4-26-2013

The Problematic Search for an Emerging American Identity before the Revolution: An Analysis of Colonial Newspapers and Secondary Literature

Emma Florio
Illinois Wesleyan University, eflorio@iwu.edu

Emma Florio

The Problematic Search for an Emerging American Identity before the Revolution: An Analysis of Colonial Newspapers and Secondary Literature[1]

In 1966 Richard Merritt, professor of communications and political science at the University of Illinois, published *Symbols of American Community, 1735-1775*, which is discussed in more detail below. Merritt's title implies that there *was* an "American Community" in the colonies before the American Revolution. My research and findings show that a single community like this did not exist. It would be easy to say that the colonists had a sense of themselves as a distinct group of people, ideologically bound by their identity as "Americans," but in reality, if a colonist did have a larger sense of community, it was more likely within the city, region, or colony in which they lived, or as a British subject, rather than as an "American." The Revolution was not a foregone conclusion, even in the early years of the 1770s. A hatred of

[1] Originally, I planned to analyze uses of the word "American" as a noun to identify the Americans. Difficulties arose because of the nature of colonial newspapers. The word "American" appears at least once in almost every issue of every newspaper I looked at in the 1760s and 1770s but interpreting the intent behind the use of the word can prove problematic. News from the pages of the *Boston Gazette*, *Boston Post-Boy,* and the *Georgia Gazette* provides multiple examples of the use of the word "American" as well as other ways of identifying the colonists. Most of the articles I analyze, though, come from the Boston papers, especially the *Gazette*. While these papers may give an accurate representation of some colonists' opinions, it is only *some* of the feelings of the time. The words in one or two newspaper only give the point of view of one small group of people in one city and cannot encompass the wide array of opinions of all people in any time period. Thus, my results apply to a limited group of people, but can at times be extrapolated to apply to a larger group of colonists. The use of mainly Boston newspapers also depended upon the fact that newspapers printed in Massachusetts made up the majority of papers available in the *Early American Newspapers* collection. This shows a bias towards Boston, which makes sense because it was the scene of many important events in history, especially in the time period I am looking at.

the parliamentary legislation being passed in the 1760s and 1770s may have bound many colonists together, but this only presents an example of colonists rallying around a single specific issue, rather than the formation of a single "American" identity that some scholars try to find in this period. People living in each colony had different social, economic, and political situations that would make it difficult for them to truly identify with each other ideologically, although events like the Stamp Act crisis brought out common opinions on certain issues. Also complicating the search for a distinct American identity is the fact that many colonists still thought of themselves as British subjects and identified themselves as such. Newspapers of the time offer insight into the ways writers in both the colonies and Britain saw the colonists, although some scholars make the mistake of asserting that words used in urban newspapers could express the mood of the thirteen colonies as a whole. The variety of terms used to describe them shows that collectively neither the people living in the colonies nor those living in Britain had a cohesive idea of who the colonists really were. Many writers did refer to themselves as "Americans" in the years leading up to the Revolution but just as many still used words such as "his Majesty's loyal subjects," although "Americans" became much more popular by the 1770s as the generally accepted term when referring to the colonists. In this way, writers identified them as a single group, but generally only as a geographical and political unit, as those people who happened to live in the American colonies, rather than as a group bound together by a common identity or ideology. Thus, although we may want to think of the colonists as a united group of people striving for independence, in reality they did not have a single, common "American" sociocultural identity before the Revolution.

In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, most colonists in America accepted their status as British subjects and considered themselves to be British. By the 1770s, though, enough felt distanced from Britain, after years of perceived oppression from Parliament, that a select group of men declared independence in Philadelphia in 1776. Many scholars have written about the mood of the American colonists on the eve of the Revolution, regarding their sense of identity as Americans and as British subjects. They debate the ways in which the colonists' identities formed and changed: how and why some colonists began to consider themselves a separate people; if and how they attempted to build their own "American" national identity over the course of the eighteenth century; and why some remained loyal to the crown and their British heritage. As the colonies developed throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, changes on both sides of the Atlantic affected how the colonists saw themselves and their place in the wider context of the empire

One group of scholars argues that the colonists remained connected and loyal to Britain and the king right up until the Revolution. Brendan McConville cites colonial celebrations of the king's birthday and his likeness being put onto various commercial products as evidence of these sentiments. He does acknowledge, though, that a love of and loyalty to the king could and did exist alongside a growing sense of independence and a separate identity. In fact, Pauline Maier contends that the Sons of Liberty, often viewed as the forefront of revolutionary politics and action in the 1770s, remained loyal to the king even as they attacked other parts of the British government, most importantly Parliament.[2] For these colonists, attacking Parliament did not mean ideologically breaking from their identity as British subjects. Due to advancements in transportation and communication, the colonists also had easier access to British goods and

[2] Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1991), 104.

culture, which led to what Jon Butler calls an "Anglicization" in the colonies in the first half of the eighteenth century.[3] Another source states that in 1700 the colonies consumed only a tenth of British exports, but by mid-century, that proportion rose to over a third, and by 1770 colonists were spending 30 percent of their incomes on British goods.[4] Alan Taylor notes a threefold increase in transatlantic crossings between the 1670s and 1730s brought higher amounts of information, goods, and people from Britain and provided a stronger sense of connection with the mother country.[5]

At the same time, however, an "Americanization" occurred, as the colonists also used their new economic strength to support growing numbers of colonial craftsmen and artisans.[6] In fact, despite the large amounts of British imports coming into the colonies, "locally produced items accounted for the majority of purchases" in the eighteenth century.[7] A growing population, too large for any supply of British goods to meet their needs, and constantly moving inland, away from port cities, meant that many colonists did not have access to British imports, so they turned to colonial craftsmen.[8] Thus, colonists did have a stronger sense of themselves as a

---

[3] Jon Butler, *Becoming America: The Revolution before 1776* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 154.

[4] Steven Sarson, *British America, 1500-1800: Creating Colonies, Imagining an Empire* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 190.

[5] Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 302.

[6] Butler, 156.

[7] Terrence H. Witkowski, "Colonial Consumers in Revolt: Buyer Values and Behavior during the Nonimportation Movement, 1764-1776," *Journal of Consumer Research* 16, no. 2 (September 1989): 218.

[8] Carl Bridenbaugh, *The Colonial Craftsman* (New York: Dover Publications, 1990), 6.

distinct, self-sustaining people and did focus some attention on their own society while still heavily affected by influences from Britain.

