

**“Consumer Revolutions and the Politics of Tea”**

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Early modern peoples often distrusted consumer impulses, even criticized those who purchased and used certain goods they considered superfluous to daily needs. One could speculate that current interest in the origins of consumer culture stems from our own moral struggles with consumerism, acquisitiveness, and the extreme commodification of contemporary life. Rather than a post-consumer world, we live in a world embedded with commodities and consumerism. We can't escape it. Relentlessly, Facebook asks us to comment on or "Like" things (often consumer products) or ideas (often tied to products, brands, or celebrities). According to Mat Honan of *Wired*, "Liking is an economic act," or a political expression akin to voting.<sup>1</sup> Advertisers and the brands that they shill through social media (explicitly or covertly) depend upon our impulse to consume. Thus the exploration of the circulation of goods, consumer behavior, but especially the meaning and morality of consumption resonate for us today and have become important avenues of research in early America.

The history of consumer culture and consumption employs a variety of disciplines and approaches. It lies at the intersection of more traditional economic history (which examines trade, pricing, and circulation of goods) and anthropology (more interested in human behaviors, cultural values, and their meaning). Although the origins of the historiography for early American consumer culture can be traced to at least the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, current trends stem from scholarship of the 1980s and 1990s. Economic historians have long been interested in patterns of trade and the circulation of goods, but in the 1970s, outside disciplines, such as anthropology, gave us a new language with which to define and explore consumer culture. Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods*, reminded us that goods in and of themselves only have meaning given the manner in which they are consumed; the motives of the consumer infused those goods with cultural import.<sup>2</sup> In the succeeding decades, historians broadened their understanding of consumer culture, especially as they incorporated new research on Atlantic systems and global trade, as well as new questions related to race, class, and gender.

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<sup>1</sup> Mat Honan, "I Liked Everything I Saw on Facebook for Two Days. Here's What it Did to Me," *Wired*, August 11, 2014, <http://www.wired.com/2014/08/i-liked-everything-i-saw-on-facebook-for-two-days-heres-what-it-did-to-me/> (accessed August 18, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978). For a recent overview of scholarship on early American consumption see Frank Trentmann, "Introduction," in Trentmann ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1-19, and Michelle Craig McDonald, "Transatlantic Consumption," in Frank Trentmann, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 111-126.

Historians of consumer culture have taken the literature in at least three directions: 1) commodity studies that focus on the production, distribution, and circulation of consumer goods; 2) consumer behaviors, including shopping habits, household consumption, and advertising; and 3) the cultural significance of consumption, especially its social and political meanings. Most scholars agree that by the eighteenth century, the early modern world experienced a surge of consumer activity; they don't always agree about the origin and impact of that consumer revolution.

I will draw on the tea trade for examples of these three approaches to consumer culture; indeed the history of tea as a commodity reflects how quantitative and qualitative methods can intersect. Tea gives us insight into the economics of Atlantic trade, by tracing imports and exports from Old World to New. Nations, such as Great Britain and the emerging United States, imposed taxes on these trade goods, allowing for further growth as commercial empires. The consumption of tea and its circulation among communities on both sides of the Atlantic also tell us a lot about consumer behavior. Economic historians have been especially interested in questions of supply and demand; they have quantified material wealth, creating economic portraits of household consumption and class. Tracing the use of tea can help us understand shifting social status. Initially, tea graced only the tables of a few elite as it seeped into Europe. By the eighteenth century, however, it was democratized, becoming more readily available to all. With the demographics of early modern standards of living in hand, scholars can parse the trickier cultural meaning of consumer behavior. Again tea was a favorite target of those who criticized luxury consumption; tea and its use symbolized the break down of class barriers; it was often associated with women and weakness. And finally, tea became politicized; it was at the center of late-eighteenth-century imperial struggles that pitted Great Britain against American colonists. Patriots drew on the rhetoric of earlier luxury debates to berate American consumers who bought tea, but soon found that tea and the tax revenue it generated could be harnessed for the new nation and assure its commercial independence.

By the turn of the eighteenth century, English political economists extolled the virtues of foreign trade that exchanged home products for exotic and desirable commodities, generating the wealth of nations. Tea was among a long list of new commodities that profoundly changed European and American consumer tastes, merchant habits, and national commercial policies. Long-distance trade and consumption of foreign goods was made possible by technological

changes in ship-making and navigation, as well as bookkeeping, instruments of credit, trade charters, and calendar standardization.<sup>3</sup> But individual demand and desire for luxury goods further stimulated trade, granting merchant investors of many countries immense opportunities to accumulate great wealth and rise as a consuming class. In turn, investment in large European mercantile companies, such as the English East India Company, pushed commercial networks further into South Asia, Indonesia, and China. Tea and other luxury commodities thus became the building blocks for the imperial expansion of Europe and a window through which we can understand the eighteenth-century British commercial empire and America's place in an increasingly global consumer economy.<sup>4</sup>

Although the British Empire by the eighteenth century was intently focused on the Atlantic world and exploiting the products of its American and Caribbean colonies, in truth, the transnational links between Atlantic participants and Asian trade – what David Armitage has called “Circum-Atlantic” – played an important role in nurturing the economic imperialism of Great Britain.<sup>5</sup> While the American colonies provided key resources and a place for colonization, the East Indies stirred the English commercial imagination with new and exotic commodities: spices—such as pepper, cinnamon, nutmeg, and mace—offered tasteful ways to preserve meats and other perishable foods, sugar from India, coffee from Arabia and Indonesia, and tea from China eventually seeped in from the margins of empire. Tracing the paths of commodities through an expanding maze of global markets requires a broader lens than one trained on British colonial activities alone. Scholars of the Atlantic World note the economic interconnections across national boundaries; peoples of Europe, Africa, and the Americas

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<sup>3</sup> Mark M. Smith, “Culture, Commerce, and Calendar Reform in Colonial America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (October 1998): 557-584. Adam Anderson, eighteenth century political economists noted that merchants “and other Persons corresponding with other Nations and Countries” praised the shift from the Julian to Gregorian calendar, approved by the British Parliament in 1751, knowing it would “tend to prevent Mistakes and Disputes concerning the Dates of letters and Accounts, if the like Correction be received and established in his Majesty's Dominions.” [Adam Anderson, *An Historical and Chronological Deduction of the Origin of Commerce, from the Earliest Account to the Present Time* (London, 1764), II:398.] See also John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill, NC: the University of North Carolina Press, 1985, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 112-113; David Hancock, “Atlantic Trade and Commodities, 1402-1815,” in Nicholas Canny and Philip Morgan, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World, 1450- 1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 325-327 and 332-335; Carole Shammas, “America, the Atlantic, and Global Consumer Demand, 1500-1800,” *OAH Magazine of History* (January 2005): 59-64.

