

IV

The Die is Cast

In the course of a burgeoning rebellion, rising political temperatures caused positions to solidify during the early months of 1775. For the first time opposition to the popular front began to coalesce. Governor William Franklin (Doc. 2) as well as private citizens (Doc. 6) called upon the legislature to resolve the dispute between Britain and America, which had escalated to the point where armed confrontation was a distinct possibility. Men who had previously supported protest against specific pieces of parliamentary legislation now shrunk from a clash with the mother country over the issue of sovereignty (Doc. 1). Quakers, caught in an increasingly untenable conflict between religious persuasions and secular politics, opted for a position of prudent neutrality (Doc. 3). Some defenders of the royal regime like Chief Justice Frederick Smyth publicly reminded the people of the virtues of law and order and the consequences of civil disorder (Doc. 10), while others challenged the actions and arguments of the protesters (Doc. 8) and called for unity in countering the challenge to imperial authority (Doc. 5).

In spite of deepening divisions among the populace, the resistance movement continued to grow. Whatever their misgivings, most Jerseymen were convinced of the need for united opposition to the actions of the British government (Doc. 9). The New Jersey assembly, hoping for an accommodation of Anglo-American differences and yet wishing to maintain intercolonial solidarity, endorsed the measures of the Continental Congress (Doc. 4) and sent a catalogue of colonial grievances coupled with a plea for reconciliation to the king (Doc. 7). But despite the apparent success of their efforts, even the most ardent Whigs were uneasy. Elias Boudinot, for one, feared that the excesses of the more radical citizens would discredit the popular movement or intensify the conservative backlash (Doc. 11). And people of all political persuasions feared that the imperial dispute would move from the halls of government to the

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battlefield, that Great Britain would seek a military rather than a political solution to the American problem.

Such foreboding proved justified. During the winter of 1774-1775 the British government worked out a plan to resolve the controversy by coupling conciliation with coercion. By early March the package was complete: for the future, Lord North pledged that Parliament would refrain from colonial taxation if Americans provided adequately for their own defense and civil government; for now, Britain would strengthen military and naval forces in North America and blockade those colonies adhering to the Association. As George III had declared in September 1774: "The dye is now cast, the colonies must either submit or triumph." To that much maligned monarch the issue was simple: America was in a state of rebellion.

Rebellions are seldom resolved peacefully, and the spectre of war that had long haunted young Jemima Condict, a semiliterate New Jersey farm girl, became a reality in the early morning hours of April 19 (Doc. 12). The exchange of musket fire between British regulars and Massachusetts militiamen at Lexington and the subsequent skirmish at Concord ignited the volatile atmosphere; from New Hampshire to Georgia colonials took up arms to avenge the spilling of American blood. The "shot heard round the world" echoed throughout New Jersey. Whigs gained the upper hand even in counties such as Bergen, where strong hostility toward the Continental Congress and bitter religious division within the Dutch Reformed Church undermined political unity (Doc. 14). Men everywhere made ready to meet any military contingency (Doc. 13).

By the summer of 1775 the dispute between Britain and America had reached the point of no return. After a decade of vacillation and capitulation, the British government had resolved to draw the line. There was really no alternative. The issue was no longer the merit of parliamentary legislation or the wisdom of imperial policies, but the sovereignty of Great Britain over the North American colonies. As Lord North observed in February 1775: if the American dispute "goes to the whole of our authority we can enter into no negotiation, we can make no compromise." The Americans were equally determined to resist, with arms if necessary, what they considered infringements of their constitutional rights and encroachments upon their traditional spheres of home rule. The die had indeed been cast.

1 "Y" to "Z" on Political Apostasy

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