Dunmore's new world: Political culture in the British Empire, 1745–1796

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Dunmore’s New World: Political Culture in the British Empire, 1745-1796

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ABSTRACT

Despite his participation in the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, John Murray, fourth earl of Dunmore, eventually became royal governor of New York (1770-1771), Virginia (1771-1783), and the Bahama Islands (1787-1796). His life in the British Empire exposed him to an extraordinary range of political experience, including border disputes, land speculation, frontier warfare and diplomacy, sexual scandal, slave emancipation, naval combat, loyalist advocacy, Amerindian slavery, and trans-imperial filibusters, to say nothing of his proximity to the Haitian Revolution or his role in the defense of the British West Indies during the French Revolutionary Wars. Quick to break with convention on behalf of the system that ensured his privilege, Dunmore was an usually transgressive imperialist, whose career can be used to explore the boundaries of what was possible in the political cultures of the Anglo-Atlantic world at the end of the eighteenth century.

Remarkably, Lord Dunmore has not been the subject of a book-length study in more than seventy years. With a few exceptions (the work of African American historians notable among them), modern scholars have dismissed him as a greedy incompetent. While challenging this characterization, the dissertation makes several arguments about the weakness of royal authority in pre-Revolutionary New York and Virginia, the prominent and problematic role of the land grant as a mechanism of political consent, the importance of Dunmore's proclamation of emancipation, and the endurance of British ambition in North America after 1783. It seeks to make a methodological contribution as well. By positioning Dunmore as the epicenter of a web of interrelations, one reflected in a variety of historical texts and involving people at all levels of the imperial social structure, the dissertation suffuses a host of elements and actors within a single biographical narrative. This integrated approach can serve to counter the excessive compartmentalization that has marked some academic history in recent decades.
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For my parents
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Introduction

Sometime before 9 o’clock on the morning of December 5, 1793, a couple identifying themselves as Augustus Frederick and Augusta Murray were married at St. George’s church in Hanover Square, London. The bride had arrived in a hackney coach, the equivalent of a modern taxi, wearing a “common linen gown” beneath a winter cloak. The groom was dressed in a brown greatcoat not unlike those worn by London shopkeepers at the time. She was in her early thirties; he was ten years her junior. The curate who performed the ceremony didn’t recognize either one of them, but St. George’s was a large parish, so he believed them when they claimed to be congregants. If he noticed the bulge in the bride’s coat—she was nearly eight months pregnant—he never mentioned it. They seemed to him totally unremarkable, well “below the rank of gentleman,” as he told the Privy Council several weeks later, “...not at all distinguished by their dress from the appearance of persons in trade.”¹ He had no reason, in short, to believe that the marriage of this Augustus Frederick and Augusta Murray represented anything but the dawn of an ordinary day in the life of his church.

Across the Atlantic Ocean, more than four thousand miles away, the father of the bride was equally unaware of the forces in motion at St. George’s that day. At sixty-three, John Murray, fourth earl of Dunmore, was an aging Scots aristocrat living on the margins of the British Empire. A veteran of imperial service, he now found himself in Nassau, New Providence, where for the last six years he’d served as governor of the Bahama Islands. It was a modest post for someone of such elevated

social status—an earl was a rare thing on this side of the Atlantic—but the path to
Nassau had been treacherous and his position there hard won.

The son of a convicted Jacobite, Dunmore had served as a page of honor in
Bonnie Prince Charlie’s court during the Rebellion of 1745. After working his way
back into the Hanoverian fold with the help of a prominent uncle, he went on to
become a colonial governor, first in New York and then Virginia. It was in the latter
post, in 1774, that he led an expedition against the Shawnee Indians and their allies in
the Ohio River Valley. Dunmore’s War, as the conflict came to be known, forced the
Shawnees to accept the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix, through which the British
Empire had acquired the coveted Kentucky country. Dunmore remained loyal to
George III during the American Revolution and famously offered freedom to rebel-
owned slaves who were able to reach British lines and fight for the king.
Approximately one thousand enslaved men, women, and children answered the call. It
wasn’t the first time a European had armed black slaves, far from it, but Dunmore’s
proclamation of emancipation, dated November 7, 1775, was unique. Never before
had a British official promised liberty to slaves on the express condition that they
commit themselves to the destruction of their masters—and in the context of a civil
war no less. For this, George Washington thought him an “Arch Traitor to the Rights
of Humanity,” one with the potential to “become the most formidable Enemy America
has.”

For a variety of reasons, most of them outside Dunmore’s control, this dreaded

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Henry Lee, 26 December 1775, both in W. W. Abbot, ed., The Papers of George Washington,
Revolutionary War Series, Vol. 2 (Charlottesville, 1987), 553, 611.
strength never materialized. Yet the proclamation made him one of the great villains of the American Revolution, a status that, for different reasons, he retains to this day.

In 1793, Dunmore faced a whole new set of problems in the Bahamas. An influx of loyalist refugees, mainly from South Carolina and Georgia, had transformed the political landscape of the colony in the wake of the Revolution. Though this migration made the old inhabitants (those who’d been there before 1783) a minority, imperial officials continued to support their claims to a majority share of power. Various aggrieved, the new inhabitants spent a great deal of time and energy railing against the political establishment. They forced Governor Richard Maxwell to flee to England in 1785 and quickly came to despise Dunmore as well. The loyalists accused him of obstructing justice, doling out patronage to “the husbands of his whores,” and generally promoting disorder in an effort to divide and rule.3 Their efforts to secure Dunmore’s recall had always been in vain, but his daughter’s marriage to the young man in the greatcoat threatened to change that, dropping the curtain, once and for all, on one of the most controversial imperial careers of the age.

* 

James Boswell closed his immortal Life of Samuel Johnson with a simple acknowledgement of irreducible human complexity. “Man is in general made up of contradictory qualities,” he wrote, “and these will ever show themselves in strange succession.”4 The insight suits Lord Dunmore, whom Boswell knew, to a tee. His was

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3 For the case against Dunmore, see [William Wylly], A Short Account of the Bahama Islands... (London, 1789). The quotation is from an unnamed source in Michael Craton, A History of the Bahamas (London, 1962), 174.

4 Quoted in Nigel Hamilton, Biography: A Brief History (Cambridge, Mass., 2007), 93.
a life full of dissonance. His respect for monarchy on the one hand and his propensity for unauthorized action on the other, his willingness to lead the way in arming and emancipating slaves alongside his personal investment in slavery, his antagonistic relations with the Bahamian opposition against the backdrop of his genuine empathy for loyalist exiles—in view of these and other incongruities, I’ve tried to retain as much ambiguity as possible in the portrait that follows. Whether Dunmore was fundamentally a force for good or ill is a question I’ve opted to leave open. The stories we tell about the past—whether written or oral, footnoted or popular—are already overrun with heroes and villains. More often than not, these characters impose a false, facile coherence onto what were very messy worlds.

This approach is partly a response to the uncomplicated consensus surrounding Dunmore in the literature on the Revolution. Historians have long disregarded him as a greedy incompetent, a view rooted in the overheated criticism of his contemporaries. More influential than the outright demonization of patriot propaganda were the comparatively sober claims of men like Richard Henry Lee, who argued that if the British government “had searched through the world for a person best fit to ruin their cause, and procure a union and success for these colonies[,] they could not have found a more complete agent than Lord Dunmore.” Subsequent commentators emphasized his appetites to the exclusion of all else. In a 1782 poem by Philip Freneau, a fictional

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Dunmore admits to being motivated only by lust for "lands, whores and dice." The less partisan appraisal of one early historian of the Revolution, John Lendrum, did nothing to prevent patriotic writers from piling on in the nineteenth century. Hezekiah Niles thought that Dunmore's "impetuous, haughty and revengeful temper" indicated "the agitation of a perturbed mind." Later, the earl was held up to national scorn in George Bancroft's six-volume History of the United States of America, which described him as "passionate, narrow, and unscrupulous in his rapacity." According to Bancroft, the acquisition of money "was his whole system.

This version of Dunmore has survived through a self-perpetuating cycle of misunderstanding and neglect. In 1939, Percy Burdelle Caley completed a nine-hundred-page dissertation that tried to bring Dunmore's reputation into balance, but it was never published and rarely read. It may well have been too measured to make much of an impact in a country that was, generally speaking, still too quick to accept the views of the founding generation as gospel. Ignoring Caley, modern historians have absorbed the opinions of Dunmore's enemies, albeit for reasons far removed from patriotism. As a result, Dunmore has not been the subject of a book-length study in more than seventy years. At least two factors, aside from his shabby reputation, have contributed to this neglect.

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6 "Lord Dunmore's Petition to the Legislature of Virginia," in Philip Freneau, Poems Written between the Years 1768 and 1794 (Mount Pleasant, N.J., 1795), 199-200.
8 Niles is quoted in McPhail, "Dunmore's Proclamation," 492.
have contributed to the indifference. First, the 1970s saw a turn away from “dead white men” in academic history, an aversion that persists to this day. Furthermore, the biographers who made an industry out of founding-father encomium in the 2000s—talented writers all—evidently had no interest in exploring the lives of the Revolution’s losers.¹¹

When scholars do touch on Dunmore’s career, either in connection with his proclamation or his “war” against the Ohio Indians, they tend to impugn his motives as conservative, cynical, or self-serving.¹² Notably, this is not true of pioneering African American historians, who produced work that was more sympathetic to Dunmore both before and after the appearance of Caley’s dissertation.¹³ And yet, Benjamin Quarles’s well-regarded study of “Lord Dunmore as Liberator,” the governor’s image as a morally unfettered fool endures. In Rough Crossings, Simon Schama describes him as a “standard issue Scot-Hanoverian imperialist,” who

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"alternately fumbled and blustered his way through a sorry, unwinnable predicament." In a book that highlights the role of black slaves and British abolitionists in the American Revolution, as Schama’s does, one would expect less flippant engagement with the author of the war’s first emancipation decree. Contrary to Schama, there was absolutely nothing “standard issue” about Dunmore. His social rank, his Jacobite roots, and his ambition to settle permanently in the colonies combined to make him a unique figure there. Patrick Griffin offers a different sort of caricature in his recent account of the revolutionary Ohio Valley. Here, Dunmore is not a hapless blunderer but, rather, the mastermind of a grand conspiracy in which settlers were duped into fomenting an Indian war on behalf of elite land speculators. Try as he might, Dunmore could not have controlled events in northwestern Virginia with anywhere near this level of precision. In the end, he was both more interesting and less powerful than Griffin allows. Incongruous as they are, Schama’s dolt and Griffin’s conspirator both reflect superficial understandings of the person they purport to describe.

Dunmore was not a simple case, not as a governor or a person. A man of average ability and extraordinary confidence, he had many flaws. He was high-handed, headstrong, and occasionally unscrupulous in his quest for wealth. These faults are well documented but rarely set in the proper perspective. His personality tended to aggravate political tensions, but it was in no way decisive in the events that

14 Simon Schama, Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves, and the American Revolution (New York, 2006), 70, 74.
15 Patrick Griffin, American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier (New York, 2007), Chapter 4, esp. 98, 123.
led to American independence or the ultimate triumph of the Bahamian loyalists. While his greatest misdeeds were committed in the pursuit of land, he was hardly the only notable Briton or American to bend the rules in the crowded, cutthroat arena of eighteenth-century land speculation. Nor can it be said that he always used his influence on behalf of the powerful. He frequently supported the neediest people around him—suffering loyalists, black veterans, poor whites. While clearly influenced by a paternalistic ethic of one sort or another (perhaps an inchoate version of Kipling’s white man’s burden), these actions did nothing to promote the narrow economic interests to which he’s so often reduced.

Neither the best nor the worst governor in the first British Empire, Dunmore relied heavily on subordinates in matters of law and administration but was not without achievements of his own. His conduct during Dunmore’s War was admired on both sides of the Atlantic, and the peace he reached with the Shawnees at its conclusion was remarkably equitable by the standards of the day; Virginians came to see it as suspiciously generous, in fact. Later, with famine looming in the Bahamas, he put aside his personal animosity toward the United States and contravened British trade laws by opening the colony’s ports to American merchants. It didn’t take a genius to see the need for this step, but nor was it the work of a self-involved, small-minded imperial functionary.

17 Stephen Conway argues that this imperial paternalism, which in some ways began with the introduction of foreigners and many more Indians into the Empire after the Seven Years War, was based more on authority than liberty: The British Isles and the War of American Independence (New York, 2000), 334.
An evenhanded account of Dunmore's career opens new windows onto revolutionary North America. Governing the colonies was not an easy job in 1770, the year Dunmore arrived in New York. The political culture he encountered there was all but devoid of deference. Far from being enamored of monarchy, New Yorkers defied the king and his representatives with impunity and without hesitation. They often lavished imperial leaders with respect, but these displays were almost always instrumental at base. Dunmore learned quickly that royal power, in both New York and Virginia, was only effective in so far as it appealed to local interests.

The historian John Brewer has noted the need for inquiry into "the mechanisms by which the state secured or lost the attachment of its subjects." Dunmore's story shows that the land grant was among the most important of these mechanisms, for it served to assure allegiance in the short term while subverting it in the long run. After the Seven Years War, the ministry in London wanted desperately to control British expansion in North America. Deeply in debt, the government had to avoid costly Indian wars and figure out a way to maximize quitrent revenues. With these goals in mind, the king issued the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which prohibited white settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains. The uncertainty this created about if, when, and how the Empire would move west helped to restrain colonists from streaming into Indian country. But the government couldn't help showing its hand. As

19 This conclusion is at variance with a group of studies that emphasizes the affective bonds between colonial subjects and the monarch even on the eve of the American Revolution: Brendan McConville, The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776 (Chapel Hill, 2006); Benjamin Lewis Price, Nursing Fathers: American Colonists' Conception of English Protestant Kingship, 1688-1776 (Lanham, Md., 1999); Richard Bushman, King and People in Provincial Massachusetts (Chapel Hill, 1992, c. 1985).
incentives or rewards, land grants were crucial to generating support among colonists for particular initiatives. In the same document that restricted white settlement, in fact, the king also promised western lands to veterans of the Seven Years War. In time, further signs that the Proclamation Line would soon be lifted emerged, including the purchase of Indian lands and the usual promises of grants on generous terms. Such activity prompted squatters and speculators to race west in hopes of securing all the benefits of getting there first. Though crucial in the acquisition of consent, then, grants also indirectly encouraged colonists to break the law in a way that disrupted the ministry’s plans for orderly expansion. More than the ambitions of any single individual or interest group, it was this fraught relationship between land and consent that led to Dunmore’s War.

Dunmore’s role in the American Revolution has also been widely misunderstood. His proclamation of emancipation was not, as recent scholarship suggests, a conservative document—not in conception and not in practice. To begin with, it owed more in the way of inspiration to the political actions of slaves than it did to prior imperial policy. It diverged from previous examples of slave armament in several key respects. Dunmore was the first British official to formally guarantee slaves freedom for service. The custom had been for outstanding black soldiers to receive liberty as a conditional reward—a gift rather than a right. Nor had the Empire


22 Though she emphasizes the cynical nature of British emancipation policy, Sylvia Frey has noted this and recognized how unusual it was for Dunmore to use slaves in combat: *Water from the Rock*, Chapter 2, and “Between Slavery and Freedom,” 388.
ever armed slaves against its own subjects. And while the letter of the proclamation applied only to the able-bodied male slaves of patriot masters, Dunmore never enforced these criteria, harboring runaways regardless of gender, age, and capacity. He even co-opted and freed the slaves of loyalists. Contrary to patriot propaganda, moreover, the motivation behind the proclamation was almost entirely devoid of cynicism, something that cannot be said about similar arm-and-emancipate schemes. (When, in 1794, Secretary of State Henry Dundas refused to guarantee freedom in exchange for five years of service in the West India Regiments, Governor Adam Williamson of Jamaica tried to sway him by noting that only a few would “be alive to partake of the” reward.) Finally, Dunmore did not share the then-prevailing view that blacks were lazy and prone to cowardice. He never waivered in his belief that they made good soldiers whose service merited lifelong liberty.

Spanning the Revolution as it did, Dunmore’s career in America provides a valuable frame of reference, one that highlights, among other things, the persistence of British designs on the continent after 1783. In the closing years of the century, Dunmore and his associates took jaw-dropping risks in pursuit of personal and imperial redemption in America. As governor of the Bahamas, he worked to seize Florida and the lower Mississippi Valley from the Spanish with a view to establishing a loyalist colony there. He even indulged the hope that this might ultimately reverse the outcome of the Revolution. The British government never officially endorsed these activities, but it didn’t discourage them either. Had one or two things gone differently,

23 Williamson to Dundas, 13 September 1794, quoted in Roger Norman Buckley, Slaves in Red Coats: The British West India Regiments, 1795-1815 (New Haven, 1979), 16; see also 143 for views of blacks among British officials.
particularly in 1793, war with the Spanish could have realized something close to Dunmore's vision.

The optimism that fueled these projects was a product of the age. Dunmore lived through three world wars and four revolutions (the great trauma of his life, the American Revolution, qualifies in both categories). In most of these conflicts, he identified with the losing side. Bonnie Prince Charlie at Culloden, George III at Yorktown, Louis XVI in Paris, the British Army in Saint Domingue—Dunmore experienced defeat with them all. In spite or, perhaps, because of these disappointments, the fundamental assumption of his life was change. Everything he knew pointed to the mutability of governments, boundaries, and kings. He had no interest in social reform, and he hated radicals. If anything, the perception of all this instability activated authoritarian tendencies within him. But it also sustained his hopes. In such a fluid world, almost anything was possible.

* *

In spite of appearances, the man who married Dunmore's daughter on December 5, 1793 was not a tradesman or a local shopkeeper. The true identity of Augustus Frederick was, in fact, unknown to most of those involved in the day's events. Mary Jones, the longtime Dunmore family dressmaker who delivered the banns to the parish clerk and attended the wedding ceremony, claimed that she thought he was a private gentleman from Devonshire, "a relation of Sir something
Augusta had good reason to keep her co-conspirators in the dark. The name the groom gave in the banns and at the church wasn’t an alias, technically speaking, but it was deliberately misleading all the same. Like the greatcoat on his back, it was meant to help him blend in. Had he wanted to be recognized, he would have used the title by which he was more commonly known: His Royal Highness Prince Augustus Frederick Hanover. He was the sixth son of King George III.

The identity of the groom wasn’t the only thing amiss that morning. The couple was already married, for one thing. Planned and conducted with the utmost secrecy, the original wedding had taken place in Rome the preceding April. An Anglican minister had presided, so the bride and groom were confident that their bond was legitimate in the eyes of God. It wasn’t long before she became pregnant, however, and they worried about the legal status of the child, a son to be named Augustus Frederick D’Esté. Hoping that a ceremony on English soil would help to shore up his status and secure to him all the advantages of royalty, his parents set their sights on St. George’s. The union they were reaffirming was strictly illegal, no matter where it was consecrated. The Royal Marriage Act of 1772 forbid any descendent of George II from marrying before the age of twenty-five without the consent of the current sovereign. Even after that age, royals’ right to marry was restricted by law. A mere twenty when he fell in love with Augusta, the prince was in no position to

contract a marriage on his own, and no attempt was made to put the relationship through the formal channels.

The couple somehow knew that the king would not approve, though it's not clear exactly why. Augusta was a Protestant with royal ancestry. According to the Gentleman's Magazine, "her fortune is certainly slender, but, if birth might give pretensions to great alliances, there is no Prince in Europe who could say that a match with Lady Augusta would disgrace his rank."\(^{26}\) She did have her detractors. In 1795, Sir William Hamilton, British Minister to the Neapolitan Court, wrote that Augustus was "a good-hearted young man, but without much judgment, and perfectly bewitched by Lady Augusta Murray, who is by no means worthy of the regard he seems to have for her."\(^{27}\) Later, after much of the controversy surrounding the marriage had played out, the Prince of Wales, Augustus's older brother, stated that the rank of princess was "totally inadmissible" to Lady Augusta.\(^{28}\) At no point during the controversy surrounding their marriage was any mention made of her family's Jacobitism, though that could not have helped.

The Gentleman's Magazine reminded its readers that "no less important a matter than the eventual inheritance of the crown" was at stake in all of this.\(^{29}\) A minor imperial career and the welfare of the family that it supported also hung in the balance. Though he never had much in the way of money to show for it, Dunmore's political life had been a story of survival up to that point. He'd overcome the taint of Jacobitism

\(^{26}\) "Marriages," 87-88.
\(^{27}\) Aspinall, ed., Later Correspondence of George III, Vol. 2, 150 n. 2.
\(^{28}\) Prince of Wales to Prince Augustus Frederick, 4 September 1799, in A. Aspinall, ed., The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales 1770-1812, Volume IV 1799-1804 (New York, 1967), 74.
\(^{29}\) "Marriages," 87.
and weathered a host of controversies. The recipient of three colonial appointments (one of them after the terrible disappointment of the American Revolution), he had proven himself adept at maintaining his position within the hierarchy of British influence, modest though it was in the grand imperial scheme. The enemies he'd made along the way, and there were many, had so far proven to be the right ones. News of his daughter's illegal marriage to Prince Augustus, however, gave them new life in the quest for his undoing.
Chapter 1
Family Politics, 1745-1770

Lady Augusta Murray wasn't the first close relation to jeopardize Dunmore’s standing in the Empire. Nearly a half-century earlier, his father, William Murray of Taymount, had staked the family’s entire future on the success of an ill-fated revolution. In the summer of 1745, Charles Edward Stuart, the famous Bonnie Prince Charlie, landed secretly near a place called Moidart on the northwest coast of Scotland. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 had removed his grandfather, the Catholic James II, from the English thrown in favor of the Dutch sovereign, William, and his wife Mary, James’s Protestant daughter. Prince Charles came to Scotland in 1745 in the hopes of raising an army and, with the assistance of a French fleet, forcibly unseating George II, the Hanoverian king of Great Britain. His father, James III, had led a similar expedition in 1715 and was still living in exile in Rome. If Charles Edward were now to succeed, the male line of the Stuart dynasty would be restored and James III would at last take up the crown that had always eluded him.

Those who supported this project were known as Jacobites for the Latin version of the name James. They constituted a loosely organized but deeply committed counterrevolutionary underground that, according to its own logic, sought to right the wrongs of 1688. The vast majority of them were Scots. Many were Presbyterians; only a few were Catholic. Some were leaders of Highland clans who commanded the allegiance of hundreds of men. As the prince made his way south to Edinburgh that summer, nearly two thousand soldiers—wearing kilts, speaking Gaelic, and wielding broadswords—collected around him. On September 4 in the town of Perth, where
supporters shouted acclamations upon his arrival, several key members of the Scots
nobility formally embraced the cause. There, among the group’s lesser lights, were
William Murray and his fifteen-year-old son, John, the future governor of New York,
Virginia, and the Bahama Islands.  

The Jacobite movement divided a great many Scottish families, including the
Dunmore Murrays, whose mixed record of loyalty to the Hanoverians on the one hand
and Jacobitism on the other was typical. The earldom originated with John’s
grandfather Charles Murray. When James II gave him the title in 1686, Charles was
only twenty-five, but he’d already served in the House of Commons, made colonel in
the Royal Scots Greys, and served as master of horse for Queen Mary of Modena.
Having opposed the Glorious Revolution, he was imprisoned by King William on
three separate occasions for conspiring to restore James to the thrown. Queen Anne, a
longtime friend, arranged for his release upon her ascension in 1702 and named him to
the Privy Council. Though committed to the Protestant succession, Anne, the youngest
daughter of James II, had a soft spot for her father’s supporters. Initially, Charles
continued to associate with the semi-Jacobite cavalier party in Scotland but over time
managed to reposition himself as a reliable supporter of the court. It was in this new
role that he backed the union of Scotland and England in 1707.

The conversion served Charles’s children well. By the time of his death in
1710, his oldest surviving son and heir, John, was already making a name for himself

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1 On the Rebellion of 1745, see Geoffrey Plank, Rebellion and Savagery: The Jacobite Rising of 1745
and the British Empire (Philadelphia, 2006); Christopher Duffy, The ’45 (London, 2003); Jeremy
Black, Culloden and the ’45 (New York, 1990); Bruce Lenman, The Jacobite Risings in Britain, 1689-
in the British Army. A colonel at twenty-eight, the second earl of Dunmore eventually
took on the role of lord of the bedchamber for King George II and Governor of Plymouth Castle. When the Duke of Cumberland was forced to
return home to confront the rebellion of 1745, he named John commander-in-chief of the allied armies in the Netherlands.  

Despite his older brother’s connections to the House of Hanover, William Murray chose to gamble his life and the fate of his family on the fortunes of the Young Pretender. The decision likely had less to do with his father’s politics than it did with his 1729 marriage to Catherine Nairne, who came from a family with impeccable Jacobite credentials. Her father had been convicted of treason for his part in the rebellion of 1715, and her mother, Margaret Nairne, remained staunchly committed to James III until her death in 1747.  

There were also a number of prominent Jacobites among William’s paternal cousins. The Marquis of Tullibardine, considered in Jacobite circles the rightful second Duke of Atholl, was one of the “Seven Men of Moidart,” who accompanied Bonnie Prince Charlie on his secret voyage from France.

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to Scotland in the summer of 1745.\(^4\) Not long after landing, Tullibardine sent out several circular letters in an attempt to drum up support for the campaign. The one that most likely prompted William to join read:

His Royal Highness...has brought me with him for the better accomplishment of his intention of freeing these Nations from the usurpation of foreigners [the Hanoverians] and the imposing practices of those that adheres to them; therefore, according to the Prince’s comands, this is requiring my Brothers, or any other of my near relations who are capable and well inclin’d, to make themselves, ready armed for the publick service...so soon as H. R. H. comes amongst you, which will be very soon...\(^5\)

With words like “command” and “require,” Tullibardine implied an unambiguous obligation on the part of the recipient. One of his other letters was even more explicit in this respect. “I shall be heartily sorry,” he wrote, if “your delay to appear should oblige me, by his Highness[’s] orders, to use more disagreeable methods” than letter writing in the search for recruits.\(^6\) William Murray took no more than a few days to consider his response. It was unwavering, if obsequious. “The kindness you [were] pleased to shew me in my younger days,” he told Tullibardine, “encourages me still to hope for your patronage and friendship, which I flatter myself I have never done any thing to forfeit.”\(^7\) There wasn’t a trace of ideology in the letter—nothing about the divine right of the Stuarts or the illegitimacy of the Hanoverians. Even by the standards of the age it seems self-serving.

\(^5\) [Duke of Atholl, aka William Marquis of Tullibardine], “CIRCULAR LETTER—TO THE LAIRD OF ASSHENTILLY AND OTHER GENTLEMEN IN ATHOLL,” Jacobite Correspondence of the Atholl Family, during the Rebellion... (Edinburgh, 1840), 1-2.
\(^6\) Tullibardine, “CIRCULAR LETTER FROM THE DUKE OF ATHOLL,” Jacobite Correspondence, 2.
\(^7\) William Murray of Taymount to Tullibardine, 2 September 1745, Jacobite Correspondence, 5.
Many Murrays came to the royal standard at Perth that September. The most illustrious was Tullibardine’s younger brother, Lord George Murray. After participating in the unsuccessful rebellion of 1715, George spent several years in exile in France and Italy, where he became a favorite of James III. He eventually received permission to return to Scotland to tend to his dying father, the first duke of Atholl. An accomplished soldier, George immediately assumed the rank of lieutenant general in the Jacobite army and quickly emerged as Charles Edward’s chief military strategist (though the relationship between the two was often strained). George’s thoughts on the eve of his momentous second leap into rebellion no doubt provide some insight into what William Murray, young John’s father, was going through at the time:

What I do may & will be reccon’d desperate...all appearances seem to be against me, [and] Interest, prudence, and the obligations...which I ly under, would prevent most people in my situation from taking a resolution that may very probably end in my utter ruin. My Life, my Fortune, my expectations, the Happyness of my wife & children, are all at stake (& the chances are against me), & yet a principle of (what seems to me) Honour, & my Duty to King & Country, outweighs every thing.9

It is difficult to image anyone risking these odds without believing, as George did, in the righteousness and “honour” of the Stuart cause. William didn’t share Bonnie Prince Charlie’s religion, but nor was he militantly anti-Catholic. Since his Taymount estate was in Perthshire, he served in the Duke of Perth’s division and, thus, operated throughout the rebellion beneath two layers of Catholic leadership.10 Most Scots...

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9 George Murray to James Murray, duke of Atholl (brother), 3 September 1745, quoted in Winifred Duke, Lord George Murray and the Forty-Five, 2nd ed. (Aberdeen, 1927), 72 (see 282 and 283 for a useful genealogical table).
Jacobites were Presbyterian, not Catholic. Fervent traditionalists, they could conceive of only one legitimate, divinely sanctioned royal house at the apex of British society. However principled William’s participation was, his letter to Tullibardine indicates that a desire for personal gain played a role in his decision to join the cause. As much as there was to lose by fighting for the prince, there was also a great deal to gain. William must have understood that victory would mean new lands, new titles, perhaps even pensions for James III’s adherents. For someone longing to make a mark of his own, to come out from the shadow of his brother and cousins, it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Young John initially had very little reason to regret his father’s decision. The Jacobites met no resistance while occupying Edinburgh, and by mid-September he and his father were ensconced at the Palace of Holyroodhouse, where Charles Edward established his court. The traditional residence of Scots monarchs, Holyrood was the epicenter of political authority in North Britain. It was here that the sixteen Scots members of the House of Lords were elected, young John’s uncle, the second earl of Dunmore, among them. Beyond its public functions, Holyrood had special significance for the Murrays. The first earl of Dunmore had briefly lived on the palace’s second floor, where he died in 1710. William and John spent approximately five weeks there, attending a royal ball in the Great Gallery and, later, a supper party

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11 Plank, Rebellion and Savagery, 16.
12 Black, Culloden and the ‘45, 80.
13 “Grant of apartments in the Palace of Holyrood House to Charles Murray by Queen Anne,” DFP, Bundle 29, 353A.
hosted by the prince. William served as vice chamberlain, an assistant to the manager of the royal household. Young John was a page of honour to the prince, a privilege that exposed him to the very peaks of political power. The rituals of royal authority he experienced as a result must have left indelible impressions. On September 18, James III was proclaimed king of Great Britain at the Mercat Cross in the heart of Edinburgh. Here, in the presence of the prince, John saw how delicate and unstable power could be. Whether he learned the lesson there or elsewhere, the future fourth earl of Dunmore came to understand that the restoration of legitimate authority (however one defined it) required bold action, like that of Charles Edward in the weeks leading up to his reconquest of Scotland.

The Jacobites gained momentum as they moved south from Edinburgh. In late September they defeated Hanoverian forces at Prestonpans. Here, William Murray faced off against his younger brother Thomas, who had remained loyal to George II and was now commanding the 57th Regiment. After another important Jacobite

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16 Duffy, The ’45, 198.
17 The material on William and John joining the Jacobites is from “History of the Dunmore Branch,” 509, 695, and “Chronicles of the Dunmore Branch of the Atholl and Tullibardine Families...” (hereafter “Chronicles of the Dunmore Branch”), DFP, NRAS 3253, [Bundle 28], RH4/103/1 (microfilm). (N.B.: This section begins immediately following Bundle 6 on the microfilm reel but is unmarked; its contents, when compared to the calendar of papers at the NAS, suggest that it is Bundle 28. Also, the pagination is so irregular that it is best to navigate with reference to the year being covered, which appears in the top left corner of each page.) Another source has William joining the prince at a slightly earlier date (24 August) than the above (4 September), but this likely refers to another William Murray; see [?], A journal of the Pretender’s expedition. To North Britain... (London, [1745]), 30. On Holyrood Palace, see The Palace of Holyroodhouse: Official Guidebook (London, 2005), 15-16 (second floor and the Forty-Five), 46-49 (Great Gallery).
18 Duffy, The ’45, 175, [578]. The family history draft erroneously has Thomas heading the 46th Regiment at Prestonpans: “The Jacobite Rising of 1745,” DFP, NRAS 3253, [Bundle 28], RH4/103/1 (microfilm), 9.
victory at Falkirk, the Highlanders advanced into central England as far as Derby, where they appeared poised to march on London. But at the urging of his military command, Charles Edward agreed to return to Scotland to regroup and gather much-needed supplies for his hungry army. Commanded by the king’s youngest son, the twenty-five-year-old Duke of Cumberland, the Hanoverian army followed them north. Charles Edward had yet to lose a battle, but he was about to lose the war. At Culloden Moor on April 16, 1746, his men were outnumbered nearly two to one. They were largely unpaid, poorly fed, and tired from an abortive march the night before. The prince wanted to confront Cumberland as soon as possible, and this determination drove him to dismiss sound advice from his advisors, particularly in the selection of a battle site. The result was a slaughter from which the cause never recovered.\textsuperscript{19}

Disguised at one point as a woman, Bonnie Prince Charlie was able to escape from Scotland, but thousands of others were not so lucky.\textsuperscript{20} An untold number of Scots Jacobites were mercilessly cut down in the aftermath of Culloden, which was itself a bloodbath. As “rebels,” they were not entitled to the rights afforded to foreign soldiers. Ultimately, about 120 men were tried and executed for participating in the rebellion. Some were hanged, others beheaded. Another hundred or so died amidst the appalling conditions of their confinement.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{19} On the details of the battle, see Black, \textit{Culloden and the ‘45}, 165-201; Duffy, \textit{The ‘45}, 510-26.


The part that young John Murray played in these events is unclear. Jacobite leaders expected all men from sixteen to sixty to take up arms.\textsuperscript{22} Going on sixteen, John was on the borderline, but his place in Prince Charles’s household probably kept him on the sidelines. A “lad” of his name was a messenger for Tullibardine in the early stages of the rebellion.\textsuperscript{23} At least initially, General George Murray didn’t think much of this young man, calling him a “blundering lad” who was “not to be trusted in anything of moment.”\textsuperscript{24} Less than a month later, however, George asked the same person to carry £300 to Tullibardine, which he accomplished without event.\textsuperscript{25} Whatever John actually did in the service of the prince, the rebellion was a pivotal moment for him, the significance of which would reverberate, often uncomfortably, throughout the course of life.

William Murray survived the battle of Culloden and, after a brief stretch in hiding, turned himself in to the authorities. In doing so, his brother John, the second earl of Dunmore, thought that he exhibited “some signs of a penitent heart,” but even though his role in the rebellion had been minor, he had little hope for leniency. Confessing to deeds that amounted unambiguously to high treason, he would in all likelihood face the gallows. The earl did everything he could to prevent this, writing a series of breathless letters to the ministry from his post in the Austrian Netherlands requesting a pardon for his younger brother. Desperate though they were, the please

\textsuperscript{22} Tullibardine proclamation, 8 February 1746, \textit{Jacobite Correspondence}, 193.
\textsuperscript{23} See, e.g., George Murray to Tullibardine, 2 October 1745, \textit{Jacobite Correspondence}, 47-49.
\textsuperscript{24} George Murray to Tullibardine, 7 September 1745, reproduced in Duke, \textit{Lord George Murray and the Forty-Five}, 77.
\textsuperscript{25} George Murray to Tullibardine, 3 October 1745, and Tullibardine to George Murray, 7 October 1745, both in \textit{Jacobite Correspondence}, 51, 67. This person is not to be confused with the John Murray who was the prince’s secretary, but it could be the John Murray who was the duke’s master of horse, for whom see Atholl to Robert Graham of Fintry, 25 January 1746, \textit{Jacobite Correspondence}, 157.
were utterly unsentimental. Through his actions, the earl wrote, William had incurred
his “highest displeasure” and forfeited all “brotherly affection.” The incident
nonetheless raised some very serious practical questions, for which he now begged the
king’s attention. A lifelong bachelor with no direct heirs, the earl had always
considered William’s “children as his own immediate Successors.” If it were his
brother’s fate alone at stake, he told the Duke of Newcastle, he

would not think of troubling His Majesty with any application in his
behalf, but his heavy sorrow and affliction for the inevitable
Extinguishment of his Honour and Family upon his own death should
this Brother undergo the trial and sentence he has but too justly
merited[,] his concern for the children whom he has hitherto looked
upon as his own and who by their father’s Conviction must become
incapable of succeeding to the Earl[dom] may urge him to implore His
Majesty’s Royal Clemency and humbly to Entreat His Majesty.\(^26\)

The Dunmore title would be forever lost if William was convicted of treason and
hanged. In view of this, John was asking the king to issue a pre-trial pardon, which
would allow the earldom to pass from him to the children of his attainted brother with
as little stigma attached as possible.

The crimes in question were simply too serious for George II to consent to this.
Newcastle informed the earl that the king had “all the Concerne and Compassion
imaginable for your Lordship, but as orders were given for Mr Murray’s Tryall before
I had your Lordship’s first letter, I find it is not thought proper to postpone or suspend
it.”\(^27\) A grand jury handed down the indictment in November 1746. Yet all was not

\(^{26}\) All of the above quotations are from a letter to the ministry from July 1746, which is copied beneath
the heading “State of the Honble Sir William Murray of Taymount’s Case,” in “Chronicles of the
Dunmore Branch,” DFP, NRAS 3253 [Bundle 28], RH4/103/1 (microfilm), 3-4.
\(^{27}\) Newcastle to John Murray, second earl of Dunmore, 22 July 1746, copied in “State of the Honble Sir
William Murray of Taymount’s Case,” 8.
lost. John made one final petition to the king later that month. It cited his thirty-two years of military service as well as the "inexpressible Anguish" that the ordeal had caused. He reiterated that he was not seeking the pardon on his brother's behalf—"let him be imprisoned during his Life," he wrote, "Let him be sent to the remotest part of the Earth, never to return"—but rather for the innocent victims involved, including his young nephew and namesake, John. Miraculously, the letter secured him a degree of satisfaction. In December, the Privy Council recommended that William be pardoned, but only after the trial and sentencing. This decision promised to expose William to the shame of formal censure while simultaneously showcasing the king's mercy and rewarding a trusted friend. The pardon was granted upon the condition that William remain "a Prisoner, during his Life in such Place, or Places, as We, Our Heirs and Successors should be pleased, from Time to Time...to direct." For now, he was to live in the city of Lincoln and forbidden from traveling any more than six miles from it. 28 The earl of Dunmore had done remarkably well—his actions alone had averted what he feared would be "the extinction of the Honour and Dignity of his family for Ever." 29

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Having secured the family title, the second earl of Dunmore now faced the difficult business of finding a place in the Empire for the son of a convicted traitor. According to family histories, his nephew John had completed two years at Eton

28 Hollis Newcastle to second earl of Dunmore, 30 November 1747, Dunmore Family Papers, Special Collection Research Center, Earl Gregg Swem Library, The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va., Box 2, fol. 71 (photostat; original at NAS).
College before the summer of 1745. For obvious reasons, he did not return to school in the fall of that year. It was probably just as well, for his disposition in later life—somewhat impetuous, unreflective, and in all ways action-oriented—suggests that he may not have made much of a student. With his uncle’s connections, a military career understandably seemed the best option. The earl arranged for no less a figure than Henry Fox to put forth his nephew’s name as a candidate for an ensign’s commission. Already a member of the king’s cabinet and a rising star in British politics, Fox was nevertheless unable to deliver. The king, he told the earl, had been “pleas’d to refuse Yr Nephew Mr Murray positively.” That the young man’s father had recently attempted to overthrow the king no doubt factored into the decision. The earl persisted in spite of the disappointment, and in the spring of 1749, he acquired the commission his nephew was seeking. Happily, young John, now nineteen, was to serve as an ensign under his uncle in the 3rd Regiment of Foot Guards.

