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PRAGMATIC IDEALISM: IDEOLOGICAL TENSION IN
THE AMERICAN NEWSPAPER POLEMICS; 1764-1776.

The Ohio State University, Ph.D., 1972
History, modern

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This dissertation examines the format and ideological components of the polemical essays which appeared in the American newspapers during the Revolutionary era. Yet viewed within a broader context this is also a study of a single point along the historical continuum of rhetorical expression. The art of persuading others through the effective use of written or spoken words must have been an important feature of human interaction since the dawn of civilization. It remained a prominent and formal feature of Western life until the twentieth century when the advent of modern communications popularized a more conversational manner of expression.

Rhetoric developed as an art form among the Greeks during ancient times. In the fifth century B.C., Corax of Syracuse formalized the rhetorical pattern into a five-part format: the proem (or preface), the narrative, the arguments, the subsidiary remarks, and the peroration. Later refinement of rhetorical theory was offered by Aristotle and Quintilian.

In medieval times rhetoric was adopted as part of the trivium of liberal arts and was fostered by the
church. During the seventeenth century rhetorical development took a somewhat different direction as parliaments emerged into positions of prominence and were accompanied by the rise of great political orators.

The Americans of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, despite their physical separation from Europe, retained strong ties with the European cultural tradition. Among other intellectual concerns, the colonists carried with them to their new homes a continuing interest in rhetoric. Grammar school students received concentrated exposure to the subject in their fourth year of study. And those who attended Harvard College spent one day each week in sharpening their rhetorical skills.

Yet this form of argumentation was known in colonial America far beyond the classroom walls. It was familiar to those acquainted with popular English essayists such as Addison and Steele or Trenchard and Gordon. It was repeatedly heard, too, by those who frequented the courtrooms of the day since the standard lawyer's brief adhered to a similar organizational format. And the public orations of Revolutionary times, such as the commemorations of the Boston Massacre, bore striking resemblance to the ancient rhetorical pattern. But perhaps the best known example of this form, and one known to the vast majority of the Americans, was the
sermon. The colonial ministers employed a plain style in their exhortations which stressed persuasion rather than the explication of abstract theological topics. They began by alerting their congregations to the "doctrine" or Biblical text which was to be the focal point of the day's remarks. Then they advanced their "reasons" which afforded further support for their theme. And finally the clergymen suggested "uses" for the doctrine, attempting to apply the lessons to the lives of the faithful.

The rhetorical form did not die in America with the end of the colonial period, but lived on to play a prominent role in the molding of the new nation. The polemical structure of Webster's orations and of Lincoln and Douglas' debates attest to the continued importance of ordered argumentation in the nineteenth century.

Grateful appreciation is expressed to Professor Paul C. Bowers, Jr., at whose suggestion this topic was undertaken. Without his guidance and support this dissertation would not have been completed.
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On February 10, 1763 the Treaty of Paris was signed, drawing to a close the colonial and western European phases of the Seven Years' War. Britain, as a result of her decisive victory in the North American theater, ruled supreme in the eastern half of that continent. After more than a half-century of conflict her longstanding colonial rival France had been humbled. Indeed, in viewing a post-war map of America, only discerning eyes would have detected the two small dots representing the fishing islands of Saint Pierre and Miquelon—the only remnants of Louis XV's once great imperial holdings.

Yet even if the eyes of the western world had overlooked some of the details of the Peace of 1763, its overall significance was abundantly clear. Britain had emerged from the struggle as the undisputed leader of the colonial powers. Her trade-rich empire embraced vast expanses of territory scattered throughout the world. These diverse holdings gained a semblance of order and unity through the policing activities of the peerless British navy.
Yet within the short space of thirteen years the British empire was tottering under the impact of events emanating from her American colonies. These challenges were first made in a variety of forms of resistance to imperial programs beginning in the early 1760's. ¹ By 1775 this resistance had been transformed into open revolt. In the following year the ultimate step was taken as the aims of the fighting were enlarged to encompass independence.

The causes of the collapse of the British system in America have been studied from almost every conceivable viewpoint, the result being that library shelves groan under the collective weight of the volumes pertaining to American Revolutionary history.

From this mass of historical commentary those works which concern themselves with the literary efforts which either guided or followed the development of colonial resistance are of particular interest to this dissertation. In the past twenty years the works of three scholars perhaps stand out above all others. First, Bernard Bailyn of Harvard had addressed himself to

probing the origin, evolution, and impact of the political pamphlets of this era. Second, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., the longtime Francis Lee Higginson Professor of History at Harvard, made a valuable chronological study of American Newspaper activity, including an analysis of both the polemical essays and the basic news reports. A third major study has been made by Clinton Rossiter, the late John L. Senior Professor of American Institutions at Cornell, who concerned himself with a topical examination of both the pamphlets and the newspaper essays.

In spite of the fact that fruitful studies have already been made in this general area, it would seem worthwhile to center attention on the newspaper polemics alone. After reading several hundred of these pieces, two noteworthy features stand out in the mind of this writer.

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First, the overwhelming majority of the essayists employed the same general organizational form in their writings—a three-phased literary assault composed of a statement, a justification, and an appeal. The statement contained the theme being sounded by the polemicist, an assessment of the major grievances which were tending to divide the colonies and mother country. Having informed his readers of why he was placing his views before them, the author then moved on to justify his position. Here, citing ancient and contemporary authorities, appealing to natural rights, and occasionally depending upon interesting conceptions of logic, the essayist attempted to convince the public of the veracity of his position. Last came the appeal. Much as the ministers of that day would admonish their congregations to transform their faith into practice by going forth to do the work of God, the colonial polemicists would issue a call to action urging their readers to act in support of the previously mentioned contentions.

Second, whether describing alleged problems, arguing the soundness of their logic, or urging particular courses of corrective action, the writers ranged irregularly between the extremes of pragmatism and idealism. Some of the authors would center their essays around such nebulous themes as virtue and propriety, while others tended to emphasize more pragmatic concerns.
relating to law and economics. Further, there existed a vast middle ground which tended to be neither clearly pragmatic nor idealistic. Here the writers focused their attention upon such matters as liberty and natural rights—topics which could appear as either vague or precise, depending upon the treatment provided by the individual essayist. One additional, and somewhat confusing, factor should also be noted. With surprising regularity the contributors varied their tone within a single essay, perhaps arguing against British programs in logical, legalistic terms, but sounding a lofty and imprecise call to action.

Before undertaking this investigation, however, some statement should be made regarding the colonial newspaper essays as historical sources. Few would deny that these journalistic efforts yield many insights into early American life and thought. Yet one must resist the temptation of expecting too much from them. Great caution should be employed in drawing parallels between these essays and that elusive and ill-defined element known as public opinion. In other words, one cannot expect to conclude that the essays reflect the sentiments of any precise percentage of the colonial population. That type of exacting analysis can only be found in the modern opinion polls—and even these are often unreliable.
Nonetheless, the problem regarding public opinion does not negate the value of these essays. Instead, one should first remember that we know from the historical record that many of the leading political activists were regular contributors to the newspaper columns. Further, we also know that the newspapers enjoyed widespread reading. Often the editions were read orally in public places, and on other occasions the regular subscribers passed old issues on to non-subscribing friends and neighbors.

Therefore, the study of the polemical literature in the colonial newspapers appears to comprise a legitimate historical inquiry because the sources yield the sentiments of many of the revolutionary (or Tory) leaders, and because these same thoughts were being widely read and discussed throughout the colonies.

It is, then, the purpose of this dissertation to analyze the content of the three segments of the polemics and to examine the ideological framework which supported them.
CHAPTER I

THE COLONIAL NEWSPAPER

In order to comprehend the full impact and importance of the newspaper polemics, one should first seek some understanding of the historical development and practical concerns of early American journalism.

Perhaps one of the most striking features noted by European travelers in eighteenth century America was the remarkably high rate of literacy among the colonists. On the eastern side of the Atlantic reading was largely the preserve of the professionally educated, but in America the farmer and artisan, as well as the minister and lawyer, were readers. This familiarity with the printed page was facilitated by the surprising availability of reading materials in the colonies. At the time of the outbreak of the War for Independence the streets of Boston were dotted by fifty bookstores and those of Philadelphia by more than thirty.\(^1\) Furthermore, the wagons of the peddlers who ventured into more remote

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reaches of America were filled not only with the usual array of pots, pans, rolls of cloth, and medicines, but also with an impressive selection of books, pamphlets, and sermons.

From a very humble beginning in the late seventeenth century, the newspaper evolved into the most popular object of America's reading hunger. The first newspaper, Publick Occurrences Both Forreign and Domestick, appeared in Boston in the fall of 1690 and flickered for one brief issue. Fourteen years later New Englanders saw this flame rekindled in a second, and a more enduring, exposure to a native newspaper effort. At that time John Campbell of Boston began his celebrated News-Letter which continued to appear in one form or another until near the time of the outbreak of war with Britain. A third early Massachusetts newspaper was the New England Courant, begun in 1721 by James Franklin, the half-brother of the illustrious Benjamin.

Newspaper activity began somewhat later in the middle colonies. William Bradford launched his American Weekly Mercury in Philadelphia in 1719, and nine years later Samuel Keimer initiated a rival effort, the Pennsylvania Gazette. Bradford, having clashed with the Quaker leaders of the colony, migrated northward and established the New York Gazette in 1725. Competition
for Bradford developed in 1733 when John Peter Zenger founded his *New York Weekly Journal*.

The southern colonies were considerably slower in developing their own journalistic organs. This fact is no doubt largely explained by the understandable hesitancy of the printers to set up their presses in these relatively sparsely settled regions.² William Parks, however, established the *Maryland Gazette* in 1726 and four years later he began a second effort, the *Virginia Gazette*. In later times a few of the southern newspapers, such as the *South Carolina Gazette* and various forms of the *Virginia Gazette*, occasionally reached the high standards of the northern urban press. Yet the overall quality of literary efforts in the Chesapeake and Carolina regions suffered at the hands of an aristocracy which was primarily concerned with its extroverted rural existence.³

Some diversity was added to the American journalistic scene through the appearance of a small number of foreign language newspapers. Few of these ventures were lasting ones, but Christopher Sauer and Heinrich Muller


experienced some success with their efforts in Philadelphia. Indeed, the eighteenth century was one of remarkable expansion for colonial journalism. In all, more than seventy newspapers had appeared in North America by the time of the exchange of shots at Lexington and Concord. But much of this development was compacted into the years immediately preceding the war. Only five newspapers were in operation in 1725; that number had increased to twelve by 1740, to twenty-nine by 1770, and to forty-eight by 1775.

Three basic explanations exist for this growth. First, the British colonies in North America experienced a very sharp increase in population in the eighteenth century. In 1704 there were perhaps three hundred thousand inhabitants in the colonies; by 1725 the total was approximately one million, and by the time of the outbreak of fighting there were more than 2,800,000 people in the thirteen colonies. This increase in population naturally provided an enlarged market for the newspapers. Second, as the time of the war approached more and more

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6Ibid.
printing supplies were being manufactured in America. Thus the printers of the late colonial era did not have to concern themselves as deeply about the scarcity of paper and type, problems which no doubt discouraged would-be publishers in an earlier time. Third, beginning as late as the Stamp Act controversy in 1765, a general tension between the colonists and the mother country was evident. Logically the American readers desired to keep abreast of the latest imperial and domestic developments. The newspaper emerged as the best means of doing so.

Yet to conclude from the fact that the colonial newspaper business was expanding rapidly that all was favorable for the printer would be erroneous. Many difficulties remained. One of the greatest of these was the problem of procuring newsworthy items for the papers. Eighteenth century news-gathering was not a highly refined art. Professional reporters, as are known today, did not exist. Instead, the printer depended upon news-bearing correspondence from various corners of the world, upon reports from travelers and ships' officers, and, quite frequently, upon items lifted in their entirety from rival newspapers.?

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Yet even with this variety of news sources at his disposal, the colonial printer was still often faced with an insufficiency of material to fill his pages. The solution to this dilemma, then as today, was found in employing "filler." The printer kept on hand a supply of almanacs, law and medical books, and a collection of sermons from which he could borrow to complete his paper.  

Even when the news had been gathered the problems of the printer were not fully solved. In spite of the increased production of paper, ink, and type in America, the supplies were not always sufficient to meet the demands of the growing numbers of printers. Shipments of these items from England were unpredictable. Vessels arriving from the mother country could make the trip in four weeks if they were fortunate enough to catch a steady following wind. But if the weather was not favorable, a westward crossing might take as long as six or eight weeks.  

Not only did bad weather cause headaches for American printers when it occurred on the high seas, but also when it lashed the colonies. Winter, in particular, presented a variety of difficulties. Anne Catharine Green,  

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8 Weisberger, p. 20.

publisher of the *Maryland Gazette*, once lamented to her readers that:

As the Northern Post is not yet arrived, and the Southern One brought no Mail; and our Rivers, at the same time being frozen up, by which we are prevented receiving any Articles of Intelligence from the different parts of the Province, we hope we shall stand excus'd for the Single Half sheet. ¹⁰

These abbreviated winter editions were not highly prized by the readers, who frequently cancelled their subscriptions until bulkier papers were available in the spring. ¹¹ One can easily imagine the printers' sentiments in regard to this practice.

Even within the confines of his shop the printer was not safe from the ravages of winter. As part of the printing process it was necessary to dampen the paper before putting it on the press. It was not unusual in these poorly heated buildings for the sheets of wet paper to freeze together, the end result being severely frayed pages and nerves. ¹²

In some instances uncooperative weather continued to plague the printer even after winter had passed. Then


¹² Ibid.
the spring thaws brought problems of another variety. In March 1765, the publisher of a Boston paper begged his readers' indulgence for the lack of news from the west, explaining that the roads were "exceeding miery" from the recent rains and melting snow which forced a delay in the expected mail delivery.\(^{13}\)

Financial difficulties comprised another area of concern for the colonial printer. Even when his business affairs appeared well in order he led a very precarious existence. Yet seldom did the printer enjoy an orderly flow of business, particularly because many of his subscribers were undependable in making their payments. William Weyman, a prominent New York publisher, had learned from past experiences how political disruptions could affect his business. Therefore, in the spring of 1765, he began to plead with his patrons to settle their overdue accounts before the dreaded Stamp Act went into effect.\(^{14}\) A similar appeal was made by Richard Draper of Boston, who lamented the fact that many of his accounts were at least twelve months in arrears.\(^{15}\)

In order to ease the financial burden the printers employed several tactics. A number of publishers, 

\(^{13}\) *Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter*. Hereafter cited as *MGBNL*.

\(^{14}\) *New York Gazette*, April 29, 1765.

\(^{15}\) *MGBNL*, June 18, 1767.
realizing the general shortage of specie, were willing to accept produce as payment from their subscribers. 16

Others expanded their business operations, becoming booksellers, stationers, and occasionally venders of patent medicines. 17

Once the printer had conquered the problems of compiling the available news and putting his paper to press, there remained the additional problem of distributing the finished product. Especially in the first half of the eighteenth century the postmaster played a prominent role in this process. John Campbell, a Scottish immigrant who became postmaster of Boston in 1702, serves well as an example. Since he had access to the details of many newsworthy events, he began to capsulize accounts of these affairs and post them to a number of the leading citizens. 18

Two years later this project was formalized in the publication of the Boston News-Letter. Soon the practice of sending one's newspaper through the mails, at no expense to the publisher, became known to many of the colonial printer-postmasters. A few monopoly-minded individuals went so far as to order their post riders to refuse to accept rival papers—even if the competitors offered to

16 Schlesinger, pp. 52-53.

17 Lee, p. 72.

18 Schlesinger, p. 51.
pay the going rate. The printers retained their privileged positions until a series of reforms was brought about by Benjamin Franklin in 1758.

A rather large percentage of the colonial newspapers carried the word gazette in their names. This term, suggesting an official record, indicated the strong ties between the press and the government in early colonial days. It appears that the primary function of these favored printers was to "publish such materials as the state or the church saw fit... in the interest of maintaining the status quo." Indeed, incidents of reaction against governmental interference were infrequent in the first half of the eighteenth century—perhaps for two reasons. First, the printers needed little reminding of their dependence upon the government as a source of livelihood. Lucrative contracts for the printing of official business frequently kept the publisher out of the red. Second, censorship in America, while not strict by European standards, was anticipated by the printer. Importantly, they pacifically accepted the judgements of the colonial officials as a regular feature of their age.

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19 Ibid., p. 54.
20 Savelle, p. 80.
21 Wroth, p. 176.
There were, however, a number of isolated instances in which censorship did develop into a noisy issue. Perhaps the most famous of these involved the German immigrant John Peter Zenger, whose *New-York Weekly Journal* in 1734 carried polemical articles critical of the government. He was arrested and brought to trial in the following year. In a celebrated courtroom encounter lawyer Andrew Hamilton was able to secure Zenger's acquittal, in spite of the court's refusal to admit evidence regarding the truth of the alleged libel. Yet it appears that the fame of this case rests more upon the fact that it was well publicized than the more fanciful view that it emancipated the American press. In later years there occurred a number of significant clashes between printers and officials, indicating that government censorship did not end with the Zenger case.\footnote{Leonard W. Levy (ed.), *Freedom of the Press from Zenger to Jefferson. Early American Libertarian Theories* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966), pp. xxxiv, xxxvii.}

Because of this strong tie with the government most of the leading early newspapers were openly sympathetic to the Crown. Yet during the mid-1760's the orientation of the papers began to change. A statement by Richard Draper at the height of the Stamp Act controversy indicates the degree to which the printers were feeling...
criticism for their governmental ties. The Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter of August 22, 1765 carried the following under Draper's name:

The Publishers . . . cannot but take as unkind the late Intimation from their Brethren [rival printers] That, being a Court Paper, it must of Course be under the Controul of higher Powers: So far from which, they take this Occasion to declare, once and for all, That this Gazette is, always has been, and they hope, ever will be, as free from an Imprimatur, as any one on the Continent; that from them, the Lucubrations of all, will ever meet with a cheerful reception, with this single Restriction, that they be allowed the . . . Privilege of distinguishing for themselves, between such as convey either Amusement or Edification, and those which are charged with Invective, personal, public, or private.

