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THE FORMATION OF THE U.S. HEGEMONIC REVOLUTIONARY BLOC 1763–1776

Oblikovanje revolucionarnog hegemonijskog bloka u Sjedinjenim Američkim Državama u periodu 1763–1776

ABSTRACT: *This article examines the formation and transformation of the revolutionary hegemonic bloc in colonial America during the period 1763–1776. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, the analysis conceptualizes the American Revolution as a process of formation of class alliances among heterogeneous social classes under conditions of crisis. The article argues that revolutionary unity did not emerge spontaneously nor through elite manipulation alone, but through a prolonged and conflictual process in which merchants, large landowners, and lawyers articulated a hegemonic project capable of incorporating artisans and yeomen, while simultaneously containing popular radicalism. Using a structural-historical approach, the article distinguishes between two phases of the revolutionary crisis: an initial phase characterized by a fragmented and decentralized bloc organized around negative unity and resistance to British taxation (1763–1774), and a second phase marked by the institutionalization of the hegemonic bloc through the Continental Congress, provincial conventions, and committees of safety (1774–1776). The analysis highlights the central role of institutional mediation, the relative autonomy of political and ideological processes, and the strategic sacrifice of short-term economic interests by leading classes in order to sustain bloc cohesion. By demonstrating how hegemony can be constructed and exercised in the absence of a consolidated state, the article contributes to historical sociology and offers a theoretically grounded reinterpretation of the American Revolution as a case of pre-state hegemonic formation.*

KEYWORDS: *American Revolution, hegemony, hegemonic bloc, Gramsci, Continental Congress, Committees of Correspondence*

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APSTRAKT: Ovaj rad analizira formiranje i transformaciju revolucionarnog hegemonijskog bloka u kolonijalnoj Americi u periodu od 1763. do 1776. godine. Polazeći od Gramšijeve teorije hegemonije, Američka revolucija se konceptualizuje kao proces konstituisanja klasnog saveza između heterogenih društvenih klasa u uslovima krize, u periodu koji prethodi uspostavljanju centralizovane države. Rad pokazuje da revolucionarno jedinstvo nije nastalo spontano, niti kao rezultat puke manipulacije masa od strane elita, već kroz dugoročan i protivrečan proces u kojem su trgovci, krupni zemljoposednici i advokati artikulisali hegemonijski projekat sposoban da uključi zanatlije i sitne seljake, uz istovremenu kontrolu i ograničavanje narodne radikalizacije. Primenom strukturalno-istorijskog pristupa, analiza razlikuje dve faze revolucionarne krize: početnu fazu fragmentisanog i decentralizovanog bloka zasnovanog na negativnom jedinstvu i otporu britanskom oporezivanju (1763–1774) i drugu fazu institucionalizacije hegemonijskog bloka kroz Kontinentalni kongres, provincijalne konvencije i komitete za bezbednost (1774–1776). Poseban akcenat stavljen je na ulogu institucionalnog posredovanja, relativnu autonomiju političkog i ideološkog nivoa, kao i na strateško žrtvovanje kratkoročnih ekonomsko-korporativnih interesa vodećih klasa radi očuvanja kohezije bloka. Time se pokazuje da je hegemoniju moguće uspostaviti i sprovesti u uslovima nepostojanja konsolidovane državne vlasti, čime rad teorijski doprinosi istorijskoj sociologiji i nudi reinterpetaciju Američke revolucije kao slučaja predržavne hegemonijske formacije.

KLJUČNE REČI: Američka revolucija, hegemonija, hegemonijski blok, Gramši, Kontinentalni Kongres, komiteti za korespondenciju

Introduction

The American Revolution has not received much attention in Gramsci's analyses, although it is a subject of research that is quite appropriate, challenging, and inspiring for modifications of the theoretical and methodological approach of Gramsci's theory of hegemony.² Although social scientists have analyzed revolutionary ideology, events, social and military conflicts, and social history, less attention has been paid to how relatively heterogeneous social classes were part of a relatively stable, yet heterogeneous revolutionary hegemonic bloc for almost 20 years (1763–1783). Gramsci's theoretical and political intervention generalized the concept of hegemony beyond working-class strategy and defined it as a mode of rule and socio-political leadership, exemplified by Cavour's Moderate Party during the Italian Risorgimento, which formed a coalition of landowners and industrialists who marginalized radical democrats and popular

2 The article is based on research I conducted in my monograph *The U.S. between Empire and Hegemony: Period of Revolution and Early Republic* (Korolija, 2026). The differences compared to the monograph concern a more detailed explanation of the concept of a hegemonic bloc, while the subject of research on the establishment, maintenance and transformation of a revolutionary hegemonic bloc is in special focus and presented in an integrated form. New sources are included in this paper, and the argumentation is improved and presented somewhat more concisely and, I hope, more clearly than in the book.

participation (Anderson, 2022: 9–11). Similar to Gramsci's insight into Cavour's Moderate Party, colonial America saw the creation of a coalition of Northern merchants and Southern landowners who led a broad coalition of yeomen and artisans, but with control over the radicalization and pacification of the masses in accordance with the internal political and economic structure. Crises as conjunctural processes shaped hegemony, and hegemonic blocs transformed hegemony within contingent and contradictory relations. In this regard, this paper examines:

How did heterogeneous classes without central leadership form a coherent revolutionary hegemonic bloc during the revolutionary crisis (1763–1776)?

