

*From Radicalism to Revolution:
The Political Career
of Josiah Quincy, Jr.*

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AMONG the many luminaries of the Patriot party in Massachusetts in the decade before the American Revolution was a young lawyer eminent at the bar and pre-eminent in oratory whose career seems today largely remembered as a set of momentary aspirations to greatness. Although Josiah Quincy, Jr. (1744–1775) has been the subject of a memoir, it has become customary for historians of the pre-Revolutionary years to cite and discuss only a few incidents of his life—his defense of British soldiers after the Boston Massacre, his publication of a pamphlet in 1774, or his voyage to England later that year.¹ Indeed their selection is quite proper; a study of Quincy's contribution to radical thought and activity in the Bay Colony after 1767 does not reverse the modern view of his importance. Quincy was a star, but not a guiding star, of the Liberty party.

But while it would be wrong to ascribe to him a hitherto unsuspected influence on his contemporaries, it is possible that historians, by examining only fragments of his life, have obscured a process which only a consideration of his entire public

¹Josiah Quincy, *Memoir of the Life of Josiah Quincy, Junior* (1st ed., Boston, 1825; 2nd ed., 1874), hereinafter cited as Quincy, *Memoir*. Although the remainder of this essay will be detailed, it is not meant to be an exhaustive biography. For some aspects of Quincy's life the *Memoir* should be consulted.

career reveals: a transformation from a radical to a revolutionary position in the years from 1767 to 1775, a process as unexpected as it was complex.² The more one studies Quincy, the more one becomes aware of a curious feature of his political behavior: a discrepancy between a dominant radical public posture and, at certain crucial moments, surprisingly cautious and restrained counsel and actions. It was a peculiarity that would become intensified in the final months of his life as he wavered, at times almost daily, between independence and reconciliation, between war and 'peaceful' coercion. It was a peculiarity all the more notable because Quincy, unlike such sometimes anguished moderates as John Dickinson, was throughout his life a radical and his niche among the Massachusetts Patriot party leadership was almost always secure.

The transformation of Quincy's activity 'from dissent to resistance' was not, however, an orderly one; it involved instead (and especially in the mission to England) a set of fits and starts and oscillations. Nevertheless the vagaries of the political career of Quincy reveal a pattern whose implications may extend far beyond the life of the man who made it.

In 1763, at the age of nineteen, Josiah Quincy, Jr. graduated from Harvard College and joined as a student the law office of Oxenbridge Thacher, distinguished Boston lawyer and patriot leader.³ Even as the young apprentice was learning his profession events were occurring which would affect the course of his career. In the summer of 1765 news of Parliament's passage of the Stamp Act had precipitated preparations for resistance throughout the colonies. In Boston itself the situation was explosive and on the night of August 26 a crowd wrecked the home of Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson.

It was this act which evoked the earliest expression of opinion by Quincy that survives. In a memorandum written on the

²A 'radical' position will refer in this paper to fervent, principled opposition to post-1763 British imperial policy. A 'revolutionary' position will refer to a willingness to achieve total severance of connections from Great Britain, by force (war) if necessary.

³James Truslow Adams in *DAB* s.v. 'Quincy, Josiah.'

day after the riot and included in his legal papers, he was quick to laud New England opponents of the Stamp Act as 'the warmest Lovers of Liberty' and to denounce the new law as 'unconstitutional.' There could be no doubt at this early date where his political sympathies lay. Nevertheless the preceding night's mob violence was abhorrent and even while commending the patriots' zeal Quincy noted that 'in the Fury of Revenge against those who they thought had disclaimed the Name of Sons for that of Inslavers and oppressive Taxmasters of their *native* Country, they committed Acts totally unjustifiable.' The way to avoid the Scylla of popular 'Fury and Instability' and the Charybdis of tyranny and oppression by 'arbitrary Power,' he concluded, was 'that best asylum, that Glorious Medium, the BRITISH CONSTITUTION !' If Quincy adhered to the popular cause in 1765 he could not countenance the use of raw power by Boston mobs. It was a position that he would expound again.⁴

Whatever Quincy's views on the Stamp Act, his meditations of 1765 were private; two years later, however, he was ready to make his first known public foray into the thicket of Massachusetts politics—as a dedicated Patriot polemicist. On September 28 and October 5, 1767, he published under the pseudonym 'Hyperion' two articles in the radical *Boston Gazette*; the occasion was the recent passage by Parliament of the Townshend duties, and Quincy's response revealed attributes that would be characteristic of him in subsequent years. Adopting a militant, patriotic pose he exhorted his countrymen to resist British oppression and eschew 'moderation and prudence.' Whether Quincy was actually advocating armed resistance at this point, as one historian believes, or whether his rhetoric was designed merely to encourage intransigent, nonviolent opposition to the Townshend Act, it is interesting that by 1767

⁴Josiah Quincy, Jr., *Reports of Cases . . . in the Superior Court of Judicature . . . Between 1761 and 1772* (Samuel M. Quincy, ed., Boston, 1865), pp. 168, 173, 174; see pp. 168–174 for the entire document, which is also reprinted in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Proceedings*, 1st ser., IV (1858–1860), 47–51.

he had joined the radical faction in Massachusetts. Whatever doubts he might once have had about the popular party had been submerged in patriotic fervor.⁵

And whatever sympathy he evinced for Thomas Hutchinson in 1765 had also dissipated, for on January 4, 1768, Quincy published in the *Boston Gazette* an article which seemed to denounce the Lieutenant Governor; he had adopted another tenet of the radical creed. Zealous polemics such as this evidently soon earned him the respect and trust of the radical leadership, for as early as 1768 he was rising to prominence in local politics. In June the Boston town meeting elected him to two important committees during the *Romney* crisis. Another clue was that many of his drafts for publication in the *Gazette* contained the admonition, 'Let Samuel Adams, Esq., correct the press.' Certainly Quincy did not subvert his reputation as a radical when he began in early 1768 to write adulatory letters to the current patriot hero, the Englishman John Wilkes. Indeed, he so identified himself with the cause of 'Wilkes and Liberty' that Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson irritably remarked in 1770, 'Young Quincy . . . goes by the name of Wilkes Quincy.'⁶

By 1770 then Quincy was well-established in radical circles in Boston.⁷ If the doubts and hesitations that seemed to be revealed in his response to the Hutchinson riot of 1765 had ever seriously impeded his progress as a member of the Patriot party, they had long since appeared to vanish. Indeed a further indication of his ascent was his marriage in October 1769 to Abigail Phillips, daughter of a wealthy (and radical) Boston merchant, William Phillips.⁸ In the early years of the 1770s,

⁵ Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 9. Quincy's second article is quoted in entirety in Joseph Tinker Buckingham, *Specimens of Newspaper Literature* (Boston, 1850), I, 178-180. For the suggestion that Quincy in this essay 'rashly advocated armed resistance,' see William V. Wells, *The Life and Public Services of Samuel Adams* (2nd ed., Boston, 1888), I, 148. Wells' assertion is plausible but not, by Quincy's rhetoric alone, clearly demonstrable.

⁶ 'Pro Lege' [Quincy], *Boston Gazette*, Jan. 4, 1768, quoted in Quincy, *Reports of Cases*, pp. 580-584; Boston, *Reports of the Record Commissioners . . . Containing the Boston Town Records, 1758-1769* (Boston, 1886), pp. 253-255; Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 21; Thomas Hutchinson to Francis Bernard, Boston, May 22, 1770, Hutchinson Letter Books (Mayo typescript, Massachusetts Historical Society), p. 1070.

however, his career became somewhat complex; it could no longer be surveyed in simple, evolutionary terms. As the crisis in the British Empire continued, Quincy would not cease to be a radical. But he would sometimes act in peculiar ways.

The years between 1770 and 1774 were eventful ones in the life of Josiah Quincy. But even more important than the increased tempo of his public activities was a curious pattern that they occasionally revealed. At certain crucial moments in these years Quincy unexpectedly diverged from the path of his political allies. Yet each time he soon veered back from the aberrant course. There were limits, it seemed, to his radicalism.

The first such instance occurred early in 1770. By January of that year, the nonimportation agreements devised by Sam Adams and his cohorts in retaliation for the Townshend Acts were nearing collapse. In desperation Adams had organized the mobs which visited recalcitrant importers with demands that they cease commerce with England. On January 17 this tactic failed, and when the non-importation 'body' reconvened the next morning, the meeting was tense. It was at this session that Quincy nearly split the Patriot party wide open. He contended that crowd intimidation of merchants was illegal and imprudent; his remarks were so persuasive that only with difficulty was a breach in the ranks avoided. While Quincy ultimately lost the argument and a large crowd resumed demonstrations (without success), it seems more significant that at a

⁷He was also attaining status on another front, his profession. In July 1766 after three years of study he was admitted as an attorney to the Suffolk Inferior Court. After the requisite two years of practice, he duly entered the Superior Court of Judicature (the highest court in the province) in Aug. 1768. See Lyman H. Butterfield, ed., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams* (Cambridge, 1961), I, 316, 300n. Although Quincy never acquired the ultimate rank of barrister, perhaps because of his political antipathy to the Governor, nevertheless his practice flourished. For indications of his success as a lawyer, see *Memoir*, pp. 7 and 51. The details of his legal career are too complex and peripheral to present here. It should be noted, however, that there seems to be no significant connection between Quincy's failure to become a barrister and his political attitudes and activities. 'Legal frustration' or 'status anxiety' do not account for the behavior of this Boston radical.

