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**“Tyrant and Oppressor!”¹:
Colonial Press Reaction to the Quebec Act**

By

Paul Langston

In September 1774, Guy Carleton, lieutenant governor of the Quebec province, arrived in Quebec to make official the news that would escalate the rising tensions experienced throughout the British North American Colonies. Carleton was “received by the Lieutenant Governor, and all the French clergy at his landing, when he had the honor to be kissed by the Bishop, and afterwards very genteelly introduced Popery.”² The Quebec Act, while an attempt to appease the dominant Roman Catholic religion in the province, resulted in an increased opposition to the arbitrary nature of British government throughout the North America colonies. Opposition toward the Crown on this matter was expressed through colonial newspapers. This emerging platform spread dissent among its colonial readership.³ The increased distribution of the press in the years preceding the American War of Independence provided editors with a method to express concern regarding the Quebec Act, legislation that many feared would establish a more despotic government over North America.

¹ *Connecticut Gazette*, November 4, 1774.

² *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle*, November 8, 1774.

³ By 1775, the *Boston Gazette* and the *Massachusetts Spy* alone possessed 2000 and 3500 subscribers respectively.

Historians have examined the impact of the colonial press upon the mounting resistance to Britain following the Seven Years War. Arthur M. Schlesinger stated, "Not until the rise of troubles with Britain did the editor come to think of himself as a maker of opinion as well as a transmitter of news and literary offerings. Yet he unwittingly did something, however little, in that direction by the very act of deciding what to put in or leave out of his paper, and once in a great while he offered a terse comment of his own."⁴ This surge of antagonism being presented by the colonial press resulted in editors becoming players in shaping public opinion. With the enduring opposition in the newspapers pertaining to the Tea Act and the Coercive Acts, the Quebec Act provided these individuals another such opportunity.⁵ However, historians have rarely examined press opinion solely concerning the Quebec Act. The more common practice is to incorporate this bill into press opinion regarding the Coercive Acts of 1774 or inclusion into a larger overarching presentation.⁶ Absent are examinations of the colonial newspapers' response to the Quebec Act and an assessment of the messages being expressed by these colonial presses regarding this legislation. Such an approach is necessary given that the Quebec Act was not a punitive measure, as the Coercive Acts were upon Boston; therefore, the bill could be perceived as an expression of Britain's constitutional intentions in North America.

⁴ Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Prelude to Independence: The Newspaper War on Britain, 1764-1776* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1980), 61.

⁵ Philip Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution: 1763-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), xiii-xvi; Schlesinger, 3. Isaiah Thomas, ed. Marcus A. McCorison, *The History of Printing in America: With a Biography of Printers & an Account of Newspapers* (New York: Weathervane Books, 1970), 18-20.

⁶ Davidson, 123,126; Lawrence Henry Gipson, *The Coming of the Revolution, 1763-1775* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), 226-227; Dirk Hoerder, *Crowd Action in Revolutionary Massachusetts: 1765-1780* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 277; Edmund S. Morgan, *The Birth of the Republic: 1763-89* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 59; Schlesinger, 11, 199; Gordon S. Wood, *The American Revolution: A History* (New York: Modern Library Edition, 2002), 22-23.

An examination of press opinion concerning the Quebec Act provides significant insight into the motives of colonial editors, illustrating that colonial newspapers used the Quebec Act as a metaphor for the continuing loss of liberty within Britain's North American colonies.⁷ In printing anti-government writings, these editors and their allies and sponsors sought to establish opposition to the Crown and Parliament. The enactment of the Coercive Acts earlier in 1774 and the enforcement of perceived tyrannical laws in Quebec confirmed, according to colonial papers, that colonists' liberties were being systematically eliminated.⁸ Such an interpretation alters the notion that the colonies possessed resentment toward the once French colony of Quebec, when in fact empathy was demonstrated for the fellow British colony. Consequently, editors used the Quebec Act as a catalyst against the use of arbitrary power that would deny the colonies their existing liberties.

