



Was the American Revolution Avoidable? Online Seminar

Selected readings from

Colonies to Nation, 1763-1789: A Documentary History of the American Revolution.

Jack P. Greene, editor (Norton, 1975, 1967).

- Blueprint for Reform: Governor Francis Burnard, *Principles of Law and Polity, applied to the Government of the British Colonies in America*, 1764. (pp. 8-12)
- The Case Against Parliamentary Authority in Internal Colonial Matters: Richard Bland, *An Enquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies*, 1766. (pp. 88-92)
- The Rejection of Parliamentary Authority: James Wilson, *Considerations on the Authority of Parliament*, 1769 (not published until 1774). (pp. 222-227)
- Royal Proclamation of 1775, August 1775. (pp. 259-260)

Colonies to Nation 1763-1789

**A Documentary History of the American
Revolution / Edited by Jack P. Greene**



**Blueprint for Reform: Governor Francis Bernard,
"Principles of Law and Polity, Applied to the Government
of the British Colonies in America" (1764)**

The growing conviction in London that measures had to be undertaken at the end of the French and Indian War to shore up British authority in the colonies was revealed by the stream of proposals for imperial reform that poured from the pens of Crown officials and other interested observers during the early 1760s. One of the most perceptive and comprehensive of these proposals came from Francis Bernard (1712–1779), governor of Massachusetts Bay. Unable to support a growing family in what he considered proper style on his earnings as a county barrister in Lincolnshire, Bernard in 1758 had secured an appointment as governor of New Jersey through the influence of his wife's cousin, Lord Barrington. So successful was he in reducing the turbulent politics of that colony to some semblance of order that he quickly won the praise of his superiors in London and in 1760 secured a promotion to the governorship of the wealthier and more important colony of Massachusetts.

Persuaded by his experience in both New Jersey and Massachusetts that imperial authority in the colonies had to be somehow strengthened and aware of the general sentiment for colonial reform in London, Bernard early came to conceive of himself as the architect of imperial reform. As early as December, 1761, he began to pepper Barrington and other friends in England with suggestions for reorganizing the empire, and in the spring of 1764 he drew up a series of ninety-seven propositions entitled "Principles of Law and Polity, Applied to the Government of the British Colonies in America," a systematic and comprehensive blueprint for the total reconstruction of the British imperial system. In this document Bernard proposed a number of specific innovations to redefine the nature of the imperial-colonial relationship and to remodel the governments within the colonies in such a way as to satisfy both the imperial demand for closer control over the colonies and the colonial aspirations for an expanded role in the empire and for specific guarantees of their local self-governing rights. An ingenious scheme, Bernard's plan, if adopted, might have removed the ambiguities that lay behind the constitutional debate between Britain and the colonies and the catastrophes that accompanied it over the next decade. Circulated in manuscript, it won high praise from colonial officials in London, but the King's chief ministers, confronted with several specific colonial problems that seemed to require immediate and particular solutions, operated within a narrower focus and displayed no serious interest in such wholesale reforms. Ironically, one of Bernard's proposals, which were not published until 1774, was incorporated into the punitive legislation against Massachusetts Bay in that year and thus actively contributed to bring about the revolution it might have prevented.

*Edmund S. Morgan and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (1953), contains the best analysis of Bernard's career as colonial governor, his aspirations to be an imperial statesman, and his "Principles of Law and Polity," though the discussion in Richard Koebner, *Empire* (1961), may also be read with profit. The most important portions of Bernard's proposals are reprinted below from the original London edition.*

1. THE Kingdom of *Great Britain* is imperial; that is, Sovereign, and not subordinate to or dependent upon any earthly power.

2. In all *imperial* states there resides somewhere or other an absolute power, which we will call the *Sovereignty*.

3. The *Sovereignty* of *Great Britain* is in the *King in Parliament*; that is, in the *King*, acting with the advice and consent of the *Lords* and the *Commons* (by their Representatives), assembled in the *Parliament of Great Britain*.

4. The *King in Parliament* has the sole right of legislation, and the supreme superintendency of the government; and, in this plenitude of power, is absolute, uncontrollable, and accountable to none; and therefore, in a political sense, can do no wrong. . . .

9. The kingdom of *Great Britain* has, belonging to and depending upon it, divers external dominions and countries; all which, together with *Great Britain*, form the *British Empire*. Let, therefore, the *British Empire* signify the aggregate body of the *British* dominions, and the *Kingdom of Great Britain* the island which is the seat of the government.

10. The *King in Parliament*, is the sole and absolute Sovereign of the whole *British Empire*.

11. No members of the *British Empire*, other than the *Parliament of Great Britain*, can have a right to interfere in the exercise of this Sovereignty, but by being admitted into the *Parliament*, as *Wales*, *Chester*, and *Durham* have been, and *Ireland* may be.

12. Such an union is not necessary to the generality of the *British* external dominions; but it may be expedient with most of them.

13. The external *British* dominions, without such an union, are subordinate to and dependent upon the *Kingdom of Great Britain*, and must derive from thence all their powers of legislation and jurisdiction.

14. Legislation is not necessary to an external and dependent government; jurisdiction is necessary and essential to it. Therefore,

15. A separate Legislation is not an absolute right of *British* subjects residing out of the seat of Empire; it may or may not be allowed, and has or has not been granted, according to the circumstances of the community.

16. Where it is granted or allowed, it must be exercised in subordination to the Sovereign power from whom it is derived.

17. No grant of the power of Legislation to a dependent government, whether it comes from the *King* alone, or from the *Parliament*, can preclude the *Parliament of Great Britain* from interfering in such dependent government, at such time and in such manner as they shall think fit. . . .

29. The rule that a *British* subject shall not be bound by laws, or liable to taxes, but what he has consented to by his representatives, must be confined to the inhabitants of *Great Britain* only; and is not strictly true even there.

30. The *Parliament of Great Britain*, as well from its rights of *Sovereignty* as from occasional exigences, has a right to make laws for, and impose taxes upon, its subjects in its external dominions, although they are not represented in such *Parliament*. But,

31. Taxes imposed upon the external dominions ought to be applied to the use of the people, from whom they are raised. . . .

36. The Colonies ought, so far as they are able, to pay the charge of the support of their own Governments, and of their own defence.

37. The defence of the *American Colonies*, being now almost wholly a sea service, is connected with the defence of trade. Therefore,

38. Duties upon imports and exports, make the most proper funds for the expenses of such defence. And

39. It being the proper business of the *Parliament of Great Britain*, to establish and determine the necessary regulations and restrictions of the trade of their external dominions; and the duties upon the *American* imports and exports being interwove with the regulations and restrictions of trade; the imposition of such Duties is the proper business of the *Parliament*.

