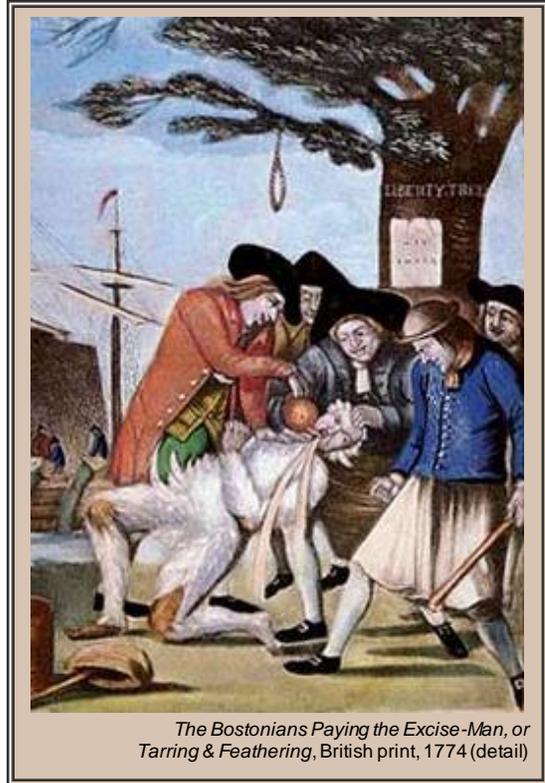


“the sufferings of all from mobs, rioters and trespassers”

Mob Attacks on Loyalists in Massachusetts Aug. 1774 – Feb. 1775

Peter Oliver, *Origin and Progress of the American Rebellion*, 1781; appendix based on events compiled in *The Boston Weekly News-Letter*, 23 Feb. 1775

From the beginning of the revolutionary period in the 1760s, British supporters (Tories and later called Loyalists) were harassed, intimidated, and often attacked by Patriot mobs. As war approached in the 1770s, the victims of Patriot wrath expanded to include lukewarm supporters and the vocally undecided, and the threats and injuries they received escalated in severity. One victim was the Loyalist judge Peter Oliver, who was forced from his judgeship and left America for Britain in 1776. In 1781 he wrote an angry history of the prewar period entitled *Origin and Progress of the American Rebellion*, in which he printed, almost verbatim, a list of violent acts upon Loyalists perpetrated over a six-month period (Aug. 1774 through Feb. 1775), which had been printed in a 1775 Boston newspaper. What kinds of intimidation and injury were inflicted on Loyalists? What did the attackers hope to accomplish? How does Oliver judge the Patriot perpetrators?



The Bostonians Paying the Excise-Man, or Tarring & Feathering, British print, 1774 (detail)

Exhibiting a few, out of the many, very innocent Frolics of Rebellion,¹ especially in the Province of *Massachusetts Bay*.

1774 August

A Mob in *Berkshire* assembled & forced the Justices of the Court of Common Pleas from their Seats on the Bench and shut up the Court House, preventing any Proceedings at Law. At the same Time driving one of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace from his Dwelling House so that he was obliged to repair² to Boston for Protection by the King's Troops.

At *Taunton* also, about 40 Miles from *Boston*, the Mob attacked the House of *Daniel Leonard*, Esqr.,³ one of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace; & a Barrister at Law. They fired Bullets into the House & obliged him to fly from it to save his Life.

A Col. *Gilbert*, a Man of Distinction & a firm Loyalist, living at *Freetown*, about 50 Miles from *Boston*, being absent [away] about 20 Miles from his Home, was attacked by a Mob of above an 100 Men at Midnight. But being a Man of great Bravery & Strength, he, by his single Arm [weapon], beat them all off. And on the same Night & at the same Place, Brigadier *Ruggles*, a distinguished Friend of Government⁴ & for many Years a Member of the general Assembly, was attacked by the same Mob; but by his firm Resolution he routed them all. They, in Revenge, cut his Horse's Tail off & painted him all over. The Mob found that Paint was cheaper than Tar and Feathers.⁵

Copyright© National Humanities Center, 2010/2013. AMERICA IN CLASS®: americainclass.org/. Douglass Adair & John A. Schutz, eds. *Peter Oliver's Origin & Progress of the American Rebellion: A Tory View* (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1961); permission pending. Some spelling and punctuation modernized for clarity. Complete image credits at americainclass.org/sources/makingrevolution/imagecredits.htm.

¹ Oliver's tone is one of sardonic bitterness, throughout.

² Repair, i.e., move, resettle.