In spite of the popularity of the newspapers, they never achieved impressive numbers of subscribers during colonial times. Perhaps less than nine colonists per thousand regularly received a newspaper. Yet this figure can be deceiving. The Americans, in practical imitation of the Englishmen of the day, frequently gathered at popular inns or coffee houses for refreshment and political discussion; the newspapers, including the polemical essays, were often read aloud and served as the basis of the discussions and arguments. Further, it should be noted that a close connection often existed between the printing shops and the taverns. The popular Green Dragon tavern adjoined Edes and Gill's Boston

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23 Kobre, p. 97.
The Gazette office, and William Bradford owned both the Pennsylvania Journal and the much frequented London Coffee House in Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{24}

The final product of the printers' labors tended to differ very little in appearance from region to region. A single large sheet was folded in half and printed on both sides, resulting in a total of four pages. From modern standards these newspapers were not visually attractive. Each page was divided into three, and sometimes four, columns. As every student of the colonial period knows, the print was extremely small and uneven. Capital letters were often used at the beginning of key words and italics were widely employed for emphasis. Sometimes the capital letters and italics were used without any apparent good reason, perhaps only to satisfy the whim of the printer. Headlines, in the modern sense, were virtually unknown. Often advertisements appeared on the front page and news items or essays of profound importance were buried on the second, third or fourth page. Yet the absence of front page priority is not quite as irrational as the current observer might think. It must be remembered that the colonial reader had an entire week to peruse his paper, thus having ample time to read and

\textsuperscript{24}Schlesinger, p. 33.
reread the entire issue. Only in times of great excitement, such as the Stamp Act crisis, were eye-catching embellishments like skull-and-crossbones or black borders of mourning used. And even these items must be regarded as a form of protest rather than a step toward more enterprising journalism.

In addition to a similarity of appearance among the newspapers, the content, too, differed very little from one colony to another. Anywhere from one-fourth to one-half of the standard edition was devoted to advertisements. These items were concerned with the sale or recovery of runaway slaves and livestock, plus the usual listings of houses, wagons, candles, beer, and so forth which were offered for sale by the local residents.

The remainder of the paper was devoted to news and comment. Unlike today, however, local events were seldom reported. Well-developed gossip channels laced the colonial towns and spread word of these affairs much faster than could a weekly newspaper. The printers would occasionally suspend this embargo on local news, especially for the more fevered events—crimes, executions, natural disasters, etc. Sometimes the temptation to draw political conclusions from these local occurrences was

overpowering. For example, the Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter carried news of the execution of a minor criminal, one Henry Halber, who would "never pay any of the [stamp] taxes unjustly laid on these once happy lands." 26

The great bulk of the news came from foreign cities--from Constantinople, Lisbon, Paris, and especially from London. The abundance of these foreign reports reflects an interesting side of the colonial character. While many colonists undoubtedly had a deep concern about events in their ancestral lands, it does appear that much of the American concern about international affairs "rested upon the feeling of escape from the troubles of the old continent and of isolation from European conflict." 27 It was not until the imperial crises of the mid-1760's that the American newspapers showed much interest in news from their sister colonies.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the eighteenth-century American newspapers was the polemical essay. These argumentative writings, designed to re-fashion or reinforce public opinion on various issues, were evident in the early journalistic offerings of

26 November 7, 1765.

colonial America. More than any other single individual
James Franklin helped to popularize this literary form in
the colonies. His New England Courant generally
ignored the stale imported news from Europe and stressed
viable local concerns. Following the example of the
Tatler and the Spectator the American newspaper essays
were designed to afford both amusement and information
for the reader, and generally concluded by recommending
some simple course of action. Such offerings were common
features of the colonial newspapers from the 1720's on­
ward, yet for the first several decades the scope of the
writings was rather narrow. Much attention was given to
local scandals, witty observations about morals, and to
other seemingly petty topics. Upon rare occasions the
scope was broadened to include pertinent political
questions. Franklin, for example, suffered a month's
imprisonment for his charges of official laxity in dealing
with a pirate problem. Further, there was a short flurry
of pungent articles attacking some of the British deci­
sions and policies during the French and Indian War. It
was not, however, until the 1760's that the essay
developed into a finely honed political weapon. Articles
appeared in sudden abundance after word arrived in America
about the passage of the Revenue Act of 1764 and reached

28 Wright, p. 244.
a rapid maturity during the Stamp Act crisis in the following year.

The great number of these articles which appear in the 1760's and 1770's gives ample evidence of how sensitized the popular mind was to political questions, that indeed as "The Sick Lady" felt, many colonists appeared to breathe politics, not air.29

The vast majority of these essays were single efforts, complete in one issue of the newspaper. Occasionally, however, an author would compose a series of essays which would appear in the same paper for a number of weeks. Belonging to this category were some of the most thoughtful newspaper efforts, notably John Dickinson's twelve "Letters of a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies."

Another popular but infrequent form was the exchange of articles among a number of writers, all dealing with roughly the same subject. "A Patron of Truth" rather succinctly described this process, writing:

I observed a piece in your last paper, signed "A Lover of Peace," full of--I won't say soft names, which the author, I suppose, intended as an answer to a piece wrote by one Mr. Y, which Mr. Y appeared in answer to one Mr. Z. Now . . . I itch to have a finger in the Pye, and be a fourth man amongst them. . . .

29Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), November 27, 1766.

30Providence Gazette, May 2, 1772.
Rarely did the printers draft their own political statements since the rigors of the profession left them little time for such exercises. In most cases, then, the eighteenth-century publisher was relatively faceless from an editorial standpoint—at least when judged from later standards. He did, of course, exert an editorial function simply by choosing those items which he wished to appear in print. Sometimes his editorial burdens were lightened by a group of literary helpers who often served without pay. These individuals aided in the selection of articles to be printed and occasionally contributed essays of their own.31

For two basic reasons the vast majority of the polemical writings appeared under pseudonyms. First, the author was afforded some protection from charges of libel and treason. Second, by employing a variety of pseudonyms a single writer could appear to the public as being a host of concerned citizens. Samuel Adams, for example, used more than two dozen pen names in his efforts to rouse the New England populace through the Boston Gazette.32

Another notable aspect of the polemical essays was the tendency of the authors to resort to inflammatory

32 Davidson, Propaganda, p. 242.
language. One obvious explanation for this caustic tone in the articles is that the writers were profoundly concerned individuals. They wrote in biting and often incautious terms simply because they felt a deep frustration and were moved by sincere conviction. Beyond this, one should remember that the essayists were competing for public attention in a market flooded with similar appeals. Thus many writers no doubt concluded that the best way of making their work stand out was to employ even stronger language than their competitors.

As early as the Sugar Act controversy of 1764, "Americanus" charged that the formulators of the measure were "unreasonable and cruel," and that the American colonists were being submerged into a state of "slavery." Later, shortly after the repeal of the Stamp Act, an anonymous author maintained that "venal parties" and "corruption" in England had been the cause of the recent difficulties. Importantly, not all of the barbs were directed eastward across the Atlantic. "Carduus Benedictus" chided his fellow colonists for their lack of resolution, comparing them to a timid boy


34 "Ode on the Repeal of the Stamp Act," MGBNL, May 29, 1766.
on a tilt-board,"... who was always ready to crawl to the end that is uppermost."\(^35\) He concluded his essay by stoutly affirming that in times of crisis "neutrality is little better than Treason."\(^36\) Later, on the eve of the First Continental Congress "B.D." painted a bleak picture for the future, warning that America was about to "sink under the arm of despotism."\(^37\) Throughout the entire period before the outbreak of war, words and phrases such as "dastardly," "effeminate," and "want of virtue" were used to describe the British and their policies, and the words "slavery" and "suffering" to portray the resulting plight of the colonists. Such literary embroidery closely followed a pattern set earlier by the English radical whigs.\(^38\)

After the fighting had begun the tempo of denunciation and insult was heightened. Yet some of the more timid colonists felt that the political writers were going too far and feared that the flow of virulence might negate the possibilities for retrieving peace. "I beg of you, gentlemen, you will be cool, and not precipitate

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\(^{35}\) \textit{MGBNL}, August 25, 1768.
\(^{36}\) \textit{Ibid}.
\(^{37}\) \textit{Virginia Gazette (Rind)}, August 4, 1774.
matters into a state from whence you can't recall them," warned "T***L" in venting the sentiments of a significant minority of the polemicists.\(^{39}\)

Still another facet of the peevish nature of the essays is seen in those which depended upon sarcasm to make their point. Even before the enactment of the Townshend duties and the Tea Act of 1773, the importation of tea was subject to questioning by some essayists. "Publicola" felt that the luxury of tea drinking was "a certain means of conveying all the cash out of the Colonies."\(^{40}\) To more deeply implant his views in the minds of his readers he none too gently dealt with those who rationalized their imbibing on medicinal grounds:

I leave to physicians to determine whether the many hypochondriac cases, lowness of spirits, spleen, vapours, and the whole cohort of genteel ailments, so prevalent among our women (ladies I mean) and some of our female men (or gentlemen) be not caused principally by Tea.\(^{41}\)

Other essayists illuminated their ideas by offering ridiculous alternatives to their readers. "Pacificus" in discussing the Stamp Act suggested that perhaps the wisest course for the colonists to follow would be to surrender their rights as stated in the charters and

\(^{39}\)Pennsylvania Evening Post, March 26, 1776.

\(^{40}\)Providence Gazette, October 13, 1764.

\(^{41}\)Ibid.
allow a military commander from Britain to dictate the law; in that way the Americans would not have to trouble themselves with the perplexing questions regarding rights. 42

The bitter words of the writers were not without some touches of sneering humor. In describing his version of colonial commerce after the Sugar Act, "Z" believed that the American shippers were like an "ass with a pack-saddle... we are fenced in on every side but the South, where there is a gap left open that we may trot to the Sugar Islands with our Masters baggage on our backs." 43

It seems certain that the colonial American newspapers played a crucial role in the swelling tide of imperial unrest. The press began the decade of the 1760's as a rather weak and inconsequential organ, tied closely to the agents and agencies of the Crown. Yet primarily because the newspapers were the only organ capable of smashing the bonds of provincialism and serving as a channel of news and propaganda, they emerged as the most powerful molder of colonial minds. 44

Pamphlets, indeed, played heavily in the mobilization of

42 Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), March 21, 1766.

43 Providence Gazette, October 27, 1764.

44 Kobre, pp. 95-96.
public opinion, but it was generally easier, cheaper, and more influential to publish in a newspaper. "Providus" expressed this contention in the following terms:

However little some may think of common Newspapers, to a wise man they appear the ark of God, for the safety of the people. Their fullness of general entertainment, small bulk and price recommend them to every one, and the variety of matters, with the great importance of many of them, awaken the minds of many to a solid enquiry of interests they would never once dream of.\footnote{Providence Gazette, December 12, 1767.}

The colonial American newspaper essays were what they had to be—useful, relevant, and short. They coincided with the needs of an active and often unsophisticated people during a time of crisis.
CHAPTER II

THE STATEMENT

The polemical essays of the Revolutionary era generally began with a statement of purpose. This explanation of why the article was written presented the author's specific grievance or his assessment of what had happened to cause the deterioration in the relationship between Britain and America.

Many of these statements advanced their ideas in the hackneyed words and phrases associated with the 1760's and 1770's—taxation without representation, trial by jury, natural rights, standing armies, etc. While the vast majority of the essayists concentrated its efforts upon a single colonial difficulty and its immediate ramifications; a few addressed themselves to a broad scope of problems.¹

The introductory statements of the polemical essays fell rather conveniently into three categories. The first

¹For an example of the latter approach see the lengthy listing of imperial problems offered by "Atticus," Virginia Gazette (Rind), May 4, 1769.
two were closely related in that they both focused attention upon issues. First, a relatively small number of the statements viewed the imperial problems in purely economic terms. Second, a far greater number advanced the belief that constitutional concerns were at the root of colonial difficulties. The third category of statements differed rather significantly from the others, though the difference was primarily one of emphasis rather than content. These propositions sought to assign blame or responsibility for the troublesome imperial situation to individuals or groups. In short, the first and second types of statements placed their focus on what was resulting from the policies of the king, the ministry, the members of Parliament, or the royal officials; the third category directed attention toward the character and motivation of those men or agencies.

The Economic Question

A small minority of the essayists presented their views in economic terms, maintaining that British policies were damaging to the financial well-being of the colonies. Complaints of this nature were heard throughout the entire period of crisis, but seldom after 1774 when other concerns came to dominate the writings. In comparison with those essays arising from constitutional questions and those which sought to assign blame to
certain parties in England, the economic complaints were relatively infrequent. Nonetheless, they still constitute a meaningful portion of the polemical statements.

The American literary forces mustered themselves into a state of readiness in the spring of 1764. It was at this juncture that Parliament had passed the measure popularly known as the Sugar Act. This law, in the judgement of the British officials, would "improve the revenue of the kingdom."\(^2\) For the first time in colonial history the Americans were facing a Parliamentary measure which was designed both to regulate trade and to raise a revenue. Other provisions of the act were aimed at tightening a terribly leaky customs service. An order-in-council of October 1763 had laid the basis for this later action by pointing up the inefficiency of the system, reporting that the revenues obtained in America defrayed only a small fraction of the collection costs.\(^3\)

In the same month, April 1764, Parliament took sweeping action in regard to the colonial paper money situation. British concern on this question was not new.


Back in 1751 a measure had been passed to restrict the proliferating paper money schemes then popular in New England. Under this law the colonial governments in that region could issue paper currency in order to pay their operating expenses, but it was stipulated that those bills had to be retired within two years through tax receipts. The most important provision of this earlier act was ending the use of paper money as a means of settling private debts. The new measure sponsored by the Grenville ministry applied to the areas outside of New England, making it illegal to issue paper money as legal tender "in payment of any bargains, contracts, debts, dues or demands whatsoever. . . ."\(^4\) Clearly the latter act was the harsher of the two, being designed to end the paper money programs rather than just to restrict them.\(^5\) Such steps reflected the position of the ministry and Parliament that the only true money was gold and silver, a point of view which gave evidence of a shocking blindness to colonial economic reality.\(^6\)

\(^4\)Act of April 19, 1764, EHD, IX, 648.


These two Parliamentary steps of 1764, despite the alleged British intentions, were viewed with horror by many of the colonists. An essay appearing in a Boston paper concluded that the American economy would be "totally sunk and destroyed in a few years" as a result of the Sugar and Currency Acts.\(^7\)

"S" stated the case for many merchants, claiming that honest shippers who had to compete with the smugglers were unable to make a sufficient profit when they operated according to the British rules.\(^8\)

The deepening frustration which many businessmen felt was vented by a writer in the Boston Gazette who maintained:

A colonist cannot make a button, a horseshoe nor a hob-nail, but some sooty ironmonger or respectable button-maker of Britain shall bawl and squawl that his honor's worship is most egregiously maltreated, injuréd, cheated and robb'd by the rascally North American republicans.\(^9\)

A "Virginian" who sensed this same steady strangulation stated flatly that the economic decline of his colony was occasioned by the trade regulations, yet like most of his fellow essayists he provided no statistical support.\(^10\)

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\(^7\){\textit{Pennsylvania Journal}, n.d., cited by MGBNL, September 13, 1764.}

\(^8\){\textit{MGBNL}, April 26, 1764.}

\(^9\){\textit{April 29, 1765.}}

\(^10\){\textit{Virginia Gazette} (Rind), December 11, 1766.}
Such writers contented themselves with casting literary dirt in the direction of Britain, trusting the reader to supply the necessary illustrative detail from his own experience.

There had been developing in the newspaper columns strong sentiment among American merchants for a thorough reform of the existing British commercial system.\textsuperscript{11} Parliament responded to such appeals in the passage of the Revenue Act of 1766, a rather disappointing measure which left unanswered many of the American complaints. On the positive side, the act called for the removal of the export tax on sugar shipped from the British West Indies to the continental colonies. This was greeted with some approval in America since it served to make sugar cheaper. Meeting with a mixed reaction was that portion of the law which abolished the 3d. per gallon duty on all foreign molasses, but which, as a substitute, imposed a 1d. per gallon tax on all molasses entering the mainland settlements. By far the most unpopular aspect of the new measure was that requiring all colonial exports destined for northern European ports to pass first through Great Britain. This reform program was regarded

\textsuperscript{11}For example, see \textit{Virginia Gazette} (Purdie and Dixon), June 13, 1766.
by some colonists as being generally unsatisfactory in bringing relief to their threatened trade.\footnote{\textit{Boston Post-Boy}, November 2, 1767.}

It appears rather clearly that as time passed in the 1760's the polemicists paid increasingly less attention to the purely economic grievances. In those later instances when complaints were heard, they were of a very general, almost scattershot, nature. Further, few of these statements were found in the pages of the Southern newspapers. Except for the Currency Act (which dampened the fortunes of many Virginia planters), the impact of the Grenville program was largely confined to the Northern commercial areas. And, too many of the planters had dealt unsuccessfully with the shrewd yankee traders and found it difficult to summon many tears over their plight.

The Constitutional Question

By far the most common reason for writing polemical essays was to warn the readers of threats being made to their constitutional rights as Englishmen. Reference was sometimes made in these pieces to the role being played by the King or Parliament, but the emphasis here was upon the question of rights.

