

ABSTRACT

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AMERICAN INTEREST AND
INTERPRETATION OF THE GORDON
RIOTS

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This project examines American interest and interpretation of the 1780 London-based Gordon Riots during the American Revolution. Patriot and Loyalist newspapers and personal correspondence is reviewed and analyzed to demonstrate broad interest in the British domestic disturbance and usage of the riots and the government's response to affirm support for Americans' particular position on the war for independence. This interest and interpretation is confirmation of a continued transatlantic dialogue and spread of information post-signing of the Declaration of Independence, and recovers an instance of continued interconnectedness between the British and American publics that informed Patriots and Loyalists' identities and ideologies during the war.

TRANSATLANTIC VALIDATION: AMERICAN INTEREST AND
INTERPRETATION OF THE GORDON RIOTS

By

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Introduction

“No Popery!” the crowd chanted in response to news that Parliament would not be taking up their petition to repeal the 1778 Catholic Relief Act. Championed by Lord George Gordon, a 28-year-old Member of Parliament and president of the Protestant Association, the petition was a firebrand that ignited a spirit of protest across the middle and lower classes of London. In the midst of a war that had blossomed between the metropole and her American colonies to become an international affair involving old British foes, the French and Spanish, the large assembly of Protestant Association members was a tool to pressure Parliament to take up and act upon their petition. At the heart of the contention that would spark a week-long riot was the indifference that Members of Parliament paid to the petition submitted by the Protestant Association calling for the repeal of the Catholic Relief Act of 1778 and signed by approximately 45,000 citizens.¹ Adopted in 1778, in part as a response to the French alliance with the United States, the Catholic Relief Act was an appeal by the British government to gain support of British Catholic subjects for the American War by granting them certain rights.² For British Protestants, particularly of the middle and lower classes, this act was viewed as a capitulation that threatened the sovereignty of the British state. Longstanding distrust and outright fear of Catholic plots to overthrow the Protestant British state imbued a sense of British identity that the Catholic Relief Act threatened, as it was seen as potentially opening the door to the return to power of Catholicism and its philosophy of

¹ Mark Knight, “The 1780 Protestant petitions and the culture of petitioning,” in *The Gordon Riots: Politics, Culture and Insurrection in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain*, eds. Ian Haywood and John Seed (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 46.

² The Catholic Relief Act of 1778 did not grant Catholics in Britain full citizenship, but it did expand their liberties to a certain extent. As a means to compel them to join the military, the requirement to denounce the Catholic Church when taking the oath of allegiance to the crown was removed. Restrictions were eased on land ownership as well, but the ability to hold public office was still prohibited. Haywood and Seed, *The Gordon Riots*, 1-2.

absolute power and the divine right of rule.³ The Protestant Association's own pamphlets asserted this in its call for protestors to assemble, arguing

All the true friends of Great Britain, and of civil and religious liberty, are exhorted to unite in support of the Protestant interest before it is too late, for unanimity and firmness in that glorious cause can alone protect us from the *dangerous confederacy of Popish powers*. If we unite, like one man, for the honour [sic] of God, and the liberties of the people, we may yet experience the blessing of Diving Providence on this kingdom, and love and confidence may again be restored amongst the brethren. But if we continue to obstinate in errors, and spread *idolatry* and *corruption* through the land, we have nothing to expect but *division amongst the people, distraction in the Senate, and discontent in our camps, with all other calamities attendant on those nations whom God has delivered over to arbitrary power and despotism*.⁴

At a time when the nation was in the midst of a significant imperial conflict, the popish struggles of the past resonated in the collective memory. The systems that prevented the monarch amassing absolute power were tied to Protestantism, and any change to the system to provide for more tolerance of Catholics chipped away at the framework of the limited, constitutional monarchy. That the British government would support the shift in the notion of what it meant to be British sparked citizens, through the Protestant Association, to lodge their concerns via petition.⁵

The Protestant Association had called for supporters across London to gather on Friday, June 2, 1780, to deliver their petition and demonstrate the enormity of their displeasure and disagreement with the Catholic Relief Act—an action which they felt

³ See John Seed's chapter, "'The Fall of Romish Babylon anticipated': plebian Dissenters and anti-popery in the Gordon riots," in *The Gordon Riots*, eds. Haywood and Seed, 69-92. Seed explains that the concern of not only Dissenters involved in the Protestant Association, but other citizens as well, was the "increasingly arbitrary power of George III," (88).

⁴ As quoted in Thomas Holcroft, *Thomas Holcroft's A Plain and Succinct Narrative of the Gordon Riots London, 1780*. Ed. Garland Garvey Smith. (Atlanta, GA: Emory University Library, 1944), 18. (emphasis original)

⁵ For more on the role of Protestantism in the formation of the British national and imperial identity, see Dana Rabin, "Imperial disruptions: city, nation and empire in the Gordon riots," in *The Gordon Riots*, eds. Haywood and Seed, 93-114.

undermined their very identity and jeopardized the constitutional constraints on the power of the king. An estimated crowd of between 40,000 and 50,000 people assembled in St. George's Fields and marched upon Parliament.⁶ The good natured atmosphere of the crowd began to shift, and as prominent members of Parliament navigated the crowd to enter Parliament some, including Lord George Germaine and Lord Mansfield, had their carriages and persons attacked. Later that afternoon, after an impassioned speech to the House of Commons that forewarned the consequences of not heeding the petition, Lord George informed the crowd that Parliament was ignoring their voices and adjourning until the following Tuesday. The discontent of the crowd erupted into frenzied anger and violence. While Parliament's Guards were able to disperse the crowd, their intercession merely relocated the setting rather than quashed the anger that fueled the flames of riot.

The dismissal of their petition and the perceived permission to allow Catholicism, which they believed was a threat to their liberties, to gain a greater foothold in British society—and potentially the government—motivated the crowd, who set their sights on those who had been key supporters of the act and were overtly friendly to Catholics in the early days of the protest. No longer mulling about Parliament generally, the crowd sought out institutions and individuals against whom to demonstrate their frustration. They attacked the Bavarian and Sardinian Embassies for their Catholic connections. They attacked homes and pubs in predominantly Catholic sections of London. They focused their rage on Chief Justice Lord Mansfield's house, which was the scene of significant destruction, with angry protestors tearing down parts of his home, stealing antiques, and finally setting fire to his lauded collection of books and manuscripts. Due to mishandlings by Parliament and city officials,

⁶ Haywood and Seed, eds., "Introduction," in *The Gordon Riots*, 1.

response from the military and constabulary was uncoordinated and sparse. They made a few arrests of rioters but mainly acted to disperse the crowds and put out the fires they had set.⁷

The following days saw more destruction of property as the riotous crowd set its sights on members of the upper class who were either Catholic or perceived as being too sympathetic to Catholics, prompting those in fear of being targeted to paint “No Popery” on their doors or wear blue cockades, a symbol adopted by the movement. A new target was also set for rioters: the prisons. As embodiments of power and authority, the prisons represented the very institutions that were ignoring the rioters’ voices. Releasing not only imprisoned rioters, but also non-affiliated prisoners, the rioters targeted prisons to express their challenge to the power structures of society. Their first target was Newgate Prison, recently rebuilt and housing many of those who had been arrested the previous day; it was torn apart and burned. Inmates, whether associated with the movement or not, were released by order of “King Mob” in a blatant attack on the institutional authority of the government.⁸ In the following days, attacks on the other prominent London prisons, including the King’s Bench Prison and Fleet Prison, occurred with both the city and British government mustering limited means to squash the uprising. The riots reached their climax on Wednesday, June 7, with widespread attacks on homes, businesses, and even an attempt on the Bank of England. The rioters were no longer strictly attacking Catholic or Catholic-sympathizing symbols, but had turned to destroying symbols of power and authority that had rejected their concerns and was opening the door for the return of arbitrary and absolute power to return to Great Britain. The destruction on June 7 was the culmination of the ire and frustration of the rioters. “Black

⁷ Haywood and Seed, eds., “Introduction,” in *The Gordon Riots*, 1-7.

⁸ Christopher Hibbert, *King Mob: The Story of Lord Gordon and the London Riots of 1780* (Cleveland, OH: The World Publishing Company, 1958).

Wednesday was the most horrible night I ever beheld, which for six hours together I expected to end in half the town being reduced to ashes,” recorded Horace Walpole.⁹

The loyal opposition, comprised of popular politicians in and out of Parliament (such as Edmund Burke and John Wilkes), were divided over how to handle the middle and lower class crowd, of which they had become champions. Their Enlightenment ideals of tolerance clashed with the anti-Catholic rhetoric of the crowd. Yet some were sympathetic, particularly in the early days of the petitioning and protests, to the desire of the crowd that Parliament listen to and represent their constituents. The eruption of violence and its continued threat, however, hampered the ability of the opposition party to appeal to popular politics if chaos was a result. Days went by, but city officials failed for a myriad of reasons: lack of resources to suppress the rioters, sympathy with the crowd’s motives (indeed, some members of the city government were signatories on the petition), and outright fear of gaining the crowd’s wrath. Finally, on June 7, with no end of the riots in sight and word that the Bank of England were the rioters’ next target, King George III issued a proclamation—which many interpreted as declaring martial law—to reassert order. He then sent military troops into London to quell the riots, troops which fired into the crowds, killing over 200 persons in the streets and arresting nearly as many. This was indeed a variant on the riot act, but because it was done by soldiers it looked very much like martial law.¹⁰ By June 9, the riots had ceased and numerous people were jailed or killed for their participation in the riots.

In the end, the king’s troops killed approximately 300 people and wounded 175, a majority of whom were civilians involved in the protests. The government prosecuted over 150 rioters for their actions in the riots; the results being the execution of twenty-five men

⁹ As quoted in J. Paul De Castro, *The Gordon Riots* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 110.

¹⁰ Hibbert, *King Mob*, 125-135.

and women (an additional twenty-seven had been sentenced to die but their sentence was commuted), the imprisonment of twelve, and the acquittal of eighty-five.¹¹ The Privy Council ordered the arrest and prosecution of Lord Gordon for high treason for his role in inciting the riots, though he was acquitted by a jury. After his trial, newspapers and those in power dismissed him as an ignorant buffoon who did not realize what his rhetoric could provoke. His reputation was tarnished by further forays into unpopular political positions and he died in 1793 in debtors' prison as a result of later sedition convictions.¹² The riots cost hundreds of thousands of pounds, due to the crowd's destruction of private and public property. George III and his ministers were so terrified by the riots, that they never dismissed the military they had called in to repress them. For the next two years, the British military camped in the heart of London, policing the city far more effectively than the old town watch, undercutting the power of the old borough government and enforcing the power and authority of the king. Finally, the week-long upheaval in British life fractured the opposition party and the triumph of suppressing the riot ensured the continuation of the status quo government for decades to come.¹³

The Gordon Riots, as history has come to call the June 1780 London uprising, were a significant event in Great Britain during the late eighteenth century. Occurring during the height of the American Revolutionary War, the riots demonstrated substantial discord between the government and its subjects. But the riots also fractured the unity amongst the opposition, granting the governing coalition and King George III greater ability to pursue their agenda both domestically and in the war with the American colonies. This pivotal revolt, however, signaled the imbalanced relationship between the governed and governing

¹¹ George Rudé, "The Gordon Riots: A Study of the Rioters and Their Victims: The Alexander Prize Essay." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, Vol. 6 (1956): 93-114.

¹² Dominic Green, "George Gordon: a biographical reassessment," in *The Gordon Riots*, eds. Haywood and Seed, 245-264.

¹³ Rudé, "The Gordon Riots," 93-114.

reached beyond the colonies and resonated within British society itself. The subsequent dismissal of the petition and concerns of the citizens sparked rebellious reactions that targeted Members of Parliament and privileged members of society seen as being overly sympathetic towards Catholics, and ultimately institutions of authority and power such as multiple prisons and the Bank of England. The Gordon Riots, therefore, were a challenge to the very system of power and authority that the British society and government depended upon, and the response of the government reaffirmed its significant power over its subjects and its ability to dictate the relationship between citizens, in this case in London, and their supposed representatives.

Analysis of the Gordon Riots has focused primarily on the cause, effect, and image of the riots in English culture and memory. Almost immediately after the riots, publications such as “A Plain and Succinct Narrative of the Gordon Riots,” written by Thomas Holcroft in 1780, sought to frame the conflict as without motive: drunkards and lower sorts attacking people and institutions. By diminishing the legitimacy of the concerns of the rioters, and by painting them as a “mob” engaged in destruction for destruction’s sake, these publications re-entrenched views on the distribution of power and authority that served the government.¹⁴ Sixty years later, Charles Dickens further ingrained in the public memory this frame of the riots as a result of drunkards and low-class hoodlums in his semi-historical novel, *Barnaby Rudge*. The riots entered historical memory through this popular work that dovetailed with the historical narrative encouraged by accounts drawn from elite members of society. Most images of the riots, like the one featured in Figure 1, entrenched this idea of the participants

¹⁴ See Gordon Wood’s analysis on the use of the word “mob” to destroy the legitimacy of rebellious activities (Wood, “A Note on Mobs in the American Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (1966): 635-642). Specifically, Wood notes that the use of the term “mob” prior to Rudé and E.P. Thompson’s works was a means to deny any type of political agency or agenda to the activities of the crowd. Wood also draws parallels to the characteristics that Rudé observes in European mobs to those commonly ascribed to American mobs prior to and during the Revolution.

being members of a dangerous order, intent on violence that threatened the very fabric of society.¹⁵

This trend of portraying the riots as without rational motivation continued into the early twentieth century, when it was somewhat complicated, but ultimately reaffirmed, by J. Paul de Castro in 1926. In his recounting of the riots, de Castro gave some legitimacy to the early motives of the rioters regarding their petitions against the Catholic Relief Act and their dismissive treatment by Members of Parliament. But de Castro ultimately determined that the earlier motives did not inform the riotous behavior of the subsequent mob, and that the movement for repeal of the law was overtaken by a nefarious sort who used the movement to create anarchy and chaos. It was not until the mid-twentieth century, with George Rudé's



Figure 1: *The Riot in Broad Street on the Seventh of June 1780*, James Heath, engraver, after Francis Wheatley [London: John and Josiah Boydell, 1790.] The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection, The Society of the Cincinnati, Washington, D.C.

study of the riots as an intentional and methodical expression of the anti-Popery movement, that the actions of the rioters were given credence and legitimacy.

Following Rudé's significant contribution to the

reexamination of riots and their components, further

scholarship has sought to examine the nature of the rioters and the influences of other factors beyond intolerance that may have contributed to their actions. British Imperialism and the

¹⁵ For more analysis on the engravings and paintings produced after the riots, see Ian Haywood, "'A metropolis in flames and a nation in ruins': the Gordon riots as a sublime spectacle," in *The Gordon Riots*, eds. Haywood and Seed, 117-143. Of note is one particular image, produced in 1791, that does subtly challenge the portrayals of the rioters as being from a lower class. In this image, the author notes, the rioters are dressed nicely and appear clean and sober. Contrast this engraving with others, and one sees early signs of subtle empathy with the rioters.

American War are two such factors, both having prompted British citizens to reaffirm their British identity, which included Protestantism, by protesting measures to appease and garner support from Catholics.¹⁶ The commonality of Protestantism as the British national religion was a means to counteract the challenge that the expansion of the British Empire and the ideals of the American Revolution posed to the notion of a singular, British identity. Allowing for the partial citizenship rights for Catholic subjects threatened the role of Protestantism as a defining characteristic of British identity, and reignited fears of subjugation at the hands of a Catholic-controlled monarchy and government. As many recent authors have asserted, the Gordon Riots were a reflection of concerns over the meaning of British identity at a time of great upheaval both domestically and across the empire.

Yet the historical exploration of the inspiration, methods, and meaning of the Gordon Riots has focused on the significance of the event to the British government and the British people. Events in Britain were not happening in a vacuum, however, and the American public during the American Revolution was keenly interested in affairs of the British government and society. Though treating the American Revolution in a broader, transatlantic frame has recently reemerged after decades of submission to works inherent with the theme of “American Exceptionalism,” few historical works in the field even refer to the impact of the Gordon Riots on revolutionary America.¹⁷ Don Higginbotham mentions the riots in *The War of American Independence*, but does not delve into the influence the riots may have had in revolutionary America. This lack of attention to the impact of the Gordon Riots in

¹⁶ David Featherstone, “Atlantic networks, antagonisms, and the formation of subaltern political identities,” *Social & Cultural Geography*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (June 2005): 387-404; Brad A. Jones, “‘In Favour of Popery’: Patriotism, Protestantism, and the Gordon Riots in the Revolutionary British Atlantic,” *Journal of British Studies* 52 (January 2013): 79-101.

¹⁷ Even earlier historical scholarship that did take more of a transatlantic approach to the history of the American Revolution, such as George Bancroft’s six volume *History of the United States of America, From the Discovery of the Continent* published in the last quarter of the 1800 did not include the Gordon Riots. Focus of these earlier works centered on the politics and policies influencing the war, with little attention paid to the spread of information and news across the Atlantic.

America, when its importance within Britain has been acknowledged, raises the question of how this omission has distorted our understanding of the culture and identity of revolutionary Americans. When one considers that contemporary historians such as Mercy Otis Warren devoted a few pages of her *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* (1804) to discussing both Lord George Gordon and the Gordon Riots, our contemporary blindness to the imperial dimensions of these riots seems especially strange. Likewise, Dr. David Ramsay's *History of the American Revolution* (1789) emphasized that former Continental Congress President Henry Laurens, while imprisoned in the Tower of London, had encountered and interacted with Lord Gordon, both imprisoned on the same charge of treason. The fact that contemporary historians of the American Revolution felt it worthy to make mention of Lord Gordon and the Gordon Riots underscores the disparity between contemporary and modern understandings of what was important to Americans during the revolution.

The Gordon Riots had a profound influence on the nascent American culture and provided motivation and morale for continued commitment to the revolutionary cause. More than just a point of fascination for Patriots, the Gordon Riots, the British government's response, and the trial of Lord Gordon provided further justification for rebellion and independency against an overreaching government with too much power and authority.¹⁸ The riots legitimized the issues inherent in the revolution—that the government was not representative of its citizens and held too much power and authority over them— and further revealed that this was not merely an imperial issue between the colonies and the metropole, but was a significant flaw in the much hailed British system. The proof was in the pudding, so to speak, and if the British government would dismiss the petitions and concerns of more

¹⁸ "Patriots" in this work is broadly defined to include those Americans supportive of independence from Great Britain and the creation of the United States. I use this term to encompass not only leaders and soldiers, but also regular citizens who share this ideology to some degree.

geographically local citizens and expand executive powers to suppress the riots, then the likelihood of acceptable reconciliation for the colonial citizens seemed even more improbable. Further, the treatment of the rioters and of Lord Gordon served as a warning of what actions the British government might pursue in retaliation against Patriot leaders (and even common soldiers!) should the British win the war. For Loyalists, on the other hand, the riots and governmental response demonstrated the triumph of order and the British government over the dangerous and subversive ideas that existed on both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁹ The details of the extent of the riots and the attacks on prominent British institutions and individuals was proof for Loyalists the damage that subversive ideas can have on the cohesion of a nation. The ultimate return of order and the ability of the government to withstand the challenge to its authority, therefore, was a premonition for Loyalists of Britain's ability to hold onto its colonies and retain the imperial nation as a whole. At a time when the American War was colored by the significant defeat of the Patriots in Charleston and a feeling of stagnation by Loyalists in the north, the Gordon Riots acted as a morale booster that reaffirmed the righteousness of both American ideologies during the war.

By reasserting the influence of the Gordon Riots on both Patriot and Loyalist subjects in the American colonies, a more complex and nuanced understanding of the culture and identity of those on both sides of the conflict is revealed. How Loyalists and Patriots viewed and interpreted the Gordon Riots underscores what values they viewed as crucial for a well-functioning society. With the rise of print culture in the eighteenth century, the spread of information and ideas had become a key factor in the development of national identities.²⁰

¹⁹ Similar to how "Patriots" is broadly defined, I use the term "Loyalists" to encompass those Americans that remained, to varying degrees, loyal to the British government. While some individuals were more explicit with their loyalty, such as those who were leaders in their community or joined loyalist militias, others remained less demonstratively loyal, due to their location amidst Patriots or for other reasons.

²⁰ Benedict Anderson provides an excellent conceptual model for the role that print culture and print capitalism had in the formation of national identity. This model is particularly valuable when assessing how newspapers helped to used ideas about commonality and perception as a unifying force to create a burgeoning

The differential emphasis and variety of coverage of the events relating to the Gordon Riots reveal identity building through an internationally reported event. Tracing the Gordon Riots' impact helps us to understand what propelled morale during a long and costly war and what helped the soldiers and common citizens to keep fighting, giving a fuller breadth to a conflict beyond certain battles or years of significance. Revolutionary history emphasizes dates and places, whether they be battlefields or in meeting halls, thereby missing the broth of motivation that holds the soup together. The reaction to the Gordon Riots serves as an example of one component of that broth, and compels the examination into what other factors sustained or depleted Loyalists' and Patriots' support. The influence of the Gordon Riots on Americans during the American Revolution also provides another example of the transatlantic exchange of ideas that influenced the political, social, and cultural make-up of British and American societies. In years prior to the Declaration of Independence, American and British societies were closely connected. John Wilkes, the radical British politician, was a celebrity figure in American society in the 1760s, with many colonial newspapers printing reports of his political activities. And Thomas Paine's influential *Common Sense* was printed in numerous British newspapers shortly after its publication in the American colonies. Exploring these continued exchanges of information and ideas that occurred after the Declaration of Independence allows for a richer understanding of history that moves beyond nationalistic focus and emphasizes the interconnectedness that has existed beyond the recent "information age." Assessing the role of the Gordon Riots in the American consciousness creates an appreciation for the nuances that propelled the conflict during the years between Lexington and Paris.

It is clear that the Gordon Riots were, at the very least, a source of fascination for Americans during the American Revolution. The obsession with the riots in contemporary

national identity. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983, rev. 2006), 39-48.

American newspapers and by American writers speaks to their influence on the morale of both Loyalist and Patriot citizens. This project explores this profound event and attempts to determine the immediate and long lasting impact that it had on the revolution and new nation. The first chapter examines Patriot reactions to the Gordon Riots by exploring 1780 newspaper publications related to the riots, as well as the writings of prominent individuals within the Patriot cause. The second chapter delves into the Loyalist interpretation and reaction to the Gordon Riots in 1780. Taking into account geography and events of the war, this chapter focuses on prominent newspapers in Loyalist strongholds. I also analyze the writings of Loyalists for their interpretation of the Gordon Riots. The third and final chapter analyzes the lingering effects of the Gordon Riots for both Patriots and Loyalists in 1781. Revolutionary newspapers continued to be obsessed with Lord Gordon, his trial and acquittal, and reports of the British government and society's reaction to the riots and to Lord Gordon's trial. The evidence and analysis allows the Gordon Riots to be reinserted into its proper place in the history of the American Revolution.

Chapter 1: Patriots and the Gordon Riots

“Ld George Gordon I think will be the Oliver Cromwell, after all. He seems the only Man of Common sense, and he begins with Religion. Burke, Barry, Fox, Conway, &c and all the rest appear but small Boys to Lord George.”¹

-John Adams

In the months leading up to the week-long uprising that history would label the “Gordon Riots,” Lord George Gordon became a notable figure to American Patriots. His speeches and activities appeared regularly in American newspapers, which touted him as a champion of their principles. Prominent leaders such as John Adams extolled his potential to change British politics and compared him to historic revolutionary figures. Before news even reached American shores about the massive and severe riots, the Patriot newspapers had framed Lord Gordon as an ally who spoke to the underlying issues that had caused the separation between the American Colonies and Great Britain. In his criticism of the British government’s policies regarding Ireland, Lord Gordon asserted that the government had not learned their lessons that precipitated the American conflict. Patriot support and regard for Lord Gordon grew as the protests, imprisonment, and the trial of Lord Gordon for high treason filled the pages of Patriot newspapers. Their sympathetic portrayal of Lord Gordon allowed Patriots to differentiate the Protestant Association petition and protest from the ensuing riots. They held Lord Gordon responsible for the initial peaceful and eloquent protest but not for the destructive riots. At the same time, they were horrified by the inability of the government to suppress the riots without relinquishing expanded power to the king. Patriots viewed the government’s approval of the king’s illicit extension of power to

¹ “From John Adams to Edmé Jacques Genet, 20 May 1780,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-09-02-0205> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: *The Adams Papers*, Papers of John Adams, vol. 9, *March 1780 – July 1780*, ed. Gregg L. Lint and Richard Alan Ryerson. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996,) 328.

maintain control and order in London as a replica of the very same maneuvers the government had employed in the American colonies, and would continue to employ should the Patriots lose the war.

