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THE AMERICAN BOYCOTT OF BRITISH GOODS, 1764–1770: A MARCUSEAN CRITIQUE OF THE MARKETPLACE OF REVOLUTION

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Abstract. This paper critically examines the American boycott of British goods between 1764 and 1770 through the lens of Herbert Marcuse's theory of false needs and consumer society, in dialogue with Timothy Breen's notion of the marketplace of revolution. While Breen emphasizes the transformative role of consumer resistance in forging colonial political identity, this article questions the depth and sincerity of anti-consumerist sentiment during the boycott. It argues that the boycott was primarily a tactical reaction to British coercion, rather than a strategic rejection of consumerism. Drawing on secondary sources and historiography, the analysis reveals sharp class contradictions in the organization, enforcement, and symbolic meaning of boycotts across regions and social groups. The article contends that neither Breen nor Marcuse adequately integrate class struggle into their interpretations. By incorporating class analysis, it highlights the different motives of merchants, artisans, planters, and lower classes, showing that the boycott often reproduced existing inequalities. The study concludes that the ephemeral nature of anti-consumerist discourse and the rapid return to consumption following British concessions suggest that marketplace resistance was limited in ideological and political depth and largely failed to really challenge the underlying capitalist logic.

Introduction

In the modern capitalist consumer society, the current topics of tariffs and trade wars, as well as the boycott of certain goods, are notable. However, the boycott of goods was used as a political tool in still underdeveloped consumer societies such as colonial America. After the Seven Years' War, Britain introduced the Sugar Act and the particularly problematic Stamp Act in 1764 and the Townshend Acts after 1766, which imposed taxes and provoked resistance from the colonial population (Ulrich, 2013, p. 65).

From a modern perspective, colonial resistance is interesting because it chose as a tool a modern method of combating consumerism by implementing a policy of nonconsumption and nonimportation of British goods. This was not new in colonial America, given that in Boston in 1713 a riot was recorded that resulted in the destruction of wheat belonging to a local merchant who was accused of high prices (Glickman, 2009, p. 36), but it was only after the Stamp Act that an organized boycott of British goods and a higher level of political struggle in the economic and ideological field came about. The organized boycott of goods as a political pressure on Great Britain represented an uncertain direction of resistance that oscillated between violent and nonviolent resistance.

Feldman (2019) argues that boycotts had expressive and instrumental features because they represented a tactic of resistance to the British Empire, but also helped to constitute and consolidate political identity. They also helped political mobilization and showed an ambivalent attitude towards the rule of law because, in addition to persuasion and argument, they showed the other side of threats and violence. Eventually, from defending local legislatures, they reached a revolutionary dimension and armed rebellion (Feldman, 2019, pp. 5–6). Merritt takes a different view, arguing that economic self-interest shaped consumption policy, while the republican ideology of rejecting the vices and luxuries of the Old World was of lesser importance (Merritt, 2014, p. 14). Merritt also criticizes Breen for overemphasizing the willingness to sacrifice pleasures as a test of allegiance, pointing out that many women did not abandon fashion, which created a political problem for the Whigs. In addition, both men and women continued to buy forbidden items

such as tea in shops (Merritt, 2014, pp. 14–15). With limited agreement with this criticism, this paper nevertheless approaches it from a different direction, guided by Marcuse's theory, but with a critique of the limitations of Marcuse's theory that are not only related to the historical context, but also to the lack of class features.

Herbert Marcuse theoretically considered the connection between consumption, aggression, and violence. He notes that although nonviolent resistance is not successful in the fight against a violent capitalist society, passive resistance that is massive and disrupts economic life, as was the case with Gandhi in India, can be successful because it ceases to be passive and nonviolent (Marcuse, 1969, pp. 102–103). However, Marcuse did not analyze the American boycotts in the period 1764–1770, which contained a combination of violent and nonviolent resistance, and this context remained a research gap. The American historian Timothy Breen identifies the boycotts as the key events that linked the 13 colonies in a single struggle and thus announced the coming revolution and independence.

This paper criticizes certain of Breen's theses based on Marcuse's theory, arguing that the American boycott of goods was a tactical tool, but not a strategic one, since it did not resist consumerism as such, but rather British domination. Marcuse's theory is not applied directly, as it would be anachronistic, since it originated as a critique of the welfare state, but is adapted to the class struggles of colonial American society. Breen's analysis provides a good basis that allows us to observe the different actions of different classes and their positions towards boycotts. Therefore, the paper begins with a brief theoretical overview of the basic theses of Marcuse and Breen. This is followed by sections on the organization of boycotts and the ideological articulation of anti-consumerism. The analysis focuses on the period 1764–1770, because it was a relatively "pure" period in which the boycott emerged as a political tool of struggle that can be examined in the context of consumerism, while after 1774 the boycott was already involved in the Revolutionary War and the struggle for independence, and the issue of consumerism as such is of very little importance there. The term *boycott* was not yet known at the time of the campaign (Charles Boycott would give the term its name by declaring a boycott in Ireland 115 years later) but is used more frequently in this paper than *nonimportation* and *nonconsumption* for stylistic reasons.

