

V FROM RESISTANCE TO REBELLION

former were mostly black, the latter mostly white). Rumors of Negro plots and insurrections, more fanciful than substantive, circulated throughout New Jersey in 1775 and 1776. As a result, steps were taken to disarm servants and slaves, prevent them from gathering in large groups, and restrict their activities at night. Although the problem was not so serious in the middle colonies as in the South, the concentration of sizable numbers of blacks in Bergen, Monmouth, and Somerset Counties did prove worrisome to local Jersey Whigs.

5. Inflated prices charged by merchants to profit from the shortages caused by the boycott of British goods was a persistent problem for committeemen in all parts of the province.

6. There was widespread opposition to inoculation in colonial America, the more so during times of public crisis because of fears that exposure to disease might start an epidemic.

4 Daniel Coxe to Cortlandt Skinner

[*NJA*, 10:654-55. This is a copy of Coxe's letter enclosed by Governor William Franklin in his letter to Lord Dartmouth of August 2. See Doc. 7.]

The increased intensity of the protest-turned-rebellion and the outbreak of actual fighting between Britons and Americans struck fear in the hearts of many Jerseymen, especially those who held positions with the royal government or occupied the highest rungs of the socioeconomic ladder. To Daniel Coxe (see Sec. I, Doc. 1), who fit both descriptions, the growing rebellion was an intensely personal matter: he feared a social as well as a political revolution, an upheaval that could utterly destroy his privileged place in society. In other words, the activities of the rebels angered ideological conservatives like Thomas Bradbury Chandler (see Sec. VIII, Doc. 2) and Frederick Smyth (see Sec. IV, Doc. 10) but frightened men like Coxe and Cortlandt Skinner (see Doc. 14).

July 4th 1775

Dear Sir

Such is the present infatuated Temper of the Times, and the Minds of Men daily increasing in Madness and Phrensey, that they are ready to enter upon the most daring and desperate attempts. A prostration of Law and Government naturally opens the Door for the licentious and abandoned to exercise every malevolent Inclination. What then have men of Property not to fear and apprehend, and particularly those who happen and are known to differ in sentiment from the generality? They become a mark at once for popular Fury, and those who are

NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

esteemed Friends to Government denoted for Destruction. They are not even allowed to preserve a neutrality, and passiveness becomes a Crime. Those who are not for us are against us is the Cry, and Publick necessity calls for & will justify their Destruction, both Life & Property. In short those deemed Tories have every thing to fear from the political persecuting Spirit now prevailing. The Lex Talionis¹ is talked of should Genl. Gage² exercise any Severity on those Prisoners lately taken in forcing the Entrenchments on Bunker's Hill and every man who may be deemed disaffected to the present measures of America must make atonement for their sufferings. This I can assure you is mentioned as a matter determined upon, and I doubt not in the least of its being put in Execution should the General proceed against those unhappy people as is expected he will, in Terrorem.³ This is an impending Storm that ought, if possible, to be averted, and could Genl. Gage but be informed of the probable, and, as I really believe, a certain, consequence of such a proceeding, I should imagine it might, as it ought to, be an inducement for him to suspend taking any present measures against them, otherwise than as keeping them safe as Prisoners. It is a matter of such importance to all of us that I think the General should be immediately advertised of it some how, but how is the question? Was a safe communication open by the Post I should not hesitate one moment to write to him, but that is impossible I believe. I can think of no better method than for the Governor to write, and from whom it will come with more propriety, and, perhaps, some opportunity may be known to or contrived by him that we are ignorant of this way. I write to you rather than the Governor as less suspicious, and beg you will communicate to him my apprehensions, they are serious and ought to be attended to. If a Blow should be once struck anywhere, you must know that it will be a sufficient precedent to carry it through, and must come to your own door as well as your Friends and therefore think every precaution should be taken to avert the Horrid evil. I entreat you then to attend to it while it is possible, or perhaps it may be too late bye and bye. Your own prudence will dictate to you the propriety of keeping this Letter to yourself should it get Safe to you a Risque I must run by the Post as no other opportunity offers.

I am Dr. Sir
Yours sincerely, in haste,
D.C.

1. *Lex talionis*: law of retaliation.
2. General Thomas Gage, commander in chief of the British army in North America from 1763 to 1775 and, since April of 1774, governor of Massachusetts Bay.
3. *In terrorem*: as a warning.