized in terms of submission to the British policies. In this part Otis dismissed his nonconformist spirit and claimed that he “must and ought to yield obedience to an act of parliament till repealed” (Otis). His conformism and call to submission can be better appreciated in the following quote:

We are blessed with a prince who [...] studies the good of his people, and the true glory of his crown [...] We must, it is our duty to submit and patiently bear them (taxes), till they will be pleased to relieve us [...] the equity and justice of a bill may be questioned, with perfect submission to the legislature. (Otis 1764)

In this part, Otis assumed that the Parliament was a court, with a supreme and legislative body. However, according to Bailyn (180), these assumptions were no longer valid in the 18th century as the Parliament had become a sovereign body. It was said that James Otis continued living in the past, and for this reason he received severe criticism from colonial radicals, who accused him of preaching submission, obedience and nonresistance.

What this pamphlet shows is that, by 1764, the American position was still ambivalent. On the one hand, they were protesting against the taxes imposed by the British Parliament, arguing that only Colonial assemblies could impose them. On the other hand, there was the consideration that the power of Parliament was undeniable. (Bonwick 80)

However, in the very last part of the pamphlet Otis still showed some glimmer of revolutionary spirit. He concluded that the administration of the civil government belonged originally to the population; that the colonies could not be taxed without consent; and that every part of the British Empire had a right to be represented in the Supreme (Otis).

3.2. *The Virginia Resolves on the Stamp Act*

Rights of the British Colonies would serve as an inspiration for Patrick Henry⁴, who confronted the Stamp Act⁵ by proposing *The Virginia Resolves on the Stamp Act* in the Virginia House of Burgesses in May 29th, 1765. These *Resolves* followed the same line as *Right of the British Colonies* in the sense that they declared the rights of Americans as British subjects, and also opposed to the imposition of taxes without Colonial representation in Parliament. However, Patrick Henry focused this claim on the colony of Virginia exclusively.

James Otis argued that only those who represented the Colonies and the American people could impose taxes over them, and these are only the Colonial Assemblies. Following the same discourse, Patrick Henry stated in the *Resolves* that “the general assembly of the colony (Virginia) [...] have the only and exclusive right to levy taxes on the inhabitants of this colony”, and goes on to assert that “every attempt to vest such power [...] is illegal, and a manifest tendency to destroy British, as well as American freedom” (Henry). Although these resolves were not as successful as the previous texts by Otis, they were still important in the sense that the Virginians became conscious of their own independence and asserted their rights as free men (Warren 18-20).

The consequence of these incendiary pamphlets was a violent response against the Stamp Act in Boston. Meanwhile, in New York the rise of the Sons of Liberty⁶ created a framework to collaborative action against British oppression. These groups tried to spread the revolutionary spirit all along the colonies by holding mass meetings and involving the people on the cause. Moreover, delegates from nine colonies held the so-called “Stamp Act Congress” in New York (Bonwick 81). The function of this congress was to pass a series of collective resolutions, as the *Declaration of Rights and Grievances*.

⁴ Patrick Henry (1736-1799) was a Virginian lawyer and politician. He was also one of the leading figures of the American Revolutionary period (Foner and Garraty).

⁵ The Stamp Act, in 1765, required revenue stamps to be affixed to all kinds of documents, even to playing cards. It was applied universally. (Jones 40)

⁶ The Sons of Liberty were organized groups of upper-middle-class men united against British taxes. There were members coming from the upper social class in areas such as Virginia, Rhode Island and North Carolina, while those coming from New York came from the middle ranks. (Bonwick 81)

3.3. Declaration of Rights and Grievances

The Declaration of Rights and Grievances was promoted by the Stamp Act Congress on October 19, 1765. This pamphlet was drafted by John Dickinson⁷, and presented at the Congress. It can be considered an extension of *Rights of the British Colonies* and the *Virginia Resolves*, as it dealt with the same ideas. However, this pamphlet also dealt with the effect of the Stamp Act on trade, an issue not presented in previous pamphlets.

John Dickinson stated that the “duties imposed by several acts of parliament [...] will be extremely burdensome and grievous [...] and the payment of them absolutely impracticable”. He went on to assert that these restrictions on trade “will render them unable to purchase the manufacturers of Great Britain” (Dickinson). The author finally stated that the prosperity and trade of the colonies depended on the enjoyment of their liberties, and that this act would affect American commerce in a negative way (Dickinson).

The consequence of these writings was the policy of nonimportation carried out by colonial merchants. This caused a paralysis in the American trade, which led British merchants to demand the invalidation of the Stamp Act (Jones 40). All these protests resulted in the nullification of the Stamp Act in 1766. However, it is thought that this repeal of the act resulted from a change of government due to internal disputes in Great Britain and pressure of British merchants, rather than for the colonists’ opposition (Bonwick 81).

