
T H E
C R I S I S

T H E
C R I S I S.

NUMBER I. *To be continued Weekly.*

FRIDAY, JANUARY 20, 1775. [*Price Two-pence Halfpenny.*]

Potior visa est Periculosa libertas quieto servitio.

SALUST.

To the People of ENGLAND and AMERICA,

Friends and Fellow Subjects,



It is with the greatest Propriety I address this Paper to you: It is in your Defence, at this GREAT, this IMPORTANT CRISIS, I take the Pen in hand: A CRISIS big with the Fate of the most glorious Empire known in the Records of Time; and by your FIRMNESS and RESOLUTION ONLY, it can be saved from DESTRUCTION: By your FIRMNESS and RESOLUTION, you may preserve to yourselves, your immediate Offspring, and latest Posterity, all the glorious Blessings of FREEDOM, given by Heaven to undeserving Mortals: By your SUPINENESS and PUSSILANIMITY, you will entail on yourselves, your Children, and Millions yet unborn, MISERY and SLAVERY.

It is in your Defence I now stand forth to oppose, the most sanguinary, and despotic Court that ever disgraced a free Country.

It is in your Defence I now unsheath the Sword of Justice, to oppose the most profligate and abandoned Administration, that ever shewed the Weakness, or abused the Confidence of a Prince.

T H E
C R I S I S

A British Defense
of American Rights

1775–1776

Edited and with an Introduction by
Neil L. York



Liberty Fund
Indianapolis

This book is published by Liberty Fund, Inc., a foundation established to encourage study of the ideal of a society of free and responsible individuals.



The cuneiform inscription that serves as our logo and as the design motif for our endpapers is the earliest-known written appearance of the word “freedom” (amagi), or “liberty.” It is taken from a clay document written about 2300 B.C. in the Sumerian city-state of Lagash.

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Liberty Fund, Inc.

8335 Allison Pointe Trail, Suite 300

Indianapolis, Indiana 46250-1684

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Acknowledgments

Once again, serendipity has helped set the course of my academic life. I happened to be at a Liberty Fund gathering in June of 2012 on the British debate over Colonial American resistance, 1764–1776, when *The Crisis* came up in conversation. Hans Eicholz, of Liberty Fund, and Jack Greene, professor emeritus at Johns Hopkins, were discussing the possibility of bringing out a scholarly edition of *The Crisis*—all ninety-two issues of it under one cover. I had written an article about this London weekly a few years before. They agreed that I was a logical choice for editor of a Liberty Fund compilation, and, four years later, here we are. Jack and Hans are fine scholars; I am flattered by their trust in me. Jeremy Black, at the University of Exeter, and Timothy Breen, now emeritus at Northwestern, were kind enough to read over my introductory essay. Pat Gallagher and Laura Goetz championed my cause at Liberty Fund. Laura skillfully copyedited and guided the manuscript through to Dan Kirklin, who expertly took the manuscript into production and handed it off to Otto Barz at Publishing Synthesis for typesetting. Kate Mertes then did the index. Bill Pidduck, publisher and chairman of Adam Matthew Digital, generously shared what his team had done with *The Crisis* in its online Eighteenth Century Journals Portal (www.amdigital.co.uk) so that this edition could be produced.

What Liberty Fund does to make historical texts available to modern readers reflects a rare commitment to the life of the mind. It is an honor to be associated with such an effort. I am quite certain that the men behind *The Crisis* would marvel at what Pierre Goodrich, founder of Liberty Fund, made possible through his vision and by his generosity.

Neil L. York

Introduction

EPITAPH on the Cruel Death of CRISIS,
HERE to the flames poor CRISIS was configu'd,
His body is consum'd, but not his mind,
For, from his ashes, many forms shall rise,
TRUTH may be burnt alive, but never dies.¹

So observed the *Morning Post* about *The Crisis*, one member of the London press lamenting the passing of another, even as it sought to reassure readers that the quest for truth would not be deterred. As it turned out, *The Crisis* did not die a “cruel death,” despite the efforts of government authorities to suppress it.² The third issue, which appeared on 4 February 1775, had been burned publicly at the order of Parliament. And yet, *The Crisis* continued to be printed for more than another year and a half, ninety-two issues in all, much to the irritation, no doubt, of those who hoped the public burning, followed by the prosecution of one of the publication’s presumed printers, would crush it.

1. *The Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 8 March 1775.

