INDIANS, DEBTORS, SLAVES, AND THE MAKING OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION IN VIRGINIA

Forced Founders

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courts. Moderates and loyalists warned that the dismantling of Virginia's governmental machinery would lead to "anarchy." In December 1774, when the patriot committee of Charles County, Maryland, demanded that the county court adjourn without trying any debt cases, the court "thought it most safe and Discreet to obey," trader William Fitzhugh reported. "The Lord grant a speedy End, to this Democratical confusion."[2] These fears were somewhat exaggerated but not entirely unjustified. Even though the county courts continued to handle criminal cases, something was lost when they stopped holding their regular monthly or quarterly meetings—something undefinable that had kept most slaves in awe of free Virginians and most smallholders in awe of the gentry. Although common Virginians' deference or intimidation did not disappear when the courts closed, it diminished enough to frighten many gentlemen.

Like the white Virginians' 1774 decision to cut off trade with Britain, the actions of insurgent slaves and smallholders in 1775 and 1776 would have results that few people could have anticipated. The resistance they mounted starting early in 1775 contributed—inadvertently but powerfully—to the movement for Independence.

2. William Fitzhugh to James Russell, January 6, 1775, Russell Papers at Coutts and Company, bundle 6, VCRP.

He has excited domestic
Insurrections amongst us.
—Declaration of Independence

5

FREE VIRGINIANS VERSUS SLAVES AND GOVERNOR DUNMORE

For more than six months after the battle of Lexington an Concord, the fighting between British and patriot troops was confined to th northern colonies. Then, on the morning of October 27, 1775, a squadron o British naval vessels attacked Hampton, Virginia. The Revolutionary W had come to the South. The battle of Hampton resulted partly from th actions of a "small mulatto man" named Joseph Harris. Only four month earlier, Harris had been a resident of Hampton and the property of anothe Hamptonian, Henry King, whom he served as a pilot on Chesapeake Ba Harris was reportedly "well acquainted with many creeks on the *Easter* Shore, at *York*, *James* River, and *Nansemond*, and many others." All in all, h was "a very useful person."[1]

Harris's knowledge gave him an opportunity to gain his freedom. O June 8, 1775, Virginia's last royal governor, Lord Dunmore, fearing an attac from the increasingly belligerent patriots, fled Williamsburg and took refug on HMS *Fowey*. There he set about assembling a small squadron to fight th patriots. For that he needed people that knew the bay. So, when Harr

1. Howard H. Peckham, ed., *The Toll of Independence: Engagements and Battle Casualti of the American Revolution* (Chicago, 1974), 9; George Gray, deposition, Sept. 4, 1775, i *Revolutionary Virginia*, IV, 70; George Montague to Matthew Squire, July 20, 1775, in Pet Force, comp., *American Archives: Consisting of a Collection of Authentick Records, Sta Papers, Debates, and Letters and Other Notices of Publick Affairs . . .* , 4th Ser. (Washingto D.C., 1837–1846), II, 1692.

slipped away one night in July and presented himself to the British, he was welcomed and immediately put to work as a pilot on a schooner called the *Liberty*.

On the night of September 2, 1775, a hurricane swept through tidewater Virginia, driving the *Liberty* ashore near Hampton. On board Harris's ship when it went aground was Matthew Squire, captain of the *Liberty's* mother ship, the *Otter*. Harris obtained a canoe from a slave, and he and Squire managed to get across Hampton Roads to the *Otter*, which was anchored off Norfolk. Meanwhile, the beached *Liberty* fell into the hands of a group of rebels, who helped themselves to the sails, swivel guns, and other equipment and then set the boat ablaze. The *Liberty* "was burnt by the people thereabouts," the *Virginia Gazette* reported, "in return for [Squire's] harbouring gentlemen's negroes, and suffering his sailors to steal poultry, hogs, etc." Captain Squire was furious. He demanded that Hampton at least return the *Liberty's* stores. The rebel committee that ruled the town said it would be happy to comply with the captain's request—as soon as Squire returned Joseph Harris and other black crewmen to their former owners. This Squire refused. A patriot newspaper called Harris Squire's "Ethiopian director" and offered sarcastic praise for his "singular ATTACHMENT AND LOYALTY to his sovereign."[2]

Eventually deciding that the contest could not be resolved peacefully, Squire attacked Hampton on October 27 with several small craft. The little squadron came under deadly rifle fire and had to retreat. A British tender called the *Hawke* ventured too close to the town, and two of its crewmen were mortally wounded. The captain and Joseph Harris plunged from the tender into the chilly river and made it to another of the British boats. For the second time in as many months, Harris had escorted one of his officers to safety. Meanwhile, the *Hawke* was captured. On board were two black men, "1 white woman," and several white men, including Joseph Wilson, an indentured servant that had escaped from George Washington. The white prisoners were "treated with great humanity," a patriot newspaper reported. The black crewmen were "tried for their lives."[3]

2. Purdie's *VG*, Sept. 8, 1775; Dixon and Hunter's *VG*, Sept. 23, 1775; *Otter* muster roll, Admiralty 36/7763 (my thanks to the Public Record Office for providing a photocopy).

3. Purdie's *VG*, Nov. 3, 1775; Dixon and Hunter's *VG*, Oct. 28, 1775; Pinkney's *VG*, Nov. 2, 1775. Washington had purchased Wilson to paint Mount Vernon (Lund Washington to George Washington, Dec. 3, 1775, in W. W. Abbot et al., eds., *The Papers of George Washington*, Revolutionary War Series [Charlottesville, Va., 1985–], II, 479). The *Hawke*'s black crewmen were probably sent to the West Indies to be sold (Moss Armistead, petition, May 27, 1784, Virginia Legislative Petitions [Elizabeth City County], LVA).

FIGURE 10. Attack on Hampton. *The battle of Hampton is depicted here. From Mary Tucl Magill*, History of Virginia for the Use of Schools *(Lynchburg, Va., 1890), 188. Courte Virginia Historical Society*

Thomas Jefferson reported that the battle of Hampton "raised our cou try into perfect phrensy."[4] If Joseph Harris had not made his dash for fre dom, or if Captain Squire had not needed his help, Squire and white Ham tonians might not have come to blows at that time.

Joseph Harris was but one of thousands of enslaved Virginians that four opportunity within the breach that opened between loyalist and patri

4. Thomas Jefferson to John Randolph, Nov. 29, 1775, Archibald Cary to Jefferso Oct. 31, 1775, in Julian P. Boyd et al., eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, N 1950–), I, 249, 269; Edmund Randolph, *History of Virginia*, ed. Arthur H. Shaffer (Ch lottesville, Va., 1970), 227–229. George Montague, captain of the first naval vessel on whi Harris served, said Joseph Harris was free (to Matthew Squire, July 20, 1775, in Force, com

whites in 1774. A majority of those that reached British lines ended up worse off than before. Many were recaptured and subjected to worse working conditions than ever, in Chiswell's Mines, which supplied rebel soldiers with lead, or on West Indies sugar plantations. Others were killed in battle, and hundreds died from disease. One casualty was Joseph Harris, who served a year in the Royal Navy and then died on July 19, 1776 (probably from disease) off Charles Island in the northern Chesapeake. In the single year 1776, however, four hundred former slaves sailed away from Virginia to freedom, and thousands more escaped later in the war.[5] One result of the slaves' struggle was political: in seeking their own freedom, black Virginians indirectly helped motivate white Virginians to declare Independence from Britain.

Although in August 1774 most white Virginians were furious at Parliament for adopting the acts they called Intolerable, they were content to express their anger by cutting off trade with Britain. It was a long way from the boycott of 1774 to the Revolution of 1776. What happened during the crucial year 1775 that turned mere boycotters into revolutionaries? White Virginians became angry when the British army invaded far-off Massachusetts, and they surmised that it might invade Virginia, too, sometime in the future. Another source of the white Virginians' anger was neither geographically remote nor hypothetical: they were irate at Governor Dunmore for first threatening to ally with enslaved Virginians and then, later, actually doing so.

Neither Dunmore's April 1775 threat to free Virginia's slaves nor his November 1775 proclamation offering freedom to patriots' slaves that joined his army would have carried much significance if black Virginians had remained entirely passive during the Revolutionary crisis. But slaves were not passive. Even before the governor published his proclamation, scores of them had joined his little army. Still earlier, before Dunmore even threatened to offer freedom to the slaves, black workers in different parts of Virginia had gathered to discuss how to take advantage of the growing rift among whites. And the slave resistance of 1774 and 1775 was only the culmination of a tradition of black resistance that was as old as Virginia slavery itself.[6]

I

Afro-Virginians were most often the victims, not the perpetrators, of interracial violence. But they struck back often enough to maintain a permanent undercurrent of fear in the minds of most whites in the Chesapeake. At the same time that the black proportion of the population increased, the proportion of slaves that killed whites also grew.[7]

American Archives, 4th Ser., II, 1692). This he certainly was when Montague wrote, but the captain's statement implies that Harris was already legally free before he joined the crew of the *Fowey*. Certainly there were free blacks in pre-Revolutionary Hampton, but it is not known whether Harris was one of them. Every other reference to Harris says he was a fugitive slave (Sarah Shaver Hughes, "Elizabeth City County, Virginia, 1782–1810: The Economic and Social Structure of a Tidewater County in the Early National Years" [Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1975], 32).

5. *Otter* muster book, Adm. 36/7763, July 19, 1776, *Otter* log, Adm. 51/663, VCRP; Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1961); Sylvia R. Frey, "Between Slavery and Freedom: Virginia Blacks in the American Revolution," *JSH*, XLIX (1983), 375–398; Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, N.J., 1991); Peter H. Wood, " 'The Dream Deferred': Black Freedom Struggles on the Eve of White Independence," in Gary Y. Okihiro, ed., *In Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean, and Afro-American History* (Amherst, Mass., 1986), 166–187; Wood, " 'Liberty Is Sweet': African-American Freedom Struggles in the Years before White Independence," in Alfred F. Young, ed., *Beyond the American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (DeKalb, Ill., 1993), 149–184; Robert A. Olwell, " 'Domestick Enemies': Slavery and Political Independence in South Carolina, May 1775–March 1776," *JSH*, LV (1989), 21–48; Charles W. Carey, Jr., " 'These Black Rascals': The Origins of Lord Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment," *Virginia Social Sciences Journal*, XXXI (1996), 65–77. For earlier studies of African Americans in the Revolution, see William Tittamin, "The Negro in the American Revolution" (M.A. thesis, New York University, 1939); Herbert Aptheker, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (New York, 1940); Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York, 1943); Luther P. Jackson, "Virginia Negro Soldiers and Seamen in the American Revolution," *JNH*, XXVII (1942), 247–287.

6. Quarles, *Negro in the Revolution;* Frey, "Between Slavery and Freedom," *JSH*, XLIX (1983); Wood, " 'The Dream Deferred,' " in Okihiro, ed., *In Resistance*, 166–187; Wood " 'Liberty Is Sweet,' " in Young, ed., *Beyond the Revolution*, 149–184.

7. Philip J. Schwarz, *Twice Condemned: Slaves and the Criminal Laws of Virginia, 1705–1865* (Baton Rouge, La., 1988), ix–x, chap. 6 (esp. 143–144); Richard Bland and William Fleming, petition, Nov. 5, 1764, James Boyd, petition, Nov. 7, 1764, *JHB, 1761–1765*, 237, 239; Daniel Hamlin, petition, Feb. 25, 1772, *JHB, 1770–1772*, 189; Thomas Patterson, petition, May 12, 1774, and public claims committee, report, May 13, 1774, *JHB, 1773–1776*, 92, 98; Augusta County Court, order book, Apr. 11, 1772, in Lyman Chalkley, ed., *Chronicles of the Scotch-Irish Settlement in Virginia, Extracted from the Original Court Records of Augusta County, 1745–1800* (Rosslyn, Va., 1912), I, 167; John Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America during 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801, and 1802* (1803; reprint, New York, 1909), 414; Eugene A. Maloney, *A History of Buckingham County* (Waynesboro, Va., 1976), 38; Herbert Clarence Bradshaw, *History of Prince Edward County, Virginia* (Richmond, Va., 1955), 33; Philip D. Morgan, "Slave Life in Piedmont Virginia, 1720–1800," in Lois Green Carr, Philip D. Morgan, and Jean B. Russo, eds., *Colonial Chesapeake Society* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1988), 441, 455–56; Henry Lee to Richard Lee, Feb. 16, 1767, Richard Bland Lee Letterbook (part of the Custis-Lee Papers), LC; Malcolm H. Harris, *History of Louisa County, Virginia* (Richmond, Va., 1936), 20; Thaddeus W. Tate, *The Negro in Eighteenth Century Williamsburg* (Charlottesville, Va., 1965), 101–102; David John Mays, *Edmund Pendleton, 1721–1803: A Biography* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), I, 22, 35; Warren M. Billings, John E. Selby, and Thad W. Tate, *Colonial Virginia: A History* (White Plains, N.Y., 1986), 281

If individual whites had nightmares about waking up amid flames or feeling the first spasms of a stomach invaded by poison, whites as a group frequently worried about large-scale servile insurrection. Slave plots seemed to be especially rife during the Seven Years' War (1754–1763). In July 1755, Charles Carter reported to Lieutenant Governor Robert Dinwiddie that enslaved workers had gathered near his son's home, possibly with a view to allying with the Native American and French soldiers that had just defeated General Edward Braddock's army near Fort Duquesne (present-day Pittsburgh). Dinwiddie replied on July 18. "The Villany of the Negroes on any Emergency of Gov't is w[ha]t I always fear'd," he told Carter; "I greatly approve of Y[ou]r send'g the Sheriffs with proper Strength to take up those [tha]t apear'd in a Body at Y[ou]r Son's House." If the slaves were "found guilty of the Expressions mention'd," Dinwiddie said, "an Example of one or two at first may prevent those Creatures enter[in]g into Combinat[ion]s and wicked Designs." Later in the war, Richard Henry Lee told the House of Burgesses that slaves, "from the nature of their situation, can never feel an interest in our cause, because . . . they observe their masters possessed of liberty which is denied to them."[8]

White Virginians became especially alarmed about their slaves during Pontiac's Rebellion. For the first time in recent memory, Indians spared th lives of blacks at the settlements they attacked; gentlemen wondered why. "A the Indians are saving and Carressing all the Negroes they take," militia lieu tenant William Fleming told Governor Fauquier in July 1763, "should it b productive of an Insurrection it may be attended with the most serious Con sequences." The following month, a Virginia clergyman reported that th rebel Indians had "carried a great number of women and children, as well a some men, and (for the first time too) a good many negroes, into captivity."

Although the slave-Indian alliance that so frightened white Virginian never materialized, black workers continued to meet to plan insurrection after Pontiac's Rebellion. A group in Loudoun County revolted in early 176 and killed an overseer named Dennis Dallis. Three of them were hanged. I neighboring Fairfax County that same year, a group of enslaved worker poisoned several overseers. "Some of the negroes have been taken up, four o whom were executed about three weeks ago, after which their heads were cu off, and fixed on the chimnies of the court-house," a Boston newspape reported, "and it was expected that four more would soon meet with th same fate." Frederick County slaves also reportedly plotted a rebellion in th 1760s. In Stafford County in May 1769, some of John Knox's slaves "barba rously murdered" him. Suspicion fell on two fugitives named Phill an Winny, and Knox's brothers offered a reward of £105 for their capture an conviction. Within a month, both had been apprehended and put to death along with one of the "house wenches," who had not initially been a suspec in her master's death. Around Christmas of the same year, the slaves o Bowler Cocke's plantation in nearby Hanover County attacked the steward his assistant, and a neighbor, beating each severely. When a band of white arrived to suppress the rebellion, Cocke's slaves "rushed upon them with desperate fury, armed with clubs and staves." The whites saved themselves b shooting dead two of the rebels and nearly decapitating a third.[10]

Jack P. Greene, "Society, Ideology, and Politics: An Analysis of the Political Culture of Mid-Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in Greene, Richard L. Bushman, and Michael L. Kammen, *Society, Freedom, and Conscience: The American Revolution in Virginia, Massachusetts, and New York*, ed. Richard M. Jellison (New York, 1976), 68; Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York, 1972), 58–59; Freeman H. Hart, *The Valley of Virginia in the American Revolution, 1763–1789* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1942), 15; *SAL*, VI, 104–112.

8. Dinwiddie advised Carter to keep "Patrollers out for the Peace of Y[ou]r Co[un]ty" and instruct undersheriffs to "seize all Horses used by Negroes in the Night Time" (Dinwiddie to Charles Carter, July 18, 1755, in R. A. Brock, ed., *The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie* . . . [Richmond, Va., 1883–1884], II, 102–103). After Braddock's defeat, Dinwiddie refused to send all available troops to fight the Indians. "I must leave a proper number in each county to protect it from the combinations of the negro slaves, who have been very audacious in the defeat on the Ohio" (W. Robert Higgins, "The Ambivalence of Freedom: Whites, Blacks, and the Coming of the Revolution in the South," in Higgins, ed., *The Revolutionary War in the South: Power, Conflict, and Leadership: Essays in Honor of John Richard Alden* [Durham, N.C., 1979], 54–55). See also Mark J. Stegmaier, "Maryland's Fear of Insurrection at the Time of Braddock's Defeat," *MHM*, LXXI (1976), 467–483; Wood, " 'Liberty Is Sweet,' " in Young, ed., *Beyond the Revolution*, 154; undated speech, in Richard Henry Lee, *Memoir of the Life of Richard Henry Lee, and His Correspondence with the Most Distinguished Men in America and Europe* . . . (Philadelphia, 1825), I, 18; Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 18–208; Tate, *Negro in Williamsburg*, 205–207; Theodore Allen, " '. . . They Would Have Destroyed Me': Slavery and the Origins of Racism," *Radical America*, IX (1975), 56; Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, 171, 175; Mays, *Edmund Pendleton*, I, 119–120.

9. William Fleming to Francis Fauquier, July 26, 1763, in George Reese, ed., *The Offici Papers of Francis Fauquier, Lieutenant Governor of Virginia, 1758–1768* (Charlottesville, Va 1980–1983), II, 998; Peter Fontaine to Moses and John Fontaine and Daniel Torin, Aug. 7 1763, in Ann Maury, trans. and comp., *Memoirs of a Huguenot Family* . . . (New York, 1853) 372; Benjamin Johnston, advertisement, Rind's *VG*, Dec. 16, 1773. For a March 1755 effort b the South Carolina legislature to promote enmity between Indians and slaves, see Wooc " 'Liberty Is Sweet,' " in Young, ed., *Beyond the Revolution*, 154.