40. The port duties being most properly applicable to the defence of the Colonies, it remains that the support of the Governments be provided for by internal duties. . . .

44. Although the right of the *Parliament of Great Britain*, to raise taxes in any parts of the *British Empire*, is not to be disputed; yet it would be most advisable to leave to the Provincial Legislatures the raising the internal taxes.

45. If the sums required were fixed, there would be no inconvenience in letting the Provincial Legislature determine the manner in which they shall be raised.

46. It will be more agreeable to the people, that the necessary internal taxes should be raised by the Provincial Legislatures; as they will be most able to consult the particular convenience of their respective provinces. Whereas,

47. It may be difficult to form a general Parliamentary tax, so as to make it equally suitable to all Provinces.

48. It would make it more agreeable to the people, though the sum to be raised was prescribed, to leave the method of taxation to their own Legislature.

49. If the Provincial Legislatures should refuse to raise the sums required for the support of Government, or should insist upon doing it by improper means, the *Parliament* might then take the business into their own hands.

50. But it is most probable that the people would acquiesce in this measure, and would soon be reconciled to it, when they observed the good effects of a certain and adequate establishment for the support of Government. For

51. The want of such an establishment has had bad consequences in many of the Governments of the *American* colonies, and has contributed more than all other things put together, to contention in the legislature, and defect of justice in the courts of law. Therefore,

52. The establishment of a certain, sufficient, and independent Civil List, is not only expedient, but necessary to the welfare of the *American Colonies*.

53. Such an appointment will tend greatly to remove all the seeds of contention, and to promote a lasting harmony and good understanding between the government and the people. . . .

59. The subjects of the *British Empire*, residing in its external dominions, are intitled to all the rights and privileges of *British* subjects, which they are capable of enjoying.

60. There are some rights and privileges which the *British* subjects, in the external dominions, are not equally capable of enjoying with those residing in *Great Britain*.

61. The right of having a share in the Imperial Legislature, is one of these

incapacities in those external dominions, where a representation is impracticable.

62. A Representation of the *American Colonies* in the Imperial Legislature is not impracticable: and therefore,

63. The propriety of a Representation of the *American Colonies* in the Imperial Legislature, must be determined by expediency only.

64. A Representation of the *American Colonies*, in the Imperial Legislature, is not necessary to establish the authority of the *Parliament* over the Colonies. But

65. It may be expedient for quieting disputes concerning such authority, and preventing a separation in future times.

66. The expediency of *American Legislatures*, does not arise from the want of their having Representatives in the Imperial Legislature.

67. If the *American Colonies* had Representatives in *Parliament*, still there would be an occasion for provincial Legislatures, for their domestic œconomy, and the support of their Governments. But

68. All external Legislatures must be subject to, and dependent on, the Imperial Legislature: otherwise there would be an *Empire in an Empire*. . . .

70. The same form of Government is not equally proper to a Colony in its infant and in its mature state. . . .

72. There is but one most perfect form of Government for Provinces arrived at maturity.

73. That is the most perfect form of Government for a *dependent* province, which approaches the nearest to that of the *sovereign* state, and differs from it as little as possible.

74. There is no such form of Government among the *American Colonies*. And therefore

75. Every *American Government* is capable of having its Constitution altered for the better. . . .

85. To prevent revolts in future times (for there is no room to fear them in the present) the most effectual means would be, to make the governments large and respectable, and balance the powers of them.

86. There is no Government in *America* at present, whose powers are properly balanced; there not being in any of them a real and distinct third Legislative power mediating between the *King* and the *People*, which is the peculiar excellence of the *British Constitution*.

87. The want of such a third Legislative power, adds weight to the popular, and lightens the royal scale: so as to destroy the balance between the *royal* and *popular* powers.

88. Although *America* is not now (and probably will not be for many years to come) ripe enough for an hereditary *Nobility*; yet it is now capable of a *Nobility* for life.

89. A *Nobility* appointed by the *King* for life, and made independent, would probably give strength and stability to the *American governments*, as effectually as an hereditary *Nobility* does to that of *Great Britain*.

90. The reformation of the *American governments* should not be controlled by the present boundaries of the colonies; as they were mostly settled upon partial, occasional, and accidental considerations, without any regard to a whole.

91. To settle the *American governments* to the greatest possible advantage,

it will be necessary to reduce the number of them; in some places to unite and consolidate; in others to separate and transfer; and in general to divide by natural boundaries instead of imaginary lines. . . .

95. The *American* colonies, in general, are at this time arrived at that state, which qualifies them to receive the most perfect form of government, which their situation and relation to *Great Britain* make them capable of.

96. The people of *North America*, at this time, expect a revisal and reformation of the *American* Governments, and are better disposed to submit to it than ever they were, or perhaps ever will be again.

97. This is therefore the proper and critical time to reform the *American* governments upon a general, constitutional, firm, and durable plan; and if it is not done now, it will probably every day grow more difficult, till at last it becomes impracticable.

SELECTION

2

New Measures

The failure of London officials to inaugurate the broad reconstruction program proposed by Bernard was not the result of any absence of sentiment on their part for colonial reform. Never before, in fact, had there been in British government circles such widespread concern about colonial problems and such a clear consensus that something had to be done about them as there was in the early 1760s. To stop the wholesale violations of the Navigation Acts by merchants from the middle and northern colonies; to organize, administer, and police the vast new territories acquired from France and Spain in both North America and the West Indies; to keep the Indians quiet in the new territories and provide some orderly means for westward expansion from the seaboard colonies; to render royal officials in the colonies independent of grasping colonial legislatures and pay for the army necessary to secure the new acquisitions from possible reconquest by their former possessors; and to regulate in a way acceptable to British mercantile interests the vast quantities of legal-tender paper money issued by colonial legislatures during the war—all of these problems obviously demanded immediate attention. But they seemed to call for a series of patchwork reforms rather than a total reconstruction of the colonial system.

