

REVOLUTIONARY CONSCIOUSNESS AND HARDENING OF BRITISH LOYALTY IN PRE— REVOLUTIONARY BOSTON

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Newspapers during the Revolutionary War period, including the Boston Gazette, Boston News—Letter, and Massachusetts Spy, directly contributed to the evolution of revolutionary consciousness and the hardening of British loyalty. This paper analyzes how in the months preceding and following the Boston Tea Party, newspaper publishers conveyed and promoted their burgeoning political perspectives regarding the English, thereby articulating the growing division within the previously united colonies. This fracture formalized and entrenched distinct Patriot and Loyalist ideologies, motivated by differing political and social factors, and established conflict within a nation unknowingly heading toward war.

Introduction

In the two months leading up to the Boston Tea Party, newspapers contributed significantly to the development of new revolutionary consciousness, as well as the pivotal hardening of British loyalty. In the early fall of 1773, Boston political culture had yet to fracture. Therefore, publishers maintained newspapers that promoted their own ideologies. These perspectives, although not necessarily holding the same values, all identified with the common English settler. The Tea Act, as well as the enactment of other British laws that served to fracture and divide Americans, destroyed this shared single perspective of English settlers who obeyed the Crown. Newspapers are the source of media in which this fracturing of the shared English perspective began. Furthermore, as publishers established their own consciousness, newspapers developed new perspectives that reflected the political identities adopted. Newspapers, as Adelman points out in his book *Revolutionary Networks*, serve as a “printed extension of political debate.”¹ Therefore, the publishers of each newspaper aligned themselves with a particular political position,² the content of their newspapers reflected these ideologies, and ultimately enabled the publishers in power to promote distinctly different perspectives. Publishers ensured that readers would receive certain messages that aligned with their political and social connections. Loyalist papers utilized British connections and government officials while Patriots tended to seek connections with other Massachusetts towns.³ Furthermore, as Adelman describes, “Printers determined what news fit ... they delimited the boundaries of political debate.”⁴ Publishers used newspapers to hold the public’s

¹ Joseph M. Adelman, *Revolutionary Networks: The Business and Politics of Printing the News, 1763—1789* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 83.

² Adelman, *Revolutionary Networks*, 91—92.

³ Adelman, 94.

⁴ Adelman, 111—12.

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attention, as well as a means to promote particular political perspectives, thereby playing a pivotal role in the development of revolutionary ideals.

This paper serves to analyze the publisher's perspective of Boston in the two months leading up to the Boston Tea Party, using the *Boston Gazette*, the *Boston News—Letter*, and the *Massachusetts Spy* to examine the development of revolutionary consciousness, as well as the hardening of British loyalty on the eve of a revolutionary moment. As stated by *Infamous Scribblers*, "The Boston Tea Party was at least as much the newspaper's as it was the town's."⁵ As Burns depicts, it was newspapers which had the power to influence public opinion surrounding the tea rebellion. Therefore, publishers held the power to rally their readers either in support or opposition to the British. Studying newspapers in the months leading up to this critical event in Boston reveals the influence of both public happenings and publisher perspectives on revolutionary consciousness.

In October 1773, newspapers depicted a united perspective influenced by the Crown of Great Britain. However, the enactment of oppressive laws, such as the Tea Act, caused this single unified perspective to fracture. This fracture in perspective established a political rift in which publishers took sides, ultimately reflected in their newspapers. In November 1773, as the political rift deepened, newspapers reflected two distinctly different perspectives, heavily influenced by the politics emphasized by different publishers. In December 1773, newspapers aligned themselves with one of these two distinct perspectives, causing increased tension between the colonies and Britain. As publishers divided politically, and influenced their readership's understanding of British oppression, or supposed lack thereof, the political rift reached an eventual breaking point, causing the distinct development of revolutionary consciousness, as well as the hardening of British loyalty. The newspapers of January 1774 reflect the development of this consciousness and loyalty in the aftermath of the Boston Tea Party, as well as address how political affiliation served to influence the success of different papers.