³ Esquire: title of respect for members of the English or American elite.

⁴ i.e., Loyalist, a supporter of Britain and its colonial administration.

⁵ Tarring and feathering was a common form of intimidation and revenge in colonial America, used against royal officials and offending citizens, and, in the prerevolutionary period, used to threaten Loyalists or others who did not fully support the Patriot cause. The crowd would strip the victim, pour hot tar over his/her body, and then roll the person in feathers that would adhere to the tar. Usually the person was paraded about the area on a cart before being released and perhaps threatened with further violence. Occasionally the victim would die.



September 1774

The Attorney General, *Mr. Sewall*, living at *Cambridge*, was obliged to repair to Boston under the Protection of the King’s Troops. His House at *Cambridge* was attacked by a Mob, his Windows broke & other Damage done; but by the Intrepidity of some young Gentlemen of the Family, the Mob were dispersed.

About the same Time, *Thomas Oliver* Esqr.,⁶ the Lieut. Govr. of *Massachusetts* Province, was attacked in his House at *Cambridge* by a Mob of 4000 Men; & as he had lately been appointed by his Majesty one of the new Council, they forced him to resign that Office; but this Resignation did not pacify the Mob — he was soon forced to fly to Boston for Protection. This Mob was not mixed with tag, rag & Bobtail⁷ only. Persons of Distinction in the Country were in the Mass, & as the Lieut. Governor was a Man of Distinction, he surely ought to be waited upon by a large Cavalcade & by Persons of Note.

In this Month, also, a Mob of 5000 collected at *Worcester*, about 50 Miles from *Boston*, a thousand of whom were armed. It being at the Time when the Court of Common Pleas was about sitting, the Mob made a lane & compelled the Judges, Sheriff, & Gentlemen of the Bar [other judicial

officials] to pass & repass them, Cap in Hand, in the most ignominious Manner & read their Disavowal of holding Courts under the new Acts of Parliament⁸ no less than Thirty Times in the Procession.

Brigadier *Ruggles*’s House at *Hardwicke*, about 70 Miles from *Boston*, was also plundered of his Guns, & one of his fine Horses poisoned.

Col. *Phips*, the high Sheriff of *Middlesex*, was obliged to promise not to serve any Processes of Courts, & retired to *Boston* for Protection.

A Committee, with a Justice *Aikin* at their Head & a large Mob at their Heels, met at *Taunton* aforesaid, at Term Time, & forbade the Court of Common Pleas to sit.

Peter Oliver Esqr.,⁹ a Justice of the Peace at *Middleborough*, was obliged by the Mob to sign an Obligation not to execute his Office under the new Acts. At the same Place, a Mr. *Silas Wood*, who had signed a Paper to disavow the riotous Proceedings of the Times, was dragged by a Mob of 2 or 300 Men about a Mile to a River in Order to drown him, but, one of his Children hanging around him with Cries & Tears, he was induced to recant, though, even then, very reluctantly.

The Mob at *Concord*, about 20 Miles from *Boston*, abused a Deputy Sheriff of *Middlesex* & compelled him, on Pain of Death, not to execute the Precepts for a new Assembly — they making him pass through a Lane of them, sometimes walking backwards & sometimes forward, Cap in Hand, & they beating him.

Rev. Mr. *Peters*, of *Hebron* in *Connecticut*, an Episcopalian Clergyman, after having his House broke into by a Mob & being most barbarously treated in it, was stripped of his Canonicals [minister’s robe] & carried to one of their Liberty Poles, & afterwards drove from his Parish. He had applied to Governor

⁶ British-born Thomas Oliver was not related to Peter Oliver. An earlier lieutenant governor, however, was Oliver’s brother Andrew. During the Stamp Act crisis of 1765, Andrew served as a stamp tax collector, for which he was hanged in effigy by a mob and his house ransacked, for which Peter Oliver was forever enraged.

⁷ I.e., common people, scoundrels.

⁸ The Coercive Acts, passed in March to assert firmer control over the colonies and, specifically, to punish Massachusetts for the Boston Tea Party and New York for its refusal to comply with the Quartering Act.

⁹ The author of *Origin & Progress of the American Rebellion*.

Trumble & to some of the Magistrates for Redress, but they were as relentless as the Mob, & he was obliged to go to England incognito,¹⁰ having been hunted after to the Danger of his Life.

William Vassall Esqr., a Man of Fortune, and quite inoffensive in his public Conduct, tho' a Loyalist, was travelling with his Lady from *Boston* to his Seat at *Bristol*, in *Rhode Island* Government, about 60 Miles from *Boston*, & were pelted by the Mob in *Bristol*, to the endangering of their Lives.