The polemical path followed by the writers was often a confusing one. At first they voiced their
constitutional dismay over the fact that Parliament was taxing them for purposes of raising a revenue. These rather narrow statements were soon enlarged to deal with the broader question of the relationship between taxation and representation. This fundamental issue was debated at length. Then for a short period authors on both sides of the Atlantic engaged in a futile polemical aside, debating the nature of actual and virtual representation. Later, the essays returned to the mainstream by considering alleged differences between taxation and legislation. A further topic which briefly occupied the constitutional attentions of the writers was that centering on the legitimacy of internal and external taxes. Others shifted the focus of their statements and dealt with the intent of taxation. In short, the constitutional controversy of the 1760's, as seen through the eyes of the colonial newspaper polemicists, reflected an overriding preoccupation with the propriety of Parliamentary taxation of the colonies.

Beginning in the 1760's and reaching full fruition in the early 1770's was a more comprehensive constitutional concern. These writers concentrated their journalistic efforts on the question of America's position within the British Empire. It was this issue which ushered in the most radical arguments.
The constitutional statements, just as the economic ones, were sparked by the Grenville program. The New York legislature fired one of the opening shots when it responded to news of the Sugar Act of 1764 and affirmed that American rights were being violated by a tax program which was intended to raise a revenue.\(^ {13} \)

Similar views were being expressed in the newspapers. "A New-England Man" alleged that America's role in the Empire was being perverted by such a policy. Yet his conception of the British constitution took an interesting turn when he argued that since the mother country had simply been seeking additional territory in the French and Indian War, instead of the protection of the colonists, the recent taxes were illegal.\(^ {14} \) This interpretation of the recent conflict is intriguing in itself, but of primary importance is the writer's contention that an unconstitutional action threatened the Americans. His focus was upon the new legislation and its ramifications, not upon the motivations of those who designed the measures.


\(^ {14} \)Providence Gazette, August 18, 1764.
American concern over her constitutional position was heightened in the following year by the passage of the Stamp Act. Duties stemming from this measure were so arranged that almost every colonist would be affected. Stamps, which would attest to the payment of the taxes, were to be affixed to a variety of documents, ships' papers, college diplomas, deeds, mortgages, contracts, playing cards, dice, pamphlets, almanacs, and newspapers.

During the interim between the passage of this piece of legislation in late March 1765 and November 1 when it was to go into effect, popular resistance achieved new heights. The newspapers abandoned their moderate tone and became the chief agency for molding public opinion and for expressing ideas far more radical than those most colonial assemblies were willing to accept. In short, the "Stamp Act crisis brought colonial newspapers to the very head of the protest movement."  

In the spring of 1765 a sparsely attended session of the Virginia House of Burgesses gave its approval to the more conservative portions of a series of resolutions offered by a young lawyer from Louisa County, Patrick Henry. Included in these statements of position was the contention that the early settlers in Virginia had brought with them the full rights of Englishmen--the most

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fundamental of which was the right of being taxed only with the consent of one's representatives.\textsuperscript{16}

This plea for representative consent to tax measures was taken up with vigor by the polemicists of almost all of the newspapers and was heard at an undiminished level for several years. An unsigned essayist in Charleston stated flatly that "being taxed . . . by a body in which we are not represented is the foundation of the dispute between Great Britain and America."\textsuperscript{17} The prominent Virginian Arthur Lee summarized his statement by arguing that the colonists were little better than slaves unless they could exercise their prerogative of electing those who levied taxes upon them.\textsuperscript{18}

A heated debate which branched out from the taxation-representation hassle occurred over the question of whether or not the Americans were in fact represented in Parliament. Perhaps the most solid exposition of the British position on this issue was offered by Thomas Whately, the secretary of the Treasury and a close friend of George Grenville. A pamphlet which he published


\textsuperscript{17}South Carolina Gazette, July 13, 1769.

\textsuperscript{18}"Monitor IV," Virginia Gazette (Rind), March 17, 1768.
during the Stamp Act controversy contained what soon became regarded as the official ministerial sentiments. Whately maintained that the American colonists were in essentially the same position as the vast majority of British citizens, that neither group had the opportunity of voting for its representatives, yet both were indeed represented virtually. In essence he was saying that the members of Parliament did not serve the interests of any particular locality, but that this factor was of no real importance since the legislators had the welfare of the entire Empire at heart.

At this juncture a number of the newspaper polemists were clearly disturbed with the ministerial interpretation of this constitutional point and began to write in increasingly incautious terms. "What do we wait for?" asked "Phileleutherus," "Is it not as clear as the sun at noon-day that it is absurd to pay any regard to a law made by a body of men who have no more legislative authority over us than those that lived before the flood?" Importantly, this writer, as so many of the others, indicated that he was moved to action solely by a question

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of rights and not by economic pressure or a desire to lambaste the British officials.

A more thoughtful and explicit examination of the conflict was presented by Daniel Dulany in his Considerations on the Propriety of Imposing Taxes in the British Colonies . . . (1765). This author was especially lucid on one point—his rejection of virtual representation which he described as "a mere cobweb, spread to catch the unwary, and intangle the weak." To him the legal word-twisting on this question was as illogical as calling "lake Erie a Duck- meddling because [it was] not the Atlantic Ocean." He admitted that the doctrine of virtual representation might have some validity for compact England, but totally rejected it for America. Furthermore, Dulany, unlike "Philetherus," took pains to distinguish between taxation and legislation, stating that Parliament had the right to make statutes for the colonies, but that taxation was a right which belonged solely to the American legislatures. He rooted his argument in the colonial charters which he felt offered constitutional backing for his interpretation.

Such arguments were not confined to America alone. William Pitt, in a famous Parliamentary exchange with

21 Cited by Greene, Colonies, p. 53.
Grenville, echoed many of Dulany's contentions, especially the idea that Parliament could legislate for the colonies but not tax them. In response to Grenville's view that taxation was but a branch of legislation, Pitt replied that taxes were a "voluntary gift," and that a distinction between the two was essential to liberty.

Importantly, in spite of all the sound and fury generated by the American pamphlets and newspapers, the debate over actual and virtual representation was not really a viable one. Only a few colonists, such as the highly erratic James Otis, ever gave serious consideration to sending Americans to serve in Parliament.

Further, few British officials ever regarded virtual representation as a sound basis for proclaiming power over the colonies. Instead, most preferred to reason simply that Parliament could make laws, including revenue measures, for the colonies since they were members of the British Empire.

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23 Ibid., 106-107.
The drift of political affairs in England was rapidly turned into a torrent as mid-1765 approached. Apparent to many in high circles in London was the growing rift between the king and the Grenville ministry. A sharp down-turn in business conditions (attributable in part to the effective non-importation program organized in the colonies), unrest in certain English counties over heavy taxation, the popular uproar in the wake of John Wilkes' adventures, and personal matters separating minister and monarch were among the many factors working in this direction. Finally in July, Grenville was succeeded by Rockingham, the titular head of the weak, new ministry whose only apparent concern was simply to remain in office. In the slightly more than twelve-month tenure which the Rockingham Whigs enjoyed, they responded to pressures from British merchant and manufacturing groups and urged two important measures upon Parliament. In March 1766, final approval was given to the repeal of the Stamp Act, thus satisfying the demands of the British business community. Yet at the same time Parliament attempted to save face and to reassert her threatened prerogatives by passing the Declaratory Act, a measure which stated that that body "had, hath, and of right ought to have, full power and authority to make all laws and statutes [for the colonies]. . . in all cases
whatsoever." The majority of the essayists chose to ignore this statement of Parliamentary supremacy and instead congratulated themselves on a successful campaign against the Stamp Act. This tepid response can be noted in the analysis of the recent events offered by "Algernon Sydney" who dismissed the matter by noting that "The relief they have given is professedly for their Sakes, not ours."

The dust raised by the events of 1765 and 1766 had barely settled before the newspaper correspondents had yet another crisis in which to demonstrate their talents. In mid-1766 a new ministry was formed in England, containing such prominent figures as William Pitt (now Lord Chatham), the Duke of Grafton, and a holdover from the previous leadership, Charles Townshend. The king and many in Parliament had never been truly satisfied with the Rockingham Whigs and recent news from the colonies indicated that a firmer hand must guide American affairs.

Chancellor of the exchequer Townshend, who had assumed the actual leadership of the ministry when Chatham became ill, volunteered to supply his steady hand. Promising that he could raise a revenue in America,

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26 EHD, IX, 696.
27 Virginia Gazette (Rind), May 30, 1766.
Townshend appeared ready to answer a two-fold need. First, a new revenue program would help to swell the dwindling financial resources of the treasury and, second, such a measure would tend to enforce upon the proud Americans the full impact of the Declaratory Act. When the Revenue Act of June 1767 emerged it was significantly different from what many had expected. By placing duties on the importation of such items as lead, glass, tea, and paper into America, Townshend expected to raise approximately £40,000 a year, a sum to be employed for the defense of the colonies and for the payment of the salaries of the royal officials residing there.

The issue of consuming interest in this new measure was a differentiation, real or supposed, between internal and external taxation. Townshend himself had long maintained that such hair-splitting was contrived and ridiculous, but he decided it would be expedient to humor the colonists on this score, nonetheless. The question was not a new one. During the Stamp Act crisis Daniel Dulany had stated his opposition to those internal taxes which were designed to raise a revenue.\textsuperscript{28} And evidence exists that this distinction, unpopular as it may have been, was one already familiar to British officials. The Earl of Mansfield, speaking in the House of Lords, argued

\textsuperscript{28}Considerations, Greene, Colonies, p. 58.
that there was "no difference between laying internal and external taxes." Less than two weeks after Mansfield's remarks were made, Benjamin Franklin appeared before the House of Commons to testify in regard to the existing attitudes of his fellow colonists. In relating his impressions, Franklin stated that the Americans were receptive to "all laws, except such as should lay internal taxes." Clearly the implication was that the colonists would accept external taxation. It appears that this testimony, while achieving its objective in the short-run, helped to perpetuate the troublesome distinction between internal and external taxes and thus contributed to future imperial strife.

The American response to the Revenue Act of 1767 was prompt and hostile. While the duties levied by the measure might well have been external, the colonists regarded the entire act as one designed to interfere with their internal affairs. Since the tax money collected from this program was to be used to pay the salaries of royal officials in America, many feared that those individuals would no longer be responsive to the colonial

29Hansard, XVI, 176.
30Hansard, XVI, 152-153.
legislatures. Further, the provisions that these duties were to be paid in sterling and that writs of assistance were to be employed in locating smuggled goods raised colonial fears to even higher levels. To the Americans these were constitutional issues of the first order.32

A conservative lawyer from Pennsylvania, John Dickinson, led the literary opposition. His "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies" first appeared in December 1767 in the Pennsylvania Chronicle. These essays were later reprinted in almost all of the other colonial newspapers and finally appeared in pamphlet form. While Dickinson spent a portion of his first letter in warning his fellow colonists to guard against encroachments upon their legislatures, such as had been recently seen in the New York Suspending Act, he placed his greatest emphasis on the unconstitutionality of the Townshend Revenue Act.

Dickinson's major contribution to the controversy was his consideration of the question of intent in taxation and revenue accumulation. He denied that there existed any valid distinction between internal and external taxes, that even one of the Townshend duties might be regarded as a type of internal tax since the colonists would have "no possible method of avoiding ... [it

32See Boston Post-Boy, November 21, 1767.
since they cannot do without the commodities on which it is laid. . . .\textsuperscript{33} In Dickinson's estimation these duties were unconstitutional because they were designed to raise a revenue and the colonists had no voice in that process. Importantly, however, Dickinson was not denying the right of Parliament to regulate trade. Earlier British measures had indeed raised revenues, but that accumulation of duties was valid since it had not been the specific intent of those measures to do so.\textsuperscript{34}

Dickinson was deeply disturbed that many of his fellow colonists were regarding this matter so lightly, presumably since the duties did not appear to be heavy. He stated that "These duties . . . are expressly laid FOR THE SOLE PURPOSE OF TAKING MONEY. This is the true definition of 'taxes.' We are therefore Taxed. Those who are taxed without their own consent, expressed by themselves or their representatives, are slaves. We are taxed without our own consent. . . . We are therefore SLAVES."\textsuperscript{35}

This series of essays, then, provided a loophole through which the colonial theorists could escape their own encircling arguments. Opposition to the Townshend

\textsuperscript{33}\textit{Pennsylvania Chronicle}, December 28, 1767.

\textsuperscript{34}\textit{Pennsylvania Chronicle}, December 14, 1769.

\textsuperscript{35}\textit{Pennsylvania Chronicle}, January 11, 1768.
duties could be voiced, not in the limited conceptions of internal and external taxation, but in terms of the more majestic constitutional principle that Parliament could not levy a tax in the colonies.

The "Farmer's Letters" experienced unparalleled popularity throughout the colonies. Later, as the identity of the author became known, others urged him to remove himself from the relative calm of Philadelphia and lead America in the defense of her rights. Writers in other areas soon began to echo the arguments of Dickinson. "Philo-Patriae" sounded the theme of America's violated rights, maintaining that the Townshend duties were "as much a tax upon the colonies, and as much without their consent as the stamp act. . . ." Because of this commotion which Dickinson's writings had caused, An article in the Pennsylvania Chronicle signed by "Anti-Machiavel" held that the polemical essays denying the Parliamentary right to tax the colonies without their consent were based on sound ground, but should be abandoned since they were generating imperial tension.38

36 "A Son of Liberty," Pennsylvania Chronicle, August 1, 1768.
37 New London Gazette, April 8, 1768.
38 August 22, 1768.
Thus even some of the conservative polemicists were willing to acknowledge the legitimacy of the constitutional argument.

The position taken by Dickinson and others in 1767 and 1768 has led to an interesting historiographical controversy. A number of historians have maintained that the American colonists rather sharply changed their arguments between 1765 and 1767. These writers argue that at the time of the Stamp Act controversy the colonists objected to internal taxes, but conceded Parliament's right to levy external taxes for the purpose of regulating trade. Then with the advent of the Townshend duties the colonists denied the propriety of both types of taxation. Other historians, notably Edmund S. Morgan, have argued that the colonists were fairly consistent in their statements, that they never really admitted the right of Parliament to levy external taxes.

The newspaper polemicists of this era often wrote of both internal and external taxes, but whether this distinction was one of conviction or mere convenience is hard to assess. What is important is that the dissection

39 For a clear statement of this point of view see Randolph G. Adams, Political Ideas, pp. 91-92.

of the taxation issue was not their major concern. Rather, from the beginning of the conflict of interests with Britain the majority of the American essayists were simply proclaiming their right to tax themselves through their own legislatures. The implementation of the internal-external distinction may very well have been a temporary expedient, offering a handy leverage point from which they could advance their larger program.

Although it would be misleading to maintain that any rigid chronological stratification of arguments existed in the essays, it does appear that there was a perceivable broadening of the attack after 1767. The earlier polemics dealt with the problems of representation and taxation, but in the late 1760's an increasing number of essays were concerned with the more sweeping constitutional question of the status of the colonial governments within the British Empire.

According to the standard American interpretation, the colonial governments received their constitutional authority from their charters. In this way power was delegated to them from the king. But there followed, then, the logical question of the extent to which a third party, Parliament, had authority over the colonies.

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41 Such a view is expressed by "Philo-Patria," New London Gazette, April 3, 1767.
In the fall of 1765, twenty-seven delegates from nine of the colonies assembled in New York City to consider the impending enforcement of the Stamp Act. Such a gathering had been suggested a year earlier by the Boston townmeeting, but no action had resulted at that time. Enthusiasm developed rapidly in the spring of 1765, however, when plans for the stamp tax were formalized. Emanating from this Congress was a "Declaration of Rights and Grievances," a statement in which the delegates affirmed that they owed "the same allegiance to the Crown of Great Britain, that is owing from his subjects born within the realm, and all due subordination to that august body, the Parliament of Great Britain." The Congress had issued a purposely imprecise statement in regard to America's relationship to Parliament. The words "due subordination," apparently meaning that Westminster could legislate for the colonies but not tax them, provided an expeditious means of skirting the vital question. Although the "Declaration" has been called by some "the most deliberate and 'official' statement of the colonial constitutional position," it does not


43Morgan, Stamp Act, pp. 145-146, 150.

44Greene, Colonies, p. 60.
appear to be representative of many of the views appearing then and later in the colonial newspapers.

Even in the early days of imperial tension some of the essayists had been quick to deny Parliament a significant role in American affairs. Shortly after the Sugar Act had received final approval in the mother country, "A New-England Man," who judged the measure to be "not very motherly," argued that such a step was un-constitutional. He supported his contention by attacking Parliament's alleged control over America, stating that "no other relation now subsists between Britain and the . . . colonies, only that they are all common subjects of the same crown or king."45

Later, an unsigned essay in the Virginia Gazette maintained that Parliament indeed had the power to enforce its recent measures, but doubted its constitutional right to do so.46 By 1767 the British officials were so deeply disturbed by the trend of many of the colonial legislatures to regard themselves as miniature houses of commons that the colonial governors were

45 Providence Gazette, August 18, 1764.
46 (Purdie and Dixon), May 30, 1766.
instructed to veto all laws attempting to alter their local charters. 47

A similar view of Parliament's role was expressed in a widely-read pamphlet written by the Virginia planter, lawyer, and antiquarian Richard Bland. His "Inquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies" (1766) asserted, perhaps a bit more timidly than "A New-England Man," that the bonds holding America to England were forged by trade, friendship, and allegiance to a common monarch. 48 No direct mention of Parliament was made.

Further support for this position emerged almost immediately within Bland's own colony. An unsigned contributor to the Virginia Gazette addressed his comments to the Colonel, "concurring with . . . [him] in the opinion that Parliament may have Power to carry their _______ acts into execution, but no Right . . . [to do so]." 49

One of the many writers who signed himself "Philo-Patria" provided additional amplification for this stand. He urged the residents of Connecticut to remember their charter, a document which granted them the right to

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49(Purdie and Dixon), May 30, 1766.
select their own rulers—representatives who should exercise the full and only legislative and executive power within the colony.  