<sup>5</sup> David Armitage, “Three Concepts of Atlantic History,” in David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 17.

participated in an Atlantic economy where manufactured goods circulated in exchange for colonial resources such as furs, timber, sugar, rice, indigo, and human laborers. And within the Atlantic network, imperial restrictions rarely kept Spanish, French, Dutch, Portuguese, and English colonials from trading with each other. Smuggling, for instance, became an important mechanism for circulating tea and other foreign imports within and among colonial economies. An Atlantic World paradigm has limitations as well. Just as local or regional demand and activities often tapped into broader networks of the Atlantic exchange, eighteenth century Atlantic trade economies grew more dependent on links to credit, services, and goods of India, Asia and the Pacific beyond. Spanish American silver, for instance, made the tea trade possible; it linked the Americas to European merchants who required hard currency to purchase commodities in the East Indies. Silver's purchasing power was far greater in India and China than in Europe. And of course, American colonial demand brought these Asian commodities full circle, making tea one of the fastest growing consumer products by the mid-eighteenth century and a key component to the British commercial empire.<sup>6</sup>

Many recent studies of early modern economies recognize that European commercial hegemony was late in coming and incomplete. European economies, demands, and consumption did not necessarily drive the engine of global markets. Rather than "drawing the rest of the world inexorably into its fold,"<sup>7</sup> as World Systems proponents argue, by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries European merchants were instead captivated by the vibrant commercial markets of central, south, and east Asia, where, according to Kenneth Pomeranz, a wealth of goods and international ports of call "came closer to resembling the neoclassical ideal of a

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<sup>6</sup> For silver see Kent G. Deng, "Miracle or Mirage? Foreign Silver, China's Economy and Globalization from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries," *Pacific Economic Review* 13, no. 3 (2008): 320-358; Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 131-164. Adam Smith has an extensive discussion of the purchasing power of silver in the East Indies: *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991; orig. pub. 1910, Everyman's Library), 186-ff. See also Philp J. Stern, "British Asia and British Atlantic: Comparisons and Connections," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d ser., 63, no. 4 (October 2006): 693-712; Nicholas Canny, "Atlantic History and Global History," (317-336); and Peter A. Coclanis, "Beyond Atlantic History," (337-356) in Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Atlantic History: a Critical Appraisal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Sudipta Sen, *Empire of Free Trade: the East India Company and the Making of the Colonial Marketplace* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 5-6. Sen is critical of dependency theorists and World Systems proponents such as Immanuel Wallerstein and Andre Gunder Frank.

market economy than did western Europe.”<sup>8</sup> European nations sometimes armed merchants who, in turn, forced access to these new markets. However, Asia was willing to accommodate foreign traders, which made European economic expansion possible, including the introduction of new luxury goods. Indeed, European competition within these foreign markets created a new supply stream of goods that sometimes preceded consumer demand. For example, England challenged the economic dominance of the Portuguese and Dutch by granting a monopoly corporate charter to the English East India Company, allowing them great powers to establish trading posts in Asia by the seventeenth century. The English East India Company, in the 1720s and 1730s, systematically attempted to corner the Canton market in tea as a political strategy to thwart European commercial competition. As a result, the Company warehoused surplus tea and subsequently struggled to stimulate consumer demand for this commodity.<sup>9</sup>

Recent scholarship has explored how these new goods got into the hands of consumers. Commodity studies demonstrate the complex lifecycles of everything from cod to salt, sugar, mahogany, and coffee. Anthropologist Sidney W. Mintz’s classic study, *Sweetness and Power: the Place of Sugar in Modern History*, for example, marches us across the world and through the centuries to explore the role of sugar in Europe’s New World domination and the exploitation of slave labor, as well as its introduction to eager consumers who quickly added sugar to the western diet. The availability of sugar, of course, was integral to the increased consumption of tea and creating the attendant commercial networks connecting the Americas, Europe, and East

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<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 70. See also Peter Manning, “Asia and Europe in the World Economy,” *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 2 (2002): 419.

<sup>9</sup> For attempts to corner the tea market in Canton see, for instance, Dec. 1720, Instructions, Misc. China Papers, 19 Dec. 1712 – 24 Dec. 1725, p. 1382, IOR/G/12/8, *East India Company Factory Records, Sources from the British Library, London, Part 1: China and Japan* (Adam Matthew Publications, 2005), Reel 2; and Diary and Consultation, June 27, 1729, China Diary and Consultations, 1728-30, p. 16, IOR/G/12/28, *East India Company Factory Records, Sources from the British Library, London, Part 1: China and Japan* (Adam Matthew Publications, 2005), Reel 10. In 1740, the EIC sent 4 ships with instructions to coordinate cornering the market in Hyson tea, but the agents failed to negotiate the contracts. (Hosea Ballou Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company, Trading to China, 1635-1834*, vol. 1 (Taipei, 1966), 272.) See also Tan Chung, “The Britain-China-India Trade Triangle (1771-1840),” *Indian Economic Social History Review* 11 (1974): 411-412; Felicity A. Nussbaum, “Introduction,” in *The Global Eighteenth Century*, Felicity A. Nussbaum, ed. (Baltimore and London: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 2 and 10; Kenneth Pomeranz and Steven Topik, *The World that Trade Created: Society, Culture, and the World Economy, 1400 to the Present* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), xiv; Alexander Nutzenadel and Frank Trentmann, “Introduction: Mapping Food and Globalization,” in *Food and Globalization: Consumption, Markets and Politics in the Modern World* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2008), 1-18; and Anne E.C. McCants, “Exotic Goods, Popular Consumption, and the Standard of Living: Thinking about Globalization in the Early Modern World,” *Journal of World History* 18, no. 4 (December 2007): 438.

