The Driving Force Behind The American Revolution

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While going through the Essay “Towards a Theory of Revolution” by James C. Davies [[1]](#footnote-1), the opening sentence was more than enough for me to pause and reflect on the state of affairs in the world that we live in.

*“Revolutions are most likely to occur when a prolonged period of objective economic and social development is followed by a short period of sharp reversal.”*

If we explore the history of the world alone, the cause behind every revolution, not just the American Revolution was a tyrant ruling body that chose to oppress a flourishing system just because, in their opinion, it was time to harvest the fruits of their benevolence. History is filled will examples of civilizations rising and falling at the hands of a few that became too greedy for their own good. The fall of the Greek civilization paved the way for the Roman empire to build its stronghold over the region. While some regions gave into their rule willingly, other regions gave into their rule because they did not have a better alternative at hand. While the great Ottoman Empire paved the way for its own downfall, it was pride that took away the power and the splendor held by Spain, especially around the discovery of the New World. It is only through the fall of one empire, that another can seize its power and glory and shine. When Spain fell, England quickly stepped in to capture the vacuum of power created, and it shone undefeated for years, right from the era of Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II. However, its demise began the moment it began taxing its colonies to pay for the debts it incurred following the French and the Indian War.

While no revolutions have had the impact or the repercussions where the civilizations revolted in such a fashion, then again, no other civilization was this cruel towards its very own people at the same time [[2]](#footnote-2).

The American Revolutionary War, also known as the U.S. War of Independence, lasted from 1775 to 1783. The American Revolution began with conflicts between inhabitants of the thirteen British colonies and the government. The Battle of Lexington and Concord started off the revolution in 1775. In 1778, France allied with the colonists to defeat Great Britain, and with their help, the British surrendered at Yorktown, in 1781. Even though the Americans became independent in 1781, the war did not end up until 1783. During and after the Revolution, the Americans called for equality, justice, fairness, and liberty. Americans were dissatisfied with the promise of freedom based on race, religion, and gender. However, at that time, they had different issues to contend with [[3]](#footnote-3).

As mentioned earlier, the English were suffering from the repercussions of the French and Indian War. The way that was fought in North America, the region had left Great Britain with a huge debt that it needed to settle. The parliament was considering a number of options at the point and as a result, the parliament was considering passing a number of laws by placing taxes on the colonies. According to them, Great Britain had fought a long and costly war to protect the American subjects from the French living in Canadian lands. Thus, in an attempt to justify the taxes being implemented, the parliament stated that it had a right to tax the American colonists to pay for the bills incurred during the war for their protection [[4]](#footnote-4).

Despite seemingly sound reasoning, most American units disagreed with the idea. They were of the belief that England had fought a terribly expensive war in an effort to strengthen its own empire, as opposed to fighting in it in an effort to benefit its own subjects. Furthermore, they also stated that the parliament was chosen by the people living in England at present and did not have any right to impose the required taxes. In their opinion, this foreign elected parliament did not understand their needs in the first place, thus taxing them is nothing short of being incredibly wrong. Moreover, the colonists were of the opinion that they did not have any representation in the parliament, which furthered their opinions on the matter. They took a stand on taxation without proper representation and stood their ground for a short period of time.

When you think about it from the perspective of the colonists living in America, they were sent over with a royal charter to form colonies in the area. They came over and settled into their lives, forming a government on their very own to handle their affairs. The system that they put in place worked for their colonies and allowed the people living in the colonies to look after the needs of one another. Another indisputable fact here is that the colonies were initially formed in America so that Great Britain can hold autonomy over the produce brought over from the New World into Europe. This was its way of increasing its trading powers, and hence increasing its wealth and status of power. This lays the basis of the fact that setting up colonies in New World had purely economical reasons associated with it. It may have solved Britain’s population and religious problems at the same time, but the country had a whole lot more to earn by placing its colonies in the areas that it did. Thus, when the colonies were settled, Britain let them develop, grow, and prosper in peace. It left them to their own devices until they began to prosper and that is when, conveniently, Britain decided to step in and turn the colonies into Royal Colonies [[5]](#footnote-5).

This brings us back to Davis’ essay and how the possibility of a better economy inspires empires to change its ways and beliefs on the subject in an effort to accumulate more power and wealth. Great Britain was no different really. As soon as their colonies flourished, they began paving the way for their own woeful doom. Some of the main economic causes of the American Revolution are mainly due to Britain's unfair actions regarding trade, social order, and incrementation of taxes.