Despite these developments, some scholars see negative changes in the way the colonists and the British viewed each other. Butler argues that the years following the French and Indian War (1754-1763) saw an increased amount of negative feelings towards Britain and its empire. Britain had called upon the colonists to fight a war not of their making, while not providing enough support through their own troops. During the war, British and colonial soldiers came into contact with each other, perhaps the first time either group had met someone from the other group, and found each other "not only different but disagreeable."[9]

In his book on the history of the American colonies, Alan Taylor reconciles these conflicting ideas about colonial attitudes after the French and Indian War: the colonists did feel proud of their contribution to the war effort and of their place in the wider British empire but at the same time the Britons' experiences on the American continent led them to rethink their administration. People were well aware of this change in attitude: a report from London published in the *Georgia Gazette* in May 1765 explains, "It is certain that American affairs will be more closely attended [by Parliament] than heretofore."[10] The writer also mentions taxes being raised, which the people of England should appreciate since they had previously noticed a difference in the amount paid by the colonies. The colonists' apparent prosperity meant they could pay more taxes to help the empire that had saved them in the war, and members of Parliament realized they would need to enforce these new taxes more vigorously because during the war they had seen how the colonists ignored previous regulations that hurt them

[9] Butler, 127.

[10] *The Georgia Gazette*, May 9, 1765.

economically.[11] The major political events surrounding these taxes in the decade before the Revolution led to increasing tension between the colonists and the British government, particularly Parliament and the king's ministers. By passing legislation like the Stamp Act (1765)[12] and the Intolerable Acts (1774)[13] the colonists saw Parliament as infringing upon their rights inherent to them as subjects of the British Empire, even while they remained loyal to the King.

In addition to differences in their relationship to Britain, the colonists faced other obstacles to forming a unified identity. Each colony had different social, political, and economic situations. It is difficult to imagine that a slave-owning planter in Virginia or South Carolina would share an ideological viewpoint about what it means to be American (if they thought they were "American" at all) with a merchant in Boston, a minister in Pennsylvania, or a subsistence farmer on the frontier. The colonists were also quite diverse ethnically. The dichotomy between the idea of a colonist either having an American or a British identity hides the fact that many people living in the colonies came from other European countries. After 1680, Scottish, Scots-Irish, French, German, and Swiss immigrants made up three-quarters of European immigration

---

[11] Taylor, 437-438. For example, the colonists ignored the 1733 Molasses Act, which imposed duties meant to prevent New Englanders from importing molasses from the French colonies in the West Indies rather than the British colonies—the colonists continued to trade with the French colonies, even during the Seven Years' War when France and Britain were at war.

[12] The Stamp Act require that all legal documents, newspapers, pamphlets, playing cards, etc. be printed on stamped paper purchased from local officials

[13] The Intolerable Acts, passed in response to the Boston Tea Party, included the Boston Port Act, which closed the city's harbor until they paid for the destroyed tea; the Massachusetts Government Act, which annulled the colony's charter and substituted a military government; the Quartering Act, billeting troops in people's homes in Boston; and the Administration of Justice Act, which allowed British colonial officials to return to England for trial.

and by the 1760s, 30 percent of New Englanders had not come from England.[14] In such a vast expanse of land, colonists from the thirteen separate colonies had few reasons or means to interact with each other. Newspapers could facilitate the spread of ideas, but they could mainly only be found in large cities, where only 5% of the population lived.[15] Advancements in communication and transportation did occur within the colonies, making it easier to travel and send information between them, but it is unlikely that large numbers of colonists travelled far distances or were aware of political events in the colonies as a whole, especially those who lived on the frontier or in remote rural areas.

Increased intercolonial communications also meant an increase in the colonial press. The earliest newspapers (the *Boston News-Letter*, considered the first continuously published colonial newspaper, started in 1704) were mainly addressed to the merchant community and contained only shipping information and official items from the London press. By the 1730s, political commentary began to appear regularly alongside commercial notices and British news.[16] Many scholars assert the importance of newspapers and the press in forging a sense of unity amongst the colonists before the Revolution. Pauline Maier, for example, explains that throughout the Stamp Act crisis and into the Revolution, "newspapers continued to serve as a forum for the formation of policy and remained the prime vehicle for uniting the population," although, as stated above, many colonists probably did not have access to these newspapers.[17]

Scholars such as Jack Greene contend that, even if the colonists had little contact with each other and could not and did not form ideological bonds, and while each of the British

---

[14] Butler, 10.

[15] Taylor, 308.

[16] Butler, 112-113.

[17] Maier, 91.

colonies (including Ireland and the islands in the Caribbean) may have developed their own unique cultures and identities during the seventeenth century, by the eighteenth century the American colonies began to converge socially and culturally, making their differences less and less noticeable.[18] All of the British colonies, and Britain itself, were "moving closer together in the configuration of their socioeconomic life…toward greater order, coherence, differentiation, and complexity."[19] The American colonies' distance from the British metropolis, the laxity of British control, an opportunity-filled and complex economy, and incorporation into the larger Atlantic economy created high levels of prosperity, which in turn allowed for "differentiated, pluralistic, and improved" societies as well as higher levels of individual activity and economic and demographic growth.[20] Greene acknowledges that growing "metropolitanization or anglicization" helped to bring the colonies together as well. That being said, while the economic and social conditions in the colonies may have grown more and more similar, this does not necessarily mean that colonists who had no contact with other colonies were aware of these shifts. Their lives may have become similar but they still may not have had an ideological connection.

One conclusion that can be drawn from this scholarship is that a unified American identity is difficult to find. Many things stood in the way of the American colonists creating a unified national identity before the Revolution. People in each of the thirteen colonies were too separate—physically and ideologically—to form common bonds, even if their political mood tended to swing in the same direction during major political events like the Stamp Act crisis.

---

[18] Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 171.

[19] Ibid., 172.

[20] Ibid., 174.

Even on a small scale, when studying the ideas expressed in newspapers in certain cities, few conclusive arguments can be made about how colonial and British writers saw the colonists, except that they had conflicting views. Finding common ground and ideas amongst such disparate people can prove difficult. There were those colonists who wanted to forge a patriotic sense of being separate and distinct from Britain in the years leading up to the Revolution. They were determined to create a sense of unity where one did not exist. But many other colonists, such as Loyalists or those living on the frontier, remained unaware of these efforts or were ideologically opposed to them. Thus, while some used the word "American" to refer to the colonists, there was by no means a single "American" identity uniting them before the Revolution.

