

"Liberty Is Sweet"

African-American Freedom Struggles in the Years before White Independence

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S I R,

AS the Committee of Safety is not sitting, I take the Liberty to enclose you a Copy of the Proclamation issued by Lord Dunmore; the Design and Tendency of which, you will observe, is fatal to the publick Safety. An early and unremitting Attention to the Government of the SLAVES may, I hope, counteract this dangerous Attempt. Constant, and well directed Patrols, seem indispensably necessary. I doubt not of every possible Exertion, in your Power, for the publick Good; and have the Honour to be, Sir,

Your most obedient and very humble Servant,

P. H E N R Y.

HEAD QUARTERS, WILLIAMSBURG,

November 20, 1775.

In March 1775 Patrick Henry gave his famous speech, "Give me liberty, or give me death," and later, Virginia patriots made him commander-in-chief of the colony's military forces. On November 17 the Royal Governor, Lord Dunmore, issued a proclamation promising freedom to all slaves, owned by rebels, "Able and willing to bear arms" in the King's cause. On November 20 Henry issued this public broadside denouncing the Proclamation, calling for "unremitting attention to the Government of SLAVES." Circular Letter of 20 November 1775, broadside.

Courtesy Library of Congress.

Not long after the outbreak of the American Revolution, a prominent Lutheran minister noted in his journal the sentiments of two black house servants he had encountered near Philadelphia. "They secretly wished that the British army might win," Henry Muhlenberg wrote, "for then all Negro slaves will gain their freedom. It is said that this sentiment is almost universal among the Negroes in America."¹

Only recently have most Americans again begun to take seriously the deeply held commitment to freedom that existed among African Americans on the eve of the Civil War in the mid-nineteenth century. But we have not yet given enough thought to the obvious question of whether this sentiment was equally widespread among enslaved Americans a century earlier, at the time of the Revolution, as the Reverend Muhlenberg reported. Indeed, who were the persons to whom he referred and about whom most of us know so little?

By 1775, African Americans figured far more prominently in the colonial population than they had a century earlier. On the eve of white Independence nearly 500,000 blacks constituted almost twenty percent of the people in England's mainland colonies. They were not spread out evenly, for the vast majority resided south of Pennsylvania. Indeed, nine of every ten African Americans lived in the South, primarily in the Atlantic coastal regions that produced tobacco, rice, and indigo. The black population of the southern colonies had jumped tenfold in the first thirty years of the eighteenth century, and a generation later, in 1775, black Virginians totaled over 185,000; black Carolinians, North and South, numbered roughly 160,000, and even the fledgling colony of Georgia contained 15,000 black inhabitants.² At no other time, before or after, have African Americans constituted such a large proportion of the American populace.

Not only did black persons constitute one of the largest single ethnic groups in the heterogeneous eighteenth-century colonies; in addition, they were singularly and explicitly oppressed. All of these men and women, or their recent ancestors, had been forced to migrate from Africa against their will.³ And almost all remained inextricably ensnared in the dominant southern system of hereditary racial slavery. Though concentrated in several strategic areas and consigned to live at the very bottom of colonial society, black people were highly visible—often troublingly so—to their white contemporaries. Yet they have proven virtually invisible to subsequent scholars of colonial America, who floated for generations on a placid mainstream oriented geographically toward the northeast, ethnically toward the English, and socially toward the colonial elites.

For the better part of two centuries, therefore, historians have retold the saga of the Revolution and its origins with almost no

awareness or acknowledgment of these African Americans. Even in 1992, a leading author in the early American field can still write: "the social conditions that generically are supposed to lie behind all revolutions—poverty and economic deprivation—*were not present in colonial America*. There should no longer be any doubt about it," Gordon Wood continues, shifting the subject somewhat, "the *white* American colonists were not an oppressed people. . . ." (Emphasis added.)⁴ What are we to make of such a categorical statement, followed by a qualified observation about the Caucasian majority, dropping African Americans into oblivion in mid-paragraph? Did not the perpetual servitude of hundreds of thousands of individuals—denied any right to the fruits of their own labor or to the offspring of their own families—constitute deprivation? Were their numbers too small, or their skins too dark, to be deemed significant by established historians?

Gradually, over the past generation, some eighteenth-century scholars have begun to restore these absent Americans to their distinctive place in the drama of the country's founding, making it harder, although not yet impossible, to ignore their significant presence. But we still have little sense of what these black members of the revolutionary generation were *thinking*. How firm, how widespread, how varied, and how recent were their "sentiments" regarding freedom, for example? After all, the antislavery movement among whites in Europe and America was still only in its infancy, and hence one might suspect—at least countless intellectual historians have—that thoughts of liberty and independence had not yet "reached" the black population of the American colonies. Indeed, it has become a basic tenet of many who write about the period that the most radical ideas of the American Revolution—especially the core concept of personal liberty—for the most part trickled *downward* through colonial society from the top.

Take, as an example, the two house servants encountered by Muhlenberg. Did they hold such an ardent desire for freedom before the outbreak of war, and if so, did they discuss it with one another? Had they merely picked up ideas about individual liberty through their special status as house servants or their privileged location near the focus of colonial rebellion in Philadelphia? It is indeed true, as Gary Nash has written, that "when the language of protest overflowed its initial boundaries and confronted the relationship between American liberty and domestic slavery, black Philadelphians must have listened intently and talked ardently among themselves."⁵ This essay argues that we can go further. It is no longer enough for historians to imply that African Americans finally picked up on "the spillover" from an earlier white debate about freedom, or that they belatedly

contracted "the contagion of liberty." On the contrary, I believe the evidence suggests that they had a long and bitter familiarity with the ideas and issues at hand.

While white colonists were evolving through a lengthy and unplanned ideological education, linking them to England's Puritan Revolution of the seventeenth century and to the strain of continuing underground radical thought associated with the "eighteenth-century commonwealthmen," several generations of black Americans were also being educated and politicized in the harsh school provided by slavery and racial discrimination. Like their European counterparts these Africans struggled to integrate knowledge and beliefs brought over from the Old World into their response to conditions faced in America. But enslavement is an extraordinary crucible, and it may well be that, during the generations preceding 1776, African Americans thought longer and harder than any other sector of the colonial population about the concept of liberty, both as an abstract ideal and as a tangible reality.

"The desire of blacks for freedom did not, of course, originate with the American Revolution," writes historian Benjamin Quarles.⁶ For resistance to chattel slavery appeared as soon as that coercive institution had taken firm root in England's mainland colonies during the second half of the seventeenth century. And much of this resistance proved collective and prearranged, despite the overwhelming repression reserved for any hint of organized rebellion. As Herbert Aptheker pointed out long ago, slave plots—both rumored and real—occurred frequently, and they often appeared in waves. Throughout the eighteenth century and beyond, these surges of slave resistance seemed to occur during periods when the white community was distracted. (As we shall see later, one such wave, starting in the 1760s, crested a decade later in the eventful months before the Declaration of Independence.)

Often the slaves themselves used arson to create a temporary distraction, but there were other larger conflagrations that could throw the dominant society into relative disarray. Epidemics, for example, frequently disrupted the normal patterns of life among white colonists, providing an opportunity for enslaved persons to conspire for freedom. While a virulent smallpox epidemic raged in Massachusetts in 1721, Cotton Mather felt obliged, in a midweek lecture to Boston slaves, to denounce the "*Fondness for Freedom* in many of you," despite living "Comfortably in a very easy Servitude."⁷ Widespread yellow fever was in evidence when blacks near Charlestown (modern

Charleston), South Carolina, initiated the Stono Rebellion in September 1739. The sickness had prompted the colonial assembly to adjourn and the local newspaper to suspend publication. The Stono Uprising came remarkably close to succeeding, and as the ranks of the rebellion swelled, it is significant that participants raised the chant of "Liberty!"—a cry that would be repeated by both blacks and whites in Carolina at the time of the Stamp Act crisis.⁸

Imperial wars could also prompt ideological shifts and economic pressures that slightly improved the terrible odds against revolt. At Stono, for instance, the uprising hinged on a plan to gather large numbers and march to St. Augustine, where Spanish authorities were offering sanctuary at Fort Mose to slave refugees from Carolina. So it is probably not coincidence that the largest slave revolt in the history of the English colonies began on the very weekend when news reached Charlestown that Spain and England were at war. Within a generation, the South Carolina elite, in a familiar pattern, were blaming the uprising on "wantonness" among their black workers and "slackness" among their white overseers.⁹ But no matter what colonial leaders wished to believe, this had not been a spontaneous outburst prompted by character weakness or poor oversight. On the contrary, black efforts to obtain freedom in the mid-eighteenth century, like white colonial efforts to gain political freedom in subsequent decades, derived from reasoned interpretation of long sequences of events.

