

4-11 Protests on the Frontier I: The Paxton Riots (1764)

In December 1763 a group of frontiersmen from Paxton Township, Pennsylvania, fell upon a small, peaceful group of Conestoga Indians, killing six. When the magistrates of nearby Lancaster sheltered the Native American survivors in the workhouse, a mob invaded the town, broke into the workhouse, and murdered fourteen more Indians. Soon after, two hundred of the “Paxton Boys” marched on Philadelphia in pursuit of Indian refugees there; civil war was averted only by the diplomacy of Benjamin Franklin and others, who promised a hearing for the Paxton grievances if the men would return home.

The Paxton incident brought to a focus numerous tensions resulting from frontier expansion, the increasingly multiethnic character of Pennsylvania, and continued tight control of the colony by the Penn family and the Quaker elite of Philadelphia. All of these tensions are displayed vividly in this early manifesto, circulated along the frontier and reproduced in a pamphlet written by one of their defenders. Compare with Document 2-5.

Source: Thomas Barton, “The Conduct of the Paxton-Men, Impartially Represented . . .,” in John R. Dunbar, ed., *The Paxton Papers* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1957), 269–275. (Note: Footnotes are from the original document.)

For my Part, I am no Adept in Politicks, and have but seldom troubled my Head about that Science, beyond the reading of a common News-Paper.—It has long been my unhappy Lot to be a Spectator of the Distresses and Sufferings of my Fellow Subjects; my Heart has often bled for them;—and I should still have continued a secret Mourner for what I had not Power to redress, had not the unaccountable [*sic*] Conduct of your City Quakers provoked me to speak my Sentiments, and unburthen myself to my Friend.—By my Principles as well as Situation in Life, you know, my dear Sir, that I have no political Ends to serve; that I have nothing to hope or fear from Party Connections; and that I can have no other View in troubling you with this Letter than to rescue the miserable Frontier People, who lately rose in Arms, from the Infamy and Odium thrown upon them, by *those* whose unfeeling Hearts have never suffered them to look beyond their own private Interest and Party.¹

The INSURGENTS themselves hand about a Kind of *Manifesto*, which contains the following Declaration, Grievances, Complaints, &c.—viz.

“That a trifling Dispute, between a few English and French Traders upon the *Ohio*, was neglected; the profer’d Mediation and Assistance of the Indians to end the Quarrel, and the Proprietary-Offer of £. 400, for erecting a small Fortification there, together with £. 100 yearly, towards the Support of it, were contemptuously rejected, till it kindled the

Flames of War, which at last spread and raged over half the Globe.—That from the Neglect of the *Legislative Part* of this Province, and the horrid Doctrines of *Non-Resistance* at that Times so strenuously maintain’d, such Calamities ensued, that near *one Hundred Miles* of as thriving a Settlement as any in Pennsylvania has been reduced to Desolation; many of the Inhabitants murdered or carried into Captivity, and the Rest often drove from their Habitations in the utmost Distress and Want.—And besides these particular Effects of this War, some of the best Blood in Christendom has been spilt in it—whole Kingdoms have been almost depopulated; and Misery and Ruin entail’d upon Millions of their Fellow Creatures.

“That even in the Midst of this Desolation and Carnage, every publick Measure was clogg’d—the King’s Demands for Men and Money procrastinated—unnecessary, or at least ill-timed Disputes, about *Proprietary Instructions and Taxes*, were brought upon the Carpet, in Order to divert the Reproach and Dishonour which the Province, thro’ Quakers Measures, had incurr’d, and throw the whole Blame of the War at the *Proprietary Doors*. And that this villainous Scheme might carry with it a better Face, the late infamous TEDYUSCUNG² was treated with, and employed to charge the Proprietaries with having defrauded the Indians of some Lands, and to declare that this was the Occasion of all their Uneasiness and Enmity to the *English*.—But infamous as TEDYUSCUNG was, he own’d at lastt [*sic*] that his Complaints were unjust; publicly renounc’d his Claim, and declared in open Treaty that he was urged to act this base Part, and that he was only the *Mouth of some Persons* in Philadelphia, whom he did not chuse to name.

¹The Author of this Letter, hopes he will not be understood as approving of these People’s having taken up Arms. Such violent Steps can never possibly be productive of anything, but WILD UPROAR and CONFUSION. Whatever therefore can have a Tendency to promote this; or that offers the *least Insult* to the LAWS and GOVERNMENT of this Country, he will ever think it his Duty to bear his Testimony against, and to discountenance by every Means in his Power.

