

North Carolina's Regulator Movement

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about North Carolina's Regulators, an association formed by backcountry residents to fight government corruption and extortion. Through a Power Point presentation, class and partner discussion, creative writing activities, imaginative scenarios, and the examination of primary sources, students will learn about the civil disobedience practiced by North Carolina's working class in the late 1700s, as well as the colonial government's response.

Grades

5-8

Essential Questions

- What differences existed in the 1700s in colonial North Carolina's land regions, people, cultures, natural resources, and economic interests?
- How did taxation contribute to colonial frustration and conflicts in North Carolina?
- Who was William Tryon how effective was he as a governor?
- Why did the construction of Tryon's Palace, and the poll tax levied to fund its construction, fuel colonial anger?
- Who were the Regulators and what were their grievances?
- What methods of civil disobedience did the Regulators employ and how did the colonial government respond?
- When people are upset with the decisions of their government, what choices do they have in voicing their displeasure?
- What compelled the Regulators to escalate their actions over the years?
- What occurred at the Battle of Alamance and what was the impact of this fight on colonial North Carolina?

Materials

- The Regulators Power Point, available in the Database of K-12 Resources (in PDF format) at <https://k12database.unc.edu/files/2014/06/RegulatorsPPT.pdf>
 - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click "View" in the top menu bar of the file, and select "Full Screen Mode"
 - To request an editable PPT version of this presentation, send a request to CarolinaK12@unc.edu
- "Life in the Backcountry" and "Life in the Colonial Upper Class" handouts; attached
- Think, Pair & Share Activity, attached
- Primary Source Activity, attached
- Optional: Parent/Student Discussion Topic, attached
- Small candies/prizes for the "Experiencing Unjust Taxation" warm up
- "Regulators: Justified Protestors or Lawless Rioters," reading attached
- The Colonial Observer, assignment attached
- Optional Teacher Resource: "The Regulators," from ANCHOR: <https://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/regulators-introduction>

- Optional Teacher Resource: [Crowds and Soldiers in Revolutionary North Carolina: The Culture of Violence in Riot and War \(Southern Dissent\)](#), by Dr. Wayne Lee

Duration

60-90 minutes (Activities can be split over two class periods, or aspects of the lesson omitted so that all information can be covered in one class period.)

Procedure

Day 1

Upper Class vs. the Back Country

1. At the start of class, explain to students that they are going to be exploring escalating conflicts in colonial Carolina, some of which were attributed to the economic and social differences in the people who were living in the colony. Go over the information on [slide 2](#) with students and provide time for them to examine the map of North Carolina, ensuring they get a firm geographical sense of Carolina in the late 1700s.
2. Next, provide half of the class with the attached “Life in the Back Country” and the other half with “Life in the Colonial Upper Class.” Instruct students to take 5-7 minutes to consider the prompt then write their imaginative response. Remind them that they should assume the persona of the person pictured on the sheet given to them, and write using the pronoun “I.” Tell students to be prepared to share.
3. After students have had ample time to write, project [slide 3](#) and solicit volunteers to read their first person accounts, alternating between a back country response and an upper class response. After approximately 4-6 responses have been shared, create a “T” chart (with one column for Back Country and one column for Upper Class) and ask students to share the differences they heard between the two. Further ask students to examine the images pictured (this will be their first opportunity to look at the images provided to the other half of the class) and ask them to note additional physical differences. Keep the chart posted to refer back to throughout the lesson, since such differences are key to the Regulator conflict.

