



DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

INDEPENDENCE IN 1774? THE SUFFOLK RESOLVES

TIME AND GRADE LEVEL

One 45 or 50 minute class period in a **Grade 9-12** US history, civics, or government course. This lesson can also be split into two days in the following way: Day 1- students convene as the Continental Congress and consider whether to support the Suffolk Resolves (prefatory homework and sections one and two of the lesson); Day 2 - students convene as the Massachusetts Provincial Congress and decide whether to declare independence (sections three, four, and five of the lesson).

PURPOSE AND CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONS

History is the chronicle of choices made by actors/agents/protagonists in specific contexts. This simulation places students at the First Continental Congress in September 1774 and asks them whether they will endorse the Suffolk Resolves, which articulate the rebellion underway in Massachusetts. Then, as the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, they consider whether to declare “independency,” as radicals in the interior of the province wish to do, or take a more cautious approach, following the advice of established leaders like John Adams and Samuel Adams.

The overarching goal is to have students treat the momentous issue of independence with close attention to time and circumstance. Why did colonists not even consider independence in the 1760s? Why did Massachusetts entertain independence in 1774 but then back off? By considering the options at different historical moments, students will have a keener sense of how political resistance to imperial measures evolved, years later, into national independence. This ConSource lesson works best in conjunction with the one that follows: “Independence in 1776?”

LESSON OBJECTIVES

*Students will be able to explain the difference between fighting for the rights of British subjects (how colonists articulated their struggle against imperial policies in the 1760s and early 1770s) and declaring independence from a country they had known as their own.

*Students will be able to explain how the 1774 Massachusetts Government Act, which disenfranchised the citizens of that colony, sparked a new wave of resistance.

*Students will be able to summarize the Suffolk Resolves, a moderate response by Boston’s leadership that stopped short of independence.

*Students will be able to cite instances of more radical resistance in the Massachusetts countryside, where many citizens wanted to declare independence and attack the British soldiers garrisoned in Boston.

*Students will be able to explain why the Continental Congress supported the Suffolk Resolves, but only if the people of Massachusetts did not declare “independency” or start a war.

*Students will be able to explain why Samuel Adams, John Adams, and other Massachusetts leaders opposed declaring independence at that time, for fear of losing the support of other colonies.

*Students will be able to place the British march on Lexington and Concord in its political perspective: only by waiting until the British struck the first blow did rebels in Massachusetts insure the support of other colonies.

OVERVIEW OF THE LESSON

Prefatory homework:

Handout A, “**When Did Colonists First Talk of Independence?**” and Handout B, “**Suffolk Resolves (excerpts).**”

In class:

1. Homework review: 10-15 minutes
2. Student deliberations: Will Congress support the Suffolk Resolves? 10 minutes
3. Presentation: Radicals in Massachusetts push for independence. 10-15 minutes
4. Student deliberations: Will the Massachusetts Provincial Congress declare independence? 10 minutes
5. Presentation of historical outcome: Massachusetts Prepares for War but Doesn't Start One. 5 minutes.

Summary Homework / Extended Activities

MATERIALS

Background Handouts:

- A. When Did Colonists First Talk of Independence?
- B. Suffolk Resolves (excerpts)

Classroom Handouts

- C. Congress's Reaction to the Suffolk Resolves
- D. Massachusetts Radicals Push for Independence
- E. Massachusetts Prepares for War but Doesn't Start One

PREFATORY HOMEWORK

Distribute **Handout A: “When Did Colonists First Talk of Independence?”** and **Handout B: “Suffolk Resolves (excerpts).”** Go over the instructions on those sheets.

CLASS ACTIVITIES: 45-50 MINUTES

1. HOMEWORK REVIEW: 10-15 minutes

Allow students to share their responses to Handout A, “**When Did Colonists First Talk of Independence?**” The key to answering question #1 is the second sentence of the text, “That would be seen as treason, and besides, they believed that as subjects of Great Britain, they enjoyed greater liberties than anyone else in the world.” Answers to question 2 will vary. Ask students at this time: “How might you respond if you were effectively “disenfranchised”—that is, if you lost the power of your vote and you no longer had *any* say in the government that ruled you?”