When discussing the term “liberty” during the colonial era, one must recognize the evolution of its meaning over time and examine the interpretation of this word as perceived by eighteenth century society.⁹ John Phillip Reid stated, “In the meaning of liberty during the age of the American Revolution the equation was plural, not singular. Liberty meant that individuals had rights, true enough, but so did society.”¹⁰

⁷ While acknowledging that colonial newspapers fail to fully express the thoughts and beliefs of colonial society, one must assume that few would remain in business long if they constantly opposed public opinion. Therefore, one can extrapolate that colonial newspapers not only expressed the bias of the editor, but represented a segment of the colonial population.

⁸ The Coercive Acts were passed in May 1774 and included the Boston Port Act, the Government Act, the Better Administration of Justice in Massachusetts Bay, and the Quartering Act. The Quebec Act, passed a month later, did not directly affect Boston.

⁹ The contemporary definition of liberty is interpreted by some as the right of representation or individual privacy of American citizens.

¹⁰ John Phillip Reid, *The Concept of Liberty in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 2.

Colonial subjects feared that the use of arbitrary power by the British government would deny colonists these rights:¹¹

Americans as well as some sympathetic British understood liberty primarily in terms of their desire to secure freedom against arbitrary governmental power....It was not the arbitrary power of privileged individuals....Nor was it class legislation duly enacted....Rather, what was feared in the eighteenth century was the power of government acting without restraint. To be subject to arbitrary governmental power was to live without liberty.¹²

Fearing virtual enslavement in light of recent British legislation in Massachusetts, indignation against the Quebec Act arose.

The Quebec Act passed into law, with only minor protests and revisions by the House of Lords, on June 22, 1774. The bill restructured the military government that had been present in Quebec since British acquisition in 1763.¹³ The Crown asserted its authority to appoint and remove the governor, the governing council, and judges within the Quebec province. The Act assigned all civil cases to the former French system of law in Quebec, including the removal of trial-by-jury; criminal cases were retained under British law. Roman Catholics within the province were emancipated and the oath of office, that had denied the spiritual authority of the Pope, was removed.¹⁴ The territory of Quebec was expanded to include “the vast territory extending from the western boundary of Pennsylvania west to the Mississippi River and from the Ohio River north to the Hudson Bay Territory.”¹⁵ These territorial gains, previously considered Indian

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 109.

¹³ Bernard Knollenberg, *Growth of the American Revolution:1766-1775* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1975), 141.

¹⁴ Individuals professing the Roman Catholic faith were required to take a new oath, swearing loyalty to the Crown.

¹⁵ Knollenberg, 144.

Territory by the Royal Proclamation of 1763, were also claimed by the colonies of Pennsylvania and Virginia, to be used for future settlement. “The ‘diabolical’ measure included provisions for a Crown-appointed legislature, direct taxation by Parliament and restrictions on trial by jury -- all of which violated cherished American principles and supplied effective grist for the opinionmongers.”¹⁶

Upon the arrival of the bill on North American soil, an outcry in the colonial press erupted.¹⁷ Editors of northern colonial newspapers were keen to respond to this evident employment of arbitrary power which threatened colonial liberty. Well-known Whig editor Isaiah Thomas, editor and publisher of the *Massachusetts Spy* and perhaps one of the best-known printers in the colonies, expressed passionate opposition to the arbitrary nature of the bill.¹⁸ In a reprinted letter, the newspaper reads, “Of the acts of parliament, which the most abandoned minister ever procured to be passed in this kingdom, that for the government of Quebec is the most daring, arbitrary, and unconstitutional. It is an act contradictory to his Majesty's coronation oath; it is an act, repugnant to the rights, liberties, and religion of this nation; and it is an act,...to, and subjective of the fundamental principles of our free constitution.”¹⁹

Benjamin Edes, editor and proprietor of the *Boston Gazette*, and his partner, John Gill, both committed Whigs, also lashed out at the British government concerning such despotic legislation.²⁰ The paper stated,

¹⁶ Schlesinger, 199.

