
“REBEL AGAINST REBEL”

Enslaved Virginians and the Coming of the American Revolution

by WOODY HOLTON*

FOR more than six months after the battles of Lexington and Concord, the fighting between British and patriot troops was confined to the northern colonies. Then on 26 October 1775, a squadron of British naval vessels attacked the town of Hampton, Virginia. The Revolutionary War had come to the South.¹ The battle of Hampton resulted partly from the actions of a “small mulatto man” named Joseph Harris. Only four months earlier, Harris had been a resident of Hampton and the property of another Hamptonian, Henry King, whom he served as a pilot on the Chesapeake Bay. Harris, it was said, was “well acquainted with many creeks on the *Eastern Shore*, at *York*, *James River*, and *Nansemond*, and many others.” All in all, he was “a very useful person.”²

Harris’s knowledge gave him an opportunity to gain his freedom. On 8 June 1775, Virginia’s last royal governor, John Murray, fourth earl of Dunmore, fearing an attack from the increasingly belligerent patriots, fled Williamsburg and took refuge on HMS *Fowey*. There he set about assembling a small squadron to fight the patriots. To accomplish his designs he needed people who knew the bay, so when Harris slipped off one night in July and presented himself to the skipper of the *Fowey*, he was welcomed

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¹ Howard H. Peckham, ed., *The Toll of Independence: Engagements & Battle Casualties of the American Revolution* (Chicago and London, 1974), p. 9.

² George Gray, deposition, 4 Sept. 1775, in William J. Van Schreeven, Robert L. Scribner, and Brent Tarter, eds., *Revolutionary Virginia: The Road to Independence* (7 vols.; Charlottesville, 1973–83), 4:70 (first quotation); George Montague to Matthew Squire, 20 July 1775, in Peter Force, comp., *American Archives: Consisting of a Collection of Authentick Records, State Papers, Debates, and Letters and Other Notices of Publick Affairs . . .*, 4th ser. (6 vols.; Washington, D.C., 1837–46), 2:1692 (second and third quotations).

and immediately put to work as a pilot. When the *Fowey* left the Chesapeake a short time later, Harris transferred to a tender called the *Liberty*.

On the night of 2 September 1775, a hurricane swept through Tidewater Virginia and drove the *Liberty* ashore near Hampton. On board Harris's vessel 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. Their escape was fortunate, because white leaders had threatened to execute slaves like Harris who fled to the British. Meanwhile, the beached *Liberty* fell into the hands of the rebels, who helped themselves to the sails and other equipment (including seven swivel guns) 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, &c." 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 Harris and other black crewmen to their former owners. This Squire refused to do, prompting a patriot newspaper to note with sarcasm the "singular ATTACHMENT AND LOYALTY to his sovereign" of Squire's "Ethiopian director."³

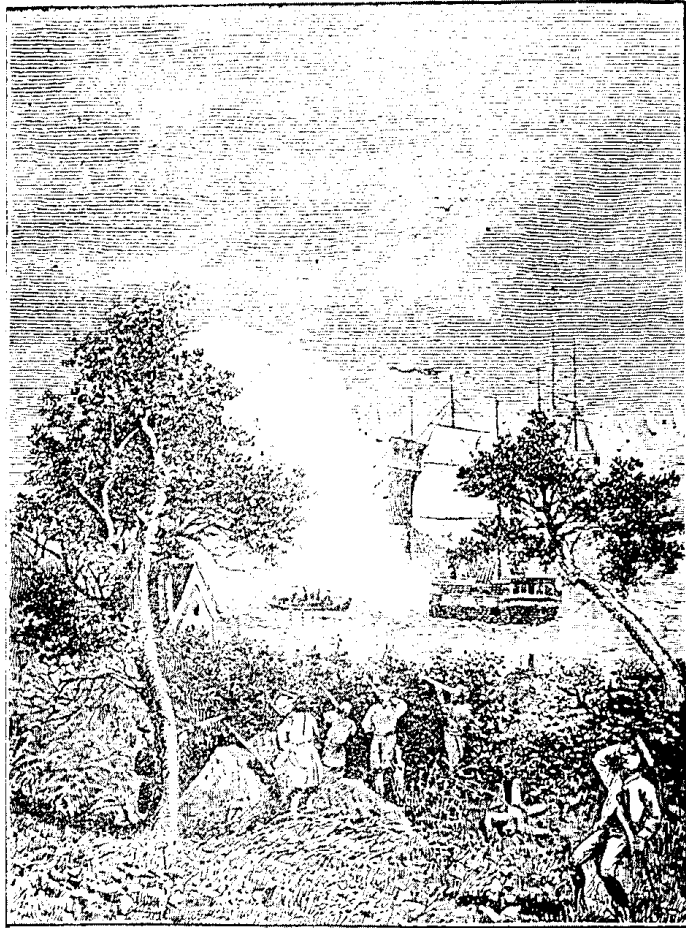
Eventually deciding that the contest could not be resolved peacefully, Squire attacked Hampton on 26 October with six small craft. The little squadron came under deadly long arms fire. Some nine blacks and other British sailors were killed, and Squire had to retreat. One of his vessels, the *Hawke*, went aground, and its crew was captured. The white prisoners, including Joseph Wilson, an indentured servant who had escaped from George Washington, were "treated with great humanity," a patriot newspaper reported. The black crewmen were "tried for their lives."⁴

The engagement at Hampton was the first battle of the Revolutionary War south of Massachusetts. Just as the earlier fighting in New England had helped poison relations between Britain and all the rebel colonies, so the battle of Hampton helped embitter white Virginians against their king. Thomas Jefferson reported that the armed confrontation had "raised our

³ *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), 8 Sept. 1775; *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter), 23 Sept. 1775. Joseph Harris appears on the muster role of the *Otter* during this time; see Admiralty 36/7763, Public Record Office, Kew, England (hereafter cited as PRO), Virginia Colonial Records Project, survey report 8793.

⁴ Lund Washington to George Washington, 3 Dec. 1775, in W. W. Abbot et al., eds., *The Papers of George Washington: Revolutionary War Series* (7 vols. to date; Charlottesville, 1985–), 2:479; *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), 3 Nov. 1775 (quotation); John Page to Thomas Jefferson, 11 Nov. [1775], in Julian P. Boyd et al., eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (26 vols. to date; Princeton, 1950–), 1:257. The fate of the *Hawke*'s black crewmen is not known.

The Revolutionary War came to Virginia on 26 October 1775, when Matthew Squire attacked Hampton with six small British craft. The little squadron came under deadly long arms fire. Among the British seamen killed in the action were nine black Virginians.

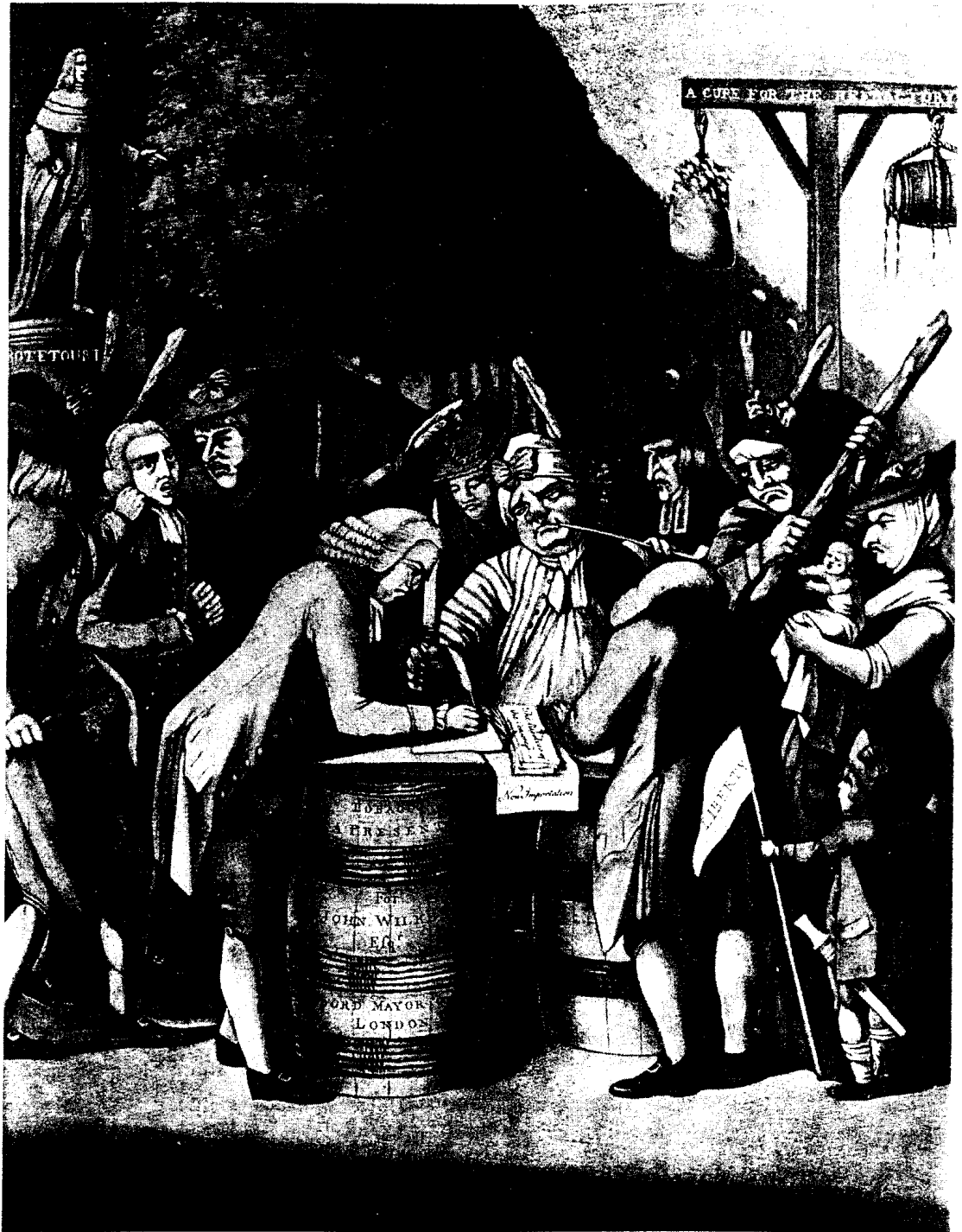


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country into perfect phrensy." The story of the battle would have been very different if Joseph Harris had not made his dash for freedom. Perhaps Hampton whites would never have come into conflict with Captain Squire at all.⁵

Harris was but one of thousands of enslaved Virginians who found opportunity within the breach that opened between loyalist and patriot whites in 1775. A majority of those who reached British lines ended up worse off than before. Many were killed in battle, and hundreds died of disease. Others were recaptured and subjected to worse working conditions than before, in Chiswell's Mines, which supplied rebel soldiers with lead, or

⁵ Thomas Jefferson to John Randolph, 29 Nov. 1775, Archibald Cary to Thomas Jefferson, 31 Oct. 1775, in Boyd et al., eds., *Jefferson Papers*, 1:269 (quotation), 249; Edmund Randolph, *History of Virginia*, ed. Arthur H. Shaffer, Virginia Historical Society Documents, 9 (Charlottesville, 1970), pp. 227–29. George Montague, captain of the *Fowey*, stated that Joseph Harris was free (George Montague to Matthew Squire, 20 July 1775, in Force, comp., *American Archives*, 4th ser., 2:1692). The captain's comment implies that Harris was already legally free before he joined the crew of the *Fowey*. Certainly there were free blacks in prerevolutionary Hampton, but it is not known whether Harris was one of them. Every other reference to Harris indicates he was a fugitive slave. See, for example, 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), p. 32.



Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

In response to the Coercive Acts imposed after the Boston Tea Party, the First Continental Congress drew up a nonimportation association. "The Alternative of Williams-Burg" depicts a well-dressed merchant putting his name on the association to avoid the tar and feathers hanging on a gibbet labeled "A CURE FOR THE REFRACTORY." The armed mob includes a black man, just to the left of the clergyman. Between August 1774 and April 1775, white Virginians' mounting fears of black insurgency drove many boycotters into the patriot ranks.

on sugar plantations in the West Indies. In the single year 1776, however, 400 former slaves sailed away from Virginia to freedom. The aspirations and actions of enslaved Virginians during the American Revolution have been ably chronicled by several scholars.⁶ Now that the struggle for black freedom during the revolutionary era is coming into focus, we can begin to assess its effect on white Virginians. 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.

In August 1774 most white Virginians were angry at Parliament for adopting the acts they called Intolerable. These colonists, however, were content to express their outrage 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 to convert mere boycotters into revolutionaries? Some of the factors that turned white Virginians against Britain were geographically or temporally remote; the colonists were incensed that the British army had invaded far-off Massachusetts, and they feared that the king's troops might invade Virginia as well. A third source of the white Virginians' anger was not remote at all; they were irate at Governor Dunmore for first threatening to ally with enslaved Virginians and then, later, actually doing so.

Neither Dunmore's threat in April 1775 to emancipate Virginia's slaves nor his offer of freedom in November of that year to patriots' bondspeople who joined his army would have carried much significance if black Virginians had remained entirely passive during the revolutionary crisis. But slaves were not passive. Perhaps a thousand of them took advantage of Dunmore's offer of emancipation in November 1775. Even before the governor published his proclamation, however, scores of slaves had joined his little army or undertaken their own resistance to white rule. Even earlier, before Dunmore first threatened to offer freedom to the slaves, bondspeople in different parts of Virginia had gathered to discuss how to take advantage of the growing rift among whites. And the opposition of

⁶ See, for example, Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1961); Sylvia R. Frey, "Between Slavery and Freedom: Virginia Blacks in the American Revolution," *Journal of Southern History* (hereafter cited as *JSH*) 49 (1983): 375-98; Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, 1991); Robert A. Olwell, "'Domestick Enemies': Slavery and Political Independence in South Carolina, May 1775-March 1776," *JSH* 55 (1989): 21-48; and Charles W. Carey, Jr., "'These Black Rascals': The Origins of Lord Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment," *Virginia Social Science Journal* 31 (1996): 65-77. Earlier studies of African Americans in the Revolution include 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); and Luther P. Jackson, "Virginia Negro Soldiers and Seamen in the American Revolution," *Journal of Negro History* (hereafter cited as *JNH*) 27 (1942): 247-87.

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Before being transferred to Virginia, John Murray, fourth earl of Dunmore (1732–1809), served briefly as governor of New York. He arrived in Williamsburg in September 1771 to take up the reins of his new office. Less than four years later, he fled the capital and took refuge on HMS *Fowey*. After the Revolution, Dunmore became governor of the Bahamas, 1787–96.

1774 and 1775 was only the culmination of a tradition of black resistance that was as old as Virginia slavery itself.⁷

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. Although it has been estimated that fewer than 1 percent of enslaved Virginians killed whites in the eighteenth century, it is likely that by the 1760s almost every white person in the eastern counties knew of a free person who had been killed by a slave.⁸ At the same time that the black percentage of the population increased, the percentage of slaves who killed whites (as opposed to fellow slaves) also grew.⁹

If individual whites had nightmares about waking up amid flames or feeling the first spasms of a stomach contorted by poison, whites as a group frequently worried about servile insurrection. Slave plots seemed to be

⁷ Quarles, *Negro in the Revolution*; Frey, "Between Slavery and Freedom"; 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), pp. 166–87; Peter H. 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*, Explorations in the History of American Radicalism series (DeKalb, Ill., 1993), pp. 149–84.

⁸ Philip J. Schwarz, *Twice Condemned: Slaves and the Criminal Laws of Virginia, 1705–1865* (Baton Rouge, 1988), p. 144. For examples of violence, see Richard Bland and William Fleming, petition, 5 Nov. 1764, James Boyd, petition, 7 Nov. 1764, in John Pendleton Kennedy, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1761–1765* (Richmond, 1907), pp. 237, 239; Daniel Hamlin, petition, 25 Feb. 1772, in John Pendleton Kennedy, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1770–1772* (Richmond, 1906), p. 189; Thomas Patterson, petition, 12 May 1774, Committee of Public Claims, report, 13 May 1774, in John Pendleton Kennedy, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1773–1776 . . .* (Richmond, 1905), pp. 92, 98; Augusta County Order Book, 11 Apr. 1772, in Lyman Chalkley, ed., *Chronicles of the Scotch-Irish Settlement in Virginia, Extracted From the Original Court Records of Augusta County, 1745–1800* (3 vols.; Rosslyn, Va., 1912–13), 1:167; John Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America During 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801 and 1802* (1803; New York, 1909), p. 414; Henry Lee to Richard Lee, 16 Feb. 1767, Richard Bland Lee Letterbook, Custis-Lee Papers, Manuscripts Department, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as DLC); David John Mays, *Edmund Pendleton, 1721–1803: A Biography* (2 vols.; Cambridge, Mass., 1952), 1:22, 35; Freeman H. Hart, *The Valley of Virginia in the American Revolution, 1763–1789* (Chapel Hill, 1942), p. 15; Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, pp. ix–x, chap. 6; and William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia . . .* (13 vols.; Richmond, Philadelphia, and New York, 1809–23), 6:104–12.

⁹ Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, p. 143. Edmund S. Morgan draws a connection between slavery and the American Revolution that is very different from the one drawn in this essay. He argues that elite Virginians felt secure enough to embrace republicanism because they had solved "the problem of the poor" by creating "a society in which most of the poor were enslaved." By holding the poorest Virginians in bondage, he says, gentlemen "removed them from the political equation." Morgan's argument is undermined by a growing body of evidence showing that slaves consistently resisted their condition and thus remained, at the same time that they were among their owners' largest sources of income, a "problem" for them. (It also appears that very few Virginia gentlemen embraced republicanism with the enthusiasm ascribed to them by Morgan.) See Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975), pp. 381 (first and second quotations), 380 (third quotation).

especially rife during the Seven Years' War (1755–63).¹⁰ In July 1755 Charles Carter reported to Lieutenant Governor Robert Dinwiddie that enslaved workers in Lancaster County had gathered near his son's home, possibly with a view to allying with the Native American and French foes who had just defeated General Edward Braddock's army near Fort Duquesne. Dinwiddie replied on 18 July. "The Villany of the Negroes on any Emergency of Gov't is w't I always fear'd," he told Carter. "I greatly approve of Y'r send'g the Sheriffs with proper Strength to take up those y't appear'd in a Body at Y'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'g into Combinat[ion]s and wicked Designs."¹¹ 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."¹²

White Virginians became especially alarmed about their slaves during Pontiac's War, the Indian uprising of 1763–64. For the first time in recent memory, Indians spared the lives of blacks at the settlements they attacked; gentlemen wondered why. "As the Indians are saving & Carressing all the Negroes they take," militia lieutenant William Fleming told Lieutenant Governor Francis Fauquier in July 1763, "should it be productive of an Insurrection it may be attended with the most serious Consequences." The following month, a Virginia clergyman reported that Indians had "carried a great number of women and children, as well as some men, and (for the first time too) a good many negroes, into captivity."¹³

Although the slave-Indian alliance that so frightened white Virginians never materialized, bondspeople continued to plan insurrections after the war. A group in Loudoun County revolted in early 1767 and killed an overseer named Dennis Dallis. Three of them were hanged. In neighboring

¹⁰ Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York, 1943), pp. 18–208; Thad W. Tate, *The Negro in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg* (Charlottesville, 1965), pp. 109–13; Theodore Allen, "... They Would Have Destroyed Me": Slavery and the Origins of Racism," *Radical America* 9 (1975): 56; Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, pp. 171–74; Mays, *Edmund Pendleton*, 1:119–20.

¹¹ Dinwiddie advised Carter to keep "Patrollers out for the Peace of Y'r Co[un]ty" and to instruct sheriffs to "seize all Horses used by Negroes in the Night Time" (Robert Dinwiddie to Charles Carter, 18 July 1755, in R. A. Brock, ed., *The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie* ... , Collections of the Virginia Historical Society, new ser., 3, 4 [2 vols.; Richmond, 1883–84], 2:104–5). Cf. Mark J. Stegmaier, "Maryland's Fear of Insurrection at the Time of Braddock's Defeat," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 71 (1976): 467–83; Wood, "Liberty Is Sweet," p. 154.

¹² Richard Henry Lee, speech, n.d., in Richard H. Lee, ed., *Memoir of the Life of Richard Henry Lee, and His Correspondence With the Most Distinguished Men in America and Europe* ... (2 vols.; Philadelphia, 1825), 1:18.

¹³ William Fleming to Francis Fauquier, 26 July 1763, in George Reese, ed., *The Official Papers of Francis Fauquier, Lieutenant Governor of Virginia, 1758–1768*, Virginia Historical Society Documents, 14, 15, 16 (3 vols.; Charlottesville, 1980–83), 2:998; Peter Fontaine to Moses and John Fontaine and Daniel Torin, 7 Aug. 1763, in Ann Maury, ed., *Memoirs of a Huguenot Family* (New York, 1872), p. 372. Cf. Benjamin Johnston, advertisement, in *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 16 Dec. 1773.

Virginia, &c.
Francis Fauquier Esq; his Majesty's
 Lieutenant-Governour, and Commander in Chief of the said
 Colony and Dominion:
 To *Lieutenants Baynes Edmund Robinson John Withers John Bowdoin Angel Bondhull John Stoddard Samuel Byrd John
 Hannumson John Robins Nathaniel Savage Samuel Bowdoin Patrick Mannum and John Stanger Thomas J. Bondhull
 and Arthur Robinson of the County of Northampton Gent. Gentling*
K NOW YE that whereas I have constituted and appointed you Justices of Oyer and Terminer for the Trial of
Peter Hill a negro Man slave belonging to William Christian of Northampton for Felony
 I do therefore, by Virtue of the Powers and Authorities to me granted by his Majesty, as Commander in Chief of this Dominion,
 authorize and appoint that, the Commission being read as usual, any one of you the said *Lieutenants Baynes Edmund Robinson John Withers
 John Bowdoin Angel Bondhull John Stoddard or Samuel Byrd*
 having first taken the Oaths appointed by Act of Parliament to be taken, instead of the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy,
 the Oath appointed to be taken by an Act of Parliament made in the first Year of the Reign of his late Majesty King GEORGE
 the First, entitled, "An Act for the further Security of his Majesty's Person and Government, and the Succession of the Crown
 in the Heirs of the late Princess Sophia, being Protestants, and for extinguishing the Hopes of the pretended Prince of Wales, and
 his open and secret Abettors," as also the Test, together with the Oath for duly executing the Office of a Justice of Oyer and
 Terminer, which the said *John Hannumson and John Robins*
 or any two in the Commission above-named, are hereby required and empowered to give and administer to you, you administer
 to the above Justices, and every of them, in the Commission above-named, the above mentioned Oaths and Test, together
 with the Oath for duly executing the Office of a Justice of Oyer and Terminer, of the Performance of which you are to make
 due Return to the Secretary's Office. Given under my Hand, and the Seal of the Colony, at Williamsburg, the first
 Day of November One Thousand Seven Hundred and Seventy six in the 1st Year of the
 Reign of our Sovereign Lord King GEORGE the Third.
Francis Fauquier

Preston Davie Papers, 1749-1846, Virginia Historical Society

Rumors of slave uprisings escalated in times of conflict, especially during the Seven Years' War (1755-63) and Pontiac's War (1763-64). On 1 November 1765, Lieutenant Governor Francis Fauquier issued a commission appointing a court of oyer and terminer to try Peter Hill, a slave belonging to William Christian of Northampton County, on felony charges.