Population Changes, Sectionalism & Corruption in Colonial North Carolina

4. Project [slide 4](#) and explain to students that as they just heard, in 1700s colonial North Carolina, vast sectional differences existed. Go over the information on the slide and further discuss:
 - What is sectionalism? (Facilitate the answer that sectionalism is a strong loyalty to a region or section where a person lives, as well as its way of life.)
 - What differences and challenges were at play between the east and the west (back country) of colonial North Carolina? (Encourage students to consider the differences in land, the differences in people and cultures who settled each region – including those they noted in the warm up, differences in resources and economic interests, etc.)
 - What types of sectionalism still exist within our state today? (A great example is loyalty to local universities and sports teams.)
5. Discuss the information on [slides 5 & 6](#) regarding corruption in the Carolina colony. Next, instruct students to partner up, providing each set with the attached Think, Pair & Share prompt. Project [slide 7](#) and read the prompt out loud, explaining to partners that they should consider this predicament for several minutes then discuss possible responses together:
 - You are a hardworking farmer who lives in the back country. You have a small colonial homestead, which includes a one room cabin. You live here with your wife and 7 children. You’ve been working 14 hours a day for the past year trying to keep up with the debt of the purchase of your farm. (You purchased it from a speculator last year and have since learned that you paid more than it was actually worth.) Your days are spent trying to keep pests away from your crops, repairing fences and buildings, hunting for food, and doing everything in your power to keep food on the table for your

family. You are a good citizen – you vote and you pay your taxes as demanded by the royal government. However, even though you paid your taxes to the sheriff last week, he recently returned insisting you still owe money. He claims he has no record of your payment, and that if you do not turn over more money, you will have to answer to the judge. You have no more money to pay, but you feel sure the court will see that this is a mistake. A neighbor insists that you need a lawyer, otherwise it will be difficult to prove your innocence. Even though you have no money to spend on a lawyer, you figure a small fee for legal representation will be better than repaying all of your taxes. You hire a lawyer and go to court. However, the judge ends up ruling in favor of the sheriff, claiming that if the record shows you owe the taxes then you must pay them. At the end of your hearing, your lawyer also demands twice as much money than the fee you originally agreed upon, claiming that your case required more hours of work than he originally thought. You are furious. You feel that your hard earned money is being stolen by corrupt people in power. In talking to several neighboring farmers, you learn they have had similar experiences. What do you do?

After brainstorming, partners should summarize what they feel is their best idea for a course of action and be prepared to share it with the class.

6. Once students have had 6-8 minutes to think and discuss, ask partners to share their ideas for possible actions/responses to this situation. Note each in a list and make sure the class discusses the potential advantages and consequences to the various ideas. Once all ideas have been compiled, ask students to identify any similarities or outliers among their answers. Discuss with the class which of the list they feel would be most effective and why. To do this, teachers may want to provide each students with 1-2 sticker dots and have them vote for what they feel is the top (or top 2) effective responses in the list by placing their sticker beside that line in the list. After everyone has voted, discuss what responses students selected as most effective, as well as which potential responses had no votes. Discuss why this might be the case. Further discuss which responses are utilized in today's society when citizens are frustrated with their government.
7. Finally, point out to students that this scenario, as unjust as it may be, was reality for many colonial citizens during 1760s North Carolina. Share the information on [slide 8](#) and further discuss:
 - Why do you think colonial citizens began resorting to threats and violent behavior?

Tryon's Palace

8. Move on to [slide 9](#) and ask students to examine the image:
 - What do you see here? How would you describe this structure?
 - What year do you think this was built? What evidence makes you think this?
 - Who might live here? What kind of life does the resident have? What types of activities do you think would take place here?
 - Think about our warm up exercise and how we discussed the differences in the East and the backcountry. What would these two types of people think of this place?
 - What might this building symbolize?
9. Project [slide 10](#) and let students know that this building was constructed in New Bern, NC in 1767-70 for the North Carolina governor of the time, William Tryon. Explain to students that "Tryon's Palace" was to be paid for by the people via a poll tax. Tryon's poll tax charged each person, rich and poor alike, at the same rate. Discuss:
 - Based on what you have learned about life in the back country, how does this home differ from what you would be living in as a farmer?
 - How do you think back country residents felt when they learned they would be footing the bill for this lavish home?