In order to answer these questions, the article begins with a theoretical definition of the hegemonic bloc, and then moves on to a concise analysis of the colonial structure of American society. It then analyzes the formation and political articulation of the revolutionary hegemonic bloc during the Revolutionary Crisis. A structural-historical analysis is conducted in which the subject is divided into two phases according to the degree of organization of the revolutionary bloc. The analysis is based on Gramsci's theory of hegemony and mainly on secondary sources of American historiography. The contribution of the paper is that it shows, using a concrete historical example, how hegemony was formed and transformed in two different phases during the American revolutionary crisis. By specifically operationalizing Gramsci's theory of hegemony, the analysis starts from the material basis, showing the relative autonomy and importance of sacrificing short-term economic interests for the sake of maintaining the long-term cohesion of the revolutionary bloc. The paper shows that leadership was not possible without a broad class alliance with the consent and broad participation of the lower classes, but that it was institutionalized primarily by the actions of the colonial elite, which replaced the initial relatively horizontal organizational form of the Committees of Correspondence with the relatively vertical Continental Congress.

Hegemonic Bloc

For Gramsci, the term historical bloc (*blocco storico*) serves to connect the economic base and the superstructure, but not in an economically reductionist way but with respect for the relative autonomy of political and civil society (May, Nölke and Schedelik, 2025: 339). Historical blocs are temporarily stable configurations of social relations that are based on the hegemonic capacity of the social class that leads it, maintaining unity under the influence of opposing interests (Amable and Palombarini, 2024: 5). The concept of hegemony could complement Skocpol's otherwise insightful argument about the limitations of avant-garde movements that are unable, by themselves, to generate revolutionary crises. While Skocpol emphasizes the crisis of the political-military state as a decisive condition for revolution (Skocpol, 1979: 17), hegemony points to

the existence of a relatively autonomous social agency before and during such crises—one capable of making strategic decisions and radicalizing itself within the unfolding conjuncture. Before and during the revolutionary crisis itself, the discursive realization of consent was continuously developed. The function of dominant discourses is to create consensus, acceptance and legitimization of dominance, i.e. to construct a hegemonic project under a unity that is in favor of the ruling group that organizes common sense (Donoghue, 2018: 396). Thomas Paine, in his revolutionary pamphlet *Common Sense*, begins with the idea that the habit of not thinking of something as bad creates the superficial appearance that it is right (Paine, 1776). It will be shown below that *Senso commune* in Gramsci's sense as beliefs and opinions shared by a large number of peoples and which are chaotic, fragmentary and inconsistent (Crehan, 2011: 274–282) was not only associated with royal power but also with the colonial elite in terms of power.

Consent and understanding of common sense are important elements in establishing hegemony. The establishment of hegemony as leadership (*direzione*) through consent does not take place at the level of individuals, but in the relations of forces between different social groups (Thomas, 2021: 326). This is not a one-dimensional process that is carried out exclusively top-down, but the dispositions of real people are constitutive elements of competing visions of leadership (Theodossopoulos, 2025: 107). In order for a historical bloc to be truly formed, it is necessary to establish organic cohesion and understanding between leaders and led, which are the only guarantee that a relationship of representation truly exists (Crehan, 2011: 276). However, ideological form and consent nevertheless rest on deeper social structures. The establishment, reproduction and transformation of hegemony cannot be explained without an analysis of the social structure and relations in the economic base. Gramsci highlights three levels: 1) the level of international relations of force, 2) the objective level within society which constitutes the productive forces, the development of political relations of force, 3) the politico-military level (Gramsci, 2015: 176–182).

Hegemony is analyzed through social and political leadership, as a political project and as the realization of the hegemonic project in concrete institutional and organizational forms (Thomas, 2013: 24–25). In order for hegemony to be realized and for a national-popular collective will to emerge, it is necessary to satisfy the interests of subordinate groups within the bloc (Ives, 2004: 68). Moreover, sometimes it is necessary to sacrifice the interests of the leading groups for the sake of maintaining unity, which will later be shown to have been present in the American Revolution. This is in line with Jessop's thesis that economic hegemony takes place through the general acceptance of an accumulation strategy in which, in addition to the leading, other class factions also find their interests. Even with certain sacrifices of the economic-corporate interests of the ruling class for the sake of the long-term interests of the alliance and the avoidance of a crisis of hegemony (Jessop, 1991: 159–160).

