“POLITICS, POLITICS, POLITICS!”

THE COERCIVE ACTS, POLITICAL MOBILIZATION, AND LEGITIMACY IN NEW YORK CITY, 1774-1775

James Samuel Hefter

AN HONORS THESIS

in

History

Presented to the Faculty of the

Department of History of the University of Pennsylvania

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts with Honors

2023

Benjamin Nathans, Honors Seminar Director

Sarah L. H. Gronningsater, Thesis Advisor

_____

Ramya Sreenivasan, Undergraduate Chair, Department of History

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I must thank Professor Nathans for pushing the limits of my writing and acting as a sounding board for my ideas. He taught me that history is an art that "carves a story out of what is true." I hope this thesis embodies that statement.

I also want to thank Professor Gronningsater for her kindness, energy, and vast knowledge of Revolutionary New York. When I entered Penn as a junior, Professor Gronningsater served as a wonderful mentor and rekindled my passion for the American Revolution.

Thank you to Herb and Sheila Weiner for financially supporting my summer research efforts. I am also incredibly appreciative for the librarians at the Patricia D. Klingenstein Library of the New-York Historical Society and the Brooke and Russell Astor Reading Room at the New York Public Library for aiding my quest to find sources over the summer.

I am eternally grateful for my family and friends. I could not write this thesis without their undying support and optimism. Ella, thank you for tolerating my long lectures about 18th-century New York City. And to Mom, Dad, Steven, and Robert, your lessons over the years taught me the value of hard work and inquisitiveness.

Finally, I am thankful for all my teachers throughout high school and college who instilled curiosity and discipline within me. This thesis serves as the culmination of my love for American History, and particularly the American Revolution.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Rise like Lions after slumber

In unvanquishable number—

Shake your chains to earth like dew

Which in sleep had fallen on you—

Ye are many—they are few.

— Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Masque of Anarchy*

and I am waiting

for the lost music to sound again

in the Lost Continent

in a new rebirth of wonder

—Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *I Am Waiting*

Percy Bysshe Shelley's romantic poem begs the question of how powerful the many are in enacting change. In addition, the British writer meditates on anti-violent tactics to achieve an adjustment in society. And Lawrence Ferlinghetti's piece makes us wonder how America lost her music and if it ever resonated again. The American Revolution's political underpinnings and ramifications can help clarify these inquiries. Although the poems were constructed in different centuries – and in separate continents – they nevertheless provide considerable insight into the British Empire's most rebellious colonies. New York City during this time of political upheaval serves as the preeminent testing ground for the writers' musings.

In response to the Boston Tea Party in December of 1773, the British government penalized the city of Boston by passing four laws in March of 1774 known as the Coercive Acts. Out of the four laws, two caused an uproar throughout the colonies. The first closed the Boston Port and the second transferred local power away from the colonists to the royally appointed governor. In the summer of 1774, Committees of Correspondence appeared throughout the colonies. First erected by Samuel Adams in 1772, the committees had been established to foster a more united resistance against Great Britain. The committees were also set up to establish connections with their counterparts throughout the colonies. The Committees of Correspondence were the main source of united resistance against Britain in the pre-Revolutionary War era. The number of committees skyrocketed after colonists heard about the Coercive Acts in May 1774. Colonists desired to mount an even fiercer resistance against their mother country and to establish inter-committee cooperation.

Historian T.H. Breen argues that successful revolutions require authorization,[1] so to contextualize this assertion, my research ponders the rich concept of extralegal legitimacy by examining the New York City committee system. “Extralegal” and “legitimate” are fundamentally at odds, so exploring this paradox will reveal the innerworkings of revolutions and how they succeed. New York City in 1774 and 1775 saw a tension between political invention and the striving for the appearance of legality and institutional continuity. The tension did not paralyze the city’s government, but rather it created a new political culture. I focus on the clash between conservatism and

[1] T.H. Breen. 2010. *American Insurgents, American Patriots: The Revolution of the People*. New York: Hill and Wang, 160.

radicalism in the city and how the alternating control of local government between cunning and wily men forged the identity of New York City during this eleven-month sliver of the American Revolution.

The future of the colonies was at stake. Would New York join Boston in defying the British Empire, or would they stay loyal to their mother country? It is crucial to investigate New York City because there was a strong pushback to resistance. The city, therefore, moved significantly more methodically and slowly than Boston. Scrutinizing the committee system in New York City from 1774 to 1775 provides us with an extensive assessment of the legitimacy of extralegal government in Colonial America. Further, if we can understand the role of mobilizing common people in perpetuating the radical shift in New York's political consciousness, we can better appreciate the art of political decision-making in a time of amplified tension.

In a widely cited quotation, an aging John Adams reminisced on his yonder years with former political rival turned friend Thomas Jefferson. The second president stated, "What do We mean by the Revolution? The War? That was no part of the Revolution. It was only an Effect and Consequence of it. The Revolution was in the Minds of the People, and this was effected, from 1760 to 1775, in the course of fifteen Years before a drop of blood was drawn at Lexington."[2] Leading scholarship on the apparent "down-time" in Revolutionary America from late 1774 to early 1775 focuses on "government by

[2] "John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 24 August 1815," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-08-02-0560; Prior to the Battle of Lexington, colonists started to feel an emotion Bridenbaugh deems "Americanism." Carl Bridenbaugh. 1955. *Cities in Revolt. Urban Life in America, 1743-1776*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 424-425.

committee"[3] and how the committees garnered local popular support, eventually taking power into their own hands to enforce Congress' Continental Association. However, many scholars investigate the expansion of the committees' powers after the First Continental Congress and the shots fired at Lexington and Concord in April of 1775. These are such canonical events in American history that the lead-up to them has gotten lost. I want to explore how the extralegal New York City Committee of Correspondence – the Fifty-one – and ultimately the Committee of Observation and Inspection – the Sixty – functioned prior to the onset of armed conflict at Lexington because war distorted their work. My main interest lies in showing how the committees intended to function as organs of self-government during "normal" – or "peaceful" – times. Researching the Committee of Fifty-one's evolution to the Committee of Sixty will reveal valuable historical scholarship on the committees' fundamental authority and evolving group consciousness that was paramount in setting the stage for the First Continental Congress and the battles of Lexington and Concord.

Several puzzles and questions are at the forefront of my research. How was the effect of legitimacy achieved by the leaders of the New York City Committee? What is the relationship between this attempted legitimacy and repression? How did this relationship play out from the Coercive Acts in May 1774 to the Battle of Lexington in April 1775? How does New York politics in this period exemplify the organization of the revolutionary movement as a whole? How and why did the conservative Committee of Fifty-one evolve to the more radical Committee of Sixty in only six months? Why is the

[3] David Ammerman. 1974. *In the Common Cause: American Response to the Coercive Acts of 1774*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.

New York phenomenon unique? How did New Yorkers end up mobilizing and appearing at elections and protests? How did elections occur and what can that reveal regarding their legitimacy and democratization? How was the popular will expressed?

Several key terms are central to my research. First, a legitimate government is one that receives acceptance and authority without having to use force. Legitimacy can mean "conforming to the law," but my definition incorporates extralegal government. Jerrilyn Greene Marston in *King and Congress* defines the concept of political legitimacy as "the belief of the governed that their government rightfully exercises authority over them."[4] She declares that a government's legitimacy is rooted in a "pragmatic" manner, meaning that a body is legitimate if it continually fosters an orderly society by protecting its constituents from domestic and foreign enemies.[5] Further, I will add that "legitimacy" also usually implies that the government does not need to use force to keep things running. I see my work contributing to Marston's analysis of political legitimacy by showing the evolution from the Fifty-one to the Sixty. This evolution is relevant to Edmund Morgan's *Inventing the People*, which underscores that Americans' consciousness evolved during the Revolutionary Era because they originally asked for the same rights as all Englishmen, but then realized that it was required to discard England's authority. Morgan generalizes about the revolutionary movement, so my work will contribute by scrutinizing New York City, which is a more targeted and unique case study. The Committee of Fifty-one was nominated by merchants, but as the months of 1774 continued, New York City transformed into a place that predicated itself more on

---

[4] Jerrilyn Greene Marston. 1987. *King and Congress: The Transfer of Political Legitimacy, 1774-1776*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press., 4
[5] Marston, *King and Congress*, 4

the everyday worker. The conservative merchants did not think or act like the people at large, but the Sixty took a large step to achieve this end.

Extra legality will be used to portray government entities that are outside British-authorized institutions. Benjamin L. Carp defines political mobilization as "the difference between reading a fiery pamphlet and acting on it." In essence, mobilization is when people are acting on the ground – going to street demonstrations, voting, etc.[6] Political mobilization is a key term in my research because it is a requisite element to achieve legitimacy. Going further, I will define mobilization as the broad radicalization of New Yorkers' political consciousness. Radicals are who we think of "patriots" today and conservatives as "loyalists." Because my thesis occurs before the advent of war, the terms "patriots" and "loyalists" were seldom used.

The most elusive term, however, is "the people." Kathleen Wilson examines eighteenth-century England, in which she defines "the people" as an "invented community…lying outside formal political structures and is having interest dichotomous or potentially dichotomous to those in power."[7] Wilson elaborates, by which she argues that utilizing the people as influential actors "imparted credibility to extra parliamentary forms and tactics as legitimate parts of the political process."[8] Edmund Morgan similarly denotes "the people" as a fictitious concept and the success of government and the powerful few demand the credence of such fictions.[9] On the other hand, Laura F.

---

[6] Benjamin L. Carp. 2009. *Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press, 5
[7] Kathleen Wilson. 1995. *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture, and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785*. Cambridge University Press, 17.
[8] Ibid., 21.
[9] Edmund S Morgan. 1989. *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America*. New York: WW Norton & Company, 13.

Edwards defines "the people" as "flesh and blood individuals" who were involved in every aspect of the political process. Edwards asserts that nebulous "legal concepts – such as the people's welfare, or the good order of the peace – had concrete meetings and localized law, because they were inseparable from the people who articulated and embodied them."[10] Therefore, to provide some concrete definition of "the people" in colonial New York City, I define this abstract concept as individuals typically left out of the government system, whether that be the British-appointed Colonial Assembly or the extralegal committees. In my thesis, the people, typically with the connotation of "common," consists of real working-class individuals who achieved immense success in radicalizing New York City and achieving political legitimacy for the extralegal system.

Finally, there are numerous elections that occur in the following pages. Robert J. Dinkin writes that it was much harder to obtain the right to vote at the time. He asserts that localities decided if suffrage was a right for everybody or a reward for being a white male with money and property. The latter, according to the localities at the time, "enhance[d] the welfare of the state."[11] Therefore, in Colonial America, many people were excluded from the electorate. In fact, 68.6 percent of the adult white males in New York City were eligible to vote by 1771, which significantly outnumbered the colony's more rural counties.[12] According to Chilton Williamson, in 1774, prominent radicals and the Mechanics Committee attempted to desert the "freeholders and freemen" requisites

---

[10] Laura F Edwards. 2014. *The People and Their Peace: Legal Culture and the Transformation of Inequality in the Post-Revolutionary South*. UNC Press Books, 65.
[11] Robert J. Dinkin. 1977. *Voting in Provincial America: A Study of Elections in the Thirteen Colonies, 1689-1776*. Bloomsbury Academic, 28-29.
[12] Ibid., 44.

for voting eligibility.[13] The extralegal committee system New York City from 1774 to 1775 challenged conventional voting procedures. People who were not qualified to vote appeared at elections and voted. Due to this progression, "the elected, not the electors, were henceforth the subject of intimidation and coercion. Political power was changing sides."[14] Conservative printer James Rivington commented on the pressure to democratize suffrage: "They begin by reminding the people of the elevated rank they hold in the universe, as men; that all men by nature are equal."[15] The procedures of the elections evidently changed over time, and the committee system in New York City experimented with several voting procedures – public and private ballots – and requirements – freeholders and freemen, all tax-paying inhabitants, all male New Yorkers. Elections were an integral facet of the revolutionary experience, and I argue that the Committee of Sixty eventually achieved legitimacy not through its election, but through its reliance on action taken by common people.

I also see my work contributing to existing knowledge on whether the committees were legitimized by the First Continental Congress (top-down authorization), or whether the committees authorized the Congress (bottom-up authorization). David Ammerman's breakthrough work argues that the most important provision of Congress' Continental Association was establishing popularly elected local committees to enforce boycotts and the other provisions of the Association. The Congress economically resisted Britain, meaning that they set out terms to boycott all British goods and urged local committees to

---

[13] Chilton Williamson. 2019. *American Suffrage: From Property to Democracy, 1760-1860*. Princeton University Press (originally published in 1960), 84.
[14] Ibid., 78-79, 82-83.
[15] Ibid., 76.

enforce such boycotts. These committees were elected by local qualified voters. Ammerman emphasizes that Congress authorized committees to physically inspect people and their property on suspicion of violating the Association. Certain violations consisted of consuming tea, importing tea on British ships, smuggling banned English goods, etc. The violators' names, in turn, would be published in the local Gazette: a form of public shaming and attempted ostracization.[16] The purpose of this shaming was to hold the violators accountable, and by doing so, radicals hoped that violators would conform to the growing movement. My thesis will investigate the Sixty's growing regulatory powers in relation to their attempted legitimacy and inclusion of more working-class men. I hope to demonstrate that there was tension with this inclusion of more men and the ousting of those who violated the Continental Association. Ammerman does not explicitly comment on the committees' legitimacy, but he conveys that the committees obtained legitimacy partly from their cooperativeness throughout the colonies. This cooperativeness was made possible because the Congress spoke in a "clear and undivided voice."[17] This is a top-down argument because the authorization and wisdom from the Congress through the Continental Association gave power and legitimacy to the committees to enforce such boycotts.

Although Ammerman's narrative is a comprehensive analysis of the committee system throughout the colonies in response to the Coercive Acts, he briefly investigates New York City politics during this critical period. New York City was one of the only localities in New York that formed a committee – showcasing the colony's large

[16] Ammerman, *In the Common Cause*, 85
[17] Ibid., xi.

conservative presence – and the Sixty became a regulatory agency of the First Continental Congress, albeit the city remained extremely divided along party lines. Ammerman's analysis focuses on the period between the First Continental Congress and the battles of Lexington and Concord, so my work will contextualize his analysis by examining New York City.

T.H. Breen and Mary Beth Norton felt differently about the committees' authorization. Breen emphasizes that the common people served as the bedrock of the Revolution.[18] Local committees carried out the Revolution and not the elite congressmen in Philadelphia. Committees established a revolutionary foundation and they were the reason why the Revolution took flight.[19] Breen spends most of the book arguing that this insurgency originated from the bottom-up. The Continental Association's Article XI, which authorized the creation of Committees of Observation and Inspection to enforce the boycott, codified the Association as a legitimate and enforceable law by Congress.[20] However, the Association only received its legitimacy through local enforcement by the novel committees,[21] such as the Committee of Sixty. Breen goes farther – because Congress offered no guidelines in Article XI about the sizes of the committees and how the committees ought to deal with offenders of the Association, congress "transferred" that power to local committees.[22] Therefore, the committees acquired legitimacy partly

---

[18] Bridenbaugh is "firmly convinced that it is people who make history." In his book, he focuses on cities. Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt*, vii.
[19] Breen, *American Insurgents*, 1.
[20] Carl Becker. 1909. *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760-1776* (Vol. 2, No. 1). Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 153.
[21] Becker argued that "It was only by leaving the enforcement of its recommendations to the radicals within each colony that its ends could be accomplished." Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 153.
[22] Breen, *American Insurgents*, 167; "In making these recommendations, it was transformed from a peaceable assembly into a revolutionary organization," Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 155.

from the Congress, but they were revolutionary bodies that carried out the shift to a more republican form of government while also prohibiting widespread violence.[23] The local committees used the Association to legitimize the American revolutionary cause.[24] Thus, there is a symbiotic relationship between the high-level Association and the grassroots populism that underpinned the local committees. The Association became the "political charter of the insurrection," and in the early months of 1775, committees employed more aggressive tactics towards ideological enemies and regulated behavior that violated the Association.[25]

Breen argues that the committees transformed political culture by dissolving a monarchical structure and propping up a government in which many new local people could vote and serve.[26] New York City is a prime example of this evolution, and my thesis will provide more information on how this mobilization occurred on the ground. In this period, as seen in New York City, new actors such as working-class men entered the political arena as voters and committeemen, showcasing the committees' popular nature. This phenomenon gave the committees their legitimacy.[27] Breen asserts that the committees were unconstitutional under British law because they were not explicitly authorized by Parliament or the King, but they acted on behalf of people's rights and they

---

[23] Breen, *American Insurgents*, 18, 164, and Pauline Maier. 1991. *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776*. New York: WW Norton & Company, 271-272; "The revolutionary movement in the years between 1774 and 1776 was the work of the Committees of Inspection and Observation; each township and each county had one; they all were watchdogs not only over the Association agreed to by the Continental Congress in October 1774, but quickly expanded their concerns to most other moral, political and ideological fields relevant in the struggle with the mother country." Hermann Wellenreuther, ed. 2006. *The Revolution of the People: Thoughts and Documents on the Revolutionary Process in North America, 1774-1776*. Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 8.
[24] Breen, *American Insurgents*, 170.
[25] Ibid., 203-204.
[26] Ibid., 11-12.
[27] T.H. Breen. 2019. *The Will of the People: The Revolutionary Birth of America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press., 132.

legally enforced their work at the local level.[28] By people's rights, I am referring to the colonists' natural born rights as English citizens specified in the Magna Carta, which were constantly referenced during the colonial period. My thesis can provide insight into how the New York City committee attempted to ensure these rights and by doing so, they assumed more local authority.

Mary Beth Norton's book, published in 2020, converses with Breen's book, which was published in 2010. Breen argues that there was broad agreement throughout the colonies, so factionalism was kept at bay. The revolutionary agenda was not the issue, Breen asserted, it was how to implement it.[29] One of Breen's most convincing and controversial arguments is that the local committees reshaped the Association's original intention (enforcing the boycott of British goods) to a second, unintended outcome in that the Association now served as a "kind of provisional constitution." Norton agrees with Breen by bluntly declaring that "it was bottom-up, not top-down governance."[30] The basis for her argument is that qualified local voters began to hold the reins of local police power. The committeemen relied on their local freeholders and freemen to vote them into office, thereby showcasing the power of local politics and government. My analysis can contextualize Breen and Norton's arguments by inspecting how the revolutionary agenda was achieved in New York City. Norton asserts that the Continental Association was an extremely vague document that empowered local committees to decide how to carry out the enforcement of the boycott. The committees decided if a violator would be punished

---

[28] Breen, *American Insurgents*, 162.
[29] Breen, *American Insurgents*, 163.
[30] Mary Beth Norton. 2020. *1774: The Long Year of Revolution*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 270.

by majority vote and if convicted, that violator would be publicly shamed.[31] Due to the document's vagueness, Norton encourages the reader to not view the formations of the committees as a unified act – they were in fact extremely divided, even within the Patriot camp.[32] My thesis will expose the inner workings of the evolution from the Committee of Fifty-one to the Committee of Sixty, thereby providing a closer look at what happened.

Carl L. Becker's book, published in 1909, focuses on the Fifty-One's progression to the Sixty. This is one of the few books that concentrates on New York City politics in my chosen era, and it is a leader in the field, so I will have to distinguish my argument from his. Becker writes that the Continental Association brought radicals' original and suppressed ideas to the surface. The Congress, therefore, legitimized and legalized a boycott. However, New Yorkers' consciousness evolved rapidly in 1774, which caused the change from the Fifty-one to the Sixty, meaning that the change was not strictly caused by the Association. The Committee of Fifty-one and the Sixty were themselves extralegal, meaning they were outside traditional and British-authorized legal structures. The committee system "had no authority except the authority of popular support." Therefore, according to Becker, the people controlled the Committee of Fifty-one's decisions. Becker's statement suggests that to achieve legitimacy, a body needs to seek public approval.[33] I will contribute to Becker's scholarship by further examining New York's extralegal committee system and placing more importance on New York City's role in defining the revolutionary movement.

---

[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., xix.
[33] Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 119-120.

My primary source base can be split into three components: newspapers and pamphlets, collections of personal papers (including letters) from relevant people, and documents to and from the Committee of Fifty-one and the Committee of Sixty.

Newspapers and pamphlets will give me ideas of how "the people" thought on an almost daily basis. Although many of the pamphlets were written by elite men, such as merchants, politicians, and clergymen, their thoughts are undoubtedly important in gauging how New York City politics evolved on an intimate level. At this time, tensions were astoundingly high. To curb dissent and enforce the Continental Association, radical committees took more local power into their own hands in the spring of 1775. They enforced the boycott on the ground, and by virtue of this new responsibility, the committees sought out violators of the boycott and ideological dissenters against the revolutionary cause. In response to this power grab, Loyalist pamphleteers became more radical themselves, calling the committees illegitimate, mobbish, arbitrary, and tyrannical. Both sides armed themselves literally and figuratively by this time. So, the sources will be central to my thesis in understanding how people, whether elite or not, thought and dealt with growing tensions. In addition, there are broadsides, which are large printed single sheets of paper that featured headlines and important news. They were printed in newspapers all throughout New York City. Broadsides were effective in obtaining people's attention and spurring political action and discourse. Since I am studying the rise of popular sovereignty and popular politics, I will use broadsides to contextualize the period and see what people discussed and prioritized. I have found newspapers, pamphlets, and broadsides in Force's *American Archives*, *America's*

Historical Newspapers, and Early American Imprints. The last two source bases contain everything printed in the colonial era in digital form.

Notable New Yorkers spearheaded much of this movement, so collections of personal papers will reveal how their thoughts evolved on extralegal government, the committee, political mobilization, etc. The committeemen in the Fifty-one and the Sixty were typically educated and higher-class New Yorkers, so many of them have a large written trail. The New York-Historical Society and the New York Public Library possess many documents from these leaders, and I encountered them over the summer in-person and online.[34]

Similar to the personal paper collections, documents to and from the Committee of Fifty-one and the Sixty will be worthwhile in providing me with ideas on how the committee operated and evolved throughout 1774 and 1775. Force's *American Archives* digitized all the Fifty-one's proceedings. I have also amassed sources from the archives at the New-York Historical Society and the New York Public Library.

My thesis is broken up into ten chapters, including the conclusion. My large argument is that radicals succeeded in achieving legitimacy for the New York City Committee by relying upon and mobilizing common people. This attempt did not go unchallenged, however, as conservatives throughout 1774 and 1775 continuously strove to undermine the radical agenda.

Chapters 1-3 examine May 1774 to the start of the First Continental Congress in September 1774. In the first chapter, I analyze the rapid creation of an extralegal

[34] I visited the Patricia D. Klingenstein Library at the New York Historical Society and the Brooke and Russell Astor Reading Room for Rare Books and Manuscripts at the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building for the New York Public Library.

committee to organize resistance against Britain due to the punitive Coercive Acts. Although conservatives controlled the Committee of Fifty-one, I argue that the committee's establishment demonstrates how the laboring class's authority grew in the process and how it represents the first step in the demolition of the old conservative political order. In the second chapter, I assess the summer of 1774 in which I argue that there are symbolic and political ways to establish legitimacy other than elections. Within the argument, "the popular will" started to express itself outside the extralegal government through street demonstrations and collective action. And these operations greatly influenced the committee's strategy, which will also be examined in the third part of the thesis. In the same chapter, to substantiate my arguments, I scrutinize the operations of the Mechanics Committee and how they formed their own legitimacy as a group. Arising out of the summer were notions of a permanent and legitimate political organization that truly represented common New Yorkers. The third chapter examines the nomination and selection of delegates to the First Continental Congress and how that procedure revealed ideological and strategic discrepancies between conservatives and radicals. I claim that this episode reflects a further dissipation of conservative power in the city and how newspapers transformed into more partisan vehicles.

Chapters 4 and 5 investigate the First Continental Congress and its reception thereafter. The fourth chapter investigates the proceedings of the Congress in Philadelphia and how the extralegal body's most principal measure was the Continental Association. In addition, I place more credit on the New York delegation. In the next chapter, I analyze the significance of newspapers and pamphlets in constructing New Yorkers' political consciousness after the Congress. Within this topic, I argue that

conservatives were driven by fear of losing power rather than ideals that predicated upon law and order.

Finally, chapters 6-9 scrutinize November 1774 to April 1775. I side with authors who champion bottom-up authorization – local committees, rather, retroactively legitimized the Congress. To understand this development, I analyze the establishment of the Committee of Sixty and its actions from November to April. I differentiate myself by arguing that the committee did not achieve legitimacy through its election, but rather by its continued reliance on common New Yorkers amid formidable conservative pushback.

In essence, there is no one person or group that can be fully credited for the rapid radicalization of the New York extralegal committee system in a mere eleven months. However, prominent radicals such as Alexander McDougall and Isaac Sears could not have succeeded without the assistance from common New Yorkers. I hope the following pages elucidate the deeply divided and cunning world of New York City politics and reveal the remarkability of the American Revolution.

Chapter 1: The Creation of the Committee of Fifty-one

The news of the Coercive Acts arrived in New York City on the evening of May 11, 1774, and the Acts received widespread distribution and attention the following day.[35] Sons of Liberty leader Alexander McDougall wrote a series of memorandums to document the tense time and ultimately raise resentment towards the Acts in New York City.[36] McDougall rebuked Parliament and the conservatives who were unwilling to enforce nonimportation on Britain. The Coercive Acts received "great abhorrence and indignation by the Sons of Freedom" and the British ministry's objective, according to an infuriated colonist, was "to divide the people."[37] The feeling was mutual among Bostonians. Thomas Young, in a letter to New York radical John Lamb, called the Port Bill a feat of "impolicy, injustice, [and] inhumanity."[38] Colonists were enraged in the immediate aftermath of the Coercive Acts.

The press diverged in its response to the Coercive Acts. The Acts jeopardized "The FATE OF A GREAT EMPIRE" and they caused "a crisis" in the colonies.[39] An anonymous writer from Boston wrote a "sacred truth": "By UNITING we STAND, by DIVIDING we FALL!"[40] Albeit published in Boston, Holt nevertheless included the article in his paper, highlighting the colonies' solidarity with besieged Boston. Hugh

---

[35] Alexander McDougall, "Political memorandums relative to the Conduct of the Citizens on the Boston Port Bill," 11-12 May 1774 (hereafter "Political memorandums"). Alexander McDougall Papers, Reel #1, 1757-1776 (+ 1780, 1783), Patricia D. Klingenstein Library of the New-York Historical Society.
[36] The Sons of Liberty went by the Liberty Boys in New York City. They are also known as the Sons of Freedom.
[37] McDougall, "Political Memorandums," 12 May 1774.
[38] Thomas Young to John Lamb, 18 May 1774, John Lamb Papers, Reel #1 1762-1887 (bulk 1762-1799), New-York Historical Society.
[39] John Holt, *New-York Journal* (hereafter *NYJ*), 12 May 1774; Christopher F. Minty. 2023. *Unfriendly to Liberty: Loyalist Networks and the Coming of the American Revolution in New York City*, Cornell University Press, 153.
[40] *NYJ*, 12 May 1774.