Many such reforms were already in progress by the time Bernard put together his proposals. Acting upon orders from William Pitt, who was outraged by colonial trading with the enemy, the Treasury initiated a number of administrative reforms in the colonial customs service during the last years of the war. In a now-famous letter presented to the Privy Council in October, 1763, the Treasury described the nature of these reforms, explained the motives behind them as well as the general objectives of British commercial policy toward the colonies in the

scend the ordinary course of the laws, are within the reach of this extraordinary tribunal. It can regulate or new model the succession to the crown; as was done in the reign of Henry VIII and William III. It can alter the established religion of the land; as was done in a variety of instances, in the reigns of king Henry VIII and his three children. It can change and create afresh even the constitution of the kingdom and of parliaments themselves; as was done by the act of union, and the several statutes for triennial and septennial elections. It can, in short, do every thing that is not naturally impossible; and therefore some have not scrupled to call it's power, by a figure rather too bold, the omnipotence of parliament. True it is, that what the parliament doth, no authority upon earth can undo. So that it is a matter most essential to the liberties of this kingdom, that such members be delegated to this important trust, as are most eminent for their probity, their fortitude, and their knowledge; for it was a known apothegm of the great lord treasurer Burleigh, "that England could never be ruined but by a parliament:" and, as sir Matthew Hale observes, this being the highest and greatest court, over which none other can have jurisdiction in the kingdom, if by any means a misgovernment should any way fall upon it, the subjects of this kingdom are left without all manner of remedy. . . .

It must be owned that Mr Locke, and other theoretical writers, have held, that "there remains still inherent in the people "supreme power to remove or alter the legislative, when they find the legislative act contrary to the trust reposed in them: for when such trust is abused, it is thereby forfeited, and devolves to those who gave it." But however just this conclusion may be in theory, we cannot adopt it, nor argue from it, under any dispensation of government at present actually existing. For this devolution of power, to the people at large, includes in it a dissolution of the whole form of government established by that people; reduces all the members to their original state of equality; and, by annihilating the sovereign power, repeals all positive laws whatsoever before enacted. No human laws will therefore suppose a case, which at once must destroy all law, and compel men to build afresh upon a new foundation; nor will they make provision for so desperate an event, as must render all legal provisions ineffectual. So long therefore as the English constitution lasts, we may venture to affirm, that the power of parliament is absolute and without control.

**B. THE CASE AGAINST PARLIAMENTARY
AUTHORITY IN INTERNAL COLONIAL MATTERS:
RICHARD BLAND, "AN ENQUIRY INTO THE RIGHTS
OF THE BRITISH COLONIES" (1766)***

It is in vain to search into the civil constitution of *England* for directions in fixing the proper connection between the colonies and the mother-kingdom; I mean, what their reciprocal duties to each other are, and what obedience is due from the children to the general parent. The planting colonies from *Britain*, is but of recent date, and nothing relative to such plantation can be collected from the ancient laws of the kingdom; neither can we receive any

* These excerpts are reprinted from the London edition of 1769, pp. 11-13, 16-20.

better information, by extending our enquiry into the history of the colonies, established by the several nations, in the more early ages of the world. All the colonies (except those of *Georgia* and *Nova Scotia*) formed from the *English* nation in *North-America*, were planted in a manner, and under a dependence, of which there is not an instance in all the colonies of the ancients; and therefore I conceive, it must afford a good degree of surprize, to find an *English* civilian giving it as his sentiment, that the *English* colonies ought to be governed by the *Roman* laws; and for no better reason, than because the *Spanish* colonies, as he says, are governed by those laws. The *Romans* established their colonies, in the midst of vanquished nations, upon principles which best secured their conquests; the privileges granted to them were not always the same; their policy in the government of their colonies, and the conquered nations, being always directed by arbitrary principles to the end they aimed at, the subjecting the whole earth to their empire: but the colonies in *North-America*, except those planted within the present century, were founded by *Englishmen*, who, becoming private adventurers, established themselves, without any expence to the nation, in this uncultivated and almost uninhabited country; so that their case is plainly distinguishable from that of the *Roman*, or any other colonies of the ancient world.

As then we can receive no light from the laws of the kingdom, or from ancient history, to direct us in our enquiry, we must have recourse to the law of nature, and those rights of mankind which flow from it.

I have observed before, that when subjects are deprived of their civil rights, or are dissatisfied with the place they hold in the community, they have a natural right to quit the society of which they are members, and to retire into another country. Now when men exercise this right, and withdraw themselves from their country, they recover their natural freedom and independence: the jurisdiction and sovereignty of the state they have quitted, ceases; and if they unite, and by common consent take possession of a new country, and form themselves into a political society, they become a sovereign state, independent of the state from which they separated. If then the subjects of *England* have a natural right to relinquish their country; and by retiring from it, and associating together, to form a new political society and independent state, they must have a right, by compact with the sovereign of the nation, to remove into a new country, and to form a civil establishment upon the terms of the compact. In such a case, the terms of the compact must be obligatory and binding upon the parties; they must be the magna charta, the fundamental principles of government, to this new society; and every infringement of them must be wrong, and may be opposed. It will be necessary, then to examine, whether any such compact was entered into between the sovereign, and those *English* subjects who established themselves in *America*.

You have told us, that "before the first and great act of navigation, the inhabitants of *North-America* were but a few unhappy fugitives, who had wandered thither to enjoy their civil and religious liberties, which they were deprived of at home." If this was true, it is evident, from what has been said upon the law of nature, that they have a right to a civil independent establishment of their own, and that *Great-Britain* has no right to interfere in it. But you have been guilty of a gross anachronism in your chronology, and a great error in your account of the first settlement of the colonies in

North-America; for it is a notorious fact that they were not settled by fugitives from their native country, but by men who came over voluntarily, at their own expence, and under charters from the crown, obtained for that purpose, long before the first and great act of navigation. . . .

From [a review] . . . of the charters, and other acts of the crown, under which the first colony in *North-America* was established, it is evident, that "the colonists were not a few unhappy fugitives who had wandered into a distant part of the world to enjoy their civil and religious liberties, which they were deprived of at home," but had a regular government long before the first act of navigation, and were respected as a distinct state, independent, as to their *internal* government, of the original kingdom, but united with her, as to their *external* polity, in the closest and most intimate LEAGUE AND AMITY, under the same allegiance, and enjoying the benefits of a reciprocal intercourse.

But allow me to make a reflection or two upon the preceding account of the first settlement of an *English* colony in *North-America*.

America was no part of the kingdom of *England*; it was possessed by a savage people, scattered through the country, who were not subject to the *English* dominion, nor owed obedience to its laws. This independent country was settled by *Englishmen* at their own expence, under particular stipulations with the crown: these stipulations, then, must be the sacred band of union between *England* and her colonies, and cannot be infringed without injustice. But you object, that "no power can abridge the authority of parliament, which has never exempted any from the submission they owe to it; and no other power can grant such an exemption."