The Patriots' affinity for Lord Gordon helped to frame their interpretation of the protest, and later riots, that were associated with the leader of the Protestant Association. Patriots viewed Parliament's refusal to address the concerns from the Protestant Association's petition and protests as similar to their own grievances against the British government. When riots broke out, their judgment of the rioters was colored with awe at the paralyzed response from Parliament and the local authority. Most alarming to the Patriots, however, was the collaboration between the crown and Parliament to calm the riots through a measure that exerted power just shy of enacting martial law—something that the crown and Parliament had no qualms about essentially doing in Boston in the last decade. The arrest of Lord Gordon for high treason, the execution of twenty-five rioters, and the hundreds of civilians killed by the military when suppressing the riots confirmed for Patriots that the British government had no qualms about amassing and exerting proscribed power to maintain their control.

This chapter examines the Patriot newspapers' and prominent Patriots' interpretation of Lord Gordon and the Gordon Riots, revealing how their interpretation of Lord Gordon and the riots encouraged sustained commitment to the Patriot cause. Printers' editorial decisions shaped the narrative of those involved in the tumultuous affair, and subtly highlighted parallels and contrasts between events in London and America that resonated with the Patriot audience. As 1780 drew to a close, the Patriots interpreted the Gordon Riots as evidence of the dangers of remaining under the British government and the necessity of continuing to fight for independence.

Patriot Press and the Gordon Riots

American newspapers during the Revolutionary War consisted primarily of the reprinting of stories, letters, and reports cobbled together from other newspapers or from travelers and ship captains arriving at major ports. News was not the result of investigative journalism and being the first to break the story was not the imperative. Rather, the often limited competition and specificity of the newspaper's targeted audience led to the spread of information as a web across time and space. Letters with copies of foreign newspapers enclosed traveled across the Atlantic between friends and family rent by the war, before winding their way to newspaper printers to be mined for relevant or interesting information. Similarly, letters and travelers circulated domestic newspapers throughout the continent, and through a Patriot printers' network that sought the same goal of promoting the cause of independence.²

The spread of information during the American Revolution was impacted in a variety of ways that seem both foreign and familiar to modern experiences with the distribution of information. International reporting was a significant component of the Revolutionary Era newspaper. In addition to reports of battles with foreign entities and domestic events, newspapers recounted British Parliament discussions and debates, the latest diplomatic negotiations, and the social activities of important individuals. Yet newspapers in the United States also were affected by the war occurring around them. Battles, blockades, and shifting control of regions interrupted or delayed newspapers' ability to function and could determine

² For more information on printing and the role of print culture in eighteenth century America, see Bernard Bailyn and John B. Hench, eds., *The Press and the American Revolution* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1980); Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Ralph Frasca, *Benjamin Franklin's Printing Network: Disseminating Virtue in Early America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006); Isaiah Thomas, *The History of Printing in America with a Biography of Printers & an Account of Newspapers*, ed. Marcus A. McCorison (1810, repr., New York: Weathervane Books, 1970).

the content they published. With the potential for information to be derailed or hindered, the reprinting of news in a single newspaper did not necessarily reflect the linear order of events. And with multiple sources, newspapers could and did print different versions of the same story within a single issue. Newspapers of the time did not strive for objectivity, nor were they necessarily concerned with repetitiveness. Rather, the goal of newspapers was to amass a targeted readership. Lord Gordon and the Gordon Riots provided a dynamic story that, through printers' editorial decisions which shaped the interpretation of the events, confirmed the cause of the Patriot press, as well as that of the Loyalist press (as discussed in the next chapter).

The sheer volume of articles the Patriot press printed related to Lord Gordon or the Gordon riots in 1780 spoke to the importance printers awarded the issue. In the course of the year, over 160 articles were featured in the nineteen different Patriot newspapers reviewed in this study. These newspapers ranged from Massachusetts to Virginia, demonstrating the continental-wide interest in this matter.³ Even more striking is the placement of articles within the newspaper issues. Over fifty articles were featured on the first page of the edition, with sixty-nine starting on the second page. Only forty-three would begin on the third or fourth page of the edition (twenty-seven on page three, sixteen on page four). The printers' deliberate decision to locate the news of Lord Gordon overwhelmingly on the first and second pages of the issue attests to the significance that printers felt the events deserved. Rather than place the news in the latter pages of the issue where it might be overlooked, publishers placed the articles where they had the best chance to be consumed by the audience. But while the dramatic number and placement of Lord Gordon or Gordon Riots

³ Additional newspaper from further south (South Carolina and Georgia) were also reviewed for this study. Those newspapers, however, were in the control of Loyalist printers and therefore are featured in subsequent chapters.

related articles in 1780 is important, the articles' content exposes the Patriot press' framing of the events to engender support and motivation for American independence.

As early as March 29, 1780, Lord Gordon's participation in the debate over Ireland in the House of Commons—and his criticism of the Ministry's handling of the American colonies—was featured in the *Connecticut Gazette*.⁴ By May 1780, Patriot newspapers regularly featured Lord Gordon in their issues. His comments in the House of Commons were reported alongside key figures such as Lord North, Edmund Burke, and the Marquess of Rockingham.⁵ For Patriots, Lord Gordon's criticism of the government's handling of the American War and his objections to the British government's policies regarding Ireland engendered affinity. That Lord Gordon was undeterred by his lack of success repealing trade restrictions on Ireland when faced with a hostile British government only furthered the Patriot press' esteem for him. Lord Gordon's motion to repeal “the act declaring Ireland dependent on Great-Britain” and its failure was reported in multiple newspapers.⁶ Certainly part of the attraction to Lord Gordon was his inflammatory and renegade remarks. The *Connecticut Journal* noted that “the papers of the opposition themselves agree that...[his

⁴ *Connecticut Gazette*, 29 March 1780. A portion of this report, including the statement of Lord Gordon accusing the king of being a papist, was also featured in the *Connecticut Journal*, 29 March 1780; *Massachusetts Spy*, 27 April 1780.

⁵ Indeed, much of newspaper publications at the time were reprints of stories from other newspapers, and were therefore dependent upon the coverage of the initial newspaper source. That being said, printers did edit or exclude sections of reporting as they saw fit. The transmission of news stories from one paper to another did not necessitate the reprinting of the entire story. Lord Gordon could have easily been excluded from the newspapers if the Patriot printers had found him disagreeable or uninteresting. That they included him alongside major policy makers demonstrated that Lord Gordon was deemed important to the Patriot cause.

⁶ *Independent Chronicle*, 20 April 1780; *Massachusetts Spy*, 27 April 1780; *Connecticut Courant*, 2 May 1780; *Connecticut Journal*, 4 May 1780; *Pennsylvania Journal*, 10 May 1780; *Maryland Journal*, 16 May 1780. Lord Gordon's continual motions and speeches regarding Ireland on different dates in Parliament were also covered in multiple newspapers. See *Pennsylvania Journal*, 3 May 1780; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 10 May 1780; *Massachusetts Spy*, 25 May 1780. That Lord Gordon championed giving more liberties for Ireland, a predominantly Catholic country, negates his later actions as head of the Protestant Association as being completely anti-Catholic.

letters to the newspapers] breathed High Treason.”⁷ Rascals and radicals sell—even in Revolutionary America—and especially when those rascals shared a common enmity towards those in power. Lord Gordon’s passionate language and his fiery devotion to his ideas and causes resonated with Patriots who felt similarly about their own. “The Irish deem themselves *oppressed*, and call this government *tyranny*. To prove this, Sir, I need only read to you the opinions of some leading members of the Irish Commons,” Lord Gordon asserted in a “genuine” speech to the House of Commons, using language and accusations mirroring those of the American Patriots.⁸ Lord Gordon alluded to his sympathy for American independence, if not his outright support, when he criticized the administration for having “dismembered America from the Crown.”⁹ The increasing attention the Patriot press gave to Lord Gordon in the second quarter of the year reflected their growing affinity for the outspoken noble. When reporting on a debate in the House of Commons, the *Maryland Journal* noted that one of the participants was “called by Lord George Gordon the old Rat of the Constitution,” indicating that Lord Gordon’s opinions of other members of Parliament was significant enough to note in debates in which he was not even a participant.¹⁰ Moving beyond recounting his comments in the House of Commons alongside other noteworthy Members of Parliament, Patriot newspapers included news of Lord Gordon’s extracurricular activities, including his involvement with the Protestant Association.¹¹ Lord Gordon’s advocacy with the Protestant Association against the Catholic Relief Act of 1778 echoed the

⁷ *Connecticut Journal*, 29 March 1780; this same article was also printed in *Connecticut Gazette*, 29 March 1780; *Massachusetts Spy*, 27 April 1780.

⁸ *New-Jersey Gazette*, 10 May 1780 (emphasis original); *Independent Chronicle*, 25 May 1780; *Continental Journal*, 25 May 1780; *Boston Gazette*, 29 May 1780; *Virginia Gazette*, 31 May 1780; *Massachusetts Spy*, 1 June 1780; *Norwich Packet*, 1 June 1780.

⁹ *Connecticut Journal*, 29 March 1780; *Connecticut Gazette*, 29 March 1780; *Massachusetts Spy*, 27 April 1780.

¹⁰ *Maryland Journal*, 27 June 1780. This story was also carried in the *Pennsylvania Journal*, 5 July 1780; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 12 July 1780.

¹¹ *Newport Mercury*, 24 June 1780; *Connecticut Journal*, 6 July 1780; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 19 July 1780.

efforts of Patriots to rescind detrimental acts of Parliament that precipitated the Revolutionary War. From seeking an audience with the king to organizing meetings and a petition to present the Protestant Association's concerns, Lord Gordon's actions were strikingly similar to the petitions and representatives sent by the aggrieved American colonies.¹² The Patriot press' reports of Lord Gordon's efforts deepened the sense of kinship that Patriots Americans had for the noble.

The press' fascination with Lord Gordon and his activities reached a fever-pitch in mid-August 1780, when the first reports of the Protestant Association's petition, protest, and the subsequent week-long riot trickled into American newspapers. Soon the newspapers exploded with reports from across the Atlantic. At least fifteen Patriot newspapers carried the same story initially reported in the *Pennsylvania Journal* on August 16, 1780, which detailed the first three days of the protest and riots.¹³ Because of the delay in the transmission of information due to the technology of the time, a fair number of newspapers reported information on the protest and riots as it was received. This meant that some newspapers reported the entirety of the event, from petition to riots to suppression, in one article while others would recount only portions of the event but in more detail. Between the initial publication of news of the riots on August 16 and the end of October, nineteen different patriot newspapers published over 100 articles detailing the riots, the government response, and the fallout. This high volume reflected the interest in the event, as well as how

¹² For more on the practice and politics of petitioning, including efforts made by American colonists, see James Bradly, *Popular Politics and the American Revolution in England: Petitions, the Crown, and Public Opinion* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986).

¹³ *Pennsylvania Journal*, 16 August 1780; *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, 18 August 1780; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 19 August 1780; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 23 August 1780; *Independent Ledger*, 28 August 1780; *Connecticut Courant*, 29 August 1780; *Maryland Journal*, 29 August 1780; *American Journal*, 30 August 1780; *Connecticut Journal*, 31 August 1780; *Norwich Packet*, 31 August 1780; *Continental Journal*, 31 August 1780; *Connecticut Gazette*, 1 September 1780; *Newport Mercury*, 2 September 1780; *Providence Gazette*, 2 September 1780; *Virginia Gazette*, 6 September 1780.

the British government responded, colored with a bit of schadenfreude and amazement at the difficulty the British had in suppressing the riots.

It was not uncommon for newspapers to contain two or three different reports related to the riots in a single issue.¹⁴ As information traveled from sources in Europe and in the United States, reports within single or across multiple issues of newspapers ranged from mere mentions of an “insurrection” occurring in London to full-scale accountings of the riots.¹⁵ The more descriptive accounts generally started their coverage with the Protestant Association’s call for a large gathering to demonstrate to Parliament the support for the petition that was to be delivered on June 2, 1780. Approximately 50,000 men and women joined Lord Gordon to deliver the “Protestant Petition, against the bill passed last session in favour [sic] of the Roman Catholics” the *Pennsylvania Journal* reported on August 16.¹⁶ The reports asserted that Lord Gordon was well intended in his call for a large protest to deliver the petition, but that the size of the crowd made it difficult to maintain peace and attracted those who easily perverted the good intentions of the Protestant Association. The Patriot press’ support of Lord Gordon dulled slightly as the account of the “tumult” continued, with the papers chastising Lord Gordon’s address to the crowd as propelling those assembled to grow more reckless, ultimately leading to the attack on Members of Parliament as they

¹⁴ Examples of newspapers that had multiple articles on the riots in a single issue include the *Pennsylvania Packet*, 19 August 1780; *Pennsylvania Journal*, 23 August 1780; *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, 25 August 1780; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 30 August 1780; *Independent Chronicle*, 7 September 1780.

¹⁵ Less detailed accounts can be found in the following newspapers: *Continental Journal*, 17 August 1780; *Independent Ledger*, 21 August 1780; *American Journal*, 23 August 1780; *Connecticut Journal*, 24 August 1780; *Massachusetts Spy*, 24 August 1780; *Norwich Packet*, 24 August 1780; *Providence Gazette*, 26 August 1780; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 5 September 1780; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 6 September 1780. More detailed accounts can be found, for example, in *Pennsylvania Packet*, 19 August 1780; *American Journal*, 7 September 1780; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 30 August 1780; *Maryland Journal*, 26 September 1780.

¹⁶ *Pennsylvania Journal*, 16 August, 1780; this same article was additionally reported in *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, 18 August 1780; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 19 August 1780; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 23 August 1780; *Independent Ledger*, 28 August 1780; *Connecticut Courant*, 29 August 1780; *Maryland Journal*, 29 August 1780; *American Journal*, 30 August 1780; *Connecticut Journal*, 31 August 1780; *Norwich Packet*, 31 August 1780; *Continental Journal*, 31 August 1780; *Connecticut Gazette*, 1 September 1780; *Newport Mercury*, 2 September 1780; *Providence Gazette*, 2 September 1780; *Virginia Gazette*, 6 September 1780.

entered or left Parliament and to property destruction against Catholic institutions (and those viewed as supporting them).¹⁷ As the disturbances continued and grew, the articles reported the House of Commons' June 6 discussion and debate, including the members' reactions to Lord Gordon sitting among them wearing a blue cockade and his assertion that "if the House would appoint a day to discuss the business [the petition], and promote to do it to the satisfaction of the people...they would quietly disperse."¹⁸ With the House of Commons again declining to address the petition, Lord Gordon addressed the crowd outside of Parliament to share the news that Parliament had refused to act and advising the crowd to "depart quietly."¹⁹ The press' attention to Lord Gordon's activities was largely sympathetic and tended to paint his actions as misinterpreted by the crowd that, while he used as a political tool, he was also trying to subdue from further destruction. This portrayal absolved Lord Gordon of complete responsibility of the mob's actions, and implied that his principles were valid, even if the actions of the mob were not.

The Patriot press' sympathetic treatment of Lord Gordon continued as reports of the riots' height, suppression, and aftermath were detailed. Though at times the reports were compassionate towards the targets of the rioters, particularly prominent individuals such as

¹⁷ *Pennsylvania Journal*, 16 August, 1780; this same article was additionally reported in *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, 18 August 1780; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 19 August 1780; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 23 August 1780; *Independent Ledger*, 28 August 1780; *Connecticut Courant*, 29 August 1780; *Maryland Journal*, 29 August 1780; *American Journal*, 30 August 1780; *Connecticut Journal*, 31 August 1780; *Norwich Packet*, 31 August 1780; *Continental Journal*, 31 August 1780; *Connecticut Gazette*, 1 September 1780; *Newport Mercury*, 2 September 1780; *Providence Gazette*, 2 September 1780; *Virginia Gazette*, 6 September 1780.

¹⁸ *Pennsylvania Packet*, 19 August 1780; *Pennsylvania Journal*, 23 August 1780; *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, 25 August 1780; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 30 August 1780; *American Journal*, 6 September 1780; *Independent Chronicle*, 7 September 1780; *Providence Gazette*, 9 September 1780; *Boston Gazette*, 11 September 1780; *Massachusetts Spy*, 14 September 1780. Wearing a blue cockade was originally associated with John Wilkes during his first Middlesex election, and generally represented solidarity for liberty. Protestors with the Protestant Association adopted the symbol to reflect their claim that the government was oppressing them through their enactment of the Catholic Relief Act of 1778. For more information on the symbolism of the blue cockade, see Lloyd I. Rudolph, "The Eighteenth Century Mob in America and Europe," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Winter, 1959): 455; Arthur H. Cash, *John Wilkes: The Scandalous Father of Civil Liberty* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), ch. 9.

¹⁹ *Pennsylvania Journal*, 23 August 1780; *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, 25 August 1780; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 26 August 1780; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 30 August 1780.

Edmund Burke and Lord Mansfield, the reports' portrayal of the rioters was rather mixed. Stories of the protestors' actions in the early stages of the week-long disturbance tended to depict those engaged as misguided or stirred into frenzy by the sheer volume of their numbers. As the protest turned to riots, however, the reports were less forgiving, labeling those participating a "mob" overtaken by nefarious individuals and describing their destruction of symbols of Catholicism or authority.²⁰ Articles frequently noted the destruction of prisons, such as the King's Bench Prison, that were brought down by the sheer force and numbers of the crowd and without much resistance from either municipal or military forces. These papers even observed that the Poultry Compter was the only prison spared, and "would have shared the same fate [of the other prisons], if the lord mayor had not ordered the rioters confined there to be released," demonstrating the weakness of the city government to respond.²¹ While reporting the actions of the mob as the riots proceeded, the accounts also had begun to describe the British government's efforts to respond. After days of riot and insipid response from local officials, the king, with approval of the Privy Council, deployed troops into the city to suppress the riots. The reported killing of fifty rioters on June 7 and the encampment of 15,000 troops in Hyde Park served as prelude to the official proclamation ordering the military to suppress the riots (often assumed to be enacting martial law), and demonstrated the extraordinary shift of power to quell the mob from local authority to the authority of the crown.²² Later editions go to great length to distinguish that the proclamation did not, in fact, enact martial law but was an extension of the king's authority and power, at the behest of the Privy Council, to suppress the riots as the civil magistrates

²⁰ For an exploration of the use of the term "mob" and the connotation that word holds, see Wood, "A Note on Mobs in the American Revolution."

²¹ *Pennsylvania Journal*, 23 August 1780; *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, 25 August 1780; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 26 August 1780; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 30 August 1780.

²² *Ibid.*

were “either afraid or unwilling to direct the military under the law.”²³ Patriot newspapers further explored this argument by reprinting of the king’s proclamation, in which he required (i.e. ordered) the local authorities to take action to suppress and apprehend the rioters.²⁴ Making the distinction between an actual enactment of martial law, which required an act of Parliament and appeared more extreme as it would suspend judicial due process, and the actions the king took might, at first glance, paint the king as having reacted in a measured way. However, to Patriot audiences, this action and the sustained presence of 15,000 troops in the London area reeked of an underhanded extension of power, for nowhere was it mentioned that the king relinquished his control of the military in London back to the civil magistrates. Additionally, the reluctance to enact martial law in London in wake of deadly and destructive rioting rang hypocritical when compared to the use of martial law in Massachusetts in 1770s, which was far less costly in terms of life and property.²⁵ The king and Parliament’s decision not to enact martial law smacked of favoritism, and confirmed for Patriots that they would be treated as second-class citizens if they remained under British rule. For why was it so easy to suspend the rights and liberties of Bostonians for their protests when the same action was not taken when Londoners rioted to a far greater degree? The unequal response reaffirmed for Patriots that they were not considered British subjects in the same manner as those actually residing in Great Britain.

With the military empowered to “use their discretion in exerting the force under them, to suppress the riots,” the reports paired coverage on the quelling, capturing, and killing of

²³ *Independent Ledger*, 4 September 1780; *Norwich Packet*, 7 September 1780; *Continental Journal*, 7 September 1780; *Independent Chronicle*, 7 September 1780; *New-Hampshire Gazette*, 9 September 1780; *Connecticut Journal*, 14 September 1780; *Massachusetts Spy*, 14 September 1780; *American Journal*, 20 September 1780; *Connecticut Gazette*, 22 September 1780; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 23 September 1780; *Maryland Journal*, 26 September 1780.

²⁴ *Independent Chronicle*, 7 September 1780; *New-Hampshire Gazette*, 9 September 1780.

²⁵ Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice 1763-1789* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1983), 44-53.

rioters with the administration's treatment of Lord Gordon.²⁶ The Patriot press thoroughly reported his arrest, relaying the Privy Council's inquest and process used to issue the warrant and Lord Gordon's confinement to the Tower of London, which they noted involved "by far the greatest in number ever remembered to guard a state prisoner."²⁷ During the Privy Council's questioning of him, Lord Gordon expressed regret for not foreseeing the destructive riot that followed the protest he headed, though indicated he still felt justified in "his adherence to the cause he was concerned in."²⁸ The press' attention to Lord Gordon did not wither with his confinement to the Tower; indeed the Patriot newspapers featured mere mentions that he was still awaiting trial to reports on the restrictions on his visitors and ability to write, receive mail, and move around the Tower throughout the fall of 1780.²⁹ The *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, in their September 4 issue, reported the actions of the organization that Lord Gordon headed, the Protestant Association, in the aftermath of the riot, including their meeting with Lord North and receiving his "approbation" and their advertisement in newspapers disavowing connection with the rioters.³⁰ In printing this, the newspapers distinguished between the petition and protest of the Protestant Association and the riots that followed, making a subtle point that if perhaps Parliament had addressed the concerns of the petitioners then there might not have been a situation that gave rise to riots. With the riots suppressed, the Patriot press turned to printing articles that dealt with the

²⁶ *Independent Chronicle*, 7 September 1780; *New-Hampshire Gazette*, 9 September 1780.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, 4 September 1780; *Maryland Journal*, 12 September 1780; *Connecticut Journal*, 28 September 1780; *Massachusetts Spy*, 28 September 1780; *Norwich Packet*, 3 October 1780.

²⁹ *Providence Gazette*, 13 September 1780; *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, 16 September 1780; *Boston Gazette*, 18 September 1780; *American Journal*, 20 September 1780; *Pennsylvania Journal*, 20 September 1780; *Massachusetts Spy*, 21 September 1780; *Providence Gazette*, 23 September 1780; *Independent Ledger*, 9 October 1780; *Virginia Gazette*, 11 October 1780; *Pennsylvania Journal*, 13 September 1780; *Independent Chronicle*, 14 September 1780; *Connecticut Gazette*, 15 September 1780; *Pennsylvania Journal*, 20 September 1780; *Connecticut Journal*, 21 September 1780; *Newport Mercury*, 25 September 1780; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 26 September 1780; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 27 September 1780.

³⁰ *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, 4 September 1780; *Maryland Journal*, 12 September 1780; *Connecticut Journal*, 28 September 1780; *Massachusetts Spy*, 28 September 1780; *Norwich Packet*, 3 October 1780.

fallout of the tumults and underscored distinctions between Lord Gordon and the Protestant Association's actions and intentions and that of the rioters.

The government's prosecution and sentencing to execution of twenty-five men and women involved in the riot also made the Patriot newspapers, as did reports that in total 458 persons were killed or captured in the course of the riots.³¹ The articles varied in detail, with some included information on those sentenced to execution such as their name and actions they were convicted of committing.³² Newspapers similarly reported, to varying degrees, the estimates of the cost of property damage to both public and private buildings, including the approximation of Newgate prisons' damage totaling 70,000 pounds sterling and the destruction of Lord Mansfield's house and property estimated at 30,000 pounds sterling.³³ The *Pennsylvania Journal* estimated the damage at "upwards of 1,000,000£. sterling."³⁴ The cost of the riots, in both monetary and casualty terms, laid bare the magnitude of the event. Yet it was also a signal to a Patriot audience of what could befall them should they lose the war. The swift trial and execution of rioters left little doubt of how those associated with the Patriot cause would be treated if Britain prevailed in the war. The British government's demonstration of different treatment towards her subjects, and the American's significantly longer and more costly "rebellion" would certainly yield far harsher punishments if independence was not achieved.