10. *Boston Chronicle*, Jan. 11–18, 1768; Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 198–199 Mar. 23, 24, 1767, Nov. 23, 1769, *JHB, 1766–1769*, 91, 93, 286; Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, 146-147; Robert Knox and Willim Knox, advertisement, news item, both in Rind's *VG*, June 15 July 20, 1769; Rind's *VG*, Jan. 25, 1770. Although the discussion above, which document

As Lieutenant Governor Dinwiddie had said in 1755, "any Emergency" that divided white Americans could give blacks the opportunity to launch rebellions. The American Revolution was such an emergency. "In one of our Counties lately," James Madison reported in November 1774, "a few of those unhappy wretches met together and chose a leader who was to conduct them when the English Troops should arrive." Enslaved workers in other colonies also met to discuss how to take advantage of the imperial conflict. In St. Andrew Parish, Georgia, slaves rebelled in December 1774 and killed four whites before being captured and burned alive. An account of a New York plot appeared in the *Virginia Gazettes* in mid-March, 1775; it had been discovered when a white man overheard two enslaved conspirators discussing how to obtain more gunpowder and shot.[11]

The fears that these plots induced in white Virginians were heightened by the rumor that the British government might encourage slave insurrections as a way of suppressing the patriot movement. Ever since Francis Drake's raids against Spanish ports in the Caribbean in the 1570s, Englishmen had occasionally made common cause with their enemies' slaves. In the fall of 1774, William Draper, who had just returned to London from an extended tour of America, published a pamphlet arguing that one way to put down the patriot rebellion would be to "Proclame *Freedom* to their Negroes." Arthur Lee, who was living in London, had obtained a copy of Draper's pamphlet by early December 1774, when he mentioned Draper's "proposal for emancipating your Negroes by royal Proclamation and arming them against you" to his brothers in Virginia. Lee claimed the plan "meets with approbation from ministerial People." James Madison heard in early 1775 that a slave emancipation bill had been introduced in Parliament. No such bill has been found, but Edmund Burke noted (in his March 1775 speech "On Conciliation with the Colonies") that many progovernment members favored "a general enfranchisement of [the] slaves." During the spring of 1775, many Virginians believed that those proposals were about to be implemented. According to a House of Burgesses report, British officials contemplated "a Scheme, the most diabolical," to "offer Freedom to our Slaves, a turn them against their Masters." A similar accusation was made in anonymous letter that appeared in Alexander Purdie's *Virginia Gazette* June. The writer alluded to recent slave plot rumors and then added: "Fro some hints, it was inferred that the negroes had not been without encou agement from a Gentleman of the Navy"—probably Captain Henry Colir whose HMS *Magdalen* patrolled the Chesapeake in those months.[12]

Without waiting for British "encouragement," several groups of slaves the James River watershed reportedly assembled to plan rebellions duri the third week of April 1775 (see Figure 11). On April 15, 1775, a Prince Edwa County slave named Toney was charged with insurrection and conspiracy commit murder; he received fifteen lashes. Three days later, whites in near Chesterfield County were "alarm'd for an Insurrection of the Slaves," trad Robert Donald reported. Slave patrols were usually somewhat lax in Vi ginia, but the Chesterfield patrol was now quickly revived. "We Patrol and armed—a dreadful enemy," Donald wrote on April 18. Three more da passed. Then "Sentence of death [was] passed upon two Negroes . . . tried Norfolk, for being concerned in a conspiracy to raise an insurrection in th town," the *Virginia Gazette* reported. One of the Norfolk conspirators w named Emanuel, and he was the property of Matthew Phripp, the milit lieutenant for Norfolk County. The other's name was Emanuel de Antoni and before resorting to rebellion he had tried to obtain his freedom by leg

white fears, focuses on violent means by which slaves sought their freedom, it should be noted that not all slaves that struck out for freedom in the pre-Revolutionary era used violence. Several slaves that learned about the *Somerset* decision, in which Lord Mansfield had attempted to outlaw slavery in the British Isles, tried to reach England (Wood, " 'Dream Deferred,' " in Okihiro, ed., *In Resistance*, 169). Also, several enslaved Virginians tried to sue for their freedom during this period (Duncan J. MacLeod, *Slavery, Race, and the American Revolution* [London, 1974], 109–111).

11. Madison to William Bradford, Jr., Nov. 26, 1774, in William T. Hutchinson et al., eds., *The Papers of James Madison* (Chicago and Charlottesville, Va., 1962–), I, 130; Wood, " 'Liberty Is Sweet,' " in Young, ed., *Beyond the Revolution*, 161–163.

12. Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colon Virginia* (New York, 1975), 9–42; "Viator" [William Draper], *The Thoughts of a Travel upon Our American Disputes* (London, 1774), 21; Arthur Lee to Richard Henry Lee, Dec. 1774, Lee Family Papers (1638–1867), section 108, VHS; William Bradford, Jr., to Jam Madison, Jan. 4, 1775, in Hutchinson et al., eds., *Papers of James Madison*, I, 132; Edmu Burke, speech on conciliation with the colonies, Mar. 22, 1775, in Burke, *Speeches and Lett on American Affairs* (London, 1908), 102; House of Burgesses, address to Dunmore, June 1775, *JHB, 1773–1776*, 256; anonymous letter, Purdie's *VG*, June 16, 1775; Jack P. Greene, e *The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752–1778* (Charlottesville, Va., 1965), 959; Virginia Convention, "Declaration of the Delegates," Aug. 26, 1775, in *Revolution Virginia*, III, 501; Frey, *Water from the Rock*, 55–56; Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, 181–182. T rumor that the British government intended to arm enslaved Americans against th masters circulated in other colonies as well. During the critical month of April 1775, Phi delphia Quaker James Kenny reported that "a great Woman in London" had writter Philadelphian, saying several members of the House of Lords had informed her of a "sec Plan": "arms" were "to be given to all . . . the Negros to act against the Collonies." Kenny to Humphry Marshall, Apr. 25, 1775 (typescript), Marshall Papers, William L. Cle ents Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (my thanks to Rob Cox for bringing tl document to my attention); Henry Cruger to Ralph Izard, Mar. 21, 1775, *Correspondence Mr. Ralph Izard, of South Carolina* . . . (New York, 1844), 58.

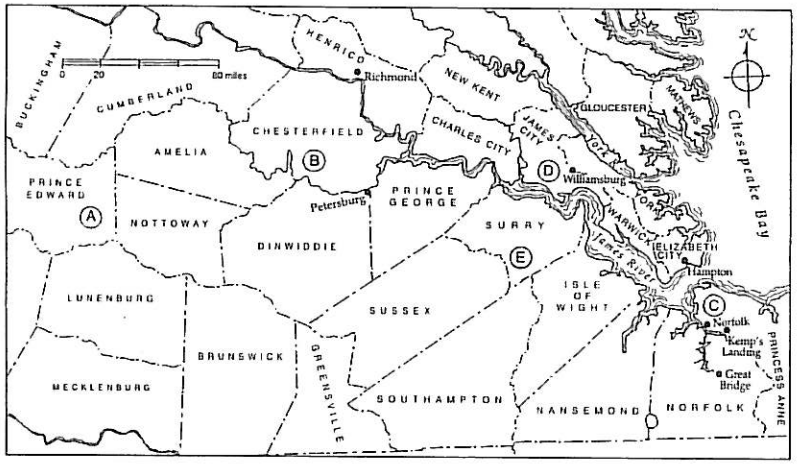


FIGURE 11. Rumors of Slave Plots in the James River Watershed, April 15–April 21, 1775. *A.* April 15. Prince Edward County. A slave named Toney is charged with insurrection. *B.* April 18. Chesterfield County. White inhabitants are "alarm'd for an Insurrection of the Slaves." *C.* April 21. Norfolk. Two slaves, Emanuel and Emanuel de Antonio, are convicted of leading a slave revolt. *D.* April 21. Williamsburg. Edmund Pendleton reports "some disturbances in the City, by the *Slaves*." *E.* April 21. Surry County. Dunmore and the Williamsburg town council say slaves in a nearby county (later identified as Surry) have conspired to rebel. *Drawn by Richard Stinely*

means. In March 1771, Antonio, who was owned by the trading house of James Campbell and Company, had sued the firm for his freedom. He claimed he was "a free born subject of his catholic majesty"—the king of Spain. Although in those years several enslaved Virginians secured their freedom by establishing in court an unbroken line of female ancestors extending back to an Indian woman (who could not have been legally enslaved after 1705), Emanuel de Antonio's suit was unsuccessful, and he remained a slave. The two Emanuels do not complete the list of slaves that were accused of rebellion that week. On April 21, the very day that they were sentenced to die, Edmund Pendleton reported that the free half of Williamsburg's population had been frightened by "some disturbances in the City, by the *Slaves*."[13]

13. Michael Lee Nicholls, "Aspects of the African-American Experience in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg and Norfolk" (report prepared for CWF, October 1990), 69–70; Peter Wallenstein, "Indian Foremothers: Race, Sex, Slavery, and Freedom in Early Virginia," in Catherine Clinton and Michelle Gillespie, eds., *The Devil's Lane: Sex and Race in the Early South* (New York, 1997), 62–68; Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, 182, 184; Robert Donald to Patrick Hunter, Apr. 18, 1775, *Buchanan and Milliken v. Robert Donald* (1794), U.S. Circuit Court, Virginia District, Ended Cases (restored), LVA. Although charged with insurrection Toney of Prince Edward County was only convicted of a misdemeanor. See Dixon and Hunter's *VG*, Apr. 29, 1775 (supplement); Edmund Pendleton to George Washington, Apr. 21 1775, in David John Mays, ed., *The Letters and Papers of Edmund Pendleton, 1734–180* (Charlottesville, Va., 1967), I, 102. My thanks to Michael Nicholls for biographical information on Emanuel de Antonio.

It is possible that the two Emanuels in Norfolk and Toney in Prince Edward County were not in touch with each other, with the Williamsburg plotters, or with those in Chesterfield County. Inevitably, though, many white Virginians believed that the alleged occurrence of four slave conspiracies in different parts of the James River watershed during the same week—the largest number in such a short time before Gabriel's conspiracy in 1800—was no coincidence. They believed that what they were facing was not just a few scattered outbreaks but a coordinated attack. "There was a suspicion" that spring "of the Negroes having formed a conspiracy," a group of Virginia traders later recalled. Edward Stabler, a Williamsburg Quaker, would note in May that "There hath been many Rumours here of the Negroes intending to Rise." Although Stabler considered the rumor of a wide-ranging slave conspiracy "without much foundation," it was real enough to terrify many of his fellow whites. An anonymous newspaper essayist stated in June that "various reports of internal insurrections" had circulated during the spring "Whether this was general, or who were the instigators, remains as yet a secret," he said.[14]

II

It was in this context of rising aspirations among blacks and mounting fears among whites that Governor Dunmore decided to put Virginia's major ammunition cache out of the reach of patriot militiamen. Early on Friday morning, April 21, 1775, he had a detachment from HMS *Magdalen* remove

Toney of Prince Edward County was only convicted of a misdemeanor. See Dixon and Hunter's *VG*, Apr. 29, 1775 (supplement); Edmund Pendleton to George Washington, Apr. 21 1775, in David John Mays, ed., *The Letters and Papers of Edmund Pendleton, 1734–180* (Charlottesville, Va., 1967), I, 102. My thanks to Michael Nicholls for biographical information on Emanuel de Antonio.

14. Edward Stabler to Israel Pemberton, May 16, 1775, Pemberton Papers, XXVII, 144 Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; anonymous letter, Purdie's *VG*, June 16 1775; unnamed merchants, replies to questions in Archibald Cary to James Lyle et al June 12, 1775, C.O. 5/1353, 401, P.R.O., VCRP; Hugh Hamilton, deposition, in Committee of the Late Disturbances, report, June 14, 1775, *JHB, 1773–1776*, 234.

Were the white Virginians that suspected a connection among the various slave conspiracies in the James River watershed in April 1775 in fact correct? Certainly a conspiracy this extensive was possible. Twenty-five years later, in 1800, organizers of Gabriel's conspirac managed to recruit clusters of supporters in counties throughout the tidewater and piedmont sections of Virginia. See Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, 140–163; Philip J. Schwarz "Gabriel's Challenge: Slaves and Crime in Late Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *VMHB*, XC (1982), 283–309; Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1993).

fifteen half-barrels of gunpowder from the colonial powder magazine in the center of Williamsburg and secure them in the warship. Many white Virginians believed that the governor's timing was no coincidence—that he intentionally removed the powder amid the swirl of insurrection rumors in order to abandon whites to the fury of their slaves. Years later, Edmund Randolph, who had lived in Williamsburg in April 1775, pronounced the removal of the powder "not far removed from assassination." He said the governor "designed, by disarming the people, to weaken the means of opposing an insurrection of the slaves . . . for a protection against whom in part the magazine was at first built."[15]

In 1774, Governor Dunmore had led an attack against the Shawnee and Mingo nations that forced them to cede Kentucky and the region east of the Ohio River to Virginia. In March 1775, a patriot convention unanimously praised the governor "for his truly noble, wise and spirited Conduct on the late Expedition against our Indian Enemy." As late as April 20, despite the anti-British currents sweeping over the American colonies, Dunmore remained what Norfolk merchant James Parker pronounced him in January 1775, upon hearing that the governor had just named his new daughter "Virginia": "as popular as a Scotsman can be among weak prejudiced people." Overnight, the removal of the gunpowder turned him into a villain. By dawn on the morning the powder was removed, most of white Williamsburg gathered on the town green near the governor's palace. Many carried weapons. The people in the crowd meant to force the governor to return the gunpowder, but they agreed to stand down while the town council and provincial leaders first gave Dunmore a chance to give up the powder peacefully. A delegation met with him and surprised everyone by agreeing to let the powder stay on board the *Magdalen*. Returning to the green, the leaders persuaded the crowd to disperse.[16]

Williamsburg lapsed into "perfect tranquility." But then "a Report was spread by his Excellency's throwing out some threats respecting the Slaves." The report was true. On April 22, the day after he removed the gunpowder,

15. Randolph, *History of Virginia*, ed. Shaffer, 219; Sussex County committee, May 8, 1775, proceedings, Aug. 25, 1775, Virginia Convention, "Declaration of the Delegates," Aug. 26, 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 107, 488, 501; Dunmore to William Legge, Lord Dartmouth, May 1, 1775, in K. G. Davies, ed., *Documents of the American Revolution, 1770–1783* (Shannon, Ireland, 1972–1981), IX, 109; John E. Selby, *The Revolution in Virginia, 1775–1783* (Charlottesville, Va., 1988), 2.

16. Mar. 25, 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, II, 376; James Parker to Charles Steuart, Jan. 27, 1775, Steuart Papers, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh (microfilm at LVA); Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 1–2.

FIGURE 12. Williamsburg Gunpowder Magazine.
Courtesy, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

Dunmore reignited the crisis. In an effort to discourage patriot violence, he gave Dr. William Pasteur, a member of the Williamsburg town council, a message for Peyton Randolph, the speaker of the House of Burgesses: If any senior British official was harmed, Dunmore "would declare freedom to the slaves and reduce the City of Wmsburg to ashes."[17]

Now it became clear what had probably prompted Speaker Randolph and other white leaders to back off so quickly from their April 21 demand that Dunmore immediately return the gunpowder. They did not want to provoke him to employ a weapon far more lethal than fifteen half-barrels of ammunition: the more than 180,000 Virginians that were enslaved. In Williamsburg, the town fathers doubled the nightly slave patrol. In Amelia County the patriot committee, fearful "for the internal security of the county," ordered "that patrollers in every neighbourhood be constantly kept on duty."[1]

17. John Dixon, deposition, in Committee on the Late Disturbances, report, June 14 1775, *JHB, 1773–1776*, 233; Randolph, *History of Virginia*, ed. Shaffer, 220; "Deposition of Dr William Pasteur. In Regard to the Removal of Powder from the Williamsburg Magazine, *VMHB*, XIII (1905), 49.

18. Peter H. Wood, "The Changing Population of the Colonial South: An Overview by Race and Region, 1685–1790," in Peter H. Wood, Gregory A. Waselkov, and M. Thomas Hatley, eds., *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1989), 38

Dunmore's suspiciously timed removal of the gunpowder and his threat to free the slaves coincided with the decision of Massachusetts governor (and American commander in chief) Thomas Gage to send troops to Concord to seize patriot military stores—especially gunpowder. White colonists imagined a ministerial plot to disarm them, and the government had, in fact, ordered royal governors to prevent the patriots from obtaining war matériel. Although the battle of Lexington and Concord was destined to receive much more attention than the events in Virginia, it was clear at the time that in the slave provinces the government's effort to disarm the patriots carried the greatest danger.

Now white Virginians debated how best to respond. Provincial leaders in Williamsburg believed the safest strategy was to avoid antagonizing Dunmore. In the countryside, however, independent military companies mustered and prepared to march to the capital. At least seven counties that had not yet formed independent companies now hastily did so. Although the battle of Lexington and Concord was clearly one reason that so many white Virginians turned their attention to military preparedness at this time, they were also concerned about events in their own colony. The Sussex County committee said the reason it had formed an independent company was that the removal of the gunpowder had made it not only justifiable but "absolutely necessary that this county be put into the best posture of defence possible." More than six hundred members of independent companies converged on Fredericksburg by April 29 and made ready to march south to the capital. Among their goals, a Virginia historian recalled many years later, was "to seize the governor and crush at once the seeds of insurrection."[19]

The men that gathered for the march to Williamsburg no doubt expected whites in the capital to be comforted to hear that help was on the way.

Benjamin Waller and John Dixon, depositions, in Committee on the Late Disturbances, report, June 14, 1775, *JHB, 1773–1776*, 232–233; May 3, 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 83.