For the legally enslaved blacks, as for those whites who eventually came to feel themselves "enslaved," coordination was important, and local initiatives often hinged upon word of related events in other colonies. So it is not surprising that when efforts were mounted to break the bonds of slavery, they often occurred in more than one place at roughly the same time.¹⁰ In Virginia, where significant challenges to enslavement had occurred around 1730,¹¹ historian Philip Schwarz has noted that another "cycle of insurrectionary thinking emerged" in the 1750s. In recently settled Brunswick County, authorities were troubled to find ideas of liberty circulating too freely among the enslaved population. In June 1752 three black men were tried for insurrection and conspiracy to commit murder in that southside county. The alleged leader, Peter, was hanged, while Harry Cain and James each received thirty-nine lashes. They were charged with "being privy to an Opinion entertained among many Negroes of their having a Right to their Freedom and not making a Discovery thereof."¹²

When war erupted in North America between Protestant England and Catholic France in 1754, it was again predictable in the English colonies that both the unfree workers and the provincial authorities would sense the lack of internal defenses and the prospects for slave

revolt. After the initial defeat of Colonel George Washington at Fort Mifflin in September 1776, members of the South Carolina Assembly saw the frontier threat as an opportunity to reinforce the wedge which they had gradually driven between African Americans and native Americans. "If Indian Enemies should appear in our settlements, as they too often do," the assembly advised the council in March 1776, "we thought that it might be necessary to Arm some of the most Trusty of our Slaves to defend their masters' Lives and Property and to destroy such Enemies." Making clear their underlying long-term motive, the assemblymen added: "we thought it good Policy in this way to keep up and increase that natural aversion which happily subsists between Negroes and Indians."¹³

Such aversions, of course, were hardly natural; they had been cultivated by colonial authorities at great expense.¹⁴ But efforts to set red against black still could not address the fact so troublesome to white settlers: when conflict flared on the frontier, the prospects mounted for insurrection at home. In particular, reports of possible slave violence increased when the English suffered reversals in the field. During the French and Indian War this occurred most dramatically with General Edward Braddock's defeat at Fort Duquesne in early July 1755.¹⁵ When word of this setback reached Governor Horatio Sharpe of Maryland, he sent out "Circulatory Letters to have the Slaves, Convicts &c well observed & watched," while giving orders for Maryland militia units "to be prepared to quell it in case any Insurrection should be occasioned by this Stroke."¹⁶

Similarly, in Virginia Lieutenant Governor Robert Dinwiddie received reports after Braddock's loss that groups of black workers were asserting themselves. He wrote to the Earl of Halifax that the defeat in the Ohio country had prompted local slaves to become "very audacious. . . . These poor Creatures imagine the Fr. will give them their Freedom. We have too many here, but I hope we shall be able to defeat the Designs of our Enemies and keep these Slaves in proper Subject'n."¹⁷ In South Carolina it is no coincidence that the engineer beginning work on a new fort at Charlestown in July 1776, to secure the city "against a sudden Surprize from the Sea," also proposed a fortification six miles west of town as a defense against slave revolt. William De Brahm sent to Governor Glen detailed plans for an 11,600-foot canal connecting the Ashley and Cooper Rivers, so that Charlestown Neck would become an island, "protected against an Insurrection of the Negroes or Indian War by the fortified Canal."¹⁸

*B*y 1760 the South Carolina port of Charlestown had a greater number of blacks and a larger proportion of enslaved residents than

any community in North America. "The City is inhabited by about 12,000 Souls," reported engineer De Brahm; "more than half are Negroes and Mulattoes."¹⁹ Moreover, the town was located in the mainland colony with the harshest slave codes and the highest concentration of African workers. (The black majority was approaching 58,000 persons, in contrast to fewer than 39,000 whites; in other words, six of every ten South Carolinians were black during the third quarter of the eighteenth century.) So it should come as no surprise that enslaved men and women again gave signs of testing their chains in 1759-60, when a war erupted with the Cherokees and a smallpox epidemic descended upon the city.

One other powerful factor was also at work, for repercussions of the powerful Christian revival known as the Great Awakening were still being felt throughout the region. Early in 1759 the Reverend Richard Clarke, the influential Anglican rector of St. Philips Church in Charlestown, began preaching—as had earlier millenarians in England—that the world would end during the 1760s.²⁰ Governor Lyttleton related that "at length his Enthusiasm rose to such a height that he let his beard grow and ran about the streets crying Repent, Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Fearing civil unrest, authorities made note of Clarke's "overheated" imagination and wasted no time in forcing his resignation and sending him back to England.²¹ But Clarke, who would continue his career as a religious radical in England over four more decades, had already aroused the attention of nonwhite Carolinians.

Not long after Clarke's departure in March 1759, a free mulatto or black identified variously in the colonial records as Philip John or Philip Jones was arrested, tried, whipped, and branded for allegedly endeavoring to stir up sedition among blacks. He had apparently been turned in by "two Negroes named Tom and Trane," to whom he had secretly entrusted "a written paper and charged them to carry it to all the Negroes and show it them." At first a date in June "was fixed upon for killing the Buckras," or white people, but later "it was agreed to wait," especially since "the Justice before whom he had been had taken his paper from him." John vowed revenge upon Tom and Trane "for telling the designs" and surrendering his important paper, but he insisted that "he did not care if the devil had it for he had another and would go to Charles Town with it and would do the work God Almighty had set him about," adding that within six months all the buckras "would be killed."

Despite punishment, John persisted with his plan, apparently telling several blacks that "Mr Broadbelt's Caesar is to be the Head man, I am to be the next to him." He then retreated briefly into the backcountry, returning with the claim that "God Almighty had been

with him in the woods." He claimed "that he had seen a vision, in which it was reveal'd to him, that in the month of September the White People shou'd be underground, that the Sword shou'd go thro' the Land, and it should shine with their blood." John argued powerfully, in the tradition of a utopian Leveller, "that there should be no more White King's Governor or great men, but the Negroes should live happily and have Laws of their own." Governor Lyttleton, alert to reports of unrest among black Carolinians, recorded that "a spirit of cabal began to shew itself among them" just as he was beginning to plan a campaign against the Cherokee Indians.

On 20 July 1759 the Royal Council issued a warrant for the arrest of Philip John, along with Caesar and a free mulatto named John Pendarvis, who had apparently offered to put up funds for the revolt. After the plot had been foiled, Governor Lyttleton reported from Charlestown that "their scheme was to have seized some arms and ammunition that were in a storehouse in the country belonging to a merchant, and then with what force they could collect to have marched to this town." Like any suspected leader of an unsuccessful rebellion, Philip John was put to death, while Pendarvis, a free man "reputed to be a person of credit and property," was charged with buying guns and ammunition to support the insurrection. The events surrounding Clarke, John, and Pendarvis would have been fresh memories at the time of the Stamp Act Crisis six years later, and their names were no doubt still remembered locally in 1775, when a free black pilot, Thomas Jeremiah, faced similar charges and punishment.

*I*t was in the wake of the Stamp Act in 1765 that large numbers of newly politicized whites began to feel oppressed enough to engage in vociferous debate and public action. For the first time, therefore, the emerging Whig ideology of radical dissent appeared in the streets alongside the well-established black "fondness for freedom." Much has been made of the Stamp Act demonstrations in Boston, which so agitated a whole generation of young provincials, but events in South Carolina's port city remain somewhat less familiar.²² There, as Donna Spindell has written, "the fear of a slave insurrection, which dominated the thoughts and actions of many Charlestonians, was decidedly the most significant factor in shaping the evolution of the Stamp Act crisis."²³

Any black South Carolinian who had sympathized with Philip John's opposition to "the white king's governor and great men" in 1759 surely realized six years later that prospects for a successful

slave uprising were notably enhanced when the Stamp Act crisis divided Charlestown's white minority. Thousands of black residents must have seen and heard "the very extraordinary and universal commotions" which began on 18 October 1765 with the arrival of a ship rumored to be carrying the stamped paper which Parliament had ordered for the implementation of the Stamp Act. By the next morning a gallows had been erected at the corner of Broad and Church Streets, and a stamp collector had been hanged in effigy above the words, "Liberty and no Stamp Act."²⁴ Several days later sixty to eighty Sons of Liberty, many with their faces blackened under the "thickest disguise of Soot," staged a march upon the house of the wealthy merchant and slave trader Henry Laurens. Knowing that Laurens was a prospective stamp officer and hoping to confiscate the dreaded paper which they suspected was hidden in his residence, the noisy but orderly crowd visited the Laurens home at midnight chanting, "*Liberty, Liberty & Stamp'd Paper.*"²⁵

Several days later the town celebrated the resignation of its stamp officers with the largest demonstration in local history, led by Christopher Gadsden's triumphant Sons of Liberty, who unfurled a British flag in the streets with the word LIBERTY emblazoned across it.²⁶ Soon afterward, further conflict was evident, fomented by some of the 1,400 sailors whose ships were being held in port by confusion over the Stamp Act. A letter written from Charlestown in early December stated, "At present everything is quiet here; our Liberty Boys being content to keep out the stamps, do not injure, but protect, the Town; for some time ago a Parcel of Sailors, having a mind to make the most of this suspension of law, formed a Mob, to collect Money of the People in the Streets; but these Sons of Liberty suppressed them instantly, and committed the Ringleaders to Gaol."²⁷ Inevitably, these public displays were watched closely by blacks in Charlestown, giving them clear evidence of dissension—and therefore potential weakness—in the dominant power structure.

Racial tensions during the fall of 1765 already seemed more strained than they had been at any time in the quarter century since Stono. In September the noted naturalist John Bartram, exploring the region south of Charlestown, recorded seeing "two negroes Jibited alive for poisoning their Master."²⁸ In mid-October, two days before the ship bearing stamped paper arrived, the grand jury handed down an unusually long list of presentments, many of which concerned the regulation of blacks in both town and country. They argued "that slaves in Charles-Town are not under a good regulation, and that they at all times in the night go about streets rioting." These same black South Carolinians, the grand jury protested, "do

often gather in great numbers on the sabbath day and make riots, where it is not in the power of the small number of watchmen to suppress them, which hereafter may, without any precaution, prove of the utmost ill consequence to this province." The grand jury also noted "the too frequent liberty given to negroes in the country" and "the great neglect of the militia law, the people in the country not mustering often."²⁹

Worried that matters were spinning out of control, the legislature took the drastic action of imposing a three-year embargo on further importation of slaves, to take effect 1 January 1766. Ironically, the initial result of this law was a flurry of activity in the Charlestown slave market in anticipation of the closing of the African trade.³⁰ As the deadline approached and the sudden influx of African newcomers reached record proportions, the prospects for violent challenges to the status quo increased sharply. On 17 December Lieutenant Governor William Bull, Jr., convened the Royal Council to inform them that the wife of Isaac Huger, a white merchant, had overheard from the balcony of her home a conversation between two slaves suggesting that an insurrection was being planned for Christmas Eve.³¹