Indies.<sup>10</sup> More recently, in *Oceans of Wine*, David Hancock traces the “decentralized” distribution networks of family, ethnicity, faith, and business to explore how a relatively unremarkable product, wine from Madeira, became a mainstay for Atlantic households. Hancock examines how marketing and distribution helped gentrify the taste and sociability of luxury consumption often outside the centralized control of British merchants or ministries, creating “a vocabulary for a cross-imperial Atlantic culture.”<sup>11</sup> Tea, like sugar and wine, once unleashed in the circulating global marketplace, easily moved from producers, to merchants, to consumers across permeable imperial boundaries in ways that neither China nor Great Britain could always predict or control.

Thus, the trade in foreign luxury commodities changed the ways people ate and lived, laying the groundwork for what many historians have called a consumer revolution. The revolution in consumption was not new to the turn of the eighteenth century. Lisa Jardine traces the appearance of “Worldly Goods” in Europe to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when maritime and commercial technologies made exploration and foreign commerce not only possible, but increasingly common. Wealthy families, not just those with title or political power, sponsored mercantile enterprises and collected rarities and consumable luxuries that gave them elevated cache and status.<sup>12</sup> Only in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, however, did Europe and British North America experience what Jan de Vries has called an “industrious

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<sup>10</sup> Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: the Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 214. Although tea was never produced by bound labor, as a “consumption bundle” in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, sugar and the tea it sweetened certainly fueled the slave trade in the Americas. (Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 30-32.) Other recent commodity studies include James Walvin, *Fruits of Empire: Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660-1800* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Mark Kurlansky, *Cod: a Biography of the Fish that Changed the World* (Penguin, 1998); Kurlansky, *Salt: a World History* (Penguin, 2003); Dan Koeppel, *Banana: the Fate of the Fruit that Changed the World* (Plume, reprint edition, 2008); Jack Turner, *Spice: the History of a Temptation* (Vintage, 2005); Amy Butler Greenfield, *A Perfect Red: Empire, Espionage, and the Quest for the Color of Desire* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005); Jennifer L. Anderson, *Mahogany: the Costs of Luxury in Early America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012); and Michelle Craig McDonald, *Caffeine Dependence: Coffee and Commerce in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania press, forthcoming). For slave economies and consumption see Roderick A. McDonald, *The Economy and Material Culture of Slaves: Goods and Chattels on the Sugar Plantations of Jamaica and Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994); and various essays in Ira Berlin and Philip Morgan, eds., *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas* (Richmond, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> David Hancock, *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), xvi, xviii.

<sup>12</sup> Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods: a New History of the Renaissance* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996), 9, 15, 30-33.

revolution,” which helped more households “increase *both* the supply of market-oriented, money-earning activities *and* the demand for goods offered in the marketplace.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, families were making conscious decisions about reallocating their time and wages in order to maximize the purchase of ready made goods. Increased productivity gave rise to an ability to consume and the ensuing demand increased trade and choice for a rising middling and newly moneyed classes. Aided by competition between and among European merchants, global trade became commonplace and luxury goods (especially groceries) became more readily available and cheaper.<sup>14</sup>

Economic historians who focus on material culture and standards of living give us a better portrait of the new consumer and their behavior. Scholars of early America with training in social demographics and material culture have quantified household wealth and the ability to consume. Carole Shammas calculated the standard of living by “gauging the proportion of disposable income that average or poor households spent on the consumption of material goods, especially food, clothing, shelter, and fuel.”<sup>15</sup> She estimates that American colonists, for instance, spent as much as 30% of their income on imported goods, most of them “consumer commodities,” with the peak of this import trade between the 1720s and 1740s.<sup>16</sup> New amenities such as kitchen and tableware, ceramic dishes, and silverware eased food preparation and consumption; textiles of wool, linen, and cotton enhanced personal appearance; and mahogany furniture, clocks, and books filled ever-larger domestic spaces. And, of course, during the first

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<sup>13</sup> de Vries, *Industrious Revolution*, 10. De Vries looks at early modern consumption through present-day theories of psychology. For instance, he argues that boredom drove consumption. (37.) Some historians insist that any consumer revolution came only with the 19<sup>th</sup> century Industrial Revolution, arguing that technologies of mass production and transportation marked the beginning of broad consumer participation. However, scholarship on the rise of standards of living and distribution of consumer goods from the early eighteenth century clearly refutes this. See Trentmann, “Introduction,” in *Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, 15; McCants, “Exotic Goods, Popular Consumption, and the Standard of Living: Thinking about Globalization in the Early Modern World,” 434-436.

<sup>14</sup> Maxine Berg, “Luxury, the Luxury Trades, and the Roots of Industrial Growth,” in Trentmann, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, 184

<sup>15</sup> Carole Shammas, “Standard of Living, Consumption, and Political Economy over the Past 500 Years,” in Trentmann, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, 211. See also David Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods: the Material Culture of Early America* (2010).

