

**ASSIGNMENT**  
**JOHN DICKINSON, LETTERS FROM A FARMER IN**  
**PENNSYLVANIA**  
**10 POINTS**

Read the attached excerpts and answer the following questions

1. John Dickinson was a wealthy and influential lawyer. Why does he call himself a farmer?
2. What are Dickinson's beliefs about liberty?
3. Does Dickinson believe that one person can make a difference/
4. What Act of Parliament prompted Dickinson to write Letter 1?
5. Does Dickinson believe that Parliament has a right to impose duties on the American colonists? If so, under what circumstances? Does Dickinson's view on this issue seem to change by the time of Letter 12?
6. How does Dickinson distinguish between acts such as the Sugar Act of 1764 and acts such as the Stamp Act of 1765 and the Townshend Duties of 1767
7. Benjamin Franklin and others in the colonies sought to differentiate between internal and external taxes. How does Dickinson address that distinction?
8. Map out the logic of Dickinson's arguments contained in Letter 7 and 12. Does it make sense?

## John Dickinson, Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania

1767-68

(excerpts)

### Letter 1

My dear Countrymen,

I am a *Farmer*, settled, after a variety of fortunes, near the banks of the river *Delaware*, in the province of *Pennsylvania*. I received a liberal education, and have been engaged in the busy scenes of life; but am now convinced, that a man may be as happy without bustle, as with it. My farm is small; my servants are few, and good; I have a little money at interest; I wish for no more; my employment in my own affairs is easy; and with a contented grateful mind, undisturbed by worldly hopes or fears, relating to myself, I am completing the number of days allotted to me by divine goodness.

Being generally master of my time, I spend a good deal of it in a library, which I think the most valuable part of my small estate; and being acquainted with two or three gentlemen of abilities and learning, who honor me with their friendship, I have acquired, I believe, a greater knowledge in history, and the laws and constitution of my country, than is generally attained by men of my class, many of them not being so fortunate as I have been in the opportunities of getting information.

From my infancy I was taught to love *humanity* and *liberty*. Enquiry and experience have since confirmed my reverence for the lessons then given me, by convincing me more fully of their truth and excellence. Benevolence toward mankind, excites wishes for their welfare, and such wishes endear the means of fulfilling them. *These* can be found in liberty only, and therefore her sacred cause ought to be espoused by every man on every occasion, to the utmost of his power. As a charitable, but poor person does not withhold his *mite*, because he cannot relieve *all* the distresses of the miserable, so should not any honest man suppress his sentiments concerning freedom, however small their influence is likely to be. Perhaps he “may touch some wheel,”\* that will have an effect greater than he could reasonably expect.

These being my sentiments, I am encouraged to offer to you, my countrymen, my thoughts on some late transactions, that appear to me to be of the utmost importance to you. Conscious of my own defects, I have waited some time, in expectation of seeing the subject treated by persons much better qualified for the task; but being therein disappointed, and apprehensive that longer delays will be injurious, I venture at length to request the attention of the public, praying, that these lines may be *read* with the same zeal for the happiness of *British America*, with which they were *wrote*.

### Letter 2

There is another late act of parliament, [the Townshend Duties,] which appears to me to be unconstitutional, and as destructive to the liberty of these colonies, as [the Stamp Act]. The parliament unquestionably possesses a legal authority to regulate the trade of Great-Britain, and all her colonies. Such an authority is essential to the relation between a mother country and her colonies; and necessary for the common good of all. He, who considers these provinces as states distinct from the British Empire, has very slender notions of justice, or of their interests. We are but parts of a whole; and therefore there must exist a power somewhere to preside, and preserve

the connection in due order. This power is lodged in the parliament; and we are as much dependent on Great-Britain, as a perfectly free people can be on another.

I have looked over every statute relating to these colonies, from their first settlement to this time; and I find every one of them founded on this principle, till the Stamp-Act administration. All before, are calculated to regulate and preserve or promote a mutually beneficial intercourse between several constituent parts of the empire; and though many of them imposed duties on trade, yet those duties were always imposed with design to restrain the commerce of one part, that was injurious to another, and thus promote the general welfare. The raising a revenue thereby was never intended.... Never did the British parliament, till the period above mentioned, think of imposing duties in America, for the purpose of raising a revenue....

The preamble [of the Townshend Duties reads:] "Whereas it is expedient that a revenue should be raised in his majesty's dominions in America..." Here we may observe an authority expressly claimed and exerted to impose duties on these colonies; not for the regulation of trade; not for the preservation or promotion of a mutually beneficial intercourse between the several constituent parts of the empire, heretofore the sole objects of parliamentary institutions; but for the single purpose of levying money upon us.

