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Taylor Fischer

“Thirsteth for the Blood of America”: Propaganda and Violence during the American Revolution

On December 14, 1763, a group of discontented farmers from the Pennsylvania frontier, called the Paxton Boys, arrived at Conestoga Manor in Lancaster County. The Paxton Boys were Scots-Irish Presbyterians who aimed to take over a Quaker colony. The group of farmers murdered six peaceful Conestoga Indians who were under the long-standing protection of the colonial Pennsylvania government. After the initial attack, Pennsylvania’s government placed the remaining Conestoga in a Lancaster jailhouse for their supposed protection. The Paxton Boys then traveled to Lancaster and slaughtered fourteen more Conestoga peoples. These murderous and militant frontiersmen claimed that the Conestoga Indians had supplied Native tribes fighting in Pontiac’s Rebellion, a pan-Indian conflict from 1763 to 1766 to remove British colonists from Indian territories.¹ After the second attack, surviving Conestoga Indians sought refuge in Philadelphia, hoping for protection from the Pennsylvania government. When the Paxton Boys heard about this move, they marched on Philadelphia, planning to attack the jail and kill the remaining Conestoga and Moravian Indians.² To avoid further massacre and bloodshed, Pennsylvania officials met the Paxton Boys in Germantown and struck a deal with them, preventing them from entering the city.³

In 1764, a pamphlet war broke out between critics and sympathizers of the Paxton Boys. This pamphlet war led to an explosion of printed materials—with the publication of sixty-three

¹ “Historical Overview,” Digital Paxton, <http://digitalpaxton.org/works/digital-paxton/historical-overview?path=index>; Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York, NY: Viking, 2005), 70-72.

² Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 26; “Historical Overview,” Digital Paxton, <http://digitalpaxton.org/works/digital-paxton/historical-overview?path=index>.

³ Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian Transformed Early America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 187-188; Alison Olson, “The Pamphlet War over the Paxton Boys,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 123, no. ½ (1999): 33.

pamphlets and ten political cartoons.⁴ Sympathizers argued that the Paxton Boys acted in self-defense and accused the government of not protecting frontiersmen from Indian attacks. In a pamphlet titled *The Plain Dealer*, Hugh Williamson, a future member of the Continental Congress, scorned the Quaker-led government for harming the Scots-Irish and German population in Pennsylvania.⁵ In his pamphlet, Williamson wrote that “the Scots and Irish were rode by main force; and the unhappy Germans... have been blindly led into your schemes.”⁶ James Claypoole Jr., a young engraver from Philadelphia, engraved a print based on the pamphlet (see Figure 8). Claypoole depicted the oppressive Quaker-led government’s alliance with Indigenous people by illustrating figures emblematic of Quaker and Native people sitting atop, guiding, and manipulating German and Scots-Irish figures.

In their efforts to criticize and demonize the Quakers, propagandists questioned the Quaker’s camaraderie with Indigenous people. For example, the Paxton Boys and their sympathizers viewed Israel Pemberton, a prominent Quaker merchant and leader, as a villain who opposed the interests of frontiersmen and had sexual relationships with Native women.⁷ In a political cartoon titled, *An Indian Squaw King Wampum Spies*, Pemberton embraced a Native woman with an exposed chest.⁸ Paxton propagandists argued that the Quaker-led colonial government privileged the Conestoga and other American Indians over European frontiersmen. Pro-Paxton sympathizers separated Quakers from the rest of the populace through Quaker leaders’ corrupting connections with Natives. In the next decade, propagandists would apply a

⁴ Olson, “Pamphlet War over the Paxton Boys,” 34.

⁵ Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*, 213.

⁶ Hugh Williamson, *The Plain Dealer: or, A Few Remarks Upon Quaker-Politicks, and Their Attempts to Change the Government of Pennsylvania. With Some Observations on the False and Abusive Papers Which They Have Lately Publish’d* (Philadelphia, PA: Andrew Steuart, 1764), 9.

⁷ Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*, 208-9.