<sup>16</sup> Shammas, *Pre-Industrial Consumer*, 6 and 292. See also Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 25-31, 86.



half of the eighteenth century commercial expansion and relative colonial prosperity opened an avenue for the proliferation of exotic consumables from various parts of the world.<sup>17</sup>

The rising standard of living coupled with a change in how Euro-Americans viewed the act of consumption helped stimulate market demand for new goods, perhaps even helped create a shared identity among consumers. Of course, historians debate whether demand preceded supply or vice versa. Cary Carson, famously asked “Why Demand?” in his classic study of consumption in colonial British America, arguing that consumer desires prompted merchants to ramp up supply.<sup>18</sup> But even if supply outpaced demand initially, as I argue for tea, no doubt merchants and retailers, as well as their customers, “engaged in a shared language of commerce, luxury, and products,” that Maxine Berg asserts provided expanded choice and penetration of goods.<sup>19</sup> Advertising, marketing, and increased distribution helped circulate luxuries, such as tea, across ranks. By the eighteenth century sumptuary laws no longer curtailed consumption, and laboring classes could emulate the refined style they saw among their betters; in other words, consumers sought aspirational consumption – what Woodruff Smith terms “respectability” – adding social, moral, and political meaning to their actions.<sup>20</sup> Still, aspiring to “genteel living” did not necessarily lead to an exact emulation of the elite. Instead, expanded choices and low

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<sup>17</sup> Margaret Ellen Newell, *From Dependency to Independence: Economic Revolution in Colonial New England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 97-ff; Shammas, *The Pre-Industrial Consumer in England and America*, 3-5, 83-86; Lorena S. Walsh, “Urban Amenities and Rural Sufficiency: Living Standards and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1643-1777,” *The Journal of Economic History*, 43 (March 1983):109-117; Gloria L. Main and Jackson T. Main, “Economic Growth and the Standard of Living in Southern New England, 1640-1774,” *Journal of Economic History*, 48 (March 1988):27-46; Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, “Changing Lifestyles and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake,” in Carson, et al, eds, *Of Consuming Interests*, 67, 80; K.N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660-1760* (Cambridge, 1978), 387-388.

<sup>18</sup> Cary Carson, “The Consumer Revolution in Colonial British America: Why Demand?” in Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 486. Lorna Weatherill, “The Meaning of Consumer Behavior in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-century England,” in John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 216, and K.N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660-1760* (Cambridge, 1978), 388, also argue that consumer demand precipitated supply.

<sup>19</sup> Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5. See Ann Smart Martin, *Buying into a World of Goods: Early Consumers in Backcountry Virginia* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010) and Ellen Hartigan O’Connor, *The Ties that Buy: Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) who provide new insights into shopping habits and household economies.

<sup>20</sup> Woodruff Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600-1800* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 3; Maxine Berg, “In Pursuit of Luxury,” 92; Carl Robert Keyes, “Early American Advertising: Marketing and Consumer Culture in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia,” Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, October 2007; Ann Smart Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods: Early Consumers in Backcountry Virginia* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 9-10.

cost brought new items and new comforts to more households, where non-elite helped to redefine the meaning of luxury.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, the consumer revolution was revolutionary because global trade and the proliferation of goods quickly turned luxuries into necessities (or “competencies”) as less wealthy colonists participated in the nascent consumer revolution. For example, the supply of tea increased after 1715; the amount essentially doubled every 5 years until it leveled off in the mid 1740s. During the 1720s, the English East India Company shipped roughly 150,000 lbs. of tea to the American mainland and Caribbean colonies. The following decade, over 660,000 lbs. were re-exported across the Atlantic.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, the price of tea dropped and, in turn, became accessible to a broader range of people—elites, shopkeepers, and the “lower sort” began to drink tea on a regular basis, and their tastes and preferences eventually shaped the course of the tea trade.<sup>23</sup> Although historians have placed annual consumption of tea at under a pound per person, eighteenth-century observers estimated that by mid-century American consumers drank

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1992), xii; de Vries, *Industrious Revolution*, 52, 55-56; Colin Campbell, “Understanding Traditional and Modern Patterns of Consumption in eighteenth-century England: a Character-Action Approach,” in John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds. *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 40-41; Anne E.C. McCants, “Exotic Goods, Popular Consumption, and the Standard of Living: Thinking about Globalization in the Early Modern World,” *Journal of World History* 18, no. 4 (December 2007): 449; Paul G.E. Clemens, “The Consumer Culture of the Middle Atlantic, 1760-1820,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (Oct. 2005), 577; Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger, “The Rise and Fall of the Luxury Debates,” in Berg and Eger, eds., *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires, and Delectable Goods* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 13. Lorna Weatherill, “The Meaning of Consumer Behaviour in Late Seventeenth- and early Eighteenth-century England,” in Brewer and Porter, eds. *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 206-ff, cautions against trying to pinpoint exactly what a “luxury” or “necessity” was to early modern consumers. Luxuries are assumed to be goods that had not been owned by an earlier generation, that marked rank and status, and were “desirable but not indispensable.” [207] See also John Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities and Design in Early Modern Britain and Early America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> Data compiled from Great Britain, Public Records Office, Board of Customs & Excise, *Ledgers of Imports and Exports, 1697-1780*, microform, n.d., Reels 3-37 (hereafter Customs 3). Data is missing for years 1705, 1712, and 1727. G. N. Clark, *Guide to English Commercial Statistics, 1696-1782* (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1938), 33-34, gives a good overview of PRO customs data, its usefulness, and pitfalls, indicating “these statistics are more valuable as records of the quantities of goods, given by weight or measure or tale [tare?], than of their value in money, for the greater part of the values were reached by subsequent calculation and all of them involved a much larger element of estimation or guessing, and left more room for fraud, than the statements of quantity.”