Later, after the Townshend duties had been softened, "Junius" continued to advance the hard line in the constitutional debate. He held that Parliament was only an interpreter "whose duty it is to convey the sense of the people faithfully to the Crown. If the interpretation be false or imperfect, the constitutional powers are called upon to deliver their own sentiments."  

Opposition to this argument, as might be expected, was found on the pages of the Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter. "A.Z." considered absurd the idea that Parliament was constitutionally excluded from governmental control over the colonies. He supported his stand by holding that the king, whom the polemicists had acknowledged could rightfully play a role in imperial affairs, had received his crown from Parliament; thus Parliament was the ultimate power—even in colonial affairs.  

Pushing the debate into even sharper focus was one of the better known polemical exchanges to appear in the

50 New London Gazette, April 3, 1767.
51 Virginia Gazette (Rind), June 7, 1770.
52 March 5, 1772.
American newspapers. From late 1774 until the spring of 1775 "Massachusettensis" and "Novanglus" delighted Boston Tories and Whigs, respectively, with their assessments of the constitutional intricacies involved in the continuing dispute. The former was the pseudonym employed by Daniel Leonard, a lawyer and a member of one of the most distinguished families in the Commonwealth. He had recently incurred the wrath of the popular party by accepting an appointment to the council under the reorganized system imposed by the Massachusetts Government Act. His essays, appearing in the Massachusetts Gazette and Boston Post-Boy, trumpeted the theme of colonial subserviency. The American legislatures had indeed derived certain powers from their charters, "Massachusettensis" maintained, but this did not negate the fact that the colonies were subject to parliamentary control.53

The Whig counter-argument was offered by John Adams, operating in the guise of "Novanglus," who wrote for the sympathetic Boston Gazette. Adams argued on the basis of his conception of English constitutional history that the legislatures were the only true authorities in the colonies and that the sole legal bond uniting America to England was the person of the king. Thus Adams was

envisioning a British empire composed of largely autonomous states and a Parliament with the single function of administering external imperial affairs. Adams attempted to legitimize this stand by arguing that most of the colonial charters had been granted before the Act of Union and, therefore, the colonies could not be subservient to a kingdom which was created at a later time.54

As imperial anxiety mounted in the 1770's, many of the Whig polemicists expanded their constitutional statements. In the early crises the essayists had denied the legality of Parliamentary taxation; now they denied that that body had any legal basis for legislating for the colonies.

It seems clear that the shield of anonymity which protected the "private" statements of the newspaper essayists and pamphleteers allowed them to advance ideas far ahead of the "official" agencies.

The Question of Responsibility

A rather sizeable minority of the polemical essayists preferred to state its case, not in terms of economic and constitutional allegations, but instead by ascribing blame for the crises to various individuals or groups of individuals.

54 March 6, 1775.
A number of these polemicists, especially in the 1770's, viewed the encroachments of British authority upon America as being parts of a plot which was designed to lead the colonists into a state of utter subjugation. According to this theory the colonists had been among the most contented people in the world after the triumph over the French in 1763. Then the English financial interests, the royal officials in America, the ministry, or the king— or any combination of these four elements— acted to usurp colonial liberties. This conspiracy was temporarily halted with the repeal of the Stamp Act, but it was renewed again through the Townshend program and other later measures.  

"Americanus," writing for the New Hampshire Gazette, illustrates one aspect of the conspiracy-oriented statements. He contended that the financial interests in London were overly responsive to the appeals of the West Indian planters (an argument almost as old as the North American colonies themselves), and that these two forces knowingly endeavored to thwart American development through urging Parliament to pass the Sugar Act.  

55See the essay submitted by "R" for a full treatment of this theory, Pennsylvania Evening Post, April 18, 1776.

56Cited by MGBNL, September 20, 1764.
This same type of charge was frequently repeated later during the Stamp Act difficulties. Commercial interests in Parliament, however, did the best they could to counter such remarks by maintaining that British trade regulations were not only good for the Empire at large, but also for America in particular. Nonetheless, criticism directed against the mercantile forces came to full fruition after the passage of the East India Regulating Act in 1773. This measure, which was so clearly designed to provide salvation for the East India Company, drew fire from "Hampden" who charged that the ministry was cooperating with the Company "to give the last and finishing stroke to . . . [American] commerce and . . . liberties." The author was giving literary expression to the frequently heard thesis that a two-fold conspiracy was underway: America was in imminent danger of losing both her commercial and political rights.

It should be noted once again, however, that colonial opinion was divided. The Conservatives, no doubt including some anxious merchants within their numbers, countered by charging that those who attacked the East India Company were doing so for personal reasons

57_Hansard, XVI, 133-135._

58_Virginia Gazette (Rind), November 25, 1773._
and did not have the welfare of the Empire at heart.\(^{59}\)

As early as 1766 some essayists were focusing upon another group, the royal officials in America, as being the source of the current distress. An unsigned piece in the *Virginia Gazette* argued that those officeholders who cooperated with the stamp program were planning to diminish colonial strength by lessening the Americans' basic liberties.\(^{60}\) One of the most frequent targets of the polemical shafts of the 1760's was Thomas Hutchinson, one of the leading figures in Massachusetts society. Beginning his career as a merchant, he soon discovered that his true talents lay in the political realm. While still a relatively young man, Hutchinson had held an impressive array of offices, including speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, member of the council, judge of the probate and common pleas courts, delegate to the Albany Congress, lieutenant governor and chief justice of the Commonwealth. Many of the contributors to the *Boston Gazette* reported with alarm Hutchinson's tendency to accumulate offices, charging him with pluralism and the destruction of the traditional bounds between judicial and legislative positions of

\(^{59}\)"Poplicola," *New York Gazetteer* (Rivington), November 18, 1773.

\(^{60}\)(Purdie and Dixon), April 18, 1766.
It was even intimated that Hutchinson had played the leading role in the usurpation of colonial liberty by authoring the Stamp Act. Yet the paper's propensity for character assassination did not always meet with the approval of the entire readership. "Saltator" refuted charges of all-night reveling which had been leveled against the lieutenant-governor and voiced his objection to the general conspiracy theory. As time passed the figure who came under the greatest suspicion by the polemicists was General Thomas Gage, the commander of the British forces in America. Even in faraway Virginia "Cato" objected to the imposition of martial law in Boston, and characterized Gage as a "tyrant" in league with the schemers in London.

Other colonial essayists looked to the ministry as being the source of the difficulties. A letter from an English observer to the Virginia Gazette in 1766 expressed the opinion that "it was a bad ministry, who carried things so far as to bring" affairs to their current state. After reviewing a long list of colonial

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61 Boston Gazette, January 27, 1766 and February 3, 1766.
62 Boston Gazette, September 2, 1765.
63 MGBNL, June 13, 1771.
64 Virginia Gazette (Rind), September 15, 1774.
65 (Purdie and Dixon), March 7, 1766.
sufferings "Phileleutherus" concluded that it was the king's leading advisors who were responsible for the existing tensions. In reaching the same conclusion, that the ministry was at fault, "An Independent Whig" was unsure whether the colonies were being impoverished because the governmental leaders were wicked or simply because they did not understand what they were doing. Other essayists directed their attacks against particular individuals. "Thalastris" charged North and Bute with plotting the ruin of America, explaining that they were "wicked men with foul intent." This suspicion of Bute reflected a broader hatred of the Scots which was prevalent among the Whigs at this time. The popular mind in England, and to a lesser extent in America, often bunched together thoughts of Scotsmen, Catholics, the Stuarts, and arbitrary monarchy. Jensen illustrates the depths of this prejudice in citing Wilkes' North Briton which said of Scottish women that "'pride is bred in their bones and their flesh naturally abhors cleanliness. . . . To be chained in marriage with one of them were to be tied to a dead carcass and cast into a stinking ditch.'"

66 Providence Gazette, March 12, 1766.
67 Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), March 21, 1766.
68 Pennsylvania Evening Post, March 20, 1775.
69 Founding, p. 156.
Later, after the fighting had erupted, Lord Dartmouth was informed through the Pennsylvania Evening Post that "the ministry of Great Britain have heaped injuries on the heads of the Americans, that no one period of history can parallel."\(^7^0\)

The fourth and final element to which the polemicists looked to determine the cause of their difficulties was their monarch, George III. Sometimes the essay statements concerned themselves with the institution of the monarchy, and others dealt personally with the king.

The first two Hanoverian kings of England had not been highly popular with their subjects. They had been rather distasteful individuals, more often concerned about German affairs than British ones. When George III assumed the throne in 1760, many in America had high hopes for the future since the new monarch had been born in England and tutored by Bute.\(^7^1\) Yet less than two months after the passage of the Stamp Act the colonial essayists were beginning to express their reservations. An anonymous writer in the Providence Gazette indicated his concern over recent events and premised his remarks by doubting that monarchy was the best form of

\(^7^0\) "An English-American," February 10, 1766.

\(^7^1\) Stella F. Duff, "The Case Against the King: The Virginia Gazette Indicts George III," William and Mary Quarterly, ser. 3, VI (July 1949), 383.
government. However, criticism of the monarchy was sporadic in the 1760's.

Instead, many of the writers who were displeased with the relationship between the colonies and the mother country offered gentle rebuke in the form of essays describing their conceptions of a properly functioning monarchial system. The point of these statements was, no doubt, to indicate that the actions of George III had not measured up to the polemists' standards. "Philotanos" composed a rather lengthy dissertation on the history of monarchy, tracing its development from ancient times to his own day. He concluded that the exact constitution of the monarchy was not really the pivotal point in its success; rather, he professed that the ruler must guide his people with leniency, moderation, and resolution, and that the subjects themselves must behave with reason for the best possible functioning of the state.

While a few of the essays offered these suggestions to the king, the vast majority of the writings of the 1760's were largely affirmations of loyalty to the king. Even the hot-blooded Samuel Adams, expressing the sentiments of the Massachusetts lower house, fit into this

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72 May 11, 1765.

73 MGBNL, July 30, 1767.
pattern. The Massachusetts Circular Letter of February 11, 1768 declared the Townshend Revenue Act to be unconstitutional and urged the other colonial legislatures to unite in their opposition to it, yet stated that "this House cannot conclude without expressing their firm confidence in the King. . . ." Other essayists provided similar sentiments. "Philo-Patriae" voiced disapproval of the ministry's programs, but maintained that the colonists were still loyal subjects of George III. A polemicist from Virginia maintained that "I have often employed my thoughts on the subject of freedom; but never with more satisfaction to myself, than when I am recommending love, duty and obedience to our Sovereign. . . ." In describing the ministerial policies "Civis" wrote, "It were really difficult for all the art and malice of man, to contrive a set of political regulations which so completely inslave and murther any people as our haughty enemies have contrived for us." Yet he was not willing to give up hope for a brighter future since, in his eyes,

74 Harry A. Cushing (ed.), The Writings of Samuel Adams (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), I, 184-188.
75 New London Gazette, April 15, 1768.
76 "An American," Virginia Gazette (Rind), September 1, 1768.
77 New London Gazette, October 21, 1768.
there was still a virtuous monarch on the throne in England.

In the midst of these rather patronizing, and sometimes hopeful, remarks about the king, another "Philo Patriae" offered a strikingly pointed poetic observation:

That Kings are Kings for that sole Cause
To be the Guardians of the Laws,
That subjects only should obey,
Only submit to sovereign sway,
When sov'reigns make those laws their choice,
To which the people give their Voice.\(^{78}\)

Continuing in a similarly censorious vein, "Junius" offered a theme frequently repeated in the essays, the contention that the king should provide a proper example for his subjects. The author maintained that the people imitate the conduct of their sovereign, and therefore, he was responsible "for the crimes they commit from his example."\(^{79}\)

In the period of relative calm following the repeal of most of the Townshend duties in 1770, the Boston Gazette, nonetheless, continued to direct many scathing comments in the direction of the king. "Aequitas" was offended by such statements, and writing in terms understandable to many Bostonians, urged that as the son of a

\(^{78}\)South Carolina Gazette, September 21, 1769.
\(^{79}\)Virginia Gazette (Rind), June 14, 1770.
merchant obeys his father so should all subjects obey their king. 80

Several weeks before news of the Tea Act arrived in America, loyalty to the king was showing signs of erosion. "An American Genius" addressed the monarch, "Great George! as you would see many and good days, and leave an unshaken throne to your heirs, let your soul bless the inhabitants of America, and your heart and ears ever be open to their cry. . . . O KING! that their dependence is not on thee, but thy dependence is on them--people can make a King, but the King cannot make subjects." 81 This idea that a monarch who ignores his people and their laws and thereby was in danger of losing his kingdom had been advanced several centuries before by Machiavelli and more recently by Jonathan Mayhew. 82 Jefferson, too, in his Summary View echoed this argument and stated further that it was the king's duty to veto

80 MGBNL, August 1, 1771.
81 Providence Gazette, May 15, 1773.
those measures which deprived the colonists of their rights since the monarch was the servant of the people.\textsuperscript{83}

Even after the passage of the Intolerable Acts there flickered a few small flames of friendly sentiment for George III. "Scipio" assured his audience that a majority of the colonists still were devoted to their monarch, but cautioned the king that he must act to insure a proper relationship between the colonies and England.\textsuperscript{84}

The literary activists of the Revolutionary era offer conflicting testimony on the conspiracy theory. First, there is evidence that a considerable number of the American essayists did indeed support such a view. Many wrote of their belief that some plot was underway to rob them of their liberties. Others, fewer in number, feared that the unfolding scheme was designed to force the colonists into an inferior economic position. In other words, the conspiratorially-minded contributors assessed the motivations of the plotters as being both the accumulation of power and the marshalling of economic advantage.

On the surface the essayists' reasons for believing in the existence of a plot seems clear. The series of

\textsuperscript{83}Jensen, \textit{Tracts}, pp. 274-275.

\textsuperscript{84}\textit{Virginia Gazette} (Rind), October 17, 1774.
crises running from the Sugar Act in 1764 down to the Intolerable Acts ten years later offered them perhaps a dozen instances in which to question British intentions. The fact that imperial policy had changed so sharply and that so many threats had been concentrated into such a short period of time made such a conclusion almost inescapable.

Yet the attempt to understand the mental frame of reference of the colonists which allowed them to accept readily this idea (for indeed some spoke of conspiracy as early as 1764) is not absolutely clear. Modern scholars have advanced two basic explanations. First, Bernard Bailyn has argued that the English political experience, especially the alleged despotism under the Stuarts, alerted the people's minds to the possibility of conspiracy and that the colonists were simply expressing this now traditional fear. The second explanation is that given by Gordon Wood who holds that the Americans were responding to conditions in accordance with the prevailing Enlightenment mood. They were seeking plans or patterns in human (British) behavior much as Newton and others had earlier sought laws within the physical

85Pamphlets, I, 87.
As noted previously, support for both views appears in the newspaper essays.

There remains one further important point to be reiterated in regard to the conspiracy theory. Many of the correspondents unequivocally attributed the string of crises to individual or group ignorance or stupidity. Therefore, some observers saw the colonial dilemma in terms of human shortcomings rather than in a formal, organized plot.

The general tenor of the colonial arguments after Parliament's moves against Massachusetts in the spring of 1774 was one of increasing hostility. George III was attacked from almost every possible direction. Strangely, one writer even charged the king with failing to live up to the high standards set by the first two Hanoverians. 87 "Truth" cited the shameful conditions which existed in the colonies as a result of recent enactments and warned that action would be taken. 88 He concluded that "If the K--g wants proof, let him search for the severed head of Charles." By late 1774, many newspaper correspondents agreed with the sentiment of a writer in the Pennsylvania


88 Providence Gazette, October 29, 1774.
Packet who believed that "A good king is a miracle." Others attacked the basis of English monarchy, claiming that the divine right theory was unconstitutional and wicked. Thus the polemical scene was dotted by a number of sharp criticisms of the king well before Thomas Paine put in his commanding appearance.

In summary, it should be remembered that ever since the Glorious Revolution the American colonists had been striving for increased forms of self-government. Evolution in that direction had been aided over the years by the "salutary neglect" of many British officials. Seldom had London tampered with the colonial assemblies except by an occasional reprimand or the disallowance of an offending law. Yet in 1764 an overwhelming national debt and a sudden desire for order in the Empire led the British to change their outlook and methods. What followed was simply another chapter in the struggle between the forces of centralization and those of local authority--clearly one of the major themes of colonial American history.

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89 November 14, 1774, cited by EHD, IX, 816-817.

90 Providence Gazette, April 8, 1775.

During this time of crisis the essayists resorted to a variety of arguments in stating the colonial case. Yet whether the essays dealt with representation, or the regulation of trade, or America's role in the Empire, or the proper conduct of the king, the arguments were clearly concerned with the question of rights. Thus, in spite of a few scattered economic complaints, the introductions to the polemical essays indicate that the writers saw the imperial difficulties of the 1760's and 1770's as stemming from different interpretations of constitutional issues.
CHAPTER III

THE JUSTIFICATION

Having established in the statement the nature of the problem between mother country and colony, the polemical essay then endeavored to justify the author's particular interpretation of events. Certainly the compulsion of the writer to legitimatize his case was an understandable one. The literary marketplaces of colonial America were heavily stocked with polemical offerings and some writers were seeking to make their wares more attractive by resorting to inflammatory language. Yet most of the contributors attempted to sell their ideas through argumentative rather than more combative means. In fact, a few confident writers showed such remarkable trust in their readers' common sense and in their own ability to express themselves logically and convincingly that they wasted little time with the justification. But as a rule the donors called upon a wide variety of authorities in a massive effort to infuse credence and weight into their arguments.