⁸ *Indian Squaw King Wampum Spies political cartoon, circa 1764*. Historical Society of Pennsylvania. <https://digitallibrary.hsp.org/index.php/Detail/objects/1952>.

similar logic to British forces who sought alliances with American Indians during the American Revolution.⁹



Figure 8: Quaker Israel Pemberton (wearing the broad brimmed hat) works with a Conestoga Indian to repress German and Scots-Irish colonists. Pemberton receives legitimacy and support from the Pennsylvania colonial government, represented by Benjamin Franklin, who holds out a resolve. A Native person hides in the bushes near Franklin's feet, looking at the scalped family he murdered. Another Native person holds an ax and wears a pack with the initials "I.P." for Israel Pemberton. "The German Bleeds & Bears Ye Furs," (Philadelphia 1764). Courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's Collection.

On the eve of the imperial crisis, Pennsylvanians argued that the Quaker-led colonial government engaged in inappropriate relations with Indigenous groups and excited Indian

⁹ Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*, 229; Reports of Indian attacks in newspapers typically sought to blame other Europeans for neglect or partial guilt.

warriors to commit violence against frontiersmen. These pamphleteers defined colonial forces as a violent “other” through their connections to groups racialized as violent.¹⁰ This strategy built upon the rhetorical foundation that enslaved and Native bodies were inherently violent and that contact with these groups would make Europeans savage and brutal by proximity.¹¹ This chapter investigates printers’ reporting of violent and racialized events to analyze how this reporting shaped patriot motivations leading to the colonies declaring independence. What conspiracies, insurrections, and rumors did propagandists disseminate? How did the racialization of marginalized bodies impact these interpretations of societal violence? Colonial printers published real, exaggerated, and groundless stories about Indian attacks, slave insurrections, and uncontrollable mobs. With growing dissatisfaction towards British authorities, propagandists increasingly positioned racialized bodies as violent tools for the British empire to employ against innocent colonists. Through this claim, propagandists portrayed British soldiers as a foreign enemy, associating the brutality and savageness they aligned with enslaved and indigenous bodies with the British empire.

With the passage of the Stamp Act in 1765, the seaports of Boston exploded into violent protests, coupled with equally explosive propaganda. Printers felt motivated to produce anti-Stamp Act propaganda as the Act taxed printers and threatened their economic viability.¹² Pope’s Day was an annual crowd event in Boston where opposing gangs, composed of the working poor, sailors, and enslaved people—the “lower sort”—in Boston from the North and South End, paraded effigies of Pope, Devil, and Pretender. In this demonstration of

¹⁰ Robert G. Parkinson, *Thirteen Clocks: How Race United the Colonies and Made the Declaration of Independence* (Williamsburg, VA: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2021), 81.

¹¹ Kathleen M. Brown, *Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America* (New Haven: CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 71–2; Ned Blackhawk, *The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023), 142.

¹² Stephen Botein, “Printers and the American Revolution,” in *The Press and the American Revolution*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and John B. Hench (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1980), 23–4.

anti-Catholicism, the two gangs ended the ritual parade with a violent conflict of the two companies attempting to burn each other's effigies. In November 1765, patriot leaders in Boston met with the event's leaders to temper the event from an uncontrollable violent mob into a protest of the Stamp Act. Some so-called "gentlemen" met with Ebenezer MacIntosh and Samuel Smith, the two leaders of the South and the North End and negotiated a union between the two gangs. MacIntosh, a shoemaker and leader of the South End, became the leader of both gangs.¹³ This transformation in leadership and involvement from elites significantly reshaped the conduct and composition of participants.

Before Pope's Day's transformation, newspapers described the event as a largely meaningless exhibition of violence carried out by Black and poor Bostonians. The *Boston Gazette* contrasted the demographics and actions of the mob before and after patriot integration. Before 1765, the Pope's Day crowd consisted of violent poor white servants and Black Bostonians "armed with clubs."¹⁴ These descriptions of the racialized mob possessing weaponry capitalized on the white populace's fear of slave insurrection. A similar *Boston Evening-Post* article implied that this violence occurred largely due to the presence of weaponry and enslaved people.¹⁵ When patriots tamed Pope's Day to protest the Stamp Act instead of practicing a violent anti-Catholic ritual, the *Boston Gazette* described participants as "Gentlemen," "chiefs," and "Commanders." When MacIntosh, a plebeian leader, joined the revolutionary cause, the *Gazette* illustrated the shoemaker as a calm and responsible "Commander" who "entered into a Treaty" with other plebeian Bostonians.¹⁶ This language indicated a sense of order and governance that patriots achieved through the exclusion of Black people. The *Boston*

¹³ Alfred F. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1999), 24, 93-4; Richard Archer, *As If an Enemy's Country: The British Occupation of Boston and the Origins of Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 34-35; *Boston Evening-Post*, November 11, 1765.