Although the colonists had succeeded in their objective of nullifying the Stamp Act, the problem had only just begun. As the Stamp Act was invalidated, British politicians such as Thomas Pownall declared that if Parliament “have not that power over America they have none, and therefore America is a kingdom of itself” (Bailyn 202). Therefore, together with the invalidation of the Stamp Act, the British Parliament reaffirmed its ultimate power over all the British Empire through the Declaratory Act of 1766, introduced by Charles Watson-Wentworth (Jones 40).

The Declaratory Act asserted that Parliament had full authority both in Great Britain and the colonies, to make laws to “bind the colonies and people of America [...] in all cases

⁷ John Dickinson (1732-1808) was an American statesman, delegate to the Continental Congress and one of the writers of the Articles of Confederation. He was sometime referred as the "penman of the Revolution," ("John Dickinson")

whatsoever” (Watson-Wentworth). This act was not first realized by the colonists, as no taxes were raised or colonial assemblies dissolved. In other words, it did not involve anything that could immediately threaten the liberty of the colonists.

With the Declaratory Act of 1766, the British government started a series of policies on what they were convinced it was the best solution to end the crisis after the Seven Years’ War. However, these policies confronted with the colonists’ ones, challenging their principles. Still, colonists found out that it was too late to abandon this right to taxation imposed by the Parliament. (Bonwick 82)

4. The Townshend Duties Controversy

In 1767, the new British Chancellor Charles Townshend imposed the so-called “Townshend Duties”. This duty imposed taxes on tea, glass, lead, paint, and paper in order to solve the revenue problem. The intentions of these duties were stated as following:

That a revenue should be raised in His Majesty’s dominion in America, for making a more certain and adequate provision for defraying the charge of the administration of justice, and the support of civil government in such provinces where it shall be found necessary, and toward further defraying the expenses of defending, protecting and securing the said dominions (Townshend)

Secondly, in order to enforce these Townshend Duties, he created a Board of Customs Commissioners⁸ located in Boston. Thirdly, Townshend decided to enforce the Mutiny Act of 1765⁹. This enforcement originated complaints from the colony of New York, as it was the state with the highest number of British troops assented. In order to avoid these reproaches, Townshend arranged to suspend New York’s assembly until the Mutiny Act was obeyed (Jones 41). With these measures, Britain was stating its position as absolute. Before this moment the imperial system had worked to a greater or lesser degree, but now Parliament was becoming tyrannical and resisting their taxes was an irreversible step.

The colonial response to Townshend Duties came swiftly. The Boston Town Meeting adopted a non-importation policy in New England in October. In December a Philadelphia lawyer called John Dickinson represented the American position in his pamphlet *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania*.

⁸ The Board of Customs Commissioners was formed by a number of inspectors whose purpose was to stop Colonial smuggling and illegal activities. ("British Reforms And Colonial Resistance, 1767-1772")

⁹ The Mutiny Act of 1765 (or Quartering Act) was passed on May 3rd, 1765. It required colonial assemblies to supply British troops in the colonies with food, drink and housing in order to reduce the cost to the Crown. (“1765 – Quartering Act”)

4.1. Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania

Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania, written by John Dickinson at the very end of 1767, dealt directly with the Mutiny Act of 1765, the Declaratory Act and the Townshend Duties by showing the American position against what they considered a tyrannical government of Parliament. These letters were published in twelve installments in *Pennsylvania Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*.

Dickinson began his *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* by introducing himself as a farmer addressing to his countrymen. He first criticized the suspension of the legislation of New York by the Townshend Duties, claiming that “they have punished in a manner pernicious to American freedom” and that “they cannot be legally deprived of the privilege of legislation” (Dickinson). He demanded that the Mutiny Act is another direct attempt of Parliamentary taxation, with the only difference that Britain is “leaving to them the manner of raising it” (Dickinson). In reference to the Townshend Duties, he attacked them by making a comparison with the Stamp Act, as the former imposed as much taxes as the latter with the same consequences to American liberty. He maintained that there was nothing they could call their own, comparing himself and his countrymen with slaves.

That the Parliament imposed the duties “for the sole purpose of raising a revenue” (Dickinson) will be a constant thorough the twelve letters. He argued that for one hundred and fifty years no statute had been passed only for the purpose of raising a revenue, as there was an “acknowledged exclusive right of the colonies to tax themselves”. He added that these duties were only beneficial for Great Britain as they maintained the colonies dependent. Parliament could choose the amount of money they want to levy upon them without any limitation. The money was collected by officers who were subject to no inspection and were “impowered to enter into any house, warehouse or other place” (Dickinson), just as what happened with the Writs of Assistance of 1761.