2. What follows adds to what I have already written in “George III, Tyrant: *The Crisis* as Critic of Empire, 1775–1776” *History* 94 (2009):434–60. Edward Solly wrote briefly about “‘The Crisis,’ 1775–6” in *Notes and Queries*, 5th series 8 (1877): 14–15, but the first true scholarly interest was shown by Paul Leicester Ford, “The Crisis” *The Bibliographer* 1 (1902):139–52. *The Crisis* has thereafter been at least mentioned in various studies: in John A. Sainsbury, *Disaffected Patriots* (Kingston, Ont.: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1987), pp. 85–86; James E. Bradley, *Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 424–25; Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 242–43; and, with more detail and greater gusto, in T. H. Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011), pp. 162–74.

But the men behind this weekly, men every bit as shadowy now as they were then, had made it clear that they would not be easily intimidated. “The CRISIS will be carried on with spirit, in defiance of Lawless Power, upon the true principles of the Constitution,” they informed London readers as they prepared the first issue for publication. They pledged “even at the risk of every thing that is dear to man, to rescue the Liberty of the Press, the Natural Rights of mankind, and the Constitution of the British Empire in England and America, from that Ruin with which they are now threatened.”³ That they continued to print *The Crisis* each Saturday for so many months to come, was a testament to the growing power of the press and to the rise of a public whose political voice could not be silenced by legislative fiat or judicial decree.

The Crisis pursued its political objectives with a vituperative intensity that set it apart from its contemporaries in the London press. *The Crisis* oozed sarcasm from its pages; its sardonic tone most likely added to the anger of policy makers even as it fed the appetite of readers who relished the irreverence. It cleared the literary ground that others, perhaps most famously Thomas Paine in his *Common Sense*, would later seed. Nonetheless, different plants grew from this rhetorically similar soil. Paine criticized one king as a first step toward condemning monarchy altogether; the men behind *The Crisis* never went that far. For all of their complaints against crown and parliament, for all of their warnings that the wrongs committed against Americans might next be visited upon Britons, they did not advocate overthrowing George III. When rebellious Americans decided on an independent republic as the solution to their imperial problem, they and the authors of *The Crisis* parted ways. However hard *The Crisis* had worked to create a transatlantic community of protest, however much it drew on a philosophical tradition equally appealing to dissident colonists, their social circumstances and the political ideology that grew out of them were fundamentally different. Thus *The Crisis* provides a study of contrasts between what became revolution in America but remained protest in Britain.



3. *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 20 January 1775.

Just as Paine was not the first to put the call for “common sense” to good polemical use, there were others who had already titled their efforts at political consciousness-raising *The Crisis*. More than sixty years earlier, Richard Steele’s pamphlet of that title urged readers to rely on their “common sense” and support the Hanoverian succession, thereby upholding the principles of the Glorious Revolution and preventing any return of Stuart absolutism. Parliament, Steele instructed readers, embodied the notion that all legitimate government was based on consent; the authority of the crown, he admonished, had to be limited because “absolute Power in one person” was but “clandestine tyranny;” and the people, he stressed, could justifiably resist any attack on their constitutional rights because those rights came from nature, not government.⁴

Where Steele focused on the British Isles, the anonymous author of *The Crisis* published in 1766 looked beyond them, to the larger empire, when protesting against the Stamp Act and the flawed thinking that led to its passage. He condemned any attempt to tax the colonists directly as unconstitutional, but he, like Steele before him, appealed to reason rather than emotion and avoided ad hominem attacks; stylistically, neither anticipated what would be done in *The Crisis* reprinted here.⁵

That far more strident *Crisis* debuted in London on 21 January 1775 and appeared weekly, without interruption, through 12 October 1776. More like a brief pamphlet than a true newspaper, a typical issue ran six pages with perhaps three thousand words in total, each issue composed of a single essay with nothing else to accompany it: no general news and

4. Richard Steele, Esq., *The Crisis* (London: Samuel Buckley, 1714), p. v, for “common sense” and “clandestine tyranny”; also see *Extracts from Sir Richard Steele’s Crisis* (London: M. Cooper, 1746), which were reprinted as a guide to the next generation. For background see Calhoun Winton’s *Captain Steele* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1964), but there is still good reason to go back to Winton’s “Richard Steele: The Political Writer” (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1955), pp. 238–97.