My study looks at only a small portion of the newspapers printed in the colonies. I looked at three papers in detail: *The Boston Gazette, the Boston Post-Boy,* and *The Georgia Gazette*. These papers represent only two cities in all of the thirteen colonies. My main criteria for using these papers is, most importantly, that they cover the 1760s and 1770s and secondly, that they are available at Ames Library.[21] I chose to look at three different periods between the end of the French and Indian War and the beginning of the Revolution: 1765-66, between the passage and repeal of the Stamp Act; 1769, a relatively quiet year in terms of major political events; and 1773-74, the aftermath of the Boston Tea Party and the passage of the Intolerable Acts, four of which were in direct response to the Tea Party. These years provide a good range, from the 1760s when many colonists were beginning to feel a strain in their relationship to Great Britain but for the most part remained loyal subjects, to the years closer to the Declaration of Independence, when ideas about separating from Britain appeared more frequently (although

[21] Most of the papers in the collection either came from the nineteenth century or, if they had been published in the eighteenth century, stopped publishing decades before the Revolution.

colonists in 1773-4 by no means saw independence as the inevitable conclusion to their struggles against Parliament). The newspapers in all three of these periods contain numerous examples of articles with both colonial and British bylines referring to the colonists as a single unified group, using many different terms. References to the colonists as a single, distinct group appear especially during the Stamp Act crisis and after the repeal of the Stamp Act, when political events had brought them together. However, I also found that in these three limited groups of years, in the three main newspapers I used, although writers referred to colonists as a unified group, they still used many different words to describe them.

Before the content of the newspapers is scrutinized, it helps to know the background of the printers and the papers themselves, to understand the point of view and the biases of the people responsible for spreading information in the colonies and to gain insight into why they might have chosen certain news and letters to publish in their papers. These three newspapers and their printers represent a spectrum of political opinions in the colonial era, from Patriots to Loyalists, but no matter what opinion the printer held, the news and letters published in all the papers contained many different words—mainly variations of "Americans" and "subjects"—to refer to the colonists. I had originally planned to only analyze the use of the word "American" when used to describe the colonists, but I quickly realized that instances when writers used other words are just as telling about how the colonists were viewed and how they viewed themselves. In this section I also present my findings in terms of how many examples of each word I found in each paper. This data can give us a general idea of the leanings of the printer, whether he chose to include more articles written by colonists that use the word "Americans" or British articles that use the word "subjects." Even with these facts, further analysis is needed to fully understand the implications of the use of these words.

The *Boston Gazette*, published from 1719 to 1798, was under the control of John Gill and Benjamin Edes from the 1750s to the 1770s. Both men were strong advocates of American independence by the 1770s who became known for "the increasingly anti-British, pro-independence stance of their publications" beyond the newspaper and "participants in the Boston Tea Party are said to have assembled at their shop before setting forth on their raid."[22] Under the control of Gill and Edes, "the paper gave support and encouragement to the Patriots in unwavering opposition to the British policy."[23] In each of the groups of years, I found more examples of every word used to describe the colonists, regardless of the intent or implication, in the *Boston Gazette* than in any of the other papers. I found 21 uses of "Americans" in articles and letters with colonial bylines and 25 uses in British articles, and only 9 uses of "subjects" in colonial articles and 10 in British articles. As a paper printed by men who became known for their pro-American leanings, it makes sense that references to the colonists that distinguish them completely from the British appear most frequently.

In contrast to the pro-independence *Boston Gazette*, the *Boston Post-Boy*, printed from 1734 to 1775 and originally published by postmaster Elias Huske, was under the control of John Green and Joseph Russell from the 1750s to the 1770s. Although less is known about Green and Russell's personal lives, the *Post-Boy* "became the most eloquent of the Loyalist papers in the years between the Stamp Act and the Revolution."[24] The highest number of examples of any word used by either colonists or Britons I found in any of the newspapers came from the *Boston Post-Boy*: 37 uses of the word "Americans" in articles and letters from Britain. Colonial uses of

[22] *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "John Gill," http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/233704/John-Gill (accessed March 30, 2013).

[23] Nathan Cohen, ed. *Early American Newspapers (1704-1820)* (New York: Readex Microprint Corporation, 1964), 16.

[24] Ibid., 12.

"Americans" appear 23 times, colonial uses of "subjects" appear 3 times, and I found no examples of the British use of "subjects." These findings seem to go against what would logically be assumed, that the Loyalist paper would express more of a connection to Britain, rather than identifying the colonists as distinct "Americans." This could mean that "American" was simply the most common word used by anyone to refer to the colonists, regardless of political beliefs.

Even less is known about the *Georgia Gazette*, which was published from 1763 to 1770 and "lasted only as long as the Royal government gave it support," implying a royalist leaning. [25] The fact that it stopped printing before the 1770s makes it difficult to trace the printers' opinions through to the Revolution, but it offers insight into the Stamp Act crisis and its aftermath. British uses of the word "Americans" appear most frequently in the *Georgia Gazette*: 9 times. American uses of "American" appear 5 times, American uses of "subjects" appear 6 times, and British uses of "subjects" appear once. Like the other two papers, "American" is used most often to describe the colonists, which perhaps emphasizes that even as they remained loyal to the crown, some writers understood that "American" was becoming the most common way to refer to the colonists, even though they may not have actually wanted the distinction to exist.

However the colonists saw themselves, and even if they did not share a common identity, both colonial and British writers often referred to them as a collective, separate people in the newspapers, distinct from British subjects living in Britain. Oftentimes colonial writers refer to the colonists as a generalized whole in order to take a stand against Parliament's violations of their rights and to symbolically include every colonist in their fight against what they perceived

[25] Ibid., 8.

to be tyranny. In this way, the generalization is more apt. For example, in 1773, in reference to the Tea Act, the *Boston Post-Boy* published resolves passed in colonies that stated "a Duty upon Teas, landed in America, payable here, is a Tax whereby the Property of Americans is taken from them without their Consent."[26] By using this rhetorical strategy, the writers assert that *all* of the colonists have had their rights violated, even those living on the frontier, completely unaware of the events in Boston and elsewhere. Even if colonial or British writers refer to the colonists as a whole, though, it cannot be taken as evidence that all the colonists saw themselves as a unified group. The Stamp Act and other Parliamentary legislation leading up to the Revolution may have bound many together behind a common cause, but they remained very different people, and many writers still had differing ideas of how to identify them. Numerous examples appear in colonial newspapers of disparate words used to describe the colonists, even a few years before the Revolution.

Other scholars who have investigated the use of different words in colonial newspapers have come to different conclusions about the colonists' sense of an American identity. In *Symbols of American Community, 1735-1775*, Richard Merritt lays out the findings of his study of the use of words signifying British or American national identity. He counted the number of times "American" symbols (the words "America," "American," or even "the American colonists," or colonial place names like "the Carolinas" or "Boston") appeared versus "British" symbols ("British colonists," "British Americans," "His Majesty's subjects") in American newspapers.[27] He found that between the years 1735 and 1775 authors of newspaper articles, both British and colonial, increasingly referred to the colonists as a single group and identified

[26] *The Boston Post-Boy*, December 27, 1773.

