

New York's Refugees and Political Authority in Revolutionary America  
*By Matthew P. Dziennik*

British forces landing on Long Island in late August 1776 precipitated a mass exodus of revolutionary citizens from their homes in lower New York. Drawing on colonial precedents as well as wartime innovations, the New York provincial congress and an assortment of local committees of safety stepped in to help relocate these refugees to safe havens farther up the Hudson Valley. In providing housing and financial support to the displaced, these institutions—from the state to the municipal level—enhanced both their capacity to govern and their right to rule over the state's citizens. But the revolutionary government also taxed, mobilized, and exploited this dispossessed population in ways that reinforced revolutionary political power. Refugees facing terrible hardships were utilized as part of the construction of active and interventionist revolutionary government. The previously neglected story of New York's refugees challenges ideas about the weakness of political authority in New York and illuminates the complicated history of authority, obedience, and consent in revolutionary America.