⁸DAB.

critical moment he had opposed the use of extremism in the pursuit of colonial liberty.⁹

But if Quincy disagreed with the radical leadership on tactics, he quickly reaffirmed his support of its principles. In a broadside published on January 23, 1770, and attributed by the *Memoir to Quincy*, the Boston merchants, traders, and freeholders fervently defended nonimportation, denounced its opponents as enemies of their country, and pledged to refrain from any communication with them. In the ensuing months Quincy engaged in newspaper polemics which denied the importance of commerce and supported the continuing boycott. Quincy's divergence from the 'mainstream' of Massachusetts radicalism was a temporary one.¹⁰

If Quincy's brief vagary of January 1770 seemed peculiar, it was soon dwarfed by a far more egregious episode that began only two months later: his role as defense counsel in the Boston Massacre cases. The story of the trials themselves is well-known and need not be repeated, and the recent suggestion that shrewd politics rather than selfless conceptions of duty motivated Quincy and fellow counsel John Adams to accept the cases seems persuasive.¹¹ Far more intriguing was the content of Quincy's speeches and his conduct at the trial of the soldiers. Certainly it was to be expected that as a defense lawyer he would exhort the jury to be impartial, to emphasize legal and constitutional issues, and to disapprove mob violence.

⁹ John C. Miller, *Sam Adams: Pioneer in Propaganda* (Stanford University Press ed., Stanford, 1964), pp. 205-208; George Mason to —, January 24, 1770, Jared Sparks MSS, (Harvard University, Papers Relating to New England), III, 63.

¹⁰ Broadside [Josiah Quincy, Jr.], *An Address of the Merchants, Traders, and Freeholders of the Town of Boston, Assembled at Faneuil Hall, January 23, 1770, for the Purpose of Enforcing the Non-importation Act*; Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 22. 'An Independant' [Quincy], *Boston Gazette*, Feb. 12, 26, 1770; 'An Old Man' [Quincy], *Boston Gazette*, Aug. 6, 1770.

¹¹ For a short discussion of the possibility that 'Josiah Quincy, and, more particularly, Adams were there not simply to present the defense but to make certain that Boston itself was not put on trial,' see Hiller B. Zobel, 'Law Under Pressure: Boston 1769-1771,' in George Athan Billias, ed., *Law and Authority in Colonial America* (Barre, 1965), p. 202, and see also Zobel, 'Newer Light on the Boston Massacre,' *American Antiquarian Society, Proceedings*, LXXVIII (1968), 119.

But what a modern reader does not automatically anticipate is the degree and vehemence of Quincy's dissociation from the radical cause in his statements at the trial. He deplored the circulation of 'a series of *ex parte* evidence' which 'has appeared in the world against us' and which 'we were not present to cross examine'—apparently a reference to the efforts of Sam Adams and other patriots to collect testimony for propaganda purposes, including publication of *A Short Narrative of the Horrid Massacre in Boston*. Moreover, in his final plea Quincy boldly denounced the events of the fifth of March—events which his fellow radicals were already transmuted into a glorious legend. Once more Quincy, partly by necessity and partly, perhaps, by choice (although it is impossible to distinguish them here with certitude) found himself uttering sentiments at variance with the Boston radical leadership.¹²

But regardless of Quincy's motives and expressed opinions, he quickly recovered from any temporary decline in public esteem; throughout 1771 and 1772 his law practice flourished as hundreds of cases occupied his time. Nor were his basic radical proclivities substantially altered by the soldiers' trials; in less than three months he had resumed writing for the *Boston Gazette* on the subject, interestingly enough, of the evils of standing armies and quartering troops in populous cities in peacetime. He even proposed 'that a regular plan be formed for an annual and solemn remembrance of the 5th of March,' although he noted that 'we may differ in opinion concerning the real

¹²The quotations by Quincy are from the pamphlet *The Trial of William Wemms*, quoted in L. Kinvin Wroth and Hiller B. Zobel, eds., *Legal Papers of John Adams* (Cambridge, 1965), III, 165, 166; see also 228. For an account of the Liberty party's attempt to exploit the 'Boston Massacre,' see John Cary, *Joseph Warren: Physician, Politician, Patriot* (Urbana, 1961), pp. 98–97. It is interesting that several anecdotes of the Massacre trials have survived which suggest that Quincy and John Adams may have seriously differed about strategy and tactics during the trial. The weight of the evidence (which is conveniently quoted and analyzed in Wroth and Zobel, *Legal Papers of John Adams*, II, 25–27) seems to indicate that Quincy was rather fervently anxious to win the case, even to the point of alienating the jury and perhaps implicating the town of Boston in a plan to expel the British troops from its boundaries. See especially p. 26, where Adams is quoted as writing that his clients' lives 'were hazarded by Quincy's too youthful ardour.' It is a fascinating, if not securely established, possibility.

state of facts, as they existed between the *agents* on the unhappy evening.' In June and July 1772 he engaged in a newspaper battle over the refusal of the Governor to allow the General Court to return to Boston for its sessions. In November of the same year his position of eminence was recognized when he was elected a member of Boston's first Committee of Correspondence. A few months later Quincy journeyed to the southern and middle colonies on a visit ostensibly to cure his tuberculosis but primarily to encourage intercolonial cooperation. Quincy was rising in the radical ranks.¹³

And yet only months after the completion of his journey to the South, Quincy once more found himself in a position of momentarily tempered radicalism and divergence from the chieftains of the Liberty party in Boston—a dissociation, moreover, from the most daring stroke yet undertaken in opposition to King and Parliament, the Boston Tea Party. Perhaps aware that violence would transform the struggle with Britain, Quincy rose on the climactic afternoon of December 16, 1773, to urge a strange brand of restraint:

It is not, Mr. Moderator, the spirit that vapors within these walls that must stand us in stead. The exertions of this day will call forth the events which will make a very different spirit necessary for our salvation. Whoever supposes that shouts and hosannas will terminate the trials of the day, entertains a childish fancy. . . let us consider the issue. Let us look to the end. Let us weigh and consider before we advance to those measures which must bring on the most trying and terrific struggle this country ever saw.

In effect Quincy was objecting, not to the legality or propriety of dumping tea, but of doing so in thoughtless disregard of the

¹³Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 51; 'Mentor' [Quincy], *Boston Evening Post*, Feb. 11, 1771; 'Marchmont Nedham' [Quincy], *Boston Gazette*, June 8, 15, 22, 29, July 6, 1772 (for the newspaper polemics); Boston, *Report of the Record Commissioners. . . Containing the Boston Town Records, 1770 Through 1777* (Boston, 1887); Mark A. DeWolfe Howe, ed., 'Journal of Josiah Quincy, Junior, 1773,' *Massachusetts Historical Society, Proceedings*, XLIX (1915-1916), 427, 451, 457-458, 460 (hereinafter cited as Quincy, 'Southern Journal'). For a brief discussion of Quincy's trip to the South, see Cary, *Joseph Warren*, p. 125.

likelihood that arms would replace words as the weapons of conflict. But it was too late. In reply other speakers contended, 'Now the hand is to the plow, there must be no turning back.' Whatever Quincy's hesitations Sam Adams and his followers were not to be deterred. That night tea mixed with brine in Boston harbor.¹⁴

But if Quincy had deviated from the radical norm, it was a difference, as in 1770, of tactics. And as in 1770, so in 1773: his 'moderation' was transitory and he returned with alacrity to the fold. Only four days after the Tea Party, Quincy himself published an article in the *Boston Gazette* defending the dumping of the tea! It was the tea consignees, he said, who had caused the destruction because of their obstinate refusal to yield. This defense of the Tea Party was but the first of a series of articles extending into early February 1774 in which Quincy trained his oratorical guns on a favorite foe, Governor Hutchinson. As the political climate worsened, Quincy published in May his *Observations...on the Boston Port-Bill: with Thoughts on Standing Armies*, a pamphlet which declared that Americans were 'slaves,' which exhorted them to 'live a life of liberty and glory,' and which prophesied, 'America hath in store her Brutii and Cassii, her Hampdens and Sidneys, men who will have memories and feelings, courage and swords,—courage that shall inflame their ardent bosoms, till their hands cleave to their swords, and their swords to their enemies' hearts.' In the late spring and early summer, as Boston girded for resistance to the Intolerable Acts, Quincy was elected to numerous important committees, including a Committee of Safety on July 26. He was now as embroiled in radical politics as he would ever be.¹⁵

¹⁴Francis Drake, ed., *Tea Leaves: Being a Collection of Letters and Documents* (Boston, 1884), pp. lix-lx; Wells, *Samuel Adams*, p. 121.