After the council agreed that these two men should be sent for and questioned, Bull went on to express his apprehension "that a pernicious Custom had lately prevailed of private people Firing Guns by way of rejoycing on Christmas Eve, which would this year be attended with this further Consequence as firing gunns was the method by which an alarm was to be published and therefore if continued might either raise false alarm or prevent a True one being attended to." The council issued a proclamation strictly prohibiting such practices in the future. It also recommended that a party of one hundred militiamen be deployed to mount a guard in Charlestown during the holidays, and it suggested to Bull that sailors from the unusually numerous ships in the harbor might be of great service to authorities in case of a slave uprising.³²

Christmas Eve passed without major incident, and the council, highly apprehensive, met again on Christmas Day. Lieutenant Governor Bull reported that the ship captains had indicated a "great readiness" to provide assistance, and he offered an elaborate plan for making use of their men. To captains who applied to him, he would make available "a Hundred Stand of arms to be distributed amongst the discretist of their people." When Bull recommended to the council that "it would greatly tend to defeat any attempts of the Negroes if they could hunt out the runaways now in the Woods and destroy their several camps," he received quick approval of a measure calling upon Catawba Indian allies in the backcountry for assistance.³³ "This place has been in an uproar for twelve days past, in consequence of a

report which prevailed, that the Negroes had agreed to begin a general insurrection throughout the province," wrote one resident on 29 December. "Every company in town mount guard day and night, and the severest orders given which has prevented it hitherto."³⁴

In early January 1766, only weeks after the initial scare, some blacks in Charlestown reportedly took up the shout of "Liberty." The unprecedented display, undertaken at a time of heightened white vigilance, seemed a brazen echo of the earlier Stamp Act demonstrations, and it galvanized authorities to impose even tighter controls. The entire town was placed under martial law for a week, and for ten to fourteen days mounted messengers were dispatched throughout the colony.³⁵ Moreover, in a message to the Commons House of Assembly on 14 January 1766, Bull stated with precision that he "had received accounts that One Hundred and Seven Negroes had left their plantations soon after the Intended Insurrection had been discovered and joined a large number of runaways in Colleton County which increase to a formidable Body." An account of the episode published in the *Virginia Gazette* stated that "the strictest search" had been made "to find out the ringleaders; that circumstances appeared very strong against them, many fire arms being found concealed; and at several plantations in the country, the house arms were found to have their touchholes plugged up."³⁶

By late January, Bull could write to London with assurance: "I have the pleasure to acquaint your Lordships that the apprehensions of a Negro Insurrection last December happily proved abortive."³⁷ But at the same time he exhorted the provincial legislators to be more mindful of the potential for coordinated resistance within the black community. Satisfied that "the late wicked Machinations are now happily disappointed, and seem to be at an end," he reminded the assemblymen "not to suffer a present appearance of tranquillity to lull you into a dangerous neglect" of internal security. "The cause of our danger is domestic," he cautioned, "and interwoven with almost all the Employments of our lives and so ought to be our attention to the remedy."³⁸ Despite all that transpired during the subsequent decade, Bull's observation would still hold true in the mid-1770s. What he thought of as domestic dangers and wicked machinations, and what black Americans looked upon as necessary assertions and unprecedented opportunities, grew ever more apparent along the Atlantic seaboard.

*E*ight eventful years later, when the First Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia in the fall of 1774, South Carolina was not the only colony rife with rumors of insurrection. Over the previous

decade black challenges to white domination had increased in frequency up and down the Atlantic coast.³⁹ "There has been a conspiracy of the negroes," a New England woman wrote to her husband in September. "At present it is kept pretty private, and was discovered by one who attempted to dissuade them from it," she informed her spouse, away on business. With the aid of an Irishman, they had prepared "a petition to the Governor, telling him they would fight for him provided he would arm them and engage to liberate them if he conquered" the local rebels. "I wish most sincerely there was not a slave in the province," she added. "It always appeared a most iniquitous scheme to me—to fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have."⁴⁰ The province was Massachusetts, and the author was Abigail Adams, writing to her husband John in Philadelphia.

Throughout the colonies the population of enslaved Africans was growing rapidly, due to importation and natural increase, and expectations of possible change were spreading through the black community. No group had less formal power, or a larger potential interest in the unraveling of established social relationships, than African Americans. Although most were confined to the gulags of southern plantations, hemmed in by legal and physical constraints, they still represented a crucial force in the overall political equation, for their numbers were great, their situation seemed desperate, and their detachment from the niceties of the imperial debate was considerable. Among whites, meanwhile, the gap was widening between popular Whigs on one hand and their Loyalist opposition on the other. Soon all three of these diverse constituencies would find themselves embroiled with one another, as the stakes grew higher for all concerned.

As 1774 changed into 1775, printer William Bradford of Philadelphia received a letter from young James Madison in Virginia. "If America & Britain should come to a hostile rupture I am afraid an Insurrection among the slaves may and will be promoted," wrote Madison, a member of the Committee on Public Safety for Orange County.

In one of our Counties lately a few of those unhappy wretches met together and chose a leader who was to conduct them when the English troops should arrive—which they foolishly thought would be very soon and that by revolting to them they should be rewarded with their freedom. Their intentions were soon discovered and the proper precautions taken to prevent the Infection.⁴¹

In early January Bradford replied, "Your fear with regard to an insurrection being excited among the slaves seems too well founded."

The Philadelphian informed Madison that, "A letter from a Gentleman in England was read yesterday in the Coffee-house, which mentioned the design of [the] administration to pass an act (in case of rupture) declaring ['] all Slaves & Servants free that would take arms against the Americans.'"⁴²

As the prospects for insurrectionary acts improved and the anxiety of white patriots grew, the frequency and harshness of punishments increased, and the rate of slave executions seems to have risen. In the fall of 1774 two Georgia blacks accused of arson and poisoning had been burned alive on Savannah's Common, and in December several more slaves were "taken and burnt" for leading an uprising in nearby St. Andrew's Parish that killed four people and wounded others.⁴³ Significantly, not all white colonists responded to prospects of black rebellion with acts of reprisal, due to a blend of religious scruples, ideological consistency, and strategic necessity. On 12 January 1775, for example, a group of Scottish parishioners in Georgia, meeting at Darien, adopted a resolution that slavery was an "unnatural practice . . . founded in injustice and cruelty, and highly dangerous to our liberties, (as well as lives), debasing part of our fellow-creatures below men, and corrupting the virtues and morals of the rest." Slavery's existence, they asserted, "is laying the basis of that liberty we contend for . . . upon a very wrong foundation," and they pledged to work for the manumission of Georgia slaves.⁴⁴

Another immigrant expressed similar sentiments. In early March 1775 Thomas Paine, using the pen name "Humanus," published his first article, three months after reaching Philadelphia. His essay in the *Pennsylvania Journal and Local Advertiser* was entitled "African Slavery in America," and it pointed out that blacks had been "industrious farmers" who "lived quietly" in Africa before "Europeans debauched them with liquors" and brought them to the New World. Paine reminded white colonists that because they had "enslaved multitudes, and shed much innocent blood in doing it," the Lord might balance the scales by allowing England to "enslave" whites. To avoid such retribution and give greater consistency to the patriot cause, "Humanus" urged the abolition of slavery and suggested that freed Negroes be given land in the West to support themselves, where they might "form useful settlements on the frontiers. Thus they may become interested in the public welfare, and assist in promoting it; instead of being dangerous as now they are, should any enemy promise them a better condition."⁴⁵

Paine, as a newcomer to Pennsylvania, may actually have been picking up on an idea regarding western lands that had been in the air for several years, there and elsewhere, among whites and blacks

searching for an effective way to end race slavery. In Philadelphia in 1773 the Quaker abolitionist Anthony Benezet had suggested that freed slaves might be settled with whites in new communities beyond the Alleghenies.⁴⁶ In Boston, meanwhile, a group of enslaved blacks had submitted a petition to Governor Thomas Hutchinson and the provincial legislators in June 1773 "in behalf of all those, who by divine permission are held in a state of SLAVERY, within the bowels of a FREE country." Arguing forcefully for freedom on religious, legal, and humanitarian grounds, they acknowledged the fact that "if we should be liberated and made free-men of this community, and allowed by law to demand pay for our past services, our masters and their families would by that means be greatly damnified, if not ruined: But we claim no rigid justice," the authors added magnanimously. Instead, with humility and a touch of Old Testament poetry, they only asked the authorities to provide full legal freedom and, in addition, to "grant us some part of the unimproved land, belonging to the province, for a settlement, that each of us may there quietly sit down under his own fig-tree, and enjoy the fruits of his own labour."⁴⁷

During the spring of 1775, even as Paine wrote, the interlocking struggles of Tories, Whigs, and African Americans intensified. In this phase, as talk of rebellion grew among worried officials, aroused patriots, and hopeful slaves, the issue of who controlled supplies of powder and shot took on central importance. Loyalists charged white radicals with spreading rumors of black worker unrest. "In the beginning of 1775," Thomas Knox Gordon of South Carolina recalled, "the Malecontents being very anxious to have some plausible pretence for arming with great industry propagated a Report that the Negroes were meditating an Insurrection."⁴⁸ Patriots, in turn, claimed authorities were prepared to enlist black strength if necessary to quell white dissent. The Committee of Safety for New Bern, North Carolina, announced in a circular letter that "there is much reason to fear, in these Times of General Tumult and Confusion, that the Slaves may be instigated and encouraged by our inveterate Enemies to an Insurrection, which in our present defenseless State might have the most dreadful Consequences." The Committee advised "Detachments to patrol and search the Negro Houses, and . . . to seize all Arms and Ammunition found in their Possession."⁴⁹