All the *Plymouth* Protestors against Riots, as also all the military Officers, were compelled by a Mob of 2000 Men collected from that County & the County of *Barnstable* to recant & resign their military Commissions. Although the Justices of the Peace were then sitting in the Town of *Plymouth*, yet the Mob ransacked the House of a Mr. *Foster*, a Justice of the Court of Common Pleas, a Man of 70 Years of Age, which obliged him to fly into the Woods to secrete himself, where he was lost for some Time and was very near to the losing of his Life. Afterwards, they deprived him of his Business & would not suffer [permit] him to take the Acknowledgment of a Deed.

A Son of one of the [British] *East India* Companies Agents being at *Plymouth* collecting Debts, a Mob roused him in the Night, & he was obliged to fly out of the Town; but the Midnight favored his Escape.

December 1774

A *Jesse Dunbar*, of *Halifax* in the County of *Plymouth*, an honest Drover,¹¹ had bought a fat Ox of one of his Majesty's new Council & carried it to *Plymouth* for sale. The Ox was hung up & skinned. He was just upon quartering it when the Town's Committee [Patriot] came to the Slaughter House, & finding that the Ox was bought of one of the new [British] Councilors, they ordered it into a Cart, & then put *Dunbar* into the Belly of the Ox and carted him 4 Miles, with a Mob around him, when they made him pay a Dollar after taking three other Cattle & a Horse from him. They then delivered him to another Mob, who carted him 4 Miles further & forced another Dollar from him. The second Mob delivered him to a third Mob, who abused him by throwing Dirt at him, as also throwing the Offals [innards] in his Face & endeavoring to cover him with it, to the endangering his Life, & after other Abuses, & carrying him 4 Miles further, made him pay another Sum of Money. They urged the Councilor's Lady, at whose House they

"take refuge in Boston"

Oliver's list is taken almost verbatim from an anonymous letter (written by Oliver?) to the new provincial Congress of Massachusetts, published under the pseudonym "Plain English" in *The Boston News-Letter* of Feb. 23, 1775.

The writer lists "the distresses of some of those people who, from a sense of their duty to the King and a reverence for his laws, have behaved quietly and peaceably, and for which reason they have been deprived of their liberty, abused in their persons, and suffer'd such barbarous cruelties, insults, and indignities beside the loss of their property by the hands of lawless mobs and riots as would have been disgraceful even for savages to have committed." Below are instances of mob action that Oliver did not include in his history of the Revolution.

The chief justice of the province in Middleboro was threatened to be stopped on the highway in going to Boston court, but his firmness and known resolution for supporting government in this, as well as many other instances, intimidated the mob from laying hands on him. He was also threatened with opposition in going into court, but the terror of the troops prevented. The whole bench [of judges] were hissed by a mob as they came out of court, since that, his carriages stopped and some turned back, his goods and effects kept from him, and he obliged to take refuge in Boston ever since last August.

Daniel Oliver, Esq. [no relation to Peter Oliver] of Hardwick, was disarmed by the mob for the purpose of arming some of the mob, for putting down the court of Worcester, and has been obliged to take refuge in Boston ever since, to the total loss of his business.

Col. Putnam of Worcester, a firm friend to government, had two fat cows stolen and taken from him and a very valuable gristmill burnt, and he obliged to leave a large estate in the county and repair to Boston to save himself from being handled by the mob, and compelled to resign his seat at council board. His house has been attacked, his family put in fear, &c. &c.

Richard Clark, Esq., a consignee of the Tea, was obliged to retire from Salem to Boston as an asylum, and his son Isaac went to Plymouth to collect debts but in the night was assaulted by a mob and obliged to get out of town at midnight.

The writer concludes: "To recount the sufferings of all from mobs, rioters and trespassers would take more time and paper than can be spared for that purpose. It is hoped the foregoing will be sufficient to put you upon the use of proper means and measures for giving relief to all that have been injured by such unlawful and wicked practices."

Feb. 20th, 1775 PLAIN ENGLISH.

¹⁰ Incognito: In secret or disguise, with one's identity concealed.

¹¹ Drover: herder.

stopped, to take the Ox; but she being a Lady of a firm Mind refused; upon which they tipped the Cart up & the Ox down into the Highway, & left it to take Care of it self. And in the Month of February following, this same *Dunbar* was selling Provisions at *Plymouth* when the Mob seized him, tied him to his Horse's Tail, & in that Manner drove him through Dirt & mire out of the Town, & he falling down, his Horse hurt him.

