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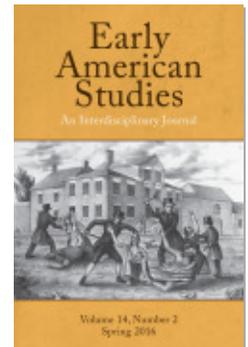
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1763: Pontiac and Paxton

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There are certain dates that loom large in colonial American history. The year 1607 marked the founding of Jamestown, 1630 the establishment of Massachusetts Bay. In 1676 New Englanders fought Metacom (King Philip), while Bacon's Rebellion raged in Virginia. The New Englanders' defeat of Metacom and the Virginian elite's suppression of Nathaniel Bacon and his allies shaped the course of history in both colonies. In 1701 the Iroquois signed the Great Peace of Montreal, which established their military neutrality and would influence Great Britain's grand strategy in North America for decades; Pennsylvania passed the Frame of Government, which would guide the colony's government until the Revolution; and Parliament passed the Act of Settlement, which set the pathway for the Hanoverian succession that eventually brought George III to power. In 1754 George Washington faced off with French forces at the Forks of the Ohio, setting in motion a war that would remake global politics, and representatives from various colonies descended on Albany to discuss forming a colonial union. Finally, the Stamp Act Crisis in 1765 began a decade of colonial protests against imperial policies that would eventually lead to American independence.

The year 1763 certainly holds a place among these dates, but its exact significance remains unclear. On the one hand, it was a momentous year for the British Empire. In February, in a peace treaty signed in Paris that brought the war Washington began to a close, France ceded to Great Britain its claims to North America, while the British Empire expanded its hold in other areas of the globe. The peace of 1763, many Britons hoped, would end the decades of warfare and strife that had marked the history of North America up to that point. For many in the colonies and across the Atlantic, the treaty appeared as a new political settlement for the British in North America in which peace alongside control of Canada and the Ohio would usher in a period of stability, growth, and prosperity.

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The essays in this special issue, however, draw a very different picture of 1763. The year remains a turning point that was crucial for the history of North America and the British Empire, but for a very different reason. Rather than marking the end of an era, the year marks the beginning of a period of continued instability as colonists and Native Americans came to terms with this new world created by “the scratch of a pen” at Paris. This special issue of *Early American Studies* focuses on two events that in recent years have become seminal to historians’ understanding of colonial America: Pontiac’s War, begun in the summer of 1763, and the Paxton Boys’ Rebellion, occurring in December 1763.

The first half of the issue focuses on the causes, course, and consequences of Pontiac’s War. In 1763, just as British diplomats in Europe were celebrating their seizure of the North American interior, a pan-Indian movement opposed to the new British superpower in North America swept across the greater Ohio River Valley and Great Lakes region. The war is named for an Ottawa military leader called Pontiac who began the conflict by spearheading a daring attack on Fort Detroit, but as these essays and many recent historians have shown, the war’s origins rested in widespread dissatisfaction with the British Empire rather than the skills of a single charismatic leader. Pontiac’s attack may have started the war, but several other Indian groups were poised to launch their own separate attacks throughout the Ohio and into Pennsylvania.

These essays tackle Pontiac’s War from a number of perspectives. Georgia Carley’s essay examines Great Britain’s diplomacy toward Native groups in the wake of the Seven Years’ War, focusing especially on how the Board of Trade understood the symbolic use of gift giving. She shows that cut-backs in diplomatic gift giving disillusioned Indian groups already wary of the British in the years before Pontiac’s War. Carley argues that this policy only reminded imperial administrators of the importance of gift giving to maintaining the stability they sought. As she writes, Pontiac’s War “offered [the Board of Trade] a striking reminder of the consequences of granting precedence to financial and commodity calculations.” On the other hand, Jeffrey Kaja examines the way spatial contests over power and empire influenced the cause and course of Pontiac’s War. Kaja shows that control of space, specifically the rules and limitations that Indians and imperialists tried to place on new roads and old pathways, were a central element in the coming of the war and the strategies for waging it. Michael Goode, meanwhile, explores the way access to alcohol created common ground between Native leaders and colonial reformers who sought to limit the trade. He suggests that Pontiac’s War upset the potential for sustained unity between

Natives and Europeans. Finally, Christian Crouch expands our understanding of life on the North American borderland by taking a fresh look at Detroit during this period. She examines the varied experiences of people of African descent in Detroit, what she terms the “Black City,” to remind us of the significance of this population. As she concludes, historians have overlooked those of African ancestry, but their presence in and around Detroit “caused real imperial headaches for Britain” in the era of Pontiac’s War.