Patriot newspaper coverage of the riots trailed off in October 1780, as the quelling of the riots and the rioters' trials and executions had mostly closed the book on British attention

³¹ *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, 4 September 1780; *Maryland Journal*, 12 September 1780; *Connecticut Journal*, 28 September 1780; *Massachusetts Spy*, 28 September 1780; *Norwich Packet*, 3 October 1780.

³² *Norwich Packet*, 10 October 1780; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 11 October 1780; *Providence Gazette*, 18 October 1780; *Independent Chronicle*, 19 October 1780.

³³ *Independent Ledger*, 4 September 1780; *Massachusetts Spy*, 7 September 1780.

³⁴ *Pennsylvania Journal*, 23 August 1780. This article was also featured in the *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, 25 August 1780; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 26 August 1780; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 30 August 1780.

to the event.³⁵ Still, the Patriot press did continue to print stories related to the riots, albeit less frequently. Lord Mansfield's statement deeming it plausible that the Americans and French conspired to provoke the riots, and asserting that reports about London being burned to ashes had circulated in the American press a month before the riots occurred in June, made an issue of the *Pennsylvania Journal*.³⁶ Similarly, newspapers featured reports that the government of the City of London had presented an address to the king thanking him for stepping in during the riots.³⁷ To a Patriot audience, these articles demonstrated that Britain was trying to absolve itself of any intrinsic maladies that would have prompted the protests and riots. Public expression of gratitude was a tacit approval of the king's extension of power and authority. Rather than admitting to systemic problems in British society, these articles showed the Patriot audience that the British elites embraced attributing the riots to outside influence or subversive elements not reflective of the British character, rather than admit their own culpability. Yet of the articles concerning to the riots in the last three months of the year, the actions of and relating to Lord Gordon received the most attention. Multiple newspapers printed false reports that the trial of Lord Gordon had started (he would not be tried until February 1781), and several newspapers reprinted a letter from an April edition of the *Edinburgh Gazette* that Lord Gordon wrote to his constituents, in which he portrayed himself as an honest and principled representative.³⁸ Newspaper printers even deemed worth publication the fact that the "Duke of Gordon, brother to Lord G. Gordon,"

³⁵ Shift in the focus of the British press and public was also a result of the news of the British capture of Charleston reaching London shortly after the riots were stopped. The news of the success was a welcomed diversion by the British nation.

³⁶ *Pennsylvania Journal*, 11 October 1780.

³⁷ *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, 24 October 1780; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 31 October 1780.

³⁸ For false trial mentions, see *Virginia Gazette*, 11 October 1780; *Pennsylvania Journal*, 18 October 1780; News that the trial was delayed until November can be found in *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, 24 October 1780; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 31 October 1780; *Virginia Gazette*, 11 November 1780; *Connecticut Journal*, 16 November 1780; *Massachusetts Spy*, 16 November 1780; *American Journal*, 18 November 1780. For reprints of Lord Gordon's April letter, see *Independent Ledger*, 23 October 1780; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 24 October 1780; *Massachusetts Spy*, 26 October 1780.

met with the king for two hours—though no other information on the meeting was revealed.³⁹ The *American Journal* reported that Lord Gordon was actively studying state trials in preparation for his own; while the *New-Jersey Gazette* published that he was now permitted to correspond, though it was limited to his brother and counsel and the letters would be inspected. The *New-Jersey Gazette* also noted that news of the rioters’ executions had “greatly affected” him. These accounts, however, are refuted in a *Massachusetts Spy* article, which claimed that reports that Lord Gordon had been given limited permission to correspond were untrue and included the government’s comprehensive order to the Tower, spelling out the restrictions placed upon Lord Gordon.⁴⁰ The Patriot press’ attention to Lord Gordon’s portrayal cast him in a sympathetic light, where even the (supposedly false) loosening of his restrictions while imprisoned was tinged with qualifications. As the year came to a close, Lord Gordon and his plight retained the interest of the Patriot press as his trial was eagerly awaited.

Throughout 1780, the Patriot press was actively engaged in relating information related to Lord Gordon and the Gordon Riots. What was significant about the Patriot newspapers’ reports of the riots was the portion devoted to detailing the Protestant Association’s protest and asserting the hijacking of the movement by nefarious sorts. Coverage of the petition, the request of parliamentary action, and the subsequent denial held significant similarities to the experiences of the American colonies in the previous two decades. Prior attempts by American colonists to petition and obtain adequate responses from Parliament met with mixed results, though overall left a large enough portion of American residents dissatisfied with their treatment from the “mother country” to make

³⁹ *American Journal*, 14 October 1780.

⁴⁰ *American Journal*, 11 November 1780; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 15 November 1780; *Massachusetts Spy*, 6 December 1780.

declaring independence a necessary course of action.⁴¹ Any doubts that perhaps physical distance between the colonies and the mother country contributed to the discord between the two was pushed aside with the reaction of Parliament to the petition and protest of those citizens proximally closest to them. That Parliament would not even address the concerns—however intolerant they might be—of their closest constituents was for Patriots further proof that Parliament had become deaf to those they claimed to represent.⁴² The government's inability to quell the riots without turning over more authority and power to the king underscored the belief that Parliament could not and would not act as a check and balance to the king. Yet the decision to forego declaring martial law and suppress the riots through other controversial means pointed out the crown and Parliament's highly contradictory treatment of domestic and colonial subjects. Their conduct towards Lord Gordon, who was confined to the Tower and denied pen, paper, and even the visit of his physician, and charged with high treason for his involvement in the petition and protest that gave way to riot, smacked of a government intent on retribution rather than justice. What then, would be the fate of American Patriots should they lose the war for independence? Newspapers latched onto these sentiments, providing multiple rationales for Patriots' continued support of American independence. From Parliament's indifference to the petitions of their people to the king's usurpation of more power to the stationing of 15,000 troops to maintain order, all within the capital city, confirmed that the crown was on a course to amassing absolute power and a Parliament that was too complicit to stop him. The only option was to stay the course and continue to fight for independence.

⁴¹ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776: repr., New York: Penguin Books, 2005); Bradly, *Popular Politics and the American Revolution in England*.

⁴² The Patriot press did view with some skepticism the religious motivation behind the petition and protest, while still sympathizing with the right to petition and protest. In addition to the similarities with petitioning and protest in both America and London, and of the connection with the revered Lord Gordon, the skepticism against the religious motivations also may have stemmed from the alliance with France and Spain, both Catholic countries. Ensuring the alliance was of paramount concern, and too much support of the protesters' cause could damage the relationship.

Prominent Patriots and the Gordon Riots

Newspapers demonstrated how pervasive and fascinating the Gordon Riots were in the larger Patriot audience. Yet this fascination was also shared and interpreted by prominent Patriot leaders, both domestically and abroad. With shrewd eyes observing and analyzing the implications of domestic affairs in Britain and how they might impact the Revolutionary War, these leaders sensed an opportunity in the domestic tumult that could further their own agenda. Reflected in their own letters as well as the letters to them, diplomatic, political, and military leaders of the American Revolution all show some level of engagement in interpreting the Gordon Riots and what they meant for American independence. As leaders of the revolution, their interpretation of the Gordon Riots verified that the issue penetrated the different aspects of the Patriot cause, and gives insight as the messages Patriots drew from the riots and the British government's reaction to them.

One of the most prolific writers of the American Revolution was undoubtedly John Adams. As a diplomat in France in 1780, Adams received intelligence from sources in Britain on a multitude of subjects, including domestic situations that might impact the direction of the American War. Adams' sources provided him the opportunity to comment upon significant figures in Britain who may impact the American War, including Lord Gordon. In a May letter to Edmé Jacques Genet, Adams praised Lord Gordon for his "common sense" and compared him to the revolutionary figure of Oliver Cromwell.⁴³ As the events of the petition, protest, and riots unfolded in London, Adams' intelligence sources kept him abreast of the activities that were impacting the capital city. A letter on June 8, 1780, from Thomas Digges recounted the details of the riots initially in explanation of the limits they caused on Digges' ability to acquire books and papers for Adams.⁴⁴ Further on in

⁴³ "From John Adams to Edmé Jacques Genet, 20 May 1780."

⁴⁴ Thomas Digges was a shipping agent from Maryland living in England at the time the American War broke out. He acted as a source of intelligence to John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, among others, during the

the letter, Digges elaborated about the origin and outcome of the riots while also alluding to further information being held in the newspapers enclosed with his letter.⁴⁵ Digges noted that “[t]he mischief done by fire and plunder both to private and publick [sic] property is incredible and nothing can throw greater disgrace upon the civil authority, or on the Government for want of energy, than that a very few hundreds Rioters and plunderers did such compleat [sic] mischief, alarmd [sic] the whole City for many nights, and intirely [sic] put an end to all police and government for several days.” Yet he also determined that the enactment of martial law (or what he interpreted as such) and the deployment of troops into the city had made the king the “happiest Monarch in Europe; He is now at the head of everything and I believe at the summit of his wish.”⁴⁶ In Digges’ opinion, the king’s intervention into quelling the mob had afforded him the ability to expand and fortify his power.⁴⁷ In another letter to Adams, Edmund Jenings offered his opinion that the riots “will have other serious Consequences in the Opinion of foreigners, it will serve to increase the Animosity Against the English, which in general prevails throughout Europe, and it cannot but give Spirits to our countigences [sic] to find such Destructions [sic] in the Capital of the Ennemy [sic]” and that the event should make the need for peace “more Obvious” to the

war. For more information on his life, see Robert H. Elias and Eugene D. Finch, eds., *Letters of Thomas Attwood Digges (1742–1821)* (Columbia, S.C., 1982), xxiii-lxxvii.

⁴⁵ “To John Adams from Thomas Digges, 8 June 1780,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-09-02-0251-0001> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: The Adams Papers, Papers of John Adams, vol. 9, March 1780 – July 1780, ed. Gregg L. Lint and Richard Alan Ryerson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996) 392–396.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ In a subsequent letter, Digges would enclose several pamphlets and publications on the Gordon Riots. The continued inclusion of materials examining the riots, including those that provide legal means of suppressing riots, demonstrates the importance Digges thought this event warranted. The difficulty of correspondence and the possibility that it could be intercepted by the enemy further underscored the value placed on these materials and this event. For a list of the enclosed materials, see “To John Adams from Thomas Digges, 12 July 1780,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-09-02-0308> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: The Adams Papers, Papers of John Adams, vol. 9, March 1780 – July 1780, ed. Gregg L. Lint and Richard Alan Ryerson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 512–515.

king.⁴⁸ Jenings' view of the results of the riot was starkly different from Digges', insisting that despite ordering the military to quash the uprising, the king's position had been weakened in the eyes of foreign observers and would hasten the end of the war.⁴⁹ As Adams contemplated the ramifications of the riots, elements of both Digges' and Jenings' opinions were reflected in his own analysis.

The significance of the Gordon Riots was such that Adams included details about them in his letters to his wife, his friends, and in his reports to the Confederation Congress. Writing to Abigail on June 17, Adams related that "London is in the Horrors," before subsequently recounting certain parts of the riots, including the destruction of the prisons and the crowd insulting the "Lords of Parliament."⁵⁰ Noting the "universal discontents of the nation" and that martial law was proclaimed and many had been killed or hanged, Adams ended this section of his letter to his wife by stating "[t]he Mobs all cryd [sic] Peace with America, and War with France—poor Wretches! as if this were possible."⁵¹ In a letter

⁴⁸ "To John Adams from Edmund Jenings, 18 June 1780," Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-09-02-0272> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: The Adams Papers, Papers of John Adams, vol. 9, March 1780 – July 1780, ed. Gregg L. Lint and Richard Alan Ryerson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 442–446. Jenings was a frequent correspondent with Adams over the course of the war. For more information on him, see "To John Adams from Edmund Jenings, 10 March 1779," Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-08-02-0008> [last update: 2014-12-01]). Source: The Adams Papers, Papers of John Adams, vol. 8, March 1779–February 1780, ed. Gregg L. Lint, Robert J. Taylor, Richard Alan Reyerson, Celeste Walker, and Joanna M. Revelas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 7–12, n.1.

⁴⁹ Jenings continued with his negative opinion on the British government relating to the Gordon Riots in his other letters, noting that "[f]resh Instances are given of the Corruption of England in the perjuries daily Committed at the Old Bailey," in reference to the July trials of rioters that resulted in a number of men and women being hanged. See "To John Adams from Edmund Jenings, 15 July 1780," Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-09-02-0318> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: The Adams Papers, Papers of John Adams, vol. 9, March 1780 – July 1780, ed. Gregg L. Lint and Richard Alan Ryerson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 591–592.

⁵⁰ "John Adams to Abigail Adams, 17 June 1780," Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-03-02-0276> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: The Adams Papers, Adams Family Correspondence, vol. 3, April 1778 – September 1780, ed. L. H. Butterfield and Marc Friedlaender (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 366–368.

⁵¹ Ibid.

written a week later, on June 23, Adams offered further considerations on the riots and their meaning, stating:

These Riots discover Symptoms of deep distress and misery, among the lower Classes of People. The particular Spight [sic] against the Prisons is one mark of it. The decided Part they took against the Ministry, shews upon what Ground they stand. It is however a Shocking Scaene [sic]. The King seems in a fair Way to the Summit of all his wishes, absolute Power. Martial Law is very agreable [sic] to him.⁵²

Adams recognized that while there was a “fanatical” aspect to the riots that he disagreed with, there was some semblance of reason to the targets of the riot.⁵³ He also observed that the riots furthered the consolidation of power and authority in the king, making the need for American independence even more compelling. This view of Adams’ was further demonstrated by his letter to Thomas Jefferson on June 29, 1780, when he stated:

Before this reaches you, you will have learned, the Circumstances of the Insurrections in England, which discover So deep and So general a discontent and distress, that no wonder the Nation Stands gazing at one another, in astonishment, and Horror. To what Extremities their Confusions will proceed, no Man can tell. They Seem unable to unite in any Principle and to have no Confidence in one another. Thus it is, when Truth and Virtue are lost: These Surely, are not the People who ought to have absolute authority over Us. In all Cases whatsoever, this is not the nation which is to bring us to unconditional Submission.⁵⁴

In no uncertain terms, Adams asserted that the riots demonstrated why independence was paramount. As a nation so rife with disagreement and a government so weak that it cannot

⁵² “John Adams to Abigail Adams, 23 June 1780,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-03-02-0278> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: The Adams Papers, Adams Family Correspondence, vol. 3, April 1778 – September 1780, ed. L. H. Butterfield and Marc Friedlaender (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 369–370.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ “To Thomas Jefferson from John Adams, 29 June 17[80],” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-03-02-0545> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, vol. 3, 18 June 1779 – 30 September 1780, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 469–470.

maintain peace without extreme authority asserting itself, continued British control over the American people would be fraught with overreach and the suppression of liberty.⁵⁵

With the impending Parliamentary elections in September and October of 1780, Adams used the “deep and general discontent and distress” among the British people as rationale for why the Comte de Vergennes should reveal that Adams had been appointed powers to treat for peace with the British government.⁵⁶ Announcing his powers, Adams argued, could sway the election in favor of those for peace, or at the very least compel the sitting British government to entreat before the election for fear of losing their offices. Frustrated with the results of the election, Adams, in a report to Congress on October 31, 1780, attributed the gains in seats and power in Parliament by the sitting ministry to the intimidation of the nation as a result of the Gordon Riots.⁵⁷ By concentrating their power, Adams reported, there pervaded a sense of vigor and determination to continue the war. This lament was repeated in a December 1780 letter to James Lovell, with Adams bemoaning that the “Committees in England” had been “[f]rightened by the Executions of the Mob.”⁵⁸ The riots and the response to them had afforded the crown and Ministry an opportunity to capitalize on fear of rebellion and chaos to leverage compliance to meet their goals.

⁵⁵ Indeed, this sentiment is reflected in a later letter to William Lee, where Adams stated, “[t]he Suppression of the Riots, Committees associations Correspondences and all, have given Ministry more giddy Confidence than even the taking of Charlestown.” “From John Adams to William Lee, 20 July 1780,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-10-02-0010> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: *The Adams Papers*, Papers of John Adams, vol. 10, *July 1780 – December 1780*, ed. Gregg L. Lint and Richard Alan Ryerson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 14–16.

⁵⁶ “From John Adams to the Comte de Vergennes, 17 July 1780,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-10-02-0001-0001> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: *The Adams Papers*, Papers of John Adams, vol. 10, *July 1780 – December 1780*, ed. Gregg L. Lint and Richard Alan Ryerson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 1–4.

⁵⁷ “From John Adams to the President of Congress, No. 19, 31 October 1780,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-10-02-0163> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: *The Adams Papers*, Papers of John Adams, vol. 10, *July 1780 – December 1780*, ed. Gregg L. Lint and Richard Alan Ryerson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 312–314.

⁵⁸ “From John Adams to James Lovell, 7 December 1780,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-10-02-0225> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: *The Adams Papers*, Papers of John Adams, vol. 10, *July 1780 – December 1780*, ed. Gregg L. Lint and Richard Alan Ryerson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 398–399.

While Adams was a keen observer and abundant writer, his extensive reflection on the Gordon Riots cannot be seen as a mere fascination.⁵⁹ Rather, that this event featured in a number of letters both personal and professional in nature indicates that Adams found this event to be important for the pursuit of American independence. His analysis of the reaction of the government furthered his resolve that American independence was necessary. The concentration of power and authority that followed the riots confirmed for Adams that absolute rule was the true intention of the king, and that he would assert his power wherever he could, including in his own backyard. Facing little backlash from gathering greater authority and power over his most proximal subjects, the king would certainly have little qualms over the continued subjugation of those across the Atlantic.

Other diplomats also discussed the Gordon Riots in their letters. Benjamin Franklin, also stationed in Paris in 1780, received and wrote numerous letters that discussed the cause and demise of the Gordon Riots. Similar to his letter to John Adams on June 8, Thomas Digges wrote and sent newspapers to Franklin on June 10, reiterating that George III was pleased by the results of the riots and the enactment of martial law.⁶⁰ John Rainey also wrote to tell Franklin of the disturbances in London, remarking that the event was “Nothing but Anarchy & Confusion,” while a letter from Dumas asserted that the event had further alienated the French from the British.⁶¹ Franklin first remarked about the riots in a June 15,

⁵⁹ I have found approximately twenty letters (to and from), reports, and unpublished articles in John Adams’ papers as compiled online for the period between January 1780 and December 1781. These writings reflect explicit discussion of Lord Gordon and/or the June 1780 riots, as well as implied references to policy shifts by the British government as a result of the riots.

⁶⁰ “To Benjamin Franklin from Thomas Digges, 10 June 1780,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-32-02-0358> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 32, *March 1 through June 30, 1780*, ed. Barbara B. Oberg. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 500–503.

⁶¹ “To Benjamin Franklin from John Rainey, 12 June 1780,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-32-02-0364> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 32, *March 1 through June 30, 1780*, ed. Barbara B. Oberg (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 512–514; “To Benjamin Franklin from Dumas, 15 June 1780,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-32-02-0377> [last update: 2014-

1780, letter to Benjamin Vaughn, stating with a sentiment of just retribution, “I just now hear, that the Mob have burnt several Houses of the Ministers. If they went no farther, I should be less concern’d [sic] at their Extravagancies; as such a Taste of fire may make those Gentlemen sensible of the Wanton malice with which they have encouraged the Burning of Poor People’s Houses in America!”⁶² This opinion was echoed in Franklin’s ensuing letters to William Carmichael and Samuel Wharton, both of which indicated that Franklin supported or at least in some measure understood the initial aims of the protests and rioters attacking representations of authority.⁶³ Franklin continued to be updated on the fallout from the riots, with Digges noting in his July 12, 1780 letter that as a result of quelling the mob and restoring peace, the British government thought “they can subdue the whole world,” including the American states.⁶⁴ Franklin’s correspondence is indicative of Patriots experiencing a sense of mirth at the British undergoing situations similar to Americans at the hands of the British military. This reaction indicates the diversity of interpretations that Patriots had of the Gordon Riots, while still viewing them as important for the Patriot

10-23]). Source: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 32, *March 1 through June 30, 1780*, ed. Barbara B. Oberg (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 530–531. Franklin responded to Dumas on June 22, though his response was measured and expressed his astonishment at the “mischief” of the mob and how close they reportedly came to destroying the Bank of England. His response reads coy in nature, as though he did not wish to agree nor disagree with how Dumas had interpreted the events. See “From Benjamin Franklin to Dumas: Two Letters, 22 June 1780,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-32-02-0410> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 32, *March 1 through June 30, 1780*, ed. Barbara B. Oberg (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 568–569.

⁶² “From Benjamin Franklin to Benjamin Vaughn, 15 June 1780,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-32-02-0376> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 32, *March 1 through June 30, 1780*, ed. Barbara B. Oberg (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 528–530.

⁶³ “From Benjamin Franklin to William Carmichael, 17 June 1780,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-32-02-0387> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 32, *March 1 through June 30, 1780*, ed. Barbara B. Oberg (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 540–543; “From Benjamin Franklin to Samuel Wharton, 17 June 1780,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-32-02-0391> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 32, *March 1 through June 30, 1780*, ed. Barbara B. Oberg (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 545–547.

⁶⁴ “To Benjamin Franklin from Thomas Digges, 12 July 1780,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-33-02-0043> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 33, *July 1 through November 15, 1780*, ed. Barbara B. Oberg (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 60–63.

cause—if for no other reason than they served to cause headache for the British government and diverted its focus. Franklin’s correspondence is also significant due to his print house connections.⁶⁵ It is entirely likely that Franklin might have shared letters similar to the ones examined here with his network of printers in the United States.

Adams and Franklin were not the only American diplomats stationed in Europe who received or wrote about the riots. In a September 1780 letter to John Jay, stationed in Spain, James Smith wrote of the crackdown by the British government on associations and committees as a result of the riots, and of the rumor that the riots were part of a plot by “Doctor Franklin to Burn the City” that justified the British government’s conduct.⁶⁶ Though it is not surprising that diplomats such as Adams, Franklin, and Jay engaged in gathering intelligence and commenting on the domestic situation of their enemy, that these events struck a chord of familiarity and justification with them is noteworthy. Undoubtedly, and as the sheer volume of correspondence for each man indicates, a great deal of information was being exchanged during the war by these diplomats and their sources of intelligence. That information on the riots in London was deemed important enough to mention in letters back to the United States demonstrated the significance that these diplomats attached to the event. The riots were a confirmation that not only was the British governing system flawed, but that there was real momentum towards the king obtaining absolute power. Sharing these recent observations connected the initial rationale for American independence with the contemporary situation in Britain, and made an implicit, and sometimes explicit, argument to continue the pursuit of independence.

⁶⁵ Frasca, *Benjamin Franklin’s Printing Network*.

⁶⁶ *The Selected Papers of John Jay Digital Edition*, Elizabeth M. Nuxoll, editor. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2014—. <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/JNJY-01-02-02-0098> [accessed 10 Feb 2015] Main Series, Volume 2 (1780–1782), 236-243.

Beyond foreign diplomats, leading domestic figures were also commenting upon the riots in London and contemplating or inferring their meaning for the Patriot cause in America. James Madison, the future father of the U.S. Constitution, engaged in correspondence in which Edmund Pendleton, his friend and presiding justice of the Virginia court of appeals, shared his analysis of the effects of the riots. In his letter from October 8, 1780, Pendleton asked Madison's opinion on news that the British government had advertised the time and place of the execution of the rioters. Pendleton opined that this action confirmed for him his former opinion that "the despotism adopted at the commencement of the present Reign had a much more extensive Object than America & was intended to reach the whole Empire."⁶⁷ Seemingly Madison did not reply to Pendleton's postulation, though his lack of response on the topic does not necessarily mean that Madison disagreed. It is significant, however, in and of itself that Madison was explicitly informed on the actions that the British government took and how that was interpreted to reveal their true sinister intent. Pendleton's letter demonstrated that not just the press, but political leaders were also engaging on the Gordon Riots and what it might reflect about the nation they were actively trying to break with.