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Occasionally the desire to bolster their stands untracked the authors from the normally travelled polemi­cal paths. Such writers would exchange pieces in the same or competing newspapers for several issues, basically agreeing on the nature of the imperial difficulties. Yet the literary blasts continued to be leveled, no doubt in the hope that one particular variety of vindication would prevail. These essayists were not content simply to have others agree with them, but demanded that they agree for the right reasons.

A study of the newspaper polemics reveals four major sources from which the essayists drew sustenance for their arguments. First, many writers sought to strengthen their positions by pressing ancient authori­ties into literary service. Others took a somewhat dif­ferent approach by emphasizing the issue of rights; in these instances a second group appealed to natural rights while the third relied upon constitutional or prescrip­tive rights. Lastly a number of the contributors marshalled support for their stands by dwelling upon party preferences, particularly by aligning their arguments with the Whig posture.

The Ancient Authorities

The American polemicists found strong backing among the writings of various ancient authorities. Especially
during the 1760's the essayists looked back to republican Rome and, to a lesser extent, to ancient Greece. These were logical centers of support for the colonial writers if one remembers the strong classical orientation of their educations. The practice of citing the ancients was so widespread that one prominent modern historian has labeled it a "habit" among the American writers.¹

This habit, however, seems to have been almost a literary reflex rather than a consistent means of expressing profound ideas. The polemicists were often name-droppers who spotted their writings with superficial references to the ancient past. For example, a writer who signed himself "I.H." held that the passage of the Stamp Act undermined colonial liberty and, therefore, presented a threat to American happiness.² In a weak effort to justify his contention he noted that ancient Greece and Rome were most happy when they enjoyed their greatest liberties. Yet the author did not trouble to provide illustrative examples of the connection between liberty and happiness in classical times. Similarly, "Philander," writing later about the degenerate nature of an England which could impose the Townshend duties on the virtuous American colonies, employed the familiar tactic

¹Bailyn, Pamphlets, I, 21.
²MGBNL, December 12, 1765.
of contrasting righteous Greece against debased Rome. But here again the author was satisfied simply to pin labels on the ancients, providing nothing in the way of specifics. This lack of depth might be explained in part by the realization that many colonists received their exposure to classical literature through any number of the many popular summarizations of the ancient works available in eighteenth-century America. Yet it should be noted in defense of the polemicists that another possible explanation for the existence of this classical veneer was the fact that the newspaper essays were not intended to be probing examinations of scholarly topics. Instead, these were political articles designed for the sole purpose of molding popular thought in response to the immediate crises of the day.

On other occasions, however, some of the polemicists could draw more meaningful lessons from the past. An anonymous writer in the Virginia Gazette attempted to justify his opposition to British imperial policies through reference to the Greek experience. In citing a speech of Thrasimenes the writer introduced a significant

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3 MGBNL, July 30, 1767.
4 Colbourn, Lamp, p. 22.
5 (Purdie and Dixon), April 18, 1766.
argument—that the Greek colonies had been established solely for the benefit of Athens, and that because of this fact the colonists owed no special debt to the mother country. The essay continued noting the Greek orator's contention that when a man moved away from his homeland in order to aid the empire, he was still entitled to his full, native rights. Certainly the writer was stretching the bounds of credulity if he was seriously intimating that any considerable portion of the American colonists had left England for the highly patriotic purpose of strengthening the Empire. But his justification of the transfer of basic rights from mother country to colony undoubtedly reinforced the sentiments of many Americans.

For those writers who preferred to make their points by drawing parallels between contemporary events and ancient times, the late years of the Roman Empire were especially fruitful. Two basic approaches were employed. First, many of the defenders of the popular cause in America found some polemical advantage in recalling the decline and fall of Roman civilization. "Atticus," for example, held that a morally and politically corrupted England would inevitably slip from the ranks of the great powers. To reinforce his contention
"Atticus" reminded his readers of the fate of Rome. Second, those who defended British policies found succor in other aspects of imperial Roman history. "Machiavel," noting that the Americans were turning their backs on legitimate constitutional authority, predicted that the colonists were doomed to sink into anarchy and chaos as had the fifth-century Romans.

Other contributors in seeking to prove the correctness of American actions pointed to a favorable comparison between the classical and American characters. "Philo-Americanus" wrote that "others may extol Roman greatness . . . but the impartial must think American patriots fall [not] behind [them]. . . ." These polemicists willingly assumed classical virtues for their fellow countrymen, but at the same time unflinchingly assigned the less admirable characteristics of the ancients to the English.

In the 1770's there appeared to be a slackening in the number of appeals made to classical sources and an intensification of those made to Biblical authority. The most frequently aired arguments based upon the Bible were found in the New England newspapers and dealt with the

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6Virginia Gazette (Rind), May 4, 1769.
7Pennsylvania Chronicle, August 15, 1768.
8Virginia Gazette (Rind), November 9, 1769.
relationship between a king and his subjects. Several of the essayists cited Job 34:18 which states that "it is meet to say to a king, thou art wicked; and to Princes, ye are ungodly." Others, of course, resisted the waning of faith in the ruler by citing Biblical quotations appropriate to their point of view. One of the most imaginative Biblical interpretations came from a writer who signed himself "Hamden." During the height of the Tea Act controversy he sought to justify American resistance by reminding his readers of the heroic exploits of such great "patriots" as Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Paul, and Jesus.

A related form of justification was that dealing with the joint question of colonial sufferings and religious purity. The basic theme that God's grace did not flow in a society which was morally and politically corrupt was one well known to the Americans. They gained familiarity with it through the sermons of the day and the highly popular writings of such early eighteenth-

9 See "Leonitas," MGBNL, May 21, 1772.
10 "A.B.,” MGBNL, August 13, 1722.
11 South Carolina Gazette, November 29, 1773.
century polemicists as Thomas Gordon.\textsuperscript{12} The contemporary newspaper essays, while tending to link their arguments to the Puritan heritage rather than radical Whiggism, were also deeply concerned on this issue.

"Assecla Majorum" justified his anxiety over the current Townshend unrest in the following terms:

It was the practice of our pious ancestors when they apprehended themselves under the frowns of divine providence carefully to enquire what might be the procuring cause. This they were sensible must be their own misconduct. They therefore searched and tried their ways; and exhorted each other "to turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that was in their hands." Whoever believes the world is under the superintendence of an almighty and all-wise BEING, who "loveth righteousness, and hateth wickedness" and upon repentence is propitious to his offending creatures, must applaud this practice. It is rational as it is proud.\textsuperscript{13}

Similarly, an essay appearing under the pseudonym of "X.Y." in the Pennsylvania Chronicle began with a statement decrying the usurpation of colonial liberties by Parliament. In seeking justification for his anxiety he initially toyed with the possibility that a corrupt monarchy might be responsible for declining conditions in


\textsuperscript{13}MBGNL, June 1, 1769.
both England and America. God was not asleep and his wrath was imminent.\textsuperscript{14}

While references to the Greeks and Romans did not disappear entirely in the 1770's, there was an increased emphasis placed upon Biblical support for the polemical arguments. This interesting trend could be attributed in part to the mounting imperial tension and the accompanying upsurge in newspaper activity. The essayists, caught under the immense pressure of events, sought justification for their stands from a source which they hoped would be insulated from the blasts of political opponents. Literary rivals might quarrel with the words of Cicero, but who would dispute the word of God? The effort, nonetheless, was a vain one. Those who culled carefully enough through the Bible could find an equal number of passages to counter almost any argument.

In relying upon ancient history the American polemicists felt they were girding their arguments with armor-plate. Yet from the modern vantage point the armor was often worn and rusty, creaking under the strain of wide-ranging assertions. The colonial readers, however, were seldom perturbed. They were less inclined to shake their heads in disapproval at the historical shortcomings of the essays than they were to nod in approval of the

\textsuperscript{14} May 11, 1767.
general sentiment which the contributor was expressing.

On somewhat firmer ground the essayists displayed an abiding concern about the history of England. No doubt a portion of this interest was purely polemical in that they used history to forge justifications for their arguments. Yet there was also evident a deeper intellectual concern, one which led them to probe the past for their own origins. Elements of both of these uses of history frequently appeared within the same articles.

The dominant interpretation of English history found in the American newspaper essays was the Whig view. This theory expressed the stand taken by those individuals who were opposed to the power of an unbridled monarchy.15 This concept received further refinement at the hands of correspondents who found the roots of parliamentary government in the reaches of the Saxon experience. Those virtuous and seemingly democratic ancestors were corrupted by the feudalistically-inclined Normans following the invasion.16 The decline of traditional English constitutionalism, starting under William the Conqueror, reached its nadir under the Stuarts in the


16 See "Libertas et Natale Solum," Supplement to South Carolina Gazette, August 20, 1770.
seventeenth century. "A Customer" expressed popular Whig sentiments in equating those monarchs with "sin," "error," "priestcraft," and "oppression." In the essayists' eyes these evils were crowned by the Stuarts' advocacy of divine right over constitutional guarantees. In linking their historical view with more modern times, the Whigs argued that the Glorious Revolution of 1688-1689 had initially brought reforms, but William III and his successors had soon reverted to the errors of the previous monarchs.

Natural Rights

Another area in which the polemicists found justification for their arguments was in the abundant literature of certain Enlightenment thinkers. The rationalistic appeals of these European intellectuals struck a responsive chord within the often less sophisticated minds of the Americans. Justification of politico-religious concerns in terms of natural rights was evident as early as 1717 in the writings of John Wise, a noted

17 *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, February 9, 1775.
18 *Providence Gazette*, April 8, 1775.
Massachusetts minister. Scattered throughout the newspaper essays of the 1760's and 1770's were occasional references to the theories of Montesquieu and Delolme when the writers were attempting to support their contentions about the nature of the British system of government. At other times Grotius and Pufendorf were employed as the authorities on questions of natural and international law. A small number of articles attempted to justify royal policies by drawing upon the thoughts of Hobbes and Filmer. Overall, however, attention to these and other Enlightenment figures was infrequent. The essayists sprinkled references to these men in their offerings, but depended upon other sources as the real driving force behind their justifications.

A notable exception is found in regard to John Locke, the late seventeenth-century English philosopher. His views on natural rights and the limited nature of government, often twisted almost beyond recognition by ax-grinding Americans, became one of the major ideological rallying points of the Revolution. Locke's fame was so widespread that one historian has maintained that the

eighteenth-century colonists were almost as familiar with Locke's treatises as they were with the Bible.21

In weaving the natural rights justification into the fabric of their essays, few of the writers spent much time in pursuing the question of the origin of government. The majority was content to make a quick reference to Hobbes or Locke on the state of nature theory and then move on to more substantive issues. Perhaps they reasoned that it was fruitless to engage in the deadening practice of repeating a theory which was so popularly known.

A few essayists, however, felt compelled to sketch out in more detail the ideological background which others were dismissing in several bold strokes of their pens. "Poplicola" set the stage for his defense by summarizing his conception of the origin of government in the following terms:

Men in a state of nature were equal. Their actions were subject to no limitations but those which arose from the laws of God. But through want of a common judge finally to determine their respective rights, and power sufficient to vindicate them, injuries must often have remained unredressed. . . .22

This same author had, in an earlier piece, gone to great lengths to discuss the formation of the social compact,

22 New York Gazetteeer (Rivington), December 2, 1773.
the agreement which united men "in civil society, a common interest of the whole. . . ."\textsuperscript{23}

Discussion of a state of nature and the perils of unbridled liberty, while perhaps seeming fanciful to the twentieth-century mind, were not necessarily so to the eighteenth-century newspaper readers. An essay in the \textit{Boston Gazette}, which was voicing opposition to the Stamp Act, sought reinforcement in Lockean thought relative to the origin of government. The author, attempting to build a case for the virtue of New Englanders, compared the tribulations of the Pilgrims to those encountered by early man in the state of nature.\textsuperscript{24}

Undoubtedly one of the most effective methods of justifying polemical stands was by employing the natural rights terminology. Its polemical value lay in the splendidly amorphous quality of such arguments. As with so many topics, the essayists were almost uniformly reluctant to define their terms. Apparently the writers understood what they meant by natural rights and assumed that their readers shared this same knowledge. Only on rare occasions did an essay offer anything in the way of a broad definition for the term. "A Landlord," appearing

\textsuperscript{23}\textit{New York Gazetteer} (Rivington), November 18, 1773.
\textsuperscript{24}March 7, 1766.
in the Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter, provided what was perhaps the best example, writing that "there are natural Rights . . . [which] belong to individuals as men; these derive their natural rights from the power from which they derive being, the God of Nature."25

The importance of this theory in justifying the polemical arguments of the Revolutionary era is evident from the earliest literary offensives. James Otis, a firm opponent of royal power in Massachusetts, penned a noteworthy essay entitled "The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved" which first appeared in the Boston Gazette26 and later in pamphlet form. He maintained that Parliament had "supreme, sacred, and uncontrollable" power in England and in all her possessions, yet that body could not violate the natural rights of British subjects. Otis, then, employed the nebulous concept of natural rights to cloud over the seeming contradiction of his contention that governments could be supreme and limited at the same time.

Although there was much debate among the essayists as to which rights were guaranteed by nature (or by God),

25 December 4, 1772.
26 July 23, 1764.
those advanced by Locke—life, liberty, and property—were frequently examined in the newspaper polemics.

The first of these alleged rights, the protection of life, was such an obvious one that it seldom drew the isolated attention of the writers. Yet one contributor who was seeking to justify colonial opposition to the Sugar Act, a measure which he felt threatened the very existence of the New Englanders, held that the government was "bound by the laws of God and Nature" to protect the lives of the Americans even though they were removed by several thousand miles from England.²⁷ This author, as several previously mentioned ones, believed that no diminution on rights occurred because the colonists were physically separated from the mother country.

The natural right of liberty was also proclaimed by the American writers. Again, few of the essayists bothered to provide a detailed description of their conception of this prerogative. However, an unsigned essay from a New England paper, while not truly defining liberty, did describe the conditions under which it prospered. Lamenting what he interpreted to be a shrinkage of the colonists' natural freedoms, the essayist stated that "liberty is the felicity of a nation, and prevails where a prince rules with clemency, and is

²⁷"A New-England Man," Providence Gazette, August 18, 1764.
truly attached to the interests and happiness of his subjects." In his view such a condition belonged quite properly to all people.

Within the realm of these justifications there existed, at least on the surface, a considerable problem for the essayists in reaching a common agreement on what was meant by liberty. This difficulty stemmed from the understandable confusion of the broad philosophical concept of liberty and the more complex and specific exposition of liberties. A piece submitted by "Honestus" illustrates this problem. On the one hand he writes that "True liberty is the uncontrolled exercise of every privilege which we derive from the laws of our Country"—clearly an affirmation of the broad natural right of liberty. Yet at the same time he firmly reminded his readers that this did not mean that man should slavishly follow his instincts. In this latter assertion he was expressing the concept of "responsible liberty," an idea present in the American tradition from earliest Puritan times. The settlers of the Bay colony had believed people would properly exercise liberty by carrying out good, just, and honest activities. In other words, the Puritans felt they were at liberty to do God's

28 MGBNL, December 12, 1765.
29 New London Gazette, January 24, 1772.
will (as interpreted by the civil authorities whose election to a position of responsibility was sanctioned by God).  

In the same general vein, "Chronus," who was reviewing the tribulations of non-importation, judged that a man who wantonly refused to submit to regulation was not practicing liberty, but licentiousness. Similarly, a "liberty of acting without . . . restraint," warned another writer, "would render society a rope of sand." The conservative tenor of these arguments belies the judgement of those who have viewed the newspaper essays as unmitigated hotbeds of liberalism. The essayists were not a group of social revolutionaries. Yet this strain is not really so surprising. Both the philosophical background and the practical experience of many of the contributors demanded this reaction. Many had read of the dangers of unchecked liberty in the Lockean state of nature; others, perhaps more importantly, recalled the need for restraint upon individual actions from their own experiences in the remoteness of

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31 MGBNL, November 28, 1771.

the American frontier. Further, such sentiments underscore the fact that the essayists frequently displayed a negative view of human nature. This was rooted in part in a religious tradition of Calvinism which had preached the depravity and corruptibility of man and was supplemented by a political climate of opinion which held that man was a power-hungry being, feasting when possible upon liberty.

One of the abiding tendencies of those writers justifying their contentions in terms of natural rights was that of linking one polemical concept to another. In an effort to strengthen his opposition to the Townshend program, "A Citizen" cautioned that the natural rights of liberty and property were being undermined. Justifying the same type of argument was another writer who stated that "Liberty and property are not only join'd in common discourse, but are in their own natures so clearly ally'd that we cannot be said to possess the one without ... the other."

Additional evidence of this

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34 Robbins, Commonwealth.


36 Boston Gazette, February 22, 1768.
aggregate approach to the natural rights defense is found in the "Monitor" essays in the Virginia Gazette. Arthur Lee maintained that liberty and happiness were so closely bound together that they were one and the same.37

A few of the literary donors carried this form of justification to its logical extreme. "A Son of Liberty," for example, was content to explain his opposition to the Stamp Act program in the blanket indictment that the measure violated natural rights.38

To the reader of today the natural rights justifications appear to accomplish somewhat less than their authors intended. Instead of adding meat to the arguments, they remain skeletal. The primary problem appears to be a lack of depth, stemming perhaps from one of two sources. First, it has been argued by some that the essayists were unable to transmit detailed support for their contentions in terms of natural rights simply because they did not grasp the philosophical points involved. "Chronus" speculated that his fellow essayists' inexact defenses were rooted in ignorance and that their sole aim was to stir up trouble.39 The other possibility,

37(Rind), March 3, 1768.
38Providence Gazette, March 12, 1766.
39MGBNL, January 2, 1772.
and perhaps the most tenable one, is that there existed throughout most of the colonies a general concern and understanding about these rights. This is not to say that all of the colonists comprehended the complexities of the natural rights philosophy; that would truly be an extravagant claim. Yet it is apparent that there existed a widely held frame of reference regarding natural rights, that many Americans grasped the basics of the theory and, therefore, the essayists felt no compulsion to belabor a subject that was common knowledge.