<sup>23</sup> Walsh, “Urban Amenities and Rural Sufficiency,” 112; Newell, *Dependency to Independence*, 96; Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: the Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 2. Caroline Frank, *Objectifying China, Imagining America: Chinese Commodities in Early America* (Chicago University Press, 2011), Chapters 1 and 2, argues that American colonists may have incorporated exotic Asian goods into their household inventories far earlier than thought. In the 1690s, American seafarers participated in early privateering adventures to the East Indies.

more than 2 pounds of tea a year, at least one cup a day.<sup>24</sup> For early eighteenth century elite, tea had become a daily ritual that punctuated a new leisure life marked by entertainments, visitations, and public celebrations. Yet, tea also became a staple for a surprising number of working people. Merchants usually kept running accounts for artisans and laborers, who often exchanged work for goods in kind (or, perhaps, were paid for their work with goods on hand). By the 1730s in Boston, for instance, tea figured prominently for customers like bricklayer Samuel Brooks and barber Phillip Adeburt, who regularly received tea for their labor or, in Adeburt's case, "By wiggs & Shaveing."<sup>25</sup> Laborers chopped wood, mended clothing, built furniture, and shaped brass in exchange for tea.<sup>26</sup> What had begun in the 1720s and 1730s as an occasional purchase, by the 1750s and 1760s, had become a regular habit among laborers. Whether a potter, brewer, washerwoman, ship carpenter, mariner, laborer, cooper, baker, or painter, these working folk received tea in small amounts (usually one-quarter to one-half pound of tea at three to six month intervals), though proportionally the small luxuries such as sugar and tea were equivalent to a great deal of their wages.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Carole Shammas has found that when strapped for cash, people in the early modern world tended to do without food before giving up new luxuries such as tea, sugar, or chocolate.<sup>28</sup> Even the very poor drank tea. In 1738, New York's Poorhouse spent 13.8 percent of their budget on sugar and caffeinated drinks, a

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<sup>24</sup> Samuel Wharton, "Observations Upon the Consumption of Teas in North America, 1773," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 25 (1901):139-140. Shammas, *The Pre-Industrial Consumer*, 84, indicates that colonists drank .5 to .8 pounds of tea annually, while Billy Smith, "The Material Lives of Laboring Philadelphians, 1750-1800," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 38 (April 1981), 170, estimates that a laborer in the 1760s consumed only .2 pounds.

<sup>25</sup> Aug. 10, 1743 and 1737, [Thomas Boylston II] Ledger, 1735-1767, vol. 57, Boylston Family Papers, MHS. See also 1738 and 1739, [Thomas Boylston II] Ledger, 1735-1767, vol. 57, Boylston Family Papers, MHS; and Benjamin Greene Account Books, 1734-1756, MHS.

<sup>26</sup> David Evins, debtor, 1738; John Davis, debtor, 1738-1740; Moses Purce [brazier], debtor, 1740-1741; and Samuel Henshaw [distiller], debtor, 1739-1740, Benjamin Greene Account Book, 1734-1756, MHS. Purce purchased 7.25 lbs. of tea over the course of a year and a half. Between January 1739 and Oct. 1740, Samuel Henshaw exchanged his services and cords of wood for a total of 7.75 lb of tea.

<sup>27</sup> In the mid-eighteenth century, male laborers were generally paid about two shillings a day, making a pound of tea worth as much as a week's pay. See James T. Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country: a Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (Baltimore, 1972), 179; Mary M. Schweitzer, *Custom and Contract: Household, Government, and the Economy in Colonial Pennsylvania* (New York, 1987), 51-52. For further examples of purchases and labor exchange see Samuel Coates, *Ciphering and Invoice Books, 1724-1758*, inside cover; Thomas Wharton Ledger, 1752-1756; Mifflin and Massey Ledger, vol. 1, 1760-1763 and vol. 2, 1763-1766, Business Accounts; John Chevalier Daybook, 1760-1766; Charles Wharton Cashbook, 1765-1771, Wharton Family Papers; William Clarkson and George Morrison Ledger, 1767-1779, Commercial Records, Simon Gratz Collection, all at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>28</sup> Shammas, *The Pre-Industrial Consumer*, 298-299.

much larger portion of their expenditures than English counterpart, St. Andrew Holborn Workhouse, which spent only 4.5 percent on similar consumables.<sup>29</sup>

An increased desire for new goods, enabled by a rising standard of living in England and its colonies, intensified the paradoxical moral questions about what, how much, and why people consumed things. Economics and ethics have often pitched battle as opposing forces in society. Some social commentators at the turn of the eighteenth century complained that the spread of luxury goods was directly related to a decline of virtue and harmful to individual and social well-being; they were particularly critical of the habits of working poor and female consumers.<sup>30</sup> By the 1720s and 1730s, Boston newspapers regularly condemned “Luxury” and “the Pleasures of Taste” as equivalent to ungodliness and counter to God’s plan.<sup>31</sup> In the 1730s, articles appeared regularly with complaints “how our Extravagance in Apparel, and Luxury at our Tables, are hastening the ruin of our Country, and are evils which call loudly for a Remedy.”<sup>32</sup> At mid-century, however, economic theorists (no doubt with the help of merchants and their customers) were in the process of redefining economic behavior, separating morality from merchandising, secularizing market activities, and even promoting the accumulation of goods as beneficial to the nation. Montesquieu, David Hume, James Steuart, and Adam Smith especially wanted to distinguish the new luxuries arriving from the East Indies or grown in New World colonies as an impetus for national prosperity rather than a prelude to sin and lost salvation. Generally, the eighteenth century brought less moralizing than a modernizing of the economic lexicon. Such laden terms as “profit,” “desire,” “luxury,” even “credit,” once suspect for their negative implications, were softened to neutralize moral overtones and to encourage or justify participation in the marketplace.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Shammass, *The Pre-Industrial Consumer*, table 5.8.

<sup>30</sup> Indeed, as sumptuary laws faded, the luxury debates emerged, which questioned the consumption patterns of the poor who were original targets of sumptuary laws. (Shammass, “Standard of Living, Consumption, and Political Economy over the Past 500 Years,” in *Oxford Handbook*, 213.)

<sup>31</sup> Jan. 24, 1732, *New England Weekly Journal*.

<sup>32</sup> Nov. 20, 1732, *The Boston Gazette*; Feb. 26, 1733, *The Boston Gazette*.

