

GEN. NATHANAEL GREENE RECOMMENDS THE BURNING OF NEW YORK CITY AFTER AMERICAN LOSSES AT LONG ISLAND & KIP'S BAY



...The object under consideration is whether a... speedy retreat from this island is necessary or not. To me it appears (to be) the only eligible plan to...secure ourselves from disgrace ...It has been agreed that the city of New York would not be (defensible) if the enemy got possession of Long Island and Governor's Island. They are now in possession of both. Notwithstanding, I think we might hold it for some time, but the annoyance must be so great as to render it an unfit place to quarter troops in...The city and island of New

York are no objects for us; we are not to bring them into competition with the general interests of America. Part of the army already has met with a defeat; the country is struck with a panic; any capital loss at this time may ruin the cause...

The sacrifice of the vast property of New York and the suburbs I hope has no influence upon your Excellency's measures. Remember the King of France. When Charles the Fifth, Emperor of Germany, invaded his kingdom, he hid whole provinces waste, and by that policy he starved and ruined Charles' army and defeated him without fighting a battle. Two-thirds of the property of the city of New York and the suburbs belongs to the Tories (loyalists). We have no very great reason to run any considerable risk for its defense. If we attempt to hold the city... we shall be wasting time...

I give it as my opinion that a general and speedy retreat is absolutely necessary...I would burn the city and suburbs, and that for the following reasons: If the enemy gets possession of the city, we never can recover the possession without a superior naval force, it will deprive the enemy of an opportunity of barracking their whole army together, which, if they could do, would be a (threat to) security. It will deprive them of a general market; the price of things would prove a temptation to our people to supply them for the sake of grain, in direct violation of the laws of their country...All these advantages would result from the destruction of the city, and not one benefit can arise to us from its preservation that I can conceive of. If the city once gets into the enemy's hands, it will be at their mercy either to save or destroy it, after they have made what use of it they think proper