19. Sussex County committee, resolutions, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 107; John Burk et al., *The History of Virginia, from Its First Settlement to the Present Day* (Petersburg, Va., 1804–1805), III, 410; Archibald Cary to James Lyle et al., June 12, 1775, C.O. 5/1353, 400; Randolph, *History of Virginia*, ed. Shaffer, 220. The counties that formed independent companies in the wake of the gunpowder removal were Mecklenburg, New Kent, Chesterfield, Louisa, Essex, Henrico, and Nansemond. See James Lyle and Robert Donald, Thomas Mitchell, Archibald Ritchie, Archibald Bryce, Andrew Sprowle, et al., depositions, in Committee on the Late Disturbances, report, June 14, 1775, *JHB, 1773–1776*, 234–237; New Kent County committee, May 3, 1775, Mecklenburg County committee, May 8, 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 85, 105; Mays, *Edmund Pendleton*, II, 353n; Dale E. Benson, "Wealth and Power in Virginia, 1774–1776: A Study of the Organization of Revolt" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maine, 1970), 173.

Actually, they were terrified. The moment provincial treasurer Robert Carte Nicholas and speaker Peyton Randolph learned that the independent com panies had gathered, they began "writing letters over all the country t prevent those meetings," according to Norfolk trader James Parker. Ran dolph warned the Fredericksburg encampment that "violent measures ma produce effects, which God only knows the consequences of." Randolph' fears were not unfounded. On April 28, the day after Dunmore learned tha the independent companies intended to march against him, he reiterated hi threat to raise the slaves. The governor drew a line in the sandy tidewate soil, telling Dr. Pasteur that "if a large Body of People came below *Ruffin Ferry* (a place about thirty Miles from this City), that he would immediatel enlarge his plan and carry it into execution." If any whites had dared to hop that Dunmore's earlier threat to free the slaves had been only the product o momentary passion, he now set them straight. During "this alarming crisis," a group of Williamsburg slave patrollers said, "even the whispering of th wind was sufficient to rouze their fears." The governor underscored that h would not strike the first blow; Pasteur reported that he "more than once di say he should not carry these Plans into Execution unless he was attacked."[2]

Fearful gentry leaders managed to persuade most of the independen volunteer companies to disband. Most, but not all. The Albemarle Count volunteers voted on April 29 to march to Williamsburg "to demand satisfac tion of Dunmore for the powder, and his threatening to fix his standard an call over the negroes," the company's first lieutenant noted. Apparently, th Albemarle company had second thoughts and turned back, but a compan from Hanover County, led by Patrick Henry, voted on May 2 to march on.[2]

20. James Parker said Nicholas had found "it more difficult to extinguish a flame tha kindle it." See Parker to Charles Steuart, Norfolk, May 6–7, 1775, Steuart Papers; Randolp and the Corporation of the City of Williamsburg to Mann Page, Jr., Lewis Willis, an Benjamin Grymes, Jr., Apr. 27, 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 64; William Pasteu deposition, June 14, 1775, *JHB, 1773–1776*, 231; "Intelligence Extraordinary," Pinkney's *VG* May 4, 1775; Dunmore to Dartmouth, May 1, 1775, in Davies, ed., *Documents of the America Revolution*, IX, 109; Frederick County committee, June 19, 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia* III, 209; James Madison to William Bradford, Jr., May 9, 1775, in Hutchinson et al., eds *Papers of James Madison*, I, 145; Charles Campbell, *History of the Colony and Ancient Domin ion of Virginia* (Philadelphia, 1860), 609.

21. George Gilmer notebook, Albemarle County independent company, [Apr. 29, 1775 both in *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 52n, 69–70; Pinkney's *VG*, June 30, 1775. It has generall been believed that the Hanover men sought only the return of the gunpowder to th Williamsburg munitions depot. But Hanover's patriot committee said the men marched t Williamsburg because they had heard that white inhabitants of the capital felt "appreher sion for their persons and property." See Hanover County committee, May 9, 1775, i

As Henry's group headed toward Williamsburg, "some Negroes" went to the governor's palace and "offered their Service," Attorney General John Randolph reported. The governor turned them away, but he told Randolph that if Henry's group attacked him and "Negroes on that Occasion offered their Service they would be received." On May 3, Dunmore issued a proclamation reminding free Virginians of their "internal weakness"—their vulnerability to slave and Indian uprisings. He assured colonists that he would "avail myself of any means" necessary to restore his authority. Meanwhile, he "armed his servants, together with the Shawanese hostages" that had been handed over to him at the end of the autumn 1774 Indian war, as historian John Burk later reported. For the next few days, "Parties of negroes mounted guard every night at the [governor's] palace," Burk wrote. In this context, it was natural for the Sussex County patriot committee to read Dunmore's May 3 proclamation as a threat to expose free Virginians "to the attacks of a savage invasion, or a domestick foe." Now the governor was threatening to ally with Indians as well as slaves! Dunmore's proclamation was probably interpreted in the same way by Patrick Henry, and it might have helped persuade Henry and Receiver General Richard Corbin to reach a face-saving compromise in which Corbin paid Henry for the gunpowder—which remained on board the *Magdalen*.[22]

The powder magazine incident is one of those chestnuts of Virginia history. It is significant because it was the first time since Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 that a large number of Virginians had taken up arms to attack a royal governor, and even more because it served "to widen the unhappy breach between Great Britain and her colonies," as the soldiers encamped at Fredericksburg declared. While the Hanover independent company marched toward Williamsburg in the midst of the crisis, Patrick Henry observed that "it was a fortunate circumstance, which would rouse the people from North to South."[23]

Revolutionary Virginia, III, 111; Archibald Govan et al., deposition, in Committee on the Late Disturbances, report, June 14, 1775, *JHB, 1773–1776*, 236; "A True Patriot," May 11, 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 117; George Dabney to William Wirt, May 14, 1805, Patrick Henry Papers, LC; Campbell, *History of the Colony*, 612.

22. John Randolph, Benjamin Waller, depositions, in Committee on the Late Disturbances, report, June 14, 1775, *JHB, 1773–1776*, 231; Dunmore, proclamation, May 3, 1775, Pinkney's *VG*, May 4, 1775; Burk et al., *History of Virginia*, III, 407, 409; Sussex County committee, resolutions, May 8, 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 107; "Intelligence Extraordinary," Pinkney's *VG*, May 4, 1775; Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 4; Randolph, *History of Virginia*, ed. Shaffer, 220.

23. Fredericksburg encampment, Apr. 29, 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 71; Henry,

Henry and his comrades would have been surprised at the widespread modern notion that the only reason they were angry at their governor was that he had removed the gunpowder. A group of Hanover County traders stated that the political ferment that Dunmore caused was "heightened and encreased by his threatening to enfranchise the Slaves." Benjamin Waller, a member of Williamsburg's patriot committee, informed the governor that he had forfeited "the Confidence of the People not so much for having taken the Powder as for the declaration he made of raising and freeing the Slaves." Dunmore himself boasted that his "declaration that I would arm and set free such slaves as should assist me if I was attacked has stirred up fears in them which cannot easily subside."[24]

The looming presence of an enslaved and potentially rebellious workforce guaranteed an intensely hostile white reaction not only to Dunmore's emancipation threat but also to his decision to remove the gunpowder. The editor of a South Carolina newspaper believed that the governor's odd timing—he took the ammunition at the end of a week when rumors of slave revolts had poured into Williamsburg from up and down the James River—was deliberate. "The monstrous absurdity that the Governor can deprive the people of the necessary means of defense at a time when the colony is actually threatened with an insurrection of their slaves," the *South-Carolina Gazette; And Country Journal* reported, "has worked up the passions of the people there

in George Dabney to William Wirt, May 14, 1805, Patrick Henry Papers; Gloucester County committee, Apr. 26, 1775, New Kent County committee, May 3, 1775, Orange County committee, May 9, 1775, Richmond County committee, May 12, 1775, Mecklenburg County committee, May 13, 1775, all in *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 61, 85, 112, 121, 124; "Civis," "Brutus," Purdie's *VG*, May 26, 1775 (supplement), Aug. 4, 1775 (supplement). On April 20 the day before Dunmore removed the gunpowder, Robert Munford had said that he intended to ask the voters of his county to endorse a loyalist address that he had written. After learning of the gunpowder incident and Dunmore's threat to free the slaves, Munford decided not to present his loyalist petition. In fact, he ultimately became a major in the patriot army (Munford to William Byrd III, Apr. 20, 1775, in Marion Tinling, ed., *The Correspondence of the Three William Byrds of Westover, Virginia, 1684–1776* [Charlottesville, Va., 1977], II, 806, 806n).

24. Benjamin Waller, Archibald Govan et al., depositions, both in Committee on the Late Disturbances, report, June 14, 1775, *JHB, 1773–1776*, 232, 236; Dunmore to Dartmouth, June 25, 1775, in Davies, ed., *Documents of the American Revolution*, IX, 204; Mays, *Edmund Pendleton*, II, 13–14. Louisa County trader Thomas Mitchell noted "that the Governor's Declaration to give Freedom to the Slaves greatly inflamed the Minds of those who believed it," although not everyone did. See deposition, in Committee on the Late Disturbances report, June 14, 1775, *JHB, 1773–1776*, 234; "Deposition of Dr. Pasteur," *VMHB*, XIII (1905), 50 (resolution at foot); Randolph, *History of Virginia*, ed. Shaffer, 220; Ivor Noël Hume, *1775: Another Part of the Field* (New York, 1966), 146–147.

FIGURE 13. John Murray, Fourth Earl of Dunmore.
Courtesy, Virginia Historical Society

almost to a frenzy." The Fredericksburg encampment also considered Dunmore's decision suspiciously "ill timed."[25]

The possibility must be considered that patriot writers deliberately exaggerated the likelihood of a slave insurrection in order to heap further odium upon their governor. Actually, though, the white Virginians that said they feared a slave revolt seem to have been telling the truth. James Robison, a staunch loyalist, agreed with patriots that "an insurrection . . . was dreaded" in Virginia during the spring of 1775. Although patriot writers sometimes exaggerated evidence of black resistance, they just as often withheld it. In November 1774, when James Madison told a fellow Princeton alumnus that some of his enslaved neighbors had met to discuss how to take advantage of an expected British invasion, he judged it "prudent such attempts should be concealed as well as suppressed." A year later, when editor John Pinkney printed a letter from South Carolina in his *Virginia Gazette*, he omitted part of it. "This letter goes on farther," Pinkney informed his readers, "and relates a great deal about the negroes in South Carolina; but we think it prudent to suppress the account."[26]

In the aftermath of Dunmore's removal of the gunpowder and his subsequent threat to free the slaves, some white Virginians expressed their grow-

25. Peter H. Wood, " 'Taking Care of Business' in Revolutionary South Carolina: Republicanism and the Slave Society," in Jeffrey J. Crow and Larry E. Tise, eds., *The Southern Experience in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1978), 282; Fredericksburg encampment, Apr. 29, 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 71; Gloucester County committee, Apr. 25, 1775, Henrico County committee, Apr. 26, 1775, Fredericksburg encampment, Apr. 29, 1775, New Kent County committee, May 3, 1775, Richmond County committee, May 12, 1775, Virginia Convention, "Declaration of the Delegates," Aug. 26, 1775, all in *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 61, 62–63, 71, 84–85, 121, 501; Rawleigh Downman to Samuel Athawes, July 10, 1775, Downman Letterbook, LC.

Even Herbert Aptheker, a careful searcher for evidence of slave conspiracies, believed that there was no plot in Virginia in April 1775 (*American Negro Slave Revolts*, 204). Aptheker's conclusion was understandable given that the only evidence before him was Governor Dunmore's public claim that he had removed the powder to protect whites from a rumored slave "insurrection in a neighbouring county" (Dunmore to Williamsburg Common Hall, Apr. 21, 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 55). Aptheker's skepticism regarding Dunmore's claim that he removed the gunpowder in order to protect whites from a rumored slave plot was justified, for Dunmore himself acknowledged in a letter to Dartmouth, the secretary of state, that the plot was not the real reason for the removal of the powder. But apparently the governor sincerely believed the slave plot rumor himself, for he stated in the same letter to Dartmouth that whites in Williamsburg really were "apprehensive of insurrections among their slaves (some reports having prevailed to this effect)" (May 1, 1775, in Davies, ed., *Documents of the American Revolution*, IX, 107–108).

26. James Robison to William Cuninghame and Company, May 3, 1775, in T. M. Devine, ed., *A Scottish Firm in Virginia, 1767–1777: W. Cuninghame and Co.* (Edinburgh, 1984), 187.

ing rage at him in jokes about his relations with black women. There had long been talk about the governor's philandering. Now, for the first time, his sex partners were said to include blacks. In June 1775, Pinkney's *Virginia Gazette* sarcastically predicted that "The BLACK LADIES" would "be jollily entertained at the p[alace]." A year later, after Dunmore had assembled his mostly black army to battle the patriots, Purdie's *Virginia Gazette* claimed that the diminutive Dunmore and his army celebrated their landing on Gwynn's Island "with a promiscuous ball, which was opened, we hear, by a certain spruce little gentleman, with one of the black ladies." It is significant that both newspapers called the black women that joined Dunmore "ladies." This was meant ironically. White Virginians referred to adult female slaves as "women" or "wenches," but never as "ladies." In July 1776, Landon Carter of Richmond County heard a story about a patriot cannonball passing right between Dunmore's legs. Carter joked in his diary that perhaps the "shot cooled his latitudinous virility for that night at least."[27]

III

The actions that Governor Dunmore and Virginia slave rebels took in April 1775 inflamed the patriot movement not only in Virginia but in other colonies as well. Accounts of the Virginia slave plots, the taking of the gunpowder, and Dunmore's threat to ally with slave conspirators soon spread throughout the South. At the same time, the same routes carried reports of the battle of Lexington and Concord and rumors from London about an emancipation bill being proposed in Parliament. All of that news led many southerners of every race and condition to believe that the British government might soon forge some sort of alliance with enslaved Americans. Governor Dunmore's April 22 threat to "declare freedom to the slaves" was ambiguous (perhaps deliberately so). Had the governor planned to free only those slaves he could enlist in the British army—or *all* of them? Many southerners believed that Britain might adopt "an Act of Grace" by which enslaved Americans would "be all set free," as Charleston merchant Josiah Smith, Jr., reported on May 18. A group of Charleston slaves had apparent contemplated a rebellion since April, and the alleged conspiracy terrifie whites. The news from Virginia, Massachusetts, and London persuade many South Carolinians that the new governor, Lord William Campbe who was due to arrive in June, was going to free the slaves and "encourage a insurrection," as the governor himself later reported. The rumor kept whi South Carolinians on tenterhooks from early May until June 19, when Go ernor Campbell landed without incident.[28]

In North Carolina, too, the news from London, Massachusetts, and Vi ginia contributed to talk that the British government might soon incite slave revolt. In early July, when a widespread slave conspiracy was discover in Pitt, Craven, and Beaufort Counties, whites suspected that British officia had discussed strategy with the conspirators and made certain promises them. Allegedly, the plan was for blacks to start a rebellion on the night July 8. They were to kill their owners and then move westward toward t backcountry, where "they were to be received with open arms by a numb of Persons there appointed and armed by [the] Government for their Pr tection," according to Colonel John Simpson of Pitt County.[29]

Many enslaved Americans carried the rumors about British aid for bla insurrection one step further: they believed that the whole purpose of t expected British invasion of the South was to liberate them. In South Ca olina, a slave reported that Thomas Jeremiah, a free black fisherman a harbor pilot that hoped to link the British army with rebel slaves, to enslaved workers "the War was come to help the poor Negroes." Furth south in St. Bartholomew Parish at about the same time, a black preach named George told gatherings of slaves "That the Young King, meaning o Present One, came up with the Book, and was about to alter the World, a set the Negroes Free." George was executed. The widespread belief amo

27. Pinkney's *VG*, June 1, 1775; Purdie's *VG*, May 31, 1776; July 16, 1776, in Greene, ed., *Diary of Landon Carter*, II, 1058. Still later, Adam Stephen predicted that Dunmore would participate in a rumored British invasion of Virginia "in order to add some more odiferous beauties to his Ethopian seraglios." See Stephen to Richard Henry Lee, Apr. 22, 1777, in Harry M. Ward, *Major General Adam Stephen and the Cause of American Liberty* (Charlottesville, Va., 1989), 168; Brent Tarter, "Some Thoughts Arising from Trying to Find Out Who Was Governor Dunmore's Mistress" (manuscript). On the language used to describe enslaved women, see Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1996).

28. "Deposition of Pasteur," *VMHB*, XIII (1905), 49; Robert Beverley to William Fi hugh, July 20, 1775, Beverley Letterbook, LC; Josiah Smith to James Poyas, May 18, 1775, George Appleby, June 16, 1775, Josiah Smith Letterbook, Southern Historical Collectic University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Olwell, " 'Domestick Enemies,' " *JSH*, LV (198 Wood, " 'Liberty Is Sweet,' " in Young, ed., *Beyond the Revolution*, 166–168; Wood, " 'Taki Care of Business,' " in Crow and Tise, eds., *Southern Experience*, 280–287; Robert M. We *Colonial South Carolina: A History* (Millwood, N.Y., 1983), 200–203.

29. Wood, " 'The Dream Deferred,' " in Okihiro, ed., *In Resistance*, 175; Jeffrey J. Cro "Slave Rebelliousness and Social Conflict in North Carolina, 1775 to 1802," *WMQ*, 3d S XXXVII (1980), 83–86; Alan D. Watson, "Impulse toward Independence: Resistance a Rebellion among North Carolina Slaves, 1750–1775," *JNH*, LXIII (1978), 317–328. On t importance of the backcountry as a haven for emancipated slaves, see Wood, " 'Liberty Sweet,' " in Young, ed., *Beyond the Revolution*, 162.

black southerners that the British intended to free them was known to whites. John Drayton reported many years after the Revolution that Arthur Lee's assertion that the London government meant to incite an insurrection was "the more alarming; because, it was already known, [slaves] entertained ideas, that the present contest was for obliging us to give them their liberty."[30] The rumor that freeing the slaves was one of Great Britain's principal aims—perhaps even the primary one—might have been fabricated by black leaders in the hope that it would serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy. If a real slave revolt crystallized around the apocryphal story of a British army of liberation, British statesmen might indeed be drawn into an alliance with the slave rebels.