<sup>33</sup> Berg and Eger, “The Rise and Fall of the Luxury Debates,” in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, 7, 11-12; Maxine Berg, “Luxury, the Luxury Trades, and the Roots of Industrial Growth,” in *Oxford Handbook* 180-181; Walvin, *Fruits of Empire*, ix-xiii; Nancy F. Koehn, *The Power of Commerce: Economy and Governance in the First British Empire* (Ithaca and London, 1994), 61-85, 180; and John E. Crowley, *This Sheba Self: the Conceptualization of Economic Life in Eighteenth-Century America* (Baltimore and London, 1974), 6-12. Anna Neill argues that “the expansion of a world economy depended upon disciplining passions in the peripheral parts of the globe, even while commercial expansion required that appetites be stimulated in the metropolitan regions.” (Anna Neill, *British Discovery Literature and the Rise of Global Commerce* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 29.) For the

Even as the concept of “luxurious vices” faded, however, ambivalence and anxiety about consumption lingered in the Anglo-American world. The luxury debates of the 1720s and 1730s provided a rhetorical language that Americans readily adopted as they began to question the constitutionality of British economic sovereignty, trade monopolies, and the political economy of the mid-eighteenth century. Calling on consumer restraint in the aftermath of the Townshend Acts, boycott supporters blamed luxury consumption for threatening American liberties. The nonimportation agreements reflected these moral arguments. Subscribers in Annapolis, Maryland, for instance, resolved in June, 1769, “to discourage, and as much as may be, prevent the Use of foreign Luxuries and Superfluities, in the Consumption of which, we have heretofore too much indulged ourselves, to the great Detriment of our private Fortunes, and, in some Instances, to the Ruin of Families.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Virginia’s House of Burgesses, while acknowledging the dire economic impact of the Townshend Acts, called on a change in consumer behavior. In May 1769, they demanded subscribers use “their own Example, as all other legal Ways and Means in their Power, [to] promote and encourage Industry and Frugality, and discourage all Manner of Luxury and Extravagance.”<sup>35</sup> As historian John Crowley argues, the exhortation to join subscriber lists helped unify consumers, in theory at least, letting the signers publicly acknowledge their shame and adhere to a new program of patriotic austerity.<sup>36</sup>

Still, republican political ideals, which demanded virtuous restraint from luxury, often collided with the continuing demands of colonial consumers. By 1767, when the Townshend Acts went into effect, legal tea imports had rebounded substantially from the 1750s, especially in New England and Pennsylvania, surpassing imports from earlier years. Whereas the decade between 1751 and 1760 saw the importation of 1,492,496 lbs. of tea to the mainland colonies,

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intersection of economies and ethics see Christopher Clark, “A Wealth of Notions: Interpreting Economy and Morality in Early America,” *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 8, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 672-683.

<sup>34</sup> *Annapolis (in Maryland) June 22, 1769. We, the Subscribers, his Majesty’s loyal and dutiful subjects, the Merchants, Traders, Freeholders, Mechanics...*, p. 1, broadside, no. 11158, Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans, 1639-1800.

<sup>35</sup> Virginia Assembly, House of Burgesses, *Williamsburg, Thursday the 18<sup>th</sup> May, 1769. At a farther Meeting, according to Adjournment, the Committee appointed Yesterday made this Report...*, p. 1, no. 11513, Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans, 1639-1800.

<sup>36</sup> Crowley, *This Sheba Self*, 126; T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), xv-xvi.

during the 1767 and 1768 seasons alone, 1,400,000 lbs. of tea arrived in America.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the spike in importation would suggest that American markets were well supplied with tea by the time that nonimportation agreements went into effect and merchants could easily forego new purchases for several years, thereby making it easy for some merchants to continue to sell, if not purchase, dutied tea from British sources while supporting nonimportation. When merchants adhered to nonimportation agreements, they did so not as “a critique of consumption, and an expression of the colonists’ uneasiness with economic change,” or “an attempt to regain the lost virtue and frugality of the fathers;” rather, as Margaret Newell has argued, they used boycotts as “a means to redress long-standing deficiencies in the colonial economy,” which had made them so dependent on British manufactures.<sup>38</sup>

Boycotts did not necessarily translate “into action the moral component of republican ideology that rejected the debilitating vices and luxuries of the Old World,” as historian Thomas Doerflinger has contended.<sup>39</sup> Instead, economic self-interest shaped the politics of consumption on the part of merchants and consumers. The discourse that permeated early American pamphlets and the press during the pre-Revolutionary period demanded that colonists restrain their consumption to maintain their virtue and political liberties. If one looks only at those sources, you might assume, as T.H. Breen does, a far greater political consensus or unity of action among Americans based on a “shared experience as consumers.” In *Marketplace of Revolution* he asserts that “private decisions were interpreted as political acts; consumer choices communicated personal loyalties,” and “one’s willingness to sacrifice the pleasures of the market provided a remarkably visible and effective test of allegiance.”<sup>40</sup> However, another discourse also runs through the sources. In early American merchant ledgers, consumer restraint and consensus about boycotting products such as tea are less clear. Kate Haulman, in *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America*, traces the same tensions between revolutionary mandates to embrace homespun and republican style of dress, and consumer desire; “the personal politics of fashion persisted,” she argues, “especially among women and other

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<sup>37</sup> Customs 3 (1751-1760); Robert F. Oaks, “Philadelphia Merchants and the Origins of American Independence,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 121 (December 1977): 418; Benjamin Woods Labaree, *The Boston Tea Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 32.

<sup>38</sup> Newell, *From Dependency to Independence*, 238-239.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Doerflinger, “Philadelphia Merchants and the Logic of Moderation, 1760-1775,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (April 1983): 214.

<sup>40</sup> Breen, *Marketplace of Revolution*, xv-xvi.

feminized figures that became a political problem for Whigs.”<sup>41</sup> Women also played an important role as consumers of tea. As shoppers, revolutionary committees called on them to stop buying goods listed in nonimportation agreements. Gendered images of weak women prone to licentious and luxurious living associated women with scandal and gossip at the tea-table. However, men, as much as women, continued to purchase forbidden goods for their families at local shops.<sup>42</sup> Internal anxiety and doubt instilled by burgeoning economic self-interest, rather than a clear ideological vision of right economic behavior, fueled the Revolutionary movement.