²Tedyuscung: 1700?–1763. Delaware chief. After Braddock’s defeat he assembled the Delawares and Shawnees in Wyoming Valley to fight the whites. He was pacified by treaties at Easton in 1756 and 1757.

“That they have always manifested, and are still upon every occasion ready to manifest their Allegiance and Loyalty to their most gracious Sovereign King GEORGE, whom they have ever esteemed as the kind and careful Father of his People.

“That tho’ born to Liberty, and all the glorious Rights and Privileges of BRITISH SUBJECTS, they were denied Protection, at a Time when the Cries of Murder and Distress might have made the very Stones relent; and tho’ roused to Vengeance and eager to maintain and defend their Lives and sacred Rights, their Hands were basely tied up!

“They could obtain no proper Law to collect their Strength; nor any Sanction or Encouragement to pursue the Enemies of their Country!

“That they have suffered and bled in the Cause of their Country, and have done more to protect it from the Violence of a rapacious Enemy than any others in the Province.

“That agreeable to the Command of the Prophet, they have ‘fought for their Brethren, their Sons, and their Daughters, their Wives and their Houses.’—That in this Context, many of them have lost their dearest Relatives; their Houses, their Lands, their all; and from a plentiful independent People have been reduced to Misery and Want.

“That they have been treated as *Aliens* of the Commonwealth, and denied a just and *proportionable Share in Legislation*: For that out of 36 Members which the eight Counties in the Province send to Assembly, the three Counties of *Philadelphia, Chester and Bucks*, where the Quakers are chiefly settled, return 26 of that Number; while the 5 remaining Counties, where these LORDLY RULERS could have no Chance of getting elected, are suffered to send but the other Ten.

“That by this iniquitous Policy, the Inhabitants of these five Frontier Counties, altho’ a great Majority, have been rendered unable to act in Defense of their Lives and Properties; and therefore have lain for above eight Years at the Mercy of a cruel Savage Enemy and an unrelenting Quaker Faction: Whereas had they been justy [*sic*] represented in Legislation, instead of presenting PACIFICK ADDRESSES to the Assembly, telling them that ‘the raising large Sums of Money, and putting them into Hands of COMMITTEES, who might apply them to Purposes inconsistent with their PEACEABLE TESTIMONY, was in its Consequences destructive of RELIGIOUS LIBERTY.’ Instead of doing this, I say,—the first great Law of Nature, that of SELF-DEFENCE, would have been administred to the People upon the first Alarm of Danger, and the Hands of the HARDY and the BRAVE would have been set at Liberty, till they had taken ample Vengeance of their MURDERERS.

“That they have often, in the most suppliant Manner, laid their Grievances before the Assembly; and instead of being redress’d, have been abused, insulted, and even by some Members of that *venerable House*, deem’d as unworthy of Protection, as ‘A Pack of insignificant SCOTCH-

IRISH, who, if they were all *killed* could well enough be spared.³

“That whilst they were thus abused, and thus stript of their Birth-Rights,—ISRAEL and JOSEPH,⁴ two petty Fellows, who ought to have no higher Claims than themselves, were permitted to lord it over the Land; and in Contempt of the Government, and the express Orders of the Crown, forbidding them to hold private Treaties with the Indians, exchange Belts of Wampum with them—make them Presents—all this they have done, and in their own Name, without so much as including the simple MENONISTS, from whom they had extorted large sums of Money to Support this Expence.—Nay, even with the most matchless Impudence, insinuated to the Indians that they were Rulers and Governors; as plainly appear’d at the late Treaty at LANCASTER, where the Principal CHEIF [*sic*] and SPEAKER told Mr. H——N,⁵ then Governor, ‘That as he understood there were two GOVERNORS in the Province, he would be glad to know which of them he was to treat with.’⁶

“That the Indians were induced to look upon ISRAEL as the *first* Man, or CHEIF [*sic*] SACHEM of the Province, from seeing the Haughtiness and Contempt with which he treated his Fellow Subjects, and his insolent and arrogant Behaviour to Sir W——M J——N⁷ at *Easton*; and to Governor H——N, at *Lancaster*: And that this, among other Things, has been productive of manifold Evils, by weakening our Credit with Indians, frustrating the good Intention of holding Treaties with them, and encouraging them, after they return’d from us loaded with Money, Cloaths, Arms and Ammunition, to look with Contempt upon us as a pusillanimous Pack of *old Women*, divided among ourselves, without SPIRIT or RESOLUTION to call them to an Account, let them commit what Outrages they pleased upon us.—

“That they have been made Tributaries to support the immense Expence of Indian Treaties; to which they cheerfully submitted, in Hopes that their dear Relations and

³This unchristian and ungenerous Speech was made by N——L G——B, a Quaker, Member of Assembly for *Chester* County, and some others.