Gaine published a moderate response to Parliament's policies four days later. "A British American, who is a Lover of Peace, as well as a Hater of every Species of Tyranny" urged New Yorkers to "RAISE IMMEDIATELY, by Subscription, a Sum equal to the estimated Value of the DROWNED TEAS."[41] Another writer declared that "the liberty and welfare of America is suspended on the issue of the present struggle."[42] The news of the Coercive Acts sent shockwaves throughout New York City, which consisted of wealthy merchants, poor artisans, and radical leaders. The plurality of New York City contributed to its factious reaction to Britain's martyring of Boston.

Numerous printers abhorred the acts while conservatives merely desired the repayment of the destroyed tea so the relationship between Britain and her North American colonies would recuperate. Oliver DeLancey, a wealthy conservative merchant, claimed that "he would rather spend every shilling of his fortune than that the Boston Port Bill should be complied with."[43] The Boston Port Bill was one of the Coercive Acts and it shut down the port of Boston from all commerce, thereby causing mass suffering among common people. The port would only open if Boston repaid the price of the destroyed tea. Conservative merchants disagreed with Parliament's policies, but they prioritized cordial relations with their mother country. Non-importation and non-exportation agreements, the conservatives thought, would flatten their pockets and decimate New York City's economy.

---

[41] Hugh Gaine, *New-York Gazette and Weekly Mercury* (hereafter *NYGM*), 16 May 1774. Minty, *Unfriendly to Liberty*, 153.
[42] Peter Force, ed., *American Archives . . . A Documentary History of . . . the North American Colonies*, 4th ser., 6 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1837-1846), vol. I (Hereafter *AA*, 4, I), 294.
[43] McDougall, "Political memorandums," 13 May 1774.

Immediately after news of the Coercive Acts reached New York City, tensions rose to a boiling point, forcing people to choose sides. No matter what profession a person worked, how rich or poor their families were, or how connected they were to the British Empire, the Coercive Acts undoubtedly touched every New Yorker. Preliminary thoughts from radicals and conservatives demonstrate a highly strung city amid an identity crisis. The responses to the Coercive Acts foreshadow the brutal, chaotic, and trying birth of the New York City Committee of Correspondence.

Over the next few days, it became apparent that a Committee of Correspondence was necessary. McDougall and fellow Sons of Liberty leader Isaac Sears spurred the merchants to action. A general meeting of merchants occurred on the evening of May 16th at Samuel Fraunces' tavern to devise proper measures to respond to the frightening acts.[44] Specifically, the meeting's objective was to "determine on a nomination of a Committee of Correspondence, to bring about a Congress."[45] McDougall had already been pondering a Congress to redress the grievances levied by the Coercive Acts, but New York City had more immediate measures: the nomination of members to the Committee of Correspondence. In preparation for the meeting, McDougall posted two advertisements at the Merchants' Coffee Houses on the morning of May 16th.[46] "The Friends of Liberty," McDougall wrote in his personal diary, "deliberate on the

---

[44] *NYJ*, 17 May 1774.
[45] He posted the advertisements at 11 A.M. McDougall, "Political memorandums," 14 May 1774.
[46] "The Merchant Coffee House and other fine taverns were at the pinnacle of New York's loose, shifting hierarchy of taverns—they offered the best food and drink, hoping to attract the wealthiest clientele." Carp, *Rebels Rising*, 67.

expediency of [a] non-importation agreement."[47] McDougall spoke for the radicals and championed support for Boston rather than pushing a moderate course of action.[48]

Hundreds of merchants "accordingly appear[ed] at the time and place appointed" on the evening of May 16th.[49] So many merchants appeared, in fact, that the meeting relocated to the nearby Merchants' Exchange. When the meeting started, the DeLanceys evidently had the upper hand. "The whole of the Business of this meeting," McDougall noted, "the Delancy[s] had an agency in it…a design to get such a [Committee] as would be under their direction with a view to gain credit with the people if any thing to advance the liberty cause."[50] At this time, the "liberty cause" signified open resistance to the British Empire. It did not mean independence, but rather it referred to the restoration of the colonists' rights as Englishmen that were stripped due to the Coercive Acts. The DeLanceys sought to curry favor with the people rather than legitimately defending American rights and the liberty cause.[51] DeLanceyites desired complete and unfettered control of the Committee of Correspondence, and with Delanceyite Isaac Low as chairman, this occurred with relative ease. Low deferred to his fellow DeLanceyites who were primarily interested in the cordial relationship between Britain and her colonies. To rekindle this relationship, the DeLanceyites believed, a payment of the cost of the destroyed tea in Boston Harbor would "open the Port of Boston," implying that the

---

[47] McDougall, "Political memorandums," 16 May 1774.
[48] Roger J. Champagne. 1975. *Alexander McDougall and the American Revolution in New York*. Schenectady, N.Y.: New York State American Revolution Bicentennial Commission in conjunction with Union College Press, 55.
[49] According to Champagne, 300 people turned out. Champagne, *Alexander McDougall*, 55; *NYJ*, 17 May 1774.
[50] McDougall, "Political Memorandums," 16 May 1774; Minty, *Unfriendly to Liberty*, 156; The DeLanceys were also called DeLanceyites, so the two terms are interchangeable.
[51] Champagne, *Alexander McDougall*, 55.

conservatives were driven by financial motives. On the same note, McDougall recorded, DeLanceyites wanted to gain a "Sense of the other Colonies" before taking concrete action, suggesting that they opposed a non-importation agreement and were unwilling to lead the charge against the Coercive Acts.[52] The DeLanceyites' stalling tactics angered radical leaders like McDougall and Sears, who grew increasingly impatient with the laggard conservatives.

The size of the Committee also proved to be a contentious issue. McDougall ardently backed a smaller committee of twenty-five members that could act decisively regarding non-importation, but moderate and conservative merchants desired a larger, fifty-person committee that granted more power to merchants and thwarted the influence of popular leaders like McDougall and Sears.[53] In addition to impeding a non-importation agreement, the conservatives boasted a great majority in the nomination procedure. When the decision arose between a fifty-person or a twenty-five-person committee, it was "Carried for fifty by a great majority," all being "duly summoned."[54] The election of the Fifty-one represented a major conservative victory. According to one conservative newspaper, the extralegal committee would be in the hands of "men of property, probity, and understanding, whose zeal for the public good cannot be doubted."[55] Essentially, public virtue and selflessness ran strongest within men of industry because they had the independence to think for themselves. Unlike Alexander McDougall, Isaac Sears, and other popular leaders, the writer urged, the wealthy conservative committeemen could not

---

[52] McDougall, "Political Memorandums," 16 May 1774; Minty, *Unfriendly to Liberty*, 156.
[53] Champagne, *Alexander McDougall*, 55.
[54] Martha J. (Martha Joanna) Lamb, Harrison, Burton. 1829-1893. *History of the City of New York: Its Origin, Rise, And Progress*. New York: A.S. Barnes, Appendix C; AA, 4, I, 293.
[55] Rivington, *New-York Gazetteer* (hereafter *NYG*), 19 May 1774; *AA*, 4, I, 293

be swayed by radical public opinion or bribery. Lieutenant Governor Cadwallader Colden chastised the popular leaders, calling them "hot headed men [who] might run the City into dangerous measures."[56] Further, supporters of the British ministry craved order, thereby hoping that "New York may not be led into any further rash & hasty proceedings."[57] In addition, similar to the DeLanceyites, one New Yorker believed it would be unwise to enter non-importation and non-exportation "without consulting the country…[the merchants] of this city have not a right which they do not assume to determine for the city, the city has not more right to determine for the whole province."[58] For the moment, rash and hasty measures were kept to a minimum as long as the conservatives were in charge.

Although the nominees desired a slow response to the Coercive Acts, "a great majority" believed that it was necessary "to appoint a committee to correspond with the neighboring Colonies on the present important crisis." Albeit for varying reasons amongst conservatives like the DeLancey faction and radicals like the Liberty Boys, a Committee of Correspondence was nevertheless nominated. "A great majority" of nominees desired the "approbation of the public," showcasing that in a city controlled by aristocratic conservatives, the creation of a Committee of Correspondence is remarkable.[59] The New York City Committee of Correspondence, and by virtue the extralegal government system, was appointed by fellow New Yorkers rather than by the

---

[56] John Romeyn Brodhead, *Documents relative to the colonial history of the state of New York* (hereafter *DRCNY*), vol. 8, 343-344.
[57] *DRCNY*, 8: 468.
[58] 31 May 1774. Thomas Ellison Jr. to Thomas Ellison Sr. Ellison Family Papers (1753-ca. 1900), New-York Historical Society.
[59] Lamb, *History of the City of New York*, Appendix C; *AA*, 4, I, 293.

British government. Further, the public would approve the committee, therefore straying away from established forms of colonial governance. The conservatives at Fraunces' tavern on Thursday evening could have simply erected the committee on the spot, but they yearned for the public's approval. In the short-term, order emerged victorious in the nomination phase of the Committee of Correspondence. The conservatives stood atop a precarious foundation, however, because "New Yorkers were now congregating in taverns to debate public affairs, rather than delegating this responsibility to legislators."[60] Political mobilization became an increasingly common practice, and this phenomenon pushed the city to a more radical foundation over time. In addition, the Committee was extralegal, meaning that "it had no authority except the authority of popular support."[61]

Publications advertised the approval of the Committee of Fifty the next day. The Coffee House on Thursday, May 19th would be the forum "to approve of the Committee nominated as aforesaid, or to appoint such other persons, as in their discretion and wisdom may seem meet." Although the merchants were the nominees, the handbill requested "inhabitants of this city and county" to approve a "duly chosen" Committee.[62] Conservatives must have circulated the handbill, but inconsistent with their aristocratic ideology, all New York City inhabitants would approve the Committee. The election, therefore, granted immense power and legitimacy to non-merchants and laboring people. Rivington's newspaper urged the nominees to "be confirmed without any sinister opposition from narrow and ungenerous sentiment."[63] The conservatives attempted to

---

[60] Carp, *Rebels Rising*, 94.
[61] Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 119.
[62] They met at the Coffee House at 1 P.M; *NYJ*, 17 May 1774.
[63] *NYG*, 19 May 1774; *AA*, 4, I, 293.

limit the influence of radical members' whose opinions, according to the same conservatives, were adverse to the public good. DeLanceyites were sly political operators, attempting to court public opinion for the approval of their fifty-man ticket.

Before the May 19th confirmation, the conservatives' radical counterparts retaliated. Although on the losing end on May 16th, Alexander McDougall sought to establish a rival ticket. In the evening on May 18th, McDougall met with members of the Mechanics Committee at Bardin's Tavern, previously called Hampden Hall, and "unanimously approved the list of 25 nominated by a number of merchants and other Friends to Liberty."[64] The Liberty Boys, now calling themselves Mechanics to speak for the city's laboring class, chose their own slate of the fifty nominated members two days prior. McDougall intently concerned himself with the size of the committee, presumably believing a committee of twenty-five could take quicker and more concrete action steps. McDougall frequented city taverns like Bardin's and Drake's, the latter owned by Isaac Sears' father-in-law.[65] This activity demonstrated his capacity to level with the artisans, mechanics, and other tavern-goers, which garnered support for the cause of liberty.[66] By separately establishing a committee of twenty-five of the more radical members of the nominated Committee of Fifty, McDougall wanted the people of New York City to cast its lot with radicalism. The popular leader must have been disgruntled with the May 16th decision, so the rival Committee of Twenty-Five would be a valiant attempt to prevent

---

[64] McDougall, "Political memorandums," 18 May 1774.
[65] Pauline Maier. 2013. *The Old Revolutionaries: Political Lives in the Age of Samuel Adams*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. New York, 74.
[66] Ibid., 65-66, 74; Carp, *Rebels Rising*, 16.

the control of the city, and its response to Parliament's punitive acts, from entering conservative hands.

At 1 o'clock on Thursday, May 19th, "a much larger Meeting of the Inhabitants" convened at the Merchant's Coffee House to approve the May 16th meeting's nomination of fifty gentlemen for New York City's Committee of Correspondence.[67] The DeLancey faction, as they had at the May 16th meeting, packed the Coffee House to ensure the election of their fifty-man ticket. Popular leaders and Mechanics also attended the meeting albeit at a massive numerical disadvantage. Isaac Low addressed the public before the election, urging New Yorkers to conduct themselves "by the dictates of calm reason only" and "to banish from our hearts all little party distinctions, feuds and animosities…"[68] Low stressed unanimity amongst the public, and by articulating this concept, Low admonished the popular leaders for stirring up controversy. Low presumably referred to the radical nomination of a twenty-five-man ticket.

The meeting broke into confusion and raucousness, causing the decision of whether New York City's Committee of Correspondence would comprise of fifty or twenty-five members to be determined by "Voices of the Citizens by Subscription." The citizens now voted by signing their name, rather than orally announcing their choice. Due to the chaotic nature of the meeting, the new voting procedure demonstrated novel experimentation in local government. The Committee of Correspondence was New York's first attempt at an extralegal form of government, and the reliance on people's voices demonstrates its legitimacy. Laboring men, now voting by subscription rather than

---

[67] *NYGM*, 23 May 1774.
[68] *AA*, 4, I, 294.

by public announcement, presumably could limit their acquiescence to wealthy merchants who long dominated local politics. This did not occur, however. The DeLanceys, "dreading a [non-importation agreement]," influenced numerous members of the laboring class, thereby siphoning votes away from the radical Committee of Twenty-five ticket.[69] Gouverneur Morris observed a stark social divide where "people of property, with some few poor dependants" convened on one side of the room and "on the other all the tradesmen" who relinquished a day's wages for the good of the country."[70] Morris' observation reveals that some of the laborers deferred to the wealthy merchants, but on the whole, the meeting was divided amongst social and economic classes.

Before the voting commenced, Isaac Sears attempted to broaden the electorate as the last attempt to grasp power for the radical base. The popular leader urged that "everyman whose liberties were concerned" ought to choose their desired Committee of Correspondence, which would require a relocation to City Hall to poll the entire city. If this happened, a separate election procedure would need to occur, therefore elongating the process of electing a Committee of Correspondence. In addition, the change of site would mean laborers would lose a day's wages if the meeting continued.[71] Therefore, Sears set up a meeting with leaders of the DeLancey faction later that night to canvas the regions of the city. The fifty-man committee was approved, but the DeLanceys added Francis Lewis "to the number by unanimous consent," likely as a conciliatory measure.[72]

---

[69] William H.W Sabine, ed. *Historical memoirs From 16 March 1763 to 25 July 1778 of William Smith*. Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution. NY Times & Arno Press, 187.
[70] *AA*, 4, I, 342-343; Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker. 1948. *Father Knickerbocker Rebels, New York City during the Revolution*. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 37.
[71] McDougall, "Political memorandums," May 19, 1774.
[72] *AA*, 4, I, 295. *NYGM*, 23 May 1774.

The meeting concluded with the establishment of the Committee of Fifty-one. McDougall was absent at the meeting, alleging illness, but William Smith impertinently wrote that he "forsaw the Consequences."[73] Regardless of the addition of Francis Lewis, who was among the twenty-five radical nominees,[74] popular leaders were skeptical of the DeLancey faction. In the evening meeting between Sears and DeLanceyites regarding a city poll, nothing could be agreed upon and the meeting ended in stalemate.[75] On Friday, May 20th, the Mechanics reconvened at Bardin's where they agreed that they "would try the Committee of Fifty-one and if they misbehaved they would be removed."[76] At this point, the radical faction knew no other alternative than to go along with the Committee of Fifty-one.

The conservative merchants undoubtedly won the day. Conservatives commanded representation in the Committee of Fifty-one and subdued radical measures proposed by McDougall and Sears.[77] Rivington, in a letter to Boston, commented on this event, saying that "the power over our crowd is no longer in the hands of Sears, Lamb, and such unimportant persons… their power… expired instantly upon the election of the…Fifty-one, in which there is a majority of inflexibly honest, loyal, and prudent citizens."[78] The printer undoubtedly valued the established conservative wing of New York politics.

---

[73] Smith, *Memoirs*, 187.
[74] Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 115, footnote 12.
[75] Champagne, *Alexander McDougall*, 56; Roger, J Champagne. 1960. *The Sons of Liberty and The Aristocracy in New York Politics, 1765-1790*. The University of Wisconsin, Ph.D., 322.
[76] McDougall, "Political memorandums," 20 May 1774.
[77] Thomas Jones and Edward Floyd De Lancey. 1879. *History of New York during the Revolutionary War*. New York: Printed for the New York Historical Society, Vol. I, Chapter 2, 34.
[78] Rivington allegedly said this, according to Young. Thomas Young to John Lamb, 19 June 1774, John Lamb papers.; Quotation from Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 166, footnote 13.

Although a disappointment for radicals, New Yorkers nevertheless established a Committee of Correspondence stemming from the outrage caused by the Coercive Acts. From the news of the Acts reaching New York City on May 12th to the establishment of a governing body merely seven days later demonstrates a rapid mobilization of the people. Even the conservatives sought the approval of freeholders and freemen throughout New York City, showcasing how the Committee of Fifty-one had key elements of a legitimate representative body. At the meeting, New Yorkers "fairly contended about the future forms of our Government, whether it should be founded upon aristocratic or democratic principles." Morris' comments suggest that although aristocratic conservatives controlled the Committee, common New Yorkers experimented with this new form of local government, showcasing initial instances of political mobilization. "The mob begin[s] to think and to reason," uttered Morris, which he viewed "with fear and trembling…if the disputes with *Great Britain* continue…we shall be under the domination of a riotous mob." If the Committee continued down this radical and destructive route, concluded Morris, "farewell aristocracy."[79] The mob essentially refers to anybody except the conservative and established merchants who desired peaceful reconciliation with Britain. According to Morris, even though New York City's politics caught a break with the election of the moderate Fifty-one, the radical wheel had been put in motion. The election of the Committee of Fifty-one, and the commencement of the extralegal system in New York, represented a small but crucial step toward radicalism and ardent resistance to Britain. The mob's growing influence frightened establishment

[79] *AA*, 4, I, 342-343; Champagne analyzes this episode well. Roger J. Champagne. 1961. "New York and the Intolerable Acts." *New-York Historical Society Quarterly*, vol. 45, pp. 195-207, 206-207.

New Yorkers, who yearned for the control and ultimate subordination of laboring people.[80] DeLanceyites and other conservatives succeeded in controlling the establishment of the Committee of Fifty-one. Although in the minority in the Committee of Fifty-one, the laboring class's legitimacy grew tremendously in the process, thereby contributing to the further waning of an old order.[81]

---

[80] Maier, *Old Revolutionaries*, 78.
[81]Edward Countryman. 1989. *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760-1790*. New York: WW Norton, name of Part I – "The Waning of An Old Order: 1760-1775."

Chapter 2: The Rise of the Mechanics

The late spring and summer of 1774 featured a tremendous rise in tension between the conservative Committee of Fifty-one and the radical Mechanics Committee. New York City was, according to a young Alexander Hamilton, "full of uproar as if besieged by a foreign force."[82] Several novel problems emerged for New Yorkers, which revealed an identity crisis within conservatism and radicalism. The debates and agreements in these condensed three months serve as the catalyst for the First Continental Congress and future revolutionary action in New York City. The concepts of legitimacy and political mobilization are paramount to understanding New York City politics in the summer of 1774. The terms are closely aligned, and I argue that if a governing body can mobilize people to act and support their cause without using force, then that body has acquired legitimacy. "Legitimate" and "extralegal" are fundamentally at odds – the literal meaning of "legitimate" is "accordant with law or with established legal forms and requirements."[83] The events of the summer of 1774 started to highlight how the Fifty-one was not a legitimate governing body because they attempted to exclude common people. The summer raised inquiries about how organs of extralegal government ought to operate in colonial New York City and their relationship with traditional institutions.

The tension in the summer of 1774 highlights three primary arguments. First, there are other symbolic and political ways to establish legitimacy other than elections, such as pamphlets, broadsides, and street demonstrations. Second, the Mechanics

---

[82] Edwin G. Burrows, Mike Wallace. 2000. *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, Oxford University Press, 216.
[83] "Legitimate Definition & Meaning," *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/legitimate.

Committee successfully mobilized common people, constantly pressured the Committee of Fifty-one, and caused the collapse of the colonial government. As a result, the Mechanics forged its own legitimacy.[84] Finally, political mobilization of common people in New York City democratized the New York City Committee, which engendered the legitimacy of the First Continental Congress before the Congress occurred. It was the mobilization of common people that set the tone for the Congress and future revolutionary action.

The laggard Committee of Fifty-one facilitated the rise of the Mechanics Committee, and this phenomenon is evident in the late spring of 1774. By the summer, the Mechanics garnered attention from the Committee of Fifty-one. The Committee first met on May 23rd. Isaac Low was appointed chairman and John Alsop deputy chairman.[85] The Committee received a letter from the "body of Mechanics," signed by their Chairman Jonathan Blake, in which the radical group concurred with the public in the conservatives' nomination and creation of the Committee of Fifty-one.[86] The concurrence is important because after the chaotic and contentious creation of the Committee, the Mechanics, although initially on the losing side, did not take up arms. At their home taverns like Hampden Hall or Bardin's, the radical group must have spent late nights pondering the formation of their own separate committee to deal with affairs pertaining to the Coercive Acts. In the end, however, this did not occur. The Mechanics' explicit

---

[84] Bonomi discusses the growth of "interest" representation. Bonomi argues that "the growing legitimacy of self-interest as a public concept may be the sharpest single innovation of colonial politics." P. U. Bonomi. 2014. *A Factious People: Politics and Society in Colonial New York*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 281-282; Michael D Hattem. 2017. "'As Serves Our Interest Best': Political Economy and the Logic of Popular Resistance in New York City, 1765–1776." *New York History* 98, no. 1, 40–70, 43.
[85] *AA*, 4, I, 295; *NYGM*, 30 May 1774; *NYJ*, 2 June 1774.
[86] *AA*, 4, I, 295.

agreement to the Committee of Fifty-one is a sign that a certain degree of legitimacy has been achieved since no coercion was involved. Legitimacy is a way for the few to govern the many without force.

After receiving the letter from the Mechanics, a sub-committee was appointed to prepare a response to Boston's Committee of Correspondence; the letter's approval would be voted upon by the Committee at large later that night.[87] As early as May 13th, one day after the Coercive Acts reached New York City, Bostonian Thomas Young wrote to Liberty Boy John Lamb on the state of affairs in Boston and his outlook for the colonies. Young "presume[d] New York [would] fall behind none of her Sister Colonies in the alacrity and extent of her operations."[88] Young's optimistic sentiments can be extrapolated to the city of Boston, which impatiently awaited New York's course of action. On the same day, Bostonian radicals urged New York to follow suit. Boston's Committee was curious "whether you consider Boston as now suffering in the common cause and sensibly feel and resent the injury and affront offered to her? If you do…may we not from your approbation of our former conduct in defense of American liberty, rely on your suspending your trade with Great Britain at least."[89] Boston had taken action and New York needed to respond. Would New York join its suffering sister in resisting Britain? Or would the Committee of Fifty-one cast its lot with moderation? It was a trying moment for the Committee of Fifty-one and their response to the letter would be a turning point for both New York City politics and the affairs of the colonies.

---

[87] Ibid., 295-296; The sub-committee consisted of Alexander McDougall, Isaac Low, James Duane, and John Jay.
[88] Thomas Young to John Lamb, 13 May 1774, John Lamb papers.
[89] Boston to New York, 13 May 1774, New York Public Library; From Champagne, *The Sons of Liberty*, 345, footnote 25.

At 8 P.M. on May 23rd, the sub-committee reported the drafted response to Boston, and it was unanimously approved.[90] The letter started out promising, with the Committee declaring that as New York was "suffering in defence of the rights of America, we consider your injuries as a common cause, to the redress of which it is equally our duty and our interest to contribute." "Common cause" connotes a sense of unity to resist the mother country, which would lead Bostonians to believe that New York would adopt similar non-importation measures. This optimism, however, would be short lived. "What ought to be done in a situation so truly critical," the sub-committee wrote, "is very hard to be determined." This decision was difficult because the Fifty-one reluctantly supported Boston in its fight against Britain. The committeemen, especially conservative ones, were frightened by a trade boycott considering they were all merchants. After providing logistical details of the Committee of Fifty-one's composition and their first meeting earlier that day, the sub-committee cast its lot with moderation.[91] Albeit uttering that "the cause is general," the Committee of Fifty-one was unwilling to enact non-importation against England. Instead, the Committee "[foresaw] that no remedy can be of avail unless it proceeds from the joint act and approbation of all." The redressability of the injuries sustained by the Boston Port Bill would, in the conservatives' eyes, be achieved by "a congress of deputies from the colonies in general." This position, the conservatives thought, would curtail the influence of radical

---

[90] *AA*, 4, I, 296-297; "We sat four Hours P Day and have agreed to attempt a Congress of Deputies from all the Colonies, as the most probable Means of effecting a general Union and Consistency of Councils—Four (of which Number I am one) are appointed to prepare Dispatches for Boston." John Jay to John Vardill, 23 May 1774. Elizabeth M. Nuxoll, ed. *The Selected Papers of John Jay Digital Edition*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2014–, 87-89.

[91] Hugh M. Flick, Alexander C. Flick, ed. 1933. "The Rise of the Revolutionary Committee System," in *The History of the State of New York*, vols 3-4. New York: Columbia University Press, 227-228.

leaders like McDougall and Sears and bolstered DeLanceyites like Low. The conservatives wanted to gain a "Sense of the other Colonies."[92] Further, the sub-committee recommended that action ought to come from the collective. The writers urged that a future course should be determined by "a virtuous and spirited union which may be expected while the feeble efforts of a few will only be attended with mischief and disappointment to themselves and triumph to the adversaries of our liberty."[93] This statement belittled and must have angered McDougall and Sears, who ardently supported a speedy and effective non-importation agreement. The zealots of liberty would not get their non-importation right away, but they did not leave empty-handed because a general Congress was nevertheless decided upon. Although the Fifty-one kicked non-importation down the road in New York City, the letter opened the door to future radical action against Great Britain.

The radicals wanted to mobilize New York City to defend Boston, but that would be difficult to achieve. After the meeting concluded, McDougall recognized the laggard Committee of Fifty-one and therefore encouraged messenger Paul Revere to urge his fellow Bostonians to "[appoint the] time and place for the Congress as we did not do it [in the] Letter."[94] Even though a Congress was proposed, McDougall and presumably other radicals deplored the slow-moving merchants in the Fifty-one. This feeling emerges in McDougall and Sears' letter to Boston's Committee of Correspondence on May 15th. The radical duo, lamenting the sluggard Committee of Fifty-one, "judged it necessary" to forgo consulting with the rest of the committeemen. McDougall and Sears craved

---

[92] McDougall, "Political Memorandums," 16 May 1774; Minty, *Unfriendly to Liberty*, 156.
[93] *AA*, 4, I, 297-298.
[94] McDougall, "Political Memorandums," 24 May 1774.

expediency, and by informing the rest of the Committee of their intentions to send a letter after the fact, there was zero chance that the moderate and conservative majority would approve.[95] Exaggerating the amount of support for non-importation in New York City, McDougall and Sears attested that "a great number of our citizens wish our port to be in the same state with yours."[96] Hence, due to the letter, Boston must have been disappointed in the Committee of Fifty-one's decision to postpone non-importation because they were under the impression that New York was right behind them in enacting a boycott. New York City evidently did not mobilize as quickly as the more radical cities desired.