In the British aristocracy, even a small string of family deaths could catapult a person into a position of unfamiliar eminence. So it was with John. In 1752 his uncle died with no direct heirs. Upon the death of his attainted father just four years later, John became the fourth earl of Dunmore. He was twenty-six. More than a half-century would pass before a fifth earl would rise to the title.

Dunmore’s professional progress failed to keep pace with his social status, and as the decade wore on he grew dissatisfied. He participated in raids along the French coast during the Seven Years War, all of them unsuccessful. He hadn’t made

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30 H[enry] Fox to [second earl of Dunmore], 15/26 March 1747-8, in Dunmore Family Papers, Swem Library, Box 2, fol. 73 (photostat; original at NAS).
31 Newcastle to [William Murray?], 30 May 1749, DFP, NRAS 3253, Box 3, RH4/195/3 (microfilm).
lieutenant until the age of twenty-five, and in 1760 he was a thirty-year-old captain. According to Lord Cathcart (who'd made captain at the age of twenty-one), all of their friends regretted the “melancholy” to which he had begun to devote himself. The news that he’d been passed over for promotion once again, which Cathcart delivered in the very same letter, was unlikely to lift his spirits. Attempting to cushion the blow, Cathcart attributed the disappointment to “nothing more essential” than Dunmore’s lack “of Correspondance with the proper chanel.” It wasn’t for lack of trying. The ambitious earl had marshaled all of his contacts in his quest for advancement, including Viscount Fitzmaurice (the future Earl of Shelburne), but all for naught.

When George II coldly rebuffed his application to serve on the battlefields of Germany in the winter of 1757-1758, Dunmore decided to leave the military for good. On learning this, Fitzmaurice tried to console his friend: “I assure you as to yourself, you have no loss. The English Service at the end of a War is for the most part a grumbling one.” But Dunmore’s entire life up to this point had been a grumbling one, full of scandal and disappointment. Whether from his tainted parentage, his

33 A confidant of the Duke of Cumberland, Cathcart had impeccable connections, but in “the unsettled state of this country,” he wrote, “no military man, at so great a distance [as Dunmore was in continental Europe] could have any rational dependance upon any Sect. of the Crown”: Cathcart to “Dear Lord” [Dunmore?], 20 January 1758, DFP, NRAS 3253, Box 3, RH4/195/3, item 7 (microfilm). See also H. M. Scott, “Cathcart, Charles Schaw, ninth Lord Cathcart (1721–1776),” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, online edn [www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.wm.edu/view/article/4885, accessed 28 November 2008].
34 Fitzmaurice to Dunmore, 14 December 1758, DFP, NRAS 3253, Box 3, RH4/195/3, item 9 (microfilm).
36 Fitzmaurice to Dunmore, 13 January 1760, DFP, NRAS 3253, Box 3, RH4/195/3, item 13 (microfilm).
limitations as an officer, or forces completely outside his control, he now exited the army—an arena in which so many of his kinsmen had achieved so much—in a state of profound frustration.

Almost immediately upon returning to civilian life, his fortunes began to change. In February 1759, he married his first cousin Charlotte Stewart, daughter of the Earl of Galloway. She was wellborn, charming, and, by all accounts, beautiful. Some felt she deserved better, but the couple eventually had nine children together, and the family they raised consistently inspired admiration, even in some of Dunmore’s most inveterate enemies. Of course, Charlotte brought more to the match than impressive social graces and healthy, attractive children. She wasn’t rich—her birth exceeded her fortune, as did his—but her family connections provided the foundation for Dunmore’s entire imperial career. In time, the marriage proved the biggest patronage boon of his life.

That was still several years off. In the meantime, he benefited from a number of developments at Whitehall. In October 1760, King George II died. The coronation

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37 On Lady Dunmore’s charm, see Lady Sarah Lennox to Lady Susan Fox Strangways, 20 December 1761, in Countess of Ilchester and Lord Stavordale, eds., The Life and Letters of Lady Sarah Lennox, 1745-1825... Vol. 1 (London, 1902), 118. Many years after meeting the couple, Philip Mazzei, an Italian friend of American independence who thought that Dunmore “had a head as weak as his heart,” observed that Charlotte “deserved a better husband”: E. C. Branchi, ed. and trans., “Memoirs of the Life and Voyages of Doctor Philip Mazzei,” The William and Mary Quarterly, 2nd Ser., 9 (1929): 162-74 (quotations on 171 and 166). Prince Augustus Frederick Hanover told his brother, the Prince of Wales, “I love and respect Lady Dunmore exceedingly; she has one of the most noble and honest hearts I ever saw”: 2 March 1793, in A. Aspinall, ed., The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales 1770—1812, Volume II 1789-1794 (London, 1964), 340. For admiration of the Dunmore family, see Charles Stuart to James Parker, 5 December 1773, Parker Family Papers, 1760-1795, City of Liverpool Public Libraries, Liverpool, England, PAR 9-52 (microfilm viewed at the David Library of the American Revolution, Washington Crossing, Pa.); Edward Foy to Ralph Wormeley Jr., [1775?], Papers of Ralph Wormeley, Jr., Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va. On their children, see Paul, ed., Scots Peerage, Vol. 3, 383-96, which names ten children—the usual nine plus a daughter named “Anne,” who does not appear in any other records; Paul’s Peerage contains several errors, but it is entirely possible that Anne died in infancy at some point before 1770.
of George III, which Dunmore attended, opened a new chapter in British politics, one marked above all by the influence of the new king’s longtime advisor, the Scots Earl of Bute. Because of their acquaintance with Bute, Cathcart and Fitzmaurice were able to get Dunmore’s name onto something called the “King’s List.” The Act of Union of 1707 endowed Scots peers with all of the rights and privileges enjoyed by their English counterparts except for hereditary seats in the House of Lords. The Act reserved only sixteen places in that body for Scots nobles, of whom there were about ninety at any one time during the 1760s. Elections were periodically held in Edinburgh to decide who would occupy these seats, and the King’s List contained the names of the ministry’s recommendations. In theory, every Protestant member of the Scots peerage had a vote on these occasions, but placement on the King’s List was effectively tantamount to royal nomination. When Dunmore was elected in May 1761, not a single off-list vote was cast.

Given this system, the sixteen Scottish peers would seem to have been beholden to the king, but they did not behave like a ministerial bloc in the Lords. They were often absent for entire sessions, and those who did attend didn’t always spurn the opposition. Early on, Dunmore generally voted with the party in power, but from time to time he showed independence. In one instance he defied Bute by supporting a motion to immediately withdraw British troops from Germany; he was

one of only sixteen in the Lords to do so, and he was the lone Scot to formally protest
in the House journal when it was defeated. Since he’d unsuccessfully applied to serve
in Germany himself not long before, lingering resentments may have played a role. In
any case, he later voted to repeal the Stamp Act, a step that Bute and most other Scots
peers opposed. In the final analysis, Dunmore was an indifferent legislator. He was
absent for about ten of the nearly thirty years he spent in Parliament due to overseas
appointments. When in England, he attended regularly and did some committee work
but almost never spoke in general session. His presence in the record is faint and
suggests a pragmatist without a strong passion for politics.41

What drove Dunmore in the mid-1760s was not ideology but financial crisis.
Scots aristocrats had been emulating their English counterparts ever since the Act of
Union in 1707, and by the time Dunmore came along, they’d taken to metropolitan
living and adopted expensive new standards of consumption.42 As important and
prestigious as it was, a seat in Parliament did not pay well. It was a gentleman’s place,
suited to those who could afford to live in high style from the rents of the tenants on
their estates. Dunmore associated with some of the wealthiest people in England while
living in London, but he was never a rich man himself. For one thing, his title was
land-poor. When James II created the earldom in 1686, he meant for it to carry the
estates belonging to the first Marquess of Atholl, whose loyalty he correctly doubted.

But Charles Murray surrendered whatever claim he had to the lands in a family

42 The money that this lifestyle demanded was part of what drove so many Scots into imperial service:
Eric Richards, “Scotland and the Uses of the Atlantic Empire,” in Bernard Bailyn and Philip D.
Morgan, eds., Strangers in the Realm: Cultural Margins of the British Empire (Chapel Hill, 1991), 101-
02.
settlement of 1690, whereupon they redounded to the dukedom of his older brother.\textsuperscript{43} As a result, the only land that the fourth earl of Dunmore received upon succeeding to the title was his father’s estate at Taymount, Perthshire. By that point, he had already purchased ground near the town of Airth in Sterlingshire, which he named Dunmore Park. Though he later bought lands in Argyle, this remained his most important and profitable holding.\textsuperscript{44} In addition to collecting rents from the tenants at Dunmore Park, he began leasing collieries on the property to the iron-producing Carron Company in 1768. Even when augmented by ventures like this, however, his assets consistently lagged behind his expenses.\textsuperscript{45}

The problem was simple: Dunmore spent more money than he made. In 1761, the same year that he entered Parliament, he built a gardening complex on the grounds of Dunmore Park. Here, a small classical pavilion joined two gardener’s cottages, the external walls of which were made hollow to allow for the heated cultivation of exotic fruits. It was probably years later, after the American Revolution forced his return to Britain, that he built the towering stone pineapple that dominates the complex today. Over thirty-seven feet tall, the Dunmore Pineapple is a masterpiece of meticulous detail, complete with cantilevered leaves of the very finest masonry and ogee-arched gothic windows. The fruit that it honors was an icon of the age, symbolizing wealth and hospitality. Likenesses of it sat atop gateposts and adorned


\textsuperscript{44} Lowe, “Parliamentary Career,” 17–18; Wrike, “Chronology,” 18.

consumer goods, usually expensive ones (it was in the early 1760s that Josiah Wedgwood first began decorating his fine china with pineapple motifs). Like so much of what Dunmore did, his Pineapple was conventional in spirit but unique in scale. Constructed by an unknown architect, it bears the unmistakable stamp of its owner's personality. On reflection, one can plainly see its kinship to the grandiose and often eccentric brand of political theatre that marked Dunmore's imperial career.46

With poorly performing estates and expenses like his garden complex, Dunmore frequently found himself in financial trouble. In 1765, he came to his cousin the Duke of Atholl in “very Great Distress.” He needed an emergency loan of £7,000. Atholl summarized the situation for a friend:

Lord Dunmore is one who I regard as the Head of the second Branch of my Family, & likewise for his Good Qualities of which from a long acquaintance I can really say he has many, though at the same time I must confess that Tares have grown up with the Wheat, have very much Spoilt, and in time may Totally destroy the Crop: Though none but the Good Deserve our Friendship yet the Improvd have often a Title to our Assistance. Ld Dunmore Appealed to me Last year in very Great Distress for my Assistance to Raise a Sum of Money at a Risk to Myself, which my Friend Harry Drummond [a leading London banker and a Scot] who was to be at Part of the Risk Convinced me, would Give Ld Dunmore a Chance of Entirely Retreiving his Affairs if he behaved hereafter with prudence; that on the Contrary if this money Could not be Raised he was irretrievably Ruined.47

Atholl agreed to lend his cousin £2000. To address the remainder of the debt, a trust was created through which Dunmore mortgaged some of his lands and applied their

46 Fran Beauman, The Pineapple: King of Fruits (London, 2005), esp. 115-18. For more on Dunmore’s Pineapple, contact the Landmark Trust of Scotland (www.landmarktrust.org.uk), which currently maintains the site as a vacation retreat. For this paragraph, I consulted two pieces of literature that the Trust distributes to visitors. There is also a volume called History Album (1992), which collects all of the existing information about the structure. See also Mary Woods and Aretes Swartz Warren, Glass Houses. A History of Greenhouses, Orangeries and Conservatories (New York, 1988), 61-62. 47 Duke of Atholl to John Mackenzie of Delvine, 11 June 1766, quoted in Lowe, “Parliamentary Career,” 20.
income to pay his lenders. His father-in-law, Lord Galloway, was to manage the trust. 48 It was all terribly humiliating. Dunmore was a man of thirty-five whose affairs were now reduced to the superintendence of his wife's father. He'd been living well above his means, and now everyone knew it. As the trust paid down the original debt, Dunmore still needed cash to live in the style to which he was accustomed. Certainly sacrifices were made, but there were children to think of, five of them by 1765 and more on the way. With his family's future in mind, he sought a lucrative imperial appointment, but for years nothing came of it. 49

Everything changed on May 25, 1768, when Lady Dunmore's sister Susanna Stewart married Granville Leveson-Gower, second earl of Gower. Here was the stroke of good fortune for which Dunmore had been waiting. Weddings could make and break careers in the British Empire, particularly when they involved men like Gower, one of the most powerful politicians in all the realm. At the time of the marriage—it was his third—he had just begun what would prove to be a twelve-year term as president of the Privy Council. 50 His influence was such that Dunmore immediately began trying to curry favor with him. Gower was a lifelong Bedford Whig (his sister was the Duke of Bedford's wife), so Dunmore shifted his support in Parliament to that faction, even though many of his own friends, including Fitzmaurice (now Lord Shelburne), were rival Rockingham Whigs. The Bedfordites were best known for advancing a hard line in colonial affairs. Up to this point, Dunmore had been relatively

48 Lowe, "Parliamentary Career," 20 n. 64.
49 Ibid., 19.
moderate on these issues, backing the conciliatory approach of the Rockingham and Chatham administrations. Though he'd voted to repeal the Stamp Act in 1766, he no longer favored concessions when the debate over the Townshend duties came around in 1770. In a rare speech in the Lords, he argued that repeal was unnecessary, because "the Americans, if left to themselves, would soon be quiet." 51

Political influence radiated from the Earl of Gower and attached itself to everyone in his inner circle, including women. Lady Gower, Dunmore's sister-in-law, was tireless in pursuit of patronage for family and close friends. Horace Walpole once observed that "her life was a series of jobs and solicitations, and she teased every Minister for every little office that fell in his department." 52 Walpole disapproved of such women, but Dunmore was lucky to have her on his side. Nor did Lady Dunmore play a passive role in her husband's affairs. In 1773, she wrote to Lord Dartmouth, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, on behalf of Dunmore's personal secretary, Edward Foy, who was seeking a job in the Naval office in New York. 53 Though the Countess was unsuccessful in this effort, women were absolutely crucial to the patronage system at the heart of British politics during this period. Dunmore could never have gotten where he did without his wife and sister-in-law. As Cathcart told him years earlier, "Correspondance with the proper chanel" was all-important in the

53 Lady Dunmore to Dartmouth, 10 August 1773, in The American Papers of the Second Earl of Dartmouth, Staffordshire Record Office, Reel 9, 678 (microfilm viewed at the David Library of the American Revolution). Her request on Foy's behalf was unsuccessful.
Empire, and very often access to these channels could only be obtained through and with the assistance of women. 54

With the support of his sister-in-law and his powerful new patron, Lord Dunmore at last found himself in consideration for high office in America. A vacancy emerged with the death of Governor Henry Moore of New York on September 11, 1769. Moore had been educated at Eton and Leiden University before returning to Jamaica, the island of his birth. His success as acting governor there earned him a baronetcy in 1764 and the governorship of New York the following year. He was a capable administrator and a salutary force for moderation in the colony during the Stamp Act crisis. Imperial appointees had to be well connected, of course, but, as Moore’s rise indicates, governorships weren’t simply handed out to the king’s friends without regard to their abilities. 55 Evidently encouraged by his dutiful, if undistinguished, performance in the House of Lords, Gower advanced Dunmore as Moore’s replacement, and by December 1769 the job was his. 56

Virtually all British governors came to America for money and money alone. Most were pushed out of England by insolvency or pulled across the Atlantic by the prospect of fortune. Though not a particularly prestigious appointment from the lofty

54 Cathcart to “Dear Lord” [Dunmore?], 20 January 1758, DFP, NRAS 3253, Box 3, RH4/195/3, item 7 (microfilm).
56 Dunmore’s good fortune did not go unremarked in Parliament. When, during debate in Lords on 11 December 1770, Gower noted the injustice of Lord Amherst receiving a governorship without supporting the court, the Duke of Richmond observed that “Lord Gower’s own brother-in-law, Lord Dunmore, had just had two governments given to him”: Simmons and Thomas, eds., Proceedings and Debates, Vol. 3, 356.
vantage of the House of Lords, it was perceived as a potentially lucrative one. For Dunmore, it was a windfall. The annual salary was £2,000 sterling, and he could count on making nearly that much in perquisites and emoluments, although these had declined sharply in recent decades. There were also great swaths of land to be had for practically nothing, or so he thought.\textsuperscript{57} What he wanted most of all was to acquire enough lands to permanently settle his large family and establish a fortune. He and Lady Dunmore had three daughters—Catherine, Augusta, and Susan—and four sons. The order in which the male children were named is telling. The two oldest were George (for the ruling Hanoverian king) and William (for Dunmore’s Jacobite father), a pairing that bespoke their father’s desire to braid the British and Scottish strands of his background for posterity. A third son was named Alexander for his maternal grandfather, Lord Galloway. It wasn’t until John arrived in 1766 that Dunmore had a namesake of his own. When he set out for New York in 1770, Charlotte was once again pregnant. In December, she delivered a healthy baby boy and named him Leveson Granville Murray. If there was any question about how grateful she and her husband were for the chance to start anew, this gesture laid it to rest. Lord Gower must have been pleased.\textsuperscript{58}

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As it turned out, Dunmore wasn’t especially well suited to the task before him. By the end of his career, he had occupied the position of governor for some fifteen

\textsuperscript{57} On this lack of prestige and the preeminence of financial considerations in the acceptance of gubernatorial appointments, see Beverly McAnear, \textit{The Income of the Colonial Governors of British North America} (New York, 1967), 1-39.

years—first in New York, then in Virginia, and finally in the Bahama Islands—but it was never easy. Some of those who worked with him found the experience frustrating. In 1775, his secretary, Edward Foy, had grown so fed up that he was threatening to return to England if he didn’t receive a place of profit in America soon. Believing the secretary essential to Dunmore’s government, Gower intervened. “Tho’ my Brother in Law has many good qualities,” he wrote the ministry, and “[is] in many things very deserving...it is quite necessary for him to have a Person about him, who is knowing, & attentive & who will remind him of business.” The Duke of Atholl had expressed similar sentiments during Dunmore’s financial crisis. Both he and Gower recognized that the young earl had good points, but they worried about his poor judgment, his impracticality, and his lack of self-control. All of Gower’s efforts on Dunmore’s behalf were for the benefit of Lady Dunmore and the children. The only reason he pressed the Foy issue, he explained to Dartmouth, was “the great Affection I have for a Sister, who is in a manner banish’d” to America as a result of her husband’s financial situation. Gower foresaw Dunmore getting “into Scrapes” without sound advisors, and he reminded Dartmouth that “the welfare of a good Wife & eight Children depends upon his succeeding in his present line of Life.”

As helpless as he seems in this light, Dunmore could not have gotten where he was without certain strengths. Contrary to patriot propaganda, he was not fundamentally “a brute and a dunce.” He never went to university, but his education

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59 Gower to Dartmouth, 30 May 1775, Dartmouth Papers, Reel 13, 1280.
60 “Lord Dunmore’s Petition,” in Philip Freneau, The Poems of Philip Freneau... (Philadelphia, 1786), 200. Virginian Edmund Pendleton observed that Dunmore didn’t even “pretend” to “external
was sufficient for him to travel amongst some of the leading figures of the Enlightenment. After leaving the army, he was admitted to an elite Edinburgh debating club called the Select Society. Meetings covered a range of issues in the fields of politics, economics, morals, and the arts, and its members (there were about 130 when Dunmore joined) included the leading minds of the age, notably Adam Smith. Another member was David Hume, whom Dunmore dined with at the home of the Earl of Shelburne in 1766.61 He was also friendly with James Boswell, the great biographer of Samuel Johnson. Not easily impressed, Boswell thought that Dunmore “talked very well” over dinner one night.62 Dunmore loved books. According to his own account, his personal library contained some thirteen hundred volumes in 1775. A collection this size could hardly have been mere display, particularly for someone as intellectually unpretentious as Dunmore. In Virginia, he would help to found the Society for the Advancement of Useful Knowledge on the model of the Royal Society and was active in the movement toward agricultural diversification.63 All of this is not to say that he possessed a particularly formidable intellect, but his associations and accomplishments certainly bespeak a capable one.

62 Of another dinner companion during this period, Boswell wrote, “I was disgusted by Cooper’s coarse manners and unlettered conversation”: Joseph W. Reed and Frederick A. Pottle, eds., *Boswell, Laird of Auchinleck. 1778-1782* (New York, 1977), 118-19, 236.
63 Graham Hood is skeptical of Dunmore’s claim to such a notable library, observing incorrectly that “none of the many descriptions of that governor hint even remotely that he was a lettered man”: *Governor’s Palace*, 223. For the Society for the Advancement of Useful Knowledge, see W. W. Abbott, ed., *The Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series*, Vol. 9 (Charlottesville, 1994), 356 n. 4; Bruce A. Ragsdale, *A Planters Republic: The Search for Economic Independence in Revolutionary Virginia* (Madison, 1996), 146 (which discusses diversification efforts).
The virtue that elicited the most admiration in Dunmore was conviviality. He was friendly, fun loving, and social, sometimes to a fault. This made him a "capricious ignorant" aristocrat in the eyes of those who didn't like him, but to those who did he was a "cheerful free liver." Upon his arrival in New York, one sympathetic observer reported that he was "Short, Strong built, well shaped with a most frank and open Countenance, easy and affable in his manners, very temperate, and a great Lover of field sports, indefatigable and constant in pursuit of them. In short, he seems Very likely to secure the affections of the Gentlemen of this Country." Having spent time with Dunmore in Pittsburgh in the summer of 1774, Augustine Prevost thought that in terms of "private character" he was "by no means a bad man. On the contrary, he is a jolly, hearty companion, hospitable & polite at his own table." Unfortunately, affability didn't always translate into successful leadership. As a governor or the commander of a military expedition, Prevost thought, Dunmore was "the most unfit, the most trifling and the most uncalculated person living." This was an overstatement, as Dunmore's astute peace with the Shawnee Indians would soon show. According to Prevost, however, the governor was always eating, drinking, hunting, and target shooting at Pittsburg, even in the midst of important conferences. Seeing him from a

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64 For his "great affability," see Andrew Snape Hamond, "An Account of the Progress and Proceedings of His Majesty's Frigate Arethusa, between the 17 June 1771 and the 28th Nov.r 1773..." in Hamond Naval Papers, Vol. 3, Acc. 680, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.
65 The quotations are from Cadwallader Colden and an unidentified friend, both in Percy Burdelle Caley, "Dunmore Colonial Governor of New York and Virginia, 1770-1782" (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Pittsburgh, 1939), 91-92.
distance, one Delaware chief supposedly asked, “'What old little man is that yonder playing like a boy?'” 67

Dunmore had an expansive sense of possibility to go along with his youthful exuberance. Throughout his career, he thought big, pursuing grand objectives for which he was rarely rewarded. He was a man of average ability and boundless imagination. His considerable courage often served only to enable the impulsive pursuit of outsize ambitions. On top of it all, he could be stubborn and imperious. The American poet Philip Freneau once likened him to Don Quixote, and there's something to the analogy. 68 While they produced very few triumphs, these characteristics exposed Dunmore to a staggering range of experience, including border disputes, western expansion, Indian war, sexual scandal, loyalist advocacy, and slave emancipation. His involvement in all of this was at least partially attributable to the kind of person he was—loyal, ambitious, adventurous, and impractical.

* The American commission that Dunmore finally received in January 1770 was not, technically speaking, issued to him at all. The original document named William Murray, not John, the next governor of New York, a mistake that newspaper editors throughout the realm reproduced in their haste to announce the appointment. 69 It wasn’t the first time the ghost of Dunmore’s father had come haunting. In 1761, he

was sworn into the House of Lords as “William Earl of Dunmore,” rather than John. So, the new governor of New York was publicly confronted with the burdens of the Murray family history at two critical points in his life. The irony was unmistakable, even cruel. William’s participation in the rebellion of 1745 had very nearly placed the prospect of imperial service out of reach for his son. It is in light of moments like these that Dunmore’s career can be seen as the self-conscious, overwrought performance of Hanoverian Britishness that it occasionally was.

Dunmore was a Scot in the British Empire. This fact was never far from the minds of his friends or his foes. “His principles of Government are such,” one enemy wrote, “as might naturally be expected from the lordly despot of a petty Clan.” But Dunmore was proud of his ancestry. Nowhere is this clearer than in a portrait that Sir Joshua Reynolds painted of him in 1765. Two decades removed from the last Jacobite rebellion and more than five years after he resigned his army commission, he chose to stand in the dress of his old regiment, the Third Foot Guards, complete with kilt, feathered bonnet, and patterned socks. Following the battle of Culloden, the British government sought to suppress clan culture in a variety of ways, including the Dress Act of 1747, which proscribed Highland clothing for everyone except officers and soldiers in Scottish military regiments. Wearing the old uniform was a way for Dunmore to honor his heritage without officially offending authorities. In the picture, he stands beside a gnarled tree trunk. Though torn, a reference to the devastation of the Highlands in 1746, it is sprouting new leaves. The detail suits Dunmore’s optimistic

71 [William Wylly], A Short Account of the Bahama Islands…(London, 1789), 16.
cast of mind, but as buoyant as his outlook always was, he could never entirely overcome the tension between his rebel past and his imperial present. Under the circumstances, it is remarkable that he was able to do so at all.\(^{72}\)

Chapter 2
The Absence of Empire, 1770-1773

Two ships carried Lord Dunmore’s baggage across the Atlantic Ocean in 1770. One of these wrecked on its approach to Manhattan—an ill omen. That the other arrived safely was fortunate, for in addition to the new governor’s furniture it also had a four-thousand-pound gilt equestrian statue of George III on board. Ordered as a tribute to the king after the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766, the statue was erected on the commons outside Fort George in August 1770, just a few months before Dunmore’s arrival. A large celebration accompanied the unveiling, during which New Yorkers danced to the music of a band, drank health after health in the king’s honor, and winced beneath the thunderclap of a thirty-two cannon salute. The affection for monarchy displayed on this and countless other occasions like it seemed deeply rooted. Heir to the authors of the Glorious Revolution, the Hanoverian king was a father figure for colonists, one who provided protection from enemies outside the Empire and constitutional justice within it. It was to him that New Yorkers had turned for redress during the crisis over the Stamp Act, for example, and his intervention that they credited for its repeal. In an age when non-importation and non-


exportation threatened the bonds of mercantile commerce, loyalty to the House of Hanover was an important source of unity in the Empire. As the eldest son of William Murray well understood, it was among the fundamental facts of being British.³

Yet Dunmore would soon learn how superficial the love of monarchs was in British America. While governor of New York and Virginia from 1770 to 1774, he encountered contempt and defiance at every turn. This was partly a function of the declining importance of his office. Long targets of popular outrage, royal governors had watched their power erode throughout the eighteenth century with the expansion of ministerial patronage and assembly influence.⁴ But the challenges that Dunmore faced went deeper. There was no implicit deference to the king or his representatives in North America and plenty of disdain for the hierarchy that was supposed to structure the Empire. In his experience, subjects almost never deferred to anyone when it contravened their interests to do so. By 1770, George III didn't reign in any meaningful way over the leading families of New York, whose stranglehold on elective office restricted what any governor was able to accomplish there. In Virginia the problem was even worse, for while there was a prerogative-friendly opposition in the New York assembly, the House of Burgesses in Williamsburg was united against the executive. Nor was resistance limited to provincial elites; disregard for the

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³ For the importance of monarchy in colonial political culture, see McConville, King's Three Faces, esp. Part III; Benjamin Lewis Price, Nursing Fathers: American Colonists' Conception of English Protestant Kingship, 1688-1776 (Lanham, Md., 1999); Richard Bushman, King and People in Provincial Massachusetts (Chapel Hill, 1992, c. 1985).

authority of the state was widespread in both colonies.\(^5\) In this atmospheres of impertinence, Dunmore himself found ways to disobey the king. Much like the colonists who flouted his commands, he managed to do so more or less without consequence.\(^6\)

The appearance of deference was ubiquitous in New York and Virginia, whether in professions of esteem for authority from below or displays of elite preeminence from above, but these forms should not be overemphasized. They reflected a system of deference in the patron-client tradition, in which hierarchy was sustained through mutually (though not equally) beneficial relationships. Regard for superiors was contingent, not spontaneous.\(^7\) Even the most obsequious petition to a governor, for example, sought to impress him with a sense not only of obligation but


\(^7\) Beeman, “Deference, Republicanism, and the Emergence of Popular Politics,” 409-12.
also of the consequences of non-compliance. When subjects solicited the good will of
the king or his proxies, as they so often did, the allegiance they expressed was more
instrumental than intrinsic. The political culture of royalism offered tools, like the
petition, with which colonists pursued their own interests, and when these tools ceased
to function properly, the legitimacy of authority was sure to be called into question.
This is not to say that revolution was inevitable. Had the British government not opted
to aggressively assert its sovereignty, the imperial relationship could well have
persisted. Before the winter of 1773-1774, nothing in Dunmore's experience indicated
that a revolt against monarchy was in the offing. There was, however, an enormous
amount of evidence suggesting that the bond between subject and sovereign was
something less than sacrosanct.

The early 1770s are regarded as a period of calm before the storm, a break in
disruptive imperial relations that began with the repeal of the Townshend duties in
1770 and ended with the Boston Tea Party in late 1773. Focusing on tax policy and
the resistance it engendered, political historians of the Revolution have failed to note
that the limits of royal power remained manifest throughout these years. Even with
the resistance movement dormant in the early 1770s, North Americans' attachment to
royalty remained manifestly feeble. Historians credit Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*
with inspiring the anti-monarchical spirit of the Revolution almost as if from thin air,

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as did some contemporaries. But the tenuousness of royal authority earlier in the 
decade serves as a reminder of the vulnerability of the bond between subject and 
sovereign. In this light, it is not at all surprising that colonists were receptive to 
Paine’s message or that they were capable of imagining a political existence outside 
the Empire.\textsuperscript{10}

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Dunmore had a tendency to make people wait. When, in February 1770, New 
Yorkers learned that he was to succeed Henry Moore, all indications were that he’d be 
leaving England before the end of spring.\textsuperscript{11} In keeping with this timetable, what 
 survived of his baggage reached Manhattan in late May. The man himself was 
expected to follow close behind, perhaps sometime in July, but the summer passed 
without any sign of him.\textsuperscript{12} Back in England, the ship on which he was to travel, the 
\textit{Tweed}, sat idle in a Portsmouth dock. It had been ready to go to sea for months by the 
time Dunmore finally came aboard in August. A good deal of provisions and livestock 
were lost during the delay, so the \textit{Tweed} had to stop in Madeira for supplies before 
crossing to America. Dunmore claimed to have been too ill to make the trip that

\textsuperscript{10} The king did serve as an important constitutional model for executive authority in Revolutionary 
America, one that the Continental Congresses drew on with considerable success: Jerrilyn Greene 
Paine’s impact, see Eric Foner, \textit{Tom Paine and Revolutionary America} (New York, 2004, c. 1976), 71- 
87; see also the quotation of George Washington in David McCullough, \textit{1776} (New York, 2007), 112. 
\textsuperscript{11} For an announcement of Dunmore’s appointment, see “New York, February 19th,” \textit{The Essex Gazette} 
27 February to 6 March 1770, 126. Secretary of State Hillsborough assured Lieutenant Governor 
Cadwallader Colden that Dunmore would set out “as early in the Spring as he can find a safe 
conveyance”: Hillsborough to Colden, 9 December 1769, in Cadwallader Colden, \textit{Letters and Papers of 
Cadwallader Colden, Vol. 9, Collections of the New-York Historical Society, Vol. 68} (New York, 
1937), 218 (hereafter LPCC). 
\textsuperscript{12} Dunmore is expected in Hugh Wallace to William Johnson, 3 June 1770, \textit{PWJ}, Vol. 7, 711.
summer, but, truth be told, he had a habit of tarrying in old posts before taking up new
ones. 13

What Dunmore knew about the people and politics of New York is not clear. His most
reliable guide during the voyage to America was the set of official instructions that he
received on his departure. These orders were drafted by the Board of Trade and signed by
the king. Along with his commission, they outlined his constitutional role and the range
of his authorities. As chief colonial executive, he would be the principal instrument and
 guardian of royal prerogative in the province. Though he had no legal training, he was to
serve along with his advisory board, the council, as the colony’s highest court of appeals.
On the legislative side, he had the power to prorogue or dissolve sitting assemblies and
to call new ones. He could also veto any bill that he believed contravened the interests
of the crown. All of his predecessors had been paid by the assembly, but the instructions
now prohibited him from accepting any gifts at all from that body; his annual salary of £2000
was to come, instead, out of the tax on tea. In view of the increasing power of the
province legislatures, these checks were critical. Still, what governors needed most was
the ability to enrich others through patronage. While the instructions gave Dunmore the
authority to appoint and, in some cases, remove a variety of local officials—justices of
the peace and judges, for example—these powers had eroded over time, as the ministry
took on more and more colonial appointments. There were also a number of

13 On the Tweed, see the memorial of George Collier to Lord Dartmouth, 20 September 1774, the
American Papers of the Second Earl of Dartmouth, Staffordshire Record Office, Reel 2, 1019
(microfilm viewed at the David Library of the American Revolution, Washington Crossing, Pa.).
For Dunmore’s illness, see “LONDON. July 11,” The Pennsylvania Gazette, 20 September 1770, [2].
restrictions on his ability to issue land grants, particularly large ones. By 1770, in short, the governor had a limited set of tools with which to build a loyal following. But for Dunmore, this realization lay ahead.

The instructions led him to expect a higher level of religious and ethnic diversity in New York than he had ever known in Britain. A veritable parade of humanity ran through the pages, which mentioned groups of people who, though completely alien to him at the time of his departure, would profoundly influence the course and character of his American experience—and he theirs.

Governors of New York were required as far back as the seventeenth century to “permit liberty of conscience to all persons except Papists.” As a result, New York was home to an unusually vibrant spiritual marketplace. In Manhattan alone there were places of worship run by Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, Moravians, Reformed German Protestants, and others. There was a French church, a Jewish synagogue, and something called the Old Church of Jesus Christ, to say nothing of the Church of England or the Dutch Church, the two largest religious institutions in the city. As the mere listing of these names suggests, myriad ethnic groups—Dutch, Germans, French, Scots, and English—had gathered beneath the umbrella of toleration in Dunmore’s new government. Throughout the entire Empire,

\[\text{15} \text{ On the preparation and distribution of royal instructions, see Leonard Woods Labaree, ed., } \textit{Royal Instructions to British Colonial Governors}, \text{Vol. 1 (New York, 1935), viii.} \]
\[\text{16} \text{ Labaree, ed., } \textit{Royal Instructions}, \text{Vol. 2, 494 (entry 714).}\]
\[\text{17} \text{ Lester J. Cappon, et al., } \textit{Atlas of Early American History}, \text{Vol. 2: The Revolutionary Era, 1760-1790 (Princeton, 1976), 10.} \]
perhaps only neighboring Pennsylvania could rival New York’s ethnoreligious pluralism. 18

Dunmore also understood that he was entering a society with slaves. As governor, he would have to submit annual reports on the number of bondsmen and women brought into the colony, and he was forbidden from consenting to any bills passed by the assembly that increased the tax on their import or export. Bowing to Atlantic slave trading interests and the powerful London sugar lobby, the ministry sought to maintain a steady flow of black bodies into the colonies. 19 This meant that Dunmore would be interacting with Africans and African Americans in New York as never before. There were roughly six thousand blacks scattered amongst the nearly one million people that he had left behind in London. By contrast, of the approximately 21,000 people living in New York City (which was then limited to the southern tip of Manhattan), there were more than 3,000 blacks, virtually all of them unfree. It was in New York, then, that Dunmore first encountered slavery, an institution that would eventually come to define his career. 20

18 New York sensitized Dunmore to the importance of religious toleration, which he was later forced to defend against an anti-dissenter majority in the Virginia House of Burgesses. He dissolved that body in 1772 rather than allow the passage of laws restricting slave participation in religious services as well as the right to worship at night and out of doors: Andrew Levy, The First Emancipator: Slavery, Religion, and the Quiet Revolution of Robert Carter (New York, 2005), 69-70.

19 Labaree, ed., Royal Instructions, Vol. 2, 667-68 (entry 931) and 673-74 (entry 939).

20 Due, in part, to the desire of status-conscious gentlefolk for black servants, northern slavery was a largely urban phenomenon in Dunmore’s day. New York City, for instance, contained roughly 13% of the colony’s white population and 16% of its slaves. Even so, several of the southern counties in Dunmore’s government—Ulster, Westchester, Queens, and Kings—had even higher percentages of blacks than Manhattan: Gary Nash, “Forging Freedom: The Emancipation Experience in the Northern Seaport Cities, 1790-1820,” in Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman, eds., Slavery and Freedom in the Age of Revolution (Urbana, Ill., 1983), 4-[5]. On the population of New York circa 1771, see Evarts B. Greene and Virginia D. Harrington, American Population before the Federal Census of 1790 (New York, 1932), 102. On the general populations of London and New York, see Richard R. Beeman, The Varieties of Political Experience in Eighteenth-Century America (Philadelphia, 2004), 249. On blacks
If the instructions were any indication, American Indian relations would be far more important to his success or failure in office than slavery. In all likelihood, Dunmore had never laid eyes on a Native American, but soon after arriving he was expected to meet with delegations from each of the nations in the vicinity of his government—Iroquois, Shacocks (River Indians), and others—in order to encourage them to continue trading with the British. Officials at Whitehall understood Indians to be simultaneously inside and outside the Empire—both subject and sovereign—so these pages introduced Dunmore to newly expansive conceptions of British subjecthood as well as new peoples. “Upon their renewing their submission to our government,” the king wrote, the governor was to offer assurances that “that we will protect them as our subjects against the French king and his subjects.” 21 An instruction pertaining to white encroachment on Indian lands suggested that this status would hold even in conflicts with Britons. 22 The Indians were potential enemies as well as quasi-subjects. Dunmore was required to occasionally report on the military strength of all of New York’s neighbors, “be they Indians or others.” 23

All of this diversity helped to make New York politics uncommonly complex and contentious, and on this the instructions were silent. In addition to its ethnic and

in late-eighteenth-century London, see Simon Schama, Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves, and the American Revolution (New York, 2006), 17, 23, 426 n. 3.
22 Ibid., 466-67 (entry 669).
religious pluralism, the colony also had a quasi-feudal land-tenure system. Virtually the entire east side of the Hudson River Valley, from the northern tip of Manhattan all the way up to Albany, was owned by a handful of families and farmed by thousands of tenants. In the 1750s, New Englanders accustomed to land ownership began squatting on unoccupied manor lands near the Massachusetts and Connecticut borders. A good deal of violent conflict resulted, but through it all the great landlords maintained a firm grasp on political power. Time and again, men from the same coterie of families returned, often unopposed, to places reserved for the estates in the legislature. With only twenty-seven seats, the assembly was an exclusive club, made up of manor lords, upwardly mobile lawyers, and merchants at various points along the socioeconomic spectrum. This apparent fealty did not materialize spontaneously, and it certainly did not come without strings. Nor did it translate, unfortunately for Dunmore, into deferential attitudes toward representatives of the king. 24

New York was an oligarchy, but relations within the ruling class were highly contentious. Assemblymen were divided by region (upstate/downstate as well as east/west), economic interest (commercial/landed), profession (merchant/lawyer), ethnicity (English/Dutch), and religion (Anglican/dissenter). The single most important factor in determining one’s allegiance, though, was kinship. The few

24 Concentrating largely on New York City and Westchester County and the conflicts within the assembly as well as between the assembly and governor, Patricia Bonomi (Factional People) finds a high level of popular participation in the political life of pre-Revolutionary New York. Focusing on the Hudson Valley, Edward Countryman (A People in Revolution) paints a more oligarchic picture, even as he emphasizes popular unrest. See Beeman, “Deference, Republicanism, and the Emergence of Popular Politics,” 422-23 n. 47. For relations between landlord and tenant on the colony’s baronial estates, see Sung Bok Kim, Landlord and Tenant in Colonial New York: Manorial Society, 1664-1775 (Chapel Hill, 1978); Alan Tully, Forming American Politics: Ideals, Interests, and Institutions in Colonial New York and Pennsylvania (Baltimore, 1994).
families that ruled the colony were constantly vying with one another for a larger
share of power, a process that resulted in opposing factions. Disputes were typically
expressed along country-court lines, with one side making concessions to the people
and the other backing the establishment, but civic ideals were largely incidental to the
promotion of the family. In the decades leading up to American independence, the
rival DeLancey and Livingston clans predominated. The Episcopalian DeLanceys had
the support of the merchants and landowners of southern New York, while religious
dissenters and the great landlords north of Westchester formed the Livingston base.
After controlling the assembly for years, the Livingstons lost the elections of 1768 and
1769. The DeLanceys had emerged as the more “popular” of the two parties during the
controversy over the Townshend duties, but once in power they embraced the
executive branch. Upon the death of Henry Moore, a friend of the Livingstons, they
formed an alliance with the Lieutenant Governor Cadwallader Colden. 25

Dunmore’s ability to govern in this environment was a recurring theme in the
speculation that preceded his arrival. What little the colonists knew about him
suggested that he was an active, affable man of uncertain professional capacities. “By
all Accounts,” one wrote, he was a “very good natured Jolly Fellow” who “loves his
Bottle.” 26 All would soon come to see just how well earned this reputation for
conviviality was, but most already understood that New York politics required

25 On New York politics in the 1760s, see Beeman, Varieties of Political Experience, 103-11; Bonomi,
Factious People, 257-67; Roger Champagne, “Family Politics versus Constitutional Principles: The
New York Assembly Elections of 1768 and 1769,” The William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Ser., 20
Assembly Elections of 1768 and 1769: The Disruption of Family Politics,” New York History 46
(1965): 3-24; Jensen, Founding of a Nation, Chapters 10 and 15.
26 Benjamin Roberts to William Johnson, 19 February 1770; James Rivington to William Johnson, 19
February 1770; and Hugh Wallace to William Johnson, 3 June 1770, all in PWJ, Vol. 7, 400, 403, 711.
something more than a well-born drinking buddy. "We have strange party Work here," wrote Manhattanite John Watts, who thought Dunmore would need "his Eye teeth and be a good State pilot in the Bargain, to steer clear of the shoals and quicksands that lye in his way." While some toasted the prospect of "a total Abolition of all Party-Spirit, by the just and equal Administration of the Earl of Dunmore," others took a more pragmatic view. The illustrious Superindendant of Indian Affairs, William Johnson, believed that Dunmore would have to choose a side in order to be successful. Normally, it was the faction "most Capable of rendering pecuniary Services" that secured the allegiance of the governor, he wrote, "but I know so little of the Character of the Nobleman appointed to the Government, that I cannot pretend to Judge of his principles." Balancing the party interests would "be a Masterly stroke in our New Ruler," Watts concluded, one that would "require a reach of discretion and judgement that does not fall to every Mans share, more especially to great folks bred in the pride of life and us'd to implicit Obedience from their inferiors."