Fairfax County that same year, enslaved workers poisoned several overseers. "[S]ome of the negroes have been taken up, four of whom were executed about three weeks ago, after which their heads were cut off, and fixed on the chimnies of the court-house," a Boston newspaper reported, "and it was expected that four more would soon meet with the same fate."¹⁴ Frederick County slaves also reportedly plotted a rebellion in the 1760s.¹⁴ In Stafford County in May 1769, some of John Knox's slaves "barbarously murdered" him. Suspicion fell on two fugitives named Phill and Winny, and Knox's brothers offered a reward of £105 for their capture and 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 suspect in her master's death.¹⁵ Around Christmas of the same year, the bondsmen on Bowler Cocke's plantation in nearby Hanover County attacked the steward, his assistant, and a neighbor and beat each severely. When a band of whites

¹⁴ Boston Chronicle, 11-18 Jan. 1768, quoted in Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, pp. 198-99; Frederick County militia, accounts, 23 Mar. 1767, Committee of Public Claims, report, 23 Nov. 1769, in John Pendleton Kennedy, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1766-1769* (Richmond, 1906), pp. 91, 286; Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, pp. 146-47.

¹⁵ Robert Knox and William Knox, advertisement, in *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 15 June 1769 (first quotation); *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 20 July 1769 (second quotation).

arrived to suppress the insurrection, Cocke's slaves "rushed upon them with a desperate fury, armed with clubs and staves." The whites saved themselves by shooting dead two of the rebels and nearly decapitating a third.¹⁶

As Lieutenant Governor Dinwiddie had said in 1755, "any Emergency" that divided white Americans could give blacks the opportunity to launch rebellions.¹⁷ The American Revolution was such an emergency. By Christmas 1774, some enslaved Virginians had begun to discuss how to exploit the widening rift between white colonists and the royal governor and navy. "In one of our Counties lately," James Madison reported in November 1774, "a few of those unhappy wretches met together & chose a leader who was to conduct them when the English Troops should arrive." Enslaved workers in other colonies also met to consider how to profit from the imperial conflict. In St. Andrew's Parish, Georgia, slaves rebelled in December 1774 and killed four whites before they were captured and burned alive. An account of a plot in Ulster County, New York, appeared in the *Virginia Gazette* in mid-March 1775; the scheme had been uncovered when a white man overheard two enslaved conspirators planning to obtain gunpowder and shot.¹⁸

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.¹⁹ Late in 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 . . . & arming them against you" to his brothers in Virginia. Lee reported the plan "meets with approbation from ministerial People."²⁰ James Madison heard in early 1775 that a bill freeing the slaves had been introduced in Parliament. No such bill has been found, but Edmund Burke noted on the floor of the House of Commons in March that many pro-government members favored "a general enfranchisement of

¹⁶ *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 25 Jan. 1770.

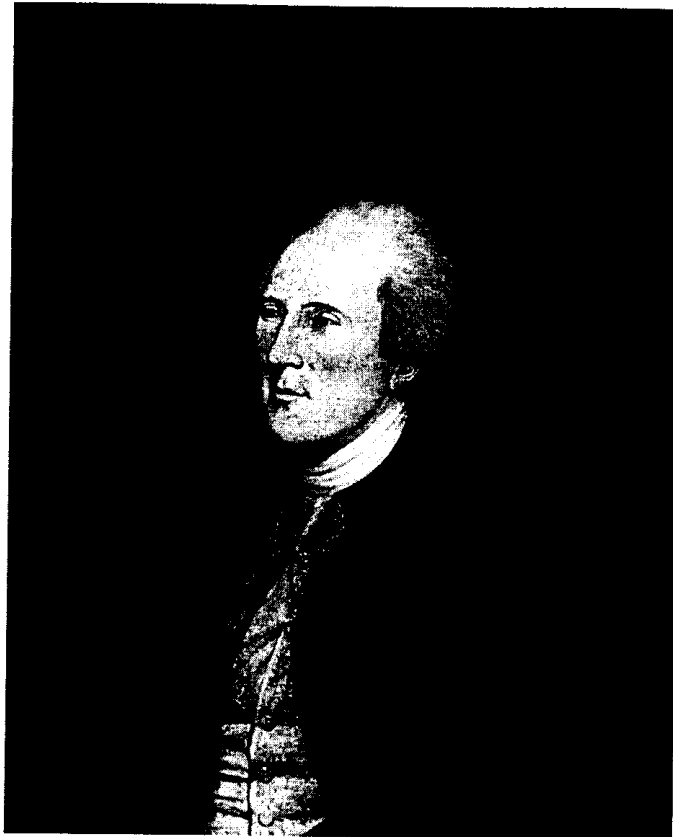
¹⁷ Robert Dinwiddie to Charles Carter, 18 July 1755, in Brock, ed., *Dinwiddie Records*, 2:104 (quotation); Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, p. 4.

¹⁸ James Madison to William Bradford, Jr., 26 Nov. 1774, in William T. Hutchinson et al., eds., *The Papers of James Madison* (17 vols.; Chicago and Charlottesville, 1962–91), 1:130 (quotation); Wood, "Liberty Is Sweet," pp. 161–63.

¹⁹ Jonathan Boucher, *A Letter from a Virginian to the Members of the Congress . . .* ([New York], 1774), p. 32; Henry Cruger to Ralph Izard, 21 Mar. 1775, in *Correspondence of Mr. Ralph Izard, of South Carolina . . .* (New York, 1844), p. 58.

²⁰ "Viator" [William Draper], *The Thoughts of a Traveller Upon Our American Disputes* (London, 1774), p. 21; Arthur Lee to [Richard Henry Lee?], 6 Dec. 1774, Lee Family Papers, 1638–1867, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond. Lee continued: "Do not laugh at it, till you are sure it would be vain. If you apprehend it would be dangerous take proper precautions against it."

From his home in London, Arthur Lee (1740–1792) kept his brothers abreast of political developments. In December 1774 he warned of the positive reaction several ministers had had to William Draper's suggestion that the patriot rebellion could be quashed by "Proclam[ing] *Freedom* to their Negroes." Lee became the London correspondent for the Continental Congress in 1775 and after the outbreak of hostilities was named one of three commissioners to negotiate an American alliance with France.



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[the] slaves."²¹ During spring 1775, many Virginians believed that these 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, and turn them against their Masters." A similar accusation was made in an anonymous letter that appeared in Alexander Purdie's *Virginia Gazette* in June. The writer alluded to recent rumors of slave conspiracies and then added: "From some hints, it was inferred that the negroes had not been without encouragement from a Gentleman of the Navy"—probably Captain Henry Colins of HMS *Magdalen*.²²

²¹ William Bradford, Jr., to James Madison, 4 Jan. 1775, in Hutchinson et al., eds., *Madison Papers*, 1:132; Edmund Burke, speech on conciliation with the colonies, 22 Mar. 1775, in Edmund Burke, *Speeches and Letters on American Affairs*, Everyman's Library, 340 (London and New York, 1908), p. 102.

²² House of Burgesses, address to John Murray, earl of Dunmore, 19 June 1775, in *JHB*, 1773–76, p. 256; *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), 16 June 1775. Cf. Virginia convention of 1775, "A Declaration of the Delegates . . .," 26 Aug. 1775, in Van Schreeven, Scribner, and Tarter, eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, 3:501. The rumor that the British government intended to arm enslaved Americans against their masters circulated in other colonies as well. During the critical month of April 1775, Philadelphia Quaker James Kenny reported that "a great Woman in London" had written a Philadelphian saying several members of the House of Lords had informed her of a "secret Plan." "[A]rms &c" were "to be given to all the . . . Negroes to act against the Collonie" (James Kenny to

Enslaved Virginians did not wait for British “encouragement” to intensify their activism. In spring 1775 several groups of slaves in the James River watershed reportedly assembled to plan rebellions. On 15 April 1775 Toney, a slave in Prince Edward County, was charged with insurrection and conspiracy to commit murder; he received fifteen lashes.²³ Three days later whites in nearby Chesterfield County were “alarm’d for an Insurrection of the Slaves,” trader Robert Donald reported. Slave patrols were usually somewhat lax in Virginia, but the one in Chesterfield was quickly revived. “[W]e Patrol and go armed—a dreadful enemy,” Donald wrote on 18 April.²⁴ Three more days passed. Then “Sentence of death [was] passed upon two Negroes . . . tried at Norfolk, for being concerned in a conspiracy to raise an insurrection in that town,” the *Virginia Gazette* reported. One of the accused blacks in Norfolk was Emanuel de Antonio. The other was called simply Emanuel, and he was the property of Matthew Phripp, the militia lieutenant for Norfolk County.²⁵ On 21 April, the very day that the two Emanuels 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*.”²⁶

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. Many white Virginians, however, thought that the alleged occurrence in different parts of the James River watershed of four slave conspiracies during the third week of April 1775—the largest number in such a short time before Gabriel’s Rebellion in 1800—was no coincidence. They believed that what they were facing was not just a few scattered outbreaks but a coordinated attack. Edward Stabler, a Williamsburg Quaker, noted in May that during the previous month “[t]here had 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 citizens. An anonymous newspaper essayist stated in June that “various reports of internal insurrections” had circulated throughout the spring.

Humphry Marshall, 25 Apr. 1775 [typescript], Humphry and Moses Marshall Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor).

²³ Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, pp. 182, 184.

²⁴ Robert Donald to Patrick Hunter, 18 Apr. 1775, in *Buchanan and Milliken v. Robert Donald*, 1794, U.S. Circuit Court, Virginia District, Ended Cases (restored), Box 6, Vi.

²⁵ *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter), 29 Apr. 1775 (supplement); Norfolk County Minute Book, 21 Apr. 1775, Vi.

²⁶ Edmund Pendleton to George Washington, 21 Apr. 1775, in David John Mays, ed., *The Letters and Papers of Edmund Pendleton, 1734–1803*, Virginia Historical Society Documents, 7, 8 (2 vols.: Charlottesville, 1967), 1:102.