The deepest fears of white leaders, and the highest hopes of blacks, were not realized. Governor Dunmore did not proclaim a general emancipation. During the summer, however, he began assembling a small fleet to confront the patriots. The governor soon began to offer a quiet welcome to fugitive slaves such as the aforementioned Joseph Harris. Previously, fugitive slave advertisements appearing in the *Virginia Gazettes* commonly surmised that the escapee had gone to visit family. By September 1775, advertisers began to conjecture that their slaves had fled slavery altogether by joining the British.[31]

The story of one fugitive illustrated how the meaning of escape changed in the summer of 1775. On February 10, 1775, a fifteen-year-old girl (whose name is not known) was purchased by Virginia's official vintner, Andrew Estave. The teenager might have been one of the many young Virginians that were sold far away from their families as they reached adulthood. In any event, she found life with Estave so intolerable that, in her first few months as his property, she ran away three times. Each time the girl was recaptured and suffered forty lashes. The torture did not have its desired effect, so Estave suspended it and assumed that the fifteen-year-old would be thereby reconciled to her fate. She was not. Early in the summer of 1775, as Estave told

30. Frey, *Water from the Rock*, 58, 62; John Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution, from Its Commencement to the Year 1776, Inclusive; As Relating to the State of South-Carolina* . . . (Charleston, S.C., 1821), I, 231; William Lee to Robert Carter Nicholas, Mar. 6, 1775, in Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *Letters of William Lee* . . . , *1766–1783* (Brooklyn, 1891), I, 143; Henry M. Muhlenberg, in Graham Russell Hodges, ed., *The Black Loyalist Directory: African Americans in Exile after the American Revolution* (New York, 1996), xiii; James W. St. G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783–1870* (New York, 1976), 4.

31. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, 109, 132–133. White servants, especially convicts, also ran away and headed to the British naval squadron. See Francis Smith and James Tutt, advertisements, July 27, Nov. 2, 1775, Pinkney's *VG*; Dunmore to Dartmouth, June 25, 1775, in Davies, ed., *Documents of the American Revolution*, IX, 202–203.

readers of the *Virginia Gazette*, another of the women he owned "found my child, together with this cruel and unnatural wretch, concealed behind my barn, among the bushes, with her thumb thrust into the private parts of my poor child." Estave was summoned. "During the confusion," the fifteen-year-old escaped and fled to the governor's palace in Williamsburg, where she hoped to cast her lot with Dunmore. But the governor had himself recently fled—to the *Fowey*—and the teenager was soon returned to her master for punishment. First she suffered "eighty lashes, well laid on." Then Estave poured embers on her back. Although the teenager's escape attempt was unsuccessful, it is significant that she sought refuge in the building that until recently had symbolized the enforcement, not the evasion, of white rule.[32]

The new opportunities produced by the conflict among white Virginians inspired resistance even among those slaves that did not try to reach Dunmore. In the summer of 1775, the number of enslaved workers brought before the county courts for criminal trials reached a record level. Diarist Philip Fithian reported in June that slaves were "running off daily."[33] No doubt many white Virginians blamed the crime wave on Governor Dunmore.

In the fall of 1775, Dunmore gave white Virginians additional reasons to hate him and the government he represented. On November 14, at Kemp's Landing south of Norfolk, his outnumbered force, made up largely of former slaves, defeated three hundred members of the Princess Anne County militia, killing several militiamen and putting the rest to flight. The patriot

32. This story is based entirely on a newspaper notice that Estave published in order to justify what some of his white neighbors had called his "cruel and inhuman" treatment of the enslaved teenager (Pinkney's *VG*, July 20, 1775). We can only imagine how the story would change if we had testimony from the fifteen-year-old. Estave was colonial Virginia's official vintner. He was provided with slaves—perhaps including the fifteen-year-old he spoke of in his newspaper notice—and land by the House of Burgesses. See Bruce A. Ragsdale, *A Planters' Republic: The Search for Economic Independence in Revolutionary Virginia* (Madison, Wis., 1996), 141; Edward D. C. Campbell, Jr., "Of Vines and Wines: The Culture of the Grape in Virginia," *Virginia Cavalcade*, XXXIX (1990), 110. If the teenager had reached the governor's palace before Dunmore left, he might have been able to grant her sanctuary ("Charter of Williamsburg," in "The Building of Williamsburg," *WMQ*, 1st Ser., X [1901], 87). My thanks to Brent Tarter and John M. Hemphill, Jr., for this reference.

33. June 17, 1775, in Robert Greenhalgh Albion and Leonidas Dodson, eds., *Philip Vickers Fithian: Journal, 1775–1776: Written on the Virginia-Pennsylvania Frontier and in the Army around New York* (Princeton, N.J., 1934), 31. John Bailey's slaves Phil and Mial "received guilty verdicts in Southampton County conspiracy trials" (Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, 181, 183, 184). On July 3, 1775, William Johnson's slave Gloster was sentenced to death for burglary "but broke out of jail and vanished" (Randolph W. Church, comp., *Virginia Legislative Petitions: Bibliography, Calendar, and Abstracts from Original Sources, 6 May 1776–21 June 1782* [Richmond, Va., 1984], 24–25).

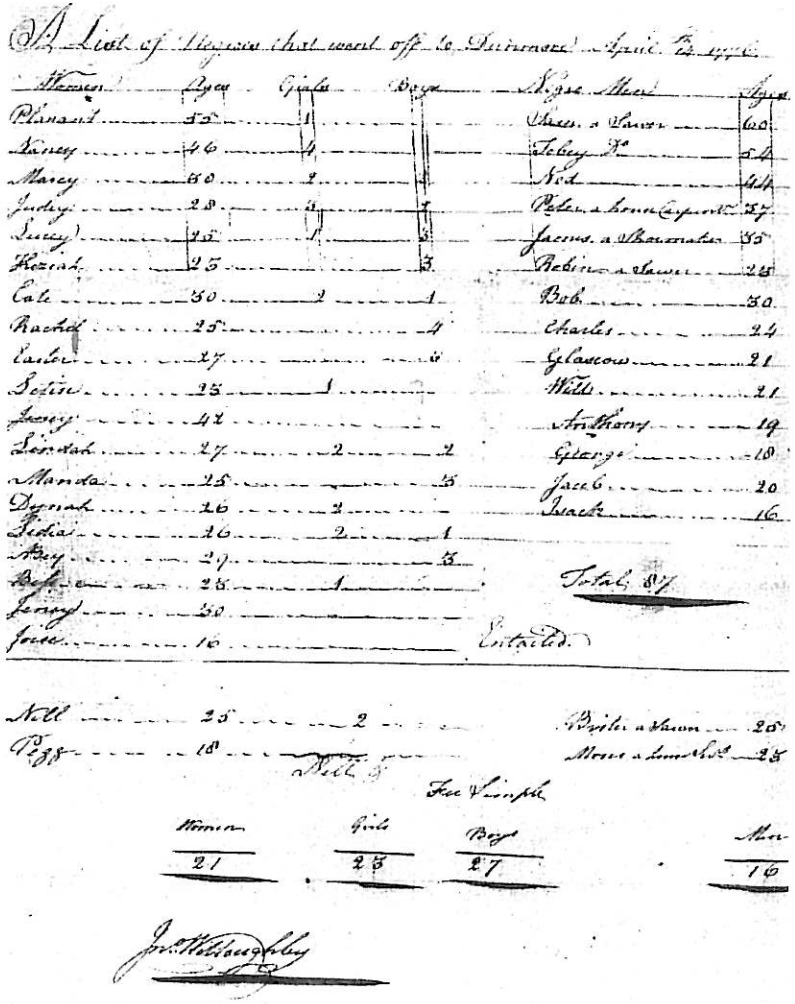
commander, Joseph Hutchings, was captured by two of his own former slaves. Kemp's Landing persuaded Dunmore that ex-slaves could be valuable allies indeed. The governor "was so ela[ted] with this Victory," John Page, vice-chairman of the Committee of Safety, reported, that he immediately published his famous proclamation declaring "all indented Servants, Negroes, or others, (appertaining to Rebels,) free that are able and willing to bear Arms, they joining His MAJESTY's Troops." About a thousand slaves escaped their owners and joined Dunmore. Enlisted in his Ethiopian Regiment and wearing uniforms that pointed up the hypocrisy of liberty-seeking patriots by proclaiming "Liberty to Slaves," former slaves soon made up the major part of the loyalist troops. In order to glimpse the psychological impact of emancipation on the people that reached Dunmore, it may be sufficient to note the case of a man whites called Yellow Peter. He escaped one day in 1775 or 1776 and was later seen "in Governor Dunmore's regiment with a musquet on his back and a sword by his side." He had changed his name to *Captain* Peter.[34]

Although Dunmore apparently meant to limit his emancipation offer to able-bodied men, half of those that joined him and survived the war were women and children. Among them was Francis Rice's slave Mary. One night in the spring of 1776, Mary, a resident of Hampton, grabbed up her three-and-a-half-year-old daughter Phillis and made a dash for the British lines. The two got in safely, survived the war, and settled afterward in Nova Scotia.[35]

Still, for the 99 percent of slaves that did *not* escape to Dunmore, his emancipation proclamation was in many ways a disappointment. Instead of

34. Jan. 2, 1776, Robert Honyman diary, LC; Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 64; John Page to Thomas Jefferson, [Nov.] 24, 1775, in Boyd et al., eds., *Papers of Jefferson*, I, 265; Dunmore, proclamation, Nov. 7, 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, IV, 334–335; Dixon and Hunter's *VG*, Dec. 2, 1775; James Jones, credit report on Edmund Taylor, "British Mercantile Claims, 1775–1803," *Virginia Genealogist*, XVI (1972), 104–105.

35. Hodges, ed., *Black Loyalist Directory* (Mary and Phillis Halstead are listed on p. 201); Quarles, *Negro in the Revolution*, 172; "*Women Embarked at* MILL POINT, *May 21, 1776, on board the* DUNLUCE," Dixon and Hunter's *VG*, August 31, 1776; Sarah Stroud, "Tracing Runaway Slaves from Norfolk County, Virginia, during the American Revolutionary War" (seminar paper, Randolph-Macon Woman's College, Fall 1995). During the American Revolution, many of the enslaved women that ran away took their children with them—an occurrence that was very rare before and after the war (Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* [New York, 1989], 52). For accounts of other black Americans that joined the British and settled in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone after the war, see Gary B. Nash, "Thomas Peters: Millwright and Deliverer," in David G. Sweet and Gary B. Nash, eds., *Struggle and Survival in Colonial America* (Berkeley, Calif., 1981), 69–85; Ellen Gibson Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks* (New York, 1976); Walker, *Black Loyalists*.


A List of Negroes that went off to Dunmore ... April ... 1776.

Names	Boys	Girls	Boys	Negro Men	Ages
Pleasant	5	1		Sawney a Pilot	60
Nancy	4	4		Toby Do	54
Mary	6	2		Ned	44
Judy	2	1		Peter a horse Captain	27
Lucy	2	1		Jacobs a Shoemaker	35
Hannah	2		3	Robin a Sawyer	28
Cate	5	2	1	Bob	30
Rachel	2		4	Charles	24
Easter	2		6	Glascow	21
Sophia	2	1		Will	21
Jenny	4			Anthony	19
Linda	2	2	2	Grange	18
Manda	2		5	Jack	20
Dyrinah	2	2		Isaac	16
Lydia	2	2	1		
Mary	2		5		
Bob	2	1		Total 87	
Jenny	3				
Jesse	1			Entered.	

Nell	2	2	Phillis a Sawyer	20
Rose	1		Moses a Sawyer	28

For Hampton

Women	Girls	Boys	Men
21	25	27	16

FIGURE 14. "A List of Negroes That Went Off to Dunmore."
Courtesy, Library of Virginia, Richmond

making the abolition of slavery a goal of the war, Dunmore had offered freedom only to those individuals that joined British forces. Even as Dunmore's decision to fight a conventional war destroyed the hopes of many black Virginians, it emboldened whites. To them, a black regiment in the British army was frightening, and the loss of enslaved workers would be financially devastating, but neither was as daunting as an official promise of general

emancipation.[36] By August 1776, patriots forced Dunmore's vastly outnumbered army to retreat to New York City.

The relief that white Virginians experienced when Dunmore chose not to dissolve the institution of slavery did not diminish their anger at him for allying with the slaves. As early as spring 1775, free subjects had begun literally to demonize their governor. In November, when he published his "Damned, infernal, Diabolical" emancipation proclamation, the process intensified. Citizens denounced Dunmore's "Diabolical scheme" and "his infernal tribe." "Our Devil of a Governor goes on at a Devil of a rate indeed," member of Congress Benjamin Harrison commented after reading the Virginia news.[37]

The deterioration in Dunmore's popularity among white Virginians was not the only political result of his proclamation. Thomas Jefferson spoke for other white Americans when he stated, in the largest and angriest complaint in the Declaration of Independence, that Dunmore's emancipation proclamation was a major cause of the American Revolution. (Although Jefferson's colleagues in Congress shortened the statement, they left it at the *end* of Jefferson's list of complaints—a case of saving the best for last.) All over Virginia, observers noted that the governor's freedom offer turned neutrals and even loyalists into patriots. "The Inhabitants of this Colony are deeply alarmed at this infernal Scheme," Philip Fithian wrote in his journal as he passed through the Virginia backcountry in late November. "It seems to quicken all in Revolution to overpower him however at every Risk." Richard Henry Lee told Catherine Macauley that "Lord Dunmores unparalleled conduct in Virginia has, a few Scotch excepted, united every Man in that large

36. Judith Bell to Alexander Speirs, Feb 16, 1776, Speirs of Elderslie Papers, Glasgow County Archives, Glasgow, Scotland.

37. House of Burgesses, address to Dunmore, June 19, 1775, *JHB, 1773–1776*, 256; Raleigh Downman to Samuel Athawes, July 10, 1775, Downman Letterbook, LC; John Hatley Norton to John Norton, [Dec. 9, 1775], in Frances Norton Mason, ed., *John Norton and Sons, Merchants of London and Virginia: Being the Papers from Their Counting-House for the Years 1750 to 1795* (Richmond, Va., 1937), 391; Thomas Nelson, Jr., to Mann Page, Jan. 4, 1776, Benjamin Harrison to Robert Carter Nicholas, Jan. 17, 1776, Francis Lightfoot Lee to Landon Carter, Feb. 12, 1776, all in Paul H. Smith et al., eds., *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774–1789* (Washington, D.C., 1976–), III, 30, 107, 237. For an additional reference to Dunmore as devilish, see George Washington to Richard Henry Lee, Dec. 26, 1775, in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, II, 611. A rumored British scheme to ally with Native Americans was also described as "Diabolical" and "infernal" (George Washington to John Augustine Washington, Oct. 13, 1775, Richard Henry Lee to George Washington, Nov. 13, 1775, in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, II, 161, 363).

Colony." Archibald Cary agreed. "The Proclamation from L[or]d D[unmore], has had a most extensive good consequence," he wrote; white "Men of all ranks resent the pointing a dagger to their Throats, thru the hands of their Slaves." Cary noted that, by endangering loyalists as well as patriots, Dunmore's proclamation turned many of the former into the latter.[38]

Although those patriot writers' comments on Dunmore's proclamation might have reflected some measure of wishful thinking about its impact on neutral and loyalist whites, it did convert many of them. It even pushed two members of the colony's powerful Executive Council, Robert "Councillor" Carter and William Byrd III, from the loyalist to the patriot camp. Originally, Byrd had offered to lead British troops. After Dunmore confirmed his alliance with black Virginians, Byrd and Carter both became patriots, and Colonel Byrd tendered his services to the rebels.[39]

Some of Byrd's fellow conservatives initially believed that, as soon as Dunmore's superiors in London learned about his emancipation proclamation, they would repudiate it and recall him. At the end of 1775, Landon Carter assured himself that it was "not to be doubted" that Dunmore would soon receive "some missive commission to Silence all his iniquities both male and female." (That was yet another reference to Dunmore's alleged miscegenation.)[40] But the winter of 1775–1776 came and went with no evidence that anyone at Whitehall objected to Dunmore's decision to offer freedom to the slaves. The ministry's silence implied consent. Although Dunmore was the only royal governor that made a formal offer of freedom to his colony's slaves before July 4, 1776, other British leaders informally cooperated with slaves and thereby helped motivate white Americans to declare Independence. In North Carolina in June 1776, patriot James Iredell

38. Nov. 28, 1775, in Albion and Dodson, eds., *Philip Vickers Fithian: Journal*, 135; Richard Henry Lee to Catherine Macauley, Nov. 29, 1775, Archibald Cary to Richard Henry Lee, Dec. 24, 1775, in Paul P. Hoffman, ed., *The Lee Family Papers, 1742–1795* (microfilm, Charlottesville, Va., 1966); Page Smith, *A New Age Now Begins: A People's History of the American Revolution* (New York, 1976), I, 704; Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (Garden City, N.Y., 1978), 71, 75.

39. William Byrd III to Jeffery Amherst, July 30, 1775, in Tinling, ed., *Correspondence of the Three William Byrds*, II, 812–813; Feb. 25, 1776, in Greene, ed., *Diary of Landon Carter*, II, 989; *Revolutionary Virginia*, V, 386n–387n; Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 66; Thomas Jefferson to William Wirt, Sept. 29, 1816, *Reminiscences of Patrick Henry in the Letters of Thomas Jefferson to William Wirt* (Philadelphia, 1911), 29; Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680–1800* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986), 308; Jeannie Ford Dissette, "Slavery and the Coming of the Revolution in Virginia, 1774–1776" (seminar paper, University of Pennsylvania, 1972), 28–49.