¹⁷ The Quebec Act arrived in late August in the coastal cities.

¹⁸ It was Isaiah Thomas that later wrote in his newspaper regarding Paul Revere and his famous ride. Clarence Brigham, *History and Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690-1820* (American Antiquarian Society, 1947), 319-320; Schlesinger, 185; Thomas, x; Davidson, 229.

¹⁹ *Massachusetts Spy*, September 8, 1774; Duplications of writings within colonial newspapers were common at this time. Therefore, reference is given to the first reading of cited statement.

²⁰ With the escalation in tensions, *The Boston Gazette and Country Journal* “assumed a serious aspect...from the part its able writers took in the cause of

It is a fundamental principle of the English Constitution that whenever any territories are added to...the dominion of the Crown, the people of such territories shall enjoy the Laws and Liberties of Englishmen. The free Constitution of England abhors all ideas of Slavery, and does not admit that people inhabiting any part of its dominions should be under Arbitrary Power, and be Slaves, instead of Subjects, of the Crown.²¹

Such open hostility to British power had a persuasive effect within colonial society. Thomas, Edes, and Gill, referred to as the “old faithfuls” for their Whig views in the New England area, clearly refused to permit such a tyrannical bill to come to pass without the masses learning the truth.²²

One method to demonstrate this abuse of power was to illustrate the despair of English subjects within the Quebec province. An increasing number of English merchants and traders had moved north into Quebec following the Seven Years War and with the passage of the bill “agitation among the English-speaking merchants increased.”²³ The newly blossoming colony of Nova Scotia, with a substantial British military presence, also expressed opposition regarding this abuse of governmental power.²⁴ New Englanders following 1755 had largely resettled Nova Scotia and the strong familial connection to its neighbor and the more southern colonies resulted in transference of similar ideology, as well as constant

liberty and their country; and it gained a very extensive circulation.” See Thomas, 135, 137; Brigham, 297-298; Davidson, 227.

²¹ *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, September 12, 1774.

²² Schlesinger, 185.

²³ S. D. Clark, *Movements of Political Protest in Canada: 1640-1840* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), 75, 77.

²⁴ Nova Scotia, after the expulsion of the French Acadians in 1755, had been largely resettled from persons originating in the New England colonies.

communication across the Bay of Fundy.²⁵ The reprinting of articles expressing condemnation toward British policy and mutual support between the different colonies was a common practice, increasingly so between New England and Nova Scotia. The *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle*, edited and printed by Anthony Henry, printed a letter discussing an English settler's view of Carleton.²⁶ While the French flocked to make his acquaintance, he was visited “very little by the *beggarly English* (as we hear he has been pleased to call them) and who we may naturally conclude, are in general incensed against him, -- not only from his abuse of them, but also on account of the detestable Quebec act, which is solely ascribed to him, and said to have been framed under his direction.”²⁷ The *Boston Evening Post*, edited by Thomas Fleet Jr. and John Fleet, took this stance a step further by presenting the French as opposing the bill as well, stating that “most of the French farmers wish the continuance of our liberties.”²⁸

The *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle* further presented colonial opposition with a reprinting of a letter to the Committee of Montreal from Canadian farmers, stating,

We the Canadian Farmers and others, being greatly alarmed at a late Act of Parliament which re-establishes the ancient laws of this country, the bad

²⁵ In the years following the expulsion, an attempt was made by the British government to resettle the colony with British subjects.

²⁶ Anthony Henry served as a fifer in a British regiment until his release from service in North America and upon arriving in Halifax, a province without a printer, founded the *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle*. See Thomas, 592-594.

²⁷ *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle*, November 8, 1774.