Black activists, for their part, sought to capitalize on white divisions in their plans for freedom fully as much as white factions tried to implicate half a million blacks in their political designs. In such a highly charged atmosphere timing could be everything, and premature action was a matter of constant risk, but black Americans had

grounds to be particularly "impatient of Oppression," and given the enormous stakes some chose armed rebellion well before their white counterparts.⁵⁰ Consider a report from Ulster County, New York, that early in 1775 a farmer had caught part of a conversation between two of his slaves, discussing the powder needed and support available to carry out an uprising. The plot included burning houses and executing slave-owning families as they tried to escape. This organized liberation plan involved blacks from the villages of Kingston, Hurly, Keysereck, and Marbletown, and the twenty persons who were taken into custody had considerable powder and shot in their possession. In addition, rumor had it that these blacks were to be joined in their freedom struggle by five or six hundred native Americans.⁵¹

*I*n the colonies of the upper South in 1775 the demographic and social situation differed markedly from conditions in the Northeast, for fully two-thirds of the black persons in English North America were concentrated in Maryland, Virginia, and eastern North Carolina. Almost all these Americans remained entrapped in the web of hereditary race slavery, and in the spring of 1775 they, like the more numerous whites around them, were paying close attention to internal dissensions and to news from other provinces. Notice of the plot in Ulster County, New York, for example, appeared in the Virginia papers in mid-March, apparently creating fresh hopes and increased consternation in the already volatile capital of Williamsburg, where the royal supply of gunpowder was housed in a well-guarded magazine on the village green. Within a month, when Governor Dunmore ordered the barrels of gunpowder in the Williamsburg magazine removed to a ship under cover of night, the town's Whig mayor immediately submitted a petition claiming that widespread rumors of a local slave revolt made internal security a crucial matter. News soon reached the capital that irate citizens were coming from the west to reclaim the powder by force.⁵²

On 1 May 1775 Governor Dunmore wrote to the Earl of Dartmouth that he intended "to arm all my own Negroes and receive all others that will come to me whom I shall declare free," in expectation that such an armed force would be able to "reduce the refractory people of this colony to obedience."⁵³ Word quickly spread throughout Williamsburg that Dunmore was fortifying the Governor's Palace and had issued arms to his servants; a physician testified that the governor swore to him "by the living God that he would declare Freedom to the slaves and reduce the City of *Williamsburg* to Ashes" if disorder continued.⁵⁴ Hearing this, several blacks presented themselves at

the palace to offer their services but were turned away.⁵⁵ The governor, quipped the *Virginia Gazette* bitterly on 1 June 1775, "who for some time past has been suspected of acting the part of an incendiary in this colony, is to take the field as generalissimo at the head of the Africans." The editor, protecting himself with blank spaces, added that, "the BLACK LADIES, it is supposed, will be jollily entertained in the p----e [palace]."

Word of Lord Dunmore's rumored threat to liberate and arm black Virginians quickly reached Thomas Gage, the British general serving as governor of Massachusetts. "We hear," he wrote in mid-May, "that a Declaration his Lordship has made, of proclaiming all the Negroes free, who should join him, has Startled the Insurgents." And on 12 June 1775, a week before the disastrous engagement at Bunker Hill which was to cost him his command, Gage wrote to his friend Lord Barrington, "You will have heard of the boldness of the rebels, in surprising Ticonderoga. . . . Things are come to that crisis, that we must avail ourselves of every resource, even to raise the Negroes, in our cause."⁵⁶ Two weeks later Dunmore himself observed regarding Virginia's planter elite: "My declaration that I would arm and set free such Slaves as should assist me if I was attacked has stirred up fears in them which cannot easily subside."⁵⁷ Within a month he was at work on a secret plan with John Connelly of Fort Pitt to add the threat of an Indian attack on the backcountry to the prospect of slave insurrections.⁵⁸

In Maryland in late April 1775, planters pressured Governor Robert Eden into issuing arms and ammunition to guard against rumored insurrections, though the governor feared their acts "were only going to accelerate the evil they dreaded from their servants and slaves." In May, John Simmons, a white artisan in Dorchester County, refused to attend militia muster, saying "he understood that the gentlemen were intending to make us all fight for their land and negroes, and then said damn them (meaning the gentlemen) if 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." Simmons, a wheelwright, reportedly told James Mullineux "that if all the gentlemen were killed we should have the best of the land to tend and besides could get mony enough while they were about it as they have got all the money in their hands." Mullineux told a grand jury "that the said Simmons appeared to be in earnest and desirous that the negroes should get the better of the white people." Simmons was later tarred, feathered, and banished on the accusation of fomenting a slave insurrection. By fall the Dorchester County Committee of Inspection

reported, "The insolence of the Negroes in this county is come to such a height, that we are under a necessity of disarming them which we affected on Saturday last. We took about eighty guns, some bayonets swords, etc."⁵⁹

In North Carolina the black freedom struggle during the summer of 1775 was even more intense. "Every man is in arms and the patrols going thro' all the town, and searching every Negro's house, to see they are all at home by nine at night," wrote Janet Schaw, an English visitor to Wilmington. "My hypothesis," she stated, "is that the Negroes will revolt."⁶⁰ Her view was confirmed when a massive uprising in the Tar River area of northeastern North Carolina was revealed just before it was to begin, on the night of 8 July. Scores of blacks were rounded up and brought before Pitt County's Committee of Safety, which "Ordered several to be severely whipt and sentenced several to receive 80 lashes each [and] to have [their] Ears crapt [cropped,] which was executed in the presence of the Committee and a great number of spectators." Colonel John Simpson reported that, "in disarming the negroes we found considerable ammunition" and added: "We keep taking up, examining and scourging more or less every day." According to Simpson, "from whichever part of the County they come they all confess nearly the same thing, viz[t] that they were one and all on the night of the 8th inst to fall on and destroy the family where they lived, then to proceed from House to House (Burning as they went) until they arrived in the Back Country where they were to be received with open arms by a number of Persons there appointed and armed by [the] Government for their Protection, and as a further reward they were to be settled in a free government of their own."⁶¹

*I*n the deep South colonies, where the relative proportion of blacks was high, the prospects for dramatic change in their condition seemed even brighter during the spring and summer of 1775, as contending British authorities and Whig leaders were well aware. Early in 1775 General Gage had written from Boston to John Stuart, the superintendent of Indian Affairs based in Charlestown, observing that South Carolina's Patriot leaders could hardly afford to promote too much "Serious Opposition" and local unrest, or they might find that "Rice and Indigo will be brought to market by negroes instead of white people."⁶² In early May a letter reached local Whigs from Arthur Lee, their attentive correspondent in London, suggesting that a plan had been laid before the British administration for instigating American slaves to revolt.⁶³

About the same time a black preacher named David—apparently African-born and English-trained—arrived in Charlestown from the settlement of Bethesda in Georgia, founded by the famous evangelist George Whitefield. He stayed at the home of Patrick Hinds, who had been cited in February by the Grand Jury “for entertaining and admitting Negroe Preachers in his House and on his grounds, where they deliver Doctrines to large numbers of Negroes dangerous to and subversive of the Peace, Safety and Tranquility of this Province.”⁶⁴ But this earlier presentment did not stop Hinds from inviting David to address “several white People and Negroes, who had collected together to hear him.” Whatever his intent, “David in the course of his exhortation, dropped some unguarded Expressions, such as, that he did not doubt; but ‘God would send Deliverance to the Negroes, from the power of their Masters, as He freed the Children of Israel from Egyptian Bondage.’” Soon after his talk David made a hasty exit from Charlestown, for in the city’s tense atmosphere such remarks were “construed, as tho’ he meant to raise rebellion amongst the negroes.” According to a letter dated 8 May 1775, “the Gentlemen of this Town are so possessed with an opinion that his Designs are bad, that they are determined to pursue, and hang him, if they can lay hold of him.”⁶⁵

Word arrived in Charlestown that same day regarding the bloodshed at Lexington and Concord three weeks earlier, and, as one observer put it, “the people of Carolina were thrown into a great Ferment.”⁶⁶ If such news had differing meaning for Loyalists, Whigs, and enslaved African Americans, all were challenged by its unknown implications. Ten days later Josiah Smith, Jr., wrote that “our Province at present is in a ticklish Situation, on account of our numerous Domesticks, who have been deluded by some villanous Persons into the notion of being all set free” on the arrival of the new governor, Lord William Campbell. The situation was made still more ticklish by the portion of a letter from England that appeared in the local paper at the end of May. The correspondent, apparently linking a regular annual shipment of trade guns for the Indians with the heightened prospect of violence in the colonies, had reported on 10 February that “there is gone down to Sheerness, seventy-eight thousand guns and bayonets, to be sent to America, to put into the hands of N-----s [Negroes], the Roman Catholics, the Indians, and the Canadians; and all the means on earth used to subdue the colonies.” Writing again in mid-June, Josiah Smith, Jr., noted that the rumor of freedom among the slaves “is their common Talk throughout the Province, and has occasioned impertinent behaviour in many of them, insomuch that our Provincial Congress now sitting hath voted

the immediate raising of Two Thousand Men Horse and food, to keep those mistaken creatures in awe, as well as to oppose any Troops that may be sent among us with coercive Orders."⁶⁷

In early July Charlestown's Council of Safety received word from the Chehaw District south of Edisto River that "Several Slaves in the neighborhood were exciting & endeavouring to bring abt a General Insurrection." For several years a Scotsman named John Burnet had apparently been holding frequent "Nocturnal Meetings" with local blacks, and a slave named Jemmy told the planters "that at these assemblies he had heard of an Insurrection intended," in which slaves were "to take the Country by Killing the Whites, but that John Burnet was to be Saved as their Preacher." Besides Burnet, Jemmy proceeded to name fifteen black men and women on six plantations who "are Preachers, & have (many of them) been preaching for two Years last past to Great crouds of Negroes in the Neighborhood of Chyhaw, very frequently, which he himself has attended." Indeed, Jemmy had heard one of these preachers, a man named George from the plantation of Francis Smith, "say that the old King had reced a Book from our Lord by which he was to Alter the World (meaning to set the Negroes free) but for his not doing so, was now gone to Hell, & in Punishmt That the Young King, meaning our Present One, came up with the Book, & was about to alter the World, & set the Negroes Free."⁶⁸