5. *The Crisis. Or, A Full Defense of the Colonies* (London: W. Griffin, 1766). Eight pamphlets printed in London between 1722–1770 had “Crisis” in their title. Most dealt with some aspect of imperial affairs; all can be found in the text-searchable online compilation, Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO).

no advertisements placed by others. It had to compete for readers in a city bustling with printers and publishers. Imperial affairs, and their implications for Britons, had become increasingly prominent in the press, with some writers—anonymously, as was the fashion—defending government as vigorously as others condemned it. As an anti-government weekly *The Crisis* followed in the wake of John Wilkes' *The North Briton* and, later, *The Whisperer*.⁶ Failed attempts to silence them probably only added to their readership and emboldened those who eventually brought out *The Crisis*.

Important, too, were the bi- and thrice-weekly newspapers that carried essays critical of government policy. These essays were necessarily briefer than what appeared in a free-standing weekly like *The Crisis* because they had to be squeezed into the columns of four-page sheets, where usually half of the overall space was given over to advertisements. Still, those newspaper essays could deploy their fewer words to equal effect. Most notable among these stood the "Junius" series that

6. The first issue of *The North Briton* appeared on 5 June 1762 and the last in the regular run, the controversial No. 45, on 23 April 1763. The earliest compilations, which began to appear before the end of 1763, did not include No. 45. They can be found in ECCO (see n. 5 supra). See the discussion in George Nobbe, *The North Briton* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939); and more broadly in George Rude, *Wilkes and Liberty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp. 17–36; P. D. G. Thomas, *John Wilkes: A Friend to Liberty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 27–56; and Arthur H. Cash, *John Wilkes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 65–120. *The Whisperer* ran from 17 February 1770 through 11 January 1772. "Printed for the Authors by W. Moore" appeared at the end of each issue. The original Fleet Street address eventually shifted to Chancery Lane. *The Whisperer* is now available online, as digitized by Adam Matthew in its Eighteenth Century Journals Portal. For the revolutionary American press in general see Philip Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution, 1763–1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941); Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Prelude to Independence: The Newspaper War on Britain, 1764–1776* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957); John B. Hench and Bernard Bailyn, eds., *The Press and the American Revolution* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1980); Jeffery A. Smith, *Printers and Press Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); and Russ Castronovo, *Propaganda 1776: Secrets, Leaks, and Revolutionary Communications in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

ran in the *Public Advertiser*.⁷ Earlier essayists like Richard Steele had been no less didactic, but much more deferential. Nonetheless, caustic as “Junius” or John Wilkes or *The Whisperer* could be, none were as unrelentingly strident or as witheringly personal as what would be printed in the pages of *The Crisis*.

London, on the eve of the American rebellion, with its population of nearly a million, had just under twenty papers. Boston, by comparison, with a population of fewer than twenty thousand, had five weekly newspapers—an indication of higher literacy rates and a higher standard of living in the provincial town’s laboring classes than in the imperial capital. The divisions that marked pro- and anti-government newspapers were not quite as pronounced in London as in Boston,⁸ and yet there were tendencies in the London press that would distinguish a *Public Advertiser* (which had run “Junius”) or *St. James Chronicle* from the more staid *London Gazette*.⁹ None printed more than thirty-five hundred copies per issue; most printed far fewer than

7. Junius’s first “letter” appeared on 21 January 1769, the last, the sixty-ninth, on 21 January 1772. See the compilation and analysis (including the difficulty of establishing authorship) in John Cannon, ed., *The Letters of Junius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

8. For Boston see *The History of Printing in America*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Albany: J. Munsell, 1874; orig. ed., 1810); Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Prelude to Independence: The Newspaper War on Britain, 1764–1776* (Boston: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958); Mary Ann Yodelis, “Boston’s Second Paper War: Economics, Politics, and the Theory and Practice of Political Expression in the Press, 1763–1775” (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1971); and my case study in “Tag-Team Polemics: The ‘Centinel’ and His Allies in the *Massachusetts Spy*” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 107 (1995):85–114.

9. Solomon Lutnick broke down print-run size and sympathies in *The American Revolution and the British Press, 1775–1783* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1967), pp. 224–25. He listed seventeen titles that fit the newspaper category being printed in London in 1775, but also cautioned that the list excluded papers with too few surviving copies to effectively evaluate. Lutnick did not include *The Crisis*, though R. S. Crane and F. B. Kaye, *A Census of British Newspapers and Periodicals, 1620–1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1927), from which he drew, did. See too Fred Junkin Hinkhouse, *The Preliminaries of the American Revolution as seen in the English Press, 1763–1775* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926); and Troy Bickham, *Making Headlines: The American Revolution as Seen through the British Press* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009). Neither of them allude to *The Crisis*.