The late spring of 1774 featured bouts between the conservative and radical factions within the Committee of Fifty-one, but as New York City progressed into the summer, tension rose exponentially. And as the temperature rose in the city, so did the popularity, effectiveness, and legitimacy of the Mechanics Committee. The primary issue on the docket was now the nomination and approval of delegates to the general Congress. Although a general Congress was proposed, conservatives in the Fifty-one nevertheless needed to make a decision regarding a boycott. The selection of delegates to the Congress would only exacerbate current tensions.[97] This would lead to more debates, more conflict, and more questions of legitimacy.

---

[95] McDougall, "Political Memorandums," 15 May 1774.
[96] Alexander McDougall and Isaac Sears to Boston Committee of Correspondence, 15 May 1774, Boston Committee of Correspondence Records, New York Public Library. https://archives.nypl.org/mss/343#detailed. According to Champagne, McDougall and Sears "purposely misrepresent[ed] the situation in New York." Champagne, *Alexander McDougall*, 53; Champagne, "New York and the Intolerable Acts," 200.
[97] Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 119-120.

As the Committee of Fifty-one attempted to contain the influence of the disenfranchised, the artisans' and mechanics' legitimacy rose tremendously in the summer of 1774. Their participation in the political system by means of advertisements, street demonstrations, and overall pressure reshaped political culture. The various forms of political participation demonstrate that there are additional symbolic and political ways to establish legitimacy other than elections or public approbations. Gary B. Nash wrote that "the will of the people was being determined quite apart from whether individuals were franchised or not."[98] Going one step further, the popularly approved Committee of Fifty-one, which "was set up to capture and represent the will of New Yorkers"[99], did not achieve this lofty goal. Through the increasingly popular forms of entering the political system, the will of the people was in fact being determined by a growing disenfranchised laboring class who were represented by the Mechanics Committee. This phenomenon sheds light on what extra-political participation meant in revolutionary New York City outside of being a committeeman. The Mechanics did not have outspoken leaders as they predominantly functioned as a group, so there is an exceedingly small written trail connected to the Mechanics and many of their members are unknown.[100] The Mechanics, therefore, functioned as a group without outspoken and popular leaders like the Liberty Boys. The Mechanics Committee emerged as a legitimate organization throughout the summer of 1774 because they successfully mobilized common people and constantly pressured the Committee of Fifty-one. The Mechanics pressed the moderate Fifty-one to

---

[98] Gary B. Nash. 1986. *The Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 233-234.
[99] Minty, *Unfriendly to Liberty*, 161.
[100] Minty, *Unfriendly to Liberty*, 158-159.

act more radically and democratically without force, which highlights the Committee's legitimacy in colonial New York City.

To understand the Mechanics' success and legitimacy as a governing body in revolutionary New York, it is necessary to examine the etymology of the word "mechanic" in Colonial America. Set against "men of property, probity, and understanding"[101], the mechanic arts signify activities in which "the Hand and Body are more concerned than the Mind." The terms "mechanick" and "mechanical" conveyed a sense of brutishness – something "mean, base, [and] pitiful," because the "mechanick Arts or Handicrafts are more mean and inferior than the Liberal Sciences." According to Staughton Lynd, "'mechanic' referred to all groups below merchants and lawyers."[102] Conservative New Yorkers pitted themselves against the laboring class, as they saw "the Mechanicks" as an organization that relied upon riots and mobs.

But how did the Mechanics Committee originate? In the 1760s, the Mechanics were "uniformly identified with the Sons of Liberty."[103] By the spring of 1774, they emerged as an autonomous body. Becker attributes the advent of the Mechanics to a strategic effort made by the radicals to elect favorable delegates to the general Congress. There had not been any long-standing requirements for who was eligible to vote and run for office in elections to the general Congress. Since the Congress had the same legal standing as the Fifty-one – both were extralegal – the local committees decided on their own terms who was eligible to vote and serve. Therefore, the nomination and selection

---

[101] *NYG*, 19 May 1774; *AA*, 4, I, 293.
[102] Carl Bridenbaugh. 1961. *The Colonial Craftsman*. University of Chicago Press, 155-156; Staughton Lynd. 1965. "The Mechanics in New York Politics, 1774–1788," Labor History 5, 82.
[103] Lynd, "The Mechanics in New York Politics," 88, footnote 28.

process to the general Congress was a novel form of experimentation, and the radicals used the elections to Congress to push the colonies – and their own city – to a more radical foundation.

Becker attests that the rise of the Mechanics Committee, which would acknowledge the disenfranchised and attach importance to their demands, was the radicals' only chance to send radical delegates to Philadelphia. The Mechanics Committee, then, "was virtually a continuation of the Sons of Liberty…[and] the chief instrument through which the radical leaders made their determined fight for the election of delegates to the general Congress."[104] Becker's interpretation of a "virtual continuation" from the Sons of Liberty to the Mechanics is insufficient.[105] By backing the young Committee and considering the voices of the disenfranchised, the radicals presumably expected that the Committee would be considered legitimate, therefore spurring more effective action in sending resistance-loving delegates to the Congress. The Mechanics Committee went farther than their Sons of Liberty counterparts, however. The leaders of the Mechanics, unlike the merchant-led Liberty Boys, were part of the laboring class – they lived and worked with their disenfranchised brethren.[106] Although McDougall and Sears popularized the Mechanics Committee, the Mechanics were independent from the Liberty Boys. Edward Countryman argues that the Mechanics propelled the revolutionary movement in New York, declaring that they "gained the self-

---

[104] Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 120.
[105] Lynd and Mason have shown that the Mechanics were in fact not a continuation of the New York Sons of Liberty (Liberty Boys). Lynd, "The Mechanics in New York Politics," 88; Bernard Mason. 1966. *The Road to Independence: The Revolutionary Movement in New York, 1773–1777*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 15n., 21n., 23n., 27n.
[106] Lynd shows how leaders of the Mechanics worked laboring jobs, unlike McDougall and Sears, who were merchants. Lynd, "The Mechanics in New York Politics," 88-89, footnote 30.

awareness and self-confidence necessary to make themselves a separate group."[107] Christopher F. Minty lauds the Mechanics by declaring that "the organization of the Committee of Mechanics was among the most significant moments in the history of British New York."[108] The Mechanics fully embraced street demonstrations and popular action. In the late spring and summer of 1774, the rise of the Mechanics Committee fostered the notion of a legitimate laboring class.

After corresponding with sundry Committees of Correspondences over the months of May and June, the Fifty-one convened on June 29th at the Merchants' Exchange, where Alexander McDougall motioned to nominate five New York City delegates to represent the colony of New York in the general Congress. In addition, the radical leader proposed that the names of the five delegates would be sent to the Mechanics Committee "for their concurrence." Finally, in similar Fifty-one fashion, the nominees would be approbated by the "freeholders and freemen" of New York City the following Tuesday. After deliberation, it was ordered that McDougall's motion would be decided on the evening of July 4th.[109] McDougall's motion, according to Becker, "was a radical step toward overhauling the traditional organs of governance in New York—the colony and the city." The proposal of nominating delegates and their concurrence by the Mechanics represents McDougall's impatience with the laggard Colden-led Colonial Assembly, leading to the Fifty-One organizing and legitimizing "an alternative form of institutional governance." The Fifty-one's governing process would now include the Mechanics Committee, who the conservatives vehemently disliked. The conservatives

---

[107] Countryman, *A People in Revolution*, 124.
[108] Minty, *Unfriendly to Liberty*, 159.
[109] *AA*, 4, I, 307.

did not want to acknowledge the Mechanics as a legitimate body that represented the people of New York.[110]

According to the proposal, the Fifty-one would locally govern New York City and they would supersede the British-authorized Colonial Assembly by taking control in nominating delegates to the Continental Congress. On July 5th, a moderate writer asserted that to lay a "firm foundation…for a future permanent Union," a general Congress should take place and the delegates ought to send a letter to King demanding redress of grievances. "Should it be objected that some of the Assemblies are dissolved," the writer continued, "that when such a *disposition* shall appear in the *people*, it cannot be doubted that all the Governours upon the Continent would readily embrace the favourable season, and give us *all* what *ought* to be our most ardent, and is our most *patriotic* wish to obtain."[111] Colonial activists played a dangerous game in the summer of 1774. They sought to create a parallel institution that would compete with and eventually replace the British authorized Colonial Assembly. The author wrote optimistically because they said that a statement to King would be the "final" step to reinstate a harmonious relationship between the colonies and Britain. Therefore, the Congress would only serve as a temporary remedy. Shortly after its publication, a radical responded to the moderate writer, asserting that since the Congress has "no existence in law, you say also it may be judged to be illegal; by no means, Sir, when you have allowed that the last extremes will make it legal."[112] The radical's reasoning implies that a last resort makes a governing

---

[110] Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 121.
[111] *AA*, 4, I, 309.
[112] Ibid., 310-311.

body legal. The proposal to concur with the Mechanics served as the next step in the upending of "legal" governance, such as the British appointed Assembly.

The conservatives thought that the Mechanics' concurrence would erode the legitimacy of the Fifty-one.[113] These committeemen nevertheless acted outside traditional organs of government, but they believed that the Fifty-one acted as a solid middle ground between the British appointed government and the people. The conservatives wanted to hold this moderate stance, as they believed the Committees of Correspondence were a temporary resolution. Adding the Mechanics into the mix would upset this reality and push extralegal governance to a more radical foundation. Therefore, conservative committeemen sought to construct barriers to legitimacy – these fortifications served to block the people from influencing the Committee. That is why the Fifty-one only consists of merchants. But throughout the late spring and summer, the barriers softened. Even though the proposal frightened conservative committeemen, who initially yearned "to abate the Liberty Interests," they were "now swimming with the Current & taking the Advantage of the Weakness of Colden, they venture to speak aloud [against] the Measures of [Administration] even at Dinner in his Presence…"[114] Even the conservatives started to swim with the radical tide throughout the late spring and summer of 1774. This is because the Colonial Assembly weakened as 1774 progressed and committeemen took advantage of Colden's inaction by taking concrete action, showcasing the growing legitimacy of extralegal government. Due to McDougall's and Sears' pressure to pass non-importation and non-exportation agreements, conservatives

[113] Minty, *Unfriendly to Liberty*, 161.
[114] Sabine, *Memoirs*, 188.

followed popular opinion and were forced to recognize the Mechanics and disenfranchised laborers as legitimate sources of power. Popular opinion expressed itself outside Committee meetings and election days at the Exchange. It exercised influence in the streets through action. Finally, according to Minty, McDougall believed that by legitimizing the Committee of Fifty-one, which nominated delegates who were approved by New Yorkers, the upcoming Continental Congress would also have a solid claim to legitimacy.[115]

Much of the proposal relies on the Mechanics Committee. According to McDougall's motion, establishing the legitimacy of the Committee of Fifty-one, and therefore undermining the Colonial Assembly, depended on the Mechanics' concurrence to the Fifty-one's nominations. The proposal attempted to legitimize the Mechanics by ushering them into the extralegal political process. McDougall's endeavor was bold. The Mechanics Committee, which represented common New Yorkers, would now have immense power as a check on the conservative Fifty-one. The Mechanics were paramount in shaping radical consciousness and revolutionary action in New York City.

Thus, the nomination and selection of delegates to the general Congress in Philadelphia served as a time of transformation for New York City politics. But with this transformation came astronomical amounts of tension. At the meeting of July 4th, after hearing motions from numerous committeemen, the conservatives emerged successful. The Committee of Fifty-one nominated a moderate ticket: Philip Livingston, John Alsop, Isaac Low, James Duane, and John Jay. Isaac Sears and other radical committeemen

[115] Minty, *Unfriendly to Liberty*, 161.

made "a violent effort" to have Alexander McDougall and fellow Liberty Boy John Morin Scott replace Jay and Alsop, but this motion failed.[116] The Committee ordered that the approval or disapproval of the nominees would occur at 12 P.M. on July 7th at City Hall. In addition, McDougall's original motion fell through. The nominees would be approved by the freeholders and freemen of New York City without endorsement by the Mechanics Committee.[117] In essence, the conservatives wanted to limit the influence and legitimacy of the Mechanics. But by intentionally omitting the Mechanics from the approval of delegates to the general Congress, the Committee of Fifty-one opened the door for the radicals to assert their influence outside traditional governmental structures. Colden alluded to this progression when he reported the July 4th proceedings to the Earl of Dartmouth. "These transactions are dangerous…and illegal," Colden wrote, "but by what means shall Government prevent them?"[118] Lieutenant Governor Colden lamented the inability of the Colonial Assembly to thwart the extralegal Committee of Fifty-one. Colden's comments demonstrate the futility of the rule of law and the start of the crumbling of the colonial government in New York City. Further, "the present political zeal and phrenzy is almost entirely confined to the City of New-York."[119] It is remarkable that New York City radicals pushed such a predominantly conservative colony's colonial government to the brink. Colden's outlook on the colony showcases how important New York City was in mounting resistance to Great Britain. Colden suggests that it is irrelevant whether the Committee is illegal because the British-controlled colonial governments cannot stop the Committee from operating. Popular support, then, was a

---

[116] *DRCNY*, 8: 469-470.
[117] *AA*, 4, I, 308-309.
[118] *DRCNY*, 8: 470.
[119] Ibid.

greater measure of legitimacy than the rule of law.[120] When formal legal systems themselves come to be seen as illegitimate organs of government, new fields of action are opened and the rules of the game for achieving legitimacy become fluid until they are eventually codified into a new system of law. The Committee, unlike the Colonial Assembly, included ordinary people in the political processes of approval and disapproval. Legitimacy, however, stretches further than the inclusion of the people in extralegal public affairs. Becker proposes two thought-provoking questions: "Were the legal voters alone to act as the people, or were the disenfranchised also to be included? Were the decisions to be by ballot or by mass-meeting demonstrations?"[121]

These questions were answered in July of 1774. After the Committee of Fifty-one sided with the conservatives in nominating their moderate ticket, the Mechanics Committee reconvened at Bardin's Tavern and nominated their own ticket: Isaac Low, Philip Livingston, John Jay, Leonard Lispenard, and Alexander McDougall.[122] To approve the Mechanics' nominees, an advertisement called "every Friend to the true Interest of this distressed Country" to attend a meeting in the Fields on July 6th at 6 P.M. The advertisement censured the conservatives and moderates within Committee of Fifty-one, calling them "Enemies of the Liberty of America," and claiming that they "[misrepresent] the Attachment of the Inhabitants of this City."[123] According to the broadside, the Coercive Acts impacted every New Yorker regardless of voting status. The Mechanics championed the inclusion of common people in politics – the posting implies

---

[120] Countryman elucidates this point. Countryman, *A People in Revolution*, 144-145.
[121] Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 119-120.
[122] Burrows, *Gotham*, 217; *At a general meeting of the Committee of Mechanicks*…, Wednesday July 6, 1774. Evans, 13093; Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 123.
[123] *The enemies of the liberty of America*…, Tuesday July 5, Evans 13095.

that everyone had a say in the extralegal government system. According to the Mechanics, the Committee of Fifty-one did not garner popular approval nor have a true connection to the people of New York City. Instead, the advertisement infers that the Mechanics rightfully represented common New Yorkers, and the mass demonstration to take place on July 6th exemplifies this sentiment.

On the evening of July 6th, numerous radicals and laborers convened at the Fields. Now home to City Hall, the Fields was an open space on the geographical fringes of revolutionary New York City. The space was a breeding ground for radicalism, and the Sons of Liberty frequented the Fields in the 1760s to publicly resist the British Empire.[124] McDougall served as the chairman and Alexander Hamilton spoke.[125] Although there are no records of what was exactly said at the meeting, nine resolutions were unanimously passed. The meeting approved a resolution that non-importation and non-exportation to Britain "will prove the salvation of North America and her liberties." In addition, the meeting "instructed, empowered, and directed" the Mechanics' slate of delegates to agree upon a non-importation policy and "obey and observe all such resolutions, determinations and measures" passed at the Congress in September. In the ninth resolution, the radicals approved that the Committee of Fifty-one ought to "use their utmost endeavours to carry these resolutions into execution." Finally, the radicals ordered the nine resolutions to be printed in New York City newspapers.[126]

---

[124] "The Fields of New York." *Son of the South*, www.sonofthesouth.net/revolutionary-war/colonies/fields-new-york.htm.
[125] Ron Chernow. 2005. *Alexander Hamilton*. New York: Penguin Books, 55.
[126] *AA*, 4, I, 312-313; *NYJ*, 7 July 1774; *NYGM*, 11 July 1774; *NYG*, 14 July 1774.

Conventional analysis of the July 6th meeting is that it was called by popular leaders like McDougall to pressure the idle Fifty-one by harnessing public outrage over the Coercive Acts.[127] The radicals likely desired the mass spreading of the resolutions because they wanted more common people to join their cause. By printing the resolutions in city newspapers, the radicals further legitimized the Mechanics Committee. While there is no explicit mention of the Mechanics in the resolutions, they read like typical Fifty-one resolutions, which showcases the July 6th meeting's commitment to overtake the Fifty-one. Conservatives and radicals used the press as their battleground; they were places where people forged allegiances and burned bridges. In the creation of the Fifty-one, leaders used newspapers to call New Yorkers to approve their creation. At this point in July, newspapers were used to spread radical information and to court remaining neutral New Yorkers. Newspapers were another method to establish legitimacy in revolutionary colonial New York City.

The meeting redefined notions of legitimacy, which is achieved not only by including common people in the political process, but by mobilizing people outside these conventional institutions without force. The public demonstration highlights the variety and fluidity of paths to political engagement and enacting change. A growing disenfranchised laboring class showcased their power on July 6th. The people could now act for themselves – they did not need merchants to represent them. They also did not need an expansion of suffrage. Common New Yorkers successfully exercised their influence outside the extralegal system, so voting would not significantly increase their power. Therefore, the Mechanics Committee – the group that represented the interests of

[127] Champagne, *Alexander McDougall*, 63.

disenfranchised people – was successful because it harnessed the voices of common New Yorkers and coalesced their visions into a legitimate and concrete body. In addition, the July 6th meeting pressured the staunchly moderate Committee of Fifty-one. In revolutionary New York City, being a committeeman was not necessary to carry out tangible action. The scope of extra-political participation widened in the summer of 1774.

But there lies a problem. For the resolutions to turn into concrete actions, agreement amongst the committeemen in New York City was necessary; and the July 6th resolutions were passed in a radical public street demonstration, which would likely face strong headwinds from conservatives, who refused to recognize the Mechanics as a legitimate governing body. In the future, two separate governing bodies churning out contradictory resolutions would only lead to more internal conflict. A united front on matters pertaining to resistance to Britain was vital.

The conservative committeemen's response to the July 6th meeting showcases their anxiety about an excess of democracy. The meeting on July 7th highlighted the clash between conservatism and radicalism. At the meeting, both slates of candidates were rejected.[128] However, in the days surrounding the election, "Another Citizen," championed the Fifty-one's ticket and proclaimed that "the *Voice* of the Committee will be the *Voice* of the People."[129] In addition, the writer asserted that the popular leaders had "*turbulent Tempers*" and incited division both within the Fifty-one and the broader realm of New York City politics. "Another Citizen" believed that the committee represented the people. The Fifty-one and the Mechanics were also ordered to designate sub-committees

---

[128] *To the Inhabitants of the City and County of New York*, 7 July 1774, Evans, 42713.
[129] "Another Citizen," *To the Inhabitants of the City and County of New York*, 5 June 1774, Evans, 13661.

to choose people from each ward to canvass votes to decide which ticket should go to the general Congress in Philadelphia. Voters, unlike past elections, now consisted of all the city's male taxpayers, which showcases a growing democratization of the extralegal committee system.[130] The July 6th meeting pushed the Committee to a more democratic – and therefore radical – foundation because the extralegal body would now canvass the city from a broader swath of voters, instead of their usual approval procedure by the city's merchants.

The most important part of the meeting, however, came from DeLanceyite John Thurman, who introduced a motion to reprimand the July 6th meeting in the Fields. Thurman described the July 5th advertisement's critique of the conservatives in the Fifty-one as "mystic and ambiguous," and declared that no person, especially a committeeman[131], "had a right to call a meeting by an anonymous advertisement" and pass unauthorized resolutions. Thurman overtly clarified the unofficial rules of the extralegal Committee, and by defining these rules, Thurman likely desired to show that the conservatives, unlike the radicals, played the game fairly. Thurman then motioned to censure the proceedings in the Fields, which "calculated to throw an odium on this Committee, and to create groundless jealousies and suspicions of their conduct, as well as disunion among our fellow-citizens." After some futile pushback by McDougall, the Fifty-one carried the motion in the affirmative.[132] Thurman seized more power for the Fifty-one, and his condemnation undermined any future governmental body that would

---

[130] *AA*, 4, I, 310; Champagne, *Alexander McDougall*, 61.
[131] Calling out McDougall.
[132] *AA*, 4, I, 310-311; Joseph S Tiedemann. 1997. *Reluctant Revolutionaries: New York City and the Road to Independence, 1763-1776*. Cornell University Press, 194.

rely on public support.[133] However, the motion goes further than the preservation of order – it highlights the conservatives' fears of disenfranchised New Yorkers. The conservatives considered the July 6th meeting a legitimate threat to their dominion over New York City local politics. Shedding light on this changing order, Edward Countryman argues that "during the last years of the old order power wielders found themselves profoundly out of harmony with the needs of the society that they claimed a mandate to govern."[134] The conservatives believed the Fifty-one had achieved popular approval from franchised voters, but the July 6th meeting reveals that to assert power and achieve legitimacy, it was necessary to garner support from disenfranchised voters. The conservatives did not truly represent the will of common New Yorkers, who likely saw the Mechanics as truly acting on their behalf.

To further assert control, the Committee agreed to publish the censure.[135] This order, according to the conservatives, infuriated McDougall and Sears, who stormed out of the meeting yelling "the Committee is dissolved – the Committee is dissolved," and along with nine other radicals, the popular leaders resigned from the Fifty-one the next day.[136] Further, McDougall was so angry that he demanded that he be removed from the nomination ticket for the general Congress.[137] The radicals remembered the events of the July 7th meeting differently in that "printing the proceedings of the Committee has been…judged inexpedient because every citizen, by the rules of the Board, may have

---

[133] Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 194.
[134] Countryman, *A People in Revolution*, xvii
[135] *AA* 4, I, 312; Champagne, *Alexander McDougall*, 61.
[136] *AA*, 4, I, 314; Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 194.
[137] *AA*, 4, I, 315; Alexander McDougall, *To the Freeholders, Freemen, and Inhabitants of the City and County of New York*, 9 July 1774, Evans, 13384; Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 194.

access to them in the presence of one of the members." In addition, the radicals contested, the motion to publish the censure was agreed upon after the Committee adjourned and numerous members had dispersed.[138] Hence, it is unclear what occurred at the July 7th meeting, but it is evident that there was a major dispute on how the Fifty-one was procedurally organized. Even though the conservatives got their wish in chastising the radicals, the radicals pressured the conservatives so much that the Fifty-one had to violate Committee rules by publicly announcing their condemnation.[139] The conservatives valued order above everything else, and the episode in early July petrified them. They were willing to bend the rules so they could squash an increasingly democratic New York City.

In the end, according to Becker, the incident demonstrates the failure of the Fifty-one to represent both conservatives and radicals in setting up organized resistance to Britain. Becker asserts that it was inevitable that the radicals would withdraw from the Fifty-one and form their own Committee.[140] Expanding on this interpretation, the nomination and election of delegates to the general Congress in Philadelphia inflamed the tensions between the radical and conservative factions. The Committee's efficacy in connecting with the people minimized now that the Fifty-one was now severed along party lines. Disenfranchised New Yorkers must have heard the radicals' story: how the conservatives cunningly ordered the publishing of the censure and McDougall's and Sears' outrage, which in turn led to more indignation among the masses. If these events truly occurred, the popular leaders presumably wanted common people to know about this episode to garner more support for non-importation. Finally, Becker wrote that

---

[138] *AA*, 4, I, 313-314.
[139] Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 128-129.
[140] Ibid.,128.

neither the conservative nor the radical faction could transform their partisan Committee into a government at this point.[141] Becker's statement is not wholly true. The radicals and the Mechanics, namely through the July 6th meeting, mobilized numerous disenfranchised New Yorkers and at this juncture in which the radicals resigned from the Fifty-one, a genuine government started forming amongst the people. Arising out of the July 6th public demonstration were notions of a permanent and legitimate political organization that truly represented common New Yorkers.

[141] Ibid.

Chapter 3: Cloudy Skies

The remainder of July and August of 1774 featured an increasingly distressed relationship between conservatives and radicals within the Fifty-one. After the radicals' secession from the Committee, William Smith observed, "the political Sky at this Place is cloudy."[142] The withdrawal threw New York City into confusion – it was difficult to understand who was in charge and who represented New Yorkers. The Fifty-one needed to compromise to solve their existential problems, but the relationship between conservatives and radicals became increasingly fraught during July and August. Thus, as the general Congress in Philadelphia approached, the tension in New York City grew to its zenith, which impeded the Fifty-one's ability to act quickly and effectively. However, with the Fifty-one deciding on whom to send to Philadelphia, they also needed to determine their identity as an extralegal group operating in Colonial America.

The radical resignation from the Fifty-one further divided the city into ideological factions. McDougall hoped the resignations would cause widespread jealousy across the city.[143] The radicals desired the growth of public indignation towards the conservative Fifty-one and for New York to join the "common voice of the continent." "Strange that the colony who had the first intelligence of Parliamentary measures," William Smith added, "is behind all the rest."[144] The Fifty-one's division only exacerbated New York's sluggard reaction to the Coercive Acts. The committeemen decided that a moderate set of resolutions and delegates would be decided at a public meeting at the Coffee House on

---

[142] Smith, *Memoirs*, 188.
[143] Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. (25 July 1774). *Letter from Isaac Sears and Alexander McDougall*. Retrieved from https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/ea515610-1157-0134-065d-00505686a51c; Champagne, *Alexander McDougall*, 63.
[144] Smith, *Memoirs*, 188.

July 19th.[145] The conservatives' resolutions, albeit less radical than their July 6th counterparts, evidently yielded to the radical agenda. The first resolution pledged fealty to their constitutional and sovereign ruler: King George III. However, the Fifty-one chastised Parliament, declaring that recent "unjust and unconstitutional" policies will cause "fatal consequences to the Colonies and their parent State." The Committee then declared that the upcoming general Congress was "the most prudent measure" to assist and relieve Boston. Most importantly, the Fifty-one asserted that if the Congress agreed on a non-importation agreement in Philadelphia, then "it ought to be very general and faithfully adhered to."[146] This was a major break from previous conservative objectives. Overall, radical and conservative ideologies intertwined in producing the resolutions. The popular leaders got their wish with New York's support of a congressional non-importation agreement. The conservatives in the Fifty-one championed the wisdom and prudence of the general Congress, but they capitulated to the radicals because they valued a unified response to the Coercive Acts. The conservatives must have prioritized the legitimacy of a singular committee over a fractured New York City political scene. The backdrop of the July 6th resolutions and the recent radical secession from the Fifty-one must have frightened the conservative committeemen and spurred them to compromise. The conservatives relinquished their tight grip on the Fifty-one by granting power and legitimacy to the radical agenda. The radicals were willing to walk out, whereas the conservatives were not. The actions in the summer of 1774 reflect how the parties

---

[145] *AA*, 4, I, 315; *Proceedings of the Committee of Correspondence in New York*, 13 July 1774, Evans, 13477; John Jay to John Morin Scott, 22 June 1774; Nuxoll, *The Selected Papers of John Jay*, 92-93.
[146] *AA*, 4, I, 315-316; *NYGM*, 25 July 1774.

employed different political strategies and the shifting balance of power in New York politics.

