lecture on the Revolution

- so I’ll remind you all of some basic facts which you may remember from various history classes throughout your lives (although if you’re an international student – like that guy from Canada I met Monday, perhaps some of this will be new to you)
- but also – suggest some things which will complicate the conventional narrative we all know about the patriots who rise manfully to fight tyranny and reclaim their natural rights
- last, I’d like to talk about the rhetoric of revolution and of community – at what point do the colonists begin to think of themselves as Americans with more in common than differences between them?

INTRO
1. Britain seen by rest of world
to America,
   England was feudal, tyrannical and reactionary
but to Euro monarchs:
   English were wild, upstart people
   notable for their revolutions
   almost pathological adherence to liberty
   a people who kept its kings in subjection and rioted at the least provocation
   as one historian puts in, “a nation of hard-drinking, beef-eating shopkeepers with the instincts of pirates”
2. Brit vs. France

   in terms of culture, in particular, Brit not tops
   French had become the language of science, diplomacy and the arts
   the nobility of Europe
     spoke Fr
     wore Fr clothes
     sat on Fr furniture
     bought Fr paintings
     read Fr books
     and pretended to believe Fr philosophy (and several Fr thinkers were very important to Americans as well, which we will hear more about when we talk about the French revolution)

   with all this in mind, it made little sense to many Europeans that Britain was the world power

3. but, in fact, here’s one of the important facts for context for us
   1763 the Seven Years’ War ended with the treaty of Paris, and France cedes all of their North American territory to the British – Canada, basically
   The American phase of this war was called the French and Indian war

GEORGE

the other crucial historical fact we need to know is that a new king, George III succeeded to the throne in 1760, (just three years before the end of the war with the French)
he came to the throne at an early age (22) and many historians argue he wasn’t ready yet – one source, for example, gripes that he wasn’t very smart and he couldn’t read until the age of ten.
he’s been described as lacking faith in his own abilities and even that the difficulties of his reign literally drove him a literally insane.  but what is sure:

he did not doubt the authority of the Crown and Parliament

1763 did bring significant changes in the way Britain dealt with the colonies

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WHERE THE COLONIES ARE AT THIS POINT

-- upper class in America held similar attitudes towards life as upper class in Britain but their position was more secure and more powerful

-- the powers of the Crown that were in the colonies – custom officers, Royal governors and so on, were (predictably) not usually in favor of social change, but for the most part these men were transient visitors to America

-- last, the great tidal sweep of immigration and expansion sapped ties with Britain and the old ways of gov’t, whereas the social organization of England had the power of habit of centuries

-- unit of life was the farm, specialization happened slowly as natural resources were discovered and population grew to support, say, one man devoting himself solely to milling flour

-- in theory and often in practice there was a leveling in terms of class because labor was at a premium

-- gov’t was ostensibly headed by Royal governors but in many places the locally-elected legislative had been basically in charge

--different colonies had more differences than similarities, geographically, agriculture, attitudes towards religion (some had official religion, some did not), attitudes towards slavery

UNITE OR DIE

this is before trouble really starts,

The first cartoon appeared in Ben Franklin's newspaper The Pennsylvania Gazette on May 9, 1754. It appeared as part of an editorial by Franklin commenting on the present disunited state of the British Colonies.

The drawing was based on the popular superstition that a snake that had been cut in two would come to life if the pieces were joined before sunset.

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WHAT CHANGES IN 1763

so colonies had basically ruled themselves for 150 years – one writer describes it as “salutary neglect” when 1763 rolls around – what changes?

as you may know (from what’s in press now about the U.S’s efforts in Iraq), wars are very expensive, and Britain had just concluded a long and expensive one against France who was going to pay for a standing army in the Americas to keep the French at bay? some Brit reasoned that since the Am colonists stood to benefit most from this, why shouldn’t they help pay for it?

second, they had new western territories to manage

SO, they decided to tighten administration over the colonies
I’d like to suggest that it wasn’t simply that the laws were unambiguously unfair, but that it’s the laws coupled with American reactions that show fundamental differences that had developed between the colonies and Britain.

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**UNITE OR DIE**
changes in Brit’s policy toward American colonies means this cartoon is reprinted a lot

plenty of people who were not initially sympathetic to “patriots”

show satire of Franklin’s cartoon
invokes Genesis 3:15 where God, after having expelled Adam and Eve from Eden, predicts revenge to the tempter snake: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman…and it shall bruise thy head”

**CAUSES OF WAR**

have class generate list of causes they remember (list, then add qualifications)

- **Restrict settlement**
- **Maintain standing army in Am and in some cases quarter them**
- **Start enforcing trade laws**
- **Restrict colonial currency** (here’s an example of why this matters - -quote)
  - what did circulate didn’t look the same or have uniform value; the average man was an exchange broker
- **Taxes** there were between 2-6 million Englishmen who were totally unrepresented in Parliament and taxed just the same, and they didn’t revolt

how did colonists react? with protests, riots, boycotts, and even got Parliament to repeal some specific taxes, but refused to relinquish in principle its ultimate authority to tax

what sorts of things lead individuals to think of themselves as a community?

what in our extremely recent history brought out a surge of patriotism in our country?
violence and tragedy is a good one

anyone remember any good tragedies leading up to the Rev?

**CONTINENTAL CONGRESS**

1774
delegates from all states
drew up decl not of independence, but of rights, called for repeal of all brit laws since 1763
sent to England, but wasn’t even considered by George
so starts off with colonists asking to have rights equivalent with other Englishmen, and only later moved to struggle for polit independence
nonimportation and nonconsumption agreements – citizens agreed to boycott all Brit goods;***interesting to note in the fight for equality for all: those who refused or strayed from promise had their names published in the paper and were socially ostracized

disadvantages of Brit in war:
  • 3000 miles across ocean – with good conditions it took a month to get there, under bad conditions, up to four
  • no strategic center
  • communications poor
  • very little flat and open country which favored Euro-style warfare
  • extremes in temp
1776 starts war proper
1777, Art of Confed, weak & decentralized gov’t
can’t raise money (made war difficult to pay for)
sept 1783, Treaty of Paris, official end