

Music of the American Revolution

ADDRESS TO THE LADIES

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When songs from the American Revolution are contemplated, one typically recollects lyrics conveying political grievances or recounting martial conflict. The song "Address to the Ladies" is unique in this regard as its message is not one of politics or military matters, but rather economics. Another unique aspect of this song is it is one of the few from this period directed towards the women in the American Colonies.

The message conveyed in "Address to the Ladies" was resistance to British regulations which at the time were creating economic stress in the colonies. The resistance proposed in the lyrics was to be in the form of boycotts of British goods and frugality when there were purchases that must be made. A principal aim of the lyrics was to link support of the boycott to the security of private households.¹

The lyrics of "Address to the Ladies" first appeared in the Boston Post-Boy on 16 November, 1767.² They were subsequently printed in the Connecticut Gazette on 20 November 1767 and Virginia Gazette on 24 Dec 1767.^{3,4} Address to the Ladies was written in response to various economic policies imposed upon the colonies culminating in the Townsend Acts passed in 1767.⁵ These Acts placed several burdens on the American Colonists, principally in the form of taxes and the creation of captive markets. While the Townsend Acts did not take effect until 20 Nov 1767, their impact was clear to the author who published "Address to the Ladies" four days prior on 16 Nov 1767.

The Townsend Acts were named after Charles Townsend, British chancellor of the Exchequer from Aug 1766 until his death in September 1767. The Acts imposed duties on British china, glass, lead, paint, paper and tea imported to the colonies. These particular items were selected for taxation as Townsend thought they would be difficult for the colonists to manufacture themselves. Townsend's intention was that most of the revenue generated would come from tea sales.⁶ In addition, Townsend saw the Acts as a device by which the colonial governments could be manipulated and reconstructed. The objective was to apply some of the revenue provided by the duties to pay the salaries of colonial governors and judges, thereby ensuring the fidelity of the colonial officials to the British Crown and not the colonists. However, the colonists were sufficiently perceptive to foresee the outcome of this scheme. Therefore, the Patriots circumvented the act in the most effective manner available to them; boycotts of imported British goods.

The original title was "Address to the Ladies" though in later years the title "Young Ladies in Town" was frequently applied. The "Young Ladies in Town" label was taken from the opening line of the song. At least three versions of the lyrics were commonly used. While all three versions contain common core stanzas, each version omits stanzas present in the others and/or includes stanzas not present in the others.

The author remains unknown but the lyrics were clearly patterned after Thomas D'Urfey's song "Advice to the Ladies of London, in the Choice of Their Husbands" published around 1686.^{7,8} Whereas the lyrics to "Advice to the Ladies of London" warned of less than honorable male suitors, "Address to the Ladies" warned of financial hardships placed upon colonial households at that

time as well as the hardships foreseen to be brought about by the Townsend Acts. All the ladies, as managers of their households and primary consumers of household items, were considered the key to limiting consumption of British goods. Consequently, the song encouraged the women to boycott British goods and replace them with products of their own or local manufacture. Unmarried ladies were additionally charged with selecting husbands who were supportive of the boycott.

In none of the early printings of the lyrics was a tune named by which the lyrics should be sung. It may be that the author only intended to compose a poem and not a song. However, since the words to "Address to the Ladies" matched the meter and form of D'Urfey's song "Advice to the Ladies of London, in the Choice of Their Husbands", it was natural the same melody would be applied. Although D'Urfey's melody appears to be the most frequently applied to "Address to the Ladies" other tunes have been used as well.⁹

The lines

"Since money's so scarce, and times growing worse
Strange things may soon hap and surprise you:"

are references to the Currency Act of 1764 and the Townsend Acts, respectively. The colonies had always suffered from a shortage of hard currency due to the trade imbalance with Britain. However, the British Currency Act of 1764 worsened the situation as it prevented the colonies from issuing paper currency which made it difficult for the Americans to pay debts and taxes. The Townsend Acts, although not yet enacted, were expected to place additional burdens on the colonial economy.