The task ahead was obviously daunting. Restricted in his ability to cultivate support, Dunmore would have to preside over an all-but-hopeless multiplicity of competing interests. And yet, New York was arguably the ideal place for him to pursue an American estate for his family. Though small and culturally primitive compared to London, the colony figured to feel like home in a number of respects. Oligarchy suited his political sensibilities, and his time in Parliament had accustomed

30 John Watts to William Johnson, 5 June 1770, PWJ, Vol. 7, 713.
him to partisan rancor. Surely he couldn’t hope to find a more congenial land tenure system outside of Britain. As an ambitious Scots aristocrat with years of London living under his belt, Dunmore would be encouraged to find that elite society in New York was as self-consciously English as it was anywhere in America. This was partly due to leading provincials’ efforts at overcoming the colony’s Dutch roots, and there was something kindred in this for Dunmore as well. He could relate to outsiders yearning to fit in. 31

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On a Thursday afternoon, October 18, Dunmore finally disembarked at Sandy Point, New York. More than ten months had passed since his appointment, but New Yorkers, who had been in daily anticipation of his arrival since August, seemed to take his tardiness in stride. 32 The appearance of a new governor was always treated as cause for celebration in British North America, and the welcome that Dunmore received was typically warm and enthusiastic. As soon as he landed, one newspaper reported, “the Battery Guns were fired, and all the Shipping in the Harbour displayed their Colours.” Lieutenant Governor Cadwallader Colden, General Thomas Gage, and other dignitaries then accompanied him to Fort George, his new home and place of work. “People of all Ranks” followed the procession, shouting acclamations over the sound of cannon fire. “The utmost Joy appeared in every Countenance,” wrote one observer. The following day, a corrected version of the commission (with “John” in place of “William”) was read and all the usual oaths taken. With this, the new

administration officially began. That evening, Dunmore attended a dinner party, where he was toasted immediately following the king and royal family. As they dined, a large bonfire illuminated the commons outside the fort, where "the greatest Number of People ever seen" on such an occasion was assembled. Later, there was "a genteel Ball" in his honor at Bolton's Tavern. With the weekend winding down, Dunmore attended services at the Old Episcopal Church.33 "I have the greatest reason to be pleased with the reception I have met with," he told Secretary of State Hillsborough, his primary contact in London, "and from the good humour that now appears amongst the people, I conceive hopes of an easy & peaceful administration."34 The festivities, with their lavish displays of deferential regard, were apparently quite seductive.

Still more encouraging signs followed soon after in the form of congratulatory addresses from the colony's leading secular and religious institutions. There were letters from the Chamber of Commerce, the College of New York, the Grand Jurors, the Marine Society, and a host of churches in Albany as well as New York City.35 On the surface, the messages were humble and flattering, but they could be quite pushy in their praise. The commencement of a new administration provided an opportunity for organizations to affirm loyalty to the crown while reasserting claims to customary

34 Dunmore to Hillsborough, 24 October 1770, Documents Relative, Vol. 8, 249. In a typical show of regard for new governors, a township west of the Connecticut River was named in Dunmore's honor: "To Be Sold," New-York Gazette; and The Weekly Mercury, 17 December 1770, [4].
35 For the secular organizations, see "To his Excellency..." New-York Gazette, 5 November 1770, [1]; "To his Excellency..." New-York Journal, 1 November 1770, 183; "To his Excellency..." New-York Gazette, 12 November 1770, [1]. For New York City churches, see "To his Excellency..." New-York Gazette; and The Weekly Mercury, 29 October 1770, [1]; New York Journal; or, The General Advertiser, 1 November 1770, 183-84 (quote on 183); New-York Gazette, 5 November 1770, [1]. Messages from churches in Albany are in New-York Journal, 13 December 1770, 221.
rights and privileges. Often these letters served as introductions, complete with information about the function of a given group and its value to the community. But they also represented a form of political action. The corporation of New York City, for instance, expressed its gratitude that the king had appointed "a Nobleman eminently distinguished, by his Rank and Quality, and whose personal accomplishments afford the most pleasing prospect of an able and upright administration." It is hard to say exactly which of Dunmore’s "accomplishments" gave them so much confidence, but that was beside the point. The tribute contained implicit instructions and warnings. When local officials claimed that Dunmore’s reputation made them optimistic for an "able and upright administration," they were, in effect, demanding just that.

It was in this spirit that the assembly closed its first speech to Dunmore by stating that "your Solicitude for the welfare and Prosperity of this Colony, cannot fail of securing to your Lordship the Esteem and Affection of a grateful People." The subtext was plain: the "affection" of the people was contingent upon the "welfare and Prosperity" of the colony; far from being spontaneous, consent was something that Dunmore would have to "secure." Not one to read between the lines, the new governor took the messages at face value. "Nothing of a public nature has occurred within the little time I have been arrived," he told Hillsborough, "except the addresses of congratulations on my arrival, which being full of sentiments of Loyalty and affection to His Majty’s person and Governt, I have thought proper to send copies of

37 Journal of the Legislative Council of the Colony of New-York. Began the 8th Day of December; 1743; and Ended the 3d of April, 1775 (Albany, 1861), 1758.
them, imagining they might be acceptable." Dunmore failed to see how calculating and instrumental these avowals of "Loyalty and affection" were. 38

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British Americans were constantly defying or twisting the royal will in self-serving ways in pursuit of their own best interests, and more often than not they did so with impunity. This created all sorts of embarrassing situations for royal officials, whose authority was limited not only by the dominance of the assemblies but also by an inability to inspire awe in subjects at all levels of the imperial social structure. As one anonymous New Yorker declared around this time, "the power of the crown is no longer dreaded by the subject." 39 One wonders if it ever truly was.

Dunmore's education in royal futility began soon after his assumption of office. The issue at hand involved executive compensation. In addition to their annual salaries, colonial governors collected a variety of fees and perquisites in the course of their duties. Anyone with a document that required the seal of the colony—a land patent, say, or a marriage license—had to pay the governor to have it authorized, and funds like these made up a substantial portion of every executive's income. 40 Before embarking for America, Dunmore received a letter from Lord Hillsborough stating that it was "His Majty's pleasure, that a moiety of the perquisites and Emoluments of

38 Dunmore to Hillsborough, 12 November 1770, Documents Relative, Vol. 8, 252.
the Governt of New York be accounted for and paid to your Lordp from the date of your Commission to the time of your arrival." This meant that Dunmore was entitled to half of what Lieutenant Governor Colden had made in office between January 2 and October 19. Hillsborough maintained that King William had established this policy by declaration in 1698. Evidently, men in Dunmore’s position had previously had a claim to all of the executive income that postdated their appointments, not merely half. Though its initial intent was to improve compensation for interim governors, the policy failed to elicit any gratitude from Colden. When presented with an extract of Hillsborough’s letter and a copy of King William’s declaration, the lieutenant governor was unmoved. Standing firm in defiance of “His Majty’s pleasure,” as Hillsborough had put it, Colden positively refused to give the governor anything at all.

Dunmore faced an adversary in Colden who was his superior in age, experience, and intellect. Born the son of a Presbyterian minister in Scotland, Colden could look back with pride on a life full of achievements. Now eighty-two, he’d been an important player in New York politics since the 1720s. Dunmore, an imperious forty, must have seemed to him an insufferable novice. After serving as a top advisor to Governor George Clinton in the 1740s, he went on to become lieutenant governor. During the 1760s, he served as acting governor on three separate occasions. Nor were

42 Dunmore estimated this sum to be about £5000, which seems high, although the amount in question was undoubtedly significant: Percy Burdelle Caley, "Dunmore: Colonial Governor of New York and Virginia, 1770-1782" (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Pittsburgh, 1939), 75.
43 Hillsborough to Dunmore, 16 July 1770, Documents Relative, Vol. 8, 223. See also “Lord Dunmore’s Petition to Governor Tryon….” [1771?], LPCC, Vol. 7, 174-75.
his accomplishments limited to politics. He was an internationally known astronomer and botanist, corresponding regularly with continental luminaries such as Carolus Linnaeus and Peter Kalm. He had a disputatious temperament to go along with his polymathic intellect. Thomas Gage observed that Colden did “not dislike a little Controversy, which he has been engaged in for the greatest part of his life.” With fifty years in New York politics, it could hardly have been otherwise.

In his dispute with Dunmore, Colden had history on his side, and he knew it. When Governor William Cosby arrived in New York in 1732, he made the same demand on his predecessor, Rip Van Dam, that Dunmore was making now. When Van Dam refused, Cosby initiated legal proceedings. Realizing that no provincial jury would find in his favor, the governor attempted to empower the New York Supreme Court to hear the case as a Court of Exchequer, but Chief Justice Lewis Morris publicly opposed this step. After removing Morris and promoting a reliable replacement, Cosby found that popular opinion wouldn’t abide his arbitrary pursuit of the case. Well before Dunmore’s time, Colden himself wrote a detailed account of these events, in which he explained that Cosby and his pet justices ultimately dropped the matter in the belief that “it might be dangerous to their persons to proceed.” Colonists, Colden argued, were bound to reject the authority of any administration that

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44 On Colden, see Alice Mapelsden Keys, Cadwallader Colden: A Representative Eighteenth Century Official (New York, 1906); Alfred R. Hoermann, Cadwallader Colden: A Figure of the American Enlightenment (Westport, Conn., 2002); Bonomi, Factious People, 152-54 (Gage is quoted on 154).
45 It was during the resulting legal battle that the printer John Peter Zenger, whose New York Journal served as the organ of the opposition to Cosby, was tried for sedition and, in a landmark decision in the history of free speech, acquitted: Jill Lepore, New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan (New York, 2005), 70-78.
they suspected of using its judicial power for its own benefit. Since 1732, no one in Dunmore’s position had invoked King William’s declaration. This was key, for as Colden told Hillsborough, in the colonies “Usage and Custom” were considered “the Rule.” As the leading living authority on the Van Dam affair, and executive compensation in New York generally, Colden understood better than anyone how difficult it would be for Dunmore to collect on the promise of the king.

Their struggle, like Cosby’s and Van Dam’s, was nevertheless destined for the courts. Dunmore hired attorney William Smith Jr., a Livingston-allied councilman with a visceral hatred for Colden. From the standpoint of prerogative, the entire question came down to the king’s right to dispose of imperial revenue as he wished. So on Smith’s advice, Dunmore filed a bill of equity in the king’s name in the Court of Chancery. The immediate object of the motion was to force Colden to submit a precise account of everything he had earned during the transitional period, including outstanding debts, as well as any assets that he had acquired with the income. Never mind that Dunmore was himself the sole judge in Chancery and that he had a financial stake in the decision—it was a question of royal sovereignty. Even Cosby hadn’t been so bold or high-handed. Dunmore’s “ordering a suit which is solely for his


47 Colden to Hillsborough, 10 November 1770, Colden Letter Books, Vol. 2, 233. If an executive who had already been sworn into office had to leave the colony, Colden later acknowledged, his replacement retained only half of what he earned before his superior’s return. But, he argued, this was not the case when someone rose to the office by virtue of a governor’s death: Colden to Samuel Johnson, 12 November 1770, Colden Letter Books, Vol. 2, 237.


49 Dunmore to Hillsborough, 5 December 1770, Documents Relative, Vol. 8, 256.
advantage," Colden wrote, "to be brought for Judgment, before himself, is such an instance of Injustice and Oppression, as must shock and alarm every honest Man."

Like Van Dam before him, Colden wanted the case to be decided by a jury in a common law court, where the governor, not the king, would be the plaintiff. He saw Dunmore's demand as "an act of mere Power," and he was convinced a provincial jury would agree.

Both sides appealed to Whitehall before the Chancery proceedings began. Sensing the weakness of his position, Dunmore demanded intervention. "It is incumbent on Your Lordship," he told Hillsborough, "not only to insist" that Colden comply with the order, but also to require "in the name of his Majesty" that he account for what he earned as acting governor and how he spent it. Strong words, to be sure, but Dunmore's cause was the monarchy's cause at this stage, and the dignity of the crown was at stake. Hoping to avoid unnecessary stress and legal fees, Colden asked the king (through Hillsborough) to drop the Chancery bill altogether. If the conflict of interest in the case wasn't persuasive enough, he humbly suggested that his long career in public service be considered. Until recently, Colden had been a proponent of prerogative in New York. It was in that role that he'd been targeted by mobs during the Stamp Act crisis, which saw the destruction of his Manhattan home. Colden believed that this entitled him to stay on as chief executive after Henry Moore's death. He resented Dunmore's appointment but had come to accept it. Surely, he pled, the

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51 Dunmore to Hillsborough, 5 December 1770, Documents Relative, Vol. 8, 256.
king could not now mean to deprive him of what little compensation his brief term in office had afforded.  

Much like the welcome addresses that greeted Dunmore upon his arrival in New York, there were implicit threats as well as prostrate supplications in Colden's letters to the ministry. No doubt thinking back to the power of popular opinion in the Van Dam affair, he urged Hillsborough to consider the authoritarian impression that Dunmore's pursuit of the case in Chancery would make on the minds of the people. He was asking that the bill be dropped not only "in justice to myself, but likewise to remove the prejudices which the People otherwise may entertain of his Majesty's Ministers and which may be prejudicial to his Majesty's Service." Here, again, the prospect of popular disfavor is couched in an avowal of regard for the crown. In the end, the petition never reached the king and did nothing to soften the ministry's position. In London, Hillsborough told one of Colden's lawyers that he viewed the disputed sum as Dunmore's "Property," and he refused to consider dropping the equity bill, calling it "a matter of Right, in which he could with no propriety interpose." Colden was not discouraged. He believed that Hillsborough's defense of Dunmore served only to further reduce the stature of the king in the eyes of the people.  

Colden chose not to frame his refusal to comply with Dunmore's demand as a denial of the king's rights, but the limits of royal authority were never far from his

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54 Colden to Hillsborough, 6 December 1770, Documents Relative, Vol. 8, 257-58.
mind. "In the British Constitution," he reminded his lawyer in the fall of 1770, "the King cannot at his Pleasure dispose of the Property of any of his Subjects."57 This was beyond dispute, but he had reportedly gone further at his first meeting with Dunmore, declaring that "the Favor of the Crown was nothing to him now." Recognizing this as a reference to Colden's advanced age, Dunmore told him to consider yielding "for the Sake of your Children," but he remained intransigent. Colden was no fool. He understood, as William Smith Jr. suspected, that if he didn't care about "the frowns of the Crown there could be no method of forcing the Money he has receiv'd out of his Hands."58

The first Chancery hearing was held in Dunmore's house at Fort George on January 10, 1771. "A good many Gen[tle]m[en] attended," Colden wrote, "and many more would have gone" if the court had been held in City Hall, where he felt it belonged. True to form, Dunmore made everyone wait for almost an hour before getting started.59 Eventually, both sides aired their arguments, and Dunmore adjourned the court without rendering a decision. Weeks passed. The governor had controlled nearly every aspect of the trial and yet never seems to have operated from a position of strength. Bowing to popular pressure, he eventually opted to consult the four members of the Supreme Court before making a decision. Colden was elated. "The voice of the

People,” he crowed, “is that the Cause is so clear, the Judges must give their opinion in my favour.”

And he was right. One of the key elements in the justices’ decision was the origin of Colden’s salary. While Dunmore was paid out of the imperial tax on tea, it was the assembly that had compensated his predecessors, not the king. In light of this, it was the justices’ unanimous view that, in Colden’s words, “the Crown could have no Right to any part of the Salary granted to me by the Legislature of the Province.”

They also determined that “the Law considers all fees, which includes Perquisites & Emoluments, as Recompence due to the officer for his Labour, and not as a bounty bestowed by the King.” Two of the justices were staunch opponents of the DeLaticeys and, as such, had good reason to despise Colden, but even they supported his position. The ultimate decision nevertheless lay with Dunmore. More than a month after the justices weighed in, he had yet to reconvene the Chancery court. When Colden informed Hillsborough of this, he reintroduced the specter of popular disapproval. The case, he wrote, “must make an impression on the Minds of the People favourable to Government, or very much other wise, especially in the Course Lord Dunmore has now put it.”

Popular opinion was behind Colden. The broad outlines of the case—noble placeman comes to town demanding property from a long-tenured local leader—and

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62 Colden to Arthur Mairs, 8 May 1771, and David Colden to [?], 8 June [1771], both in Colden Letter Books, Vol. 2, 323, 324.
63 They also agreed with the defense that even if King William’s declaration applied, it reserved only half the salary and no part of the perquisites and emoluments to the crown: Colden to Hillsborough, 15 June 1771, Colden Letter Books, Vol. 2, 326-27.
his desire for a trial by jury both suggest this. But Colden was not without critics. He made all sorts of enemies over the years, most recently through his alliance with the DeLanceys. William Livingston published a satire of the salary dispute featuring Colden as a greedy tenant farmer who laments having to surrender half of his harvest to his landlord. "Why can't I, for the first Time in my Life," the farmer asks himself, "do that which is right, and pay the Gentleman his Money without any Litigation? I know very well that there is such a Clause in the Lease; and that I took the Farm upon that express Condition."64 To Livingston and those who resented the recent dominance of the DeLanceys, the answer was simple: Colden was a hopeless moneygrubber. All his life, the farmer had followed his "old Practice of making Money, Money, my sole and only Friend." The choice to place a feudal analogy at the heart of the satire is revealing, for it suggests that Livingston was writing for an audience that identified with established authority; after all, more radical readers might all too easily have found themselves sympathizing with the farmer. Though printed in multiple editions, it was a relatively obscure pamphlet, most likely for a small audience.65

The king never got personally involved in matters like the dispute between Dunmore and Colden. The risk of embarrassment heavily outweighed the potential reward. The image of the crown was foremost in Hillsborough's mind when he asked Colden's lawyer in London to consider settling the case out of court. Utterly assured of his eventual success, Colden refused.66 Compelling the disgorgement of profits has

64 [William Livingston], A Soliloquy...([Philadelphia], 1770), 10.
65 [Livingston], Soliloquy, 6, 4-5. For other editions, see Early American Imprints, Ser. 1, nos. 11702, 11703.
always been a legal challenge. As Livingston’s farmer observes, “Possession is eleven Points of the Law.”67 After weeks of inaction, a frustrated Dunmore decided to transmit all of the papers pertaining to the case to Whitehall for the ministry’s lawyers to review. They advised him through Lord Dartmouth, Hillsborough’s successor as Secretary of State, to pursue the cause in his own name rather than the king’s. It is hard to imagine a more deflating response. Dunmore resolved to carry on at his own expense but abandoned the effort once the tide of colonial resistance swept other concerns to the fore. Colden died in September 1776 never having surrendered a cent.68

Some New Yorkers disapproved of Dunmore well before his ineffectual pursuit of the moiety had a chance to tarnish his image. Their disdain was at least partly rooted in a sense of their own social superiority. Dunmore was still new in town when he attended the feast of the Sons of St. Andrew in late November 1770. The following day, John Bradstreet told William Smith that the governor’s behavior had “ashamed” the entire gathering. Evidently, he had gotten drunk and become “noisy and clamorous in giving” what Bradstreet called “the vilest baudy” toasts. Even John Reid, a confidante of Dunmore’s, was reportedly “sunk into silent Astonishment” by the scene. Bradstreet came away thinking the earl “a damned Fool” and “a silly extravagant Buck,” who would surely “be lampooned and despised.” This story didn’t much surprise Smith. His allegiance to the Livingstons compelled him to oppose

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67 [Livingston], Soliloquy, 3.
Colden in the salary dispute, but Dunmore had never impressed him as a person of quality. Smith observed early on that his Lordship’s “Education and Abilities are equally beneath his Birth,” and familiarity did nothing to alter this view. “This poor Creature exposes himself daily,” he complained later. “How can the Dignity of Government be maintained,” he asked himself, “by so helpless a Mortal, utterly ignorant of the Nature of Business of all Kinds.” Still later, he wondered if there had ever been “such a Blockhead.” Smith and others drew from a deep well of contempt when describing their noble leader.⁶⁹

With the help of Edward Foy, his personal secretary, Dunmore nevertheless managed to steer clear of catastrophe in the course of his official duties. Before proroguing the assembly on March 4, 1771, he signed thirty-seven bills into law. Some were of great consequence. There was a controversial act committing £2,000 for the provision of the king’s troops then stationed in Manhattan, an act to emit £100,000 in loans (the interest from which was to pay down the colony’s debts), and another act to discourage the illegal occupation of patented lands. Most were more local in orientation: an act “to prevent the taking and destroying of Salmon in Hudson’s River”; an act extending an existing law “for the better regulation of the Public Inns and Taverns” in Ulster and Orange counties; an act restricting the right to discharge guns, pistols, squibs, and other fireworks at particular times and places; an act “to

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encourage the taking and destroying of Wild Cats” in Suffolk County; and an act for
the relief of “an Insolvent Debtor” named Elizabeth Seabury. 70

Such was the work of provincial government, but in New York even the most
mundane piece of business could be fraught with party implications. On April 15,
1771, the council set about filling the position of Potash Inspector. This office was
charged with controlling the quality of the colony’s potassium carbonate, a chemical
used in the production of soap, glass, medicine, and various other manufactures.
Dunmore recommended a one-armed man named John Abeel for the job, but the
DeLancey contingent in council managed to elect someone called Montaigne. It was
an embarrassing defeat for the governor, one that Smith recorded in his diary with
amazement: “Montaigne [sic] was appointed agt. Abeel tho’ he was recommended by
the Earl – How daring they! – How weak the Govr.!” Smith considered Montaigne,
who owned a public house “in the Fields where the DeLancey Party meet,” “a low
Fellow, ignorant and a Tool.” 71 But at this point in its history, New York belonged to
the DeLanceys, and it hardly mattered that the new Potash Inspector knew more about
whiskey than potassium carbonate. The popular party’s ability to reward followers
with this kind of post both reflected and reinforced its influence, which in New York
far surpassed even the king’s.

Brazen in the assertion of their dominance, the DeLanceys had no qualms
about crossing the king. In 1770, James DeLancey and his allies refused to admit
Robert R. Livingston to his seat in the assembly on the grounds that he was also a

70 Journal of the Legislative Council of the Colony of New-York, 1788-90.
71 Smith, Historical Memoirs, entry for 15 April 1771, 102-03.
member of the Supreme Court. Though repeatedly chosen to represent Livingston Manor, the judge had already been turned away from the house twice in recent years. Colden had even assented to a law prohibiting justices from serving in the assembly. Despite principled arguments about the need to separate the legislative and judicial branches of government, no one doubted the primacy of partisanship in the affair, including the ministry in London. The king opposed Livingston’s exclusion and, in January 1770, repealed the law mandating it. And yet, royal reproof did nothing to faze the DeLanceys. In his loyalty to the Livingstons, Smith thought Dunmore should threaten to dissolve the assembly if the judge wasn’t seated. To resolve the situation, he wrote, “His Lordship has only to declare that he will suffer no Party to invade the Prerogatives of the Crown.” If he did not make such a stand, Smith reasoned, he would be deemed a tool of the DeLanceys, for “what can account for a Desertion of the Interest of the Crown but the bias of Party.”

Dunmore knew better. Hoping to avoid inflaming either side, he vacillated and stalled. Eventually, he took Livingston’s part and pled his case to the speaker of the house, but to no avail. Already impatient, the judge came to suspect the governor of duplicity. “The Assembly are determined to resist me again,” Livingston told his wife in January 1771, “owing I am sure to hints from the Governor that he thinks it right at the same Time that to me he says he will represent the whole matter home.”

Dunmore was in no position to take a hard line. Even if he had made good on a threat

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72 Smith, Historical Memoirs, entries for 18 December to 23 December 1770, 93-97 (quotations on 97).
73 Robert R. Livingston to Robert Livingston (father), 7 January 1771; Robert R. Livingston to Margaret Beekman Livingston (wife), 11 January 1771 (quotation); Robert R. Livingston to Robert Livingston, 11 January 1771, all in Robert R. Livingston Papers, New-York Historical Society (microfilm).
to dissolve the assembly, the DeLanceys were unlikely to lose any ground in the new elections. They might even have increased their majority by spinning the dissolution as an arbitrary act of executive power. As it happened, Livingston remained on the outside looking in. Though the controversy persisted well into 1774, he never did take the seat that he and the king believed to be rightfully his. 74

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The exclusion of Judge Livingston from the assembly showed that, committed though he was to overcoming his Jacobite heritage, Dunmore was himself no monument to royal prerogative. All governors had to juggle local, provincial, and imperial interests in the course of their duties, and this required a certain amount of flexibility. The doctrinaire enforcement of prerogative simply wasn’t feasible in the colonies. Governors could not, for instance, veto every assembly bill that contravened the king’s commands, whatever their formal powers. By signing and defending acts that they knew the ministry would disallow, they might incur a manageable amount of royal disfavor while generating much-needed goodwill closer to home. Dunmore would come to practice this brand of politics before long, but not all of his deviations from the royal script were the result of provincial pressure. He was also prone to defy the king when imperial policy stood in the way of his chief personal ambition—the establishment of an American seat for his family.

He was in the midst of making arrangements to achieve this goal when, in February 1771, unexpected news arrived from London. According to several New England newspapers, he had been chosen to replace the recently deceased Lord

Botetourt as governor of Virginia.\textsuperscript{75} Evidently, Lord Gower had not been idle in his brother-in-law’s interest. On hearing the news, William Johnson congratulated Dunmore on this “promotion to the first American Government,” which he considered a far “more distinguish[ing] Mark of his Majesty’s favor” than New York.\textsuperscript{76} Virginia was indeed a higher paying, more prestigious post. Yet Dunmore wanted no part of it. Desperate to remain in New York, he composed a private letter to Hillsborough explaining his desire to stay. While not “the most considerable” colony in the Empire, he admitted, New York did “powerfully influence the Political conduct of the whole Continent.” Besides, he felt he was getting along well with the people, and men “of both parties” had assured him that he’d be able “to maintain a perfect good agreement between them.” On top of all this, he feared Virginia’s climate would compromise his health.\textsuperscript{77} Dunmore did not confine these feelings to the pages of private correspondence. In February, he told Hugh Wallace that he had no intention of going to Virginia, preferring “Health and good Society to a greater salary.”\textsuperscript{78} Printer James Rivington knew enough of the situation to tell Johnson that the “Aguish Climate” of Virginia “would ill suit” the governor’s “Convivial Disposition.” As a consequence, Rivington wrote, Dunmore was “determined to try his weight at home for permission to Keep this Government.”\textsuperscript{79}


\textsuperscript{76} Johnson to Dunmore, 16 March 1771, \textit{PWJ}, Vol. 8, 28-30.

\textsuperscript{77} Dunmore to Hillsborough, private, 9 March 1771, DC, 60, or Dunmore Family Papers, Swem Library, Box 3, fol. 41.

\textsuperscript{78} Hugh Wallace to William Johnson, 17 February 1771, \textit{PWJ}, Vol. 7, 1145.

And so he would, but not for these reasons alone. When he first learned of the transfer, he had been preparing a large grant of land for himself in what is now the state of Vermont. Composed of 51,000 acres along the banks of Otter Creek near Lake Champlain, it held out the promise of a beautiful future. Unfortunately, it was also illegal. Both the size and location of the grant violated Dunmore’s instructions. From an imperial perspective, large landholdings discouraged settlement and reduced agricultural produce and tax revenue.\(^{80}\) Beginning in 1698, the ministry therefore prohibited all governors of New York from granting more than one thousand acres of land to any single individual.\(^{81}\) This instruction was easily circumvented, however, and such grants persisted up to the Revolution.\(^{82}\) Dunmore’s approach to the Otter Creek grant was typical. As he later explained, he purchased “the Grants of fifty real Grantees,” each of whom had a right to one thousand acres, at the nominal price of five shillings apiece. To this, he added the acreage that he was himself entitled to under the law. Technically speaking, then, no single individual had been granted more than one thousand acres in the deal. In light of this, Dunmore argued that the grant had been “a fair open and strictly legal acquisition, the practice of every Governor I dare say, and was allowed, I know, to every one of His Majesty’s Subjects without distinction.”\(^{83}\)

Although such schemes obviously ran counter to the spirit of the king’s instructions, Dunmore was technically correct.

\(^{80}\) Bonomi, Factious People, Chapter 6.
\(^{81}\) Labaree, ed., Royal Instructions, Vol. 2, 578.
\(^{82}\) See Countryman, People in Revolution, 81; Matt Bushnell Jones, Vermont in the Making, 1750-1777 (Cambridge, Mass., 1939), 93.
\(^{83}\) Dunmore to Dartmouth, 24 December 1774, DC, 420-57, or C.O. 5/135/7-39. The grant is described in Caley, “Dunmore,” 35-37. This kind of scheme was standard practice. John Jay invited the governor to take part in something similar in June 1771, though the grant never materialized: Petition of “John
But the more difficult question of the grant's location remained. Jurisdiction over the region west of the Connecticut River had long been contested by New York and New Hampshire. In 1764, the king and Privy Council decided the dispute in New York's favor, but by that time New Hampshire had issued patents amounting to nearly three million acres in the area, a small portion of which had already been occupied and improved under its authority. The king intended to honor these efforts. In order to prevent the eviction of actual settlers with New Hampshire titles, he put a moratorium on all Vermont grants in 1770, pending the identification of truly unsettled areas.84 But Dunmore was eager to grant these lands. He needed them for the hundreds of Seven Years War veterans who were clamoring for the grants promised in the royal Proclamation of 1763. Privately, he also acknowledged a personal interest in the matter. In a draft of a letter to Lord Gower, he wrote:

There is one more reason that I shall mention to your Lordship, and you will perhaps think that it weighs more than all the others with me, and I will own to your Lordship it does weigh and that not a little. It is this—if I am permitted to grant these lands, I hope I shall be able to provide something for my younger Children. If I am not, I doubt I shall rather be a looser [sic] than a Gainer in point of fortune by coming to New York.85

In truth, Dunmore had already decided to proceed without the permission of the king.

In March 1771, the same month he drafted the letter to Gower, he presented a petition...
for the land in council on behalf of himself and his fifty partners. When Smith argued that it would be illegal to comply with the request, the governor reportedly "seemed to be amused—and looked like a Fool." But just as Smith expected, Dunmore eventually "put the Seal to the Patent," an act that only the king himself could undo.86

Part of what made a transgression of this kind possible was the irregularity of correspondence between London and the colonies. Dunmore had been governor of New York for nearly six months before he received a single personalized dispatch from his superiors at Whitehall. When a letter finally did arrive in March, it confirmed his transfer to Virginia.87 A second dispatch containing his new commission and instructions arrived in June and informed him of "the King's Pleasure that" he waste "no time in repairing to your Government in Virginia."88 Rather than obey this directive, Dunmore offered up a new solution. He proposed giving the Virginia job to William Tryon, who'd been tapped to replace him in New York. He pledged not to leave, in any event, until he received a response to his initial letter on the matter, dated March 9.89 So much for not wasting time. Dunmore's receipt of a third letter from Hillsborough in early July merely prompted a restatement of his preference for New York. This time he portrayed himself as a frustrated family man. He had been separated from his wife and children for nearly a year already, and he feared that the Virginia climate would "oblige" him to live without them still longer. This would

86 Smith, Historical Memoirs, entry for 20 March 1771, 102. Dunmore signed a number of other grants in the restricted area as well: Jones, Vermont in the Making. Appendix K. Colden had broken the instruction before Dunmore, as did Tryon after: Delegates of the New Hampshire Convention to Continental Congress, PCC, Roll 47, Vol. 1.
87 Hillsborough to Dunmore, 11 December 1770, Documents Relative, Vol. 8, 260.
89 Dunmore to Hillsborough, 4 June 1771, private, DC, 64-65, or C.O. 5/154/11-12.
make his “residence in that Country, where there is little or no society, so tiresome that I cannot be certain I should be able to stay there any time.”

William Tryon arrived in Manhattan without warning on July 8. He had impressed the king while governor of North Carolina by putting down the Regulator movement in the colony’s backcountry. His reception in New York was nonetheless unenthusiastic. Dunmore was in Jersey scouting lands when he arrived but returned soon enough to escort the newcomer to Fort George. Here, one man reported seeing “Ld Dunmore walking the Room and reading a Newspaper,” while Tryon read another and his wife sat “neglected in a Couch.” Though he’d recently lobbied for the Virginia job himself, Tryon now flatly refused Dunmore’s offer of an exchange. He too expressed health concerns about Williamsburg. Frustrated, Dunmore suggested that they await the arrival of the next packet boat before reading Tryon’s commission, but this request was denied as well. Finally, Dunmore gave in. Tryon was sworn into office on July 9.

The whole awkward ordeal reached an inglorious climax that evening. At the dinner following the day’s ceremonies, Dunmore got drunk. Of the fireworks that followed, Smith wrote:

My Lord took too Cheerful a Glass and forced it upon his Company -- I escaped by a Cold for which he excused me -- but the Company did not part without Blows -- His L[or]d[ship]. struck [Councilman Charles

90 Dunmore to Hillsborough, 2 July, 1771, private, DC, 69, or C.O. 5/154/20.
91 Smith, Historical Memoirs, entry for 8 July 1771, 105. The newspaper account of the arrival leaves a more dignified impression than Smith’s: “NEW-YORK, July 15.” The New-York Gazette; and the Weekly Mercury, 15 July 1771, [3].
92 Smith, Historical Memoirs, entry for 8 July 1771, 105.
93 Tryon to [Hillsborough?], private, 31 August 1771, in Correspondence of William Tryon, Vol. 2, 831-32.
94 Smith, Historical Memoirs, entry for 8 July 1771, 106.
Ward] Apthorpe and Colo. [Edmund] Fanning[,] the New Govrs. Sec[re]t[ar]y -- [He also] called Tryon a Coward who had never seen Flanders, and ran about in the Night assaulting one and another in spite of Capt Gordon who was sober, and his Servants who followed out of Sight, for Fear of Accidents -- under Dr Mallet's Window, he was heard to say 'Damn Virginia - Did I ever seek it? Why is it forced upon me? I ask'd for New York -- New York I took, and they have robb[e]d me of it without my Consent' -- This was a drunken Solliloquy, but shews exactly the true State of Ld. Dunmore's Mind at that Moment. 95

If Smith's diary is to be credited, the failings of the British aristocracy never had a more reliable icon than Lord Dunmore. Gathered second and third hand, this account is no doubt fraught with embellishments, but it shouldn't be dismissed entirely. Dunmore had a reputation for drunken mischief, even violence. A Virginia burgess returned from a visit to Manhattan with the following anecdote: "His Lordship, with a set of his Drunken companions, sallied about midnight from his Palace, and attacked Chief Justice Horsmanden's coach & horses. The coach was destroyed & the poor horses lost their tails." This was evidently what Horsmanden got for the prideful presumption of owning an extravagant six-horse coach. 96 Yet Smith's description of the evening of July 9 suggests more than Dunmore's capacity for open-air excess. Whether they were actually protecting their master, as Smith believed, the slaves lurking in the shadows of this story symbolize the elusive but undeniable part that people at the bottom of the imperial social structure played in political life. Faint as is

95 Smith, Historical Memoirs, entry for 9 July 1771, 106. All bracketed insertions are mine. Fanning is identified in Paul David Nelson, William Tryon and the Course of Empire (Chapel Hill, 1990), 91.
96 Richard Bland to Thomas Adams, 1 August 1771, The William and Mary Quarterly, 1st Ser., 5 (1897): 149-56, 156 (quotations). Bland continued, "The next day the Chief Justice applied to Government for redress, and a proclamation issued by advice of the Council, offering a reward of £200 for a discovery of the Principal in this violent act. We have not heard whether the Governor demanded the Reward." This episode is mentioned without reference to Dunmore's possible involvement in Lepore, New York Burning, 223.
it is here, the role of such individuals became far clearer with the onset of the Revolution.