Distribute Handout B, “The Suffolk Resolves.” As students share their simplified summaries, take special note of these aspects, which they should consider in class when they decide whether to endorse the resolves:

- #1: The continuing pledge of allegiance to King George III. This will set up the contrast between leaders in Boston (county seat for Suffolk) and radicals from Worcester and the interior of Massachusetts, who pushed for independence—the issue students will debate later in the lesson.
- #2. The duty *to* “our country” to defend the rights of citizens. This is not independence *from* “our country”—instead, it embraces the rights that citizens of “our country” are entitled to.
- #3. Acts of Parliament violate “the laws of nature, the British constitution, and the charter of the province”—what we would call “unconstitutional.”
- #4. “No obedience is due” to acts of Parliament. This is not new; colonists also showed no obedience to the Stamp Act, the Townshend Duties, and the Tea Act.
- #5. If citizens disregard courts, how are they to maintain law and order? Colonists worried about this. They did not relish the “state of nature,” where there are no laws.
- #7. Tax collectors were to hold onto the money citizens paid. This was *not* a tax revolt – people still paid taxes to local collectors, but the money was not turned over to British authorities.
- #8. Council members must resign or be “enemies to this country.” People enforcing the Massachusetts Government Act were seen as the traitors.
- #12. Note, again, the “affection to his majesty.” Note also the pledge to act “merely on the defensive”—this might calm the fears of people in other colonies, who worried that Massachusetts could drag them into a war.
- #17. The pledge to abide by acts of Continental Congress. This underscores the importance of the decision students will make in class: should Congress endorse or disavow the Suffolk Resolves?

2. STUDENT DELIBERATIONS: WILL CONGRESS SUPPORT THE SUFFOLK RESOLVES? 10 minutes

Teacher presents: *Paul Revere, a courier who carried many significant messages for rebellious colonists, rushed a copy of the “Suffolk Resolves” to Philadelphia, where the First Continental Congress had just convened. The big question: Would Congress endorse the Suffolk Resolves, thereby siding with the resistance efforts in Massachusetts? Or*

would they think that Massachusetts was acting too fast? Might other colonies be dragged into a war against their mother country? Were they ready for that? Did they want that? You will now convene as delegates to the First Continental Congress and decide whether to endorse the Suffolk Resolves, even though Great Britain might then retaliate by cracking down harder on other colonies.

Students become delegates to the First Continental Congress. Teacher can either assign students to specific state delegations or make them generic delegates—from any state *except* Massachusetts.

Ask students, in their deliberations, to consider the possible impact of specific resolutions. For example:

#5: Should citizens really ignore the courts? Might that lead to chaos?

#7: Might British officials punish local tax collectors who refused to turn over the money?

#1 and #12: Would the pledge of allegiance to the crown calm fears that Massachusetts might be heading towards war?

#17: Whatever Congress decided would have a huge impact on the resistance efforts in Massachusetts.

At the close of deliberations, take a vote. If students represent specific states, they vote by state delegation—the way votes were actually cast in Congress. Otherwise, just count the votes of all student delegates.

After the vote, present the historical outcome, stated in Handout C, “**Congress’s Reaction to the Suffolk Resolves.**” This is brief and can be presented orally.

3. PRESENTATION: RADICALS IN MASSACHUSETTS PUSH FOR INDEPENDENCE. 10-15 minutes

Distribute Handout D, “**Massachusetts Radicals Push for Independence.**” Start with this introduction: “*Some people in Massachusetts now pushed for independence, but others, including famous leaders Samuel Adams and John Adams, feared that if Massachusetts moved too swiftly, it would lose the support of other colonies. Shortly, the class will convene as the Massachusetts Provincial Congress to consider whether Massachusetts should declare independence and attack British soldiers in Boston. Here is the background you will need to place yourselves in that historical moment.*”

Students can then read the handout or teacher can present the material.

4. STUDENT DELIBERATIONS: WILL THE MASSACHUSETTS PROVINCIAL CONGRESS DECLARE INDEPENDENCE? 10 minutes

Students convene as the Massachusetts Provincial Congress. For the purposes of this debate, they will be delegates from *neither* Worcester nor Boston. The point is to see how other delegates will respond.

5. PRESENTATION OF THE HISTORICAL OUTCOME: MASSACHUSETTS PREPARES FOR WAR BUT DOESN'T START ONE. 5 minutes.

Distribute Handout E, “**Massachusetts Prepares for War but Doesn’t Start One.**” Present the gist of this orally. Perhaps students can read it as summary homework—see question #1 below.