I will not dispute the authority of the parliament, which is, without doubt, supreme within the body of the kingdom, and cannot be abridged by any other power; but may not the king have prerogatives, which he has a right to exercise, without the consent of parliament? If he has, perhaps that of granting licence to his subjects to remove into a *new* country, and to settle therein upon particular conditions, may be one. If he has no such prerogative, I cannot discover how the royal engagements can be made good, that "the freedom and other benefits of the *British* constitution" shall be secured to those people who shall settle in a new country under such engagements; the freedom, and other benefits of the *British* constitution, cannot be secured to a people, without they are exempted from being taxed by any authority, but that of their representatives, chosen by themselves. This is an essential part of *British* freedom; but if the king cannot grant such an exemption, in right of his prerogative, the royal promises cannot be fulfilled; and all charters which have been granted by our former kings, for this purpose, must be deceptions upon the subjects who accepted them, which to say, would be a high reflection upon the honour of the crown. But there was a time, when some parts of *England* itself were exempt from the laws of parliament: the inhabitants of the county palatine of *Chester* were not subject to such laws *ab antiquo*, because they did not send representatives to parliament, but had their own *commune concilium*; by whose authority, with the consent of their earl, their laws were made. If this exemption was not derived originally from the crown, it must have arisen from that great principle in the *British* constitution, by which the freemen in the nation are not subject to any laws, but such as are made by representatives elected by themselves to parliament; so that in either case, it is an instance

extremely applicable to the colonies, who contend for no other right, but that of directing their *internal* government by laws made with their own consent, which has been preserved to them by repeated acts and declarations of the crown.

The constitution of the colonies, being established upon the principles of *British* liberty, has never been infringed by the immediate act of the crown; but the powers of government, agreeably to this constitution, have been constantly declared in the king's commissions to their governors, which, as often as they pass the great seal, are *new* declarations and confirmations of the rights of the colonies. Even in the reign of *Charles* the second, a time by no means favourable to liberty, these rights of the colonies were maintained inviolate; for when it was thought necessary to establish a permanent revenue for the support of government in *Virginia*, the king did not apply to the *English* parliament, but to the general assembly; and sent over an act, under the great seal of *England*, by which it was enacted, "by the king's most excellent majesty, by and with the consent of the general assembly," that two shillings per hogshead upon all tobacco exported, one shilling and three-pence per ton upon shipping, and six-pence per poll for every person imported, not being actually a mariner in pay, were to be paid for ever as a revenue, for the support of the government in the colony.

I have taken notice of this act, not only because it shows the proper fountain from whence all supplies to be raised in the colonies ought to flow, but also as it affords an instance, that royalty itself did not disdain formerly to be named as a part of the legislature of the colony; though now, to serve a purpose destructive of their rights, and to introduce principles of despotism unknown to a free constitution, the legislature of the colonies are degraded even below the corporation of a petty borough in *England*. . . .

I have proved irrefragably, that the colonies are not represented in parliament, and . . . that no new law can bind them, that is made without the concurrence of their representatives; and if so, then every act of parliament that imposes *internal* taxes upon the colonies, is an act of *power*, and not of *right*. I must speak freely; I am considering a question which affects the *rights* of above two millions of as loyal subjects as belong to the *British* crown, and must use terms adequate to the importance of it; I say, that *power*, abstracted from *right*, cannot give a just title to dominion. If a man invades my property, he becomes an aggressor, and puts himself into a state of war with me: I have a right to oppose this invader; if I have not strength to repel him, I must submit; but he acquires no right to my estate which he has usurped. Whenever I recover strength, I may renew my claim, and attempt to regain my possession; if I am never strong enough, my son, or his son, may, when able, recover the natural right of his ancestor, which has been unjustly taken from him.

I hope I shall not be charged with insolence, in delivering the sentiments of an honest mind with freedom: I am speaking of the *rights* of a people: *rights* imply *equality*, in the instances to which they belong, and must be treated without respect to the dignity of the persons concerned in them. If "the *British* empire in *Europe* and in *America* is the same *power*;" if the "subjects in both are the same people, and all equally participate in the adversity and prosperity of the whole," what distinctions can the difference of their situations make, and why is this distinction made between them? Why is the trade of the colonies more circumscribed than the trade

of Britain? And why are impositions laid upon the one, which are not laid upon the other? If the parliament "have a *right* to impose taxes of *every kind* upon the colonies," they ought in justice, as the same people, to have the same sources to raise them from: their commerce ought to be equally free with the commerce of *Britain*, otherwise it will be loading them with burthens, at the same time that they are deprived of strength to sustain them; it will be forcing them to make bricks without straw. I acknowledge the parliament is the sovereign legislative power of the *British* nation, and that by a full exertion of their power, they can deprive the colonists of the freedom, and other benefits of the *British* constitution, which have been secured to them by our kings; they can abrogate all their civil rights and liberties; but by what *right* is it, that the parliament can exercise such a power over the colonists, who have as natural a right to the liberties and privileges of *Englishmen*, as if they were actually resident within the kingdom? The colonies are subordinate to the authority of parliament; subordinate I mean in degree, but not absolutely so: for if by a vote of the *British* senate, the colonists were to be delivered up to the rule of a *French* or *Turkish* tyranny, they may refuse obedience to such a vote, and may oppose the execution of it by force. Great is the power of parliament, but, great as it is, it cannot, constitutionally, deprive the people of their *natural* rights; nor, in virtue of the same principle, can it deprive them of their *civil* rights, which are founded in compact, without their own consent. There is, I confess, a considerable difference between these two cases, as to the right of resistance: in the first, if the colonists should be dismembered from the nation, by act of parliament, and abandoned to another power, they have a natural right to defend their liberties by open force, and may lawfully resist; and, if they are able, repel the power to whose authority they are abandoned. But in the other, if they are deprived of their civil rights, if great and manifest oppressions are imposed upon them by the state on which they are dependent, their remedy is to lay their complaints at the foot of the throne, and to suffer patiently, rather than disturb the public peace, which nothing but a denial of justice can excuse them in breaking. But if this justice should be denied, if the most humble and dutiful representations should be rejected, nay, not even deigned to be received, what is to be done? To such a question, *Thucydides* would make the *Corinthians* reply, that if "a decent and condescending behaviour is shown on the part of the colonies it would be base in the mother-state to press too far on such moderation:" And he would make the *Corcyreans* answer, that "every colony, whilst used in a proper manner, ought to pay honour and regard to its mother state; but, when treated with injury and violence, is become an alien. They were not sent out to be the slaves, but to be the equals of those that remain behind." . . .