²⁸ *Boston Evening-Post*, January 9, 1775. Isaiah Thomas stated, regarding Thomas Fleet Jr. and his brother John Fleet, “The impartiality with which the paper was conducted, in those most critical times, the authenticity of its news, and the judicious selections of its publishers, gained them great and deserved reputation.” See Brigham, 290-291; Thomas, 142-143; Davidson, 228.

effects of which we too severely felt during the French government, and being entirely satisfied under the English laws administered in this Province, beg leave to acquaint the gentlemen of the Committee of Montreal, that any legal steps they shall take for the repeal of said Act will be approved by us, and we sincerely hope and pray that they will use all means in their power for the same...which we attribute to that freedom which every one has enjoyed under the English laws.²⁹

A second letter, within the same publication, continued this stance and asserted that individuals in Quebec were “drawing up a petition to his Majesty, against the Act of Parliament for regulating the government of this province, and hope they will meet with success.”³⁰ Not only did this influx of opposition from Quebec allow colonial papers to display the revulsion of Canadians toward the Quebec Act, through “the strengthening of the movement of agitation in the old colonies during the winter of 1774-5, the efforts of the English-speaking residents in Quebec...received important support.”³¹

The ability to associate the exercise of arbitrary power by Crown and Parliament against Quebec to that of the recent restrictions upon Boston was a key factor in buttressing colonial resistance. While a restructured version of the Quartering Act and the Boston Port Bill were seen as a threat to Boston, the Administration of Justice Act and the Massachusetts Government Act were seen as the greatest loss of governmental liberty.³² These bills “struck at the very roots of local

²⁹ *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle*, December 13, 1774.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Clark, 30.

³² Both had been recently passed on May 20, 1774. The Administration of Justice Act stated that British Officials could not be tried in provincial courts for capital crimes. The Massachusetts Government Act limited the powers of town meetings and stated that the majority of elective offices within the colony would be appointed by the Crown and not popular elections.

self-government long enjoyed in Massachusetts.”³³ This prior legislation was the context of the colonial response to the Quebec Act. The colonists feared “if Britain could alter a charter, as she had done in the Government Act, and if she preferred colonial governments without representative assemblies, as the Quebec Act implied, then the end of responsible government seemed in sight.”³⁴ While aspects of the Coercive Acts were initially seen as punitive, the introduction of the Quebec Act altered the interpretation of certain acts. Precedent set by the removal of the Bostonians’ liberties resulted in the assertion that the Quebec Act was not punitive, but a continuation Britain’s new tyrannical system. Indeed, the legislation enforced in Boston harmonized closely with sections 8, 12 and 13 of the Quebec bill:

And be it further enacted by the Authority foresaid, That all His Majesty's Canadian Subjects, within the Province of Quebec...that in all Matters of Controversy, relative to Property or Civil Rights, Resort shall be had to the Laws of Canada....and all Causes that shall hereafter be instituted in any of the Courts of Justice, to be appointed...by His Majesty....And whereas it is at present inexpedient to call an Assembly....That it shall and may be lawful for His Majesty...to constitute and appoint a Council for the Affairs of the Province of Quebec...and appoint such and so many other Person or Persons as shall be necessary to supply the Vacancy or Vacancies; which Council, so appointed and nominated...shall have Power and Authority to make Ordinances for the Peace, Welfare, and good Government, of the said

³³ Knollenberg, 136.

³⁴ David Ammerman, *In the Common Cause: American Response to the Coercive Acts of 1774* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1974), 11.