Newspaper Political Affiliation

This examination includes the *Boston Gazette*, the *Boston News—Letter*, and the *Massachusetts Spy* in order to provide distinctly different political perspectives emphasized by publishers in pre—revolutionary Boston. It is important to recognize that the press served as a means to convey the news to the public. However, it was the publishers who held the power to promote political messages. Therefore, as the political affiliation and perspective of the publisher changed, so too did the messages conveyed in their papers.

The *Boston Gazette* was heavily influenced by Patriot ideology. Being one of the most influential early American newspapers, the *Gazette* played a critical role in "turning American public opinion against Great Britain."⁶ As is evident in comparing issues during late 1773 and early 1774, the *Gazette* shifted to become a more radical paper. Publishers Benjamin Edes and John Gill were already well—established Patriot advocates. However as the political climate in Boston altered, they continued to shift towards more radical Patriot ideals. The *Boston News—Letter* was heavily influenced by British loyalty and was one of the first regularly printed papers in the colony.⁷ Its Crown loyalty was easily depicted in the publisher R. Draper's focus on international

⁵ Eric Burns, *Infamous Scribblers: The Founding Fathers and the Rowdy Beginnings of American Journalism* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007), 159.

⁶ Jeffrey L. Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 33.

⁷ Burns, *Infamous Scribblers*, 38.

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happenings, as well as his lack of regard for the ever increasing unrest experienced in the colonies. Finally, the *Massachusetts Spy* served as a neutral paper as reflected by its publisher Isaiah Thomas's motto "A Weekly, Political, and Commercial Paper: — Open to ALL Parties, but *Influenced* by none." Dedicated to the idea of free press, the *Massachusetts Spy* served as "a forum for public discussion and would not outwardly espouse a partisan stance."⁸

This analysis includes one paper from each of the three listed news sources for the two months preceding the event, October 1773 and November 1773, the first publication following the event, December 1773, and publications one month later, January 1774, amounting to twelve newspapers in sum. In order to effectively examine these newspapers, publications of the same week were compared to illustrate the shift in perspective of each news source. Therefore, by analyzing the contents of the *Boston Gazette*, the *Boston News—Letter*, and the *Massachusetts Spy*, this paper illustrates the development of revolutionary consciousness and the hardening of British loyalty as affected by the Boston Tea Party and literary publication.

Fracturing of the English Perspective

The *Boston Gazette* newspaper printed on October 25, 1773 illustrated a public perspective of distress in response to the previously established Stamp and Tea Acts. As established in a pamphlet printed in London, "of all the measures of government that entrench upon the rights of the subject, those laws that are made to fasten upon property are the worst."⁹ British monopolization over the colonies prohibited Americans from establishing their own sources of trade, therefore giving the Crown full control over all aspects of the American economy. The *Gazette* recognized Britain's hypocrisy claiming that the Crown's oppression of property was the worst, yet also presented the English insistence that if left to their own devices, Americans would exhaust their resources due to their lack of known limits.¹⁰

The October 25 edition of the *Boston Gazette* further served to address the beginnings of conflict between the ranks of Americans themselves. In the article "To the Commissioners," the *Gazette* publishers, Edes and Gill, challenged the ideals of Stamp Masters and Tea Commissioners, stating " [they] were marked out by the conspirators against our rights, to give the last, the finishing stroke to freedom in this country."¹¹ The publishers accused Stamp Masters and Tea Commissioners of allying with the colonies' oppressor. Therefore, these traitors were chipping away at their fellow colonists' freedom. As Edes and Gill illustrated, the wrongdoings of Loyalists created tension between ranks of colonists themselves. Therefore, as Americans began to divide politically, the fracturing of the originally shared perspective was evident. The Stamp and Tea Acts were each established to raise revenue for the Crown and thereby impacted all classes of citizens within America.¹² As discussed in the *Gazette*, the Tea Act combined both the cost of tea with an additional tax and presented it as a single price, enabling Americans to purchase tea without awareness of increased taxation. This method of taxation infuriated Patriots who claimed that those who

⁸ Adelman, *Revolutionary Networks*, 101.

⁹ "Extracts from a late Pamphlet printed in London," *Boston Gazette*, October 25, 1773, 1. Retrieved from America's Historical Newspapers database.

¹⁰ "Extracts from a late Pamphlet," 1.