Common New Yorkers voiced their concerns at the public meeting on July 19th, when the bipartisan resolutions and the moderate ticket were rejected. The resolutions "were destitute of vigour, sense, and integrity," and the people appointed a fifteen-person committee to rewrite the resolutions.[147] The decision alarmed the conservatives. DeLanceyites, including Jay, refused to serve on the newly formed fifteen-person committee because the "election[s] [are] too irregular to assume any authority." Further, the conservatives surmised that the fifteen-person committee would "cast an invidious reflection on the Committee of Correspondence."[148] Alsop, Low, and Jay lamented the enigmatic New York City political situation, in which the selection of delegates to the general Congress "remains so uncertain." "Until the sentiments of the town are ascertained with great precision," they argued, "we can by no means consider ourselves, or any others, nominated as Delegates, duly chosen or authorized, to act in so honourable and important a station."[149] The moderates and conservatives championed the legitimacy of the Fifty-one and New York's delegation to Philadelphia, but their refusal to serve on the new drafting committee highlights their reluctance to appease radicals. The conservatives' comments speak directly to the issue of legitimacy and demonstrate how fluid (or precarious) that category had become. Political institutions are melting and being reformed in front of the conservatives' very eyes. To combat the growing

---

[147] *AA*, 4, I, 317; *NYG*, 14 July 1774; *NYGM*, 25 July 1774; Smith, *Memoirs*, 189.
[148] *AA*, 4, I, 317-318; *To the Respectable PUBLICK*, 20 July 1774, Evans, 13681.
[149] *AA*, 4, I, 317; John Alsop, Isaac Low, and John Jay, *To the Respectable PUBLIC*, July 20, 1774, Evans, 13680.

dissonance amongst the Fifty-one, McDougall and Sears assuaged Samuel Adams by asserting that "whatever may be the sentiments of some members of the committee they dare not allow any that are inimical to your situation, or the cause of America. For the body of the people are your warm friends and advocates."[150] To give the revolutionary movement authority, McDougall and Sears placed more importance on common people than the committeemen. By articulating that the "body" of New Yorkers supported the common cause, the extralegal system's legitimacy depended on the people's voluntary approval.

T.H. Breen asserted that local committees evolved into "schools for revolution."[151] Popular leaders led the revolutionary movement in New York City, but common people's zealousness toward the Coercive Acts gave the leaders their most crucial foundation. In fact, following the July 19th meeting, William Smith noticed "the Rise of the Popular Pulse for Liberty."[152] Over the course of July, a radical consciousness started to form in New York City. Common people voiced their apprehension about the moderate resolutions, and instead entrusted the rewriting duty to a select fifteen members, most of whom were favorable to the radical cause. The new sub-committee, chaired by Peter Van Brugh Livingston, published 13 resolutions that would be considered at the July 25th meeting. The new resolutions mirrored their July 19th counterparts but elucidated their defense of Boston. One resolution explained that "the Minds of all the Colonists should be as the Mind of one Man; and this Mind ought to be fully and

---

[150] Manuscripts and Archives Division, 25 July 1774. *Letter from Isaac Sears and Alexander McDougall*; Champagne, *The Sons of Liberty*, 348.
[151] Breen, *American Insurgents*, 1.
[152] Smith, *Memoirs*, 189.

explicitly declared in an Assembly of the Continent."[153] New York City featured a plurality of different social groups, from conservative merchants to disenfranchised artisans, but political leaders' exhaustive endeavors to act with a single and undivided hand made the revolutionary experiment remarkable. The efforts would be arduous, as seen through the Fifty-one's operations, but New Yorkers continuously compromised, thereby revealing the city's dedication to democratic principles.

The relationship between common New Yorkers and their committeemen was fraught. To appease the people, the committeemen constantly relied on their approbation for elections. Later that day, the Fifty-one admitted that the foregoing "resolves cannot with certainty be said to correspond with the sentiments of the major part of the citizens." "To remove all doubts and uneasiness," the committeemen appointed members to "take the sense" of tax-paying inhabitants across the city's wards. In the meantime, the Fifty-one ordered the publication of the resolutions.[154] The Fifty-one was out of harmony with common New Yorkers, but they attempted to gain their trust and support. The Committee's decision ousted the disenfranchised and non-freeholding people from the political process. This choice of language must have been intentional, as the July 6th public demonstration frightened moderate and conservative committeemen. Nevertheless, since the Fifty-one wanted to be considered a legitimate governing body, they needed to poll the city to understand common New Yorkers' views on the proposed resolutions.

---

[153] *On Tuesday the 19th day of July, 1774*…, Evans, 13480; Champagne, *The Sons of Liberty*, 339-340; *NYGM*, 25 July 1774.
[154] *AA*, 4, I, 315-316; *NYGM*, 25 July 1774.

After one week, the city reached a compromise on whom to nominate to represent New York in Philadelphia at the First Continental Congress. The conservatives and radicals called for the public approval of the drafting committee's resolutions on July 25th at City Hall, but at this meeting, "nothing decisive was resolved upon," showcasing the continued fractured relationship between the extralegal government and New Yorkers.[155] Over the next couple of days, it is unclear who initiated the compromise, but it was likely McDougall and Sears. The radical camp asked the nominated delegates if they would use their "utmost endeavours at the proposed Congress…not to import goods from Great Britain until the American grievances be redressed [and] be entered into by the Colonies there to be represented."[156] Four out of the five delegates affirmed the radicals' inquiries. Due to this attestation, "a Coalition of Parties" apparently "acquiesced in the Delegates nominated for this City."[157] Holt likely referred to the DeLanceyites and the Mechanics Committee, which were the two largest and most influential political parties at the time. The nominees' affirmation of the letter must have assuaged the Mechanics enough for them to accept the Fifty-one's ticket. By the end of the day, the people approved the Fifty-one's delegates through polling in the city's different wards.[158] New York's delegation consisted of Philip Livingston, John Alsop, Isaac Low, James Duane, and John Jay. These members of the Fifty-one represented moderation. The

---

[155] *To the Inhabitants of the City and County of New York*, 23 July, 1774, Evans, 13662; Mason, *Road to Independence*, 35; Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 194; Quotation from Champagne, *The Sons of Liberty*, 340, footnote 74; *NYG*, 28 July 1774.
[156] *AA*, 4, I, 319.
[157] *NYJ*, 28 July 1774.
[158] *AA*, 4, I, 319-320.

delegates desired a deliberate and methodical response to Britain, unlike fast-paced radicals such as McDougall and Sears.

In the end, radicals succeeded because the New York delegation would support non-importation, but conservatives got their moderate ticket. One historian analyzing this episode noted that "typically the more heterogeneous a conflict group, the more moderate its goals."[159] He and other historians then noted, however, that conservatives "ignor[ed] the radical organization, or in excluding the disenfranchised classes from taking an effective part in the conflict." Further, it is possible that the conservative wing of the Fifty-one could have been too "passively aloof," thereby leaving room for the radicals to gain influence.[160]

The nomination and selection of delegates to the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia revealed a deep rift between ideological parties in New York City. Known as a moderate stalwart compared to rebellious Boston and Philadelphia, New York capitulated to a radical base that was bolstered by everyday laborers and the disenfranchised. Lieutenant Governor Colden described New York City, where "the people…have been in continual ferment of division among themselves upon their political measures, which at bottom arises solely from their local party views – they have all an eye to the next election, more than anything else"[161] Colden's attitude suggests that New Yorkers primarily cared about power, and when one party lost an election, they would propose another one. Thus, New York City featured a never-ending cycle of

---

[159] Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 196.
[160] Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 136, 141.
[161] Champagne, *The Sons of Liberty*, 341-342.

political strife, and the summer of 1774 exhibits the factional divide throughout the city. Political figures, such as McDougall and several DeLanceyites, were deeply concerned with their public image and yearned for more power. Since the extralegal movement featured mass division and party politics, Colden's analysis implies that the Fifty-one lacked authority. Colden, a conservative and evidently frightened of the power of common New Yorkers, does not understand the value of compromise in politics. A purely conservative committee would in essence act more effectively, but as the tension escalated among the ideological factions, the Fifty-one increasingly relied upon the opinions of the people to make their decisions. This is because as escalation occurred, disunity started to ferment even more in the city. The conservatives in the Fifty-one, albeit representing an established and landed class, succumbed to popular outrage. For the extralegal system to work and be respected among New Yorkers, the Fifty-one needed to include people in the political process, rather than exclude them. Therefore, mobilizing common New Yorkers shielded the city against an overreaching British Parliament. These elements democratized the Fifty-one throughout the summer of 1774. In the end, the division among conservatives and radicals unintentionally increased the authority of the Committee of Fifty-one because a greater proportion of individuals now participated and voiced their judgments in the extralegal political process.

New York City acted less raucously throughout the remainder of the summer as the city chose delegates and gave them marching orders. Large battles in print, however, occurred in August. The option for neutrality significantly dwindled throughout the summer of 1774 because the July 6th meeting radicalized both parties and partisan newspapers partly fueled the pressure to choose sides. Friends of the British government,

eventually becoming Loyalists, flocked to the printers to attack the radical cause. As the First Continental Congress approached, pressure and restlessness rose outside extralegal committee meetings. In particular, "Mercator" rebuked Holt's *New-York Journal* for "inflam[ing] the minds of the people against government" and asserting that Holt "justly renders himself abhorrent to all good men, and may well be considered as a pest to society."[162] Holt defended his reputation the following week, refuting Mercator's attacks and emphasizing the freedom of the press.[163] The conservative press attempted not only to weaken Holt's role as the radicals' mouthpiece, but to undermine the entire radical cause. It is not surprising that Rivington published Mercator's piece, as the conservative printer continuously chastised McDougall and Sears for acting against the common good. In addition to representing staunchly divided allegiances in New York City, Holt's and Rivington's newspapers mobilized people for their respective causes.[164] Newspapers, then, were places where loyalties were tested and publicly announced. They were forums where arguments were logically examined and reputations affirmed. Even though New Yorkers often wrote anonymously about certain policy issues, such as non-importation, Mercator's essay demonstrates how newspapers became personal. The summer of 1774 transformed the press into an increasingly partisan and accusatory force.

In revolutionary New York City, radicals, not moderate and landed merchants, controlled local politics, which perturbed the conservatives. Up until this point, common New Yorkers deferred to the established aristocratic class, who controlled the business of the city as well. The summer of 1774 flipped the city's long standing social order on its

---

[162] *NYG*, 11 August 1774.
[163] *NYJ*, 18 August 1774.
[164] Minty, *Unfriendly to Liberty*, 169.

head. Politics was now not a secondary profession in which conservatives utilized to control their power, but rather it emerged as a profession in its own right – successful politicians relied on mobilizing common people. Similar to Rivington, Mercator believed government ought to be run by men of property and class. So, the conservatives, with the First Continental Congress occurring in less than a month, tried to slow the radicals' momentum in redefining the extralegal government system.

Chapter 4: A Tale of Two Cities

New York's nomination and selection process was stress-inducing and fracturing. According to Becker, New York's sending of delegates to Philadelphia "threw the burden of formulating a policy of resistance upon a power outside the colony." If the general Congress adopted a policy, Becker concluded, then adherence to the Congress would be the central problem.[165] The First Continental Congress shared the same legal status as the extralegal committees that appeared throughout the colonies in the late spring of 1774 to combat the Coercive Acts. Now, Committees of Correspondence coalesced into a colonial Congress. In the days leading up the Congress, establishing the body's legitimacy was paramount. The Congress, a new institution, would take work to legitimize and achieving this lofty goal would require unity.[166] And unity is what Alexander McDougall tried to achieve. Due to New York's summer nomination and selection procedure, McDougall's popularity soared and he emerged as a leading voice for the radical cause. In addition, McDougall hosted delegates from several colonies in New England on their journey to Philadelphia, including Massachusetts Bay, whose delegation boasted John Adams and Samuel Adams.[167]

John Adams and his fellow Massachusetts delegates arrived at New York City's Hull's Tavern on the morning of August 20th. Adams lauded McDougall, deeming him "talkative," "Knowledge[able] of Politiks," and "a very sensible Man…he has none of the mean Cunning which disgraces so many of my Country men." McDougall served as the

---

[165] Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 142.
[166] "Americans had begun to acquiesce in the authority of a new continental institution that did not exist prior to 1774," Marston, *King and Congress*, 6.
[167] Robert Treat Paine and Thomas Cushing rounded out the Massachusetts crew. John Adams and Samuel Adams were cousins. McDougall also hosted the New Hampshire and Connecticut delegations.

tour guide, showing the Massachusetts delegation around the city. McDougall's affable nature impressed Adams, unlike radical John Morin Scott, whom Adams found prudent, but "lazy" and "not very polite." Adams respected Scott, however, because the radical "harrangued the People, and prevailed upon them to discard the Resolves of their Committee of 51, as void of Vigour, Sense and Integrity."[168] Finally, as Adams toured the city, he was treated with "assiduous Respect," but the "Opulence and Splendor" of New York City led to "not…one real Gentleman, one well bred Man." Adams continued, "There is no Modesty—No Attention to one another. They talk very loud, very fast, and alltogether. If they ask you a Question, before you can utter 3 Words of your Answer, they will break out upon you, again—and talk away."[169] Adams' unfamiliarity with New Yorkers' behavior highlights the heterogeneity of the First Continental Congress. New York City was visibly dissimilar from Boston and had different prerogatives and social norms, but both sets of delegates emphasized collective action over anything else.

McDougall had no intention of convincing Adams and the Massachusetts delegation to act more radically. The British Parliament had martyred Boston – the besieged city was the epicenter of resistance to the mother country. Thus, the popular leader wanted to give the Massachusetts delegation a taste of a city allied to the common cause. In addition, McDougall presumably felt slightly embarrassed that New York acted so laggardly throughout the late spring and summer of 1774, so he likely wanted to prove to the radical Bostonians that New York was on their side. The radical introduced Adams

---

[168] Lyman H. Butterfield, et al., ed. 1961. *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*. 4 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, II, 102-104. Accessed at https://founders.archives.gov/content/volumes (Hereafter, Adams, *Autobiography*, II); Smith, *Memoirs*, 191.
[169] Adams, *Autobiography*, II, 108-109.

to almost every major political figure in New York City, from "great, rough, [and] rappid" Philip Livingston to "plain" William Smith; the former "blusters away" during conversation and the latter "improves every moment of his time."[170] On August 22nd, McDougall took the Massachusetts delegation to Scott's home three miles from New York City, which Adams enjoyed. Adams received information, albeit biased, about several New York delegates. John Jay was a "hard Student and a good Speaker," John Alsop a man "of a good Heart, but unequal to the Trust in Point of Abilities," and Isaac Low, who "will profess Attachment to the Cause of Liberty but his Sincerity is doubted." And finally, James Duane, whom Adams described as "very sensible… and very artfull."[171] Adams' introduction to leading political figures in New York City was vital. The Massachusetts radicals felt foreign there, so if the colonies were to unite against the British Empire, it would be paramount for two of the largest cities in North America to connect. Further, if the First Continental Congress was to speak with a unified voice, Adams and his fellow Massachusettsans would have to understand the New York City radicals' perspectives.

Even though McDougall did not introduce Adams to the staunchly conservative DeLancey faction, the New Yorker had no problem bashing them. McDougall outlined the two great families of New York – the Livingstons and the DeLanceys – the former had "Virtue and Abilities as well as fortune," whereas the latter had "not much of either of three." Further, the DeLancey faction was "intimidated by Fears of a Civil War," wrote Adams, "and they have been induced to acquiesce by Assurances that there was no

---

[170] Adams, *Autobiography*, II, 105-108; Smith, *Memoirs*, 191.
[171] Adams, *Autobiography*, II, 105-108.

Danger, and that a peacefull Cessation of Commerce would effect Relief."[172] It was intentional that McDougall painted the DeLanceys as the villains of New York City to his allies in Massachusetts. McDougall likely wanted to prove to the fast-moving Bostonians that the DeLanceys were the culprit for the slow-moving resistance movement in New York City. Although McDougall would not serve as a delegate to the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia, he still had something to gain. McDougall was self-interested, and proving to Massachusetts that he was a leading radical in New York could potentially propel his career forward. McDougall had sent letters to Samuel Adams throughout the late spring and summer of 1774, and by hosting the radical Massachusetts delegation, he further solidified his place as a legitimate and leading radical throughout the colonies.

Shortly after John Adams' visit, New York's delegates set off to Philadelphia. John Jay decamped on Monday, August 29th, but the others departed on Thursday, September 1st. They were ushered off with "Colours flying,...music," "three Huzzas," and ultimately "saluted by several Pieces of Cannon." The patriotic send-off highlights a city that openly supported the reimposition of their rights. The First Continental Congress attempted to turn this feeling into a reality for colonists. Even though Boston bore the brunt of the Coercive Acts, New York's inhabitants felt that the entire "country" was besieged. Further, the delegates "solemnly avowed" that they would champion the necessary policies "for the Good of the common Cause" "at the Risk of every Thing sacred and dear."[173] Thus, the First Continental Congress signified a watershed in the colonies' resistance to Britain and a novel continuation of the revolutionary experiment.

---

[172] Ibid., 153, 155.
[173] *NYGM*, 5 September 1774; *NYJ*, 8 September 1774.

The Congress embodied a feat of tremendous proportions and an undertaking that required only the finest of men.

Chapter 5: The Beginning of the End

The First Continental Congress saw a stark factional divide among the colonists. The conservative delegates championed reconciliation with Britain, while radicals desired an economic boycott. At the time of the Congress, the relationship between the colonies and Britain had been deteriorating. Benjamin Franklin, writing to Thomas Cushing from London during the Congress, was "[grievanced] to hear of mobs & violence and the pulling down of houses, which our Friends cannot justify, and which give great advantage against us to our Enemies."[174] Therefore, the Congress played a crucial role in salvaging this connection. The colonists hailed from twelve out of the thirteen colonies, and the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia was the first meeting of its kind. The sheer volume and diversity of delegates that graced the floors of Carpenter's Hall highlighted the next chapter of an ever-evolving American experiment. The wide array of views also necessitated an identity problem between conservatism and radicalism. Throughout the late spring and summer of 1774, questions of political mobilization and legitimacy were confined to Committees of Correspondence, but the First Continental Congress broadened these inquiries to the colonial level which represented the next step in resistance against Britain. The Congress passed the Continental Association which authorized the replacement of Committees of Correspondence with Committees of Observation and Inspection to enforce the boycott of British goods. From its enactment in late October to the first shots in Lexington in April 1775, the Continental Association shaped the restlessness that overtook the minds of all colonists.

---

[174] 6 October 1774. B. Franklin, at London, to Thomas Cushing, at [Philadelphia]. Benjamin Franklin Papers, Box 1. George Bancroft Collection. New York Public Library.

The First Continental Congress represented the start of the official overthrow of traditional colonial government. The Committees of Correspondence were the first crucial step, but the Congress further legitimized the revolutionary extralegal cause. The Congress' crowning achievement, the Continental Association, transformed the role of politics and local government in Revolutionary America. To understand the ripple effects of the Continental Association, it is necessary to investigate the proceedings of the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia.

The delegates understood the momentousness of the Congress – Silas Deane from Connecticut asserted that "the eyes of millions are upon us" and "their posterity [is] interested in our conduct." New Yorkers reciprocated the feeling. "A New-York Freeholder" aptly noted that "there are few Occurrences in History more pregnant with political Instruction…[and] those Gentlemen are now employed in marking out a Constitutional Line."[175] Many colonists, such as this New Yorker, longed for America's prosperity and wanted Congress to devise constitutional boundaries between Parliament and her subjects in North America. This constitutional line, however, would be hard to achieve because not all delegates unequivocally supported the Continental Congress. Deane lamented the unlikeliness of solidarity among the delegates, in which he alluded to "enemies to the general Cause, and who, aided by party, are restless in their endeavors to defeat or retard our proceedings."[176] Factionalism, even at a time when unity ought to be prioritized, ran rampant throughout the Congress. Deane's alleged "enemies" questioned

---

[175] *NYGM*, 10 October 1774; Philadelphian James Wilson asserted that "such a Line does not exist." James Wilson. 1774. *Considerations on the Nature and Extent of the Legislative Authority of the British Parliament*. Philadelphia, PA, iii.
[176] Edmund C. Burnett, ed. 1921-1923. *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*. Volumes I and II. Washington D.C (Hereafter Burnett, *Letters of Members*), 4.

Congress' legal authority and legitimacy. Before the Congress commenced, delegates inquired "whether Congress was an informal body with power of advice only, or a government with power to enforce its recommendations."[177] Conservative delegates felt uneasy about the novel governing body. Delegate John Rutledge asserted that "we have no legal authority…our constituents are bound only in honor to observe our determinations."[178] Rutledge doubted the legally binding nature of Congress' adopted policies, and a large portion of delegates in Philadelphia shared this same view, including the New York delegation.[179] In the eyes of moderates and conservatives, the First Continental Congress was merely an advisory council that could not legally coerce the Committees of Correspondence throughout the colonies.

By a similar fashion, the moderate delegates championed reconciliation. New York conservatives promoted a general Congress so that moderate men could devise measures responding to the Coercive Acts.[180] This approach was the antithesis of the radicals' goal to mount public indignation for Parliament's tyrannical policies. Therefore, the conservatives sought to hamstring the radicals by undergoing a slower moving mass colonial congress in which intellectually elite and landed men could make moderate decisions. Pennsylvanian Joseph Galloway exemplified this view – he thought that the delegates "will behave with Temper and Moderation."[181] The sentiments were not restricted to the delegates, however. In a letter dated before the start of the Congress, a

---

[177] Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 143.
[178] Charles Francis Adams, ed. 1865. *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, Vol. II (Hereafter Adams, *The Works of John Adams*), 367.
[179] Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 144, footnote 6.
[180] "Our delegates to the Congress at least…are moderate prudent men" and "McDougall, Sears, and Lamb are all in disgrace," Lieutenant Governor Colden to Governor Tyron, 7 September 1774. Cadwallader Colden Papers, vol. 172. George Bancroft Collection. New York Public Library.
[181] Burnett, *Letters of Members*, 5.

British merchant "[supposed] that their resolves will be decent and conciliatory and show that it is no [enemy] to the mother country or a desire to throw off their dependency…but only to set forth grievances…to get abolished."[182] It seems that moderates did not desire unfettered obedience to Parliament. Moderates, whether in Congress or Britain, understood the gravity that accompanied the Coercive Acts and therefore desired a swift reconciliation between the colonies and Britain.

On the other hand, radical delegates believed that traditional government structures, such as the British appointed Colonial Assemblies, ceased to possess authority – Virginian Patrick Henry declared that "fleets and armies and the present state of things show that government is dissolved."[183] Since the Colonial Assemblies dissolved, the First Continental Congress assumed authority to control operations for the entire colony. Henry stressed the importance of colonial unity, declaring that "I am not a Virginia, but an American."[184] The Congress, to rectify the damages perpetrated by the British government, needed to act with an undivided hand. New Yorkers stressed this reality throughout the late spring and summer of 1774. The colonies experimented with the First Continental Congress, and the delegates in Philadelphia had to ascertain the Congress' role in regulating policy and behavior throughout the colonies.

The formal start date of the Congress was set for September 5th, but the delegates arrived in Philadelphia some days beforehand.[185] Nearly all the delegates understood that the grievances perpetrated by the Coercive Acts needed a remedy, but they disagreed on

---

[182] *NYG*, 6 October 1774.
[183] Adams, *The Works of John Adams*, II, 366; Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 144, footnote 7.
[184] Adams, *The Works of John Adams*, II, 367.
[185] John Adams, for example, arrived on August 29th, when he was met by his radical Philadelphia counterparts. Burnett, *Letters of Members*, 1.

how to get there. The delegates examined and voted on numerous issues, and the moderate hand predominantly guided the whole.[186] The repayment of the destroyed tea in Boston Harbor served as one such topic. The Boston Tea Party served as the catalyst for the punitive Coercive Acts, so a repayment of the destroyed tea sounded logical. Silas Deane documented the debate. Patrick Henry opposed the motion as he was "spirited in his harangue." Isaac Low and James Duane, representative of the moderate New York delegation, favored the motion. In the end, the motion to reimburse the British government failed.[187] In this case, therefore, the radical delegates succeeded.

The Congress, however, did not always vote radically. Resolutions authored by James Duane and Richard Henry Lee exemplified the compromising moderation among the delegates. James Duane motioned "for drawing forth the united Councils aid and Strength of these Branches of his Majesty's Dominions whenever it shall be found necessary."[188] Duane's proposition portrayed his moderate conscience and his longing for reconciliation with Britain. Deane noted in his diary that Virginian Richard Henry Lee sought to expand his motion in which Lee advocated for the colonies to raise an armed militia "for Our defence."[189] The delegates struck down Lee's motion, highlighting the overall moderate nature of the Congress.[190]

The next, and most important, debate regarded non-importation. To understand the following debates, it is necessary to consider the impacts of the Suffolk Resolves. Suffolk county, which houses the city of Boston, boycotted British goods and encouraged

---

[186] Mary Beth Norton outlines some of the several motions the delegates considered. Norton, *1774*, 192.
[187] Paul H. Smith, et al., ed. 1976-2000. *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*. 26 vols. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress (Hereafter Smith, *Letters of Delegates*), I, 133; Norton, *1774*, 192.
[188] Smith, *Letters of Delegates*, I, 134; Norton, *1774*, 192.
[189] Smith, *Letters of Delegates*, I, 133; Norton, *1774*, 192.
[190] Smith, *Letters of Delegates*, I, 138-139; Norton, *1774*, 192.

citizens to take up arms.[191] Suffolk was the first county to pass a non-importation agreement, and the resolves were whisked to Philadelphia for Congress' approval. The radical measure caused an uproar in Carpenter's Hall, and according to Becker, the delegates of the First Continental Congress faced a dilemma of openly resisting Britain or achieving unity by defending the Suffolk Resolves.[192] On September 17th, Congress unanimously approved the Suffolk Resolves.[193] Becker deemed the delegates' unanimity as "formal."[194] Further, authors contend that delegates were misled by a false report declaring that British soldiers killed a handful of Bostonians, which spurred the delegates to unify behind Suffolk.[195] Nevertheless, the Congress affirmed Suffolk County's radical measures. "This was one of the happiest Days of my Life," wrote Adams. He continued, showing his jubilation, by writing that "the esteem, the affection, the admiration for the people of Boston and the Massachusetts which were expressed yesterday, and the fixed determination that they should be supported, were enough to melt a heart of stone."[196] Adams lauded the Congress for backing Boston in its resistance to Britain. The approval of the Suffolk Resolves, according to Becker, was the pivotal event for the First Continental Congress because it bound the colonies to a radical non-importation measure.[197]

After the approval of the Suffolk Resolves, debates over a boycott occupied the delegates' waking hours. John Jay outlined the three roads that lied ahead of Congress:

---

[191] The Suffolk Resolves are printed in *AA*, 4, I, 901-904; Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 147.
[192] Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 146.
[193] *AA*, 4, I, 904.
[194] Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 147.
[195] Breen, *American Insurgents*, 155-156; Norton, *1774*, 187-190.
[196] Adams, *Autobiography*, II, 157-158; Charles Francis Adams, ed. 1875. *Familiar Letters of John Adams and his Wife Abigail Adams during the Revolution, with a memoir of Mrs. Adams*. Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin & Co (Hereafter, Adams, *Familiar Letters*), 40.
[197] Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 148.