"Whether this was general, or who were the instigators, remains as yet a secret," he said.²⁷

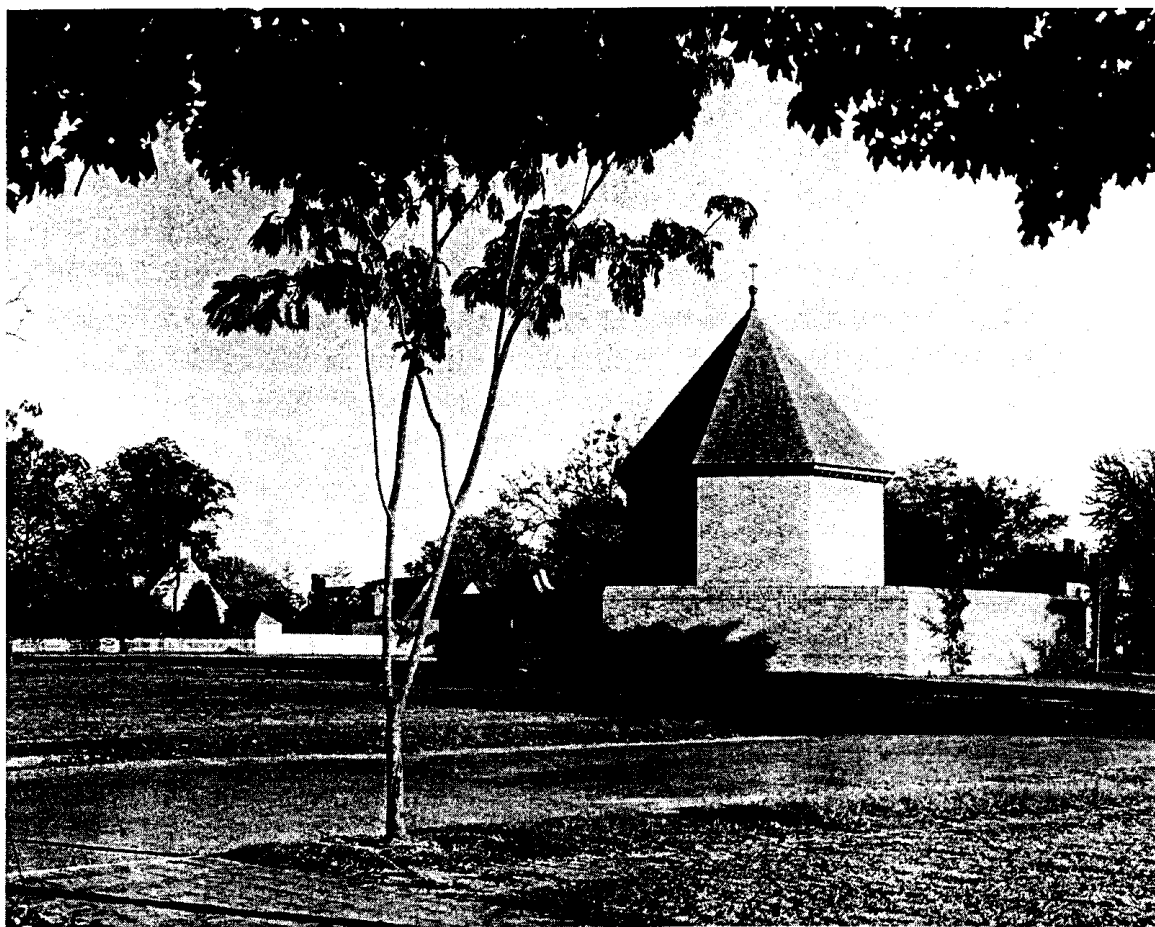
It was in this context of rising aspirations among blacks and mounting fears among whites that Governor Dunmore decided to put Virginia's major ammunition cache out of the reach of patriot militiamen. Early on Friday morning, 21 April, he had a detachment from HMS *Magdalen* remove fifteen half barrels of gunpowder from the colonial magazine in the center of Williamsburg and secure them on the warship. Many white Virginians believed that the governor's timing was no coincidence, that he intentionally removed the powder amid the swirl of rumors of servile insurrection in order to abandon them to the fury of their slaves. Many years later, Edmund Randolph, who had lived in Williamsburg in April 1775, pronounced the transfer of the powder "not far removed from assassination." He concluded that 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."²⁸

In 1774 Dunmore had led an attack against the Shawnee and Mingo nations that forced them to cede all the land east of the Ohio River to Virginia; in March 1775 a patriot convention unanimously praised the earl "for his truly noble, wise and spirited Conduct on the late Expedition against our Indian Enemy."²⁹ As late as 20 April, despite the anti-British

²⁷ Edward Stabler to Isaac Pemberton, 16 May 1775, Pemberton Papers, 27:144, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Va. [hereafter cited as ViWC]); *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), 16 June 1775. Cf. unnamed merchants, note at the foot of Archibald Cary to James Lyle et al., 12 June 1775, Colonial Office 5/1353, ff. 129-31, PRO (microfilm, p. 401, Lamont Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.). Certainly a conspiracy this extensive was possible. Twenty-five years later, in 1800, organizers of Gabriel's Rebellion recruited clusters of supporters in counties throughout the Tidewater and Piedmont. See Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York, 1972), pp. 140-63; Philip J. Schwarz, "Gabriel's Challenge: Slaves and Crime in Late Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (hereafter cited as VMHB) 90 (1982): 283-309; and Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802* (Chapel Hill and London, 1993).

²⁸ Randolph, *History of Virginia*, p. 219. Cf. Sussex County committee, resolution, 8 May 1775, Virginia convention of 1775, "A Declaration of the Delegates . . .," 26 Aug. 1775, in Van Schreeven, Scribner, and Tarter, eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, 3:107, 501; John Murray, earl of Dunmore, to William Legge, earl of Dartmouth, 1 May 1775, in K. G. Davies, ed., *Documents of the American Revolution, 1770-1783* (21 vols.; Shannon, Ireland, 1972-81), 9:109.

²⁹ Virginia convention of 1775, resolution, 25 Mar. 1775, in Van Schreeven, Scribner, and Tarter, eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, 2:376. On Dunmore's War, see Jack M. Sosin, "The British Indian Department and Dunmore's War," VMHB 74 (1966): 34-50; Turk McCleskey, "Dunmore's War," in Richard L. Blanco, ed., *The American Revolution, 1775-1783: An Encyclopedia* (2 vols.; New York and London, 1993), 1:492-97; Michael N. McConnell, *A Country Between: The Upper Ohio Valley and Its Peoples, 1724-1774* (Lincoln, Nebr., and London, 1992), pp. 268-79; and Woody Holton, "The Ohio Indians and the Coming of the American Revolution in Virginia," JSH 60 (1994): 453-78.



W. Harry Bagby Collection, Virginia Historical Society

Before dawn on 21 April 1775, British troops under orders from Dunmore removed from the magazine at Williamsburg fifteen half barrels of gunpowder. White colonists, uneasy at such a transfer while widespread rumors of servile insurrection circulated, became even more alarmed on the following day when the governor warned that if the patriots responded with force, he “would declare Freedom to the Slaves, and reduce the City of *Williamsburg* to Ashes.”

currents sweeping over the American colonies, Dunmore remained what Norfolk merchant James Parker pronounced him in January 1775—“as popular as a Scotsman can be among weak prejudiced people.” Overnight the relocation of the gunpowder turned him into a villain. By dawn on 21 April, most of white Williamsburg, having learned of the removal of the powder, 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.³⁰

³⁰ James Parker to Charles Steuart, 27 Jan. 1775, Charles Steuart Papers, MSS 5025, National

Williamsburg lapsed into "perfect tranquility." But then "a Report was spread by his Excellency's throwing out some threats respecting the Slaves."³¹ The report was true. On 22 April, the day after he removed the gunpowder, Dunmore reignited the crisis. 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 high-ranking British official was harmed, Dunmore "would declare Freedom to the Slaves, and reduce the City of *Williamsburg* to Ashes."³²

It became clear at once what probably had prompted Speaker Randolph and other white leaders to back off so quickly from their demand the previous day that Dunmore immediately return the powder. They did not want to provoke him to employ a weapon far more lethal than fifteen half barrels of gunpowder, the more than 180,000 Virginians who were enslaved.³³ A day later, Dunmore went beyond whatever subtle hints he may have dropped in his meeting with white leaders; he explicitly threatened to free Virginia's slaves.

Dunmore's posture frightened white Virginians. In Williamsburg, the town fathers doubled the nightly slave patrol. In Amelia, the patriot committee, fearful "for the internal security of the county," ordered "that patrollers in every neighbourhood be constantly kept on duty."³⁴

Dunmore's suspiciously timed seizure of the gunpowder and his threat to free the slaves coincided with the battles of Lexington and Concord. White Virginians interpreted the initiatives of General Thomas Gage in Massachusetts and Governor Dunmore in Virginia as part of a concerted ministerial plot to disarm them. The government's scheme seemed likely to have its most dire consequences in the slave colonies. 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 hastily did so.³⁵

Library of Scotland, Edinburgh (microfilm, Vi); John E. Selby, *The Revolution in Virginia, 1775-1783* (Charlottesville, 1988), pp. 1-2.

³¹ John Dixon, deposition, quoted in Committee on the Late Disturbances, report, 14 June 1775, in *JHB*, 1773-76, p. 233 (quotations); Randolph, *History of Virginia*, p. 220.

³² William Pasteur, deposition, quoted in Committee on the Late Disturbances, report, 14 June 1775, in *JHB*, 1773-76, p. 231.

³³ 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*, Indians of the Southeast (Lincoln, Nebr., 1989), p. 38.

³⁴ Benjamin Waller and John Dixon, depositions, quoted in Committee on the Late Disturbances, report, 14 June 1775, in *JHB*, 1773-76, pp. 232-33; Amelia County committee, minutes, 3 May 1775, in Van Schreeven, Scribner, and Tarter, eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, 3:83.

³⁵ The counties were Mecklenburg, New Kent, Chesterfield, Louisa, Essex, Henrico, and Nansemond. See Randolph, *History of Virginia*, p. 220; James Lyle and Robert Donald, Thomas Mitchell, Archibald Ritchie, Archibald Bryce, and Andrew Sprowle et al., depositions, quoted in

Dunmore's Order 11th May 1775.

Rec^d from the Hon^{ble} Sec^y Corbin Esq. His Majesty's Rec^d
 Gen^l £330 as a Compensation for the Gunpowder lately
 taken out of the Public Magazines by the Governor's Order
 (which Money I promised to convey to the Virginia Delegates at
 the Gen^l Congress to be used in their Direction's for out in
 Gunpowder for the Colony: And used to be stored as they should
 not within the next Colony Cont^l or G^l Assembly
 unless it shall be necessary in the Mean Time to send
 the same for the Defence of this Colony. It is agreed that
 in Case the next Cont^l shall determine that any part of
 the said Money ought to be returned to his Majesty's S^{ty}.
 That if the same shall be used accordingly

Signed
 Pth Henry Jr

Wm Corbin
 Sec^y
 Sam^l Morison
 Par^l Goodale

Virginia Historical Society

The day after Dunmore issued a proclamation demanding that white Virginians cease all resistance, Patrick Henry entered into a face-saving agreement with Virginia's receiver general. In this copy of a receipt issued 4 May 1775, Henry acknowledged Richard Corbin's payment of £330 for the gunpowder removed on Dunmore's orders to HMS *Magdalen*.