¹¹ "To the Commissioners," *Boston Gazette*, October 25, 1773, 2. Retrieved from America's Historical Newspapers database.

¹² "To the Commissioners," 2.

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enforced such revenue collection, such as the aforementioned Tea Commissioners, would “prove DETESTABLE and INFAMOUS.”¹³

As this particular issue of the *Boston Gazette* depicted, although the Boston Tea Party was still two months in the future, unrest and disagreement with the British were a source of great conflict even within the differing ranks of colonists. Edes and Gill, who were already established as Patriots, used this issue of the paper to draw attention to the British injustices. By emphasizing the beginnings of a political rift, as well as promoting their own Patriot ideals, Edes and Gill used the *Gazette* to rally against the British. This newspaper served to “create a running historical journal of imperial events,”¹⁴ acknowledging that tension between the Americans and British were ever—worsening.

The *Boston News—Letter* issue printed on October 21, 1773 served less to recognize the growing tension between the American colonies and Great Britain, but instead placed its focus on international and local news. Detailing news from London, the *News—Letter* depicted the events of “A dreadful storm of Thunder and Lightning.”¹⁵ Additionally, the paper took great care in detailing the war between Russia and the Turks, all the while making no mention of the growing tensions between America and its mother country. The *News—Letter*, as a British affiliated paper, took great care in conveying news important to the citizens of Great Britain rather than that of the American colonists, which divided the two groups.

On a local scale, the *Boston News—Letter* addressed the happenings of Boston, where a large wind drove a Virginia schooner ashore,¹⁶ as well as “that a Rape was lately committed ... by a married Man, on the Body of a Girl of 13 Years of Age.”¹⁷ Publisher R. Draper deemed this news important, which illustrated how differing perspectives found value in different news content. Draper, who held political affiliation with the British, actively chose not to emphasize the growing tension between the colonies and Britain, or among the colonists themselves. Instead, he promoted exciting or scandalous news, which ultimately drew readership attention away from British oppression. While the *Boston Gazette* highlights the Patriot perspective, establishing the hypocrisy of the British and exclaiming in great detail how the relationship between the Americans and British was consistently worsening, the *Boston News—Letter* depicts otherwise. The *News—Letter*, as a British entity, continuously neglected to recognize Patriot ideals, further establishing itself as a paper of the Loyalist elites rather than for the common colonists.

The *Massachusetts Spy* newspaper printed on October 21, 1773 acknowledged the disputes between the colonies and Great Britain, emphasizing the arrest, trial, and discharge of the printer T. Powell. The Upper House of Assembly, a Crown—influenced institution, charged Powell with contempt, but begrudgingly released the printer on the receipt of a writ of Habeas Corpus. While the publisher, Isaiah Thomas, claimed to be a neutral party, as emphasized by his motto, “A Weekly, Political, and Commercial Paper: — Open to ALL Parties, but *Influenced* by none,” this October issue of the *Massachusetts Spy* was not as neutral as Thomas claimed it to be. In his discussion of the printer T. Powell, Thomas technically addressed both the Patriot and Loyalist perspectives. However, he did so while painting the Patriots

¹³ “To the Commissioners,” 2.

¹⁴ Adelman, *Revolutionary Networks*, 11.

¹⁵ “LONDON August 14,” *Boston News—Letter*, October 21, 1773, 2. Retrieved from America’s Historical Newspapers database.

¹⁶ “BOSTON October 21, 1773,” *Boston News—Letter*, October 21, 1773, 2. Retrieved from America’s Historical Newspapers database.

¹⁷ “BOSTON October 21, 1773,” 2.

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positively and victoriously and emphasizing the wrongdoings of the British. Thomas used his newspaper, while claiming neutrality, as a means of creating political discussion. As Adelman illustrates, “Print has long been seen as a central venue for understanding the debates surrounding the American Revolution.”¹⁸ Therefore, Thomas fueled these debates by presenting both Patriot and Loyalist perspectives, although portraying each in a biased manner.

October 1773, as depicted through the *Boston Gazette*, the *Boston News—Letter*, and the *Massachusetts Spy*, illustrate the critical differences prevalent in these newspapers prior to the Boston Tea Party. The enactment of the Tea Law established cracks in the unified English perspective, which were ultimately furthered by the deepening of the political rift within the colonies.