The second half of the issue focuses on the Paxton Boys’ Rebellion, which occurred at the end of the year. In December 1763, in the midst of Pontiac’s War, a group of frontiersmen based in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, massacred the Conestoga Indians in two separate raids, killing all twenty members of the group. The frontiersmen, known as the Paxton Boys because many of the men hailed from a small town named Paxton, then mobilized more people behind their cause and marched to Philadelphia. Although we lack accurate numbers, several hundred men trekked from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to Philadelphia in the middle of the winter to protest the government’s wartime policies, which the frontiersmen found inadequate.

The essays in the second part show that the Paxton Boys’ Rebellion and its immediate aftermath raised issues about governing and status in colonial society that continued to echo as the American Revolution approached. Scott Gordon’s essay relies on Moravian sources that recast the Paxton Boys’ actions. Although historians have often believed that Lancaster officials were complicit in the Paxton Boys’ raids, Gordon’s evidence leads him to conclude that the Paxton Boys first challenged established political authority on the local level and then expanded their aim at distant targets as the movement gained wider and stronger support. He argues that the Paxton Boys’ march to Philadelphia was not a political protest, as many historians have depicted it, but rather a military march on the capital in what many Philadelphians feared was the start of a civil war begun on the frontiers of the colony. Judith Ridner’s article examines the ramifications of the Paxton Boys’ return to Lancaster County. In the weeks and months that followed their march, the Paxton Boys’ cause was transformed into a political movement as essayists throughout the colony debated the merits of the marchers’ protests. Philadelphia printers churned out dozens of essays and political cartoons in what one historian has dubbed “the Paxton Boys’ Pamphlet War.” Many historians have analyzed the political rhetoric of the pamphlets, but Ridner, inspired by a recent call for historians to take material culture more seriously, looks at the way representations of objects by the Paxton Boys and their opponents caused pamphleteers “to raise significant questions about political representation and authority” in colonial society.

John Smolenski's article continues in the same vein by exploring the gendered dynamics of the Paxton Boys and the political battles that followed in their aftermath.

The main themes that unite these events—conflicts over imperial policies, talk of civil war between colonists and established political authorities, and questions about political representation and power—combine to recast 1763 as a moment of incredible tumult and uncertainty with far-reaching repercussions. The essays that follow show that these issues, so prominent in the traditional narratives of the American Revolution, were not confined to the seacoast and port cities. Instead, this volume reveals a different crisis, a crisis on the frontiers of the British Empire that began well before the Stamp Act protests. This crisis was created by Native Americans, Africans, and colonists, who were often at odds with each other but united in a shared dissatisfaction with the new imperial regime that descended on North America in 1763. Indeed, putting Pontiac and Paxton together makes the Stamp Act Crisis of 1765 (the act having been passed in part to offset the costs of maintaining a military presence on the frontiers of North America) appear a piece of something begun two years earlier. These two events together also reveal how complex and complicated managing an expanded North American empire was for officials in Great Britain in the years that followed the victory of the Seven Years' War.

There is no better evidence for the significance of 1763 to colonial history than the origins of this special issue. In 2013 the McNeil Center hosted two major conferences, one on Pontiac's War and the other on the Paxton Boys, to commemorate the 250th anniversary of those events. The papers presented were so fresh and the conferences produced so much scholarly energy that the editor of *Early American Studies*, the late C. Dallett Hemphill, approached the organizers of the conferences to put together a special issue. As this issue was compiled, however, the 250th anniversary of the Stamp Act came and went with little fanfare at the McNeil Center. Perhaps 1763 matters more to the Revolutionary era than 1765. Making 1763 and the west the starting point of a crisis of empire that involved Indians, Africans, colonists, and others makes the American Revolution a more complex and complicated event. It also better reveals the nature of the British Empire and the challenges it faced in the 1760s, while more accurately reflecting the realities of daily life in a much expanded British North America.