¹⁵'Marchmont Nedham' [Quincy], *Boston Gazette*, Dec. 20, 1773 (cf. his columns of Dec., 1773, Jan. 3, 10, 17, 31, 1774); Josiah Quincy, Jr., *Observations...on the Boston Port-bill: with Thoughts...on Standing Armies* (Boston, 1774), reprinted in Quincy, *Memoir*, pp. 363, 375; *Boston Town Records, 1770 Through 1777*, pp. 169, 173, 183, 185, 186. The increasingly passionate character of Quincy's utterances was apparently

By the summer of 1774, then, Quincy appeared at last to be a fully convinced radical. If at times in the past he had advocated moderation and had evinced a distrust of mob rule, now his caution seemed to be submerged and his dedication to the cause complete. But if in the deepening political storm Quincy now seemed steady, a new struggle and transformation awaited him: a change from radicalism to revolution. How would he, who had acted rather moderately in several other crises, act in the culminating crisis of his life?

On August 20, 1774, Quincy wrote to John Dickinson:

At the urgent solicitation of a great number of warm friends to my country and myself, I have agreed to relinquish business, and embark for London. . . . I am flattered, by those who perhaps place too great confidence in me, that I may do some good the ensuing winter at the court of Great Britain. Hence I have taken this unexpected resolution. My design is to be kept as long secret as possible, I hope till I get to Europe. Should it transpire that I was going home, our public enemies here would be as indefatigable and persevering to my injury as they have been to the cause in which I am engaged heart and hand. . . . I propose dedicating myself wholly to the service of my country.

It was to be a strange adventure, an unexpected climax to the career of a man who had long espoused patriotic principles and who in this very letter had referred to the political struggle against Britain as 'this early period of continental warfare.' But there he was, preparing to sail—'home.'¹⁶

What kind of a man was Quincy in 1774? Despite his occasional fits and starts of political temperateness in previous years, it was evident to many that the young lawyer was a rather unstable person. In 1770 John Adams had been dimssayed by Quincy's 'too youthful ardour' at the Wemms trial, and in

recognized by Quincy himself, for in an addendum to the Port-Bill pamphlet he wrote a short apologia which acknowledged possible indiscretions in the essay but noted that 'as he first assumed his pen from the impulses of his conscience, so he now publishes his sentiments from a sense of duty to God and his country.' See Quincy, *Observations*, reprinted in Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 375-376.

¹⁶Letter from Quincy to John Dickinson, Boston, Aug. 20, 1774, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, pp. 150-151, 149.

July 1774 he wrote to his wife that Quincy was 'always impetuous and vehement.' Even when his course seemed opposed to that of the Patriot leadership, his actual conduct was fervent, as at the nonimportation meeting in 1770, the Massacre case, and the Tea Party. When in 1773 he visited Cornelius Harnett, whom he called the 'Sam Adams of North Carolina,' on his southern trip, 'Tradition affirms that Quincy, delighted at finding Harnett's views coinciding so entirely with his own, was unable to refrain from giving his host a cordial embrace.' Quincy was apparently a very impressionable being, an unusual selection, it would seem, for a voyage to London. He was also an outstanding orator, capable of torrents of extravagant prose—the Boston Cicero John Adams later called him. When one recalls that Quincy had for years been a political foe of the Governor, had in May 1774 received a 'friendly' letter informing him that he was in danger of arrest unless he repented his patriotic sins, and had presumably rendered himself thoroughly obnoxious to the Ministry, the mystery deepens. Why did he go?¹⁷

One possible motive is that Quincy sought to ascertain the reliability in the crisis of the Massachusetts agent in Britain, Benjamin Franklin. Certainly there exists circumstantial evidence to render this interpretation plausible. For years Sam Adams had distrusted Franklin and had opposed his election as Massachusetts agent in 1770; thereafter he corresponded only with Franklin's zealous assistant, Arthur Lee. Quincy, too,

¹⁷ Wroth and Zobel, *Legal Papers of John Adams*, III, 26; L. H. Butterfield *et al.*, eds., *Adams Family Correspondence* (Cambridge, 1963), I, 122; Quincy, 'Southern Journal,' p. 460; Robert Diggs Wimberly Connor, *Cornelius Harnett* (Raleigh, 1909), p. 79; Adams, *Works*, X, 271, 187; Quincy, *Memoir*, pp. 131–135 (for a letter from Quincy's 'Well-wisher'). In a letter to Samuel Adams, Aug. 26, 1774 (Miscellaneous Photostats, Massachusetts Historical Society), Charles Chauncy suggested that Quincy be appointed a representative in England by the Continental Congress; there is no evidence that this suggestion was accepted or even considered. For Sam Adams' vague and evasive reply of Sept. 19, see Harry A. Cushing, ed., *The Writings of Samuel Adams* (New York, 1904–1908), III, 155–156. Quincy did, however, solicit letters of introduction from radical friends and from delegates to the Continental Congress; see Quincy, *Memoir*, pp. 156, 209. The only known letters to survive are printed in Quincy, *Memoir*, pp. 159–160, and in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, 6th ser., IX (1897), 371–376.

suspected Franklin of expedient conduct; in his 'Southern Journal' of May 3, 1773, he wrote, 'I this day had confirmed to me, what I ever believed—that a certain North American Dr. [Franklin] is a very trimmer—a very courtier.' (Quincy was informed that Franklin 'was the first proposer of the STAMP ACT.') Another possible source of dissension was the fact that upon learning of the Boston Tea Party, Franklin condemned it as a 'violent Injustice on our part.' Ample reason for radical suspicion of Franklin thus existed in the summer of 1774.¹⁸

A far more important motive for the voyage, however, was Quincy's apparent desire to overcome distortions of the Patriot position and to present the American case with freshness and vigor to whoever would listen in England. At least this was the expectation of some who wrote to him and on his behalf. Charles Chauncy, for instance, in his letter of introduction to Dr. Amory, said of Quincy that 'he goes to England strongly disposed to serve his country wherein he may be able; and he will be better able to do this, if he may, by the help of gentlemen of character at home, have opportunity of conversing with those, either in or out of administration, who may have been led into wrong sentiments of the people of Boston and the Massachusetts Province in these troublesome times.' Another clue was provided by a letter to Quincy from a fellow Patriot partisan and later member of the Continental Congress, James Lovell: 'I imagine I may by this time congratulate you upon a general change in the prejudices of the people of England with regard to us Americans and our claims.' It is quite possible, moreover, that Quincy himself felt that the cause of the Liberty party was in danger in Britain: on June 1, 1774, his arch-enemy Governor Hutchinson had departed for London; on August 6 the remaining Coercive Acts arrived in Boston; as early

¹⁸ Justin Winsor, ed., *Narrative and Critical History of America* (Boston, 1887), VI, 105; Cornelia Meigs, *The Violent Men, A Study of Human Relations in the First American Congress* (New York, 1949), p. 89; Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1941), p. 493; Miller, *Sam Adams*, pp. 257-258; Quincy, 'Southern Journal,' pp. 473-474; Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Prelude to Independence, the Newspaper War on Britain, 1764-1776* (Vintage ed., New York, 1965), p. 182.

as August 10 Quincy had determined to undertake the mission. That he initially conceived his role to be that of a diplomat-advocate would become more evident once he arrived in England.¹⁹

But the most revealing indication of the original intent of Quincy's voyage came from the pen of his fellow radical, Joseph Warren, who, it appears, was anxious to journey to England himself. In a letter to Sam Adams on September 4, Warren made his revelation: 'I wish much to be in England at this time; but the sacrifice of my particular interest at this time [medicine?], by such a step, would be greater than I can afford to make. I fear Messrs. Oliver, lieutenant-governor, and Colonel Leonard are both going there immediately; and I hope they will not be suffered to tell their tale uncontradicted.' Here, perhaps, was the genesis of Quincy's trip. Although Warren nowhere explicitly indicated (at least in known surviving documents) that he sought Quincy as a replacement, it seems at least plausible that this was precisely what happened. Certainly Warren's expressed purpose for such a venture—the desire to counteract loyalist 'tales'—seems to have motivated Quincy. The assertion of Warren's most recent biographer also seems plausible: that Warren 'saw the necessity, if violence were to be averted, of working toward that end in England, since [Governor and General] Gage's power was severely limited.' If these inferences are correct, then Quincy's voyage was designed as an attempt—perhaps a final attempt—to reverse British imperial policy, even as Massachusetts prepared for a possible war.²⁰

¹⁹Letter from Charles Chauncy to Dr. [Thomas] Amory, Boston, Sept. 13, 1774, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 159; letter from James Lovell to Josiah Quincy, Jr., Boston, Nov. 25, 1774, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 180; Bernard Donoughue, *British Politics and the American Revolution* (London, 1964), pp. 162, 170; Cushing, ed., *Writings of Samuel Adams*, III, 155–156. This last reference is a letter from Sam Adams to Charles Chauncy, Sept. 19, 1774, in which Adams wrote, 'Our friend, Mr. Quincy, informed me before I left Boston, of his intention to take passage for England.' Since Adams departed for the First Continental Congress on August 10 (Wells, *Life of Samuel Adams*, II, 206–207), Quincy must have made his decision by that time.

²⁰Letter from Joseph Warren to Samuel Adams, Boston, Sept. 4, 1774, quoted by Richard Frothingham, *Life and Times of Joseph Warren* (Boston, 1865), p. 358; Cary, *Joseph Warren*, p. 152.