⁴Israel Pemberton and Joseph Fox. This refers to their work as leaders in The Friendly Association.

⁵James Hamilton.

⁶That you may be convinced that such was the Opinion of the *Indians*, I must observe to you, that one PATRICK AGNEW, of the Borough of *Lancaster*, White-Smith, having been duly sworn upon the HOLY EVANGELISTS, before the CHIEF BURGESS of that Town, hath deposed and said, That he, the said Deponent, being a Constable at the last Indian Treaty at Lancaster, was commanded by the *Governor*, to proclaim, that no Person should sell or give any Kind of spirituous Liquors to the Indians, on any Pretence whatever; that he proclaim’d this Order thro’ the Town accordingly, and that upon his making Proclamation, and saying, *by Order of the Governor*, an Indian named TEDYUSCUNG, cry’d out ‘D—n your G——r, D—n your G——r; P—m—t—n is my Governor, P—m—t—n is our Governor, he allows RUM enough;’ and offer’d Violence to this Deponent; who also, upon his Oath, declares that, notwithstanding the Proclamation, the Indians were privately entertained at a certain Tavern in the Town.

⁷Sir William Johnson.

Fellow Subjects, who have been long detained in barbarous Captivity, would have been restored; But that instead of insisting upon the Promises and Engagements made by the Indians to this End, an extensive and valuable Trade was opened with these faithless and perfidious Villains; and their poor unhappy Friends left to spend perhaps the Remainder of their days, in all the Sorrow and Miseries of Heathenism and Barbarity, and to bow their Necks to the cruel Slavery of Savages.

“That at a Time when their ungenerous and merciless Enemies, had again, without the least provocation, invaded the Province, with the very Arms and Ammunition which they received at the late Treaties; and when the Frontiers were yet reeking with the Blood of their slaughter’d Inhabitants; and the murdered Ghosts of their Friends and Relatives cry’d aloud for Vengeance, a Number of Indians (many of which were concerned in this horrid Butchery) were escorted to the *Metropolis*, and there protected, cherished, and maintained in Luxury and Idleness, whilst they, the poor Sufferers, were abandoned to Misery, and left to starve, or beg their Bread.

“That upon seeing themselves thus abused and thus neglected, and considering that the Influence of a *Quaker Faction* was the Source from whence all these Evils flow’d; and that *pretended* Scruples against War and Fighting were the Root from whence all their Calamities and heavy Sufferings sprang, and if yet permitted, might produce worse and more heavy, they were determined to bear no longer.

“That *Pennsylvania* appear’d to them to be really in a dangerous CACHEXY;⁸ and that at such a Crisis they look’d

upon it as their Duty to administer such Remedies (however severe they might be look’d upon by some) as might raise her drooping Head, and restore her to Health and Vigour. —And should their first Trial fail of Success, that in the Case they are determined to *double the Potion*,⁹ which they hope will intirely purge off the peccant Humours, restore the Solids, and secure her hereafter from the Infection of *Quaker Non-Resistance*.”

Such is the Declaration, and such the Complaints of these People.—And indeed nine Tenths of the Inhabitants of the Back-Counties either tacitly, or openly, approve and support them—Every cool and well thinking Man, as well as Men among themselves, are sensibly concern’d that they were reduced to the Necessity of having Recourse to such Methods as might be deem’d an Insult to the Government and Laws of their King and Country.

The Names of RIOTERS, REBELS, MURDERERS, WHITE SAVAGES, &c. have been liberally and indiscriminately bestowed upon them: But all this they look upon only as the Effects of disappointed Malice, and the Resentment of a destructive FACTION, who see their *darling Power* in Danger.—The *Merciful* and the *Good* however, they trust, will rather pity than condemn them.—And they are pleased with the Thoughts that they have been able at last to lay bare the PHARASAICAL BOSOM OF QUAKERISM, by obliging the NONRESISTING QUALITY to take up Arms, and to become Proselytes to *the first great Law of Nature*.

