

NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

1. The date is misprinted as 1764 in *NJA*.
2. The journals of the New Jersey assembly make no mention of either the presentation or consideration of the Bay Colony's proposal.
3. It would appear that the assemblymen regarded the Sugar Act of 1764, rather than the Stamp Act, as the primary concern of the Massachusetts legislature; clearly the former statute would have a greater impact on mercantile New England than on agrarian New Jersey.
4. A year later, on June 27, 1766, the assembly took exception to Odgen's account, arguing that because the circular letter was presented after some members had gone home it was not considered by a "full house." Moreover, the legislators charged that Ogden had at first "agreed to send, nay urged, that Members should be sent to the intended Congress, but changed his Opinion upon some Advice that was given to him" and declared that "this sudden Change of Opinion, displeased many of the House." Hinting at collusion between Governor William Franklin and the Speaker, the assemblymen denied that the Massachusetts message had been given "deliberate Consideration" or that they had "unanimously" declined participation in the Congress. *Votes and Proceedings, June 11-28, 1766* (Woodbridge, 1766), p. 49. However, Jacob Spicer, veteran assemblyman from Cape May, explained the refusal of the house to send delegates to New York by the "expectation" that Great Britain would "find her Trade Cramped" as a result of the "restraint and duties" laid on the colonies and that "her own Interest might incline her to mediate a reformation." Spicer is saying what was said in document two—that the commercial colonies would be most affected and that their response would induce Britain to rescind or modify the measure. (Spicer to William Bayard, July 2, 1765, Letter Book, Spicer Papers, New Jersey Historical Society.)

4 "Caesariensis" on Stamp Collectors and the Stamp Act Congress

[*New-York Gazette; or, the Weekly Post-Boy*, September 12, 1765.]

Throughout August and September the men assigned to the crucial office of stamp distributor for the various colonies succumbed to public pressure and resigned. On September 2, Philadelphian William Coxe, who owed his appointment as stamp distributor for New Jersey to the influence of Governor William Franklin and his famous father Benjamin Franklin, quit his post. It is unlikely that "Caesariensis" knew of the resignation when he penned his letter; most likely his commentary was intended, directly or indirectly, to effect Coxe's removal. While most Jerseymen shared his opposition to the Stamp Act, few people would have seconded the writer's radical assertions that Parliament

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had no legislative authority over America and that the crown was the lone constitutional link between the mother country and the colonies.

September 3, 1765

Every real friend of liberty, who understands the constitution of the American colonies, must receive great pleasure from the accounts lately published in the Newspapers respecting the resignation of several of the stamp officers. The apparent necessity of their conduct, must be a sufficient excuse to the authority by which they were appointed; and the important effects which such a step may have upon the liberties of America, in its present alarming situation, will make it appear meritorious in the eyes of their countrymen: it is therefore much to be wished, that this laudable example may be universally imitated. The advice given in the New-York Gazette, of last week, to all the stamp officers, who have not yet resigned,¹ is certainly very wholesome, and appears to be given in the spirit of *Christian Orthodoxy*; but I view this resignation in so important a light, that I cannot but subjoin another argument to those made use of by my friend; and it is this, if every stamp officer, upon the continent of North-America, does not take example by those who have already resigned, it will inevitably produce a disunion among the colonies, which, of all things, must be the most fatal; for let it be depended upon, that hereafter the conduct of the stamp officer will give the true political complexion of every colony; if the stamp officer cannot execute his office with any degree of comfort and reputation, and thereupon resigns, then it will be evident that the inhabitants of that colony are sensible of the imposition, and spurn at it; if on the other hand, they supinely submit to the unconstitutional exaction, and suffer the unrighteous taskmasters to live at ease, it may be certainly concluded, that the inhabitants of such colony are insensible, and see not, or at least regard not the difference between freedom and slavery; this will necessarily create contempt and hatred: the submissive colony will not only appear to the others, in the most groveling and despicable light, but also, with great propriety, will be esteemed amongst its most formidable enemies; no possible means can be devised so effectual to enslave the whole, as for a part servilely to put their necks to the Yoke. It is therefore evident that every stamp officer, who does not wish the total subversion of the present constitution of North-America, ought immediately to resign his office. I am more especially interested in the prosperity of the colony of New-Jersey, where I live, and have the happiness of some property. And altho' I glory in being a member of a community so submissive to government, and which has such loyalty and affection for the person, family and government of his present most gracious majesty king George the third; yet it would pain me to the Heart, to see this hitherto happy province, tamely submit to be enslaved by its fellow-subjects. It is true, our legislative body did not judge it expedient to come into the measures proposed the last year, by some of the provinces, for petitioning the parliament of Great-Britain. What was the reason of such omission, I cannot determine, as I am not a member of the legislature; but I have always commended their conduct in that instance; for it is to me a plain and evident absurdity to petition any body of men against the passing a law to bind me, when at the same time, I conceive that such law, if passed *by them*, cannot bind me. If the inhabitants of the moon, for instance, should happen to

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hear that the commons of Great-Britain had resolved *nem. con.*² that their vellum should be stamped; no one would expect them to petition the said commons against it. And the fate of the petitions which were sent, is quite sufficient to shew our brethren of the other colonies, that they, in the form they were sent, might better have been spared, or at least, that our omitting a step in New-Jersey, which was of no service to those who thought proper to take it, ought to secure our Assembly from some unkind insinuations which have appeared in print on that occasion. I am not for silence, or slavish submission; no, let us act like Freemen, like Englishmen, who know the limits of their freedom. Let us petition our gracious sovereign, whose paternal regard, is equally extended to his American, as his other subjects; his authority we glory in submitting to; he is king of Great-Britain; and blessed be God, king of America too: but the parliament of Great-Britain is not the legislature of America; we have by our constitution complete legislation independent of the lords and commons of Great-Britain, of which the king, by his several governors, is the head. I hope all the Provinces will unite in sending their several humble petitions to his majesty, without delay; whose royal heart, I doubt not, will be touched with reasonable complaint of so great a body of his faithful subjects, and that ample redress will be given us; but in such petitions let all submission to, dependence upon, or connection with, the commons, and lords of Great-Britain, in a legislative way, be carefully and absolutely disclaimed. In the mean time, all ye stamp officers resign: resign, as you will answer the contrary at your Peril, to your sovereign lords and masters, the incensed mob.

CAESARIENSIS³

1. On August 30 the *Gazette* issued a call for all stamp collectors to resign their commissions.
2. *nemine contradicente*: unanimously, without a dissenting vote.
3. The sentiments expressed in this essay correspond strikingly to those contained in a letter from Richard Stockton to Robert Ogden on September 13, 1765 (see Doc. 5). Is Stockton "Caesariensis"?

5 Richard Stockton to Robert Ogden

[Revolutionary Era Manuscripts, 49, New Jersey Historical Society.]

Support for the proposed Stamp Act Congress grew steadily during the summer of 1765. By the end of September seven colonies—Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and South Carolina—plus the Three Lower Counties on the Delaware (now the state of Delaware) had made arrangements to send delegates to the conference. The