Furthermore, Dickinson argued that this money taken from them was not for their defense, but for their injury, as if a line of fortifications is built in the colonies they will be obliged to pay for the maintenance of that defense.

Even if John Dickinson was criticizing the Parliament in his *Letters*, he is able to point out George Grenville as the originator of all this controversy in the VII letter. Dickinson

“verily believe that the late act of parliament [...] was formed by Mr. Grenville,” defining the ex-prime minister as an ambitious and detestable man. His accusation towards George Grenville was based on what he said in relation with the Sugar Act of 1764 “providing that the dependence and obedience of the colonies be asserted and maintained” (Dickinson).

He also gave an advice to Great Britain. He considered this late act of parliament to be a precedent for future oppression from the Parliament. Therefore, in the third letter he warned Great Britain that “the English history affords examples of resistance by force” and that “the punishment will exceed the offense” (Dickinson).

In order to end this collection of letters, John Dickinson made a call for the union of all the colonists against the oppression of Parliament. Talking about himself and the colonists, he affirmed that “our vigilance and our union are success and safety” while “our division is distress and death” (Dickinson). He then went on to declare Colonists as Christian freemen, and urged his countrymen to secure their property in order to be free. He ended his last letter by making a call for liberty, instigating his countrymen to fight for what they deserve.

Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania brought a good deal of important consequences, and John Dickinson became an important figure in American politics. According to Maldwyn A. Jones, John Dickinson “broke new constitutional ground” (41), while Colin Bonwick stated that Dickinson “played a prominent role in continental affairs” (83). In relation to his pamphlet, Bernard Bailyn considered it “the most influential pamphlet published in America before 1776” (101). In words of historian Forrest McDonald, its impact was “unapproached by any publication of the revolutionary period except Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*,” (13) another pamphlet that will be later discussed in this paper. Furthermore, a great figure of the American Revolution as Benjamin Franklin was, described the letters as “the general sentiments of the Americans” (Kaestle 333).

The success was such that the twelve letters were reprinted in newspapers throughout the colonies, and published in pamphlet form in the American cities of Philadelphia, Boston and New York. Also its popularity crossed the Atlantic and was published in European cities such as London, Paris and Dublin. Every week, from December 2, 1767 to October 28, 1768, the Farmer’s name appeared in the American newspapers, whether praises or critics (Kaestle 328). John Dickinson’s arguments became a priority in every town meeting and assembly in the American colonies, but it also served to revive the Irish malcontent

with England. In Great Britain, Dickinson forced the Parliament to define the nature and the distribution of power in the empire, putting the British government under pressure and beginning to be questioned by the British press (McDonald 13).

The most important consequence of the pamphlet was that Dickinson managed to unite the Thirteen Colonies against the Townshend Acts. The pamphlet helped to set the tone and vocabulary of the many protests against the duties imposed by parliament. Thus, Dickinson's pamphlet will serve as an influence for the next influential political pamphlet written in the American Colonies, the *Massachusetts Circular Letter*.

4.2. Massachusetts Circular Letter

In February 1768, the acknowledged leader of Boston radicalism Samuel Adams, with the support of James Otis, persuaded the Massachusetts Assembly to send a circular letter to the rest of the Colonial legislatures in order to call for joint action against the Townshend Acts. It was clear that, in order to draft this pamphlet, both Samuel Adams and James Otis were profoundly influenced by *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* (Kaestle 329). However, this circular letter was an official document, as it was elaborated by the House of Representatives of Massachusetts.

The *Massachusetts Circular Letter* took into consideration the "great difficulties" the colony had to face due to the "several Acts of Parliament imposing duties and taxes on the American Colonies" (Adams). The letter was intended to inform the other colonies of the position of Massachusetts in respect of the late Act of Parliament, and it called for the union of the settlements "upon a common concern". The letter then focused on the same arguments than the ones seen previously in Dickinson's *Letters*. It began defending the Englishness of the American colonist, and their right to be treated as their equals in England. The *Circular Letter* also defended Colonial property, and asserted that "what a man has honestly acquired is absolutely his own, which cannot be taken from him without consent". It then continued claiming that the duties were imposed "with the sole and express purpose of raising a revenue". It defended that the Colonies should tax themselves as they did not have representation in Parliament, and they would never be able to have it as they were "separated by an ocean of a thousand leagues" (Adams).

All in all, the majority of the letter was a summary of what Dickinson said in his pamphlet two months before. Nothing new appeared, apart from the rejection of the idea that Americans could ever be represented in Parliament (Middlekauff 166). However, the Massachusetts Circular Letter was an official document, and this means that it could not be as radical as the one written by John Dickinson. In this sense, the pamphlet written in Boston seemed more submissive to the power of Parliament. This could be appreciated throughout the letter as the assembly made “humble opinions” to express the discontent to the Parliament, “the supreme legislative power over the whole empire” (Adams). Finally, in the last paragraph, the Assembly at Boston expressed “their firm confidence in the King, our common head and father, that the supplications of his distressed American subjects will meet with his royal and favourable acceptance” (Adams).

