Lord Dartmouth to General Thomas Gage, February, 1774

"The violences committed by those who have taken up arms in Massachusetts, have appeared to me as the acts of a rude rabble, without concert, without conduct; and therefore I think that a small force now, if put to the test, would be able to conquer them, with a greater probability of success, than might be expected from a larger army, if the people should be suffered to form themselves upon a more regular plan, to acquire a confidence from discipline, and to prepare themselves, without which everything must be put to the issue of a single action.

In this view of the situation of the King's affairs, it is the opinion of the King's servants, in which his Majesty concurs, that the essential step to be taken toward re-establishing government would be to arrest and imprison the principle actors and abettors in the Provincial Congress (whose proceedings appear in every light to be acts of treason and rebellion), if regardless of your proclamation, and in defiance of it, they shall presume again to assemble for such rebellious purposes; and if the steps taken upon the occasion be accompanied with due precaution, and every means to be devised to keep the measure secret till the moment of execution, it can hardly fail of success, and will perhaps be accomplished without bloodshed. But however that may be, I must again repeat, that any efforts on their part to encounter a regular force cannot be very formidable, and though such a proceeding should be, according to your idea of it, a signal for hostilities, yet for the reasons I have already given, it will surely be better that the conflict should be brought on upon such a ground, than in a riper state of rebellion.

It must be understood, however, of all I have said, that this is a matter, which must be left to your own discretion to be executed or not, as you shall, upon weighing all the circumstances, think most advisable…

With regard to the state of America in general, affairs there are now come to a crisis, in which the Government of this country must act with firmness and decision. You will be on your guard, and on no account suffer the people, at least of the town of Boston, to assemble themselves in arms on any pretence whatever, either of town guards or militia duty; and I the rather mention this, as a report prevails that you have not only indulged them in having such a guard, but have also allowed their militia to train and discipline in Fanueil Hall. In reviewing the Charter of Massachusetts, I observe there is a clause, that empowers the Governor to use and execute the law martial in time of actual war, invasion, and rebellion. The enclosed copies of a reply made to me by the Attorney and Solicitor-General contain an opinion that the particulars stated in the papers you have transmitted are the history of an actual and open rebellion in that province; and therefore, I conceive, that according to that opinion the exercise of power is strictly justifiable, but the expediency and propriety of adopting such a measure must depend upon your won discretion under many circumstances, that can only be judged of on the spot."