---If the requirements of the act should be complied with; yet all their estates lying in wharves, water-lots, &c. will still lie at the king's mercy. So that the act cannot be complied with without giving up the struggle for liberty. The design in bearing thus hard upon one colony is evidently to divide the colonies; and thus to bring them one after another to submit to the arbitrary claims of parliament. All their means of subsistence depended on their trade, which by this act is wholly taken away. So that without assistance from the other colonies, they must inevitably yield, unless so very patriotic, as to be willing to starve to death. Our turn may soon come when we may want the like kind assistance from our brethren. Only apply the golden rule of "doing to others as we would that they should do unto us," and surely we cannot hesitate to contribute to their relief. . . . I wish the importance of contributing to the relief of Boston might be duly attended to, and that some measures might be come into in all our towns for trying the generosity of people for this purpose. I am sure they that have a sense of the worth of liberty and the importance of making a firm yet decent and harmless opposition to these oppressive measures, which are calculated to rivit the chains of slavery both upon us and our posterity, cannot hesitate a moment to contribute something generous for the relief of that suffering people. May Americans be united in a just sense of the worth of their civil rights and privileges, and in every laudable and righteous method for obtaining redress; and God grant their struggles in so glorious a cause may be crowned with happy success.

**B. THE REJECTION OF PARLIAMENTARY
AUTHORITY: JAMES WILSON, "CONSIDERATIONS ON
THE AUTHORITY OF PARLIAMENT" (AUG. 17, 1774)***

But from what source does this mighty, this uncontrolled authority of the house of commons flow? From the collective body of the commons of Great Britain. This authority must, therefore, originally reside in them; for whatever they convey to their representatives, must ultimately be in themselves. And have those, whom we have hitherto been accustomed to consider as our fellow-subjects, an absolute and unlimited power over us? Have they a natural right to make laws, by which we may be deprived of our properties, of our liberties, of our lives? By what title do they claim to be our masters? What act of ours has rendered us subject to those, to whom we were formerly equal? Is British freedom denominated from the *soil*, or from the *people* of Britain? If from the latter, do they lose it by quitting the soil? Do those, who embark, freemen, in Great Britain, disembark, slaves, in America? Are those, who fled from the oppression of regal and ministerial tyranny, now reduced to a state of vassalage to those, who, then, equally felt the same oppression? Whence proceeds this fatal change? Is this the return made us for leaving our friends and our country—for braving the danger of the deep—for planting a wilderness, inhabited only by savage men and savage beasts—for extending the dominions of the British crown—for increasing the trade of the British merchants—for augmenting the rents of

* These excerpts are reprinted from James DeWitt Andrews (ed.), *The Works of James Wilson* (1896), vol. II, pp. 522-529, 531-542.

the British landlords—for heightening the wages of the British artificers? Britons should blush to make such a claim: Americans would blush to own it.

It is not, however, the ignominy only, but the danger also, with which we are threatened, that affects us. The many and careful provisions which are made by the British constitution, that the electors of members of parliament may be prevented from choosing representatives, who would betray them; and that the representatives may be prevented from betraying their constituents with impunity, sufficiently evince, that such precautions have been deemed absolutely necessary for securing and maintaining the system of British liberty.

How would the commons of Great Britain startle at a proposal, to deprive them of their share in the legislature, by rendering the house of commons independent of them! With what indignation would they hear it? What resentment would they feel and discover against the authors of it! Yet the commons of Great Britain would suffer less inconvenience from the execution of such a proposal, than the Americans will suffer from the extension of the legislative authority of parliament over them.

The members of parliament, their families, their friends, their posterity must be subject, as well as others, to the laws. Their interest, and that of their families, friends, and posterity, cannot be different from the interest of the rest of the nation. A regard to the former will, therefore, direct to such measures as must promote the latter. But is this the case with respect to America? Are the legislators of Great Britain subject to the laws which are made for the colonies? Is their interest the same with that of the colonies? If we consider it in a large and comprehensive view, we shall discern it to be undoubtedly the same; but few will take the trouble to consider it in that view; and of those who do, few will be influenced by the consideration. Mankind are usually more affected with a near though inferior interest, than with one that is superior, but placed at a greater distance. As the conduct is regulated by the passions, it is not to be wondered at, if they secure the former, by measures which will forfeit the latter. Nay, the latter will frequently be regarded in the same manner as if it were prejudicial to them. It is with regret that I produce some late regulations of parliament as proofs of what I have advanced. We have experienced what an easy matter it is for a minister with an ordinary share of art, to persuade the parliament and the people, that taxes laid on the colonies will ease the burthens of the mother country; which, if the matter is considered in a proper light, is, in fact, to persuade them, that the stream of national riches will be increased by closing up the fountain, from which they flow.

As the Americans cannot avail themselves of that check, which interest puts upon the members of parliament, and which would operate in favor of the commons of Great Britain, though they possessed no power over the legislature; so the love of reputation, which is a powerful incitement to the legislators to promote the welfare, and obtain the approbation, of those among whom they live, and whose praises or censures will reach and affect them, may have a contrary operation with regard to the colonies. It may become popular and reputable at home to oppress us. A candidate may recommend himself at his election by recounting the many successful instances, in which he has sacrificed the interests of America to those of Great Britain. A member of the house of commons may plume himself upon

his ingenuity in inventing schemes to serve the mother country at the expense of the colonies; and may boast of their impotent resentment against him on that account.

Let us pause here a little.—Does neither the love of gain, the love of praise, nor the love of honor influence the members of the British parliament in favor of the Americans? On what principles, then—on what motives of action, can we depend for the security of our liberties, of our properties, of everything dear to us in life, of life itself? Shall we depend on their veneration for the dictates of natural justice? A very little share of experience in the world—a very little degree of knowledge in the history of men, will sufficiently convince us, that a regard to justice is by no means the ruling principle in human nature. He would discover himself to be a very sorry statesman, who would erect a system of jurisprudence upon that slender foundation. “He would make,” as my Lord Bacon says, “imaginary laws for imaginary commonwealths; and his discourses, like the stars, would give little light, because they are so high.”

But this is not the worst that can justly be said concerning the situation of the colonies, if they are bound by the acts of the British legislature. So far are those powerful springs of action, which we have mentioned, from interesting the members of that legislature in our favor, that, as has been already observed, we have the greatest reason to dread their operation against us. While the happy commons of Great Britain congratulate themselves upon the liberty which they enjoy, and upon the provisions—infalible, as far as they can be rendered so by human wisdom—which are made for perpetuating it to their latest posterity; the unhappy Americans have reason to bewail the dangerous situation to which they are reduced; and to look forward, with dismal apprehension, to those future scenes of woe, which, in all probability, will open upon their descendants.