¹⁴ *Boston Gazette* November 11, 1765.

¹⁵ *Boston Evening-Post*, November 11, 1765.

¹⁶ *Boston Gazette* November 11, 1765.

Evening-Post wrote that the 1765 Pope's Day's leaders maintained peacefulness through a lack of weapons and the absence of enslaved people, who were not "allowed to approach near the Stages."¹⁷ Patriots separated themselves from racialized subjects sympathetic to their cause, believing that associating with these groups would prevent the patriots from winning what historian Holger Hock calls a "moral war" against the British. To achieve victory, propagandists shunned support from enslaved and Native groups and defamed British forces as barbarous.¹⁸ By positioning enslaved involvement as antithetical to the patriot cause, propagandists viewed British recruiting and contact with enslaved people as a threat to colonial well-being and civilization.

In 1768, the occupation of Boston by British soldiers galvanized claims that soldiers attempted to convince enslaved Bostonians to start an insurrection. Historian Richard Archer argues that the presence of British soldiers in Boston began a gradual process of colonists' estrangement from British authority and identity. British soldiers' brutal conduct demonstrated to Bostonians that the British authorities did not view colonists as citizens entitled to the same rights as Britons. As a result, American colonists developed an identity that diverged from the British.¹⁹ In November 1768, the *Boston Gazette* published a story about Captain John Wilson of the 59th Regiment encouraging enslaved people to start an insurrection. Boston's courts charged Captain Wilson "with advising several Negro Slaves in the Town to beat, abuse, and cut their Masters Throats, promising them as a Reward... to make them free." The judge ordered Captain Wilson to pay a bond, to reappear in court the following March, and to engage in good behavior in the meantime.²⁰ News about Captain Wilson's threat traveled to New York, where John Holt's

¹⁷ *Boston Evening-Post*, November 11, 1765.

¹⁸ Holger Hock, *Scars of Independence: America's Violent Birth* (New York, NY: Crown Publishing, 2017), 12, 123.

¹⁹ Archer, *As If An Enemy's Country*, 115, 227-8.

²⁰ *Boston Gazette*, November 7, 1768.

New York Journal posted a “Journal of Occurrences” listing all the outrages British soldiers committed against Bostonians. In a November 1768 edition, the section included a lengthy complaint about John Wilson, accusing Wilson of “entic[ing] and endeavour[ing] to spirit up, by a Promise of the Reward of Freedom, certain Negro Slaves in Boston... to cut their Master’s Throats.” Wilson’s threats brought “great Terror and Danger” to Bostonians, who feared British soldiers inflaming slave insurrection.²¹ In April 1769, Wilson’s counsel delayed the trial further, causing the *New-York Journal* to speculate that Wilson “never will appear” for trial.”²² While Captain Wilson ultimately did not succeed in inciting enslaved people against their masters, Bostonians largely believed that a British soldier conspired with enslaved people to harm colonists. Incidents like Wilson’s further sowed seeds of division between British soldiers and British Americans, as colonists suspected British conspiracy with indigenous and enslaved people.

Propagandists continued to portray British soldiers as instigators of slave insurrection during their interpretation of the 1770 Boston Massacre. After the massacre, patriot propagandists collected ninety-six witness testimonies of the event to blame the British soldiers for the tragedy. In the pamphlet, *A Short Narrative of the Horrid Massacre in Boston*, eyewitnesses claimed that the British instigated mobs through their “cruel conduct... towards colonists.”²³ The pamphlet claimed that one British officer sought “to turn Black servants against their masters” and that soldiers had previously discussed “commit[ting] some outrage upon the inhabitants of the town.”²⁴ This claim of inciting insurrection further vilified the British soldiers involved in the massacre, compounding other claims of cruelty.