"Negociation, suspension of Commerce, and War." John Adams championed the first two options.[198] The delegates preferred reconciliation over bloodshed. The Congress' primary goal was to have their grievances redressed and so an economic boycott emerged as the leading remedy. The delegates started formulating the non-importation agreement on September 22nd, when they ordered the merchants throughout the colonies to halt their trade with Britain until "the sense of the Congress on the means to be taken for the preservation of the liberties of America is made publick."[199] This order was insufficient, so debates ensued on September 26th and 27th to hammer out the details of a non-importation agreement. During the meetings, each delegate outlined their colony's production – from molasses to flaxseed to lumber – and how a potential boycott would impact their primary industries. Radicals such as John Adams and Thomas Cushing strongly favored immediate non-importation and non-exportation measures, but moderate delegates such as Samuel Chase worried that the policies would drive the colonies into bankruptcy.[200] In the end, on the morning of September 27th, the Congress unanimously agreed to enter into a non-importation agreement against Britain starting on December 1st.[201] Non-exportation faced strong opposition, but the Congress, on September 30th, determined to thwart exportation of goods to Britain starting on September 10, 1775.[202] The delegates passed boycott resolutions – a major success for radicalism – but to enforce

---

[198] Smith, *Letters of Delegates*, I, 105; Norton, *1774*, 193.
[199] *AA*, 4, I, 904.; The September 22nd proceedings were published in *NYG*, 29 September 1774.
[200] Adams, *Autobiography*, II, 137-140; Cushing hailed from Boston and Chase from Maryland.
[201] *AA*, 4, I, 905; A letter dated September 29th discussed this vote. *NYGM*, 3 October 1774; *NYG*, 6 October 1774.
[202] Edmund C. Burnett. 1941. *The Continental Congress*. Stuttgart, Germany: Macmillan Company, 47; Burnett, *Letters of Members*, 61; Ammerman outlines the non-exportation debates very well. Ammerman, *In the Common Cause*, 79-80.

them, Congress constructed the Continental Association, which became the defining document of the First Continental Congress.

The conservatives did not surrender, however. On September 28th, Joseph Galloway proposed perpetual reconciliation through a British-American joint Parliament. Galloway's "Plan of Union" arose shortly after the delegates debated non-importation and non-importation.[203] Galloway saw non-importation as "too gradual in its operation for the relief of Boston" and a total non-exportation agreement as "impossible." Therefore, the Plan of Union served as a moderate middle ground to deter a rash trade boycott. Galloway continued defending his Plan of Union, declaring that "Without some Supream Legislature, some common Arbiter, you are not, say they, part of the State."[204] Galloway stressed the importance of unity. The colonies had been roped into Britain's wars for two decades now, so Galloway wanted to safeguard the rights and liberties of colonists by forming a supreme legislature that represented both Americans and Britons. In response to Galloway's proposition, Duane spoke for the New York delegation, in which he "thought it necessary to have a Congress for the Relief of Boston and Mass.—and to do more, to lay a Plan for a lasting Accommodation with G. Britain."[205] Further, Duane asserted that the colonies did not have the right to regulate trade. Galloway's plan faced strong headwinds from radicals at the meeting. One radical delegate refuted the proposition, arguing that "As We are not within the Circle of the Supream Jurisdiction of the Parliament, We are independent States. The Law of Great Britain don't bind us in any Case whatever." The Massachusetts and Virginia delegations unsurprisingly held this

---

[203] Adams, *Autobiography*, II, 141-144; Galloway's "Plan of Union" can be found in Smith, *Letters of Delegates*, I, 118-119.
[204] Adams, *Autobiography*, II, 141-144.
[205] Ibid.

view. Patrick Henry sought liberation from the "corrupt" Parliament and Richard Henry Lee would not support such a plan without consulting his constituents in Virginia.[206] After lengthy bickering on the relationship between the individual colonial governments and the British Parliament, Galloway's plan was struck down with a vote of six colonies to five.[207] In the end, "the Resolves became fruitless & were not proposed…[they were] finally rejected and ordered to be left out of the minutes."[208]

Galloway's plan exemplified the last hope for permanent reconciliation with Britain. In the following days, Congress chose Jay's second road: "utilizing commercial weapons" against the mother country, or simply a boycott. Mary Beth Norton briefly touched on the colonists' insufficient policies during the 1760s, many of which involved coercing or coaxing local merchants and forming individual and sporadic pacts throughout the colonies. The situation in 1774 warranted more structured public coercion to enforce the boycott.[209] Congress formed a committee to draft the legislation for a non-importation, non-consumption, and non-exportation agreement.[210] Before analyzing the boycott, Congress passed three overarching measures. First, they petitioned King George III for redress of grievances.[211] Second, Congress addressed the people of Great Britain.[212] The first two procedures were straightforward, and Congress approved them

---

[206] Ibid.; Adams, *The Works of John Adams*, II, 387-388.
[207] Norton, *1774*, 198-199.
[208] Smith, *Letters of Delegates*, I, 112-113.
[209] Norton, *1774*, 199.
[210] Burnett, *The Continental Congress*, 51.
[211] "The Americans, 'born the heirs of freedom,' revolted not to create but to maintain their freedom." Gordon S. Wood. Jan 1966. "Rhetoric, Reality, and the Revolution." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 3–32, 6.
[212] Adams, *Autobiography*, II, 145-146; The address can be read at John Jay. 1890. *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay, vol. 1 (1763-1781)*. G.P. Putnam's Sons. https://oll-resources.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/oll3/store/titles/2326/Jay_1530-01_Bk.pdf, 17.

without much opposition. The third measure, implementing non-importation, non-exportation, and non-consumption with Britain, warranted a more complicated process.

The most crucial measure of the First Continental Congress was not the approval of the Suffolk Resolves, as Becker contended, but the establishment of the Continental Association.[213] Silas Deane felt the same way, deeming the Association "the most critical and requiring the greatest attention." The enactment of the Association occurred towards the end of the First Continental Congress, and by virtue of this poor timing, the debates were not recorded because the delegates, also according to Deane, left the Congress in a "hurry."[214] The construction of the Association did not occur swimmingly, so to prevent the Association from falling apart, the Congress yielded to South Carolina by allowing them to export rice to Europe.

The Association contained fourteen articles, most of which set dates when non-importation, non-exportation, and non-consumption would commence and what goods fell under inspection, such as tea. The dates and terms for the separate economic measures had been agreed upon by Congress in the foregoing days. Thus, the measures were not unheard of. There were policies that made the Association unique, however. Particularly, Article VIII recommends that people refrain from "extravagance and dissipation, especially all horse-racing, and all kinds of gaming, cockfighting, exhibitions of plays, shews, and other expensive diversions and entertainments." The Association, in addition to setting out terms for a boycott, altered how the colonies acted on the ground. Congress stressed frugality and self-discipline among its fellow colonists through broad

---

[213] Burnett, *Letters of Members*, 79.
[214] Smith, *Letters of Delegates*, I, 227; Norton, *1774*, 199. According to Samuel Ward, the Association was completed on October 18, 1774. Smith, *Letters of Delegates*, I, 206-207.

legislation, which distinguishes itself from the unstructured boycotts of the 1760s. Congress passed public legislation to condemn the extravagant activities listed in Article VIII, which demonstrates the delegates' desire to use extralegal government to regulate people's behavior. However, Congress adjourned and proved unable to implement the Association, so Article XI authorized colonists to enforce the boycott on the ground by forming popularly elected local committees:

> That a Committee be chosen in every County, City, and Town, by those who are qualified to vote for Representatives in the Legislature, whose business it shall be attentively to observe the conduct of all persons touching this Association; and when it shall be made to appear to the satisfaction of a majority of any such Committee, that any person within the limits of their appointment has violated this Association, that such majority do forthwith cause the truth of the case to be published in the Gazette, to the end that all such foes to the rights of British America may be publickly known, and universally contemned as the enemies of American Liberty; and thenceforth we respectively will break off all dealings with him or her.[215]

Article XI of the Association opened a new ground of the resistance movement to Britain: public compliance.[216] Congress derived their power and influence in the coming months from this article. New York City had already been evolving to an "us versus them" culture, but Article XI solidified the radicals' agenda. Now, "every man is to be considered either as a friend or enemy to this country."[217] Public obedience to the Congress, and by extension to the new committees, forged the final divide among radicals and conservatives. Due to the Association, the Committees of Correspondence evolved into popularly elected Committees of Observation and Inspection and these novel committees now inspected people's property based on suspicion to enforce the

---

[215] *AA*, 4, I, 915.
[216] "Obedience to the Association was to constitute the test of loyalty to America." Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 153.
[217] *NYG*, 10 November 1774.

colony-wide boycott and undertook more local regulatory responsibilities, such as publishing a violator's name in the local gazette. The Continental Association propelled the American colonies into further revolutionary organization and action.[218]

The entirety of the New York delegation signed the Association, consistent with their promise to radicals back home, before embarking for Philadelphia. Samuel Ward noted in his diary that several delegates – such as Joseph Galloway – reluctantly signed the Association.[219] Even after losing his bout for permanent reconciliation, Galloway acquiesced to the boycott because he expected the agreement to thwart Congress from devolving to "more violent measures."[220] Nevertheless, Galloway judged the document as "too warm & indiscreet."[221] Galloway could not have expected, however, how far-reaching the Association became in the following months. Ward's observations beg the question of whether New Yorkers felt the same way. Even though Duane, Jay, and others in the delegation supported Galloway's Plan of Union, they were the ones who drove the adoption of a commercial boycott after the plan was rejected.[222] New Yorkers, therefore, played a crucial role in the establishment of the Continental Association.

The delegates concerned themselves with appearing unified. Ward commented that Congress' Association ought to be "the act of a majority, and not of each private person, nor his particular act."[223] The Congress deeply cared about its image and knew it would receive criticism from conservatives around the colonies. Therefore, they longed to decide with an undivided voice. The Earl of Dartmouth worried about this

---

[218] The entire Continental Association is printed in *AA*, 4, I, 913-916.
[219] Smith, *Letters of Delegates*, I, 222.
[220] Burnett, *The Continental Congress*, 55.
[221] Norton, *1774*, 200.
[222] Smith, *Letters of Delegates*, I, 112-113.
[223] Ibid., 222.

phenomenon, "suppos[ing] they would not be likely either to advise or support rash & violent Measures; but there is but too much reason to fear that the Majority of Delegates are of a different Complexion."[224] A commercial boycott was not the most radical measure the Congress could have devised, but Article XI in the Association set a greater magnitude of resistance in motion. The moderate New York delegation agreed to a plan that caused a larger ferment throughout the colonies than any prior policy. The delegation understood the gravity of the moment, and throughout Congress' session in September and October, the New Yorkers continuously pushed measures to steer the colonies towards reconciliation. But they stayed true to their promise by agreeing to a colonial-wide boycott of British goods. Thus, New Yorkers represented their colony well in Philadelphia.

[224] *DRCNY*, 8: 510.

Chapter 6: New York's Notoriety

The debates on the Association and Congress' overall legitimacy were not confined to the delegates in Carpenter's Hall. After the Congress adjourned on October 26th, people yearned to hear of their delegates' exploits since the Congress was poorly reported to the public.[225] Popular newspapers articulated their approval or disapproval of the Congress and the Association. The increasingly active public sphere in the wake of the First Continental Congress conveys the importance of newspapers in constructing New Yorkers' political consciousness. According to Willi Paul Adams, the Congress was the "ultimate source of authority" and became widely accepted as such all throughout New York.[226] I will refute this in the following chapter.

I will now investigate conservative New Yorkers' responses to the Congress and the Committees of Observation and Inspection created by Article XI of the Continental Association. The Congress, originally meant to unify the colonies, further divided New Yorkers along party lines. Carl Becker argued, in the context of the operations of the Committee of Fifty-one, that the conservative party's stagnancy allowed the radicals to garner more popularity and therefore assume greater power.[227] This thought also applies to the First Continental Congress' reception. Conservatives, both delegates and prominent New Yorkers, preached the rule of law and the dangers of extralegal government.

---

[225] Norton, *1774*, 207; New Yorkers received piecemeal information in *NYGM*, 31 October 1774, 7 November 1774. In the 31 October issue, Gaine published the full Continental Association. Gaine's paper is one such example of this occurrence. Generally, starting after October 26th, newspapers started to get more information about the Congress' proceedings and published measures; During the Congress, Jay wrote that "I am obliged to be very reserved on this Subject by the Injunction of Secrecy laid on all the Members of the Congress." John Jay to John Vardill, 24 September 1774. Nuxoll, *The Selected Papers of John Jay*, 94-95.

[226] Willi Paul Adams. 2001. *The First American Constitutions: Republican Ideology and the Making of the State Constitutions in the Revolutionary Era*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 39-40.

[227] Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 136.

However, they were not driven by ideals that predicated upon law and order, but rather fear of losing power blinded the conservatives from acting decisively and in a unified manner, which propped the door open for the more unified radicals to enter.

Gaine and Rivington provided the forum for Anglican clergymen to profess their loyalty to Britain, so New York emerged as the epicenter for conservative thought and resistance to the Congress and its radicalism.[228] Silas Deane did not appreciate this – he asserted that Rivington was seen as an "incendiary" who printed "false, & scandalous" news. Further, Deane likened Rivington to "whatever is mean, base, servile, & treacherous." The conservative printer was "so detestable every where to the Southward of New York [and] even in That City, to all, but a Ministerial Junto."[229] According to Deane, only the aristocratic conservative party supported Rivington in New York City. This is likely true, as Rivington was the preeminent printer of pamphlets written by Anglican clergymen and establishment conservatives, whereas Holt represented the radical voice in the city. Rivington styled himself as "A Free Printer, approved by such, by both Parties,"[230] so he valued publishing on both sides of the aisle, but the conservative nevertheless received harsh criticism from radicals throughout the colonies. The condemnation was valid, however, because Rivington started to favor conservative viewpoints. Thus, the clash of the press further materialized in the first months of 1775, showing how an unfettered free press shaped political consciousness in the revolutionary movement. Rivington and his allied pamphleteers drove New York City to political infamy, but the conservatives were necessary in constructing the political and social order

---

[228] Norton, *1774*, 222.
[229] Smith, *Letters of Delegates*, I, 202; Norton, *1774*, 224.
[230] Norton, *1774*, 222-224.

in New York. Although the city emerged as the moderate antithesis to radical Boston, as seen through John Adams' descriptions of its opulence and splendor, and ultimately the "progenitor of public Loyalism," many authors fail to consider the free press' role in lifting New York City to revolutionary prominence. [231] New York City's press radicalized because of the Congress and future committee action. From late 1774 into the first months of 1775, I argue that newspapers served as drivers of radicalism in New York as opposed to merely reacting to current events. Newspapers were crucial in spurring political action and revolutionary organization.

Radical newspapers lauded the "Grand" Congress – they deemed the delegates "honourable" and Congress' measures "so well calculated, so tempered with goodness and wisdom."[232] Although New York's newspapers had not been as active as other cities, such as Boston and Philadelphia, in the days following the Congress, John Holt's *New-York Journal* stood at the center of praise for radicalism. One female colonist asserted that "the various merchandise that Britain pours… / What tho' imported luxuries denied, / And all the useless ornaments of pride;… / Each swain, obedient to the great command, / Shall cull the finest wool with careful hand…"[233] It is not surprising that Holt published the poem, considering its radical nature. In the spirit of the Association, ordinary colonists started to criticize the opulence that crashed upon their shores. All of America's "swains," the poet wrote, were subservient to the "great command," which presumably refers to the Continental Congress. Therefore, the Association changed the way common people thought and acted. The Congress majorly impacted commerce, spending, culture,

---

[231] Ibid., 221.
[232] *NYJ*, 3 November 1774.
[233] Ibid., 27 October 1774.

and pride. The poet evidently supported the proceedings of the delegates in Philadelphia, who were not only determined to alter the colonial political order, but with the Association, the Congress yearned for social change.

The Mechanics Committee unequivocally praised the New York delegation for acting, in their eyes, judicially and patriotically. Particularly, the radicals acknowledged the delegates' "readiness in accepting, and fidelity in executing… the wise, prudent, and spirited measures" of the Congress, "thereby re-establishing (upon the most permanent basis) that harmony and confidence between America and the parent state." Radicals unsurprisingly championed Congress' measures to resist Britain, but the most important part of the letter is that the Mechanics pledged themselves to faithfully carry out the Association "to the utmost of [their] power and ability."[234] The Mechanics' assurance to the New York delegation is worth noting. The Association needed people to enforce it, so the Mechanics' support of the boycott served as a crucial first step in legitimizing the Congress.

The conservatives perceived the First Continental Congress differently. In the lead up to the conclusion of the Congress, Rivington published numerous pieces critiquing the extralegal body's authority. He printed an article analyzing the legislative authority of the British Parliament. The printer started off with a note, saying that "many will, perhaps, be surprised to see the legislative authority of the British parliament over the colonies denied in every instance."[235] Presumably the majority of Rivington's readership preferred British rule. Rivington intended to dilute the impact of the Congress.

---

[234] *AA*, 4, I, 987.
[235] *NYG*, 20 October. Rivington published the proceedings of the Congress in his November 3rd issue. *NYG*, 3 November 1774.

On the front page of an issue, Rivington's published the resolves of Rye, a town in Westchester County north of New York City. The inhabitants of Rye, concerned with the Congress, refused to carry out radical measures.[236] Rivington likely published this piece to give his readership hope that there are several towns and counties that braced the radical tide and opposed the Continental Congress. In that same issue, Rivington printed a work authored by Thomas C. Williams, who wrote that "in popular commotions trust is blended with error." Even though Williams acknowledged that Parliament oppressed the colonies and that he supported the Congress, he criticized the radical culture for demonizing New York merchants as traitors for not supporting non-importation measures.[237] A poem, written by "Mary V.V." satirized the Congressional delegates' lack of intellect and wit. Regarding their Association, the poet asserted that the delegates "have devised so horrid, so wicked a plan" and that they "breathe nothing, but Insult, Rebellion, and Treason."[238] James Rivington emerged as the preeminent conservative printer. His conservatism in the immediate days following the Congress prioritized the publishing of anti-radical pieces, whether they seriously analyzed legislative authority or merely mocked the delegates. Thus, the first stage of disagreement regarding the Congress was relatively benign, but as the winter started to replace the fall, the divisions in New York grew to new heights.

---

[236] Ibid., 10 November 1774; Thomas B. Chandler. 1774. *A Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans, on the Subject of our Political Confusions: in which the Necessary Consequences of Violently Opposing ... a general non-importation are fairly stated*. New York. https://archive.org/details/cihm_20462/page/n7/mode/2up, 36; Rivington, under the guise of "The Friends of America," wrote to the Committee of Observation for Hartford, Connecticut for the purpose of convincing them to not follow Congress' measures. 5 December 1774. *To the Committee of Observation for the Town of Hartford, [Conn.]* James Rivington Papers, Box 152. Schwarzman Building, Manuscripts and Archives. New York Public Library.

[237] *NYG*, 10 November 1774.

[238] Norton, *1774*, 229-231.

New York's notoriety originated from pamphlets written by Anglican clergymen, who exemplified the most vocal, persuading, and noteworthy conservative pushback to the radical tide that overtook the colonies. Particularly, Thomas Bradbury Chandler and Samuel Seabury produced thought-provoking works in November and December of 1774 that challenged the radical movement and greatly influenced New York City. Mary Beth Norton argues that conservatives, not radicals, became the largest advocates for a free press and the right of disagreement.[239] While I partly agree with Norton's assertion, she grants the conservatives too much credit. The clergymen's arguments about the freedom of the press sought to undermine the Sixty and the extralegal government system in general. As the Sixty assumed more local power and asserted their influence to enforce the Association, conservatives became fearful that the Continental Congress' measures would virtually become law. So, the contrarians' dependence on the freedom of the press highlights one of their last efforts to hold onto power. The conservative press situated itself in New York City, which makes the city's political scene the perfect place to consider questions of political polarization and the pushback to popular legitimacy. New York City, partly due to the pamphlets, radicalized further in November and December, which set up a contentious following year.

Thomas Bradbury Chandler's *A Friendly Address*, written while the Congress operated and abridged the pamphlet when it concluded, generated widespread animosity and discussion. In fact, the pamphlet was burned in nearby towns in New Jersey and upstate New York and censored in Philadelphia. Even with this provocative response, notable radicals such as James Madison and George Washington owned copies and even

[239] Ibid., xviii.

praised it as politically and culturally noteworthy. Congressman William Hooper asserted that Chandler ought to "speak in obscurity," and Norton interpreted that as a call for the pamphlet to be ignored.[240] I have a different reading of the source – Hooper likely meant that Chandler's critical work would produce extremely inflammatory responses, thereby harming his personal safety. He therefore must have recommended that Chandler speak privately about the subject rather than publicly. But this did not occur. Chandler started his address by emphasizing the glory of the British Empire and its governmental system, going as far as declaring "the subjects of Great Britain are the happiest people on earth." This happiness would be compromised, however, because of "the darkness of a rising tempest is beginning to overspread our land."[241] Chandler must be referencing the radicalism that had permeated throughout the cities and towns in the colonies. This radicalism, Chandler asserted, originated from acting undutiful to Parliament's laws. He wrote that colonists have the right to complain about Parliament's laws, but they do not have the liberty to rebel against them. This, Chandler emphatically declared, would lead to the disbanding of society.[242] To remedy this potential reality, Chandler stressed submission to the Crown and warned colonists of dangerous times if they continued to outwardly oppose Parliament's legally binding provisions. The continued radical control of the public sphere frightened Chandler. In the same vein, he exhorted Americans to "resume the liberty of thinking, and speaking, and acting for ourselves."[243] Radicalism during the time of the Congress grew in New York City, and since the city historically served as a safe-haven for moderates and conservatives, Chandler attempted to thwart

---

[240] Ibid., 225-226.
[241] Chandler, *A Friendly Address*, 3-4.
[242] Ibid., 5.
[243] Ibid., 34; Norton, *1774*, 227.

that transformation of New York City into her New England counterparts, whom he regarded as "thorough-paced Republicans."[244]

After praising the British system and foreshadowing dark and thunderous times, Chandler rebuked the delegates' characters. First, the clergyman seemed severely disappointed with the delegates' radical measures. Before the "grand Committee of Committees" met, "the hopes of all moderate and considerate persons…were long fixed upon the general American Congress."[245] At the Congress, "rebellious Republicans [and] hairbrained fanatics" concerned themselves in "judicial infatuation."[246] By using this phrase, Chandler likely referred to the radicals' current and short-lived preoccupation with extralegal government.

After rebuking the delegates' characters, the clergyman bashed the Congress' most far-reaching measure: non-importation. From the approval of the Suffolk Resolves, "every moderate man among us has despaired of feeling any good produced by the Congress; and from that time every thing that was bad has been growing worse." Thus, in Chandler's eyes, Congress' non-importation measures "hurried" the colonies into a "state of rebellion." The resistance-supporting partisans filled the colonies with distractions and raised "seditious tumults."[247] Chandler abhorred the colonies' current path, and he critiqued a non-importation agreement for two reasons. First, the boycott would agitate the colonies' economic industry. Second, the measure would not remedy the grieving colonies. Chandler compared this measure to "cutting of an arm, in order to get rid of a

---

[244] Norton, *1774*, 227.
[245] Chandler, *A Friendly Address*, 31-32; Worthington Chauncey Ford, et al., ed. 1904-1937. *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*. 34 vols. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, I, 15ff. From Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 142, footnote 2.
[246] Chandler, *A Friendly Address*, 31.
[247] Ibid., 33, 35.

small sore in one of the fingers."[248] A non-importation agreement would be a wildly disproportionate response to the anguish committed by Parliament's Coercive Acts. It would drive the colonies further into a stagnant and rotting state – New York City would become Boston. Common New Yorkers would experience immense suffering, as their ships, shops, and goods would lose all value.[249] Chandler reasoned with his readership, albeit in an accusatory fashion. He was forward-thinking – the clergyman saw the potential dangers of a large-scale boycott as an attack on the economic freedoms of common colonists. Chandler desired the Congress to formally acknowledge "the rightful supremacy in general, of Great Britain, over the American Colonies" and for the Congress to have passed, among other measures, "[a] reasonable plan for a general American constitution." The second point relates to Galloway's Plan of Union,[250] which Chandler would have unequivocally supported if he was a delegate. Akin to Galloway, however, Chandler engaged in wishful thinking. Partisan politics pushed the two parties farther along the spectrum throughout 1774, so garnering support for permanent reconciliation would be extremely difficult.

In the end, Chandler emphatically declared that "all violent opposition to lawful authority partakes of the nature of rebellion; and a rebellion of the colonies… would necessarily terminate and ruin and destruction."[251] While Chandler is correct in some respects, because the Congress lied outside the legal structures set up by Britain, the clergyman dilutes the vast importance of the delegates' meeting in Carpenter's Hall. Chandler fails to understand that an extralegal government does not constitute an open

---

[248] Ibid., 37
[249] Ibid., 39.
[250] Ibid., 45-46; Norton, *1774*, 227, also discusses the final quotation and the connection to Galloway.
[251] Ibid., 47-48.

rebellion. Parliament besieged a fellow city, now suffering to the greatest extent, so a commercial boycott, the delegates believed, would restore a cordial relationship with Britain. It is Chandler's inflammatory remarks on the Congress and the delegates themselves, rather, that warrant greater scrutiny into their role in perpetuating a partisan colonial body.

Samuel Seabury's *Free Thoughts*, published in November after the Congress adjourned, also exemplifies conservative outrage in the colonies and particularly New York. Seabury, unlike Chandler, deeply pondered the practical consequences of the Association. The clergyman started out with a harrowing note: "the bands of civil society are broken; the authority of government weakened, and in some instances taken away: Individuals are deprived of their liberty; their property is frequently invaded by violence…" The Congress, he hoped, would remedy these issues perpetrated by the Committees of Correspondence, "but alas," the delegates in Philadelphia worsened the situation.[252]

Seabury in *Free Thoughts* addressed New York farmers and discussed the dangers of a boycott at length.[253] First, "clamours, discord, confusion, mobs, riots, insurrections, rebellions" would arise throughout Britain and her colonies. He became upset with the Congress, which looked "forward to the ruin, destruction, and desolation of the whole British Empire without one relenting thought."[254] In the initial pages of *Free Thoughts*,

---

[252] Samuel Seabury. Signed A.W. Farmer. November 16, 1774. *Free Thoughts, on the proceedings of the Continental Congress, held at Philadelphia Sept. 5, 1774: etc, in a Letter to the Farmers and other Inhabitants of North America in general, and if those of the Province of New York in Particular*. By a *Farmer*. Hear Me for I will speak! Printed in the Year MDCCLXXIV. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=evans;cc=evans;rgn=main;view=text;idno=N10731.0001.001, 3.
[253] He styled himself as "A West Chester Farmer", or "A.W. Farmer," which was a politically savvy move.
[254] Ibid., 5.