In November 1774, *David Dunbar* of *Halifax* aforesaid, being an Ensign in the Militia, a Mob headed by some of the Select Men of the Town, demand[ed] his Colors [flags] of him. He refused, saying, that if his commanding Officer demanded them he should obey, otherwise he would not part with them: upon which they broke into his House by Force & dragged him out. They had prepared a sharp Rail to set him upon;¹² & in resisting them they seized him (by his private parts) & fixed him upon the Rail, & was held on it by his Legs & Arms, & tossed up with Violence & greatly bruised so that he did not recover for some Time. They beat him, & after abusing him about two Hours he was obliged, in Order to save his Life, to give up his Colors.

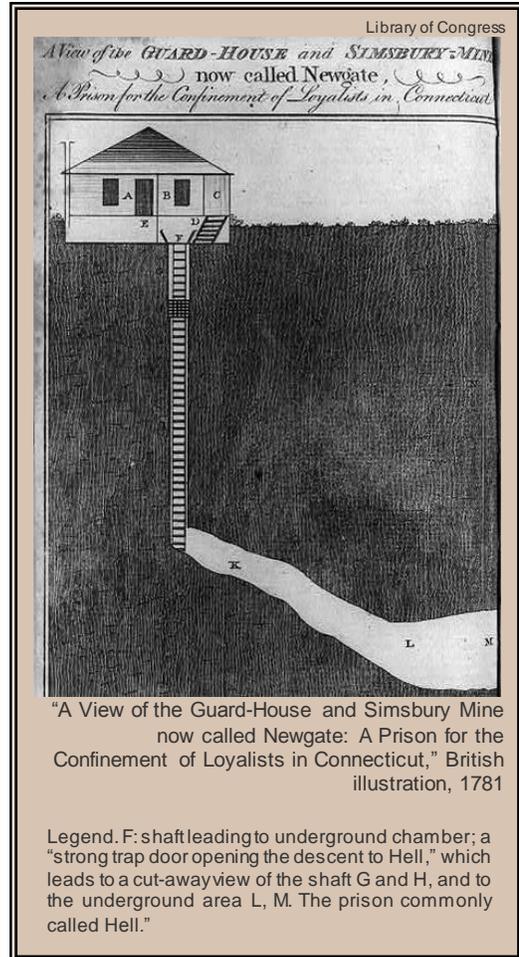
Quære [query] — Whether it would not have been as strictly legal to have stolen the Colors from his House without all this Parade?

The Mob Committee, of the County of *York* where Sir *William Pepperell's* large Estate lay, ordered that no Person should hire any of his Estates of him, nor buy any Wood of him, nor pay any Debts to *him* that were due to him.

One of the Constables of *Hardwick*, for refusing to pay the Provincial Collection of Taxes which he had gathered to the new Receiver General of the rebel Government, was confined & bound for 36 Hours, & not suffered to lie in a Bed, & threatened to be sent to *Simsbury Mines* in *Connecticut*. [see illustration at right]. These Mines being converted into a Prison, 50 Feet under Ground, where it is said that many Loyalists have suffered. The Officer's Wife being dangerously ill, they suffered [permitted] him to see her after he had complied.

The aforementioned Col. *Gilbert* was so obnoxious for his Attachment to [the royal] Government that the Mobs, being sometimes afraid to attack him openly, some of them secretly fired Balls at him in the Woods. And as he was driving a Number of Sheep to his Farm, he was attacked by 30 or 40 of them who robbed him of part of the Flock, but he beat the Mob off. And this same Col. *Gilbert* was, some Time after, travelling on his Business when he stopped at an Inn to bait his Horse. Whilst he was in the House, some Person lift up the Saddle from his Horse & put a Piece of a broken Glass Bottle under the Saddle; & when the Col. mounted, the Pressure run the Glass into the Horse's back, which made him frantic. The Horse threw his rider, who was so much hurt as not to recover his Senses 'till he was carried & arrived at his own House, at 3 Miles distance.

In September 1774, when the Court of Common Pleas was assembled for the Business of the Term at *Springfield*, a large Mob collected & prevented the sitting of the Court. They would not suffer Bench or Bar to enter the Court House but obliged [forced] Bench, Sheriffs & Bar, with their Hats off, in a most humiliating Manner, to desist.



¹² "Riding the rail" was another common act of intimidation and harassment in colonial America. Usually the rail was a fence rail, upon which the victim would be forced to straddle while it was carried about in public.