Therefore, in order to understand the formation, maintenance and transformation of the revolutionary hegemonic bloc, it is necessary to start from the analysis of the colonial social structure as an objective level, then consider

international relations with Britain and consider the internal development of political power relations. In this regard, the following key categories are distinguished: 1) particular interests based on private property, 2) institutional-organizational forms (hegemonic apparatuses), 3) sacrifice of economic-corporate interests. These categories in the following serve as indicators of the formation of the revolutionary hegemonic bloc.

Colonial Social Structure before the Revolution

The colonial social structure on the eve of the Revolution developed in such a way that a large number of the population owned private property, but within an uneven development that created regional and class differentiation. The combination of a large number of the population owning their own land and regional differences contributed to colonial society having a developed basis for self-government, but still insufficient internal cohesion that would connect the colonies as a whole. The material basis of society determined that in the North, merchants played the main role, and in the South, large landowners. However, it also limited the unity between the colonies of the North and the South, given the differences in the mode of production and the political superstructure that suited them. In Boston and Philadelphia in the mid-18th century, the richest 10% of Bostonians and Philadelphians owned about two-thirds of the taxable wealth in the cities (Kennedy and Cohen, 2019: 92–93; Butler, 2001: 81–82). In total, in the 13 colonies in 1774, the richest 10% owned 50.7% of the total wealth, while the richest 1% owned 12.9% of the total wealth, with minor differences depending on the region (New England had the highest concentration of wealth, followed by the South and finally the Middle Colonies) (Galenson, 1996: 204). According to the occupations of household heads (i.e. excluding slaves and women) in 1774 in the South, 72.7% were employed in agriculture, while in New England it was 43.9% and in the Middle Colonies 25.8%. The highest number of merchants, artisans and experts was in the Middle Colonies at 32.5%, in the South at 13.3% and in New England at 11%. Manual laborers and people without any wealth were most numerous in New England at 28.4%, in the Middle Colonies at 13%, and in the South at 1.9% (Lindert and Williamson, 2016: 10). The South primarily produced tobacco, the Middle Colonies wheat, and New England fish (Kennedy and Cohen, 2019: 93).

Merchants were most prevalent in coastal cities (New York, Boston, Philadelphia) and supplemented their trading activities with ownership in shipbuilding, distilleries, banking, insurance, and land speculation (Main, 1965: 86–87). Lawyers were at the very top of the colonial elite in terms of income and status, although they were ranked lower in wealth than merchants and large landowners (Main, 1973: 56–57), but they were “organic intellectuals” who were closely connected to merchants and landowners through kinship and business ties. Merchants connected the South and North with each other and the colonies with the rest of the world and were crucial for the export of tobacco, rice and indigo from the South (McCusker and Menard, 2014: 92–101). Food

and tobacco accounted for more than half of the total value of exports from all colonies (Perkins, 1988: 31).

Large landowners were particularly present in the South, where they generated very high incomes from the exploitation of slaves and the rent of land (Main, 1965: 110–111). The richest 10% in South Carolina owned about 50% of the land and a little more than half of the slaves, and in North Carolina 40% (Main, 1965: 64–66). The large amount of land and the influence on the food supply and export earnings were an important basis for the political leadership of large landowners (McCusker and Menard, 2014: 183–184). However, the large landowners were indebted to British creditors. On the eve of the Revolution, the total debt of the Americans to Britain was 3,000,000 pounds, of which 1,400,000 was owed by the large landowners of Virginia alone, and it reached two and a half times the value of exports, which led to large quantities of land and slaves being used as collateral (Breen, 2001: 127–128). The high indebtedness and dependence on British loans among the large landowners was a significant incentive for independence (Breen, 2001: 31–32; Perkins, 1988: 38).

Free farmers, yeomen, were widespread throughout the colonies and typical farms were relatively large at around 100 acres, while in Virginia most owned over 200 acres and made up the majority of the population (Perkins, 1988: 57–58; Main, 1965: 46–47). Artisans were most represented in the cities, and they reached the highest status in port cities with relatively high incomes that allowed them to save, while in rural areas they performed jobs requiring low levels of skills and capital (Perkins, 1988: 115–116). Only a small number of artisans managed to employ additional workers (Main, 1965: 83). Workers rarely owned land and were poorer than farmers and artisans (Main, 1965: 72), and were often employed temporarily and seasonally (Perkins, 1988: 119). Slaves and indentured servants were primarily in the South and made up the majority of the workforce on large plantations, but to a lesser extent, they also performed work in shipbuilding and households (Main, 1973: 68–69). The total share of slaves in 1770 was 20% of the total workforce (Perkins, 1988: 98).