The contribution of this paper is in the synthesis of different theoretical perspectives and the reexamination of structural class relations that influenced the processes of boycott organization. In this regard, Marcuse's and Breen's theories complement each other and in certain parts are mutually exclusive. Empirical testing calls both theories into question due to insufficient consideration of concrete class interests—in Marcuse there is not a sufficiently clear theoretical connection between class and the determination of true and false needs, while in Breen there is an overemphasized narrative about the normative unity of colonialists in the construction of a common identity through anti-consumption practices. In practice, there were significant differences conditioned by class position. Therefore,

the boycott was more of a tactical resistance to British oppression than a strategic struggle against consumer practices.

The Great Refusal or a Marketplace of Revolution?

Marcuse argues that freedom from scarcity in societies that successfully satisfy basic human needs contributes to the weakening of critical edges and the dominance of the status quo (Marcuse, 1998, pp. 21–22). In this sense, Marcuse frames his critique negatively, not as a demand that people satisfy needs, but to achieve freedom from an economic system in which they have no control over economic relations and forces—as well as to achieve freedom from the daily struggle for existence and political freedoms in relation to processes over which they have no control (Marcuse, 1998, p. 23). This is followed by his idea of false needs as those needs imposed by forces that want to oppress individuals, which creates aggression, injustice, and misery. Although meeting these needs creates a feeling of satisfaction, Marcuse describes this state as "euphoria in misery," since needs contain social functions that individuals do not control but are determined by external means (Marcuse, 1998, p. 25).

However, he clearly states that false needs should not be sought in a car or a television or other technical devices as such. False needs are false because they arise within a repressive society in which people, by exchanging goods, create profit for capital and tie their own existence to it, and by satisfying their needs, reproduce voluntary servitude (Marcuse, 2008, pp. 28–29). Therefore, the determination of which needs are false and which are real does not come from a higher instance, but can only be determined by individuals—individuals who are not manipulated, but autonomous and free to give their own assessment (Marcuse, 1998, p. 26). In his opinion, products create a false consciousness that manipulates people and prevents them from noticing their falseness. They indoctrinate them and become part of a lifestyle, and any attempt at transcendence is rejected and reduced to the one-dimensionality of the existing universe and its rationality (Marcuse, 1998, p. 32). In this sense, for Marcuse, the most important question is not how an individual can satisfy his needs without harming others, but how an individual can satisfy his needs without harming himself and increasing his own dependence on an exploitative apparatus within which satisfying needs means perpetuating his own servitude (Marcuse, 2008, p. 16).

This question goes philosophically and sociologically deeper than Breen's otherwise very insightful historical analysis. He argues that the colonists had a shared experience as consumers that represented cultural resources on the basis of which a new form of political protest was built. This form consisted of private decisions that were interpreted as political acts, and of consumer decisions interpreted as personal loyalties. In this way, products became the basis for building

trust, and the willingness to sacrifice material goods became a measure by which allegiance was tested (Breen, 2004, pp. XV–XVI). By organizing voluntary associations that enforced nonimportation of British goods, people judged other Americans by their pledges of mutual support and, conversely, by designating those who continued to buy goods as public enemies. Thus, the attitude toward buying British goods became a measure of patriotism, and political resistance was directed at the market (Breen, 2004, p. XVI). Breen argues that the boycott proved successful in mobilizing the masses because it linked an economic revolution with a political one. The economic revolution was driven by the increase in imports of British manufactured goods from the 1740s, while the political revolution represented a struggle for self-determination. This helped to ensure that self-determination played out within the context of growing consumption (Breen, 2004, p. 21). Ordinary people thus used the market to convince each other that they were trustworthy by their willingness to make public sacrifices by depriving themselves of British goods. This led colonial leaders to insist that patriotism must be affirmed in practice by the rejection of British goods, which applied to both women and men, poor and rich (Breen, 1988, pp. 92–93; Breen, 2004, pp. 23–24). This ultimately led to the development of the idea that British manufacture symbolized dependency and oppression, and that poor colonial communities contextualized tea drinking in a wider world context (Breen, 2004, p. 299). The politicization of consumption created a new radical symbolic function as throughout America the importation of goods became the basis for understanding universal rights, freedoms, virtue, and power. Thus, the boycott encouraged ordinary people to think about broader constitutional issues (Breen, 1988, pp. 76–77). This, he argues, was the main consequence of the boycott, which otherwise had no significant economic impact. Ordinary people were given the opportunity to express their own position on constitutional issues, as well as to demonstrate political resistance (Breen, 1988, p. 90). However, he notes that the repeal of the Townshend Act of 1770 also meant a slowdown in American national consciousness and the loss of symbolic significance of consumer goods, i.e., the return of consumerism frenzy (Breen, 1988, pp. 96–97).