²¹ *New-York Journal*, November 17, 1768.

²² *New-York Journal*, June 1, 1769.

²³ *A Short Narrative of the Horrid Massacre in Boston perpetuated in the Evening of Fifth Day of March 1770, by Soldiers of the XXIXth Regiment* (Boston: Edes and Gill, T. and J. Fleet, 1770), 9.

²⁴ *A Short Narrative of the Horrid Massacre*, 10, 17; This report was read aloud during a town meeting a couple of days after the event, with Bostonians voting unanimously for its passage.

Other propagandists styled the Boston Massacre in the rhetorical traditions of Native American Massacres. As historian Patricia Bradley explains, the death of five individuals was usually not defined as a “massacre,” so propagandists exaggerated the events through this word choice.²⁵ “Massacre” was commonly used to describe Native American attacks upon frontiersmen and conflicts during Indian Wars, so by utilizing “massacre” Bostonian propagandists positioned British soldiers as analogous to American Indian warriors.²⁶

Narratives of Native American attacks were filled with gory descriptions of violence, paralleling the Boston “Massacre” descriptions. In her 1682 narrative, Mary Rowlandson described “Bodies wounded and bleeding” and “blood running down to our heels.”²⁷ Nathaniel Coverly and other printers re-published Mary Rowlandson’s 1682 narrative in 1770, the same year as the Boston “Massacre.”²⁸ Shortly after the “Massacre,” Pastor John Lathrop of Boston’s Second Church preached a sermon filled with similar language to Rowlandson’s captivity narrative. Lathrop described the gruesome deaths of the martyrs, writing that “*their garments rolled in blood*, and corpses wallowing in gore.”²⁹ Lathrop further paralleled the bloodthirsty actions of British soldiers to American Indians by describing the soldiers as possessing “unparalleled barbarity.”³⁰ Like Lathrop, a Bostonian poet described the British soldiers as “barb’rous monsters.” In a broadside posted around Boston, the poet depicted the visceral pain

²⁵ Patricia Bradley, *Slavery, Propaganda, and the American Revolution* (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 57-58.

²⁶ Greg Sieminski, “The Puritan Captivity Narrative and the Politics of American Revolution,” *American Quarterly* 42, No. 1 (1990): 37-8; Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*, 57; Ian K. Steele, *Betrayals: Fort William Henry and the “Massacre”* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), vii, 149, 171; Steele’s study uses the 1757 “Massacre” at Fort William Henry to show how the language of “massacre” has been used to portray Indians as especially violent and carry out oppressive and genocidal policy against Indians.

²⁷ Mary Rowlandson, *A Narrative of Captivity* (Boston: Nathaniel Coverly, 1770), 5,7. Library Company of Philadelphia.

²⁸ Sieminski, “Puritan Captivity Narrative,” 37.

²⁹ Lathrop, John, *Innocent Blood Crying to God from the Streets of Boston* (Boston, MA: Edes and Gill, 1770), 5.

³⁰ Lathrop, *Innocent Blood*, 6.

experienced by the casualties as “moral gasps” and “dying groans.”³¹ Paul Revere’s “The Bloody Massacre” (See Figure 9 and 10) paralleled the James Claypoole Jr. print titled “The German Bleeds & Bears Ye Furs.” In Revere’s print, a martyred colonist lies bleeding out on the ground, one hand on his chest with the other outstretched above his head. Claypoole’s print depicted a massacre by American Indians against frontiersmen. One of the frontiersmen inhabited a similar position to Revere’s figure, with the added scalping mark on his forehead. By positioning the Boston “Massacre” as similar to a Native American attack, propagandists portrayed the British soldiers as possessing the same racialized violent characteristics placed upon Indigenous people—savage.



³¹ *A Poem, in Memory of the (never to be forgotten) Fifth of March, 1770* (Boston: Printed and sold next to the Writing-School, in Queen Street, 1770), https://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?item_id=2725&pid=34.