Although the clash at 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 explicitly linked its decision to establish an

Committee on the Late Disturbances, report, 14 June 1775, in *JHB*, 1773–76, pp. 234–37; Mecklenburg County committee, resolution, 8 May 1775, New Kent County committee, minutes, 3 May 1775, in Van Schreeven, Scribner, and Tarter, eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, 3:105, 85; Mays, *Edmund Pendleton*, 2:353n; and Dale E. Benson, "Wealth and Power in Virginia, 1774–1776: A Study of the Organization of Revolt" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maine, 1970), p. 173.

independent company to Dunmore's oddly timed relocation of the gunpowder. The governor, the Sussex committee asserted, had attempted "to render (at least as far as in his power so to do) this colony defenceless, and lay it open to the attacks of a savage invasion, or a domestick foe." His actions made it "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 29 April 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."³⁶

The men who assembled for the march to Williamsburg no doubt expected whites in the capital to be comforted to hear that reinforcements were on the way. Instead, white Williamsburg residents were terrified. The moment colonial treasurer Robert Carter Nicholas and Speaker Peyton Randolph learned that the independent companies had gathered, they began "writing letters over all the country to prevent those meetings," according to Norfolk merchant James Parker.³⁷ Speaker Randolph warned the Fredericksburg encampment that "violent measures may produce effects, which God only knows the consequence of." His fears were not unfounded. On 28 April, the day after Dunmore learned that the independent companies intended to march against him, he reiterated his threat to raise the slaves. The governor drew a line in the sandy Tidewater soil. He told Pasteur that "if a large Body of People came below *Ruffin's Ferry* (a place about thirty Miles from this City) that he would immediately enlarge his plan, and carry it into Execution." If any whites had dared to hope that Dunmore's earlier warning had been only the product of momentary passion, by repeating it he set them straight. During "this alarming crisis," a group of Williamsburg slave patrollers said, "even the whispering of the wind was sufficient to rouse their fears." The governor underscored that he would not strike the first blow; Pasteur reported that he "more than once did say, he should not carry these Plans into Execution unless he was attacked."³⁸

Fearful gentry leaders managed to persuade most of the independent volunteer companies to disband—most, but not all. The Albemarle County

³⁶ Cumberland County committee, minutes, 1 May 1775, in Van Schreeven, Scribner, and Tarter, eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, 3:75; Sussex County committee, resolution, 8 May 1775, in *ibid.*, 3:107; Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, p. 4; John Burk, Skelton Jones, and Louis Hue Girardin, *The History of Virginia, From its First Settlement to the Present Day* (4 vols.; Petersburg, Va., 1804–16), 3:410.

³⁷ Parker said Nicholas had found "it more difficult to extinguish a flame than kindle it" (James Parker to Charles Steuart, 6–7 May 1775, Charles Steuart Papers [microfilm, Vi]).

³⁸ Peyton Randolph and the "Corporation of the City of Williamsburg" to Mann Page, Jr., Lewis Willis, and Benjamin Grymes, Jr., 27 Apr. 1775, in Van Schreeven, Scribner, and Tarter, eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, 3:64; Charles Campbell, *History of the Colony and Ancient Dominion of Virginia* (Philadelphia, 1860), p. 609; William Pasteur, deposition, quoted in Committee on the Late Disturbances, report, 14 June 1775, in *JHB*, 1773–76, p. 231; *Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney), 4 May 1775.

volunteers voted on 29 April to march to Williamsburg "to demand satisfaction of Dunmore for the powder, and his threatening to fix his standard and call over the negroes," the company's first lieutenant noted.³⁹ Apparently the Albemarle troops had second thoughts and turned back, but the company from Hanover County, led by Patrick Henry, decided on 2 May to march on. The Hanover men, who were soon joined by volunteers from other counties, feared that Dunmore's suspiciously timed removal of the gunpowder would lead to "calamities of the greatest magnitude, and most fatal consequences to this colony," presumably including a slave revolt.⁴⁰ Speaker Randolph and other leaders tried to persuade Henry's followers that by attacking Dunmore they would provoke him to create the very "calamities" and "fatal consequences" they meant to prevent.⁴¹

The leaders' assessment of the governor's intentions was correct. As Henry's band headed toward Williamsburg, "several negroes" went to the governor's palace and "made a tender of their services." Dunmore turned them away, but he told Attorney General John Randolph that if the Hanover volunteers attacked him and "Negroes on that Occasion offered their Service they would be received."⁴² On 3 May, Dunmore issued a proclamation. He demanded that free Virginians cease all resistance to his authority, and he took the occasion to remind them of their vulnerability to a slave or Indian uprising. This veiled warning may 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*.⁴³

The powder magazine incident is one of the chestnuts of Virginia history. It marked the first time since Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 that a large number of Virginians had taken up arms to attack a royal governor. It served also "to widen the unhappy breach between Great Britain and her colonies," as the soldiers encamped at Fredericksburg declared. All over the colony, county committees proclaimed that Dunmore had "highly forfeited all title to the confidence of the good people of Virginia."⁴⁴ In the

³⁹ George Gilmer, diary and memoranda, in Van Schreeven, Scribner, and Tarter, eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, 3:52 n. 2 (quotation); Albemarle County independent company of volunteers, minutes, [29 Apr. 1775], in *ibid.*, 3:69–70; *Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney), 30 June 1775.

⁴⁰ It has generally been believed that the Hanover men sought only the return of the gunpowder to the Williamsburg munitions depot. But Hanover's patriot committee said the men marched to Williamsburg because they had heard that white inhabitants of the capital felt "apprehension for their persons and property" (Hanover County committee, minutes, 9 May 1775, in Van Schreeven, Scribner, and Tarter, eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, 3:111, 179n).

⁴¹ *Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney), 11 May 1775, in Van Schreeven, Scribner, and Tarter, eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, 3:117; George Dabney to William Wirt, 14 May 1805, Patrick Henry Papers, DLC; Campbell, *History of Virginia*, p. 612.

⁴² *Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney), 4 May 1775; John Randolph, deposition, quoted in Committee on the Late Disturbances, report, 14 June 1775, in *JHB*, 1773–76, p. 232.

⁴³ *Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney), 4 May 1775; Randolph, *History of Virginia*, p. 220.

⁴⁴ Spotsylvania council, minutes, 29 Apr. 1775, in Van Schreeven, Scribner, and Tarter, eds.,

midst of the crisis, Patrick Henry recognized that the episode would foster patriotism in Virginia. As the Hanover independent company marched toward Williamsburg, he observed that the removal of the gunpowder "was a fortunate circumstance, which would rouse the people from North to South."⁴⁵

The growth of anti-British sentiment in Virginia in May 1775 is usually ascribed simply to the battles of Lexington and Concord and to Dunmore's decision to seize the gunpowder.⁴⁶ But the governor learned from Benjamin Waller, a member of Williamsburg's patriot committee, that Dunmore 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." 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. It is possible that many patriots only pretended to believe the stories about Dunmore's "stirring up the Negroes to Rebellion" (as Rawleigh Downman put it in July) because the rumors furnished a good pretext for anti-British activities.⁴⁷ Because Dunmore's opponents had backed down, however, no one knew what he would have done if they had called his bluff and attacked him. Patriots may have exaggerated their anger at Dunmore's tactics of intimidation, but they did not invent it.

Racial tensions escalated the imperial conflict in another way as well. One of the charges that whites lodged against Dunmore was that he had chosen to remove the powder at the very moment when reports of slave conspiracies poured into Williamsburg. The slave revolt scare in April 1775 was the crucial context of Dunmore's seizure of the gunpowder. It was not

Revolutionary Virginia, 3:71 (first quotation); Mecklenburg County committee, resolution, 13 May 1775, New Kent County committee, resolutions, 3 May 1775, Gloucester County committee, resolutions, 26 Apr. 1775, Richmond County committee, resolutions, 12 May 1775, Orange County committee, resolutions and address, 9 May 1775, in *ibid.*, 3:124 (second quotation), 85, 61, 121, 112. On 20 April, 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 petition. In fact, he became a major in the patriot army (Robert Munford to William Byrd III, 20 Apr. 1775, in Marion Tinling, ed., *The Correspondence of the Three William Byrds of Westover, Virginia, 1684-1776*, Virginia Historical Society Documents, 12, 13 [2 vols.; Charlottesville, 1977], 2:806, 806 n. 3).

⁴⁵ Quoted in George Dabney to William Wirt, 14 May 1805, Patrick Henry Papers.

⁴⁶ See, for example, H. J. Eckenrode, *The Revolution in Virginia* (Boston and New York, 1916), pp. 49-54; Virginus Dabney, *Virginia: The New Dominion* (Garden City, N.Y., 1971), pp. 128-29; and Warren M. Billings, John E. Selby, and Thad W. Tate, *Colonial Virginia: A History*, A History of the American Colonies in Thirteen Volumes (White Plains, N.Y., 1986), p. 342.

⁴⁷ Benjamin Waller, deposition, quoted in Committee on the Late Disturbances, report, 14 June 1775, in *JHB*, 1773-76, p. 232; Thomas Mitchell, deposition, quoted in Committee on the Late Disturbances, report, 14 June 1775, in *ibid.*, p. 234; Rawleigh Downman to Samuel Athawes, 10 July 1775, Rawleigh Downman Letterbook, DLC, as quoted in Michael A. McDonnell, "The Politics of Mobilization in Revolutionary Virginia: Military Culture and Political and Social Relations, 1774-1783" (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1995), pp. 37-38.

only his decision to "remov[e] the powder from the magazine" but also "the several circumstances attending the same" that angered the Richmond County committee. Others agreed. The Fredericksburg encampment considered the relocation of the gunpowder "ill timed." A South Carolina newspaper described the racial context of the transfer and then observed, "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 . . . has worked up the passions of the people there almost to a frenzy."⁴⁸

Despite the reality of Dunmore's threat to free the slaves and his decision to remove the gunpowder during this tense period, the possibility must be considered that patriots publicly exaggerated their fear in order to cast further odium on the royal governor. White Virginians, however, seem to have been sincere when they said they feared a slave insurrection at the time Dunmore removed the powder. Loyalists such as James Robison, the chief factor for William Cuninghame & Company of Glasgow, agreed with patriots that "an insurrection . . . was dreaded" in Virginia during the spring of 1775.⁴⁹ If one suspects that the *Virginia Gazette's* account of the "conspiracy to raise an insurrection" in Norfolk was only patriot propaganda, one need only consult the minute book of the Norfolk County court, in which the trial of the two Emanuels is recorded.⁵⁰ The death of one of the alleged conspirators, Matthew Phripp's Emanuel, can be traced in the Norfolk County tithable lists, from which he disappeared between the taking of the 1774 and 1778 enumerations.⁵¹ The trial of Toney in Prince Edward County is also a matter of record. It is possible that the Williamsburg town council's allegation on 21 April that Dunmore had removed the gunpowder amid "various reports" of slave plots "in different parts of the

⁴⁸ Richmond County committee, resolutions, 12 May 1775, in Van Schreeven, Scribner, and Tarter, eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, 3:121; Spotsylvania council, minutes, 29 Apr. 1775, in *ibid.*, 3:71; *South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*, 6 June 1775, quoted in 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, 1978), p. 282.

⁴⁹ James Robison to William Cuninghame & Company, 3 May 1775, in T. M. Devine, ed., *A Scottish Firm in Virginia, 1767-1777: W. Cuninghame and Co.* (Edinburgh, 1984), p. 187.

⁵⁰ The newspaper accounts of the Norfolk insurrection do not mention the leaders' names, and the Norfolk County court did not specify the felony for which Emanuel and Emanuel de Antonio were convicted. One might be tempted to conclude, therefore, that the two Emanuels were not necessarily the leaders of the slave revolt mentioned in the newspaper—that they were hanged for some lesser offense. But we can conclude that the accusation against the two Emanuels was indeed insurrection, because they were hanged only one week after their trial. Under Virginia law, the execution of slaves had to be stayed for at least ten days—unless the condemned were insurrectionists (Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 6:106).

⁵¹ Lists for the intervening years have not survived. The other alleged conspirator, Emanuel de Antonio, also disappeared from the Norfolk tithable lists between 1774 and 1778—but so did all of the other slaves owned by James Campbell & Company, a loyalist firm whose principal left Virginia early in the Revolution. See Elizabeth B. Wingo and W. Bruce Wingo, *Norfolk County, Virginia, Tithables, 1766-1780* (Norfolk, Va., 1985), pp. 230, 242, 261.

country" was just rhetoric,⁵² but whites' fears as recorded in the private letters of Edmund Pendleton, Edward Stabler, and Robert Donald were almost certainly not fabricated.