This Circular Letter was quite well received amongst the colonists, but not so well by the British government in the colonies. In April 1768, the Earl of Hillsborough, the Secretary of State for American Affairs, ordered the Massachusetts Assembly to draw away the letter. The other colonial legislatures were ordered to ignore the letter; otherwise they would suffer an immediate dissolution (Bonwick 83). By this means, the Earl of Hillsborough attempted to isolate Massachusetts by opposing the rest of the colonies to the measures proposed in Boston. However, rather than separating the colonies, the British response to the *Massachusetts Circular Letter* united them to resist against Britain’s policies (Lossing 642).

The response of the Massachusetts legislature to the order of the Earl of Hillsborough was to ignore it. Moreover, following Boston’s example, colonists organized an economic boycott similar to the one against the Stamp Act, adopting a policy of non-importation and non-consumption in March 1768 (Jones 41). Boston was becoming the center of the American Revolution, and the British knew it. Orders were given to General Gage at New York to have troops ready to be sent to Boston. Americans saw this as a declaration of war, but they were not yet prepared for it (Lossing 642-643).

In June 1768, British troops finally landed at Boston. This was a consequence of the many riots that had been in the town against the Board of Customs, but especially due to the riot occurred when the customs officials tried to occupy the sloop *Liberty* which belonged to the American radical John Hancock (Jones 41).

Tensions between the inhabitants at Boston and the British troops began to rise. The climax of these tensions came on March 5, 1770, when the so-called “Boston Massacre” took place. A regime of British soldiers opened fire while being provoked by a mob, killing five Bostonians. The result was that eight soldiers went to trial, but only two of them were accused of manslaughter.

4.3 . The Boston Pamphlet

After these events the colonial union began to dissolve. Townshend’s successor, Lord North, partially repealed the Townshend Acts retaining the duty on tea, causing a division between conservative merchants and radical agitators. The consequence was the rejection of the non-importation policy from New York first and from the rest of the colonies later (Bonwick 84). After these events, almost two years passed in a relative calm in the colonies. Great Britain – America trading was restarted, in spite of the fact that the duties were not completely suppressed.

In 1772, there was a debate on who should pay the salaries to the officials. The assemblies knew well that paying the officials would mean controlling them also, and salaries were becoming to be seen as an important weapon in the struggle for action. The reality was that finally the official’s salaries were paid by the revenue taken from the colonies, but in name of the British crown. Boston radical Samuel Adams immediately showed his discomfort with these British policies, and created a Committee of Correspondence¹⁰ to state the rights of the colonists. Moreover, with the support of this committee and the help of his comrades Joseph Warren and Benjamin Church, he elaborated the *Boston Pamphlet* (Middlekauff 222).

Published on November 3rd, 1772, the *Boston Pamphlet* dealt with the problem of taxation without representation, the use of a standing army in Boston, and the violation of their rights as freemen. It was divided into three parts, each one elaborated by a different author.

¹⁰ The Committee of Correspondence were provisional emergency governments established in response to British policy on the eve of the American Revolution. Moreover, they served as a network of communication between leaders of each colony. (“Committees Of Correspondence | American Revolution | 1773”)

The first part, written by Samuel Adams, dealt with the natural rights of the colonists “life, liberty and property”, as seen in *Against Writs of Assistance* by James Otis. As John Dickinson in his *Letters*, Adams also gave glimpses of a possibility of independence, stating that all men had the right to “leave the Society they belong to and enter into another” in case of “intolerable Oppression” (Adams). He went on to assert that the “natural Liberty of Man is to be free from any superior Power on Earth” and not to be under the “legislative Authority of Man, but only to have the Law of Nature for his rule” (Adams). He ended his letter arguing that the “absolute Rights” of all freemen were “personal security, personal liberty, and private property” and that the Colonist could not be called traitors or rebels “only for complaining of their grievances” (Adams).

The second part was written by Joseph Warren, and included twelve points that summarized the main complaints of the Colonists against Parliament’s policies. The first and second points dealt with the passing of laws and acts on the colonies without their consent. The next three points had to do with the appointment of officials and standing armies to supervise colonists. Points 6 and 7 were related to the unbalanced power between Parliament and the colonies by the usurping of the American authority to pay the salaries of the officials and by dissolving the legislatures¹¹. The last five points dealt with problems within the colony of Massachusetts (Warren).