This I call an innovation; and a most dangerous innovation. It may perhaps be objected that Great-Britain has a right to lay what duties she pleases upon her exports, and it makes no difference to us, whether they are paid here or there.

To this I answer. These colonies require many things for their use, which the laws of Great-Britain prohibit them from getting any where but from her. Such are paper and glass. That we may legally be bound to pay any general duties on these commodities relative to the regulation of trade, is granted; but we being obliged by the laws to take from Great-Britain, any special duties imposed on exportation to us only, with intention to raise a revenue from us only, are as much taxes, upon us, as those imposed by the Stamp-Act.

What is the difference in substance and right whether the same sum is raised upon us by the rates mentioned in the Stamp-Act, on the use of paper, or by these duties, on the importation of it.... Here then, my dear countrymen, rouse yourselves, and behold the ruin hanging over your heads. If you once admit, that Great-Britain may lay duties upon, her exportations to us, for the purpose of levying money on us only, she then will have nothing to do, but to lay those duties on the articles which she prohibits us to manufacture--and the tragedy of American liberty is finished.

#### Letter 4

An objection, I hear, has been made against my second letter, which I would willingly clear up before I proceed. "There is," say the objectors, "a material difference between the Stamp-Act and the [Townshend Duties] that justifies the conduct of those who opposed the former, and yet are willing to submit to the latter. The duties imposed by the Stamp-Act were internal taxes; but the present are external, and therefore the parliament may have a right to impose them." To this I answer, with a total denial of the power of parliament to lay upon these colonies any "tax" whatever.

This point, being so important to this, and to succeeding generations, I wish to be clearly

understood. To the word "tax," I annex that meaning which the constitution and history of England require to be annexed to it; that is—that it is an imposition on the subject, for the sole purpose of levying money. . . . A "tax" means an imposition to raise money. Such persons therefore as speak of internal and external "taxes," I pray may pardon me, if I object to that expression, as applied to the privileges and interests of these colonies. There may be internal and external impositions, founded on different principles, and having different tendencies, every "tax" being an imposition, tho' every imposition is not a "tax." But all taxes are founded on the same principles; and have the same tendency.

### **Letter 7**

These duties, which will inevitably be levied upon us...are expressly laid for the sole purpose of taking money. This is the true definition of "taxes." They are therefore taxes. This money is to be taken from us. We are therefore taxed. Those who are taxed without their own consent, expressed by themselves or their representatives, are slaves. We are taxed without our own consent, expressed by ourselves or our representatives. We are therefore--Slaves.

### **Letter 12**

Let these truths be indelibly impressed on our minds--that we cannot be happy without being free--that we cannot be free, without being secure in our property--that we cannot be secure in our property, if, without our consent, others may, as by right, take it away--that taxes imposed on us by parliament, do thus take it away--that duties laid for the sole purpose of raising money, are taxes--that attempts to lay such duties should be Instantly and firmly opposed--that this opposition can never be effectual, unless it is the united effort of these provinces--that therefore benevolence of temper towards each other, and unanimity of councils, are essential to the welfare of the whole--and lastly, that for this reason, every man amongst us, who in any manner would encourage either dissension, diffidence, or indifference, between these colonies, is an enemy to himself, and to his country...

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(From Paul Leicester Ford, ed., *The Writings of John Dickinson*, 1895, pp. 328-406.) Dickinson wrote 13 letters in all and had a significant effect on American political thought.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 21

Pemberton.

## THE BOSTON CHRONICLE for 1767.

## LETTERS

From a Farmer in Pennsylvania, to the inhabitants of the British colonies.

By JOHN DICKENSON, Esq;

## LETTER I.

Beloved Countrymen,

I am a farmer, settled after a variety of fortunes, near the banks, of the river Delaware, in the province of Pennsylvania. I received a liberal education, and have been engaged in the busy scenes of life: But am now convinced, that a man may be as happy without bustle, as with it. My farm is small, my servants are few, and good; I have a little money at interest; I wish for no more; my employment in my own affairs is easy,—and with a contented grateful mind, I am completing the number of days allotted to me by divine goodness.

Being master of my time, I spend a good deal of it in a library, which I think the most valuable part of my small estate, being acquainted with two or three gentlemen of abilities and learning, who honour me with their friendship, I believe I have acquired a greater share of knowledge in history, and the laws and constitution of my country, than is generally attained by men of my class, many of them not being so fortunate as I have been in the opportunities of getting information.