Province, with the Consent of His Majesty's
Governor.³⁵

In addition, all ordinances passed by the Quebec government regarding the province or religion were also subject to “His Majesty's Approbation” and could be vetoed by the Crown appointed governor.³⁶ The apparent rise of a more despotic French style of government was portrayed as the “breaking [of] his coronation oath.”³⁷ The colonial press presented the re-emergence of arbitrary power to their readership as a demonstration that Boston was not a unique situation due to the effects of the Tea Party, but the beginning a governmental plot to arbitrarily remove all liberties from its colonial subjects. The *Boston-Evening Post* contended, “The Boston and Quebec Bills are universally cried out against, and the consequences are dreaded by many loyal and quiet people.”³⁸ Yet another editorial surmised, “If you submit to the last arbitrary and tyrannical Acts of Parliament, relative to Massachusetts-Bay and Quebec, there will not be a Set of more abject Slaves under Heaven than the North Americans.”³⁹

The First Continental Congress, meeting in Philadelphia from September 5 to October 26, 1774, with delegates representing the majority of North American colonies, immediately drafted the “Address to the Inhabitants of Quebec.” In this statement, Congress expressed opposition to the removal of representation and rights within the bill, seemingly a continuation of the legislation used against

³⁵ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 31, 1774; See also Hilda Neatby, *The Quebec Act: Protest and Policy* (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall of Canada, Ltd., 1972), 53.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, August 23, 1774. In his coronation oath, King George III pledged to uphold the statutes, customs, and religion of the British Empire.

³⁸ *Boston Evening-Post*, September 19, 1774.

³⁹ *Boston Evening-Post*, December 26, 1774.

Bostonians.⁴⁰ The address, reprinted in the *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, expressed alarm at the manner to which the British government “so audaciously and cruelly abuse the royal authority, as to withhold from you the fruition of the irrevocable rights, to which you were thus justly entitled.”⁴¹ Congress further argued that these rights “form a considerable part of our mild system of government” and defended “the poor from the rich, the weak from the powerful, the industrious from the rapacious, the peaceable from the violent, the tenants from the lords, and all from their superiors.”⁴² This reprinting also exhibited Congress’ opposition to further infringements upon the rights of Quebec, fearing this governmental trend.

The press presented the attempt by Congress to associate these aggressions of the Crown with that of Bostonian oppression: “The injuries of Boston have roused and associated every colony, from Nova-Scotia to Georgia....That we should consider the violation of your rights, by the act for altering the government of your province, as a violation of our own, and that you should be invited to accede to our confederation, which has no other objects than the perfect security of the natural and civil rights of all the constituent members.”⁴³ At the request of the Continental Congress, and to enforce public discontent against this action, the “Address to the Inhabitants of Quebec” was projected across the colonies. Presenting the continuing encroachment upon liberties to the public was crucial to the agenda of the nascent government and the colonial editors. The end result was not only a reprint of this address throughout colonial newspapers, but well over two thousand copies of the address were printed by colonial papers, in both English and French.⁴⁴ With an estimated readership of ten

⁴⁰ Francis Dominic Cogliano, “No King, No Popery: Anti-popery and Revolution in New England, 1745-1791” (Boston University: Dissertation, 1993), 130.

⁴¹ *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, November 14, 1774.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Various individuals entered Quebec under the guise of merchants to secretly circulate the address. Cogliano, 130-131.

individuals per newspaper purchased, the impact of the colonial press upon American colonists was immense.

The *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle* continued this course by reprinting a petition to the Crown. The severe condemnation of the bill was in view of the fact that trial-by-jury was “not admitted by this bill in any civil cases, and the French law of Canada [was] imposed on all the inhabitants of this extensive province, by which both the persons and properties of very many of your Majesty's subjects [were] rendered insecure and precarious.”⁴⁵ The address continues to assert that enacting said laws was “repugnant to your royal proclamation of the 7th of October, 1763” and stated resistance to the fact that “your Majesty can...constitute courts of judicature and public justice for the hearing and determining all cases, as well civil as criminal, within the said province.”⁴⁶ The subsequent week revealed the proceedings in the House of Commons as conveying a dismissive attitude when discussing colonial liberties and the use of arbitrary power:

The Solicitor General desired to know, if the Canadians did not at first object to the Court of King's Bench being established in Canada, and for what reasons? He answered, on account of the exorbitant fees paid to Counsellors and Attornies [sic]. [The answer being so well pointed towards the author of the question, the house was laughing for a full ten minutes.] After he withdrew, Mr. Samuel Moretin was called in, who likewise spoke greatly in favour of the English laws being exercised in Canada; they both mention, that the Canadians, as well as English, resident there, highly approved of trials by jury, and seemed to think that an annihilation of that right (which the bill is meant to take away) would greatly hurt the colony.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle*, September 20, 1774.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle*, September 27, 1774.