Seabury concerned himself with the harmony of the British Empire. The Congress' "impolicy", he asserted, further drove the colonies into a tenuous relationship with her mother country through the Association, leading to more harm and indignation.[255]

Seabury explained that Congress' measures would not immediately affect New York farmers, but non-importation, non-importation and non-consumption would have far-reaching shocks. Further, Seabury bemoaned the Congress' ploy to upset all of Britain's manufacturers on a large scale, even though these workers did nothing wrong.[256] The colonies rely on goods from the West Indies, Ireland, and Britain, so upsetting this mutually beneficial relationship would severely impact the pockets of New York farmers. "The sale of your seed not only pays your taxes," Seabury argued, "but furnishes you with many of the little conveniencies, and comforts of life; the loss of it for one year would be of more damage to you, than paying the three-penny duty on tea for twenty." The Congress' policies, Seabury continued, would only detriment the colonists and would prove unsuccessful in its original goal of distressing Britain's other colonies. Seabury predicted that Britain's merchants, who have unmatched trade connections, will simply take their business elsewhere and won't favorably respond to Congress' measures. The colonies need Britain for their everyday goods, such as food and clothing, and their prices will skyrocket if the current situation continues. Then, the farmers would wholly depend on New York's merchants, who have questionable honor, for the prices of their goods. These merchants have enough resources to hold out the boycott, and will eventually grow even wealthier during this time, but the meager farmer will suffer.[257]

---

[255] Ibid., 5-6.
[256] "Where is the justice, where is the policy of this procedure?" Ibid., 5.
[257] Ibid., 7-12. On the merchants' honor: "The sacredness of an oath, the grand security of the liberty, and property, and lives of Englishmen, is prostituted to the vile purposes of private gain. Perjury, and false-

And Britain may perhaps halt all trade with the colonies, causing "wheat, flax-seed, corn, beef, pork, butter, cheese, as was not consumed in the province, must be left to rot and stink upon our hands."[258] Therefore, the merchants who represented New York in the First Continental Congress acted selfishly, not patriotically, for deferring to Congress and the Association.[259]

After scrutinizing the financial and trade consequences of the Association, Seabury then investigated Committees of Observation and Inspection that were mandated to carry out such measures. But first, Seabury asked the farmers if they will "submit to this slavish regulation." "You must," Seabury answered himself, because the Congress "have ordered and directed…the Committees in the respective colonies, to establish such further regulations as they may think proper, for carrying their association, of which this Non-consumption agreement is a part, into execution."[260] Violators of the Association, Seabury continued, "shall be considered as Out-laws, unworthy of the protection of civil society, and delivered over to the vengeance of a lawless, outrageous mob, to be *tarred, feathered, hanged, drawn, quartered, and burnt*.—O rare American Freedom!"[261] The Committees of Observation and Inspection then violated the liberties of colonists. Seabury pointed out the hypocrisy of the committees because to preserve American liberty through a boycott, they had been acting adversely to the interests of their constituents. Seabury is confused why colonists would subject themselves to "slavery" under the committees. Further, Seabury emphatically declared that "if I must be enslaved,

---

swearing are encouraged by those very merchants, to whose honour we are now to trust, that they will not demand an unreasonable profit on their goods." Ibid., 11.
[258] Ibid., 14.
[259] Ibid., 12.
[260] Ibid., 17-18.
[261] Ibid., 18.

let it be by a KING at least, and not by a parcel of upstart lawless Committee-men. If I must be devoured, let me be devoured by the jaws of a lion, and not *gnawed* to death by rats and vermin."[262] Seabury belittled the committeemen by comparing them to lowly animals and the King to a glorious lion. His condescending comment stems from his fear of common New Yorkers. Even though the delegates, and the majority of the Fifty-one, were of the merchant class, Seabury implies that they have lost all their class and respect due to their involvement with extralegal government. On the other hand, he suggested that everyone ought to "renounce all dependence on Congresses, and Committees…Turn then your eyes to your constitutional representatives. They are the true, and legal, and have been hitherto, the faithful defenders of your rights, and liberties."[263] Seabury spoke in a close-minded manner because he did not legitimately consider the injuries of the common class. The clergyman was driven by a fear of the upending of the traditional British government, and his personal attacks to the delegates and the committeemen highlights this belief.

Rivington published Seabury's second pamphlet, titled *The Congress Canvassed*, in December. Even though Seabury continued his title as "A West Chester Farmer," the new pamphlet addressed New York merchants. Unlike *Free Thoughts*, the clergyman did not chastise merchants, whom he deemed free of scrutiny if they had acted honorably and patriotically.[264] Throughout the pamphlet, Seabury told the merchants to think rationally.

---

[262] Ibid.
[263] Ibid., 22.
[264] Samuel Seabury. Signed A.W. Farmer. November 28, 1774. *The Congress Canvassed: or, An Examination into the Conduct of the Delegates, at their Grand Convention, held in Philadelphia, Sept. 1, 1774. Addressed to the merchants of New-York.* By A.W. Farmer. Printed in the Year MDCCLXXIV. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?cc=evans;c=evans;idno=N10730.0001.001;view=text;rgn=div1;node=N10730.0001.001:2, 4.

Seabury pointed out that it would be childish for the merchants to believe that the Congress acted in a manner that secured liberties for colonists and rectified the situation with Parliament. His role is to "expose the false, arbitrary, and tyrannical PRINCIPLES upon which the Congress acted."[265] He believed that Congress "exercis[ed] an assumed power of legislation," which was not granted to them.[266] The Congress was extralegal – it was not authorized by the British government, so any law-making activity, according to Seabury, is intrinsically arbitrary. "Cruelly was I disappointed," Seabury continued, that New York's delegates, ones that he hoped would act virtuously, unanimously accepted the Suffolk Resolves.[267] He chastised the New England delegations, whose actions "deserve the epithet of rebellion."[268] Seabury seems to have levied all the blame on the delegations, which implies that the New York delegation acquiesced to the New Englanders' zeal. "Your Delegates had not the voice of an hundreth part of the people in their favour," Seabury asserted. Seabury argued that the Committee of Fifty-one possessed no authority to call the people to meet to elect these delegates.[269] Seabury then rebuked the Association's Article XI, which he deemed a "popish Inquisition" that was not based on any rule of law. The committees authorized by this article, Seabury explained, would not need to abide by any traditional legal structures, such as defending oneself and providing evidence.[270]

In *The Congress Canvassed*, Seabury refined his thoughts and exacted more targeted attacks on New York's delegation and the Continental Association. Throughout

---

[265] Ibid., 5, 13.
[266] Ibid., 13.
[267] Ibid., 6.
[268] Ibid., 7.
[269] Ibid., 9.
[270] Ibid., 14.

the final months of 1774, Samuel Seabury, or "A.W. Farmer," emerged as a leading conservative voice in the colonies. As the conservative voice strengthened stemming from New York City, New York's Committee of Observation and Inspection faced an uphill battle. The following months would be trying for the radicals and their common cause, and in attempting to achieve the legitimacy of their newly formed Committee – and disprove assertions of arbitrariness – the radical leaders depended on popular support to achieve their aims. The clergymen's writings did not go unrefuted, however, as they received persuasive responses from popular radicals, such as John Adams and a young Alexander Hamilton.

John Adams resonated with much of Chandler's comments, but they diverged in their outlook on the colonies. If the Americans deferred to the professions of Parliament, Adams argued, then "never failing and never ending disgrace, Misery, Contempt and Infamy, will be their Portion to all Ages." American colonists resided across an entire ocean, so Adams questioned the validity of Parliament to levy more taxes and fees on colonists than their fellow House members.[271] In response to Chandler's comment about rebelling to Parliament's laws, Adams declared that "The Supream Power of any Kingdom or State is in the whole Body of the People." The people have never, Adams continued, granted a governmental body absolute authority over them.[272] New York during the summer of 1774 exemplifies this argument – the people are their own distinct political class. Common New Yorkers distinguished themselves from their extralegal

---

[271] John Adams, *Reply to A Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans*, 17 November 1774. https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-02-02-0060#:~:text=A%20Friendly%20Address%20to%20All%20Reasonable%20Americans%2C%20which%20proposed%20reconciliation,description%20ends%20

[272] Ibid.

governments through public demonstrations and overall unhappiness with the British appointed Colonial Assembly and the moderate Committee of Fifty-one. The people had immense power in New York City politics and political consciousness fertilized in 1774. Thus, the events that transpired in New York City (and will further transpire in the coming months) fully refute Chandler's arguments on how a duty to obey Parliament's laws constitute a rebellion. Adams noted the impossibility to grant the "Supream Power" complete immunity from complaints from its constituents – "The Supreme Power is not omnicient, omnipresent, omnipotent, or perfectly wise just and good, because he has expressly admitted, that it may want Information, and Attention, and that it may adopt wrong and oppressive Measures."[273] The people, therefore, have a role to play in keeping their government accountable for when it adopts measures adverse to the common good. Adams finished his response by personal attacking Chandler, who supports "the absurd and exploded Doctrine of Passive obedience and Non Resistance, which he so dogmatically inculcates."[274] Essentially, Adams called Chandler spineless and he speaks for many radicals in their arguments against conservatives, who were consumed by fear of upsetting the British Empire. Adams, on the other hand, championed the people and their right to challenge laws made on their behalf.

While Seabury worked on *A Congress Canvassed*, Alexander Hamilton, then a student at King' College, entered political royalty through his response to Seabury's *Free Thoughts*. Throughout the pamphlet, titled *A Full Vindication*, Hamilton picked many of Seabury's specific arguments apart by testing their logic. Most of the piece, however,

---

[273] Ibid.
[274] Ibid.

contained broad and sweeping arguments about the Congress, the nature of man, and governance. He started out strong by condemning conservatives as antipathetic "not only to the natural rights of mankind; but to common sense and common modesty." Hamilton continued his rebuke by declaring that "bad men are apt to paint others like themselves" and accusing the conservatives for "contradicting and censuring the public voice in favour of" corrupt Parliament members.[275] Hamilton did not walk on as many eggshells as Adams, as the enraged college student exemplifies the anger that festered in the minds of all common New Yorkers throughout 1774. "The only distinction between freedom and slavery," Hamilton declared, is that "in the former state, a man is governed by the laws to which he has given his consent, either in person, or by his representative: In the latter, he is governed by the will of another."[276] Hamilton, similar to Adams, preached the will of the people as fundamental to the fabric of American colonial society. The body of the people, as Adams termed, is where legitimacy relies. A Parliament that unjustly taxes and takes, Hamilton's argument implied, is illegitimate and adverse to the principles of the British constitution.[277] Hamilton then championed the First Continental Congress, whose "decrees are binding upon all, and demand a religious observance." Hamilton's pamphlet echoes Adams', thereby showcasing the radical standpoint during this crisis. The people continuously petitioned and were neglected, so the Congress "imposed what restraint they thought necessary. Those, who condemn or clamour against it, do nothing more, nor less, than advise us to be slaves."[278] Therefore, the suspension of trade with

---

[275] Alexander Hamilton. 1774. *Full Vindication of the Measures of Congress from the Calumnies of their Enemies; in Answer to a Letter under the signature of a Westchester Farmer*. New York.
[276] Ibid.
[277] Ibid.
[278] Ibid.

Britain is the only potential remedy for the colonies to have their grievances redressed. Hamilton justified the Congress' measures on two fronts. The first is on a philosophical note, by which he argued that all people are self-interested, implying that the relinquishing of rights is not in human nature. Secondly, "it is the duty of each particular branch to promote, not only the good of the whole community, but the good of every other particular branch." Hamilton accused the manufacturers of Britain's colonies as "accomplices" for their theoretical crimes against American colonists.[279] He ended the pamphlet cautioning his readership: "beware of the men who advise you to forsake the plain path, marked out for you by the congress." Hamilton became susceptible, however, to the radicalized times in December of 1774. "If you join with the rest of America in the same common measure," the radical college student continued, "you will be sure to preserve your liberties inviolate; but if you separate from them, and seek for redress alone, and unseconded, you will certainly fall a prey to your enemies, and repent your folly as long as you live."[280] Hamilton ardently defended the Congress and its non-importation measures. In doing so, he chastised conservatives for their dubious moral character. His arguments were mostly personal towards Seabury rather than discussing any substantive political and legal questions, but nevertheless, they highlight the strained relationship between conservatives and radicals.

A Friendly Address, *Free Thoughts*, and *The Congress Canvassed* are great tests to radicalism because they contemplate the Association's impacts on New Yorkers. The clergymen ponder fundamental questions of legitimate rule in the colonies and they speak

[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid.

for conservatives, who wanted to uphold traditional governmental structures and preserve order. They believe that Committees of Observation and Inspection, created by Article XI of the Association, undermine the social and political order. In addition, the conservative outrage to the Congress and the committees exemplified the value of the freedom of the press and Rivington emerged as the publisher of these provocative pamphlets. The conservative voice strengthened in the aftermath of the First Continental Congress, but their platform was merely negatory.[281] Conservatives continuously accused the extralegal committees of betraying the interests of American colonists, but they rarely proposed any practical remedy for Parliament's wrongdoings. Conservatives failed to understand the value of increased radicalism throughout the colonies because of the Congress and by the same token, the clergymen were not cognizant of how the colonists truly felt. The Continental Congress, and the Association, sent large ripples throughout the colonies. Seabury argued that the colonists must submit to Congress' subservient measures. What the clergyman does not consider, however, is that colonists adhered to these measures without force. Therefore, the Congress and its authorized committees emerged as legitimate entities in Colonial America. The refutations by Adams and Hamilton exhibit a more theoretical attack on conservatives, which showcased the value of non-importation in rectifying the colonies' distressed relationship with their mother country. Further, the rebuttals demonstrate how the Congress itself was legitimate because it represented the will of the people, whereas these same people had not consented to a punitive Parliamentary policy. But the story is not that simple. Throughout the concluding months

---

[281] Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 160; Flick also discusses the "Loyalist" party in his book. Alexander Clarence Flick. 1901. *Loyalism in New York during the American Revolution*. New York: Columbia University Press.

of 1774 and the initial months of 1775, the practical operations of New York's Committee of Observation and Inspection weakened the clergymen's primarily theoretical – and precarious – arguments.

Chapter 7: The Creation of the Committee of Sixty

Through Article XI of the Continental Association, Congress proved itself as a generative force. Several authors argue for top-down authorization – the committees were legitimized by the First Continental Congress and further authorized by local voting, implying that the Congress was an inflection point.[282] I am on the side of authors who champion bottom-up authorization – local committees, rather, legitimized the Congress.[283] Colonists evidently questioned the Congress' authority and for it to be considered legitimate, the delegates sanctioned the formation of local Committees of Observation and Inspection to carry out their measures. The local committees, in turn, retroactively authorized the First Continental Congress, thus serving as the reason why the Association received its legal enforcement power.

Prominent New York conservatives varied in their outlook after the Congress. Some chastised the Congress and severely doubted its authority to enact any legitimate law through the newly minted Committees of Observation and Inspection. Lieutenant Governor Colden, rather, felt apathetic towards the Association, writing confidently during the Congress that "a majority of the most considerable are convinced [non-importation] is a wrong Measure."[284] Less than a month later, and after the formal passing of the Association, Colden reported that "it is certain that the measures of the Congress do not meet with rapid applause here." Colden had a positive outlook on the people's sentiments to the Association – he believed merchants and farmers disliked the

---

[282] Congress spoke in a "clear and undivided voice." Ammerman, *In the Common Cause*, xi; Nash, *Urban Crucible*, 238; Marston, *King and Congress*, 122, 128.
[283] The two best modern accounts of this argument are Norton, *1774* and Breen, *American Insurgents*.
[284] *DRCNY*, 8: 493.

boycott measures – nevertheless, due to the fact that New York recently received the proceedings, Colden was uncertain "what steps the people will take in consequence of what has been advised and determined by the Congress."[285] William Smith held a different view of the Association's impacts on New York City. "The Congress have played so bold a Card," brooded Smith, "that I think we are cast intirely upon the Magnanimity of the British Nation" and they were "pouring Oil into the Flames."[286] Smith's anxiety conveys Congress' importance in reshaping the priorities of the colonies and the British government. Through the Continental Association, Smith implicitly contended, the Congress cemented the colonies in a state of open, public, and legitimate resistance to Parliament. In Smith's eyes, the colonies played their card and now their posterity is dependent on Britain's response. At this time, however, Smith does not expect how much will be "cast" on the individual Committees of Observation and Inspection that transformed the Association.

Bottom-up authorization can be seen through New Yorkers' mobilization in September and October due to the false report that General Gage had fired upon Boston and killed a handful of people. The news allegedly radicalized the delegates in Philadelphia as well, but the people's actions in response to this news demonstrate that the New York political scene had already started democratizing before the Congress' proceedings made any impact. William Smith reported on this fury, writing that "we are in the most eminent Danger of a Civil War." Even though the report was untrue, Smith was "astonish[ed] to observe to what a Pass the Populace are arrived Instead of that

---

[285] Ibid., 510; Norton, *1774*, 219-220.
[286] Minty, *Unfriendly to Liberty*, 175-176.

Respect they formerly had for the King, you now hear the very lowest Orders call him a Knave or a Fool."[287] Common New Yorkers quickly became enraged when Gage's troops allegedly fired upon Boston, which highlights how on edge New Yorkers were. The people were already discontented with their circumstances under Parliament, and the first smell of blood completely changed New Yorkers' outlooks on their King.

The fury was not reserved to name calling, however, as New Yorkers acted. A broadside dated September 9th, four days after the official commencement of the First Continental Congress, praised honorable New Yorkers for their refusal to "let their vessels for the base purpose of transporting troops, ammunition, &c. to oppress the brave defenders of American liberty."[288] Due to this unconfirmed news, many New Yorkers now stopped sending aid to Boston that could be used to oppress radical Bostonians. It did not require much evidence to rattle New Yorkers, which foreshadows a trend that continued under the Committee of Sixty. Five days later, "The Free Citizens" "hoped that no Pilot will be found so lost to all sense of duty to his country, as to assist in that detestable work." The broadside continued by praising the merchants who stopped sending aid to Boston. "There is no doubt," the author declared, "but their patriotick conduct will be followed by all their fellow citizens."[289] The Mechanics Committee tried to thwart several artisans who were about to aid General Gage in building barricades in Boston.[290] This mobilization included varying social and economic classes. The patriotic zeal that coursed through New Yorkers' veins was not restrained to the common people or the merchants, but rather it was a shared experience.

---

[287] Smith, *Memoirs*, 192.
[288] *A Card*. New York, 9 September 1774, Evans 13184; Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 200.
[289] *To the public*. Evans 13668; Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 200.
[290] *AA*, 4, I, 803-804; Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 200.

This collaborative radicalism started to break down shortly thereafter. A broadside on September 29th detailed that an impromptu committee was formed to gather written answers from guilty local merchants who covertly traded with British merchants.[291] This angered the merchants, who published a piece defending the actions and they stressed the importance of reconciliation and a cordial relationship. "Humanus" argued that preventing the aid to British soldiers in Boston would necessitate further hostilities.[292] One day later, DeLanceyite merchant Joseph Totten rebuked the extempore committee by arguing that the radicals "disturb[ed] the Peace and Order of the Town, by assembling without any Notification from you to whom the public Voice gave the Care of the Community's Interest…[they] have arbitrarily censured and threatened" several honorable merchants. To remedy this breach of order, Totten suggested that the Fifty-one call a meeting to publish resolutions to preserve the peace of the city.[293] The Fifty-one ended up censuring the ad-hoc committee, demonstrating the conservative party's fear of the radicals.[294] The Fifty-one, which rapidly lost its power in the summer and fall, tried to retain its fleeting influence. In response to the censure, the radical committee believed their appointment was legal "because it was made by many very respectable Citizens well known to us – we esteemed it our Duty to comply with their Desire." Further, John Morin Scott reasoned that it was necessary to understand Congress' measures before sending materials to Boston.[295] The Committee, according to the radicals, drew its legality from the wishes of their neighbors, which further highlights the concept of the power of

---

[291] *AA*, 4, I, 809; Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 200-201.
[292] "Humanus," *To the inhabitants of New-York*, Evans 13342; Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 201.
[293] Joseph Totten, *To the respectable body of gentlemen*. Evans 13483; Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 201.
[294] Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 201.
[295] New-York, 1 October 1774. *To the publick*, Evans 13484; Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 201.

common New Yorkers. The radicals acted based on the impulses from the people, showcasing their commitment to including commoners in the political process. In response to the radical plea, the conservatives called "Isaac Sheer-Off, Alexander McDoubtful, [and] Peter Van-der-fight-not" factious "demagogues" who support mobbish and arbitrary actions.[296] In the end, the conservatives succeeded – they sent the artisans to aid Gage's troops in Boston. A writer praised the merchants for protecting the rights of New Yorkers from "the unwarrantable and bold attempts of those persons who use the prostituted name of liberty."[297] Even though the conservatives triumphed in this episode, the instances that occurred prior to the conclusion of the Congress conveys a city on the edge. Radicals did not need the Association's authorization to thwart exportation, which exemplifies the presence of bottom-up authorization in Colonial America. In October, shortly after this episode, a group of importers met at the Merchant's Exchange and declared to not raise prices of their goods before an agreement took place.[298] The people, even merchants, had already been mobilizing to enforce resistance against Britain.

The Association only received its legitimacy through the people's authorization, which can be seen through grassroots action taken by common New Yorkers to enforce it. One of the first instances of the Association's immediate impact in New York regarded the importation and exportation of sheep. On November 7th, people discovered eighteen sheep aboard a ship to the West Indies, to which they informed the captain that the Association prohibited the ship from leaving the harbor. When the people heard that the

---

[296] *To the freeholders, freemen, and inhabitants of the city of New-York*, Evans 13656; Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 201.
[297] Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 201.
[298] *NYJ*, 13 October 1774; Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 168.

captain was set to depart that night, therefore disobeying orders, two-hundred New Yorkers appeared on the wharf and appointed a handful of members to get the advice of the Committee of Fifty-one. In the end, the sheep disembarked the ship and the people were "well satisfied [and] peaceably dispersed."[299] Several weeks later, when an Association violator named Thomas Charles Williams arrived in the city, "A Citizen" published a broadside calling people to "discover, find out, and apprehend" the violator "without violence." Further, this discovery is one of the "most sacred Obligations of Society."[300]

These episodes reveal several lessons from the initial burst of action following the Congress. Common New Yorkers rapidly mobilized to enforce the Association. The people had jobs and responsibilities, but they decided to impose the measures of an extralegal congress that convened in a different city. The Continental Congress had a deep impact on the minds of all colonists, but the people were not legally compelled to follow the Association. The people in New York City felt that congressional measures were for a good cause – reconciliation – and giving the Association legitimate legal power showcases the importance of the people in authorizing the Congress. In addition, this episode highlights the influence of revolutionary organization. In a matter of hours, hundreds of New Yorkers appeared on the wharf to keep the ship captain accountable. Radical ideology that imbued the city in the summer now rose to the surface in the late fall. The revolution, originally controlled by merchants in the city, now included common people who acted. The significance of elections as a marker of legitimacy waned in the

---

[299] *NYGM*, 14 November 1774.
[300] *To the public. Stop him! Stop him! Stop him!*. 21 November 1774, Evans, 13676.

late fall and winter of 1774 – action took its place. Thus, looking at each month leading up to Lexington, I will analyze the battle for legitimacy and the rising tension in New York City.

The conservative controlled Fifty-one attempted to thwart the Association's influence, thereby trying to protect their increasingly fragile foundation. On November 7th, the Fifty-one's first meeting after the conclusion of the First Continental Congress, James Duane moved for the Fifty-one to publish an advertisement calling for the election of local committees in eight distinct wards to comply with Article XI of the Continental Association. Although Duane entered Philadelphia as one of the more moderate delegates – hoping for reconciliation – he emerged as a New Yorker who desired to comply with Congress' measures. This is the first instance where we see how New York's local committee legitimized Congress' actions. In the same meeting, the Fifty-one recommended that freeholders and freemen assemble on November 18th to elect representatives for their individual ward's Committees of Observation and Inspection.[301] Duane acted cleverly, which Roger J. Champagne noticed. By recommending an election of separate wards by freeholders and freemen, Duane bolstered the power of the merchants who disagreed with Congress' measures.[302] By that virtue, the proposed election procedure would limit the power of the radicals who supported the lower classes and particularly the disenfranchised.[303]

---

[301] *AA*, 4, I, 328-329. *NYGM*, 14 November 1774.
[302] Champagne, *Alexander McDougall*, 69-70.
[303] Edward P Alexander. 1938. *A Revolutionary Conservative: James Duane of New York*. New York: Columbia University Press, 106.