From infancy I was taught to love humanity and liberty. Inquiry and experience have since confirmed my reverence for the lessons then given me, by convincing me more fully of their truth and excellence. Benevolence towards mankind excites wishes for their welfare, and such wishes endear the means of fulfilling them. Those can be found in liberty alone, and therefore her sacred cause ought to be espoused by every man, on every occasion, to the utmost of his power: as a charitable but poor person does not withhold his mite, because he cannot relieve all the distresses of the miserable, so let not any honest man suppress his sentiments concerning freedom, however small their influence is likely to be. Perhaps he may “† touch some wheel” that will have an effect greater than he expects.

These being my sentiments, I am encouraged to offer to you, my countrymen, my thoughts on some late transactions, that in my opinion are of the utmost importance to you. Conscious of my defects, I have waited some time, in expectation of seeing the subject treated

† Page.

by persons much better qualified for the task; but being therein disappointed, and apprehensive that longer delays will be injurious, I venture at length to request the attention of the public, praying only for one thing,—that is, that these lines may be read with the same zeal for the happiness of British America, with which they were wrote.

With a good deal of surprise I have observed, that little notice has been taken of any act of Parliament as injurious in its principle to the liberties of these colonies, as the stamp-act was: I mean the act for suspending the legislation of New York.

The assembly of that government complied with a former act of parliament, requiring certain provisions to be made for the troops in America, in every particular, I think, except the articles of salt, pepper, and vinegar. In my opinion they acted imprudently, considering all circumstances, in not complying so far, as would have given satisfaction, as several colonies did: but my dislike of their conduct in that instance, has not blinded me so much, that I cannot plainly perceive, that they have been punished in a manner pernicious to American freedom, and justly alarming to all the colonies.

If the British parliament has a legal authority to order, that we shall furnish a single article for the troops here, and to compel obedience to that order; they have the same right to order us to supply those troops with arms, cloaths, and every necessary, and to compel obedience to that order also; in short, to lay any burdens they please upon us: What is this but taxing us at a certain sum, and leaving to us only the manner of raising it? How is this mode more tolerable than the stamp-act? Would that act have appeared more pleasing to Americans, if being ordered thereby to raise the sum total of the taxes, the mighty privilege had been left to them, of saying how much should be paid for an instrument of writing on paper, and how much for another on parchment.

An act of parliament commanding us to do a certain thing, if it has any validity, is a tax upon us for the expence that accrues in complying with it, and for this reason, I believe, every colony on the continent, that chose to give a mark of respect for Great-Britain, in complying with the act relating to the troops, cautiously avoid the mention of that act, least their conduct should be attributed to its supposed obligation.

The matter being thus stated, the assembly of New-York either had, or had not a right to refuse submission to that act: If they had, and I imagine no American will say; they had not, then the parliament had no right to compel them to execute it.—If they had not that right, they had no right to punish them for not executing it; and therefore had no right to suspend their legislation, which is a punishment. In fact, if the people of New-York cannot be legally taxed but by their own representatives, they cannot be legally deprived of the privileges of making laws, only for insisting on that exclusive privilege of taxation. If they may be legally deprived in such a case of the privilege of making laws, why may they not, with equal reason, be deprived of every other privilege? Or why may not every colony be treated in the same manner, when any of them shall dare to deny their assent to any impositions that shall be directed? Or what signifies the repeal of the stamp-act, if these colonies are to lose their other privileges, by not tamely surrendering that of taxation?

There is one consideration arising from this suspicion, which is not generally attended to, but shews it's importance very clearly. It was not necessary that this suspension should be caused by an act of parliament. The crown might have restrained the Governor of New-York, even from calling the assembly together, by its prerogative in the royal governments.—This step, I suppose, would have been taken, if the conduct of the assembly of New-York, had been regarded as an act of disobedience to the crown alone; but it is regarded as an act of “disobedience to the authority of the British legislature.” This gives the suspension a consequence vastly more affecting. It is a parliamentary assertion of the supreme authority of the British legislature over these colonies in the part of taxation; and is intended to compel New-York unto a submission to that authority. It seems therefore to me as much a violation of the liberty of the people of that province, and consequently of all these colonies, as if the parliament had sent a number of regiments to be quartered upon them till they should comply. For it is evident, that the suspension is meant as compulsion; and the method of compelling is totally indifferent. It is indeed probable, that the sight of red coat, and the beating of drums would have been