Like Madison, Samuel Adams also received correspondence from friends and associates that discussed the riots. Letters that Samuel Adams sent or received during 1780 prove that he was keenly observant of newspapers, even enclosing them to his wife in their correspondence. An August 18, 1780, letter from Arthur Lee explicitly discusses the riots, noting that "the Insurrection in London had been quelled by killing and hanging under a proclamation of martial Law" and that the rioters had "demolished Newgate and every other

⁶⁷ "To James Madison from Edmund Pendleton, 8 October 1780," Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-02-02-0075> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: *The Papers of James Madison*, vol. 2, 20 March 1780 – 23 February 1781, ed. William T. Hutchinson and William M. E. Rachal. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), 118–119.

prison in and about London.”⁶⁸ Lee ended his news of the riots by noting that Lord Gordon had been committed to the Tower. Lee’s letter to Samuel Adams provides further evidence of Patriot interest in the riots and their interpretation that the actions taken by the British government amounted to martial law. What Samuel Adams did with this information that he received about the riots from Lee and likely from his reading of newspaper accounts is unclear. But Samuel Adams’ well-known connection to newspapers and his propaganda tactics makes it entirely likely that he could have engaged in spreading the information on the riots and in determining how that information was portrayed.⁶⁹

In addition to receiving letters from her husband, John, relating the events of the riots, Abigail Adams also received letters from friends and other family members that detailed the tumults in London. “There have been great Convulsions in England,” wrote John Thaxter in a letter dated June 18, 1780.⁷⁰ “They went to Parliament to insist upon a Repeal of an Act in favor of Popery. I am sorry they have risen upon this principle. It was but an act of Toleration,” Thaxter added, wishing that instead the insurrection had been over starting the American War but stating that the entire event had made the nation even more despised in Europe.⁷¹ A later letter from Richard Cranch to Abigail also related information about the

⁶⁸ Samuel Adams Papers, Box 14, Library of Congress.

⁶⁹ Beyond Samuel Adams’ influence prior to the outbreak of the war in spreading information and propaganda to newspapers, he continued his activities during the war years as a means to boost morale and champion commitment to the cause. For more on Adams’ relationship with the press and his propaganda tactics, see John K. Alexander, *Samuel Adams: America’s Revolutionary Politician* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002).

⁷⁰ “John Thaxter to Abigail Adams, 18 June 1780,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-03-02-0277> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: *The Adams Papers*, Adams Family Correspondence, vol. 3, *April 1778 – September 1780*, ed. L. H. Butterfield and Marc Friedlaender (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 368–369. John Thaxter was a cousin to Abigail, as well as John Adams secretary during his Paris diplomatic posting.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

riots, noting that many had been killed and others were “hang’d without Judge or Jury.”⁷² That Cranch drew attention to the denial of due process in his short letter to Abigail would have resonated with the Massachusetts woman, as the denial of due process was a key grievance in Massachusetts.⁷³ It is difficult to discern exactly how Abigail interpreted the riots, as she did not appear to write on the subject at that time. However, Abigail’s commitment to the cause is legendary, and receiving news from multiple sources about the causes of the riots and the British government’s reaction would have certainly resonated with her. It is plausible that she would have spoken about the event with neighbors and family, and saw, much like her husband, the British government’s methods in quelling the riots as confirmation of the necessity of American independence.

Significantly, the Gordon Riots were featured in letters to and from the Commander-in-Chief of the American Army, George Washington. In the midst of a bloody conflict with no end in sight, that figures such as James Bowdoin, James Duane, and William Gordon felt it necessary to comment on or allude to the events in London in correspondence with the leader of the Continental Army revealed that the riots were important not only in terms of political or civilian concerns, but also for military matters as well.⁷⁴ Bowdoin, in his letter dated August 17, 1780, included reports that the mob had destroyed property and “pulled down every Jail in London” before finally being quelled by the militia.⁷⁵ Bowdoin ended his letter by noting that “[t]here is no other intelligence of importance,” thereby implying that the

⁷² “Richard Cranch to Abigail Adams, 17 August 1780,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-03-02-0287> [last update: 2014-10-23]). Source: *The Adams Papers*, Adams Family Correspondence, vol. 3, *April 1778 – September 1780*, ed. L. H. Butterfield and Marc Friedlaender (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 395–396.

⁷³ Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence*, 44-53.

⁷⁴ James Bowdoin was a prominent politician and former president of the Massachusetts Provincial Council. James Duane was a New York delegate to the Continental Congress. William Gordon was a dissenting minister from Massachusetts.

⁷⁵ “To George Washington from James Bowdoin, 17 August 1780,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-02957> [last update: 2014-10-23]).

riots ranked in importance alongside news of the provisioning of supplies and naval movements.⁷⁶ William Gordon's letter to Washington from August 21, 1780 used the suppression of the mob as a foil, asserting that the British government would not have as easy of a time conquering the combined naval fleets around Jamaica as they did in quelling the riots.⁷⁷ Britain's "internal dissentions, which instead of being extinguished are only smotherd [sic] by the Vigour [sic] which the temerity of Gordon threw into the scale of their Government, is a malady which hangs heavy upon their Administration," James Duane noted in his analysis of the geopolitical status at the end of 1780.⁷⁸ Not only did Washington receive letters about the riots, he also referenced them in his letter to John Cadwalader in October 1780. In retelling a series of events that Washington viewed as having a negative impact upon the ability of the British to continue, he included the "British disturbances"—a phrase commonly used by newspapers to refer to the Gordon Riots.⁷⁹ Washington went on to bemoan the pitiful state of his army, their lack of adequate supplies and funding that is making sustaining the war effort difficult. Still, he viewed the Gordon Riots as contributing to the demise of morale and ability on the British side, and that in turn gave a sort of "delusory" hope to the Patriot officers and troops. The letters to and from Washington demonstrated another way in which Patriots were interpreting the riots impact on the cause for American independence. Viewing the riots as impairing Britain's ability to wage war abroad while maintaining peace at home, Patriots such as Washington framed the riots as a weakness that could at the least provide some sort of hope, however deceptive, for victory in the war, if not the outright implosion of the British Empire.

⁷⁶ "To George Washington from James Bowdoin, 17 August 1780."

⁷⁷ "To George Washington from William Gordon, 21 August 1780," Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-02993> [last update: 2014-10-23]).

⁷⁸ "To George Washington from James Duane, 9 December 1780," Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-04166> [last update: 2014-10-23]).

⁷⁹ "From George Washington to John Cadwalader, 5 October 1780," Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-03482> [last update: 2014-10-23]).

In addition to Washington's correspondence referencing and discussing the Gordon Riots, the writings of Nathanael Greene, a trusted general of Washington's who would in late 1780 be appointed Commanding General of the Southern Army, revealed that sources of information came not only from letters between officers, but from newspapers as well. With the Gordon Riots featuring so prominently in newspapers throughout the country, as well as the inclusion of newspapers in correspondence, it is reasonable to conclude that officials such as Greene knew of and potentially spread information of the riots to the men under his command. In his letter from September 3, 1780, Greene notes how news of a convention in New England was being spread throughout the camps and that he hoped its aim was to secure broader powers for the Congress to supply and pay for the Army.⁸⁰ Later in the month, a letter from Boston to Greene discusses news from the newspapers, indicating that not only were local newspapers a source of information, but information from distant newspapers also reached audiences beyond their intended target.⁸¹ Greene himself wrote of intelligence from newspaper accounts regarding British troop movements and changes in command of New York City.⁸² While Greene's writings do not explicitly mention the Gordon Riots, his writings do prove that information from newspapers and other sources were discussed in the camps by troops and officers. It is therefore plausible, with the degree of attention paid to the Gordon Riots in Patriot publications, that those events were talked about and perhaps even analyzed as to their impact on the war. Greene's persistent decrying of the lack of provisions and pay for the troops, and the poor morale it contributed to, makes it reasonable that an event such as the Gordon Riots would be used as a warning signal to offset the discontent among soldiers and officers of what could result should the war be lost.

⁸⁰ Nathanael Greene Papers, Box 2, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

⁸¹ NG Papers, Box 2.

⁸² NG Papers, Box 2.

Indeed, it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which the Gordon Riots were discussed by officers and soldiers in the late summer and autumn of 1780. Written documents are a limiting source, and can only glimpse the totality of discourse between people, especially when they are gathered in close proximity such as in a military camp. Yet it is not difficult to imagine officers and soldiers discussing the protest, riots, and suppression with hope that it would lead to a quick end to the war.⁸³ By 1780, after fighting for five years, there appeared to be no end in sight for the war. Significant wins or losses in battles did little to change the feeling of stagnation that permeated the camps. Crushing losses such as Charleston, South Carolina and the subsequent occupation of the South by British forces did little to help maintain Patriot soldiers' morale and dedication. Add to that the problems in obtaining supplies and funds to pay the soldiers, and a real issue with maintaining conscription and even preventing mutiny and rebellion plagued the American forces.⁸⁴ Yet with all these elements spelling disaster for the retention of support for the Patriot cause, the army was still able to maintain its forces. Certainly, part of that is due to the charisma and devotion that leaders such as Washington and Greene inspired in those under their command. But complimenting that surely must have been a continued devotion to the ideals and principles that the Patriots were fighting for. With leaders certainly discussing privately, and newspapers discussing publically, the riots in London must have factored into conversations between soldiers and officers and fed into the rationale that the fight the soldiers were waging was justified and necessary.

⁸³ Using the technique of "imagining" is not particularly novel or a departure from historical practice. Indeed, David Richter uses this technique in his book *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), as a means to explore history beyond the traditional historical record. Historians often use this practice in the reading between texts. I explicitly mention imagining here to alert the reader that I am making a conjecture not based on certain records, but based upon context of the time and what other sources support.

⁸⁴ Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 266-330; Joseph Plumb Martin, *Private Yankee Doodle: Being a Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier*, ed. George E. Scheer (Eastern National, 1962, rev. 2002), 170-209.

Information and interpretation of the Gordon Riots was not isolated to certain segments of the leadership of the American Revolution. The writings of these prominent individuals demonstrated that the riots and the British government's reaction to them were thought to be important to the pursuit of American independence on multiple fronts. From potentially influencing diplomatic relationships, to confirming the justification of independence, and to providing some basis of hope to demoralized troops, each facet was important in securing the ultimate goal. The leaders from these various and at times overlapping areas recognized this, and utilized this event to continue the momentum towards independence.

In the annals of American history, a great deal of attention has been paid to the problems in maintaining the independence movement. Poor training for soldiers, lack of supplies and pay, conscription and retention problems, and even attempted mutinies plagued the Continental Army. Patriot civilians too faced problems that challenged their commitment, from the absence of men called to the front, to the lack of goods and supplies, to currency issues that all threatened the lives and livelihood of non-combatants. Yet something must have sustained commitment to the cause, otherwise the outcome would have been much different. News of the Gordon Riots was so surprising, and confirmed for the Patriots that their cause of liberty was just and necessary. Having learned about Parliament's disregard of such a massively supported petition and the amassing of more power by the king, total independence became an even more important and pressing objective.

Chapter 2: Loyalists and the Gordon Riots

“All is now peace again. Out of confusion order has arose. Government is rendered more firm, Administration more fixed, and more determined in their measures—because the people have by it discovered that they can have no safety but in those to whom the powers of government are committed.”¹

-“Extract of a letter from a Gentleman of distinction in London”

As with their Patriot counterparts, the conclusion of the war could not come soon enough for Loyalists by 1780. Scattered throughout the colonies at the outbreak of the war, Loyalists were caught between moving to safe havens under—sometimes fleeing—British occupation or staying in place despite who retained control and risking rebel retaliation. While certain locations had more permanence as areas of British control—such as New York City—and therefore attracted Loyalist refugees, the shifting control of cities such as Philadelphia, Savannah, and Charleston exacerbated tensions between Loyalists and their Patriot neighbors.² And though there had been significant British victories on the battlefield, by 1780 Loyalists were demoralized by the failure of a definitive victory to end the war after five years of conflict.

¹ *Royal Gazette*, 6 September 1780.

² Robert M. Calhoon, Timothy M. Barnes, and Robert S. Davis, *Tory Insurgents: The Loyalist Perception and Other Essays* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010); Wallace Brown, *The Good Americans: The Loyalists in the American Revolution* (New York: William Marrow and Company, Inc., 1969). Shifting control also influenced the content and position of newspapers. For instance, with Philadelphia under occupation by the British in 1777-1778, the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* became a Loyalist newspaper during that period. When Philadelphia was returned to Patriot control, the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* once again became Patriot newspaper. For more on Loyalist newspapers in occupied towns, see Janice Potter and Robert M. Calhoon, “Character and Coherence of the Loyalist Press,” in *The Press and the American Revolution*, eds. Bernard Bailyn and John B. Hench (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1980), 233.

Yet the news of the Gordon Riots, together with General Sir Henry Clinton's conquest of Charleston in June 1780 and the defection of General Benedict Arnold in September, gave hope to Loyalists: tide of the war was turning. While the riots themselves demonstrated the destructiveness that dangerous ideas could have on the whole of society, the British government's actions in suppressing the mob confirmed the power and rightful authority of the government to maintain order. By utilizing appropriate and just methods, the united front of the crown and Parliament had restored order to London and ensured future tranquility in the capital city. That success, Loyalists believed, would soon spread across the Atlantic and lead to definitive victory over the similarly rebellious Patriots. With accusations circulating of Patriot agents' involvement in the riots, the tumults were not evidence of dysfunction in British society, but rather the result of transatlantic democratic ideology that threatened to disrupt well-ordered society. The triumph of the British government over such threats, fitted amongst the battlefield victories, was proof for Loyalists that the Patriot rebellion would ultimately fail against the superiority of the British nation.

As the quote at the opening of this chapter attests, Loyalists were encouraged by Loyalist press reports that the British government had become more resolute and the populace more supportive through the experience of the riots. This chapter explores the portrayals and methods used by Loyalist printers to promote a specific interpretation in 1780 of the Gordon Riots and their aftermath. Drawing on newspapers from British occupied regions, certain themes become apparent and offer an alternative reading of the events from that of the Patriot press. This chapter also

briefly explores the correspondence of Joseph Galloway, a prominent Loyalist, and General Sir Henry Clinton, Commander-in-Chief of the British forces, to establish the mood of Loyalists during this time and the information about the riots that was being relayed to influential persons. These sources, coupled with the Loyalist newspapers, reveal how Loyalists interpreted the riots to be confirmation that the British government would prevail both at home and in the colonies. The Loyalists' newspapers and writings emphasized the success of the government in suppressing the rioters and in exacting justice through legal channels affirmed the superiority of the British government. That the government was able to overcome a significant challenge to its power and authority and continue on without significantly altering its framework demonstrated that the British government's design was exceptional and just. Loyalists reveled in this success, for it confirmed their rationale to retain allegiance to the king. It also promised the possibility that this success could be replicated in the American colonies, especially with the result that the riots had prompted greater unity between the crown, Parliament, and the people. On the heels of news of the conquest of Charleston, the Gordon Riots was further evidence that the winds were changing and that victory was ever closer for Loyalists and the British government.

Loyalists Press and the Gordon Riots

Determining Loyalists interpretation on the Gordon Riots and those involved is derived as much from what they did not print as from what they did. As noted in the previous chapter, newspapers relied heavily on information from other newspapers in addition to sources such as firsthand accounts and letters. Both Patriot

and Loyalist newspapers used each other as sources, as well as using accounts from newspapers from London.³ But while using Patriot newspapers as sources for information, Loyalist newspapers found different messages and lessons from the upheaval that had occurred in London. The editorial decisions over what was included and excluded, therefore, reveals the narrative that printers wanted their audience to grasp. Though Loyalist newspapers were fewer in number and spent less coverage on the Gordon Riots and related matters than the Patriot press, the Loyalist press still shaped the narrative of the event and presented the riots as an example of the dangers of democratic ideology. Further, Loyalist newspapers framed the response of the British government as being just, appropriate, and demonstrative of the superiority of the British system of government. The result was the underlying message to the Loyalist audience to stay the course and that victory was at hand. For if the British government could suppress the riot and resist challenges to its very nature, then surely it would be able to overcome the rebellion in the colonies.

During the American War of Independence, Loyalist newspapers' existence and duration was tied to the occupation of British forces in the region and "provided a necessary semblance of normality in towns under British military and administrative control."⁴ They also functioned to inform residents of British military victories and announcements from commanders and civil administrators, and

³ This is especially evident in the title of articles that appear in the newspapers, where reference was made to the source of the information as context, for example "Extract from Rivington's Royal Gazette" from the *Massachusetts Spy*, 21 September 1780, or "From the Pennsylvania Gazette, August 23" from the *Royal Gazette*, 2 September 1780.

⁴ Potter and Calhoun, "Character and Coherence," 233.

“provide a forum in which loyalists could lambast their patriot enemies.”⁵ The Loyalist newspapers’ dependency upon the control of the region by the British military had the consequence of limiting the number of newspapers in existence. In 1780, Loyalist newspapers included *The Royal Gazette*, *The New-York Gazette and Weekly Mercury*, and *The Royal American Gazette* in New York; *Royal Georgia Gazette* in Georgia; and *South-Carolina and American General Gazette* (which later became *The Royal Gazette* in 1781) in South Carolina.⁶ Yet not all were printing regularly during this time, as Loyalist newspapers’ ability to function was impacted by infrastructure concerns and proximity to battles. As a result, newspapers in areas under longer control, such as New York, were more prevalent compared to newspapers printed in areas under siege during the southern campaign of the war. Despite these limitations on Loyalist newspapers, the newspapers that were actively printing offer insight into Loyalist and Patriot presses differences in interpretation and utilization of the Gordon Riots.⁷

One of the most striking ways in which the Loyalist press differed from the Patriot press was the treatment of Lord George Gordon. To the Patriot press, Lord Gordon had become a figure of interest and respect since the beginning of 1780, with

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ From here, *The New-York Gazette and Weekly Mercury* will be referred to as *The New-York Gazette*, while the *South-Carolina and American General Gazette* will be referred to as the *South-Carolina Gazette*.

⁷ Potter and Calhoon, “Character and Coherence,” 233. Also see Calhoon, Barnes and Davis, *Tory Insurgents*. In addition to contemporary events that impacted the ability to print, loss of newspapers due to inadequate archiving or other factors could account for the small number of newspapers still in existence. For more information on the British military’s southern campaign, see Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America: British Leadership, the American Revolution, and the Fate of the Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013); Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence*, 352-364.

multiple newspaper articles recounting his participation and arguments in Parliamentary debates. In the months leading up to the reports of the outbreak of the riots, Lord Gordon had become revered for his efforts to lessen Parliament's control over Irish trade and commerce—which he and the Patriots saw as demonstrably similar to parliamentary maneuvers preceding the American rebellion.

Unsurprisingly, the Loyalists viewed Lord Gordon in a very different light. The first mention of Lord Gordon in Loyalist newspapers was not until July 19, 1780, when the *South-Carolina Gazette* printed a brief mention of Lord Gordon's unsuccessful attempt to use parliamentary procedures to stop Lord North's tax raising measures from going forward.⁸ On August 5, 1780, the *Royal Gazette* of New York City recounted a report to the House of Commons during which Lord Gordon had apparently whispered an aside to his neighbor that “seemed at once to solve the difficulty” through its criticism.⁹ These first appearances of Lord Gordon's name in the Loyalist newspapers were over four months after the Patriot press had begun to print about his actions within and outside of Parliament, and indicated Loyalists' opinion of his relative significance. That a paper such as the *Royal Gazette*, which often reprinted articles from Patriot newspapers, had not featured Lord Gordon or his advocacy clearly demonstrated the editorial decision making of its printer, James Rivington.¹⁰ As a member of the opposition and sympathetic towards Patriot grievances, Loyalists hardly identified with Lord Gordon's outspokenness.

⁸ *South Carolina Gazette*, 19 July 1780.

⁹ *Royal Gazette*, 5 August 1780.

¹⁰ Historians have determined that James Rivington, often considered a prominent Loyalist in New York, was actually a member of the Culper Spy Ring that smuggled information to General

Lord Gordon's omission was continued in the *Royal Gazette's* first mention of the riots on August 23, 1780. Buried in the middle of the third page of a four page newspaper, the first reports of "a commotion having arisen in London" merely mentioned that the insurgents were "headed by a noble Lord, brother to a noble Duke," but did not identify either figure by name.¹¹ The ambiguity of which noble Lord was leading the insurrection fit with the Loyalist newspapers' tendency of diminishing the prominence of Lord Gordon in British politics, likely because of his outspoken criticism of the British government's handling of the war.¹² Yet the identity of Lord Gordon did not remain obscured for long, especially as newspapers acquired and printed damning letters and reports that attributed some level of blame for the riots to Lord Gordon. The August 26 edition of the *Royal Gazette* included two different reports on the riots and their fallout, the first of which mentioned Lord Gordon explicitly and labeled him a "mad man" who should be "put in a straight jacket" for his part in kindling the violence.¹³ In a second article one panel over,

George Washington about British troop movements (Catherine S. Crary, "The Tory and the Spy: The Double Life of James Rivington," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., XVI (1959): 61-72). Despite this revelation, Rivington would have needed to maintain the popular perception that he was a Loyalist in order to have access to the information he smuggled to Washington. Maintaining this cover would mean continuing to print his Loyalist newspaper, which gave him access to information and reaffirmed the belief that he was a Loyalist. That also meant that his newspaper would need to appeal to a Loyalist audience by continuing to reflect their interpretation of events and values. For more information on James Rivington as a Loyalist printer, see Thomas, *The History of Printing in America*, 478-480, 508-511; Calhoun, Barnes and Davis, *Tory Insurgents*, 321.

¹¹ *Royal Gazette*, 23 August 1780.

¹² See Dominic Green, "George Gordon: a biographical reassessment," in Haywood and Seed, *The Gordon Riots*, 246-249.

¹³ *Royal Gazette*, 26 August 1780. A word for word version of this report appeared in numerous Patriot newspapers on or after August 26. What is striking is that the Patriot newspapers identified the extract as coming from letter from Thomas Irving of London to John Cruden, the commissioner of sequestered estates, in New York whereas the *Royal Gazette* omits this information. The contextualization that the Patriot newspapers give this extract frames it as being from the viewpoint of the British/Loyalists and therefore differentiates it from Patriot opinion; while the lack of

information from a letter from London explained that “the young Lord, who headed the Republican Mob in London, had been seized” and was being held in custody.¹⁴ Though denied explicit reference, this brief passage made two important conjectures to the Loyalist audience: that Lord Gordon’s age—he was twenty-eight at the time of the riots—may have had some influence on his actions, and that the mob was republican. The association of youth and republicanism reflected Loyalist criticism of the Patriots for their petulance and attempt to upset the proper social order.¹⁵ Through both direct and indirect mention, the Loyalist press had begun crafting Lord Gordon’s portrayal that diminished the legitimacy of his concerns and could be used as a parable of what would befall those pursuing the Patriot agenda. The shared naïveté of Lord Gordon and the Patriots for pursuing ideology that was dangerous and paved the way for mob rule contrasted with Loyalists’ ideology that embraced calm, considered, and ordered societal structures.

The stage had been set, and Loyalist newspapers’ subsequent reports of Lord Gordon built upon this portrayal in carefully crafted ways. In a nearly full page recounting of the riots from start to finish, the September 2, 1780, *Royal Gazette* attributed the information in large type font at the beginning of the article as being

contextualization on the *Royal Gazette*’s part presents the extract as conforming with Loyalist interpretations of the events and those involved. For Patriot newspapers with this same extract, see *Providence Gazette*, 26 August 1780; *Maryland Journal*, 29 August 1780; *Massachusetts Spy*, 31 August 1780; *Independent Ledger*, 18 September 1780.

¹⁴ *Royal Gazette*, 26 August 1780.

¹⁵ For more on the Loyalist criticisms of Patriots, see Potter and Calhoun, “Character and Coherence.” Particularly in their second section of the essay, the authors reveal common themes of “disaffection, petulance, ingratitude, and disloyalty” in Loyalist criticisms. I argue that these themes are also reflected in the portrayal of the Gordon Riots to the American audience.

“From the Pennsylvania Gazette, August 23.”¹⁶ Clearly identifying the source as a known Patriot newspaper assuaged any inherent sympathy towards Lord Gordon and his intentions, implicitly attributing such sympathy as connected to Patriot ideology.¹⁷ This attribution would also explain the relatively soft criticism that was levied at Lord Gordon later in the article, when his conduct “rather abetted the mob than endeavoured [sic] to appease them” by informing the crowd of what was happening in the House of Commons.¹⁸ Lord Gordon was criticized for not having the foresight that his speeches and appeals to the crowd would morph into violence, an unintended consequence of his zeal for his beliefs. Loyalists, however, interpreted this criticism as ironic considering that Patriot beliefs and demands had enflamed hostilities and provoked war. When they were finally suppressed, would Patriots also try to claim that their leaders had not foreseen the tumult their incendiary language and beliefs would bring about? Loyalists were skeptical of Lord Gordon’s claim that he did not intend for his rhetoric and activities to propel the mob to violence, and the Patriot press’ inclusion of criticism for Lord Gordon only furthered Loyalists’ opinion that

¹⁶ *Royal Gazette*, 2 September 1780. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* was most notably associated with Benjamin Franklin, who owned the paper until 1766 before during it over to his partner, David Hall. When the British occupied Philadelphia the newspaper was suspended until their evacuation from the city in 1778, when Hall’s sons and former partner took possession. See Thomas, *History of Printing in America*, 433-436.