The presentation of apathy by the government, when addressing colonial rights, was a noteworthy method in creating animosity between the colonists and their British government.

This practice of reprinting letters and governmental manuscripts from London newspapers was another method applied in presenting the loss of Quebec’s rights as a greater threat to all American colonies. During this time period, colonial society still viewed itself as a segment of the British Empire and the reprinting of letters and articles from London newspapers were common. In America, the practice of reprinting opposition from London, the center of the British Empire, increased the credibility of the local press concerning the infringement of rights upon Quebec, and the American colonies as a whole.

Writings from government officials and influential members of society within London were a time-honored technique for presenting opposition against legislation, such as the Quebec Act. A letter from London, reprinted in the *Pennsylvania* by William and David Hall and William Sellers, addressed the King and commented that the Quebec bill was “so far from being founded on the clearest principles of justice and humanity” and questioned whether “your Majesty’s unconquered subjects of this nation are to tremble for their liberties...[and] your Majesty’s subjects in America are more oppressed than deluded. Let tyranny cease.”⁴⁸ Thomas and Samuel Green, printers of the *Connecticut Gazette* in New London and members of a family renowned for being “firm and honest” Whigs, reprinted an address from Lord Hyde. Hyde’s statement affirmed that the Quebec Act “put the whole people under arbitrary power.”⁴⁹ He assessed that the bill “was a most cruel, oppressive, and odious measure, tearing up justice and every good principle by the roots.” His conclusion declared, “That by abolishing the trial by jury...the whole of the Bill appeared to him to be

⁴⁸ *Postscript to the Pennsylvania Gazette*, September 16, 1774. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* had been suspended numerous times over the past decade for printings against British policy. See Brigham, 933-934; Schlesinger, 53; Thomas, 435-436.

⁴⁹ *Connecticut Gazette*, November 4, 1774. Thomas and Samuel Green were the sixth generation of American printers within their family. Schlesinger, 185; Thomas, 298, 301.

destructive of that liberty which ought to be the ground work of every constitution.”⁵⁰ A later edition of the *Connecticut Gazette* sustained this attitude:

In England we have the show of Liberty without the reality; the shadow without the substance. Our Parliament...[is] by insensible degrees leading the nation into a state of slavery which is not discerned by the bulk of people, who seldom look further than the present time: But the more judicious look farther, and can see that chains are forging for them, to be made use of at a proper period. When they have obliged you, Americans, to submit to the yoke prepared for you, a much heavier will soon gall the necks of the people here. By the Quebec bill now passed, it is easy to be seen what government is aiming at; nothing less than despotism. Upon the whole, there is reason to believe, that if any liberty for Englishmen is to remain, it must be in the North American Colonies, where, I hope, the inhabitants will have virtue enough to exert their utmost strength to secure it to themselves.⁵¹

Such admonition from a British official, relating to the path of British colonial policy, gave credence to the reservations and opposition printed by the colonial press.

In another instance the *Boston Gazette* reprinted an address made by members of government in London to the King, stating, “We beg leave to observe, that the English law, and that wonderful effort of human wisdom, the trial by jury, are not admitted by this bill in any civil cases, and the French law of Canada is imposed on all the inhabitants of this extensive province.”⁵² A gentleman of distinction from London agreed that “the English laws are expressly excluded, except in criminal

⁵⁰ *Connecticut Gazette*, November 4, 1774.

⁵¹ *Connecticut Gazette*, January 27, 1775.