Two Distinct Perspectives

The *Boston Gazette* issue printed on November 15, 1773 depicted Boston in the midst of growing tension with the British, as well as the deepening of the political rift between the Patriots and British. In a printed letter from a military countryman, the author questioned “What is the end and design of forming a militia?”¹⁹ As the American relationship with Britain became increasingly strained, the forming of militias took precedence in the colonies. A month before the Boston Tea Party, the citizens of Boston were preparing both to serve on offense and defense in the event that fighting would erupt. It was the concern of the public, as depicted by this military countryman, that the militiamen “be taught the use, end, and design of discipline.”²⁰

The *Gazette* further addressed the reasoning behind such military preparation to the public. According to the article titled “BOSTON, November 15”, the East India Company became “strong solicitors for the repeal of the act of the British Parliament, by which a Tribute is exacted on us for every pound of TEA, against our consent, petitions, and remonstrances.”²¹ Publishers Edes and Gill emphasized the necessity of a military presence in response to the continued enforcement of the Tea Act. Therefore, they promoted their own feelings of anger toward British society, and urged their fellow Patriots to show contempt toward the growing party of Loyalist Americans.

The *Boston News—Letter* issue printed on November 11, 1773 was a complete reorientation of the October issue examined. Where previously the *News—Letter* had served as a source of primarily international and local news, the November 11 issue served as a political reflection of the Loyalist perspective of growing tensions. In print, “The Tradesmens Protest” illustrated the demands of “The True SONS OF LIBERTY,”²² in their protest “against the Proceedings of the MERCHANTS, relative to the new importation of Tea.”²³ As publisher, R. Draper established his newspaper as an ally to the British, solidifying his conscious perspective on the political rift between Patriots and Loyalists. As detailed in Adelman’s *Revolutionary Networks*, “printers played a crucial role in the formation and shaping of political rhetoric during

¹⁸ Adelman, *Revolutionary Networks*, 12.

¹⁹ “Messieurs Edes & Gill,” *Boston Gazette*, November 15, 1773, 1. Retrieved from America’s Historical Newspapers database.

²⁰ “Messieurs Edes & Gill,” 1.

²¹ “BOSTON, November 15,” *Boston Gazette*, November 15, 1773, 2. Retrieved from America’s Historical Newspapers database.

²² “The Tradesmens Protest against the Proceedings of the Merchants, relative to the new importation of Tea,” *Boston News—Letter*, November 11, 1773, 1. Retrieved from America’s Historical Newspapers database.

²³ “The Tradesmens Protest,” 1.

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the American Revolution.”²⁴ The only way readers formed their own political affiliation was by reading news sources and drawing their own conclusions on the topics being discussed. Therefore, receptive readers influenced the success of Draper’s paper in rallying for the British cause. It was in Draper’s best interest to increase focus on Patriot happenings in order to influence public opinion in support of the British.

It is evident within the *News—Letter* that Draper’s political connections served to provide the paper directly with information from government officials. Loyalist printers “made far more connections to government officials than to other printers,”²⁵ which negatively impacted their ability to reach a larger circulation. Of the newspapers, like the *Boston News—Letter*, who openly supported the British cause, these printers and their newspapers “depended on government appointments . . . to protect them against the vagaries of popular derision and rage.”²⁶ The *News—Letter* appealed to the Loyalist population. However, its open support for the British further served as a source of agitation for Patriot—run newspapers such as the *Boston Gazette*, ultimately deepening the political rift.

The *Massachusetts Spy* newspaper printed on November 11, 1773 reflected a political atmosphere in Boston. In a letter addressed “To the Patriotic PRINTERS in BOSTON”, the author depicted a relationship with the British he felt Americans could come to terms with. However, he also recognized the unlikelihood of such events occurring. The author Britannus Septentrionalis claims “if at worst, the crown came in barely for the appointments and commissioning a few officers, leaving every other civil and military officer in the province, to the appointment and direction of this government,”²⁷ then the nation would be free and able to function on its own. The author continued to detail that “Of all the rights that can belong to a nation, sovereignty is doubtless the most precious.”²⁸ As the *Massachusetts Spy* detailed, the current state of America was only that of a colony, a province dependent on its mother country with seemingly no hope of establishing itself as an independent state.²⁹ Publisher Isaiah Thomas, still claiming neutrality, printed several articles with the intent to rally Americans, and highlight the many manipulations of the British. Therefore, Thomas established an even greater shift toward the Patriot perspective, developing a revolutionary consciousness that was no longer neutral.