Whatever the validity of these speculations, of greatest interest for a study of Quincy is the very fact that he traveled to England at all in 1774. For however righteously patriotic he was, at least for a little while longer he was willing to work in the framework of politics and the structure of the British Empire. There can be no doubt that at the moment of his departure he was a convinced radical; he was not, however, a revolutionary. Months of frustration and confusing oscillations would pass before Quincy was prepared to resort to arms and to separate America completely from England, his 'home.'

On September 28 Quincy sailed secretly for Great Britain and he arrived in London on November 17. Apparently it required only one meeting with Franklin to convince Quincy that the Massachusetts agent seemed 'warm in our cause, and confident of our ultimate success.' Ten days later he wrote to his wife: 'Dr. Franklin is an American in heart and soul. You may trust him; his ideas are not contracted within the narrow limits of exemption from taxes, but are extended upon the broad scale of total emancipation. He is explicit and bold upon the subject.' Not only was he soon an intimate colleague of the Massachusetts agent, but he immediately tended to associate with Opposition members of Parliament and city radicals of London. The entries of his journal reveal the frequency with which he conferred on politics with such sympathetic Englishmen as Lord Shelburne, Thomas Pownall, Richard Price, and a number of lesser M.P.'s, as well as William Lee and other London radicals.²¹

Although Quincy quickly made contacts with Opposition personalities in London, his associations did not prevent him from attempting to achieve reconciliation between Britain and America. It was a settlement on radical terms that he sought,

²¹Mark A. DeWolfe Howe, ed., 'Journal of Josiah Quincy Jun. . . . in England,' Massachusetts Historical Society, *Proceedings*, L (1916-1917), 434, 437, 438 (hereinafter cited as Quincy, 'English Journal'); letter from Quincy to Mrs. Quincy, London, Nov. 27, 1774, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 211; Quincy, 'English Journal,' *passim* (for names of the people he met).

of course, but it was settlement, nevertheless, and it revealed that Quincy was not yet ready to dissolve the British Empire. Perhaps in awe at England's might, Quincy expressed his surprising sentiment in his diary on November 11 that 'my ideas of the riches and powers of this great nation are increased to a degree I should not have believed, if it had been predicted [to] me. I am not in a measure reconciled to the British plan of taxing America, but I should with cheerfulness accede to a contribution from the Colonies (they being sole judges of the time and quantity of their grants) towards the charges of the British Government.'²²

That Quincy was initially hoping, and perhaps actively striving, for reconciliation was evident from his conversations with the Ministry in the early days of his stay in London. On November 19 at the instigation of John Williams, an Inspector of the Customs in Massachusetts, he was introduced to Lord North. Far from delivering the most extreme radical position, Quincy informed North that 'gross misrepresentation and falsehood' were 'the causes of most of our political evils,' and, if a second-hand account of the interview by Hutchinson is correct, Quincy also claimed that in Massachusetts 'there was a general desire of reconciliation, and that he thought three or four persons on the part of the Kingdom, and as many on the part of the Colonies, might easily settle the matter.' These were rather unexpected opinions for Quincy to present, and they indicated how superficially he viewed the conflict. In the next few days he met with Corbin Morris, a close friend of North, and Lord Dartmouth, but the discussions, while cordial enough, were fruitless.²³

If Quincy actually believed that where such others as the colonial agents had failed, he could succeed with a few hours of

²² Quincy, 'English Journal,' p. 436.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 440, 442, 443; Peter O. Hutchinson, comp., *The Diary and Letters of Thomas Hutchinson* (Boston, 1884-1886), I, 299. Quincy's suggestion that the colonies pay a grant to the British government may not have been unique at the moment. See Cary, *Joseph Warren*, p. 154, where the Suffolk Resolves of Suffolk County, Massachusetts in Sept., 1774 are discussed. According to Cary, the original version of the Re-

earnest conversation about 'gross misrepresentation and falsehood,' his was a bold, even naive, hope. Yet such indeed seems to have been his original expectation; it was a measure both of his sincere radicalism and his absence of revolutionary motives in this first phase of his trip. How could Quincy, a dedicated Patriot leader, apparently continue to believe that peace was so easily attainable? The answer seems to lie in his conviction, unlike that of many of his allies, that evil men in New England, not Britain, were responsible for the imperial crisis. The incarnation of malevolence, of course, was Hutchinson, and repeatedly in his journal, Quincy quoted officials and friends who ascribed the Ministry's policies to his ubiquitous adversary. His letters also expressed the conviction that Hutchinson was the enemy; at one point he reported, 'Certain it is that from one man—from one man, I say, and he neither a Bute, a Mansfield, a North, or a Bernard—are all your miseries supposed to flow.' In a way, Quincy's belief in Hutchinson's culpability may have impeded his progress to a truly revolutionary position. For as long as he could conceive the issue in personal terms, as long as he believed an American responsible for

solves 'proposed as a permanent settlement with Britain that the colonies pay an annual sum into the British treasury, rather than submit to having illegal revenue officers in America.' This proposal, however, was omitted from the more bellicose final draft. Since Quincy presumably was aware of the Resolves (which were adopted on Sept. 9) before he departed, he must have realized that his views were somewhat more moderate than those of his compatriots. Whether this divergence was significant cannot, however, be determined. For further information on Quincy's interview with the Ministers, see Hutchinson, *Diary and Letters*, I, 299–301, 304–305, 318, 326. While Quincy wrote in his diary that from Lord North's discussion of the Port Bill he 'received much pleasure' and that 'his Lordship several times smiled and once seemed touched,' North, according to Hutchinson, was decidedly unimpressed by Quincy: 'his Lordship... pronounced him a bad, insidious man, designing to be artful without abilities to conceal his design.' See Quincy, 'English Journal,' p. 440, and Hutchinson, *Diary and Letters*, I, 299. North's estimate of his young guest conforms with other contemporary views of Quincy as a rather impetuous person. Quincy's suggestion of a conference of a few delegates from Britain and the colonies sounds remarkably similar to a commission which the Ministry proposed should be sent to America—a proposal made in its secret negotiations with Franklin in the winter of 1774–1775. The resemblance seems to be coincidental; there is no evidence that Quincy participated in or even knew about these negotiations. For an account of the Franklin-Dartmouth discussions, see Jack H. Sosin, *Agents and Merchants: British Colonial Policy and the Origins of the American Revolution, 1763–1775* (Lincoln, 1965), pp. 206–215.

hated British schemes, the Ministry itself could perhaps be considered amenable to persuasion and redemption. The imperial framework thus still held possibilities for change.²⁴

Yet if Quincy journeyed to England in the hope (and perhaps the belief) that an 'accurate' statement of colonial grievances would produce a diplomatic settlement, this motive was soon subsumed in a quite different set of activities: the politics of opposition. Even as his informal talks with the Ministry proceeded, Quincy became increasingly intransigent and increasingly involved in Whig and radical maneuvering. While on November 24 he could write home that 'the friends of Liberty and the friends of the ministry engross my whole time Each party makes great professions of friendship,' it is significant that it was the only time he did so.²⁵ Nevertheless, the record of this second phase of Quincy's mission in London was a record of confusion and complexity. Indeed, it appears that in the early days of this period of transition, Quincy pursued an inconsistent course. It was another reflection of his emotional instability.

The transformation of Quincy from a diplomat-advocate for the radical cause to a revolutionary began early. On November 24 he met Lord Dartmouth, Secretary of State for the Colonies, for ninety minutes of a relaxed, but inconclusive, conference; only four days had elapsed since he had allegedly insisted to North that reconciliation was still possible and in fact easy. But on this very day, while he acknowledged to his wife that he was in a 'delicate situation,' in the same letter he cautioned the Continental Congress *against* negotiation: 'If that mode of proceeding is adopted by the Congress, many, very many

²⁴Quincy, 'English Journal,' pp. 444, 446, 447, 450; letter from Quincy to Mrs. Quincy, London, Dec. 7, 1774; quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 217. Quincy's opinion about the origin of the conspiracy against American liberties seems to have been somewhat atypical; for the more common view that the sources of malice were in England, see Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 124-137.

²⁵Letter from Quincy to Mrs. Quincy, London, Nov. 24, 1774, quoted in Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 206.

friends will sink; they will desert your cause from despondency.' Moreover, he scorned efforts at economic coercion of Britain. Noting that British merchants could be easily silenced by the Ministry, he advised: 'For your country's sake, depend not upon commercial plans alone for your safety...how difficult is it, how impracticable is it for *mere commercial virtue* (if indeed it have any existence) to persevere. I repeat, therefore, depend not upon this scheme for your deliverance. I do not say renounce it, but look towards it in vast subordination to those noble, generous, and glorious exertions which *alone* can save you.' Perhaps Quincy recalled the eventful days of 1770, when the Boston merchants were anxious to surrender patriotic principle for resumption of trade. Quincy had despised such sentiments then, and he despised them now. 'It is yourselves, it is yourselves must save you,' he wrote to his friends in America, '*and you are equal to the task.*' What did he mean? War? We cannot tell. But these were strange words for a self-styled diplomat.²⁶

The next key dates in Quincy's growing disillusionment with prospects for success 'at the court of Great Britain' were December 6 and 7. On the sixth, the same date that Franklin presented his 'Hints' by a third party to Lord Dartmouth, Quincy again met Corbin Morris; it was his last known conversation with anyone intimate with the Ministry.²⁷ In his version of the session, Quincy contended that Morris insisted that the time was appropriate for Quincy to approach the Ministry with 'some line to which the Colonies would accede and by which the present controversy might be amicably adjusted.' Quincy, however, was suspicious; he noted in his journal, 'I thought I could discern the origin and drift of this curious discourse.' Thomas Hutchinson's version, however, was quite different: 'Mr. Morris...called and breakfasted [Dec. 8]...He

²⁶ Quincy, 'English Journal,' p. 443; letter from Quincy to Mrs. Quincy, London, Nov. 24, 1774, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, pp. 206, 209, 210.