- What do you think of Tryon’s poll tax? Should colonial citizens have been responsible for paying for the governor’s lavish home? Why or why not?
 - The poll tax required everyone during colonial times to pay the same amount of tax, regardless of whether they were rich or poor. Today, this taxation strategy is called a “flat tax.” Do you agree with this taxation strategy? Should people of upper, middle, and lower level incomes be taxed the same amount? Why or why not? What alternatives for taxation would you propose?
 - How does Tryon’s strategy compare to how American citizens are taxed today? What is your opinion regarding today’s system of taxation?
 - Consider the location of the Governor’s home. How long do you think it would have taken to travel from Hillsborough (the seat of the back country) to New Bern (where Tryon’s Palace, and thus the central location of government business, was located)? Why might the distance between these locations have further angered back country residents
 - Consider that by today’s travel standards, including vehicles and paved roads, the travel time between Hillsborough and New Bern is two hours, 45 minutes. This distance would have taken days to travel during colonial times.
 - What do you think Tryon’s Palace symbolized to colonists?
 - How do you think this impacted the resentment, anger and violence already present in the colony?
- For more information regarding Tryon’s Palace to share with students, including its budget and cost, go to <https://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/cost-tryon-palace>
- **Optional homework assignment:** Distribute the attached Parent/Student Discussion worksheet regarding taxes. Instruct students to discuss the issue of taxation with a tax-paying adult for homework then allow them to summarize and discuss their conversations the following day in class.

The Regulators Organize

- 10.** Tell students that the frustration felt by colonists understandably continued to increase, particularly since the government was ineffective in combatting its own corruption. Discuss:
- What choices do citizens have for voicing their displeasure when they are upset with the decisions of their local, state, or federal government today? (Note student responses in a list, discussing issues such as voting; signing a petition; writing a letter or sending an e-mail; attending a public hearing, City Council meeting, County Commissioner meeting, etc.
 - Which of these potential responses were also possible during colonial times? Were there additional responses colonial citizens had that are not available to us today?
 - Which of these types of responses, then or now, do you think are most effective and why?
- 11.** Let students know that the colonists came up with an idea for addressing their grievances. Hand out the attached primary source document and without sharing any information about it, instruct partners to read it together to determine how colonists responded, and to discuss the questions provided. Once students have reviewed and discussed the document, talk about it as a class, ensuring students know that this document, dated January 1768, is a “subscription” to a political organization — a list of men signing on to membership in the organization. It is one of the earliest documents that survives from the “Regulation.” The subscribers agreed to resist paying taxes and fees they considered unlawful and to petition their representatives to change laws they considered unfair.
- What is your first impression of this document? What particular words, lines or phrases first struck you when reading and why?
 - In the first two items, how do the men say they will respond to unlawful taxes?
 - What do you think they mean when they say they will “shew a dislike to it & bear open testimony against it” regarding taxation?
 - What sorts of interactions do you imagine took place when tax collectors knocked at the colonists’ doors?

- In the 4th point, what sort of “necessary expenses” do you suppose the Regulators might have had in carrying out their pledge?
- What is the overall purpose of this document?
- How do you think local officials reacted when they found out about this newly formed organization?
- Evaluate the decision of the frustrated colonists to organize into an official group. Is this an effective way to handle problems? Why or why not?
- Based on this primary source, how serious do you think they were about standing up for their rights? What evidence makes you think this?
- This group called themselves “The Regulators.” Why do you think they chose this name?
 - The “Regulators” took their name from the idea that they were trying to “regulate” the government. Here, regulate means to make regular or correct — so, the subscribers intended to *correct* the grievances and abuses of power suffered by colonists. *Source:* <https://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/regulators>

12. Share additional information about the Regulators using [slide 11](#) with students and further discuss:

- How would you characterize the various ways the Regulators attempted to let their grievances be known?
- How would you characterize the government’s response? How do you imagine this made the Regulators feel?

13. Project [slide 12](#) and have students respond, either as an individual writing response or as a Think, Pair, Share activity.

- Imagine your friend, who is a Regulator, tells you about all of this and asks for your advice on what to do next. What are some possible recommendations you could make? What do you predict the Regulators actually did next? Provide a few minutes for some students to share their thoughts with the class.

“Dear Governor Tryon...”

14. Tell students that for the remainder of class and homework, they are to imagine that they themselves are a Regulator. Project [slide 13](#) and tell students to write a letter to Governor Tryon (3 paragraph minimum) stating the reasons you are unhappy with the colonial government. Tell him what changes you expect and what will happen if your demands aren’t met. Ensure students understand that they must be accurate with the issues the letter addresses (i.e., noting actual issues the Regulators had and being historically accurate in terms of the things referenced in the letter). Students can be creative in the Regulator personality that comes through in the letter. Students may also want to be artistic in the design of their letter, given that it is from the 1770s (i.e., age/weather the paper, may the ink appear to have been written with Quill pen, etc.)