Aside from its attention to the influence of the British, the *Massachusetts Spy* addressed the tension established by the Tea Act. The article titled “MONDAY, November 7. BOSTON” detailed that the intent of the tax placed on the American colonies was “for the support of government, the administration of justice, and the defense of his Majesty’s dominions in America.”³⁰ In other words, as the price of tea went upwards to accommodate the Tea Act’s tax, the American colonies were not seeing an increase in personal revenue. As colonists began to realize that the increase in price was for the direct benefit of the Crown and stealing money that should have gone to their own merchants directly out of their pockets, they felt cheated. In response to these growing feelings of distrust, Americans, as illustrated in this article, began to

²⁴ Adelman, *Revolutionary Networks*, 3.

²⁵ Adelman, 3.

²⁶ Adelman, 92.

²⁷ “For the Massachusetts SPY,” *Massachusetts Spy*, November 11, 1773, 2. Retrieved from America’s Historical Newspapers database.

²⁸ “For the Massachusetts SPY,” 2.

²⁹ “For the Massachusetts SPY,” 2.

³⁰ “MONDAY, November 7. BOSTON,” *Massachusetts Spy*, November 11, 1773, 3. Retrieved from America’s Historical Newspapers database.

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feel that opposition to Britain's rule was "necessary to preserve even the shadow of liberty, and is a duty which every freeman in America owes to his country, to himself, and to his posterity."³¹ It was at this point that one can identify the two distinct Patriot and Loyalist perspectives.

While in October, the citizens of Boston recognized the growing tension in regards to British oppression. It was not until November that citizens of America recognized the extent to which this oppression had reached. It was at this time that the Patriots and Loyalists, influenced by their respective newspaper publishers, adopted two different perspectives, each motivated by different political and social factors.

While the *Boston Gazette* and the *Boston News—Letter* hardened their pre-existing political stances, the *Massachusetts Spy*, which had previously been recognized as a moderate paper, was taking a more aggressive political stance, ultimately moving toward its recognition for having a "strong anti-imperial voice."³² Being a moderate paper during a time of conflict is not good for business and may ultimately serve as a form of commercial suicide. Publisher Thomas was therefore obligated to reflect on his stake in the community, as well as the influence his paper had on responding to and shaping societal opinion and events. Therefore, while continuing to claim "neutrality," it was in the best interest of the *Massachusetts Spy* to shift its political affiliation toward a more aggressive stance.

Utilizing the political and social ideals publishers had established prior to the passing of the Tea Act, newspapers "formalized a set of connections with protest leaders and extralegal groups."³³ The protests against British oppression that began to frequently occur in the fall of 1773 utilized these networks "in order to effectively rebut the tax and the delivery of the tea."³⁴ As illustrated in the newspapers examined, it was through these political and social connections that publishers were able to influence the beliefs of the public. As Adelman depicts in *Revolutionary Networks*, this influence assisted directly in the understanding of the Tea Act as a form of "imperial oppression."³⁵

The Evolution of Revolutionary Consciousness

The *Boston Gazette* newspaper printed on December 20, 1773, several days after the Boston Tea Party occurred, illustrated the development of revolutionary consciousness in pre-revolutionary Boston. Publishers Edes and Gill promoted the colonists' drive for freedom and encouraged their fellow Patriots to no longer be docile. As Burns discusses in his book *Infamous Scribblers*, "the paper refrained from comment on the incident [Tea Party], instead reprinting a resolution passed by the neighboring town of Lexington, referring indirectly to the tea raid."³⁶ As depicted in the front page article Meeting of the Freeholders in the town of Lexington, "The enemies of the rights and liberties of Americans, ... are seeking to avail themselves of new, and if possible yet more detestable measures, to distress, enslave and destroy us."³⁷ It was with this realization that Parliament only sought to appease the East India Company, and colonists recognized the intent of the Crown to establish a trade monopoly that would ultimately destroy the colonial economy. The Freeholders

³¹ "MONDAY, November 7. BOSTON," 3.