An important feature of colonial America was its peripheral position within the capitalist world-system. As a colony, America's economic function was largely determined by its relationship with Britain. This function was reproduced through a trade pattern in which Americans purchased British manufactured goods in greater quantities than they exported foodstuffs and raw materials to the mother country. Within this subordinate relationship, the colonies produced commodities such as tobacco and rice, which Britain could re-export to other European markets, thereby improving its balance of payments. They also supplied products such as indigo, which Britain needed in order to reduce its dependence on imports from European rivals (Perkins, 1988: 19). Beyond this economic dependence, the colonial elite was also ideologically dependent on British rights discourse as the broader framework through which it organized its own consent. In ideological terms, therefore, the formation of the revolutionary bloc took place largely within the field of British Lockean thought and the rights associated with the British constitution. Before the outbreak of armed

conflict, much of the American Revolution was based on colonial demands that Britain recognize and respect the colonists' rights as British subjects: no taxation without representation. As Lynd and Waldstreicher (2011: 601–604) note, colonial prosperity was central to British national interest, but the taxation of trade led many colonists to feel that they were being reduced to the condition of “slaves.” British measures were therefore criticized not only as threats to colonial prosperity, but also as violations of political rights. In this respect, the hegemony of the colonial elite remained limited by its peripheral position and its continuing dependence on Britain. Although an independent American counter-hegemonic project did not fully materialize during the period analyzed in this article, it acquired autonomous potential later with the adoption of the U.S. Constitution.

Thus, the colonial social structure was characterized by a high degree of regionalization (North-South differences) and class stratification (merchants-large landowners-artisans-yeomen). A related characteristic was a high degree of autonomy among themselves, as well as autonomy from Britain – until the introduction of taxation. In such a political-economic context, the colonies had no closer basis for institutionalized joint action, but found the basis for resistance in the defense of particular interests, seeking where interests reached the level of general interests. Given the complexity of class positions on the internal plane and in relation to Britain, merchants and large landowners had no common interests in the resistance of Britain, since they had to sacrifice their economic interests to a large extent in the resistance through their interests in exports (planters) and imports (merchants). Individually, no class could establish itself as dominant, but it was necessary to form a broad class alliance that included all the aforementioned classes. However, since these classes often had contradictory interests, leadership could not be achieved without sacrificing narrow short-term economic interests and making compromises. Merchants and large landowners, as the classes that concentrated the greatest amount of wealth, control over land, labor, and capital, were objectively destined to be the leaders. But their leadership did not follow mechanically from a material basis, but required constant compromises and sacrifices of economic interests in order to maintain an alliance with each other, but also with the craftsmen and yeomen who also had their own particular interests. In this sense, it was important to move from particular interests to a national-popular revolutionary bloc. In this regard, it follows below how the revolutionary hegemonic bloc was formed on this material basis.

Formation and Transformation of the Revolutionary Hegemonic Bloc

The right to property acted as a common interest that united the revolutionary hegemonic bloc and at the same time divided it due to mutually contradictory interests. The colonists believed that they had earned the right to property as a birthright through their labor passed down from generation to generation. Such a view united small farmers, artisans, speculators, merchants and large

landowners/slaveowners (Rakove, 2010: 86). However, property determined who would be the leading faction of the revolutionary hegemonic bloc – ownership of large amounts of land and slaves (control of land + control of the labor force) and ownership of capital (merchant capital + finance capital) were the key factors that determined that the leading classes would be large landowners (with a faction of slaveowners and speculators) and merchants (with factions in shipbuilding, shipping, bonds). On the basis of the defense of property, heterogeneous classes united throughout the 13 colonies, first creating informal institutional frameworks within individual colonies and relatively formal communication with other colonies. Only after the willingness to sacrifice economic interests of the leading and subordinated led groups was the establishment of a formal institutional framework for the action of the revolutionary bloc, which brought the heterogeneous classes closer together in mutual coordination. In this regard, two phases can be distinguished: the first phase 1763–1774 in which there is a fragmented bloc that still operates in a high degree of decentralization, and the second phase in which the bloc is institutionalized within the Continental Congress, with an institutional form and sacrifice of economic interests, but still without central leadership.

Phase I (1763–1774) – fragmented bloc

In the first phase, which takes place from the introduction of repressive British laws to the First Continental Congress, the revolutionary bloc is still fragmented without a central leadership and consensus around common interests. The revolutionary bloc is more defined by negative unity and resistance to British laws that threaten their property. In this initial, fragmentary phase of the struggle, the colonies maintain a partial internal hegemony within the colonies themselves, but there is still no relationship with other colonies. The relationship develops gradually and is based on communication and a similar position to that in which British coercion has placed them. The organizational form does not have clear mechanisms of control, as can be seen in the example of merchants violating the boycott for the sake of particular interests. Hegemonic tendencies are consolidated only after the convening of the First Continental Congress, when an organized and partially centralized leadership is established and a common interest of the colonies is defined that acts as common sense.