¹⁷ An interesting point of contention arises from the subtitle to the *Royal Gazette* article, which reads “*The following intelligence is taken from English Prints found on board the Mercury Packet, Capt. Dillon.*” In the fourteen Patriot newspapers I found that printed a portion or all of the same story, none of them mention English Prints as the source of the information. Most, including the earliest Patriot printing I found, attribute the source as from an “Extract of a letter from Toulon,” (e.g. *Pennsylvania Journal*, 16 August 1780; *Providence Gazette*, 2 September 1780), while others give no attributing information (*Virginia Gazette*, 6 September 1780). The inclusion of the subtitle by the *Royal Gazette* may be an attempt to confirm that the incredible riots did in fact happen, despite the suspect source that could benefit from (false) reports of London tearing itself apart. The seemingly conflicting title and subtitle alerted the Loyalist audience that the events did occur, but that they audience should be aware of Patriot bias in the depiction.

¹⁸ *Royal Gazette*, 2 September 1780.

the Patriots were hypocritical for not recognizing the inherent similarities between Lord Gordon's actions and their own.

Lord Gordon remained a presence in the Loyalist newspapers after the detailed report of the riots. But while Patriot newspapers were interested in any bit of news about Lord Gordon—from the process involved in arresting him for high treason to his treatment in the Tower of London—the Loyalist papers were more restrained in their printing of Lord Gordon's treatment following the riot. *The New-York Gazette's* September 4, 1780, edition contained two separate mentions of Lord Gordon, both of which reported amidst news that rioters were being tried and executed that Lord Gordon's trial was set to commence soon.¹⁹ The succinct treatment of Lord Gordon was echoed in New York's *Royal American Gazette's* October 10 issue, which related (incorrectly) only that "[t]he trial of Lord George Gordon had commenced, and it was imagined the issue would be known in a few days after the Hope sailed."²⁰ The *Royal Gazette* printed three different articles in different issues that speculated the involvement of Americans in the riots that Lord Gordon led, implying either a conspiracy or that Lord Gordon had been a pawn of the enemy.²¹ The Privy Council's examination of Lord Gordon, in which he expressed regret for having "not foreseen" the ensuing destruction caused by his advocacy while being summarily taken to task for the danger he had fomented, was placed in

¹⁹ *The New-York Gazette*, 4 September 1780. These succinct mentions of Lord Gordon's trial being set to commence were also echoed a month later in the *South-Carolina Gazette*, 4 October 1780, and 7 October 1780.

²⁰ *Royal American Gazette*, 10 October 1780.

²¹ *Royal Gazette*, 6 September 1780; *Royal Gazette*, 9 September 1780; *Royal Gazette*, 4 October 1780.

the same article following the king's proclamation deploying the military to restore order, juxtaposing the display of power by the king with the cowing and arrest of the figurehead of the riots.²² Lord Gordon's relationship to the riots was further asserted in a November 6 article in *The New-York Gazette* and a November 29 issue of the *South-Carolina Gazette*, which referred to "Lord G. Gordon's mob"—thereby assigning him responsibility of all their actions—when reporting about a loyal address to the king that had irritated the "republicans."²³ An explanation of the government's rationale for indicting Lord Gordon with high treason, "under the clause in the act of levying war against the King," was printed in a November edition of the *Royal Gazette*, with an issue later in the month explaining the legal reasons for the delay in his trial.²⁴ By the end of 1780, the Loyalist press had presented Lord Gordon as "mad" at best and a Patriot conspirator at worst. In contrast to the Patriot press, which saw in Lord Gordon a kindred spirit and a scapegoat for the British government's inability to maintain order without resorting to extreme measures, the Loyalist newspapers' depiction of Lord Gordon represented naïve ideals that could sew discord in society and the necessity and appropriateness of the British government's actions to restore and maintain order.

The Loyalist version of Lord Gordon was not the only difference in interpretation between the Loyalist and Patriot presses. The content, breadth, and duration of newspaper coverage of the riots underscored Loyalists principles and

²² *Royal Gazette*, 16 September 1780.

²³ *The New-York Gazette*, 6 November 1780; *South-Carolina Gazette*, 29 November 1780.

²⁴ *Royal Gazette*, 4 November 1780; *Royal Gazette*, 18 November 1780.

allegiance to the British crown.²⁵ The first Loyalist article on the riots succinctly reported that numerous prisons, houses of “several persons of rank,” and foreign ambassadors’ Catholic chapels had been destroyed by insurgents resenting Parliament’s repeal of “some of the penal laws against the Roman Catholics.”²⁶ “Military power was called for” after the insurgents turned their intentions to the Bank of England, which quelled the mob and took the leaders into custody.²⁷ This first article on the riots, which attributed its information to reports from passengers recently arrived in New York, concluded by admitting that there might be errors in the details but that the newspaper would endeavor to correct them when possible. Ending the article in such a way revealed the Loyalist printer’s doubt and skepticism. The *Royal Gazette*’s next article on the riots also evoked skepticism when it delved more into speculation than recounting the events, with the author of an unattributed report crediting the “Dissenters and Methodists” for “blowing up the flame” of destruction while also expressing pleasure that the “*popular resentment is directed full as much against many of the Leaders in opposition, as against the Ministry.*”²⁸ By crediting the tumults to these groups, and asserting that the opposition was unable to make gains from the riots, the author implies that the dissatisfaction that caused the riots was not inherent and widespread, but rather isolated to certain segments of society. The doubts about the veracity and the perpetrators involved from these early reports underscores how incredulous the Loyalist press found the notion that such a

²⁵ Potter and Calhoun, “Character and Coherence.”

²⁶ *Royal Gazette*, 23 August 1780.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Royal Gazette*, 26 August 1780. (emphasis original)

widespread and destructive event could occur in London. The possibility of exaggeration or incorrect information lessened the potential for lost faith in the British government, and laid the blame at the feet of notorious agitators such as the Dissenters and Methodists to curb any notion that the disturbance reflected the broader public.

By far the most descriptive retelling of the riots printed by a Loyalist newspaper was New York's *Royal Gazette*'s September 2 issue. Taking up over three full columns on the second page of the edition, the *Royal Gazette* made it emphatically clear that the report had been taken from the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, a known Patriot newspaper. Yet underneath this attribution was a subtitle stating that the intelligence was "taken from English Prints" on a recently arrived ship. This ostensible contradiction—as other Patriot newspaper that printed this same report did not cite "English Prints" as the source of the news—was a deliberate choice of the printers to give credence to the incredible story while also absolving any criticism of the British government as the result of Patriot bias.²⁹ The report began by detailing the Protestant Association's protest amassing 50,000 men to march on Parliament and deliver the petition demanding the repeal of the Catholic Relief Act. The excuse that the size of the crowd, and not their purpose, made the crowd too difficult to maintain the proper decorum and led to its devolution into violence and destruction would be attributed to Patriot bias. This sympathetic treatment, however, was tempered by lines admonishing the crowd for its impediment of what should be "dearer to every Englishman, the freedom of debate in parliament" that Loyalists would have

²⁹ *Royal Gazette*, 2 September 1780. For more on the discrepancies on this subheading, see n.17 above.

attributed to the British press. As the crowd grew more rowdy, they began intimidating Members of Parliament by forcing them to “take oaths,” “put blue cockades in their hats,” and even began kicking members “violently on the legs.” Other members had their carriages attacked, their clothes torn, and were prevented from entering Parliament and had to find alternative methods of entry. The final paragraph in the first column ends with the reflection of the writer that the “hasty account” of the events

is sufficient to make every friend to peace and good government heartily wish, that those in power may take effectual means to prevent so gross an insult to Parliament....It is vain to talk of the liberties of a country, where the democracy can at the pleasure, at the caprice, or in consequence of the mistaken zeal of any individual...be summoned together in large bodies, and having so assembled, can exercise the most lawless and oppressive tyranny, and set the civil power at defiance.³⁰

To a Loyalist audience, the statement reflected the very concerns they had about the dangers of the democracy that they believed was component of the Patriot cause.³¹ It was not the tyranny of the crown or government that was a threat to the liberty of a people, but that of the democracy under the sway of a zealous leader or idea. The mob gathered in London attacking government officials to secure their demands shared inherent similarities to the actions and rhetoric of the Patriots that precipitated the war.

³⁰ *Royal Gazette*, 2 September 1780.

³¹ Potter and Calhoun, “Character and Coherence,” 269; This belief is not entirely unfounded, as democratic principles were used to entice people to the Patriot cause. See Gary Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York: Viking, 2005). The expansion of these democratic principles would prompt a reactionary constriction in later years, as Gordon Wood argues in *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 229-369.

The account in the *Royal Gazette*'s September 2 issue continued with this theme of the mob's dangerous and destructive nature. But it also introduced a new theme, that of the British government's strong and appropriate response. In reaction to the "lawless proceedings of the mob," "the violences [sic] on the Chapels of the foreign Ministers," and the "indecent and unruly behavior to other persons, and in other places," the Privy Council had met on June 5 to encourage the king to "instantly issue a proclamation" to quell the mob and take to trial and make an example of those instigating the disturbances. The continued violence of the mob against Catholic associated individuals and institutions, the homes of prominent members of the government, and symbols of power and authority such as the prisons, was met with the extension of power to suppress the mob. Detachments of the military were brought into London to disperse the mob, while reports of the damage the mob had caused by June 8 was "estimated at upwards of one million sterling." With the encampment of the military in Hyde Park and St. James' Park (see Figure 2), suppression of the mob that had set fire to homes and prisons, attacked individuals and destroyed property, and had the "audacity" to attempt an attack on the Bank of England was swiftly brought to an end. Loyalists viewed this as the triumph of order over anarchy, and the inclusion of the legal rationale to use a proclamation rather than martial law as confirmation of the justness of the British government. The crown and Parliament worked together to restore order to London, and to Loyalists the prevailing of the British government over the agitated rebellion offered hope that the same would happen in America.³²

³² *Royal Gazette*, 2 September 1780.

The *South-Carolina Gazette*'s similarly comprehensive account of the riots featured in their September 13 issue. The report included a detailed recount of the various people and places attacked by the mob, before explaining the tactics the king employed to quell the riots. "Had Martial Law taken place, a Provost Marshall would have been appointed, whose authority supersedes all law, the Courts would have been shut, and publick [sic] Proclamation made to apprise every person of so momentous an alteration in the situation of life, liberty, and property," the paper related in explaining the king, with the advice and support of the Privy Council, had not enacted martial law. Following the nearly full column relating the events of the riots



Figure 2: *The encampment in St. James's Park MDCCLXXX* [London: Paul Sandby, 1783.] The Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection, The Society of the Cincinnati, Washington, D.C.

and the justification of how they were suppressed, the remainder of the issue's coverage on the riots related the governmental aftermath. The king's address to the House of Lords regarding the riots and the House of Lords' response praising and justifying the king's actions took up a full page. Pairing the particulars of the destruction of the riots with lengthy descriptions of the analysis, justification, and

praise of the king's actions by the House of Lords emphasized the correctness of that approach in suppressing the rioters. The British government was able to triumph over the rebellion by employing their legitimate power in an appropriate manner.³³

Following the damning accounts printed by the *Royal Gazette* and the *South-Carolina Gazette* on September 2 and 13, respectively, the subsequent articles by Loyalist newspapers took an interesting divergence from the Patriot press. Whereas a number of Patriot newspapers had printed facts about those tried and executed for their participation in the riots, only *The New-York Gazette* printed any information about the rioter's trials. Their first issue to report about the trials—which also happened to be the first issue of this newspaper to discuss the riots in any form—contained the information within two separate, brief updates about the affairs in London. “A great many offenders in the late riot, are daily apprehended who will be tried and made a proper example of by way of attonement [sic] to an injured nation,” the newspaper reported in one article; while another in the same issue stated “[t]he trials of the rioters have already commenced and many of them will be executed.”³⁴ In an article later in the month, *The New-York Gazette* would print a slightly lengthier recount of the sentencing of the convicted rioters, including listing their names and occupations.³⁵ This article began with a recounting of the judge's speech to the convicts, in which the judge chastises them for their endangerment of “the peace, the property and even the lives of many of the inhabitants of this city, and rendered it

³³ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 13 September 1780.

³⁴ *The New-York Gazette*, 4 September 1780.

³⁵ *The New-York Gazette*, 18 September 1780.

more like a town delivered into the hands of the enemy to be sacked and pillaged, than one that remained under the authority of a well ordered Government.”³⁶ To ensure the safety of the community, “examples should be made for the preservation of their peace in the future,” the judge asserted. The themes the judge used in his sentencing of the convicted rioters resonated with the Loyalists. Such egregious actions that threatened the safety of the public and the ability of the government to function required severe punishment. With the Patriot rebellion similarly threatening the safety of society and the structure of the British Empire, punishment of the rebels after the resolution of the war would be the only way to ensure peace in the future. Loyalists viewed the trial and sentencing of rioters as the likely template for Patriots following the conclusion of the war. Certainly once the British military was successful in snuffing out the rebellion, trials and executions of—at the very least—those rebels involved in key positions or committing egregious acts against Loyalists would provide justice and prevent further acts of violence and rebellion.

While *The New-York Gazette* centered its reporting on the riots to the punishment of those involved in the event, other Loyalist newspapers explored the possibility of conspiracy and demonstrated the unflappability of the British government. The *South-Carolina Gazette* featured a letter from the City of London expressing its “most sincere and perpetual thanks” for “paternal care shewn” to the city in suppressing the riots, thereby affirming the approval of the civil government of the king’s extension of power.³⁷ In its September 6 issue, the *Royal Gazette*

³⁶ *The New-York Gazette*, 18 September 1780.

³⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 18 October 1780.

printed three extracts of letters from London which all analyzed the events of the riots and how they related to the American war. In explicit terms, the authors of these letters insisted that the riots and the government response had produced a stronger government and unified people, “because the people have by it discovered that they can have no safety but in those to whom the powers of government are committed.” The deployment of the military to forcefully suppress the riots did not, “to the astonishment and disappointment of the sons of liberty,” prompt Patriot sympathizers to protest the measures, but instead resulted in “the thanks of the great city.” By printing these observations, the *Royal Gazette* underscored both the appropriate strength of the British government and the possibility for a unified body politic to come from tumultuous fractures. In the same issue, the *Royal Gazette* began its theme of linking the riots to American Patriot agents, thereby countering any insinuations that the riots were symptomatic of inherent problems in the British governing system. “You will see the details of this business in the public prints, there are not five men of sense and candour [sic] in the three kingdoms, but pronounce a certain American Negotiator in France to be at the bottom of it,” one letter asserted, implying that Benjamin Franklin had a role in the riots.³⁸ The intimation that American agents acted in some way to foment the riots was echoed in another letter printed by the *Royal Gazette* on September 9, and in the recount of the speech of Lord Mansfield, the Chief Lord Justice, to the House of Lords which asserted that “no man of could determine, with any degree of precision, the actual cause of the riots, from the apparent ostensible circumstances which immediately produced

³⁸ *Royal Gazette*, 6 September 1780.

them.”³⁹ This opinion by such an esteemed authority led the writer of the article to assert that this corroborated accounts from America that “an universal expectation existed there upwards of a month ago, that the metropolis of England would be, in a short time, in ashes.”⁴⁰ The Loyalist newspapers provided their audience reason to continue supporting the British government by printing letters and articles that emphasized the solidity of and support for the British government, and the plausibility that Patriot agents had in some way been involved in fueling the riots. If the British government could prevail in restoring order and retaining control in London, it surely could do the same in the American continent.

The Loyalist press added to this theme of the British government’s strength and superiority with evidence of its reasonableness. Rather than see Parliament as having caved to a power-hungry monarch, as the Patriot press had, the Loyalist press relished in the cooperation between Parliament and the crown to return order. The September 16 edition of the *Royal Gazette* publication of King George’s proclamation announcing that the Privy Council had advised him to take measures to suppress the riots was paired with another article recounting the legal examination of Lord Gordon in which the Privy Council measuredly probed Lord Gordon’s intentions for the protest, thereby demonstrating the legal and judicious approach of the crown and Parliament in the face of tumult.⁴¹ The *Royal Gazette* and the *South-Carolina Gazette* also printed the king’s late June address to the House of Lords after

³⁹ *Royal Gazette*, 9 September 1780; *Royal Gazette*, 4 October 1780.

⁴⁰ *Royal Gazette*, 4 October 1780.

⁴¹ *Royal Gazette*, 16 September 1780.

the riots had been suppressed, in which the king stated that the level of violence so overwhelmed civil authority that he found himself “obligated, by every tie of duty and affection to [his] people, to suppress” the insurrection “by the most effectual and immediate application of the force entrusted to [him] by Parliament.”⁴² He concluded his remarks by renewing his commitment to the laws of the realm and to “secure and to perpetuate the rights and liberties of [his] people.” To the House of Commons the king submitted a response read at the June 20 meeting, thanking them for the “loyal, affectionate, and unanimous” address, noting that unity was necessary to the security of the public. The articles proceeded to recount the House of Commons’ decision to take into consideration the Protestant Association’s petition. That Parliament, after suffering an affront to its dignity, would discuss and debate the very petition that Lord Gordon had told the crowd the House of Commons had tabled, thereby sparking their ire, demonstrated that Parliament would entertain petitions and issues of discord—but not when threatened. The *Royal American Gazette* printed in its October 26 issue the speech of Lord Loughborough on the laws related to rioting and property destruction, which he ends by stressing:

Such is the inestimable blessing of a Government founded on law, that it extends its benefits to all alike, to the guilty and the innocent. To the latter the law is a protection and a safeguard, to the former it is not a protection, but it may be considered as a house of refuge: indeed there cannot be a greater proof of the excellence of that Constitution, than by administering its benefits to all men indifferently.⁴³

⁴² *Royal Gazette*, 13 September 1780; *South-Carolina Gazette*, 13 September 1780, 16 September 1780.

⁴³ *Royal American Gazette*, 26 October 1780.

The theme of the superiority of the British temperament was further echoed in an October 14, 1780, edition of the *South-Carolina Gazette*, which in its news from London printed an examination of the use of religion as the basis for “civil disorder.”⁴⁴ Comparing the recent riots to those in the “fanatical days of Cromwell,” the paper asserted the necessity of remaining vigilant against “embers” that could ignite the country into chaos.⁴⁵ The stories the Loyalist press featured showed the British government to be stalwart, cooperative, and impervious to threats against its power and authority while also fairly treating its subjects. Coming through the insurrection in London, reestablishing order, and returning to the routine operations of state was proof positive that the British government was superior because it was measured and guided by a just constitution.

Loyalist newspapers’ content and editorial decisions framed Lord Gordon and the riots as a challenge to the power and authority of the British government, but one which the superiority of the British government overcame without changing its nature. The seriousness of the threat was repeatedly diminished as the newspapers focused on the ability of the government to regain order and distribute justice. The level of importance the Loyalist press afforded the riots was further demonstrated by the location of the reports and letters within the newspapers. During 1780, of the five Loyalist newspapers examined, only twenty-four issues contained either one or more articles related to the Gordon Riots. Strikingly, only four of the issues featured articles associated with the Gordon Riots on the first page. Fifteen articles on the riot

⁴⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 14 October 1780.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

or Lord Gordon were located on the second page, eleven articles were located on the third page, and two articles were on the fourth page. While a significant portion of the first pages of newspapers of the time were devoted to advertisements, important news articles were also commonly featured. Loyalist printers' deliberate placement of a majority of news articles on the riots on the interior pages of the newspapers reflected their overall significance amidst other news deemed important for the Loyalist audience. Whereas Patriot newspapers often placed reports of the riots, especially during critical-mass months of August and September, on the first or second pages, Loyalist newspapers placing the majority of reports regarding the riots on the second or third pages of the newspapers was another method to diminish the significance of the London disturbance.

The Loyalists newspapers framed the Gordon Riots and Lord Gordon to encourage their audience to remain committed to their ideology. By emphasizing the British government's ability to overcome the rioters through legal means, the judicial process that afforded the rioters and Lord Gordon due process while also giving justice to those targeted by the mob, and the restoration of order and the return to the business of the empire, the Loyalist press championed the excellence of the British nation. The ability to weather the events of the riots and come out victorious was a premonition of the British government's ultimate success to do the same in the American colonies. With the capture of Charleston, the spread of the military in the South, and news of General Arnold's defection, the suppression of the Gordon Riots were yet another example of momentum turning in favor of the British and Loyalist.

Prominent Loyalists, their Allies, and the Gordon Riots

Loyalists' writings are more difficult to assess for their reaction to the Gordon Riots. Scattered in different repositories, if collected at all, makes it difficult to gain a full assessment of how individual Loyalists reacted privately to the world around them. The letters and writings that were assessed for this project, however, allow for reading into how news of the Gordon Riots might be interpreted. While the letters of Loyalists may not directly comment on the news of the Gordon Riots, they do reveal Loyalists' mood and motivation during that time period. Additionally, correspondence with key allies and figures in the British military provides the opportunity to explore what information was coming directly from Great Britain and how it dovetailed with reports in the Loyalist newspapers. The papers of Joseph Galloway and General Sir Henry Clinton examined here facilitate understanding the context for Loyalists receiving news of the Gordon Riots from newspapers and allies in the cause of suppressing the Patriot rebellion.

The letters of Joseph Galloway and his family are reflective of the mood and commitment to the cause around the time of the Gordon Riots. Joseph, a prominent politician from Pennsylvania who had been present at the First Continental Congress in 1774, had moved to New York from Philadelphia upon the British pull-out from the city in 1778. Shortly thereafter, he and his daughter traveled to London where he became a leading Loyalist liaison for the British government.⁴⁶ His wife, Grace, remained in Philadelphia in hopes to retain their property. An outspoken Loyalist,

⁴⁶ For information on Joseph Galloway, see John E. Ferling, *The Loyalist Mind: Joseph Galloway and the American Revolution* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977).

Joseph's pamphlets advocated for the suppression of the Patriot rebellion and a return of the Patriots to reason about their role within the British Empire.⁴⁷ In a pamphlet published in London in 1780, Joseph explained the opinion of Loyalists in the pre-Declaration of Independence days, stating: "they hoped that the time was approaching, when the powers of the State would be exerted; and they knew, that those powers, if conducted with wisdom, would be more than sufficient to crush the intended rebellion."⁴⁸ The government response to the Gordon Riots mirrored this hope of the Loyalists on a smaller scale, and would also prove that this hope was not unfounded as it related to America. Joseph also advocated for British compensation and fair treatment to Loyalists who had become displaced and lost their livelihoods and property because of the war, causing them to live in a state of insecurity and anxiety. The letters between Joseph and Grace reveal the fear of uncertainty that many Loyalists shared. "Provision is extremely scarce, groceries not to be bought," Joseph wrote to Grace in a 1778 letter from New York.⁴⁹ He continued in this short letter to discourage her from leaving Pennsylvania, despite the situation there, as he did not believe she would find the situation in New York much better for want of food and personal items. Grace's diary also reflects the challenging situation she

⁴⁷ See Joseph Galloway, *Cool thoughts on the consequences to Great Britain of American independence : on the expence [sic] of Great Britain in the settlement and defence ...* (London, 1780) *Sabin Americana*. Gale, Cengage Learning. University Maryland, College Park. 06 March 2015; Galloway, Joseph. *Historical and political reflections on the rise and progress of the American rebellion : in which the causes of that rebellion are pointed out, ...* London, 1780. 141pp. *Sabin Americana*. Gale, Cengage Learning. University Maryland, College Park. 06 March 2015; Galloway, Joseph. *Plain truth, or, A letter to the author of Dispassionate thoughts on the American war : in which the principles and arguments of that author are ...* London, 1780. 82pp. *Sabin Americana*. Gale, Cengage Learning. University Maryland, College Park. 06 March 2015.

⁴⁸ Galloway, *Historical and political reflections*, 95.