The third and last part of the *Boston Pamphlet*, drawn up by Benjamin Church, consisted on a letter of correspondence to the other towns of the Colony. Church tried to persuade other colonies by stating that Great Britain’s constant aim with all her policies was to enslave the colonies, or to “confide in an administration” which threatened them with “certain and inevitable destruction (Church). He then stated that the barriers of the constitution are taken away, and that only the union of the Colonies can preserve it. He ended this third part of the pamphlet by encouraging the towns to fight for their “best Birth Rights and inheritance” and to “disappoint the Men who are raising themselves on the Ruin of this Country” (Church).

The main consequence of the *Boston Pamphlet* was the fact that it encouraged each of the other towns of Massachusetts to build up a committee of correspondence, setting a colony-wide communication network in order to oppose Great Britain’s policies (Bonwick

¹¹ As seen in 1768 with the legislature of New York due to protests against the Mutiny Act of 1765.

86). The formation of these committees was a consequence of the possible British attempts to enslave the colonies, as pointed out by Benjamin Church. The Boston Committee printed six hundred copies of the pamphlet, which expanded thorough the whole colony in a matter of months (Middlekauff 223).

Through the *Boston Pamphlet*, the main intention of Samuel Adams was to keep the flame of the revolution alive, but it did not seem enough. The Thirteen Colonies were more determined to dispute among themselves than with Great Britain. There were problems between colonies for the control of lands and borders. Moreover, there were even internal conflicts within the same colony¹² (Jones 42). It seemed impossible to create a union between the Thirteen Colonies at the end of 1772.

¹² Pennsylvania frontiersmen had problems with the aristocracy in Philadelphia, as the latter did not permit adequate representation in the assembly to the former (Jones 42)

5 .The Tea Act and Coercive Acts Controversy

Everything changed with the passage of the Tea Act in 1773. This Act was intended to relieve the economic breakout of the East India Company by giving it the monopoly of the trade of tea with the colonies, but keeping the duty on tea (Middlekauff 226). The fact that the trading of tea was now a monopoly would have made the tea cheaper for the colonies; however, the price remained the same.

Radicals saw this withholding on the prize of tea unconstitutional, and began to protest against it. The first action against this act took place in Charleston, where the colonists avoided the landed tea to be offered for sale. The same happened in New York and Philadelphia harbor, where the tea was rejected and had to return to England. However, the most significant action, and the event that is considered the turning point of the American Revolution, is the Boston Tea Party. On December 16, 1773, A group of men led by Samuel Adams dressed up like Native Americans and assaulted the tea-ships at Boston's harbor, throwing their cargoes to the sea (Jones 43).

Great Britain did not keep impassive to this colonial defiance. At the beginning of 1774, British Parliament passed a series of Coercive Acts, referred as "Intolerable Acts" by the colonies. By these acts, the port of Boston was closed until the town had paid for the tea they destroyed; the power of the executive in the colony of Massachusetts was increased; and a new quartering act was imposed in all the colonies in order to supply the troops.

5.1 A Summary View of the Rights of British America

The effect of these Coercive Acts was the opposite of the intended one, as, far from isolating Massachusetts, it united the colonies against Great Britain. Radical propaganda began to be spread throughout the Thirteen Colonies. Among all the pamphlets written against Parliament's policies, *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* is probably one of the most influential ones.

Drafted by Thomas Jefferson¹³ on July 1774, *A Summary View* mainly accused King George III of being the responsible of the grievances of the colonies, being Jefferson's purpose to complain against British intervention in American affairs. He began his pamphlet by remembering that their ancestors established America for themselves, and therefore "for themselves alone they have right to hold" (Jefferson). He then went on to enumerate different grievances against the colonies from before the American Revolution, mentioning examples such as the act that limited colonial trade only with Great Britain or the one that limited certain manufacturing inside the colonies, among many others. The purpose of enumerating all these laws was to show the reader how unfair they were, and to declare that the British parliament had no right to exercise any authority over them. Thomas Jefferson went further stating British intentions in the following quote:

Single acts of tyranny may be ascribed to the accidental opinion of a day; but a series of oppressions, begun at a distinguished period, and pursued unalterably through every change of ministers, too plainly prove a deliberate and systematical plan of reducing us to slavery.
(Jefferson)

Thomas Jefferson continued his pamphlet enumerating the different acts that had dissatisfied the Americans from 1763, which were the Sugar Act and Stamp Act, the Mutiny Act, the Townshend Duties, and the act for suspending the legislature in New York. However, he then focused his pamphlet on the Coercive Acts of 1774, criticizing the closure of the harbour of Boston "whose trade was their sole subsistence", a town destined to ruin "by that unseen hand which governs the affairs of the empire" (Jefferson). He added that this measure of closing Boston's port was for revenge, and not for repay, making the town to lose millions of pounds.