When Governor Campbell arrived in Charlestown, he found the story circulating that the "Ministry had in agitation not only to bring down the Indians on the Inhabitants of this province, but also to instigate, and encourage an insurrection amongst the Slaves. It was also reported, and universally believed," Campbell stated, "that to effect this plan 14,000 Stand of Arms were actually on board the Scorpion, the Sloop of War I came out in. Words, I am told, cannot express the flame that this occasion'd amongst all ranks and degrees, the cruelty and savage barbarity of the scheme was the conversation of all Companies." A free black pilot named Thomas Jeremiah, who "had often piloted in Men of War" as they entered the harbor, was jailed on charges of being in contact with the British Navy and seeking to distribute arms.⁶⁹

One black witness for the prosecution testified that in April 1775 along the docks Jeremiah had asked him, "Sambo, do you hear anything of the war that is coming?" The pilot had assured the witness that "there is a great war coming soon," advising him to be ready to "join the soldiers—that the war was come to help the poor Negroes." Another slave named Jemmy, the pilot's brother-in-law, claimed that in early April Jeremiah had asked him "to take a few Guns" to a run-

away named Dewar, "to be placed in Negroes hands to fight against the Inhabitants of this Province." His relative told him further, Jemmy testified, "that he Jeremiah was to have the Chief Command of the said Negroes," and that while "he believed he had Powder enough already," he "wanted more arms" and "would try to get as many as he could."⁷⁰ Although sentenced to hang as a co-conspirator, Jemmy obtained a reprieve through his testimony on 17 August. Jeremiah was publicly hanged and burned in Charlestown on the following afternoon. Governor Campbell reported he had been warned that if he intervened with a pardon, "it would raise a flame all the water in Cooper River would not extinguish."⁷¹

The situation in Georgia was scarcely different, as John Adams learned through a discussion with several other delegates to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. "In the evening," Adams wrote on 24 September, "two gentlemen from Georgia, came into my room [and] gave a melancholy account of the State of Georgia and South Carolina. They say that if one thousand regular troops should land in Georgia, and their commander be provided with arms and clothes enough, and proclaim freedom to all the negroes who would join his camp, twenty thousand negroes would join it from the two Provinces in a fortnight." According to Adams, the two Georgians observed "their only security is this; that all the king's friends, and tools of government, have large plantations and property in negroes; so that the slaves of the Tories would be lost, as well as those of the Whigs."⁷² Needless to say, human property lost by a Whig or Tory could mean freedom gained by an African American.

Clearly the stakes were mounting for all concerned by the fall of 1775, and the three-way tug-of-war was becoming ever more intense. In the British House of Commons on 26 October, William Henry Lyttleton reminded his colleagues that the southern colonies were weak "on account of the number of negroes in them." Lyttleton, the former governor of South Carolina and Jamaica, prompted a bitter debate when he suggested "a proposal for encouraging the negroes in that part of America to rise against their masters, and for sending some regiments to support and encourage them, in carrying the design into execution." He, for one, believed confidently that "the negroes would rise, and embrue their hands in the blood of their masters."⁷³

To many, Virginia seemed particularly vulnerable, for it contained far more blacks than any other mainland colony, and almost all of them remained enslaved. Moreover, although the colony's black population of nearly 190,000 was outnumbered by some 280,000 whites,

many of the latter now lived in the backcountry, and all were increasingly divided along partisan lines between Whigs and Tories. By autumn Governor Dunmore, who had retreated from Williamsburg to the safety of a British ship, was preparing to use the desperate card he had threatened to play, and perhaps should have played, six months earlier. When his marines raided a printing office in Norfolk in September, they were joined by cheering blacks.⁷⁴ During October he continued to conduct raids and to remove slaves to British naval vessels via small sloops and cutters as he had been doing for months. "Lord Dunmore," charged the Committee of Safety in Williamsburg on 21 October 1775, "not contented with . . . inciting an insurrection of our slaves, hath lately, in conjunction with the officers of the navy, proceeded to commence hostilities against his Majesty's peaceable subjects in the town and neighborhood of Norfolk; captivated many, and seized the property of others, particularly slaves, who are detained from the owners."⁷⁵ "Lord Dunmore sails up and down the river," a Norfolk resident wrote to London the following week; "where he finds a defenseless place he lands, plunders the plantation and carries off the negroes."⁷⁶

Edmund Pendleton estimated in early November that perhaps fewer than one hundred slaves had taken refuge with Dunmore, but the situation changed drastically on 14 November, when the governor's forces won a skirmish at Kemp's Landing. Dunmore capitalized on this small victory in two ways. First, he sent off John Connelly toward Detroit with secret orders approved by Gage to return to Virginia with Indian troops, seize Alexandria, and await forces from the coast.⁷⁷ Second, Dunmore used the occasion to publish the less-than-sweeping proclamation he had drawn up and signed the week before, emancipating any servants or slaves of the opposition faction who would come serve in his army. It read in part, "I do hereby further declare all indented servants, negroes, and 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."⁷⁸

Connelly was soon captured, but the proclamation had its intended effect.⁷⁹ "Letters mention that slaves flock to him in abundance," Pendleton wrote to Richard Henry Lee at the end of the month, "but I hope it magnified."⁸⁰ "Whoever considers well the meaning of the word Rebel," stated a white resident of Williamsburg, "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." He added, in a line reminiscent of Patrick Henry, "there is a treason against the State, for which such

men as Lord Dunmore, and even Kings, have lost their heads."⁸¹

Since it ultimately failed from both the British and the black vantage points, there is a tendency to minimize the combined initiative of the months following November 1775.⁸² But at the time these events in Virginia had enormous potential significance for blacks and whites throughout the colonies. Word of Dunmore's proclamation must have reached Charlestown by early December, for blacks initiated a work stoppage on harbor fortifications, and many slaves gathered on Sullivan's Island in hopes of boarding a British ship.⁸³ In Philadelphia, a newspaper related on 14 December that a "gentlewoman" walking near Christ Church had been "insulted" by an African American, who remained near the wall on the narrow sidewalk, refusing to step off into the muddy street as expected. When she reprimanded him, he replied, according to the report, "Stay, you d—d white bitch, till Lord Dunmore and his black regiment come, and then we will see who is to take the wall."⁸⁴

That same day George Washington urged Congress "to Dispossess Lord Dunmore of his hold in Virginia" as soon as possible. In repeated letters the planter-general stressed that "the fate of America a good deal depends on his being obliged to evacuate Norfolk this winter." Washington spelled out his fears to Richard Henry Lee on 26 December 1775: "If my dear Sir, that man is not crushed before spring, he will become the most formidable enemy America has; his strength will increase as a snow ball by rolling; and faster, if some expedient cannot be hit upon to convince the slaves and servants of the impotency of his designs."⁸⁵ The general had personal reasons to fear such a snowball. A note written 3 December from Mount Vernon had informed him that Dunmore's proclamation was well known to his own bondsmen. It appeared, wrote Lund Washington, that "there is not a man of them but would leave us if they believed they could make their escape," even though Mount Vernon's workers had "no fault to find" with their master specifically, his reported contended. Nevertheless, Lund Washington concluded, the slaves all seemed to share one universal idea that shaped their discontented frame of mind, namely: "liberty is sweet."⁸⁶

All across the South, planters, who—like George Washington—had committed themselves to the desperate alternative of violent revolution, were growing more apprehensive than ever about the prospect of armed revolt among the enslaved. In February 1776 Richard Bennehan, founder of one of North Carolina's largest slaveholding dynasties, left instructions for his overseer near Hillsborough before

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setting out to join patriot forces for the battle of Cross Creek: "It is said the negroes have some thoughts of freedom. Pray make Scrub sleep in the house every night and [see] that the overseer keep in Tom."⁸⁷ Predictably, such planters blamed Lord Dunmore for kindling a belief in freedom among those being held in bondage. But in reality Dunmore was merely fanning embers of liberation that had been glowing in the black community for generations.

Reports from the Chesapeake southward after Dunmore's proclamation are suggestive of the events surrounding Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of 1863.⁸⁸ With the prospect of freedom at hand, flight became the logical form of rebellion, and along the coast hundreds took direct action despite terrible odds. The newspapers told of "boatloads of slaves" seeking out British ships, not always successfully.⁸⁹ Seven men and two women from Maryland "who had been endeavouring to get to Norfolk in an open boat" were apprehended near Point Comfort.⁹⁰ Three blacks who boarded a Virginia boat that they mistakenly took to be a British vessel were only "undeceived" after they had openly "declared their resolution to spend the last drop of their blood in Lord Dunmore's service."⁹¹ Although perhaps more than a thousand reached Dunmore's ships safely, an outbreak of smallpox among the refugees the next spring reduced their numbers and discouraged others from following. If it had "not been for this horrid disorder," Dunmore wrote to the secretary of state on 26 June 1776, "I should have had two thousand blacks; with whom I should have had no doubt of penetrating into the heart of this Colony."⁹²

A great deal had changed in the year since Tom Paine had advocated emancipation and western resettlement. The British had co-opted these ideas and used them to their own advantage, capitalizing on slave aspirations for freedom and swinging black hopes decidedly toward the loyalist position with the carrot of emancipation. Dunmore's proclamation gave public substance to this stance, and the planter elite viewed such a threat to their property as a compelling argument for independence—just as their grandchildren would more than four score years later. Patriot opinion had solidified around the notion that the freedom struggles of enslaved Africans were a liability rather than an asset. When Paine's *Common Sense* first appeared on 9 January 1776, it spoke of the British as barbarous and hellish agitators and of native Americans and African Americans as brutal and destructive enemies. Soon Thomas Jefferson would weave similar sentiments into his drafts for the Declaration of Independence and the preamble to the Virginia constitution.⁹³

Preoccupied with imperial misrule and prejudiced from the start

against members of another class and a different race, colonial leaders were unable to acknowledge accurately (or perhaps even perceive) the nature of the struggle for liberation that was being waged passionately around them. Unable to acknowledge the strength of the opposition from below, they preferred to believe that outside agitators had been at work, unsuccessfully, among passive and anonymous victims of enslavement. By relying on their persuasive and partisan words, we ourselves have been largely blinded for two centuries to a major factor in the turmoil leading up to the white War of Independence. We have failed to recognize an important chapter in the history of worker and artisan unrest, and we have omitted a significant strand in the ideological origins of the American commitment to freedom.