Figure 9 and Figure 10: Revere's slain figure (top), shot by British soldiers during the Boston "Massacre," emulates Claypoole's slain and scalped figure (bottom), who was murdered in a Native American attack. "The BLOODY MASSACRE perpetrated in King Street BOSTON on March 5, 1770 by a party of the 29th Regiment." (Boston 1770). Courtesy of Swem Special Collections, College of William and Mary Libraries. "The German Bleeds & Bears Ye Furs." (Philadelphia 1764). Courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's Collection.

With the outbreak of war in 1775, colonists increasingly feared that enslaved rebellion would be coupled with British military action.³² A March 1775 edition of the *New-York Journal* reported that a slave-owner overheard a conversation between two of his enslaved people, Joe and York, who plotted a slave insurrection. Joe and York planned to divide other enslaved people into parties, set fire to homes, "cry Fire, and kill the People as they came out." Then, "five or six Hundred Indians" would join the enslaved insurrectionists. The *Journal* expressed skepticism towards this claim of Black and American Indian collusion due a lack of adequate evidence.³³ In the next month, the *New-York Journal* warned that Britain was arming a whole host of undesirable groups against the Americans. In a letter from London, the *Journal* reported that England was sending "seventy eight thousand guns and bayonets" to America "to put into the hands of the negroes, the Roman Catholicks, [and] the Canadians... to subdue the Colonies."³⁴ The republished letter instructed its recipients to warn the colonists of the coming danger, gather a militia, and call the delegates of the Continental Congress together. The instability of war intensified colonial fears of slave insurrections, especially as propagandists portrayed enslaved people joining with other enemy groups, such as American Indians and Catholics, to commit violence against colonists.³⁵

³² Bradley, *Slavery, Propaganda, and the American Revolution*, 134.

³³ *New-York Journal*, March 2, 1775.

³⁴ *New-York Journal*, April 27, 1775.

³⁵ Jason t. Sharples, *The World That Fear Made: Slave Revolts and Conspiracy Scares in Early America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 71, 90; Sharples argues that white populations were more susceptible to fears of enslaved insurrection and conspiracy when these fears combined with other outside threats to the colonists, especially during wartime.

In the summer of 1775, John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, founding fathers and effective propagandists, wrote about their deep fears that British forces would manipulate enslaved and indigenous people against patriot colonists. Both Adams and Franklin worked with printers and propagandists. In his diary, Adams discussed collaborating with Benjamin Edes and John Gill of the *Boston Gazette*, which historian Patricia Bradley explained as the “patriot’s premiere organ of propaganda.”³⁶ Franklin was a successful propagandist himself, owning the *Pennsylvania Gazette* throughout the mid eighteenth-century and creating the famed “Join or Die” political cartoon. The ideas that these two founders expressed in their personal correspondence aligned with newspaper reporting and bled into revolutionary propaganda. Historian Robert Parkinson argues that during 1775, patriot leaders increasingly aligned enslaved and indigenous people with the British enemy.³⁷ In a letter to his friend James Warren, John Adams expressed his distaste towards American Indians, describing them as “warlike” and “without Faith and Humanity.” Adams revealed his racialized view towards American Indians, describing them as cannibals who “feast Men” and “butcher Women and Children.” Adams suspected that the Prime Minister might “elicit these savages to war,” which, in Adams’ belief, “would bring Eternal Infamy on the Minister throughout Europe.”³⁸ Adams feared that Britain’s government might employ American Indians against the colonists, and warned members of Parliament that British allyship with Natives would harm Britain’s reputation globally.

Similar to Adams, Benjamin Franklin argued that the wartime tactics of the British empire against the colonies alienated colonists. In a letter to David Hartley, a friend and member of Parliament, Benjamin Franklin wrote that “the exciting of the Indians to fall on our innocent

³⁶ “Sept. 3d. Sunday. [from the Diary of John Adams],” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/01-01-02-0013-0002-0002>.; Bradley, *Slavery, Propaganda, and the American Revolution*, xv.

³⁷ Robert G. Parkinson, *The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 124.