that. *The Crisis*, with its weekly output of around two thousand, stood somewhere near the middle.¹⁰

All, regardless of size, were involved in a conscious effort to shape public opinion; even more, they were part of a reshaping of the public sphere itself.¹¹ By the time that *The Crisis* became part of London's political scene the expectation that opinion out-of-doors should play a role in shaping the policy made indoors at Whitehall and Westminster had grown increasingly insistent. The London coffeehouses, where so many newspapers were left for distribution and sale, grew in political importance as proceedings in the House of Commons were now being summarized regularly, whereas less than a decade before Parliament had banned such reporting.¹² Still barred from reporting debates in the House of Lords, the press nonetheless leaked news of the proceedings there, as peers passed along notes, even speeches, as their colleagues in the Commons had been doing for years. Consequently, what has been said about the American press and the rise of colonial protest could also be said of the press in London: just as colonists developed a greater sense of danger through what essayists in the press claimed imperial policies portended for their future, Britons, too, came to worry about tyranny anticipated as much as tyranny experienced. It was that agitated state of mind that *The Crisis* sought to heighten.¹³



10. At least, that was the size of the print run early on, as noted in the *London Evening-Post*, 2 February 1775.

11. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989; orig. German ed., 1962). J. A. Downie questioned Habermas' basic argument in "Public and Private: The Myth of the Bourgeois Public Sphere" in Cynthia Wall, ed., *A Concise Companion to the Restoration and Eighteenth Century* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 58–79. Also see Jeremy Black's overview, *The English Press in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Croom Helm, 1987).

12. For parliamentary reluctance to have debates made public see P. D. G. Thomas, "The Beginnings of Parliamentary Reporting in Newspapers, 1768–1774" *English Historical Review* 74 (1959):632–36; Thomas' more general discussion in *The House of Commons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); and J. R. Pole, *The Gift of Government* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983).

13. See David Ramsay's comment that American colonists "were not so much moved by oppression actually felt, as by a conviction that a foundation was laid, and a precedent

The Crisis caught the attention of Parliament at the same moment as a just-published pamphlet with a similar title, *The Present Crisis*. Superficially they appear to be an odd pairing in parliamentary minds: *The Crisis* condemned the king and his men for doing too much, for oppressing the colonists with unconstitutional policies; *The Present Crisis*, by contrast, called on the king to do even more, to exercise his prerogative powers more aggressively and drive disobedient colonists back into line.¹⁴ The pamphlet offended one group in Parliament, the weekly another, but they concurred that these attacks on the crown could not be tolerated. The House of Lords led, and the Commons followed, in a joint condemnation of both publications. With the third issue of *The Crisis* as their evidence, they censured the weekly “as a false, daring, infamous, seditious, and treasonable Libel on His Majesty, designed to alienate the Affections of His Majesty’s Subjects from his Royal person and Government, and to disturb the Peace of the Kingdom.” They chastised *The Present Crisis* with equally harsh language, adding that it was “an audacious insult on His Majesty, tending to subvert the fundamental Laws and Liberties of these Kingdoms, and to introduce an illegal and arbitrary Power.”¹⁵

about to be established for future oppressions” in his *A History of the American Revolution*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis: The Liberty Fund, 1990; orig. ed., 1789), 1:105–106, as edited by Lester Cohen. Bernard Bailyn made a more elaborate argument along these lines in *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967).

14. *The Present Crisis, With Respect to America, Considered* (London: T. Becket, 1775), criticized repeal of the Stamp Act, claiming that from that point on the colonists had become implacable; it also condemned members of the opposition in Parliament who had encouraged them. Britain was sovereign, Parliament supreme, and colonies necessarily subordinate—all of which, it emphasized, had to be insisted upon before those dissident colonists began seeking independence altogether.

15. For the House of Lords’ resolutions of 24 February 1775, concurred in by the Commons three days later, see the *House of Lords Journals*, 30:324 and the *House of Commons Journals*, 35:159, resp. Also see R. C. Simmons and P. D. G. Thomas, eds., *Proceedings and Debates of the British Parliament Respecting North America, 1754–1783*, 6 vols. (Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus International Publications, 1982–1987), 5:456, 462 (Lords resolutions), and 5:464, 465 (Commons concurrence); *The Annual Register . . . For the Year*

To underscore their disgust, the Lords and the Commons had also agreed that the pamphlet and the offending issue of the weekly should be destroyed by the “common hangman.” Handbills circulated around London, announcing “The Last DYING SPEECH of the CRISIS,” which would be burned at the gate to the entrance of Westminster palace yard on the afternoon of March 6th, and the next afternoon in front of the Royal Exchange. *The Present Crisis* would join it in the blaze.