⁹By this Expression, I am told, these People mean, that they will renew their Application and ADDRESSES, with DOUBLE the NUMBER of Signers; and it is said, they are likely to get TEN to ONE, that they had before, to remonstrate with them.

⁸Depraved condition of the body politic.

Questions

1. What do we learn about mid-eighteenth-century Pennsylvania politics from the Paxton manifesto? What sorts of social, economic, political, and religious issues divided the colony?
2. What grievances does the author of the manifesto articulate? Where does he lay the blame for the conflict, and why?
3. Why do you think the author of the manifesto feels the need to state explicitly the loyalty of the Paxton Boys to King George?

4-12 Protests on the Frontier II: The North Carolina Regulators (1769)

While tensions were rising on the Pennsylvania frontier, other conflicts were brewing farther to the south. By the close of the French and Indian War, when the Proclamation Line of 1763 defined the extent of British jurisdiction on the frontier, thousands of new farms and villages dotted the countryside, not only in Pennsylvania but also in western Virginia and the backcountry of North and South Carolina. Many of these people had just arrived from Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and Germany, although a significant number also came

from the older coastal settlements. Everywhere on this developing frontier, people struggled to define political institutions and challenged the dominant elites of the coastal regions. Sometimes this strife erupted into violent conflict between the judges, sheriffs, and tax collectors who attempted to enforce imperial laws and the frontier settlers who rejected them. In North Carolina, a so-called Regulator group arose to voice, and often act on, the concerns of backcountry settlers, and by the early 1770s its members were engaged in a virtual civil war with the Tidewater authorities. The Regulators were smashed in 1774 at the Battle of Alamance Creek, but the conflict left a legacy of bitterness that would severely complicate later Patriot efforts to gain independence from Great Britain (see Document 6-10).

Source: "To the INHABITANTS of the Province of North-Carolina," Salisbury, North Carolina, September 14, 1769, in William K. Boyd, ed., *Some Eighteenth Century Tracts Concerning North Carolina* (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards & Broughton Company, 1927), 301-304.

"To the INHABITANTS of the Province of
North-Carolina"

Dear Brethren,

Nothing is more common than for Persons who look upon themselves to be injured than to resent and complain. These are sounded aloud, and plain in Proportion to the Apprehension of it. Our Fearfulness too, frequently augment our real as well as apparent Dangers. Let us adjust our Complaints or Resentments to the Reality as well as the Nature of the Injury received.

Excess in any Matter breeds Contempt; whereas strict Propriety obtains the Suffrage of every Class. The Oppression of inferior Individuals must only demand Tutelage of superiors; and in civil Matters our Cries should reach the authoritative Ear, when the Weight that crusheth from the higher Powers. —But when imposed by the Populace, to the Populace our complaints must extend. —When therefore the Cry of any City, Province or Nation is general, it must be generally directed to the Source from whence the Cry is caused.

The late Commotions and crying Dissatisfactions among the common People of this Province, is not unknown nor unfelt by any thinking Person. —No Person among you could be at a Loss to find out the true Cause. —I dare venture to assert you [are] all advised to the Application of the Public Money; —these you saw misapplied to the enriching of Individuals, or at least embezzled in some way without defraying the publick Expenses. Have not your Purses been pillaged by the exorbitant and unlawful Fees taken by Officers, Clerks, &c. —I need not mention the intolerable expensive Method of Recovery by Law, occasioned by the narrow Limits of the inferior Court's Jurisdiction. —Have you not been grieved to find the Power of our County Courts so curtailed, that scarce the Shadow of Power is left. This Body, however respectable, is intrusted with little more than might pertain to the Jurisdiction of a single Magistrate, or at least two or three Justices of the Peace in Conjunction. —In Consequence of this, very small Sums drags us to Superior Courts. —These must be attended with all our Evidences,

altho many at the Distance of 150 Miles. Add to this a double Fee to all Officers; Hence we are made feelingly sensible, that our necessary Expenses, with the additional Costs, are equal, if not surpass the original Sum.

For what End was the Jurisdiction of the Courts reduced to such narrow Limits? Is it not to fill the Superior Houses with Business? Why has the Authority fallen upon this wonderful Expedient? Is it not evident, that this was calculated for the Emolument of Lawyers, Clerks, &c. What other Reason can be assigned for this amazing Scheme? —none Brethren, none! . . .