At some point before the heavy drinking began on July 9, Dunmore took a moment to assure the ministry that he was preparing “with all diligence” to leave for Virginia. 97 It wasn’t true. As his alleged behavior later that evening suggests, he hadn’t yet accepted the transfer in his own mind. In fact, Dunmore reportedly continued to indulge “the delusive hope of being reinstated in his favorite Government” more than a week after Tryon was sworn in. 98 Just as he had put off his voyage to New York the year before, he now found reason to delay his trip to Williamsburg. He dispatched a shipment of his belongings to Virginia, including his numerous dogs, but instead of heading south himself, he decided to go ahead with a previously planned tour of his new property around Lake Champlain. 99 Secretly hoping to be greeted with news of his reinstatement upon his return, he sailed up the Hudson River in late July. Nothing is known of the tour itself, but Dunmore came away confident enough in his claim to include the lands, years later, among his losses in the American Revolution. 100 On his way back from Vermont, he visited William Johnson and wrote to thank him in late August for his hospitality. The note mentioned

97 Dunmore to Hillsborough, 9 July 1771, Documents Relative, Vol. 8, 278.
99 Initially planned in April, the tour was supposed to have taken place in June: Caley, “Dunmore,” 89. In expectation of the governor’s arrival, Schenectady militiamen had been “Rubing up our old rusty Guns and getting our Regimentals ready”: Daniel Campbell to William Johnson, 8 June 1771, PWJ, Vol. 8, 138. For notice of Dunmore’s dogs, see Landon Carter, The Diary of Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752-1778, Vol. 2, Jack P. Greene, ed. (Charlottesville, Va., 1965), entry for 21 August 1771, 618.
100 Dunmore to Commissioners on Losses of American Loyalists, 25 February 1784, DC, 815-23, or A.O. 13/28, fol. D. For the purposes of this claim, he valued the land at £11,475. In a summary of his wartime losses later that year, he noted that these lands, “Now claimed by Vermonters,” were “Confiscated by law passed 22 October 1779”: Dunmore’s testimony, sworn 9 July 1784, DC, 832, or A.O. 12/54/59-62.
two men, John and Abraham, who had served as Dunmore's guides from Johnson Hall to Albany. He was "much obliged" to Johnson "for their services," which he described as "perfectly sober, faithfull, and indefatigable."\(^{101}\) Almost certainly either Indians or black slaves, John and Abraham show, once again, how integrated the lives of the political elite were and how essential subalterns were to them. With the help of these men, and no doubt many others like them, the journey was a success.

When Dunmore returned to Manhattan, however, he discovered that nothing had changed. He was to be governor of Virginia, and that was that.

The new assignment was something of a public relations challenge for Dunmore. His predecessor, Lord Botetourt, had been extremely popular, as his elaborate, publicly-funded funeral made plain.\(^{102}\) Some doubted whether they would ever see his equal in the Governor's Palace. All indications were that Dunmore would be a poor substitute. According to one Norfolk merchant, he was widely rumored to be "a gamster a whoremaster and a Drunkard." That he spent months tarrying in Manhattan and touring lands before deigning to assume his post seemed to confirm the worst. During the seven months that separated the news of his appointment and his arrival in Williamsburg, the suspicions and resentments only festered.\(^{103}\)

He finally appeared on September 25, 1771. His route had taken him from Manhattan through the Jerseys to Philadelphia, where he spent two days and three

\(^{101}\) Dunmore to William Johnson, 24 August 1771, PWJ, Vol. 8, 234.
\(^{103}\) William Aitchison to Charles Steuart, 17 October 1770, and James Parker to Charles Steuart, 19 April 1771, both in Charles Steuart Papers, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland (microfilm viewed at the John D. Rockefeller Library, Williamsburg, Va.).
nights. From there, he sailed along the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia, and then across Chesapeake Bay to Yorktown. When he reached the capital he was met by several councilmen and accompanied to the Governor’s Palace, where he was immediately sworn into office. That evening, as he dined with local leaders, fireworks filled the night sky. According to the following day’s paper, the display served “as a Testimony of our Joy at his Excellency’s safe Arrival, and in Gratitude to his Majesty for appointing a Nobleman of his Abilities and good Character over us.” The initial misgivings, it seems, had given way, if only for a moment, to the wishful excitement that so often accompanies new beginnings.104

Warm though it was, the reception was not a mandate for executive carte blanche. Dunmore seems to have understood this, if only grudgingly. It was customary in Virginia for incoming executives to dissolve the General Assembly—composed of the governor, council, and House of Burgesses—on their assumption of office and call for new assembly elections. Dunmore opposed this measure on the grounds that the elections were likely to cause as much “riot and disorder here as in England.” But, as he told Hillsborough, the council had advised him that this step “would be a pleasure to the people, who are no doubt fond of the exercise of that power.” Though Hillsborough agreed that there was no real need for a new assembly, he thought Dunmore’s decision to follow custom a wise one. “The unanimous Advice of the Council and the Wishes of the People,” he wrote, “were certainly the best Guides for your Lordship’s Judgement in that case.” Even when privately dismissive of it,

104 “WILLIAMSBURG, September 26,” The Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), 26 September 1771, [2]-[3]. For a similar, though independent, account of the arrival, see “WILLIAMSBURG, Sept. 26,” The New-Hampshire Gazette and Historical Chronicle, 25 October 1771, [2].
imperial leaders recognized public participation as integral to the customs of renewal that set the rhythms of political life in the Empire.105

Things went well for Dunmore early on in part because he aligned himself with provincial elites against the king on key issues, notably the Atlantic slave trade. Dunmore’s instructions forbade him, as they had in New York, from signing any act that raised the tax on slave imports. The existing tax law on this subject was confused, but the British government believed the duty stood at 10 percent and considered anything else to be prohibitive. Shipping concerns in Britain had long ago convinced them not to allow interference with the slave trade. Less labor in Virginia meant higher tobacco prices and lower revenues for the crown. Merchants and smallholders supported this policy because it increased trade volume and made labor more accessible, but elite planters were strongly opposed. Eager to diversify Virginia’s economy, the gentry believed that a free-flowing traffic in slaves would deepen its dependence on volatile tobacco markets. Besides, Virginia was already home to a large self-sustaining slave population. Unfettered imports would dilute the value of existing holdings and potentially compromise security. With these considerations in mind, the General Assembly tried repeatedly to raise the tax on slave imports, most recently in 1769. That year, Governor Botetourt signed one such bill in contravention of his instructions, only to learn of the king’s disallowance of it a few months later. When Botetourt died, the ministry issued a special new instruction to Lieutenant

105 Dunmore to Hillsborough, 1 November 1771, DC, 80, or C.O. 5/1349/195-6; Hillsborough to Dunmore, 11 January 1772, DC, 92, or C.O. 5/1350/1-2.
Governor William Nelson reiterating the ban on any law that made it more expensive to bring slaves into the colony.¹⁰⁶

Undaunted, the General Assembly soon tried again, passing another tariff in March 1772. In an appeal to the king, the burgesses couched their case in moral terms, referring to the “great Inhumanity” of the Atlantic slave trade. This reflected a broader trend in the political culture. Slavery had taken on new currency with the crisis over colonial rights. People on both sides sought the high ground, denouncing the slave trade, in particular, in an effort to besmirch the opposition and enhance their own claims to liberty. The Virginia gentry did have genuine concerns about the evils of the slave trade, but these were secondary to the desire for economic independence and internal security.¹⁰⁷ It is significant in this regard that the 1772 tax applied to slaves brought into Virginia from neighboring colonies and the Caribbean as well as those exposed to the horrors of the Middle Passage. At the close of their letter to the king, the burgesses argued that the trade would eventually “endanger the very Existance of

¹⁰⁶ Benjamin J. Hillman, ed., Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia, Vol. 6 (Richmond, 1966), 393-95 (hereafter Executive Journals); John Pendleton Kennedy, ed., Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1770-1772 (Richmond, 1906), 263 (hereafter JHB, 1770-1772). In his work, which informs much of this paragraph, Bruce A. Ragsdale identifies diversification as the primary motivation for supporting a tariff: A Planter’s Republic: The Search for Economic Independence in Revolutionary Virginia (Madison, 1996), 111-36. For colonial opposition to a tariff (from merchants and smallholders), see Woody Holton, Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia (Chapel Hill, 1999), 66-73.

¹⁰⁷ White Virginians had good reason to feel uneasy. From 1770 to 1775, the colony’s slave population grew at an annual rate of 2.3%, increasing from roughly 180,500 to 205,000. In tidewater counties, slaves typically comprised between 50% and 59% of the total population in this period. Since mid-century, these numbers were propelled mainly by natural increase rather than slave importation, but due to improvement in the tobacco market, 1770 and 1771 had seen the highest levels of slave importation in Virginia since 1764. Politicians hoped a new tax would discourage the destabilizing influence of outsider slaves, whether they hailed from Maryland, Jamaica, or Senegambia. On Virginia’s population, see Philip D. Morgan, Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry (Chapel Hill, 1998), 61, 81, 99; Michael A. McDonnell, The Politics of War: Race, Class, and Conflict in Revolutionary Virginia (Chapel Hill, 2006), 25. On the rise in slave imports, see Ragsdale, Planter’s Republic, 132.
your Majesty’s American Dominions,” presumably by encouraging economic stagnation and infusing volatile Africans and West Indians into the slave population.108

At this point, Dunmore was willing to vex his superiors as long as it meant ingratiating himself to leading Virginians. Despite the threat of the king’s “highest displeasure,” he signed the new slave tax and sent it to Whitehall in May 1772 for approval. Dunmore’s support of the law was more than a stunt to curry favor in the tidewater. Most Scots in the Chesapeake were tobacco merchants who planned to return home after making money or contacts in America, but Dunmore was different.109 He hoped to establish a permanent seat for his family in the colonies, something that led him to identify with the provincial elite early on. He’d owned slaves while governor of New York, as the “servants” in William Smith’s account of the evening of July 9 indicate, but he embraced the institution with new vigor in Virginia.110 About a year after signing the slave import duty, he purchased a large amount of clothing for field slaves—one hundred pairs of shoes and “Coarse” stockings, fifty hats—along with livery for the black footmen who helped run the

110 Smith, Historical Memoirs, entry for 9 July 1771, 106.

The iniquities of the slave trade played no part in Dunmore’s support for the tax on imports. Defending his deviation from imperial policy, he pointed instead to the military risks of a large slave population. The enslaved were “attached by no tye” to their owners or the colony, he told Hillsborough, and “the people...tremble” at the ease with which an enemy such as Spain could enlist their aid. As far as he could tell, the opportunity for “revenge” was all that stood in the way of a large scale slave rebellion. A wartime uprising of this sort would guarantee defeat for the British, and the slave duty seemed a reasonable way to discourage such a catastrophe over the long term.

Unmoved by this or any other argument in favor of increasing the tariff, Hillsborough informed Dunmore that the Privy Council’s rejection of the 1769 version of the act left little room to doubt that the new law would meet the same fate. Dunmore would nevertheless remain convinced of slaves’ ability to influence the outcome of colonial wars. In less than three years’ time, he would stake his entire American future on it.\footnote{Dunmore to Hillsborough, 1 May 1772, DC, 116, or C.O. 5/1350/46-47. Hillsborough to Dunmore, 1 July 1772, DC, 133-34, or C.O. 5/1350/72-73}

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While it gave governors room to maneuver politically, the weakness of central authority in North America proved even more problematic for Dunmore in
Williamsburg than it had in Manhattan. Virginia did not want for forms of social and political deference. Dunmore’s new home, the Governor’s Palace, was among the grandest structures on the continent. It was part of a constellation of public buildings in Williamsburg, along with the Capitol and Bruton Parish Church, that simultaneously reflected and reinforced the preeminence of the elite and the power of the state. The wealth, discipline, and strength of the British Empire were most impressive in the Palace entry hall, the walls of which featured royal coats of arms and hundreds of the very finest firearms and swords in awe-inspiring array. The meaning of these symbols was far from stable, however, and such carefully constructed spectacles rarely conveyed precisely what their authors intended. By Dunmore’s time, Virginians had come to regard the weapons in the hall as public property subject to popular seizure. Even if colonists had internalized the values expressed in these displays uncritically, which they did not, the vast majority of them lived at great remove from the provincial center. Some rarely even entered churches. Dunmore may not have had an ocean separating him from his subjects, as the king did, but Williamsburg was itself too remote for him to exercise much command over the colony. In the end, lessons in the limits of state power were at least as common in Virginia as were symbols of state supremacy.

One conspicuous example involved the perennial problem of counterfeiting and the futility of state prosecution in cases that should have been open-and-shut. In

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January 1773, Treasurer Robert Carter Nicholas announced the discovery of “several very ingenious” forgeries of the five-pound notes emitted by the colony in 1769 and 1771. It was soon discovered that the marketplace was also flooded with counterfeit coins in the form of half pistoles, pistoles, and Spanish dollars. The fraudulence of most counterfeit currency in colonial America was easily detectable, but these forgeries had been produced in “so Masterly a Manner,” Dunmore wrote, that they were all but indistinguishable from the real thing. Treasurer Nicholas admitted that it had taken a committee of experts, including himself, two full days of close examination to “fix any certain Criteria to distinguish the good from the forged Bills.” As a consequence of their quality, the counterfeits nearly brought commerce to a halt. After discussing the situation at a meeting in Williamsburg, one plantation steward suspended cash payments for his corn. The crisis of confidence soon permeated the entire colony. Betting at a horse race in Leedes Town on the Potomac River reportedly dropped by fifty percent, as Marylanders refused to stake their property against Virginia currency. Well into March, Nicholas was reporting that the circulation of money had all but ceased—and this in the midst of a severe downturn in the tobacco economy.

One of the main functions of government in this period was to facilitate commercial transactions, and the production and emission of money was a critical part

114 *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 28 January 1773, [3]. The bills are described in a Treasury office statement, dated 8 February 1773, in *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), 11 February 1773, [2].
of this process. Undetected counterfeits devalued real money and drove inflation. When discovered, they impeded exchange by undermining confidence in cash. Since the power to coin currency rested exclusively with the imperial state and the institutions it empowered (notably the provincial government), moneymaking also represented the illegal assumption of public authority. Because of this, the Virginia government had long seen counterfeiting as an act of "high treason." The punishment for counterfeiting varied widely throughout the colonies, but Virginia statute directed offenders to the gallows. The five-pound notes that were being copied in 1773 even bore the warning "To Counterfeit is Death." Moneymakers likely had little trouble disregarding this message as they worked. As the rest of 1773 would attest, it often proved an empty threat.\(^{118}\)

Not long after Nicholas's alarming discovery, a former constable from Pittsylvania County named John Short came forward with information. An admitted accomplice of the ring, he located its base of operation in southwestern Virginia and identified about fifteen of the men involved, some of whom, Dunmore later told Lord Dartmouth, were "people of fortune and credit." Counterfeiters came from all walks of life in early modern Europe and North America and operated in increasingly sophisticated organizations. At the very least, the Pittsylvania gang had ties across the

border to North Carolina, where by late February authorities had uncovered "a Nest of
the same pernicious Crew." 119

In response to the crisis, Dunmore called an emergency meeting of the General
Assembly, to convene on March 4. If he didn’t act sooner than this in Pittsylvania,
however, Short warned that the counterfeiters would either escape to neighboring
provinces or "form so considerable a Body in that remote part of the Country, that it
would be extremely dangerous, and difficult to apprehend them." Since time was short
and the council out of session, Dunmore consulted three of Williamsburg’s leading
lawyers—Speaker of the House Peyton Randolph, Attorney General John Randolph,
and Treasurer Nicholas. This group advised him to issue a warrant for the suspects’
apprehension and to provide an armed guard in order to execute it. It was mid-
February, about two o’clock in the afternoon, when over thirty government agents
approached the counterfeiters’ shop. The doors flung open to reveal an engraver, a
printer, a paper maker, and a coiner, all busy at their work. The government force
seized the five men, their equipment, and a large quantity of finished product and took
it all to Williamsburg, to which they returned on February 23. 120

Nicholas and the Randolphs had advocated removing the suspects to
Williamsburg in the belief that trying them in the county of their crimes would be
"ineffectual." A remarkable amount of sympathy for counterfeiting operations existed
in remote, cash-poor regions like southwestern Virginia, where moneymakers were

119 Scott, Counterfeiting in Colonial America, 6-7, 124, 125, 157; Scott, “Counterfeiting in Colonial
Virginia,” 21; “WILLIAMSBURG, February 25.” Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), 25 February
1773, [3].
120 Dunmore, “A PROCLAMATION.” Virginia Gazette (Rind), 11 February 1773, [2]. Dunmore to
often the only ready source of paper currency. As weak as the state was in such places, people there often accepted and even celebrated outlaws, very much in the tradition of Robin Hood and other "social bandits." Public support for counterfeiters was most evident in the ease and frequency with which they escaped from prison. In the weeks after the Pittsylvania counterfeiters were hauled into Williamsburg, sheriffs took several other men into custody, many of them suspected of passing forgeries for the ring. A few were sent to the capital, but most remained in the jurisdictions where they were apprehended. Among these, a suspected passer named John Ford managed to escape from the Amelia County jail despite an eight-man guard. When this embarrassment came to light, Dunmore's only recourse was to pursue charges against the guards. About a month later, Ford's son, John Jr., escaped from the same jail. The elusiveness of these fugitives was a function less of Ford family ingenuity than the state's feeble grasp on the hearts and minds of its subjects, whose cooperation was essential to the execution of law. 121

As obvious as the risks involved in local prosecution were, Dunmore was not applauded for his aggressive apprehension of the suspects. Soon after reconvening in March, the assembly scolded him for failing to secure grand jury indictments in Pittsylvania before bringing the prisoners to Williamsburg. In a lecturing tone, the burgesses reminded him that government must "be as attentive to the safety of the innocent as we are desirous of punishing the Guilty." They worried that his actions,

and the "doubtful construction" of criminal law that they evinced, threatened "the safety of innocent Men," and they demanded that it not be used as precedent in the future. Dunmore's apparent disregard for the sacred role of juries in the judicial process appeared all the more menacing in light of the king's response to the burning of the Gaspee the previous summer. During that episode, a British ship had run aground off Rhode Island while enforcing unpopular trade regulations. Locals quickly boarded it, looted its valuables, and set it afame, all the while abusing its captain and crew. The king dispatched a commission to investigate and empowered it to bring the culprits back to England for trial if necessary, a prospect that enraged colonists. The burgesses saw the same injustice at work in Dunmore's plan to try the forgery suspects at the General Court in Williamsburg. It was no coincidence, then, that the assembly voted to reestablish a Committee of Correspondence during the counterfeiting controversy. The people of Virginia were at that time deeply concerned, they wrote, about "various Rumours and Reports of proceedings tending to deprive them of their ancient, legal, and constitutional Rights." 122

Opting not to acknowledge the reestablishment of the Committee, Dunmore did respond to the burgesses' criticism of his aggressive pursuit of the counterfeitors. "If I have done amiss," he wrote, "the same method will not be repeated." In the event that the ministry approved of his actions, however, he reserved the right to exert the full measure of his authority whenever necessary. In London, Lord Dartmouth was

impressed by Dunmore’s handling of the affair and sought to assuage his concerns about the burgesses’ reprimand, noting that their speech had at least been delivered in respectful terms. Even then, this must have seemed a slim reed.123

Because it was so broadly disbursed and fell into so many unsuspecting hands, forged currency created a climate of accusation in which powerful people became vulnerable to public attacks from below. In early March, Moses Terry was arrested for intentionally passing bad bills and taken to Williamsburg. After admitting his crime, he promptly began informing on others. This cooperation earned him a pardon, but his testimony apparently implicated a number of innocent people, including Prince Edward County burgess Paschal Greenhill. Assuming Greenhill was in fact innocent, as the records suggest, it is significant that Terry targeted a member of the political elite. One of Greenhill’s defenders wasn’t at all surprised that someone in Terry’s position would try “to pull down, injure, or ruin the Characters of those that he with Mortification and Envy finds standing in a more exalted and respectable Situation than his own.” So much for natural aristocrats or spontaneous deference. Much about the relationship between Terry and Greenhill remains obscure, but the counterfeiting

123 Dunmore to Dartmouth, 31 March 1773, and Dartmouth to Dunmore, 5 July 1773, both in DC,168-73 and 198-99, or C.O. 5/1351/26-30, 38-39. A number of ironies surround the burgesses’ reaction to the counterfeiting controversy. First, the Speaker of the House had recommended the conduct for which Dunmore was being criticized. When Patrick Henry, a radical burgess and a member of the Committee of Correspondence, became governor of Virginia in 1776, he grew frustrated in his own attempts to prosecute counterfeaters and in 1778 requested the authority to try them in the county of his choosing. After 1773, suspects began insisting on their right to a trial by a jury of their peers, only to escape from local prisons while awaiting trial. In acknowledgement of this phenomenon, the House of Delegates ultimately granted Henry the same power for which the burgesses had chastised Dunmore: Scott, “Counterfeiting in Colonial Virginia,” 32.
controversy seems to have created a space in which social resentments could be expressed, however obliquely, and elites targeted for public shame.  

The trial of the Pittsylvania gang at the April General Court was a disaster for the government. The state’s star witness, Short, was quickly discredited and fled the capital after being threatened with perjury charges. Even if the prosecution had been able to recover from this, there was a mysterious “defect in the act of the Assembly” under which the counterfeiters were tried, and the defendants, standing before yet another gilt coat of royal arms, were finally acquitted. A New Bern, North Carolina, correspondent of the *Virginia Gazette* despaired that the counterfeiters were “again let loose as beasts of prey.” Despite the dehumanizing rhetoric and the rage it reflected, colonists of all kinds defied established authority with impunity during the counterfeiting controversy of 1773. No matter how tough the king and his representatives talked, even when they did so on the very bills being copied, their authority went only so far.  

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Dunmore had not seen his family for nearly three years by the spring of 1773, and the indications are that he was no an angel in their absence. A reputation for philandering had preceded him in Virginia and remained with him throughout his career. In 1772, he was accused (falsely it seems) of having had an affair with Kitty

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126 James Parker to Charles Steuart, 19 April 1771, Charles Steuart Papers (microfilm at the John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library, Williamsburg, Va.).
Blair, the estranged wife of Dr. James Blair. The following year “terrible...Stories” were circulating in Williamsburg about his relationship with Sukey Randolph, the daughter of the Attorney General. There were even whispers that the girl’s parents knew all about the relationship and were subsidizing the governor’s “fun” at their home. Dunmore’s reputation for carousing eventually reached trans-colonial proportions. In a mock lamentation about the loss of British gallantry in America, a New Jersey patriot wrote, “Alas, how often shall we recall to mind those jovial and delicious hours, when our bucks experienced the inimitable conviviality, and our belles the not-to-be-told-of endearments of a Dunmore and a Sparks!” There is no definitive proof that Dunmore ever slept with anyone besides his wife, but given the rumors and the permissive mores of the British aristocracy, it seems unlikely that his first three years in America were chaste.

Nevertheless, he had grown impatient for the company of his wife and children by 1773. After being denied permission to return to England during a spell of sickness the previous autumn, he began making arrangements for them to join him in Virginia. Sadly, young William Murray did not live long enough to make the trip. Life was precarious for children in the eighteenth century and death common. Because

128 James Parker to Charles Steuart, 19 May 1773, Charles Steuart Papers (microfilm at the John D. Rockefeller Library, Williamsburg, Va.).
131 He asked permission to return to England in Dunmore to Dartmouth, 16 November 1772, DC, 147-153, or C.O. 5/1351/1-7; for the response, see Dartmouth to Dunmore, 3 February 1773, DC, 161-63, or C.O. 5/1351/14-17.
of this, the toddler Leveson, whom Dunmore had yet to meet, was to stay behind with relatives. The other six children, aged five to thirteen, embarked with their mother for a new life in November 1773. After forty-four days at sea, they arrived in New York, where they remained for one month. During that time, they charmed a number of Dunmore’s old acquaintances. The normally critical Gouverneur Morris was particularly impressed. The Countess was “a very elegant woman,” he wrote, who “looks, speaks and moves, and is a lady.” He was equally lavish in praising her daughters, whom he deemed “fine, sprightly sweet girls” from whom “goodness of heart flushes...in every look.” Governor Tryon was also taken with the family and expressed amazement that Dunmore could have deprived himself of their company for as long as he had.

In spite of all the contempt for established authority that Dunmore encountered in America, aristocratic refinement retained the power to inspire admiration there well into the Revolutionary period. At no point was this clearer than with Virginians’ rhapsodic reception of Lady Dunmore and her children. An elaborate celebration was planned in advance of their arrival in February 1774. At Yorktown, overeager cannon operators caused an accident that gravely injured five men, three white and two black. Clementine Rind’s Virginia Gazette reported that the latter, possibly slaves, “were dreadfully mangled, one of them having lost three fingers off his right hand,” the other blinded and “much burnt in the face.” Oblivious to the grisly scene, jubilant crowds

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133 Morris is quoted from an undated letter to an unknown correspondent in Caley, “Dunmore,” 214.
continued the revel. That evening, the family processed to the Governor's Palace amid the glow of lamp-lit homes and admiring faces.  

The enthusiasm extended to the pages of the press. Alongside predictably effusive addresses from the College of William and Mary and the city of Williamsburg, several lengthy poetic tributes appeared. One entitled "On the Arrival of Lady DUNMORE" gave vent to a stream of provincial self-consciousness:

While Cannon roar to hail thee, Bonefires blaze,  
And Joy 'round every Heart exulting plays,  
Our simple Swains, uncultur'd as their Meads,  
Would swell the Transport with their artless Reeds;  
Sincere their Welcome, though uncouth its Style,  
Nor such as charm'd thee in thy native Isle,  
Where Infant Genius all the Arts caress,  
And Nature's beauteous Form the Graces dress.  

...  
Fair MURRAY deigns to tread the savage Plain,  
Each Muse, and soft-eyed Grace, are in her Train.  

When Virginians imagined themselves in the eyes of the aristocracy, some evidently felt the need to apologize. When that gaze belonged to a noblewoman, the effect was compounded, for it was supposed that she would find the "uncultur'd," "uncouth," and "savage" surroundings of the colony even more offensive than would her male counterparts. Immediately hailed as a lady of particular polish, the Countess of Dunmore was, thus, an embarrassing as well as exhilarating presence in the colony.

There was nothing inconsistent about uncomplicated praise for Lady Dunmore's nobility and the pushy appeals to power with which her husband was now so familiar. Another poem published in the Virginia Gazette on her arrival begins with

136 Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), 3 March 1774, [2].
a typical profession of deferential regard. Hailing as she did from "polish'd Courts...Where Affability with graceful Mien / Adorns the Splendour of the British Queen," the Countess was sure to "scatter Blessings" of high metropolitan culture among the proud but provincial people of Virginia. Yet, when the author turns to politics in the final stanza, the old familiar mock-deferential directives begin creeping in:

Long may your Lord in publick Honours shine,  
To grace those publick Honours long be thine.  
Plac'd by his Sovereign in the Chair of State,  
To guide the Helm, yet soothe the high Debate,  
May his Example Liberty inspire,  
And urge the Senate to a Patriot Fire,  
That the Asserters of their Country's Laws  
May still unite in Freedom's glorious Cause,  
And most to bless the Spot wherein we live,  
To Commerce true Stability give;  
Warm in their Hearts that Principle to feel  
That well, that best supports the common Weal;  
That Constitution clearly to observe,  
And with a firm though temperate Zeal preserve;  
The Crown's Prerogative, the People's Right,  
Equally pois'd, and ever in their Sight."  

Here, hopeful expectations serve, in effect, as veiled demands. The passage was meant as a gentle reminder, amidst all the exuberance surrounding Lady Dunmore, that Virginians would not be distracted from their real interests by glittering metropolitan graces, lovely though they were.


138 Lady Dunmore enjoyed universal regard in Virginia throughout all of the political tumult that followed. In May, the governor dissolved the House of Burgesses for their provocative opposition to the Boston Port Act. With tensions still high the next day, the burgesses went ahead with an official ball of welcome for Lady Dunmore at the Capitol: Caley, "Dunmore," 281-82; John E. Selby, *Dunmore* (Williamsburg, Va., 1977), 16-17. After the Dunmore family had fled the Palace in the summer of
While celebrating the Declaration of Independence in New York City in July 1776, Continental troops toppled the equestrian statue of George III that had accompanied Dunmore's baggage to America. After cheering its fall, a crowd of locals proceeded to behead the statue. Similarly violent renunciations of the king took place all along the Atlantic seaboard. One recent study argues that these scenes resulted from the trauma of "unrequited monarchical love" and amounted to a "symbolic regicide" that signaled the abrupt end of "royalist culture" in North America. Dunmore never encountered such a culture in New York or Virginia. In light of his experience, the toppling of George III's statue seems less like a radical departure from the pre-1773 order than a spectacular culmination of it. This is not to say, of course, that the formal rejection of monarchy in 1776 was in any way inevitable but merely to acknowledge that substantial preconditions for it did exist. The relationship between colonial subject and sovereign did not "suddenly and violently" collapse in "a few short years." Allegiance to the king had been more instrumental than emotional for some time.

The inability of the imperial state to command obedience in New York and Virginia from the fall of 1770 through the winter of 1773-1774 obviously made life difficult for Dunmore. Despite the drafting of detailed instructions, governance was an
improvisational art in the colonies, one that forced executives to navigate through all sorts of grey areas. Matters that seemed straightforward on paper frequently turned out to be problematic in practice, and reliable advice or proper arbitrating entities were rarely close at hand. This created some space for the unscrupulous pursuit of personal gain, to be sure, but more often than not autonomy was a burden for Dunmore, not a boon.

Given all of this, to what extent did “empire” even exist in New York and Virginia on the eve of the American Revolution? Symbols of it were ubiquitous, of course—red coats in Manhattan, the Governor’s Palace in Williamsburg, even the public image of Lady Dunmore herself. But the inability of the imperial state to secure the obedience or mobilize the support of provincial subjects suggests that “monarchical love” was, even amidst an abundant array of its forms, largely an illusion.\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{140} McConville, \textit{King’s Three Faces}, 306.
Chapter 3

The Land of Consent, 1774

In August 1774, Lord Dunmore left the Governor’s Palace in Williamsburg and headed west to confront a coalition of Shawnee and Mingo warriors in the remote Ohio River Valley. It was an unusual step for someone in his position, travelling so many mountainous miles on such a dangerous mission. But Dunmore’s War, as the expedition came to be known, proved a triumph, and he returned home on December 4 to a hero’s welcome. In the days that followed, colonists clamored to extend their congratulations, not only for the subjugation of the Indians, which they thought he had accomplished with exemplary fortitude and moderation, but also for the birth of his ninth child, a daughter named Virginia, on December 3. There was even a parade in Williamsburg, during which four Shawnee hostages, taken to ensure their nation’s good behavior pending a permanent peace, were exposed to the gaze of an exuberant populace.¹

Despite all the celebration, the homecoming was dampened by a backlog of letters from London. Secretary of State Dartmouth had heard rumors that Dunmore was abiding the abuse of Indians on the frontier, sponsoring misdeeds along the contested border with Pennsylvania, and granting lands in violation of his instructions. The accusations, which originated with rival Pennsylvanians, came as a shock. After five years in the colonies, Dunmore’s place in the Empire suddenly seemed insecure.

¹ The congratulatory addresses are in Peter Force, ed., American Archives, 4th Ser., Vol. 1 (Washington D.C., 1837), 1043-4 (hereafter Force, AA); The Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), 8 December 1774, supplement, 1. An account of the parade is in Nicholas Cresswell’s journal, which is quoted in Percy Burdelle Caley, “Dunmore: Colonial Governor of New York and Virginia, 1770-1782” (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Pittsburgh, 1939), 374.
He had come to America with a view to rectifying a harrowing financial situation and reestablishing his family on a grand scale through the acquisition of lands. Apart from causing shame and insolvency, then, a recall would also sound the death knell for Dunmore’s American dream.²

Most of the issues addressed in Dartmouth’s letters involved the western lands that Britain had acquired from France at the close of the Seven Years War. Victory in that conflict had come at staggering costs and, moving forward, entailed enormous challenges. In an effort to discourage the kind of frontier entanglements that had precipitated the war, the king issued the Proclamation of 1763, which established a border along the Appalachian Mountains separating white settlements from those of the western Indians. For its architects, the boundary was a temporary measure that, once removed, would allow the Empire to grow beyond the mountains in an orderly manner. The objective was to raise quit-rent revenues without creating costly conflicts with the Indians. In anticipation of this expansion, the Proclamation also offered land grants to veterans of the war, who, it was assumed, would eventually redeem their bounties in the restricted area. Unfortunately for the British ministry, white settlers were already living and quarreling with Indians west of the Appalachian Mountains in 1763. The Proclamation ordered these people to move east, but their numbers only

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² The letters are Dartmouth to Dunmore, 8 September 1774, and 5 October 1774, both in “Dunmore Correspondence,” John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library, Special Collections, 408-9, 410-13. “Dunmore Correspondence” (hereafter DC) contains typescript copies of Dunmore-related documents, mainly held at the British National Archives in Kew, England; wherever possible, I have also included citation information for the original.
grew in subsequent years. By 1774, as many as fifty thousand whites were living illegally in the trans-imperial west. 3

These circumstances produced a welter of conflict in the Ohio Valley. More settlements led to more clashes with Indians, who were themselves divided, both across and within nations, over the map of the region and what to do about white encroachment. The grants promised in the Proclamation complicated matters by inspiring illegal surveying expeditions, which further alarmed and antagonized the Indians. Additional layers of conflict grew out of whites' competing designs on the area. Virginia speculators actively opposed the ambitions of the Philadelphia- and London-based Grand Ohio Company, an organization that sought a vast grant in what is now West Virginia and eastern Kentucky for a new colony called Vandalia. An even more heated dispute between partisans of Virginia and Pennsylvania over the country surrounding Pittsburgh was surging toward civil war in 1774. On top of it all, the contest over colonial rights had begun to escalate again with the passage of the Coercive Acts in Parliament and a looming continental boycott on imperial commerce. Well before the mythic start of the American Revolution at Lexington and Concord, Great Britain was quite clearly an empire at war with itself. 4

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4 In his recent book, Peter Silver argues that the threat of Indian raids generated fear on the frontiers of the middle colonies that helped to unify whites and crystallize the concept of "the white people" among an ethnically diverse population: Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America (New York, 2008), xix-xx, xxiv. There is a good deal of evidence for this in contemporary print culture,
The weakness of the state played a critical part in all of this. The geopolitical structure of the Empire gave far-flung representatives like Dunmore a good deal of autonomy. Yet, directing events in central and western Virginia from Williamsburg was every bit as challenging as managing North American affairs from Whitehall. Since Indians set the terms of political engagement there, the Ohio Valley was culturally as well as geographically remote from centers of imperial power. Those few who were fluent in the idioms of native warfare and diplomacy were in a position to pursue their own agendas to the detriment of the Empire. Governors’ independence vis-à-vis Whitehall was, in this way, matched by the autonomy of local leaders on the frontier. Squatters represented an additional source of volatility. With all of these variables in play, Dunmore’s War could not have been, as recent scholarship would have it, the product of a grand conspiracy conceived in Williamsburg for the benefit of elite land speculators. Even if the evidence for this claim went beyond the circumstantial, which it does not, Dunmore’s new world was simply too complicated to accommodate a scheme of such proportions. In truth, his campaign against the Ohio Indians grew out of a situation over which he initially had no control.\(^5\)

In no position to simply command consent, imperial officials often had to buy the allegiance of British subjects. When Virginia governors needed assistance, say for

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\(^5\) The most recent contribution to the conspiracy thesis is Patrick Griffin, *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier* (New York, 2007), Chapter 4, esp. 115. While charting the shift from empire to nation along with the transition to modern conceptions of sovereignty, land, and race, Griffin is careful to note that these developments “were not only imposed from above, at the center, but also achieved from below, on the margins.” Curiously, though, Dunmore’s War is an entirely top-down affair in his telling, with Dunmore ingeniously exploiting settlers’ anxieties about Indians on behalf of elite land speculators.
a military expedition, they often incentivized support with the most valuable resource available to them: land. With the Proclamation of 1763, which promised grants to Seven Years War veterans even as it restricted legal settlement, the Privy Council effectively did the same thing. It wasn’t long before that body began granting trans-Appalachian lands to speculators outright.6 Heartened by these developments, colonists staked out forbidden lands with even greater confidence after the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768, by which Britain theoretically acquired all native claims east of the Ohio River. The Proclamation Line remained in force after the ratification of Stanwix, and the ministry continued to view squatting and surveying in the restricted area as illegal acts of extreme offense to the crown. Yet the government encouraged such activity every time it promised a western grant. The benefits of being first to settle or survey new land were such that colonists were sure to try to anticipate imperial expansion. So, as effective as land grants were in generating cooperation, they also undermined the larger goal of orderly western settlement. Ultimately, they threatened to carry colonial subjects beyond the grasp of the Empire. As the fraught relationship between land and consent suggests, however, this was already a fait accompli.7

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7 Most major studies of the Ohio Valley in this period observe the weakness of imperial authority there but fail to adequately explain it. See Griffin, *American Leviathan*, chapters 2 and 4; Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires*, Preface; Michael N. McConnell, *A Country Between: The Upper Ohio Valley and Its Peoples, 1724-1774* (Lincoln, 1992), 3-4; White, *Middle Ground*, Chapter 8. These works do not recognize the cultural obstacles to central control, nor do they note how the fraught relationship between land and consent subverted imperial policies and plans for the trans-Appalachian west.
Few doubted that the future of Great Britain lay beyond the Appalachian Mountains by the late 1760s. As a result, the business of western lands became an unusually active arena for the Empire’s most ambitious subjects. People at all levels of the imperial social structure—common settlers, surveyors, small-scale speculators, well-connected provincials, metropolitan elites, and imperial officials as highly placed as the Privy Council—vied and colluded with one another and various Indian groups for a piece of the action.