➤ **Optional homework assignment:** Another homework option is to distribute the attached Parent/Student Discussion worksheet regarding taxes. Instruct students to discuss the issue of taxation with a tax-paying adult for homework then allow them to summarize and discuss their conversations the following day in class.

Day 2

Warm Up: Experiencing Unjust Taxation

15. As a warm up or experiential activity, tell students they are going to be able to earn “shillings” by answering review questions correctly. They can use their “shillings” to purchase candy. Tell students each question they answer correctly will earn them one Post-It-Note, which represents 5 shillings. Write the names of several types of candy on the board, noting the cost at 15 shillings each. Take approximately 10 minutes to pose review questions of your choice and try to ensure as many students as possible receive 5-15 shillings (1-3 Post-Its.) However, do not let any receive over 15 shillings/3 Post-Its. Once you have ended

the question period, get students excited by announcing that it is time to purchase their candy! However, tell them that before they can make any purchases, every student has to pay a tax. Explain that you want a fancy, new desk made of mahogany wood and their “taxes” will help you pay for it. Tell students that the tax is due immediately and must be paid before making any purchases. Explain that the tax is “only” 5 shillings, “a bargain.” If they do not have enough shillings to pay the tax, tell them they will be sent to the principal’s office. Once they have paid their taxes, they can buy and eat as much candy as they want.

➤ *Teacher note:* If you think your students will be clever and try to share their shillings with one another and then afford candy, instruct them to write their name on the Post-Its upon receipt, and let them know up front that their Post-Its are “non-transferable.”

16. Since no students will have enough shillings to pay their tax and buy their candy, and others won’t even have enough to pay their tax, you will likely have some frustrated class members. Harass them for a few moments regarding paying their taxes, making dramatic threats of punishment. Finally, stop the exercise and let students know you have set them up. (Teachers may want to provide a small treat to the class to compensate for “tricking” them.) Ask students to reflect in discussion:

- How did you feel when you found out your hard earned money would be spent on a new teacher’s desk?
- For those of you who could not pay your tax (not to mention afford any candy,) how would you feel being punished, just because you didn’t have enough money?
- If you were able to pay the tax, but then unable to buy candy, how did you feel and why?
- How does this connect to the situation we discussed in class yesterday? (Use this as a jumping off point for reviewing what students learned about the beginning of the Regulator movement in the previous class.)

17. As an additional review to the previous day’s lesson, several volunteers can read their Regulator letters to Governor Tryon, or, students can get into small groups and each read their letters.

The Regulators Escalate Their Actions

13. Next, project [slide 14](#) and let students know that this illustrates one of the next steps in the Regulator movement. Ask students to discuss:

- What do you see? Point out some of the first details in this painting that you notice.
- What differences do you notice regarding the people pictured in this painting? Who do you think they are? What various emotions might they be experiencing and what makes you think this?
- What is taking place and what caused this action to occur? What is the story of this painting?

14. Tell students that the image represents Governor Tryon and the militia as they fight with the Regulators at the Battle of Alamance, which they will be learning more about. Move on to [slide 15](#) and explain to students that with all attempts at peaceful resolutions ignored, the Regulators escalated their actions. Discuss:

- Why did the Regulators take the law into their own hands? Were they justified in doing so? Why or why not?
- Regardless of the justification, what can be dangerous about taking the law into your own hands?
- Do you think the Regulators make the right choice becoming violent in some of their interactions? Why or why not?

Regulators: Justified Protestors or Lawless Rioters?

15. Move on to [slide 16](#) and tell students they are going to focus on a particular event the Regulators were involved in, which some ended up characterizing as a riot. Ask students what comes to mind when they consider a riot, noting their responses in a list. Next, hand out the attached reading, “Regulators: Justified

Protestors or Lawless Rioters.” Instruct students to read the article and answer the corresponding questions.

- Why was Edmund Fanning targeted by the Regulators?
- How do you think the Regulators felt when Fanning was not punished or convicted?
- What choices did the Regulators have at this point? Why do you think they finally responded violently?
- Why do you think the majority of the public was unable to understand the Regulators’ perspective?
- What role did the media (newspapers) play in shaping public opinion regarding Regulator actions? Is this an issue in today’s society? Explain.
- How can you ensure that you are being a critical consumer of information provided by the media today?
- Would you characterize the events of 1770 as a riot? Why or why not?