[27] Richard L. Merritt, *Symbols of American Community, 1735-1775* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 44-45, 115.

them "as Americans rather than as members of a British political community," which suggests "aroused expectations about group membership in a distinctly American political community."[28] While they may have felt more distinct from Britain, due in part to their developing economy and the growing possibility of self-sufficiency, ideologically most colonists probably still did not see themselves as connected to each other and in fact many still felt connected to Britain as subjects of the king. In a letter published in the *Boston Gazette* in 1765, a colonist insists, "Nothing…can ever make an English American wish for separation from, or independence on the mother country, nor view it any otherwise than one of the greatest evils that can befall us."[29] Thus, whatever distinction the colonists may have felt from Britain, many still felt very strongly connected to the "mother country." Also, any sense of separation from Britain that may have existed among other colonists does not necessarily correspond to an ideological connection between the colonists themselves.

One major gap in Merritt's study is the lack of analysis of the context in which the symbols he studies appeared. Simply counting the number of times the words "American" or "British" appear in a newspaper does not take into account whether these uses occurred in a positive or negative context, or how the readers of a paper would have understood or perceived the use of a particular word. A colonial author attacking something "British" might indicate an ideological aversion to Britain in general, but Merritt still counts it among the evidence that the colonists still felt connected to Britain. While this may be true—that any mention at all indicates an ideological connection—a negative opinion also indicates an ideological shift away from the connection and toward a new attitude. Merritt does give some generalizations about the political climate in which the words were used. According to him, many different factors influenced the

[28] Ibid., 180.

[29] *The Boston Gazette*, September 16, 1765.

symbols that appeared in the newspapers and how the writers used them. British writers used American symbols most often when a sense of unity between Britain and the colonies ran high (particularly in the 1750s) and they did not have to worry about the colonists feeling negatively toward this connection.[30] In these same periods, the colonists used more British symbols, reemphasizing their easy relations with Britain, when they had no need to assert any differences with the mother country.[31]

Merritt's study also functions under the assumption that the newspapers expressed the general mood of the colonists. While this may not be wholly true, since the urban newspapers that he chose to study certainly could not reach an audience in rural and frontier areas and could not know or express the opinions of the people there, a growth in literacy and proliferation of newspapers in the eighteenth century was key in helping the colonists to publicize their causes and attempt to forge at least a political bond between the colonies, especially during major publicized political events.[32] Despite this, we cannot assume that a high rate of use of a word like "American" meant that *all* colonists thought of themselves as a politically and ideologically distinct group of people. Use of the word "American" can only signify that the people who wrote the news and letters in which it appears, and perhaps the broader readership of the paper, thought of themselves as something different or wanted *others* to think of themselves this way, although even this sort of generalization is difficult to make.

What can be said definitively about colonial identity is that people on both sides of the Atlantic had conflicting views. References to the colonists as "subjects" appear just as frequently

[30] Merritt, 119.

[31] Ibid., 125.

[32] Although numbers vary in each colony, male literacy ranged from 60-90% by the late 1700s, higher than in England. Thomas L. Purvis, *Colonial America to 1763*, vol. 1 of *Almanacs of American Life*, ed. Richard Balkin (New York: Infobase Publishing, 1999), 248.

as references to them as "Americans." Sometimes they even appear in the same sentence: a letter signed with the pseudonym "Pro Patria" (and discussed in more detail below) asserts, "…the Americans shew themselves capable of making staunch and loyal subjects."[33] It is easy retrospectively to say that surely the colonists must have felt more and more "American" as they approached the Revolution, but this discounts large numbers of loyalists, as well as the large numbers who lived in frontier areas and presumably had no sense of a common bond with other colonists, as British subjects or as Americans. The fact that many colonists who would become revolutionary patriots remained loyal to the king as they began to fight against other parts of the British government, namely the king's ministers and Parliament, also shows that the colonists had conflicting views about their place in the wider British empire in the years leading up to the Revolution. There certainly was a growing sense of a distinct identity, starting especially in the 1760s when many colonists felt singled out by Parliament through the Stamp Act, but it was not enough to make them want to break with Britain and the king.

On the other hand, in his book on colonial newspapers, Daniel A. Copeland says that the Stamp Act crisis "was one of the few times when all printers agreed," and that during this time printers stopped referring to the colonists as British: "they spoke of themselves as Americans, or free born sons of America."[34] Obviously, this is not what I found in my research. There may have been instances of people referring to themselves as American, but just as many continued to consider themselves British subjects. In fact, some writers refer to the colonists as Englishmen, usually in connection to their *rights* as Englishmen. In the midst of the Stamp Act crisis, a letter from Connecticut, published in the *Boston Gazette*, talks of "the cause of liberty, of every thing

[33] *The Boston Post-Boy*, April 14, 1766.

[34] Daniel A. Copeland, *Debating the Issues in Colonial Newspapers* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 193.

valuable and dear to us as men, and as Englishmen especially…"[35] Copeland's first conclusion does appear to be true, though: all of the papers I studied, whether their printers would become patriots or loyalists during the Revolution, opposed the Stamp Act. For example, the *Boston Post-Boy*, known as a Loyalist paper, ran under its masthead for many months the words: "The united Voice of all His Majesty's free and loyal Subjects in America, --- LIBERTY and PROPERTY, and NO STAMPS." Thus, even papers and printers that were ostensibly loyal to Britain and the king opposed the Stamp Act and the actions of Parliament.

While words such as "American" or "subjects" are easy enough to locate in a colonial newspaper, many difficulties arise when using these papers as a primary source, especially when looking for opinion, subjective information, or the context or meaning behind the use of a single word. The news and letters printed in papers often came from other cities, colonies, or countries. One issue of a Boston newspaper could include news taken from Pennsylvania, Barbados, or London. Even if the source of the news is known, it is sometimes impossible to know whether the words in a Boston paper, for example, are those of an original paper in London, of the man who relayed the news from London to Boston, or of the Boston printer. For example, news about a speech made in the House of Commons by Irish MP Isaac Barré, a supporter of the colonists' fight against the Stamp Act (and the man who coined the phrase "Sons of Liberty"), was reported in the *Boston Gazette* on May 13, 1765: "He said the Americans were a brave people, inflexably loyal, and affectionately attached to his majesty's person and family."[36] It is difficult to know whether Barré used the word himself, a London printer originally chose the word, or Gill and Edes first chose the word when they published the news in Boston. Problems such as these make it difficult to interpret the use of the word, whether a Briton used it and thus showed solidarity

[35] *The Boston Gazette*, September 16, 1765.