Furthermore, although Breen does not name Marcuse, he notes that it has become fashionable to criticize modern consumer culture for creating false needs. Similarly, 18th-century moralists underestimated the ability of ordinary people to cope with market temptations: "It is true that goods can corrupt. But in certain circumstances they can be made to speak to power. The choice is ours to make" (Breen, 2004, p. 331). Although in this critique he comes close to Marcuse in arguing that people make their own decisions about false needs, the paper continues with an analysis that examines how class interests drive the organization of the American boycott. Before that, a few words about the development of the consumerist revolution that determines false needs.

The consumer revolution consists of an increase in productivity and the distribution of goods to a larger number of people, as well as the liberation of a

section of people from producing their own food and clothing. The American colonies were designed to be dependent on British clothing imports, while exporting food increased their own income with which to purchase British products (Ulrich, 2013, p. 67). During the 1750s, the colonies increased their imports and the market changed material culture, introducing issues of fashion, etiquette, color, and texture of products as important issues of consumer choice (Breen, 2004, p. XV). The initial surge in demand came from the wealthy, who imitated the English wealthy and purchased luxury goods (Breen, 1986, pp. 486–487). In contrast to the upper classes, who purchased luxury clothing, chinaware, etc., the use of tea spread among the poor. Tea was used as a mild stimulant, but it also served to imitate the style of the upper classes. An old woman from Long Island described how they did not know what to do with tea leaves, and some ate them like porridge, others sprinkled them on bread and butter (Breen, 2004, p. 171). Such irrational use of tea is an obvious example of false needs today, but the boycott was more complex and called into question consumption itself. It questioned the rationality of consumerism as such, but also cut across different class interests. At the same time, there were the tendencies of the "great refusal" and the "marketplace of revolution," where the revolution was both an opposition to the British market and a transformation of one's own market that did not prevent consumerism but encouraged it on the basis of one's own merchants and manufacture.

The Political Organization of the Boycotts

The boycott took place in two waves. First, after the Stamp Act of 1765–1766, then after the Townshend Acts of 1767–1770, when it spread significantly throughout the colonies. However, the organization of the boycott was not simple and generally accepted, and class relations played an important role in determining its dynamics.

Colonial merchants had problems with borrowing from British suppliers before the Stamp Act and therefore saw an interest in boycotting imports in order to sell off the goods they had already imported. One merchant notes that there were enough English goods in Pennsylvania for the next seven years and that their sale could pay off all debts (Breen, 2004, p. 224).

Boston merchants began organizing in 1765 to limit the import of mourning clothes and funeral gloves as an initial pressure on English goods, which was partially successful (Jensen, 2004, p. 75). In the summer of 1765, London merchants noticed a significant drop in imports, which led to ships sailing half-empty for America, as evidenced by a drop of £600,000 in revenue during the summer (Schlesinger, 1917, p. 80). At the very beginning of the boycott, colonial merchants and British merchants had conflicting interests, but the boycott itself did not cause much harm to colonial merchants, who had enough supplies to continue consumption without new imports. In December 1765, an agreement for the complete cessation

of imports was signed in Boston by 250 merchants and traders, but without clear measures and control over its implementation, which caused its numerous violations (Schlesinger, 1917, p. 80). However, the success was not primarily economic but political. Extraconstitutional local bodies emerged throughout the colonies, exerting political and economic influence over all colonial residents, especially in port cities. In Pennsylvania, these bodies were crucial to the development of radical resistance and politics, uniting merchants and retailers with the support of all other social classes (Ryerson, 1978, pp. 25–27).

The organization of extraconstitutional committees opened up opportunities for greater participation of the broader popular classes in politics, which mechanics and artisans exploited in New York despite the landowners and merchants (Becker, 1909, p. 22). This was a novelty for New York, in contrast to Boston, where the masses were already involved in the political process (Nash, 1979, p. 192). Although all classes were united against the Stamp Act, landowners and merchants supported popular demonstrations on the condition that they could keep them under control and direct them as desired (Becker, 1909, p. 29).