What has been already advanced will suffice to show, that it is repugnant to the essential maxims of jurisprudence, to the ultimate end of all governments, to the genius of the British constitution, and to the liberty and happiness of the colonies, that they should be bound by the legislative authority of the parliament of Great Britain. Such a doctrine is not less repugnant to the voice of her laws. In order to evince this, I shall appeal to some authorities from the books of the law, which show expressly, or by a necessary implication, that the colonies are not bound by the acts of the British parliament; because they have no share in the British legislature.

The first case I shall mention was adjudged in the second year of Richard the Third. It was a solemn determination of all the judges of England, met in the exchequer chamber, to consider whether the people in Ireland were bound by an act of parliament made in England. They resolved, “that they were not, as to such things as were done in Ireland; but that what they did out of Ireland must be conformable to the laws of England, because they were the subjects of England. Ireland,” said they, “has a parliament, who make laws; and our statutes do not bind them; *because they do not send knights to parliament*: but their persons are the subjects of the king, in the same manner as the inhabitants of Calais, Gascoigne, and Guienne.” . . .

From this authority it follows, that it is by no means a rule, that the authority of parliament extends to all the subjects of the crown. The inhabitants of Ireland were the subjects of the king as of his crown of England; but it is expressly resolved, in the most solemn manner, that the inhabitants

of Ireland are not bound by the statutes of England. Allegiance to the king and obedience to the parliament are founded on very different principles. The former is founded on protection; the latter, on representation. An inattention to this difference has produced, I apprehend, much uncertainty and confusion in our ideas concerning the connection, which ought to subsist between Great Britain and the American colonies.

The last observation which I shall make on this case is, that if the inhabitants of Ireland are not bound by acts of parliament made in England, *à fortiori*, the inhabitants of the American colonies are not bound by them. . . .

The American colonies are not bound by the acts of the British parliament, because they are not represented in it. But what reason can be assigned why they should be bound by those acts, in which they are specially named? Does naming them give those, who do them that honor, a right to rule over them? Is this the source of the supreme, the absolute, the irresistible, the uncontrolled authority of parliament? These positions are too absurd to be alleged; and a thousand judicial determinations in their favor would never induce one man of sense to subscribe his assent to them.

The obligatory force of the British statutes upon the colonies, when named in them, must be accounted for, by the advocates of that power, upon some other principle. In my Lord Coke's Reports, it is said, "that albeit Ireland be a distinct dominion, yet, *the title thereof being by conquest*, the same, by judgment of law, may be, by express words, bound by the parliaments of England." In this instance, the obligatory authority of the parliament is plainly referred to a title by conquest, as its foundation and original. . . . It is foreign to my purpose to inquire into the reasonableness of founding the authority of the British parliament over Ireland, upon the title of conquest, though I believe it would be somewhat difficult to deduce it satisfactorily in this manner. It will be sufficient for me to show, that it is unreasonable, and injurious to the colonies, to extend that title to them. How came the colonists to be a conquered people? By whom was the conquest over them obtained? By the house of commons? By the constituents of that house? If the idea of conquest must be taken into consideration when we examine into the title by which America is held, that idea, so far as it can operate, will operate in favor of the colonists, and not against them. Permitted and commissioned by the crown, they undertook, at their own expense, expeditions to this distant country, took possession of it, planted it, and cultivated it. Secure under the protection of their king, they grew and multiplied, and diffused British freedom and British spirit, wherever they came. Happy in the enjoyment of liberty, and in reaping the fruits of their toils; but still more happy in the joyful prospect of transmitting their liberty and their fortunes to the latest posterity, then inculcated to their children the warmest sentiments of loyalty to their sovereign, under whose auspices they enjoyed so many blessings, and of affection and esteem for the inhabitants of the mother country, with whom they gloried in being intimately connected. Lessons of loyalty to parliament, indeed, they never gave: they never suspected that such unheard-of loyalty would be required. They never suspected that their descendants would be considered and treated as a conquered people; and therefore they never taught them the submission and abject behavior suited to that character.

I am sufficiently aware of an objection, that will be made to what I have

said concerning the legislative authority of the British parliament. It will be alleged, that I throw off all dependence on Great Britain. This objection will be held forth, in its most specious colors, by those, who, from servility of soul, or from mercenary considerations, would meanly bow their necks to every exertion of arbitrary power: it may likewise alarm some, who entertain the most favorable opinion of the connection between Great Britain and her colonies; but who are not sufficiently acquainted with the nature of that connection, which is so dear to them. Those of the first class, I hope, are few; I am sure they are contemptible, and deserve to have very little regard paid to them: but for the sake of those of the second class, who may be more numerous, and whose laudable principles atone for their mistakes, I shall take some pains to obviate the objection, and to show that a denial of the legislative authority of the British parliament over America is by no means inconsistent with that connection, which ought to subsist between the mother country and her colonies, and which, at the first settlement of those colonies, it was intended to maintain between them; but that, on the contrary, that connection would be entirely destroyed by the extension of the power of parliament over the American plantations.

Let us examine what is meant by a *dependence* on Great Britain: for it is always of importance clearly to define the terms that we use. Blackstone, who, speaking of the colonies, tells us, that "they are no part of the mother country, but distinct (though dependent) dominions," explains dependence in this manner. "Dependence is very little else, but an obligation to conform to the will or law of that superior person or state, upon which the inferior depends. The original and true ground of this superiority, in the case of Ireland, is what we usually call, though somewhat improperly, the right of conquest; a right allowed by the law of nations, if not by that of nature; but which, in reason and civil policy, can mean nothing more, than that, in order to put an end to hostilities, a compact is either expressly or tacitly made between the conqueror and the conquered, that if they will acknowledge the victor for their master, he will treat them for the future as subjects, and not as enemies."

The original and true ground of the superiority of Great Britain over the American colonies is not shown in any book of the law, unless, as I have already observed, it be derived from the right of conquest. But I have proved, and I hope satisfactorily, that this right is altogether inapplicable to the colonists. The original of the superiority of Great Britain over the colonies is, then, unaccounted for; and when we consider the ingenuity and pains which have lately been employed at home on this subject, we may justly conclude, that the only reason why it is not accounted for, is, that it cannot be accounted for. The superiority of Great Britain over the colonies ought, therefore, to be rejected; and the dependence of the colonies upon her, if it is to be construed into "an obligation to conform to the will or law of the superior state," ought, in *this* sense, to be rejected also.