SUMMARY HOMEWORK / EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

1. Read Handout F, “**Massachusetts Prepares for War but Doesn’t Start One.**” Summarize these measures. Do you think they constituted the best response? If rebels in Massachusetts had declared independence in the fall of 1774 and attacked the British garrison in Boston, do you think other colonies would have joined their fight against Britain? (NOTE: You might want to consider colonies individually, or at least by region: New England, middle colonies, and southern colonies. These had diverse histories, economies, social structures, and dominant religions.) Of course we will never know—but people back then didn’t know the answer to that question either. By considering what *might* have happened, we place ourselves more truly in their shoes.
2. On April 3, 1775, the *Boston Gazette* published the latest news from London: King George III had dispatched four additional regiments from Ireland and a “proper number of frigates,” with 2,000 seamen, to help suppress the insurrection in Massachusetts. Post riders rushed off with copies of the *Gazette*. The paper reached New Haven the following afternoon, and Ezra Stiles, president of Yale College, [noted in his diary](#) that town’s response: “In general the Friends of Liberty are hereby exasperated & declare themselves ready for the Combat, & nothing is now talked of but immediately forming an American Army at Worcester & taking the Field with undaunted Resolution” Consult a map of New England and discuss the geography of the conflict. Why do you think Americans talked of basing their army in Worcester? And why did General Gage choose to go after the arms and supplies in Concord rather than Worcester?
3. In the 1760s, colonists opposed “taxation without representation” by boycotting British goods. (They called it “nonimportation”; the word “boycott” refers to Captain Charles Boycott, a Nineteenth Century land agent in Ireland, who was “boycotted” by angry tenants.) In 1774, Massachusetts citizens responded to the revocation of their charter (in essence, their constitution) by shutting down the government. Write an essay that compares the grievances of each period and the responses they triggered.
4. Once Massachusetts citizens had closed the courts, forced council members to resign, refused to obey any measure of the Massachusetts Government Act, and established their own Provincial Congress that collected taxes and armed for war, was there anything British officials could do to regain the people’s allegiance? If they repealed that act and reopened the Port of Boston, would people in Massachusetts still have rebelled? Why do you think Parliament and King George III did *not* to repeal the Coercive Acts?

Handout A: When Did Colonists First Talk of Independence?

Through the 1760s, as colonists protested “taxation without representation,” not even the most rebellious dared to suggest that British colonies in North America should become independent of the mother country. That would be seen as treason, and besides, they believed that as subjects of Great Britain, they enjoyed greater liberties than anyone else in the world. Years later, it was said that Samuel Adams, the celebrated Boston radical, pushed for independence back then, but that is not what the historical record shows. Following the lead of historian Pauline Maier, we can trace Adams’s views:¹

*In 1765, during the Stamp Act controversy, [Adams argued](#) that the colonists were and always had been “good Subjects” who had “brought with them all the Rights & Laws of the Mother State”; they had never made any “Claim of Independency,” he boasted, despite their geographic isolation. At that time, there was no reason that Adams and his fellow colonists would even consider abandoning the country they deemed to be the freest in the world.

*In 1768, when British troops started occupying Boston, [Adams wrote](#) that colonists should be “restored to the rights, privileges and immunities of *free subjects*.” Boston’s problems, [he asserted](#), were caused “by the Vile insinuations of wicked men *in America*”—not by any structural irregularities of the British Constitution.

*In 1771 [Adams argued](#), “By our compact with our King, wherein is contain’d the rule of his government and the measure of our submission, we have all the liberties and immunities of Englishmen....It is our duty therefore to contend for them whenever attempts are made to violate them.”

Even after the Tea Act in 1773, independence was off the political table. Neither Samuel Adams nor any other leader pushed for it. Colonists were still fighting for their rights as British subjects, and some of their protests had achieved positive results. Having forced the repeal of the Stamp Act and most of the Townshend duties, they imagined they could defeat the Tea Act as well.

Not until 1774 did the possibility of independence enter the political dialogue. To punish the perpetrators of the Boston Tea Party, Parliament closed the Port of Boston. Worse yet, in the Massachusetts Government Act, it gutted the [1691 Charter for Massachusetts](#), which functioned as its constitution. No longer could citizens call their own town meetings; they needed permission from the royal governor, and once they met, they could not discuss any items the governor had not approved. No longer could the people’s representatives choose the powerful Council, the body that functioned as the legislature’s upper house, the governor’s advisory cabinet, and the administrative arm of provincial government. No longer did the people have any say in choosing judges, jurors, justices of the peace, or sheriffs—the officials who could instantaneously upend a person’s life.