⁴⁹ Joseph Galloway Papers, Box 1, Library of Congress.

endured in Philadelphia, though it also related her hopes that the British would ultimately succeed in the war. Fighting a losing battle to retain her home, Grace lamented that “[n]o body offers to serve me or take Me in,” finding friend after friend turning her away until finally one took her in.⁵⁰ Laying bare the loss of friends and property and dissatisfaction with the course of the war, Grace’s diary shows the daily difficulties Loyalists’ faced during the war and reflects the low morale developed by the situation.

Pairing the information gleaned from these writings with the Loyalist press’ portrayal of the riots facilitates insight into how Loyalists might interpret and utilize the news of the events within the framework of their ideology. By 1780, Loyalists were eager for positive movement towards the end of the war. Conditions in New York, where upwards of 25,000 Loyalist refugees had migrated, were taxing and difficult.⁵¹ Life in Patriot occupied areas, such as Philadelphia, was equally difficult, with hostilities and uncertainties complicating daily living. With military victories such as Charleston and the defection of General Benedict Arnold to buoy spirits, the news of the Gordon Riots and the government response would provide further evidence that the Loyalists allegiance to the British government was justified. The British government, through its wise approach in handling the domestic rebellion, retained its superiority in the eyes of its Loyalist subjects. Reports that highlighted the government’s strength and reasonableness in reaction to the riots would, when

⁵⁰ Grace Growden Galloway and Raymond C. Werner, “Diary of Grace Growden Galloway,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (1931): 42-52.

⁵¹ Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 28-36.

coming shortly after the news of the capture of Charleston, create optimism that momentum was turning in favor of the British winning the war.

But while it is difficult to find Loyalists explicitly writing about the Gordon Riots, allies within the British military received and came into possession of letters that discussed the riots and how they might impact the British war effort. One such ally was General Sir Henry Clinton, the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces, who had returned to New York from his conquest of Charleston, South Carolina, in late June, 1780. Sir Clinton received ten letters written in June and July, 1780, from friends and associates in London alerting him to the riots.⁵² A June 24, 1780, letter from Earl Charles Grey contained enclosed papers giving details about the riots, while Earl Grey specifically noted that the riots “occasioned Martial Law to be proclaimed.”⁵³ Later in his letter, Lord Grey related that Lord Gordon had been confined to the Tower to await trial for high treason, and that the riots had resulted in troops being encamped in Hyde Park. A letter from Richard Cox, dated June 26, 1780, similarly shared the details of the riots and the destruction they caused.⁵⁴ Cox’s stated that the news of Sir Clinton’s conquest of Charleston “raise[d] our spirits,” while the city was under threat from the mob, a sentiment echoed by most letters sent to Sir Clinton about the riots. In a July 2, 1780, letter from J.P. Clinton, “very little doubt, but that it was a scheme formed by the Americans and French to

⁵² Henry Clinton papers, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan.

⁵³ HC papers, Vol. 106.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

burn down London” was reported to Sir Clinton.⁵⁵ Charles Mellish’s July 4 letter also alleged that American agents had played some role or attempted to benefit from the riots, while also proclaiming that because the civil magistrates had “run away from their Duty” the king was “obliged to issue orders to the Military to proceed against the Rioters.”⁵⁶ The letters to Sir Clinton contained many of the same themes as the Loyalist newspapers, including the ability of the British government to suppress the riots and restore order and the possibility of American involvement in either fueling or benefiting from the riots. The letters also demonstrated the similarities between American Loyalists and British citizens to seek motivation from across the Atlantic to continue the war. While Loyalists found it in the power of the British government to suppress the rebels in London, British citizens reveled in the conquest of Charleston that gave hope the war was yet winnable.

In addition to the ten letters specifically addressed to Sir Clinton, an additional letter from August 24, 1780, is included in his papers that discussed news of the Gordon Riots. Written by Pennsylvania Loyalist William Smith, the former Provost of the University of Pennsylvania, it is addressed to “Madam.”⁵⁷ It is unknown who the intended recipient was, but it possibly could have been Sir Clinton’s mistress, Mary Baddeley, who lived with him in New York during the war.⁵⁸ The letter, written from Philadelphia, recounts the news of the riots in significant detail, noting that “50,000 gathered have been committing the most

⁵⁵ HC papers, Vol. 108.

⁵⁶ HC papers, Vol. 109.

⁵⁷ HC papers, Vol. 243.

⁵⁸ O’Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 238.

extravagant outrages” and attacks were made against “the person and effects of Members of Parliament, Foreign ministers and other distinguished characters.” He later opined that “[i]t will, I suppose, soon evaporate in smoke, as their leader, Lord Gordon has in some of his late speeches in parliament rather discovered marks of insanity.”⁵⁹ Smith’s information likely was drawn from likely Patriot newspaper accounts, as they printed speeches from Lord Gordon in their newspapers in Philadelphia. That Smith found the specific information relevant and drew his conclusions about Lord Gordon’s sanity despite his sources likely being Patriot newspapers provides evidence of how Loyalists read and interpreted events to suit their worldview.

While it is unsurprising that the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces would be alerted to the domestic situations that could impact the war, the significance of Sir Clinton receiving this information is more pronounced considering his relationship with the Loyalist community in New York. Though Sir Clinton was dubious of bringing Loyalists into the military, he nevertheless strove to retain their support and protect them from rebel retaliation.⁶⁰ The riots, which featured notably in a number of letters to Sir Clinton, were almost certainly discussed in his conversations with fellow officers and Loyalist civilians. Loyalist newspapers often printed information for Loyalist citizens from Sir Clinton, which also often featured reports about battles and efforts to raise Loyalist troops.⁶¹ The interaction between Sir Clinton’s sphere and the press invites the possibility that Sir Clinton and his

⁵⁹ HC papers, Vol. 243.

⁶⁰ O’Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, ch. 6.

⁶¹ For an example of this, see *Royal Gazette*, 13 September 1780.

associates related some of the information on the riots to the Loyalist newspapers. At the very least, it is plausible that the news of the event invited discussion between Sir Clinton and his officers as to the impact this affair could have on the military. The possibility of those discussions spreading beyond Sir Clinton and his associates and making their way to the press is not out of the question.

The writings of the Galloways and letters within Sir Clinton's collection are starting points for looking into how individual Loyalists might have reacted to the news of the Gordon Riots. They offer insight into the world in which the news would be received, and what news might come from allies on American soil in addition to the newspaper accounts. It is entirely likely that more Loyalist were also corresponding and spreading the news and their opinions about the Gordon Riots, as William Smith's letter demonstrates. By bringing light to the impact of the Gordon Riots in America, references to this event that may have been overlooked could receive the proper attention they so richly deserve.

The Loyalists interpretation of the Gordon Riots differed significantly from that of the Patriots. The event confirmed Loyalists' analysis of the disruptive and transportable potential of dangerous ideas that challenged structures of power and authority. Yet the event also demonstrated the British government's strength and resoluteness. Loyalists were reassured by the ability of the different components of the British government, the crown and Parliament, to band together to suppress the riots, restore order, and then return to business as usual. Coupling this perception of

the riots and their aftermath with news of the British military's conquest of Charleston and the defection of Patriot General Benedict Arnold gave Loyalists reason to hope for the swift and victorious conclusion to the war. The government appeared to be on the path towards definitive victory, and its ability to weather challenges to its authority domestically proved that it would withstand and triumph over the rebels in the colonies.

Chapter 3: Beyond 1780: Continued Interest in the Gordon Riots

“Lord George Gordon is still in the Tower—Administration would be very glad to rid themselves of this thorn—To charge him with high treason is easy—to convict him upon proof is difficult. It is still very problematical whether he is guilty of anything more than a misdemeanour [sic]. He is most certainly beloved by Scotland in general—his sacrifice would cause some heart-burnings—perhaps something more. If he is to be tried by a Jury, a Sherriff [sic] can readily procure one that would find him guilty without the shadow of evidence, or at least with very little of it.”¹

-Extract of a letter dated Paris, August 10, 1780

At the close of 1780, British society had settled a majority of the issues relating to the Gordon Riots. The government had tried and sentenced over one hundred of the rioters, executing twenty-five.² In Britain, the disturbances left their mark by dividing the opposition and strengthening the ministry.³ But with news of the capture of Charleston and the defection of General Benedict Arnold, the nation’s focus shifted beyond the riots and towards the successful completion of the war and unification of the British Empire. There remained, however, unfinished business associated with the riots that would demonstrate the superiority or the tyranny of the British government: Lord Gordon’s trial for high treason.

While the British sought to resolve the riots and move forward, the aftermath of the Gordon Riots retained the American public’s interest to varying degrees. In 1781, ninety Patriot newspaper articles and fifteen Loyalist newspaper articles featured either Lord Gordon or the Gordon Riots in some capacity. Henry Laurens, former president of the Continental Congress and prisoner of the British in the Tower of London, wrote about his

¹ *Independent Chronicle*, 19 April 1781.

² *Norwich Packet*, 10 October 1780; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 11 October 1780; *Providence Gazette*, 18 October 1780; *Independent Chronicle*, 19 October 1780.

³ Rudé, “The Gordon Riots.” Rudé attributes the strengthening of the Ministry in the general election in 1780 to support of the voting public for the government in the wake of the riots. The opposition, which had been split in reaction to the riots, had also been hurt in the court of public opinion for the association of known members of the opposition with the cause of the rioters. The result was a more unified and strengthened Ministry, with the opposition in a weaker position to affect policy, including those related to the American War.

encounters with Lord Gordon on the Tower grounds and the dramatic reaction they provoked in his jailers—and in fact the concurrent confinement of Laurens and Lord Gordon was a point of interest for newspapers. With both Patriots and Loyalists viewing the trial of Lord Gordon as crucial evidence of the British government’s disposition, Americans remained concerned with the aftermath of the riots and how it might vindicate their ideology.

Loyalist and Patriot opinions of the Gordon Riots’ relevancy to their ideologies in 1780 culminated in the attention shown to the riots and Lord Gordon in the year following the week long disturbance. Newspaper reports in 1781 further clarified and nuanced initial lessons and impressions from the riots and the government’s response. This chapter explores the Patriot and Loyalist presses’ continued interest in the Gordon Riots, analyzing their differences and similarities, and how they framed the narrative of the riots’ aftermath to evoke specific understandings for a particular audience. Patriot and Loyalist newspapers’ treatment of Lord Gordon and the riots’ lingering aftermath entrenched previous themes drawn from the events and connected them to each ideology’s cause. The result was the calcification of support to stay their particular course that would ultimately bring victory to their side in the conflict.

1781: A New Year, An Ongoing Story

Both the Patriot and Loyalist press persisted in reprinting articles featuring Lord Gordon and the Gordon Riots throughout 1781. But just as their coverage and portrayal differed in 1780, the editorial decisions Patriot and Loyalist printers made advanced certain interpretations of the events and demonstrated the different degree of importance the ideologies gave to the riots and their aftermath. The Patriot press’ intensity and attention given to Lord Gordon in 1781, and particularly regarding his trial for high treason, contrasted sharply to the Loyalist press’ reserved and minimalist treatment of Lord Gordon and his trial.

Patriots saw the events leading up to the trial and the trial itself as more proof of the British government's corrupted nature, as the quote at the beginning of this chapter asserted, while Loyalists echoed their British counterparts in their desire to tidy up the loose ends of the riots and reestablish the focus of the British nation on victory in the war. These were trends carried on from the previous year, yet as more information crossed the Atlantic, both the Patriots and Loyalists found further evidence in the trial and treatment of Lord Gordon by the British government to support their positions. The American press' coverage of the lingering elements connected to the Gordon Riots, therefore, had the effect of cementing the previous year's interpretations while adding more corroboration to support those interpretations.

As the new year began, Patriot newspapers continued to report protracted information about the riots themselves, even accounts that differed from the previously detailed reports from the past autumn. By doing so, the Patriot press persisted in shaping the connection between the fight for independence and the British government's response to the riots. In a succinct listing of reports taken from a British ship, the January 3 *Pennsylvania Journal* relayed that "the mob in England had levelled Lord North's house, and several others— Several prisons were opened, and the Americans and other prisoners were set at liberty."⁴ Though the report closed by stating "[b]y the channel we received those reports, they at least appear probable," the information was given the benefit of the doubt.⁵ This report, though not explicitly mentioning Lord Gordon or specific dates, included enough information that it was likely a retelling of the June 1780 riots. Patriot audiences would welcome the report's claim, though incorrect, that Lord North's home was destroyed and that Americans had been set free in the attacks on the prisons, especially as they despised Lord North as the head of

⁴ *Pennsylvania Journal*, 3 January 1781; also printed in *Massachusetts Spy*, 4 January 1781.

⁵ *Ibid.*

the ministry and champion of the war. Undoubtedly the news that the riots had freed American prisoners would also be well received, particularly after news spread of the state's execution of London rioters and the rumors of American involvement in the riots—the fate of any Americans previously detained would have been even more precarious. The publication of this report exemplified the Patriot press' determination to use any bit of information to strengthen the support of their cause, regardless of its potential to be incorrect or its lateness (which they might have interpreted as the British's attempts to censor damaging information leaving their shores). Patriots' spirits would be buoyed by the brief report that played on their sense of *schadenfreude*. American involvement in the riots was similarly featured in reprints of reports from London, which alluded to the accusation of American involvement in the riots. These reports noted that the British government had information on “no less a number of incendiaries than forty seven, now residing in and near this metropolis, who have lately come over from America” right above news that Lord Gordon's trial was to commence in the next term.⁶ For a British audience, this placement was intended as a subtle reminder of the rumored connection between rioters and rebel Americans, but to a Patriot audience the placement read as further efforts by the British to deflect their culpability in the riots by asserting blame with outside elements.

The Loyalist press also printed ensuing discussions on the riots, with the *Royal Gazette* printing two letters contesting the claims of an earlier letter printed in August 1780. The two letters refuted the assertion that Methodists were “secretly blowing up the flame” of the riots, claiming that “not one of them was any otherwise concerned in the late tumults than in doing all they possibly could to suppress them.”⁷ The publication of these letters refuting

⁶ *American Journal*, 10 March 1781.

⁷ *Royal Gazette*, 24 February 1781; these letters were also reprinted in the *Royal Gazette* on 3 March 1781. It is probable that this reprint indicates the seriousness by which the printer took the accusations and the correction of them.

the involvement of Methodists in the riots reflected concerns held by marginalized religions on both sides of the Atlantic. Accusations that they were involved in fanning the flames of the riots would breed further persecutions of their pastors and members. That the *Royal Gazette* printed these repudiations from London was likely to appease the Methodist Loyalists and to draw distinction between peaceful Methodists and radical Britons and Americans.⁸ The Loyalist newspapers also focused on the continued efforts of the British government to carry forward and to enact measures to ensure the restored peace. The *South-Carolina Gazette* in a February 24 article printed the House of Commons' discussions and actions relating to legislation that would indemnify civil magistrates to order "constables to act in the time of riots," with one member arguing that the order for the military to act in suppressing the riot should be extended to the entire kingdom if local magistrates are not able to maintain order.⁹ Loyalists viewed this ongoing effort of Parliament to address the situations that had allowed the riots to grow so large and destructive as proof that the government was capable of overcoming national issues in a calm, orderly fashion. The Loyalist press' decision to print articles that dealt with identifying blame for the riots and showing the government working to ensure riots like this would not happen again reassured the Loyalist audience of the superiority of the British government. Contrasted to the Patriot perception that the British government intended to ignore their complicity in the riots, the Loyalists interpretation saw the British nation as committed to holding the true culprits accountable and ensuring safety and peace continued forward.

⁸ For more on Methodism in America, see Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 471-488. Rack notes that there was a significant population of Methodists in New York in the years leading up to the outbreak of war. Methodists were encouraged by their leader, John Wesley, to remain loyal to Great Britain, as he linked "American rebellion with English radicalism" (487).

⁹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 24 February 1781.

The Patriot newspapers in the beginning of the year also took a great deal of interest in the fact that both Lord Gordon and Henry Laurens, the former president of the Continental Congress and ambassador captured on his way to Holland, were in the Tower at the same time. “There are now two late Presidents confined in the Tower, viz. Lord George Gordon, formerly President of the Protestant Association; and Mr. Henry Laurens, formerly President of the American Congress,” the *Pennsylvania Journal* first reported on January 10.¹⁰ The report from London may have sought to diminish the stature of the “American Congress” by equating it to an association, but the Patriot audience saw British equation of these two men to each other as yet another sign that American Patriots would be held to a similar standard as those involved in the Gordon Riots. Over a month later, the *Pennsylvania Packet* printed excerpts of a letter from Portsmouth that contrasted the treatment of Lord Gordon and Laurens in the Tower, relating that “[s]everal people now visit Lord Gordon in the Tower, but always in the presence of one of the warders” while “no person whatever will be allowed to even see” Laurens.¹¹ Laurens’ more severe treatment as compared to Lord Gordon, who was facing trial for high treason, indicated the British’s likely treatment of the Patriots should they lose the war. Granted, Patriots had no illusions that they would not face retribution should they lose the war. But the clear example that the government’s response to the rioters and Lord Gordon presented, and the harsher treatment for the captured Patriot diplomat, reiterated that point when victory seemed further out of reach. The juxtaposition of Lord Gordon and Laurens continued in later newspapers, such as the *Connecticut Courant*’s March 6 edition, which included ruminations from London over whether Laurens should be

¹⁰ *Pennsylvania Journal*, 10 January 1781; also printed in *Connecticut Journal*, 1 February 1781; *Norwich Packet*, 6 February 1781.

¹¹ *Pennsylvania Packet*, 20 February 1781. Earlier in this same extract, the author notes that Laurens is staying in the same apartments in the Tower that John Wilkes, notorious for his championing of liberty and freedom, and seen by American Patriots as a friend, was confined to during his arrest over fifteen years earlier. Inclusion of this detail would likely be taken by Patriots as a sign of the British government’s view of Laurens and the danger he represented.

tried for treason right below two paragraphs regarding Lord Gordon's satisfaction on being arraigned and his push to expedite his trial.¹² "If deliberate treason, and active rebellion, are crimes against the state," then Laurens "certainly deserves the severest reprobation," the author asserted.¹³ Discussing Lord Gordon's trial for high treason in the context of the debate over what to do with Laurens suggested a link between the two men, which a Patriot audience read very differently than a British or Loyalist audience. Patriots were already conscious of the rioters' punishments and executions for their involvement in a relatively short rebellion; the greater magnitude of the American rebellion would certainly produce greater punishment and retribution should the Patriots fail to win the war. Patriots would see the comparisons between the linking of Lord Gordon's charges to Laurens as indicative of what Patriot leaders—and perhaps even those not directly involved, but guilty by association—could expect should the British win the war.

In contrast, the Loyalist newspapers offered a different interpretation when relating news of Laurens and Lord Gordon. The Loyalist newspaper of Laurens' home state, the *South-Carolina Gazette*, reported right beneath its discussion of Lord Gordon's indictment for high treason that the Secretary of State's office had issued an order to "indulge Mr. Laurens with the liberty of walking abroad in the Tower, for the benefit of the air, with proper attendance."¹⁴ Permitting Laurens the liberty to leave his apartment was in stark contrast to Patriot reports on his confinement and inability to see visitors, and demonstrated the British government's humaneness which would grant due process to Lord Gordon and give those charged with treason a reasonable degree of liberty despite their imprisonment. That both Patriot and Loyalist press situated the capture and confinement of Laurens with

¹² *Connecticut Courant*, 6 March 1781.

¹³ *Connecticut Courant*, 6 March 1781.

¹⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 13 January 1781.

Lord Gordon indicates that both saw reasons to link the two men. For Patriots, it was to demonstrate the British government's corruption and the potential for their similar treatment of Patriots should the war be lost; for Loyalists, the comparisons showed the magnanimity of the British government towards their prisoners. The two interpretations were further corroboration for the positions each ideology had already taken on the matter.

Henry Laurens' own journal writings and narrative shed further insight into the encounters between himself and Lord Gordon, and the reactions their British jailers had to both men concurrently inhabiting the Tower. His writings also confirmed and conflicted with some of the reports that the Patriot and Loyalists press were printing. Most strikingly, Laurens' journal entries confirmed that Lord Gordon and Laurens were not only just occupying the same space, but, in fact, had encounters that prompted concern from their jailers. In a December 3, 1780 run in with Lord Gordon on the Tower grounds, Laurens noted that Lord Gordon had asked to walk with him, and though Laurens declined, the Governor of the Tower had placed Laurens in close confinement as a result. Laurens claimed he was not the transgressor in the incident, but rather "the fault was in Lord George but the Brutal Governor dared not lock him up."¹⁵ In late January 1781, Laurens noted that Lord Gordon had sent him a piece of cake, but that the Governor of the Tower was so "wrathful beyond all decency" that he had the warder inform Laurens that he would receive "nothing but through him."¹⁶ In an entry for February 8, 1781, Laurens related the rude behavior of the Governor to Lord Gordon as he was being conducted to Westminster Hall for his trial.¹⁷ Laurens' inclusion of Lord Gordon in his journal, written in pencil and reflecting his denial of ink and pen with which to write, demonstrated the significance that both Laurens and his

¹⁵ Henry Laurens, *The Papers of Henry Laurens, Vol. 15: December 11, 1778-August 31, 1782*, eds. David L. Chesnutt and C. James Taylor (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 349-350.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 353.

¹⁷ Laurens, *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, 353.

jailers placed upon Lord Gordon and the two prisoners meeting. With little materials to write with, Laurens determined that his encounters with Lord Gordon and the reactions they provoked in his jailers were important to record. Additionally, Laurens' implied comparison between the treatment of Lord Gordon and himself by the jailers reflected the level of danger that was associated with both men, and how that manifested into restrictions upon their occasional interactions. Laurens' observations dovetail with Patriot newspaper accounts that—while not directly asserting the interactions between Laurens and Lord Gordon—note the degree of comparison and concern that British jailers had for the two men. By his own accounts, Laurens could receive and interact with some visitors, which also lent itself to Loyalist newspapers' interpretation of British treatment of Laurens as more lenient, while conflicting with Patriot reports of Laurens' strict confinement. Though Patriot and Loyalists newspapers portrayed the treatment of Laurens and the connections between him and Lord Gordon while at the Tower in different lights, the fact that Laurens' own private writings confirmed both interpretations underscores the efforts of interpretation that each ideology took to further their agenda.

Similar to their antithetical approach to the Laurens and Lord Gordon connection, the Patriot and Loyalist presses persisted in framing Lord Gordon and his impending trial in a manner that suited their particular cause. Just as Patriot newspaper coverage at the close of 1780 contained mere mentions of Lord Gordon's upcoming trial to more detailed information about his treatment in the tower, this trend continued at the beginning of 1781. The *Norwich Packet* printed in its January 2, 1781, issue the same explanation printed in *Massachusetts Spy*'s November 16, 1780, issue regarding the legal reason why Lord Gordon's trial was taking so long to commence, let alone be presented the bill of indictment.¹⁸ A January 20

¹⁸ This article, in addition to being printed in 1780 in the *Massachusetts Spy*, 16 November 1780, and in the *Norwich Packet*, 2 January 1781, was also printed in *Independent Ledger*, 8 January 1781.

article in the *Pennsylvania Packet* provided further information on the justification for the indictment of Lord Gordon for high treason, explaining that the large crowd assembled and belligerent served as the “arms, instruments, array and operations common” in levying war against the king.¹⁹ The Patriot press was able to use these reports explaining the legal methods and reasoning being employed in the pre-trial judicial proceedings to demonstrate the British government’s delays and tactics to pin fault of the riots entirely on Lord Gordon. Even Lord Gordon’s movements within the Tower walls were “constantly attended by one of the yeomen of the guard, who walks a few yards after his lordship.”²⁰ Though a similar story was used by the Loyalist press to show humaneness towards Henry Laurens, to a Patriot audience this continual vigilance in the closely guarded Tower of London read as excessive and harassing. From excuses for delays in the start of his trial to restrictions on his movements, the Patriot press found the British government’s actions towards Lord Gordon as oppressive and unjust. If they would pursue these methods in their prosecution of Lord Gordon for his connection to the riot, what tactics would the British government use on Patriots should they lose the war?