³² Adelman, *Revolutionary Networks*, 1.

³³ Adelman, 81.

³⁴ Adelman, 82.

³⁵ Adelman, 101.

³⁶ Burns, *Infamous Scribblers*, 160—161.

³⁷ "At a Meeting of the Freeholders and other Inhabitants of the Town of Lexington," *Boston Gazette*, December 20, 1773, 1. Retrieved from America's Historical Newspapers database.

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continued to note that upon the receipt and distribution of tea, “the badge of our slavery is fixed, and the foundation of ruin is surely laid.”³⁸ The publishers chose to include these articles in order to rally further support for the Patriot cause. By using the newspaper as a platform to spread their ideals, Edes and Gill held the power to manipulate the public to adopt their perspective. To oppose the British, the publishers insisted on turning against any individual participating in the distribution of tea, claiming them to be “Enemies of their Country,”³⁹ and further solidifying the disdain felt toward Loyalists.

As colonists divided themselves among the Patriots and Loyalists, the evolution of distinct perspectives further enforced the understanding of the colonies as two separate groups: one in support of resistance, and one not. The articles published in this edition of the *Gazette* were heavily influenced by the concept of tea, demonstrating the publishers’ resentment toward the British. As Pasley depicts in *The Tyranny of Printers*, the press serves as a “means by which political leaders could enlist their constituents’ support for resistance to Great Britain.”⁴⁰ Patriot publishers Edes and Gill encouraged rebellion, such as the Tea Party, as a means of confronting the British and Loyalists in their attempts to oppress the colonists.

The *Boston News—Letter* issue printed on December 16, 1773, the day of the Boston Tea Party, served to illustrate the newly defined perspective of the Loyalist party, that of allegiance to their British mother country. What had always served as a Crown—favored newspaper became an advocate for British loyalty. *News—Letter* publisher R. Draper actively chose to highlight the English happenings in order to further Loyalist identification with the British. In regards to news, the Loyalists read of “The Earl of Dartmouth’s plan for improving the value of American lands,”⁴¹ or of the execution of a woman named Mrs. Herring for the murder of her husband.⁴² While this issue of the *Boston News—Letter* was printed prior to the Tea Party, Draper ignored the increasing tension between America and Britain, insisting that the London and international news was of greater importance to the Loyalists. Therefore, Draper presented news that was only of marginal importance to Boston citizens instead focusing on the establishment of the Loyalist perspective with emphasis on maintaining close political ties with the mother country. By promoting his Loyalist perspective, Draper ensured the *News—Letter* readership continued to receive messages downplaying the significance of the political rift. While the Patriots sought trade freedom and the beginnings of independence, Loyalists maintained a perspective heavily defined by their connections to the Crown and denial of experienced oppression. This elitist attitude and loyalty to a country that the Patriots deemed domineering eliminated what shared perspective remained.

The *Massachusetts Spy* newspaper printed on December 16, 1773, the same day as the Boston Tea Party, reflected its shift toward a more aggressive political stance, however, it continued to insist on neutrality. Thomas emphasized his claims of moderation in his portrayal of both the Patriot and Loyalist perspectives, however, his biased demonstration of both parties reflected his aggressive political stance. Included on the first page was an article from the “London Public Advertiser” stating English claims that separation from the mother country would cause the colonies to become weak. This included a statement insisting that it would be best to quarter the

³⁸ “At a Meeting of the Freeholders,” 1.

³⁹ “At a Meeting of the Freeholders,” 1.

⁴⁰ Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers*, 34.

⁴¹ “LONDON,” *Boston News—Letter*, December 16, 1773, 2. Retrieved from America’s Historical Newspapers database.

⁴² “LONDON,” 2.

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soldiers and not complain, for they could very easily turn against you.⁴³ The article established that if Americans attempted revolution, then the prepared British would be victorious. The Crown would “Send armies into their country under pretence of protecting the inhabitants; but instead ... demolish those forts, and order the troops into the heart of the country.”⁴⁴ In reflecting his Patriot political stance, *Massachusetts Spy* publisher Isaiah Thomas highlighted several anti—British articles with the intent to rally against the British, and ultimately influenced the Patriot perspective.