[36] *The Boston Gazette*. May 13, 1765. (Boston, MA: Gill and Edes, 1765

with the colonists or perhaps felt secure enough in America's connection to Great Britain to use such a distinguishing word, or whether an American chose to use it and emphasize that distinction, or whether there was any political motivation behind it at all.

Another problem with using these newspapers is often the impossibility of knowing whether a writer uses the word "American" as a conscious political statement, or whether they simply found it to be the most convenient noun to use to describe the colonists. Many uses of the word do seem to have been used without a political bias, especially in the one-sentence news reports from other cities that appear in every issue: "The grand question, Whether the British Parliament have a right to tax the Americans, has been determined in the affirmative, almost unanimously" or, "That the British Parliament have a right to tax the Americans, is now no longer a matter of dispute."[37] A strong bias is not apparent in these reports. Both contain simple explanations of the proceedings of Parliament and thus the use of "Americans" here cannot be out of a political bias. If the news report had a readily apparent bias toward Parliament, and supported their decision, it would make more sense that they would use a description that would more closely identify the colonists with Britain, by calling them subjects, rather than distinguishing them as Americans. This perhaps shows us that "American" was a generally accepted term to use when reporting on the colonists, with or without political motive. An extract of a letter from London in 1764 also contains a neutral use of the word "Americans," when discussing their presence in London during Parliamentary debates: "This was the Debate of Yesterday, from the sitting of the [words obscured] Midnight; and at which all the Americans in and about this City attended, and several were examined at the Bar."[38] In this example, "Americans" seems to only be used to distinguish those people from the colonies who happened

[37] *The Boston Post-Boy*. April 21, 1766. *The Georgia Gazette*, May 21, 1766.

[38] *The Boston Post-Boy*, June 11, 1764.

to be in London at the time. Another letter, first published in a London paper and written under the pseudonym of "Pacificus" makes an equally neutral statement after discussing the various way that Parliament could react to the colonists' resistance to the Stamp Act: "Whether the Americans do not deserve this Treatment, I shall leave to the Consideration of the Reader." He does not express an opinion and seems to have no personal feelings either way about the colonists. The use of a pseudonym, a common feature in almost every letter published in a colonial newspaper, also makes it difficult to know the author's intent because the true identity of the writer cannot be known and thus, we cannot know more about their personal lives, opinions, and other political activities.

Having said this, though, the fact that "American" was even an option, rather than "subject" or "Briton," is very telling. "Americans" had become a distinct enough group that they warranted their own title, separate from their fellow subjects in Great Britain. This may go back to the fact that by the end of the French and Indian War the colonial and British soldiers had interacted enough that they saw differences between themselves and needed a way to distinguish each other, out of convenience more than anything else. People had been using the word American as a noun even before the French and Indian War. Colonists had used the word as far back as 1691, when Cotton Mather called himself a "rude American," or in 1701 when a pamphleteer signed off as "An American."[39] Mather's use appears self-deprecating and not at all a term of pride in a certain identity, and the pamphleteer may simply have used "American" as a convenient geographical identification, rather than as a political statement. These uses appear to be anomalous and cannot be used as evidence of any sort of unique "American" identity at the turn of the eighteenth century. The first widespread use of "American" appears during the War of

[39] Albert Harkness, Jr., "Americanism and Jenkins' Ear," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 37, no. 1 (June 1950), 88.

Jenkins' Ear in the 1740s, the first time that Britons and colonists interacted on a large scale.[40] British soldiers used the word "American" to distinguish the colonials, usually as a term of disrespect, or at least to establish them as a group who seemed strange and foreign.[41] For example, when the issue of soldiers from the thirteen colonies settling in the Caribbean arose, English Admiral Edward Vernon believed that "only unserviceable Americans…[should be sent] back to their own continent." On the other hand, in an article on British perceptions of the colonists in the eighteenth century, Stephen Conway adds that the colonial soldiers during the War of Jenkins' Ear referred to themselves as Americans as well and, most importantly, the description of the colonists as "American" on either side was "probably as much geographical as political."[42] Whatever the earlier motives of earlier colonists and Britons, by the 1760s both colonial and British writers were using the word "American" (among many other words) to refer to the colonists in newspapers.

One obvious fact is that, while many people, colonists and Britons alike, use "American" to describe the colonists, many other descriptive words appear in newspapers throughout the 1760s and 1770s. "American subjects," "British subjects," and "North-Americans," can be found in the pages of colonial newspapers, all of which can have very different implications. "North-American" seems the closest to "Americans," but it can also be broader, or even narrower, in scope. "Americans" may refer to just the colonists in the thirteen colonies while "North-Americans" may refer to colonists in Canada, or even the Indies. On the other hand,

---

[40] The War of Jenkins' Ear, eventually subsumed into the larger War of Austrian Secession (1740-48) and instigated by the severing of English Captain Robert Jenkins's ear by Spanish forces off the coast of Florida in 1731, was fought between Britain and Spain in the Caribbean, starting in 1739.

[41] Harkness, 88.

[42] Stephen Conway, "From Fellow-Nationals to Foreigners: British Perceptions of the Americans, circa 1739-1783," *William and Mary Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (January 2002): 77.

"Americans" may refer to any person living in *the Americas*, while "North-Americans" may refer more specifically to the colonists in what we now know as "America," excluding those colonists living in the Caribbean or Canada. This dichotomy perfectly illustrates the issue of the inability to know a writer's intent: sometimes it is impossible to know who exactly a writer means by "North-American," what his intent was—political, geographical, or otherwise—in using the word, or whether he had any intent at all and it was simply the first noun that he could think of.

A pair of letters from the *Boston Gazette* in May of 1766 contains good examples of the use of "North-American" to describe the colonists, as well as offering some insight into the political implications of the word and a connected identity. The editors preface the first letter, published on May 12, as "from a North-American, now on the Island of Barbados."[43] The writer explains that when he discovered the Barbadians had "tamely submitted" to the Stamp Act, he felt "truly North-American," but he also goes on to explain that the Barbadians do not resist the Act because it would be detrimental to their economy, which depends on trade with Great Britain. By saying he feels "truly North American," he implies that true North Americans resist the Stamp Act, fight for their liberties, and react negatively to anyone who does not feel the same way. This "true" North American also explains that this lack of resistance he sees to the hated Act "would exasperate to a Degree of Madness every Man who is worthy of the Name of a Briton." Thus, he refers to the colonists both as North Americans and as Britons, without seeing any conflict between the two terms. It could be said that he uses "North American" simply as a geographical convenience, to distinguish a group of people living in a certain place, but his use of the word has political implications as well: not only do such people live in North America, but

[43] *The Boston Gazette*. May 12, 1766.

they have a certain set of standards and ideas about the Stamp Act, or at least he wants his readers to believe they should.