Authorities may have come away from the first staged display of governmental prowess feeling that they had made their point; not so the second. At Westminster, the sheriffs of the city of London and Middlesex County carried off their duties with no difficulties. The crowd of hundreds that gathered did nothing to disrupt the proceedings, beyond uttering some “Hissings and Shoutings.” The hangman stacked wood, started a fire, and tossed copies of the offending pamphlet and disreputable weekly on the little pyre, with a ring of constables forming a circle around it.¹⁶

The orderly affair of that day was followed by chaos the next. The Royal Exchange, site of the second burning, was located on Threadneedle Street in the heart of London, across from the Bank of England and close by the lord mayor’s mansion house. That was an area where crowds could more easily turn into mobs. Sure enough, events there were “abundantly more diverting,” as one newspaper put it wryly afterward. The crowd that gathered was larger than at Westminster, the number of constables, smaller. The hangman had difficulty getting a fire started because people interfered with him; insults were hurled, dead cats and dogs and other

1775, 2nd ed. (London: J. Dodsley, 1777), Part I, Chronicle, pp. 94–95; and the typically acidic comments of Horace Walpole in A. Francis Steuart, ed., *The Last Journals of Horace Walpole during the Reign of George III from 1771–1783*, 2 vols. (New York: J. Lane, 1910), 1:439–41; and Walpole’s letter of 28 February 1775 in W. S. Lewis, *Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, 48 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937–1983), 28:180.

16. As recounted by the *Public Advertiser*, 7 March 1775, and the *London Evening-Post*, of that same day, which also noted, “A person unknown took an opportunity, while the Crisis was burning, to throw the Address of the Archbishop and Clergy of the Diocese of Canterbury to the King into the said flames.”



The Royal Exchange, as viewed from Cornhill Street in London. From a copper line engraving by John Green of the scene produced by painter and illustrator Samuel Wale. Originally printed in *London and its Environs Described*, 6 vols. (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1761), where it appeared between pp. 280–81 in the fifth volume. Later removed and colored by hand. The attempt to burn a copy of the third issue of *The Crisis* here the day after another had been burned in the yard at Westminster Palace produced a riot.



John Collyer's engraving of Westminster Hall, as reproduced on copper plate for and printed in John Noorthouck's *A New History of London* (London: R. Baldwin, 1773), p. 692. The third issue of *The Crisis* was publicly burned in the yard here without incident on 6 March 1775.

debris were flung at anyone representing authority; one of the sheriffs was pulled from his horse and beaten; the stack of wood and tinder was broken apart before the offending pieces were fully burned, smoldering bits being scattered along the street; three men seized by the sheriffs or constables were freed by the crowd so that no one could be charged with creating a public disturbance. What was intended to be a demonstration of governmental resolve instead turned into embarrassing street theatre.¹⁷

With that, parliamentary action against *The Present Crisis* ceased. No legal case against it was pursued. The real test for *The Crisis* still lay ahead. Parliament exercised its authority to direct Attorney General Edward Thurlow to prosecute those responsible for it. That freed Thurlow from the need to seek a grand jury indictment, which he knew he was not likely to get in London anyway because any attempt to stifle the press would be unpopular with the public.

When the men behind *The Crisis* had claimed, in their very first issue, that freedom of the press was a bulwark of English liberty, they repeated a widely shared sentiment. “The liberty of the press is indeed essential to the nature of a free state,” wrote William Blackstone in his influential *Commentaries* on English law. Nonetheless, Blackstone’s notion of a free press differed from that of most printers and high court judges sided with him, not the printers. Printers believed that truth should be a mitigating factor in any defense; Blackstone limited press protection to freedom from prior restraint. As Blackstone explained it, “provocation, and not falsity” was the key issue. Any printer who published “what is improper, mischievous, or illegal” must accept “the consequence of his own temerity.” Any writing that demonstrated “a pernicious

17. “Diverting” comment in the *Public Advertiser*, 8 March 1775; also see the *Morning Post*, 8 March 1775, and *The General Evening Post* for the next day. The *St. James Chronicle*, 9 March 1775, reported that thousands of copies had been dispersed through the kingdom. Two centuries and three hundred books later, Parliament was coming to see that the exercise too often backfired. See Charles Ripley Gillett, *Burned Books*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 2:656–660 for *The Crisis* and *Present Crisis*.