In New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, the lower classes expressed their distaste for luxury and elitist politics, which contributed to a significant increase in the momentum of the patriotic movement in these cities (Nash, 1979, p. 189). Among the maritime workers, the movement was radical and violent, leading to the resignation of a merchant in Boston who was in charge of stamp distribution under threat of having his house burned down by the movement (Nash, 1979, p. 189). In Boston, the sailors were numerically strong, but they also had the support of other members of the working class who were protesting against British policies and the local elite. In New York, the protests were led by members of the middle class such as captains, master craftsmen, and lawyers, while in Philadelphia, members of the upper class such as merchants were also present (Nash, 1979, p. 198).

The problem with leading the protests was that the upper classes did not have control over the lower classes everywhere, which, in the case of New York, led to fears that the protests would get out of control and could lead not only to harm for the British but also for the local wealthy people (Nash, 1979, pp. 198–199). An example is the protest of sailors and a group of boys who broke windows and threatened property owners, then made an effigy of the governor and hung it. Next, they threw stones at the fort with soldiers and symbolically burned the hanged effigy (Becker, 1909, pp. 30–31). Such radical measures were not in the interests of the merchants and they caused them to fear that the resistance would completely escape their control and take an unpredictable direction.

For merchants, the boycott was a moderate measure that they did not want to go beyond, unlike the popular leaders (Jensen, 2004, p. 129). Therefore, for merchants, the boycott was successful in shifting tactics from violent resistance to nonviolent resistance (Jensen, 2004, p. 75). It was also successful for Boston merchants, who understood that they could lead traders, mechanics, and seamen

if they recognized their needs and enabled them to participate politically (Nash, 1979, pp. 222–223). But it was not successful for popular leaders, who accused merchants of using the boycott to raise prices and thus survive hardships more easily than the poor (Jensen, 2004, p. 130). However, British merchants were not satisfied with the protest either and influenced the Parliament to repeal the Stamp Act. Once this was done, Americans abandoned the boycott; expensive funerals were once again organized, and in Philadelphia, in honor of the king's birthday, new British clothes were ordered for the poor (Schlesinger, 1917, pp. 85–86). The first wave of boycotts was over, and consumption continued unabated.

The introduction of the Townshend Acts in 1767 influenced the emergence of a second and significantly more intense wave of boycotts. The Sons of Liberty in New York and South Carolina revived their organizations and began to arrange a new phase of boycotts, with the support of Boston and Philadelphia (Conroy, 2000, p. 217). The key ones were the town meetings in New England, which were particularly active in drawing up lists of British goods that would not be used and whose production would be encouraged by domestic manufacture (Schlesinger, 1917, pp. 105–106); at the same time, penalties for violators of the boycott were agreed upon (Maier, 1991, pp. 116–117). Therefore, in the initial phase of the second wave of boycotts, there was more talk of nonconsumption than nonimportation, and this policy spread most widely through New England, where town meetings existed as gatherings of broad popular classes. Only later did the interest of the people in New York and Philadelphia arise, where in 1768 there were still no successful agreements on a boycott until the end of the year (in New York) or the following spring (in Philadelphia) (Schlesinger, 1917, pp. 112–115). Despite pressure from the people of Philadelphia, the merchants of that city did not agree to accept the boycott agreement with New York and Boston, which made it impossible for the trading cities to establish a common policy of resistance (Schlesinger, 1917, p. 119), and many merchants who had participated in the previous boycott did not join this time (Ryerson, 1978, pp. 27–28). It was not until March of the following year in Philadelphia that the majority of merchants and traders signed the nonimportation agreement, conceding that any individual who violated the agreement should be labeled an enemy of the liberties of America (Schlesinger, 1917, pp. 129–130). Over 250 merchants signed the agreement and established a committee of 21 members to oversee its implementation, and among them, large merchants and traders had the greatest influence (Ryerson, 1978, p. 29). A letter of support for the boycott from Benjamin Franklin, who was in England at the time, also had a significant symbolic impact (Ryerson, 1978, pp. 31–32).

Thus, the second wave came under the initiative of popular leaders, while merchants were wary of an explosion of mob action, which is why, in 1767, most merchants were against the boycott (Jensen, 2004, p. 265). Only the following year did Massachusetts merchants join the boycott, primarily led by Boston, but on the condition that the merchants of New York and Philadelphia accept the same

agreement. The governor of Boston noted that merchants reluctantly joined the boycott under pressure from the lower classes, out of fear for their property, as well as from resentment from the wealthier boycotters (Jensen, 2004, p. 270). Given that coercion was not only carried out in Boston, Jensen concludes: "Economic coercion of Britain was achieved, in part at least, either by the threat or the reality of coercion of Americans by Americans" (Jensen, 2004, p. 313).