The pamphlet asserted that the responsible of all the harm to the colonies was George III King of England. Jefferson knew that the king had the power to avoid any Act of Parliament, but instead King Charles III allowed all harm to the Thirteen Colonies, which control was at his Majesty's will. The author accused the king of not possessing the right to send large bodies of armed forces to the colonies, and if lawful, the colonists would have the right to limit the number and the restrictions of British troops in America, otherwise it

¹³ Thomas Jefferson (1743 – 1826) was one of the most important figures in the first years of the United States of America as a country. He was a spokesman for democracy, an American Founding Father, the author of the Declaration of Independence and the third President of the United States ("Thomas Jefferson").

would be seen as an invasion. He finished his criticism against the King by stating that “the kings are the servants, not the proprietors of the people” (Jefferson).

Thomas Jefferson finished *A Summary View* in the same way as John Dickinson did with his *Letters*, that is to say, by making a call for union of the Thirteen Colonies. Jefferson claimed that, as there were no ministers for American affairs “it behoves you to think and to act for yourself and your people”. In this sense, he made a call by encouraging the colonists to not “let any act be passed which may infringe on the rights and liberties of another” (Jefferson). He finished his pamphlet by stating, in the name of all British Americans, that it was not their purpose to separate from Great Britain, but they were not going to let their rights to be infringed.

A Summary View was widely read and it was considered Jefferson’s debut, making his reputation as one of the figures of the American Revolution. While in London his name was written in the lists of enemies of Great Britain, in Philadelphia he had the honor of drafting the Declaration of Independence two years later, having a lot of influence from *A Summary View* (Padover 14).

The purpose of the pamphlet was to persuade the colonists to unite for common action, and that was the consequence. On September, 1774, five colonies sent delegates for an inter-colonial meeting, also called the Continental Congress¹⁴ in order to deal with the Coercive Acts united. Led by Samuel Adams and John Adams¹⁵, the resolution of the Continental Congress was to create the “Suffolk Resolves”, which opposed the Coercive Acts by demanding the formation of a joint colonial government which should retain taxes, establish a militia, and impose economic sanctions against Great Britain (Jones 44). The revolution was now inevitable.

It was during the winter of 1774 when Colonial attitude became more rebellious. British Provincial congresses started to assume government and carried out defensive preparations, as collecting arms and powder. The only solution to avoid the rebellion was a backward movement in the politics of Great Britain, but it was not enough (Jones 44).

¹⁴ From 1774 to 1789, the Continental Congress served as the government for the Thirteen Colonies ("The Continental Congress - American Revolution").

¹⁵ John Adams (1735 – 1826) was a political philosopher and the second President of the United States. He was also the Vice-President of George Washington, the first President of the United States ("John Adams").

5.2 Declaration of the Causes and Necessities of Taking Up Arms

On May 10, 1775 the Second Continental Congress met at Philadelphia. This time it was to prepare a joint plan of defense against Great Britain. The resolution was the creation of a Continental Army of 20000 Americans led by George Washington¹⁶ (Jones 45).

Although the American mind towards Great Britain had changed, there were still a great number of colonists who wanted to remain under the administration of the British Parliament. There was still a sentiment of affection towards the British countries, plus a feeling of losing political control with the removal of British authority. In order to relieve the population, John Dickinson, with the support of the Continental Congress, drafted the *Declaration of the Causes and Necessities of Taking Up Arms* using the same language as Thomas Jefferson in *A Summary View* (Jones 45).

The *Declaration of the Causes* may be seen at first as a manifesto for war. John Dickinson began his pamphlet by asking the Parliament if they had any authority from God in order to enslave the colonies by violence, as otherwise their policies were unjustifiable and reprobated by their own constitution. Because of this, he started defining the British as enemies. He then went on to assert that the Colonies had been opposed to every intolerable policy in “the most mild and decent language” (Dickinson). However, as the Parliament’s position did not change, Americans found “how vain was this hope of finding moderation in our enemies” (Dickinson). As previous pamphleteers, John Dickinson stated that Parliament policies were designed to divide and confront the colonies between them.

Dickinson continued his pamphlet by making reference to the incident at Lexington and Concord. In line with the anti-British propaganda published regarding those events, John Dickinson stated that British troops “made an unprovoked assault [...] murdering eight of the inhabitants” and considered it as a “cruel aggression” (Dickinson). In spite of this, continued Dickinson, Americans had been called rebels and traitors only for the reason of defending themselves.

It may be seen, as said before, that this pamphlet was a manifesto for war. However, in the final part of the pamphlet John Dickinson assured that the purpose of the colonies was

¹⁶ George Washington (1732-1799) was elected Commander in Chief of the Continental Army. Then in 1789 he became the first President of the United States ("George Washington").

not to “dissolve that union which has so long and so happily subsisted” (Dickinson) between Great Britain and America, but to see it restored. He added that they did not fight for glory or conquest, but only in defense of their freedom, and this was the cause of their taken up of arms. It was then clear that, while he desired to maintain the union with Great Britain, he opened the doors for independence if the dispute was not satisfactorily resolves (Bonwick 98).