The Mechanics convened in the Fields on November 14th,[304] which incented the Fifty-one to write to Daniel Dunscomb, Chairman of the Mechanics Committee, that they had experienced "some difficulties" regarding the advertisement to elect Committees of Observation and Inspection for each ward. In that letter, the Fifty-one requested a conference with the Mechanics to agree upon a more desirable method of election.[305] On the next day, the conference abandoned Duane's proposal for the election of one unified committee of sixty to seventy members at City Hall on November 22nd.[306] The Fifty-one then resolved that they would dissolve with the election of the Committee of Observation and Inspection.[307] It is unclear why the Fifty-one consulted with the Mechanics, considering the Fifty-one controlled local politics through moderate merchants. Duane's election idea would serve the majority of the Fifty-one's interests best, so it is confusing why they would relinquish their power to a Mechanics Committee who got their wish in electing a unified Committee of Observation and Inspection. The Fifty-one publicly announced that there would be "a new Committee to superintend the execution of the Association entered into by the Congress."[308] The Fifty-one acted nebulously in this crucial time, and they likely deferred to the Mechanics because moderate members of the Fifty-one, such as Duane and Jay, desired to adhere to Continental Association's

---

[304] New-York, 13 November 1774. *The mechanicks of this city, are earnestly requested to meet*…; Champagne, *Alexander McDougall*, 234, footnote 7.
[305] AA, 4, I, 329-330; *NYG*, 17 November 1774; In a seemingly different letter to the Mechanics, prominent Fifty-one members wrote that "To soften the rigour of the calamities to which, in this tempestuous season, we may be exposed, let us all, with one heart and voice, endeavour to cultivate and cherish a spirit of unanimity and mutual benevolence, and to promote that internal tranquillity which can alone give weight to our laudable efforts for the preservation of our freedom, and crown them with success." Jay, *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay*, 32; Nuxoll, *The Selected Papers of John Jay*, 109-110.
[306] *NYJ*, 24 November 1774; *AA*, 4, I, 329-330; *NYG*, 17 November 1774.
[307] *AA*, 4, I, 329-330; *NYG*, 17 November 1774.
[308] *AA*, 4, I, 330; *NYG*, 17 November 1774.

provisions.[309] In a letter to Philip Schuyler, Smith asserted that "You knew what Spirit prevailed in our Committee of 51 before the Congress had published their Resolves Letters &c – Their Delegates are become Converts to the prevailing Sentiments of the Congress."[310] In the same vein, Colden "was surprised to find such men joining with the Committee whose design is to execute the plan of the Congress."[311] New York's delegation, including Low, Duane, and Jay, originally opposed non-importation but yielded to the radicals by promising that they would support such a measure if the Congress at large supported it. Therefore, the delegates would remain conservative if it were not for Congress' Continental Association – moderate conservatives transformed into moderate radicals because of the Congress. But this interpretation does not tell the entire story. Radical leaders, such as McDougall and Sears, worked tirelessly throughout the summer of 1774 to guarantee a New York delegation that supported a non-importation measure if adopted by the Congress.[312]

On November 22nd, New York City freeholders and freemen unanimously elected sixty members to serve as the city's Committee of Observation and Inspection, now regarded as the Committee of Sixty.[313] There is a discrepancy in how many people appeared at the election. Smith believed less than two-hundred people voted, but Colden reported that around thirty to forty inhabitants elected the Committee of Sixty. Colden supposed that this meager turnout conveys how Congress' measures were "generally

---

[309] Champagne believes it was because the Mechanics put pressure on the Fifty-one, among other factors. *Alexander McDougall*, 70.
[310] Smith, *Memoirs*, 203.
[311] *DRCNY*, 8: 513.
[312] Minty and Champagne heavily credit McDougall for the events of the fall of 1774. *Unfriendly to Liberty*, 176; Champagne, *Alexander McDougall*, 71.
[313] *AA*, 4, I, 330; *NYJ*, 24 November 1774; *NYGM*, 28 November 1774. Smith, *Letters of Delegates*, I, 262-263.

disrelished."[314] Several historians claim that few people voted because the conservatives and radicals reached an agreement before the election. Therefore, according to one historian, New York City preserved its facade of unity.[315] Another historian deemed the unity under the Sixty an "illusion."[316] Nevertheless, New York City, at this crucial turning point, cast its lot with radicalism "in the same Spirit as the other colonies," therefore ruining the conservative's steady foundation.[317] The Sixty consisted of the New York delegation, leaders of the Liberty Boys, and a handful of the Mechanics who the Fifty-one consulted a week prior. Twenty-nine members of the original Fifty-one retained their spots on the Sixty. Of these men, fewer than eight cast their lot with Loyalism and eleven were radicals. Of the twenty-two committeemen that lost their seats, the majority became Loyalists.[318] The Fifty-one's conservative bloc that controlled New York City politics since the creation of the body in May of 1774 "retired outwitted and disgusted and as they think betrayal."[319] Some conservatives nevertheless held positions on the Sixty, such as Isaac Low, but their power was severely depleted because staunch DeLanceyites such as Bache and Thurman were ousted from the committee. The election of the Committee of Sixty demonstrated a vast change in New York City's political atmosphere. Radical Hugh Hughes believed the new Committee would halt "the Minds of Others from being poisoned by the Emissaries of Power."[320] Thus, new men garnered

---

[314] Smith, *Memoirs*, 202-203; *DRCNY*, 8: 512; Champagne said the number was 30-40. Champagne, *Alexander McDougall*, 70; Nevertheless, a meager number of people elected; *AA*, 4, I, 330
[315] Mason, *The Road to Independence*, 40-41
[316] Champagne, *Alexander McDougall*, 70-71.
[317] The conservatives were losing their independent organization. Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 166.
[318] Becker discusses the composition of the Sixty in detail. Ibid., 167-168, footnotes 34-36.
[319] Smith, *Memoirs*, 203.
[320] Minty, *Unfriendly to Liberty*, 177-178.

power to the chagrin of conservatives in the city. The Sixty, by assuming power from Congress, showcased the influence of radicals in the city.

In speaking about the election of the Committee of Sixty, which served as a resounding triumph for radicals, Smith emphatically stated that "Necessity has no Law."[321] Smith presumably referred to New York City's necessary duty to obey the Continental Association and therefore elect a Committee of Observation and Inspection. The Sixty, akin to the Fifty-one, was an extralegal government operating outside the British appointed Colonial Assembly. But, according to Smith, the responsibility levied by Congress on the colonies trumped the necessity to obey Britain and act in a traditionally legal and orderly manner. Smith, a conservative throughout 1774, potentially turned a new leaf after the Congress. Perhaps he was now favorable to the common cause. The fact that a conservative-led New York City committee that opposed non-importation rapidly abided by an extralegal Continental Congress highlights the radicals' adherence to and authorization of the Congress's measures. Due to the election, "the Current will set all one Way for Liberty," Smith noted to Schuyler.[322] Momentum was on the side of the radicals, who supported non-importation to achieve redress of their grievances. This required an overhaul of New York City local politics, and the transition from the Committee of Fifty-one to the Committee of Sixty started the process of cementing New York City as a crucial member of the colonial resistance movement.

Several historians contend that the Committees of Observation and Inspection guaranteed their legitimacy through local voting because more ordinary citizens entered

---

[321] Smith, *Memoirs*, 203.
[322] Ibid.

the public sphere.[323] New York City is a different story, however. Roger J. Champagne observed that in the spring of 1775, radicals adjusted from hosting street demonstrations and posting broadsides in newspapers to running a legitimate government.[324] Even though the Sixty primarily consisted of radicals and drained conservative power, the Committee's legitimacy was not achieved through its election, but rather by its steadily growing regulatory role amidst mass conservative headwinds in late 1774 and early 1775. The election of the Committee of Sixty, and therefore the legitimizing of the First Continental Congress, enraged conservatives. The Committee obeyed the Association and radicals pushed conservative Fifty-one members out of the extralegal government process. Due to this progression, the ousted committeemen and other conservatives started to form into their own unified party.[325] Party politics were extremely tenuous after the election, which led to arguments about elemental questions of legitimacy and extralegal government.[326] Thus, in the following section, I argue that the aforementioned hostile tests levied by conservatives, such as the Anglican clergymen, were no match for the Sixty – the extralegal Committee blocked the attacks and achieved legitimacy by relying on common New Yorkers to carry out the measures set out in the Association.

---

[323] Breen, *American Insurgents*, 162; Norton, *1774*, 270; Gary B. Nash. 2006. *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America*. New York: Penguin, 178; Jackson Turner Main. 1966. "Government by the People: The American Revolution and the Democratization of the Legislatures." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 391–407, 391; Breen, *The Will of the People*, *132*.
[324] Champagne, *Alexander McDougall*, 21.
[325] Mason, *Road to Independence*, 41.
[326] Champagne, *Alexander McDougall*, 71.

Chapter 8: The People Enforcing the Association

The people enforced the Association on behalf of the Committee of Sixty, showing how New Yorkers played a crucial role in shaping revolutionary New York City. As the cold days of December commenced, the Association started to be enforced more. After the December 1st deadline passed, signifying the start of the Association's non-importation provisions, the Sixty appointed two sub-committees to oversee the arrivals of two cargoes.[327] But the Association was not limited to commercial affairs. When British actors arrived in New York City, "Pro Patria" invoked the eighth article of the Continental Association, which "discountenance[s] and discourage[s] every species of extravagance and dissipation," including plays.[328] The author continued by asserting that in a "political light," having the plays is "highly improper" and the Sixty ought to "observe the conduct of all persons touching the Association."[329] The author, likely a concerned citizen, evidently approved of Congress' measures. Even though the Association originally intended to commercially boycott Britain, the delegates in Philadelphia left its provisions open-ended, which allowed local committees to take matters into their own hands. The people used the Association as a tool to enforce social norms rather than a mere trade boycott. The culture in New York City changed, and Pro Patria's reporting of British actors to the Sixty reinforces how common people were integral in granting the Sixty legitimate enforcement power.

The committeemen helped legitimize the Association as well. The remainder of December and January featured internal bickering among Sixty members. Colden thought

---

[327] *NYJ*, 15 December 1774
[328] *AA*, 4, I, 915.
[329] *NYJ*, 15 December 1774; Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 203.

several Sixty committeemen were "gentlemen of property…who are esteemed to favor moderate and conciliatory" measures. However, Colden himself "was surprised to find such men joining with the Committee whose design is to execute the plan of the Congress," but these moderate men only did so out of necessity – they thought backing the Association would lead to more benign measures. The Lieutenant Governor, though, deeply worried that "the Colonies must soon fall into distraction and every Calamity annexed to a total annihilation of Government."[330] Prominent committeemen experimented with their newly formed committee. James Duane and Alexander McDougall disagreed on the terms of the Association and how they would be enforced in the city. Duane championed earlier dates than what was required in the Association, in which December 1st would be the cutoff for imports of tea rather than a March 1st deadline – this would be used to target smugglers. In addition, Duane proposed that all goods imported between December 1st and February 1st would be sold at a public auction.[331] Colden believed that Duane's proposal would enrage numerous merchants and smugglers that the Association would lose all its authority.[332] On the other hand, McDougall disagreed with the proposal and championed the Association's explicit deadlines. He believed Duane's "end in contending for this severe construction of the association was to first destroy it." McDougall wanted to aid the tea smugglers, and he asserted that it was discriminatory to force the smugglers to "sacrifice their property, without advancing the Public Cause."[333] The Sixty ultimately dismissed Duane's plan and

---

[330] *DRCNY*, 8: 513.
[331] Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 204; Norton, *1774*, 276; Champagne, *The Sons of Liberty*, 370-371.
[332] *DRCNY*, 8: 512.
[333] "Marcus Brutus," Letter to Samuel Adams, 29 January 1775. Alexander McDougall Papers. First direct Quotation from Champane, *The Sons of Liberty*, 371; Second direct quotation from Norton, *1774*, 276;

criticized him. In a broadside on January 30th, the Sixty declared that "a few Persons…pretended to be in Doubt" and in the end, the committee "unanimously" rejected Duane's premature deadline, and acted "according to the true Interest and Meaning of the Association." They declared that after February 1st, imported goods would be sent back to their vessel.[334] The clash between Duane and McDougall exemplifies the Sixty's commitment to the Association, and in particular Article X. The committeemen were crucial in establishing the Congress' legitimacy because they outwardly supported the Association, and by publishing their resolves, they likely gained more followers.

February would be a trying month for radicals attempting to enforce the Association because February 1st marked the date when the Association required a full boycott of goods. Particularly, the instances of the *James* and the *Beulah* demonstrate how the Committee of Sixty assumed more regulatory powers. On February 2nd, the *James* arrived from Glasgow with goods that were prohibited by the Association. The Sixty sent a sub-committee to keep watch of the ship, and subsequently a large group of people tried "to prevent the landing of any Goods in a clandestine manner." Some "Ministerial tools," or "British sympathizers," as Joseph S. Tiedemann dubbed them, convinced Captain Watson to disregard the Association and they hired "banditti" to bring the goods onto shore. But when the people ultimately "suppressed" the men and "assembled in great numbers," Captain Watson capitulated to the crowd and the ship "fell

---

McDougall felt Duane's plan "would be construed a wanton exercise of Power, void of wisdom or justice, and the restless miscreants who are eagerly waiting to improve the least misconduct would not fail to lead the sufferers to charge the committees impolitic measures on the congress, and brand them all with Folly." Acquired from Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 204.

[334] *To the freeholders, freemen, and inhabitants*…, Evans, 14497.

down about four miles below the City" where sub-committeemen watched for several days. Responding to the initial radical victory, Colden requested the *King Fisher*, a much larger British Navy warship, to guard the *James* as it attempted to re-enter the New York harbor. When people got word of this, "they were greatly exasperated," and subsequently a large number of people captured the *James*' captain and "after conducting him through many of the principal streets…he was, without suffering the least hurt or injury, put on board a boat, with some hands to row him, and sent off."[335] In addition to this physical action, local politicians were furious, as Oliver DeLancey shouted, "What does that damn'd Rascal come up here again for? Why don't he quit the Port?" Even though DeLancey had been a staunch conservative, he was upset because Colden did not have the power to overstep the Sixty. William Smith shared this same view, writing that "Colden negotiated with the Capt. without us."[336] A few days later, on February 11th, the *James* tried to leave, but the Lieutenant of the Man-of-War thwarted its departure. An "exasperated" crowd appeared once more, which resulted in the Captain of the *King Fisher* overriding the Lieutenant and the *James* left the next morning.[337] This highlights New Yorkers' commitment to their own rule of law. If the Sixty declared something, then it would be followed. The continued effort from the *James* illustrated British and ultra-conservative counter-resistance. They did not recognize the Sixty as a legitimate and law enforcing body, and without the zealous crowds, the Sixty could not have enforced their provisions. Thus, in the case of the *James*, "it must give real pleasure to every lover of his country, to observe, that the good people of this City are determined to support the

---

[335] *AA*, 4, I, 1243.
[336] Smith, *Memoirs*, 210.
[337] *AA*, 4, I, 1244.

Association of the General Congress at all events."[338] The Sixty sent watch boats to observe the *James*, which was within their enumerated powers under the eleventh article of the Association, but the people were paramount in allowing the Sixty to achieve and enforce those powers.

It did not take long for the next controversy. On the night of February 16th, the *Beulah* docked outside New York's main harbor, which violated the Continental Association.[339] The harbor patrollers were ordered to not interfere with the ship, but "the Populace sent down a boat with armed men to watch her & prevent her Landing Goods."[340] The owners of the ship, John and Robert Murray, tried to get an exemption from the Committee of Sixty, but their petition was denied. Thus, the *Beulah* remained anchored for the next few weeks, but then the *Beulah's* crew attempted to trick the radicals. Captain McBussell set sail during a stormy night and docked at Sandy Hook, New Jersey. When the radical sloop was not paying attention, John and Robert Murray, "meditated a Plan to land them [and they] assured themselves of this opportunity, and appeared in the night of this they are suspected."[341] The two merchants transferred "a small part of her Cargo" to a small vessel to take to the mainland.[342] The next day, the *Beulah* set sail once again, but the Sixty's sub-committee sensed that something was wrong, so they recruited the nearby Elizabethtown committee for assistance. In the end the two committees discovered the violation, and the Murray's "confessed the matter

---

[338] Ibid.
[339] Champagne, *Alexander McDougall*, 77; Norton, *1774*, 316-317; Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 205; *To the freeholders, freemen, and inhabitants…*, 25 February 1775, Evans, 14496.
[340] Smith, *Memoirs*, 210; *NYJ*, 23 February 1775; AA, I, 1257.
[341] 6 April 1775, Alexander McDougall Papers.
[342] The inventory of the goods can be seen in Peter Force, ed., *American Archives . . . A Documentary History of . . . the North American Colonies*, 4th ser., 6 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1837-1846), vol. II (Hereafter *AA*, 4, II), 145.

upon oath."[343] In one of the oaths, the Murrays "hereby engage[d] to reship all the said Goods, according to the tenour of the Association, and [gave] the Committee full and satisfactory proof thereof."[344]

After the climax of the *Beulah* affair, New Yorkers further penalized the brothers, showing the people's commitment to the Association. Even though the Murrays apologized for their actions and "will for the future strictly adhere to the said Association,"[345] people nevertheless ostracized the two brothers and some even called for their banishment in mid-March.[346] In the following days of the call for their exile, the Murrays felt hopeless, as they publicly announced that they "will not transact any trade or commerce whatsoever, during the continuance of the association" and they "[reserve] to ourselves a right to remove with our property out of the province."[347] New Yorkers must have shunned the Murray brothers after their unwise actions, so the Murrays seriously considered leaving New York due to their lack of business. Amid public outcry and demonization, New Yorkers strictly adhered to the Association. The brothers received the appropriate penalties, as enumerated in Article XI of the Association: they were publicly deemed violators of Congress' measures. Therefore, no further security…is necessary" one broadside declared, "especially as their taking an oath to observe [the Association], would impeach the virtue of the people."[348] "A Friend to Order" agreed.[349] At the same time, John Murray's wife wrote a letter to McDougall and Sears pleading with the two

---

[343] 6 April 1775, Alexander McDougall Papers; The Murray's confessed several times. These can be seen in *AA*, 4, II, 145; Robert and John Murray, Dated at New-York, the 9th of June 1775.
[344] *AA*, 4, II, 145.
[345] Robert and John Murray, Dated at New-York, the 9th of June, 1775.
[346] "A Son of Freedom," 17 March 1775. Evans, 14031.
[347] *To the public*…, 21 March 1775, Evans, 14267; *To the public*, 18 March, Evans, 14266.
[348] *To the publick*…, 24 March 1775, Evans, 14514.
[349] "A Friend to Order," *To the publick*, 22 March 1775, Evans, 14513.

popular leaders for mercy. "For Humanity's Sake, Gentlemen!" said Mrs. Murray, who believed the Murray brothers' "present Punishment to be as full and ample Satisfaction as the good of the Public can be supposed to call for."[350] William Smith ended up convincing the radicals to spare the two men from exile and any further punitive action – therefore ending this episode.[351]

The instance of the *Beulah* represented an emphatic victory for radicals. The Association had been rigidly enforced, and the violators openly confessed several times throughout the spring of 1775. Particularly, the Association's articles were followed with no further radical action. Even though people called for the banishment of the Murrays, which was a more draconian punishment, McDougall and Sears acted wisely for reprieving the violators and terminating the *Beulah* affair. The popular leaders' decisions exemplify their commitment to following the plain language of the Association's articles. Allowing more radical New Yorkers to trump the Association would jeopardize the legitimacy of the Sixty. Therefore, it was necessary to foster a city that abided by Congress' measures and the Sixty. In April, McDougall assured a radical Bostonian that "the Friends of the Association and the Great Cause are daily increasing, so that you have no reason to fear a defection of this Colony."[352] The rise of popular support from the instances of the *James* and the *Beulah* shocked conservatives. "The success…which the violent Party have had in preventing these vessels from Landing their Cargoes here,"

---

[350] "Your Afflicted Friend," *The following is a copy of a letter*…, 20 March 1775, Evans, 14032.
[351] "I advise that they send an answer not counting the supposition of their being leaders – promising to diffuse the controls & to inform her the public temper when known & to couch the letter in the tenderest terms for fear of an after publication & the Wrath of the people when a change happens as will certainly be the case ere long." Smith, *Memoirs*, 214.
[352] 6 April 1775, Alexander McDougall Papers.

bemoaned Colden, "has given them great spirits, and…it has chagrined me a good deal."[353]

In late March, the Sixty reproved two merchants who sold nails to the British army.[354] At the same meeting, radicals confronted two separate merchants – Ralph Thurman and Robert Harding – for also dealing with the British. The radicals then ransacked Harding's home, but he escaped, and Thurman's home was not attacked. Then, the radicals convened at the Fields – particularly the Liberty Pole – where the two violators were expected to confess and explain themselves.[355] Ralph Thurman, outraged, published a broadside in Rivington's newspaper. "Those enemies to Peace and Order", Thurman declared, "shall not rule over me." The merchant continued: "I despise their Threats, and if the Civil Authority of this City will not keep the Peace and good Order thereof, and restrain the licentious Spirit of those arbitrary Sons of Discord, I am determined to do Justice to Liberty, I will die in her Cause."[356] The conservative voice transitioned to a more punitive tone. Rivington published an article authored by "Anti-Licentiousness," who criticized the radicals for such rash measures. Sears, the author wrote, called people to arms, but moderate members struck the measure down. The meeting at the Fields "was disorderly and breach of law," and the police ended up arresting Sears, who eventually was released from jail shortly thereafter. Radicals then

---

[353] Colden to the Earl of Dartmouth, 1 March 1775. *DRCNY*, 8: 543.
[354] Two days later, the Sixty published a resolution discouraging the exportation of nails. The full resolution is printed in *NYGM*, 3 April 1775; *NYJ*, 13 April 1775.
[355] Smith, *Memoirs*, 219-220; *To the inhabitants of the city and county of New-York*…, 13 April 1775, Evans, 14505; Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 218.
[356] Ralph Thurman, *To the inhabitants of the city and county of New-York*…, 15 April 1775, Evans, 14484.

paraded Sears around the city, and he eventually made a final speech in the Fields, in which "Anti-Licentiousness" compared the popular leader to the "devil."[357]

The radicals seemingly controlled the politics of New York City, but throughout the remainder of the spring up until the battle of Lexington, the conservatives resorted to publicly undermining the radical cause and utilizing formal government structures. The altercations between radicals and conservatives throughout the late winter and spring of 1775 became more tenuous over time – William Smith observed that "every Day produces fresh Fuel to the General Opposition."[358] This is because at this time, to curb dissent and enforce the Association, radical committees took more local power into their own hands in the spring of 1775. They enforced the boycott on the ground, and by virtue of this new responsibility, the committees sought out violators of the boycott and ideological dissenters against the revolutionary cause. In response to this power grab, Loyalist pamphleteers became more radical themselves, calling the committees illegitimate, mobbish, arbitrary, and tyrannical. Both sides were arming themselves literally and figuratively by this time. In fact, one New York visitor observed in the spring, "Politics, Politics, Politics! There are numbers of Hand bills, Advertisements, Extracts of Letters on both sides daily & hourly printed, published, pasted up & handed about. Men, women, children, all ranks & professions mad with Politics."[359] Fiery debates occurred in the spring and Rivington's newspaper perpetrated this tension by publishing many conservatives. The pamphlets, which became more fervid over the course of the season, severely attacked the committee system.

---

[357] *NYG*, 20 April 1775.
[358] Smith, *Memoirs*, 220.
[359] Norton, *1774*, 291.

Conservatives were outraged at their loss of power, so to combat this, they tried to undermine the legitimacy of the Sixty, the Congress and the overall extralegal system through the press. The conservatives in the spring of 1775 ardently championed the freedom of the press. Thomas Bradbury Chandler published *What think ye of the Congress, Now?,* which adequately highlighted this conservative standpoint. In the pamphlet, Chandler praises the freedom of the press, which he defines as "the liberty of publishing, by means of the press…all public transactions, whether relating to religion or government." This freedom, Chandler asserts, is "one of the most sacred and invaluable rights of Englishmen" and central to the welfare of society. The clergyman chastised the radicals for inhibiting this right. He categorized the radicals, particularly the Sons of Liberty, as men of "the lower and more illiberal classes" and accused them of "perpetually running counter to the sentiments of the Congress, in striving to intimidate writers, and printers, and readers, and speakers, and thinkers, on the side of government."[360]

Rivington published his own pamphlet in his newspaper under the pseudonym "Anti-Tyrannicus," in which he admonished the Committee of Sixty for acting adversely to the core free speech principles of Englishmen. By using this pseudonym, Rivington calls attention to the Sixty's tyrannical behavior and positions the Loyalists of New York as defenders of free government. Written in late March of 1775, Rivington's critique of the Sixty emerges from this tension, as he must have been cognizant of this radical

---

[360] Chandler, Thomas B. 1775. *What Think Ye Of The Congress Now?: Or, An Enquiry, How Far The Americans Are Bound To Abide By, And Execute, The Decisions Of The Late Continental Congress.* New York: Printed by James Rivington. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=evans;cc=evans;view=text;idno=N10953.0001.001;rgn=div1;node=N10953.0001.001:2, 4; Norton, *1774*, 293.

colony-wide evolution. Rivington tries to accomplish two things: first, to persuade moderates in New York City to realize the hypocrisy of the Sixty, which will lead to more Loyalist support. This claim is based on the freedom of the press, which Rivington argues is a "sacred privilege…that can be safely used to check the growth of arbitrary power." [361] Rivington rebukes the Sixty for encouraging people's abuse of the English Parliament, but at the same time threatening people who criticize their own committee's processes. In this regard, Rivington pointed out the radicals' duplicity:

> Should those who have fixed themselves as sentinels upon the watch-tower of liberty, to give notice of all invaders, be the first to curtail this darling immunity, will it not give the people cause to suspect that they themselves are about to establish a power more arbitrary and tyrannical than any thing we have hitherto complained of?[362]

It's interesting that Rivington uses "we," as if all colonists, even conservatives, have had the occasion to complain about British rule. The radicals, in Rivington's eyes, are on the path to forging a government more arbitrary than anything the colonists have seen before. Rivington's second goal in the pamphlet is to further radicalize his own Loyalist readership. He appears to believe what he is writing, but as a person financially and personally dependent on the wide reading of his newspaper, Rivington likely attempted to stir up an even more factious city, where additional people would submit pieces to him for publication. The more radical people are, the more they will read the paper and involve themselves in local politics.

Rivington's attacks on the Sixty for suppressing the "impartial" press highlight his unawareness because his publication is by no means "impartial." His accusations are

---

[361] Anti-Tyrannicus. 1775. "To the Committee of Inspection for the City and County of New York." *NYG*, 23 March 1775 (accessed through *AA*, 4, II, 213-214).
[362] Ibid.

based on his personal bias as a printer and elite Loyalist, so he fails to recognize that the Sixty is a check on tyrannical British power. In classic Rivington fashion, he deemed "the generality" of the Fifty-one's members "the most sensible and judicious part" of the population and that they were "principal citizens."[363] Rivington is evidently referring to the aristocratic merchants who controlled the Fifty-one and is lamenting the more democratic Sixty. There seems to be an unstated social hierarchy at work that is not entirely consistent with the principle of democracy.

Rivington's pamphlet expresses the importance of freedom of speech as a bulwark against arbitrary government. He claims that the Sixty "greedily descend[s], like a hawk upon his prey, and seize the poor Printer in your talons." Comparing the committee to a hawk demonstrates its predatory and arbitrary behavior towards innocent people. Rivington further displays his Loyalist colors by praising the British Constitution; he argues that "the proceedings of all publick bodies should be freely discussed."[364] Presumably Rivington includes the Committee of Sixty among such bodies, thereby justifying his "free discussion" of their deliberations. He criticized the Sixty for not publishing their proceedings, in which he asserted that "nothing is more necessary than to lay the particulars before the publick, and if any censure is due at all, it is to a neglect of this precaution."[365] Rivington articulates a typical free speech argument: if you oppose what someone says about you, publish your own account. In his eyes, more speech is better than banning speech. Therefore, based on Rivington's comments, freedom of the press is a sine qua non for the legitimacy of a governing body. The Continental

---

[363] Ibid.
[364] Ibid.
[365] Ibid.

Association's creation of local committees and common New Yorkers' involvement in the committees, however, lead us to believe that the Sixty's actions are legitimate and warranted.

The late winter and spring of 1775 showcased the hostilities that arose from the election of the Sixty and the committee's operations. Prominent conservatives undoubtedly chastised the extralegal committee system because they were determined that the best way to reconcile with Britain was through formal government structures, such as the Colonial Assembly. Anglican clergymen and conservative printers became loud voices in the press when the Sixty started to control the city more, and they predicted their arguments on the illegitimacy of the committee because of its inherent illegality and how it infringes on the rights of Englishmen, such as a free press. The conservative party tried to undermine the Sixty at every step, but the agitated arguments were underpinned by the fear of losing power. Conservatives, primarily consisting of ministers and wealthy merchants, did not acknowledge common New Yorkers when proposing colonial policies. The radicals, on the other hand, relied on the people to achieve their legitimacy. The Sixty authorized Congress' actions and enforced the Association because of common New Yorkers.