One week later, another letter appears, criticizing the letter from Barbados. This writer begins, "I observed in your Paper of last Monday, a very pompous Epistle, said to be wrote by a North American, but from the Spirit of it, much more like to have come from a slavish Creole."[44] This writer continues his attack on the first writer, calling the inhabitants of Barbados slaves because they submit to the Stamp Act. He takes exception to the idea that they are "Fellow Subjects" and asserts, "we disdain the Relation, that we are the Fellow Subjects of Freemen, not the Fellow Subjects of Slaves." He ends his letter by writing "if he continues the Business of an Apology Maker, please to advise him to assume some other Title than that of A North American, since if he is really one, and has given us his Sentiments without a Fee, he is a Bastard and no Son" and signs as "A True North American." Thus, these two letters demonstrate that some colonists understood that words like "North American" could have political implications and used them for political purposes: if someone wanted to call themselves a North American, they should have a certain set of ideals and beliefs regarding politics, namely the Stamp Act. This logic could be applied to "American" as well, although these letters do not give a specific example of that.

The use of "Briton" by the first "true North American" discussed above to describe the colonists brings up another point about colonial identity, especially during the 1760s. After the passage of the Stamp Act, many colonists were eager to assert their status as Britons or Englishmen in order to tap into the rights inherent in being British subjects, derived from the

[44] *The Boston Gazette*. May 19, 1766.

constitution, which they felt had been violated by the Act.[45] This was not just a rhetorical strategy to achieve their desired goal. Many colonial writers who use words like "Briton" or "Englishman" to describe the colonists considered themselves Englishmen. One letter writer in July, 1765 gives a perfect example of this mentality. He explains that those people who would justify the Stamp Act do so by asking, "Are not the people of America British Subjects? Are they not Englishmen?" If so, as subjects of the king they are also subject to the rule of Parliament. The writer counters by saying "Yes, ye base hirelings, —we are British Subjects—we are Englishmen," which he gives more ideological meaning. As true Englishmen, the colonists are "more than ever attentive to their Rights and Privileges," which have been violated by Parliament's actions.[46] A statement issued by members of the Connecticut House of Representatives echoes these sentiments when they describe "the Rights and Privileges of the British Constitution, which we have not forfeited, but ought to hold, as Englishmen…"[47] The writer, along with many others during the Stamp Act crisis, emphasizes this connection, rather than asserting a separate identity, to gain the benefits of a British subject, such as the right to not be taxed without consent. Thus, a colonist could attack the British government while still maintaining his identity as a loyal subject and an Englishman.

---

[45] Legal theorist Thomas C. Grey explains in *Origins of the Unwritten Constitution: Fundamental Law in American Revolutionary Thought* that the colonists adhered to the idea of unwritten, fundamental law—natural rights that were superior to any "organs of government"—an idea which had existed since the Middle Ages in English legal theory. By violating the colonists' natural rights, Parliament made it possible (and even necessary) for the colonists to oppose legislation like the Stamp Act because if they did not revolt, it would lead the English to continue passing illegal legislation.

[46] *The Boston Gazette*. July 15, 1765.

[47] *The Boston Post-Boy*, November 11, 1765

This mentality continued after the Stamp Act had been repealed, but when other political events in the colonies threatened the colonists' sense of their rights as Englishmen. Resolves drawn up in Lexington, Massachusetts, in 1773 express solidarity with Bostonians and their struggles for liberty, and pledge that they are ready to take measures "for the preservation, or recovery, of our rights and liberties, as Englishmen…"[48] In January, 1774, the *Boston Gazette* published a series of articles written by Josiah Quincy, Jr., a Boston lawyer and patriot, which scrutinized and attacked a group of letters written by Governor Thomas Hutchinson in the 1760s, which had been published a few months before and seemed to have evidence of Hutchinson's desire to abridge the colonists' rights. Quincy, under the name of Marchmont Nedham (who himself was a propagandist publisher in seventeenth century England), in his attacks on Hutchinson, mentions "those liberties, which are peculiar to us as Englishmen."[49] With the Revolutionary War less than a year and a half away, even men known for their revolutionary leanings still stressed their identities as Englishmen, in order to take advantage of the rights they still saw as theirs as British subjects.

The use of "subjects" (as in, "his Majesty's subjects") by colonial writers offers the same insight into the conflicting ideas about an American identity as the use of "Englishmen" or "Britons." It extends further, though, because there are more opportunities for variation. Within the newspapers, the colonists are variously called "his Majesty's subjects," "American subjects," "British subjects," and "British American subjects." Each one of these phrases offers a slightly different interpretation of the colonists' identity. "His Majesty's subjects" would make no distinction with other subjects in any of the other colonies or in Britain and thus would not express any idea of the American colonists being a distinct group. Typically, though, a

[48] *The Boston Gazette*, December 20, 1773

[49] *The Boston Gazette*. January 17, 1774

distinction *is* made, such as "his Majesty's subjects in the colonies" or "his Majesty's subjects in America." This is usually done to emphasize the distinction first made by Parliament in passing the Stamp Act. At the same time, however, using "his Majesty's subjects" rather than "British subjects," makes the distinction more vague: they can be Americans, while still being subjects of the king, just as a Barbadian could be a subject of his Majesty while still being a Barbadian. Using "British subject" implies a closer connection to being British, rather than leaving the place of origin vague and unspoken, but it also leaves out large numbers of the colonists who did not come from Britain and never considered themselves Britain. Just as when using "Briton" or "Englishman" to describe themselves, colonial writers refer to themselves as British subjects only when emphasizing the inherent rights that go along with the distinction.

The fact that many colonists still saw themselves as loyal subjects of the king can explain why the Stamp Act crisis actually caused them to reconsider this connection. The violation of rights they saw in the act may have been an impetus for the forming of a separate identity. As royal subjects, the colonists assumed they had access to all the rights of other British subjects. When Parliament imposed the Stamp Act, many colonists saw themselves as singled out from their fellow subjects in Britain, whose rights were not violated in the same way. Many colonial and British writers did continue to identify the colonists as "his Majesty's subjects," but they also saw a distinction being made by Parliament. An example of this appears in a petition from the Massachusetts House of Representatives published in the *Boston Gazette* on March 18, 1765, still days before the Stamp Act had been officially passed by Parliament. In this petition, the representatives "Most humbly showeth…That every act of parliament, which in this respect distinguishes his Majesty's subjects in the colonies, from their fellow subjects in Great Britain, must create a very sensible concern and grief." This sentence demonstrates that these

Massachusetts representatives saw themselves and their fellow colonists as singled out from other British subjects by Parliament, although it is also significant that they still did see themselves as subjects. The petition gives no evidence of a completely distinct American identity, but it shows that at least some colonists in the 1760s understood that Parliament had singled them out from other British subjects.