Although this pamphlet did not have great consequences, it can be said that it gave a reason for all the American resistance, and encouraged the colonists to continue fighting. However, at the same time, it reassured the Colonists that feared a potential separation with Great Britain. Moreover, it would be an important influence for Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*.

5.3. *Common Sense*

The confrontations between the Thirteenth Colonies and Great Britain continued thorough 1775. In June 17, the bloodiest battle of the Revolutionary War, the Battle of Bunker Hill, took place. Despite the American loss, there were many casualties from the British side¹⁷, which gave an important boost of confidence to the Colonists. This battle served George Washington to remedy the Continental Army’s deficiencies, and by spring 1776 the American army was more organized and disciplined (Jones 45).

In 1776 the American Congress did not still want to break the union with Great Britain , as they still hoped that there would be an agreement in order to stop hostilities. However, George III was not going to give up, and Parliament passed the Prohibitory Act of December 22. By this act, the colonies were no longer under British protection and their trade was going to be embargoed. This act was seen by John Adams as an expulsion of the Thirteen Colonies from the British Empire.

¹⁷ More than a thousand British soldiers died, while Americans lost less than a half of their men (Jones 45)

It was in the middle of all this conflict when the figure of Thomas Paine¹⁸ appeared. Paine, although born English, thought that Americans were in their right to fight for the unfair policies of the Parliament. Moreover, he considered that the best solution for the Colonies was to become independent from Britain. He summarized all his ideas in the most famous pamphlet of the American Revolution, *Common Sense* (Marrin 41-51).

Common Sense, published on January 9, 1776, was divided into four different parts. In the first one, Thomas Paine wrote about the origin and design of government in general, making some allusions to the English constitution. He stated that, while society promotes happiness, government restrains our vices, defining it as a punisher. He then claimed that the creation of governments was to “leave the legislative part to be managed by a select number of chosen [...] who have the same concerns and will act as those who appointed them” (Paine 7). Later in the same part, Paine defined the English Constitution as an absurdity and useless, as it said that the role of the king is hereditary and therefore it did not contribute towards the freedom of the state. The author finished this first part by stating that population was the culprit for the absolute authority of the king, as it was in their hands the possibility of controlling this one.

The second part of the pamphlet had to do with monarchy and hereditary succession. In this part Paine showed himself very critical with the role of the king in the society, saying that if there were no kings, there would not be wars, as “it is the pride of kings to throw mankind into confusion” (Paine 11). He then defined monarchy as “the most prosperous invention the Devil ever set on foot for the promotion of idolatry” (Paine 11). After that, he talked about succession, saying that it is a violation of the right that states that all men are originally equal. Moreover, he said that it was unfair that someone could reign, despite their age, without being elected by the nation.

The third part was entitled as ‘*Thoughts on the present State of American Affairs*’. In this part, Thomas Paine analyzed the relationship between Great Britain and America, pointing out that the British Empire did not serve the colonist’s interests, but only the Mother Country’s ones. He first considered that the period of debate was closed, and that

¹⁸ Thomas Paine (1737 – 1809) was born in Thetford (England). He emigrated in 1774 to America advised by Benjamin Franklin, where he became a radical of the Revolution and fought for the independence of the Thirteen Colonies (Marrin).

only war would determine the contests, encouraging the colonists by saying that “now is the seed time of continental union, faith and honor” (Paine 20). Paine did not also recognize the colonists as British subjects, but rather as European subjects due to the fact that only a third of the colonists were British.

Continuing this third part, Paine asserted that America would have flourished much more without European power over her. He acknowledged that Great Britain’s protection over the Colonies was for its interests and not, as the colonists had previously thought, for attachment. For this reason, Paine considered that America did not need Great Britain in order to prosper, as the Colonies could flourish by trading as a free independent port¹⁹ with the rest of Europe. In connection with this, the author added that an independent America would have good relations with Europe, as the Colonies would no longer be in direct connection with Great Britain and her foreign conflicts.

After that, Paine talked openly about independence. He questioned the reasons to remain under the influence of Great Britain, writing states such as:

It is repugnant to reason to suppose that this continent can longer remain subject to any external power [...] There is something very absurd, in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island (Paine 26-27)

He continued saying that without independence they would be “enslaved by the want of laws in America, as by submitting to laws made for us in England” (Paine 29). He then added that the only solution in order to remain united is that the King of Great Britain repealed all acts, something that was not going to happen as America was a secondary object in the system of British politics possessed only for their own interests.