40. Greene, ed., *Diary of Landon Carter*, II, 960.

said that, when royal officials encouraged enslaved Americans "to cut our throats," they "added spurs to our Patriotism."[41]

Students of the causes of the American Revolution often underestimate the contribution of enslaved Virginians, and one reason is that slaves are seldom mentioned until November 1775, when Dunmore issued his proclamation. But the governor's proclamation was only part of a process that had begun much earlier. Slaves had always resisted their condition. In 1774, they began conspiring to exploit the opportunities presented to them by the imperial crisis. The following April, as rumors of a wide-ranging insurrection plot circulated, a group of slaves knocked on the governor's door and offered to cast their lot with his. And slaves kept knocking all through the summer and into the fall. It was only after fugitive slaves had proven their skills as soldiers, sailors, and raiders that Dunmore officially offered them freedom. The slaves' insurgency played an important role in persuading Dunmore to ally with them and thus in prodding white Virginians further along the road to Independence.[42]

41. It was not just in Virginia that Dunmore's emancipation proclamation helped alienate whites from Britain. In Maryland, loyalist William Eddis observed that Dunmore's "measure of emancipating the negroes has excited an universal ferment" and would "greatly strengthen the general confederacy." Edward Rutledge of South Carolina expected that the "proclamation issued by Lord Dunmore" would tend "more effectually to work an eternal separation between Great Britain and the Colonies,—than any other expedient, which could possibly have been thought of." In Philadelphia, a play depicting Dunmore welcoming black recruits became part of the library of anti-British propaganda. In the play, *The Fall of British Tyranny*, by Philadelphia silversmith John Leacock, "Lord Kidnapper" (Dunmore) congratulates himself on raising "rebel against rebel" and says he expects his emancipation proclamation "will greatly intimidate the rebels—internal enemies are worse than open foes." See Jan. 16, 1776, in William Eddis, *Letters from America*, ed. Aubrey C. Land (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), 133; Edward Rutledge to Ralph Izard, Dec. 8, 1775, in *Correspondence of Mr. Ralph Izard*, I, 165; [John Leacock], *The Fall of British Tyranny; or, American Liberty Triumphant: The First Campaign . . .* (Philadelphia, 1776), 48; Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720–1840* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 46; Quarles, *Negro in the Revolution*, 20, 20n; Olwell, "'Domestick Enemies,'" *JSH*, LV (1989), 41; James Iredell, untitled essay, in Don Higginbotham, ed., *The Papers of James Iredell* (Raleigh, N.C., 1976–), I, 409; Crow, "Slave Rebelliousness," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXVII (1980), 83.

42. To be sure, Dunmore's emancipation proclamation is often mentioned as a cause of the Revolution. See Burk, Jones, and Girardin, *History of Virginia*, IV, 134n; Eckenrode, *Revolution in Virginia*, 73; Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and His Time*, I, *Jefferson the Virginian* (Boston, 1948–1981), 215; Billings, Selby, and Tate, *Colonial Virginia*, 343; Clifford Dowdey, *The Great Plantation: A Profile of Berkeley Hundred and Plantation Virginia from Jamestown to Appomattox* (New York, 1957), 230–231; Campbell, *History of Virginia*, 634; John C. Miller, *Origins of the American Revolution* (Boston, 1943), 478; Virginius Dabney, *Virginia: The New Dominion* (Garden City, N.Y., 1971), 131; Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York, 1997), 26.

Several students of the black freedom struggle have also asserted that the slaves helped push whites into the American Revolution. See Quarles, *Negro in the Revolution*, 19; Wood, "'Liberty Is Sweet,'" in Young, ed., *Beyond the Revolution*, 171; Frey, *Water from the Rock*, 78. But they have focused on African Americans themselves and have not presented the abundant evidence that the slaves helped provoke whites to declare Independence.

For a similar argument—that enslaved Americans, through their actions, helped push Abraham Lincoln into issuing his Emancipation Proclamation—see W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (New York, 1935), chap. 4; Vincent Harding, *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York, 1981), chap. 11.

43. W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), 2.

44. Anonymous letter, Nov. 30, 1775, in Force, comp., *American Archives*, 4th Ser., III, 1387; anonymous letter, Nov. 23, 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, IV, 459–462.

When Americans think of slaves and sailing ships, they inevitably imagine the slaves crammed in the hold, enduring the indescribable Middle Passage. It is important to remember that some enslaved Americans were up on the decks of colonial vessels, and that some, like Joseph Harris, even piloted them.[43] That simple fact must, in any accurate description of Virginia in 1775 and 1776, acquire the power of metaphor, for black Virginians were not simply swept along on the political currents. Through their actions, they helped steer Virginia into the American Revolution.

"Whoever considers well the meaning of the word Rebel," an anonymous white critic of Dunmore's proclamation wrote in late November, "will discover that the author of the Proclamation is now himself in actual rebellion, having armed our slaves against us, and having excited them to an insurrection."[44] In modern terms, that author might have said that white Virginians' struggle against Dunmore and his Ethiopian Regiment was not a revolution but a counterrevolution. The war in Virginia pitted two classes, slaveowners and slaves, against each other. Thus, in that sense (as well as others), Virginia's Revolutionary experience fits the Progressive historians' interpretation of the American Revolution as a conflict over both home rule and who would rule at home.

IV

White Americans also denounced British cooperation with American Indians. The same native diplomats that indirectly advanced the Independence movement by instigating the British government to adopt an anti-

expansionist land policy later helped alienate white Virginians against Britain in a more direct way. As the year 1775 opened, the Native American effort to form an anti-British coalition still had not succeeded. But as the shots fired at Lexington and Concord echoed through Indian country early that summer, the coalition builders spotted an opportunity: as the patriot rebellion spread, the imperial government was likely to need their help. An alliance with the British would give them a crucial asset that they had lacked during the late 1760s and early 1770s—a steady supply of arms and ammunition. By June, British officials were making overtures. James Wood, who toured the Ohio country as the representative of the House of Burgesses, learned that an "English Officer" had held a "Great Council" with several nations and told them "that the Virginians would take the whole Country if they did not all join together against them." By the end of his journey, Wood was convinced that "the Indians are forming a General Confederacy against the Colony."[45]

John Connolly, Dunmore's representative at Fort Pitt, might have heard about the Ohio Indians' revived effort at an antisettler league by early July, when he set out for Williamsburg to meet with the governor. Certainly Dunmore and Connolly knew about the natives' earlier coalition-building efforts, and that knowledge entered into an important decision Dunmore made at the end of the summer. At about the same time that he began to welcome the slaves that escaped to his little fleet on Chesapeake Bay, Dunmore sent Connolly to Boston. The governor wanted Commander in Chief Thomas Gage to send Connolly on to Detroit, where he would meet with representatives of the Indian nations between the Great Lakes and the Ohio River. He would ask them to join in a massive attack against the Virginia frontier. The Franco-American *habitants* that lived in Detroit and other former French settlements were also to be recruited for the attack. Then, on April 20, 1776, the first anniversary of the night Dunmore took the gunpowder from the provincial munitions depot in Williamsburg, Connolly and his red and white troops would meet Dunmore and his black and white troops at Alexandria. From that base they would march forth to conquer the Virginia patriots.

Gage approved the plan, but as Connolly and two accomplices, Englishman J. F. D. Smyth and British Indian agent Alexander Cameron, headed west across Maryland, they were captured. A patriot committeeman discovered a copy of Connolly's plan hidden in the horn of his saddle. The plan showed that, in addition to allying with Indians and habitants, Connolly hoped to enlist white Virginians by offering them "a confirmation of titles to their lands."[46] Connolly and Dunmore knew that the Proclamation of 1763 had virtually shut down Virginia land speculation, and they now proposed to provide relief from the proclamation to any militia officer that would take up arms in support of the government that had promulgated it.

Although Dunmore's offer to confirm land titles showed that he had learned a great deal about white Virginians during his four years in their colony, another element in the plan that he and Connolly devised—the proposed alliance with the Ohio Indians—indicated that he had not learned enough. The revelation in November 1775 that Dunmore had encouraged Native Americans to use violence against white colonists coincided with the publication of his emancipation proclamation and helped to seal his fate in the minds of his constituents. In John Leacock's *Fall of British Tyranny*, the character "Kidnapper" (Dunmore) muses: "If we can stand our ground this winter, and burn all their towns that are accessible to our ships, and Colonel Connolly succeeds in his plan . . . we shall be able to make a descent where we please, and drive the rebels like hogs into a pen."[47]

Both Dunmore's emancipation offer to the slaves and the alliance he tried to form with the Ohio Indians were in large part dramatic responses to the rebellious activities that those two groups had already initiated. Thus the Indian and slave rebels—the fomenters of "domestic insurrections"—added fuel to the Independence movement in Virginia.

45. James Wood, journal, July 20, 28, Wood to Peyton Randolph, August 1775, in Reuben Gold Thwaites and Louise Phelps Kellogg, eds., *The Revolution on the Upper Ohio, 1775–1777* (Madison, Wis., 1908), 44, 54, 66. Shawnee headmen later confirmed Wood's suspicion that the English officer was the official representative of the commanding officer at Fort Detroit, from whom he brought "a Belt and String of Black Wampum" (Aug. 2, 1775, *The Revolution on the Upper Ohio*, 62).

46. Wood, " 'Liberty Is Sweet,' " in Young, ed., *Beyond the Revolution*, 169.

47. Leacock, *Fall of British Tyranny*, 49. On British cooperation with Indians as a cause of white Americans' growing alienation from Britain, see Wood, " 'Liberty Is Sweet,' " in Young, ed., *Beyond the Revolution*, 169; Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 92; Pinkney's *VG*, Aug. 3, 1775.

Free colonists were also angry at Dunmore for emancipating and arming convict servants. See Leacock, *Fall of British Tyranny*, 45; "A British American," Dixon and Hunter's *VG*, Feb. 17, 1776.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly. . . . the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the Dangers of Invasion from without, and Convulsions within.
—Declaration of Independence

6 GENTLEMEN VERSUS FARMERS

The American Revolution is generally remembered as a supremely confident step. But for many members of the Virginia gentry, the final step along the road to revolution—the May 1776 vote to ask Congress to declare Independence—was less a display of confidence than an act of desperation. "For God's sake declare the Colonies independant at once, and save us from ruin," John Page urged Thomas Jefferson in April 1776. For gentlemen like Page, the decision for Independence was not really a decision at all; it was forced upon them by their fears.[1]

Gentry Virginians in fact had much to fear in the spring of 1776. They were in the midst of a war against a group of black and white loyalists that might, at any moment, receive support from a British invasion force. Nor were loyalists and redcoats the only problems: gentlemen were becoming increasingly concerned about smallholders and poor whites. In May, Francis Lightfoot Lee said he hoped a Virginia convention would "make such an establishment, as will put a stop to the rising disorders." In other words, the delegates should reestablish government in Virginia. But of course they could not create a new government until they declared Independence.[2] If poor and middling Virginians had obeyed the gentry's orders, gentlemen would have had one less reason to remove Virginia from the British Empire.

Insurgent Virginia farmers pushed the gentry toward Independence in another way as well. The colonists' boycott of British trade and the British government's retaliatory attacks on other colonial commerce virtually halted Virginia's imports and exports and led to shortages that led to riots. The only solution was to revive international trade. Another pressing reason for commercial revival was that it was only from overseas that Virginia's leaders could obtain the weapons and ammunition they needed to put a quick end to the Revolutionary War, which was itself the preeminent cause of agrarian unrest. The problem was that no foreign government would open a trade with the colonies until they declared themselves independent states.

Thus smallholders and poor whites pushed gentlemen toward Independence in two ways. First, gentlemen believed that they stood a better chance of suppressing disorder if they revived government, which they could only do by declaring Independence. Second, Independence was a prerequisite for a commercial alliance with France. Such an alliance would allow gentlemen both to satisfy the demands of the rioters and to obtain the arms and ammunition that they needed to put a quick end to the burdensome Revolutionary War.

I

As noted earlier, Virginia gentlemen believed that they could not control the 40 percent of the population that was enslaved unless they preserved unity among whites. In 1775 and 1776, white solidarity began to dissolve.

Although one reason gentlemen established independent volunteer companies in late 1774 and early 1775 was to prevent "Insurrection," many of the companies themselves soon got out of hand.[3] In the spring of 1775, when Governor Dunmore emptied the colony's largest gunpowder depot and threatened to free Virginia's slaves, independent companies mustered all over the colony. A loyalist observed that the popular clamor to confront the governor threw elites into "a terrible panic." It was only with great difficulty, Thomas Jefferson reported, that elites were able "to moderate the almost ungovernable fury of the people" and prevail upon them "to return to their

1. John Page to Thomas Jefferson, Apr. 6, 1776, in Julian P. Boyd et al., eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, N.J., 1950–), I, 287. Charles Lee, commander in chief of patriot troops in the South, sent a similar plea to Richard Henry Lee, who would soon introduce Virginia's Independence resolve at the Continental Congress. "By the eternal God," General Lee wrote Richard Henry Lee on May 10, 1776, "if you do not declare immediately for positive independence We are all ruin'd." See Paul P. Hoffman, ed., *The Lee Family Papers, 1742–1795* (microfilm, Charlottesville, Va., 1966); Charles Lee to William Byrd III, Apr. 1, [1776], in Marion Tinling, ed., *The Correspondence of the Three William Byrds of Westover, Virginia, 1684–1776* (Charlottesville, Va., 1977), II, 818; Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York, 1997), 86–88.

2. Lee to Carter, Apr. 9, May 21, 1776, in Paul H. Smith et al., eds., *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774–1789* (Washington, D.C., 1985–), III, 500–501, IV, 57.

3. Virginia Convention, Mar. 25, 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, II, 375. Several counties had already established independent companies.

habitations." Patrick Henry's Hanover company had initially defied patriot leaders' urgent order to turn back. Williamsburg Quaker Edward Stabler thought Henry had been "guilty of such a rash disorderly action as I'm affraid the whole Colony will suffer for."[4]

At first, the independent companies had been made up entirely of gentlemen. Like gentlemen's clubs, they had chosen their officers democratically. By the summer of 1775, the independent companies consisted mostly of smallholders, yet many were still internally democratic. By that time, the companies had become far too independent, in the gentry's estimation. George Gilmer, an officer in Albemarle County, acknowledged that "many members are rather disorderly." In July 1775, a Chesterfield County company refused to submit to the county's militia officers. The gentry-run county committee denounced this "disorderly behaviour."[5]

Restraining the independent companies was one of the principal goals of the third Virginia Convention, which gathered in Richmond on July 17, 1775. Delegate George Mason proposed that the convention "melt down all the volunteer and independent companies into [one] great establishment" in which officers would be appointed, not elected. When delegate Francis Lightfoot Lee warned his colleagues not to create a large and expensive army, which he said would "occasion great discontent" among taxpayers, the convention tried to obtain the benefits of a regular army for the price of independent volunteer companies. It decided to hire only a thousand full-time soldiers and place the chief burden of defending white Virginians on eight thousand "minutemen" that would be paid only during training sessions and military emergencies.[6]

The one thousand places in the regular army were filled quickly, for the army promised poor farmers a living wage at a time when nonexportation prevented them from selling their produce. The minuteman battalions were another matter. George Gilmer, who, as captain of an Albemarle County minuteman company, was responsible for recruiting soldiers for it, feared that, when he marched off to battle, he would look back to find no one following. "I know not from what cause, but every denomination of the people seem backward" in enlisting in the service, Gilmer said. Even men that had volunteered for the Albemarle independent companies refused to become minutemen. "[The] Convention have altered the name Volunteers to that of Minute Men, and behold! what a wondrous effect it has had. Out of near three hundred Volunteers there are how many Minute Men? So few that I am afraid to name them." All over the province, farmers refused to join the minuteman battalions. "Virginia is in the greatest confusion," Fielding Lewis wrote George Washington in November 1775; with "only one Battalion of Minute Men compleat, and little prospect of the others being so, a convention is daily expected to regulate it."[7] Gilmer learned that some smallholders

4. James Parker to Charles Steuart, May 6, 1775, Steuart Papers, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh (microfilm at LVA); Jefferson to William Small, May 7, 1775, in Boyd et al., eds., *Papers of Jefferson*, I, 166n–167n (crossed out); Michael A. McDonnell, "The Politics of Mobilization in Revolutionary Virginia: Military Culture and Political and Social Relations, 1774–1783" (D.Phil. diss., Balliol College, Oxford University, 1995), 42–43, 48; Edward Stabler to Israel Pemberton, May 16, 1775, Pemberton Papers, XXVII, 144, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; "Cato," Pinkney's *VG*, Oct. 19, 1775 (supplement).

5. George Gilmer to Thomas Jefferson, [July 26 or 27, 1775], in Boyd et al., eds., *Papers of Jefferson*, I, 237; Chesterfield County committee, memorial to Virginia Convention, [July 1775?], in *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 339; William E. White, "The Independent Companies of Virginia, 1774–1775," *VMHB*, LXXXVI (1978), 160–161; John E. Selby, *The Revolution in Virginia, 1775–1783* (Charlottesville, Va., 1988), 45–49; McDonnell, "Politics of Mobilization," chap. 1. In frontier Botetourt County, the independent company undermined Virginia's solidarity with the embattled farmers of New England by pointedly refusing to march beyond the borders of the Old Dominion (Bedford County committee [June 26?], 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 230). The company's resolution reflected the localism that was analyzed by Albert H. Tillson, Jr., in his article, "The Militia and Popular Political Culture in the Upper Valley of Virginia, 1740–1775," *VMHB*, XCIV (1986), 285–306. Cf. *Revolutionary Virginia*, III, 231n–232n; Tillson, *Gentry and Common Folk: Political Culture on a Virginia Frontier, 1740–1789* (Lexington, Ky., 1991).

6. Mason to Martin Cockburn, July 24, 1775, in Robert A. Rutland, ed., *The Papers of George Mason, 1725–1792* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1970), I, 241; Francis Lightfoot Lee to Landon Carter, Aug. 3, 1775, in Dale E. Benson, "Wealth and Power in Virginia, 1774–1776: A Study of the Organization of Revolt" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maine, 1970), 239n. The summer 1775 convention agreed to pay not only the soldiers in the new military establishment but also the militiamen that had participated in Dunmore's War. Earlier in the year, Adam Stephen had warned that, if the militiamen were not paid, it would "come to the Shedding of Blood" (to Richard Henry Lee, Feb. 17, 1775, in Hoffman, ed., *Lee Family Papers*).

7. Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 61; Jean B. Lee, *The Price of Nationhood: The American Revolution in Charles County* (New York, 1994), 163; "Address of George Gilmer to the Inhabitants of Albemarle," [Fall 1775], in "Papers, Military and Political, 1775–1778, of George Gilmer, M.D., of 'Pen Park,' Albemarle County, Va.," VHS *Collections*, N.S., VI (1887), 122; Fielding Lewis to George Washington, Nov. 14, 1775, in W. W. Abbot et al., eds., *The Papers of George Washington*, Revolutionary War Series (Charlottesville, Va., 1985–), II, 371–372; Archibald Campbell to St. George Tucker, Oct. 10, 1775, in William Bell Clark et al., eds., *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* (Washington, D.C., 1966–), II, 395; Archibald Cary to Thomas Jefferson, Oct. 31, 1775, in Boyd et al., eds., *Papers of Jefferson*, I, 249; James Freeland to John Tailyour, Oct. 20, 1775, Accomack County committee to Virginia Convention, Nov. 30, 1775, Fairfax County committee to George Mason and Charles Broadwater, Dec. 9, 1775, Virginia Convention, Jan. 10, 1776, all in *Revolutionary Virginia*, IV, 246, 498, V, 89, 372; Jan. 2, Mar. 17, 1776, Robert Honyman diary, LC. The smallholders' reluctance to become minutemen ensured that the battalions would be rife with mutiny and

not only declined to become minutemen but made "endeavors to dissuade [others] from the service." Even a gentleman, William Lyne, was accused of "endeavoring to prejudice the minute service, and exciting a mutiny."[8]

The minuteman battalions were unattractive to smallholders for precisely the same reason that they appealed to gentlemen: their purpose, celebrated by George Gilmer and lamented by common soldiers, was to replace the democracy of the independent volunteer companies with "proper subordination." Where the officers of the independent volunteer companies had been chosen by the troops they commanded, minuteman officers were selected by special district committees chosen by the county committees. Several of the district committees' appointments were considered "improper," and they provoked "many disorders."[9] Smallholders also objected to the convention's decision to exempt anyone that paid taxes on more than three slaves (or other workers) from militia duty and thus also from service as minutemen and slave patrollers. As Gilmer paraphrased the soldiers' view of the slaveholders' exemption, "It is calculated to exempt the gentlemen and to throw the whole burthen on the poor."[10]

A similar sense of emerging class consciousness was revealed in smallholders' objections to the way in which minutemen would be paid. It was not that they wished to earn more; they wanted officers to earn less. Top officers in the minuteman battalions were paid eleven times as much as common soldiers. In defending these high salaries, George Gilmer did *not* suggest that officers contributed more to Virginia's defense than common soldiers did. Instead, he said that the purpose of the pay disparity was to set officers apart from common soldiers. "Without some distinction there can be no subordination," Gilmer argued, and, unless some subordinate themselves to others, "no discipline can be observed." The whole purpose of the minuteman battalions was, in fact, to obviate the need for the undisciplined independent companies. For their part, smallholders greatly favored the structure of the independent companies, where they and gentlemen had served side by side, without (in Gilmer's words) "partiality or distinction shewn." After the summer 1775 convention created the minuteman battalions, smallholders longed for the old system in which there had been "no pay at all or officers, but all marching *promiscuously* and on *equal* footing as volunteers," as Gilmer understood.[11]

The most powerful force keeping smallholders out of the minuteman battalions was its enormous demand on their time. New recruits had to leave their homes for twenty days of training; after that, minutemen had to train for another twenty-four days each year. No man that was vital to his family's productive process—and that included almost everyone below the rank of gentleman—could afford such a long absence. For minutemen, as the Accomack County committee explained, "the time of Encampment [is] Such that it must unavoidably break in upon their Whole years Business while they are only Allowed pay for the actual time of Duty."[12]

Thus the minuteman battalions, which the gentry had viewed as the solution to the problem of the disorderly independent companies, actually provoked still more dissent. The convention that gathered in Richmond in December 1775 had to yield to the smallholders' demand that it reduce dramatically the amount of time that minutemen spent in training. Fearing that the captains of the minute companies would still have trouble filling their quotas, the convention further sought to reduce its dependence on the minutemen by quadrupling the size of the regular army. The convention also required men that paid taxes on four or more workers, who had been

desertion (Leven Powell to Sarah Powell, Dec. 18, 1775 [typescript], Jan. 27, 1776, Leven Powell Papers, box 1, folder 1, William and Mary). The best sources on the minutemen are McDonnell, "Politics of Mobilization," chap. 2; McDonnell, "Popular Mobilization and Political Culture in Revolutionary Virginia: The Failure of the Minutemen and the Revolution from Below," *Journal of American History*, LXXXV (1998), 946–981.

8. Gilmer, "Address to the Inhabitants of Albemarle," VHS *Collections*, N.S., VI (1887), 123. Although a patriot subcommittee in King and Queen County found Lyne innocent of encouraging mutiny, it said he had "imprudently dropped expressions tending to injure the minute service" (King and Queen County committee, Dec. 9, 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, V, 92–93).

9. Gilmer, "Address to the Inhabitants of Albemarle," VHS *Collections*, N.S., VI (1887), 122, 127; White, "Independent Companies," *VMHB*, LXXXVI (1978), 149, 151–152, 161; *SAL*, IX, 9–35, esp. 24; Benson, "Wealth and Power," 312n–313n; Cumberland County voters, petition, Dec. 22, 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, V, 215; Fielding Lewis to George Washington, Nov. 14, 1775, in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, II, 372; Archibald Cary to Thomas Jefferson, Oct. 31, 1775, in Boyd et al., eds., *Papers of Jefferson*, I, 249.

10. Virginia's militia law provided a similar exemption, but only for "bona fide . . . overseer[s]" (*SAL*, VII, 93, IX, 28). It seemed to smallholders that "none" of the gentlemen of Albemarle "enter[ed] the service but as officers" (Gilmer, "Address to the Inhabitants of Albemarle," VHS *Collections*, N.S., VI [1887], 122–123). The criticism was apparently valid. Fielding Lewis acknowledged to George Washington that "young Gentlemen [were] not setting a good example by inlisting" (Nov. 14, 1775, in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, II, 372).

11. Gilmer, in McDonnell, "Politics of Mobilization," 81; Leven Powell to Sarah Powell, Dec. 5, 1775, Leven Powell Papers, VHS.

12. Accomack County committee, Nov. 30, 1775, Lunenburg County inhabitants, petition to Virginia Convention, presented May 11, 1776, both in *Revolutionary Virginia*, VI, 475; *SAL*, IX, 20; McDonnell, "Politics of Mobilization," 73–76.

exempted from all military duty by the summer 1775 convention, to serve their time on the slave patrols.[13]

Yet the virtual abolition of the minuteman battalions did not solve the problem of disorder, for gentlemen still had the regular army to worry about. On October 28, Major Alexander Spotswood of the Second Regiment "Observed with Concern" that his soldiers "Straggle into Town and are Disorderly there." On the same day, Spotswood ordered a court-martial for two camp followers, Florence Mahoney and Ann Jones, "for Rioting after sun set." A week later, Bernard Cary was court-martialed for "Spreading and Incouraging Mutiny." On December 19, regimental commander William Woodford ordered that officers make sure the chimneys of the barracks and other buildings not catch fire, lest "the confusion that hapens by Accidence might occasion mutiny amongst the men."[14]

Perhaps the gravest conflict between officers and common soldiers began in December, when the gentry-dominated convention repudiated the only gentleman that was extremely popular among the soldiers—Patrick Henry. Although Henry had been elected at the summer 1775 convention as supreme commander of the Virginia army, when the winter 1775–1776 convention persuaded the Continental Congress to take most of Virginia's full-time soldiers into continental pay, it failed to recommend that Henry remain commander in chief. Congress gave the command to William Woodford. When Henry learned of his demotion, he resigned his commission, whereupon the soldiers in his regiment "assembled in a tumultuous manner" and demanded discharges.[15] The soldiers' anger (allegedly inflamed by Henry) "begot a presenting of Pieces" at officers, as Landon Carter reported. Eventually the men stood down, but the mutiny unnerved Virginia gentlemen. It was mid-March before Richard Henry Lee could celebrate that "The mutinous spirit of our Soldiery" was "so well subdued."[16]

Less than a month after the Henry mutiny, a rifle company from Augusta County set fire to the ferryhouse where they were stationed and committed other "Seditious and Mutinous" acts. When the court-martial that examined the Augusta men's actions returned a verdict that Lieutenant Colonel Hugh Mercer considered too lenient, he set the verdict aside, jailed two of the riflemen, and threatened to jail others. He told guards that, if any of the prisoners tried to escape, they were to "fire on the offenders With such Effect as to kill them if possible." Less than a week later, Mercer had to apologize publicly to the Augusta riflemen for his heavy-handedness. In the midst of that crisis, officers of the Virginia line selected, for the first time, a daily password that was neither a place nor a person. The watchword was "discipline." That certainly reflected the officers' most cherished goal—but not the reality on the ground. In May, a soldier in the Sixth Regiment was found guilty of "the most Henious and Dangerous of all Capitol Crimes, Mutiny," but escaped with only "slight punishment." General Charles Lee set aside the court-martial's verdict and discharged the soldier.[17]

The only certain way to suppress the disorderly behavior of the Virginia soldiers would be to end the war quickly. Victory would require guns and ammunition, but those were in such short supply that some soldiers were armed with spears, clubs, and slingshots.[18] The only way to satisfy Virginia's

13. *SAL*, IX, 86, 89; Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 78. Many smallholders were still angry that slaveholders were exempt from other military service. Petitions were sent to the next convention, which withdrew the exemption. See Lunenburg County inhabitants, petition to Virginia Convention, presented May 11, 1776, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, VI, 474–477; Chesterfield, Lunenberg, Mecklenburg, Amelia, and Caroline County freeholders, petitions, [May–June 1776], in Randolph W. Church, comp., *Virginia Legislative Petitions: Bibliography, Calendar, and Abstracts from Original Sources, 6 May 1776–21 June 1782* (Richmond, Va., 1984), 4, 9, 17, 24.

14. Oct. 28, Nov. 4, Dec. 19, 1775, in Brent Tarter, ed., "The Orderly Book of the Second Virginia Regiment, September 27, 1775–April 15, 1776," *VMHB*, LXXXV (1977), 175, 179, 309.

15. Purdie's *VG*, Mar. 1, 1776; Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 88–89. Henry's resignation "occasioned some disturbance in his regiment," Leven Powell told his wife Sarah (Mar. 5, 1776, in Robert C. Powell, ed., *A Biographical Sketch of Col. Leven Powell, Including His Correspondence during the Revolutionary War* [Alexandria, Va., 1877], 20).

16. Patrick Henry and his supporters claimed that Henry himself had talked the mutineers into laying down their weapons and then spent most of the night reconciling them to their new leaders. Landon Carter heard a different version of the story: the mutiny had been forcibly suppressed by Thomas Bullit, the army's adjutant general. "Tom Bullet collared a man or two and called out to a party well disposed who came in to his assistance and Clappt these two fellows under a close confinement," Carter said. See Mar. 12, 1776, in Jack P. Greene, ed., *The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752–1778* (Charlottesville, Va., 1965), II, 999; John Page to [Richard Henry Lee], Apr. 12, 1776, in Hoffman, ed., *Lee Family Papers*. For further evidence of insurgency within the army, see Nathaniel Cocke, advertisement, Dixon and Hunter's *VG*, Apr. 20, 1776. On the subsiding of the discontent that surrounded Henry's demotion, see Richard Henry Lee to John Page, Mar. 19, 1776, in Smith, ed., *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, III, 408n.

17. Mar. 11, 14, 17, 1776, "Orderly Book of the Company of Captain George Stubblefield, Fifth Virginia Regiment, from March 3, 1776, to July 10, 1776, Inclusive," VHS *Collections*, N.S., VI (1887), 150–154; Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 89; May 10, 1776, in Charles Campbell, ed., *The Orderly Book of That Portion of the American Army . . . under the Command of General Andrew Lewis . . .* (Richmond, Va., 1860), 36.

18. Charles Lee to John Hancock, Apr. 19, 1776, Andrew Lewis to Charles Lee, May 27, 1776, *The Lee Papers* (New York, 1871–1874), I, 433, II, 44; Apr. 7, 1776, in Campbell, ed.,

need for guns and ammunition would be to establish commercial ties to a European nation.[19] Would European rulers be willing to trade with the thirteen colonies while they officially remained part of the British Empire? Patriot leaders believed that they probably would not. Although Louis XVI and other monarchs were delighted at the prospect of direct trade with the British tobacco colonies, they feared that it would lead to hostilities with Britain. They were unwilling to run this risk until the Americans convinced them that their separation from Britain was permanent, and that could be demonstrated only by making it official.

Like soldiers, civilians sometimes refused to bear the unequal burdens placed on them by the war. Starting in December 1774, free Virginians had initiated nonimportation in order to exert pressure on Parliament by precipitating unemployment, and thus riots, in Britain. But, as the boycott began, Arthur Lee worried that it would also lead to social turmoil in Virginia. Lee feared that the British government would retaliate against the boycott by obstructing the flow of rum into Virginia, provoking smallholders to turn against their gentry rulers.[20] Lee's fears were not unfounded—once the New England Restraining Act took effect, few vessels sailing from other countries managed to slip past the British navy ships cruising the bay.[21]

The first item to run out was salt. George Gilmer tried to persuade white Virginians that they would be healthier if they ate less salt. He argued that African Americans and Indians consumed less salted meat and salt than white Virginians, yet were healthier.[22] White Virginians were unconvinced. Salt was essential not only to their own diets but to their livestock. It was also needed to preserve meat. By November 1775, gentlemen worried that the salt shortage would lead to civil conflict. "From all parts," the Committee of Safety told the Virginia congressional delegation on November 11, the "Clamours of the people begin to be high on Acco[un]t of" the scarcity of salt, "and we greatly fear the consequences if some method cannot be fallen on to Supply their wants." On November 23, the Fairfax County committee reported that it was "apprehensive of the great Distress and Discontent that the Want of this necessary Article may occasion among the People." The next day, Lund Washington, the general's cousin, reported to him from Mount Vernon that "the people are run[nin]g mad about Salt."[23]

In early December, desperate Virginia farmers began conducting salt riots. The Hanover County committee reported that "several persons have, of their own accord, gone about in a disorderly manner to search for salt, and have taken the same." Some people questioned the heavy-handed measures that the committee employed "to preserve peace and good order, and to prevent riots and tumults." Yet they seemed to work. On December 9, the *Virginia Gazette* reported that "the disturbance in Hanover, on account of the present scarcity of salt, has subsided." Actually, the riots only shifted to

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Orderly Book of Andrew Lewis, 17; Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 91; Lund Washington to George Washington, Jan. 17, 1776, in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of George Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, III, 130. Some gentlemen believed the reason the Princess Anne County militia lost a famous skirmish to Dunmore's mostly black army at Kemp's Landing near Norfolk on Nov. 14, 1775, was that the militiamen were "less than half armed." See Richard Henry Lee to George Washington, Dec. 6, 1775, in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, II, 500; William Aylett to Richard Henry Lee, Apr. 20, 1776, in Hoffman, ed., *Lee Family Papers*.

19. Francis Lightfoot Lee to Landon Carter, Jan. 22, 1776, Benjamin Harrison to Robert Carter Nicholas, Feb. 13, 1776, Carter Braxton to Landon Carter, Apr. 14, 1776, Richard Henry Lee to Patrick Henry, Apr. 20, 1776, all in Smith, ed., *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, III, 130, 246, 522, 564; Charles Lee to Patrick Henry, May 7, 1776, *The Lee Papers*, II, 3. Leading Virginians sought a commercial treaty with France or some other European nation, not a military one. At that point, they wished to be supplied only with arms and ammunition, not with troops (Adam Stephen to Richard Henry Lee, Feb. 4, 1776, John Augustine Washington to Richard Henry Lee, Apr. 22, 1776, in Hoffman, ed., *Lee Family Papers*). One reason they were wary of military alliances was that they knew that this type of diplomacy could easily be turned against them. See Charles Lee to Patrick Henry, May 7, 1776, *The Lee Papers*, II, 2; May 2, 1776, in Greene, ed., *Diary of Landon Carter*, II, 1032; James H. Hutson, "The Partition Treaty and the Declaration of American Independence," *Journal of American History*, LVIII (1971–1972), 877–896.

20. [William Lee] to [Richard Henry Lee], Jan. 17, 1775, in Hoffman, ed., *Lee Family Papers;* Richard Henry Lee to George Washington, Sept. 26, 1775, Fielding Lewis to George Washington, Nov. 14, 1775, in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, II, 53, 373; "A British American" [Thomson Mason], "Number VIII," July 21, 1774, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, I, 188; Arthur Lee to brother, Dec. 13, 1774, in Richard Henry Lee, *Life of Arthur Lee . . .* (Boston, 1829), I, 210; Boyd et al., eds., *Papers of Jefferson*, I, 150–151.

21. United States Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957* (Washington, D.C., 1960), II, 1176–1178; Gilmer, "Address to the Inhabitants of Albemarle," VHS *Collections*, N.S., VI (1887), 118.

22. Gilmer, "Address to the Inhabitants of Albemarle," VHS *Collections*, N.S., VI (1887), 119.

23. Committee of Safety to Virginia Delegates in Congress, Nov. 11, 1775, James Freeland to John Tailyour, Oct. 20, 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, IV, 246, 379; Jan. 2, 1776, Honyman diary; Nov. 26, 1775, William Cabell diary, negative photostat (accession no. 23338), LVA; Oct. 11, 1775, in Tarter, ed., "Orderly Book of the Second Virginia Regiment," *VMHB*, LXXXV (1977), 165; David John Mays, *Edmund Pendleton, 1721–1803: A Biography* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), II, 47–50; Larry G. Bowman, "The Scarcity of Salt in Virginia during the American Revolution," *VMHB*, LXXVII (1969), 464–472; Fairfax County committee to John Hancock, Nov. 23, 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, IV, 455–456; Lund Washington to George Washington, Nov. 24, 1775, in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, II, 423.

neighboring Henrico County, where "several companies of armed men" seized salt, one writer reported in mid-December. He warned that, "if a stop was not put to such marauding, some among us may be induced to make opposition [which] may produce civil discord."[24]

By the spring of 1776, numerous gentlemen feared that the salt shortage would provoke agrarian insurgency throughout Virginia. On March 19, Richard Henry Lee urged Virginia leaders to find some way to produce or procure salt, lest "the want of this Necessary . . . produce universal riot and convulsion." In April, Edmund Pendleton told Lee that "Our people will break through all restraint" if they did not obtain salt soon. Another patriot believed that the British government intentionally protracted its negotiations with the colonists, expecting that their shortages would leave them "naked, and perhaps distracted with mutual discords among ourselves."[25] Shortages not only produced internal discord but threatened to drive smallholders and poor whites into the arms of the British. John Page wondered darkly what the farmers around him would do "When to their Want of Salt there shall be added a Want of Clothes and Blankets." Page warned Thomas Jefferson that, if the shortages got much worse, smallholders and poor whites might even "give up the Authors of their Misfortunes, their Leaders" and "sacrifice them to a Reconciliation."