In August 1768, a nonimportation agreement was signed in New York, which was supported by almost all merchants and traders. It was also agreed to boycott all traders who continued to buy or sell British goods, which especially concerned smugglers who transported goods from Holland and tried to sell at monopoly prices (Becker, 1909, p. 63). After the Boston Massacre, New York sent a letter to Boston and Philadelphia with the aim of organizing a continental congress, but both cities rejected such a proposal. The Sons of Liberty organized large demonstrations under the slogan "Liberty and no Importation, in Union with the other Colonies" (Alpaugh, 2021, pp. 51–52). However, a month later, New York merchants suspended the boycott and sent a letter to Philadelphia merchants, urging them to do the same (Alpaugh, 2021, p. 52).

In the South, the situation was different due to the small number of merchants, and a further characteristic was the high indebtedness of planters to British creditors, which made this class interested in reducing the consumption of luxury goods (Schlesinger, 1917, p. 135). Charleston was the main trading city and its citizens had a strong influence on local politics, so the working class, with the support of the planters, managed to win over some of the merchants to its side, although in the fall of 1768 a letter from Boston merchants accepting the boycott received a negative response. An important symbolic act occurred there in January 1769, when the largest local merchant attended his wife's funeral in a plain blue suit. In the summer of the same year, about 80 merchants agreed to the boycott, albeit with less rigorous regulations than in the North (Schlesinger, 1917, pp. 140–144).

Similarly, in Georgia, where merchants were very lightly represented at public meetings, they held meetings in certain places where they tried to forestall more radical demands by creating lists of only certain items that would not be imported. In the fall, they nevertheless agreed to an agreement identical to that in South Carolina, which stipulated that the boycott would continue until the Townshend Acts were repealed (Schlesinger, 1917, pp. 147–148). In Maryland, public meetings were also organized, and county-level delegates decided on a boycott (Maier, 1991, p. 115). In North Carolina, merchants resisted the boycott the longest, but in the fall of 1769, they nevertheless yielded to the influence of the Sons of Liberty (Schlesinger, 1917, p. 148).

Virginia was unique in that the planters organized a boycott led by prominent figures such as Washington, Jefferson, and Mason, who voluntarily compiled a long list of goods that would not be imported (Breen, 2004, p. 246). A resolution

on nonimportation was adopted, which argued that further importation of goods led to the risk of loss of freedom and falling into slavery as debts to Britain grew. Therefore, the resolution, through the personal example of the signatories, promoted frugality and discouraged luxury, with the hope that others would follow suit. However, it specified that certain goods from Ireland were not prohibited, including not only food but also items such as chairs, watches, jewelry, and glass (Nonimportation Resolutions of the Former Burgesses, 1977, pp. 74–75). A year later, the Association of Burgesses and Merchants was organized, which confirmed the boycott of imports of British and European goods. A five-member committee was appointed to publish the names of violators of the boycott, and the ban on imports, including the purchase of slaves, was further tightened (Nonimportation Association of Burgesses and Merchants, 1973, pp. 80–81). Although the purchase of slaves was officially prohibited, 14,000 African slaves were purchased in Virginia between January 1769 and December 1770, and the buyers were mostly smallholders who found it more difficult to boycott than large planters (Holton, 2011, p. 90). Washington believed that public censure would be enough to discourage further violations, and that people would follow a gentleman who could explain why the boycott was a good decision (Ragsdale, 1996, p. 74).

However, in Virginia the boycott did not spread significantly beyond the planters. The leaders of the boycott calculated that if they stopped consumption, it would make it easier for other planters to do the same without damaging their social reputation by giving up conspicuous consumption (Ragsdale, 1996, p. 75; Holton, 2011, p. 85). In a letter to his comrade George Mason, Washington argued that the boycott served both patriotic and financial purposes because it advocated the repeal of Townshend duties and allowed for a reduction in consumption without embarrassment while improving credit ratings (Holton, 2011, p. 85). The wives of wealthy planters began to wear locally made clothing and shoes, and they also began using local wool and cloth, contributing to a significant increase in local cloth production (Ragsdale, 1996, p. 84). However, this shift remained confined to the planter class, and even the creation of county committees advocated by Mason based on the success in Maryland did not contribute to the spread of the boycott (Ragsdale, 1996, pp. 92–93). The conclusion of the great planters was that the influence of British merchants was too strong in Virginia and that they achieved "nearly unchecked influence over Virginia's domestic economy and external trade" (Ragsdale, 1996, p. 107).