The Battle of Alamance & the End of the Regulator Movement

16. Tell students that they will be coming back to the issue of whether the Regulators deserved to be characterized as a mob of rioters or justified protestors, but you first want to talk about what occurred at the Battle of Alamance. Go over the information on slides 17-19 and discuss:
- On May 16, the Regulators sent word to Governor Tryon that they wanted to meet with him and talk over their grievances. Tryon refused. Do you think this was the right decision on his part? Why or why not?
 - When Tryon instead told the Regulators to surrender, their response was “Fire and be damned!” Why do you think they responded in this way? Should they have responded differently? Explain.
 - Summarize and evaluate the government’s actions after the Regulators lost the battle. Why do you think they hung some of the Regulators? Why do you think they let some Regulators go?
 - Why did the government require an oath of allegiance? In your opinion, does such an oath mean anything? Explain.
 - Why do you think the Regulator Movement ended after this? How do you think the defeated Regulators that were left alive and pardoned truly felt?
 - Should and could the course of these events, which escalated over several years, have gone differently? Explain.
 - Are there similar frustrations present in society today as there were during the Regulator movement? (i.e., distrust of government, dislike of taxes, government corruption, etc.) How do citizens deal with such frustrations?
 - Discuss not only the civic ways in which people respond, but also violent responses. Discuss with students how one determines when violence is justified (if ever) and when it is not.
 - These years became known as the War of Regulation, with the Battle of Alamance marking the end of the war. Could such a war happen in the United States (and/or in North Carolina) today? Explain.
17. As a culminating assignment, provide students with the attached “The Colonial Observer” assignment, for which they will write an editorial newspaper article arguing that the Regulators were either a group of justified protestors or a violent, riotous mob. Let students know the due date and whether or not they will be sharing their work with class (i.e. in small groups.)

Name: _____

Life in the Colonial Upper Class



Examine the images above carefully, one of a man and the other of his home. Based on the evidence you see, as well as your own inferences, imagine what a day in the life of the man pictured would be like. How does he spend each day, from morning until night? What does he do, think, feel, worry about, hope for, etc.? After considering this, write a first person account (in the voice of the person pictured, using “I...”) of a typical day, or something that might happen during the day, noting accompanying emotions, thoughts, actions, etc.

Think, Pair & Share...

You are a hardworking farmer who lives in the back country. You have a small colonial homestead, which includes a one room cabin, where you live here with your wife and 7 children. You've been working 14 hours a day for the past year trying to keep up with the debt of the purchase of your farm. (You purchased it from a speculator last year and have since learned that you paid more than it was actually worth.) Your days are spent trying to keep pests away from your crops, repairing fences and buildings, hunting for food, and doing everything in your power to keep food on the table for your family. You are an honest citizen and you pay your taxes as demanded by the royal government. However, even though you paid your taxes to the sheriff last week, he recently returned insisting you still owe. He claims he has no record of your payment, and that if you do not turn over more money, you will have to answer to the judge. You have no more money to pay, but you feel sure the court will see that this is a mistake.

A neighbor insists that you need a lawyer, otherwise it will be difficult to prove your innocence. Even though you have no money to spend on a lawyer, you figure going into debt for a small fee for legal representation will be better than repaying all of your taxes. You hire a lawyer and go to court. However, the judge ends up ruling in favor of the sheriff, claiming that if the record shows you owe the taxes then you must pay them. At the end of your hearing, your lawyer also demands twice as much money than the fee you originally agreed upon, claiming that your case required more hours of work than he originally thought.

You are furious. You feel that your hard earned money is being stolen by corrupt people in power. In talking to several neighboring farmers, you learn they have had similar experiences. **What do you do?**

Consider this predicament for several minutes then discuss possible responses with your partner. What choices/options do you have? What are the possible advantages and consequences for these various possibilities? After brainstorming, note what the two of you think is your best course of action below. Be prepared to share with the class.

Name: _____

Read the following primary source document with your partner and discuss the questions that follow.