The initial discontent of the merchants in 1763 was not based on constitutional rights, but on restrictions on trade and taxes, and merchants still operated locally without colonial connections (Jensen, 1968: 71–73). However, there was an implicit ideological connection. Across the colonies, it was becoming clear that taxes represented confiscation of property and even enslavement, which resonated with all classes, but there was still no consensus on what to do about it (Maier, 1991: 51–53).

In New York, two large landowning families (the Livingstons and the De Lanceys) fought each other for control, but were united in their belief that self-government from Britain and the non-payment of taxes on a large amount of land were necessary (Jensen, 1968: 91–94). In Virginia in 1764, the wealthiest

large landowners were having difficulty paying off their debts due to the fall in the price of tobacco, with the British demanding that all debts be paid in sterling money, which the colony was in short supply of (Jensen, 1968: 95–96). The North, Middle Colonies and the South found themselves in a similar position, defending their interests which were particular but which British law affected on a general level as citizens of the colonies. The British imposition of taxes through the Stamp Act was precisely the pressure on property that united the colonies in resistance which was discursively implemented within the Lockean slogan “no taxation without representation” (Burnett, 1941: 6–9). Massachusetts was the leader in organizing the rebellion, and James Otis informed the other colonies through the Committee of Correspondence that Britain was taking away their rights and preparing to tax them (Jensen, 1968: 88–90). The Virginia House of Burgesses was in the same position, and after the Stamp Act and the Townshend Act it was the leading local institution that insisted on the rights of the colonies and called on others to join in resistance to Britain (Burnett, 1941: 10–4; Jensen, 1968: 104–105). Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New York, led by merchants, organized mass uprisings in which the people participated, and then the Sons of Liberty movement was organized (Jensen, 1968: 109–114).

The Sons of Liberty were also divided, with the lower classes being more radical and violent, while the elites favored legal means, which led to internal divisions based on class and the form of means of resistance (Miller, 2012: 4–8). In Boston, a clear distinction is made between the “lower sorts” who use violence with counterproductive effects and the elite who still adhere to legal means, while in New York, violent methods are advocated by captains who lead the sailors (Maier, 1991: 59–69). This initial association in resistance still has no formal organizational form and is characterized by a high level of spontaneity arising from the interests themselves.

However, spontaneity was not equal for all classes and the more violent reactions of the lower classes were not well received by the upper classes. Although in South Carolina the leading merchants were against the Stamp Act, they were not at all in favor of the Northern violent protests and the possibility of secession, but here in the South the popular reactions were similar to those in the North and favored the Sons of Liberty (Jensen, 1968: 118–121). In this sense, violent means did not have a wider cohesive effect on inter-colonial actions. This colonial connection was crucial in that violence was replaced by a boycott that was coordinated throughout the colonies as a more effective measure of resistance (Maier, 1991: 74–76).

The Stamp Act riots led to the first political articulation, which consisted in the demand for the organization of a Stamp Act Congress. The declaration that was voted on was generally milder than the individual actions of the colonies and had little practical significance since the protest had already led to the withdrawal of the law (Jensen, 1968: 122–125). The Stamp Act Congress emerged as the first inter-colonial organizational connection, but it had only a short-term effect and after the withdrawal of the Stamp Act this organizational

form did not retain its structure and did not exert a cohesive effect. Although communication and coordination between the colonies existed during the boycotts organized after 1764 (Breen, 2004; Korolija, 2025), the leading role after the Townshend Acts was taken by Massachusetts, which tried to gain support for independence from other colonies through Committees of Correspondence (Jensen, 1968: 249–250).

However, there was no single organization in Boston either, but rather Whig leaders (merchants and mechanics) who were active in town meetings, newspapers, committees, and on the other hand, the lower classes (unskilled laborers, seamen) or crowds/mobs who spontaneously gathered due to some events, most often against custom officers (Young, 1999: 94–98). It is important to note that the Committees of Correspondence actually emerged from the earlier practice of merchants who were the only class that frequently corresponded with other colonies (Perl-Rosenthal, 2011: 24–38). It was precisely from this existing practice that it was transformed under the influence of the Sons of Liberty, who organized their network in almost all major cities in the North and South and frequently communicated in still *ad hoc* committees that were most often based on personal connections without a formal organizational structure (Perl-Rosenthal, 2011: 40–43). During 1765–1766 the correspondence goes beyond merchants and business discourse and increasingly uses moral discourse and calls for union with the participation of other classes such as Southern planters. However, it is still more about sentiment than about political analysis, organization and intercolonial coordination of actions (Perl-Rosenthal, 2011: 50–55).

