

Title – The Plot to Land a Bishop: Religious Opposition in 18th Century America

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Abstract: This paper investigates Britain's plot to land an Anglican Bishop in Colonial America in the 18th century and how the plot instigated religious opposition in the colonies, which affected the American Revolution. The 18th century was a watershed moment in American religious history. The unprecedented move by the British to allow religious thought and freedom in the New World opened the door for an independent mindset unique in America. However, two forces were at work. The creation of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) in 1701 began a new era of expansion for the Anglican Church coupled with a long span of time with no clerical oversight set the stage for divergent opinions. Although the British attempted numerous plans to either set a bishop in America or increase clerical oversight, such as through the office of the commissary, they failed largely due to fear of strong opposition by the colonists. Moreover, different acts and duties placed on the colonists fueled the fire of opposition to the British on both economical and religious grounds, as seen by the opinions of different preachers and political leaders. John Adams was the most famous voice to the colonists' fear that British acts, such as the Stamp Act, would usher in religious oppression and popery. Meanwhile, preachers such as Isaac Backus and Elisha Williams declared freedom to worship God as one saw fit. Backus posits the existence of two forms of government enacted by God on earth, the civil and ecclesiastical governments, which ought to never be confused together. Support of the Anglican Church was of course different between the Northern and Southern colonies. The

North, with Boston and other hotbeds of British resentment, tended to trumpet the loudest against British incursions while the South proved more laidback. However, opinions across the colonies shifted and swayed with the oncome of the Great Awakening led largely by the Anglican minister George Whitefield. In the end, religious opposition against the British before and up to the American Revolution is a complex feature of American history in need of further study.