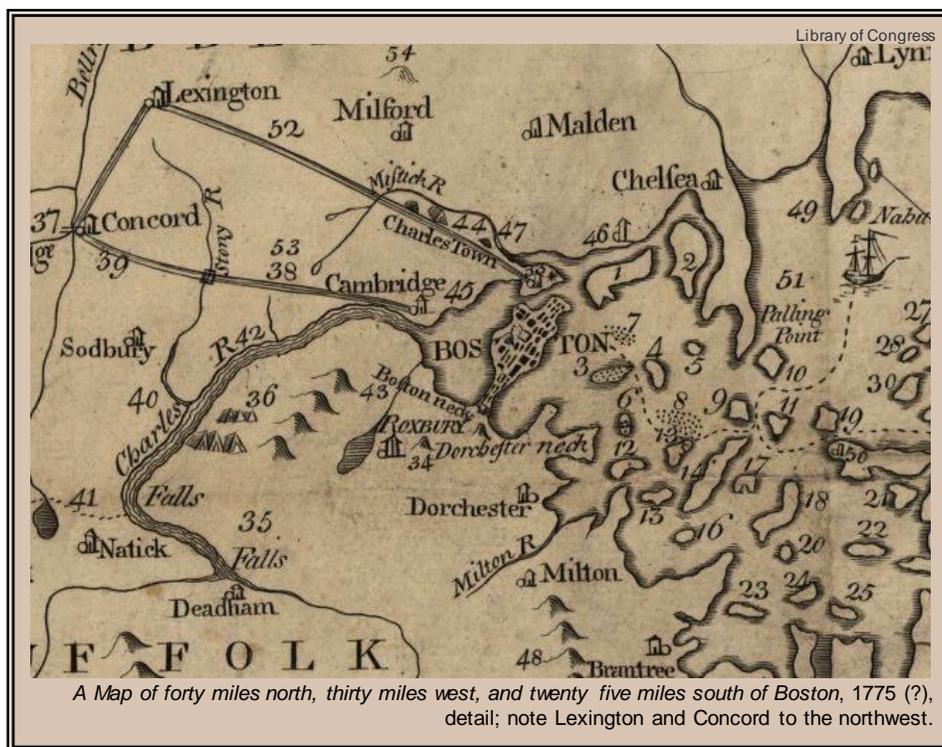
February 1775

A Number of Ladies at *Plymouth* attempted to divert [entertain] themselves at the public Assembly Room; but not being connected with the rebel Faction, the Committee Men met and the Mob collected, who flung Stones & broke the Windows & Shutters of the Room, endangering the Lives of the Company, who were obliged to break up & were abused to their Homes. Soon after this, the Ladies diverted themselves by riding out of Town, but were followed & pelted by the Mob, & abused with the most indecent Language.

The Honble. *Israel Williams* Esqr., who was appointed one of his Majesty's new Council, but had refused the Office by Reason of bodily Infirmities, was taken from his House by a Mob in the Night & carried several Miles, then carried home again after being forced to sign a Paper which they drafted, & a guard set over him to prevent his going from Home.¹³

A Parish Clerk of an Episcopal Church at *East Haddam* in *Connecticut*, a Man of 70 Years of Age, was taken out of his Bed in a Cold Night & beat against his Hearth by Men who held him by his Arms & Legs. He was then laid across his Horse without his Clothes & drove to a considerable Distance in that naked Condition. His Nephew Dr. *Abner Beebe*, a Physician, complained of the bad Usage of his Uncle & spoke very freely in Favor of [the royal] Government, for which he was assaulted by a Mob, stripped naked, & hot Pitch was poured upon him, which blistered his Skin. He was then carried to an Hog Sty & rubbed over with Hog's Dung. They threw the Hog's Dung in his Face & rammed some of it down his Throat; & in that Condition exposed to a Company of Women. His House was attacked, his Windows broke, when one of his Children was sick, & a Child of his went into Distraction upon this Treatment. His Grist-mill was broke, & Persons prevented from grinding at it & from having any Connections with him.

All the foregoing Transactions were before the Battle of Lexington, when the Rebels say that the War began.



¹³ "The honorable Israel Williams, Esq. one who was appointed of his Majesty's new council but had declined the office through infirmity of body, was taken from his house by a mob in the night, carried several miles, put into a room with a fire, the chimney at the top, and doors of the room being closed, and kept there for many hours in the smoke, 'till his life was in danger; then carried home after being forced to sign what they ordered, and a guard over him to prevent his coming from home." *The Boston News-Letter*, 23 February 1775; see p. 3.