³⁸ John Adams to James Warren, June 7, 1775, Warren-Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

Back Settlers, and our Slaves to murder their Masters” was illegitimate war-making by the British army. Franklin wrote that using enslaved people and Natives against the colonists amounted to “barbarous tyranny.”³⁹ Franklin’s explicit combination of fears about enslaved insurrection and Native American attacks signaled that many propagandists began to synthesize fears of these racialized groups more widely. According to Franklin, the usage of racialized proxies was a crime that made the British more brutal and barbarian.⁴⁰ On the same day Franklin wrote to Hartley, Franklin penned a letter to Jonathan Shipley, a Church of England bishop and member of Parliament. In his letter, Franklin attached a list of American grievances, such as the British army “encouraging our Blacks to rise and murder their Masters.” In addition, Franklin blamed the British for manipulating American Indian attacks, writing that British forces were “exciting the Savages to fall upon the innocent Outsettlers.”⁴¹ Due to Britain’s manipulation of Natives and enslaved people against the American colonists, Franklin claimed that patriots began to develop an unfavorable view towards the British, making reconciliation increasingly unlikely.⁴²

These fears of the British army inciting American Indians and enslaved people against patriots were not entirely unfounded. In a private letter from British General Thomas Gage to Lord Barrington, the Secretary of War, Gage explained how the British loss at Fort Ticonderoga should reshape British strategy. Gage hoped that the unexpected patriot victory would convince General Guy Carleton to raise “all the Canadians and Indians in his power to Attack” the patriots. General Gage recognized Carleton’s and Barrington’s hesitancy towards allying with American Indians, but argued that the patriots’ fortuitous resistance required the British Army to

³⁹ “From Benjamin Franklin to David Hartley, 12 September 1775,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-22-02-0122>.

⁴⁰ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 180.

⁴¹ “From Benjamin Franklin to Jonathan Shipley, 13 September 1775,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-22-02-0124>.

⁴² Parkinson, *Thirteen Clocks*, 7.

utilize all of the resources at their disposal. According to Gage, these resources included Indians and Canadians, as well as enslaved people, who they might need to “raise” against the patriots. Gage also hired foreign mercenaries, such as “Hanoverians, Hessians, [and] perhaps Russians,” as part of these resources and hoped to arm loyalists.⁴³ While propagandists exaggerated the threat of enslaved and Native proxies, propagandists based these fears on British actions.

The alliance between the British empire and enslaved people became increasingly plausible due to Lord Dunmore’s Proclamation. On November 7, 1775, Lord Dunmore, the Royal Governor of Virginia, declared that enslaved people, convicts, indentured servants who were in the service of rebels and “able and willing to bear Arms” must join the British army.⁴⁴ For colonists who constantly feared British forces inciting slave insurrection, Dunmore’s Proclamation represented their worst fears coming true. The news from Virginia traveled north, with newspapers from Philadelphia, New York, and Boston reprinting Dunmore’s Proclamation.⁴⁵ John Dunlap’s *Pennsylvania Packet* reported that the British army was “calling upon indentured servants” to join the army and crush the colonists’ revolution.⁴⁶ In a report from Williamsburg, Virginia, the *Packet* wrote that Dunmore’s militia included British soldiers, sailors, loyalists, and “run-away” enslaved people. The *Packet* predicted that the colonial public would be disgusted by the inclusion of enslaved people in the British army, writing that “Lord Dunmore has taken into service the *very scum* of the country to assist him in his diabolical schemes against the good people of this government.”⁴⁷ The *New-York Journal* reported that

⁴³ “Thomas Gage to Lord Barrington, Boston, June 12, 1775,” In *The Correspondence of General Thomas Gage with the Secretaries of State, and with the War Office and the Treasury, 1763-1775*, Vol. 2, ed. Clarence Edwin Carter (New Haven, CT: Archon Books, 1969), 684-5.

⁴⁴ Bradley, *Slavery, Propaganda, and the American Revolution*, 134; “Dunmore’s Proclamation,” in *Revolutionary Virginia: The Road to Independence: A Documentary Record*, IV, eds. Robert L. Scribner and Brent Tarter (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1973-1983), 334.

⁴⁵ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 156.