My sentiments concerning this matter are not singular. They coincide with the declarations and remonstrances of the colonies against the statutes imposing taxes on them. It was their unanimous opinion, that the parliament have no right to exact obedience to those statutes; and, consequently, that the colonies are under no obligation to obey them. The dependence of the colonies on Great Britain was denied, in those instances; but a denial of it in those instances is, in effect, a denial of it in all other instances. For, if

dependence is an obligation to conform to the will or law of the superior state, any exceptions to that obligation must destroy the dependence. If, therefore, by a dependence of the colonies on Great Britain, it is meant, that they are obliged to obey the laws of Great Britain, reason, as well as the unanimous voice of the Americans, teaches us to disown it. Such a dependence was never thought of by those who left Britain, in order to settle in America; nor by their sovereigns, who gave them commissions for that purpose. Such an obligation has no correspondent right: for the commons of Great Britain have no dominion over their equals and fellow-subjects in America; they can confer no right to their delegates to bind those equals and fellow-subjects by laws.

There is another, and a much more reasonable meaning, which may be intended by the dependence of the colonies on Great Britain. The phrase may be used to denote the obedience and loyalty, which the colonists owe to the *kings* of Great Britain. If it should be alleged, that this cannot be the meaning of the expression, because it is applied to the kingdom, and not to the king, I give the same answer that my Lord Bacon gave to those who said that allegiance related to the kingdom and not to the king; because in the statutes there are these words—"born within the allegiance of England"—and again—"born without the allegiance of England." "There is no trope of speech more familiar," says he, "than to use the place of addition for the person. So we say commonly, the line of York, or the line of Lancaster, for the lines of the duke of York, or the duke of Lancaster. So we say the possessions of Somerset or Warwick, intending the possessions of the dukes of Somerset, or earls of Warwick. And in the very same manner, the statute speaks, allegiance of England, for allegiance of the king of England."

Dependence on the mother country seems to have been understood in this sense, both by the first planters of the colonies, and also by the most eminent lawyers, at that time, in England.

Those who launched into the unknown deep, in quest of new countries and habitations, still considered themselves as subjects of the English monarchs, and behaved suitably to that character; but it nowhere appears, that they still considered themselves as represented in an English parliament, or that they thought the authority of the English parliament extended over them. They took possession of the country in the *king's* name: they treated, or made war with the Indians by *his* authority: they held the lands under *his* grants, and paid *him* the rents reserved upon them: they established governments under the sanction of *his* prerogative, or by virtue of *his* charters:—no application for those purposes was made to the parliament: no ratification of the charters or letters patent was solicited from that assembly, as is usual in England with regard to grants and franchises of much less importance.

My Lord Bacon's sentiments on this subject ought to have great weight with us. His immense genius, his universal learning, his deep insight into the laws and constitution of England, are well known and much admired. Besides, he lived at that time when settling and improving the American plantations began seriously to be attended to, and successfully to be carried into execution. Plans for the government and regulation of the colonies were then forming: and it is only from the first general idea of these plans, that we can unfold, with precision and accuracy, all the more minute and intricate parts, of which they now consist. "The settlement of colonies," says he, "must proceed from the option of those who will settle them, else it sounds

like an exile: they must be raised by the *leave*, and not by the *command* of the *king*. At their setting out, they must have their commission, or letters patent, from the *king*, that so they may acknowledge their *dependency upon the crown* of England, and under his protection." In another place he says, "that they still must be subjects of the realm." "In order to regulate all the inconveniences, which will insensibly grow upon them," he proposes, "that the king should erect a subordinate council in England, whose care and charge shall be, to advise, and put in execution, all things which shall be found fit for the good of those new plantations; who, upon all occasions, shall give an account of their proceedings, to the king or the council board, and from *them* receive such directions, as may best agree with the government of that place." It is evident, from these quotations, that my Lord Bacon had no conception that the parliament would or ought to interpose, either in the settlement or the government of the colonies. The only relation, in which he says the colonists must still continue, is that of subjects: the only dependency, which they ought to acknowledge, is a dependency on the crown.

This is a dependence, which they have acknowledged hitherto; which they acknowledge now; and which, if it is reasonable to judge of the future by the past and the present, they will continue to acknowledge hereafter. It is not a dependence, like that contended for on parliament, slavish and unaccountable, or accounted for only by principles that are false and inapplicable: it is a dependence founded upon the principles of reason, of liberty and of law. Let us investigate its sources.

The colonists ought to be dependent on the king, because they have hitherto enjoyed, and still continue to enjoy, his protection. Allegiance is the faith and obedience, which every subject owes to his prince. This obedience is founded on the protection derived from government: for protection and allegiance are the reciprocal bonds, which connect the prince and his subjects. Every subject, so soon as he is born, is under the royal protection, and is entitled to all the advantages arising from it. He therefore owes obedience to that royal power, from which the protection, which he enjoys, is derived. But while he continues in infancy and nonage, he cannot perform the duties which his allegiance requires. The performance of them must be respited till he arrive at the years of discretion and maturity. When he arrives at those years, he owes obedience, not only for the protection which he now enjoys, but also for that which from his birth, he has enjoyed; and to which his tender age has hitherto prevented him from making a suitable return. Allegiance now becomes a duty founded upon principles of gratitude, as well as on principles of interest: it becomes a debt, which nothing but the loyalty of a whole life will discharge. As neither climate, nor soil, nor time entitle a person to the benefits of a subject; so an alteration of climate, of soil, or of time cannot release him from the duties of one. An Englishman, who removes to foreign countries, however distant from England, owes the same allegiance to his king there which he owed him at home; and will owe it twenty years hence as much as he owes it now. Wherever he is, he is still liable to the punishment annexed by law to crimes against his allegiance; and still entitled to the advantages promised by law to the duties of it: it is not cancelled; and it is not forfeited. "Hence all children born in any part of the world, if they be of English parents continuing at that time as liege subjects to the king, and having done no act to forfeit the benefit of

their allegiance, are *ipso facto* naturalized: and if they have issue, and their descendants intermarry among themselves, such descendants are naturalized to all generations." . . .

Now we have explained the dependence of the Americans. They are the subjects of the king of Great Britain. They owe him allegiance. They have a right to the benefits which arise from preserving that allegiance inviolate. They are liable to the punishments which await those who break it. This is a dependence, which they have always boasted of. The principles of loyalty are deeply rooted in their hearts; and there they will grow and bring forth fruit, while a drop of vital blood remains to nourish them. Their history is not stained with rebellious and treasonable machinations: an inviolable attachment to their sovereign, and the warmest zeal for his glory, shine in every page.