The history of western political thought, dating back to the time of the ancient Greeks, was filled with appeals to natural rights as philosophical means of resisting tyranny. By "recurring to first principles" the Americans were attempting to broaden their justifications, to lend an air of universality to their cause and link it with the struggles of men in different ages and different parts of the globe.

Constitutional or Prescriptive Rights

Most of the polemicists recognized the existence of a dichotomous arrangement of rights. One branch

\[40\text{There was little discussion of natural rights in the Southern colonies before 1774. See Benjamin F. Wright, American Interpretations of Natural Law: A Study in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), pp. 75-76.}

\[41\text{Rossiter, Seedtime, pp. 352-354.}\]
(previously discussed) included natural rights, those provided by God or nature to all men as their birthright. The other was comprised of a more exclusive group of rights which were guaranteed to British citizens through their participation in British society. In modern parlance these might be referred to as civil, prescriptive, or derivative rights, although such terms were not employed by the colonial newspaper essayists. Instead, they most frequently labeled this second branch as being simply their constitutional rights.

The familiar theory of the derivation of these rights was recited by "Philelutheros." He reminded his readers that the chaos of the state of nature had forced men into concluding a social compact among themselves. The members of the newly created society surrendered control over their natural rights and bestowed stewardship of those liberties upon their chosen rulers. In these strongly Lockean terms "Philelutheros" continued by noting that just governments would acknowledge restraints upon their own actions, thus guaranteeing the citizens certain rights within society. These constitutional rights were necessary simply because natural rights did not offer the individual enough protection from potential arbitrary treatment by the government.42

42 New London Gazette, November 18, 1768.
The colonial polemicists were profoundly concerned about the maintenance of these liberties. "Aristides," for example, strongly urged his readers to acquaint themselves with all the rights they possessed under the British constitution, arguing that only those who truly understood and respected their rights would be able to preserve them.43 Further, this concern was not limited to the educated lawyers and merchants of America, but encompassed also the lower elements of society.44 Even in the Southern colonies, where anxiety over the seemingly abstract question of natural rights was slow to develop, a writer in the South Carolina Gazette urged resistance to the impending Stamp Act because, in his view, the surrender of one's constitutional rights was not only unwise but treasonous.45

Much controversy existed among the correspondents as to which rights properly belonged to them as British citizens. In fact, many of the essays attest to the belief that the line between natural and civil rights was often blurred in the American mind. Nonetheless, there was a general acceptance of a number of points as being legitimate British freedoms, including the right

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43Providence Gazette, October 31, 1772.
44Boston Gazette, January 20, 1766.
45August 26, 1765.
of a representative voice in governmental decisions, the right for a free press to exist, the right to petition the government for redress of grievances, the right to a trial by a jury, and the guarantee that the government would not maintain a standing army in peacetime.

Certainly one of the most commonly heard justifications for American opposition to British programs was that based upon the constitutional principle that citizens rightfully had a voice in the legislative process. This belief was perhaps best phrased by the essayist who wrote simply that "no law is binding on me unless done by me or by commission from me. . . ."46 Beginning during the Stamp Act controversy in 1765, writers such as "F.B." complained about the usurpation of American rights. He sought to vindicate colonial concern by noting that the Americans had not been pioneers in demanding representative consent for taxation; that trail had been blazed by Englishmen of earlier generations including such prominent figures as Selden, Locke, and Sidney.47 In so doing "F.B." was employing a two-pronged justification. He began by asserting in his statement that his countrymen should be aroused against an unconstitutional act of

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47 Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), March 21, 1766.
Parliament. His fear was justified first by citing the constitutional principle which was being violated, then further strengthened by appealing to established authorities. The aggregate approach to supporting one's arguments was as popular in dealing with civil rights as it was with natural rights.

The newspaper essays assumed further that freedom of the press was another fundamental liberty guaranteed by the British constitution. It is easy to understand that the desire for a freely operating press would weigh heavily upon the minds of the essayists. While discussion of the right of a representative voice in matters of taxation was largely confined to the 1760's, the insistence upon an independent press was maintained throughout the entire period of imperial ferment.

In order to achieve a semblance of balance on this score it should be noted that the polemicists were not with a single voice demanding complete license for the press. A number of the writers issued periodic calls for restraint in the exercise of that liberty. Typical of this sentiment was the offering of "Z" in the Providence Gazette. He urged that some caution be employed in the launching of literary offensives since, in his mind,
irresponsible attacks tended only to expose weaknesses in the American position. 48

The vast majority of those dealing with the question of the press wielded this right as a club against alleged British wrongdoings. "Z.Z." while expressing mild disapproval at the extreme language employed by some irresponsible writers, attacked the Stamp Act as a violation of English rights since the proposed tax upon newspapers tended to abridge freedom of the press. 49 Similarly, "Philanthropos," at the time of the repeal of that same measure, justified his happiness with the British officials by noting that the recent Parliamentary retreat had served to preserve the basic freedom of an unrestrained press. 50

One of the most famous clashes over newspaper rights occurred in Boston in 1768. Though not mentioned by name, Governor Francis Bernard was addressed as a "Man totally abandoned to Wickedness" and in other similarly uncomplimentary terms in an essay composed by Dr. Joseph Warren. 51 The council of the colony responded

48 October 27, 1764.
49 Providence Gazette, December 3, 1768.
50 Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), August 22, 1766.
immediately by sternly reprimanding the paper for the alleged libel and the Governor himself favored prosecuting publishers Benjamin Edes and John Gill. While many of the Boston patriots were concerned by the abusive language contained in the essay, the consensus supported Warren and condemned the chief executive under the shield of freedom of the press.52

A somewhat similar event which has drawn less attention occurred later in South Carolina. There in the fall of 1773 interim printer Thomas Powell published a biting denunciation of the actions of the majority of the councillors in killing a recent legislative enactment. Powell refused to apologize for his action and was shortly thereafter committed to jail. The newspaper offensive against this unfortunate series of events was sustained by charges of violation of freedom of the press.53

Other polemicists argued that their compatriots were justified in their growing anxiety over imperial relations because of the tendency of the British government to turn a deaf ear to American grievances. This inattentiveness on the part of the king and Parliament

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52 *Boston Gazette*, March 7, 1768.

53 *South Carolina Gazette*, September 13, 1773.
led a number of writers to affirm that their right of petitioning for redress of grievances was being abridged.\(^4\) A correspondent in the *South Carolina Gazette* performed some interesting literary acrobatics revolving around this issue. In his statement he maintained that the most pressing political problem of the day was corruption among the ministry in England; this was a theme commonly seen in all of the colonial polemics. Yet he departed from the mainstream in his attempt to justify his concern about corruption in constitutional terms, arguing that the governmental leaders were so enmeshed in their worldly concerns that they did not trouble to hear colonial complaints. In this way the American rights were being ignored.\(^5\)

In exploring other areas of prescriptive rights justification a few writers cited the guarantee of freedom of speech. For example, from the relative calm of the period immediately following the repeal of the Stamp Act, a contributor to the *Boston Gazette* attempted to defend the recent outbursts of fellow patriots on the


\(^5\)August 26, 1765.
basis of the right of free speech, a liberty which "keeps
the constitution in health and vigour. . . ." 56

In other instances the literary donors sanctioned
their unwillingness to comply with imperial programs
because of the alleged blows being struck at the right of
trial by jury. Such a justification was used almost ex-
clusively in those essays dealing with the growing menace
of the vice-admiralty courts. The decision of the Privy
Council in the 1690's to allow these courts to hear cases
involving violations of the various acts of trade had
first alarmed the colonists. American concern leaped
from the theoretical to the actual in 1764 when the
Revenue Act of that year established a new vice-admiralty
court at Halifax with jurisdiction over all the colonies.
Further, this measure required that a ship owner accused
of violating the navigation laws must provide funds to
cover the court costs and assume the burden of proving
himself innocent. "W.B.," in a lengthy essay, traced
the evolution of these policies and justified his concern
over the loss of fundamental liberty, namely trial by
jury. 57

A further violation of English rights was noted by
those who viewed the presence of British soldiers in

56March 9, 1767.
57Providence Gazette, April 24, 1773.
peacetime America as being just cause for concern. Some­
time during the course of the French and Indian War it
was decided by British officials that troops should
remain in North America after the conflict had been con­
cluded. Such a decision, it was hoped, would provide
solutions for two potential problems. First, the British
forces would serve as a deterrent against any advances
contemplated by the French, Spanish, or Indians. And
further, George III, who always kept one eye on the
domestic political scene, would have increased opportuni­
ties to win supporters by employing patronage within the
expanded army.

In the spring of 1765 a Quartering Act went into
effect in the colonies. This law required that the
soldiers be provided with living quarters in barracks and
inns and, if such accommodations were not available, in
uninhabited barns and houses. Further, the act stated
that the colonial legislatures must provide a variety of
necessities for those troops not living in inns. Colonial reaction to the measure was sharp. Clearly much
of the concern stemmed from the financial burdens imposed
on the colonial governments. Major resistance was mounted
in New York and lesser efforts in New Jersey and South
Carolina. Yet most of the polemical essayists justified

58EHD, IX, 656-658.
their opposition to the program, not in terms of economic hardship, but rather in the guise of violated constitutional rights. "A Pumpkin" stated the case as succinctly as any, arguing that the maintenance of a standing army within the king's domain during time of peace was both unwarranted and unconstitutional.59

A rather large number of the essays sought to bolster their justifications by citing the British constitution at large, rather than any particular right contained therein. Almost universally the newspaper writers heaped praise upon this foundation of the British government. "Chronus" claimed that the constitution, while being an imperfect document since it was composed by imperfect men, was still a better guideline for society than those devised by any other people at any time in history.60

This aggregate tactic was well illustrated by an unsigned essay appearing in the Providence Gazette. The writer first indicated that his purpose in composing the piece was his desire to temper the joy of his countrymen who were rejoicing upon the repeal of the Stamp Act. He argued that his concern was warranted because of the

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59 Providence Gazette, March 12, 1766.
60 MGBNL, January 23, 1772.
motivations which led to the change of policy in England. He expressed deep anxiety over the alleged fact that the law was rescinded because of financial and commercial pressures, not because Parliament wished to mend the damage it had done to the constitution.\(^{61}\)

Certainly the rationale behind employing civil rights justifications was found in their seeming immediacy and impact upon the newspaper readers. This position should not be taken to mean that the natural rights arguments were superfluous. While few Americans really feared for their lives before the mid-1770's, they were disturbed about the threats to their liberties and property. Yet when these last two topics were scrutinized by the polemicists in terms of natural rights it was often done in a highly theoretical and lofty manner. The constitutional rights defenses, on the other hand, appeared to be based on somewhat more solid ground—upon the British constitution. In this body of law and precedent which had been evolving in England since medieval times the colonial writers felt they were working with something physical and vigorous.

The evidence, however, seems to indicate a general weakness within this belief of the essayists. If the British constitution was truly a viable foundation of

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\(^{61}\)August 30, 1766.
the American political consciousness, few of the contributors indicated an awareness of its origins and development. In discussing the limits of taxation the essayists were reluctant to cite the debt owed to the Magna Charta and those dwelling upon the right of protection from a standing army were similarly forgetful of the Petition of Right. Only in such prominent exceptions as John Adams' "Novanglus" essays, John Dickinson's "Letters," and a handful of others were the readers treated to a careful probing of constitutional development.

The Whig Tradition

Party labels provided another arsenal for the polemical assaults. In seeking to align his cause with either Whig or Tory sentiments the essayist hoped to win the readers' approval by appealing to their political prejudice.

Following in the familiar pattern established in other portions of the essays, many correspondents were confused by terminology. For instance, "A Reasonable Whiggess" lamented that while "I am contending for what I think is true liberty, I am told that I am a Tory, and perhaps the next day, expressing the same sentiments, that I am an outrageous whig." Perhaps a more intriguing

62 Pennsylvania Evening Post, November 16, 1775.
example of the perplexity generated by political labels is seen in the remarks of that erratic patriot James Otis. During the acrimonious controversy surrounding the establishment of the board of customs commissioners, Otis found himself in the uncomfortable position of being the recipient of the Boston mob's rancor. While British sympathizers might have detected an element of poetic justice in this turn of events, Otis himself was dismayed. In the fall of 1767 he had acted as the moderator of a public meeting and, much to the astonishment of the popular element, had warned his fellow Bostonians against further antagonizing the British. Later, a few weeks after the arrival of the customs commissioners, Otis further lowered his popular appeal by defending the government's right to appoint these officials and by declaring that resistance to the program would be unwise. The Boston press, to which Otis had earlier made noteworthy polemical contributions, now showered abuse upon him.  

He answered his critics in seemingly paradoxical terms, claiming that "I am, and ever have been, . . . a Tory. On the other hand, if to stand like Men for the Rights of Men be a distinguishing characteristic of the Whigs, [then] I hope I am . . . a Whig."  

63See especially Boston Evening Post, November 30, 1767.  

64MGBNL, November 26, 1767.
other writers who engaged in such arguments probably would not have regarded themselves as fence-straddlers. Instead they were giving simple recognition to the fact of their entrapment in a confining position, that of trying to defend both American liberty and loyalty to Britain. Apparently to many colonial minds of the 1760's and early 1770's both Whigs and Tories supported such obvious virtues.

"An Old Whig" was one of the few writers who troubled to provide a listing of what he regarded as being the basic tenets of his party. A whig, in this donor's mind, should desire to preserve the British constitution, seek to prevent too much power from gathering in the hands of the Crown, and stoutly resist all forms of tyranny and popery. Yet even this simple definition was far from satisfactory to some readers. A contributor to the Massachusetts Gazette and Boston Post-Boy stated that "the terms Whig and Tory have been adopted according to the arbitrary use of them in this province, but they rather ought to be reversed; an American Tory is a supporter of our excellent constitution and an American Whig is a subverter of it."  

65 New London Gazette, October 23, 1772.  
66 April 3, 1775.
A closely related source upon which the essayists depended was found in the philosophy expressed by two early eighteenth-century English Whigs, John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon. These intellectual middlemen had been responsible for transferring many seventeenth-century political concepts to the readers of their own generation. Their collaboration began in 1719 with the publication of the first of fifty-three weekly editions of the Independent Whig, a paper which was noted for its outspoken anti-Catholicism and anti-clericalism. These efforts represented the residual feeling still smoldering in England from the Glorious Revolution of 1688-1689. Later Trenchard and Gordon attacked objectionable features of the British political system through Cato's Letters, a series of essays which appeared first in the London Journal and eventually in book form.

It appears that the American colonists had ample opportunity to expose themselves to these writings since editions of both series were commonly found in the college and subscription libraries of that day. Further, many of the subscription lists which remain in existence today suggest that the "reading of Trenchard and Gordon matched and perhaps exceeded that of the political works of John Locke."67

67 Jacobson, English Libertarian, p. lv.
The attempts to employ Trenchard and Gordon's thoughts in strengthening colonial newspaper arguments appeared in two basic forms. First, the polemicists would incorporate quotations directly from the works of the two men into their essays, or the American writers would allude to some specific ideas contained within a particular piece by Trenchard or Gordon. "Timoleon," for example, stated his opposition to the recently imposed Townshend duties and attempted to justify this concern by appealing to Whig principles and constitutional rights. However, this essayist felt his own abilities of literary expression were lacking and so he urged his readers to note the thoughts of Gordon. A lengthy quotation from Cato's Letters followed, arguing that the time-honored Whig tradition of limited government was necessary to allow British citizens to enjoy their right of commercial freedom. 68

The other method was simply to reprint, in toto, the essays of Trenchard and Gordon. Sometimes these pieces would be submitted by the readers and on other occasions by the printers. This second form represented a unique variety of polemical expression. Generally the donors included no statement of grievance or any final appeal to the readership. Instead, they believed that

68 New London Gazette, December 18, 1767.
the essays of the Independent Whig and Cato's Letters were so timely that the public would immediately be able to apply the basic principles and their ramifications to the events of their own day. In short, these contributors were supplying only a justification; the reader provided the issue and the course of action through his imagination—with the helpful guidance of Trenchard and Gordon. 69

The popularity of these writings among the colonists is explained by the remarkable degree to which the radical Whig arguments met the polemical needs of the Americans. The defense of constitutional rights and the plea for a reasoned colonial policy seemed to speak as directly to the colonists of the Revolutionary era as they had to Englishmen in earlier years.

The justifications offered in support of the polemical statements were notable in four areas. First, the essayists displayed an impressive amount of imagination. This can be seen in part through the wide variety of authorities they cited in their defenses. Further, this creative turn of mind was found in those instances when the same justification was used to support two opposing sides of a question. Second, the writers

gave evidence of an amusing, but totally human, dramatic egoism. This was especially discernible when they asserted that they stood shoulder to shoulder with Locke or Cicero or Jesus on the issues of vital importance to mankind. Third, the contributors quite frequently offered the public justifications which were weakly constructed; their overriding tendency was to assume that a name or label would carry more weight than a probing study of a particular topic. Perhaps, indeed, there was method in their weakness. Fourth, the essayists made clear once again that their real concerns were deeply rooted in matters related to politics and the constitution.
CHAPTER IV

THE APPEAL

After having pointed out an important imperial difficulty and rationalized his stand on that issue, the American polemicist concluded his essay by issuing an appeal to his readers. This third segment of the literary offensive served a number of functions. First, it often summarized the foregoing portions, making certain that the reader kept the problem and the writer's arguments well in mind. Second, the essayist tried to put his readers in a submissive mood by delivering an admonition; he rebuked them for their lack of response and showed how they were contributing to their own downfall. Finally, and most importantly, the author delivered his call to action in which he put forth his formula for stemming the unfavorable drift of imperial affairs.