The Exorbitant, not to say unlawful Fees, required and assumed by Officers, —the unnecessary, not to say destructive Abridgement of a Court's Jurisdiction, —the enormous Encrease of the provincial tax unnecessary; these are Evils of which no Person can be insensible, and which I doubt not has been lamented by each of you. It must have obliged you to examine from what Quarter Relief might be found against these sad Calamities —In Vain will you search for a Remedy until you find out the Disease.

Many are accusing the Legislative Body as the Source of all those woful Calamities. —These, it must be confessed, are the instrumental Cause; they can, yea do impose some of these heavy Burdens. —But whence received they this Power? Is not their Power delegated from the Populace? The original principal Cause is our own blind stupid Conduct.

If it be queried, How doth our Conduct contribute to this? Answer presents itself—we have chosen Persons to represent us to make Laws, &c. whose former Conduct and Circumstance might have given us the highest Reason to expect they would sacrifice the true Interest of their Country to Avarice, or Ambition, or both.

I need not inform you, that a Majority of our Assembly is composed of Lawyers, Clerks, and others in Connection with them, while by our own Voice we have excluded the Planter. —Is it not evident their own private Interest is, designed in the whole Train of our Laws? —We have not the least Reason to expect the Good of the Farmer, and consequently of the Community, will be consulted, by those who

hang on Favour, or depend on the Intricacies of the Laws. — What can be expected from those who have ever discovered a Want of good Principles, and whose highest Study is the Promotion of their Wealth; and with whom the Interest of the Publick, when it comes in Competition with their private Advantages, is suffered to sink? —nothing less than the Ruin of the Publick. . . . Doth not Reason declare we might expect such cringing Vassals would readily sacrifice the Interest of the Community to the Idol Self? . . .

But you will say, what is the Remedy against this malignant Disease?

I will venture to prescribe a sovereign one if duly applied; that is, as you have now a fit Opportunity, choose for your Representatives or Burgesses such Men as have given you the strongest Reason to believe they are truly honest: Such as are disinterested, publick spirited, who will not allow their private Advantage once to stand in Competition with the publick Good. . . . Let your Judgment be formed on their past Conduct; let them be such as have been unblamable in Life, independent in their Fortunes, without Expectations from others; let them be such as enjoy no Places of Benefit under the Government; such as do not depend upon Favour for their Living, nor do derive Profit or Advantage

from the intricate Perplexity of the Law. In short, let them be Men whose private Interest neither doth nor can clash with the Interest or special Good of their Country.

Are you not sensible, Brethren, that we have too long groaned in Secret under the Weight of these crushing Mischiefs? How long will ye in this servile Manner subject yourselves to Slavery? Now shew yourselves to be Freemen, and for once assert your Liberty and maintain your Rights— This, this Election let us exert ourselves, and show, that we will not through Fear, Favour or Affection, bow and subject ourselves to those who, under the Mask of Friendship, have long drawn Calamities upon us. . . .

Have they not monopolized your Properties; and what is wanting but Time to draw from you the last Farthing? Who that has the Spirit of a Man could endure this? Who that has the least Spark of Love to his Country or to himself would bear the *Delusion*?

In a special Manner then, let us, at this Election, rose all our Powers to act like free publick spirited Men, knowing that he that betrays the Cause now betrays his Country, and must sink in the general Ruin. . . .

Salisbury, [North Carolina], September 14, 1769

Questions

1. What are the Regulators' major grievances? Do they sound anything like the grievances colonists express against imperial authorities during the Revolutionary crisis?
2. What kind of people do the Regulators oppose—what kind of character do they have, what kind of occupations do they have, and what makes them so different from the frontiersmen writing this document?
3. What do the Regulators mean when they write about a “publick Good”? What do they mean by “private Interest”?

Questions for Further Thought

1. What do Documents 4-10, 4-11, and 4-12 tell us about the social makeup of the American backcountry in the mid-eighteenth century?
 2. What tensions existed along the American frontier? Why at midcentury did they often flare into violence?
 3. Frequently, pre-Revolutionary War violence in the American backcountry was sparked by conflicts between white settlers and local Indians. In many instances—as with the Paxton riots—the backcountry settlers believed that *their colony's* government had not acted to protect their interests. Were they correct? How might one explain the actions of the Indians?
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