Informal and fragmentary organizations were active during the boycott, but their success was very limited. In order to force the repeal of the Townshend Acts, the colonies boycotted tea imports by only a third, which showed both the strength of the protest, but also the weakness of the organization, considering that 446,000 pounds of tea were imported, of which about 150,000 pounds were imported to Boston alone. Merchants bypassed the boycott and made more profits due to the fall in prices caused by the boycott (Labaree, 1979: 32–35). However, New York was the first where merchants as a class decided at their congress to continue importing tea, followed by merchants from Philadelphia and Maryland with increased violations of the boycott in Boston (Labaree, 1979: 47–49).

Thus, merchants as a class did not emerge as a leading group during the boycott, and it was only after the Boston Massacre that Boston began to organize more radically under the influence of the popular classes and received key support from Virginia (Jensen, 1968: 422–424). However, in Boston as in other colonies, resistance significantly decreased after the failure of the boycott, until the people in Providence burned a British ship, which caused a minor crisis that prompted the Virginia House of Burgesses to re-establish a committee for regular communication of colonial interests, as well as Boston, which was followed by 80 other towns in New England (Labaree, 1979: 83–86). Petitions, pointing out rights and violations of rights spread rapidly and as many as 290 settlements in Massachusetts had petitions written in Boston, and by the spring of 1773,

12 colonies had standing committees of correspondence, which established constant inter-colonial communication (Warford-Johnston, 2016: 85–87), as well as the first regular communication within a colony that actively communicated and was able to reach the first formal organization of joint political and tactical decisions (Perl-Rosenthal, 2011: 107–114).

On the basis of regular inter-colonial communication, a key crisis erupted, provoked by the British Parliament through the Tea Act. The introduction of the Tea Act was presented in Boston as a monopoly, and artisans rejected it more harshly than merchants, as well as local political leaders. In Philadelphia, artisans and farmers were also strongly opposed, unlike many merchants who were moderate, but opposition was organized by a section of merchants, and a joint committee of large landowners and artisans (Jensen, 1968: 440–443). In New York, the Sons of Liberty played a major role in the rejection, further encouraged by the leadership of Boston and Philadelphia who had taken the radical path before them (Jensen, 1968: 444–447), but influential merchants in New York also did not agree to accept the law, although they did not decide to organize a committee (Labaree, 1979: 89–92). However, the intention to give the East India Company a virtual monopoly on the sale of tea caused the merchants to rebel more fiercely, as it reduced the earlier opportunities for smuggling tea from the Netherlands (Labaree, 1979: 101–103).

Before Boston's radical response, a committee was held that gathered town meetings from around the city and called for a large meeting that gathered over 5,000 people and where a more moderate measure was agreed to return the tea instead of destroying it (Labaree, 1979: 116–125). Among those gathered were members of all classes, but the largest number were artisans (Young, 1999: 99–100). However, after the tea was destroyed, mass support for this act was created, which was further spread through communication through committees of correspondence and reached South Carolina, where pressure was exerted on merchants from that colony to stop the tea trade. Here, planters did not want to go into full boycott for fear of retaliation against their rice exports to Europe (Labaree, 1979: 152–154). In the North, support was especially strong throughout New England, which also affected farmers, but in coastal settlements, merchants balanced and avoided more radical measures, including the city of Boston itself (Labaree, 1979: 220–226).

The destruction of tea was of crucial importance when considering ownership, institutional-organizational form and sacrifice of economic-corporate interests. It was a direct blow to British ownership, led to the acceleration of the organization of colonial resistance and showed the readiness of wider social classes to make economic sacrifices knowing that the British reaction would be strong. The use of economic coercion such as boycotts, peaceful means such as petitions were replaced by direct use of coercion, and the main role was played by the Sons of Liberty, not the merchants. However, such a radical move was risky and insufficient to politically articulate resistance at the level of the united colonies. This was a limitation on the actions of the Sons of Liberty, who were led by the working class and the more radical part of the population.

Phase II (1774–1776) – institutionalization of the bloc

The second phase is of crucial importance, not only because it is an escalation of colonial resistance, but also because it leads to the institutionalization of the revolutionary bloc. In this phase, the demands of individual colonies are politically articulated, a common interest is defined on the basis of consent, which ends the period of negative unity based on resistance and the demand for the return of the previous state. Local leadership became institutionalized, and the revolutionary bloc was transformed into a national-popular bloc in which the colonial elites led the popular classes. In this phase, therefore, the initial negative unity was replaced by a positive unity that became institutionalized as part of a broader political project.