NOTES

PUBLISHING NOTE: This essay expands and provides additional documentation for an argument presented earlier in Peter H. Wood, "Impatient of Oppression": Black Freedom Struggles on the Eve of White Independence," *Southern Exposure* 12 (November-December 1984): 10-16 and in Peter H. Wood, "The Dream Deferred": Black Freedom Struggles on the Eve of White Independence," in Gary K. Okihiro, ed., *In Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean and Afro-American History* (Amherst, Mass., 1986), 166-87.

1. *The Journal of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein, 3 vols. (Philadelphia, 1942-58), 3:78.

2. In contrast, during the 1770s a total of only 15,000 blacks resided in the four northeastern colonies of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, making up only three percent of New England's population. William D. Piersen, *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Amherst, Mass., 1988), table 6, 168-69. On the shifting distribution and relative numbers of blacks, whites, and Indians across the entire South during the eighteenth century, see my demographic survey, "The Changing Population of the Colonial South: An Overview by Race and Region, 1685-1790," in Peter H. Wood, Gregory A. Waselkov, H. Thomas Hatley, eds., *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast* (Lincoln, Neb., 1989), 35-103.

3. It is important for a variety of reasons to remember that, overall, North American victims of the Middle Passage made up scarcely five percent of the entire slave trade from Africa to the Americas. See Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*

(Madison, Wis., 1969).

4. Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992), 4. This process is not unusual. More than 80,000 African migrants are set aside at the outset of another important recent book by a distinguished colonial scholar. See Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York, 1986), 17-19.

5. Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 39. For the clearest and most influential formulation of this trickle-down theory, see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), chap. 6.

6. Benjamin Quarles, "The Revolutionary War as a Black Declaration of Independence," in Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman, eds., *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville, Va., 1983), 285. Quarles's pioneer volume, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1961) remains basic to this field. Among many recent contributions, see particularly Jacqueline Jones, "Race, Sex, and Self-Evident Truths: The Status of Slave Women during the Era of the American Revolution," in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Women in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville, Va., 1989), 293-337; Robert A. Olwell, "'Domestick Enemies': Slavery and Political Independence in South Carolina, May 1775-March 1776," *Journal of Southern History* 55 (1989): 21-48; and Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, 1991).

7. Quarles, "Revolutionary War," 285. Mather is quoted in Lawrence W. Towner, "'A Fondness for Freedom': Servant Protest in Puritan Society," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d series, 19 (1962): 201. Also see Daniel K. Richter, "'It Is God Who Has Caused Them to Be Servants': Cotton Mather and Afro-American Slavery in New England," *Bulletin of the Congregational Library* 30 (Spring-Summer 1979): 4-13.

8. Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York, 1974), 312-17. Regarding subsequent black initiatives immediately after Stono, see *ibid.*, 318-23.

9. According to William Bull, Jr., son of the lieutenant governor at the time of the revolt, the Stono Rebellion had taken "its rise from the wantonness, and not oppression of our Slaves, for too great a number had been very indiscreetly assembled and encamped together for several nights, to do a large work on the public road; with a slack inspection." Letter of 30 November 1770, British Public

Record Office Transcripts (hereafter cited as BPROT), 35 vols., located in the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, S.C. (hereafter cited as SCDAH) 32:381-83. On Fort Mose, see Jane Landers, "Spanish Sanctuary: Fugitives in Florida 1687-1790," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 62 (January 1984): 296-313; and Larry W. Kruger and Robert Hall, "Fort Mose: A Black Fort in Spanish Florida," *The Griot* (Southern Conference on Afro-American Studies) 6, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 39-48. While war between Great Britain and Spain was not declared formally until October 1739, in July Admiral Edward Vernon was ordered to the Caribbean with a British squadron to "commit all sorts of hostilities against the Spaniards," and word of this pending aggression reached Charlestown in September. Orders cited in Geoffrey J. Walker, *Spanish Politics and Imperial Trade, 1700-1789* (Bloomington, Ind., 1979), 207.

10. At the time of Stono, in late 1739, for example, there was also a reported conspiracy in Prince George's County, Maryland; whites in that heavily Catholic province faced internal divisions during Great Britain's war against Spain (1739-48)—a development which slaves could not have ignored. Aubrey C. Land, ed., *Bases of Plantation Society* (Columbia, S.C., 1969), 228-30; Jeffrey R. Brackett, *The Negro in Maryland* (Baltimore, 1889), 93-94. Similarly in New York City, where some 2,000 enslaved blacks made up one sixth of the port's population, accusations that Catholic agents were encouraging slave unrest figured in the lengthy trials and extensive prosecutions that followed New York's suspected conspiracy of 1741. See T. J. Davis, ed., *The New York Conspiracy by Thomas J. Horsmanden* (Boston, 1971); Davis, *A Rumour of Revolt* (New York, 1985).

11. The return of former Governor Spotswood from England in 1730 sparked rumors that he was carrying an order from the King to liberate Virginia's Christian slaves. Governor Gooch mobilized the militia, and "by Imprisonment and severe whipping of the most Suspected, this Disturbance was very soon Quashed." Soon after, when several hundred enslaved blacks in Princess Anne and Norfolk counties gathered on a Sunday morning to choose officers to lead a revolt, four of the most prominent participants were publicly executed. Thad W. Tate, *The Negro in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg* (Charlottesville, Va., 1965), 205-7.

12. During the next ten months other black Virginians, in Surry County and in the capital of Williamsburg, were also punished for engaging in such rebellious talk. Philip J. Schwarz, *Twice Condemned: Slaves and the Criminal Laws of Virginia, 1705-1865* (Baton Rouge, La., 1988), 171-74. Schwarz notes that in September 1750 a free black man in Northampton County was charged with "suspicion of

his combining with sundry Negroes in a Conspiracy against the white People of this County." He was sentenced by the county court to thirty-nine lashes and forced to post a bond of £100 for good behavior. Two months later the same court condemned an enslaved man to twenty lashes for the same offense.

13. Parish Transcripts relating to South Carolina, in the New-York Historical Society, New York City (hereafter cited as Parish Trans.), 7 March 1755. Compare William S. Willis, "Divide and Rule: Red, White, and Black in the Southeast," *Journal of Negro History* 48 (July 1963): 157-76.

14. When South Carolina's governor agreed to "Articles of Friendship and Commerce" with Creek Indian leaders in 1721, for example, the headmen promised "to apprehend and secure any Negro or other Slave which shall run away from any English Settlements to our Nation." They would be paid in guns and blankets for returning captured runaways alive, "And in Case we or our People should kill any such Slaves . . . in apprehending them, then we are to be paid one Blanket for his Head by any Trader we shall carry such Slave's Head unto." South Carolina Commons House Journals (hereafter cited as SCCHJ), 1736-39, 110, SCDAH. Articles dated 8 July 1721. For a similar clause in a treaty with the Cherokees signed in London in September 1730, see BPROT 14:21-22, SCDAH.

15. Mark J. Stegmaier, "Maryland's Fear of Insurrection at the Time of Braddock's Defeat," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 71 (Winter 1976): 467-83.

16. Sharpe to Calvert, 15 July 1755, *Archives of Maryland*, ed. William H. Browne, 71 vols. (Baltimore, 1883-) 6:251.

17. Dinwiddie to Secretary Halifax, 23 July 1755, Virginia Historical Society, *Collections*, new series, vol. 4, *The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie, Lieutenant-Governor of Virginia, 1751-1758*, 2 vols. (Richmond, 1884) 2:114. Also see Dinwiddie to Charles Carter, 18 July 1755, *ibid.* 2:102, responding to Colonel Carter's report of slave unrest in Lancaster County: "The Villainy of the Negroes in an Emergency of Gov't is w't I always fear'd. I greatly approve of your send'g the Sheriffs with proper Strength to take up those y't appear'd in a Body at Y'r Son's House, and if found Guilty of the Expression mention'd I expect You will send for a Com'o. to try them, and an example of one or two at first may prevent those Creatures enter'g into Combinat[ion]s and wicked Designs ag'st the Subjects." Apparently worried about using blacks as combatants (as he would again worry two decades later), George Washington advised his subordinate "to detain both Mulatto's and negroes in your Company; and employ them as Pioneers and Hatchetmen." Letter from Washington to Capt.

Peter Hogg, 27 December 1755, John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*, 39 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1931-40) 1:259.

18. Louis De Vorsey, Jr., ed., *De Brahm's Report of the General Survey in the Southern District of North America* (Columbia, S.C., 1971), 91; compare 17 and plate 3.

19. *Ibid.*, 90.

20. The minister publicized his views in a pamphlet, and he predicted a great calamity for South Carolina in September (which was, not incidentally, the twentieth anniversary of Stono). Richard Clarke, *The Prophetic Numbers of Daniel and John Calculated; In Order to Show the Time, when the Day of Judgement for the First Age of the Gospel Is to be Expected; and the Setting Up of the Millenial Kingdom of Jehovah and His Christ* (Charlestown, S.C., 1759), advertised in the *South Carolina Gazette*, 3 March 1759.