From this dependence, abstracted from every other source, arises a strict connection between the inhabitants of Great Britain and those of America. They are fellow-subjects; they are under allegiance to the same prince; and this union of allegiance naturally produces a union of hearts. It is also productive of a union of measures through the whole British dominions. To the king is intrusted the direction and management of the great machine of government. He therefore is fittest to adjust the different wheels, and to regulate their motions in such a manner as to co-operate in the same general designs. He makes war: he concludes peace: he forms alliances: he regulates domestic trade by his prerogative, and directs foreign commerce by his treaties with those nations, with whom it is carried on. He names the officers of government; so that he can check every jarring movement in the administration. He has a negative on the different legislatures throughout his dominions, so that he can prevent any repugnancy in their different laws.

The connection and harmony between Great Britain and us, which it is her interest and ours mutually to cultivate, and on which her prosperity, as well as ours, so materially depends, will be better preserved by the operation of the legal prerogatives of the crown, than by the exertion of an unlimited authority by parliament.

**C. A WARNING TO THE KING: THOMAS JEFFERSON,
"A SUMMARY VIEW OF THE RIGHTS
OF BRITISH-AMERICA" (AUGUST, 1774)***

RESOLVED, that it be an instruction to the said deputies, when assembled in general congress with the deputies from the other states of British America, to propose to the said congress that an humble and dutiful address be presented to his Majesty, begging leave to lay before him, as Chief Magistrate of the British empire, the united complaints of his Majesty's subjects in America; complaints which are excited by many unwarrantable encroachments and usurpations, attempted to be made by the Legislature of one part of the empire, upon those rights which God and the laws have given equally and independently to all. To represent to his Majesty that these his states

* These selections are reprinted from the edition published in Philadelphia in 1774 by John Dunlap.

subjects in any part of the empire, we assure them that we mean not to dissolve that Union which has so long and so happily subsisted between us, and which we sincerely wish to see restored.—Necessity has not yet driven us into that desperate measure, or induced us to excite any other nation to war against them.—We have not raised armies with ambitious designs of separating from Great Britain, and establishing independent states. We fight not for glory or for conquest. We exhibit to mankind the remarkable spectacle of a people attacked by unprovoked enemies, without any imputation or even suspicion of offence. They boast of their privileges and civilization, and yet proffer no milder conditions than servitude or death.

In our own native land, in defence of the freedom that is our birth-right, and which we ever enjoyed till the late violation of it—for the protection of our property, acquired solely by the honest industry of our fore-fathers and ourselves, against violence actually offered, we have taken up arms. We shall lay them down when hostilities shall cease on the part of the aggressors, and all danger of their being renewed shall be removed, and not before.

With an humble confidence in the mercies of the supreme and impartial Judge and Ruler of the universe, we most devoutly implore his divine goodness to protect us happily through this great conflict, to dispose our adversaries to reconciliation on reasonable terms, and thereby to relieve the empire from the calamities of civil war.

By order of Congress,

JOHN HANCOCK, *President.*

Attested,

CHARLES THOMPSON, *Secretary.*

B. TO SUPPRESS "REBELLION AND SEDITION": ROYAL PROCLAMATION OF REBELLION (AUG. 23, 1775)*

Whereas many of Our Subjects in divers Parts of Our Colonies and Plantations in North America, misled by dangerous and ill-designing Men, and forgetting the Allegiance which they owe to the Power that has protected and sustained them, after various disorderly Acts committed in Disturbance of the Publick Peace, to the Obstruction of lawful Commerce, and to the Oppression of Our loyal Subjects carrying on the same have at length proceeded to an open and avowed Rebellion, by arraying themselves in hostile Manner to withstand the Execution of the Law, and traitorously preparing, ordering, and levying War against Us; And whereas there is Reason to apprehend that such Rebellion hath been much promoted and encouraged by the traitorous Correspondence, Counsels, and Comfort of divers wicked and desperate Persons within this Realm: To the End therefore that none of Our Subjects may neglect or violate their Duty through Ignorance thereof, or through any Doubt of the Protection which the Law will afford to their Loyalty and Zeal; We have thought fit, by and with the Advice of Our Privy Council, to issue this Our Royal Proclamation, hereby declaring that not only all Our Officers Civil and Military are obliged to exert their utmost

* Reprinted in full from Clarence S. Brigham (ed.), *British Royal Proclamations Relating to America, 1603-1783* (1911), pp. 228-229.

Endeavours to suppress such Rebellion, and to bring the Traitors to Justice; but that all Our Subjects of this Realm and the Dominions thereunto belonging are bound by Law to be aiding and assisting in the Suppression of such Rebellion, and to disclose and make known all traitorous Conspiracies and Attempts against Us, Our Crown and Dignity; And We do accordingly strictly charge and command all Our Officers as well Civil as Military, and all other Our obedient and loyal Subjects, to use their utmost Endeavours to withstand and suppress such Rebellion, and to disclose and make known all Treasons and traitorous Conspiracies which they shall know to be against Us, Our Crown and Dignity; and for that Purpose, that they transmit to One of Our Principal Secretaries of State, or other proper Officer, due and full Information of all Persons who shall be found carrying on Correspondence with, or in any Manner or Degree aiding or abetting the Persons now in open Arms and Rebellion against Our Government within any of Our Colonies and Plantations in North America, in order to bring to condign Punishment the Authors, Perpetrators, and Abettors of such traitorous Designs. . . .

SELECTION

29

Opposing Perceptions of Events

The wave of martial enthusiasm that swept the colonies in the weeks after Lexington and Concord was accompanied among thoughtful men of all shades of political opinion by a searching analysis of the causes and meaning of so extraordinary a turn of events, an attempt to explain to themselves and their fellows exactly what had brought this grave misfortune down upon them. For almost a decade American whigs had been attributing the difficulties of the colonies to a conspiracy of corrupt and power-thirsty ministers in Britain, and the resort to arms by Britain only seemed to reveal the depth of that conspiracy and the extent to which the ministers were willing to go to achieve their sordid ends. But many American whigs were nagged by an uneasy sense that it was not simply British corruption but their own sins that were ultimately responsible for their troubles. Earlier revealed in the colonial response to nonimportation during the crisis over the Townshend Acts (see Selection 15 D) and in the reaction to the Coercive Acts (see especially the closing paragraphs of Selection 24 A), the feeling that the ministry, Parliament, and now the British Army were the agencies of God's punishment for the colonists' impiety and moral degeneration was widely manifest in the months immediately after Lexington and Concord as well as later in the war. One of the dominant themes in public sermons, this feeling was expressed through the traditional Protestant philosophy of the jeremiad, which held that humiliation before God, acknowledgment of sins, and a sincere determination to inaugurate and carry through a moral reformation were absolutely necessary before God would intervene