The failure of the boycott in the South in the period 1769–1770 is clearly reflected in the statistics. Imports did not decrease but increased, unlike in the North, where they decreased by as much as two-thirds (Schlesinger, 1917, pp. 197–198). The increase was pronounced in the Chesapeake region, where it reached 60% compared to 1768 (Holton, 2011, p. 91). Regardless of the weakness of the boycott in the South, the boycott in the North still represented significant resistance. After the Boston Massacre, the decision was made to withdraw the

Townshend Acts, prompting a reaction similar to that following the repeal of the Stamp Act: the nonimportation movement collapsed within just a few months (Jensen, 2004, p. 354). Breen notes that merchants had previously demanded that the boycott be stopped, but that ordinary people who had sincerely protested for freedom and against oppression began to buy British goods in even greater quantities after the boycott (Breen, 2004, p. 289). In the South, smallholders and tenants did not participate in the boycott, and the tobacco trade grew significantly, allowing cheap British clothing to be imported (Holton, 2011, p. 91). Like the first wave, the second wave ended with the mere withdrawal of the British laws that had acted as the main cause of the boycott.

Anti-Consumerism Discourses

Although anti-consumerist ideology was not the main cause of the boycott, it played an important role. This ideology emerged from several different directions without central coordination, resulting in a lack of clear articulation within a single, unified discourse. The ideology of anti-consumerism did not play a major role, but was essentially of secondary importance, subordinate to the tactics of the boycott. Without centralization, there were several different anti-consumerist discourses operating in parallel. Christian religion played an important role. When advocating for the boycott, the Whigs used a moral discourse that warned of the dangers of consumption and advocated the virtues of ordinary life (Ulrich, 2013, p. 77). Protestantism, with its belief in diligence and hard work, not only emphasized work as a higher priority than consumption, but also had a strong focus on self-sufficiency. In this sense, economic success is an indicator of freedom from dependence on others. Accordingly, *The Pennsylvania Gazette* published articles arguing that it was necessary to develop one's own manufacturing in order to avoid dependence, while *The New-London Gazette* argued that English goods threatened to destroy the local economy and that sacrifices for their importation were not worth it (Breen, 2004, p. 225). This discourse was particularly influential among artisans who valued simplicity based on Quaker and Puritan ideals in the making of their furniture, rather than the ornamentation of British goods (Witkowski, 1989, p. 222).

Philadelphia newspapers ran numerous articles criticizing the selfish interests of merchants as a direct threat to patriotism. The authors argued that consumerism was a vice of slavery that would destroy Philadelphia unless people returned to the path of freedom and virtue (Jensen, 2004, pp. 272–273). It has been argued that the Stamp Act awakened the entire continent to the understanding that luxury would contribute to the forgetting of freedom, and that irresponsible borrowing endangered the common good (Breen, 2004, p. 227). In response to criticism from Boston merchants that the boycott was a partial measure that would hit them the

hardest, a slogan appeared in *The Boston Gazette* that strikingly stated: "Save your money, and you save your country" (Middlekauff, 2007, p. 176). This discourse also resonated with educated youth. Yale students voted to stop drinking foreign liquors in 1764, while Harvard students decided to stop drinking imported tea in 1768 (Witkowski, 1989, p. 223). Breen argues that the boycott succeeded for the first time in changing the way ordinary people interpreted consumer goods within an imperial environment. The colonists began to question whether they really needed so many imported goods and whether they should reduce their personal expenses before taking on new debt. This was fueled by articles in *The Boston Gazette* that argued that trade with Great Britain was negative because debts were increasing every year, which would eventually lead to debt becoming an instrument of enslavement (Breen, 2004, p. 207). Another article identifies luxury as a problem because debt is constantly increasing, and the author states that when he sees the luxury and extravagance in Boston homes, he is not surprised to hear news of bankruptcies and poverty more and more often (Breen, 1988, p. 89).

However, not all advocates of the boycott were anti-consumerist. A virtuous person was understood to be someone who exercised self-restraint but was not necessarily completely opposed to British imports or mercantile capitalism (Breen, 2004, p. 264). A virtuous person was understood to be someone who exercised self-restraint but was not necessarily completely opposed to British imports or mercantile capitalism (Breen, 2004, p. 264). In some places, the boycott was promoted as an act of virtuous self-denial, while in others it was framed as based on patriotic, peaceful, free, and virtuous principles; a New York newspaper even claimed that the boycott meant victory over Britain and eternal freedom (Breen, 2004, p. 264). It was argued that the effort of each individual who made his own clothes would be rewarded not only through personal interest, but also through public interest (Breen, 1988, p. 91). This contributed to many households owning a spinning wheel, whether they actually used it or not, as it was seen as an indicator of love for one's country (Witkowski, 1989, p. 221). This discourse resonated with the lower classes, including servants, sailors, and poorer artisans, as well as women, who recognized moral virtue in rejecting a luxurious life and the sins associated with it (Witkowski, 1989, p. 223).