If anything, white Virginians may have understated their apprehensions of slave revolt in their public pronouncements. In November 1774, when James Madison told a Princeton classmate that slaves in the Piedmont had planned to take advantage of the 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." Although nothing was certain in this murky world of "exaggeration, distortion, [and] censorship," it seems likely that white Virginians' anger at Governor Dunmore for taking their gunpowder was intensified by the context in which he took it. The earl seized the stores at the end of the third week of April 1775, when white Virginians circulated more reports of slave conspiracies than they had during any previous week in the colony's history.⁵³

Some white Virginians expressed their growing rage at Dunmore in jokes about his relations with black women. There had long been talk about the governor's philandering, but during the summer of 1775, for the first time, his concubines were said to include blacks. On 1 June 1775, Pinkney's *Virginia Gazette* sarcastically predicted that "The BLACK LADIES" would "be jollily entertained at the p[alac]e." A year later, after Dunmore had assembled a mostly black army to battle the patriots, Purdie's *Virginia Gazette* maintained that the diminutive Dunmore and his forces celebrated their landing on Gwynn's Island "with a promiscuous ball, which was

⁵² Municipal Common Hall of Williamsburg to John Murray, earl of Dunmore, 21 Apr. 1775, in Van Schreeven, Scribner, and Tarter, eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, 3:55.

⁵³ James Madison to William Bradford, Jr., 26 Nov. 1774, in Hutchinson et al., eds., *Madison Papers*, 1:130; *Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney), 6 Dec. 1775; Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, esp. chap. 7. Several recent retellings of the story do not mention its black participants. See, for example, Billings, Selby, and Tate, *Colonial Virginia*, p. 342; and Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill, 1982), pp. 256-58.

Even Herbert Aptheker, a careful searcher for evidence of slave conspiracies, believed that there was no plot in Virginia in April 1775 (Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, p. 204). His skepticism regarding Dunmore's assertion that he moved the gunpowder in order to protect whites from a rumored slave plot was justified, because Dunmore himself acknowledged in a letter to the earl of Dartmouth, the secretary of state, that the plot was not the real reason for the relocation of the powder. The governor, however, sincerely believed the rumor itself, because he stated in the same letter that whites in Williamsburg were "apprehensive of insurrections among their slaves (some reports having prevailed to this effect)" (John Murray, earl of Dunmore, to William Legge, earl of Dartmouth, 1 May 1775, in Davies, ed., *Documents of the American Revolution*, 9:107-8).

RUN away from *Hampton*, on *Sunday* last, a lusty Mulatto Fellow named ARGYLE, well known about the Country, has a Scar on one of his Wrists, and has lost one or more of his fore Teeth; he is a very handy Fellow by Water, or about the House, &c. loves Drink, and is very bold in his Cups, but dastardly when sober. Whether he will go for a Man of War's Man, or not, I cannot say; but I will give 40s. to have him brought to me. He can read and write.

NOVEMBER 2, 1775. JACOB WRAY.

RUN away from the Subscriber, in *New Kent*, in the Year 1772, a small new New Negro Man named GEORGE, about 40 Years of Age, with a Nick in one Ear, and some Marks with the Whip. He was about *Williamsburg* till last Winter, but either went or was sent to Lord *Dunmore's* Quarter in *Frederick* County, and there passes for his Property. Whoever conveys him to me shall have 5l. Reward.

1 || JAMES MOSS.

Virginia Historical Society

Before mid-1775, owners offering rewards for runaway chattels frequently assumed that the fugitives had gone to visit kin. By autumn of that year, however, advertisements, such as these two that appeared in Dixon and Hunter's *Virginia Gazette* on 4 November 1775, posited that the missing slaves had joined Lord Dunmore's forces.

opened, we hear, by a certain spruce little gentleman, with one of the black ladies." The next month, Landon Carter of Richmond County heard a story about a patriot cannonball passing between Dunmore's legs. Carter joked in his diary that perhaps the "shot cooled his latitudinous virility for that night at least."⁵⁴

Accounts of the Virginia slave plots, the removal of the gunpowder, and the possibility that Dunmore would ally with slave conspirators soon spread

⁵⁴ *Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney), 1 June 1775; *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), 31 May 1776; Jack P. Greene, ed., *The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752-1778*, Virginia Historical Society Documents, 4, 5 (2 vols.; Charlottesville, 1965), 2:1058 (16 July 1776). Still later Adam Stephen predicted that Dunmore would participate in a rumored British invasion of Virginia "in order to add some more oderiferous beauties to his Ethiopian seraglios" (Adam Stephen to Richard Henry Lee, 22 Apr. 1777, quoted in Harry M. Ward, *Major General Adam Stephen and the Cause of American Liberty* [Charlottesville, 1989], p. 168).

throughout the South. At the same time, the same routes of communication carried reports of the battles of Lexington and Concord and rumors from London about an emancipation bill being proposed in Parliament. All of this 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. Dunmore's threat on 22 April to "declare Freedom to the Slaves" was ambiguous—perhaps deliberately so. Had the governor meant he would liberate only those slaves he could enlist in the British army—or all of them? Many southerners believed during the late summer of 1775 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 18 May. A group of Charleston slaves had apparently contemplated a rebellion since April. The news from Virginia, Massachusetts, and London persuaded many South Carolinians that the new governor, Lord William Campbell, who was due to arrive in June, was going to free the slaves and "encourage an insurrection," as the governor himself later reported. The rumor kept white South Carolinians on tenterhooks from early May until 19 June, when Campbell landed without incident.⁵⁵

In North Carolina, too, reports from London, Massachusetts, and Virginia contributed to talk that the British government might soon incite a slave revolt. In early July, when a widespread slave conspiracy was discovered in Pitt, Craven, and Beaufort counties, whites suspected that British officials had conferred with the conspirators about strategy and made certain promises to them. Allegedly the plan was for blacks to start a rebellion on the night of 8 July. They were to kill their owners and then move westward toward the backcountry, where "they were to be received with open arms by a number of Persons there appointed and armed by [the] Government for their Protection," according to Colonel John Simpson of Pitt County.⁵⁶

Many enslaved Americans carried the rumors about British aid for black insurrection one step farther: They believed that the whole purpose of the expected British invasion of the South was to liberate them. In South Carolina, a slave reported that Thomas Jeremiah, a free black fisherman and harbor pilot who hoped to help the British troops link up with rebel slaves, told bondspeople "the War was come to help the poor Negroes."

⁵⁵ Robert Beverley to William Fitzhugh, 20 July 1775, Robert Beverley Letterbook, DLC; Josiah Smith, Jr., to James Poyas, 18 May 1775, Josiah Smith, Jr., to George Appleby, 16 June 1775, Josiah Smith Letterbook, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Wood, "Liberty Is Sweet," pp. 166–68; Wood, "Taking Care of Business," pp. 280–87; Robert M. Weir, *Colonial South Carolina: A History*, A History of the American Colonies in Thirteen Volumes (Millwood, N.Y., 1983), pp. 200–203.

⁵⁶ Wood, "The Dream Deferred," p. 175 (quotation); Alan D. Watson, "Impulse toward Independence: Resistance and Rebellion among North Carolina Slaves, 1750–1775," *JNH* 63 (1978): 317–28.

Farther south in St. Bartholomew Parish at about the same time, a black preacher named George told gatherings of slaves "That the Young King, meaning our Present One, came up with the Book, & was about to alter the World, & set the Negroes Free." George was executed.⁵⁷ The widespread belief among many black southerners that their freedom was Britain's chief war aim was detected by some whites. John Drayton wrote 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, [bondsmen] entertained ideas, that the present contest was for obliging us to give them their liberty."⁵⁸

The report that freeing the slaves was one of Great Britain's objectives—perhaps even the primary one—may 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.

An additional source of anxiety for white leaders, and of hope for blacks, was the possibility that a large number of poor whites might cast their lots with the slaves and the British. About a month after Dunmore removed the Williamsburg gunpowder and threatened to emancipate the slaves, John Simmons of Dorchester County, Maryland, boasted: "[I]f I had a few more white people to join me I could get all the negroes in the county to back us, and they would do more good in the night than the white people could do in the day." He added, "[I]f all the gentlemen were killed we should have the best of the land to tend."⁵⁹ During July, Thomas Cox, a white inhabitant of York County, Virginia, was accused of trying to incite slaves to rebel. He was found innocent of this charge but guilty of breach of the peace.⁶⁰

The deepest fears of white leaders, and the highest hopes of blacks, were not realized. Dunmore did not proclaim a general emancipation, nor did he lead a rebellion of slaves and poor whites. During the summer, however, he began assembling a small fleet to confront the patriots. The governor soon welcomed such fugitive slaves as the pilot Joseph Harris, and the sanctuary that he offered runaways changed the whole calculus of race

⁵⁷ Quoted in Frey, *Water from the Rock*, pp. 58, 62.

⁵⁸ John Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution From Its Commencement to the Year 1776. Inclusive; As Relating to the State of South-Carolina . . .* (2 vols.; Charleston, 1821), 1:231.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Ronald Hoffman, *A Spirit of Dissension: Economics, Politics, and the Revolution in Maryland*, Maryland Bicentennial Studies (Baltimore and London, 1973), p. 147.

⁶⁰ York County Order Book, 17 July 1775 (microfilm and typescript), ViWC; Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, p. 183. In July 1775 a rumor circulated in York County that British troops were about to land, and Cox's accusers may have thought he was working with slaves to prepare for the invasion. See William Reynolds to George Flowerdew Norton, 16 July 1775, William Reynolds Letterbook, DLC. My thanks to Julie Richter for sharing her research on Thomas Cox.



W. Harry Bagby Collection, Virginia Historical Society

The actions of a fifteen-year-old female slave in early summer 1775 illustrate the changing dynamics of the racial aspect of the imperial crisis as it played out in Virginia. Fleeing punishment by her master, Virginia's official vintner, the teenager sought refuge at the governor's palace.

relations in Virginia. Previously, fugitive slave advertisements appearing in the *Virginia Gazette* commonly surmised that the escapee had gone to visit family. By September 1775, however, advertisers began to conjecture that their slaves had fled slavery by joining the British.⁶¹

The story of one fugitive illustrated how the meaning of escape had changed. On 10 February 1775, a fifteen-year-old girl (whose name is not known) was purchased by Virginia's official vintner, Andrew Estave. The teenager may have been one of the many young Virginians who 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 punishment 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 readers of the *Virginia Gazette*, another of the women he owned "found my child, together with this cruel and unnatural wretch, concealed behind

⁶¹ Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, pp. 132–33. White servants, especially convicts, also ran away and headed to the British naval squadron. See, for example, Francis Smith and James Tutt, advertisements, in *Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney), 2 Nov., 27 July 1775; and John Murray, earl of Dunmore, to William Legge, earl of Dartmouth, 25 June 1775, in Davies, ed., *Documents of the American Revolution*, 9:202–3.

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. The governor had himself recently fled to a British warship, and the teenager was soon returned to her master for punishment. First she suffered "eighty lashes, well laid on." Then Estave poured fire embers on her back.⁶² 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.⁶³

The new opportunities produced by the conflict among white Virginians inspired activism even among those slaves who did not try to reach Dunmore. During the summer of 1775, the number of enslaved workers brought before the county courts for criminal trials reached a record level.⁶⁴ 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 15 November at Kemp's Landing south of Norfolk, his outnumbered force, made up largely of former slaves, defeated 170 members of the Princess Anne County militia. Several militiamen were killed, and the rest were put to flight. The patriot commander, Joseph Hutchings, was captured by one of his own former bondsmen.⁶⁵ Kemp's Landing persuaded Dunmore that fugitive 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 emancipation proclamation.⁶⁶ About 1,000 slaves escaped their owners and joined Dunmore. Enlisted in an "Ethiopian Regiment" and wearing uniforms that pointed up the hypocrisy of liberty-seeking patriots by proclaiming "Liberty to Slaves," former bondsmen soon made up the major part of the loyalist troops.⁶⁷ In

⁶² 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 (*Virginia Gazette* [Pinkney], 20 July 1775). We can only imagine how the story would change if we had testimony from the fifteen-year-old.