²⁷ Unless one excepts Thomas Pownall, whom Quincy met late in Dec. and twice in Jan. But by then Quincy was not attempting to communicate with the Ministry.

mentioned Quincy's having been introduced to him; and though his book [*Observations*?] was high, he professed moderation, and wanted some line to be settled.' Since Quincy met Morris at least twice, it is possible that Morris was referring to another meeting, but the occurrence of the phrase 'some line' in both accounts suggests otherwise. Moreover, Hutchinson wrote in his diary that on this same day David Hartley, an Opposition M.P., stated in Parliament that 'if things could be put upon the footing they were in the year 1764, the Colonies could be content. This same Hartley, Quincy, by some means or other, had made himself known to, and when Quincy was at the door, Hartley came out more than once, and inquired for him, and I think must have taken that hint from him.' If Hutchinson's account of the events of December 6 is correct, then as late as this date Quincy was acting within the framework of diplomacy and with some moderation. Even his desire for a return to the pre-Stamp Act days implied that he did not yet seek independence and war. Perhaps even more revealing was the fact, if the Hartley story is true, that Quincy was turning to Parliament, not the Ministry, for redress.²⁸

That Quincy was indeed now hoping for results from the English Opposition was apparent in a letter home dated December 7; it revealed again his intense, almost febrile, personality. On the one hand, he urged his American associates to 'Prepare, prepare, I say, *for the worst*... I am... most sure that your forbearance, your delays, your indecision... hath brought or will bring upon you many more and greater evils.' Once again Quincy seemed to be counseling war. But this time he drew back with a surprising admission: 'You see my heart gets the better of my head; my feelings rise paramount to my discretion. Thus it will always be with those who are warm in the cause of their country,—their zeal banishes caution. You see however, I still retain some discretion, but even that I had

²⁸Sosin, *Agents and Merchants*, p. 207; Quincy, 'English Journal,' p. 446; Hutchinson, *Diary and Letters*, I, 318, 317 (in that order).

rather lose than be “unpregnant of my cause or lack gall to make oppression bitter.”” Emotionally a revolutionary, Quincy still hesitated to take the final step. Why, however, did he advocate intransigence? In the final paragraph he provided the answer: ‘You must know that many of your friends here in both Houses will not take a decisive part till they see how you act in America . . . when once there is a conviction that the Americans are in earnest, that they are resolved to endure all hazards with a spirit worthy of the prize for which they contend, then, and not till then, will you have many firm, active, persevering, and powerful friends, in both Houses of Parliament.’ Just what forms such brinkmanship should take was not clear. Once more Quincy’s rhetoric proved noble but ambiguous.²⁹

Discretion and a certain residual willingness to use British institutions to effect a settlement appeared to motivate Quincy on December 6; they did not motivate him for long. On December 14 he openly countenanced violent resistance at last: ‘Let me tell you one very serious truth in which we all agreed, *your countrymen must seal their cause with their blood*. You know how often and how long ago I said this. I see every day more and more reason to confirm my opinion.’ After reciting his speech at the Boston Tea Party, Quincy concluded that ‘resolutions’ would never suffice for the Americans: ‘They must now stand the issue; they must preserve a consistency of character; **THEY MUST NOT DELAY**; they must——or be trodden into the vilest vassalage, the scorn, the spurn of their enemies, a by-word of infamy among all men.’ But would this advocacy of undefined acts of violence mean war? Apparently not: ‘When you shall act agreeably to your past ostentations, when you have shown that you are what Englishmen once were, whether successful or not, your foes will diminish, your friends amazingly increase, and you will be happy in the *peaceful* [emphasis added] enjoyment of your inheritance.’ Perhaps it was merely

²⁹Letter from Quincy to Mrs. Quincy, London, Dec. 7, 1774, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, pp. 218, 219, 220.

a coincidence that in this same letter Quincy wrote, 'Lord North has, I hear, given out that I have my price.'³⁰

On December 16, Quincy reiterated an earlier admonition: 'Beware of the arts of negotiation: the ministry are adepts in them.' On December 17, he wrote to Joseph Reed in Philadelphia in words which indicated that the situation was critical. He was markedly displeased at the moment with the British 'commercial world,' which was infested with 'conspirators' against American happiness; 'commercial plans founded on commercial principles' would never 'be engines of your freedom or the security of your felicity.' Rather, 'Far different are the weapons with which oppression is repelled.' Then, after alluding to a proposal of Opposition members of Parliament for a suspension for three years of all imperial measures concerning America passed since 1764, Quincy again urged vigilance: 'Now, whether the weapons of our warfare be commercial or martial, methinks we should not suddenly lay them down. ... Let our countrymen... be on their guard at every point.' And finally, after another paragraph, the climax: 'I cannot forbear telling you that I look to my countrymen with the feelings of one who verily believes they must yet seal their faith and constancy to their liberties with blood.' But even at this point, as other options appeared to be closing around him, Quincy revealed his reluctance to sanction violence and war: 'This is a distressing witness indeed! But hath not this ever been the lot of humanity? Hath not blood and treasure in all ages been the price of civil liberty?' Whether violence necessarily meant a protracted war was not, however, obvious from an examination of his rhetoric.³¹

³⁰Letter from Quincy to Mrs. Quincy, London, Dec. 14, 1774, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, pp. 224, 225, 226, 227. Quincy's statement that he had long been convinced of the inevitability of bloodshed at first seems to contradict Hutchinson's statement that Quincy told North that the conflict could be easily resolved. Perhaps, however, these two facts simply indicate that while Quincy initially believed reconciliation possible, he did not consider it likely. In the context of the London mission, this interpretation seems most plausible.

³¹Letter from Quincy to Joseph Reed, London, Dec. 17, 1774, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, pp. 235-237.

By the middle of December, then, it was plain that Quincy's mission as a diplomat-advocate, at least in its original form, had failed. Why had the young Bostonian changed his mind? What were the sources of his disillusionment? First, he must have realized by December 17 that his diplomacy had gotten nowhere. In his seemingly pleasant interview with North, Quincy carefully noted the Prime Minister's emphasis on Britain's power and her determination to use it 'to effect the submission of the Colonies.' When Quincy met Corbin Morris on November 22, he was amused by the Englishman's attempt to threaten and cajole him into urging his friends in America to submit; Morris' flattery he dismissed as 'flummery.' Quincy was suspicious on December 6 when Morris allegedly urged the 'propriety and expediency' of Quincy's presenting a proposal for negotiations, and he was also aware of Lord North's statement that Quincy had his price.³²

Moreover, he seemed increasingly repelled and irritated by what he considered the corruption and ostentation of British life. On November 29, when George III convened Parliament, Quincy was neither 'dazzled [n]or terrified' by 'the gigling and phiz' of royalty; he was certain that, in the words of the Cromwellian Henry Marten, 'I do not think one man wise enough to govern us all.' He was stung, too, by the condescension of Englishmen who considered Americans 'all cowards and poltroons'; he patriotically wanted his countrymen to prove otherwise. To be sure, on November 9, even before he arrived in London, he was convinced that 'G.B. in variety and abundance of fraud and deceits far surpass any part of N. America'; but only two days later he had been awed enough by England to suggest that the colonies grant money for maintenance of her government. By December 16, however, his alienation from the government extended even to the House of Commons through which, via Hartley, he had sought redress on Decem-

³²Quincy, 'English Journal,' pp. 440, 442, 446; letter from Quincy to Mrs. Quincy, London, Dec. 14, 1774, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 227.

ber 6: 'I have just supped and spent the evening with a circle of about a dozen influential members of the House of Commons. But whether I see them in the House or out of it, they appear—not fit to represent the inhabitants of North America.' And while Quincy believed that the English people were overwhelmingly pro-American, they were "'cowed" by oppression [and]... sunk in abject submission.'³³

Finally, he was hardly encouraged to be conciliatory by his English allies. Again and again his letters home stated that the English Opposition advocated utter inflexibility as the only proper course. On December 12, in fact, no less a Whig leader than Lord Shelburne advised Quincy that 'if they [the Americans] continued united, they must have all they ask... [because] the Ministry would not be able to carry on a civil war against America—that they began to hesitate and would be obliged to give way.'³⁴

In short, with neither diplomacy, nor the King, nor the English upper classes, nor the Parliament, nor the mass of Englishmen a suitable source of hope, and with Quincy biased against mere commercial measures, what alternative except intransigence was left? And if the Ministry dared not start a war, might not obduracy to the point of bloodshed ultimately succeed?

It is an indication of Quincy's instability, however, that his conviction of mid-December that violence was inescapable and perhaps necessary was not permanent. From late December on, in fact, Quincy would frequently oscillate between advocacy of a settlement resembling home-rule and pursuit of complete independence—between peace, in other words, and war.