Thus, there were different discourses of anti-consumerism: the discourse of Protestant ethics, which emphasized diligence, work, and self-sufficiency; the discourse of republican virtue, where individuals rise above consumerist logic through self-denial; and the discourse of economic pragmatism, which argued that consumerism contributed to indebtedness that threatened economic survival. In Marcuse's sense, these discourses did not address true and false needs directly but focused on values and economic pragmatism, thereby indirectly labeling harmful needs as false needs that would enslave Americans. However, their influence remained weak.

Conclusion

In their theory, Marcuse and Breen overlook the importance of class struggle and the contradictory interests that emerge from the complex interactions between classes. In the case of colonial America, the complexity of class relations developed both within colonial society and externally in relation to British merchants. Accordingly, patriotism and anti-consumerism did not have a monolithic meaning, and these values became arenas of political, ideological, and economic struggle. Moreover, the boundaries of patriotism were precisely the boundaries of class struggle. This can be seen in the example of the boycott, when the Sons of Liberty, who supported the lower classes, wanted to continue the boycott even after the repeal of the Townshend Acts and to extend their struggle to other colonies. However, merchants were unwilling to continue. Regarding this example, Breen's observation that the boycott contributed to the development of the political identity of colonial boycotters is accurate, but it is important to recognize that this new political identity involved a struggle for leadership along the merchant-popular class divide. Merchants, who initiated the first phase of the boycott, eventually identified their own interests in it—it could help them reduce debts, sell off stored goods, and pressure Britain into making concessions. In the second phase, however, their position became cautious and hesitant, as they failed to exert control over the popular classes, who coupled the boycott with violent resistance. Colonial merchants perceived this as a threat to their property and arguably saw British merchants an easier political partners than colonial rebels. Thus, the two phases of the boycott, in addition to continuity, were also characterized by discontinuities. While in the first phase there was a relative harmony of interests and actions across social classes, the second phase revealed internal class contradictions that led to divergent actions and conflicting perceptions of interests.

As far as the creation of a patriotic political identity is concerned, there was no successful control over the implementation of the boycott in the South, nor was the boycott a clear demonstration of patriotism and allegiance, although the planters intended it to be. Trade was carried conducted largely not through local merchants but with the help of British merchants, so control over commerce remained limited, and many freeholders who participated in the boycott did not recognize their own interests in doing so. Given this, the boycott cannot serve as the primary basis for understanding the development of patriotic struggle in the South, since four years later, Virginia, along with Boston, played a leading role in the Revolution, despite the failure of unity during the boycott. Therefore, the continuity of leadership established by Washington, Mason, and Jefferson in the South cannot be adequately explained through the boycott; instead, it becomes necessary to understand their leadership despite the failure of the boycott.

The "marketplace of revolution" is an appealing term. However, the marketplace functions precisely to maintain what Marcuse calls the status quo: it absorbs

radical rebellion into itself and imposes rules that are untouchable through the market. This is clear from the fact that the problem was the laws, which the colonial classes (in this case, truly united in perception) experienced as pressure and as the imposition of "taxation without representation." When those laws were withdrawn, consumption continued on an even greater scale. This should be seen as a subtle, latent victory for Britain, the market, and the logic of capital. Anti-consumption during the boycott operated primarily as a political tactic, with the aim of pressuring Britain into concessions that would, in turn, stimulate trade and consumption in colonial America. This is why the boycotts did not continue or directly lead to a fight for independence—British policies and renewed oppression were needed to provoke a new wave of resistance in 1774.

In considering an "alternative history," one might wonder whether the British government, had it possessed a better understanding of the workings of capitalism and consumerism, could have maintained its rule over colonial America longer by making its domination softer and more informal. Using Marcuse's theory of negative freedom, Americans were right in realizing that they had no control over political processes and the Parliament passing new laws. At the same time, they associated this with a lack of economic control, since those laws imposed taxes and damaged their economic interests. In this sense, the slogan "no taxation without representation" aligns with Marcuse's theory. The compilation of lists of prohibited products also fits Marcuse's framework, since it was not the products themselves that were rejected as false needs, but rather those related to British trade—and only for the duration of the rebellion. Apart from a small number of anti-consumerist critics, Americans lacked a deeper awareness that consumerism itself implied a lack of economic control. Some viewed the development of local manufacturing as a solution to this problem, but as Marcuse observed, the rise of modern industry ultimately reinforced—rather than challenged—consumerism and the popular classes' attachment to an exploitative system.