These closing appeals fell into three general categories. Some were rather cautious pleas which advocated limited and seemingly legal responses to the current crises. Others made more urgent calls for action
and overtly recognized the possibility that illegal steps might be necessary. Lastly, some essayists sounded the ultimate appeal—that for full independence from Britain.

The Cautious Appeal

Especially during the 1760's the concluding portions of the essays offered what by comparison with later appeals was a gentle corrective to the existing imperial dilemma. Certainly among the first such alarms to be heard were those regarding the supposed imperfections of the British mercantile system. During the Sugar Act unrest of 1764 a writer in the Providence Gazette used his statement to caution against British tyranny and American lethargy. He warned that unthinking compliance with the trade restrictions served only to give added weight to the forces of economic oppression. The polemicist concluded that the only effective and just way of combating this system would be through the development of America's ability to produce her own necessities.¹ This appeal, then, contained two themes which were frequently aired in the period from 1764 to 1768. First, the conviction that legal or just means must be employed in voicing colonial opposition, and

¹ October 6, 1764.
second, that home manufacturing was an eminently effective way of doing so.

The newspapers of the mid-1760's were filled with detailed suggestions as to how the colonists might escape their steadily increasing economic envelopment. Some of the essays contained practical advice, explaining how wine, tea and other commonly imported items might be produced profitably in America.²

Other writers took a somewhat different tack in approaching the issue of home manufacturing. An essay in the Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter praised the senior class at Harvard which had agreed to forego the pleasure of receiving their degrees while attired in imported finery, and instead vowed to wear only American-made clothing.³ This unsigned essayist, and others like him, had apparently concluded that the best way of pressuring their readers into the desired course of action was to hold up a shining example of American virtue. Then, hopefully, an embarrassed public would be shamed into following that example.

Importantly, few of these early admonitions could accurately be thought to house radical pleas. For


³January 7, 1768.
example, "A Friend to this Colony" believed with many of his fellow colonists that the existing commercial regulations would be fatal to the American economic prosperity. Yet he sternly reminded the readers that ample time remained in which to restore America to full economic health. He attempted to blunt the dire warnings of the alarmists by noting that America, unlike insular England, need not base her entire economy on trade. Thus by this conservative, circular route the author came to urge his countrymen to throw their full energies into producing their own necessities.4

A logical supplement to the home manufacturing movement was the effort of some Americans to boycott British goods. During the crisis of 1765, the merchants in the seaboard towns of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston agreed not to handle British goods until their grievances stemming from the Sugar, Currency and Stamp acts were redressed. Later, the Townshend duties elicited a similar, and even wider-ranging, response. The Virginia assembly felt so strongly on the issue that they met in an unauthorized session, after having been dismissed by the governor, to pass a non-importation agreement. Yet this second major boycott effort was not a great success. By the time most of the port cities

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4 Providence Gazette, November 14, 1767.
had complied, Parliament softened the Townshend duties to the point of near repeal. The ministry had moved in this conciliatory direction, not because of the suffering of their merchants, but because of Lord North's contention that it was unwise to tax their own goods which were sold abroad.⁵

Throughout these two introductory adventures in non-importation the newspaper essayists played an enthusiastic role. In Philadelphia, where the merchants were not inclined toward haste in adopting these policies, "A Tradesman" employed the carping tone noted earlier and scolded the reluctant businessmen for not following the lead of New York.⁶ Almost two years later residents of the same city were still critical of their merchants' behavior. "Talionis" imagined that non-cooperating businessmen were crying, "0 give us liberty, but let it be purchased at other people's expense. . . ."⁷ A writer in a New England paper also employed the tongue-in-cheek means of literary pressure, this time in attacking the continued use of tea. He drew a parallel between the temptress Eve and her apple and those women of his own day who offered tea to their guests, concluding that

⁵Hansard, XVI, 853-855.
⁶Postscript to Pennsylvania Chronicle, October 10, 1768.
⁷Pennsylvania Chronicle, August 6, 1770.
"Death is the consequence of taking the fruit of this tree." \(^8\)

Another writer clearly brought together the related issues of home manufacturing and non-importation by displaying her own family's virtue before the readers. "Sarah Plain Heart" wrote that:

There has been much talk of late about having the importation of foreign superfluities, and setting up manufacturing of our own. This has been very pleasing to me, and I have been . . . employing my daughters in spinning, knitting, etc. And I have also . . . brought them to be content without the nicknacks and fine things which they used to be so fond of. \(^9\)

She concluded her letter by admonishing the readers to reform their ways or soon become a "ruined people."

Other essays displayed some tinges of reluctance. "Cato" gave his literary support to the non-importation effort, noting in the end that it was the only recourse the colonies had since their petitions and other appeals had fallen on deaf ears in London. \(^10\)

Even more cautious was the statement of a writer in the South Carolina Gazette. He admonished his readers to employ extreme caution in effecting their non-importation program, arguing that rash action could only deepen the existing

\(^8\) Name of contributor is obscured, New London Gazette, June 9, 1769.


\(^10\) Pennsylvania Chronicle, June 4, 1770.
problems. His essay was terminated by an appeal supporting reasonable non-importation, but expressing his disgust with the excessive behavior of some overzealous patriots. For example, he denounced those who demanded that luxurious British-made garments be destroyed and argued instead that ladies should be allowed to wear out their silk gowns—as long as they did not then buy new ones. The reluctance of the South Carolinians was understandable since their economy was so heavily dependent upon exports.

The repeal of the Townshend duties, except for the tax on tea, made the early 1770's relatively quiet on the non-importation question. Scattered efforts were made by the more ardent patriots to boycott tea, but public response was not encouraging. "Medicus," in fact, attacked those essayists who were warning against the evils of tea drinking. Arguing first from economic grounds, he maintained that tea was cheaper than milk and thus almost a necessity for large families. Further, he pointed out, through some delightful logic, that money not spent on tea would be spent on less wholesome entertainment. He concluded his defense by noting the comparative virtue of the herb, writing, "Upon the whole it is my opinion

that for a single person whose life has been lost by tea, thousands have been slain by RUM."

Passing reference should be made to one other cautious appeal found in the essays. A few writers during the tempestuous year of 1765 toyed with the idea of American representation in Parliament. Some currency had been given to this proposal a year earlier through the efforts of James Otis, particularly in "The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved." The most searching advocacy of this step came from "A.B." who attempted to defend his proposition against previously voiced criticism. He realized that others had objected to actual American representation because of the wide gulf in time and space between the proposed delegates and their constituents. "A.B." suggested that this drawback "may be obviated by each colony . . . having a committee in London, of Gentlemen well versed in commercial and plantation affairs, to have the sole charge of their concerns; and to whom the representatives may have immediate recourse on any emergency." This and other similar appeals stirred little favorable reaction among the colonial essayists. Clearly the polemicists of the

12 New London Gazette, March 13, 1772.
13 MGBNL, February 7, 1765.
1760's placed their faith in economic pressure, rather than political reorganization, as the means of righting imperial wrongs.

The Urgent Appeals

The more urgent variety of polemical conclusion differed from the cautious ones in several respects. Most significantly, such appeals recognized openly the possibility of militant resistance; they dealt with illegal acts already committed or with those contemplated for the future. On the other hand, the more tepid appeals mentioned previously never directly faced the issue of violence or other extralegal responses. Yet of equal importance in understanding the urgent appeals is that they were still essentially conservative pleas, at least to the extent that they did not flatly encourage rebellion. They spoke of the fear of civil war and of the necessity for military preparedness, but they almost never urged their readers to take up arms against their oppressors or to declare their independence. Thus the urgent appeals quickened the public consciousness, preparing it for the bolder moves which lay ahead.

In this vein "Philippus Militiades" composed a lengthy essay detailing the threats contained within the Townshend program. His offering concluded by noting that colonial military preparedness had declined in recent
years and that thoughtful patriots would want to remedy this situation.\textsuperscript{14} It appears that this writer was fearful of the future and could anticipate violence, yet he withheld from issuing a direct call for illegal action. Somewhat later "Carduous Benadictus," in addressing the same imperial problem, drew his essay to a close by remarking that those Americans who refused to support the non-importation movement deserved to be treated as the traitors they were. Yet the impact of this appeal was to a large extent blunted when he warned his readers not to allow their actions to go too far.\textsuperscript{15}

This same kind of vigilant, but cautious, "preparedness" position appeared in the \textit{Virginia Gazette} where a donor first decried the nature of recent British programs. In his final appeal, however, the essayist told of the necessity of defense preparations but dropped down an octave in his last line: "Let us, in time, provide for our safety."\textsuperscript{16} Similarly, "Atticus," while falling short of calling for rebellion, did urge with an element of threat that American patriots and thoughtful British officials bring about a change in

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Boston Post-Boy}, September 14, 1767.

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{MGBNL}, August 25, 1768.

\textsuperscript{16}"A Lover of My Country" (Rind), January 12, 1769.
current policies lest "a civil war [occur] in America. . . ." Contemplation of harsh treatment of traitors and military action was, nevertheless, a long step from actually urging such steps.

Even into the 1770's many of the essays continued to put forth these tempered calls to the newspaper readers. Such appeals were notable because they gave increasing recognition to the possibility of extralegal activity. "B.D." composed a wide-ranging indictment of British policy in America and noted that other essayists appeared to be drifting toward support of violent reaction. But this writer, too, drew his piece to a close by remarking equivocally that "we need not, on the present occasion, shed our blood to secure our rights, though if necessary, let us not spare it. . . ."

In short, the American essayists were almost excruciatingly slow to urge violent opposition to the ill-directed British policies. They had, however, envisioned this possibility as far back as the mid-1760's, but had held to the hope that London would correct her erring ways. That hope dimmed in 1775, and it was only then that any considerable segment of the polemical press came to support militant resistance. The obvious aim of

17 *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), May 4, 1769.

18 *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), August 4, 1774.
the urgent appeals had been to prepare the colonists for the eventuality of violence. On this score the essayists appear to have been successful; an active minority of the public had been primed and was ready for action.

The Ultimate Appeal

The third variety of closing newspaper plea was that pertaining to independence, a topic which represented the final and ultimate appeal. As far back as the early 1760's the readers had found entreaties being made on behalf of independence. Yet it appears that these initial pleas centered upon a limited interpretation of that concept. Such essays reflected a longing for the laxity of administrative control which existed in the North American colonies before the French and Indian War, rather than a genuine desire for severing all connections with the mother country. It was not, however, until the period of soul-searching following the Stamp Act crisis that the essayists began in earnest to probe this question.

A noteworthy piece appearing in the Virginia Gazette in 1767 began by chronicling the widening rift brought by the Stamp Act and the more recent Townshend program. The author attributed American concern to constitutional fears, and finally drew his essay to a close by offering his readers a number of alternatives.
One of these was independence. Yet all thoughtful colonists, the writer maintained, would certainly reject the dangerous notion of a break with England. Early the next year, after Dickinson's Farmer's Letters had begun to rally American opposition, a number of newspapers carried, in full or in part, the contents of a pamphlet entitled "The Nature and Extent of Parliamentary Power Considered." Here John Hicks, appearing in the guise of "A Citizen," challenged Dickinson's acknowledgement of Parliamentary supremacy. He urged his readers to strive for absolute independence from Parliament, yet still retain their loyalty to the monarch. Hicks, then, in spite of the wide attention his writings attracted, adhered to the limited conception of independence. Yet the "limited" nature of this argument should not be overemphasized. While Hicks' plea was somewhat restrained, he was far in advance of most of his contemporaries. Among the pamphleteers perhaps only James Wilson, whose "Considerations on the Nature and Extent of the Legislative Authority of the British Parliament" was written in the same year (but not

19"Britannus Americanus" (Rind), October 1, 1767.
20See Boston Gazette, February 15 and 22, 1768.
published until 1774), approached Hicks' point of view during the 1760's. 21

Less compromising was the unsigned piece appearing in the Providence Gazette which focused on America's declining virtue. The solution to this lamentable condition was clear in the mind of the writer as he concluded his essay with a simple bold stroke, "The truth is, a life of independence is generally a life of virtue." 22 Yet even this appeal was far removed from many which would follow simply because the essayist had provided no clear hint of his interpretation of independence.

A poetic retort entitled "On the Word INDEPENDENT, so frequent to be met with of late in our News-Papers" expressed the popular contention that imperial relations were far from ideal, yet appealed to the public not to follow the licentious advocates of independence. 23 In 1772, some of the more practical aspects of the debate were examined by "X." His essay followed the familiar path of justifying American grievances in terms of both constitutional and natural rights, but concluded with


what he labeled a sensible assessment of the independence question. Noting that other writers had retreated from the idea of a break with Britain because of the fear of lost estates or hanging, "X" responded by stating that most Americans were men of very moderate means and that liberty was worth any risk. Therefore, he could see no reason why independence should not be declared immediately. In speaking of loss of property and punishment "X" offered a clear indication that he entertained thoughts of independence in its fullest form.

Thus as early as 1772, a few writers were expanding the scope of the urgent appeal; not only were they broaching the subject of violence, but they were advocating it and linking it to pleas for independence.

In late 1773 and early 1774 the pulse of the appeals for the ultimate action began to quicken. In London Lord North had responded to the plight of the economically prostrate East India Company by securing the passage of the East India Regulating Act. This measure permitted the company to sell its product directly to American retailers, thereby circumventing both English and American wholesalers. On the surface this appeared to be working to the financial advantage of the colonists since the act further provided for the

24 MGBNL, September 3, 1772.
elimination of duties which had been collected in England; the only remaining tax which the Americans would have to shoulder would be the sole surviving Townshend duty. Even in paying this tax the colonists would be able to purchase tea more cheaply than before. The merchants, however, who had been relatively quiet for the past few years, returned to the forefront of resistance. They argued that a tea monopoly was being formed which could only result in the destruction of American merchants' operations. Then perhaps the East India Company could demand any price which the traffic might bear since all competition would be removed.¹²⁵ There followed a flurry of activity which included newspaper protests and organized opposition generated by the committees of correspondence. The high point of colonial resistance occurred in Boston in mid-December when the "Mohawks" poured the cargoes of tea into the harbor. In the spring of the following year an angry Parliament enacted the Coercive Acts, a series of punitive laws aimed at errant


¹²⁶"Philo-Aletheias" employed the polemical pattern used by many, attempting to revive the recently latent constitutional issue by suggesting that the colonists should oppose the Tea Act because of the unconstitutional nature of the Townshend tax, Virginia Gazette (Rind), January 13, 1774.
Boston in particular and Massachusetts in general. These measures provided for the closing of the port, restrictions upon local self-government and changes in the appointment of council members, a possible change in venue for royal officials accused of capital crimes, and the quartering of troops within Boston. In spite of the fact that these acts had been designed for the chastening of the Bay colony, anxiety rapidly developed throughout America. Even in faraway Virginia "Cato" scolded the executor of the British program, General Gage, for imposing "punishment on a people . . . without distinction of age, sex [or] innocence. . . ." Such, to "Cato's" mind, was the highest characteristic of a tyrant.

These changing conditions were reflected in the newspaper appeals. The plea for independence was now being voiced with deeper sincerity and increasing frequency. Perhaps this trend is most clearly evident in that more and more contributors were doubting the good intentions of the king. "America" concluded his essay by noting that George III was the worst king in recent British history and hinted that the colonists must take

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[27] EHD, IX, 780-785.

[28] Virginia Gazette (Rind), September 5, 1774.
appropriate action. Another writer offered a broader indictment by labeling divine right a wicked doctrine, thus calling into question the entire institution of monarchy.

Yet at the same time that the Whig elements raised the tenor of their polemical attack, so too did the Tories. Rivington's New York Gazetteer carried the lament of "M" who decried the rise of criticism of George III. He appealed to the readers, asking them to disregard the king's critics and especially to resist the insidious lure of independence. In a highly practical vein an essayist in the conservative Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter warned the colonists to decline independence because they could not win the military struggle which was certain to follow.

Even as the debate of late 1774 and early 1775 raged, a number of avowed Whigs were still fearful of committing themselves totally to the idea of separation. "Americanus," after reviewing the dire circumstances of his day, reverted to the limited appeal heard in earlier times. He called for independence, but apparently

29 New London Gazette, July 1, 1774.
30 "Concerning Passive Obedience and Non-Resistance," Providence Gazette, April 8, 1775.
31 December 1, 1774.
32 November 24, 1774.
meaning only that freedom of action that the colonies had enjoyed under the non-policy of salutary neglect. Another writer petitioned his readers to be ready to effect independence, but only in the event that Britain should make some military move against the colonies. Thus as the colonists approached the brink of war, American newspaper opinion regarding the severance of ties with England was far from unanimous. Naturally the Tories were shutting their ears to the activist appeals. But even among the Whigs it appears that a solid majority harbored profound reservations on this issue.

The spring of 1775 saw the realization of the deepest fears of some and the highest hopes of others. In mid-April a portion of the British military contingent left Boston to seize powder and arms stored at Concord. The Massachusetts militia, having embarked upon a program of preparedness since the passage of the Coercive Acts, readily engaged the British force in brief encounters at Lexington and Concord and took a heavy toll among the king's soldiers as they returned later that same day to Boston.

The polemical activity which followed the outbreak of fighting bore ever more directly upon the question of

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\(^33\)Virginia Gazette (Purdie), November 11, 1774.  
\(^34\)Boston Evening Post, March 6, 1775.
independence. "A Freeman," who deplored Gage's illegal implementation of martial law in Boston, was one of the few writers who still persisted in justifying his case in constitutional rather than practical terms. Yet even though his justification was somewhat anachronistic, his appeal was fully in keeping with the prevailing Whig spirit. Similarly, another essay appearing in the Pennsylvania Evening Post sanctioned its concern over recent events through reference to classical Greece, another form of justification which had fallen into disuse in recent years. But this writer, too, adopted the popular stand when he called for the severing of ties with England in his closing appeal. More in keeping with the dominant spirit of the embattled Whig writers was "Unanimity," who was totally practical in urging independence upon his readers. He argued that America contained enough able soldiers to stand a good chance of carrying out a successful revolt and thus urged the "unified" colonists to go on about their military business.