The *Massachusetts Spy* placed a considerable amount of focus on the happenings of the Patriots, in particular the preparation for the Boston Tea Party. In a letter published from Plymouth, the citizens stated “we congratulate you Gentlemen on the spirit, revolution and good order which appeared in the several late public and respectable meetings held in your town for the purpose of checking that torrent of tyranny which has for several years threatened us and our posterity with ruin and destruction.”⁴⁵ As Isaiah Thomas promoted his more aggressive political stance, he painted the Patriot perspective in a positive light, addressing the accomplishments to come. In regards to the Loyalists, however, Thomas illustrated the negative aspects of the Loyalist party and British perspective. As emphasized in this issue, understanding the tyranny colonists experienced better enabled them to establish the liberties deemed necessary to function as a unit. As noted in the resolves of Marblehead found in the article “WEDNESDAY December 15. BOSTON,” Americans have a right to be free, just as all other inhabitants of the planet, taxing without consent places direct limitations on this freedom.⁴⁶

December 1773, as illustrated through the *Boston Gazette*, the *Boston News—Letter*, and the *Massachusetts Spy*, depicts the formalization of two revolutionary consciousnesses, as well as the hardening of British loyalty. This period of time was critical for the *Boston News—Letter*, as its lack of political coverage relevant to Loyalist colonists led to a loss of connection with its readership. Furthermore, the newly established aggressive political stance of the *Massachusetts Spy* prevented any party from being truly moderate. This division within the ranks of supposedly united colonies established the beginning of conflict within a nation unknowingly headed toward war.

Entrenching the Revolutionary Consciousness

The *Boston Gazette* newspaper printed on January 24, 1774, illustrated the lasting revolutionary consciousness that was permanently established as a result of the Boston Tea Party. This issue of the *Gazette* illustrated how the rebellious actions of the Patriots assisted in continued rallying against the British, exemplified in the article titled “AT a meeting of the inhabitants of Townshend.”⁴⁷ This writing describes how Philadelphia Patriots recognized the Boston Tea Party for its influence in their own refusal of East India Company tea.⁴⁸ Furthermore, in an article titled “At a legal Town Meeting of the freeholders and other inhabitants of Watertown,” publishers Edes and

⁴³ “From the (London) Public Advertiser,” *Massachusetts Spy*, December 16, 1773, 1. Retrieved from America’s Historical Newspapers database.

⁴⁴ “From the (London) Public Advertiser,” 2.

⁴⁵ “TUESDAY, December 14. BOSTON,” *Massachusetts Spy*, December 16, 1773, 2. Retrieved from America’s Historical Newspapers database.

⁴⁶ “WEDNESDAY December 15. BOSTON,” *Massachusetts Spy*, December 16, 1773, 3. Retrieved from America’s Historical Newspapers database.

⁴⁷ “AT a meeting of the inhabitants of Townshend,” *Boston Gazette*, January 24, 1774, 1. Retrieved from America’s Historical Newspapers database.

⁴⁸ “AT a meeting of the inhabitants of Townshend,” *Boston Gazette*, January 24, 1774, 1. Retrieved from America’s Historical Newspapers database.

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Gill detailed that “the destruction of the tea was occasioned by the custom—house officers, and the governor’s refusing to grant a clearance and pass for the vessel that was designed to carry said tea back to the owners from whence it came.”⁴⁹ Revolutionary consciousness was further entrenched as the Patriots reveled in their rebellion, seeking to gain trade independence. As the political rift between Patriots and Loyalists continued to deepen, Patriots established that “we will have no dealings with any shopkeeper or tradesman, or any others, who shall persist in buying, selling, or using tea in their families.”⁵⁰

The *Boston News—Letter* issue printed on January 20, 1774 depicted the hardening of British loyalty. In an article titled “BOSTON, January 17,” Draper detailed the Loyalist perspective of Patriot happenings. He declared that the Patriots were “Traitors to their Country, . . . who have done, and are doing every Thing to murder and destroy all that shall stand in the Way of their private interest.”⁵¹ The Loyalists viewed the Patriot rebellion to be one of greed, not in response to tyrannical oppression. Instead, the *News—Letter* continued to address British loyalty, claiming “we trust it is unnecessary to remind any among us of the duty and affection we owe to the King, who, by divine providence is placed in the sovereignty of these dominions.”⁵²