Although there were various discourses of anti-consumerism, they were not influential to the extent their advocates might have hoped. Due to their weak influence, they failed to produce long-term effects that would curb consumption, nor did they encourage local manufacturing. The development of local manufacturing had to wait until the creation of the Federal State, a national bank, and a federal fiscal policy—that is, until a new, state-directed economic system was established. But an ideology of anti-consumerism in the Marcusean sense—where rational individuals discern for themselves which needs are real and which are false—did not exist. In the case of the boycott in the South, this reached paroxysmal levels, as even slave owners committed to boycotting the purchase of slaves, yet this was an agreement they did not honor. On the one hand, Washington and other planters warned that luxurious living would lead Americans into slavery, implicitly suggesting that it consisted of false needs. On the other hand, the slave trade continued unhindered. The issue here is not merely ideological inconsistency, but the

primacy of class interests, which did not allow the planters to see the hypocrisy of their anti-consumerism. Without enslaved labor, it would not have been possible to run plantations on the same scale; thus, for them, purchasing slaves was not a false need, whereas luxuries that jeopardized their plantations and placed them in debt to British creditors were viewed as such. In this sense, it was their class and economic interests—not a universal humanistic dimension—that determined what constituted real and false needs for them.

This paper does not seek to propose a normative standard that colonial Americans should have followed based on Marcuse's theory; that is, it does not present the theory as a normative imperative they failed to meet or understand—anachronism and normativism are avoided. Instead, the goal has been to revisit this key historical period from a contemporary perspective, particularly regarding the emergence of revolutionary social movements, some of which partly grew out of the boycott and related anti-consumerist ideologies. In this regard, this movement served not only to apply Marcuse's theory in analyzing its trajectory, but also to critique his theory as insufficiently class-differentiated. Although Marcuse's theory aspires to universalism, the impression is that it has the characteristics of the historical moment in which it was developed, especially its reliance on the theoretical premise that class struggle had been displaced by the integration of the working class into the welfare state and the rise of anti-colonial, student, women's, ecological, and other movements. In colonial America, however, class division, especially between merchants, artisans, and workers, proved important for the functioning of the boycott. It is also important to remember that while the boycott was led by urban classes located in port cities, most of the population lived in rural areas. Nevertheless, these port cities played a crucial role in linking urban centers to the rural economy through trade.

In addition, this paper sought to show that the boycott was not a strategic but a tactical policy, one approached differently by various social classes. It points to sectional differences, with the South failing to implement the boycott in practice, though it participated symbolically in the second wave. Finally, the conclusion is that the boycott was not inherently tied to anti-consumerism in the long term, which would have given it strategic relevance. Had it been so, it would have led to a significantly different organization of economic and political life after the Revolutionary War. Instead, it remained a short-term tactical instrument of resistance to British oppression. Its eventual outcome was not a decrease but an increase in consumerism and consumerist identity. The final assessment is that the boycott represented not a marketplace of revolution, but rather a marketplace of the one-dimensional man.

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Амерички бојкот британске робе 1764–1770: маркузеовска критика тржишта револуције

Резиме

Овај рад анализира амерички бојкот британске робе у периоду од 1764. до 1770. године кроз теоријску призму Херберта Маркузеа и његовог појма „лажних потреба", у дијалогу са тезом Тимотија Брина о „тржишту револуције". Док Бринов приступ наглашава конституисање колонијалног политичког идентитета кроз потрошачки отпор, овај чланак доводи у питање дубину и доследност антиконзумеристичког наратива тог периода. Основна теза рада је да је бојкот био пре свега тактички, а не стратешки потез, усмерен ка изнуди уступака од Британије, а не ка суштинском одбацивању логике тржишта или потрошачког друштва. У раду се користи класна анализа како би се показало да су бојкоти имали различита значења за трговце, власнике плантажа, занатлије и ниже класе, те да је унутрашњи конфликт у оквиру новоформираног патриотског идентитета често био вођен противречним економским интересима и борбом за политичко вођство. Поред тога, указује се на то да су и Бринов и Маркузеов теоријски оквир недовољно осетљиви на улогу класне борбе у формирању идеолошких пракси, као и организацији бојкота. Краткотрајност антиконзумеристичког дискурса, неуспех у стварању локалне производње и брзи повратак британским производима након укидања закона указују на ограничени домет бојкота и његову неспособност да дубље уздрма капиталистичку структуру потреба и потрошње.

Кључне речи: Херберт Маркузе; Тимоти Брин; бојкот; америчке колоније; конзумеризам; класна борба; лажне потребе; антиконзумеристички дискурс; тржиште револуције; политички идентитет.