



Analysing the American Revolution

Chapter 5 Area of study 1, 1754–1776: Exam questions and answers

Annotated sample exam responses



Source 5.4 *The Bostonians in Distress*, by Paul Revere, 1774



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a What is suggested about colonial Americans in this representation?

That the colonial Americans, Bostonians in this case, are being denied any form of justice and are being treated harshly by Britain and its military forces. They are starving and forced into an almost barbaric state by the *Coercive Acts* of 1774.

Concise responses demonstrating a strong understanding of the image and its particular features (cage, cannon, British soldiers) as well as directly answering each question.

b Identify two details in the representation that show anti-British feeling in the colonies.

The colonists are denied their liberty (shown by the cage) and their contorted faces show they have been reduced to a state of starvation and disorder, due to the presence of British shown by British cannons, soldiers and naval blockade that were part of the military rule that occurred during the *Coercive Acts*. This Act closed Boston economically, politically and socially.

Parts a and b test comprehension, and require you to identify key points, ideas, arguments or assumptions made in the source.

Question b's high-scoring response actually identifies more than two 'details' that 'show anti-British feeling'.

c Using your knowledge and the representation, explain why this cartoon appeared in 1774.

This cartoon appeared because of the *Coercive Acts* (1774), which the Americans referred to as the 'Intolerable Acts' because they were unacceptable.

Part c tests analysis skills and requires you to quote from the extract and demonstrate your knowledge of the period by going beyond the source, placing it in historical context.

Direct opening sentence.

After 10 years of revolutionary activity in Boston (including the *Sugar Act 1764*, the *Stamp Act 1765*, the *Townshend Duties of 1767*, the Boston Massacre in 1770 and the Boston Tea Party in 1773), this new legislation was a game changer and every colony saw the dangerous precedent this set for their own state security. The *Coercive Acts* included the suspension of the Massachusetts Assembly, the closure of Boston Harbor and economy, a new *Quartering Act* (which required the Bostonians to house and feed British troops) and a new legal system that tried Bostonians in English courts in jurisdictions outside the Thirteen Colonies.

Good use of language.

This is an example of how this response goes 'beyond the source', by demonstrating 'knowledge of the period' by providing evidence of what the *Coercive Acts* actually were.

In response, Boston citizens held illegal town meetings, stepped up communication with other colonies and increased the production of propaganda, like 'Bostonians in Distress' and 'The Able Doctor', suggesting denial of liberty was being committed. Outcomes included the harnessing of media by Americans against the British, boycotts of all British products, the formation of a quasi-federal American government, with 12 of the Thirteen Colonies joining the First and Second Continental Congresses, the formation of the Continental Army and the *Declaration of Independence*.

This is an excellent example of how this response goes 'beyond the source', placing the visual representation itself in historical context.

d To what extent are the revolutionary ideas in this cartoon valid and justified? What other interpretations might exist?

The revolutionary ideas expressed in Paul Revere's cartoon, a noted revolutionary in Boston since the Boston Massacre 1770, show injustice of the hardline British reaction to the Boston Tea Party in 1773 by persecuting Boston with the *Coercive Acts* in 1774.

Part d is a critical evaluation exercise. It requires you to critique the image or document, assessing its reliability, strengths and limitations, positive or negative viewpoint, along with its accuracy, completeness and assumptions. You need to provide evidence for your answer, as well as acknowledging the existence of different points of view or historical interpretations.

Those ideas in summary: national rights (especially liberty), standing army, the injustice of British policy, the call to revolutionary action from Americans, and the injustice to all parts of

Direct opening sentence, which is a clear and strong start to an analysis of the source and its usefulness. Note how the writer weaves in knowledge of the creator of the representation and its purpose.



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Good use of language, and evidence of the writer's own point of view on the effectiveness of the image.

Good historical evidence to put the image into context in order to present a point of view about its 'accuracy' or 'limitations', and use of language: 'direct outcomes ...'.

Introduces a historical interpretation.

Excellent term to use, but most importantly, here the writer is 'acknowledging the existence of different points of view or historical interpretations'.

Excellent conclusion, recapping the writer's point of view or 'critical evaluation' of the representation, and echoing their opening sentence (or introduction) – a sign of quality writing and argumentation.

the *Coercive Acts*. This was met by hardline American reaction, as was the intention of Revere and other revolutionaries like Samuel Adams. The successful transfer of revolutionary ideas through propaganda such as this helped to bring the colonies together and they began to form an 'American' mindset and nation, as distinct from earlier colony-based attachments.

The direct outcomes of the *Coercive Acts* were the formation of the First and Second Continental Congresses, the formation of the Continental Army, the Revolutionary War and the *Declaration of Independence*, which severed all ties with Britain.

Right-wing historians like Bailyn would argue the colonists' harnessing of anti-British themed media such as pamphlets, broadsides, posters and cartoons like this in all colonial newspapers helped spread the Revolution much faster than Britain could contain it.

Contrary to this, left-wing interpretations, like those of Zinn and Jennings, suggest that these incidents were sparked by elements of the colonial merchant class, who manipulated the lower classes to help achieve separation from England in order to increase both their economic and political influence in the region. Revere's intention is clear: to paint Britain and its policies as 'intolerable'.