24. Hanover County committee, Dec. 12, 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, V, 120; Dixon and Hunter's *VG*, Dec. 9, 1775; Edward Johnston to William Preston, Dec. 16, 1775, in Benson, "Wealth and Power," 302; "A Vir[g]inian," Pinkney's *VG*, Dec. 9, 1775. Eventually Virginians persuaded Congress to modify the Continental Association to permit them to import salt. But the shortage remained severe, and disturbances continued.

Shortages also led to disaffection among Virginia soldiers. Army captain Morgan Alexander found his company "very Mutinous" in December 1775, a condition he blamed on the skillful exploitation of the soldiers' hardship by a loyalist named Jonathan Dow. The "King [fo]und his soldiers better cloathing than the Country did," Dow told Alexander's men, and he "[ad]vised them to goe to the Governor." Men in Alexander's company said that "if they were not supplied with money they would Clear their Musquets and return home." One of them did, in fact, desert (Morgan Alexander, Charles Woods, Richard Partridge, depositions, [December] 1775, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, V, 181).

25. Richard Henry Lee to John Page, Mar. 19, 1776, in Smith, ed., *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, III, 408n; Edmund Pendleton to Richard Henry Lee, Apr. 20, 1776, in David John Mays, ed., *The Letters and Papers of Edmund Pendleton, 1734–1803* (Charlottesville, Va., 1967), I, 164; "To the Inhabitants of Virginia," letter from "A Planter," Dixon and Hunter's *VG*, Apr. 13, 1776. Gentlemen also expected shortages to exasperate slaves and make them more likely to rebel. One British merchant that sympathized with the rebel colonists worried about "the great number of Negroes in some of the Colonies, and the great danger which must arise from those people being in distress" (Richard Champion to Willing, Morris, and Company, Mar. 13, 1775, in G. H. Guttridge, ed., *The American Correspondence of a Bristol Merchant, 1766–1776: Letters of Richard Champion* [Berkeley, Calif., 1934], 52).

Page believed the gentry could alleviate the shortages and shore up farmers' support for the patriot cause only by "forming a commercial Alliance with France." Jefferson concurred with Page's remedy. "As to the articles of salt, blankets etc.," he told him in mid-May, "I see nothing but the measure of a foreign alliance which can promise a prospect of importing either."[26] The widespread view that Virginia should alleviate its divisive shortages by reviving its foreign trade raised the same difficult issue as the army's need for foreign arms and ammunition. Since no foreign power would trade with the thirteen colonies while they remained part of the British Empire, to call for foreign trade was to call for Independence.

II

During the winter of 1775–1776, many of the discontents brought on by the Revolutionary War came together to produce an insurrection in Loudoun County. As late as October 1775, Loudoun farmers seemed to be fully devoted to the patriot leadership. When a rumor spread that Governor Dunmore might raid Mount Vernon to take Martha Washington hostage, "the people of Loudon talkd of sendg a Guard to Conduct her up into Berkeley" County in the interior, George Washington learned from his cousin Lund. Presumably, those that meditated the rescue included some of George Washington's own tenants in Loudoun County.[27] Scarcely a month later, the mood in Loudoun had begun to sour. Early in November, farmers in several Northern Neck counties implored the Prince William County committee "to procure them Salt." Those making the "complaints and clamours" doubtless included farmers from Loudoun County on Prince William's northwestern border. In order to "quiet the minds of the people and keep peace in the Country," the committee agreed on November 14 to purchase imported salt—in violation of the Continental Association. If the committee did send salt to Loudoun County, it arrived too late to prevent a "Great disturbance for want of Salt" in Leesburg (the county seat) on November 20, diarist Nicholas Cresswell said.[28]

The most serious conflict in Loudoun and neighboring counties pitted landlords against tenants. Renters comprised about one-third of the families

26. Page to Jefferson, Apr. 26, 1776, Jefferson to Page, May 17, 1776, in Boyd et al., eds., *Papers of Jefferson*, I, 288, 294.

27. Lund Washington to George Washington, Oct. 5, 1775, in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, II, 116.

28. Prince William County committee to Continental Congress, Nov. 14, 177[5], in *Revolutionary Virginia*, IV, 396; Nov. 20, 1775, *The Journal of Nicholas Cresswell, 1774–1777* (London, 1925), 132.

in Loudoun—possibly the highest proportion in Virginia. One of the most prominent landlords in Fauquier County, which bordered Loudoun to the south, was Richard Henry Lee. By 1775, he had turned all of his land into rental property. The "support of a numerous family depended entirely upon these rents," he said.[29] He did not believe that the Revolutionary War should interfere with tenants' rental obligations. Although the war posed no special hardship for renters whose leases specified payment in produce, Lee's tenants, along with those of George Washington and hundreds of other landlords, were obliged to pay in cash. In September 1775, when export markets closed as a result of the rebel colonists' boycott of Britain and the government's retaliatory blockade, tenants were deprived of the income they needed to pay their rent. Their landlords nonetheless demanded payment; Lee, for one, feared that the loss of rental income would lead to his "total ruin."

During the summer of 1775, a provincial convention decided to print up £350,000 in paper money to pay for Dunmore's War against the Shawnees and Mingos and to fund the new patriot military establishment. That paper money was universally expected to depreciate.[30] Richard Henry Lee did not want to receive his rent in depreciated paper money, so he demanded that his tenants pay him in "Gold and Silver," the values of which were fixed. Lee did not really expect his tenants to hand coins to his rent collectors; he was simply trying to establish the principle that a tenant that owed him, say, ten pounds in rent would not be allowed simply to pay him ten pounds' worth of the new paper money. Instead, the tenant would have to pay Lee "as much paper money as would purchase" ten pounds' worth of metal coin.[31]

Previously, Lee's leases had not required his tenants to pay him in coin. The form of payment that he required was "current money," a fictitious money of account that had always traded at par with Virginia paper money. In fact, many of Lee's leases had been negotiated in 1765, during an earlier period of paper money inflation.[32] In the 1760s, Lee had apparently been forced to accept paper money from his tenants, which would help explain why he had campaigned so hard against it in the House of Burgesses. When, in the winter of 1775–1776, Lee demanded that his tenants pay him in hard money, he was seeking a concession that he had apparently failed to obtain before the war.

In 1777, Richard Henry Lee was called to account for his refusal to accept paper money at face value. In a letter to Patrick Henry, he claimed that his demand had not harmed his tenants, because, as paper money had depreciated, driving up the amount of paper that he had demanded of them, the same process of inflation had raised the prices of the commodities they produced. But Lee knew that that was not so. In the original draft of the same letter, Lee acknowledged that, after exports ceased, the price of farm produce fell to "a pittance." (He deleted that comment from the letter before sending it.)[33]

Lee's other justification for demanding specie was that paper money was not legal tender for sterling debts at the time the leases were signed. But his tenants knew the summer 1775 convention that printed the £350,000 worth of paper bills ordered that "they shall be current between all persons within this colony." Creditors were obliged to accept them in discharge of debts. Accordingly, the trickle of income that the farmers themselves received after exports ceased in September 1775 was almost all paper money. For instance, soldiers were paid in paper money. They had no recourse as the paper money began to depreciate. Richard Henry Lee might call the convention ordinance that required creditors to accept paper money "retrospective destruction" and refuse to comply with it, but most ordinary farmers had no choice.[34]

Many private employers adopted the army's practice of paying free workers in paper money. In doing so, one of them inadvertently helped to supply the Loudoun revolt with a fiery new leader. The employer was George Washington, and his conflict with his employee grew out of his attempt to protect his title to two tracts of land in the Ohio Valley. Provincial Virginia's land grant law required the recipients of land patents to make improvements on

29. Richard Henry Lee to [Patrick Henry], [May 26, 1777], in James Curtis Ballagh, ed., *The Letters of Richard Henry Lee* (New York, 1911–1914), I, 298.

30. *SAL*, IX, 67–68; Richard Henry Lee to [Patrick Henry], [May 26, 1777], in Ballagh, ed., *Letters of Richard Henry Lee*, I, 298; William Allason to John Washington, Sept. 1, 1775, in D. R. Anderson, ed., "The Letters of William Allason, Merchant, of Falmouth, Virginia," *Richmond College Historical Papers*, II (June 1917), 168.

31. Richard Henry Lee, ". . . Reason for Desiring the Rents to Be Now Settled in Sterling," [Jan. 10, 1776], in Hoffman, ed., *Lee Family Papers*. Some parish vestries also demanded that taxpayers pay their parish levies in hard money instead of tobacco (Mecklenburg County freeholders, petition, [Spring 1776], in Church, comp., *Virginia Legislative Petitions*, 18.)

32. Thomas Ludwell Lee et al., lease to Thomas Marshall, Oct. 12, 1765, Fauquier County deed book no. 2, 424; John J. McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600–1775: A Handbook* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1978).

33. Richard Henry Lee to [Patrick Henry], [May 26, 1777], in Ballagh, ed., *Letters of Richard Henry Lee*, I, 299, 299n. After nonexportation and the British blockade began, both tobacco and wheat fetched a "very low price" (Oliver Perry Chitwood, *Richard Henry Lee: Statesman of the Revolution* [Morgantown, W.V., 1967], 137).

34. Lee, "Reason for Desiring the Rents," in Hoffman, ed., *Lee Family Papers;* Richard Henry Lee to [Patrick Henry], [May 26, 1777], to [George Wythe], Oct. 17, 1777, both in Ballagh, ed., *Letters of Richard Henry Lee*, I, 298n, 336; *SAL*, IX, 69;

their land within three years or forfeit their patents. Washington had received two large patents on the Ohio and Kanawha Rivers in December 1772; thus he had until December 1775 to make the necessary improvements. In January 1775, Washington hired James Cleveland, who had served him as an overseer since the early 1760s, to lead a crew of slaves and servants to the Ohio country to plant corn and build houses on the land. Cleveland's contract mandated that he be paid in hard money.[35] Despite the troubles he had with his white servants, some of whom ran away to the Indian towns across the Ohio, Cleveland managed to make fifteen hundred pounds' worth of improvements on the two tracts. But he had to abandon the work and return to Mount Vernon when Shawnee warriors began attacking colonists on the Ohio. When Cleveland presented his bill to Washington's cousin Lund Washington, he was paid in paper money.[36]

People like James Cleveland and the Loudoun tenants were trapped between two millstones: between landlords, like Richard Henry Lee, that demanded they pay their rent in hard money, and employers—including army officers—that paid them their wages in quickly depreciating paper money. Cleveland's anger at General Washington for placing him in this predicament apparently helped propel him to the forefront of the uprising that was just then gathering momentum in Loudoun County.[37] By mid-February 1776, Cleveland was at the "head of the Party," a mortified Lund Washington reported to his cousin. "Cleveland I am told has turn'd Polititian and is setg all Loudon to gether by the Ears."

Starting around Christmas Day 1775, the traditional date for annual rent payments, many Loudoun tenants began to follow James Cleveland's simple advice: "The Tennants shoud pay no Rents." Tenants in neighboring counties also refused to pay up, "assigning for reason that they could not sell their produce," Richard Henry Lee said.[38] Other rent collectors encountered similar resistance. "From the Accounts I have from Loudon Prince William, and some other Countys," Lund Washington wrote his cousin, "there is very little hopes of Collectg money from Tenants, they say it is Cruel in the Land Holders to expect their Rents when there is no market for the produce of the Land." The tenants were willing to pay their 1775 rent in the future if exports should resume before their 1775 crops rotted. But they told Lund Washington that, "if there shoud be no market before the present Crop spoils upon there hands, it woud be the height of Injustice ever to expect to be paid for that years Rent."[39]

There was nothing new about tenants' parrying rent collectors during hard times. In two senses, however, the events in Loudoun were extraordinary. First, many of the tenants that withheld their rent mounted a united front. Second, they did not beg their landlords' indulgence (as delinquent tenants usually did) but presumed to judge when rent collection became an act of injustice. Some landlords did not harass their tenants for rent. "Perhaps if they had money I cou'd get some from them," Lund Washington wrote his cousin George in apparent resignation. Other landlords, though, directed court officers to distrain, or seize, the property of delinquent tenants. Victims of distraint would lose as much property as had to be auctioned off to pay the overdue rent—a substantial amount even in the best of times, owing to Virginia's chronic currency shortage, and even more so now that nonexportation had depressed property values. Still more property would have to be auctioned to pay cash fees to the sheriff, to attorneys, and to the county clerk.[40]

Some landlords also threatened to evict delinquent tenants. Richard Henry Lee got involved in a rent dispute with an atypical tenant, the Glasgow firm of William Cuninghame and Company. Lee had leased the firm a town lot near the Fauquier County courthouse for one of its stores. Lee and James Robison, Cuninghame's chief factor, were unable to agree on the rent, so Robison paid nothing. Although, with the closing of the courts, Robison had no recourse against the hundreds of Virginia tobacco farmers that owed money to his firm, Lee had recourse against Robison. His rental agent re-

35. Patent Book XLI, pages 69, 73, Virginia Land Office Records, LVA; George Washington to Thomas Everard, Sept. 17, 1775, in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, II, 2; *SAL*, V, 425; Benson, "Wealth and Power," 346.

36. Valentine Crawford to George Washington, June 24, 1775, Lund Washington to George Washington, Nov. 5, 1775, James Cleveland to George Washington, Nov. 16, 1775, all in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, I, 28, II, 305–306, 382; Benson, "Wealth and Power," 346.

37. Cleveland was not the revolt's only leader. To Lund Washington's surprise, the "first promoters" of the notion that landlords were not entitled to rent during nonexportation included "some of the Leadg men in Loudon" (Lund Washington to George Washington, Dec. 30, 1775, in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, II, 621).

38. Lund Washington to George Washington, Feb. 29, 1776, in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, III, 395–396; Richard Henry Lee to Patrick Henry, [May 26, 1777], in Ballagh, ed., *Letters of Richard Henry Lee*, I, 298.

39. Lund Washington to George Washington, Dec. 30, 1775, in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, II, 621.

40. Lund Washington to George Washington, Feb. 15, 1776, in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, III, 317; Willard F. Bliss, "The Rise of Tenancy in Virginia," *VMHB*, LVIII (1950), 433.

ported telling Robison "that he might rely you would take possession of your Tenement very shortly."[41]

In Loudoun County, the landlords' threats of property seizures and evictions were only the beginning. Property owners also persuaded the patriot committee of Loudoun County to launch an effort to intimidate the leaders of the rent strike. In December 1775, strike leaders were "cited to appear before the Committee," where they could expect to receive the same rough treatment that the committee meted out to loyalists and other enemies of the new order.[42]

The landlords' effort to crush the rent strike failed. Strike leaders, learning that they were to be hauled before the patriot committee, "said they are not at all Intimidated at it," Lund Washington reported. In fact, they threatened to "turn the Committee out of the House." Tenants also stood up to the landlords' threat to have court officers distrain their property. Washington learned that the rent strike leaders, whom he called "transgressers of the peace," had said they would "Punish the First officer that dare destrain for Rent."[43]

Even as the rent strike grew, gentlemen learned that the Loudoun families were also angry about the gentry's military policies. They complained about the eleven-to-one pay disparity between top officers and common soldiers. "The people in our County talk much of the officers wages being too high," Leven Powell of Loudoun County told his wife Sarah in early December 1775. Many Loudoun people agreed with insurgent leader James Cleveland that "the pay of officers and Soldiers shoud be the same." Better yet, officers "shoud not be paid at all," Cleveland reportedly said. They should follow the example of Cleveland's employer, George Washington, and serve for expenses only. Wealthy people like General Washington had independent sources of income and a powerful inducement to fight—protecting their property against the British army. The Loudoun tenants, by contrast, did not even own the land they worked. "There is no inducement for a poor Man to Fight," ran one of James Cleveland's slogans, "for he has nothing to defend."[44]

Angry as the soldiers were about the pay disparity, they had an even greater grievance: the gentry's prosecution of the war. The Loudoun families blamed patriot leaders for allowing the war to drag on and on. At the end of February 1776, more than a year after imports of salt and other essential commodities ceased and more than six months after the creation of the Virginia line, gentry military leaders still had not managed to force Dunmore's plucky little army from its tidewater beachhead. Soldiers were tired of waiting for the final battle that would force Dunmore to abandon the Chesapeake and allow them to return to their farms. They were also impatient to resume overseas trade. "Let us go and Fight the Battle at once, and not be Shilly Shally, in this way, until all the Poor, people are ruined," James Cleveland reportedly said.[45] Thus the rent and military grievances were intertwined. If the gentry would hurry up and defeat Dunmore, soldiers could lay down their arms and once again become grain and tobacco exporters. They could acquire the income they needed to pay their rent and other expenses.

James Cleveland was not the only Loudouner that openly challenged the patriot military establishment. When Richard Morlan of Loudoun was called to a mandatory militia muster, he declared that "he would not muster, and if fined would oppose the collection of the fine with his gun," the Loudoun County patriot committee reported. Not content with individual noncompliance, Morlan resisted "publickly" and also tried to "discourage a minute-man"—apparently a deserter—"from returning to his duty."[46]

Gentlemen anticipated that the Loudoun revolt would turn violent. "I suppose the first Battle we have in this part of the Country will be in Loudon, against General Cleveland," Lund Washington told his cousin George on the

41. Richard Parker to [Richard Henry Lee], Mar. 7, 1776, in Hoffman, ed., *Lee Family Papers*. The closing of the courts in June 1774 prevented most creditors from distraining their debtors' property, but landlords were a special case. As George Mason had explained exactly ten years earlier, when the courts had also been closed (to protest the Stamp Act), English common law gave "the Land-lord a Right to distrain upon anything on his Land for the Rent due." The landlord did not need to go to court to seize sufficient property from his tenants to pay their back rent, Mason pointed out; the law "puts his Remedy into his own Hands." See ". . . [A] Scheme for Replevying Goods under Distress for Rent," enclosed in Mason to George William Fairfax and George Washington, Dec. 23, 1765, in Rutland, ed., *Papers of George Mason*, I, 62; George Washington, lease to Francis Ballinger, [Mar. 17, 1769], in W. W. Abbot et al., eds., *The Papers of George Washington*, Colonial Series (Charlottesville, Va., 1983–), VIII, 172–173.