A letter written to the *Boston Gazette* in October, 1765 takes this mentality a step further. Under the pseudonym of Americanus, the writer explains that colonists hold the belief that "British subjects are British subjects…that those of them that live in America are entitled to the same essential privileges as they that live in Britain. Vain imaginations! Be not deceived. Instead of looking upon yourselves as subjects of the K. of Great Britain, you should remember that you are subjects of the subjects of a monarch."[50] Americanus seems to sow the beginnings of an idea that the colonists are not British subjects at all. The colonists are treated so differently from other British subjects that they are no longer subjects of the King but rather subjects of Parliament, something they should not want. Most writers do not go so far as to assert a hatred of their status as royal subjects, but here Americanus shows that some colonists felt a strain in their relationship with all of the government in Britain.

Many writers echo these feelings of being singled out by Parliament. Members of the town meeting at Cambridge, Massachusetts, whose opinions on the Stamp Act were published in the *Boston Gazette* on October 21, 1765, asked why, as "His Majesty's good American subjects," must "we in America, who have in every Instance discovered as much Loyalty to His Majesty, and Obedience to His Laws, as any of His British Subjects…be thus discriminated?"[51] Resolves from the South Carolina Assembly, published on January 6, 1766, state that "his Majesty's liege

[50] *The Boston Gazette*, October 21, 1765.

[51] *The Boston Gazette*, October 21, 1765.

subjects in this province, are intitled to all the inherent rights and liberties of his natural born subjects within the kingdom of Great Britain."[52] Both of these reports from political bodies within the colonies show that they saw Parliament making a distinction between themselves and other subjects of the king but still continued to refer to themselves as subjects. The example from South Carolina especially demonstrates the distinction seen by the colonists: the British subjects are "natural born" while the American subjects are "liege," only connected through their continued faith and loyalty rather than through any natural connection—they saw their connection to Great Britain and the king as different (perhaps even lesser) than that of people living in Britain.

Symbols of solidarity with (and within) the colonists also appear from both colonial and British writers. Some British writers refer to the colonists as "brethren" or "fellow subjects," indicating that they still felt a bond between them, as a single group of people. "Pro Patria" (meaning "for the fatherland" in Latin), mentioned above, seems to fear that the colonists' opposition to the Stamp Act will lead to a break in their relationship with Britain. He insists, "If the loyal Americans can be treated as brethren…we shall ever gain the unshaken attachment of their loyalty and affection; the cultivation of which is of the utmost importance and it must tend to mutual benefit."[53] His pseudonym implies that he feels a continued connection to the colonies would be in the best interests of Britain. At the same time, though, the fact that he uses both "Americans" and "brethren" shows a conflict in his view of the status of the colonists, that they could possibly remain closely connected to Britain while gaining a new separate identity as "Americans."

---

[52] *The Boston Gazette*, January 6, 1766

[53] *The Boston Post-Boy*, April 14, 1766

Uses of the word "Americans" to refer to the colonists are equally as varied as the uses of "subjects." As stated above, attributing a political motive to a writer's choice of words can prove difficult. Often, "American" seems to be used as a convenient way to identify the colonists, rather than as any sort of political statement on their identity or political situation. Occasionally, though, as with the use of "North-American," a writer implies that being "American" includes having a certain set of political beliefs, usually in opposition to Parliamentary legislation. The closer the colonies move toward the Revolution, the more adamant these writers seem to be about the colonists' status as a single group with similar interests, although of course this tells us nothing about how the colonists actually felt about themselves, only about the feelings of the more opinionated people published in newspapers. A one-sentence news report from Philadelphia in 1765 reports that "The person appointed distributor of stamps for Halifax has declared he will not act in that office so detestable to every American."[54] The writer implies that anyone who would call themselves an American must hate the Stamp Act. Similarly, in a news report in May 1774 about the resistance of New Yorkers to the Tea Act, the writer expresses solidarity with their conduct and hopes it will "serve to convince Administration that when Americans perceive Insult added to Oppression and Injustice, they will always resent it in manner becoming the Character of a wise and great People."[55] Like the 1765 report, this writer refers to the colonists as a single group with a common interest and opinion, who hate the perceived injustices of Parliament. Also, by calling them a "People" he emphasizes their distinction as a separate group, less than a year before the start of the Revolutionary War, which can be especially telling about the writer's intentions and ideas about the political direction of the colonies. One week later, another news report in the *Boston Gazette* seems particularly

[54] *The Boston Gazette*, November 11, 1765.

[55] *The Boston Gazette*, May 9, 1774.

propagandistic: "It appears that the drift of Administration and their good friends in England, is to break the union of the American colonies…But let us not be destroyed, let us persevere to the end, and resolve to yield our lives and fortunes, before we will submit to the iron yoke of tyranny! And let this sacred truth be borne in the mind of every American, 'By Uniting we Stand, by Dividing we Fall!'"[56] The writer here, presumably one of the editors of the paper, seeks to rally all the colonists around a love of liberty and a hatred of tyranny, and would have them unite in the fight against the "Administration" that harms them.

The *Boston Gazette* provides an example of a colonist actually commenting on the fact that others call the colonists Americans. A letter from London published in April of 1765 refers to colonists as "the rascally American republicans." In a footnote, which appears to have been written by the editors themselves, they explain that the letter-writer's phrase comes from a pamphlet, where "the colonists are thus strangely distinguished:" "We on the continent [as opposed to people living in the West Indies] are called barely *Americans*, excepting now and then the *plebeian republican Americans*."[57] In these instances, based on the adjectives used with the word, "American" seems to have a negative implication and the editors take offense at its use. This is a sharp difference from the reports published in the paper nine years later that proudly refer to the colonists as Americans and assert their distinction and unity.

Sometimes self-identification by a writer as an American can seem self-deprecating, rather than something to be proud of. One letter from the *Boston Post-Boy* in July of 1765 is described as having been sent to a "certain great personage" in England. The writer refers to himself as a "plain American" and fears that this great personage will think his appeal presumptuous. This use of the word does show that the writer considers himself different from

[56] *The Boston Gazette*, May 16, 1774.