As the colonists faced the new year of 1776, the polemical debate was slightly altered. The Tory

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35 Pennsylvania Evening Post, June 27, 1775.
36 "Philo Americanus," July 6, 1775.
37 Providence Gazette, May 27, 1775.
essayists, with a few important exceptions, were forced to the literary sidelines, leaving the field open for the Whigs to contest the issue of independence among themselves.

This final drive was spearheaded by a rather unlikely leader, Thomas Paine. A relatively recent emigrant from England, Paine had taken with him an ineradicable hatred of the British establishment. Capitalizing upon his ability with the pen, he was soon able to build a local reputation for himself as a Whig polemicist. In January 1776, Paine was catapulted into the forefront of the literary agitation through the publication of *Common Sense*. He chose to present his case in pamphlet form, fearing that his views might be too radical and thus be rejected by the newspaper publishers.  

Paine's triumph stemmed from the fact that he presented in a direct and dramatic style the thoughts entertained beneath the surface of many American minds. He argued that it was simply not in accord with common sense to expect a return of freedom under British auspices. In affixing responsibility for the demise of the imperial relationship, Paine focused on the institution of monarchy, pleading that no individuals have

hereditary rights to be exalted above others. In his view, the English kings had gained their power solely by usurpation and, therefore, did not merit the allegiance of the people.

Common Sense was later reprinted in many of the American newspapers and received hearty praise from the readers. Yet the praise was not universal. John Adams, while recognizing the worth of Paine's effort in awakening a sluggish public, felt the author made his mark through hard-hitting language rather than profundity. Further, Adams was disturbed by Paine's suggested governmental reforms, such as the institution of a unicameral legislature and the apparent loss of separation of powers. In Virginia, Landon Carter branded Common Sense as nonsense and harmful to the American cause. While Paine had convinced many of the logic of his appeal, others remained uncertain—especially the members of the Continental Congress.

The polemical appeals which appeared in the last few months before independence was declared fell into two categories. First, there existed a vocal element of

39 See Virginia Gazette (Purdie), April 26, 1776.
40 Works, II, 507.
41 "Diary," February 14 and 24, 1776, William and Mary Quarterly, ser. 1, XVI (1907-1908), 149-152.
42 Schlesinger, Prelude, p. 252.
Whigs who opposed a formal break with England. They acknowledged that British conduct had often been despicable, yet offered a variety of practical concerns which they felt should dampen sentiment for independence. In this spirit an unsigned piece in the Pennsylvania Evening Post pointed to the fact that independence would sever longstanding bonds of trade, bringing a threat of economic ruin to the colonies. This practical feature alone was sufficient to move this writer to urge his readers to restrain the growing demand for separation. 43

The same newspaper carried several essays during this period which rationalized opposition to breaking with Britain in terms of constitutional propriety. "A Lover of Order" held that the Continental Congress should recess and allow the delegates to consult with their constituents before facing the issue. 44 And "Cato" noted that the great nations of ancient times never changed their constitutions without first somehow submitting the matter to the people. 45 Both contributors shared a skepticism about independence and believed this sentiment to be held by many other citizens.

43 February 17, 1776.
44 March 9, 1776.
45 March 14, 1776.
"Hampden," in a series of essays in the *Virginia Gazette*, considered the diplomatic consequences of the struggle. First, he warned that independence could be won only with military support from other British foes, notably France. Even if America should then be successful in severing the mother country's ties, she might then be under the thumb of the French. Later "Hampden" studied another aspect of the same question, arguing that a body blow to the British Empire would win the lasting animosity of the English—a feature which would surely make the American future precarious at best. The donor's appeal in both cases was the same—the colonists who would trouble to speculate on the consequences of independence must surely reject the notion.

The second group of Whigs who made appeals immediately before independence were those who felt a mutually satisfactory imperial relationship was irretrievably lost and that the Americans could gain nothing simply by allowing matters to drift. An essayist in "Reasons for a Declaration of Independence" offered a justification to support his contention that the colonies were acting foolishly in clinging to Britain. He

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46 *Dixon and Hunter*, April 20, 1776.

47 *April 27, 1776.*
advanced the alleged probability that America would receive direct aid from both France and Spain, and therefore be able to inflict a military defeat upon the British. Since, in his view, victory was the logical outcome of the struggle, he appealed to the readers to urge the Congress to act favorably on the independence question. 48 Another writer took a somewhat different tack in seeking to explain why independence had not yet been proclaimed. His assessment centered upon a single point—the contention that American merchants had fouled the wheels of independence in the fear that trade and profits might be harmed. He petitioned the reading public to ignore the wishes of this special interest group and to press on for complete American freedom. 49 "E.F.," addressed himself to yet another practical consideration, the fear expressed by some colonists that economic and political chaos might follow a successful war for independence. He countered this position by noting that the Americans had in fact been running their own affairs quite successfully for many years and that to suppose that this situation would reverse itself because of a formal break with Britain was senseless

48 Pennsylvania Evening Post, April 20, 1776.
49 Pennsylvania Evening Post, April 30, 1776.
pessimism. Thus, "E.F.," too, added his plea to the others which advocated a decision in favor of formal separation.\(^{50}\)

Other essayists who appealed for the smashing of the fetters which bound America to Britain employed the popular tactic of disparaging the monarchy. Following in the footsteps of Paine, although making no direct reference to *Common Sense*, a contributor to the *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, maintained that the king was a "tyrant" and had violated all of his obligations to America. He concluded that such a situation made it imperative to effect a permanent break with England.\(^{51}\)

"Republicus" presented one of the few examples at this late date of a purely emotional appeal. Rather than dwelling on the practical aspects of the independence question, he stated simply that if Britain should conquer America he would prefer falling as an independent man than as "an unacknowledged rebel."\(^{52}\) While his justification differed sharply from most that were appearing at this time, his appeal did not--Congress must act immediately in support of independence.

\(^{50}\)Virginia Gazette (Purdie), May 17, 1776.

\(^{51}\)May 14, 1776.

\(^{52}\)Pennsylvania Evening Post, June 29, 1776.
The debate ended abruptly in July 1776. Congress, which had been considering the momentous question at length, finally took affirmative action. In retrospect the newspaper response seems anticlimatic. As copies of the Declaration slowly filtered throughout the former colonies, the newspapers carried the full text on the front pages, generally without a single word of commentary. Yet this enervated reaction is not deeply surprising. It simply underscores the evolutionary process which the newspaper essays had experienced, a gradual change from the theoretical and the emotional to the practical. And nothing was more thoroughly practical than the decision not to gloat over independence. Instead, the essays would immediately be focusing upon the exigencies of fighting and winning a war.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The purpose of probing once again into the newspaper essays of the Revolutionary era is twofold. First, it appears worthwhile to examine why these pieces were such an attractive and apparently successful means of cultivating popular support for the political appeals of the day. And second, a study of the essays offers the modern reader an interesting insight into the polemists' thoughts on the nature of the American Revolution.

In pursuing the first point it should be remembered that this dissertation has not attempted to prove that the newspaper essays comprised a persuasive body of argument which had a discernible impact upon American actions in the 1760's and 1770's; these issues have been demonstrated convincingly by other historians.1 Yet this study has indicated that the essays' availability, brevity, and unique variety of logic contributed more to their popularity and success than any other factors.

1See Rossiter, Seedtime, Part III, Ch. 1, and Schlesinger, Prelude, pp. 20-22.
As noted earlier, the pieces were obtainable by the public in newspapers which could be purchased at a minimal cost. And whether in tavern, home or on a street corner, the American colonist was likely to find a newspaper within his grasp, or at least to be within earshot of a debate stemming from the latest edition. The mere weight of numbers, compounded by the frequency of publication, was bound to make the colonist more accustomed to holding a newspaper in his hands than a pamphlet.

It has also been noted in previous chapters that the polemical essays, as a rule, were short. They seldom extended to more than two columns and most frequently occupied less than one. This brevity was unquestionably a matter of practical editorial policy. By confining the length of the offerings, the printer could generally assure himself of a greater number of contributions and, hopefully, encourage greater public interest in his paper by widening participation. Nevertheless, a clever essayist could find an easy path around this practice. Sam Adams, no doubt with the blessings of publishers Benjamin Edes and John Gill, employed more than a score of pseudonyms in his incessant contributions. Yet the impact on the readership was the same; they were still left with the impression that many concerned citizens were addressing the public. Further, it should be
realized that brevity served the interest of the author as well. It stood to reason that a short, direct examination of current imperial events had a greater possibility of capturing the concentrated attentions of the readers than lengthy expositions. In those rare instances when the writers felt compelled to draw out their thoughts in greater detail, they were able to do so by submitting their works in installments, as did John Dickinson, Arthur Lee, and other noted essayists. Publication in a colonial newspaper placed a premium on brevity which in turn demanded directness. The polemists had to present their ideas with a minimum of embellishment and thereby added considerably to the attractiveness of this literary vehicle.

It can be argued further that a subtle logic pervaded the essays and added much to their popularity. This is not to say, however, that the arguments themselves were always reasoned and consistent—this was quite often not the case. Instead the logic of the essays was found in their structure—a polemical format composed of a statement, a justification, and an appeal. These elements, arranged in this order, presented a most effective means of driving across the desired points to the reader and comprised much more than a simple introduction, body and conclusion. Indeed, it might be
accurate to assert that structure was second only to content in determining the success of the essays.

The first phase of the newspaper polemic, the statement, was designed to illustrate what the author felt to be the major difficulty then existing between America and the mother country. Yet upon further examination it seems that an additional, and perhaps deeper, purpose is to be found. The statements also served as literary devices constructed to awaken the political and moral sensibilities of the readers. In order to accomplish this attention-getting task the essayist would choose a topic which he felt might set comfortably with his audience. In this vein the writers would bring to light matters concerning the colonial economic situation, alleged violations of the constitution, or indictments against various imperial officials.

Significantly, the stance taken in the statement was a self-righteous one. The essayist never countenanced the possibility that he was stirred to action by base motives. He always stood forthrightly for liberty and economic opportunity, and against royal tyranny and official abuse. Never was there a hint that the writer was moved by personal jealousy or a private thirst for power, although such thoughts did not escape the attention of literary opponents.
The most compelling evidence that supports the contention that the contributors viewed the statement as simply a means of awakening the reader is that this introductory portion was consistently the shortest of the three essay segments. The statement, quite understandably, was not intended to be a profound examination of the colonial dilemma. The readers were already familiar with the assorted imperial ills. Word of British policies and actions generally spread more rapidly by the grapevine and through personal correspondence than by a weekly newspaper. Indeed, it must be remembered that the colonial press was seldom the bearer of revelation. Perhaps only for those individuals living in the most isolated areas could the newspapers serve that function on a regular basis.

The short, crisp introductions to the essays were designed not so much to inform as they were to refresh. In doing so, the statements were preparing the reader for what was to follow.

The second segment was the justification which advanced arguments on behalf of the author's interpretation of events. Yet here, too, there appeared to be another purpose at work. Rather than being a totally argumentative endeavor, the justification was formulated to cultivate further rapport between author and reader.
Thus to a certain extent the motivation behind the statement and justification were similar. However, the method employed within each was notably different. The former dwelt upon wholly concrete ills within a contemporary context, while the latter focused upon seemingly more theoretical concerns as viewed through an historical setting. By expending literary effort in both areas the essayist was assuring himself of the broadest possibility of relating to his diverse audience.

Yet the justifications present two nagging difficulties for the modern reader. First, he notes that in this segment the essayists argue almost exclusively from an historical standpoint, writing in terms of the Greek and Roman experiences, Biblical stories, and English constitutional struggles. But the modern historian, tending as he does to regard himself as a scientific craftsman, recoils from the essayists' consistent use of history as a club. Undeniably the eighteenth-century newspaper contributors made history work for their partisan ends, even if that necessitated the occasional twisting of the facts. The point that needs to be made here is that the writers must be judged by their own standards. H. Trevor Colbourn has demonstrated that the writing of English history during this era was a
highly practical enterprise. Thus, assessed within their contemporary context, the newspaper justifications were examples of wholly acceptable, and probably highly successful, history.

A related and second snag which impedes the progress of the modern reader is his understandable impression that the statement deals with practical concerns while the justification centers upon theoretical issues. Such a reaction springs naturally from the content of the segments. Yet the eighteenth-century colonist might have been slow to recognize any disparity between the two. To him both parts appeared to be timely. During this age history was not the preserve of pedantic scholars; it was the tool of that great mass which took its politics seriously. And even the natural rights philosophy, as has been noted earlier, seemed to be tied directly to their own recent experiences. Thus the colonial reader would not view the difference between the statement and justification as being that of the practical versus the theoretical; instead the two segments represented the present as opposed to the past—both of which were equally practical as polemical implements.

The justification was significant also in that it was the longest of the three essay sections. This fact

2Lamp, pp. 4-5.
suggests that the correspondents viewed the task of reaching their readers on the historical plane as extremely important. Yet to conclude that the readership was highly sophisticated is not necessarily true. Instead, it must be remembered that the essayists were more imitative than original. In placing great stress upon justification and authority they were following a literary trail blazed long before by English pamphleteers and sermon writers. Yet the motivation for all three forms of expression was the same. By expanding the justification and calling upon outside support they were linking their political and moral concerns with those of other people in other times. Thus the justification represents an attempt to lessen the provincial nature of the writings and to accentuate the universal aspects.

The third and final segment was the appeal. Its purpose seems less complex, but supremely important. Indeed, the appeal was the focal point of the newspaper essay. It fairly shouted at the reader to take some particular course of action—home manufacturing, non-importation, violent resistance, etc. The method employed here involved the throwing off of all pretention and emphasized speaking directly to the reader about the means of correcting his current plight.

Beyond the questions of structure and impact, the essays offer some interesting commentary on the
correspondents' conceptions of the direction of the Revolutionary movement. Perhaps these viewpoints can best be illustrated by determining some chronological consensus of the newspaper themes.

Early in the imperial crisis the essay statements were dominated by a discussion of the taxation-representation question and, to a lesser extent, by attention to the economic impact of the Grenville programs. The justifications of this same period were heavily weighted in the area of prescriptive rights, especially notable in the emphasis upon the right of representative consent to taxation. The essays of the mid-1760's were thus employing constitutional concerns as both statements and justifications. The appeals of the early period stressed legal means of redressing the colonial grievances. They were suggesting economic pressure, rather than political action or violence, as an effective counter-force. These measured responses seemed befitting of a people who were slowly awakening to a crisis.

In the later 1760's, sometime after the passage of the Townshend Acts, the tenor of the essays began to change. The economic side of the statements declined very sharply, but never completely. Rising in their stead was the broader concern over the status of the colonies within the British Empire, a topic which was to
dominate the statements down to the time of independence. To a lesser extent, the justifications were also transformed. The ancient authorities often gave way to Biblical injunctions. Yet the reliance upon prescriptive rights remained constant. In this same period the appeals with increasing frequency began to envision the possibility of violence while still giving support to the non-importation programs. Such pleas might well be interpreted as warnings to royal personnel to mend the erring ways of Britain.

The last chronological phase, that which culminated in independence, began in the early 1770's. During this period the newspaper statements continued to weigh the question of America's role in the empire and increasingly couched this issue in terms of the responsibility of British officials. The justifications placed comparatively little emphasis on constitutional concerns as the time of independence approached. Instead, the essayists attempted to bolster their arguments by calling attention to more clearly practical concerns such as preparedness, diplomacy, and the possible outcome of the impending conflict. Interestingly, many of those writers who did continue to use the constitutional justification in the mid-1770's were the Whig elements which were resisting the drift toward a formal break. Their's were the pleas
of a group with its back against the wall. They resorted to the sweeping arguments grounded in constitutional rights since often their justifications did not match the immediacy of the pro-independence Whigs. Yet neither group of Whigs placed much stock in the purely emotional arguments. Apparently the essayists had some premonition of the trials which lay ahead and rejected the "liberty or death" mentality. The debate over independence was to be won or lost on the basis of substantive issues. Fully in line with this practical bent were the appeals of the final phase of the debate. The question of full independence accompanied by violence was transformed in the pens of the essayists from the realm of nervous speculation into a thoroughly reasoned and increasingly acceptable alternative.

It appears conclusively that a majority of the newspaper essayists viewed the imperial ferment of the 1760's and 1770's as being rooted in the issues pertaining to rights. Yet if this assertion is accepted, there remains one potentially thorny question. If the concept of rights was central to the period of Revolutionary turmoil, why did discussion of that topic virtually disappear from the essays during the height of the crisis over independence? Perhaps this dilemma can best be solved by remembering that by late 1774 the
essayists had expended over ten years' labor on convincing a meaningful portion of the public that a constitutional emergency existed within the empire. Following the imposition of the Coercive Acts they concluded that their point had been made. There appeared to be a widespread acceptance of these constitutional fears. The writers then recognized the futility of continuing to beat a horse which no longer drew breath. Therefore, the statements, justifications, and appeals pursued with increasing directness the immediate issues of the exigencies of fighting a war for independence and the possible consequences thereof.

The essays were from their beginning highly practical pieces. They focused in the early years upon what they regarded as being the fundamental issue of rights. On the eve of war their practicality took a different form, but their end was still the same. They had reached the conclusion that only through violent means could their rights be preserved. Therefore, in urging independence the essayists were appealing to their reader to step toward the ultimate practicality.
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