³³ Quincy, 'English Journal,' p. 445; letter from Quincy to Mrs. Quincy, London, Jan. 12, 1775, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 261; letter from Quincy to Mrs. Quincy, London, Dec. 7, 1774, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, pp. 216-217; Quincy, 'English Journal,' pp. 435, 437; letter from Quincy to Mrs. Quincy, London, Dec. 16, 1774, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 230; letter from Quincy to Mrs. Quincy, London, Nov. 24, 1774, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 209.

³⁴ Letters in *Memoir*, pp. 208, 220, 224 (for examples of Opposition advice); Quincy, 'English Journal,' p. 447.

It is possible, although not demonstrable, that Quincy's words in December about bloodshed actually were a call to arms. But if in a moment of indiscretion³⁵ he had passed over the brink, he remained in England, nevertheless. And even more significant is that fact that his hope in Parliament appeared to revive. For as the new year arrived, the tide of English politics seemed about to shift. Parliament was scheduled to reconvene in mid-January; it provided a final opportunity for a solution within the framework of the British Empire.

The conflicting pressures which were now beginning to beset Quincy were quite evident in his letter home of December 22. He opened by mentioning that he had devoted much time that day to 'four very influential members of the House of Commons.'³⁶ 'I have as yet heard or seen nothing,' he continued, 'to alter my sentiments of the duty of my countrymen, since I so fully wrote my opinion of the part they ought to take'—an apparent allusion to his letter of December 14 urging Americans not to 'delay' and noting the necessity of sealing their cause with blood. The members of Parliament with whom Quincy conferred, however, seemed to offer him different advice; *they* emphasized 'the infinite perplexities of the ministry, and the general commotion now beginning to take place among the merchants and manufacturers.' They were advocating, in other words, the strategy which had helped to obtain repeal of the Stamp Act. Quincy did not comment directly on this intelligence; instead he urged Americans merely to 'be men of common integrity and common sense.' But in the final paragraph he revealed the split among British contacts which would increasingly affect his course: 'Your Parliamentary friends say, "Snatch the opportunity for peace and reconciliation." Your

³⁵Recall his admission to Joseph Reed on Dec. 17.

³⁶From Quincy's 'English Journal,' p. 450, we know that two of these men were Rose Fuller and David Hartley, both at this time opposed to the American policy of the North ministry. For biographical essays on these figures, see Sir Lewis Namier and John Brooke, *The House of Commons, 1754-1790* (London, 1964), II, 477-480, and 592-593, respectively.

sanguine and warm partisans say, you "are united and inspired now—circumstances that may never happen again." Seize the glorious, happy opportunity for establishing the freedom and social felicity of all America! "There is a tide in the affairs of men." God direct you! Who were the 'sanguine and warm partisans' of whom he wrote? Not, in the context of the letter, the Whig Opposition; certainly not Franklin, who was engaged at this moment in indirect secret exchanges with the Ministry. The only remaining possibility is the radicals—Richard Price, Stephen Sayre, William Lee, and other intellectuals and London political leaders whom Quincy had met by mid-December. And what did Quincy mean by his exhortation to 'Seize the glorious, happy opportunity'? We cannot tell; perhaps he was urging independence at last. But as further events would demonstrate, if he had attained this peak, he climbed back down again.³⁷

For a new means of success short of war now appeared; economic coercion within Britain itself. Instigated and intensified by radical and Opposition stalwarts, merchants and manufacturers in England were finally rousing themselves, and although in December Quincy was skeptical of the British 'commercial world,' on January 7 he appeared hopeful that perhaps economic sanctions by America and turmoil in England could achieve success after all: 'Did Americans realize their commercial powers, spirit and obstinacy would characterize their future measures. Had the nonexportation agreement been appointed to commence on the first of March, Britain would ere this have been in popular convulsions. . . . The people of this country must be made to *feel* the importance of their American

³⁷Letter from Quincy to Mrs. Quincy, London, Dec. 22, 1774, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, pp. 239, 240, 241. Quincy met Richard Price on Nov. 24 and Dec. 12, Stephen Sayre on Dec. 14, and William Lee on Nov. 20, 21, Dec. 4, and 10. These, of course, were the only recorded meetings. See Quincy, 'English Journal,' pp. 442, 443, 447, 448. The split between the Whigs and the more extreme City Radicals in 1774–1775 undermined the possibility of effective efforts for reconciliation. See Donoghue, *British Politics*, pp. 150–152, and Charles R. Ritcheson, *British Politics and the American Revolution* (Norman, 1954), p. 224.

brethren. If the colonies have one spark of virtue, in less than a twelve-month Britain must feel at every nerve.' But even as he overcame his scruples enough to support the economic approach, he professed in the same letter not to be concerned about the Ministry's action: 'I know not, and any further than mere humanity dictates, *I care not*, what part they take. If my own countrymen deserve to be free, *they will be free.*' What, then, did the word 'free' mean? That it did not mean independence—that it did not have revolutionary connotations—seemed evident from a comment Quincy wrote a moment later: 'If the three acts relative to Massachusetts Bay are not repealed, I intend to be in Philadelphia in May next.' The *status quo ante*—not independence—was still his goal.³⁸

The same sentiment prevailed four days later, on January 11. 'The cause of the colonies grows every day more popular; that of the ministry, more desperate,' he wrote. 'There can be no doubt that the peaceful, spiritless, and self-denying warfare, in which the colonies are now engaged, would yield an ample victory,' though not the most heroic one. He again denounced the myopic selfishness of the British manufacturers and merchants and wondered whether the Americans themselves actually did possess enough 'frugal virtue' to succeed. He himself sought not only 'the safety, but the glory of my country.' Nevertheless, if his countrymen were convinced that they could effect and enforce a successful non-importation, non-exportation agreement, Quincy was prepared to assert that a 'bloodless victory' was certain. And it was, in fact, 'the bloodless deliverance of my native land' which Quincy now contended he wished. Reversing his position of mid-December, he now declared:

Permanent slavery, or a full deliverance from their present burdens, is the alternative now before America.... If her children can withstand the blandishments of luxury, and the delusions of

³⁸Letter from Quincy to Mrs. Quincy, London, Jan. 7, 1775, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, pp. 247, 248.

false pride, they may purchase liberty without its price; but if attachment to commercial leeks and onions, an idolatry equally degrading, and in the present case almost as impious as that of Egypt, have debauched the appetite and blinded all sense, they must soon make their election of *the loaf of slavery or the sword of blood*.⁸⁹

In this letter of January 11, Quincy revealed how close to the advocacy of independence he had come. His rhetoric did not speak of thirteen colonies, but of a 'country,' a 'native land'—America, and only by a deliberate act of will did he subordinate his private inclinations to the Continental Congress' plan of 'peaceful' economic warfare. Nevertheless, Quincy believed that a boycott could succeed, and by this conviction revealed that, consciously or not, he was still operating within the imperial framework. For the very idea of a boycott implied a solution dependent on British actions—actions that would in turn imply some kind of relationship with the colonies.

The most obvious indication that Quincy was not yet an advocate of war or independence was disclosed in an interview with Thomas Pownall on January 12; Pownall, a member of Parliament sympathetic to the Americans but with access to ministerial circles, informed Quincy that the chance that Parliament would repeal any of the Intolerable Acts when it reconvened was nil. In dramatic fashion Quincy recorded his reactions: 'I replied to Governor Pownall, I wished I could be satisfied that what he now said would be true. "It will ease my mind," added I, "and would determine my conduct to sail to America in four and twenty hours. I should then be in no doubt what the colonies ought to do, and [with a little elevation of voice] I am sure I should not hesitate what part to take myself.'" The rationale of Quincy's conduct was now clear. His speech to Pownall revealed more obviously than ever before the alternatives between which he was oscillating: if Parliament could not be coerced into reversing its policies, he

⁸⁹Letter from Quincy to Mrs. Quincy, London, Jan. 11, 1775, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, pp. 251, 252, 253.

would return to America to fight. And if he still believed that a choice existed on January 12, his estrangement from Britain was nevertheless becoming more total. To Pownall he declared: 'I have been confirmed more and more every day that the commonalty in this country are no more like the commonalty in America than if they were two utterly distinct people.' The underlying trend in Quincy's thinking and political consciousness was evident.⁴⁰

Still, the resolution of his perplexities was not yet to occur. In his conversation with Pownall he reiterated his conviction that 'this country [England] will be convulsed, I am sure there will be very astonishing commotions, if those acts are not repealed, and that very speedily too, after the Parliament have got well together.' More important was the very fact that Quincy remained in England. When on January 19 Parliament returned from its Christmas recess, he was seated in the gallery. His politics of coercion had not—in his own mind—collapsed.⁴¹

But time, clearly, was running out. On January 20, the Whig orators in the House of Lords, led by Chatham, vigorously supported Chatham's motion to withdraw all British troops from Boston at once. Quincy, making notes as a spectator, was enthralled by their oratory; nevertheless, the Ministry defeated the proposal 68 to 18. On January 23, as Quincy watched, the House of Commons voted, 197 to 81, to refuse even to consider a pro-American petition from the merchants of London presented by Mr. Alderman Hayley. Now it was no longer possible to hope, as Quincy himself admitted in his diary: 'This debate and division show that if King, Lords and Commons can subdue America into bondage against the almost universal sentiment, opinion, wish and hope of the Englishmen of this Island, the deed will be done.' Whether this was the climactic