The *Massachusetts Spy* newspaper printed on January 20, 1774, continued to reflect the burgeoning Patriot revolutionary consciousness, further solidifying the two distinct Patriot and Loyalist perspectives. In his coverage of the month following the Boston Tea Party, Isaiah Thomas, while still claiming to be neutral, reflected the British and Loyalists in an increasingly more negative light, further enforcing his new political stance. This included a statement regarding a Loyalist tea commissioner. Thomas stated that “one of the tea commissioners it is said narrowly escaped a tarring and feathering one day last week — presumptuous [man] to think of gaining a footing in this town again.”⁵³ Thomas’ bias regarding the Patriot and Loyalist perspectives ultimately solidified revolutionary consciousness, leaving no party truly neutral.

Conclusion

In the months prior to the Boston Tea Party, colonists identified with the perspective of the common English settler. However, the enactment of oppressive laws threatened what little independence the colonists had. Consequently, this oppression resulted in a political rift, ultimately developing a new form of revolutionary consciousness. By examining the *Boston Gazette*, the *Boston News—Letter*, and the *Massachusetts Spy*, the development of revolutionary consciousness, as well as the hardening of British loyalty, is evident.

Newspapers such as the *Boston Gazette*, the *Boston News—Letter*, and the *Massachusetts Spy* presented their readership with political and social content that influenced opinions in society. As Adelman describes, newspapers served “as an outlet for imperial, colonial, and municipal agents to announce legislation, publish proclamations, and update the public on various governmental doings.”⁵⁴ Therefore,

⁴⁹ “At a legal Town Meeting of the freeholders and other inhabitants of Watertown,” *Boston Gazette*, January 24, 1774, 2. Retrieved from America’s Historical Newspapers database.

⁵⁰ “Town Meeting of the freeholders of Watertown,” 2.

⁵¹ “BOSTON, January 17,” *Boston News—Letter*, January 20, 1774, 1. Retrieved from America’s Historical Newspapers database.

⁵² “From the PENNSYLVANIA PACKET,” *Boston News—Letter*, January 20, 1774, 1. Retrieved from America’s Historical Newspapers database.

⁵³ “MONDAY, January 17. BOSTON,” *Massachusetts Spy*, January 20, 1774, 2. Retrieved from America’s Historical Newspapers database.

⁵⁴ Adelman, *Revolutionary Networks*, 83.

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as publishers presented various forms of news that were relevant to their political following, they ultimately decided what news was important and necessary in solidifying the two distinct revolutionary positions. Newspaper publishers used their medium as a means to promote political perspectives playing a significant role in the formation of revolutionary ideals.

As October and November 1773 led to a political fracture in the colonies, newspapers and their publishers narrowed their perspectives either in favor of, or opposition to, the British. While Patriot newspapers, such as the *Boston Gazette*, published issue after issue discussing the oppression caused by the British, Loyalist papers such as the *Boston News—Letter* did little to refute these comments, ultimately making them less relevant in Boston society. Meanwhile, the *Massachusetts Spy*, as a supposedly moderate paper, continued to favor the more aggressive Patriot political stance addressing the British in a negative light while encouraging Patriot rebellion. As the *Boston News—Letter* failed to provide appeal to Loyalist readers, and neglected to supply ample reasoning to defend their mother country, this paper, as well as others run by Loyalists ultimately failed. On the other hand, as the *Boston Gazette* and the *Massachusetts Spy* further encouraged Patriots to rebel and achieve independence, these newspapers achieved great success.

Boston newspapers and their publishers held significant influence in the months leading up to, and after, the Boston Tea Party. Political fracturing and the development of revolutionary consciousness, as well as the hardening of British loyalty, ultimately established what we recognize as Patriot and Loyalist ideals. As Patriots rallied together, publishers encouraged action against the oppressive British, while Loyalists failed to acknowledge the beginning of their demise.

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