The complications involved in this process were considerable, with roots reaching at least as far back as the origins of the Seven Years War. In the early 1750s, Virginia Lieutenant Governor Robert Dinwiddie decided to erect a fort at modern-day Pittsburgh in order to discourage French and Indian incursions on the east side of the Ohio River. To this end, he issued a proclamation in 1754 promising land to those who volunteered to build and protect the fort. He understood that colonists were unlikely to come to the aid of the Empire unless they had an immediate interest in doing so. If the threat at hand was too distant or abstract to compel them, officials had to provide inducements beyond standard pay, and the abundant lands that Dinwiddie’s expedition sought to secure in the upper Ohio Valley seemed to represent the ideal incentive. The offer excited nearly as much jealousy as it did interest in imperial service. Pennsylvania Lieutenant Governor James Hamilton immediately asserted his colony’s claim to the lands in question. Loath to take any part in the coming conflict with the French, however, the Pennsylvania assembly denied its jurisdiction in the area. Later in 1754, the French seized Dinwiddie’s in-progress fort. With this, the
boundary dispute fell away for a time, only to reemerge two decades later when the holders of Governor Dinwiddie’s grants started calling in their claims.\footnote{Thomas Perkins Abernathy, \textit{Western Lands and the American Revolution} (New York, 1959, c. 1937). 9-10; “Notices of the Settlement,” \textit{The Olden Time} 1 (1846): 435-37.}

During the late 1760s, the British government was working toward the creation of a new western boundary in North America. In 1768, it authorized William Johnson, the Superintendent of the Northern Indian Department, to meet with leaders of the Iroquois confederacy at Fort Stanwix to negotiate a massive land purchase. Johnson’s efforts were coordinated with those of his southern counterpart, John Stuart, who had already begun to treat with the Cherokees at a place called Hard Labor in the Carolina backcountry. According to the plan approved at Whitehall, Johnson’s boundary was to run along the Ohio River to the mouth of the Kanawha River in present-day West Virginia. There, it was supposed to link up with Stuart’s, which ran in a straight line from Chiswells Mine in southwestern Virginia. If only things had been so simple.\footnote{Sosin, \textit{Whitehall and the Wilderness}, Chapter 7. For the boundary lines, see Lester J. Cappon, et al., \textit{Atlas of Early American History}, Vol. 2: The Revolutionary Era, 1760-1790 (Princeton, 1976), 15. Britain would also have to pay its Indian allies for their participation in the war to come, since it deprived them of their usual hunting season: Peter Way, “The Cutting Edge of Culture: British Soldiers Encounter Native Americans in the French and Indian War,” in Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern, eds., \textit{Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600-1850} (Philadelphia, 1999), 136-37.}

Given the decentralized character of Indian politics, any plan to create a new boundary that included only the Iroquois and Cherokees was sure to be problematic. The right of the Iroquois, or Six Nations, to dispense with lands along the eastern banks of the Ohio River proved especially controversial. Their claims, which extended as far south as the Cherokee (now Tennessee) River, rested on prior conquests of tribes like the Shawnees and Delawares. While these groups generally recognized their
subordinate position in the Covenant Chain, as the Iroquois alliance system was known, they still hunted on the land in question and segments within them staunchly opposed its sale. A small number of Shawnee and Delaware representatives were present at Fort Stanwix and, according to Johnson, left "well Satisfied" with the presents he gave them. Still, the treaty (by which the Iroquois received £12,000 in goods and cash) inspired strong resistance among the Shawnees, who immediately began organizing a confederacy to oppose it. Johnson’s acceptance of Iroquois sovereignty over the Ohio Indians reflected his intimate, long-standing relationship with the Six Nations, but it was also strategically convenient. It eliminated the need for the British to treat with a number of variously divided tribes, portions of which were known to be hostile to white expansion. London officials were therefore initially all too happy to accept Johnson’s expertise. They did so uncritically because it simplified a process that was, in truth, hopelessly complex.10

The ministry’s diplomatic dependence on Johnson ended up compromising several aspects of its agenda. He entered the treaty negotiations at Fort Stanwix with explicit instructions to accept only lands east of the Ohio as far south as the mouth of the Kanawha. The boundary he ultimately obtained extended some four hundred miles farther inland, all the way to the Cherokee River in what is now southwestern

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10 On the Indian politics surrounding the Treaty of Fort Stanwix, see Amy C. Schutt, People of the River Valleys: The Odyssey of the Delaware Indians (Philadelphia, 2007), 137-41 (Johnson quoted on 138); Dorothy V. Jones, License for Empire: Colonialism by Treaty in Early America (Chicago, 1982), 100-19. Scholars describe the Covenant Chain as a useful myth for the British and Iroquois: Francis Jennings, The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire: The Covenant Chain Confederation of Indian Tribes with English Colonies from its beginnings to the Lancaster Treaty of 1744 (New York, 1984); Hinderaker, Elusive Empires, 137-44, 163-70. Hinderaker and Schutt are at variance about the disposition of the Ohio Indian delegations at Fort Stanwix, with the former suggesting that the treaty was “especially galling” to Shawnee attendees.
Kentucky. He also managed to secure an enormous tract for a group of his friends known as “the suffering traders,” who were seeking reparation from the government for losses sustained during Pontiac’s Rebellion of 1763-1764. Never mind that the Proclamation of 1763 banned private land purchases from the Indians. All of these transgressions infuriated Secretary of State Hillsborough. In his own defense, Johnson argued that the Six Nations preferred to dispense with all of the distant lands to which they had a claim. He agreed to remove the provision for “the suffering traders” but insisted that the boundary could not be renegotiated without offending the Iroquois. The government had no choice but to accept this explanation. When the king signed off on the treaty in May 1769, however, he did so without any intention of asserting Britain’s claim to the unauthorized part of the cession. 11

Johnson’s deviation from the royal script emboldened westward-leaning colonists. Virginia speculators prevailed upon Governor Botetourt to lobby for a revision of the line that John Stuart had recently established with the Cherokees at Hard Labor. Somewhat reluctantly, and not before getting the ministry’s approval, Stuart effected a slight westward adjustment of this line at the treaty of Lochaber in October 1770. For all intents and purposes, the combined Indian boundary now followed the Ohio River as far as the mouth of the Kanawha, where it ran in a straight line southeast to a point on the south fork of the Holston River and, finally, due east to the Virginia-North Carolina border. The Proclamation Line, though well to the east of this, remained in force, so settlers and speculators would have to wait to obtain legal

titles in the newly acquired territory. But they would not be idle. The new Indian boundary made it absolutely clear that British institutions would one day emerge in the West, and scores of people on both sides of the Atlantic began jockeying for positions of profit. 12

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Those with claims to land under the proclamations of 1754 and 1763 were already soliciting grants in the new territory when Dunmore arrived in Virginia. At only his third council meeting, on October 14, 1771, he read a petition from Charles Philpot Hughes, who had served as a “Captain Lieutenant” during the Seven Years War. Hughes was asking for “a Quota of Land in this Colony, adequate to his Rank.” The council opted to deny the request pending the final determination of the colony’s western boundary. The Lochaber line had yet to be surveyed, but even if it had been, the governor didn’t have the authority to issue patents in the area between the Proclamation Line and the Indian boundary. Colonial executives were never formally forbidden from granting lands in this region, but where the Proclamation banned settlement it also seemed to bar grants, which were typically contingent upon some sort of residence or improvement. In the summer of 1772, Hillsborough confirmed this interpretation of imperial policy and prohibited Dunmore from granting land beyond the mountains. As a result, Hughes and many other veterans saw their petitions languish in the governor’s office. 13

Dunmore shared their frustration. The ability to grant land was the most important of all his powers. It gave him influence over settlers and speculators seeking legal title to land along with a significant stream of personal income. The process of acquiring warrants of survey and patents entailed a number of fees, a portion of which fell to the governor. Settlers imbued with the “homestead ethic” often circumvented this system and established claims simply by squatting on and improving “vacant” lands. There were also other forces limiting the free exercise of gubernatorial grants. In the early 1770s the ministry was formulating an entirely new system of land distribution in North America, designed primarily to maximize quitrent revenues, and seriously considering the proposal of the Grand Ohio Company for a new western colony called Vandalia. With these projects in mind, it sought to keep the region between the Proclamation Line and the Indian boundary as clear as possible in order to settle colonists there on its own terms.  

Predictably, events in North America failed to cooperate with this agenda. While surveying the Lochaber line in 1771, a burgess named John Donelson struck a deal with the Cherokee chief, Attakullakulla. In exchange for a mere £500, Attakullakulla agreed to drag the southern section of the Indian boundary all the way to the Kentucky River, an extension that included millions of acres in what are now eastern Kentucky and southern West Virginia. The Donelson purchase was conducted without the knowledge of either the Virginia or British government and, thus, 

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represented a boldly illicit assumption of imperial authority. Dunmore nonetheless opted to back it. While the border established at Lochaber ran mainly through undifferentiated forest, he wrote, the new boundary was a "natural" one, clearly demarcated by mountains and rivers. By eliminating all ambiguity, he hoped it might put an end to all border-related conflict. Here, the governor was echoing Attakullakulla, who told Donelson that since "the Boundary Line is now plain," the Virginia hunters with whom the Cherokees were "daily infested" no longer had any excuse for straying from their own land. Should they fail to honor this boundary, the chief concluded, they would "be compelled to do" so.¹⁵

Surely the Cherokees had other motivations for such a large cession, just as the Six Nations did at Fort Stanwix. In addition to his desire for a natural boundary, Attakullakulla probably hoped to profit in some small measure from lands to which his tribe had a contested claim. The trade goods that Donelson promised might also be used to pacify young Cherokee hunters, who'd become increasingly bellicose in recent years. In this light, the Lochaber sale appears to have been a desperate and hopelessly contradictory play for peace. Attakullakulla may also have seen white settlement as inevitable and hoped to divert it from the core of Cherokee country. For Virginians, the motives for accepting the cession were obvious: a vast tract of land with clear boundaries. Dunmore concluded his defense of the Donelson purchase by observing that the king's subjects in Virginia would be greatly displeased "if they should find that His Majesty disapproves of this Line." Inverting the threats of royal disfavor that

so often accompanied his instructions, Dunmore’s warning served as a reminder that colonists expected imperial policy to work for them.\textsuperscript{16}

If ratified in London, the Donelson boundary would create a huge tract of land without any previous private ownership. In anticipation of this, Dunmore asked the Privy Council for permission to make grants beyond the Proclamation Line. Without this authority, he argued, he would be powerless to stop squatters from taking up choice plots and living there free of quitrents and government oversight. This process was already well underway, of course. In May 1772, settlers were reportedly operating under the assumption that the Proclamation had nullified all prior patents in the restricted area. When they took up unpatented lands, moreover, squatters threatened to leave nothing but inferior tracts for speculators, who required security, whether in the form of assurances from the governor or an act of Parliament, in order to make the outlays required for exploration and surveys. To prevent this, Dunmore issued a proclamation reiterating the ban on trans-Appalachian settlement and empowering sheriffs to arrest all violators.\textsuperscript{17}

The governor was quick to dismiss his personal investment in these matters. He assured the ministry that he had “no other motive” in them “than my duty to His Majesty and zeal for his interest,” but elsewhere he was more candid. In a letter to Hillsborough marked “private,” he included a request for 100,000 acres in the

\textsuperscript{16} Dunmore to Hillsborough, [20] March 1772, DC, 101-05, or C.O. 5/1350/19-22. For goods as a means of pacifying young hunters, see Nathaniel Sheidley, “Hunting and the Politics of Masculinity in Cherokee Treaty-making, 1763-75,” in Daunton and Halpert, Empire and Others, 167-68 and 174-77. In addition to De Vorsey, Jr., Indian Boundary, 79-92, see also Jones, License for Empire, 114-5; Sosin, Whitehall and the Wilderness, 192-93.

\textsuperscript{17} Abernathy, Western Lands, 84, 88; Dunmore to Hillsborough, [20] March 1772, DC, 101-105, or C.O. 5/1350/19-22; Executive Journals, 458-59, 61.
unpatented area for himself and 20,000 for his personal secretary, Edward Foy. Dunmore argued that the grant would ingratiate him to the people of Virginia, as it would confirm his desire to settle there permanently and show “that my attachment to New York did not proceed from any dislike to this.” The request was immediately referred to the Board of Trade. Its fate would not be decided for many months. In the meantime, the land lust of Virginians and their governor remained as ardent as ever.18

The restriction of Dunmore’s ability to grant land compounded what was, in his mind, the broader problem of weak executive authority in Virginia. Throughout the colonies, gubernatorial patronage had been eroding for decades, as the colonial office and provincial assemblies accrued more and more appointments at the expense of the executive. Dunmore sought to improve his position in this regard from the outset of his administration. In at least one case, he simply usurped an appointment vested in the auditor general, claiming that this officer would only use the choice to promote “his own interest.” Governors needed offices in order to secure the allegiance of influential subjects, just as the king did. Though they were empowered to appoint and remove county judges, Dunmore also lobbied for the right to appoint clerks to the county courts. Without the “power to confer even so inconsiderable a place” as a county clerkship, he argued, the governor was “unable to acquire the least weight among the people.” Like so many of Dunmore’s requests, this one would be unceremoniously denied, but it reflected his understanding of the often implicit

18 Dunmore to Hillsborough, [? ]March 1772, private, DC, 98-99, or C.O. 5/154/35-36. Later in life, Dunmore told the British government that in New York and Virginia he had observed a rapid increase in the “value of Lands” and attempted “to establish a future Provision for his numerous Family” through their purchase and improvement. A listing of Dunmore’s land holdings can be found, along with this quotation, in his 24 February 1784 memorial to the loyalist claims commission: DC, 815-23 (quotation on 815), or A.O. 12/54/118-20.
negotiations that sustained the Empire. How could he expect to command subjects without spoils to distribute?19

The ministry’s refusal to augment executive powers made Dunmore especially eager to grant lands when legal opportunities presented themselves. Such was the case when George Washington appeared before the council in November 1772. Washington was still owed lands for his service in Dinwiddie’s expedition of 1754. Confident that the Proclamation Line would soon be lifted, he’d been surveying in the upper Ohio Valley for years. In 1769, Lord Botetourt gave him permission to make a large number of surveys on behalf of the Dinwiddie claimants, and by November 1772, most of this work was complete. He was now asking the council to authorize patents. Although the surveyed lands lay west of the Proclamation Line, Dunmore and the council agreed. Since Dinwiddie had promised the grants before imperial policy came to contradict them, no one ever seems to have questioned their legality. Washington announced the patents in the Virginia Gazette in January 1773. He described the extent of the individual grants in detail. Acres were assigned on a graduated scale according to rank. Private soldiers were entitled to four hundred acres each. As a field officer, Washington received 15,000 (by variously acquiring other shares, he ended up with slightly over 20,000). The announcement of these grants was an exciting development for colonists. It was another link in a chain of messages that unmistakably confirmed the westward trajectory of the Empire.

19 On the erosion of executive power in the colonies, see Bernard Bailyn, The Origins of American Politics (New York, 1967), 72-83. Dunmore to Hillsborough, 9 November 1771, DC, 82, or C.O. 5/1350/3-4 (“interest”); Dunmore to Dartmouth, 16 November 1772, DC, 147-53, or C.O. 5/1351/1-7 (“inconsiderable”). For the denial of Dunmore’s request, see Dartmouth to Dunmore, 3 February 1773, DC, 161-63, or C.O. 5/1351/14-17. For Dunmore’s efforts to expand his appointment powers, see also Caley, “Dunmore,” 125-32.
The confirmation of the Dinwiddie grants marked a brief moment of clarity that, paradoxically, served only to confuse a muddled situation further. It made Seven Years War veterans like Charles Philpot Hughes more impatient than ever for the lands they believed were owed them under the Proclamation of 1763. Washington’s announcement seemed to indicate that the way was finally clear for Dunmore to start making grants beyond the mountains, but Hillsborough had already informed him that this was not the case. Soon, the ministry would come to question whether provincial veterans had ever been eligible for grants under the Proclamation of 1763 in the first place. And so, the tangled knot only tightened.20

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Summer can be an unpleasant time in tidewater Virginia. Many in the eighteenth century feared the stifling heat and stagnant air, including Dunmore. Having expressed concerns about the “excessive heat” of the climate on learning of his appointment, he contracted a “violent fever” during his first summer in Williamsburg, which left him feeling “weak” for much of 1772. No doubt with this in mind, he decided to leave town the following summer on a tour of the colony’s northwestern frontier. The Virginia backcountry had more to offer than fresh air, and it was no secret that Dunmore was also anxious to acquire new lands during the trip. George Washington was supposed to accompany him before the death of a family friend prevented it and later regretted not having been able to help Dunmore acquire any

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20 “Petition to Lord Dunmore and the Virginia Council,” [c. 4 November 1772], in The Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series, Vol. 9, W.W. Abbot, ed. (Charlottesville, 1994), 118-23 (hereafter PGWC); Executive Journals, 511-14; Virginia Gazette (Rind), 14 January 1773, 1-2. For the ban on large grants, see Labaree, ed., Royal Instructions, 580. For more on the Dinwiddie claims, see PGWC, Vol. 8, 29-32, 277-80 n. For doubts about the eligibility of provincial veterans, see Dartmouth to Dunmore, 6 April 1774, DC, 325, or C.O. 5/1352/1-2.
western lands. "My Inclinations followed you closely on this Excursion," he confided. Such ambitions hardly distinguished Washington and Dunmore from their contemporaries. All sorts of politically connected people tried to use their access to power to acquire and profit from North American lands, and behavior that now seems unscrupulous, if not strictly illegal, was commonplace in the pursuit.²¹

Dunmore's tour culminated at the forks of the Ohio River, which the British had retaken from the French in 1758. The army maintained a garrison at Fort Pitt, as the fortification there was known, before abandoning it in 1772. The jurisdictional battle between Virginia and Pennsylvania remained dormant for most of this period, as each side tended to more pressing matters, including border disputes with other colonies. In 1767, surveyors Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon drew their famous boundary between Pennsylvania and Maryland. The Mason-Dixon Line exceeded the western edge of Maryland, and therefore also theoretically separated Pennsylvania from Virginia, but the Old Dominion had had no hand in its establishment, so the question of jurisdiction remained unresolved. The forks of the Ohio, offering access to the Illinois country and Mississippi Valley, were far too important for this to last.²²

During the Seven Years War, a town had emerged around Fort Pitt. Though well to the west of the Proclamation Line, Pittsburgh had grown substantially since then, mainly through migration from Virginia. Dunmore later estimated its white population at ten thousand. It was a disorderly and exposed community. A few of the

²¹ Dunmore to Washington, 3 July 1773; Washington to Dunmore, 12 September 1773, both in PGWC, Vol. 8, 258, 322-4.
²² Dunmore to Dartmouth, 18 March 1774, DC, 293-97, or C.O. 5/1352/16-20; Abernathy, Western Lands, 9-10, 19, 91; "Notices of the Settlement," 435-37; Griffin, American Leviathan, 42.
Indian traders and "meckanicks" who lived there were "worthy of regard," according to the Baptist preacher cum land agent David Jones, but others were "lamentably dissolute." The latter group included the many fugitives from justice said to reside in the area. Ministers in London had hoped that Pittsburgh might serve as a "site of civility" in the imperial west, but, as another travelling minister reported, the inhabitants acted as though they were "beyond the arm of government, & free from the restraining influence of religion."²³

Most were Virginians by allegiance, if not by birth, and remained so either in spite or because of Pennsylvania's efforts to establish its claim on the region. In 1771, authorities in Philadelphia appointed magistrates for the area and attempted in vain to collect taxes. Two years later they created Westmoreland County, which included Pittsburgh, and appointed justices of the peace to administer Pennsylvania law within it. Virginia migrants refused to recognize these innovations, and Governor Penn was all but powerless to impose them. Quaker influence in the assembly had long precluded the institution of a militia law, without which magistrates had little leverage over settlers and virtually no ability to protect against raids from neighboring Shawnee, Mingo, and Delaware settlements. Once the army left Fort Pitt in 1772, settlers had more latitude to take up lands but also more exposure to Indian attack. By the time Dunmore arrived, the people of Pittsburgh were hungry for law, order, and

security and refused to pay allegiance (let alone taxes) to any government that was unable to provide them.\(^{24}\)

Dunmore made a number of useful contacts in Pittsburgh in the summer of 1773, but none proved as important or controversial as “Doctor” John Connolly. Born to Irish parents in Pennsylvania around 1743, Connolly completed part of an apprenticeship to a local surgeon before deciding to pursue a career in the military. He went on to serve in the Seven Years War as a surgeon’s mate and later settled in Pittsburgh, where he also occasionally practiced medicine. In the 1760s, he started speculating in land, acquiring three hundred acres on Charles Creek in Augusta County, Virginia, and forty acres in the vicinity of Fort Pitt. He impressed George Washington at a meeting in a Pittsburgh tavern in 1770 as a “sensible, intelligent” man, well acquainted with the wilderness. His travels had endowed him with a working knowledge of several Indian languages and cultures, and as a soldier and sometime doctor, he was inured to the gore of life in the Ohio Valley. With a vested interest in the success of Virginia’s western claims and the knowledge and experience necessary for frontier politics, he was eminently qualified for Dunmore’s service.\(^{25}\)

Connolly was deeply impressed by the governor after their first meeting. Though hesitant to hazard an opinion about “so Considerable a Personage,” he told


Washington that Dunmore appeared “to be a Gentleman of benevolence & universal Charity, & not unacquainted with either Man or the World.” While no doubt genuine, this sort of deferential regard wasn’t enough to cement allegiance on its own. There were always people on the frontiers who shared the values and objectives of eastern elites, and they often ended up working as agents for men like Dunmore. But this was a quid-pro-quo empire, where political loyalties came at a price. Understanding this, Dunmore made Connolly a promise that summer in Pittsburgh. Under the auspices of the Proclamation of 1763 (ironically the same document that limited settlement east of the Appalachians), he would grant Connolly a tract of land near modern-day Louisville at the falls of the Ohio River. Ownership of the site around the cascade, which forced all travelers to put their crafts into portage before passing, promised great wealth. A handsome reward for service in the Seven Years War, the grant was also something of a retainer for Connolly’s assistance moving forward. Given the governor’s inability to make such a grant, it was an irresponsible down payment but a necessary one all the same.  

Word of the doctor’s good fortune spread quickly. Veterans and speculators had long awaited such a development. Some were even operating in anticipation of it. That very summer, a man named Thomas Bullitt was surveying lands along the lower Ohio. When he heard about the Connolly grant, Washington considered enlisting Bullitt to do his own surveys but decided to confirm the story with Dunmore first. The

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response was not encouraging. Without acknowledging his promise to Connolly, Dunmore denied his ability to make the desired grants, citing imperial policy. He also claimed that he hadn't known anything about Bullitt's activities before arriving at Pittsburgh, whereupon he'd immediately dispatched orders for him to desist and return east. Dunmore had indeed recalled the expedition, but it seems unlikely that he first learned of it at Pittsburgh. Bullitt not only announced the trip in the *Virginia Gazette* before Dunmore left the capital, but he had also duly acquired a commission for the task from the College of William and Mary.

Dunmore may have cut Bullitt's work short only after learning of an unauthorized conference with the Shawnees at their towns on the Scioto River in central Ohio. Here, Bullitt seems to have promised to compensate the Indians for the land being surveyed and assured them that their hunting rights would not be infringed. Perhaps Dunmore felt that Bullitt was overreaching his authority, for the surveys themselves were not the issue. When the governor returned to Williamsburg, he and the council concluded that Bullitt, while licensed "to survey the Lands on the Ohio," had undertaken the task "very unwarrantably, and in a manner likely to give Discontent to the Indians and bring on a War with them." The red flags that surveyors used to mark their work had indeed alarmed the Indians, but it wasn't long before they began popping up again. In November, Washington had his way, and the council sent John Floyd to finish what Bullitt had started.27

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27 Washington to Dunmore, 12 September 1773, Dunmore to Washington, 24 [September] 1773, and Washington to William Crawford, 25 September 1773, all in *PGWC*, Vol. 9, 322-23, 327-28, and 331-32 (see also 251 n. 6). For Bullitt's announcement of his trip, see *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie and Dixon), 3 December 1772, [2]. For the revocation of his commission, see *Executive Journals*, 14 October 1774,
Making his way back from Pittsburgh, Dunmore stopped to peruse available lands just east of the Proclamation Line in what now forms the panhandle of West Virginia. He had already acquired a 600-acre plantation called Porto Bello in York County not far from the capital, but larger plots were only available in the west. Passing through Hampshire County, he initiated the purchase of two tracts amounting to 600-700 acres, advising a local agent to buy them if they could be had for £200. He was also interested in another tract containing at least “two or three thousand acres” and rumored to be uninhabited “by any thing but Bears.” The agent likely proceeded as instructed, for Dunmore later included “3465 Acres in several Farms, in Hampshire County” in a list of property lost in America. He also acquired, perhaps during the same trip, over 2,500 acres in neighboring Berkeley County. These lands could only accrue significant value if the surrounding area was settled and secured from Indian raids, so Dunmore’s investment in them testifies to his confidence that the British Empire would expand into and ultimately come to control the North American West. Not without political significance, then, the governor’s land purchases no doubt heartened western-leaning Virginians.28

Dunmore returned from his western tour in September 1773. His new lieutenant wasn’t far behind. The following month, Connolly came to town with a

543-44. For the approval of new warrants in response to a petition from Washington, see Executive Journals, 4 November 1773, 549. See also Randolph C. Downes, Council Fires on the Upper Ohio: A Narrative of Indian Affairs in the Upper Ohio Valley until 1795 (Pittsburgh, 1940), 156-57. For reactions to Bullitt among the Indians, see Croghan to Dunmore, [May 1774], in Nicholas B. Wainwright, ed., “Turmoil at Pittsburgh: Diary of Augustine Prevost,” Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 85 (1961): 111-62, 151.
28 Dunmore to P. B. Martin, 27 August 1773, Lord Dunmore Letters, 1773-1775, Accession #38-538, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va. (“bears”); Dunmore’s land holdings are detailed in his petition to the loyalist claims commission, 25 February 1784, DC, 816, or A.O. 12/28/D (“Farms”).
delegation of Pittsburghers in an effort to convince the Virginia government to formally embrace the area surrounding Fort Pitt. They presented several petitions to this effect, one of which contained nearly six hundred signatures. In response, the council advised Dunmore to recognize Pittsburgh as part of Augusta County and to appoint a commission of the peace to enforce Virginia law there. The governor agreed and went on to name several militia officers. The capacity to raise an army was the colony’s greatest advantage over rival Pennsylvania. Not surprisingly, Connolly was to be first in command at Fort Pitt.29

Before the Pittsburgh delegation left Williamsburg, Dunmore made good on his promise to Connolly, arranging a patent for four thousand acres at the falls of the Ohio in the heart of the coveted Kentucky country. Only days later, he announced a Privy Council moratorium on all land grants, regardless of location, except those under the Proclamation of 1763. As much as it needed a time-out in order to address its confused land policies, the ministry didn’t feel comfortable putting even a temporary halt to veterans’ grants. Having served in the late world war, Connolly seemed to qualify for the exception, but his patent was plainly illegal. As Dunmore had himself told Washington, he lacked the authority to make grants beyond the Proclamation Line. There were other obstacles as well. The size of Connolly’s prize violated the ministry’s 1756 ban on grants larger than one thousand acres. Also, questions about provincial veterans’ eligibility for grants under the Proclamation of 1763 would soon be raised in London. The key issue, however, was location.

29 For the Pittsburgh petitions and other relevant documents, see the enclosures to Dunmore to Dartmouth, 18 March 1774, DC, 297-302, or C.O. 5/1352/16-20; Executive Journals, 554.
According to William Preston, surveyor of Fincastle County, the Connolly grant made "a great deal of Noise" in Williamsburg, as it seemed to announce the governor's intention to move ahead with western patents. Though Dunmore successfully "urged" Preston to sign the certificates needed to support Connolly's grant, Preston admitted that "many good Judges" considered it "altogether illegal."30

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John Connolly was itching to exercise his newly minted mandate. About a week after returning to Pittsburgh, in January 1774, he published an advertisement proclaiming Virginia rule and calling the militia to muster. In response to this affront, nearby Pennsylvania authorities arrested him and threw him in prison. This began a period of extreme turmoil in the upper Ohio Valley, during which two governments—one based nearly 300 miles away in Staunton, Virginia, the other a mere 30 miles to the southeast in Hanna's Town, Pennsylvania—fought for control over the same region. Periodic violence between Indians and whites, even as it escalated over the course of the spring and summer of 1774, did nothing to unify these factions along racial lines. The Indian war so near on the horizon never eclipsed the boundary dispute between Virginia and Pennsylvania, which persisted well into the 1780s.31

30 On Connolly's grant, see MacGregor, "Ordeal of John Connolly," 164. For the Privy Council ban on all grants, dated 7 April 1773, see Dartmouth to Governors in America, 10 April 1773, DC, 175, or C.O. 5/241/466; Executive Journals, 541-43. For skepticism about provincial eligibility, see Dartmouth to Dunmore, 6 April 1774, DC, 325, or C.O. 5/1352/1-2. For the Preston quotations, see William Preston to Washington, 7 March 1774, PGWC, Vol. 9, 511.

The seeds of this conflict were sown at the outset of the imperial enterprise in North America, when Europeans first attempted to fathom and carve up what was for them a hopelessly obscure new world. The hubris behind this process had its consequences, of course. The shortcomings of seventeenth-century maps led to overlapping charters, which eventually gave rise to a host of intractable contests over colonial boundaries. The shape of Virginia and the scope of its claims were highly ambiguous in its original charter. Given the state of geographical knowledge in 1609, it could hardly have been otherwise. One common interpretation placed the forks of the Ohio well within the colony’s bonds, along with much of the present western United States and Canada. But seventy-two years later, in 1681, the king included the same site in his grant to William Penn, which established Pennsylvania. Virginia was a royal colony dating back to 1624, so a reigning monarch could legally alter its boundaries as he or she wished. Proprietary charters like Pennsylvania’s, on the other hand, were immutable without the consent of the proprietor. According to this logic, the Penn grant had precedence in Pittsburgh even if it did violate Virginia’s original charter. 32

The matter wasn’t quite so cut and dry in Dunmore’s eyes. George II and the Privy Council had consented to massive grants for the Ohio Company near the forks of the Ohio in 1749 and 1752. The Company ultimately failed to live up to the conditions of these grants, which were permitted to lapse, but the king should not have

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been able to make them in the first place if the proprietor of Pennsylvania was sovereign in the region. Other circumstances undermined the Penn family claim as well. When Governor Dinwiddie sought military assistance to protect the site from the French in 1754, the Pennsylvania assembly denied its own jurisdiction. That the area was later conquered by the French and retaken by the British was also significant, for, in theory, this placed the land back in the hands of the king and empowered him to do with it what he pleased. Finally, there was the question of security. Without some sort of militia law, Pennsylvania had no ready way to protect the settlement from outside invasion. 33

Proprietary forces couldn't even effectively police the local populace. In February, the sheriff of Hanna's Town agreed to release John Connolly from prison on his own recognizance. The commandant was supposed to submit to re-apprehension on command, but he gave no surety. In celebration of the release, about eighty armed men marched in a noisy parade through the town en route to the drilling grounds outside Fort Pitt. There, a cask of rum was opened. According to Arthur St. Clair, the leading Pennsylvania official in the region, the rum caused the revelers' ranks to swell and sympathies for Virginia to soar. Fearing "a scene of drunkenness and confusion," St. Clair and his fellow magistrates tried to reason with the crowd. One of the officials made a speech about the justice of Pennsylvania's claim and the advantages of its jurisdiction. He cited mild laws and high land values. The provincial assembly hadn't

33 On the Ohio Company of Virginia, see Alfred P. James, *The Ohio Company: Its Inner History* (Pittsburgh, 1959), 1-110. For the Virginia case, as laid out by Dunmore, see Dunmore to James Tilghman and Andrew Allen, 24 May 1774, in Force, *AA*, 456-57, and Dunmore to Dartmouth, 2 May 1774, DC, 327-30, or C.O. S/1352/53-57.
arranged military support for the area, he explained, because of the risk that it would alarm the Indians and lead to war. The arguments rang hollow, and the magistrates decided to declare the meeting unlawful. When ordered to disperse, however, the Virginians simply promised to be peaceful and resumed drinking. The rum continued to flow as night approached, and, predictably, the situation degenerated. Worried about becoming a target of the roisterers’ resentment, St. Clair “thought it most prudent to keep out of their way.” In the middle of a remote wilderness, far from the origin of his authority, what other choice did he have? He came away convinced that as long as the government of Virginia pretended to sovereignty in Pittsburgh, it would “be next to impossible to exercise the civil authority” there.34

The Pennsylvanians were reduced to disapproving bystanders as Connolly began entrenching Virginia rule at Pittsburgh. He deployed all sorts of inducements to secure the allegiance of the inhabitants. According to Pennsylvania justice Aeneas Mackay, “the giddy headed mob” was particularly taken in by the greatest incentive of all: “promises of land grants on easy terms.” Connolly also had a stack of blank militia commissions, which, Pennsylvanians charged, he bestowed without regard for character or qualification. While condemning Connolly’s actions, they were quick to emphasize the low status of his allies. One magistrate noted that “there was not one single man of any property” in the Virginia ranks; many were actually fugitives from justice, he said. Pennsylvanians returned again and again to this theme during the

34 For the speech and St. Clair’s description of these events, see Arthur St. Clair to Governor Penn, 2 February 1774, in Force, AA, 266-68. See also, Caley, “Life and Adventures,” 29, 31-32. Another observer thought the inhabitants “would be equally averse to the regular administration of justice under the Colony of Virginia, as they are to that under the Province of Pennsylvania”: William Crawford to Penn, 8 April 1774, in Force, AA, 267, 262.
boundary dispute, as if to console themselves. The implication was that their own economic and moral resources made them resistant to the corruption of Connolly’s regime. 35

Yet, some of the individuals they disparaged had only weeks before held appointments under the government of Pennsylvania. Such was the case with Philip Reily. Having been sworn in as a Westmoreland constable in January 1774, Reily turned to the Virginia side sometime before April, when he was arrested for personally abusing magistrate MacKay. He was being held at MacKay’s home in Pittsburgh when a group of Virginians came to free him. After forcing open the backyard gate, one man thrust a gun through the parlor window and threatened to shoot Mackay’s wife if she didn’t open the door. Attempting to flee, she was stopped by a militia captain named Aston, who, according to one account, slashed her arm with a cutlass. Whether or not the assault actually took place (one would expect to find more outrage about it in a record full of outrage over lesser crimes), women were by no means exempt from political persecution in the rough and tumble Ohio Valley. The housekeeper of a Pennsylvania partisan was reportedly drummed out of town for visiting her employer in prison after he’d been arrested for defying a Virginia ban on trade with the Shawnees. 36

As all of this suggests, intimidation was crucial to the Virginia movement’s early gains. Connolly had sticks as well as carrots at his disposal. On April 6, he

35 For class-inflected denunciations of the Virginians, see Mackay to Penn, 4 April 1774 and 9 April 1774, Devereux Smith to Penn, 9 April 1774, and Thomas Shippen, 7 April 1774, all in Force, AA, 269-71 (quote on 270), 264, 264-65, 271-73.
marched at the head of nearly two hundred armed men to Hanna's Town to formally reject Pennsylvania jurisdiction at the Westmoreland County courthouse. The militiamen approached the modest structure with their swords and firearms drawn. After the initial confrontation, Connolly and the justices adjourned for a private meeting, during which the commandant delivered a statement contesting Pennsylvania's right to administer justice there and refusing to stand trial before the court, as he was then scheduled to do. He agreed to allow the court to remain open, "in order to prevent Confusion," but only so long as the people applied to it. Shocked by the affront, the justices—Aeneas MacKay, Devereax Smith, and Andrew McFarlane—scrambled to draft a response. In the resulting statement, they contradicted Connolly and vowed to continue business as usual. Their defiance would not go unpunished. 37

Days later, they returned to Pittsburgh only to be apprehended by Connolly and sent under armed guard to Staunton, Virginia, the distant seat of Augusta County. A day into the journey, MacKay managed to get permission to travel to Williamsburg in order to plead his case before Lord Dunmore. He arrived at the capital six days later. He hoped the governor would disapprove of Connolly's conduct, and the initial signs were encouraging. Dunmore agreed to see Mackay and listened patiently to his account. In the frank discussion that followed, the governor observed that it was St. Clair who had made the first arrest. In the days that followed, though, Dunmore was openly critical of Connolly. "The more violent and illegal the Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Majistrates," he told the council, "the more cautious" the representatives

of Virginia ought to be. He commanded Connolly to "refrain from imitating such unjustifiable Acts as we have complain’d of" on the part of Pennsylvania. When Mackay left Williamsburg for Staunton, he was carrying an order for the release of all three magistrates.38

There was some reason to believe that calm heads might prevail in the fight over the forks of the Ohio at this stage. News of the magistrates’ arrest prompted Governor Penn to send a commission to Williamsburg to negotiate a temporary boundary line and secure Dunmore’s assistance in promoting the royal establishment of a permanent one. Pennsylvania approached its rival as a foreign power would. On May 19, the ambassadors arrived at the Governor’s Palace. They were pleased to learn that Dunmore had already ordered the release of the magistrates being held at Staunton and given Connolly “a sharp reprimand” for his actions at the courthouse. Still, the commissioners were uninvited, and the visit was tense. Neither side was prepared to concede jurisdiction over Pittsburgh, so no progress could be made on a boundary. Frustrated, the Pennsylvanians headed home on May 28.39

Dunmore might gladly correct excesses within his own government, but he had no intention of working with Pennsylvania. Along with the letter of release for the three magistrates, he had included a proclamation, dated April 25, ordering the embodiment of a sufficient number of militia to oppose the pretensions of

38 A description of the arrests, the release order, and MacKay’s account, can be found in Andrew McFarlane to Penn, 9 April 1774, Dunmore to Daniel Smith, 26 April 1774, and MacKay to Penn, 5 May 1774, all in Pa. Archives, 487-88, 493, and 494-95. For Dunmore’s criticism of Connolly, see Executive Journals, 558. See also Caley, “Life and Adventures,” 36.
39 The quotation is from James Tilghman to St. Clair, 20 June 1774, Arthur St. Clair Papers, Box 1, fol. 2, Ohio Historical Society (microfilm viewed at the David Library of the American Revolution, Washington Crossing, Pa.). See also Force, AA, 277-80, 454-61.
Pennsylvania and insulate the region from hostile Indians. The ministry in London generally approved of Dunmore’s actions during this period, instructing him later that year to “continue to exert and exercise” Virginia authority there. But Dartmouth had misgivings about this particular proclamation, which he thought overstated “the Necessity of Military Force.” It “breaths too much a Spirit of Hostility,” he wrote, which “ought not to be encouraged in Matters of Civil Dispute between the Subjects of the same State.” Officials at Whitehall wished that a shared British identity would limit the intensity of these sorts of rifts. But even with a growing number of unfriendly Indians on the other side of the river, the bonds of Britishness were notable only for their absence.  

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There were a number of other interest groups outside of Virginia and Pennsylvania with claims to and plans for the Ohio Valley in 1774. A multitude of competing forces within the Empire struggled to control and profit from western lands. Whether initiated by rogue speculators, well-connected land companies, or indeed the king himself, every one of these efforts generated resistance and produced conflicts that reflected the inability of established authorities to dictate the terms of imperial development in the trans-Appalachian west.  

The ministry wanted desperately to wipe the slate clean on the North American frontier. In February, it attempted something like a reset for the region by rolling out a brand new set of rules for the distribution of western lands. The terms, which 

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40 For the proclamation of 25 April 1774, see Executive Journals, 656. Dartmouth to Dunmore, 1 June 1774, and 6 July 1774, DC, 350 (“exert”), 397 (“Civil Dispute”).
Dunmore received that spring, rendered all previous instructions touching on grants null and void. Governors were to survey all vacant land within their colonies and divide it into lots ranging from 100 to 1,000 acres. The resulting plots were then to be mapped, numbered, described in detail, and sold to the highest bidder at auction. An annual quitrent of a halfpenny per acre was established. Orderly though it was in conception, the new system never even approached the implementation stage in Virginia. For his part, Dunmore predicted that the expenses involved would lead colonists to simply ignore the terms. The best way to ensure quitrent revenue, he argued, was to permit grants “on the same easy terms” as they once were, presumably before 1763. He did threaten to enforce the new rules in response to an illegal land deal in Kentucky in March 1775, but the Revolution intervened before that situation had a chance to play out. The Virginia Convention repudiated the new policy, recommending that all persons “forbear purchasing, or accepting Grants of Land on the conditions prescribed by His Majesty’s new Regulations.”