Chapter 9: One Futile Final Push

In the final months of peace before widespread armed conflict, conservatives gave one final effort to control New York City. The events of the late winter and early spring indicated a once moderate city on the brink of full-out radicalism. Therefore, in a final attempt, conservatives employed the Colonial Assembly, headed by Colden, to frustrate the radical Sixty from electing delegates to the Second Continental Congress. The conservative attempt, however, ended fruitlessly, as the radicals capitalized on the conservatives' stiffness and convened a New York Provincial Convention to further their agenda, which undercut the hostile pamphlets.

The Colonial Assembly, first assembled on January 10th, 1775, decided two items: whether to affirm the measures by the First Continental Congress and appoint delegates to the Second Continental Congress, which was set to occur in May.[366] The Assembly's primary objective was to "propose conciliatory Measures"[367] and Colden later asserted that "every thing is to be tryed, that may possibly avert the calamity which hangs over this country…[the Assembly] will take the most reasonable and constitutional means of restoring Peace and Harmony."[368]

Samuel Seabury published *An Alarm to the Legislature* amid the clash between the extralegal system and the Assembly. In the pamphlet, he admonished the Congress and its committees as "*illegal* in their *beginning*, *tyrannical* in their *operation*." To combat this illegal activity, Seabury pleaded with the members of the Colonial Assembly.

---

[366] *DRCNY*, 8: 513; The first meeting's proceedings can be seen in *AA*, 4, I, 1281; Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 174-175.
[367] *DRCNY*, 8: 510.
[368] Ibid., 513-514.

"Your duty," Seabury asserted, "requires you to interpose your authority, and to break up this horrid combination of seditious men, which has already enslaved this province; and which was intended to draw the faithful subjects of our most gracious Sovereign into REBELLION and a CIVIL WAR." Seabury was fed up with the Sixty subjecting him under an "intolerable state of slavery."[369] As described by the clergyman, the Colonial Assembly served as the last blockade to radical momentum – conservatives relied on traditional and legally appointed government to thwart radical measures. The conservatives instituted a politically savvy move – they wanted to hold an election because the disapproval of the Association in the early winter was at its highest. So, DeLanceyites made sure Colden's opening speech was so outlandish and forceful that the Assembly would have to dissolve and elect a new membership, which would allow the more conservative members to grab more power. According to Smith, the measure would "prevent the Moderate from any Escape."[370] The staunchly conservative view can be seen through Isaac Wilkin's energetic speech to the Assembly, in which he was "certain beyond all manner of doubt and controversy, that the supreme authority of every Empire must extend over the whole and every part of that Empire." The conservative's used the Assembly "to put a stop to the illegal and disorderly proceedings and resolutions of Committees, Associations, and Congresses."[371] In February, after several meetings, the Assembly ultimately rejected the measures of the First Continental Congress and refused

---

[369] Samuel Seabury. Signed A.W. Farmer. 1775. *An Alarm to the Legislature of the Province of New-York, occasioned by the Present Political Disturbances, in North America*. New York. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?cc=evans;c=evans;idno=N11428.0001.001;view=text;rgn=div1;node=N11428.0001.001:2, 7.
[370] Smith, *Memoirs*, 206-209; Colden's speech can be read in *AA*, 4, I, 1283; Champagne, *The Sons of Liberty*, 375.
[371] *AA*, 4, I, 1293; Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 178.

to appoint delegates to the Second.[372] Due to these actions, the Earl of Dartmouth, in a letter to all the Colonial Governors, singled out New York for their effective measures. He lauded the "Assembly of New York, which has already shewn so good a disposition towards a reconciliation with the Mother Country."[373] In the end, the conservatives disassociated themselves with extra-legal government and fully depended on the Colonial Assembly for reconciliation.

The Assembly's actions seemingly neutralized the radicals, but the radicals circumvented the conservative agenda. Alexander McDougall envisioned the Assembly's ploy, writing in early February that "we have not yet chosen delegates to meet the next congress, waiting till we know whether the assembly will do it or not. If they don't, we shall be able with more ease to bring about a provincial Congress."[374] And that is what happened. "Since it was known that our Assembly would not appoint Delegates," Colden asserted, "the mischievous folks have been very busy at work endeavoring to bring about a Provincial Congress in this Colony; in order by that means to get provincial delegates appointed."[375] The Colonial Assembly ultimately failed because they acted too stiffly by not seriously acknowledging the Congress and its measures. Due to this, a radical Provincial Congress appeared and served as the antithesis of a Colonial Assembly. It broadened the extralegal system to the entire colony, not merely New York City.[376] The Provincial Congress had to be set up, however, so the Committee of Sixty took the lead in securing New York's commitment to the revolutionary process.

---

[372] *DRCNY*, 8: 543; Becker documents the meetings. Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 175-177.
[373] *DRCNY*, 8: 547.
[374] 9 February 1775, Alexander McDougall Papers.
[375] *DRCNY*, 8: 543. Howard Pashman. 2018. *Building a Revolutionary State: The Legal Transformation of New York, 1776-1783*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 29-30.
[376] Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 216; Champagne, *The Sons of Liberty*, 378.

The process by which the Sixty organized and created the Provincial Congress was politically murky and divided, but the Sixty employed a crucial tactic that the Colonial Assembly did not: they received their power from the people. On February 27th, P.V.B Livingston successfully moved that the Sixty "take into consideration the Ways and Means of causing Delegates to be elected…[to] the General Congress." On March 1st, the Sixty published a broadside, stating that "as this committee has no power, without the approbation of their constituents," the committee therefore called freeholders and freemen to "signify their sense of the best method of choosing such delegates."[377] In the days leading up to the March 6th meeting, a conservative wing, led by John Thurman, published a broadside critiquing the Sixty. The group asserted that a March 6th vote was "much too early," and thus recommended that the decision be postponed until late April. The group also denied the prospect of sending delegates to the Second Continental Congress.[378] Responding to this rebuke, radicals published several broadsides defending the Congress and the Sixty's actions to facilitate a Provincial Congress.[379] The radicals struck back through action. On March 4th, the "Friends to Constitutional Liberty…determined to support the Committee, of whose virtue and patriotism we have had ample experience."[380] On election day, the radicals raised a "Union Flag…on the Liberty-pole" before they convened at the Merchants' Exchange.[381] At the election site,

---

[377] *The following extracts*..., Evans, 14318. Smith recounted the days leading up to the March 6th election. Smith, *Memoirs*, 211.
[378] To the freemen and freeholders of the city and county of New-York…, 6 March 1775, Evans, 14500; Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 217.
[379] "*To the inhabitants of the city and county of New-York*, Evans, 14162; "Americanus," *To the freeholders and freemen of the city of New-York*, 4 March 1775, Evans, 13809; Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 217, footnote 56.
[380] *AA*, 4, II, 48.
[381] The Liberty Pole was located at the Fields. *AA*, 4, II, 48.

fighting broke out, leaving one conservative bloodied, robbed and thrown in jail.[382] Soon after, the electors decided two inquires. The first was whether people should be able to participate in the Provincial Congress, whose "sole purpose" was to appoint the New York delegation to the Second Continental Congress. The second was whether this election will authorize the Sixty to nominate eleven Deputies for their approbation."[383] According to Holt, New Yorkers affirmed both propositions in the "most numerous and respectable ever known in this City on the decision of any publick proposal." After the meeting adjourned, the "friends of Freedom paraded" throughout the city.[384] Conservatives saw the March 6th vote differently. Rivington published a piece that attempted to gloss over the emphatic radical victory. The author called radicals "the rabble" and he thought that "very great majority of our fellow-citizens [believe] that no new powers" had "been vested in the Committee."[385] Nevertheless, the Sixty then nominated eleven men to the Provincial Congress, who were confirmed by an overwhelming majority on March 15th. The Sixty also set the date of the Provincial Congress for April 20th.[386]

The approval of and sending delegates to the Provincial Congress represented the final blow to conservative supremacy in the New York City government system. "From

---

[382] Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 217; Champagne, *The Sons of Liberty*, 380.
[383] *AA*, 4, II, 49; *The following extracts*..., Evans, 14318; Thomas Ellison Jr. commented on the election, saying that "Last Monday we had a very large meeting of the Inhabitants, when a majority appeared for a Provincial Congress…we are to have an election of Deputies, to meet Deputies from the Different Counties, in order to Choose Delegates for the next Congress…" Thomas Ellison Jr. to Thomas Ellison Sr., 14 March 1775. Ellison Family Papers.
[384] *AA*, 4, II, 49.
[385] Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 217; *NYG*, 9 March 1775.
[386] Champagne, *Alexander McDougall*, 80-81; "825 freeman and freeholders were in favor of sending deputies, and voted for the Committee of 60's ticket...163 voted negatively…" Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 186; *AA*, 4, II, 137-139. The proceedings of the Provincial Congress can be accessed at the *Journal of the Provincial Congress, Provincial Convention, Committee of Safety and Council of Safety of the State of New York*. 2 vols. Albany. 1842.

that time all the Civil Authority has been prostrate," "A Real Churchman" said, and "the Magistrates have not even the Shadow of power or Authority." Colden observed that the events of April had "combined to depress legal authority — to increase the Terror of the Inhabitants, and which seemed to vanquish every thought of Resistance to popular Rage."[387] Traditional government dissipated, which frightened establishment conservatives.

[387] Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 219.

Conclusion

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,

Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,

Here once the embattled farmers stood

And fired the shot heard round the world.[388]

On the fateful morning of April 19th, as the sun broke through the horizon, the Revolutionary War commenced in Lexington, Massachusetts. The events outside of Boston marked the end of a peaceful reconciliation between the thirteen colonies and the British Empire, thus serving as conservatives' worst nightmare.[389] News of the bloodshed reached New York City on April 23rd at 4 P.M.[390] The city was in an "agitated state" and people constantly inquired about the "skirmishes" outside Boston. "Tales of all Kinds," Smith continued, "[were] invented, believed, denied, discredited."[391] In the week succeeding the battles of Lexington and Concord, a mob led by John Lamb, Isaac Sears, and Marinus Willett ruled the city.[392] In lightning fast motion, Isaac Sears and his radical base seized the city's gun arsenal and threatened to attack hundreds of British soldiers stationed in New York City.[393] On April 29th, six to seven thousand men "unanimously

---

[388] The first stanza from Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Concord Hymn." Accessed at https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45870/concord-hymn

[389] Only four days prior to the outbreak of violence, Robert Livingston "pray[ed] the almighty to interpose and preserve…peace and reconciliation." Robert Livingston to James Duane, 15 April 1775. Duane Family Papers, 1665-1916 (bulk 1756-1900). Series I: Correspondence, 1680-1853. Box 3, 1772-1779. New-York Historical Society.

[390] Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 193.

[391] Smith, *Memoirs*, 221.

[392] Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 193.

[393] 406 to be exact. Smith, *Memoirs*, 221; "The Troops now found the want of this security and that they were not only a force too small to make any formidable opposition to the violence of the People, but in their situation appeared insufficient to deter the rash designs which were meditated to destroy them, and which there is reason to think would have been attempted if some of the inhabitants had not supported moderation and wisdom enough to prevent the spilling of Blood." *DRCNY*, 8: 571.

voted to defend their liberties" and took "all the city arms and ammunition from the Hall and Magazine; every preparation is making to completely arm the inhabitants."[394] New Yorkers became livid due to the Battles of Lexington and Concord, so they rapidly mobilized to arms. Throughout 1774 and 1775, even though the people were disgruntled due to the Coercive Acts, they acted without widespread violence. Although the battles occurred in Massachusetts, the deaths of their fellow colonists deeply impacted New Yorkers' priorities. Thus, they leaped to join their brethren by taking radical and rash measures.

The initial outbursts would not be solely reserved to action – common New Yorkers also upended the government. One day after New York received word of the armed conflict, radicals posted a broadside urging the Sixty to meet at the Exchange that night.[395] The next day, the Sixty acknowledged its futility to deal with war-time measures. The Association established the Sixty and the extralegal committee's only role was to enforce Congress' boycott. The Sixty's members were "unanimously of opinion that a new Committee be elected by the Freeholders and Freemen of this City and County, for the present unhappy exigency of affairs," in addition to carrying out the Association's articles.[396] The Sixty then published a broadside calling the election and recommending New Yorkers to vote to establish the One-Hundred, whose members would "consist of such persons as you may think most worthy of confidence and most capable of the arduous task."[397] On May 1st, the Committee of Sixty dissolved and the

---

[394] *AA*, 4, II, 448. Smith, *Memoirs*, 222.
[395] *Notice*, 24 April 1774. Alexander McDougall Papers.
[396] *AA*, 4, II, 400.
[397] Ibid., 427-428.

war-time Committee of One-Hundred took its stead.[398] The new body acted extremely radically by seizing people's property and destroying storefronts, among other measures. The radicals now fully controlled the city, and the British appointed Colonial Assembly became useless. Colden reminisced on this rapid mobilization, remembering that "the people were assembled, and that scene of disorder and violence begun, which has entirely prostrated the Powers of Government."[399] The election of the Committee of One-Hundred commenced an arduous process through the war. General William Howe's troops infiltrated the city in 1776 and New York remained under British control until the end of the war.

But nothing would be the same after a politically rocky 1774 and 1775. Starting in May of 1774, the conservative wing kept a tight grip on radical influence by controlling the extralegal government in the city, but the creation of the Fifty-one highlights the initial waning of an established political order. Throughout the summer and fall of 1774, that grip started to loosen, as the radicals capitalized on the conservatives' sluggishness. The conservatives were not prepared for when radicals relied upon the popular will – that is, common people and the disenfranchised amplified the radicals' power and influence. Further, the popular will gained traction through street demonstrations rather than extralegal committee meetings. This phenomenon demonstrates how elections are not the only method to establish political legitimacy. During these months, the Mechanics established their own legitimacy as an organization that spoke for common New Yorkers. The process of nominating and selecting delegates to the First Continental Congress

---

[398] Ibid., 449; Ibid., 459 has the details of the election. Becker shows how the One-Hundred more adequately represented the city, with a larger number of radicals serving on the committee now. Becker, *History of Political Parties*, 197.
[399] *DRCNY*, 8: 571.

exhibited deep rifts between conservatives and radicals in the city. During this episode, newspapers turned into more personal and accusatory weapons.

The First Continental Congress, occurring in September and October of 1774, brought the radicals' long-standing beliefs on the role of extralegal government to the surface. The New York delegation played a crucial role in the establishment of the Continental Association and further revolutionary action. There was no legal statute that required New Yorkers to follow Congress' procedures, so the delegates in Philadelphia knew that Committees of Observation and Inspection would serve as the tools to carry out such measures. But the Sixty retroactively authorized Congress' most revolutionary measure – the Continental Association – by relying on common people to achieve legitimacy. And even with conservative attacks in the press and in politics, which were driven by fear rather than law and order, the Sixty remained and exerted its influence to the greatest extent granted to them by the Association. The extralegal committee depended on common people to complete their bidding from late 1774 to the first months of 1775, which highlights the existence of a bottom-up authorization in New York City.

To understand the progression to armed conflict and the dissipation of traditional government, it is necessary to scrutinize these eleven months. New York City served as a central link to the revolutionary experiment, for it was New York's merchants who suggested a Continental Congress and acted as the haven for conservative political thought. On the latter point, New York epitomized the power of a free press, albeit this attracted animosity from radicals throughout the colonies. New York's integral role can be accredited to the valiant efforts by radical leaders' who constantly pressured and

ultimately fractured the conservative foundation. At every single instance, the radical leaders strove gallantly to support their martyred counterparts in Boston.

Common New Yorkers, however, made the radicals' policies a reality by granting New York City's extralegal government its legitimacy. Throughout 1774 and 1775, radicals balanced political improvisation with the appearance of rule-based behaviors coming to be accepted as norms. To achieve this seemingly difficult equilibrium, popular leaders upended traditional government and the conservative controlled extralegal system by relying on common New Yorkers, which demonstrates how successful revolutions require the incorporation of people outside conventional methods, such as elections. Radicals turned street demonstrations and broadsides into requisites for how revolutions receive authorization. The popular leaders utilized political mobilization, which led to their success in achieving legitimacy for and democratizing the New York City committee system. Grappling with concepts such as political mobilization of common and laboring New Yorkers and the legitimacy of extralegal committees from May 1774 to April 1775, these mere eleven months provide considerable insight into the revolutionary movement and New York's role during this transformative period.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Adams, Charles Francis, ed. 1865. *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company.

Adams, Charles Francis, ed. 1875. *Familiar Letters of John Adams and his Wife Abigail Adams during the Revolution, with a memoir of Mrs. Adams*. Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin & Co. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/34123/34123-h/34123-h.htm

Adams, John, *Reply to A Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans*, 17 November 1774. https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-02-02-0060#:~:text=A%20Friendly%20Address%20to%20All%20Reasonable%20Americans%2C%20which%20proposed%20reconciliation,description%20ends%20

Alexander McDougall Papers. Patricia D. Klingenstein Library of the *New-York Historical Society*.

America's Historical Newspapers. Early American Newspapers, Series 1: From Colonies to Nation. Readex. https://www.readex.com/products/early-american-newspapers-series-01-1690-1876-colonies-nation

Benjamin Franklin Papers, George Bancroft Collection. New York Public Library.

Boston Committee of Correspondence Records, New York Public Library. https://archives.nypl.org/mss/343#detailed.

Burnett, Edmund C., ed. 1921-1923. *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*. Volumes I and II. Washington D.C.

Butterfield, Lyman H., et al., ed. 1961. *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*. 4 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press https://founders.archives.gov/content/volumes.

Cadwallader Colden Papers. George Bancroft Collection. New York Public Library.

Chandler, Thomas B. 1774. *A Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans, on the Subject of our Political Confusions: in which the Necessary Consequences of Violently Opposing ... a general non-importation are fairly stated*. New York. https://archive.org/details/cihm_20462/page/n7/mode/2up

Chandler, Thomas B. 1775. *What Think Ye Of The Congress Now?: Or, An*

Enquiry, How Far The Americans Are Bound To Abide By, And Execute, The Decisions Of The Late Continental Congress. New York: Printed by James Rivington. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=evans;cc=evans;view=text;idno=N10953.0001.001;rgn=div1;node=N10953.0001.001:2.

Ellison Family Papers (1753-ca. 1900), New-York Historical Society.

Force, Peter, ed. 1839. *American Archives . . . A Documentary History of . . . the North American Colonies*, 4th ser., 6 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1837-1846)

Ford, Worthington Chauncey, et al., ed. 1904-1937. *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*. 34 vols. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office. https://www.loc.gov/resource/llscdam.lljc001/?st=gallery

Gaine, Hugh. 1768-1783. *New York Gazette and the Weekly Mercury*.

Hamilton, Alexander. 1774. *Full Vindication of the Measures of Congress from the Calumnies of their Enemies; in Answer to a Letter under the signature of a Westchester Farmer*. New York.

Holt, John. 1766-1776. *New-York Journal*.

Duane Family Papers, Patricia D. Klingenstein Library of the *New-York Historical Society*.

James Rivington Papers, New York Public Library.

Jay, John. 1890. *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay*, vol. 1 (1763-1781). New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. https://oll-resources.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/oll3/store/titles/2326/Jay_1530-01_Bk.pdf

"John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 24 August 1815," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-08-02-0560

John Lamb Papers, Patricia D. Klingenstein Library of the *New-York Historical Society*.

Journal of the Provincial Congress, Provincial Convention, Committee of Safety and Council of Safety of the State of New York. 2 vols. Albany. 1842. https://archive.org/details/journalsofprovin01newy/page/n5/mode/2up

Kastor, P.J., 2006. Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans, 1639-1800. Readex. https://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/Evans?p_product=EVAN&p_action=keyword&p_theme=eai&p_nbid=

J53R49SFMTY3ODc0MzE1MS42MzEzODg6MToxNToxNjUuMTIzLjIyOS4yMzQ&p_clear_search=yes&d_refprod=EVAN&

Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Nuxoll, Elizabeth M., ed. 2014. *The Selected Papers of John Jay Digital Edition*. Volume 1 (1760–1779). Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press. https://rotunda-upress-virginia-edu.proxy.library.upenn.edu/founders/default.xqy?keys=JNJY-print-01-01-02&mode=TOC

O'Callaghan, E.B. and Berthold Fernow, eds. 1853-87. *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*. Albany. https://archive.org/details/documentsrelativ08brod/page/n17/mode/2up

Rivington, James. 1773-1775. *Rivington's New-York Gazetteer; or the Connecticut, New Jersey, Hudson's River, and Quebec Weekly Advertiser*.

Sabine, William H. W., ed. 1956. *Historical Memoirs from 16 March 1763 to 9 July 1776 of William Smith*. New York: Colburn & Tegg.

Seabury, Samuel. Signed A.W. Farmer. November 16, 1774. *Free Thoughts, on the proceedings of the Continental Congress, held at Philadelphia Sept. 5, 1774: etc, in a Letter to the Farmers and other Inhabitants of North America in general, and if those of the Province of New York in Particular*. By a *Farmer*. Hear Me for I will speak! Printed in the Year MDCCLXXIV. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=evans;cc=evans;rgn=main;view=text;idno=N10731.0001.001.

Seabury, Samuel. Signed A.W. Farmer. November 28, 1774. *The Congress Canvassed: or, An Examination into the Conduct of the Delegates, at their Grand Convention, held in Philadelphia, Sept. 1, 1774. Addressed to the merchants of New-York.* By A.W. Farmer. Printed in the Year MDCCLXXIV. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?cc=evans;c=evans;idno=N10730.0001.001;view=text;rgn=div1;node=N10730.0001.001:2.

Seabury, Samuel. Signed A.W. Farmer. 1775. *An Alarm to the Legislature of the \ Province of New-York, occasioned by the Present Political Disturbances, in North America*. New York. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?cc=evans;c=evans;idno=N11428.0001.001;view=text;rgn=div1;node=N11428.0001.001:2.

Smith, Paul H., et al., ed. 1976-2000. *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*. 26 vols. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress.

Wilson, James. 1774. *Considerations on the Nature and Extent of the Legislative*

Authority of the British Parliament. Philadelphia, PA. https://www.google.com/books/edition/Considerations_on_the_nature_and_the_ext/zbxbAAAAcAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1

Secondary Sources

Adams, Willi Paul. 2001. *The First American constitutions: Republican Ideology and the Making of the State Constitutions in the Revolutionary Era*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Alexander, Edward P. 1938. *A Revolutionary Conservative: James Duane of New York*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Ammerman, David. 1974. *In the Common Cause: American Response to the Coercive Acts of 1774*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.

Becker, Carl. 1909. *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760-1776* (Vol. 2, No. 1). Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin.

Bonomi, P. U. 2014. *A Factious People: Politics and Society in Colonial New York*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Bridenbaugh, Carl. 1955. *Cities in Revolt. Urban Life in America, 1743-1776*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Bridenbaugh, Carl. 1961. *The Colonial Craftsman*. University of Chicago Press.

Breen, T.H. 2010. *American Insurgents, American Patriots: The Revolution of the People*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Breen, T.H. 2019. *The Will of the People: The Revolutionary Birth of America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Burnett, Edmund C. 1941. *The Continental Congress*. Stuttgart, Germany: Macmillan Company.

Burrows, Edwin G., Wallace, Mike. 2000. *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, Oxford University Press.

Carp, Benjamin L. 2009. *Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Champagne, Roger, J. 1975. *Alexander McDougall and the American Revolution in New York*. Schenectady, New York: New York State American Revolution Bicentennial Commission in conjunction with Union College Press.

Champagne, Roger J. 1961. "New York and the Intolerable Acts." *New-York Historical Society Quarterly*, vol. 45, pp. 195-207.

Champagne, Roger, J. 1960. *The Sons of Liberty and The Aristocracy in New York Politics, 1765-1790*. The University of Wisconsin, Ph.D.

Chernow, Ron. 2005. *Alexander Hamilton*. New York: Penguin Books.

Countryman, Edward. 1989. *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760-1790*. New York: WW Norton.

Dinkin, Robert J. 1977. *Voting in Provincial America: A Study of Elections in the Thirteen Colonies, 1689-1776*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Edwards, Laura F. 2014. *The People and Their Peace: Legal Culture and the Transformation of Inequality in the Post-Revolutionary South*. UNC Press Books.

Flick, Alexander Clarence. 1901. *Loyalism in New York during the American Revolution*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Flick, Hugh M., Flick, Alexander C., ed. 1933. "The Rise of the Revolutionary Committee System," in *The History of the State of New York*, vols 3-4. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hattem, Michael D. 2017. "'As Serves Our Interest Best': Political Economy and the Logic of Popular Resistance in New York City, 1765–1776." *New York History* 98, no. 1, 40–70. https://www.jstor.org/stable/90018771.

Jones, Thomas, and Edward Floyd De Lancey. 1879. *History of New York during the Revolutionary War*. New York: Printed for the New York Historical Society.

Lamb, Martha J. (Martha Joanna), Harrison, Burton. 1829-1893. *History of the City of New York: Its Origin, Rise, And Progress*. New York: A.S. Barnes.

"Legitimate Definition & Meaning," *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/legitimate.

Lynd, Staughton. 1965. "The Mechanics in New York Politics, 1774–1788," Labor History 5.

Maier, Pauline. 1991. *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals & the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776*. New York: WW Norton & Company.

Maier, Pauline. 1990. *The Old Revolutionaries: Political Lives in the Age of Samuel Adams*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Main, Jackson Turner. 1966. "Government by the People: The American Revolution and the Democratization of the Legislatures." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 391–407., https://doi.org/10.2307/1919237.

Marston, Jerrilyn Greene. 1987. *King and Congress: The Transfer of Political Legitimacy, 1774-1776*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Mason, Bernard. 1966. *The Road to Independence: The Revolutionary Movement in New York, 1773–1777*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press.

Minty, Christopher F. 2023. *Unfriendly to Liberty: Loyalist Networks and the Coming of the American Revolution in New York City*. Cornell University Press.

Morgan, Edmund S. 1989. *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America*. New York: WW Norton & Company.

Nash, Gary B. 2006. *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America*. New York: Penguin.

Nash, Gary B. 1986. *The Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Norton, Mary Beth, 2020. *1774: The Long Year of Revolution*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Pashman, Howard. 2018. *Building a Revolutionary State: The Legal Transformation of New York, 1776-1783*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

"The Fields of New York." *Son of the South*, www.sonofthesouth.net/revolutionary-war/colonies/fields-new-york.htm.

Tiedemann, Joseph S. 1997. *Reluctant Revolutionaries: New York City and the Road to Independence, 1763-1776*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Wellenreuther, Hermann, ed. 2006. *The Revolution of the People: Thoughts and Documents on the Revolutionary Process in North America, 1774-1776*. Universitätsverlag Göttingen.

Wertenbaker, Thomas Jefferson. 1948. *Father Knickerbocker Rebels, New York City during the Revolution*. New York: C. Scribner's Sons.

Williamson, Chilton. 2019. *American Suffrage: From Property to Democracy, 1760-1860*. Princeton University Press (originally published in 1960).

Wilson, Kathleen. 1995. *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture, and Imperialism in*

England, 1715-1785. Cambridge University Press.

Wood, Gordon S. Jan 1966. “Rhetoric, Reality, and the Revolution.” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 3–32., https://doi.org/10.2307/2936154.