⁵² *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, August 23, 1774.

cases, and the Canadian and French laws are substituted in their stead; the legislature is to consist of the Governor and Council of 17 to 23 members, all appointed during pleasure, and paid by the king.”⁵³ The verification that a segment of the British government opposed arbitrary use of governmental power gave credence to the colonial press and provided a basis for concern within its readership.

The reprinting of opposition from high-ranking British officials was not the only means of showing that those in London acknowledged a colonial loss of freedom. Immediately following the arrival of the Quebec Act, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* proceeded to publish letters sent from British subjects in London stating opposition to the bill. One such letter, addressed to a man in Philadelphia, clearly supported action against this latest infringement upon colonial society: “As to America... such oppression must rouse the Stoic; you are by this time in possession of the infamous Popery bill, for the colony of Quebec; if this don't rouse the most lethargic man among you, I shall be amazed...think on this and prepare.”⁵⁴ Another letter from a London merchant emphasizing the “discontent which the Canada Bill will give both here and there” warned Bostonians that “politeness to General Gage will not save them from the awful plot. Little do they think what mighty evils are soon to follow, if they submit.”⁵⁵ The *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle* provided a letter from London stating, “As the spirit of liberty, in some of our colonies, has given so much trouble to Government, it was resolved to cherish the spirit of slavery in others: the French laws and Popery being conducive to this end.”

The *Boston Gazette and Country Journal* reprinted a letter from a London merchant to a Boston subject discussing the continuing violation of the colonial subjects. “Alarming as your treatment is [re: Coercive Act enforcement in Boston], which gives great displeasure to all true friends of liberty, the late bill for the government of Quebec is more so, as there is no room left to wonder if in the next sessions of Parliament an attempt is made to introduce the same laws and religion

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 28, 1774.

⁵⁵ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 14, 1774.

throughout the British Empire.”⁵⁶ Such expression from London supported claims being presented by the colonial press that the infringement of liberties in Quebec was a continuation of legislation enacted against Boston and that without resistance, would continue unopposed. Londoners continued to caution the government that “the Quebec bill will alarm the Americans more generally than shutting up the Boston port...I am no politician but a lover of liberty...and warm in the sentiment for the American to preserve their valuable rights and privileges.”⁵⁷ One letter asked the question, “Are the inhabitants [of Quebec] entitled to the liberties and privileges secured to Englishmen by Magna Charta [sic]? They are not.”⁵⁸

“Never was there given to a man a political engine of greater power [newspapers]; and never, assuredly, did this engine before operate upon so large a scale as in the eighteenth century.”⁵⁹ With the increase in colonial newspapers and readership in the years preceding the war, this “poor man’s library” proved to be the most efficient method of projecting the editors’ message to the greater part of the people.⁶⁰ The six colonial newspapers examined above printed eighty-three condemnations of the Quebec Act between August 1774 and February 1775, with seventy-two directly denouncing the use of arbitrary power by the British government.⁶¹ Colonial newspaper editors identified the Quebec Act not as a punitive measure, as the recently implemented Coercive Acts, but a continuation of an imperial policy to arbitrarily strip the North American colonies of the granted liberties. By presenting their readership with their interpretations

⁵⁶ *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, October 17, 1774.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Boston Evening-Post*, December 26, 1774,

⁵⁹ Thomas, 19.

⁶⁰ Carol Sue Humphrey, “*This Popular Engine*”: *New England Newspapers during the American Revolution, 1775-1789* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), 63, 74.

⁶¹ No research was performed beyond the end of February, 1775 due to the absence of any reference to the Quebec Act during this month.

concerning the Quebec Act, these editors were able to shape the growing opposition against the ever more present British government. Today, various historians conclude that the British enactment of the Quebec bill resulted in that colony refusing to revolt during the American War of Independence. However, the Quebec Act proved to be a greater tool for organizing resistance in the thirteen southern colonies against an apparently arbitrary and tyrannical government; a rallying cry used a year later in the march north to liberate the Quebec province from Britain.