The lines

"Throw aside your Bohea and your Green Hyson Tea,
And all things with a new fashion duty;
Procure a good store of the choice Labradore,
For there'll soon be enough here to suit ye;"

were directed at the tax on tea. Bohea and Hyson were popular imported teas. Conversely, Labradore, also known as Indian Tea, was a type of tea derived from evergreen bushes in Canada and the northern colonies. Therefore, Labradore, as a locally sourced tea, was promoted as a substitute to elude the tax on tea.

Address to the Ladies remained popular through the Revolutionary War with publications of the tune continuing at least through 1787.¹⁰ The song is still performed today amongst folk singers presenting both traditional and contemporary renditions.

Address to the Ladies (1767)¹¹ (aka Young Ladies in Town)

Young ladies in town, and those that live 'round,
Let a friend at this season advise you:
Since money's so scarce, and times growing worse
Strange things may soon hap and surprise you:

First then, throw aside your high-top knots of pride,
Wear none but your own country linen;
Of economy boast, let your pride be the most
To shew cloathes of your own make and spinning.

What if homespun they say, is not quite so gay
As brocade, yet be not in a passion,
For when once it is known, this is much worn in town,
One and all will cry out 'tis the fashion!

And as one, all agree that you'll not married be
To such as will wear London fact'ry:
But at first sight refuse, tell'em such you do chuse
As encourage our own Manufact'ry.

No more ribbands wear, nor in rich dress appear,
Love your country much better than fine things,
Begin without passion, it will soon be the fashion
To grace your smooth locks with a twine string.

Throw aside your Bohea and your Green Hyson Tea,
And all things with a new fashion duty;
Procure a good store of the choice Labradore,
For there'll soon be enough here to suit ye;

These do without fear, and to all you'll appear
Fair, charming, true, lovely and cleaver;
Tho' the times remain darkish, young men may be sparkish,
And love you much stronger than ever.

¹ "Address to the Ladies", Massachusetts Historical Society, retrieved 17 Nov 2024 from https://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?pid=2&old=1&mode=nav&ft=Coming%20of%20the%20American%20Revolution&item_id=413

² The Boston Post-Boy & Advertiser, 1767, November 16 No. 535, page 2. Retrieved 13 Nov 2024 from https://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?item_id=373&img_step=1&pid_

³ Schrader, Arthur F., Songs to Cultivate the Sensations of Freedom, Folkways Records & Service Corp., New York City, 1976, Page 2.

⁴ Virginia Gazette, 1767, 24 December No. 866, Retrieved 17 Nov 2024 from <https://research.colonialwilliamsburg.org/DigitalLibrary/va-gazettes/VGSinglePage.cfm?issueIDNo=67.PD.56> .

⁵ "Address to the Ladies", Retrieved 17 Nov 2024 From <https://americancenturies.mass.edu/collection/itempage.jsp?itemid=18607&img=0&level=advanced&transcription=1>

⁶ Townsend Acts, Retrieved 19 Nov 2024 from <https://www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/townshend-acts> .

⁷ "Advice to the Ladies of London, in the Choice of Their Husbands". University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, Retrieved 13 Nov 2024 from <https://name.umdl.umich.edu/B02811.0001.001>.

⁸ Pills to Purge Melancholy, Vol. II, printed by W. Pearson, London, 1719, pages 8-10, Retrieved 13 November 2024 from https://archive.org/details/imslp-and-mirth-or-pills-to-purge-melancholy-durfey-thomas/PMLP144559-Vol._2/page/n3/mode/2up .

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- ⁹ Voices Across Time Unit 2: A new Nation, Retrieved 2024 Nov 12 from <https://voices.pitt.edu/TeachersGuide/Unit%202/AddresstotheLadies.htm>
- ¹⁰ Hampshire Gazette, 1787, January 17 No. 20, page 4. Retrieved 21 Nov 2024 from https://www.historic-northampton.org/members_only/gazette/1787-06.html
- ¹¹ The Boston Post-Boy & Advertiser, 1767, November 16 No. 535, page 2. Retrieved 13 Nov 2024 from https://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?item_id=373&img_step=1&pid_