The further organization of hegemony and the formation of a revolutionary bloc were largely taken over by the colonial elite and upper classes who were still trying to balance the conflict with Britain. At the instigation of Virginia and Boston, all colonies except Georgia organized indirect and direct elections in several cities and counties where they elected delegations for the First Continental Congress as an institutional framework for resistance to British oppression (Burnett, 1941: 19–22). The organizations were most often extra-legal and were not revolutionary institutions, nor did they show opposition to the colonial elites (Rakove, 2019: 29–31). Although there is not enough information about their composition, it is possible to notice that the committees had great support and were most represented in them by large landowners, mechanics and merchants (Jensen, 1968: 474–482).

In accordance with this, the composition of the First Continental Congress, which was almost entirely composed of members of the elite. Of the total number of 55 delegates, 34 (62%) were lawyers, 11 (20%) merchants, 8 (15%) planters and large landowners, while 2 (4%) were artisans and another 2 farmers (4%). Table 1 shows the occupations of the delegates according to the colony they represented.

Table 1. *Occupational Composition of Delegates to the First Continental Congress (1774) by Colony*

<i>Colony</i>	<i>Predominant Professions Represented</i>
New Hampshire	Lawyers, military officers
Massachusetts	Lawyers, merchants, political officeholders
Rhode Island	Merchants, political officeholders
Connecticut	Lawyers, merchants
New York	Lawyers, merchants, large landowners
New Jersey	Lawyers, political officeholders
Pennsylvania	Lawyers, merchants, artisans and skilled professionals
Delaware	Lawyers, political officeholders
Maryland	Lawyers, plantation owners
Virginia	Plantation owners, lawyers, political officeholders
North Carolina	Lawyers, merchants
South Carolina	Plantation owners, lawyers

Note. The table summarizes dominant professional backgrounds of delegates. Data based on delegates to the First Continental Congress as listed by Carpenters' Hall (accessed January 30, 2026).

The first major decision of Congress implied compromise and sacrifice of economic interests. Although some merchants demanded milder measures and pointed out the importance of Britain for trade, Congress decided to stop trade and called on the people not to pay taxes and to elect their own officers in the militia (Jensen, 1968: 495). During the decision of the First Congress on nonexportation, a compromise had to be made with South Carolina, whose delegation threatened to leave, which prohibited the export of all products with the exception of rice. Other delegations signed, but only because they feared even more radical and potentially violent measures (Burnett, 1941: 54–56), which was especially true for Northern merchants (Rakove, 2019: 32–34). Merchants approached the revolution from a perspective of calculation and risk, believing that their prosperity was linked to relations with Britain, which additionally protected them from Native Americans and Spanish influence. This view of the merchants was represented by a faction of moderates – mainly from New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania – who sought to achieve a peaceful resolution of the conflict with Britain until British repression became too great (Rakove, 2010: 86–93). Virginia decided by a large majority to stop exporting tobacco, clearly emphasizing that Boston's problem was a problem for all colonies, and they also decided to stop paying debts to British merchants (Jensen, 1968: 475–478). In South Carolina, the provincial committee was dominated by large landowners and artisans who pressured merchants to accept the boycott (Jensen, 1968: 516–517). In Maryland, large landowners and merchants won the favor of the lower classes by changing the source of state revenue from poll taxes to land and slave taxes and by allowing debts to be paid in paper money, but at the same time limiting popular participation in the legislature (Rakove, 2010: 205; Rakove, 2019: 121–123). The radical orientation of large landowners in the South continued in 1775, and radicalism was further strengthened by Washington, who personally advocated a military solution and eventual independence from Britain (Rakove, 2010: 128–132).

Institutionalization at this stage was carried out not only at the collective level of the colonies but also at the individual level. In connection with the implementation of the boycott, Provincial Congresses developed in the colonies as national conventions with over 150 representatives and Committees of Safety, Inspection, and Observation that made reports on the logistical elements of defense (Novak, 2025: 17–26). In Boston, the Committee of Safety had very broad powers and even managed the militia after Lexington, although the ultimate control was in the Provincial Congress (Hunt, 1968: 15–18). In Pennsylvania, the governor as a loyalist was replaced by the Committee of Safety, which was in charge of defense and had the ability to obtain finances for these needs (Hunt, 1968: 84–86). In Virginia, the Committee of Safety also had the task of sending slaves who had fought against the Revolution to the French and West Indies in exchange for military equipment, and also issued licenses to leave Virginia to those residents who refused to take part in the war (Hunt, 1968: 111). The Provincial Congress in New York remained anti-revolutionary even after the Prohibitory Act and appealed to the Continental Congress, urging it not to declare independence (Jensen, 1968: 662–663).

The composition of the Second Continental Congress changed to a lesser extent by profession, but the colonial elite was still overwhelmingly present, with 23 (41%) lawyers, 12 merchants (21%), 12 planters and large landowners (21%), 4 (7%) physicians, 3 (5%) farmers, 1 (1%) clergyman, and 1 (1%) printer (Brunsman, 2022). Although the working classes were not significantly represented in the Second Congress, the clashes at Concord and exaggerated reports roused popular sentiment throughout the colonies and thus further pressured Congress to radicalize – after all, after the Boston Tea Party, peasant participation in the militia had already increased throughout the colonies, as reported by both British generals and governors (Jensen, 1968: 535–540).