To close this third part, Paine declared that, instead of having another monarchy, independent America should be a democratic republic based on popular vote. He then offered a model of political system by saying that there should be a congress to make laws and a president to enforce them. Moreover, this entire model would be regulated by a Continental Charter, which would resemble the English Magna Carta.

¹⁹ Paine argued that, without the commercial restrictions with Great Britain, America could become a free port and could export wherever she wanted.

In the fourth and last part, Thomas Paine showed that 1776 was the correct moment to get independence from Great Britain. Paine based his arguments on the fact that Colonies had no debts, and that their present numbers were proportioned to their wants. He defended his arguments stating that their natural sources were better or at least equal to the rest of the nations, plus their “knowledge is hourly improving” (Paine 41). Another reason was that there was much land for the colonists in order to settle; otherwise the British Crown would occupy it. Moreover, he added that “the infant state of the Colonies [...] is an argument in favor of independence” (Paine 41). He then went on to assert that, in the case of a war against Great Britain for independence, both Spain and France would help them in order to weaken British power.

In order to end his pamphlet, Thomas Paine reminded the colonists how America would be if she remains under the power of Great Britain:

Until an independence is declared, the Continent will feel itself like a man who continues putting off some unpleasant business from day to day, yet knows it must be done, hates to set about it, wishes it over, and is continually haunted with the thoughts of its necessity. (Paine 46)

This pamphlet proved essential to set the colonies on the path of independence, and defined Paine as one of the most influential ideologists of the Revolution. It quickly became a best-seller all over the colonies, with more of 150,000 copies sold, and it is considered as ‘America’s first literary bombshell’. Newspapers published it free of charge and it was read loudly in taverns and workshops. Moreover, it was translated into Spanish, French, German, Danish and Polish (Marrin 41-47).

Politically speaking, this pamphlet marked a turning point in political writing. Previous political pamphlets, like the ones seen in this paper, were only directed towards political educated elite as they were full of Latinisms and formal language. Moreover, these previous pamphlets were written in a calmly, politely way that did not result effective in order to persuade the colonists. On the other hand, *Common Sense* broke with all the established rules. Thomas Paine’s pamphlet was written in a clear way, grabbing the attention by appealing to the intelligence and emotions of the colonists (Marrin 46).

The Founding Fathers also were impressed by this pamphlet. George Washington ordered his troops to read it; Thomas Jefferson described it as “the simple voice of nature

and reason”; and John Adams admitted that he could not be able to write anything in such a striking style (Marrin 47).

Although this pamphlet was not decisive in itself, it was a great influence to shape the society of its time, and also for the *Declaration of Independence*²⁰.

Though not considered a pamphlet, The *Declaration of Independence* could be seen as the final document where all the revolutionary ideas from 1763 to 1776 were compressed and shaped. It was in the beginning of the second paragraph where the influence of Paine, and also all previous political pamphlets, can be seen:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. – That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed (Jefferson)

After the passing of the Declaration, the Thirteen Colonies started to be the United States of America. The 4th of July, 1776 was considered the birth of that nation, and this turned the Revolutionary War into the War of Independence.

²⁰ The Declaration of Independence was approved on July 4, 1776. Congress appointed Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston, and Thomas Jefferson to draft the Declaration. However, it was the last one who wrote it due to its good expressivity (Marrin 48).

6 Conclusion

The American Revolution may be generally seen as something that happened overnight, but in fact it involved a slow change in the mentality of the colonists. From 1763, when almost every colonist felt as British as the people living in Great Britain, to 1776, when the Declaration of Independence was signed, there has been a process of change of mentality prompted by the most important ideologists of the time. Political philosophers such as James Otis, John Dickinson, Samuel Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine or John Adams had successfully managed to shape the minds of the American people against the abusive policies imposed by Great Britain.

Without the first writings by James Otis such as *Against Writs of Assistance* or *Rights of the British Colonies* there would not be anybody expressing the general discontent felt by the Americans, and probably John Dickinson would not have written his famous *Letters From a Farmer in Pennsylvania*, which resulted a turning point in the mentality of his “countrymen”.

The revolutionary spirit would also have disappeared without the complaints to the conformity of the Americans in 1772 by Samuel Adams in his *Boston Pamphlet*. Moreover, the British would have success in his attempt of confronting each colony with the other if not been for the *Massachusetts Circular Letter*, which called for joint action.

Finally, independency might not have been achieved without the essential influence of Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* and his arguments in favor of secession from the union with Great Britain.

In conclusion, without the firm opposition of a little number of ideologists against Great Britain’s policies, the American Revolution might have never happened, or at least it would have happened later. Those ideals about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness that the American Constitution praises have their origin in these political pamphlets from the American Revolution. Nothing demonstrates better the power of ideas to shape history.

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