41 Order in [Privy] Council, 3 February 1774, enclosed in Dartmouth to Governors in America, 5 February 1774, DC, 266, or C.O. 5/241/511-24. See also Dartmouth et al. to the Committee of the Privy Council for Plantation Affairs, 20 June 1774, DC, 386-87, or C.O. 5/1369/183-84; Dunmore to [William Preston], 21 March 1775, in Draper Manuscripts, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 4QQ9 (microfilm at John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library, Williamsburg, Va.) (“easy terms”). Under the new rules, owners were to possess their plots in fee simple, which would allow them to subdivide the holdings, whether for the purpose of sale or inheritance. As it gradually came to supplant entail in the late colonial and early national periods, this mode of property ownership stunted the development of hereditary aristocracy and has justly been described as “revolutionary”: Holly Brewer, “Entailing Aristocracy in Colonial Virginia: ‘Ancient Feudal Restraints’ and Revolutionary Reform,” William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Ser., 54 (1997): 307-346, esp. 309. It bears noting, however, that the imperial government favored this “democratic” form of land distribution just as strongly as the Virginia gentry, as the 1756 ban on grants of over one thousand acres attests. On the new rules and the Virginia Convention’s reaction to them, see William J. Van Schreeven and Robert L. Scribner, eds., Revolutionary Virginia: The Road to Independence, Vol. 2 (Charlottesville, 1975), 383-84 and 387-88 n. 9. The Kentucky land was purchased by a man named Richard Henderson: John Filson, Filson’s Kentucke, Wiillard Rouse Jillson, ed. (Louisville, 1929); Dunmore to Dartmouth, 14 March 1775, DC, 489-91, 492 (Convention quotation), or C.O. 5/1353/103-110; Dunmore to Little Carpenter [Attakullakulla], 23 March 1775, DC, 511-13, or C.O. 5/1353/130-31.
The only cases in which governors were permitted to deviate from the new system were those involving veterans who were entitled to grants under the Proclamation of 1763. Their sacrifices would not be left unrewarded. Or would they? Not long after announcing the new rules in February 1774, the ministry learned that Dunmore and the Virginia council had begun approving warrants of survey for provincial veterans. This raised red flags in London just as surely as it did in the west. The text of the Proclamation of 1763 did not expressly restrict eligibility for the grants in question, but Dartmouth felt strongly that they applied only to regular British officers and soldiers, not provincial ones. No one in Virginia, it seems, saw this coming, least of all Dunmore. He responded with an impassioned plea on behalf of the colonials. These soldiers had not only done “considerable service” during the war, he told Dartmouth, but they had done so without the promise of post-war half pay, which the regular forces enjoyed. Therefore, he wrote, they were arguably even “better entitled to the benefits of the Proclamation than the Officers and Soldiers of the regular Troops.” Of course, Dunmore had all sorts of reasons for making this case. There was profit and prestige for him in the liberal administration of the old system, but his position here seems genuine. Along with his prior support of the tax on slave imports, it reflected his increasing tendency to identify with colonial perspectives. 42

The question of provincial eligibility wasn’t the only reason the ministry objected to the surveys that Dunmore had approved. Any such activity west of the Proclamation Line was strictly forbidden, of course, but the warrants also conflicted

42 The warrants were approved in response to a petition of George Washington: Executive Journals, 4 November 1773, 549. Dartmouth to Dunmore, 6 April 1774, and Dunmore to Dartmouth, 9 June 1774, both in DC, 325 and 371-73 (quotations), or C.O.5/1352/1-2 and 5/1352/121-23.
with the proposed Vandalia colony. Under the direction of Philadelphia merchant Samuel Wharton and London banker Thomas Walpole, the Grand Ohio Company had been petitioning the crown for an enormous grant of land in the Ohio Valley since 1769. With many of Britain's most influential politicians in its ranks, the organization seemed virtually assured of success in August 1772, when, in spite of staunch opposition from Lord Hillsborough, the Privy Council approved its proposal for a new colony pending administrative details. The precise bounds of the grant remained undetermined, but it was likely to extend along the Ohio River from Pittsburgh all the way to the Kentucky River. 43

When taken to task for authorizing surveys within the prospective bounds of Vandalia, Dunmore pled ignorance. The negotiations for the grant were indeed secret, but he knew more than he was letting on. He had heard rumors about the plan as early as November 1770, when he condemned it unequivocally in a letter to Hillsborough. Fearing the reduction of land values in New York, he argued that a new western colony would be too remote from the settled parts of the colonies. Moreover, since the disapproval of the Ohio Indians was "easily foreseen," he added, the development was sure to start an Indian war. Later, Dartmouth pointed out that Dunmore had access to plenty of information about the region under consideration for Vandalia in the records of the Virginia council. In 1770, Hillsborough had forbidden Botetourt from

supporting any grants that conflicted with Walpole’s proposal, which should have been off limits already, as it lay beyond the Proclamation Line.\textsuperscript{44}

Obscure legal considerations ultimately stalled the drafting of the Vandalia grant, and the onset of the Revolution spelled its demise, but the Grand Ohio Company was only the most successful of a number of organized land companies vying for a piece of the Ohio Valley. Dunmore was himself involved with the ambitions of the Illinois and Wabash Companies. Before leaving on his first northwestern tour in the summer of 1773, he sent the ministry a petition from a group of men, led by William Murray (no relation), who had purchased a massive tract of land from the Illinois Indians in what is now southwestern Kentucky. The group, which called itself the Illinois Company, hoped that the territory would eventually become part of Virginia. Even though the Proclamation of 1763 forbade subjects from treating independently with Indians, the Company was betting that the Camden-Yorke decision of 1757, which stated that crown patents were unnecessary in cases in which title was acquired from “princes” in India, could be applied to North America as well as South Asia.

Dunmore supported the Illinois Company, in part, because he believed that western settlement would proceed with or without the guidance of government. Despite his earlier opposition to Vandalia, he now argued that if the Empire didn’t embrace projects like this one, settlers would erect separate states, to which indebted

\textsuperscript{44} Dunmore also argued that a western colony would attract “an infinite number of the lower Class of inhabitants,” due in part to “the desire of novelty alone,” making it impossible for New York landlords to pay quitrents: Dunmore to Hillsborough, 12 November 1770, in E. B. O’Callaghan, ed., \textit{Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New-York}, Vol.8 (Albany, 1857), 252. For further evidence of his awareness of the Walpole proposal, see Dunmore to Dartmouth, 16 November 1772, DC, 147-48, or C.O. 5/1351/1-7.

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and politically aggrieved subjects along the seaboard would likely flock. He had seen just such a situation play out near the Cherokee border in the Virginia backcountry. There, a small group of settlers who had been unable to legally acquire title to lands of their own choosing had begun to establish a polity of their own. They were “in a manner tributary to the Indians,” Dunmore explained, and had already “appointed Magistrates and framed Laws.” As “inconsiderable” as it was, Dunmore thought that a “separate State” of this kind set “a dangerous example to the people of America of forming Governments distinct from and independent of His Majesty’s Authority.” In order to have a role in the development of the trans-Appalachian west, Dunmore believed, the Empire would have to start bending to the wishes of colonists. The proposal of the Illinois Company represented an opportunity to do just this.45

Dartmouth had no patience for this line of argument. Exasperated, he explained that every unauthorized attempt “to acquire title to and take possession of Lands beyond the Line fixed by His Majesty’s authority” can “be considered in no other light than that of a gross Indignity and Dishonour to the Crown.” The same went for any and all encouragement that such efforts received from royal officials. The impassioned opposition of his superiors did nothing to deter Dunmore from continuing his association with the Illinois Company. The details are unclear, but in early 1775 he was made a principal member of the Wabash Company, a spinoff of the Illinois Company organized around yet another unauthorized purchase of Indian land.

Evidently, the group hoped that the support and influence of the Virginia government would eventually help it to overcome the ministry’s misgivings and compel the king to confirm both of William Murray’s deeds. Efforts toward this end were underway when the Revolution intervened. Undeterred, Murray continued to promote what came to be known as the Illinois-Wabash Company throughout the war and afterward unsuccessfully sought confirmation from the American Congress.46

* * *

Rogue settlement and independent land deals were more than merely offensive to monarchy. According to Lord Dartmouth, they were also acts of extreme “Inhumanity and Injustice to the Indians” and, as such, were likely to produce “fatal consequences” for British subjects and possibly the Empire itself.47 From his position in London, Dartmouth could not have known that the crisis he feared was already underway in the upper Ohio Valley in the spring of 1774. The story of Dunmore’s War cannot be told from the perspective of capital cities. Dunmore himself played a relatively minor role in the conflict’s development. He exercised some control over John Connolly, of course, and he authorized surveys that antagonized young Indian warriors. But it was his frustration with the role of distant observer that ultimately led him to head west in the summer of 1774. The situation he set out to confront was very much rooted in the dark and bloody soil of the Ohio Valley.

46 Dartmouth to Dunmore, 8 September 1774, DC, 411. On the Illinois-Wabash Company, see Livermore, Land Companies, 108-11; Memorial of the Illinois and Wabash Land Company. 13th January 1797...Published by Order of the House of Representatives (Philadelphia, [1797]), esp. 6; Report of the Committee, to whom was referred...the Memorial of the Illinois and Wabash Land Company...((Philadelphia, 1797)).
47 Dartmouth to Dunmore, 8 September 1774, DC, 411.
The Delaware chief White Eyes was in Pittsburgh on April 20 with bad news for John Connolly. There had been an unspecified insult to Indians on the west bank of the Ohio River. Disputes between settlers and natives were common in this part of the world, but these were treacherous times. Few doubted that even the slightest misunderstanding could escalate into an all-out war between colonists and a formidable confederacy of Indians. Opposition to the Treaty of Fort Stanwix had created common cause among Ohio Indians. From 1769 to 1771, the Shawnees hosted annual conferences on the subject in an attempt to forge a new alliance embracing tribes in the Illinois country and around the Great Lakes as well as the Cherokees and Creeks in the southeast. Though never strongly supported by the southern nations and always hobbled by divisions between separatist and moderate attendees, the Shawnees' attempts at unity worried white leaders, including Dunmore. In the spring of 1774, he informed Dartmouth that the Indians were again "meditating some important stroke." "If they effect a general Confederacy," he wrote, "the Country must suffer very great misery." It was a remote prospect, truth be told. The Shawnees were as diplomatically isolated as ever in 1774, but the British weren't taking any chances. They continued to view the maintenance of good relations with friendly Indians as paramount.48

48 For the White Eyes meeting, see John Connolly, "Journal of my Proceedings &c: Commencing from the late Disturbances with the Cherokees upon the Ohio," 14 April to 28 May 1774, entry for 20 April, in the George Chalmers Papers, Reel 3, New York Public Library (hereafter Connolly Journal). For the Shawnees' attempts at confederacy, see Dowd, Spirited Resistance, 40-46; Woody Holton, "The Ohio Indians and the Coming of the American Revolution in Virginia," Journal of Southern History 60 (1994): 453-78, 462-63, 471; Jones, License for Empire, 102-04. Dunmore to Dartmouth, 2 April 1774, in DC, 319-21 ("important stroke" and "general Confederacy").
The nation that White Eyes represented was particularly important in this regard. Despite their subordinate position within the Iroquois alliance system, the Delawares had a well-earned reputation for neutrality, peacekeeping, and alliance building. Their status as “women” in relation to the Six Nations reflected this, as did their role as “grandfathers” to the Shawnees. Connoting the influence born of age and experience, the latter distinction bespoke a history of pacifying belligerent Shawnees, notably those who lived at Wakatomica on the Muskingum River to the west of the Ohio. Because of all this, when White Eyes spoke, British officials like Connolly listened.49

The incident that White Eyes reported occurred along a stretch of the Ohio River that was to be the cradle of Dunmore’s War. Yellow Creek was a small tributary on the west bank of the Ohio, approximately fifty miles to the west of Pittsburgh and forty-five miles north of Wheeling. According to Connolly’s personal journal, the meeting with White Eyes prompted him to dispatch advertisements throughout the region on April 21 stating that certain “imprudent people” had “very unbecomingly illtreated” innocent Indians at Yellow Creek and “threatened their Lives.” Connolly ordered the inhabitants to “be Friendly towards such Natives as may appear peaceable.” He confused matters, however, by sending out a more inflammatory letter

regarding the Shawnees, who he said were "ill disposed" and in which he urged whites to "be on their Guard against" an attack.\textsuperscript{50}

The second message exacerbated an already anxious situation at Wheeling. Nervous whites—surveyors, traders, and expectant Kentucky settlers—had begun to seek refuge here from rumored Indian raids. George Rogers Clark was there and, nearly twenty-five years after the fact, recalled that Connolly's message inspired a council of local men led by Michael Cresap. This meeting solemnly declared war against the Indians. Town founder Ebenezer Zane thought the decision unnecessarily aggressive, even in light of Connolly's letter, but he protested in vain. That evening, two Indians were spotted in a trading party on the Ohio. Cresap and his men pursued them and returned the following night with two Indian scalps. Fourteen Shawnees were said to be soliciting provisions in the area the next day. Cresap again went out in search. The resulting skirmish, at Graves Creek, left at least one Indian dead and a white man badly wounded in the groin.\textsuperscript{51} The Cresap party headed north after

\textsuperscript{50} Neither of Connolly's messages has survived, but various references to them have. Connolly's descriptions of their contents are quoted here, for which see Connolly Journal. See also Desveaux Smith to Dr. Smith, 10 June 1774, in Force, \textit{AA}, 468, which supports Connolly's description.

\textsuperscript{51} Those involved in the Cresap murders blamed Connolly's letter. Years later, George Rogers Clark recalled it stating that "war was inevitable" and ordering Cresap "to cover the country by scouts until the inhabitants could fortify themselves": George Rogers Clark to Samuel Brown, 17 June 1798, George Rogers Clark Papers, 1771-1781, James Alton James, ed., \textit{Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library}, Vol. 8 (Springfield, Ill., 1912), 5-7, 7 (quotation). Cresap and Connolly had a hostile correspondence about a month after the Wheeling letter arrived, in which Cresap claimed that it had said the Shawnees "were determined to come to an open Rupture" immediately and that this intelligence, along "with Some other Circumstances," forced him to declare war. The Connolly-Cresap correspondence is copied in Connolly Journal, entry for 21 May 1774. On Cresap, see John Jeremiah Jacob, \textit{A Biographical Sketch of the Life of the Late Captain Michael Cresap by John Jeremiah Jacob, with an Introduction by Otis K. Rice} (Parsons, W. Va., 1971); Michael J. Mullin, "Cresap, Michael..." in John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, eds., \textit{American National Biography}, Vol. 16 (New York, 1999), 724-25; Robert G. Parkinson, "From Indian Killer to Worthy Citizen: The Revolutionary Transformation of Michael Cresap," \textit{William and Mary Quarterly}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Ser., 63 (2006): 97-105. For the murders, see Devereux Smith to Dr. Smith, 10 June 1774, in Force, \textit{AA}, 468; Journal of Alexander McKee, \textit{The Papers of Sir William Johnson}, Vol. 12, Milton W. Hamilton, ed. (Albany, 1957), 1090,
returning to Wheeling with the intention of attacking the peaceful Mingo village at Yellow Creek. In a moment of moral clarity—the village posed no threat to whites—they decided to abort the mission. The Mingoes were a small, multi-cultural group of displaced Indians descended mainly from the Senecas, Cayugas, and Mohawks who had migrated to this part of the world from New York in the mid-eighteenth century. The leader of the village at Yellow Creek, a Cayuga warrior named James Logan, was well known as a friend to neighboring whites and showed little desire to oppose Kentucky settlement. But even as Cresap was turning away from Yellow Creek, forces were in motion that would set Logan on the warpath. 52

On April 28, five Mingoes from Yellow Creek accepted an invitation to visit the farm of a white man named Joshua Baker. They had a history of obtaining a variety of goods there, including liquor. Logan’s brother, sister, and infant nephew, the son of Pennsylvania trader John Gibson, were among the group. One of the buildings on Baker’s farm functioned as a tavern of sorts, and when the Indians arrived, they were encouraged to drink—some did, some refused. Later, the revelers engaged in a shooting competition, during which the Indians emptied their weapons. With the guests intoxicated and disarmed, a young white settler named Daniel Greathouse and a small detachment of his followers emerged from hiding and ambushed the Indians.

1096 (hereafter PWJ). Other accounts can be found in Connolly Journal, entry for 26 April 1774; [?], “Extracts from my Journal from the 1st May 1774 Containing Indian Transactions,” entry for 26 [April 1774], George Chalmers Papers, Reel 3, New York Public Library (hereafter “Extracts from my Journal”). See also Otis K. Rice, “Introduction,” A Biographical Sketch of the Life of the Late Michael Cresap, 3-6. One of the white traders in Butler’s canoe testified on 1 May about these events and identified 26 April as the date of the first murders, though some sources name other dates around this time. Throughout, I have done my best to correctly identify dates, but some uncertainty is unavoidable. 52 On the Mingoes (or Seneca-Cayugas, as they came to be known), see William C. Sturtevant, “Oklahoma Seneca-Cayaga,” Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 15, Bruce C. Trigger ed. (Washington D.C., 1978), 537-53; Rice, “Introduction,” 6.
killing all four of the adults. Logan’s sister, with her child strapped to her back, was shot in the forehead at a range of six feet. Others may have been beaten to death. Having heard the gunfire and growing impatient, two Indians crossed the river in search of their friends and were also killed. Soon after, six more villagers approached, at least two of whom (and as many as five) lost their lives. The man who shot Logan’s sister cut her infant free with a view to bashing its “brains out,” but after some argument, the child was spared and eventually returned to Gibson, its white father. The murderers then gathered their families and fled the area, but not before scalping their victims, lest the events of that day be misinterpreted as a drunken row.53

In a few accounts of the Yellow Creek massacre, an intoxicated Mingo donned a “regimental coat” in the moments before the ambush and, according to one, mockingly affected the manner of its white owner. If true, the performance demonstrated a keen awareness of cultural difference, its manifestations in dress and carriage, on the part of the Indians present. Yet, other aspects of the massacre—the common social space, the impulse toward friendly competition, the mixed-race child—point to a shared, culturally hybrid world at Yellow Creek, one that bore very little resemblance to the one occupied by imperial leaders. Though hardly implements of mutual accommodation, the knives that the whites used to scalp the Mingoes were part of this story as well. Scalping was a language that many whites in the Ohio Valley

53 William Crawford and John Neville encountered the perpetrators of Yellow Creek among a group of refugees days after the fact and related what they heard to Pittsburgh authorities on 3 May. Their account is in Alexander McKee’s journal in PWJ, Vol. 12, 1097-98 (quotation on 1098); Connolly Journal, entry for 3 May. For references to the coat, see Reuben Gold Thwaites and Louise Phelps Kellogg, eds., Documentary History of Dunmore’s War, 1774 (Madison, 1905), 9-19, esp. 15-17, quotation on 16 (hereafter DHDW). See also Rice, “Introduction,” 6-7; White, Middle Ground, 358 and n. 85; Downes, Council Fires on the Upper Ohio, 163. The date of the massacre has often been reported as 30 April or 3 May, but a stronger case can be made for 28 April.
understood and practiced fluently. The Greathouse killers were careful to take scalps from their victims because they knew how the Indians would interpret it. For natives and newcomers alike, the scalped body served, dead or alive, as an ominous message to enemy groups that war was underway.  

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The Cresap and Greathouse murders threw the Ohio Valley into a panic. Understanding the inevitability of Indian reprisals, whites fled east. The speed and scale of this migration equaled anything seen during the Seven Years War. According to Valentine Crawford, over a thousand people crossed a one-mile stretch of the Monongahela River in a single day. Some of those who remained gathered in small wooden forts, from which they were able to make brief sorties to tend to their corn and cattle. St. Clair thought it "truly shameful that so great a body of people should have been driven from their possessions without even the appearance of any enemy." It was true that only a small number of people would be physically harmed in the weeks ahead, but precaution wasn't entirely misplaced. Having lost no fewer than three family members to white violence that April, Logan began a series of raids on isolated settlements. It was likely he and his followers who murdered a family at Muddy Creek near the Cheat River in early May. Later, they attacked the home of William Speir, whom they killed and scalped, along with his wife and four children. When neighbors

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arrived, they found a broadax embedded in Speir's chest. Over the course of the summer, Virginia and Pennsylvania officials did their best to manage popular hysteria. Ironically, they hoped to avoid the abandonment of settlements that Whitehall considered illegal.\(^{55}\)

Within a week of the events at Wheeling and Yellow Creek, Indian and white authorities around Pittsburgh leapt into diplomatic action. They organized a conference at the home of former Indian agent George Croghan, whose home, Croghan Hall, had long served as a hub of intercultural activity. Representing the northern Indian Department, Alexander McKee began the proceedings on May 3 by addressing the Six Nations delegation, which was led by the influential Seneca chief Kiashuta. McKee apologized for "the outrages" committed upon the Mingoes by certain "ill disposed" whites. With Connolly present, he assured them that the government of Virginia had played no part in, nor would it countenance, those atrocities. The next day, White Eyes and a number of other Delaware chiefs arrived, and on May 5 the whites formally conducted their condolences. "We wipe the tears from your eyes," McKee began, "and remove the grief" that the murders "have impressed upon your hearts." This symbolic cleansing was a commonplace of native-white diplomacy in the Ohio Valley. McKee was fluent in this discourse. The son and husband of Shawnee women, he had fifteen years of experience in the Indian service and lived just a few miles from the Shawnee town of Chillicothe. "We now collect the bones of your deceased people," he continued, "and wrap them up in those goods

\(^{55}\) Valentine Crawford to Washington, 7 May 1774, PGWC, Vol. 10, 52. St. Clair to Penn, 12 June 1774, in Force, AA, 467. On the forts, see DHDW, xvi. On Logan's raids, see Devereux Smith to Dr. Smith, 10 June, in Force, AA, 469; White, Middle Ground, 361-62 n. 92.
which we have prepared for that purpose, and we likewise inter them, that every remembrance of uneasiness upon this head, may be extinguished and also buried in oblivion.” With these gifts, the Indian dead were “covered” so that those present could move beyond the misdeeds for which they were gathered and continue in pursuit of mutual accommodation. Along with the practice of white scalping, these rituals show how Indians set the terms of cross-cultural political engagement on the frontier.56

Connolly’s statements likewise reflected the influence of Indian idioms. After expressing regret for the recent murders, he attempted to cast the crisis they had wrought in generational terms. He assured the Delawares and Six Nations that those killings had been “entirely owing to the folly and indiscretion of our young people, which you know, like your own young men, are unwilling to listen to good advice.” With his background in Indian languages and cultures, Connolly understood how prominently generational conflict featured in native political life. He knew that young Shawnee men tended to be more militant than their elders on the subject of Kentucky. As the tribe’s hunters, they had the most to lose from white encroachment and the most to gain from war, with all its opportunities for battle heroics. Sown into the fabric of native life, generational conflict came to inflect the way some Indians described disruptions in their political relations. With this in mind, Connolly hoped the attendees would relate to the problem of youthful recalcitrance. That he was himself younger than Michael Cresap was beside the point. Youth was characteristic of

56 Force, A.A. 476. On McKee, see Larry L. Nelson, A Man of Distinction among Them: Alexander McKee and the Ohio Country Frontier, 1754-1799 (Kent, Ohio, 1999). On Chillicothe, see Jones, Journal of Two Visits, 55-58. If, as has been suggested, the abandonment of native diplomatic forms serves as one indicator of European cultural dominance, Delawares and Mingoes had yet to reach subaltern status in the Ohio Valley: Philip D. Morgan, “Encounters between British and ‘Indigenous’ Peoples, c. 1500-c.1800,” in Daunton and Halpert, Empire and Others, 51.
insubordination, which, when emphasized, deflected responsibility from leadership. Generational symbols were part of the Indian diplomatic discourse that whites attempted to master on the frontier—one of the political “technologies” they employed—in order to advance their interests.57

White Eyes was impressed by Connolly’s speech. “We cannot doubt of your uprightness toward us,” he said, “and that the mischief done to us, has been done contrary to your intent and desire.” Along with Kiashuta, he agreed to convey the message to the Shawnees in the Ohio country. Before setting out, Kiashuta told George Croghan that the Shawnees “ought to be chastized” if they refused to make peace. He even suggested that Dunmore should build a fort at the mouth of the Kanawha to keep them “in Awe and prevent them makeing Inroads amongst the Inhabitants.” White ownership of Kentucky was essential to the maintenance of the fading power and prestige of the Iroquois in post-Stanwix North America, so Kiashuta had as little patience for Shawnee intransigence as the Virginians.58

Greathouse and five of his accomplices wrote to Connolly not long after the conference at Croghan Hall. In an ironic twist, the messenger they chose to deliver the letter was an Onondaga Mingo. Greathouse promised to kill again if Connolly did not order all Indians to remain on the west bank of the Ohio. Loathe to take orders from anyone besides Lord Dunmore, Connolly immediately sent an officer and six militiamen in pursuit of the gang with a note that read, “you have already committed

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57 Force, AA, 476. On generational conflict among the Shawnees, see Griffin, American Leviathan, 126. For thoughtful analysis of diplomatic discourse on the middle ground, see Merritt, “Metaphor and Meaning,” 60-87. I use the term “discourse” throughout to describe a specialized way of talking and thinking—a set of symbols, essentially.

58 Croghan to Connolly and McKee, 4 May 1774, PWJ, Vol. 12, 1099.
Actions So Barbarous in their nature, and so Evil a Tendency to this Country in general that you merit the severest punishment from this Government.” The events at Yellow Creek were particularly odious, he wrote, because they jeopardized the “apparent probability” of an accommodation with the Shawnees (what specifically this refers to is unclear). Should they ever attempt to kill another friendly Indian, he concluded, he would have them immediately arrested. Back in Williamsburg, Dunmore was also quick to condemn the Greathouse murders, which he thought displayed “an extraordinary degree of Cruelty and Inhumanity.” And yet, neither he nor Connolly ever attempted to bring Greathouse to justice. With the threat of Indian reprisals foremost in everyone’s mind, Dunmore said, very little popular will existed for the aggressive pursuit of white criminals. Perhaps the counterfeiting fiasco of 1773 had turned him off prosecuting western fugitives who enjoyed large pockets of sympathy. In any event, he lacked either the will or the courage to allocate security resources to the apprehension of whites at a time when Indians were on the attack.59

On the way back to Pittsburgh from their meeting with the Shawnees, White Eyes and Kiashuta spread the word that the council had been a success. The Shawnees had promised to be peaceful. Other native travelers were telling a different story. Some had recently seen Shawnees “dance the war dance.” Others had encountered a

59 For the Connolly quotations, see Connolly Journal, entry for 19 May 1774. For Dunmore’s, see Dunmore to Dartmouth, 24 December 1774, DC, 433, or C.O. 5/1353/7-39. Enclosed with this was a letter from Dunmore to Major General Haldimand, in which the governor reprimanded the recipient for passing intelligence to the ministry that named Cresap as the initiator of the hostilities rather than Greathouse. Dunmore was mistaken in this. According to Griffin (American Leviathan, 307 n. 112), Cresap possessed a Virginia commission. This claim is based on uncited evidence in DHDW (393). Cresap did go on to fight under Major Angus McDonald in a subsequent expedition against the upper Shawnee towns, but since blank commission documents were common in the region, this does not mean that Dunmore personally approved his participation.
group of Mingoes in possession of a white scalp, which signified that “war was declared.” Moravian missionary David Zeisberger thought the Shawnees were afraid to reveal their true intentions to the Delaware chiefs. Be that as it may, the Shawnee statement that White Eyes delivered to Connolly was far from timid. It insisted that the Virginians hold themselves to the same standards of political engagement that they demanded of others. Just as Connolly wanted the Shawnees to disregard the actions of “young men” like Cresap, they expected him “not to take any notice of what our young men may now be doing.” The message concluded with a request to hear from Governor Dunmore. Until that happened, the Shawnee warriors in Logan’s party would not deviate from their present course. The message infuriated Connolly. “We are sorry to think that the Shawanese want to destroy themselves, and be no longer a people,” he told his Indian allies at Pittsburgh. “If they attempt to kill any of us, for what has happened owing to bad young men,” he concluded, “our warriors will fall upon them.”

At the same meeting, White Eyes conveyed a message from the Shawnees to the Pennsylvanians. Far more friendly than the letter to Connolly, it was punctuated by the presentation of a string of wampum. A mutual antipathy for Virginians reinforced longstanding trading ties between the Shawnees and Pennsylvanians. Shawnee chiefs had recently helped protect a group of about thirty Pennsylvania traders from retaliatory violence in the Scioto Valley and escorted them to safety in Pittsburgh.

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Since Connolly's Pittsburgh was unsafe for Shawnees, the grateful traders returned the favor by secreting them to Croghan Hall.Shortly after the chiefs began the journey back to the Ohio Country, however, Connolly learned of their presence and tried to capture them. One of the two parties he dispatched overtook the Shawnees at Beaver Creek and fired on them, wounding one before retreating. For St. Clair and other Pennsylvania partisans, this episode clearly demonstrated Connolly's determination to go to war. "Every manly principle," he told Governor Penn, including "honour, generosity, [and] gratitude," should have compelled Connolly "to be kind, and afford protection to those poor savages, who had risked their own lives to preserve the lives and property of their fellow-subjects." The invocation of shared subjecthood across racial lines is noteworthy. The prospect of Indian violence did nothing to unite Pennsylvanians and Virginians in the Ohio Valley in 1774. This was a world in which white men denounced one another not only in spite of but also in unflattering opposition to the supposedly savage others in their midst. For St. Clair, the Shawnees who escorted the traders to Pittsburgh were better men and better subjects than the Virginians who tried to cut them down.61

Connolly's pursuit of the Shawnee chiefs reflected a new militancy toward that tribe among the Virginians. In early June, the commandant instructed all friendly Delaware and Six Nation Indians among the Shawnees to withdraw in order to avoid any accidental violence. In so doing, he effectively declared his intention to go on the offensive. His plan was to send an initial scouting party of about forty men to

61 For the Shawnees' protection of Pennsylvania traders and Connolly's pursuit of the guards, see St. Clair to Penn, 22 and 26 June 1774, in Force, AA, 474, 483.
Wheeling, where they were to begin constructing a stockade and wait for him to arrive with approximately two hundred reinforcements. From there, they were to head south and erect another fort at Hockhocking Creek. Before putting the plan into action, Connolly asked St. Clair to contribute men, but the Pennsylvanian refused. Logan was still killing whites, even though he had surpassed the thirteen scalps he originally demanded. But all the terror he inspired wasn't enough to bridge the divide between the Virginians and Pennsylvanians—not by a long shot.62

Connolly proceeded with his plan not only in spite of St. Clair's disapproval but also before receiving authorization from Lord Dunmore. The governor had not had a chance to endorse the scheme, which he did on June 20, before it quickly sputtered out. Two of the officers in the initial scouting party were separated from their men en route to Wheeling. Logan’s party promptly killed one and badly wounded the other. When the rest of the Virginians happened on the scene, they collected the surviving officer and returned to Pittsburg. The alarming incident prompted Connolly to abort the mission. From June on, Dunmore viewed the Ohio Valley as a theater of war. While endorsing Connolly’s plan, he told him to order “all officers going out on parties to make as many prisoners as they can of women and children.” If the Indians should decide to sue for peace, he wrote, “I would not grant it to them on any terms, till they were effectually chastised for their insolence.” Here was the ruthlessness for

62 Caley, “Life and Adventures,” 83-85; White, Middle Ground, 361-62 and nn. 93-94. For a Pennsylvanian’s view of the mobilization of Virginia forces at Pittsburgh, see Devereux Smith to Dr. Smith, 10 June 1774, in Force, AA, 469.
which Dunmore eventually gained infamy. Interestingly, it bears little resemblance to
the approach that he ended up taking during his own expedition later that year.\footnote{Dunmore to Connolly, 20 June 1774, in Force, \textit{AA}, 473 (quotation). Callendar, “Shawnee,” 631.}

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Not long after the massacre at Yellow Creek, a group of Shawnee warriors attacked a surveying party near the mouth of the Kanawha River. The lead surveyor was a man named Angus McDonald who had fought on the Jacobite side in the rebellion of 1745 before immigrating to the colonies from Scotland. In the aftermath of the incident, McDonald wanted badly to punish the Shawnees. He asked Dunmore for permission to raise a body of men and march on their towns along the Muskingum River. Having approved Connolly’s plan for offensive action in June, Dunmore now agreed to take the fight across the Ohio River into the heart of Indian country. McDonald raised four hundred men and advanced on Waketomica, long a hotbed of Shawnee resistance. A small battle took place there sometime around late July, during which two Virginians lost their lives and three Indians were scalped. Though the casualties were minimal, McDonald’s men ended up laying waste to Waketomica and several neighboring villages, burning all of the corn they found along the way. For all the destruction it wrought, the expedition served only to inflame the Indians without subduing them.\footnote{On McDonald and the Waketomica expedition, see \textit{DHDW}, 149-56; St. Clair to Penn, 8 August 1774, and “Extract of a Letter from Redstone...Received at Williamsburg, August 18, 1774,” both in Force, \textit{AA}, 683, 722-23 (quotation on 723); McDonald to Connolly, 9 August 1774, and Intelligence from Simon Girty at Fort Pitt, 11 August 1774, both enclosed in Thomas Walpole to Dartmouth, 29 October 1774, in the American Papers of the Second Earl of Dartmouth, Staffordshire Record Office, Reel 2, 1056 (microfilm viewed at the David Library of the American Revolution, Washington Crossing, Pa.).}
Dunmore had foreseen the need for a larger effort. His intention to address the disorder on the frontier by raising an army dated at least as far back as May, when Landon Carter noted it in his diary: “Ld. Dunmore wants 1,200 men to fight the Pensylvanians. I’d rather raise them for Boston a great deal.” Around this time, the Virginia House of Burgesses proclaimed its support for the people of Boston and its opposition to the closing of the port there. When they took the provocative step of establishing June 1 as a day of fasting and prayer in Virginia, Dunmore dissolved the house. The following day, eighty-nine burgesses met secretly at Releigh’s Tavern, where they voted to send delegates to the first Continental Congress in Philadelphia. Though clearly gathering momentum, the patriot movement wasn’t yet the all-consuming consideration it would become. Certainly, it did not preclude the governor from leaving the capital on official business. 65

Before authorizing the Waketomica mission that summer, Dunmore decided to personally lead an expedition against the Shawnees and their allies. His interests in the project were many. He wanted to bring an unstable situation to an advantageous conclusion for his colony. If it helped to distract Virginians from their dispute with the mother country, all the better. His hunger for lands further heightened his investment in the task. There were also significant civil concerns in play. North America had experienced a number of social disruptions in the 1760s and 1770s, from the uprising of the Scotch-Irish “Paxton Boys” in Pennsylvania to the regulator movements in the Carolinas. In many of these cases, dissidents cited poor regulation of western

borderlands and the failure of the state to protect them from Indian raids.  

Never short on self-confidence and always up for adventure, Dunmore now sought to head off such discontent and, in so doing, ensure Virginia’s dominion over contested land. He was determined to demonstrate the power of imperial might in the process, both for those in the west and those watching in Williamsburg.

The mobilization of colonists required attractive terms of enlistment. Hostility toward Indians and allegiance to the king would not be enough to build an army. Before leaving for Pittsburgh, Dunmore ordered Colonel Andrew Lewis, the ranking militia officer in southwestern Virginia, to raise a body of troops and march north to the Ohio. Volunteers were to be promised financial rewards, presumably in the form of plunder, along with an opportunity to distress the Shawnees. Officer William Preston told prospective recruits that interest, duty, honor, and self-preservation—in short, everything that “a man ought to hold Dear or Valuable”—all recommended enlistment. Whatever notions of civic humanism the volunteers entertained, they saw personal profit as a perfectly legitimate object of manly endeavor, especially when they were being asked to leave their farms behind. Certainly, the call to arms would not have attracted the hundreds of volunteers that it did had it not acknowledged the needs and ambitions of its audience.

Dunmore traveled to Pittsburgh in mid-August to raise an army of his own while conferring with Connolly and allied Indians. Things around Fort Dunmore, as

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67 Percy B. Caley, “The Life and Adventures of Lieutenant-Colonel John Connolly: The Story of a Tory,” Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine 11 (1928): 90; Dunmore to Andrew Lewis, 12 July 1774 and 24 July 1774, both in DC, 399-400, 401-02; Preston’s circular letter, 20 July 1774 and Dunmore to Dartmouth, 14 August 1774, both in DHDW, 91-93 (quotes on 92 and 93), 149-50.
Connolly had renamed Fort Pitt earlier that year, remained as volatile as ever. A few days before the governor’s arrival, Virginians allegedly murdered two innocent Delawares on their way to Croghan Hall. McDonald, who was in town at the time with supplies for Dunmore’s expedition, immediately offered a £50 reward for the culprits, but his advertisements were destroyed under cover of night. Croghan’s son-in-law, Augustine Prevost, thought “the want of discipline” at Pittsburgh rendered “it impracticable” to imprison the murders. Prevost had come to town on business and was distressed by the disorder and lawlessness he found. The “ruffians & plunderers” who populated the militia were, in his mind, far more dangerous than any Indians. He was sure the governor would find it difficult to exercise much control. For their part, Pennsylvania partisans were looking forward to seeing Dunmore. They hoped he might bring some relief from the tyranny of Connolly’s henchmen. Their situation was desperate. “We Dare not venture to enjoy the Comfort of peaceable Rest or Sleep at nights,” magistrate Mackay wrote, “for fear of our houses being broke open about our ears & our persons maltreated.” That the dreaded threat came from fellow white subjects rather than the Indians was, by this point, a given.68

Dunmore arrived on September 10. When he entered the fort, the sentry laid down his rifle, removed his hat, and extended a personal welcome. Dunmore accepted the presumption with characteristic good humor, but far more grievous deviations from form would soon require his attention. The following day he offered a £100 reward for the apprehension of those responsible for murdering the Delawares. A few

days later he heard evidence in the case, but nothing came of it. According to Prevost, Dunmore now believed that Pennsylvanians had taken the Indians' lives "in order to throw the odium upon the Virginians." Whether an instance of paranoia or political theater, this seems unlikely. It does, however, suggest how entangled the crises had become, with racial violence and inter-colonial strife constantly informing and reshaping one another. And yet, the struggles remained at least partially distinct in Dunmore's mind. Negotiations with the Pennsylvania commission at Williamsburg had convinced him that the boundary dispute was at an impasse; he still entertained some hope for peace with the Indians.69

The governor was at Fort Dunmore on the evening of September 12 meeting with Delaware chiefs and a delegation of Mohawks that claimed to represent the Shawnees. It was his first direct exposure to high-stakes Indian diplomacy. White Eyes began by symbolically cleansing Dunmore's eyes and ears with a string of wampum, as was customary, so that he might confront the crisis at hand with an open mind and unclouded senses. Then rose the Mohawks, who explained that the Shawnee leadership, while limited in its inability to control the "foolish young men" who had "loosened their hands" from the chain of friendship, remained committed to peace. The Shawnees, they said, hoped to arrange a conference with "their brethren, the English of Virginia."

Dunmore's response exhibited the command of native diplomatic discourse that North American frontiers demanded. Assisted by Alexander McKee, the half-Shawnee Indian agent, he began by presenting a string to the attendees in gratitude for

69 "Turmoil at Pittsburgh," 129-35.

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their efforts toward peace and providing condolence presents to cover the graves of their fallen friends. Eastern Virginians were exposed to these rituals in the pages of John Pinkney's *Virginia Gazette*, which published the proceedings in a special supplement that October. In cabins and taverns and on plantations, many no doubt read or listened with great interest as Dunmore turned his attention to the Shawnees. Ohio Indians traditionally addressed him as their “brother,” often acknowledging his “elder” status, as the Delawares did at this meeting. Dunmore was careful to reciprocate selectively. While referring to the nations present in fraternal terms, he declared “how little the Shawanees deserve the treatment or appellation of brethren from me.” They had never “truly buried the hatchet” after Pontiac’s Rebellion of 1763-1764, he charged, and had repeatedly violated the terms of the treaty that brought that series of conflicts to a close. Acknowledging the atrocious behavior of whites the previous April, he cataloged a host of murders that the Shawnees had committed, allegedly before a drop of their blood was ever spilled. Finally, he denounced the Shawnee practice of selling the plundered property of Virginians, most notably horses, to colonists from Pennsylvania. With this, Dunmore closed his remarks by promising to regard and protect the Delawares and Mohawks as the younger brothers he acknowledged them to be.70

Diplomatic efforts were also underway in Indian country. Not long after the meeting at Fort Dunmore, a Delaware chief named Captain Pipe returned to Pittsburgh from the lower Shawnee towns. He had attended a conference there and now presented

70 The records of this meeting are in Force, *AA*, 872-74. The printed version is in *Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney), 13 October 1774, supplement.
speeches from it at Fort Dunmore. In Ohio, a Mohican delegation had scolded the Shawnees for holding onto the chain of friendship with one hand while keeping “a tomahawk in the other.” Removing this figurative instrument of war from their hands, the Mohicans handed it to the Delawares, who, as the Shawnees’ “grandfathers...are good judges, and know how to dispose of it.” Recognition and reciprocity were essential parts of Ohio Indian diplomacy. When a subject was raised, the respondent had to address it directly and in precisely the terms through which it was introduced. In answer to the Mohicans, the Shawnees admitted that “some foolish young people may have found” a tomahawk hidden “in the grass” but insisted that it had now been safely disposed of. After relating this exchange at Fort Dunmore, Pipe reported that the leadership was anxious to renew friendly relations with the Virginians. White Eyes volunteered to help organize and attend a meeting between Dunmore and the Shawnees. The Mohawks followed suit, committing their brethren the Wyandots to the task as well.71

Before responding to the offer, Dunmore directed his attention to reconciling with an old ally. According to Prevost, the governor believed that “the whole success of his expedition depended” upon George Croghan’s “assistance in managing” the Ohio Indians then at Pittsburgh. Croghan had initially agreed to support Virginia in the boundary dispute in exchange for Dunmore’s promise to provide legal title to lands that he’d purchased from the Indians over the years. As part of the deal, Croghan signed on as a Virginia magistrate. This position conflicted with a number of his past and future allegiances. He was a large shareholder in the Grand Ohio Company and its

71 Force, AA, 874-76.
chief representative in the region. He also came to openly sympathize with the Pennsylvanians at Pittsburgh. Croghan accused Connolly—the two had once been quite close—of promoting chaos at Pittsburgh in order to rule with an iron fist. In May 1774, he helped St. Clair to raise one hundred “rangers” in an effort to protect Pennsylvania partisans and forestall evacuation in the event of an Indian war. And it was widely known that Croghan had called Dunmore “a bankrupt” in casual conversation. All of this made reconciliation more complicated, but with the governor in town, the aging Croghan became an eager participant. Croghan had to formally apologize and explain himself in writing before a conference could be arranged. When he and Dunmore did meet, Prevost wrote, “they drank one bottle hand to fist” and sealed an agreement “in a great flow of spirits.”