Beyond the pre-trial justifications for delays in indicting Lord Gordon and bringing him to trial, the Patriot press focused a great deal of attention to the actual indictment process. Reports from London that “a true bill against George Gordon, Esq.; commonly called Lord George Gordon, for high treason,” had been issued seemingly stripped Lord Gordon of his title, at least by the British sources of the report.²¹ Though this action could be

¹⁹ *Pennsylvania Packet*, 20 January 1781. A less explanatory report of the indictment process also appeared in Patriot newspapers, which primarily listed that it was rumored that a bill of indictment would go to the grand jury in the next term, and that if the bill was found Lord Gordon would be tried in the Court of King’s Bench “most probably in the next Hillary Term” (*Pennsylvania Journal*, 14 February, 1781; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 21 February 1781).

²⁰ *Connecticut Journal*, 8 February 1781; *Independent Chronicle*, 15 February 1781; *Newport Mercury*, 24 February 1781; *Massachusetts Spy*, 1 March 1781.

²¹ *Norwich Packet*, 1 March 1781; *Independent Chronicle*, 8 March 1781; *Independent Ledger*, 9 April 1781.

interpreted as disrespectful and further evidence of the government's intention to make Lord Gordon an example and scapegoat, to a Patriot audience that had rejected titles of nobility this action could also be seen as further aligning Lord Gordon with the maligned and nominally aristocratic-free United States.²² The *New-Jersey Gazette*, in late March, featured a more comprehensive version of this account which recounted the justice's instructions to the grand jury that included the more liberal definition of high treason and directed them to "give every attention to the circumstances of the case of the prisoner; at the same time remembering the duty they owed to the publick [sic] justice of the kingdom."²³ Within that same day the grand jury had returned with a "*true bill...for high treason.*"²⁴ In the ensuing legal discussions between the Attorney General and justices of the court—including Lord Mansfield, whose house had been ransacked by the rioters—the Attorney General's earlier reported "confidence in [Lord Gordon's] conviction" was underscored by his motion to quickly empanel a jury for trial and the revelation that Lord Gordon would not appear in court until the trial—thereby precluding Lord Gordon from any pre-trial appearances or decisions.²⁵ The article additionally recorded the discussion between the justices on the manner of appointing Lord Gordon's counsel, which deviated from the normal procedure in appointing counsel.²⁶ The Patriot press' attention to the pre-trial court proceedings called into question the notion that the British judicial system was fair and impartial—a sentiment

²² Titles of nobility was explicitly forbidden in the Articles of Confederation, and later continued in the United States Constitution. The seemingly insult to Lord Gordon's status in the indictment announcement could have further engendered him to a Patriot audience, as it would have placed him on more equal footing with the common people.

²³ *New-Jersey Gazette*, 28 March 1781.

²⁴ *Ibid.* (emphasis original)

²⁵ *American Journal*, 10 March 1781; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 28 March 1781.

²⁶ The conversation relates that after Mr. Erskine moved, on behalf of the absent Lord Gordon, to have himself and Mr. Kenyon admitted as Lord Gordon's advocates, Justice Buller asked if "it was usual for such motions to be made, but by prisoners in person at the bar of the court?" Lord Mansfield and the Attorney General approved of the motion, the paper reported.

many Patriots already held. The directions to the grand jury, the broadening of the definition of “high treason,” and the deviation in typical proceedings reeked of efforts to deny impartial treatment.²⁷

A scathing letter excerpt from Paris printed by the *Independent Chronicle* further brought the British government’s methods and motives into question, which criticized the tactics employed by the government in their prosecution against Lord Gordon and the other accused rioters. The letter charged that the sheriff could easily select a jury that would convict Lord Gordon “without the shadow of evidence, or at least with very little of it,” and that “[p]unishment and pardon are become subservient to the caprices and humours [sic] of the King and his sychophants [sic], rather than to the good of the state.”²⁸ Yet as they reported and criticized the sluggish advancement towards trial, the Patriot press also took notice of Lord Gordon’s reported demeanor, recording that he “expressed the highest satisfaction” at the prospect of being arraigned and entering his plea, and that he had even pushed for his trial to start without delay.²⁹ Lord Gordon’s desire to start his trial quickly demonstrated to Patriots that he was eager to prove his innocence and dispel the government’s attempt to equate his passion for his cause with treasonous riots. By the end of March, the Patriot press had set the stage for Lord Gordon’s trial, slanting opinion and sympathy in his favor through their framing of the government’s tactics employed against him thus far.

²⁷ Douglas Hay explores the nature of Eighteenth Century British justice in his chapter in *Albion’s Fatal Tree*, in which he details the values placed upon equality before the law (though he notes this value is more in ideology than in practice, particularly when it comes to class), strict adherence to procedural rules, and the importance of property in the determination of capital offenses (Douglas Hay, “Property, Authority and the Criminal Law,” in *Albion’s Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, Ed. Douglas Hay et al (London: Verso, 2011), 17-63). The prosecution of Lord Gordon was an attempt by the British government to demonstrate that no one is beyond the laws, though its methods challenge some of the core values of the justice system. His ultimate acquittal could therefore be seen as adhering to the spirit of the judicial system, despite the government’s attempts to bend elements to fit their goals.

²⁸ *Independent Chronicle*, 19 April 1781.

²⁹ *Providence Gazette*, 3 March 1781; *Connecticut Courant*, 6 March 1781.

While the Patriot press was much more invested in the details of Lord Gordon's impending trial, it was actually the Loyalist press where reports of Lord Gordon's trial and verdict first appeared at the end of April. The first Patriot newspaper—the *Pennsylvania Packet* on April 28—to report on the trial results printed a single line amidst a letter extract, relating that the “protestant associations begin to stir a little. Lord George Gordon is acquitted.”³⁰ Subsequent Patriot newspapers were slightly more descriptive, consisting of one paragraph recapping the acquittal and Lord Gordon's brief speech thanking the jury and decrying the “wicked prosecution” that was reprinted in nine Patriot newspapers, from Massachusetts to Maryland.³¹ This concise recount whet the appetite of the Patriot press, and over the course of the next month a variety of comprehensive articles appeared. The *Continental Journal's* May 10 edition devoted one and a half pages to printing, from London Papers found on a ship, the report on Lord Gordon's trial.³² The accounts of government's witnesses related Lord Gordon's request for large public support for his presentation of the petition to Parliament so that it would be taken seriously, as well as his assertion that “when his Majesty heard that his subjects were flocking up for miles round, [he] would send his minister to repeal the act.”³³ The government's witnesses' statements showed Lord Gordon's encouragement for the protestors to display their seriousness through their numbers, but the witnesses failed to establish that Lord Gordon intended the protests to turn violent and into riots. For a Patriot audience, the testimony was evidence of how feeble the government's

³⁰ *Pennsylvania Packet*, 28 April 1781. This letter extract was later reprinted in the *Norwich Packet*, 17 May 1781.

³¹ *Freeman's Journal*, 2 May 1781; *Pennsylvania Journal*, 2 May 1781; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 5 May 1781; *Maryland Journal*, 8 May 1781; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 9 May 1781; *Norwich Packet*, 10 May 1781; *Providence Gazette*, 12 May 1781; *Independent Ledger*, 14 May 1781; *Connecticut Courant*, 15 May 1781; *Massachusetts Spy*, 17 May 1781.

³² *Continental Journal*, 10 May 1781. This article was also printed in *Connecticut Gazette*, 11 May 1781; *Norwich Packet*, 17 May 1781; *Independent Ledger*, 21 May 1781; *Massachusetts Spy*, 24 May 1781; *Providence Gazette*, 26 May 1781; *Connecticut Courant*, 29 May 1781.

³³ *Continental Journal*, 10 May 1781. This article was also printed in *Connecticut Gazette*, 11 May 1781; *Norwich Packet*, 17 May 1781; *Independent Ledger*, 21 May 1781; *Massachusetts Spy*, 24 May 1781; *Providence Gazette*, 26 May 1781; *Connecticut Courant*, 29 May 1781.

accusations were in trying Lord Gordon for high treason. If they would use very tenuous evidence to pin the riots entirely on Lord Gordon, what means would they resort to against Patriots if the British won the war? Having heard from the government's witnesses, the sequel article recounted Lord Gordon's defense, including his lawyer's compelling statement that challenged the government's assertions and witnesses.³⁴ Declaring that instigators not associated with "those with whom the prisoner was connected, who went up to the house with their petition, went up in a sober, quiet manner, unarmed, unaccounted, and entertaining no hostile intentions" started the tumults, it would be unfair for Lord Gordon "to be found guilty of crimes which belonged to another."³⁵ The second article concluded with the announcement of the jury acquitting Lord Gordon, and exhibited to Patriots that the jury had seen through the government's attempt to equate Lord Gordon's political activities with high treason. The *Freeman's Journal* on May 30 published a fairly descriptive recount of the trial of Lord Gordon in which it spent more time relating the defense's witnesses' testimony validating the defense's claims that Lord Gordon had not intended or called for violence when he asked his followers to show their support for the petition he was submitting to Parliament.³⁶ Lord Gordon's acquittal signaled to the Patriots that even the citizens of London saw through the corrupt government's attempt to escape any sort of criticism for their handling of the riots by pinning responsibility on Lord Gordon. Despite having the heft of the government against him, Lord Gordon was able to overcome the extreme charges because the people were on his side. For a Patriot audience, Lord Gordon's victory was proof that perseverance and commitment to cause could trump persecution.

³⁴ *Connecticut Gazette*, 18 May 1781; *Independent Ledger*, 28 May 1781; *Massachusetts Spy*, 31 May 1781; *Providence Gazette*, 2 June 1781; *Connecticut Courant*, 5 June 1781.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Freeman's Journal*, 30 May 1781.

The *Pennsylvania Evening Post* in May and June, 1781, contained the most comprehensive retelling of the trial of Lord Gordon. Spread across four weeks and six issues, the newspaper reported at length the actions at the trial.³⁷ The first issue covered the empaneling of the jury and challenges to specific jurors, the opening statement of the Attorney General which described the actions of the crowd and the riots over the course of the next week, and that Lord Gordon directed the crowds like an army and used his rhetoric to encourage them to remain resolute in their purpose. The second article continued with the Attorney General's statement, before delving into the witnesses called to testify that Lord Gordon had encouraged the crowd and treated it like an army in order to spur redress from either Parliament or the king, before being cross-examined by Lord Gordon's attorney. The third, fourth, and fifth issues further delved into the testimony and cross-examination of the prosecution's witnesses, with their evidence that Lord Gordon knew, but did not care, that what he was doing was illegal, and that he fomented the tumults with his rhetoric, an argument challenged by Lord Gordon's counsel. The sixth, and final article in the series, concluded the testimony of prosecution witnesses and began the statement from Lord Gordon's counsel. Curiously, the series ends with the note that "Lord G. Gordon's defence [sic] will be published as soon as it comes to hand," though a review of subsequent *Pennsylvania Evening Post* issues for the remainder of the year show no such publication.³⁸ It was possible that the omission of this sequel publication was because no such detailed account reached the newspaper. Also likely was that more pressing news, such as the Battle of Yorktown in the autumn of 1781 supplanted any imperative in continuing the story of the acquittal of Lord Gordon in the face of the victory at Yorktown and the commencing of

³⁷ The following issues of the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* contain the serial report of the trial of Lord Gordon: 21 May 1781; 22 May 1781; 25 May 1781; 1 June 1781; 18 June 1781; 22 June 1781. Two issues, printed on 4 June 1781 and 9 June 1781 occur amidst the serial article but do not include any portion of this recounting. This may have been a tactic to retain subscriptions interest in the newspaper by delaying the serialized story, or was a result of more pressing news being featured in those two publications.

³⁸ *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, 22 June 1781.

peace negotiations. Despite this, the comprehensive attention that the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* paid to the prosecution's portion of Lord Gordon's trial still reflected the intensity of the Patriot press' interest in the government's methods in trying Lord Gordon. The attention to how the prosecution shaped their case, what the witnesses they called testified to, and how the defense challenged those witnesses revealed to Patriots what could be expected should they lose the war and face trials by the British for high treason. The extent of the coverage also showed the degree to which the government would resort to in holding someone accountable for riots—or rebellions. In addition to the twenty-five rioters previously tried and executed for lesser charges than high treason, the government sought to make an example of the figurehead linked to the riots. Should the Patriots lose the war, how widespread and far reaching would be the British government's prosecutions go for persons in any sort of leadership or ranking role, whether they were diehard Patriots or not?

The Patriot press' interest in Lord Gordon and the riots did not end with the reports of his acquittal and triumph over the British government's attempt to assign him responsibility for the riots. Lord Gordon's continued presence in Patriot newspapers in the latter half of 1781 represented the ability of persons of conviction to rise above persecution by a corrupt government. Post-trial articles explored Lord Gordon's continued relevancy to British politics and the reaction of British society to Lord Gordon. Articles and letters from London, some associated with prominent individuals, were printed in Patriot newspapers to exhibit the British elite's efforts to minimize the government's loss at trial. The *Pennsylvania Packet* printed a letter to a "gentlemen of the navy" that asserted that "you cannot conceive with what indifference the matter [Lord Gordon's acquittal] has passed over, except with his immediate partizans: indeed there might be prudence in it, for government had discreetly collected a pretty body of troops around the metropolis."³⁹ The government's desire to

³⁹ *Pennsylvania Packet*, 19 May 1781.

maintain peace was also evident in a June 28 article in the *Pennsylvania Packet* that explained that a significant number of troops were on ready alert in and about Westminster on the days of Lord Gordon's trials, to "quell any disturbance that may happen."⁴⁰ A letter from Lord Huntington reprinted in multiple Patriot newspapers contended that "[i]t is suggested that government did not wish to convict Lord George Gordon, for fear of offending the Scotch fanatics," thereby pinning the failure to convict Lord Gordon as a political decision to retain peace.⁴¹ The Patriot press found Lord Gordon's post-trial demeanor a point of interest, as witnessed in a *Pennsylvania Packet* article which announced that Lord Gordon had left for the country to "enjoy a little relaxation, so necessary after his tedious and disagreeable confinement," and that the support of his friends who stood by him during his trial had left him extremely at ease despite the "malevolence" towards him from the government.⁴² While some letters sought to diminish the reaction to Lord Gordon's acquittal, others announced that at the news "the bells were immediately set a ringing and the evening was concluded with illuminations, fireworks, and other demonstrations of joy."⁴³ This variety of post-trial articles held different tenors and subjects, but all demonstrated that the reaction of the elite in British society was to downplay the results of the trial, while the common people were celebratory of Lord Gordon's acquittal. The Patriot press used these reactions to further enshrine the idea that those British in power were out of touch with the other segments of British society.

⁴⁰ *Pennsylvania Packet*, 28 May 1781.

⁴¹ *Pennsylvania Packet*, 12 June 1781; *Pennsylvania Journal*, 13 June 1781; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 20 June 1781; *Norwich Packet*, 28 June 1781; *Providence Gazette*, 30 June 1781; *Independent Ledger*, 2 July 1781; *Massachusetts Spy*, 5 July 1781.

⁴² *Pennsylvania Packet*, 22 May 1781. This article was also printed in *Providence Gazette*, 26 May 1781; *Norwich Packet*, 31 May 1781.

⁴³ *Pennsylvania Packet*, 29 May 1781. This was further confirmed in an article in the *Newport Mercury*, 9 June 1781.

The *Pennsylvania Journal* published the debates from the House of Commons over the strengthening the civil magistrates as a result of the military being called out to suppress the riots.⁴⁴ During this debate, members argued about the legality of the military being deployed into London, with one member, Mr. Sheridan, asserting that “moderation had prevented the Sovereign from availing himself of an opportunity...if his Royal breast had been capable of harbouring [sic] a design hostile to the liberties of his people.”⁴⁵ This member further went on to assert that the decision to charge Lord Gordon with high treason, when the other rioters were charged with mere felonies, was a “very dangerous tendency, to construe one crime into another, and make a riotous meeting a levying war against a king.”⁴⁶ Sheridan’s assertions were challenged by others, but that he made them was significant enough for the *Pennsylvania Journal* to print in its issue. The Patriot press’ inclusion of these arguments was sure to strike a chord with Patriots who questioned the reliance upon moderation of powerful kings and the conflation of dissent and riots into treasonous actions. In July, the *Pennsylvania Journal* reprinted from the *Westminster Magazine* of January 1781 a “Recapitulation of Memorable Occurrences in the Year 1780,” which featured a breakdown of the key events of the year by date.⁴⁷ What is noteworthy about this reprint was that despite its recounting of the actions of the rioters and damage across London, Lord Gordon was not explicitly linked to the riots. Though his connection was widely known, the decision to not explicitly link Lord Gordon with the riots provided distance between his political actions and the riots, thereby removing the stigma of the riots from Lord Gordon’s political agenda. While *Westminster Magazine* had originally printed this article in London prior to

⁴⁴ *Pennsylvania Journal*, 30 June 1781.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Pennsylvania Journal*, 14 July 1781; a portion of this article is also printed in *Boston Gazette*, 10 September 1781.

his trial, additional vocal approval of Lord Gordon's political agenda resurfaced post-trial. Letters from "Protestant friends" congratulated their "worthy, firm and steady president on his late acquittal, from a charge they always thought him innocent of," while some even offered him money as recompense for the hardships he suffered for interesting himself "so warmly in the same important cause" as the "true friends to the Protestant interest."⁴⁸ Other letters reprinted in December 1781, echoed this sentiment, noting that though they were not associated with the societies that Lord Gordon corresponded with, they were "attached to [him] with equal warmth in the cause for which [he had] been so great a sufferer."⁴⁹ The late publication of these later articles was likely reflective of the news about the Battle of Yorktown diverting attention to the more pressing and promising events. Still, that the Patriot press returned to the matter of Lord Gordon and support for his cause following the victory at Yorktown and the commencement of peace negotiations demonstrated the interest and importance they placed upon him.

The support expressed in public letters and in monetary donations perhaps explained Lord Gordon's return to politics following his trial, which caught the attention of the Patriot press and furthered their narrative of Lord Gordon being a principled man committed to his ideology. Multiple Patriot newspapers printed copies of an advertisement published by Lord Gordon to the "Worthy Liverymen of the City of London" in which he stated:

PERMIT me to solicit the favour [sic] of your vote and interest to be your representative in Parliament in the room of Mr. Alderman Haley, deceased. Should I be so happy as to meet your approbation, you may depend on my exerting myself in the House of Commons, in support of

⁴⁸ *Pennsylvania Packet*, 29 May 1781; *Newport Mercury*, 7 July 1781; *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, 1 September 1781.

⁴⁹ *Pennsylvania Journal*, 8 December 1781; *Freeman's Journal*, 8 December 1781.

your civil and religious liberties, according to the principles laid down at the Reformation and Revolution.⁵⁰

At the same time as reprints of Lord Gordon's advertisement was circulating, the *Pennsylvania Journal* printed his September 7 letter to Lord North, in which Lord Gordon requested Lord North's assistance in presenting a book to the king that outlines the Church of Scotland's opposition to the Catholic Relief Act of 1778.⁵¹ A post-script to the letter added the suggestion that the king's response to the book, which should conform "to the principles established at the time of the reformation and of the revolution," would "calm the minds and dispel the apprehensions" of the some 20,000 men involved in the Protestant Associations.⁵² The response from Lord North, printed in the *Pennsylvania Packet* and the *New-Jersey Gazette*, succinctly instructed that Lord Gordon "must present [the book] at the levee" and offered no assistance, confirming the dismissal that Lord Gordon continued to receive from those in power.⁵³ Lord Gordon putting himself forward as a candidate after being charged—though acquitted—with high treason was itself remarkable. Doing so while referencing the same ideology that got him into trouble initially, while also attempting to yet again leverage his mass of supporters to exact his political goals, served as inspiration to Patriots to remain steadfast in their convictions.

The Patriot press also printed articles in the aftermath of the acquittal that further displayed the British government's desire to move past the riots. In a copy of a letter printed in the August 22 *American Journal*, the author stated "I hope now all tumults are over. Lord

⁵⁰ *Boston Evening Post*, 1 December 1781; *Providence Gazette*, 8 December 1781; *Pennsylvania Journal*, 19 December 1781; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 20 December 1781; *Connecticut Gazette*, 21 December 1781.

⁵¹ *Pennsylvania Journal*, 12 December 1781.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Pennsylvania Packet*, 13 December 1781; *New-Jersey Gazette*, 26 December 1781.

G. Gordon was two days ago tried and acquitted for his share in the riots, in July 1780.”⁵⁴ The casual mention of Lord Gordon’s trial and acquittal with the author’s desire that the nation would be at peace reflected the hope of citizens that the matter had been settled. Similarly, an article detailing the king’s speech to the House of Lords notes that the king “earnestly recommended” to the members of Parliament that they used their “influence and authority...in guarding the peace of the kingdom from future disturbances, and watching over the preservation of the public safety.”⁵⁵ Patriots would view the king instructing the members of the government to exert “influence and authority” over their constituents as the king moving beyond his scope of power and authority, despite his intentions. By the end of the year, the Patriot press had used the aftermath of Lord Gordon’s acquittal to exemplify standing fast in one’s convictions, while also as providing more evidence of the British government’s intention to deflect any criticism of their involvement in the riots by both committing them to the past and refusing to engage in self-reflection of the system’s role in pushing protests to riots.

While the Patriot press continued to portray Lord Gordon in ways that evoked sympathy and admiration for his convictions, the Loyalist press also retained their interpretation of the British government’s superiority through its fair judicial system. A total of fifteen articles between four Loyalist newspapers reported—to some degree—on the aftermath of the Gordon Riots or on the trial of Lord Gordon in 1781, compared to ninety articles between nineteen Patriot newspapers. Yet as in 1780, the limited attention paid to the riots was not the only way that Loyalists newspapers framed their interpretation; the content and sources also influenced the message the Loyalist press intended to convey to its audience. From the onset of the year, the Loyalist press was more deliberate in its approach

⁵⁴ *American Journal*, 22 August 1781.

⁵⁵ *Connecticut Journal*, 12 October 1781; *Connecticut Courant*, 24 October 1781.

to Lord Gordon and his impending trial. A *New-York Gazette* article from February 19, 1781, succinctly related that a “Bill of Indictment was found by the Grand Jury,” while a January 13, 1781, article from the *South-Carolina Gazette* contained slightly more information on the issuing of a bill of indictment for high treason against Lord George and related the upcoming arraignment process.⁵⁶ The *South-Carolina Gazette* article, which would later be picked up by Patriot newspapers, established for the Loyalist audience that due process was being afforded to Lord Gordon when contextualized with the articles featured and not featured in Loyalist newspapers.⁵⁷ The *Royal Georgia Gazette* echoed this in a February 15 article, which explained to readers that Lord Gordon’s trial would commence in the next term, and the reason for the delay was because of “the necessary rules of process in causes of trials for High Treason.”⁵⁸ The *Royal Gazette* in New York further demonstrated this fair treatment of Lord Gordon while imprisoned in the Tower, noting that he had the “liberty of walking where he pleases,” even if continually accompanied by a guard.⁵⁹ Loyalists witnessed this freedom of movement for someone charged with such a significant crime as further proof of the fairness of the British justice system. Yet the *Royal Georgia Gazette* also noted that, while fair in process, the significance of the charge against Lord Gordon resulted in a “special commission” being created “under the great seal of Great

⁵⁶ *New-York Gazette*, 19 February 1781; *South-Carolina Gazette*, 13 January 1781.

⁵⁷ This article was reprinted in the following Patriot presses: *Norwich Packet*, 1 March 1781; *Independent Chronicle*, 8 March 1781; *Independent Ledger*, 9 April 1781.. Further, the *New-Jersey Gazette*’s March 28 article printed a more comprehensive version of this report, including the directions from the justice to the grand jury and the legal discussions following the indictment that revealed atypical legal proceedings in the appointment of Lord Gordon’s lawyer. That the *South-Carolina Gazette* printed the first and more limited report would be read by a Loyalist audience differently from that of a Patriot audience with the different contextualization of the treatment of Lord Gordon by the British justice system.

⁵⁸ *Royal Georgia Gazette*, 15 February 1781.

⁵⁹ *Royal Gazette*, 17 January 1781.