[57] *The Boston Gazette*, April 29, 1765

people in Britain, but the deferential tone of the letter also demonstrates that, as an American, he feels inferior to the lords in Britain and seems nowhere near ready to break off from the mother country and form a separate nation. Also, the use of the singular "American" used by the writer to describe only himself gives a different impression than if he had used the plural "Americans" to describe all of the colonists, as many other writers do. The singular "American" adds to the self-deprecating tone because the writer appears more pitiable as a sole figure, rather than as one person amongst a self-identified group. This singular, self-deprecating use of American does not appear often, though, and seems anomalous amongst the other writers who call themselves Americans proudly or even without political intent.

Many articles and letters from Britain that use "Americans" show support for their cause, in opposition to taxation. One writer, under the title "Occasional Thoughts relating to the Taxation of the American Colonies," asks whether members of Parliament, who own no property in the colonies and thus are not affected by any taxes levied there, have a right to tax the colonies—are these men "proper persons to be vested with a power of taxing the Americans?"[58] He logically explains that MPs can tax the British because, to be in the House of Commons, men must own a certain amount of property; they are affected by the taxes as much as any other person living in Britain. He goes on to explain that the Americans do indeed pay a large amount of taxes through all the products they import from Britain, the cost of which he estimates at two million pounds annually. Thus, he supports the liberties of the colonies and by using "Americans" shows that he may consider them a distinct people. Other British writers express similar feelings of support for the colonists' cause, but at the same time fear the idea of their independence. Writing under the pseudonym "Impartial" in 1774, one British writer chastises

[58] *The Georgia Gazette*, May 21, 1766.

Parliament for continuing "to enforce that obnoxious principle of slavery into the Colonies."[59] He fears that if Parliament does persist "in endeavouring to enforce the vicious sting of revenge into the Americans, a final exit may be the event," which would "be dreadfully felt in Europe." While some writers in Britain insist that the colonists have liberties without even mentioning their status as subjects, implying they saw them as something different, they still did not want the colonists to be completely separated from Britain.

Interestingly, many uses of the word "Americans" by British writers come from reports of debates in Parliament regarding policies in the colonies. Most of these reports come from the *Boston Post-Boy*, especially in the 1770s, demonstrating its Loyalist leanings by paying more attention to Parliament than other colonial papers. Like the earlier quote from Isaac Barré, though, it is sometimes impossible to know whether a Member of Parliament originally used the word or a British or colonial printer first used it, but occasionally the reports from Parliament appear to be direct quotes. Analyzing debates in Parliament is especially helpful because the MP using the word "American" typically has a history in regards to his opinions of the colonies. Supporters of the colonists' liberties as well as those who would rather tax them use "American," which again implies that by this point it was the accepted term to use, regardless of one's political beliefs. The common usage of "American," especially only one year before the Revolutionary War, also shows a growing sense, at least among members of Parliament, of the colonists as a separate people, whether or not the colonists saw themselves as a single distinct group.

In one report of proceedings in the House of Commons, Henry Seymour Conway, an MP who advocated for moderate treatment of the colonies in the 1760s, talks about the last session of

[59] *The Boston Post-Boy*, May 8, 1774.

Parliament where "we came to a resolution, that it might be proper to tax the Americans." He later explains that he has little knowledge of the colonies, but would like to hear the colonists' evidence of their inability to pay a tax, or ideas for a different way to tax them.[60] Like others, his use of "Americans" does not seem to be a conscious political statement. Perhaps he is only quoting others who used the word in the last session of Parliament. At the same time, however, the knowledge that he was at least sympathetic to the colonists could perhaps explain why he chose to refer to them as Americans rather than call them subjects and emphasize the connection to what he would have seen as a government enforcing oppressive measures.

Colonial newspapers reveal that neither colonists nor Britons had a clear idea of the colonists' identity before the Revolution. Many of the secondary sources would lead us to believe that all colonists had a coherent idea of themselves as a single group of people, but this is not the case. The newspapers published in the decade before the Revolution demonstrate that both colonial and British writers had different ideas of how to identify the colonists. Some refer to them as Americans, implying a separate identity from Britons, and others still call them subjects of the king, emphasizing this continued connection. By the 1770s, though, many more people use "Americans" rather than "subjects," showing that at least the writers had found a common way to refer to the colonists. More radical writers sought to find or create an identity amongst the colonists as a single unified group, fighting against what they saw as the oppressive actions of Parliament. The period of the Stamp Act crisis provides particularly interesting insights into the colonists' relationship with Britain and its government, as the impetus for many colonists' feeling of separation from Britain. Despite what writers in newspapers might say or

[60] *The Georgia Gazette*, August 1, 1765.

hope to achieve, and despite what modern scholars might say, the abundance of words used to indentify the colonists throughout the time period and the differences between the thirteen colonies in all aspects of life show that no one single colonial identity existed before the Revolution.

Bibliography

Boston Gazette. Printed by John Gill and Benjamin Edes. Boston, 1765-1774.

Boston Post-Boy. Printed by John Green and Joseph Russell. Boston, 1764-1774.

Bridenbaugh, Carl. *The Colonial Craftsman*. New York: Dover Publications, 1990.

Butler, Jon. *Becoming America: The Revolution before 1776*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Cohen, Nathan, ed. *Early American Newspapers (1704-1820)*. New York: Readex Microprint Corporation, 1964.

Conway, Stephen. "From Fellow-Nationals to Foreigners: British Perceptions of the Americans, circa 1739-1783." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (January 2002): 65-100.

Copeland, Daniel A. *Debating the Issues in Colonial Newspapers: Primary Documents on Events of the Period*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000.

Georgia Gazette. Printed by James Johnston. Savannah, 1765-1766.

Greene, Jack P. *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

Harkness, Jr., Albert. "Americanism and Jenkins' Ear." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 37, no. 1 (June 1950): 61-90.

Maier, Pauline. *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776.* New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1991.

McConville, Brendan. *The King's Three Faces: The Rise & Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

Merritt, Richard L. *Symbols of American Community, 1735-1775.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966.

Purvis, Thomas L. *Colonial America to 1763*. Vol 1 of *Almanacs of American Life*, edited by Richard Balkin. New York: Infobase Publishing, 1999.

Sarson, Steven. *British America, 1500-1800: Creating Colonies, Imagining an Empire*. London: Hodder Arnold, 2005.

Taylor, Alan. *American Colonies: The Settling of North America*. New York: Penguin Books, 2001.

Witkowski, Terrence H. "Colonial Consumers in Revolt: Buyer Values and Behavior during the Nonimportation Movement, 1764-1776." *Journal of Consumer Research* 16, no. 2 (September 1989): 216-228.