Suddenly disenfranchised, the people of Massachusetts rose up and rebelled. In August 1774, when the act took effect, citizens forced all thirty-six Crown-appointed councilors to resign their posts or flee from their homes. They convened town meetings whenever and wherever they wanted, even in Salem, literally a stone’s throw from Governor Thomas Gage’s temporary office. They besieged the all-important county courts whenever one was slated to convene and prevented these imperial

outposts of judicial and executive authority from doing business of any kind. At their hands the Massachusetts Government Act became “[a blank piece of paper and not more](#),” in the words of a one contemporary.

Although opposition was nearly unanimous, some citizens wanted to go farther and move faster than others. This lesson will explore two distinct paths of resistance.

The first path is represented by the Suffolk Resolves, excerpted in Handout B. As they shut down the courts, committees of correspondence in each county issued resolutions that explained and justified their actions. The best-known resolutions came from Suffolk County, which included Boston. (Ironically, that was the only county *not* to shut down its courts, which were protected by British troops stationed in Boston.) As you read through them, take note of both the actions recommended and any limitations placed on the resistance.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think Samuel Adams and other colonists did not push for independence in the 1760s?
2. Why were the citizens of Massachusetts so upset over the Massachusetts Government Act?
3. How do you think United States citizens would react today if, suddenly, they and their elected representatives were stripped of all political power?

¹ Pauline Maier, *The Old Revolutionaries: Political Lives in the Age of Samuel Adams*, 21–26. See also Maier’s entry for Samuel Adams in the 1999 edition of *American National Biography*.

Handout B. [Suffolk Resolves](#) (excerpts)

The Suffolk Resolves are on pp. 601-605 of the hyperlink above: William Lincoln, ed., *The Journals of Each Provincial Congress of Massachusetts in 1774 and 1775, and of the Committee of Safety, with an Appendix, containing the Proceedings of the County Conventions* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1838). The minutes and resolutions of the other county conventions in Massachusetts are on pp. 609-660.

1. That whereas his majesty, George the Third, is the rightful successor to the throne of Great-Britain, and justly entitled to the allegiance of the British realm, and agreeable to compact, of the English colonies in America--therefore, we, the heirs and successors of the first planters of this colony, do cheerfully acknowledge the said George the Third to be our rightful sovereign, and that said covenant is the tenure and claim on which are founded our allegiance and submission.
2. That it is an indispensable duty which we owe to God, our country, ourselves and posterity, by all lawful ways and means in our power to maintain, defend and preserve those civil and religious rights and liberties, for which many of our fathers fought, bled and died, and to hand them down entire to future generations.
3. That the late acts of the British parliament for blocking up the harbour of Boston, for altering the established form of government in this colony, ... are gross infractions of those rights to which we are justly entitled by the laws of nature, the British constitution, and the charter of the province.
4. That no obedience is due from this province to either or any part of the acts above-mentioned, but that they be rejected as the attempts of a wicked administration to enslave America.
5. That so long as the justices of our superior court of judicature, court of assize, &c. and inferior court of common pleas in this county are appointed, or hold their places, by any other tenure than that which the charter and the laws of the province direct, they must be considered as under undue influence, and are therefore unconstitutional officers, and, as such, no regard ought to be paid to them by the people of this county...
7. That it be recommended to the collectors of taxes, constables and all other officers, who have public monies in their hands, to retain the same, and not to make any payment thereof to the provincial county treasurer until the civil government of the province is placed upon a constitutional foundation, or until it shall otherwise be ordered by the proposed provincial Congress.
8. That the persons who have accepted seats at the council board, by virtue of a mandamus from the King, in conformity to the late act of the British parliament, entitled, an act for the regulating the government of the Massachusetts-Bay, have acted in direct violation of the duty they owe to their country, and have thereby given great and just offence to this people; therefore, resolved, that this county do recommend it to all persons, who have so highly offended by accepting said departments, and have not already publicly resigned their seats at the council board, to make public resignations of their places at said board, on or before the 20th day of this instant, September; and that all

persons refusing so to do, shall, from and after said day, be considered by this county as obstinate and incorrigible enemies to this country...

12. That during the present hostile appearances on the part of Great-Britain, notwithstanding the many insults and oppressions which we most sensibly resent, yet, nevertheless, from our affection to his majesty, which we have at all times evidenced, we are determined to act merely upon the defensive, so long as such conduct may be vindicated by reason and the principles of self-preservation, but no longer...