We the under written subscribers do voluntarily agree to form ourselves into an Association to assemble ourselves for conferences for regulating publick Grievances & abuses of Power in the following particulars with others of like nature that may occur

1. That we will pay no Taxes until we are satisfied they are agreeable to Law and Applied to the purposes therein mentioned unless we cannot help and are forced.
2. That we will pay no Officer any more fees than the Law allows unless we are obliged to it and then to shew a dislike to it & bear open testimony against it.
3. That we will attend our Meetings of Conference as often as we conveniently can or is necessary in order to consult our representatives on the amendment of such Laws as may be found grievous or unnecessary and to choose more suitable men than we have heretofore done for Burgesses and Vestry men and to Petition His Excellency our Governor the Honble the Council and the Worshipful House of representatives His Majesty in Parliament &c. for redress of such Grievances as in the course of this undertaking may occur and to inform one another & to learn, know and enjoy all the Priviledges & Liberties that are allowed us and were settled on us by our worthy Ancestors the founders of the present Constitution in order to preserve it in its ancient Foundation that it may stand firm & unshaken.
4. That we will contribute to Collections for defraying necessary expences attending the work according to our abilities.
5. That in Cases of differences in Judgment we will submit to the Majority of our Body.

To all which We do solemnly swear or being a Quaker or otherwise scrupulous in Conscience of the common Oath do solemnly affirm that We will stand true and faithful to this cause until We bring them to a true regulation according to the true intent & meaning of it in the judgment of the Majority.

Regulators Advertisement No. 4, January 1768, from the *Colonial and State Records of North Carolina*, Volume 7, pp. 671–672. Source: <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-revolution/4246> (Source Link not working)

DISCUSS:

- What is your first impression of this document? What particular words, lines or phrases first struck you when reading and why?
- In the first two items, how do the men say they will respond to unlawful taxes?

- What do you think they mean when they say they will “shew a dislike to it & bear open testimony against it” regarding taxation?
- What sorts of interactions do you imagine took place when tax collectors knocked at the colonists’ doors?
- In the 4th point, what sort of “necessary expenses” do you suppose the Regulators might have had in carrying out their pledge?
- What is the overall purpose of this document?
- How do you think local officials reacted when they found out about this newly formed organization?
- Evaluate the decision of the frustrated colonists to organize into an official group. Is this an effective way to handle problems? Why or why not?
- Based on this primary source, how serious do you think they were about standing up for their rights? What evidence makes you think this?
- This group called themselves “The Regulators.” Why do you think they chose this name?
- What questions do you have about this document or the organizers of this group?

Parent/Student Discussion Topic

Discuss the following issue with an adult. Students should then sum up your discussion in the space provided, noting similarities or differences in your opinions.

During the 1700's, the colonial North Carolina governor, William Tryon, enacted a **poll tax** that greatly angered colonial NC citizens. This tax charged each person – rich and poor alike – at the same rate. Today, our government taxes citizens at different bracketed rates, often based on income and number of dependents. Many citizens in modern society also think this is unfair.

What do you think? Should people of upper, middle, and lower level incomes be taxed the same, as by Governor Tryon, or do you agree with the way we are taxed today? Do you have another philosophy on how citizens should be taxed?

Students, sum up your conversation with an adult below, as well as your personal thoughts on this issue:

Regulators: Justified Protestors or Lawless Rioters?

After their complaints regarding government corruption were repeatedly ignored, and their attempts at reasonable and peaceful negotiations with government officials failed, the Regulators escalated their actions.

One person targeted as part of this escalation was Hillsborough official Edmund Fanning, who the Regulators believed was the epitome of political corruption. Fanning received a law degree in 1759 and then moved to Hillsborough, NC to begin a political career. His friendship with Governor Tryon helped him become a prestigious and profitable lawyer. He was appointed Crown Attorney in 1761 and in 1763 he became the clerk of the Superior Court of Orange County. He was eventually appointed as the Associate Justice of North Carolina. Fanning became a target of Regulator frustrations, since he was known to abuse his tax collection duties and was thought to be embezzling collected monies. By 1768, Regulators were demanding documentation for Fanning's collections; they wanted information concerning the construction of Tryon's Palace in New Bern, one of the many Crown actions they believed to be unnecessary for their welfare. They accused Edmund Fanning of corruption and extortion, and even though he was a friend of the Governor, Tryon allowed Fanning to be tried on September 1, 1768.