⁴⁰Letter from Quincy to Mrs. Quincy, London, Jan. 12, 1775, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, pp. 257, 258, 259.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 258; Quincy, 'English Journal,' p. 456.

disillusionment cannot be determined, for on this day Quincy fell ill and his letter-writing ceased. His days of greatest activity were over.⁴²

Meanwhile, Parliament was acting with mounting rapidity and decisiveness. On January 24, 25, 27, and 31, it killed by means of what Burke called 'a committee on oblivion' petitions from mercantile groups in major English cities. February 1 saw the Lords reject Chatham's motion for conciliation, 61 to 32; on February 2, the Commons declared Massachusetts in rebellion, 296 to 106. On the tenth Lord North introduced a bill to restrain New England's trade; on the twentieth the peculiar conciliatory motion of the Ministry passed the Commons. Parliament's energy was matched by Quincy's despair. On February 24, Quincy compiled a tally of but nine London merchants and added in his journal: 'Take out the above from the list of London merchants and where will you find a friend to America? or rather, are not the residue its bitter enemies at heart?'⁴³

It was sometime during these darkening final weeks of his stay that the third and final phase of Quincy's London mission commenced: the period in which at least part of the time he finally was an advocate of revolution. But even in these last days his course was unsteady, and before he boarded the ship for America oscillations occurred almost daily.

During his sickness in late January and February, Quincy remained as active as possible. Franklin himself acknowledged the fervor of his young compatriot: 'I am much pleased with Mr. Quincy,' he wrote. 'It is a thousand pities his strength of body is not equal to his strength of mind. His zeal for the pub-

⁴²Quincy, 'English Journal,' pp. 456-465 (p. 465 for the quotation). For a discussion of these events, see Donoghue, *British Politics*, pp. 232-238, and Ritcheson, *British Politics*, pp. 182-183. For the debate in the Commons on Hayley's motion of January 23, see William Cobbett and L. C. Hansard, eds., *The Parliamentary History of England* (London, 1806-1830), XVIII, 167-177.

⁴³For the votes and discussion of them, see Donoghue, *British Politics*, pp. 238-243, 248-251, and Ritcheson, *British Politics*, pp. 183-188. Quincy's statement is contained in his 'English Journal,' p. 467.

lic, like that of David for God's house, will, I fear, eat him up.' During this period Quincy was frequently visited by the most radical of his London acquaintances, including Richard Price, Joseph Priestley, William and Arthur Lee; and it was they, it seems, who convinced him as early as February 26 to return to America bearing information and their advice. A clue to the nature of this advice—and Quincy's own position—was provided by his record of a conversation with Franklin on March 1. When Quincy presented the opinions of his radical friends concerning 'what course America and especially New England ought now and during the spring and summer to hold,' he discovered that Franklin 'utterly dissented from them all.' Apparently Quincy had initially agreed with the radicals, for upon perceiving the 'good sense and solid wisdom' of Franklin's 'moderate' views, he abruptly altered his own sentiments: 'I was charmed: I renounced my own opinion: I became a convert to his. I feel a kind of enthusiasm which leads me to believe that it was something almost supernatural which induced this discourse and prompted the Dr. to speak so fully and divinely upon the subject. This interview may be a means of preventing much calamity and producing much good to Boston and the M. Bay, and in the end to all America.' And what did Franklin state to Quincy? A letter from Franklin to James Bowdoin on February 25 reveals the probable answer:

Though they [the Ministry] have by the late deceptive motion [North's conciliatory motion of February 20] amused many people here, so as to give an appearance as if they intended pacific measures, . . . yet when this deceit is understood, and time proves the intended offer to America futile and ineffectual, the redoubled clamour of the trading, manufacturing, and Whig interests here will infallibly overthrow all enemies of America, and produce an acknowledgement of her rights and satisfaction for her injuries.

If we continue firm and united and resolutely persist in the nonconsumption agreement, this adverse ministry cannot possibly stand another year. . . . By a brave perseverance, with prudence and moderation, not forward in acting offensively, but resolute

in defence when necessary, they [the colonies] will establish a respectable character both for wisdom and courage; and then they will find friends everywhere. . . .

Obviously Franklin's scheme rejected recourse to war and independence in favor of an economic struggle *within* the Empire. That Quincy did not at first adhere to this position implies his willingness to consider more drastic measures (certainly not less) on March 1; that he was so easily persuaded to change his mind reflected the erratic nature of his temperament.⁴⁴

And yet if Quincy became a 'moderate' on March 1, his conversion appeared to endure for only twenty-four hours. On March 2, he conferred with one of the most militant radicals, William Lee, and the 'English Journal' yields the unmistakable impression that the two Americans were plotting war. Among the topics discussed were a number of very curious subjects:

Vote of credit for the raising and supporting
[troops] for the defence of the liberties of America
in whatever part attacked.

A proper person to [command ?]

France and Spain [to be approached ?]

The Hereditary Prince of Brunswick.

Supposes Boston ought to be abandoned.

Although this conversation was, as far as is known, purely speculative and productive of no results, it revealed dramatically that Quincy contemplated at last the pursuit of diplomacy 'by other means.' If ever he was a revolutionary in thought, it was now.⁴⁵

But—his behavior was so patterned by March 1775—he did not remain one for long. The next day he again met

⁴⁴Albert Henry Smyth, ed., *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1906), VI, 310; Quincy, 'English Journal,' pp. 467, 468; Smyth, ed., *Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, VI, 309-310.

⁴⁵Quincy, 'English Journal,' pp. 468-469. The brackets and words within them were supplied by the editor of the 'English Journal,' Mark A. DeWolfe Howe. In 1776, Ferdinand, duke of Brunswick, was suggested by Arthur Lee and Silas Deane as an appropriate commander for the American armies. See Quincy, 'English Journal,' p. 469n.

Franklin, and once more the shrewd Philadelphian convinced his young aide to refrain from the *ultima ratio*: 'Disswades from France or Spain or Hereditary Prince of B[runswick]... by no means take any step of great consequence (unless a sudden emergency) without advice of the Continental Congress.' Franklin then proceeded to reaffirm his faith in more traditional measures: 'Let your adherence be to the nonimportation agreement, a year from next September, or to the next sessions of Parliament, and the day is won.' Significantly, perhaps, this time Quincy did not record any wave of emotional conversion to Franklin's entire position. On March 4 he sailed for America; on April 21 he wrote in a final statement that if only he could have presented a message from 'fifteen or twenty most staunch [English] friends to America'—no doubt his radical acquaintances—he would have been 'of great service to my country.' The intelligence he wished to communicate was too precious to write down.⁴⁶

The contents of this message, however, may be inferred from several other sources, which provide a clue to Quincy's last position. The very day he left for America, for instance, his close associate William Lee wrote to a friend: 'You are quite mistaken in supposing anything conciliatory towards America is intended. The ministers, with their leader are violently blowing the coals into a flame, that will lay waste the whole British Empire. From the destruction of so vast a body, new empires and new systems of government must arise. In short a civil war is inevitable.' On March 17, Lee sent Quincy a letter, intercepted by the British, which included an enclosure urging British soldiers to refrain from fighting the Americans and a request that Quincy distribute the address throughout the colonies. A letter of March 2 from Brand Hollis, an English radical whom Quincy had met, also implied that independence was now a common expectation: 'Mr. Brand Hollis... has no doubts but that the magnanimity and good sense of his

⁴⁶ Quincy, 'English Journal,' p. 469; Quincy, *Memoir*, pp. 286-287.

[Quincy's] countrymen will fix their Liberties on a solid basis, and knowing the errors of England will avoid them, and hopes they will show to the world a perfect form of Government where Liberty and Justice shall act in Union.' Finally, Lee related to Quincy on April 12 that Isaac Barré, a pro-American M.P. whom Quincy knew,⁴⁷ believed that 'the quarrel can not be terminated without fighting, which the sooner it happens the better.' Whether Quincy completely concurred with these opinions is impossible to determine, but he did consider them important enough to relay to America orally. And at least once in early March he acted like a man dedicated to prosecuting a revolution.⁴⁸

Quincy's ultimate position we shall, of course, never know; on April 26, 1775, a few hours after arriving at Gloucester, he died. In his 'Southern Journal' of 1773 he recorded an observation that may serve as an unwitting epitaph: 'I had often in past life expressed my creed that every man died a hater of tyrants, an abhorer of oppression, a lover of his country, and a friend to mankind.' Whether as a radical or a revolutionary, Quincy in death fulfilled his creed.⁴⁹

If the political career of Josiah Quincy, Jr. may be interpreted as a process of transformation from a radical to a revolutionary posture, it remains necessary to 'weigh and consider' this theme and to suggest its implications for understanding the life of Quincy and the Revolutionary era in which he lived. One prominent feature of Quincy's public activities especially requires explanation. What was most extraordinary about him is not that he was a Patriot leader or even that he became a

⁴⁷ Or possibly Richard Price; the antecedent of the pronoun is not entirely clear.