⁶³ If the teenager had reached the governor's palace before Dunmore left it, he might have been able to grant her sanctuary (charter of Williamsburg, in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1st ser., 10 [1901–2]: 87). My thanks to Brent Tarter and John M. Hemphill II for this reference.

⁶⁴ John Bailey's slaves Phil and Mial "received guilty verdicts in Southampton County conspiracy trials" (Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, pp. 181, 183 [quotation], 184). On 3 July 1775, William Johnson's slave Gloster was sentenced to death for burglary "but broke out of jail and vanished" (William Johnson, petition, 14 June 1776, Caroline County, calendared in Randolph W. Church, ed., *Virginia Legislative Petitions: Bibliography, Calendar, and Abstracts from Original Sources, 6 May 1776–21 June 1782* [Richmond, 1984], pp. 24–25).

⁶⁵ Robert Honyman, diary, 2 Jan. 1776, DLC; Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, p. 64.

⁶⁶ John Page to Thomas Jefferson, 24 [Nov.] 1775, in Boyd et al., eds., *Jefferson Papers*, 1:265.

⁶⁷ *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter), 2 Dec. 1775. Slaves also answered later calls from British

By His Excellency the Right Honorable JOHN Earl of DUNMORE, His
MAJESTY's Lieutenant and Governor General of the Colony and Dominion of
VIRGINIA, and Vice Admiral of the fleet

A PROCLAMATION.

AS I have ever entertained Hopes, that an Accommodation might have
taken Place between GREAT-BRITAIN and this Colony, without being
compelled by my Duty to this most disagreeable but now absolutely necessary
Step, rendered so by a Body of armed Men unlawfully assembled, firing on His
MAJESTY's Tenders, and the formation of an Army, and that Army now on
their March to attack His Majesty's Troops and destroy the well disposed Sub-
jects of this Colony. To defeat such reasonable Purposes, and that all such
Traitors, and their Abettors, may be brought to Justice, and that the Peace, and
good Order of this Colony may be again restored, which the ordinary Course
of the Civil Law is unable to effect; I have thought fit to issue this my Pro-
clamation, hereby declaring, that until the aforeaid good Purposes can be ob-
tained, I do in Virtue of the Power and Authority to ME given, by His MAJE-
STY, determine to execute Martial Law, and cause the same to be executed
in this Colony, and in the Town of Norfolk, and in the County of York, until the
sooner be restored, I do require every Person capable of bearing Arms, to resort
to His MAJESTY's STANDARD, to be looked upon as Traitors to His
MAJESTY's Crown and Government, and thereby become liable to the Penalty
the Law inflicts upon such Offences; such as forfeiture of Life, confiscation of
Lands, &c. &c. And I do hereby further declare all indented Servants, Negroes,
or others, (appertaining to Rebels,) free that are able and willing to bear Arms,
they joining His MAJESTY's Troops as soon as may be, for the more speedily
reducing this Colony to a proper Sense of their Duty, to His MAJESTY's
Crown and Dignity. I do further order, and require, all His MAJESTY's Leige
Subjects, to retain their Quitrents, or any other Taxes due or that may become
due, in their own Custody, till such Time as Peace may be again restored to this
at present most unhappy Country, or to send of them for their former salu-
tary Purposes, by Officers properly authorized to receive the same.

GIVEN under my Hand on board the Ship WILLIAM, in York,
the 7th Day of NOVEMBER, in the sixth Year of His Majesty's said Majesty.

DUNMORE

(GOD save the KING.)

Tracy W. McGregor Library, University of Virginia

Abraham Lincoln's later document, Dunmore's emancipation proclamation of 7
November 1775 was limited in its scope. It offered freedom only to the male slaves of
rebels. Slaves who fled to Dunmore from loyalist masters were returned. The proclamation
urged Virginians to withhold payment of their taxes and quitrents until royal authority
was restored.

order to glimpse the psychological effect of emancipation on the people who reached Dunmore, it may be sufficient to notice 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.⁶⁸

Although Dunmore apparently meant to limit his offer of emancipation to able-bodied men (he addressed it to servants and slaves "able and willing to bear Arms"), half of those who joined him and survived the war were women and children.⁶⁹ Among them was Francis Rice's slave, Mary. One night in spring 1776, Mary, a resident of Hampton, snatched up her three-and-a-half-year-old daughter Phillis and made a dash for the British lines. The two got in safely, lived through the Revolution, and settled afterward in Nova Scotia.⁷⁰

Still, for the 99 percent of slaves who did not escape to Dunmore, his emancipation proclamation was in many ways a disappointment. During summer 1775, many Virginians anticipated that the British government might make the abolition of slavery a goal of the war. Instead, Dunmore offered freedom only to individuals and formed a conventional army to pursue the limited strategy of taking and holding ground. Even as Dunmore's decision to fight a traditional war destroyed the hopes of many black Virginians, it emboldened whites. To them, a black regiment in the British army was a frightening thing indeed, but it was nothing like a British promise of general emancipation. 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 to fight a conventional war did not diminish their anger at him for allying with slaves. As early as May 1775, free subjects had begun literally to demonize

generals. North of Virginia, bondsmen were allowed to join the Continental army in return for their freedom—but only with their owners' permission (Quarles, *Negro in the Revolution*, chaps. 4–5).

⁶⁸ Edmund Taylor, debt owed to Thomas Banks, 1 Sept. 1776, abstracted in "British Mercantile Claims, 1775–1803," *Virginia Genealogist* 16 (1972): 104–5.

⁶⁹ John Murray, earl of Dunmore, proclamation, 7 Nov. 1775, in Van Schreeven, Scribner, and Tarter, eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, 4:334; Graham Russell Hodges, ed., *The Black Loyalist Directory: African Americans in Exile after the American Revolution* (New York, 1996). Cf. Quarles, *Negro in the Revolution*, p. 172; and the list of fifty formerly enslaved "Women [who] embarked at Mill Point" with Dunmore's fleet, printed in the *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter), 31 Aug. 1776, and analyzed in Sarah Stroud, "Tracing Runaway Slaves from Norfolk County, Virginia, during the American Revolutionary War" (seminar paper, Randolph-Macon Woman's College, 1995).

⁷⁰ Hodges, ed., *Black Loyalist Directory*, p. 201. During the American Revolution, many of the enslaved women who 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 and London, 1989], p. 52). For accounts of other black Americans who joined the British and settled after the Revolution in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 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 and Los Angeles, 1981), pp. 69–85; Ellen Gibson Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks* (New York, 1976); and James W. St. G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783–1870*, Dalhousie African Studies Series (New York, 1976).

their governor. In November, when he published his declaration of emancipation, this process intensified. Citizens denounced Dunmore's "Diabolical scheme" and all "his infernal tribe." "Our Devil of a Governor goes on at a Devil of a rate indeed," Benjamin Harrison commented after reading the Virginia news.⁷¹

The deterioration in white Virginians' affection for Dunmore was not the only political result of his proclamation. Thomas Jefferson spoke for other white Americans when he stated in the Declaration of Independence that Dunmore's emancipation proclamation was a major cause of the Revolution.⁷² Throughout Virginia, observers noted that the governor's pronouncement turned neutrals and even loyalists into patriots. "The Inhabitants of this Colony are deeply alarmed at this infernal Scheme," Philip Fithian recorded in his journal as he passed through the Virginia backcountry in late November. "It seems to quicken all in Revolution to overpower him at any Risk." Richard Henry Lee told Catharine Macauley that "Lord Dunmores unparalleled conduct in Virginia has, a few Scotch excepted, united every Man in that large Colony." Archibald Cary agreed. "The Proclamation from Lord D[unmore], has had a most extensive good consequence," he wrote; white "Men of all ranks resent the pointing a dagger to their Throats, through the hands of their Slaves." Cary noted that by endangering loyalists as well as patriots, Dunmore's decision converted many of the former into the latter.⁷³

These patriot writers' comments on the governor's declaration may have reflected some measure of wishful thinking about its effect on undecided and loyalist whites, but Dunmore's pronouncement did transform many neutrals and loyalists into patriots. It even pushed two members of the colony's powerful executive council, Robert "Councilor" Carter and William Byrd III, from the loyalist to the patriot camp. During summer 1775, Byrd had offered to lead British troops. Both he and Carter, however,

⁷¹ Thomas Nelson, Jr., to Mann Page, 4 Jan. 1776, Francis Lightfoot Lee to Landon Carter, 12 Feb. 1776, Benjamin Harrison to Robert Carter Nicholas, 17 Jan. 1776, in Paul H. Smith et al., eds., *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789* (23 vols. to date; Washington, D.C., 1976-), 3:30 (first quotation), 237 (second quotation), 107 (third quotation). A rumored British design to ally with Native Americans was also described as "diabolical" and "infernal" (George Washington to John Augustine Washington, 13 Oct. 1775, Richard Henry Lee to George Washington, 13 Nov. 1775, George Washington to Richard Henry Lee, 26 Dec. 1775, in Abbot et al., eds., *Washington Papers: Revolutionary War Series*, 2:161, 363, 611).

⁷² Page Smith, *A New Age Now Begins: A People's History of the American Revolution* (2 vols.; New York, St. Louis, and San Francisco, 1976), 1:704; Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (Garden City, N.Y., 1978), pp. 71, 75.

⁷³ 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, 1934), p. 135 (28 Nov. 1775); Richard Henry Lee to Catharine Macauley, 29 Nov. 1775, Archibald Cary to Richard Henry Lee, 24 Dec. 1775, in Paul P. Hoffman and John L. Molyneaux, eds., *The Lee Family Papers, 1742-1795* (microfilm; Charlottesville, 1966), Reel 2.

A List of Negroes that went off to Dunmore April 14 1776

Women	Age	Girls	Boys	Size Men	Age
Plasani	35	1		Charles a Saver	60
Nancy	46	1		Jobey R.	54
Mary	50	2	1	Ned	44
Judith	28	3	2	Peter a house (expert)	37
Jenny	25	1	3	Jacob a Shoemaker	35
Heriah	23		3	Robin a Saver	28
Cate	30	2	1	Bob	30
Rachel	25		4	Charles	24
Esther	27		6	Glasgow	21
Leah	25	1		Will	21
Jenny	42			Anthony	19
Sarah	27	2	2	George	18
Manda	25		5	Jacob	20
Dinah	26	2		Isack	16
Lidia	26	2	1		
Ben	29		3		
Ben	23	1		Total 87	
Jenny	30				
Jane	16			Intact.	

Nell	25	2		Peter a Saver	25
Pegg	18			Moses a house (expert)	25

Nell & Sue Linph

Women	Girls	Boys	Men
21	23	27	16

John Willoughby

Legislative Petitions, Records of the General Assembly, Library of Virginia

Although Dunmore offered freedom only to those slaves "able and willing to bear Arms," half of those who joined the royal governor's forces were women and children. In June 1777 John Willoughby, Jr., sought compensation from the General Assembly for eighty-seven slaves who had escaped from Willoughby Point in Norfolk County. Of this number, only sixteen were adult men.

became patriots after Dunmore confirmed his alliance with black Virginians. Byrd then tendered his services to the patriot forces.⁷⁴

Some of William 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 his diary that it was "not to be doubted" that Dunmore would soon receive "some missive commission to Silence all his iniquities both male and female." (This was yet another reference to Dunmore's alleged miscegenation.)⁷⁵ But the winter of 1775-76 came and went with no evidence that anyone at Whitehall objected to Dunmore's decision to offer freedom to the slaves.