⁴⁶ *Pennsylvania Packet*, December 4, 1775.

⁴⁷ *Pennsylvania Packet*, December 5, 1775.

Dunmore's black regiment, who made up a "considerable part" of Dunmore's army, boasted about beating the colonists in battle, "with the odds of five to one." To intensify these fears, the report described the Black soldiers wearing an "inscription on their breasts" that read "Liberty to Slaves."⁴⁸ While propagandists expressed colonists' fears of slave insurrection, they directed their vitriol against Dunmore. The *Pennsylvania Evening Post* coined Dunmore's Black regiment "his Lordship's Ethiopian battalion."⁴⁹ The *Massachusetts Spy* published a letter from a reader who derided Dunmore as the "most atrocious criminal that ever appeared in America."⁵⁰ Propagandists utilized harsh criticisms against Dunmore's proclamation to position British authorities as foreign and barbarous enemies who threatened the well-being of colonists.

Many printers published stories responding to Dunmore's Proclamation that reflected colonial disaffection from Britain. Colonists argued that the British were more savage and cruel as a result of their perceived allyship with enslaved people.⁵¹ In January of 1776, Alexander Purdie's *Virginia Gazette* published a series of letters by "an American" that criticized Dunmore's Proclamation. The letter argued that the proclamation exposed Britain's cruelty and forced colonists to "lay aside that childish fondness for Britain, and that foolish tame dependence on her." The anonymous letter-writer rhetorically asked why Britain immediately sought to employ "domestick enem[ies]" against the Americans, such as "Roman Catholicks and Indians," instead of fighting the patriots on their own. The author wondered why two civilized opponents had to employ racialized others against the colonists: "Why make use of every base and inhuman stratagem, and wage a savage war unknown amongst civilized nations?"⁵² In another letter in this series, "An American" blames several colonial governors, including Lord Dunmore, for

⁴⁸ *New-York Journal*, December 21, 1775. Other newspapers also published this story, such as the *New England Chronicle, or Essex Journal*, December 21, 1775.

⁴⁹ *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, December 26, 1775.

⁵⁰ *Massachusetts Spy*, December 15, 1775.

⁵¹ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 172.

⁵² *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), January 5, 1776.

stimulating violence throughout the thirteen colonies. The author consolidated fears of Dunmore's proclamation leading to slave insurrection with fears of American Indian attacks on the frontier. British forces "meditated" frontier violence that was "carried into execution by all the tribes of savages." The republished letter argued that King George III "let the horrid massacre" occur, as his colonial officials "laboured to excite" these insurrections.⁵³ With the outbreak of war, patriot propagandists coalesced a whole host of undesirable and racialized groups into a British proxy group, using this affiliation to vilify the British army.

Into the summer of 1776, the specter of armed Black people in the British army permeated newspaper reports. In June, John Dixon and William Hunter's *Virginia Gazette* reported that Dunmore used smallpox-infected Black soldiers as germ warfare against the colonists.⁵⁴ Smallpox ravaged the Black troops posted at Gwynn's Island, Virginia, and the *Gazette* reported that the British army "inoculat[ed] the blacks" for the disease. After inoculating two of the Black soldiers, the *Gazette* claimed that Dunmore's forces sent them to mainland Virginia "in order to spread the infection." Luckily for the colonists near Gwynn's Island, the *Gazette* reported that the potential spread of smallpox "was happily prevented."⁵⁵ Dunmore's proclamation haunted slave-owning colonists who believed that the order empowered enslaved people to seek freedom. In a runaway advertisement published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, a slave owner postulated that his enslaved person, "commonly called Cuff Dix," had escaped to join Lord Dunmore's "own black regiment," as enslaved people believed that "Lord Dunmore is contending for their liberty."⁵⁶ Even in Pennsylvania, far away from Dunmore's authority, slave owners feared the emancipation of their enslaved people. The Continental Army also expressed

⁵³ *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), January 26, 1776.

⁵⁴ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 246.

⁵⁵ *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon & Hunter), June 15, 1776.