On the same day he made up with Croghan, an inebriated Dunmore agreed to a meeting with the Shawnees. He had one condition: it had to take place at Wheeling or somewhere further south along the Ohio. He knew that the Shawnees were politically divided and that while some might want to talk, others could easily be on the warpath. Rather than sit back and wait for peace terms, then, he was moving forward with his initial plan to link up with Lewis’s army. In his conversations with Croghan, Dunmore confided a desire to make peace with the Shawnees, provided, Prevost wrote, they “make restitution for the plunder they had made upon the Virginians, & give hostages

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Pinkney’s supplement indicated that Dunmore answered the offer on the afternoon it was made, but other evidence suggests that the Indians had to wait several days for his reply: Wainwright, George Croghan, Chapter 13, esp. 281, 286-87. On the rangers, see St. Clair to Penn, 29 May 1774, and Croghan to St. Clair, 4 June 1774, both in Force, AA, 463 and 465-66. In “Turmoil at Pittsburgh,” see correspondence between Connolly and Croghan, 2 June 1774 to 3 June 1774, 155-57, Croghan to Dunmore, 15 [September] 1774, 159-61, as well as Prevost’s diary, 136 (“bankrupt”), 139 (“whole success” and “spirits”).
for their future good conduct.” He was perfectly willing to negotiate, as later events
confirmed, but he preferred to do so from a position of strength. He dispatched
William Crawford, a prominent westerner with close ties to George Washington, at the
head of about 500 men and instructed him to march to the mouth of the Hockhocking
River. A few days later, he left Pittsburgh and floated down the Ohio with another 700
men toward Wheeling, where, in a sense, it had all begun.73

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By the end of September, Dunmore had reconnected with Crawford and
erected a small fort on the west bank of the Ohio at the mouth of the Hockhocking. In
honor of his brother-in-law and political patron, he named it Fort Gower. The force
now under his command amounted to 1,200 men, and Lewis was on his way north
with 1,100 more. White Eyes had followed the Virginians from Pittsburgh in the
hopes of arranging the conference to which Dunmore had consented. The Delaware
chief agreed to solicit Shawnee participation but didn’t get far before returning with
ominous news: the warriors had all gone south “to speak with” Lewis’s army. The
window for peace had closed.74

Lewis was encamped at a place called Point Pleasant, where the Kanawha
meets the Ohio. In the hollow of a tree there, one of his men found a note from
Dunmore ordering them to proceed to Fort Gower, approximately forty-five miles to
the north. Having come all the way from southwestern Virginia, the army was tired, so
Lewis elected to rest for a few days and await supplies before advancing. It was

73 “Turmoil at Pittsburgh,” 142; Force, AA, 872-74; DHDW, 302 n. 15.
74 William Christian to William Preston, 8 November 1774, DHDW, 302.
October 6. As they gathered strength, the Virginians examined their motives. A soldier named James Newell wrote verse exhorting the soldiery, as the “offspring of Britain,” to “extend the Dominion of George our Great King.” As they so often did for Dunmore, the personal and imperial good converged in the minds of these men: “The land it is good, it is just to our mind, / Each will have his part if his lordship be kind, / The Ohio once ours, we’ll live at our ease / With a bottle and glass to drink when we please.” The call to arms that the soldiers had answered promised only a share of the spoils, but land grants for veterans were often made after the fact of service, as they had been in 1763. Newell’s verse suggests that Lewis’s men expected access to the land that they were fighting for. 75

Lewis was still at Point Pleasant when the Shawnee chief Cornstalk crossed the Ohio with several hundred warriors on October 10. The ensuing attack took the Virginians utterly by surprise. Estimates of the Indians involved ranged from 400 to 1,000. They were mainly Shawnees and Mingoes, but there were also disaffected Delawares, Cherokees, Wyandots, Ottawas, and Miamis among them. At least three white men, most likely captives taken as children, were on the Indian side as well. Despite reports that the Shawnees possessed “timorous spirits, far from anything heroick,” Cornstalk’s men fought with fearsome courage at Point Pleasant. Their bravery “exceeded every mans expectations,” wrote Colonel William Christian. The Virginians were less impressive. John Floyd thought his fellow offices had shown courage—some twenty percent of them, including Andrew Lewis’s brother Charles, lost their lives—but he estimated that no more than three or four hundred whites were

75 DHDB, 285 n. 3 and 302 n. 15, 361-62 (verse). See also Abernathy, Western Lands, 112.
ever in action at one time, with “trees & logs” serving “as shelter for those who could not be prevailed on to advance to where the fire was.” The battle was an appalling experience. Lieutenant Isaac Shelby recalled inexpressible “Acclamations” filling the air. “The Hidious Cries of the Enemy and the groans of our wound[ed] men lying around,” he wrote, were “Enough to shudder the stoutest hart.” Despite losing approximately 70 men, with about 80 more seriously wounded, Lewis managed to eke out a marginal victory. But the Indians’ retreat occasioned no celebration, and very little respite. According to Christian, “the cries of the wounded prevented our resting any that night.”

Dunmore had not had time to warn Lewis of the Shawnees’ approach. Assuming that the Virginians’ superior numbers assured victory, he advanced toward the Shawnee villages with a view to intercepting the Indians in retreat. He set up camp approximately eight miles from the main Shawnee town at Chillicothe near present-day Circleville, Ohio. One observer noticed the name “Camp Charlotte” written in “red chalk on a peeled sapling” at the entrance of the encampment, a modest tribute to the Queen of England. It was here that Cornstalk, pursued by Lewis from the south and facing an army of even greater strength, applied for peace. When Lewis and his men showed up outside the camp, they caused the Indian attendees to flee, disrupting

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treaty negotiations that were already well underway. On October 18, Dunmore personally implored Lewis to restrain his men, who were furious and adamant for revenge. Many years later, Lewis's son recalled that his father had had to double or triple Dunmore’s body guard in order “to prevent the Men from killing” him.77

With Lewis’s reluctant cooperation, the governor managed to convince all of the Indian chiefs to return to Camp Charlotte except those representing the Mingo...
the Shawnees "as an Elder Brother." He sought to discredit reports that the Delawares had caused the war through treachery, urging the Shawnees "to bury in oblivion these idle prejudices against your Grand Fathers the Delawares, & see each other on your former friendly terms." With the Fort Stanwix cession evidently secured, Dunmore thus sought to restore the political relations that, he believed, best promoted peace and order, albeit on Virginia’s terms. He officially proclaimed the cessation of hostilities in January 1775. The Shawnees had agreed not to hunt south of the Ohio and to honor white navigation rights on the river. In return, they would "be protected from all injury" whenever they had occasion to pass through Virginia territory. "Any violence upon" Indians, no matter what their "Tribe or Nation," was now expressly forbidden.79

The Camp Charlotte settlement was not perfect, nor could it have been. It did not involve the Cherokees, who were also deeply concerned in Kentucky, and did nothing to pacify the Mingoes. There were even a few Shawnees who refused to accept it. Virginians who wanted to exact revenge for Point Pleasant or to extend the Fort Stanwix cession thought it too forgiving. No settlement could have satisfied all these groups at once.80 Even so, the Camp Charlotte treaty was widely praised for what it did achieve. Thomas Gage, once critical of Dunmore’s activities in the west,

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79 For the treaty terms, see Dunmore to Dartmouth, 24 December 1774, DC, 439-40, or C.O. 5/1353/7-39; [Dunmore], "Deluded Brethren," n.d., George Chalmers Papers, Reel 3, New York Public Library ("Hatchet"). For the January announcement, see Dunmore, "A Proclamation," in Force, AA, 1169. There was a rumor in London that Dunmore had divided the land ceded at Camp Charlotte into twenty-two tracts and promptly sold them. Lord North was asked in Parliament to confirm or deny this information but did neither. Extant documents do not substantiate the rumor: R. C. Simmons and P. D. G. Thomas, eds., Proceedings and Debates of the British Parliaments Respecting North America, 1754-1783, Vol. 5, (White Plains, N.Y., 1986), 519.

approved the "very Moderate Terms" of the peace. The Virginia council was also impressed by its "lenity." The Indians had likely braced for "the cruelty of the victor," the councilmen wrote, but Dunmore "taught them a lesson which the savage breast was a stranger to—that clemency and mercy are not incompatible with power." (That the Mingoes seemed not to appreciate this "lesson" went unacknowledged.) Even Arthur St. Clair, the leading Pennsylvanian in the region, was pleased. He conceded that the war had "come to a much better end than there was any reason to have expected." 81

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Returning east from Indian country, the officers who had served under Dunmore stopped at Fort Gower. Out from under the governor's gaze (he went his own way home), they drafted several resolutions strongly supporting the Continental Congress's impending boycott of commerce with Great Britain. The officers' patriotism did not prevent them from expressing gratitude to Dunmore. He had undergone "the great fatigue of this singular campaign," they wrote, "from no other motive than the true interest of this country." 82 Others, then and now, have not been so sure.

An air of conspiracy has always surrounded Dunmore's War. Edmund Pendleton suspected that the Yellow Creek massacre was calculated to provoke Indian

raids, which could then serve as a pretext for a war that would introduce white settlement north of the Ohio. Pendleton never revealed who he thought might be behind such a scheme, but the proprietors of the Grand Ohio Company were eager to believe any rumor implicating Dunmore, whom they blamed (improbably) for delaying approval of Vandalia. During the first Continental Congress, Patrick Henry allegedly discussed the “secret springs” of Dunmore’s then-upcoming expedition with Thomas Wharton, a Company principal. Wharton said that Henry had told him that since “his Lordship was determined to settle his family in America, he was really pursuing this war, in order to obtain by purchase or treaty from the natives a tract of territory” north of the river. These men imagined that Dunmore had designs on what is now that state of Ohio in addition to the lands acquired at Fort Stanwix. The Camp Charlotte settlement likely disabused them of this notion, but the Revolution added new suspicions to the mix. Some colonists came to believe that Dunmore had pursued the war in order to distract them from the Coercive Acts. There were even those who thought that he had colluded with the Shawnees in their attack on Lewis. It was in the dim light of this delusion that Point Pleasant came to be known, in the nineteenth century, as the first battle of the American Revolution.83

Dunmore has retained the role of villain in modern scholarship. One recent study holds that he manufactured the war with the Shawnees in order to enrich land speculators. The governor was clearly a savvier participant in western affairs than his reputation for incompetence allows, but it is doubtful that anyone could have orchestrated the remote and complicated series of events that led to Point Pleasant. Even if he had done so, speculators didn’t gain anything worth the effort from the Champ Charlotte settlement. Some, like Patrick Henry, viewed it as a disappointment—another example, according to Simon Schama, of “the Crown’s suffocating determination to confine their territorial expansion.” As whites in London and Virginia saw things, the land south of the Ohio River already belonged to the crown under the terms of the Treaty of Fort Stanwix. Dunmore merely forced the Shawnees to acknowledge this. 84

That he aggressively pursued Virginia’s interest in the Ohio Valley, at times in violation of his instructions, is beyond question. He seized upon disorder in and around Pittsburgh to strengthen Virginia’s position vis-à-vis Pennsylvania and Vandalia. And though he never made any grants to himself during this period, he was no innocent in the world of land speculation. In spite of all this, there is no evidence linking either him or Connolly to the April 1774 murders that set Logan and his

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Shawnee allies on the warpath. Both men criticized those atrocities and, along with everyone else, proceeded to focus on the raids they provoked rather than the prosecution of Cresap and Greathouse. In the final analysis, Dunmore’s War resulted not from a shadowy conspiracy but from the convergence of a number of powerful North American interests—the Six Nations, the Virginia government, independent settlers—in opposition to a loosely connected collection of weaker interests, including the Ohio Indians, proprietary Pennsylvania, and the ministry in London.

Colonial governance required autonomy and improvisation from far-flung officials. The information lag alone—letters took anywhere from three weeks to three months to reach London from Williamsburg—made it nearly impossible to manage colonial affairs from Whitehall, where instructions often had to percolate through a variety of channels before being shipped across the Atlantic. Once the orders did arrive, ever-changing local circumstances often precluded their institution. Authorities in Williamsburg faced similar obstacles while trying to govern the backcountry. The importance of native diplomatic discourse, including scalping, made places like the Ohio Valley culturally as well as geographically remote from imperial centers. The state’s dependence on people who could operate in this milieu—William Johnson, George Croghan, Alexander McKee, John Connolly—often compromised its goals. It was hard enough for these men to control events, let alone someone hundreds or even thousands of miles away who didn’t speak the language. The state’s principal leverage was its ability to grant legal title to land. The exercise of this power was both a sign and a source of weakness, for by promising grants in the acquisition of consent, the state encouraged colonists to move west well in advance of its ability to control them.
there. As all of this suggests, one need not focus on the progress of the colonial resistance movement to see that the imperial order was little more than a precarious illusion in North America by 1774.85

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On Christmas Eve, Dunmore wrote the most important letter of his life. A response to the accusations he encountered on his return home, it contained an exhaustive self-defense and related new developments in the mounting crisis over colonial rights. One of the letter’s main themes was the troubling independence of colonists throughout Virginia. “The established Authority of any Government in America, and the Policy of Government at home,” he wrote, “are both insufficient to restrain the Americans” in their movement west. He had observed this first hand; it was incontrovertible. Matters were also desperate at the capital, where “the Power of Government” was now “entirely disregarded, if not wholly overturned.” Despite its pessimistic tone, the letter managed to restore the ministry’s confidence in Dunmore’s administration. The following March, Dartmouth reported that there was “no Room in the Royal Breast to doubt of the uprightness of your Lordship’s Intentions.”86

Whitehall had very little reason to regret the outcome of Dunmore’s War. It was unauthorized and risky, and if handled with less finesse, it might well have strengthened the prospects for a north-south native alliance. Instead, it affirmed the Treaty of Fort Stanwix while shoring up relations with the Indians at a time when the

85 On Shawnee diplomatic isolation, see McConnell, A Country Between, 255-58; Dowd, Spirited Resistance, 45; Schutt, Peoples of the River Valley, 148. For geographical distance as a source of imperial weakness, see Hinderaker, Elusive Empires, xiii-xiv.
86 Dunmore to Dartmouth, 24 December 1774, DC, 422, or C.O. 5/1353/7-39; Dartmouth to Dunmore, 3 March 1775, 476-77, or C.O. 5/1352/84-86.
Empire badly needed friends in the backcountry. Strictly speaking, it did nothing to prevent the government from proceeding with its plans for Vandalia. There was a downside as well, of course. Dunmore’s War gave heart to settlers and speculators who had transgressed the Proclamation Line and probably encouraged others to do so. Like so much else in western affairs, it was at once complicating and clarifying. As the Empire tried in vain to manage its own growth, mixed signals were inevitable.
Chapter 4
A Refugee’s Revolution, 1775-1781

Early on the morning of June 8, 1775, cannon fire resounded off the coast of Yorktown, Virginia.¹ Two months earlier, amidst the mounting crisis over colonial rights, Lord Dunmore had raised a furor by ordering the secret removal of gunpowder from the public magazine in Williamsburg. At the time, he cited the powder’s vulnerability to a rumored slave uprising, but he later admitted the true impetus: the Virginia Convention’s March resolution to arm the militia, made in the wake of Patrick Henry’s “give me liberty, or give me death” speech. Following Dunmore’s orders, British seamen managed to seize the powder in the dark of night on April 20. Almost immediately, the news began to spread and alarms were raised. Volunteers gathered at points throughout the colony and, with tomahawks and muskets in hand, demanded the gunpowder’s return. As the militias marched toward Williamsburg, they learned of the battle of Lexington and Concord, which intensified an already-strong sense of impending confrontation. Patrick Henry and his Hanover County volunteers were the first to reach the capital, encamping just a few miles outside the city on May 3. In response, the captain of HMS Fowey, the twenty-four-gun warship now holding the colony’s gunpowder, vowed to bombard Yorktown if any harm came to the governor.²

Cooler heads prevailed during the ensuing stand-off, but the spirit of resistance remained very much on display at the capital. In mid-May, Dunmore reported that “even in the Place where I live, Drums are beating and Men in uniform dresses with Arms are continually in the Streets, which my Authority is no longer able to prevent.”

When the General Assembly convened on June 1 to consider Lord North’s conciliatory proposals, burgesses wore coarse linen hunting shirts and carried tomahawks to signal their solidarity with the volunteers. Four days later, tempers flared again when a spring-loaded gun wounded three young patriots who had broken into the magazine in search of arms. Since the government had obviously booby-trapped the door, most directed their outrage at Dunmore. The usually unflappable Edmund Pendleton was apoplectic. He thought the governor might justifiably face “Assassination” for his part in the episode. Dunmore himself later claimed that his home was “kept in continual alarm” during this period “and threatened every night with an assault.”

It would not have been unreasonable under these circumstances for the people of Yorktown to suppose that they had awoken on the morning of June 8 to the sounds of open war. The shots, while not fired in anger, did signal an ominous new development. The night before, under cover of darkness, Dunmore had fled the capital.

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3 Dunmore to Dartmouth, 15 May 1775, “Dunmore Correspondence,” Special Collections, John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library, Williamsburg, Va., 541, or C.O. 5/1353/141-44. “Dunmore Correspondence” (hereafter DC) contains typescript copies of documents now held at the British National Archives in Kew, England. Wherever possible, I have also included citation information for the original along with the page number in DC.


with his family and a small group of associates. A few hours later, HMS *Magdalen*, anchored not far from the *Fowey* in the York River, fired thirteen cannon rounds in honor of their arrival aboard ship. No one could have known it then, but the shots marked the end of British government in Virginia.

As Dunmore struggled to reestablish his authority in the months ahead, a community of royalists coalesced around him. Over the course of its existence, the “Floating Town,” as Commodore Andrew Snape Hamond dubbed it, included nearly 200 ships and some 3,000 souls. A temporary home for Scots merchant families, British soldiers and seamen, runaway slaves, prisoners of war, and an array of others, it was a place of remarkable intercultural engagement, both aboard ship and in the patriot imagination. Perceived as a hotbed of racial mixing and sexual promiscuity, the fleet was a rich source of symbols for patriot propagandists trying to unify the fledgling “American” nation. But to follow Dunmore through the waters of revolutionary Virginia, and beyond, is to witness ordinary people making history again and again, not merely as symbols but as independent actors in a grand, often harrowing drama.

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6 Journal of the *Magdalen*, 8 June 1775, DC, 635, or A.O. 51/3894.
7 Statistics for the floating town are necessarily approximate. In his ongoing work on the subject, Peter Wrike has identified some 180 vessels that were, at one point or another, attached to the town: Peter Jennings Wrike, *The Governor’s Island: Gwynn’s Island, Virginia, during the Revolution* (Gwynn, Va., 1995), 115-19. Population statistics are even more uncertain. No more than 1,500 slaves reached British lines (Cassandra Pybus, “Jefferson’s Faulty Math: The Question of Slave Defections in the American Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 62 [2005]: 243-64, 250). The only estimates of civilian population at any one time that I have been able to locate suggest that “several Hundred Families” or about 1,000 individuals occupied the town: W. Hugh Moomaw, ed., “The Autobiography of Captain Andrew Snape Hamond...1738-1793” (M.A. Thesis: University of Virginia, 1953), in Hamond Naval Papers, Vol. 1, Accession #680, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va. (hereafter HNP); “[James] Cunningham’s Examination, 18th July 1776,” *NDAR*, Vol. 6, 1135. Added to this were 160 members of the 14th regiment along with miscellaneous seamen.
Like all good friends of government, Dunmore hoped for a quick accommodation of the dispute with the colonists, but his actions suggest that he expected to be in the water for some time. Just a few weeks after taking up residence on the Fowey, Lady Dunmore and her children were on their way back to England on board the Magdalen. The governor had ordered the unauthorized voyage on the pretext of informing the ministry about his situation as quickly as possible. It proved a controversial decision. The British naval command in North America objected to the Magdalen’s removal, citing the need for ships to police contraband trade along the coast. Dunmore was always prepared to exasperate his superiors when his family’s interests were on the line. An Admiralty Office investigation eventually cleared him of any wrongdoing, but the episode prompted the ministry to prohibit all governors from dispatching navy vessels without authorization in the future.8 The Virginia Convention also took exception to Lady Dunmore’s departure. The delegates resented the implication that she and her children might in any way be “in danger amongst a people by whom they were universally esteemed and respected.”9 How the Convention proposed to protect the first family, particularly in the event of war, is unclear. They

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8 On the Magdalen’s departure and the subsequent controversy, see Dunmore to George Montague, 16 June 1775; Virginia Gazette (Purdie), 7 July 1775; Samuel Graves to Admiral Philip Stephens, 16 July 1775; Montague to Dunmore, 9 August 1775: all in NDAR, Vol. 1, 697 and n. 2, 841, 897, 1104; Lords Commissioners of the British Admiralty to Dartmouth, 26 August 1775, and Stephens to Samuel Graves, 6 September 1775, both in NDAR, Vol. 2, 690. 705. The letter from the ministry is Dartmouth to Governors in America, 5 September 1775, DC, 619, or C.O. 5/242/92-3.
were probably just as happy to make a show of their offense as Dunmore had been to
draw attention to his vulnerable young family.

In need of a new mast for the *Fowey* one day in early July, Dunmore took the
opportunity to visit Porto Bello, the farm he owned on the outskirts of Williamsburg.
Greeted by some of the plantation’s slaves, he sat down to dinner with the *Fowey*’s
captain, George Montague, while a group of men from the ship felled a tree for the
new mast. In the middle of the meal, slaves spotted a body of armed men approaching
the house. 10 It was Captain Samuel Meredith, brother-in-law to Patrick Henry,
marching at the head of about seventy Hanover County volunteers, no doubt some of
the very same men who had camped outside Williamsburg during the gunpowder
controversy. The slaves quickly alerted the diners, enabling them to escape some three
or four minutes ahead of Meredith. Despite supposedly peaceful intentions, the
patriots fired four or five (ineffectual) rounds at a slave rowing in a canoe not far
behind the governor. 11

By saving Dunmore from capture, the slaves at Porto Bello altered the course
of the American Revolution. In the process of ensuring that he remained free to wreak
havoc on the rebellion, they bolstered their own prospects for liberty as well as those
of other bondsmen and women. From this point forward, blacks were among
Dunmore’s most important allies. The relationship between the British fleet and
coastal Virginia was by turns symbiotic and antagonistic. The king’s ships always had

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10 Dunmore to Dartmouth, 12 July 1775, *NDAR*, Vol. 1, 874. Porto Bello was situated on the present
site of the C.I.A. training facility at Camp Peary.
11 For Meredith’s peaceful intentions, see Benjamin Harrison to George Washington, 21[-24] July 1775,
(Charlottesville, Va., 1985), 146 (hereafter *PGWR*). See also Dunmore to Dartmouth, 12 July 1775,
to struggle to extract resources from the land—whether timber, pork, or people. Without the cooperation of black Virginians, many of these transactions would have been impossible. British officers like Montague didn’t know what to expect from enslaved Virginians when they arrived in Chesapeake Bay, and experiences like the one at Porto Bello no doubt opened their minds to the possibility of more formal associations in the future.

A few days after his narrow escape at Port Bello, Dunmore led the fleet south to Norfolk. There, he could count on the assistance of a friendlier local populace and more easily monitor the entrance to Chesapeake Bay for illegal shipments of war munitions from the West Indies. He soon moved his quarters aboard an impressed merchant vessel called the *William* and dropped anchor off neighboring Portsmouth. He’d written effusively the previous year about the harbor there, which he thought could comfortably “contain the whole Fleet of England.” In the nearby Elizabeth River, he wrote, “a ship may lay in four, five, Six or ten fathom Water with as good anchorage as any in the World.” In the months ahead, he would take full advantage of these natural features. But whether they would inspire the naval command to devote precious imperial resources to the area remained to be seen.¹²

It was here that John Connolly found the fleet that August. After courting support from the Shawnees, Six Nations, and Delawares on behalf of the British during peace negotiations at Pittsburg, he had decided to make his way to Norfolk to help suppress the rebellion. It was not an easy trip. The intervening territory had

grown so full “of Committees, new raised militia, petty officers, and other persons officially busy, in hopes of being distinguished,” he later wrote, “that the utmost circumspection was continually necessary.” In order to conceal his true purpose, he travelled with three Shawnee warriors, whom he claimed to be escorting to a conference with Lord Dunmore. He was detained twice during the trip despite the misdirection, but he managed to escape in both cases and ultimately reached the coast unscathed. The arduous trek did nothing to dampen his ambition. On joining the governor on board the William, Connolly later wrote, “my heart swelled with the hopes of doing something eminently conspicuous.”

It wasn’t long before the two men, reunited for the first time since Dunmore left Pittsburgh in September 1774, began formulating a scheme to subdue the rebellion. Like much British strategy, their plan attempted to capitalize on the various inequalities that structured and strained colonial society. The idea was for Connolly to travel in secret to Detroit, all the while recruiting Ohio Indians, disaffected backwoodsmen, and French settlers. Financial inducements for the prospective soldiers were, as always, essential. Connolly had already sent letters to militia officers in Augusta County promising “300 acres to all who should take up arms in the support of the constitution.” He also planned to engage French and English recruits “by pecuniary rewards” and would later request “reasonable presents” for Indian chiefs.

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and others in order to "urge them to Act with Vigor." Once formed, Connolly's army would seize Fort Pitt and continue marching east. Meanwhile, Dunmore's naval force was to make its way up the Potomac to Alexandria, Virginia, where it would unite with Connolly that spring. If successful, the twin missions would effectively sever all communication between the northern and southern colonies.

Dunmore and Connolly were not alone in their desire to split the colonies. As one British strategist observed, threats to "the boasted American Union" were more "dreaded by the Congress than a Defeat to Washington's Army." The impulse to sever North from South reflected metropolitan conceptions of North American geopolitics. The managers of the war in London believed that the southern colonies were too dependent on seaborne trade to resist reconciliation for long. Places like Georgia and South Carolina were thought to have more in common with the islands of the West Indies than with provinces like Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. At this stage, there was nothing certain about the rebellion encompassing as much of the eastern seaboard as it ultimately did. Because of this, friends and foes alike took Dunmore and Connolly's plan quite seriously.  

14 Connolly to Gage, [9 September 1775], Rev. Va., Vol. 4, 82-83. Financial incentives would have been critical. One account of Detroit in the spring of 1776 stated that the French there wanted to remain neutral and that the Indians were wavering and divided amongst themselves: “Information Regarding Detroit,” 2 April 1776, in Reuben Gold Thwaites and Louis Phelps Kellogg, eds., The Revolution in the Upper Ohio, 1775-1777 (Madison, 1908), 147-51. However, the British did employ French Indian agents during the early part of the war at places like Michilimackinac and Detroit: Richard White, The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815 (New York, 1991), 402.

15 The quote is from “Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1776-1782,” Henry Clinton Papers, Box 245, item 96, Clements Library. Not long after Connolly and Dunmore moved forward with their scheme, John Shuttleworth similarly told George Germain that control of the Chesapeake could cut off communication between the north and south: John Shuttleworth to Germain, [“Plan for the reduction of Maryland,” late in 1775], George Germain Papers, Vol. 4, 5-6, Clements Library. Sir John Dalrymple made the same observation in his “Advantages of Lord Cornwallis’s Expedition going rather to
In early September, Connolly sailed to Boston to propose the idea to the British commander-in-chief in North America, General Thomas Gage. Though unable to judge the viability of all the particulars, Gage thought well enough of the presentation to lend his support. He asked General Guy Carleton and the superintendent of northern Indian affairs, Guy Johnson, to facilitate Connolly’s work in any way they could. He also instructed the commanding officer at Detroit to encourage the French Canadians in the district to enlist. Finally, he ordered two companies of the Royal Irish 18th Regiment, then in Illinois, to meet Connolly at Detroit and join him on the march east. If Dunmore was “able to make a stand at the same time in the lower parts of the country,” Gage told the ministry, “the Project will be of great use.”

On his way back to Virginia with news of Gage’s support, Connolly lost track of a servant of his named William Cowley. If Connolly had any idea how disastrous the defection could be, he never gave any indication of it. Soon after escaping, the servant betrayed his master’s plan in a detailed letter to George Washington. Subaltern sabotage was a commonplace of the age, one that flourished all the more amidst the chaos of war. That it redounded in this instance to the benefit of the patriots is ironic,


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for, as Cowley’s letter revealed, Connolly intended to set convicts and indentured servants “at their liberty and to give them land to join him.”17 People like Cowley often had access to information that could hurt their superiors and, given an opportunity, frequently used it to improve their situations. Dunmore and his allies did everything they could to encourage this. The lower ranks of colonial society were crucial to British strategy throughout the war. Why Cowley chose to align himself with the rebellion is a mystery. His story nevertheless demonstrates how vulnerable masters could be to their subordinates.

About a month after returning to Norfolk, Connolly set out for Detroit as planned. An unnamed servant and two Scotsmen—a surgeon called John Smyth and a newly-minted lieutenant from Pittsburgh by the name of Allen Cameron—accompanied him on the mission. The party was carrying a number of sensitive papers, which they carefully concealed in a manner of Dunmore’s devising. The sheets were rolled into the handles of the servant’s suitcase, which were hollowed out “and covered with tin plates” before being recanvased. On the eve of the departure, the mood within the group was tense. Cameron told a relative that they were “very apprehensive of being intercepted by some of [the Virginians’] Damnd Committies.”18 In less than a week, their worst fears would be realized.

On November 20, someone recognized Connolly near Hager’s Town, Maryland, and informed patriot authorities. It was 2 a.m. when Connolly, Smyth,
Cameron, and the servant were roused from their beds at a nearby public house and taken into custody. Hoping to urge his contacts in the West to proceed with the mission in his absence, Connolly asked a “good negro” girl to smuggle paper and ink into his room. She “proved to be faithful” and delivered the desired items undetected.19 Outsiders like this slave woman often facilitated the flow of wartime intelligence, but these letters never reached their destinations. They were in Smyth’s possession when he escaped on December 29. After suffering alone for nearly two weeks in the winter wilderness of western Maryland, Smyth was recaptured along with the letters.20 In the meantime, Connolly and Cameron were marched to Philadelphia. On New Year’s Day 1776, they were “exhibited in terrorem to all” in “a parade of indignity” through an unnamed Pennsylvania town. Another rogue’s march awaited them in Philadelphia, where they were interrogated by members of Congress. It would be another four years before Connolly was free again.21

The plan that he and Dunmore had devised to split the rebellion had come to an end before ever really getting started. Even in failure, it reveals the pivotal roles that political outsiders—servants, slaves, women, Indians, French Canadians—could and did play on both sides of the war. After the summer 1775, British policy would formally embrace servants and slaves, in particular, as never before.

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19 Connolly, Narrative, 46, and Smyth, Tour, 158-59. The letters to Hugh Lord and Richard Lemoult are in Papers of the Continental Congress, Roll 93, i. 78, Vol. 5, 1, 13-14, 17-18.  
20 Smyth, Tour, 163-68.  
21 Connolly, Narrative, 50-54, 98.
Slaves in the lower tidewater were keeping a close watch on the governor's fleet. When sixty soldiers from the 14th Regiment arrived in July, local whites noticed an uptick in slave flight. Captain John McCartney of the Mercury, which had relieved the Fowey, refused to harbor the runaways, but other officers greeted them with open arms. During a powerful hurricane in September, a tender called the Liberty ran aground in Back River. Before burning the vessel, patriots discovered a number of runaway slaves among its crew. Aaron and Johnny, fugitives from King and Queen County who had joined the fleet at Yorktown, were both seized. The captain of the Otter, Matthew Squire, had been on board himself but managed to elude capture during the hurricane. The Liberty's pilot, a mulatto runaway from Hampton named Joseph Harris, also found his way back to the Otter. On learning this, the Elizabeth County Committee demanded that Squire discharge Harris, who, along with "other slaves, hath been long harboured, and often employed, with your knowledge." Squire never complied. The fleet needed men desperately, and runaways served the additional purpose of depriving the enemy of labor. Contemporaries estimated that about one

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23 John McCartney to Paul Loyall (Mayor of Norfolk), 12 August 1775, Rev. Va., Vol. 3, 431-32. See also Selby, Revolution, 58.

24 Virginia Gazette (Purdie), 8 September 1775, and Elizabeth Country Committee of Safety, and the town of Hampton, to Matthew Squire, 16 September 1775, both in NDAR, Vol. 2, 56, 125 (quote). On Aaron and Johnny, see Wilson Miles Cary to Purdie, 4 September 1775, Rev. Va., Vol. 4, 69-70.
hundred enslaved men and women successfully reached Dunmore between June and November 1775.\textsuperscript{25}

A small number of indentured servants also sought out the king’s ships that summer. Some did so after being forced to take up arms for the patriots.\textsuperscript{26} Others simply ran at their first opportunity. Such was the case with Joseph Wilson, a servant indentured to George Washington at Mount Vernon. A painter by trade, Wilson made his escape after being hired out to someone in Fredericksburg.\textsuperscript{27} Knowing how badly Dunmore needed men, Washington didn’t hold out much hope of retrieving the servant, but Wilson was eventually captured near Hampton. When he refused to return to his former situation, Lund Washington, Mount Vernon’s manager, recommended that he be publicly whipped and sold into the backcountry. Like so many residents of the floating town, Wilson’s fate is unknown.\textsuperscript{28}

Though not numerous enough to mount a decisive attack, the black and white runaways who found refuge with Dunmore strained the fleet’s already scant resources. Merchants in and around Norfolk were able to provide some supplies on credit—the firm of Aitcheson and Parker furnished bread, oatmeal, cheese, butter, rum, and pork in August of 1775—but it was never enough. Meat was particularly scarce. Before the war, it had reached the coast through now-severed channels in the colony’s interior. It

\textsuperscript{25} The estimate comes from Virginia Committee of Safety to Virginia Delegates in Congress, 11 November 1775, \textit{Rev. Va.}, Vol. 4, 380. The first piece of modern scholarship to acknowledge pre-proclamation runaways was Benjamin Quarles, \textit{The Negro in the American Revolution} (Chapel Hill, 1996, c. 1961), 22-23 and n. 12.

\textsuperscript{26} Dunmore to Dartmouth, 25 June 1775, DC, 564, or C.O. 5/1353/160-72.


was mainly in the hopes of finding pork and mutton that Dunmore began authorizing raids on coastal plantations that summer.\textsuperscript{29} Not surprisingly, this exposed him to accusations of piracy, which undercut whatever legitimacy his government still had. References to Dunmore's "Piratical War," as Edmund Pendleton styled it, had all the more resonance given the frequent involvement of runaway slaves and servants in the raids, as either liberators of patriot property or the liberated themselves.\textsuperscript{30}

The immediacy of the fleet's needs did not prevent Dunmore from monitoring these sorts of insults. All four of Virginia's newspapers were emitting a steady stream of patriot propaganda by this time, but John Holt's \textit{Virginia Gazette, or, The Norfolk Intelligencer} was the most provocative. In Dunmore's view, Holt was guilty of "aspersing the characters of his majesty's servants, and others, in the most scurrilous, false, and scandalous manner."\textsuperscript{31} Holt had spent a large part of September antagonizing Squire, in particular, whom he accused of harboring slaves and kidnapping patriots. Matters came to a head for the governor when Holt printed what one observer called "a few Anecdotes of the Rebellious principals of Lord Dunmores

\textsuperscript{29} See the documents reproduced in Brent Tarter, "'The Very Standard of Liberty': Lord Dunmore's Seizure of the \textit{Virginia Gazette, or, The Norfolk Intelligencer}," \textit{Virginia Cavalcade} (1975): 58-71, 60, 63.

\textsuperscript{30} For characterizations of Dunmore as pirate, see \textit{Virginia Gazette} (Purdie), 6 October 1775, Supplement, \textit{NDAR}, Vol. 2, 342-43; Edmund Pendleton to Thomas Jefferson, 16 November 1775, in Julian P. Boyd, ed., \textit{The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. 1, 1760-1776} (Princeton, 1950), 261. For piracy and slaves, see \textit{Virginia Gazette} (Pinkney), 15 September 1775, quoted in Tarter, "'Standard'," 60-62. Runaways were often implicated in the theft of other slaves; see the example of Benjamin Wells, who was abused by twelve of Dunmore's men, "mostly Negroes," and relieved of "two Negro women" in late November: \textit{Virginia Gazette} (Dixon and Hunter), 2 December 1775, \textit{NDAR}, Vol. 2, 1239.

father." The reference to William Murray's Jacobitism struck a nerve. Having himself been a page of honor at Bonnie Prince Charlie's short-lived Edinburgh court, Dunmore remained touchy about the association for the rest of his life. A few days after the barb appeared in print, the governor ordered a group of about twenty men from the Otter to go ashore and seize the press, types, paper, and tools in Holt's shop, along with anyone found on the premises.

Dunmore watched through a spyglass from the deck of the William as the seizure unfolded. Two or three hundred onlookers gathered around the scene, but no resistance was made. Richard Henry Lee, who heard the story while attending Congress in Philadelphia, thought the locals' inaction "disgraceful" and concluded that all "the good men" must have been out of town, leaving "none but Tories & Negroes" behind. In addition to the tools of the trade, Squire's men carried off two of its practitioners, including a journeyman printer named Alexander Cameron. After being forced into the king's service that day, both men went on to publish Dunmore's proclamations aboard the William along with a new royal Gazette. Cameron remained loyal to the king and eventually sought the role of government printer in the

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32 The issue is no longer extant, but it is mentioned in James Parker to Charles Steuart, 2 October 1775, Charles Steuart Papers, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh (microfilm at the John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library, Williamsburg, Va.). See also Rev. Va., Vol. 4, 155-56 n. 2. In an open letter to Dunmore in Pinkney's Gazette, an anonymous observer stated that he'd been at a loss to discover what had angered the governor so, "until I looked into the Norfolk gazette of the preceding week, and there I find your genealogy described, which I confess reflects but little honour on your family": quoted in Mapp, "Pirate' Peer," 75. This was not the last time that Dunmore was publicly criticized for his Jacobite heritage: "Extract of a Letter from Philadelphia, Dec. 6," Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser, 20 January 1776, NDAR, Vol. 2, 1307.