⁴⁸ Worthington C. Ford, ed., *Letters of William Lee* (New York, 1891), pp. 138-139; letter from William Lee to Josiah Quincy, Jr., London, Mar. 17, 1775, quoted by Great Britain, Historical Manuscripts Commission, *The Manuscripts of the Earl of Dartmouth* (London, 1895), II, 280-281; letter from Brand Hollis to Josiah Quincy, Jr. [London?], Mar. 2, 1775, Massachusetts Historical Society, *Proceedings*, 2nd ser., L (1916-1917), 489; letter from William Lee to Josiah Quincy, Jr., London, Apr. 12, 1775, *Ibid.*, 494.

⁴⁹ For the report of Quincy's death shortly after arriving at Gloucester, Mass., see *Essex Gazette*, May 2, 1775 (available on microfilm in Harbottle Dorr newspaper collection, Massachusetts Historical Society); Quincy, 'Southern Journal,' p. 437.

revolutionary—many men experienced the same change—but the quite unexpected fact that for a man consciously and militantly radical throughout his life, the transformation was as slow, fitful, and tortuous as it was. Why should he have occasionally been ‘moderate’ before 1774? Why should he have even considered a voyage of reconciliation to England in that year? Why was he, unlike Sam Adams, for instance, such a reluctant revolutionary?

The reasons for Quincy’s erratic career may be found in four factors which collectively account for the moderation (and, in one case, some of the extremism) of his life as a public figure. An examination of Quincy’s sometimes restrained radicalism before 1774 reveals the first of these factors: in every instance examined, the common denominator was a distrust of crowds. In 1765, the occasion for his rejection of extremes was ‘the wholly unjustifiable’ destruction of the Hutchinson residence by a mob in January 1770, he protested the illegality of mob pressures against violators of the nonimportation agreement. Again in 1770, at the soldiers’ trial, Quincy denounced mass violence as a political weapon, and in 1773 he cautioned the Boston town meeting against the vain expectation that the roar of a crowd would secure American liberties. Perhaps the Hutchinson riot of 1765 profoundly impressed him, but whatever its source, an uneasiness about mobs seemed to motivate Quincy in some of his ‘moderate’ moments.⁵⁰

A second apparent restraint on his radicalism, evident at least in December 1774, was his reluctance to accept bloodshed as the price of liberty. Even as he wrote to Joseph Reed that ‘sealing the cause with blood’ was inevitable, he added that his opinion was ‘a distressing witness indeed.’ To such a man as Quincy, capable of apocalyptic utterances, an apocalypse

⁵⁰Josiah, Jr. was not the only member of his family who distrusted mob rule. In 1747 his father served on a Boston committee which vigorously condemned a local riot. Perhaps the elder Quincy’s distaste for disorder influenced the education of his son. Yet—like his son—the father was capable of reversing his position. He vehemently opposed his son’s role as defender of the British troops at the Boston Massacre trials of 1770. See Clifford K. Shipton, ed., *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates* (Boston, 1951), VIII, 469–471.

may have seemed terrible as well as inevitable. It is not surprising that in a moment of emotional tension, he might have been acutely sensitive to the possible devastation of war. How significant an influence this was, however, is impossible to determine.⁵¹

A far more crucial moderating factor was Quincy's distrust of Thomas Hutchinson; from 1767 to 1775, it was one of the dominant themes of his conduct. Especially during his mission to England Quincy recorded his suspicion that it was one man—Hutchinson—who was the source of all evil done to the Americans. Yet as long as Quincy could believe that a single person was the enemy, he could still retain hope in British institutions. This seems to have been precisely the psychology of the first phase—the diplomatic—of his London trip and the basis of his almost audacious statement to North that 'gross misrepresentation and falsehood' were the principal cause of the conflict in the empire. Only later in his London mission did Quincy become convinced that something more than Hutchinson was an obstacle to peace and liberty.

But probably the most important single source of Quincy's 'moderation'—indeed, a source of much of his political instability, including the final wild oscillations of March 1775—was the erratic and impressionable personality of Quincy himself. Again and again in his career, the young⁵² radical revealed what even his biographer acknowledged to be 'the extreme sensibility of his temperament.' In 1770 he was known as 'Wilkes' Quincy; in 1770 also, John Adams worried about his 'too youthful ardour' at the Massacre trials. In 1773, overwhelmed by emotion, he embraced Cornelius Harnett at a meeting in North Carolina.⁵³ Even his private letters and counsels of caution were often impassionate. Moreover, as

⁵¹Letter from Quincy to Joseph Reed, London, Dec. 17, 1774, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 237.

⁵²All his known political activity occurred while he was between twenty-one and thirty-one years old.

⁵³Connor, *Harnett*, p. 79.

noted earlier, Franklin wrote to James Bowdoin in 1775 that he feared that Quincy's 'zeal for the public, like that of David for God's house, will...eat him up.' That the 'Boston Cicero' was impressionable as well was abundantly demonstrated by his English voyage. While he was rather pleased by his interview with Lord North, the shrewd English minister was quite contemptuous of him. Near the end of his stay in England, he claimed that he was 'charmed' and 'converted' to Franklin's 'moderate' (that is, opposed to violence and to independence) position, but while he was a non-revolutionary radical in Franklin's company, he was something quite different in the presence of William Lee. Buffeted by the advice of men who urged peaceful resistance and by men who wanted bloodshed, Quincy for a long time was undecided about which course to choose, as he admitted to Thomas Pownall on January 12, 1775. This is not to argue that he was unintelligent; indeed, his success as a lawyer, his pamphlet and newspaper articles, the contemporary view that he would be a successor to James Otis, and his prestige as an orator all indicate that he was a man of considerable intelligence. But it does seem that Quincy sometimes lacked in discretion and judgment what he compensated for in moral fervor and rhetorical proficiency. The final reason for his occasional 'moderation,' in short, was also a reason for his extremism: the peculiarly volatile psychology of this Boston radical.⁵⁴

Four causes of Quincy's public moderation and hence his curious and unexpectedly agitated career are thus discernible; surely it is plausible that similar causes and similar motives influenced some of his contemporaries. For Quincy obviously

⁵⁴Most of the facts mentioned in this paragraph have been cited already. For the quotation on Quincy's unstable temperament, see Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 5; for Franklin's letter of February 25, 1775, see Smyth, ed., *Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, VI, 310. It is noteworthy that Quincy's elder brother Samuel was a friend and protégé of Governor Hutchinson and ultimately a loyalist refugee during the Revolution. This family division, with possible overtones of fraternal rivalry and jealousy, might have had an effect on Quincy's demeanor, although definite proof is lacking. See John Adams to Dr. J. Morse, Dec. 22, 1815, in Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams* (Boston, 1856), X, 195.

was not alone; the transition to an acceptance of revolution was a painful one for many. And it is here, perhaps, that Quincy's career finally transcends the limitations of the idiosyncratic and aspires to a significance beyond itself. In the perspective of this essay, what has been implicit at several points may now be stated explicitly: between 1765 and 1775 Quincy acted out a fitful, fluctuating but nevertheless progressive alienation from Great Britain—an estrangement which, repeated thousands of times, helped to produce the American Revolution. In August 1765 Quincy commented favorably on 'that Glorious Medium, the BRITISH CONSTITUTION'; ten years later he talked as if America were destined to be a united nation. What produced this transformation? It has been argued elsewhere⁵⁵ that for the Boston radicals and other colonists the turning point was the disillusionment with Britain following the unsuccessful Wilkesite agitation of 1768–1770. Whatever the general validity of this thesis, it does not apply to Quincy, who for five more years retained some hope for redress within the political structure of the British Empire. But if Quincy in this respect lagged behind his fellow radicals, nevertheless he experienced the same process, and acutely, in 1774 and 1775. Almost on the very day he landed, he experienced a generalized revulsion of English 'corruption.' Slowly his repulsion extended to major British institutions and classes—Ministry, King, merchants, Parliament, and 'cowed' people—until in the end he appeared to despair of effecting political change in the mother country. Partly perhaps in despair but partly probably in hope, he turned as last (however briefly) to revolution.

In a sense, the young, emotional Bostonian provided an early example of a recurrent theme in American life: the confrontation of American 'innocence' and Old World 'decadence.' There is something familiar and almost archetypical about the story of this bold, naive New Englander who, in the autumn

⁵⁵ Pauline Maier, 'John Wilkes and American Disillusionment with Britain,' *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., XX (1963), 373–375.

of 1774, journeyed to what he called his 'home,' only to discover that wherever he looked, monuments of degeneracy were present. If in 1765 Quincy possibly considered himself an Englishman, his sentiments were different in the final winter before the British Empire was rent asunder: 'I feel a pride in being an American. Neither my affection nor zeal in any degree abates in the cause of my injured country.' 'That pageantry I see here makes me every day more attached to the simplicity of my native soil; and while I hourly survey the extended miseries of enormous wealth and power, I warm with more enthusiastic fervour in the cause of freedom and my country.'⁶⁶ This underlying trend, this underlying alienation from Britain and a world that was old, gave meaning and direction to the vicissitudes of Josiah Quincy's life.

⁶⁶Letter from Quincy to Mrs. Quincy, London, Dec. 16, 1774, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 230; letter from Quincy to Joseph Reed, London, Dec. 17, 1774, quoted by Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 234.

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