21. Evidence here and in the next three paragraphs is from Parish Trans., 9 July 1759 and 1 September 1759. Also see David Zornow, "A Troublesome Community: Blacks in Revolutionary Charles Town, 1765-1775," (undergraduate honors thesis, Harvard College, 1976), and the forthcoming book of John Scott Strickland on "millenial visions and visible congregations" among South Carolina slaves.

22. See Robert M. Weir, "'Liberty and Property, and No Stamps': South Carolina and the Stamp Act Crisis" (Ph.D. diss., Western Reserve University, 1966); Maurice A. Crouse, "Cautious Rebellion: South Carolina's Opposition to the Stamp Act," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 73 (April 1972): 59-72.

23. Donna J. Spindell, "The Stamp Act Riots" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1975), 204; compare Pauline Maier, "The Charleston Mob and the Evolution of Popular Politics in Revolutionary South Carolina, 1765-1784," *Perspectives in American History* 4 (1970): 176.

24. Richard Walsh, *Charleston's Sons of Liberty: A Study of the Artisans, 1763-1789* (Columbia, S.C., 1959), 36-37.

25. Henry Laurens to Joseph Brown, 28 October 1765, Philip M. Hamer, George C. Rogers, Jr., David R. Chesnutt, eds., *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, 11 volumes to date (Columbia, S.C., 1968-), 5:29-31; compare 37-40.

26. David Duncan Wallace, *The Life of Henry Laurens* (New York, 1915), 118-20. For a note regarding the slave Equiano's possible description of this celebration, see Peter H. Wood, "'Taking Care of Business' in Revolutionary South Carolina: Republicanism and the Slave Society," in Jeffrey J. Crow and Larry E. Tise, eds., *The Southern Experience in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1978), 289, n. 23.

27. *Boston Gazette*, Supplement, 27 January 1766.

28. John Bartram, "Diary," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, new series, 33 (December 1942): 22.

29. No doubt recalling that the Stono revolt of 1739 had occurred on a Sunday morning, the jurors went on to "complain of the neglect of not carrying arms to church and other places of worship, and against the bad custom of delivering their arms to negroes or other slaves, to keep while they are at devine service." *South Carolina Gazette*, 2 June 1766. Two further items listed by the grand jury read as follows:

VII. We present as a general grievance through the province, the want of a patrol duty being duly done, and submit it to the legislature, whether a provincial or parochial tax to support the expense of a standing patrol, to be constantly on duty, would not better answer the intentions of apprehending fugitive slaves; and that all fugitives after so many months absence should be deemed out laws and subject to death without sentence or expense to the province.

VIII. We present it as a grievance, the too frequent abuse of the law relative to the keeping of a proper number of white men on plantations, according to the number of blacks.

30. The number of enslaved Africans imported into South Carolina in 1765 jumped drastically over previous years, to well above 7,000 persons—more than the entire resident black population, or the white population, of Charlestown at the time. George C. Rogers, Jr., *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys* (Norman, Okla., 1969), 42; Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America*, 4 vols. (Washington: D.C., 1930–35) 4:411–13.

31. Mr. Huger told Bull that at first he had doubted the validity of his wife's information, but that "on some other circumstances happening he thought it proper to be so far attended as to communicate it to him as it gave uneasiness to many people." Bull added that he had since received further confirmation of the intended plot through the "friendship to the White People" of two black informers on Johns Island, bordering the Stono River south of Charlestown. BPROT, Council Journal, 17 December 1765.

32. Ibid.

33. BPROT, Council Journal, 25 December 1765. Bull later explained candidly that he had "thought it very Advisable to call down some of the Catawbias, as Indians Strike Terrou into the Negroes, and the Indian manner of hunting render them more sagacious in tracking and expert in finding out the hidden recesses where the runaways conceal themselves from the usual searches of the En-

glish." SCCHJ, 14 January 1766.

34. Extract from a letter from South Carolina dated 29 December 1765, in the *Newport Mercury*, 10 February 1766.

35. Henry Laurens to John Lewis Gervais, 29 January 1766, *Laurens Papers* 5:53-54.

36. *Virginia Gazette*, 7 March 1766. Of more than 100 persons suspected of going into hiding, only 7 were apprehended, even though the Assembly paid out more than £380 in compensation to those who searched. SCCHJ, Audit of Public Accounts, 2 April 1767. When the South Carolina Assembly published its list of public accounts for the year, one entry showed that £277 had been allotted to an "ordnance storekeeper for cleaning the muskets and bayonets and for twelve days work of a white man and two Negroes fixing Bayonets to 599 gunns and Flinting 980 muskets in the late alarm." SCCHJ, 17 January 1766.

37. BPROT, Council Journal, 25 January 1766. "The vigorous execution of our Militia and Patrol Laws for 14 days before and after Christmas Day," Bull told his superiors, "prevented the festivity and the assembling of Negroes usual at that time, and disconcerted their schemes."

38. SCCHJ, 14 January 1766. "I earnestly recommend to you," Bull concluded, "to revise the Militia and Town Watch Acts for better governing Negroes" to assure "not only a punctual but a continued observance of their salutary injunctions." Several years later, a report from Charlestown dated 16 August 1768 mentioned a battle with maroons, "a numerous collection of outcast mulattoes, mustees, and free negroes." *Boston Chronicle*, 3-10 October 1768.

39. For a brief description of those intervening years, see Peter H. Wood, "'Impatient of Oppression': Black Freedom Struggles on the Eve of White Independence," *Southern Exposure* 12 (November-December 1984): 11-12.

40. Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Familiar Letters of John Adams and His Wife Abigail Adams* (New York, 1876), 41-42.

41. James Madison, letter of 26 November 1774, William T. Hutchinson and William M. E. Rachal, eds., *The Papers of James Madison* (Chicago, 1962) 1:129-30. "It is prudent," Madison reminded the printer, that "such attempts should be concealed as well as suppressed."

42. "By this," Bradford concluded, "you see such a scheme is thought on and talked of; but I cannot believe the Spirit of the English would ever allow them publically to adopt so slavish a way of Conquering." William Bradford to James Madison, Philadelphia, 4 January 1775, Hutchinson and Rachal, eds., *Madison Papers* 1:132.

43. *Georgia Gazette*, 14 and 21 September, 7 December 1774; Herbert Aptheker, *The American Revolution, 1763-1783* (New York, 1960), 220; Herbert Aptheker, *Negro Slave Revolts* (New York, 1943), 201.

44. Harvey H. Jackson, "'American Slavery, American Freedom' and the Revolution in the Lower South: The Case of Lachlan McIntosh," *Southern Studies* 19 (Spring 1980): 81; Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia: 1730-1775* (Athens, Ga., 1984), 202-3. Also see Kenneth Coleman, *The American Revolution in Georgia, 1763-1789*, (Athens, Ga., 1958), 45-46.

45. Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, 2 vols. (New York, 1945), 2:19. Paine's essay "is said to have inspired the American Anti-Slavery Society, founded on April 14." Wylie Sypher, *Guinea's Captive Kings: British Anti-Slavery Literature of the XVIIIth Century* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1942; repr. 1969), 61.

46. See Ellen Gibson Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks* (New York, 1976), 15-16; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 40-46.

47. *The Massachusetts Spy* (Boston), 29 July 1773.

48. This loyalist claims memorial, filed in London, n.d., is in Audit Office 12, vol. 51, f. 289. Gordon goes on, ff. 290-91, to explain how he tried to quiet these fears. The claims memorial of Thomas Irving, another South Carolina official (vol. 51, ff. 306-7), also addresses this matter. I am indebted to Prof. Mary Beth Norton for these references.

49. 31 May 1775, Adelaide L. Fries, ed., *Records of the Moravians of North Carolina*, 2 vols. (Raleigh, N.C., 1968) 2:847, 928-30.

50. The phrase is from a justly famous letter of 11 February 1774 from black poet Phillis Wheatley to Indian minister Samson Occom. Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, 2 vols. (New York, 1951) 1:8-9. On Wheatley, see Sidney Kaplan and Emma Nogrady Kaplan, *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution*, rev. ed. (Amherst, Mass., 1989), 170-91; Charles W. Akers, "'Our Modern Egyptians': Phillis Wheatley and the Whig Campaign against Slavery in Revolutionary Boston," *Journal of Negro History* 60 (July 1975): 405-6. For a fascinating discussion and references to recent scholarship on Wheatley, see David Grimsted, "Anglo-American Racism and Phillis Wheatley's 'Sable Veil,' 'Length'ned Chain,' and 'Knitted Heart,'" in Hoffman and Albert, eds., *Women in Revolution*, 338-444.

51. *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter), 18 March 1775.

52. In nearby Norfolk two enslaved workers were arrested for plotting and swiftly condemned to hang. On 29 April, a special supplement of the *Virginia Gazette* reported that the two bondsmen had

been sentenced to death "for being concerned in a conspiracy to raise an insurrection in that town." *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter), Supplement, 29 April 1775; Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, 184, 187. For a discussion of Virginia events during this month, see Ivor Noel Hume, *1775: Another Part of the Field* (New York, 1966), chap. 4. On continuing unrest in Norfolk and Williamsburg during the summer of 1775, see Sylvia R. Frey, "Between Slavery and Freedom: Virginia Blacks in the American Revolution," *Journal of Southern History* 49 (1983): 377-78.

53. Dunmore to Dartmouth, 1 May 1775, CO5/1373, Public Record Office.

54. "Deposition of Dr. William Pasteur," *Virginia Magazine of History & Biography*, 13 (July 1905): 48-49. Compare "Deposition of John Randolph" in *ibid.* 15 (October, 1907): 150.

55. *Virginia Gazette* (Pickney), 4 May 1775.

56. Gage to Dartmouth, Boston, 15 May 1775, quoted in Quarles, *Negro in the Revolution*, 21-22; Gage to Barrington, Boston, 12 June 1775, in Howard H. Peckham, ed., *Sources of American Independence: Selected Manuscripts from the Collections of the William L. Clements Library*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1978) 1:133.