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." He speculated that the declaration 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."⁷⁶

Although Dunmore was the only royal governor who made a formal offer of freedom to his colony's slaves before 4 July 1776, other British leaders informally cooperated with bondspeople and thereby helped motivate white Americans to declare independence. In North Carolina in June 1776, patriot James Iredell stated that when royal officials encouraged

⁷⁴ William Byrd III to Sir Jeffery Amherst, 30 July 1775, in Tinling, ed., *Byrd Correspondence*, 2:812-13; Greene, ed., *Carter Diary*, 2:989 (25 Feb. 1776); Van Schreeven, Scribner, and Tarter, eds., *Revolutionary Virginia*, 5:386n-87n; Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, p. 66; Thomas Jefferson to William Wirt, 29 Sept. 1816, in *Reminiscences of Patrick Henry in the Letters of Thomas Jefferson to William Wirt* (Philadelphia, 1911), p. 29.

⁷⁵ Greene, ed., *Carter Diary*, 2:960 (n.d. 1775); John Page to Richard Henry Lee, 20 Feb. 1776, in Hoffman and Molyneaux, eds., *Lee Family Papers*, Reel 2.

⁷⁶ William Eddis, Letter 26, 16 Jan. 1776, in William Eddis, *Letters from America*, ed. Aubrey C. Land (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), p. 133; Edward Rutledge to Ralph Izard, 8 Dec. 1775, in *Izard Correspondence*, p. 165; [John Leacock], *The Fall of British Tyranny, or, American Liberty Triumphant: The First Campaign . . .* (Philadelphia, 1776), p. 48. Cf. Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1988), p. 46; Quarles, *Negro in the Revolution*, p. 20, 20n.



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Dunmore's alliance with black Virginians in autumn 1775 turned many loyalists into patriots. In April William Byrd III (1728–1777) had sought to awaken in his colleagues on the governor's council “a due sense of the obligations both of duty & allegiance that bind them to their sovereign.” After Dunmore's emancipation proclamation, however, Byrd tendered his services to the Virginia convention. Ironically, Byrd's son, Thomas Taylor Byrd, remained loyal to Dunmore and commanded the Ethiopian Regiment in the British army.

enslaved Americans “to cut our throats,” they “added spurs to our Patriotism.”⁷⁷

White Americans also denounced British cooperation with American Indians. Here, too, Dunmore was one of the most popular targets. In November 1775 Dunmore sent his associate John Connolly to Detroit and the Ohio country to recruit an army of Indian warriors that would join forces with the governor's Anglo-black army at Alexandria in spring 1776. Connolly was captured as he rode west through Maryland, and his plot was revealed. It infuriated white Americans. In John Leacock's *Fall of British Tyranny*, Lord Kidnapper muses: “[I]f 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

⁷⁷ James Iredell, untitled essay, June 1776, in Don Higginbotham, ed., *The Papers of James Iredell* (3 vols. to date; Raleigh, 1976–), 1:409.

make a descent where we please, and drive the rebels like hogs into a pen."⁷⁸

As previously noted, a man named Emanuel disappeared from Matthew Phripp's tithables between the recording of the 1774 and 1778 lists. He was one of the two slaves executed in Norfolk in April 1775 "for being concerned in a conspiracy to raise an insurrection in that town."⁷⁹ Emanuel was not the only enslaved worker whom Phripp lost in the early years of the American Revolution. Other names also vanished from his tithable list during the war. About most of these people we know nothing, but we do know what became of several of them. When the British army and navy evacuated New York City in 1783, about 3,000 slaves went with them. Before leaving, navy captains made a list of their formerly enslaved passengers. On board the *Danger*, anchored near Staten Island (and not far from the little island where the Statue of Liberty would rise a century later), the compilers of the list recorded the presence of "James Tucker, 55 years, almost worn out . . . Formerly slave to Capt. [M.] Fipps, Norfolk, Virginia; left him in 1776 with Lord Dunmore."⁸⁰ When the *Danger* cleared New York harbor, bound for Nova Scotia, James Tucker was on board. He might have been "almost worn out," but he was headed to freedom.

We do not know how James Tucker had spent the years between 1776 and 1783, but it is clear that he was able to wring a larger measure of freedom from the American Revolution than did any of the white colonists who had revolted against British tyranny. If slaves such as Matthew Phripp's Emanuel had not made their own efforts to win freedom in 1774 and 1775, Governor Dunmore might never have published the emancipation proclamation that resulted not only in the freedom of hundreds of Virginians such as Phripp's James but also in the deterioration of relations between white Virginians and the British government.

Although the effect of Dunmore's cooperation with slaves on white Virginians' decision to declare independence is often mentioned by scholars who write about the Revolution, it is generally underestimated.⁸¹ One

⁷⁸ [Leacock], *Fall of British Tyranny*, p. 49. On British cooperation with Indians as a cause of white Americans' growing alienation from Britain, see Wood, "'Liberty Is Sweet,'" p. 169; Selby, *Revolution in Virginia*, p. 92; and *Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney), 3 Aug. 1775. Free colonists were also angry at Dunmore for emancipating and arming convict servants ([Leacock], *Fall of British Tyranny*, p. 45; *Virginia Gazette* [Dixon and Hunter], 17 Feb. 1776).

⁷⁹ *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter), 29 Apr. 1775 (supplement).

⁸⁰ Quarles, *Negro in the Revolution*, pp. 171-72; Hodges, ed., *Black Loyalist Directory*, p. 198 (quotation).

⁸¹ See, for example, Burk, Jones, and Girardin, *History of Virginia*, 4:134n; Eckenrode, *Revolution in Virginia*, p. 73; Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and His Time*, vol. 1: *Jefferson the Virginian* (Boston, 1948), p. 215; Billings, Selby, and Tate, *Colonial Virginia*, p. 343; Clifford Dowdey, *The Great Plantation: A*

reason for this minimization is that students of the origins of the Revolution often do not mention enslaved Virginians until November 1775, when Dunmore issued his famous emancipation proclamation. Actually, as several social historians have shown, the governor's declaration culminated a process that had begun much earlier. Slaves had always resisted their condition. In 1774, while Dunmore was still one of the colony's most popular governors, enslaved Virginians began conspiring to exploit the opportunities presented to them by the imperial crisis. The following April, as rumors of the planning of a wide-ranging insurrection circulated, a group of slaves literally knocked on the governor's door and offered to cast their lots with his.⁸² And slaves kept knocking all through the summer and into the fall. Andrew Estave's fifteen-year-old bondswoman presented herself at the governor's palace early in the summer, after Dunmore had taken refuge on a British warship. She was recaptured, but other slaves did reach the earl and served him as sailors, raiders, and soldiers.⁸³ It was not until after the series of black initiatives culminating in the victory at Kemp's Landing on 15 November that Dunmore officially offered freedom to the slaves.⁸⁴ The slaves' insurgency played an important role in persuading Dunmore to ally with them—and thus in prodding white Virginians farther along the road to independence.

If black Virginians really did help push whites into independence, how does that change our understanding of the Revolution in Virginia? At least to some extent, we must agree with an anonymous resident of Williamsburg who assessed the situation in November 1775, shortly after Dunmore published his emancipation proclamation. "Whoever considers well the meaning of the word Rebel," he wrote, "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."⁸⁵ In modern terms, this author might have said that white Virginians' struggle against Dunmore and his Ethiopian Regiment was not a revolution but a counterrevolution.

Profile of Berkeley Hundred and Plantation Virginia from Jamestown to Appomattox (New York and Toronto, 1957), pp. 230–31; Campbell, *History of Virginia*, p. 634; John C. Miller, *Origins of the American Revolution* (Boston, 1943), p. 478; and Dabney, *New Dominion*, p. 131.

Several students of the struggle for black freedom have also asserted that the slaves helped push whites into the American Revolution. See, for example, Quarles, *Negro in the Revolution*, p. 19; Wood, "'Liberty Is Sweet,'" p. 171; and Frey, *Water from the Rock*, p. 78.

⁸² *Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney), 4 May 1775.

⁸³ Quarles, *Negro in the Revolution*, pp. 20–22; Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, p. 181.

⁸⁴ 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; and Vincent Harding, *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York and London, 1981), chap. 11.

⁸⁵ Unidentified letter, 30 Nov. 1775, in Force, comp., *American Archives*, 4th ser., 3:1387.



Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of John Stewart Kennedy, 1897 (97.34)

Slaves who cast their lots with the British were not the only ones to earn their freedom during the Revolution. In Emanuel Leutze's familiar image, the black oarsman (third from the left) is believed to be Prince Whipple, an African-born slave belonging to one of George Washington's aides-de-camp, who was emancipated during the Revolution for his devotion to the patriot cause. Washington himself freed only one slave at his death (the rest were not to be manumitted until after his wife's death). The individual he singled out for immediate liberation and an annuity of \$30 was William Lee, who had served at Washington's side throughout the war.

The war in Virginia pitted two classes, slave owners and slaves, against each other. At least in this one aspect of Virginia's multifaceted revolutionary experience, therefore, Virginia fits the Progressive historians' interpretation of the Revolution as a dual conflict over both home rule and who would rule at home. For years students of the origins of the American Revolution in Virginia, taking as an article of faith the "relative docility of the poorer farmers" in that colony, found almost no value in the Progressives' hypothesis that class conflict helped cause the Revolution.⁸⁶ More

⁸⁶ Marc Egnal, *A Mighty Empire: The Origins of the American Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London, 1988), p. 302 (quotation). In Virginia, "the classic Progressive conflict of domestic interests appears not to have taken place in the political realm" (Herbert Sloan and Peter Onuf, "Politics, Culture, and the Revolution in Virginia: A Review of Recent Work," *VMHB* 91 [1983]: 262, 264 [quotation]). "[A]lone among the thirteen provinces," Virginia "did not face armed internal dispute during the revolutionary era" (Edward Countryman, *The American Revolution* [New York, 1985], p. 35). Many Progressive historians implicitly acknowledged that the internal conflict thesis did not apply to Virginia, where the ruling class endorsed the independence movement. Instead, Progressive historians studying Virginia emphasized the economic motives that inspired free farmers at all income levels. See Isaac Samuel Harrell, *Loyalism in Virginia: Chapters in the Economic History of the Revolution* (Durham, N.C., 1926), pp. v-vi, 5; and Charles A. Beard, *Economic Origins of Jeffersonian*

recently, the assumption that small farmers were tractable has been challenged.⁸⁷ And if enslaved Virginians are considered a class—which surely they must be—then there certainly was class conflict in Virginia during the prerevolutionary period, and that antagonism did help bring on the American Revolution. In fact, judging from the frenzied white reaction to Dunmore's decision to forge an alliance with black Virginians, it may be that Virginia was the colony in which class conflict gave the biggest push to the movement for independence.

Democracy (New York, 1949), p. 270. For a revision of this economic interpretation of the Revolution in Virginia, see Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: How Indians, Debtors, and Slaves Helped Turn Elite Virginians into American Revolutionaries* (Chapel Hill, forthcoming).

⁸⁷ James Titus, *The Old Dominion at War: Society, Politics, and Warfare in Late Colonial Virginia*, *American Military History* (Columbia, S.C., 1991); Albert H. Tillson, Jr., *Gentry and Common Folk: Political Culture on a Virginia Frontier, 1740–1789* (Lexington, Ky., 1991), pp. 45–77; McDonnell, "Politics of Mobilization."