17. That this county, confiding in the wisdom and integrity of the continental Congress, now sitting at Philadelphia, pay all due respect and submission to such measures as may be recommended by them to the colonies, for the restoration and establishment of our just rights, civil and religious, and for renewing that harmony and union between Great-Britain and the colonies, so earnestly wished for by all good men.

QUESTIONS:

1. What means of resistance are recommended? Cite the number of the resolve and a brief summary of that action.
2. Do the Suffolk Resolves favor independence from Great Britain? Cite evidence for your response.
3. Do any or the Resolves place a limit on resistance? If so, cite that limit.

Handout C: Congress's Reaction to the Suffolk Resolves

Although moderates from some colonies were wary of the radical actions taken in Massachusetts, their hand was forced. A refusal to support Massachusetts would divide the colonies—exactly what the Crown and Parliament wanted. On September 17 the [Continental Congress unanimously endorsed the Suffolk Resolves](#), “trusting that the effect of the united efforts of North America in their behalf, will carry such conviction to the British nation, of the unwise, unjust, and ruinous policy of the present administration, as quickly to introduce better men and wiser measure. John Adams, a delegate to Congress from Massachusetts, [wrote in his diary](#): “This was one of the happiest days of my life. In Congress we had generous, noble sentiments, and manly eloquence. This day convinced me that America will support the Massachusetts or perish with her.”

Still, there was a limit. When agreeing to back the Suffolk Resolves, moderate delegates pointed to the twelfth resolution, which pledged “to act merely on the defensive” and within “reason.” On October 11, the [Continental Congress underscored this](#). It advised “the people of Boston and the Massachusetts-bay ... still to conduct themselves peaceably towards his excellency General Gage, and his majesty's troops now stationed in the town of Boston, as far as can possibly be consistent with their immediate safety, and the security of the town; avoiding & discountenancing every violation of his Majesty's property, or any insult to his troops, and that they peaceably and firmly persevere in the line they are now conducting themselves, on the defensive.” *Peaceably* and *on the defensive* were the operative notions. Resistance, yes—but do not start a war.

Handout D: Massachusetts Radicals Push for Independence

While Boston's leaders, now backed by the Continental Congress, pledged to remain on the defensive, many militiamen from the interior of Massachusetts wanted to attack British troops in Boston *before* King George III could beef up the garrison there. Only if British soldiers departed would the people of Massachusetts be truly free, these radicals argued.

Further, some thought the time was ripe to form a new government, entirely independent from the British Crown. On October 4, the [Worcester Town Meeting instructed its representative to the upcoming Provincial Congress](#), the blacksmith Timothy Bigelow, that if the Massachusetts Charter of 1691 was not fully restored by the following day, which was obviously impossible, "You are to consider the people of this province absolved, on their part, from the obligation therein contained, ... and you are to exert yourself in devising ways and means to raise ... a new form [of government], wherein all officers shall be dependent on the suffrages of the people, whatever unfavorable constructions our enemies may put upon such procedure."

Since this new government must be based exclusively on the "suffrages of the people," there could be no more King or Queen. Further, the new government would be formed without asking for the consent of British authorities. Although the Worcester document does not use the word "independent," people at that point in time labeled this move "independency." (Note that Worcester's instructions were issued exactly 21 months before the national Declaration of Independence, and more than six months before fighting broke out at Lexington and Concord.)

When John Adams and Samuel Adams, who were in Philadelphia at Congress, got wind of the push for independence, they quickly urged their allies back home to oppose it. [Samuel Adams wrote to Joseph Warren](#), who had drafted the Suffolk Resolves:

"The congress have, in their resolve of the 17th instant [September 17], given their sanction to the resolutions of the county of Suffolk, one of which is to act merely on the defensive, so long as such conduct may be justified by reason and the principles of self-preservation, but *no longer*. . . I have been assured, in private conversation with individuals, that, if you should be driven to the necessity of acting in the defence of your lives or liberty, you would be justified by their constituents, and openly supported by all the means in their power; but whether they will ever be prevailed upon to think it necessary for you to set up another form of government, I very much question." (Emphasis in the original.)

In a similar vein, [John Adams warned William Tudor](#), his former law clerk:

"The Proposal ... of Setting up a new Form of Government of our own ... would render all Hopes of a Reconciliation with Great Britain desperate. It would light up the Flames of War, perhaps through the whole Continent, which might rage for twenty year, and End, in the Subduction of America, as likely as in her Liberation."