Regulators served on the jury and gathered outside the courthouse to demand the return of funds allegedly taken illegally for Crown purposes. However, the judge ruled that there was not enough evidence against Fanning to convict him. Though the militia was present and the Regulators frustrated, no violence occurred. The militia lacked a legal excuse to attack, for events were directed exclusively at Fanning's actions and fell within the bounds of traditional protest. However, Tryon assembled a council in New Bern to plan ways to gather support for Crown policies in the back country in an attempt to diminish the Regulator movement. Protesting colonists and Regulator members were required to pledge their loyalty to the Crown and respect for law and order.

September, 1770

Regulator opposition to Tryon and Fanning continued, however, culminating in the Hillsborough "Riot" of 1770. After the 1768 events, the General Assembly continued to ignore Regulators' problems and the courts continued to anger them. Protests seemed not to matter. The Regulators, therefore, refused to pay taxes. Violence soon erupted.

On September 22, 1770, Regulators assembled in Hillsborough to disrupt the court and bring attention to their political demands. All was peaceful until September 25, when Regulators, armed with clubs and whips, packed the courthouse and asked to be jury members. They debated for approximately thirty minutes, before the court continued without regarding their requests. Outside the courtroom, frustrated Regulators attacked a lawyer named Williams (first name unknown) and then reentered the courthouse, seized Edmund Fanning, and dragged him from the courthouse by his heels, banging his head on each step. Both men eventually escaped, but were soon found. Under duress, both made agreements with Regulators to stand trial. Under duress, too, the judge at the time promised to try the men the following day. That night, however, he fled town. The judge's escape prompted frustrated Regulators to again target Fanning. They ran him out of town, plundered his home, marched with his effigy through Hillsborough, destroyed a church bell donated by him, and ended their violence by breaking merchants' house windows.

These actions did not amuse government officials. They were especially upset over the closing of the court and called the Regulator actions of September 1770 a “riot.” Yet, the actions of the Regulators reveal how riots of the 1700s defy modern-day definitions of riot. According to historian Wayne E. Lee, “They [Regulators’ actions] were legitimate in a way that uncontrolled havoc is not.” The Regulators acted out of a need to have specific demands met. Fanning could have been killed, but he was not. Regulators could have destroyed the courthouse, but they did not. They did not practice indiscriminate violence; rather, they called for a restoration of fairness and justice.

Ultimately, the Regulator Movement was a struggle between mostly lower-class citizens, who made up the majority of the backcountry population of North and South Carolina, and the wealthy planter elite, who comprised about 5% of the population, yet maintained almost total control of the government. Thus, in eastern North Carolina, a modern definition of riot emerged, largely because wealthy and powerful individuals (such as government officials and absentee landowners), feared the social-leveling effect of the riot. Sensational news stories overemphasized the violence. Reports ignored the Regulators’ call for order and not a revolution. News stories demonized the Regulators, painting them as traitors and outlaws. Such reports fostered a willingness among many North Carolinians to support the government in suppressing the Regulator Rebellion, with force if necessary, and even to volunteer for the militia that would eventually be used against them.

In response, the General Assembly passed a so-called **Riot Act**. This measure gave Governor Tryon the authority, and the funds, to march from the seat of government in New Bern to the Piedmont and subdue the Regulators with military force. Along the way, Tryon gathered militia forces, made up of ordinary men, most of them farmers, required to serve when called upon by the governor. Many leading Sons of Liberty even volunteered as officers in the governor’s army. It is ironic that these men felt it was their right to protest British injustice, but they denied Piedmont farmers the right to do the same at home. At the **Battle of Alamance (1771)**, the militia finally quelled the Regulator protest.

Sources: <http://www.northcarolinahistory.org/encyclopedia/174/entry/>;
http://uncpress.unc.edu/nc_encyclopedia/regulator.html

Answer:

- Why was Edmund Fanning targeted by the Regulators?
- How do you think the Regulators felt when Fanning was not punished or convicted?
- What choices did the Regulators have at this point? Why do you think they finally responded violently?
- Would you characterize the events of 1770 as a riot? Why or why not?