Still, Americans managed to generally unite behind the nonimportation of British goods in 1773 after the passage of the Tea Act. In their response, they again drew on the moral language of earlier luxury debates, at times condemning fellow colonists’ love of and use of tea. But, the real “politics” of consumption in 1773, more often targeted the commercial abuses of empire, rather than the spending habits of individuals. As activists in port towns planned their “tea party” protests, many American merchants feared that Great Britain would grant the English East India Company exclusive access to all colonial commercial markets and shipping, along with its monopoly on tea. Indeed, during the early 1770s, the East India Company’s conquest of Bengal, partially paid for from the sale of Chinese tea, became a point of contention for a cross-Atlantic critique of empire.<sup>43</sup> A Philadelphia “Mechanic,” for instance, warned that the East India Company, once ensconced in America, would “leave no Stone unturned to become your Masters.” Referring to the Company’s then notorious behavior in India, the author argued that the East India Company was “well versed in Tyranny, Plunder, Oppression, and Bloodshed. Whole Provinces labouring under the Distresses of Oppression, Slavery, Famine, and the Sword, are familiar to them. Thus they have enriched themselves,--thus they are become the most

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<sup>41</sup> Kate Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 5.

<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Kowlaski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 25.

<sup>43</sup> For recent scholarship that links the American colonies with the rising British Asian empire see P.J. Marshall, “The British in Asia: Trade to Dominion, 1700-1765,” in *Oxford History of Great Britain*; Elizabeth Mancke, “Negotiating an Empire: Britain and Its Overseas Peripheries, c. 1550-1780,” in *Negotiated Empires*, Daniels and Kennedy eds.; Philip J. Stern, “British Asia and British Atlantic: Comparisons and Connections,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (October 2006): 693-712; P.J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America c. 1750-1783* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); *The Global Eighteenth Century*, Felicity A. Nussbaum, ed. (Baltimore and London: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

powerful Trading Company in the Universe.”<sup>44</sup> John Dickinson best articulated the moral outrage against the East India Company after the passage of the Tea Act. Writing as “Rusticus,” he noted with alarm that the five ships of tea then headed for America would “establish a Monopoly for the East-India Company, who have espoused the Cause of the Ministry; and hope to repair their broken Fortunes by the Ruin of *American* Freedom and Liberty!” He, too, targeted the East India Company’s actions abroad, rather than British tax policy, as the source of America’s fear. “Their conduct in *Asia*, for some Years past,” he chided, “has given ample Proof, how little they regard the Laws of Nations, the Rights, Liberties, or Lives of Men. They have levied War, excited Rebellions, dethroned lawful Princes, and sacrificed Millions for the Sake of Gain.” Dickinson assumed that “The Monopoly of Tea, is...but a small Part of the Plan they have formed to strip us of our Property.”<sup>45</sup> Dickinson argued, as other Americans had, that he did not protest “the paltry Sum of Three-Pence which is now demanded, but the Principle upon which it is demanded;” he recognized that through a tangled network of global commercial concerns, an individual’s purchase in the local marketplace affected the lives of those far beyond the shores of America.<sup>46</sup>

Placing the Boston Tea Party and the crisis of 1773 into its international context helps us make sense of why Americans returned so quickly to consuming tea in its aftermath; because it was not about rejecting goods or luxury consumption. Despite the restrictions put in place by the Continental Association of 1774 and the widespread public commitment to give up consumption of British goods, especially tea as a symbol of British oppression, tea continued to be ubiquitous, consumed with relish even at the height of the tea protests, and became the basis for several American fortunes during the revolutionary war. American merchants and consumers continued to seek out, trade, and purchase tea where they could and when available. Patriots had difficulty

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<sup>44</sup> Pennsylvania, *To the Tradesmen, Mechanics, &c of the Province of Pennsylvania*, Dec. 4, 1773, HSP, also published as *Mechanic, To the Tradesmen, Mechanics, etc.* Philadelphia, 1773, broadside, HSP.

<sup>45</sup> “Rusticus” [John Dickinson], *A Letter from the Country, to a Gentleman in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1773).

<sup>46</sup> John Dickinson, *A Letter from the Country, to a Gentleman in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, Nov. 27, 1773), Library Company of Philadelphia. See also Thomas Pownall, *The Right, Interest, and Duty, of Government, As concerned in The Affairs of the East Indies* (London, 1773). Like Citizen’s United today, which grants rights of individuals to corporations, Pownall insisted that the English East India Company charters “are the like powers of incorporation, with rights of the same nature...as have been given to all other colonists and emigrants. Whoever will compare the charters of the one and of the other, clause by clause, word by word, will find this unvarying similarity extend through the whole.” (quoted in Philip J. Stern, “British Asia and British Atlantic: Comparisons and Connections,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (October 2006): 702.)



enforcing nonimportation and nonconsumption through local committees of compliance during the initial years of war. Between 1774 and the late 1770s, merchants petitioned Congress to allow the sale and use of already stockpiled tea. In addition, they demanded that bans be lifted on exportation to allow the trade of provisions with the Dutch and French West Indies; in return, they purchased tea, an easily transported commodity. But consumers also pressured merchants and governmental bodies to regulate the price and availability of tea. Women condemned tea merchants who hoarded supplies or charged excessive amounts; they demanded that state legislatures and the Continental Congress enact price controls to regulate the distribution and sale of scarce commodities like tea. Along with other foreign trade, Congress reopened markets to tea in the spring of 1776 and by the later years of the war, tea returned quickly to shops in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. Although economic matters were never the sole motivation for fighting a war of independence, the liberty that some sought as part of America's consumer revolution, was the freedom to access goods at a fair price.<sup>47</sup>