Would the people back home heed these warnings? Representatives from virtually every township in Massachusetts gathered in a Provincial Congress to determine the direction the resistance would follow. As a delegate, would you support the creation of a new government, independent of Great Britain? Would you prepare to attack British soldiers in Boston before they could be reinforced? Or would you remain on the defensive? What further actions might you take short of forming a new government or starting a war?

Handout E.

Historical Outcome: Massachusetts Prepares for War but Doesn't Start One

The Massachusetts Provincial Congress did not declare independence, nor did it organize an attack on the British garrison in Boston. But it did prepare for war. All of Massachusetts outside of Boston was in rebel hands, and everybody knew that British officials, sooner or later, would try to win back the province with military might.

Although the Provincial Congress was not formally a government, it acted like one. It collected taxes and spent the money on arms, ammunition, and gunpowder. [Here is its shopping list](#) from October 20, 1774, to be acquired through normal commercial channels. (In addition, cunning patriots managed to smuggle several cannons from the British garrison in Boston.)

16 field pieces, 3 pounders, with carriages, irons, &c.; wheels for ditto, irons, sponges, ladles, &c., @ £30	£480 0 0
4 ditto, 6 pounders, with ditto, @ £38	£152 0 0
Carriages, irons, &c., for 12 battering cannon, @ £30	£360 0 0
4 mortars, and appurtenances, viz: 2 8-inch and 2 13-inch, @ £20	£80 0 0
20 tons grape and round shot, from 3 to 24 lb., @ £15	£300 0 0
10 tons bomb-shells, @ £20	£200 0 0
5 tons lead balls, @ £33	£165 0 0
1,000 barrels of powder, @ £8	£8,000 0 0
5,000 arms and bayonets, @ £2	£10,000 0 0
And 75,000 flints	£100 0 0
Contingent charges	£1,000 0 0
In the whole [total]	£20,837 0

Shortly after, the [Provincial Congress procured supplies](#) to support soldiers in the field: food (355 barrels of pork, 700 barrels of flour, 300 bushels of peas, 20 casks of raisins, 20 bushels of oatmeal, and so on), drink (20 hogsheads of rum, 6 casks of Malaga wine, 9 casks of Lisbon wine), kitchen and dining wares (1000 quart iron pots, 1000 wooden mess bowls, “a suitable supply of wooden spoons”), tools for building earthen fortifications (200 spades, 150 iron shovels, 150 pickaxes, 50 wheelbarrows), and surgeon’s stores. (These items are in the Provincial Congress’s Journal, hyperlinked above, pp. 505-511.)

That was only the beginning. By February 1775, British spies reported that the Provincial Congress had 15,000 minutemen fit for battle, “all properly armed.”¹ Most of the arms and supplies were stored in two towns, Worcester and Concord. General Thomas Gage, commander of British forces in North America and military governor of Massachusetts, figured he could weaken rebel forces by seizing or destroying their supplies. He dispatched spies to each location and determined that Concord would be the easier target.

Rebels knew that Gage knew where the supplies were located, and they surmised that Gage would stage a raid with the onset of spring, once he received reinforcements. They also guessed, correctly, that he would choose Concord over Worcester. On March 14, 1775, [they organized an elaborate intelligence network](#) to alert the countryside the moment British soldiers set out from Boston.

On March 27, Paul Revere rode to Concord carrying news: British troops had left Boston and were heading that way! It was a false alarm, however. On April 7 Revere rode again, but again a false alarm. Meanwhile, thousands of inhabitants from Boston were fleeing the town, not wanting to be trapped within a British garrison once war broke out.

On April 18, Revere rode out once more—and this time the alarm was real. It came as no surprise. People were ready, having prepared for half-a-year for this event. With Revere, many other riders spread the word, and church bells rang, and guns fired—all warning signals that had been well rehearsed.

The rest is history, a well-known tale. Often lacking, however, is the political context for the British assault on Concord and the small town of Lexington, which lay on way. Only because the people of Massachusetts had remained “merely on the defensive,” waiting for the British to make the first strike, did other colonies come to their aid. Patience, accompanied by preparation, paid off.

¹ L. Kinvin Wroth, ed., *Province in Rebellion: A Documentary History of the Founding of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1774-1775* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 1969.