⁵⁶ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 17, 1776.

distaste towards Dunmore's Black regiment. The *New-York Journal* published a series of thirty-one toasts drunk by the Continental Army's leadership. The twenty-second toast alluded to Dunmore's proclamation when General Washington and his officers wished that the "fair genius of England cease to prostitute herself to the slaves of Americans."⁵⁷ This statement claimed that the British government degraded themselves through the enforcement of Dunmore's proclamation. These narratives further separated colonists from their cultural cousins, whom they viewed as increasingly barbaric.

Patriot propagandists increasingly projected the violent characterizations of racialized groups upon British forces. For example, in June 1776, the *Connecticut Courant* portrayed England as a bloodthirsty cannibal feasting on Americans.⁵⁸ In an article published by a writer under the pseudonym of Armatus, the *Courant* vividly illustrated the British as people who "delights in blood" and "thirsteth for the blood of America." While engaging in such bloodthirst, England invited other groups to participate in the "carnage," such as "Hessians, Hanoverians, Brunswickers, Canadians, Indians, Negroes, Regulars, and Tories."⁵⁹ Propagandists previously applied this cannibal imagery to American Indians, but as propagandists disseminated stories of British collusion with Indians, the British themselves became cannibals.

Narratives of British conspiracy with American Indians garnered harsh criticism during the Saratoga Campaign in 1777, when British army leadership allied with Mohawk, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca warriors.⁶⁰ Propagandists amplified this criticism after capitalizing on the July 27, 1777, death of Jane McCrea. Propagandists used McCrea's death at the alleged hands of American Indians to criticize British and Native allyship, and they transformed McCrea from a

⁵⁷ *New-York Journal*, June 20, 1776.

⁵⁸ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 249.

⁵⁹ *Connecticut Courant*, June 17, 1776.

⁶⁰ Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 253.

loyalist into a patriot martyr.⁶¹ Historian Peter Silver writes that British General Burgoyne worried about Indian warriors' practices and wrote a proclamation asking his Native allies to avoid scalping women, children, and the elderly.⁶² In response, Francis Hopkinson, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, composed "An Answer to General Burgoyne's Proclamation." In his writing, Hopkinson blames General Burgoyne for American Indian attacks on the frontier, writing that "you have collected an amiable host of savages, and turned them loose to scalp our wives and children."⁶³ Hopkinson detailed a horrible and brutal picture of the outcome of Britain's violence, describing "the blood of slain—the cries of violated virginity, and slaughtered infants."⁶⁴ The *Connecticut Courant* continued this criticism by describing Burgoyne as "the chief and director of the King of Great-Britain's band of thieves, rob[b]ers, cut-throats, scalpers, and murders." By positioning Burgoyne as the leader of a violent and unsavory group of British soldiers and Indian warriors, the report further vilified the British and contrasted them with noble patriot fighters. The *Courant* attacked Burgoyne as the "chief of the ruffian band," and called Britain's allies "profligate scum of the human race." Burgoyne did not call for less scalping out of "compassion or humanity," the *Courant* argued, but to protect Great Britain's reputation.⁶⁵ Propagandists portrayed Burgoyne as a dishonorable ruler over a rag-tag, racialized, and violent group of allies. Ironically, the patriots allied with Oneida and Stockbridge-Mohican warriors during the Saratoga Campaign, but propagandists' emphasis on British-Native atrocities pulled focus away from these alliances. By emphasizing British alliances and de-emphasizing patriot ones, propagandists continued to successfully fight a "moral war."⁶⁶ The arising

⁶¹ Odle, *Under the Skin*, 102; Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*, 246; Hoock, *Scars of Independence*, 502.

⁶² Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*, 245.

⁶³ Francis Hopkinson, "An Answer to General Burgoyne's Proclamation," in *The Miscellaneous Essays and Occasional Writings of Francis Hopkinson, Esq.* (Philadelphia, PA: Printed by T. Dobson, at the Stone House, 1792), 148.

⁶⁴ Hopkinson, "An Answer to General Burgoyne's Proclamation," 149.

⁶⁵ *Connecticut Courant*, September 8, 1777.

⁶⁶ Hoock, *Scars of Independence*, 12.

conception of British savagery influenced the founding documents and ideas of the American Revolution and eventual republic.

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