Armed conflicts were a key catalyst that accelerated the organization of military power and steered the colonies towards the Revolutionary War. Compromises were also needed regarding the army. The appointment of Washington as commander-in-chief of the army came at the invitation of Adams, which was important for the unity of the Union, since a Southerner from Virginia was placed at the head of an army that was predominantly from New England (Rakove, 2010: 131; Jensen, 1968: 608–613). The solution was a compromise, given that the first operations were to be conducted around Boston and that most of the soldiers were from the North, but the South opposed sending its army to a general from New England (Burnett, 1941: 76–77). On the one hand, the choice of Washington showed Britain that all the colonies were united and not just the North, and on the other hand, it was an internal compromise so that the army would not be almost entirely Northern (Irvin, 2011: 103). Throughout the Revolutionary War, Congress was an institutional mechanism that mediated between civil and military issues. Congress organized the recruitment, supply of the Continental Army, approved expenses and approved loans and proposed to local institutions what to do for the sake of common defense (Rakove, 2019: 194). Although even armed conflicts were not enough to completely break the decision of Congress to declare independence. The organization of the army itself caused a reaction among many that it was necessary to establish civilian government because otherwise the military government would be supreme, and then Congress received information that if it did not declare independence, the armed people would do it themselves and lead the situation to anarchy (Jensen, 1968: 624–627; 669–670).

Given the differences in the states and the composition of the delegations, the Massachusetts delegation was blocked by internal counter-revolutionary actions in local politics, which is why the South ultimately took the lead in the declaration, first South and North Carolina, and only then in the north Rhode Island (Jensen, 1968: 675–679). And in this way, the formation of a revolutionary bloc was finally confirmed, which institutionalized its existence, developed a political project and joint action through the military and diplomacy.

Conclusion

The revolutionary hegemonic bloc in colonial America formed in two phases between 1763 and 1776. These phases differed in their degree of institutionalization, organizational coherence, and capacity to mediate particular

class interests. Empirical analysis has shown that it was not possible for one class to be the leader of the revolutionary bloc, but there was a need for a broad class alliance led by the merchants of the North, the planters of the South and lawyers as the organic intellectuals of these classes. The classes that were led included artisans and yeomen (and proto-working class), but these classes were not manipulated or instrumentalized, but were often more radical and exerted influence on the undecided elites to choose the revolutionary path. In this regard, revolutionary unity did not arise spontaneously or was imposed by the elites, but was formed in a complex process that lasted 13 years in the 13 colonies.

In the initial phase of 1763–1774, the revolutionary bloc was formed as a negative unity through resistance to British taxation that affected the interests of all classes. However, the merchants were not ready to completely sacrifice their own interests in boycotts, which is why they did not stand out as a revolutionary class, but rather blunted the edge of protest by following their particular interests. As the class that was the most organized in the fragmentary phase, their cessation of the boycott was a significant factor in the decline of colonial resistance. This does not diminish the fact that in this phase, the merchants were still the most important class since they contained two characteristics of hegemony – they were the main actors in institutionalization through committees of correspondence and they were the central actor in the boycott, where by sacrificing their economic interests, they had the opportunity to present a defense of the general interests of the colonies. However, the merchants did not take advantage of this phase to take the position of the leading class and intercolonial leadership, so that the phase ended in decentralized resistance without clear organization, clear demands and collective action aimed at general interests.

In the second phase, 1774–1776, there was institutionalization and a shift from negative unity to a clear political project and leadership based on a relatively centralized organization and class alliance that was ready to sacrifice economic interests for the sake of general ones. Through the Continental Congress, provincial conventions and committees of safety, the revolutionary bloc gained organization, coherence and political direction. Here too, merchants played a leading role, but with the necessity of sharing leadership with Southern planters, which organizationally and institutionally established the leadership of the revolutionary bloc. The moderate path and balancing that the elites held as a course was changed by the actions of the popular classes that influenced the change in the position of the Pennsylvania delegation and showed that they had an important influence on maintaining a radical, revolutionary course.

The contribution of the analysis is in showing how the hegemonic bloc was formed on the basis of a material economic base, but with an important relative autonomy of the political and ideological levels. Although the American situation was specific and cannot be simply copied to other colonies, the paper shows that hegemony can be formed in the absence of a state and a central organization. In addition, the revolution was not interpreted as a project of elites and manipulation of the masses, but a complex and contradictory process in which particular class interests met and shaped each other through compromise,

sacrifice of short-term interests and organization of collective actions that were presented as actions in the general interest.

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