57. Dunmore to Secretary of State, 25 June 1775, CO 5/1353, quoted in Wilson, *Loyal Blacks*, 25.

58. Hume, *1775*, 328ff. Connelly had played an important role in Dunmore's war against the Shawnee Indians the previous autumn, ending with the peace settlement at Camp Charlotte.

59. The items in this paragraph are quoted in Ronald Hoffman, *A Spirit of Dissension: Economics, Politics, and the Revolution in Maryland* (Baltimore, 1973), 147-48. See Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776* (New York, 1972), 284, where the leader is listed as James Simmons.

60. Evangeline Walker Andrews and Charles M. Andrews, eds., *Janet Schaw, Journal of a Lady of Quality . . .* (New Haven, 1921), 200-201.

61. William L. Saunders et al., eds., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina* (Raleigh, 1886-90), 10:94-95. See Aptheker, *Negro Slave Revolts*, 202-3; Jeffrey J. Crow, "Slave Rebelliousness and Social Conflict in North Carolina, 1775-1802," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d series 37(1980): 82-86; and Alan D. Watson, "Impulse toward Independence: Resistance and Rebellion among North Carolina Slaves, 1750-1775," *Journal of Negro History* 63 (1978): 317-28.

62. John R. Alden, "John Stuart Accuses William Bull," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d series, 2 (July 1945): 318.

63. Communication by D. D. Wallace, *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 47 (July 1946): 191.

64. Court of General Sessions, Grand Jury Presentments, 21 February 1775, South Carolina Archives, Columbia.

65. Letter of 11 May from James Habersham in Savannah to Robert Keen in London, Georgia Historical Society *Collections* 6 (Savannah, 1904): 243-44. After quoting the 8 May report from Mr. Piercy in Charlestown, the disgruntled Habersham (one of Georgia's largest slaveholders) criticizes David for preaching "temporal" rather than "Spiritual Deliverance" for slaves and arranges his passage (return?) to London. "I must say it's a pity, that any of these People should ever put their feet in England, where they get totally spoiled and ruined both in Body and Soul, through a mistaken kind of compassion because they are black."

66. Alden, "Stuart Accuses Bull," 318.

67. Letters of Josiah Smith, Jr., to James Poyas, 18 May 1775, and to George Appleby, 16 June 1775, as cited in Crow, "Slave Rebellionousness," 84-85n; *South Carolina Gazette*, 29 May 1775.

68. Thomas Hutchinson of St. Bartholomew parish to Council of Safety, 5 July 1775, *Laurens Papers* 10:206-8.

69. BPROT 35:192-93, 196. On the strategic importance of black pilots, see P. H. Wood, *Black Majority*, 204-5; and Quarles, *Negro in the Revolution*, 152. For evidence of discussions regarding the tactical significance of ships in Charlestown Harbor, see B. D. Baragar, "Charles Town Loyalism in 1775; The Secret Reports of Alexander Innes," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 63 (July 1962): 126-28.

70. BPROT 35:215-16.

71. Ibid. 35:198-99. For further references, see Wood, "Taking Care of Business," pp. 284-87; Robert M. Weir, *Colonial South Carolina—A History* (Millwood, N.Y., 1983), 200-203; Philip D. Morgan, "Black Life in Eighteenth-Century Charleston," *Perspectives in American History*, new series 1 (1984): 212.

72. Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams . . . 2* (Boston, 1850): 428. The New Englander explained that, "The negroes have a wonderful art of communicating intelligence among themselves; it will run several hundreds of miles in a week or fortnight."

73. William Cobbett and T. C. Hansard, eds., *Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to 1803*, 36 vols. (London, 1806-20) 18:733.

74. *Virginia Gazette*, 7 October 1775; and *Constitutional Gazette*, 21 October, 1775.

75. *Maryland Gazette*, 9 November 1775.

76. *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 22 December 1775, quoted in Quarles, *Negro in the Revolution*, 22.

77. Quarles, *Negro in the Revolution*, 23; Hume, 1775, 389.

78. Francis L. Berkeley, Jr., *Dunmore's Proclamation of Emancipation*, (Charlottesville, Va., 1941), 11–12.

79. For an illustration of both the prejudices of our historical heritage and the linking of these two events, see the stilted turn-of-the-century account of Cuyler Smith, "The American Negro," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly* (September 1902).

80. Edmund Pendleton, letter of 27 November 1775, quoted in Quarles, *Negro in the Revolution*, 23. Sylvia R. Frey, "Between Slavery and Freedom," 387, reminds us: "Despite his ambitious plans to organize a black army and to use it to discipline the rebellious Virginians, Dunmore was no champion of emancipation. A slaveowner himself, he persistently invited slave defections without, however, freeing his own slaves or unleashing the black violence feared by the horror-stricken proprietor class—a fact that escaped neither the Patriot press nor Virginia slaves."

81. 30 November 1775, Peter Force, ed., *American Archives . . . A Documentary History of . . . the American Colonies*, 4th series, 6 vols. (Washington, 1837–53) 3:1387–88.

82. For example, Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York, 1972), 124, observes candidly, "The royal governor's 'Black Regiment,' little more than a group of fugitives temporarily welded together to perform a desperate holding action, was largely a creation of the planters' imagination and their newspaper press."

83. For an account of the ruthless search-and-destroy mission to prevent their departure, and a similar campaign against blacks at Tybee Island, Georgia, see 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), 178–80, 185–87; and Gov. James Wright to Lord Germain, 20 March 1776, Georgia Historical Society Collections 3 (Savannah, 1873): 241.

84. *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, 14 December 1775. I am grateful to Steven Rosswurm for this reference.

85. Fitzpatrick, ed., *Washington Writings* 4:161, 172, 186, quoted in Noel Hume, 1775, 417. For additional reactions, see Frey, "The British and the Black: A New Perspective," *Historian* 38 (1976): 227; and Hoffman, *Spirit of Dissension*, 148.

86. Lund Washington to George Washington, 3 December 1775. Letters of Lund Washington (1767–1790), Mount Vernon Library,

Mount Vernon, Va. A month earlier, on the night of 7 November (the very date that Dunmore signed his proclamation aboard the ship *William* in Norfolk harbor), "a negro man named CHARLES, who is a very shrewd, sensible fellow, and can both read and write," disappeared from the Stafford County plantation of Robert Brent. According to Brent's notice in the *Virginia Gazette*, 16 November 1775: "From many circumstances, there is reason to believe he intends to attempt to get to lord Dunmore; and as I have reason to believe *his design of going off was long premeditated*, and that he has gone off with some accomplice, I am apprehensive he may prove daring and resolute, if endeavoured to be taken. His elopement was from no cause of complaint, or dread of whipping (for he has always been remarkably indulged, indeed too much so) but from *a determined resolution to get liberty*, as he conceived, by flying to lord Dunmore." (Emphasis added.)

87. Richard Bennehan, letter of 15 February 1776 to James Martin at Snow Hill Plantation, Little River, in the Cameron Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

89. An African-born slave near Georgetown, S.C., recalled intense nighttime meetings to discuss the first rumors of secession and the prospect "dat if dey gwo to war de brack man will be FREE!" "Edward Kirke" [James Robert Gilmore], *Among the Pines; Or, The South in Secession Time* (New York, 1862), 48. Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana, Ill., 1984), p. 168, notes that blacks near Georgetown were thrown in jail for singing "We'll soon be free" and "We'll fight for liberty." Also see Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York, 1979).

89. *Virginia Gazette* (Pickney), 30 November 1775.

90. *Maryland Gazette*, 14 December 1775. This issue carried a report from Williamsburg, dated 2 December, which read: "Since Lord Dunmore's proclamation made its appearance here, it is said he has recruited his army, in the counties of Princess Anne and Norfolk, to the amount of about 2000 men, including his black regiment, which is thought to be a considerable part, with this inscription on their breasts:—'Liberty to slaves.'—However, as the rivers will henceforth be strictly watched, and every possible precaution taken, it is hoped others will be effectually prevented from joining those his lordship has already collected."

91. *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), 29 March 1776. "It is important that the only time before 1785 that slave courts whose records have survived held a trial of slaves for running away was in March, 1776,

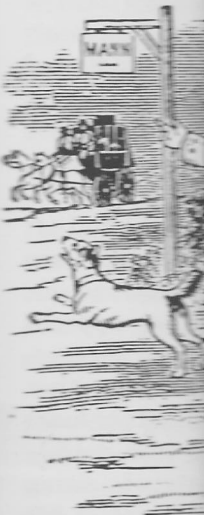
when the oyer and terminer court of Northampton County tried and convicted eleven slaves for running away and for stealing the schooner they used to do so. The judges sentenced four of them to hang and inflicted thirty-nine lashes on each of the rest." Schwarz, *Twice Condemned*, 135.

92. Quoted in Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, 132. On 28 June 1776, when nearby Maryland's provincial convention voted for independence, they also approved sending troops to the eastern shore, where poor whites, Negroes, and loyalists were reportedly fostering rebellion against the new leadership. Merrill Jensen, "The American People and the American Revolution," *Journal of American History* 57 (1970): 29-32. A month later in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, a slave named Samson "said he would burn houses of Associators and kill their women and children when they left" to go on active duty. His owner, Jeremiah Dugan, Jr., was obliged to post a bond of £100 for his good behavior. Minutes of Bucks County Committee of Safety, 29 July 1776, *Pennsylvania Archives*, 2d series, 15:368. Three days later Henry Wynkoop requested powder from the local Committee of Safety because numerous whites were "somewhat alarmed with fears about Negroes & disaffected people injuring their families when they are out in the service." Wynkoop letter, 31 July 1776, *Pennsylvania Archives*, 1st series, 4:792. I am indebted to Prof. Steven Rosswurm for these last two citations.

93. Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (Garden City, N.Y., 1978), 71-75.

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