42. Lund Washington to George Washington, Dec. 30, 1775, in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, II, 621.

43. Ibid.

44. Leven Powell to Sarah Powell, Dec. 5, 1775, Leven Powell Papers, VHS; Lund Washington to George Washington, Feb. 29, 1776, in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, III, 396.

45. Lund Washington to George Washington, Feb. 29, 1776, in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, III, 396. Of course, the Virginians' belief that a war that lasted more than a year was too long would seem naive to them after six more years of fighting.

46. Loudoun County committee, May 14, 1776, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, VII, 138; McDonnell, "Popular Mobilization," *Journal of American History*, LXXXV (1998).

last day of February 1776.[47] By that time, the Committee of Safety "feared" it might have to send patriot troops "to Quell" the "disturbances" in Loudoun. So the committee members made a prudent decision. They expected that any troops that would be marched to Loudoun would come from the Third Regiment of the Virginia line, which was stationed on the Potomac River. Someone pointed out that the Third Regiment included Captain Charles West's company from Loudoun County. On March 2, the Committee of Safety transferred the Loudoun company out of the Third Regiment. Later in March, the Committee of Safety ordered a minuteman company to march to Loudoun. The soldiers incurred no resistance, and, by April 2, the Committee of Safety believed that "the disturbances in Loudon are quieted." On that date it returned the Loudoun company to the Third Regiment.[48]

Still the tenants refused to pay their rent. "I really lament the torn and distracted condition of your County," Andrew Leitch told Loudoun gentleman Leven Powell on May 15. Leitch worried that some of the leaders of the Loudoun revolt might hold "principles of dissatisfaction to their native country." Those leaders, he warned Powell, "if they can talk and hold forth amongst their honest, well-meaning neighbors, shall work you more mischief in two or three church Sundays than a hundred virtuous and sensible citizens can, perhaps, eradicate in a year." Three weeks later, another of Powell's gentry friends asked him, "How goes on the spirit of Levelling?"[49]

Gentlemen knew better than to view the uprising as an isolated incident that would remain within the confines of Loudoun County. From Mount Vernon in neighboring Fairfax County, Lund Washington reported in early March that "here all the talk is about the Tenants."[50] Richard Henry Lee's response to the revolt was to moderate the demands he placed on his tenants. From August 1775 through January 1776, Lee had insisted that his tenants pay him as much paper money as would equal the sterling amount in his leases. By March 1776, after the outbreak of the Loudoun revolt, Lee had agreed to accept payment in tobacco. Yet his conflict with the tenants continued, for the price at which he offered to accept their tobacco was only 1.68 pence per pound. The tenants refused to part with their crops at this price. Even when Lee's rent collector, Richard Parker, offered two pence per pound, some of the tenants, those living "at the Blue Ridge," still would not settle, Parker told Lee. "They, John Webb and one Key at their head, would not strike at any thing under" 2.4 pence per pound, Parker said. That was nearly 50 percent higher than the price at which Lee had originally offered to accept tobacco. Neither Parker nor the western tenants would budge. "I could get not a farthing from those Tenants," Parker later reported.[51]

Gentlemen believed that the only way they could prevent Loudoun's "plebian infamy" (as one gentlemen called it) from spreading to other parts of Virginia was to end the war quickly. James Cleveland had said that gentry commanders must no longer "Shilly Shally," and gentlemen were beginning to get the message. "There is no error we ought more to dread than . . . inaction," an essayist that called himself "A Planter" told *Virginia Gazette* readers in April 1776. Prolonged negotiations with Britain would lead to

47. Lund Washington said he hoped "the Consequence" of Cleveland's actions would be "the loss of his life for I woud wish every Damn'd Vilain who meddles in matters he knows nothing off, may get Hang'd" (to George Washington, Feb. 29, 1776, in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, III, 395–396).

48. Committee of Safety, Mar. 2, 20, Apr. 2, 1776, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, VI, 164, 231, 306. Initially, the Committee of Safety did not acknowledge its fear that the Loudoun Company would side with the tenants. Dale Benson points out that, on Mar. 2, when it moved the Loudoun company out of the Third Regiment, the Committee of Safety stated merely that it did so "for reasons appearing to this Committee." Only later, when it returned the Loudoun company to the Third Regiment, did the committee acknowledge that the reason it had considered it "inconvenient to have the Loudon Compy. in that regiment" was that "it was feared the 3d: Regimt. might be called on to Quell" the "disturbances" in Loudoun. See Committee of Safety, Mar. 2, Apr. 2, 1776, in *Revolutionary Virginia*, VI, 164, 306; Benson, "Wealth and Power," 348.

49. Andrew Leitch to Leven Powell, May 15, 1776, James Hendricks to Leven Powell, [June] 5, 1776, in Powell, ed., *Biographical Sketch of Leven Powell*, 85, 87.

50. Lund Washington to George Washington, Mar. [7, 1776], in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, III, 432.

51. Those tenants also offered to pay their rent in wheat at four and a half shillings per bushel, but Parker declined that offer (Parker to [Lee], Mar. 7, 1776, in Hoffman, ed., *Lee Family Papers*). It was not only tenants that Lee angered by refusing to accept paper money at face value. Lee's refusal was also alleged to have contributed to the depreciation of the paper money. When his policy was brought to the attention of the House of Delegates in 1777, the House refused to give Lee another term in Congress. Delegates later heard Lee in his own defense—he justified his demand for produce but said nothing of his earlier, more inflationary demand for sterling or its equivalent in paper money—and elected him to the first seat that fell vacant. See Richard Henry Lee to [Patrick Henry], [May 26, 1777], and to [George Wythe], Oct. 19, 1777, in Ballagh, ed., *Letters of Richard Henry Lee*, I, 298–299, 300, 335–337; John Banister to Theoderick Bland [incorrectly dated June 10, 1777], *The Bland Papers, Being a Selection from the Manuscripts of Colonel Theodorick Bland, Jr. . . .*, ed. Charles Campbell (Petersburg, Va., 1840), I, 57–58; James Blackwell to Richard Henry Lee, Jan. 16, 1777, Francis Lightfoot Lee and Mann Page, Jr., to the House of Delegates, June 10, 1777, both in John Carter Matthews, "Richard Henry Lee and the American Revolution" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1939), 207, 218; Chitwood, *Richard Henry Lee*, 137–142; Herbert E. Sloan, *Principle and Interest: Thomas Jefferson and the Problem of Debt* (New York, 1995), 34–36.

"infinite dissentions among ourselves." "An enterprise that depends upon the concord and exertions of the people, will ever infallibly fail if they are long held in a state of doubtful inactivity," he wrote. If the war dragged on much longer, America would be rent by "faction and sedition." "For God's sake then," he declared, "let us waste no time in unnecessary and dangerous delays."[52]

Since the muskets, gunpowder, and lead shot that were vital to an early victory could be obtained only from Europe, the Loudoun revolt pointed gentlemen in the same direction as the disorders in the army and the salt riots: Virginia and the other rebel provinces needed to contract a commercial alliance with France or some other European nation. But first they would have to become independent states. Independence thus was increasingly considered the precondition for obtaining the salt and other supplies that were needed to prevent scarcity riots, the export income that would ease conflicts such as that between landlords and tenants, and the arms and ammunition that would allow gentlemen to meet the farmers' urgent demand (and their own urgent need) to end the war quickly.

Nor was a revival of international trade the only attraction of Independence. A formal government would stand a better chance than the extralegal conventions and committees of successfully suppressing the wave of civilian and military disorder that swept over Virginia in late 1775 and early 1776. Gentlemen favoring Independence realized by early April 1776 that the fear of disorder was a powerful tool that they could use to pull conservative gentlemen away from their attachment to Britain and into the movement for Independence.

Francis Lightfoot Lee was one of the first to recognize the political usefulness of the mounting agrarian insurgency in Virginia. Throughout early 1776, Lee maintained a steady correspondence with the conservative Landon Carter back in Virginia. Although only Lee's letters survive, they powerfully illuminate the way patriot leaders like Lee tried to persuade conservative gentlemen like Carter of the need for Independence. In March, Lee received a letter from Carter that evidently repeated the common conservative prediction that Independence would lead to anarchy. Replying on March 19, Lee at first minimized those fears. "The danger of Anarchy and confusion, I think altogether chimerical, the good behaviour of the Americans with no

52. Benson, "Wealth and Power," 343 (it is not clear where Benson found this quotation); Lund Washington to George Washington, Feb. 29, 1776, in Abbot et al., eds., *Papers of Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, III, 396; "To the Inhabitants of Virginia," letter from "A Planter," Dixon and Hunter's *VG*, Apr. 13, 1776.

Government at all proves them very capable of good Government," he told Carter. On March 30, Carter wrote back and refuted Lee's claim that ordinary Virginians had behaved well during the suspension of formal government. Possibly he reminded Lee about the December 1775 salt riots or the mutiny that followed Patrick Henry's resignation from the army. Perhaps Carter relayed information about the Loudoun tenants' revolt.[53]

Lee seized upon the information in Carter's March 30 letter and used it to turn Carter's argument against Independence on its head. "It makes me uneasy to find from yr. Letr. that licentiousness begins to prevail in Virga.," he told Carter on April 9. Lee blamed the lower-class disturbances on "the mismanagement of the Gentlemen." The problem was that the "old Government" had been "dissolved, and no new one substituted in its stead." In such a situation it was inevitable that "Anarchy must be the consequence." Then Lee came to his proposal for restoring order in Virginia. The convention that was to assemble in May 1776 should comply with an earlier suggestion from Congress and "establish such Government as wou'd best secure their peace and happiness." Lee argued that the only way Rhode Island and Connecticut had preserved "order and quiet" was by maintaining their old colonial governments. He pointed out that New Hampshire and Massachusetts had been "getting into the utmost disorder; but upon their assuming Government . . . they are restored to perfect harmony and regularity." If the May 1776 Virginia convention should fail to establish a regular government, Lee concluded, "I dread the consequences." If Virginia and the other southern colonies remained without formal governmental institutions, he warned, they would soon "have violent symptoms to encounter."[54]

Lee's April 9 letter seemed to leave open the possibility that the Virginia convention could set up a temporary government that it could dissolve upon a subsequent accommodation with Britain. But a later report from Carter describing further agrarian unrest in Virginia provided Lee the ammunition he needed to make the case for all-out Independence. Carter's letter probably reported an incident in which one of Governor Dunmore's tenders sailed up the Rappahannock River. To prevent the tender from sending a party ashore to burn the great houses along the river, a group of militiamen mustered. But, when the group asked one smallholder to lend them his firelock, the man, whom Carter identified only as "G. R.," "asked the People if they were such fools to go to protect the Gentlemen's houses on the river

53. Smith, ed., *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, III, 407. By 1783, James Cleveland was renting land from Francis Lightfoot Lee, and it is possible that he was already doing so in 1776.

54. Francis Lightfoot Lee to Carter, Apr. 9, 1776, in Smith, ed., *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, III, 500–501.

side," Carter reported in his diary; "he thought it would be the better if they were burnt down."[55]

It is even more likely that Carter told Lee about the April 1 Richmond County election, where Lee himself lost his seat in the Virginia convention. As we have seen, Lee replied that he hoped his former colleagues would "make such an establishment, as will put a stop to the rising disorders with you, and secure internal quiet for the future." It was all the more important that divisions among white patriots be suppressed, Lee argued, because soon they would have to fight British and black troops. "The violent struggle we have to go thro' this summer, the hardships we must suffer, make it necessary to cultivate the utmost harmony among ourselves," he told Carter. As he had in April, Lee argued that Virginia should follow the example of other colonies. Even the conservative middle colonies "are going fast into Independency and constituting new Governmts. convinced of the necessity of it, both for the security of internal peace and good order; and for the vigorous exertion of their whole force against the common Enemy."[56]

Carter and Lee's entire debate about Independence had centered upon the danger of agrarian insurgency. Where Carter was certain that Independence would lead to more of the refractory behavior he had already witnessed, Lee argued that Independence was actually the only way the "rising disorders" could be contained. Both men, for opposite reasons, exaggerated the danger that smallholders and tenants posed to gentlemen. But their conversation would have been very different had it not been founded upon grains of truth—the Loudoun County uprising, the salt riots, the mutiny that followed Patrick Henry's resignation, the disorders in the minuteman battalions, and the other smallholder disturbances.

Throughout 1776, other pro-Independence gentlemen joined Francis Lee in playing on their conservative brethren's fear of disorder to try to dissolve their allegiance to Britain. On April 26, John Page told Thomas Jefferson that smallholders and poor whites had pleasantly surprised him by "behaving so peaceably and honestly as they have when they were free from the Restraint of Laws." "But how long this may be the Case who can tell? . . . To prevent Disorders in each Colony a Constitution should be formed," Page wrote.[57] Jefferson actually needed no convincing on the question of Independence. No doubt Page sent him his argument linking Independence to the prevention of anarchy so that it could be passed on to the more reluctant. In the same spirit, Page sent member of Congress Richard Henry Lee a catalog of the Virginia farmers' grievances. He found "our People in some Places Discontented about Henry's Resignation." Other white Virginians were angry at the patriot leadership's military policies, especially "the removal of the Troops from their Neighbourhood." Still others were angry because they feared "being removed as the People of Norfolk and Princess [Anne] are to be into the interior Parts of the Country." Page urged Lee to come home from Philadelphia to help "prevail on the Convention to declare for Independency, and to establish a Form of Government."[58]

Lee took up this line of reasoning in an April 30 letter to provincial treasurer Robert Carter Nicholas, who opposed Independence. "Sir," Lee demanded, "do you not see the indispensable necessity of establishing a Government this Convention? How long popular commotions may be suppressed without it, and anarchy be prevented, deserves intense consideration." Lee argued that organizing a formal government would "prevent the numerous evils to be apprehended from popular rage and licence whenever they find the bonds of government removed." On December 22, 1775, Parliament had officially proclaimed the rebel colonies outside the king's protection. When Patrick Henry held back from Independence (he believed foreign alliances should come first), Lee told him that the "act of Parliament has to every legal intent and purpose dissolved our government, uncommissioned every magistrate, and placed us in the high road to Anarchy." The gentry could halt the descent into disorder only by "taking up government immediately."[59]

55. Carter chaired the Richmond County patriot committee. He wrote in his diary that, if G. R. had been hauled before the committee, its wisest course would have been to ignore him, since people like G. R. "only want to be taken notice of, that they may have some grounds to represent to those like themselves, what persecution they endure by resisting the rich or, as they call them, the Gentlemen" (May 1, 1776, in Greene, ed., *Diary of Landon Carter*, II, 1030–1031).

56. Lee to Carter, May 21, 1776, in Smith, ed., *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, IV, 57. Lee did not know that the Virginia convention had already voted to ask Congress to declare Independence.

57. Apr. 26, 1776, in Boyd et al., eds., *Papers of Jefferson*, I, 288.

58. John Page to [Richard Henry Lee], Apr. 12, 1776, in Hoffman, ed., *Lee Family Papers;* Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, 93. Charles Lee concentrated his forces in Williamsburg because he feared that, if the British could seize the provincial capital, they would win credibility in the eyes of enslaved Virginians and persuade thousands of them to risk trying to reach the British lines (Charles Lee to [William] Peachey and [Hugh] Mercer, Apr. 2, 1776, *The Lee Papers*, I, 369).

59. Richard Henry Lee to [Patrick Henry], Apr. 20, 1776, to Robert Carter Nicholas, Apr. 30, 1776, both in Ballagh, ed., *Letters of Richard Henry Lee*, I, 177 184; Robert E. Brown and B. Katherine Brown, *Virginia, 1705–1786: Democracy or Aristocracy?* (East Lansing, Mich., 1964), 292–293. Thomas Paine, whose pamphlet *Common Sense* alarmed many conservatives by advocating republican government, warned those same conservatives not

The Independence advocates' effort to inflame the conservative Virginia gentlemen's fears of anarchy and convert them to the cause of Independence succeeded with at least one prominent conservative. Carter Braxton resisted the impulse to Independence as long as he could. But by early May 1776, when convention delegates gathered in Williamsburg, Braxton believed they had no choice but to seize at once "the reins of government, and no longer suffer the people to live without the benefit of law." Inaction would invite "Anarchy and riot . . . and render the enjoyment of our liberties and future quiet, at least very precarious." In mid-May, Braxton reluctantly informed Landon Carter, his uncle and fellow conservative, that "The Assumption of Governt."—and, thus, a declaration of Independence—"was necessary."[60]

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to allow the thirteen colonies to continue on with no government. "Ye that oppose independance now, ye know not what ye do; ye are opening a door to eternal tyranny, by keeping vacant the seat of government," Paine wrote (*Common Sense* [1776], ed. Isaac Kramnick [London, 1976], 99).

60. "An Address to the Convention . . . of Virginia . . . ," letter from "A Native" [Braxton], in *Revolutionary Virginia*, VI, 518; Braxton to Carter, May 17, 1776, in Smith, ed., *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, IV, 19. The fear of anarchy also led many gentlemen in other colonies to favor Independence (Richard L. Bushman, *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* [Chapel Hill, N.C., 1985], 216); Edward Rutledge to Ralph Izard, Dec. 8, 1775, *Correspondence of Mr. Ralph Izard, of South Carolina . . .* (New York, 1844), I, 165. The constitution adopted by the South Carolina provincial congress accused the British government of working to "loosen the bands of government, and create anarchy and confusion in the Colonies" (John Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution, from Its Commencement to the Year 1776, Inclusive; As Relating to the State of South-Carolina . . .* [Charleston, S.C., 1821], II, 189). Even in Maryland, where (as Ronald Hoffman has shown) for months the gentry's fear of the lower classes had prevented it from favoring separation from Britain, that same fear eventually led many gentlemen to embrace Independence as the lesser evil. Charles Carroll of Annapolis told his son that the only way to rescue Maryland from disorder was to "establish a government" (Charles Carroll, in Hoffman, *A Spirit of Dissension: Economics, Politics, and the Revolution in Maryland* [Baltimore, 1973], 150).

PART FOUR : INDEPENDENCE

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