Recently, Staughton Lynd and David Waldstreicher, in "Free Trade, Sovereignty, and Slavery: Toward an Economic Interpretation of American Independence," have revived Charles Beard's contention that the Founding Fathers had "compelling economic reasons to favor independence."<sup>48</sup> Free trade, as much as constitutional sovereignty, was the motive for, as well as end result of the Revolution. But, the new United States, in order to retain its access to consumer commodities originally supplied by British merchants, had to balance commercial liberties with the need for market regulation. By the 1780s and 1790s self-interested merchants vied with European trade companies to dominate the Asian marketplace, bringing otter skins

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<sup>47</sup> In all, during 1776 and 1777 eight riots took place in New York (and one in Salem, MA), to protest the excessive price or artificial scarcity of tea. Barbara Clark Smith, "Food Rioters and the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 51 (January 1994): 35-36; Ruth Bogin, "Petitioning and the New Moral Economy of Post-Revolutionary America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 45 (July 1988):391-425; and Michael Zuckerman, "A Different Thermidor: The Revolution Beyond the American Revolution," in James A. Henretta, Michael Kammen, and Stanley N. Katz, eds, *The Transformation of Early American History: Society, Authority, and Ideology* (New York, 1991), 180-181. For examples of tea riots, complaints about merchants, and women's action against merchants in the mid-1770s, see August 26, 1776, *Journals of the Provincial Congress, Provincial Convention, Committee of Safety and Council of Safety of the State of New-York: 1775-1776-1777* (Albany [N.Y.]: Printed by T. Weed, 1842), vol. 1, 590; October 17, 1776, Resolution, Committee of Safety, *Journals of the Provincial Congress...of New York*, vol. 1, 682; November 19, 1776, *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut...with the journal of the Council of Safety...and with an appendix* (Connecticut, 1894), 63; July 22, 1777, *Journals of the Provincial Congress...of New York*, vol. 1, 1010.

<sup>48</sup> Staughton Lynd and David Waldstreicher, "Free Trade, Sovereignty, and Slavery: Toward an Economic Interpretation of American Independence," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 68, no. 4 (October 2011): 600. See the forum on "Economics and American Independence," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 68, no. 4 (October 2011).

from the Pacific Northwest and American ginseng in hopes of finding the perfect commodity to exchange for tea. Although they had been proponents of free trade, American traders demanded commercial policies that gave their maritime enterprises advantages over European rivals. Instead of granting monopoly rights, like Britain had to the English East India Company, a newly empowered Congress under the federal constitution conceded to the interests of private traders abroad and vowed to protect the new commercial “privileges of independence,” as John Crowley calls it.<sup>49</sup> American diplomats and statesmen bowed to the realities of commercial regulations as part of foreign policy, enacting restrictions and tariffs. Over the course of the eighteenth century, tea and its consumers drew America inextricably into the vibrant global market economy. Rather than disappearing from merchant shelves, tea provided a potential windfall for American merchants and a key source of revenue for government treasuries.

Still, American consumers and the goods they desired and purchased were fraught with political meaning, a theme that resonates in the most recent scholarship on early American consumer culture. As merchandise returned to local stores and other venues, consumers used a newly found independence to negotiate the marketplace. Expanded choices empowered shoppers to demand better goods and prices from competing merchant providers; they even embraced the “right to purchase” as a civic entitlement, Joanna Cohen has argued of Americans during the early nineteenth century.<sup>50</sup> Consumer choices both reflected a new sense of citizenship in post-war America, but also helped shape an American national identity. Merchants recognized that customers had choices, thus tried new ways to allure (even trick) individuals to purchase their goods. “Buy American” took on new meaning after the Revolution, as commercial narratives of patriotism equated certain commodities or shopping with American prosperity and public good.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, merchants began to advertise in a way that “tied consumption to the commemoration of the war,” according to Carl Robert Keyes, but also

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<sup>49</sup> Crowley, *Privileges of Independence*, xii, 25, 158-159. Carole Shammas notes that a “major impetus for the adoption of the U.S. Constitution was the belief that survival as a nation depended on overseas commerce and that its success required a strong central government.” (Carole Shammas, “America, the Atlantic, and Global Consumer Demand, 1500-1800,” *OAH Magazine of History* 19, no.1 (January 2005): 62.) See also David Hancock, “Atlantic Trade and Commodities, 1402-1815,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World, 1450-1850*, ed. Nicholas Canny and Philip Morgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 339.

<sup>50</sup> Joanna Cohen, “‘The Right to Purchase Is as Free as the Right to Sell’: Defining Consumers as Citizens in the Auction-house Conflicts of the Early Republic,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 30, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 25-62.

<sup>51</sup> Cohen, “‘The Right to Purchase Is as Free as the Right to Sell,’” 61.

created “a consumer geography based on homegrown and manufactured products.”<sup>52</sup> Historians note the ways that, by the nineteenth century, rather than criticizing consumption as corrosive to liberties, citizens, for good or for bad, embraced participation in the marketplace as truly American. Whether or not we agree with the timing of or extent of the eighteenth century consumer revolution, we, who examine the past, can at least “LIKE” the inventiveness and enterprise in the new histories of early American consumer economies.

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<sup>52</sup> Carl Robert Keyes, “A Revolution in Advertising: ‘Buy American’ Campaigns in the Late Eighteenth Century,” in Danielle Coombs and Bob Batchelor, eds., *We Are What We Sell: How Advertising Shapes American Life...and Always Has*, vol. 1, *Creating Advertising Culture: Beginnings to the 1930s*, (New York: Praeger, 2014), 1 and 15. See also Keyes, “History Prints, Newspaper Advertisements, and Cultivating Citizen Consumers: Attempts at National Marketing Campaigns in the Era of the Revolution,” in “Before Madison Avenue: Advertising in Early America,” special issue, *American Periodicals: a Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 24, no. 2 (fall 2014): 145-185.