Britain for the purpose of trying Lord George Gordon,” thereby signaling to Loyalists the British government’s seriousness in pursuing justice for the riots.⁶⁰

The attention to the pre-trial process and treatment of Lord Gordon differed sharply from that of the news of the trial itself. The Loyalist newspapers were some of the first newspapers in America to print the news of Lord Gordon’s trial and acquittal. But whereas many of the Patriot newspapers relished the details of the trial, the Loyalist press was more succinct in its recounting of the trial and outcome—if it did so at all. The *Royal Gazette* first reported the news of the verdict on April 25, relating that “the Jury, after an absence of three quarters of an hour, pronounced his Lordship *not guilty*,” after which Lord Gordon thanked the jury and contended that it had “been a wicked prosecution.”⁶¹ The *Royal Georgia Gazette* gave an even more succinct report of the trial, distilling the event into one sentence: “The trial of Lord George Gordon for High Treason came on at Westminster Hall on Monday morning the 4th of February last, and next morning, at five o’clock, the Jury gave their verdict ‘*Not Guilty*.’”⁶² The *South-Carolina Gazette* appears to have not even reported the trial of Lord Gordon, let alone the verdict.⁶³ By far the most comprehensive of the Loyalist newspaper accounts of the trial was that of the April 30 *New-York Gazette*, which spanned approximately a column and a half describing the arguments put forth by the Attorney General and Lord Gordon’s counsel.⁶⁴ Significantly, this account related the government’s attempt to link Lord Gordon to the riots that ensued from his actions and rhetoric, while the

⁶⁰ *Royal Georgia Gazette*, 1 February 1781. For more on the seriousness of “Special Commissions,” see Hay, “Property, Authority, and the Criminal Law,” 31-32.

⁶¹ *Royal Gazette*, 25 April 1781.

⁶² *Royal Georgia Gazette*, 26 April 1781. (emphasis original)

⁶³ Though the newspaper did not print any article on the trial or verdict of Lord Gordon, the *South-Carolina Gazette* did feature an article in its July 4-7 edition that specifically mentions featuring news from the Philadelphia papers from June, when many papers were printing about the trial and the verdict. This indicates a deliberate decision not to report on the trial outcome.

⁶⁴ *New-York Gazette*, 30 April 1781.

Lord Gordon's counsel refuted the charges by accusing the Attorney General of "illiberal conduct" in his prosecution.⁶⁵ The article weighted favor towards the government by implying that their case was based upon more solid evidence whereas Lord Gordon's defense resorted to undercutting the conduct and character of the prosecution. Loyalist newspaper coverage of the trial concluded on May 30, when the *Royal Gazette* printed an excerpt from a speech of one of Lord Gordon's attorneys, in which the "great and venerable Magistrate" Lord Mansfield was praised and complimented for "without adverting to the partiality, not unjustly imputed to men of our country, a man whom any country might be proud."⁶⁶ Publication of this praise by the defense counsel reaffirmed the fairness and impartiality of the British justice system, and countered Patriot claims from years prior about the inability to receive a fair trial in Great Britain. The Loyalist newspaper coverage of the trial and acquittal of Lord Gordon was in sharp contrast to that of the Patriot press. Though more succinct, the articles affirmed the Loyalists belief that the British justice system was fair and impartial, treating even a rabble-rouser such as Lord Gordon with due process and impartiality.

Post-trial coverage in Loyalist press waned even moreso than the diminished attention by the Patriot press.⁶⁷ The *Royal Gazette* printed a speech from Colonel Roberts to the House of Commons which placed blame on the opposition for both the rebellion in America and the riots in London, claiming that the opposition had "by art and clamour [sic] within doors, and with the assistance of a large party, inspired with republican principles without

⁶⁵ *New-York Gazette*, 30 April 1781.

⁶⁶ *Royal Gazette*, 30 May 1781.

⁶⁷ Loyalist newspapers were also diverted by coverage of the Battle of Yorktown and other skirmishes in the South. But their lack of attention to Lord Gordon or the Gordon Riots aftermath also reflects the parallel desire of the British and Loyalists to move past the events and towards the completion of the war.

doors, been the authors of all our misfortunes.”⁶⁸ Linking the rebellions both in America and in London dovetailed with Loyalists’ analysis, particularly as they shared the theme of the dangerous spread of subversive ideology. The *Royal Georgia Gazette* later printed the suit of Mr. Langdale against the City of London for the losses he sustained during the riots, noting that Langdale was represented by the Attorney General, who chastised city magistrates for not doing more to quell the riots and relying on an “Act of Parliament” to intercede.⁶⁹ The representation of Langdale by the Attorney General was proof that the British government intended to correct the injustices experienced by the British subjects—even if that meant holding civil governments accountable for their inactions. The final Loyalist article printed in 1781 was an address from some 1700 London inhabitants thanking the king for his protection “at a time when our lives, property, and everything dear to us, were in such danger, from the violence of the most outrageous banditti that ever existed,” and commending his constraint and moderation in the execution of the law.⁷⁰ This address, different from earlier addresses from the civil government of London, demonstrated that the king had the support and approval of his subjects in his extension of power. The Loyalist press’ post-trial coverage of the aftermath of the Gordon Riots was certainly limited, but the framing employed cemented the narrative of the fairness of the British government and the continued support it received from its citizens. For Loyalists, this was a message that resonated as they came to grips with the loss at Yorktown and what the future might hold for them. Whether they would remain or leave America, Loyalists hoped that the British government’s fairness would be reflected in their treatment when the British negotiated peace with the American Patriots.

⁶⁸ *Royal Gazette*, 25 July 1781.

⁶⁹ *Royal Georgia Gazette*, 20 September 1781. Mr. Langdale was the Catholic owner of a large distillery that was attacked and raided by rioters in the latter days of the riot.

⁷⁰ *New-York Gazette*, 23 October 1781.

Both Loyalists and Patriots printed articles in 1781 that confirmed their prior interpretations of the events of the riots and of those involved. Their continued publication of this event reflected the fascination that both groups had with the internal affairs from across the Atlantic. This interest and interpretation of the riots that, though not directly related to the war, had an indirect effect was a means to further clarify their ideology and identity. Looking towards London, Patriots and Loyalists found confirmation and encouragement for their philosophies on government and societal structure. The framing that newspapers employed shaped the narrative of the riots and the government's response, and served as a post for which Patriots and Loyalists could orient themselves with or against. Treatment of Lord Gordon, discussions about the riots themselves, and the government's reactions and actions post-riots and trial all were benchmarks for Patriots and Loyalists to clarify their commitment to their ideological pursuits. As the year drew to a close, and as peace seemed that much closer at hand, the interpretation of the Gordon Riots and Lord Gordon had sustained Americans of all ideological stripes when commitment was so crucial.

Conclusion

To a detached observer, Lord Gordon and the Gordon Riots, by modern standards, might appear as fleeting obsession that momentarily distracted Patriot and Loyalist Americans from the larger events surrounding them—a bit of escapism from the constant threat of war and chaos that was an ever present consideration in their daily lives. Indeed, perhaps this is why most of American historical works treat the Gordon Riots as a non-issue. But to Americans living during the revolution, the Gordon Riots were an important event that confirmed their ideological beliefs. The degree of attention paid to the London event and its aftermath, and the differences between the interpretations pursued by Patriot and Loyalist newspapers connects Patriots' and Loyalists' interest in the riots to their understanding of their position on the revolution. The press in both ideological camps continued to print beyond the initial reports of the riots, and included editorial decisions that shaped the interpretation of the events for their audiences. The devoted attention in the press reflected the gravity with which these newspapers weighted the events and their relevance to their particular political ideology. This seriousness was further reflected in the personal writings of the Patriot and Loyalists leaders, which displayed their efforts to come to terms with the events in London and what impact they would have on the American War. To contemporary Americans, both Patriot and Loyalist, the Gordon Riots were more than just an incredible event that happened across the Atlantic. Rather, their interpretation of this event motivated them to retain their devotion to their particular philosophy on what the relationship should be between Great Britain and America as the conflict persisted.

Through the early months of 1780, Loyalists were eager for signs of progress. The conflict was entering its fifth year, and despite a few significant successes on the battlefield the British forces had yet to definitively secure victory. Dispersed throughout the states, though with strong pockets in certain areas like New York City, Loyalists were often isolated and bereft of friends and family torn apart by war.¹ General Sir Clinton's capture of Charleston in June 1780 and the subsequent occupation of the South seemed to signal a turning point. Shortly thereafter, news of the destructive riots and the triumph of the British government in suppressing it reached Loyalists. The newspapers' reports of how the crown and Parliament demonstrated the superiority of the British constitution by cooperating to quell the riots, and emphasized the legal methods pursued to restore order and exact justice—proving the righteousness of the British government. The return to business as usual post-riots and the fair trial of the Lord Gordon was affirmation to the Loyalists that the British model was exceptional because it was stalwart and just. That the government was able to overcome a significant threat in its capital city, paired with the victories of the military in capturing Charleston and arranging the defection of American General Benedict Arnold, gave Loyalists hope that the momentum was in their favor for securing complete victory in the war.

For Patriots, the beginning months of 1780 had been particularly tough. A harsh winter and a shortage of provisions precipitated illness, death, and attempted mutinies in the Continental Army.² Currency and inflation problems, along with

¹ Brown, *The Good Americans*.

² Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 266-294; Martin, *Private Yankee Doodle*, 170-209.

difficulties in securing pay for the soldiers, also tested the resolve of those committed to the Patriot fight for independence.³ The loss of Charleston and the spread of British forces in the southern states was yet another blow to morale. News in August of a weeklong riot in London, wherein all the prisons were destroyed and attacks on significant symbols of authority and the response of the British government, reminded Patriots of the importance of their cause. The treatment of the rioters, the actions of the king to restore order not by declaring martial law—as had essentially been done in Boston before the war for far less dangerous and destructive protests—but by expanding his power and authority with the approval of a sycophant Privy Council, and the attempt to use Lord Gordon as a scapegoat by stretching the definition of high treason, all confirmed to Patriots that the British government was unjust and tyrannical. Through the ordeal, Lord Gordon had become something of an idol to Patriots for his willingness to stand fast in his convictions, a quality that Patriots admired and hoped to emulate. Lord Gordon's ultimate acquittal and his return to championing his beliefs served as inspiration that Patriots too could survive this test of their convictions and ultimately obtain independence.

Recovering the significance of the Gordon Riots for Americans during the Revolutionary War provides for better understanding of what spurred people to retain their convictions. Much of the scholarship on the American Revolution has focused on events and forces that prompted the commitment to one side or the other.⁴ Yet initial reasons for commitment, or even inclinations towards a certain ideology, does

³ Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 270-275.

⁴ For examples of this, see Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution*, which delves into the social influences that compelled Americans to join particular sides in the conflict with Britain and over declaring independence.

not explain the retention of that position as the years of conflict grew. The coverage of the Gordon Riots by American newspapers and letters provides an example of what motivated Patriots and Loyalists to continue pursuing their agendas. It additionally acts as evidence of the larger transatlantic spread of information and its role in the Revolutionary War. Internal events in Britain were important to the American people, a fact which has been often overlooked in the vein of “American Exceptionalism” scholarship. The interconnectedness between Patriot Americans and the British did not end with the first shot at Lexington; rather they still retained an interest in the internal affairs, as evident by the publication of information beyond what was explicitly related to the war—including the Gordon Riots. This information was viewed through a new lens, however, in the post-Declaration of Independence world, as Americans engaged with information about Great Britain as a means to clarify and shape their ideologies and identities. The transatlantic spread of information served to highlight the similarities and differences between Americans, both Patriots and Loyalists, and to their British counterparts. The recovery of the importance of the Gordon Riots during the American Revolution also provides a glimpse at the elements that comprised identity formation during this period. Efforts to align or distance themselves with certain actors in the riots and the response was a method for Loyalists and Patriots to distinguish their identity. In the post-war years, this would be continued in the context of building a national identity by using the Gordon Riots to juxtapose the character of the British and the Americans. The Gordon Riots was therefore another means to craft identity both during and following

the American Revolution, providing a tool for Americans to differentiate themselves from their past status as British subjects.

After the revolution, many Americans referred to Lord Gordon and the Gordon Riots as they endeavored to extricate themselves as a separate and superior nation. To combat international disrespect or dismissal of the United States, Americans juxtaposed the chaos of the Gordon Riots to the tranquility of American society, thereby asserting America's legitimacy as a sound nation. From this contrast, American authors were able to sketch out a national identity based in harmony between the government and its citizens—the opposite of Britain's inherent discord which produced the Gordon Riots.

Thomas Jefferson was one such prominent American who invoked the Gordon Riots as a tool to differentiate the American people on the world stage, particularly from that of the British. In a November 1784 letter to French newspapers, Jefferson used the Gordon Riots to counter reports of anarchy and unrest in America. “What were the mutiny of 300 souldiers [sic] in Philada. [sic], the riots of whigs and tories in Charlestown to the riots of London in 1780; disorders, where they carried the audacity to violate the Chapels of Ambassadors, and violence to burn houses and kill many people?” Jefferson wrote.⁵ Jefferson stressed that the Americans were more peaceable when compared to people of other countries, and used the riots in London as a key example of the internal disquiet that the British press overlooked when casting judgment on the newly independent America. In

⁵ “Jefferson's Reply to the Representation of Affairs in America by British Newspapers, Before 20 November 1784,” *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Digital Edition*, ed. Barbara B. Oberg and J. Jefferson Looney (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008–2015).

addition to the letter that Jefferson wrote to the French newspapers, he also received letters from friends who discussed Lord Gordon. A letter from Maria Cosway on November 17, 1786, referred to the “sensation that Lord G. Gordon has occasioned recently” when giving a brief synopsis of the recent news.⁶ Cosway felt that Lord Gordon’s actions, likely relating to his involvement in a scandal designed to injure the reputation of Marie Antoinette, were important enough to relate to Jefferson despite there being “no time to send” more news.⁷ For Lord Gordon to rate an explicit mention reveals that he was still relevant to Americans and their allies. Cosway’s letter also reveals how public opinion of Lord Gordon had begun to change in the post-war years. The earlier affinity for Lord Gordon by those aligned with the Patriot cause had begun to wane as the Patriots assumed power and control over the independent United States and as Lord Gordon’s actions became more outlandish. As diplomatic representatives of a new nation, association with such a controversial figure could jeopardize the respect of other nations.

Abigail Adams, accompanying her husband while he served as ambassador to the British court, also wrote to Jefferson two separate times in 1785 during which she discussed Lord Gordon. In her first letter on June 6, Abigail enclosed extracts from British newspapers regarding her husband, including one noting that “[y]esterday lord George Gordon had the honour of a long conference with his excellency john

⁶ “To Thomas Jefferson from Maria Cosway, 17 November 1786,” *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Digital Edition*, ed. Barbara B. Oberg and J. Jefferson Looney (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008–2015).

⁷ *Ibid.*

adams (honest john adams), the Ambassador of America.”⁸ Abigail confirmed the veracity of the account, but supposed that it was “inserted by his Lordship who is as wild and as enthusiastic as when he headed the mob.”⁹ In October 1785, Abigail again mentions Lord Gordon, relating that he “appears to interest himself in behalf of his American Friends, as he stiles [sic] them, but neither his Lordships Friendship or enmity are to be coveted.”¹⁰ Abigail’s ruminations on Lord Gordon’s character reflect the growing hesitation to associate with the increasingly problematic figure. His reputation had been on the decline since the riots, and his latest actions rallying “thousands of unemployed soldiers and sailors as Protestant volunteers against” Emperor Joseph II of Austria, an ally of the British government, had all but dried up any remaining support he had.¹¹ Abigail likely saw his attempts to associate himself with her husband was likely a ploy by Lord Gordon to regain some of his reputation, but the association could be used by the British elite to discredit John and diminish the already begrudging respect given to the United States. For a man who was once praised by her husband as being the only one with “common sense,” associating with Lord Gordon now risked the legitimacy other nations would bestow upon the new American nation.

⁸ “To Thomas Jefferson from Abigail Adams, with Enclosure, 6 June 1785,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-08-02-0141> [last update: 2014-12-01]). Source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 8, *25 February–31 October 1785*, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953, pp. 178–181.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ “To Thomas Jefferson from Abigail Adams, 25 October 1785,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-08-02-0524> [last update: 2014-12-01]). Source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 8, *25 February–31 October 1785*, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 669.

¹¹ For more on Lord Gordon’s flamboyant actions after his acquittal, see Green, “George Gordon,” in *The Gordon Riots*, eds. Haywood and Seed, 255-261.

As prominent individuals contrasted Americans with Lord Gordon and the Gordon Riots in the post-American Independence years, contemporary historians writing about the American Revolution wove his story into their broader histories. David Ramsay, writing in 1789, included in his history of the American Revolution the story of Henry Laurens' encounter with Lord Gordon while in the Tower of London. In explaining the limitations placed upon Laurens' movement within the Tower, Ramsay related how Laurens' ability to walk the Tower grounds was rescinded after "lord George Gordon, who was also a prisoner in the tower, unluckily met and asked Mr. Laurens to walk with him."¹² The blamelessness of Laurens in the transgression and the harsh reaction of the Tower Governor also featured in Ramsay's discussion about the treatment of Laurens while imprisoned. Ramsay's inclusion of this anecdote primarily is used to demonstrate the punitive treatment of the British government to prisoners no matter their stature. But it also served to connect Laurens, as a representative of America, to Lord Gordon, who by this time was an infamous figure to an American audience.¹³ Detailing the run-in between the two men linked the reasons they were both committed to the Tower. Laurens, confined for his involvement in the fight for American independence, was given similar treatment to Lord Gordon, who was being charged with high treason for inciting a riot. Ramsay's inclusion of Laurens and Lord Gordon's meeting and overlapping time in the Tower was a subtle reminder to his audience about the

¹² David Ramsay, M.D., *The History of the American Revolution in Two Volumes, Vol. 2*, ed. Lester H. Cohen (1789; repr., Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Classics, 1990), 593. Ramsay's information likely came directly from Henry Laurens, as Ramsay was married to Laurens' daughter.

¹³ In addition to his notoriety for the Gordon Riots and his political activities in the 1780s, in 1788 Lord Gordon was again imprisoned, this time in the rebuilt Newgate Prison, for libel for his statements about Marie Antoinette, among others. He eventually died in Newgate in 1793. See Green, "George Gordon," in *The Gordon Riots*, eds. Haywood and Seed, 258-260.

possible consequences that could have ensued should the Patriots have lost the war. If Lord Gordon was to be tried for high treason for inciting a riot, then the fate of Americans for actually engaging in the large-scale rebellion might have been far reaching and without mercy.

Mercy Otis Warren also felt it necessary to include Lord Gordon in her comprehensive *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution*, though Warren focused on the riots and Lord Gordon's involvement. In the concluding section to her sixteenth chapter, Warren examined how religious bigotry "concealed in the bosom of many" ignited at the spark of Lord Gordon and "interrupted the peace of the English nation."¹⁴ Warren went on to note:

Though not immediately connected with American affairs, it may not be improper before we conclude this chapter, to notice, that no heat of opposition among the *insurgents* of the *colonies*, as they were termed, ever arose to such an atrocious height, as the mobs in London, in the face of the parliament of England, and under the eye of their sovereign.¹⁵

The superiority that Warren associated with the American "insurgents" for their manner in protesting, which brought on far greater retribution by the British government, echoed that of Jefferson in his 1784 letter. "Neither the civil authority, the remonstrances [sic] of the moderate, nor the terror of the military, were able to quell the rioters, or disperse the rabble, under four or five days," Warren stressed, further outlining how severe the rioters' actions were.¹⁶ Warren ended her account of

¹⁴ Mercy Otis Warren, *The History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution, Vol. I*, ed. Lester H. Cohen (1804; repr., Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1994), 335.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 335-336.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 336.

the riots by noting that Lord Gordon was taken into custody, tried, and acquitted as “there appeared a derangement of his intellectual faculties, bordering on insanity.”¹⁷ Warren’s portrayal of the riots and of Lord Gordon paralleled Patriot newspaper accounts from twenty years earlier. But in admonishing the rioters, Warren explicitly asserted the superiority of the Americans’ methods when rebelling against the crown and Parliament to secure their liberties through independence. Noting that the civil and Parliamentary governments were unable to suppress the riots, the “terror” of military force was resorted to—an extension that was arbitrary when applied to Americans, but necessary to quell the bigoted and raging rioters in a rent England. Her treatment of Lord Gordon, while harsh compared to Patriot newspapers of 1780 and 1781, could be attributed to Lord Gordon’s inflammatory actions in the later parts of 1780s, which forever jaundiced his image. Warren’s inclusion of the Gordon Riots underscores their value as a point of comparison and contrast for Americans during and after the American Revolution, despite Warren’s claim that they had no immediate connection with the American Revolution. Contrasting revolutionary Americans with the London rioters was a method to entrench the notion that the American character was exceptional, thereby further distinguishing the identity of Americans from that of their former countrymen.

The post-American Revolution writings that delved into Lord Gordon and the Gordon riots offer a glimpse of how this London-based event continued to hold the interest and act as a point of contention or inspiration for Americans. The riots would not have featured as such if they had merely been a source of escapism or passing

¹⁷ Ibid., 336.

interest. Rather, their continued relevancy in the years following the American Revolution underscored the importance they played in the consciousness of Americans during the conflict. For American writers to come back to this event and those associated with it as a means of creating distinctions between the American and British nations reveals the weight that was attributed to Lord Gordon and the Gordon Riots. Post-war writers drew upon the assumption that their audience would have some basic knowledge of the Gordon Riots and Lord Gordon from their prominence in newspapers during the war. And by continuing to use the Gordon Riots to support their positions, they added further value to the event as being important in the formation of an independent United States. The depictions also show a shift of interpretation by Patriots that might be explained by the new lens that the assumption of power provided towards mobs and riots. Leaders of the Revolution, such as Samuel Adams, were not beyond utilizing riots to suit their needs and advance their cause in the pre-American Independence period. Yet the destructive, “democratic” nature of the Gordon Riots could have acted as a cautionary tale for the ills of “too much” democracy. As the American government created by the Articles of Confederation struggled to handle domestic tumults, those that once appreciated the results that mobs could yield might have a different view now that they are not the leaders, but rather the targets of the mob’s ire.¹⁸ Lessons from the Gordon Riots could have informed the reaction of post-war leaders to the rebellions that developed following the war. The swift suppression of the rebellions, and the creation of the federal government with more expansive powers, shares interesting similarities with

¹⁸ For more on the difficulties of the American government in regulating dissent in the post-war years, see Woody Holton, *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007).

the events of June 1780 in London. Recovering the importance of the Gordon Riots to Americans during the revolution brings the interpretation of post-revolution events into question, and could be evidence of long-term resonance of earlier transatlantic exchanges of ideas and information.

While my study has demonstrated Americans' pervasive concerns and given some flavor of their response, it is far from the last word; I could hardly explore every archive or source. Indeed the depth of contemporary interest in this topic that historians have so generally ignored begs a more complete study. Differences between regions within the United States could be further analyzed to determine if any relationship between regional identity and the interpretation of the riots existed. The role of religion has only been tangentially explored in this study, and further analysis on how the religious elements to the riots were interpreted by various religious communities in the United States might reveal more nuances to the interpretation of these events by American audiences. The movement of newspaper articles and letters makes it likely that prints and engravings also were spread across the Atlantic during this period, but this thread can be further explored and analyzed as to what engravings traversed the Atlantic, when they did so, and how they were received. Over sixty years after the riots took place, Charles Dickens' novel *Barnaby Rudge*, which was set during the tumults, was widely published by American print houses and serial literary journals, including *Burton's Gentlemen's Magazine* that Edgar Allan Poe edited. Exploring the reception of this historical fiction in American culture and any connections made between the events in the novel and American Revolution could help determine how long the relation between the Gordon Riots and

the American Revolution remained in American memory. Delving into these areas would shed even more light on the transatlantic relationships during and after the revolution, and how those relationships contributed to the formation and renovation of American identity.

The Gordon Riots are often overlooked in early modern British history, or treated as a minor religious event. More recent scholarship has delved into the nuances of the events, but these studies are narrowly framed and focus on the impact of the events in Britain. The riots' influence stretched beyond the shores of the British Isles, however, and resonated with Americans as they grappled with continuing their commitment to their ideologies and maintaining the war effort. As Americans continually call upon themes from the American Revolution to shape national identity and to appeal to the public politically or commercially, a more complete and complex understanding of the ideas and information that influenced those involved in the revolution is necessary. It is not enough to know the major battles, policies, and turning points of the Revolution. To truly grasp the complexity of the new nation being born, it is essential to understand the formation of national identity and ideals. The principles and events that sustained support for Patriot or Loyalists ideologies shaped identity creation during and after the war. Simply ascribing the support of the different ideologies in the war to what initially attracted people to them does not tell the whole story. The interest in the Gordon Riots not only serves as an example of how news and events influenced contemporary political opinions, it also illustrates a continuing transatlantic awareness that did not stop after the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

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