The series of taxes implemented in the area began with the Sugar Act of 1764. This was immediately followed by the Stamp Act, which required stamps for a number of different legal documents, which included newspapers and pamphlets. The Stamp Act was also accompanied by the Quartering Act, which required the colonies to provide the British Military Units with shelter, food and even transportation when they asked for it. Finally, the Townshend Acts of 1767 imposed further tariffs on the variety of goods being imported and kept the colonists from collecting a revenue, just how they used to.

Prior to the American Revolution, the British Empire had put in place the Mercantilism policies in the colonies. This prohibited the American colonies from freely trading with a non-British ally. At the time, the economic life was dominated by a small class of landowners and merchants while most people lived in power in North America. In 1765, King George III increased the taxes on the American colonies. This increased the tensions between the colonies and Britain, giving rise to the American Revolution. Time and again, the colonies made their best efforts to restore their relations with Britain in a peaceful manner, however, when push came to shove, the colonies had to resort to violent measures. The only efficient way for the British Empire to take the colonies seriously was by creating a boycott of British goods, meaning that trading was over, which would affect the merchants in the American and British economies negatively [[6]](#footnote-6).

These taxes were not only decided wrong and a considerably terrible decision that was made on the part of the parliament of England, but they also took away the autonomy held by the colonies and its ability to trade freely with other European countries. This free trade was one of the many reasons that the colonies were able to thrive just how they were able to for so long with nearly no support from England. Not only that, but this trade was also to always pass through England from this point forward, no matter what the destination of the shipment was in the present case. Furthermore, following the seven-year French Indian war and the implementation of taxes, the colonies were also banned from settling into the newly acquired English territory and even carry out trade with the Indian communities they shared the region with. Around 10,000 armed forces were stationed in the area to ensure that no colonists violated the land treaties and were to be responsible for forming the new centers of trade with the Indians [[7]](#footnote-7).

Add in the implementation of the law that bound the colonies to only use English produce was another low blow on the matter. At this point, Britain was trying to control every aspect of the lives of the colonists, restricting their way of life that they had lived all this time without any sort of foreign interference. So far, the protest towards the taxes was carried out in a peaceful manner. However, the Tea Act, occurring three years after the Townshend Act, was the linchpin that set the protests and rebellion against the implementation of taxes on fire. Tea, until this point, was either imported or smuggled into the area [[8]](#footnote-8). The colonies, after having been put through so much were at the end of their patience when they refused to purchase the tea imported by the East India Company. Eventually, they were mandated by the law to do so, and that is when all hell broke loose.

The Boston Tea Party was an event that showed Britain that the colonies had the propensity to not only retaliate to the royal oppression but also stand up for themselves, especially if push came to shove and they were left with no other option.

The essay by Davies, i.e. under discussion points towards the ideas presented by Marx and how he called the laborers to come forth and lose their chains. In the current context, the American colonies were the ones being oppressed, hence representing the proletariat class, while Great Britain was the ruling class that sought to benefit from the situation by putting them down. They had endured their evils for far too long and simply couldn’t continue to do so anymore.

The American Revolution was a long time coming. While England did have a history of oppressing people it brought under its rule, the American colonies were a little too resilient and didn’t hesitate to push back in a manner that it did. Following the revolution, the country was in no way perfect and a number of issues within its own boundaries made it hard for the infant country to flourish despite having access to the right resources. However, between Westward Expansion, giving the African slaves the freedom that they deserved and the Women the right to be a complete member of the society, the infant country not only came a long way but also became a superpower at its core.

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1. James C. Davies, “Toward a Theory of Revolution,” *American Sociological Review* 27, no. 1 (1962): 5–19, https://doi.org/10.2307/2089714. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Davies. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Jack P. Greene, “The American Revolution,” *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 1 (2000): 93–102, https://doi.org/10.2307/2652437. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Thomas C. Barrow, “The American Revolution as a Colonial War for Independence,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (1968): 452–64, https://doi.org/10.2307/1921776. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Gordon S Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (Penguin Random House, 1993), https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/193550/the-radicalism-of-the-american-revolution-by-gordon-s-wood/. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Greene, “The American Revolution.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. JAMES H. HUTSON, ed., “American Revolution,” in *The Founders on Religion*, A Book of Quotations (Princeton University Press, 2005), 17–19, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7scxq.10. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Gregory H. Nobles and Alfred F. Young, “Historians Extend the Reach of the American Revolution,” in *Whose American Revolution Was It?*, Historians Interpret the Founding (NYU Press, 2011), 135–256, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qgj99.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)