33 The seizure was reported in Dunmore to Dartmouth, 5 October 1775, DC, 645, or C.O. 5/1353/300-02. Other accounts are Captain Beesley Edgar Joel to Joseph Wright, 25 October 1775, Rev. Va., Vol. 4, 278; "Monthly Intelligence," Pennsylvania Magazine; or. American Monthly Museum, October 1775, 485; Richard Henry Lee to George Washington, 22[-23] October 1775, PGWR, Vol. 2, 66 ("disgraceful").
Bahamas. The confiscation of Holt’s shop was plainly illegal. Dunmore argued that it was Holt, an “instigator of treason and rebellion,” who first broke the law. The preservation of “all decency, order, and good government,” he wrote, demanded the seizures. The rebellion had reached the point at which might made right.

Emboldened by the town’s acceptance of these events, Dunmore conducted a number of successful raids in and around Norfolk in the weeks that followed, capturing dozens of patriot cannon and small arms. While maintaining his headquarters on board the William in the south branch of the Elizabeth River, he entrenched his fighting force—perhaps three hundred strong by this time—at a place called Gosport immediately southeast of Portsmouth. Owned by Andrew Sprowle, a wealthy Scots merchant, the storehouses there served as sleeping quarters for Dunmore’s men. Katherine Hunter, an intimate of Sprowle’s, hosted regular balls at the barracks, during which servicemen and loyalist civilians mingled freely. Any such diversion must have been welcome, for, despite all of Dunmore’s successes, these were trying times for friends of government.

Area loyalists had much to fear and a great deal to do that fall. In early November, more than six hundred patriot troops were preparing to march on Norfolk

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35 Quoted in Tarter, “‘Standard’,” 67.

36 Selby, *Revolution*, 62-63

from Williamsburg. The people were in a state of “Panick,” Sprowle wrote, “Removing into the Countrey” and “putting their efects at Gosports & aboard Ships all on account & fear of the Provential forces.” Some naturally saw the situation as an opportunity for profit. Merchant Robert Shedden observed that with “every body Securing their property afloat as fast as they can,” no one was thinking about business. He was optimistic about the prospects for trade, however, urging a correspondent in Glasgow to send over “a large Cargo of Goods.” The loyalists had no need for luxuries, he wrote, but basic products—“Oznabr[ig]s, Course Linens, Checks Sheeting, Pap[er] Nails Sail Cloth And every Necessary Article”—would find a ready market. He believed that the war represented “an Opportunity that Should Not be Missd to Make some thing handsome.” The prevailing mood in and around Norfolk was nevertheless one of insecurity. Having moved his family and belongings aboard a ship under Dunmore’s protection, customs officer Charles Neilson was full of wistful apprehension. “Happy are You in being at a Distance,” he told a friend who had fled to Scotland, for “our prospect is now truly alarming.” Neilson particularly regretted not having sent his wife and daughter back to Britain that summer. As it was, they would have to endure the trials ahead together.

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38 Rev. Va., Vol. 4, 7.
40 Robert Shedden to John Shedden, 9 November 1775, Rev. Va., Vol. 4, 353.
41 Charles Neilson to James Gregorie, 5 November, Rev. Va., Vol. 4, 329.
The loyalists finally had cause to rejoice on November 15. That day, Dunmore successfully led an outnumbered force of British regulars and provincial volunteers against Princess Anne County militia at Kemp’s Landing, a few miles southeast of Norfolk.42 A low point for Virginia patriots, the victory invigorated loyalists and convinced Dunmore that the time had come for a bold stroke. Reasserting royal authority would require a major mobilization of manpower, and in the absence of actual resources, he would have to leverage some of the Empire’s most abstract assets. In the days ahead, he attempted to capitalize on its reputation for strength as well as virtue, aggressively asserting the king’s will while invoking the gleaming promise of British liberty.

Despite the decisive step he was about to take, Dunmore was deeply unsure of himself in the fall of 1775. The last letter he’d received from his superiors at Whitehall was dated May 30. He had been awaiting instructions for months since then, all the while improvising as best he could amidst unprecedented circumstances. “God only knows what I have suffered since my first embarking,” he told Dartmouth, “...not knowing how to act in innumerable instances that occur every day.” These bouts of diffidence caused him to vacillate. If he “remained a Tame Spectator and permitted the Rebels to proceed without any interruption,” he knew they would only gain strength. On the other hand, given his small army, an aggressive push might only involve his supporters “in inevitable ruin, should the Rebels march a body against us that we were

42 At Kemp’s Landing, there seems to have been 120 regulars and 30 or 40 loyalists on the British side against between 200 and 400 militiamen: Rev. Va., Vol. 4, 10-11; William Calderhead to John Rodger, 16 November 1775, Rev. Va., Vol. 4, 413-14; John Page to Virginia delegates in Congress, 17 November 1775, NDAR, Vol. 2, 1061-62; Selby, Revolution, 64-66; Adele Hast, Loyalism in Revolutionary Virginia: The Norfolk Area and the Eastern Shore (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1982), 52.
not able to withstand." Thoughts like these present a stark counterpoint to the caricature of Dunmore—cocksure, blustering, foolish—that emerges from most studies of revolutionary Virginia. They reveal a powerful sense of responsibility for those who had put their faith in him as a representative of the Empire. In truth, Dunmore was neither particularly prone to circumspection nor impervious to self-doubt. Under the circumstances, how could he have been?

It was in this anxious state of mind that Dunmore published the proclamation that would come to define his career. Signed on November 7 and released immediately following the victory at Kemp's Landing eight days later, it was, first and foremost, a declaration of martial law. As "disagreeable" as this step was, he explained, the open war being waged against the king's ships around Norfolk and the formation of the army then on the march from Williamsburg made it absolutely necessary. These were acts of treason, and since the perpetrators couldn't be prosecuted through "the ordinary Course of the civil Law," the restoration of "Peace and good Order" required the institution of military justice. As nicely as a declaration of martial law fit into the Whig narrative of arbitrary imperial power, it was the proclamation's closing section that proved most controversial. "I do hereby farther declare," Dunmore wrote, "all indented Servants, Negroes, or others (appertaining to the Rebels) free, that are able and willing to bear Arms" for Great Britain. With these words, he raised the king's standard at Kemp's Landing and ordered "every Person capable of bearing Arms" to

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43 Dunmore to Dartmouth, 6 December 1775, DC, 672, or C.O. 5/1353/321-34.
44 See, e.g., Simon Schama, Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves, and the American Revolution (New York, 2006), 70-83.
resort to it. The British flag was now flying over Norfolk. Within days, well over one
thousand Virginians were wearing strips of red cloth declaring their sworn allegiance
to George III.46

The actions of slaves and servants, who had been seeking refuge with
Dunmore for months, obviously helped to inspire the proclamation’s emancipation
provision.47 Dunmore acknowledged as much. To ascribe the present disorder among
slaves to his public statements, he told Dartmouth, was to change “the effect into the
Cause.”48 Of course, the proclamation did more than simply seize upon preexisting
unrest. It simultaneously emboldened and channeled it. Yet, the ambitions of
outsiders—as represented by the actions of people like Joseph Harris, the pilot of the
Liberty, and Joseph Wilson, Washington’s indentured painter—irrefutably informed
the proclamation, a document which, in turn, had a major impact on British policy for
the remainder of the war.49

46 Ibid. For the standard in Norfolk, see Neil Jamieson to Glassfor, Gordon, Monteath, & Co., 17
November 1775, and John Brown to William Brown, 21 November 1775, both in Rev. Va., Vol. 4, 423,
446. For the strips of cloth, see Hast, Loyalism, 52, 74. The oath these people signed is in Rev. Va., Vol.
4, 395. For the king’s August declaration of rebellion, see Rev. Va., Vol. 3, 223.
47 The influence of the unfree on British war policy has recently been acknowledged: McDonnell,
Politics of War; Douglas R. Egerton, Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America
(New York, 2009), esp. 68-69. Still, the point is not sufficiently emphasized in the literature on the
proclamation; see, e.g. Schama, Rough Crossings, 7.
49 Some British officers and politicians disapproved of the proclamation, but Dunmore influenced many
others, including Henry Clinton, whose Phillipsburg Proclamation (30 June 1779) also offered freedom
to rebel-owned slaves: Christopher Leslie Brown, Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism
(Chapel Hill, 2006), 308-09. Some scholars have made the dubious claim that Dunmore’s emancipation
provision served to contain slave rebelliousness that might otherwise have produced more meaningful
and far-reaching social change: Edmund S. Morgan, “Conflict and Consensus in the American
Strange though it may seem in this light, Dunmore’s proclamation was arguably the era’s arch expression of imperial authoritarianism. The king had officially declared the colonies in a state of rebellion that August. The proclamation, drafted on board an impressed merchant vessel, the William, and printed with the press and paper illegally seized from John Holt, boldly asserted the state’s power to determine who could and could not own property in this new environment. Dunmore hoped that the offer of freedom would force patriots to leave the warfront in order to protect their homes from potential insurrections. On a practical level, then, it was designed to deprive the opposition of manpower while augmenting British forces. By combining the specters of slave rebellion and imperial power, it was also conceived, perhaps unwisely, as an instrument of intimidation. The Virginia Convention certainly saw it this way. In their official response, the delegates noted that Dunmore had assumed “powers which the king himself cannot exercise, to intimidate the good people of this colony into a compliance with his arbitrary will.” The argument touched a chord with white Virginians. Some hoped it might even unite them.

Dunmore had given quite a bit of thought over the years to the military potential of Virginia’s 200,000 slaves. In calmer times, he had worried that Spain or another rival power might seize upon it. The threat of insurrection had also played a key role in the gunpowder controversy of April 1775. Dunmore initially told colonists

50 Edmund Pendleton, “VIRGINIA. December 13, 1775...A DECLARATION,” Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter), 16 December 1775, 2. The “authoritarian implications” attending any emancipation scheme is noted in Brown, Moral Capital, 212, 254 (quotation).
that he removed the powder in response to rumors of an uprising in Surrey County, and that he had done so clandestinely in order to avoid inciting a panic. The specter of rebellion weighed heavily on the minds of white Virginians—the public magazine was itself partially a monument to this fear—but few doubted that the governor had intended to disarm white insurgents as opposed to black ones. During the ensuing furor, several Williamsburg slaves reportedly offered to help protect the Governor’s Palace in exchange for their freedom. Dunmore turned them away, but the encounter seems to have impressed him. If Patrick Henry was permitted to march on the capital unopposed, he told local magistrates soon after, he would “arm all my own Negroes, and receive all others that will come to me, whom I shall declare free.”

On May 3, he alluded publicly to the threat, reminding Virginians of the colony’s “internal weakness.” These were desperate words at a desperate time, but they were not ill-considered. Dunmore never stopped believing that all sorts of outsiders—servants, convicts, and Indians as well as slaves—could be mobilized for the benefit of government.

The ministry was not opposed to such tactics. During the gunpowder controversy, Dunmore told Dartmouth that he would be able to subdue the colony with

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52 On the gunpowder controversy, see Dunmore to Dartmouth, 1 May 1775, NDAR, Vol. 1, 260 (quotation); Municipal Common Hall to Dunmore, 21 April 1775, Rev. Va., Vol. 3, 54; Dunmore to Municipal Common Hall, 21 April 1775, Rev. Va., Vol. 3, 55; Peyton Randolph to Mann Page, Jr., et al., 27 April 1775, NDAR, Vol. 1, 234; Benjamin J. Hillman, ed., Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia, Vol. 6 (Richmond, 1966), 582 (hereafter Executive Journals); comments of the Caroline County Committee, 19 May 1775, Rev. Va., Vol. 3, 150. For Dunmore’s refusal of the slaves’ offer in April, see “Extraordinary Intelligence,” Virginia Gazette (Pinkney), 4 May 1775, 3. The contemporary historian John Burke wrote that “parties of negroes mounted guard every night” at the palace during the controversy: quoted in McDonnell, Politics of War, 65.

53 The proclamation is in Executive Journals, Vol. 6, 583. For more on this little-known precursor to the proclamation, see the flipside of William Byrd III to Ralph Womeley, Jr., 4 October 1775, in Papers of Ralph Womeley, Jr., University of Virginia Library, Special Collections, Charlottesville, Va.
"a Force from among Indians, Negroes, and other persons," if only he had enough arms.\(^{54}\) Having already ordered three thousand stand of arms for the defense of Virginia and North Carolina, Dartmouth enthusiastically endorsed the idea, calling it "very encouraging."\(^{55}\) Pluralism was nothing new in the British military. The East Indian Company used sepoy armies in the 1750s, and Amerindians were crucial allies during in the Seven Years War. Like other European powers, the British also occasionally armed slaves in the eighteenth century, particularly in the Caribbean. And from time to time, exemplary service did lead to emancipation. Even so, the proclamation that Dunmore issued on November 15 broke new ground. Never before had a European government so explicitly and unconditionally linked black freedom to military service and unleashed the resulting force on its own subjects.\(^{56}\) These innovations did not go unnoticed. As a Philadelphia correspondent of the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* wrote, "Hell itself could not have vomited anything more black than [Dunmore's] design of emancipating our slaves."\(^{57}\)

While obviously motivated by a need for manpower, Dunmore could not have been oblivious to the increasing prominence of slavery in the broader debate over liberty in the British Empire. Surely he understood that associating Britain with

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\(^{55}\) Dartmouth to Dunmore, 2 August 1775, DC, 603, or C.O. 5/1353/225-26. For the shipment of arms, see Selby, *Revolution*, 74-75.  
emancipation would help to muddle the slaveholding opposition’s claims to liberty. Though not motivated by anti-slavery principles, the proclamation imposed the issue of human bondage on the imperial debate in a way that helped to expose the unseemliness of a war against tyranny led by slaveholders. It was a product of the same zeitgeist in which Samuel Johnson famously inquired, “Why is it we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of Negroes?” The proclamation put the patriot leadership on its heels by injecting slavery into the debate over colonial rights. It compelled George Washington to lift his ban on blacks in patriot service, and it prompted anti-slavery commentators like “Antibiastes” to demand, for practical as well as moral reasons, the unconditional emancipation of all slaves and servants enlisted in the American cause. Written by someone who owned slaves himself, the proclamation was a critical, if conflicted, moment in the struggle for the moral high ground that accompanied the War for American Independence. 58

Within weeks of the document’s release, Dunmore estimated that between 200-300 blacks had joined him. 59 All told, something on the order of 1,000 runaway slaves, and as many as 1,500, successfully reached the fleet. While the letter of the

58 The day before the proclamation was released, an anonymous representative of the Empire proposed a plan of conciliation to Benjamin Franklin, whereby most of the Intolerable Acts would be repealed in exchange for the institution of an act guaranteeing slaves the right to trial by jury. All such efforts at compromise failed, of course, but the author’s interest in slavery is noteworthy. “Let the only contention henceforward between Great Britain and America be,” he wrote, “which can exceed the other in Zeal for Establishing the fundamental rights of liberty to all Mankind”: G. B. to Benjamin Franklin, 14 November 1775, in The Aspinwall Papers, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 40, Part II (Boston, 1871), 761-62. Johnson is quoted in James Boswell, The Life of Samuel Johnson (Oxford, 1998), 876. On Washington, see Henry Wiencek, An Imperfect God: George Washington, His Slaves, and the Creation of America (New York, 2003), 204. For “Antibiastes,” see Observations on the Slaves and the Indented Servants, enlisted in the Navy of the United States ([Philadelphia, 1777]), broadside. While his work is the starting point for understanding these issues, Christopher Brown situates the proclamation outside the struggle for moral capital. Along with Frey and Holton, he sees it as a simple play for manpower: Moral Capital, Chapters 3 and 4, esp. 113.

proclamation applied only to the male slaves of rebel masters, Dunmore accepted all
comers—men, women, and children of every age, whether of patriot or loyalist origin.
Many ran in family groups, often across plantations, so Dunmore likely had little
choice but to take women, children, and elders along with husbands, brothers, and
sons.60

The men fit for fighting were enlisted in a new outfit, which the governor
styled "Dunmores Ethiopian Regiment."61 They were commanded by white officers
and paid a wage. Like their white counterparts in the Queen's Own Loyal Virginia
Regiment, they did not have uniforms, so it seems unlikely that they actually wore the
"Liberty to Slaves" patches that most historians, working from a passing reference in
Dixon and Hunter's Virginia Gazette, have long assumed they did.62 That Dunmore
attached his name to the regiment suggests that he was proud of it, however ragtag its
appearance. The title was intended as a term of dignity, and enlistees likely interpreted
it as such.63 While most of the runaways who reached British lines during the war

60 On family groups, see Cassandra Pybus, Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American
Revolution and Their Global Quest for Liberty (Boston, 2006), 14, 216-17; Pybus, "Jefferson's Faulty
Math," 249, 252.
61 Dunmore to Dartmouth, 6 December 1775, NDAR, Vol. 2, 1311.
62 For the absence of uniforms, see Dunmore to Dartmouth, 20 February 1776, DC, 708, or C.O.
5/1353/363-64 ("I have used every means in my power to procure Cloathing for the men both black and
white that I have raised for His Majesty's Service in this Colony, to no purpose."). The patches are
mentioned in Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter), 2 December 1775, NDAR, Vol. 2, 1238-39. The
reference to the "Liberty to Slaves" patch was reprinted at least twelve times in the colonial press:
Patricia Bradley, Slavery, Propaganda, and the American Revolution (Jackson, Miss., 1998), 147.
Partly as a result, the existence of the patches is usually taken for granted in the literature; see, e.g., Jill
Lepore, "Goodbye, Columbus," The New Yorker 8 May 2006, 74-78, 74; Sidney Kaplan, "The
243-44, 252. Cassandra Pybus was the first to express skepticism about this report (Epic Journeys of
Freedom, 11). Whether or not they actually existed, it should be noted that the slave patches were either
made or imagined in juxtaposition to the "Liberty or Death" patches that many Virginians wore at this
time: Selby, Revolution, 67.
63 The term Ethiopian applied to all people descended from Africa south of Egypt; see entries for
performed essential manual labor as “pioneers,” Dunmore trained, armed, and, ultimately, sent the Ethiopian Regiment into battle. The experience did nothing to diminish his belief in the ability of black men to soldier, which he held for the rest of his life.  

Patriot leaders didn’t sit idly by while Dunmore (of all people) puffed up the Empire’s reputation for liberty and endangered white lives with his black regiment. As one anti-slavery historian of the Revolution later declared, “It was not for the thee, Dunmore, it was not for thee, to break the bonds of the Ethiopians!”  

Many Virginians blamed the monarchy for saddling them with slavery in the first place. Thomas Jefferson addressed this point in his first draft of the Declaration of Independence. George III, he wrote, has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian king of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce. And that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, by murdering the people upon whom he also

1971), 312-13. African Americans saw it as a term of dignity. One of the earliest black Baptist churches in America, founded by Andrew Bryan in Savannah in 1788, was called the Ethiopian Church of Jesus Christ: Quarles, Negro in the American Revolution, 192. Ethiopia was also an ancient Christian kingdom, so the term may very well have had religious significance for runaway slaves. This possibility was first suggested by Sylvia Frey in an unpublished conference paper at Northwestern University in April 2006.

64 For a broader treatment of blacks in British service, see Quarles, Negro in the American Revolution, Chapter 8. For Dunmore’s praise of the regiment, see Dunmore to Germain, 30 March 1776, DC, 719, or C.O. 5/1353/377-82.

obtruded them: thus paying off former crimes committed against the
Liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit
against the lives of another.

The passage ended up a casualty of the editing process, but not because the issues it
raised were perceived as unimportant. On the contrary, patriots and imperialists alike
saw themselves as global champions of liberty and often asserted this self-image by
pointing to the opposition's hypocritical relationship to the institution of slavery. It
was their cognizance of this debate that made the delegates on the drafting committee
sensitive to the weaknesses in Jefferson's argument. Georgia and South Carolina had
never opposed the slave trade, and several northern colonies had profited handsomely
by it. In view of these vulnerabilities, they decided to strike the entire passage out.
Everyone agreed, however, that Dunmore's proclamation deserved a place in the
catalog of the king's crimes. In place of Jefferson's lengthy paragraph, the committee
added the phrase "He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us" to a previous
section involving the employment of "merciless Indian savages" on the frontier,
something in which Dunmore had, of course, also been implicated. 66

In John Pinkney's Virginia Gazette, the proclamation appeared alongside an
editorial promising to give slaves "a just view of what they are to expect, should they
be so weak and wicked" as to abscond to the British. The offer of freedom was no act
of kindness, the author said. He noted that it applied only to the able-bodied male
slaves of patriot masters. Even those few who met this criteria had much to fear in
flight. Their actions were sure to "provoke the fury of the Americans against their

66 Pauline Maier, American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence (New York, 1997), 239
(quotations), 146-47.
defenceless fathers and mothers, their wives, and children." If the idea of loved ones being harmed wasn't discouraging enough, the author stressed how difficult it would be to reach Dunmore and how severe the punishments would be for those who got caught. With the prospect of violence clearly spelled out, he attacked the tenuous trust that existed between blacks and the empire that had overseen their enslavement. It was the Americans, not the British, who had been trying to halt the progress of slavery in recent times. "Moved by compassion," Virginia had made repeated attempts to raise the tax on slave imports, only to be denied again and again by the king. (Dunmore's efforts on behalf of this measure went unmentioned, as it would in Jefferson's draft of the Declaration the following year.) The point was simple: the British couldn't be trusted. When it was all over, the author wrote, Dunmore "will either give up the offending negroes to the rigour of the laws they have broken, or sell them in the West Indies," where every year "thousands of their miserable brethren" die as a result of inclement weather and cruel masters. The prophesy of British treachery spread, morphing over time into the baseless charge that Dunmore had, in fact, sent his black followers to be sold in the West Indies.67

Slaves did not need a newspaper to understand the risks involved in flight, particularly during periods of heightened vigilance. Patriot authorities immediately

stepped up slave patrols throughout Virginia and Maryland in response to the proclamation. Pending an initial grace period, during which those who had already escaped were offered pardons, patriot leaders instituted severe punishments for flight, including hard labor in western salt mines and death without benefit of clergy. Under these and other discouraging circumstances, the vast majority of Chesapeake slaves were ultimately either unable or unwilling to take their chances with the British. In the months and years that followed, those who decided not to run (many never really had a choice) may well have watched events unfold with a growing sense of vindication. The slaves who did strike out for freedom exhibited remarkable courage and ingenuity in the process, to be sure, but they had an exceptionally hard road ahead.

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The provincial army finally arrived in the vicinity of Norfolk with the onset of winter. Led by William Woodford, the troops encamped twelve miles below the city at Great Bridge, a structure that spanned the marshlands near the terminus of the Elizabeth River’s southern branch. Across the river, on the north side of the bridge, Dunmore had already erected a stockade fort and stationed about one hundred troops there, most of them from the Ethiopian Regiment. Thus situated, the two sides kept

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up heavy fire throughout the first week of December. Despite his men's excellent defensive position, Dunmore feared the arrival of reinforcements from Williamsburg and North Carolina. Believing that this would lead to the loss of the fort, he sent the 14th Regiment under the command of Captain Samuel Leslie to the bridge, along with sixty more black and white volunteers. In concert with those already at the fort, the troops were ordered to attack Woodford's position, which, they had no way to know, was now being defended by nearly one thousand men.

The battle of Great Bridge took place on the morning of December 9. "Having been up for 3 Nights before and perfectly exhausted," Dunmore did not participate in the action. It was probably just as well. The battle proved to be an unmitigated disaster for the British. The bridge was destroyed during the previous days' fighting, so the red coats and cast-off-clad volunteers were forced to approach and retreat from the provincial breastworks via a narrow causeway, where they were exposed to patriot guns. The shooting lasted less than half an hour. Woodford, who had only one man wounded during the battle, estimated that some fifty of the enemy's troops had fallen. The deaths cut across the British forces: blacks and whites, regulars and volunteers, officers and infantrymen. When he learned of the defeat, Dunmore ordered the survivors to abandon the fort and fall back to Norfolk. There was no time to lose. It wouldn't be long before the patriots marched into the city itself.

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71 Dunmore testimony before the Loyalist Claims Commission, sworn 9 July 1784, DC, 830, or A.O. 12/54/59-62.
72 For accounts of the battle, see Woodford to Virginia Convention, 9 December 1775, Extract, N DAR, Vol. 3, 28; Virginia Gazette (Pinkney) 20 December 1775, N DAR, Vol. 3, 187-89; Dunmore to
Woodford took dozens of prisoners during the battle, twenty-seven of whom belonged to the Ethiopian Regiment. This presented a practical problem: Should the blacks be treated as prisoners of war or fugitive slaves? According to Woodford, Dunmore wasn’t interested in handing over any of the patriot prisoners in his possession for the blacks captured at Great Bridge. When Woodford inquired about this, a negotiator for the governor allegedly “affected to treat the matter lightly, [and] at last said he supposed we must sell them.”73 Be this as it may, Woodford was likely bluffing himself. No doubt hoping to embarrass the British by exposing the contradictions underpinning their claims to moral authority, he never intended to follow through with any bi-racial exchanges. Patriot masters would have demanded restitution for their property before even considering sending fugitive slaves back to the British. The Virginia Convention’s solution to the problem of slaves captured in arms bears this theory out. It directed all runaways taken in battle to be sold in either the West Indies or the Bay of Honduras in order to compensate patriot masters for their losses. When the captured slave had belonged to a loyalist, he was also to be sold, with the proceeds going toward the war effort.74 With this policy, patriot leaders made good on the threat that they had so eagerly projected—and would continue to project—onto Lord Dunmore.

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Dartmouth, 6 December 1775, continuation dated 13 December, DC, 675-77, or C.O. 5/1353/321-34. See also, Selby, Revolution, 69-74.
73 Woodford to Pendleton, 30 December 1775, Rev. Va., Vol. 5, 288.
74 For the policy of fugitives captured in arms, see Fourth Virginia Convention, 17 January 1776, Rev. Va., Vol. 5, 423. For the death of a loyalist soldier at Great Bridge, see the claim of Penelope D’Endi in A.O. 12/54/86-87.
In view of the impending institution of rebel rule in Norfolk, area loyalists who hadn’t done so already frantically set about making arrangements to leave. The native-born tended to seek out friends and family in the colony’s interior, while most of the region’s Scots merchant population cast their lot with the fleet. The wealthiest among this group, men like Neil Jamieson, moved their families and most prized possessions (including slaves) onto their own vessels. Others managed to hastily charter small sail in the cold, chaotic days of the evacuation. Those with the fewest resources were forced to take up residence on board the men of war.\(^\text{75}\)

Having effectively lost his father to the Stuart cause in 1745, Dunmore understood what it was to suffer for one’s loyalties. Surveying the examples of sacrifice before him that December, he felt more depressed than inspired. “It is a most melancholy sight,” he told Dartmouth, “to see the numbers of Gentlemen of very large property with their Ladies and whole families obliged to betake themselves on board of Ships, at this season of the year, hardly with the common necessarys of Life, and great numbers of poor people without even these, who must have perished had I not been able to supply them with some flour.”\(^\text{76}\) Dunmore was himself a kind of model for the ordeal these refugees were facing. He was the first to experience the indignity of flight, confinement aboard ship, and separation from family. So too was he the first to have property confiscated in the name of the resistance movement. Raiding parties

\(^{75}\) For movement inland, see the case of James Dawson in A.O. 13/28/222; John Johnson to [?], 16 November 1775, Rev. Va., Vol. 4, 414.

\(^{76}\) Dunmore to Dartmouth, 6 December 1775, continuation dated 13 December, DC, 678, or C.O. S/1353/321-34. Around the same time, William Woodford reported that “all the principal Tories, with their families and effects, have retired on board the ships of war and other vessels in the harbour, of which there is a very large fleet”: William Woodford to Virginia Convention, 15 December 1775, NDAR, Vol. 3, 118.
had entered the Governor’s Palace on June 24, the day the General Assembly
adjourned for the last time, and again on July 9, when, according to reports Dunmore
heard, vandals broke open the locks on “the doors of all the rooms, Cabinets and
private places,” carrying away all sorts of his personal belongings. 77 Eleven of the
slaves he left behind at the Palace were later auctioned off, along with his horses,
cattle, and other household goods for the benefit of the provisional government. 78

What little authority Dunmore now possessed was predicated in large part on
his ability to protect the property of his followers. For most loyalists, the trauma of the
war began with the anticipation of lost property. Royalists had been securing their
possessions with the fleet since October, and by late December the Virginia
Committee of Safety estimated that Dunmore oversaw property worth £150,000.
Whatever the true value of the cargo, it represented only a small fraction of what
loyalist refugees actually owned. Those with deeds to buildings and lands couldn’t
transport their most valuable possessions, of course, but space on board vessels was so
precious that smaller items had to be abandoned as well. During the evacuation of
Norfolk, merchant James Ingram was forced to part with his “bulky effects and
furniture,” for which there was no room on the ships. At least one member of his
household watched helplessly, probably from the deck of Ingram’s ship, while
American soldiers snatched the items up. 79

77 For the confiscation of Dunmore’s property, see Dunmore to Dartmouth, 12 July 1775, NDAR, Vol.
1, 873–74 (quotation); Rev. Va., Vol. 3, 223; Dunmore Memorial, 25 Feb 1784, in A.O. 13/28/305. For
the sale of the governor’s slaves, cattle, and horses, see NDAR, Vol. 1, 667.
79 Memorial of James Ingram, A.O. 13/55/167.
Because of well-to-do men like Ingram, the patriot press persistently characterized the floating town as the domain of the “ministerial gentry,” yet some of the area’s poorest white inhabitants also sought refuge with the fleet.\(^{80}\) When, on December 20, HMS Liverpool finally arrived in the harbor with the three thousand stand of arms that Dartmouth had ordered during the gunpowder controversy, it met with “Acclamations of Joy” from what one of its midshipman thought was “near 200 Sail, large and small.” Among these were “Rafts on which” a number of “poor Families” were living.\(^{81}\) What could have inspired such people to accept temporary displacement and exposure to inclement weather (a blizzard would strike the lower tidewater two days later) when they could easily have submitted to representatives of the resistance simply by swearing an oath?\(^{82}\) Fear, economic necessity, and political commitment were likely all factors by degrees. No doubt frightened by the prospect of incoming troops, some of the city’s poor may not have had inland relations or the means to reach them. The fleet projected strength and likely seemed the safest available option.

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The vast majority of the white civilians who populated the floating town after the evacuation of Norfolk were Scottish-born merchants and their families.\(^{83}\) The prejudice these people faced, on account of their ethnicity as well as their business interests (the two were difficult to disentangle in southeastern Virginia), largely


\(^{82}\) *Rev. Va.*, Vol. 5, 224 n. 40.

\(^{83}\) Approximately three quarters of the white loyalists who joined the fleet, and for whom there is documentation, were born in Scotland: Hast, *Loyalism*, 172.
determined their political allegiance. As one refugee put it in November 1775, "wee Shall be Obliged to Take up arms" against the rebellion, "for the name of a scotshman does stink in" American noses. Scots were maligned as interlopers throughout the British Empire, but they were particularly despised in Virginia, where Scottish credit had facilitated a consumer revolution that left many planters with enormous debts. Because of their prosperity, the Virginians saw them as too well connected, too close to power. Scots identity remained quite strong under these conditions. Many of those who joined Dunmore aboard ship tried to maintain close contact with family, friends, and business associates in Scotland, often drawing on Scottish cultural memory to make sense of the events around them. Anticipating a patriot march on Norfolk, one man told a kinsmen in Falkirk that he was "afraid it will be as bad if not worse than the rebellion [of 1745] in Scotland." There had been a time in Virginia, another immigrant observed, when Dunmore was "as popular as a Scotsman can be amongst a

84 Andrew Miller to William Miller, 17 November 1775, Rev. Va., Vol. 4, 428. As Andrew Sprowle had observed in November 1775, "the Virginians" were "all against the Scots men," often threatening "to Extermate them": Andrew Sprowle to George Brown, 1 November 1775, Rev. Va., Vol. 4, 313. For an exceptional example of a Scot who sided with the patriots after marrying into a Virginia family, see Bruce P. Lenman, Britain's Colonial Wars, 1688-1783 (London, 2001), 235-36.


86 John Ewing to Thomas Ewing, 20 November, 1775, in Rev. Va., Vol. 4, 437
weak and prejudiced people," but those days were gone. By the winter of 1775-1776, the Scots had essentially been purged from eastern Virginia. 87

In 1776, a Philadelphia silversmith and amateur viticulturist named John Leacock published one of the most Scotophobic texts of the era. The first chronicler ever written by an American-born dramatist, *The Fall of British Tyranny* features a number of scenes set in the floating town along with a character based on Dunmore. The play was first published in Philadelphia in the spring of 1776 but, due to Congress's wartime ban on theater productions, was evidently not performed until a company of Harvard students put it on in the early 1780s. 88 The play identifies a grand Jacobite plot at the root of the imperial crisis. Lord Bute, the Scots royal favorite (in actuality long past the peak of his power), has conspired to incite a rebellion by taxing the colonies. The inevitable deployment of the military has rendered home defense weaker than ever. Bute now plans to fill the void with a coalition of Scots, French, and Spanish forces, which will march on London and seize control of the government on behalf of the exiled Stuarts. Bishoprics will soon sprout up throughout the Empire, followed closely by the legal toleration of Catholicism. In the world of the play, the "Scotch plot" is ultimately an instrument of the devil, but Leacock dedicated his work

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to evil’s arch minions, including the “innumerable and never-ending Clan of Macs and Donalds upon Donalds” living in America. 89

Leacock’s dedication hints at the hyper-sexualization that marked so much anti-Scots rhetoric in this period. Projections of extreme fertility were typical of the “othering” process throughout the Atlantic world, but they had particular resonance with regard to Scots in the British Empire. Since the Act of Union in 1707, Scots had come to populate virtually every sector of imperial administration. This gave rise to English fears of being overrun, which emerged, for instance, in the widespread belief that Lord Bute was sleeping with George III’s mother. 90 Dunmore’s real-life reputation as a libertine made him the ideal vehicle for these prejudices. Leacock depicts his character, “Lord Kidnapper,” as a slave to his sexual appetites. 91 When Kidnapper first appears, he has just emerged from his stateroom, where “a pair of doxies”—prostitutes—remains. Later, a meeting with a group of runaway slaves is delayed until Kidnapper “has made fast the end of his small rope athwart Jenny Bluegarter and Kate Commen’s stern posts.” All indications are that these characters are white prostitutes, but the patriot imagination was also quick to associate Dunmore

with black women. Months later, Purdie’s *Virginia Gazette* would report that the fleet had held “a promiscuous ball, which was opened, we hear, by a certain spruce little gentleman, with one of the black ladies.”

Equally suggestive was a May 1776 notice in *Thomas’s Massachusetts Spy* that stated, “a lusty likely NEGRO WENCH was delivered of a male child, who in memory of a certain notable NEGRO CHIEF, is named DUNMORE.” Whether it involved black or white women, Dunmore’s depravity symbolized the decadence, effeminacy, and moral decay of the Empire at large.

In the patriot view, Dunmore was guilty of debasing whiteness, a crime he perpetrated both by improperly associating with blacks and by deceiving them. The runways on Lord Kidnapper’s ship are led by a fugitive named “Cudjo,” the first (ostensibly) comic black character in the history of the American theater. The crewmembers observe the newcomers’ physical appearance while they wait for Kidnapper to emerge from the orgy below deck, marveling at Cudjo’s mouth, in particular. This is significant for two reasons. First, it highlights the floating town’s dilemma of needing both food and men, who consume food. Second, it alerts the

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92 Schafer seems to infer that Leacock intended the audience to understand that Dunmore’s “harem” was black, but nothing in the text of the play suggests this: *Performing Patriotism*, 150.


95 Dallett, “John Leacock,” 468 n. 49. Robert Munford’s *The Candidates* brought a similar character, Ralpho, to life five years earlier, but that play was not published until 1798.
reader to the importance of the way Cudjo speaks, as does his dialect. When Kidnapper finally appears and asks if Cudjo intends to join the British Army, he replies, “Eas, massa Lord, you preazzee.” The capacity to speak well was essential to elite conceptions of manhood in this period, so Cudjo’s mode of speech underscores his unfitness for freedom. Leacock reiterates this point by having Kidnapper make Cudjo an officer with the rank of major, while promising to make him “a greater man than [his] master.” Of course, Kidnapper never intends for the runaways to be equal partners in the Scotch plot. Cudjo and his compatriots are destined to be betrayed. In the end, the story repeats the familiar (and fallacious) charge that Dunmore secretly plans to sell his black followers in the West Indians. 96

While arbitrating racial boundaries, the scenes that Leacock set in the Chesapeake were also intended to appeal to southern experiences of British tyranny, thereby helping to secure the bonds of a collective consciousness across regions. The creation of the American “nation” may not have been possible without the mass production and dissemination of works like The Fall of British Tyranny. 97 The “Triumphant Liberty” that Leacock’s play ultimately predicts was, after all, “American” at a time when family, parish, religion, and colony were far more familiar sources of identity than nation. The parade of ethnic, racial, and gender symbols running through the play helped to define, by contrast, what “America” meant at the moment of its political inception.

96 For Dunmore as a debaser of whiteness, see Bradley, Slavery, Propaganda, and the American Revolution, 142.
Efforts to associate blackness and Scottishness on the ground in Virginia were part of the very same project. Dunmore's proclamation crystallized long-standing linkages between Scots and blacks in the colonies. The manager of Mount Vernon, for instance, felt that Scots were "proper Officers for Slaves, for they themselves Possess Slavish Principles," presumably in deference to the masters of the Empire.98 Such statements made little sense when set against the taint of Jacobitism, which evoked rebellion rather than subservience. Efforts to establish an equivalence between blacks and Scots nevertheless persisted. After the battle of Great Bridge, Woodford demanded that a young Scots prisoner named Hamilton "be coupled to one of his Black Brother Soldiers with a pair of Handcuffs." Until he received further instructions from the Convention, Woodford wrote, this "shall be the fate of all those Cattle."99 By literally linking Scots and black prisoners, he sought to debase and dehumanize both groups. While the association would seem most damaging to the status of the Scots prisoner, the realization on the part of his black counterpart that his presence was intended to humiliate the other must have been equally, if not more, degrading. In the end, Woodford's description of the policy suggested that the two groups, whom he called "Brother Soldiers" as well as "Cattle," were not only linked by blood but also subhuman. No doubt he presumed that American soldiers would be able to recognize their own affinities all the more easily in opposition to the mongrel spectacle that he created with each new set of handcuffs.

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99 Woodford to Edmund Pendleton, 12 December 1775, Rev. Va., Vol. 4, 117. This cuffing practice is also referred to in Bradley, Slavery, Propaganda, and the American Revolution, 142.
As Leacock and Woodford fashioned patriotic images out of ideas and
ingredients with ties to the floating town, the ordeal of those who actually had to live
there continued. Even before hundreds of civilians and dozens of new vessels joined
him in December, life with Dunmore had been difficult. In the days leading up to the
battle of Great Bridge, six impressed seamen deserted the Otter, later citing “the most
cruel and inhuman treatment.” British naval discipline could be harsh, especially in
wartime, but other factors, namely “Hungry bellies, naked backs, and no fuel,” had
evidently been paramount. The fleet was taking on some provisions during this
period, mainly through naval prizes, land raids, and trade with friendly inhabitants
along the coast; soon, Dunmore would even establish a watering place at Tucker’s
Point on the Portsmouth side of Elizabeth River and position a company of black
soldiers to protect the ships’ access to it. Even so, with the New Year approaching,
Woodford observed that “the Women & Children on Board the Fleet are in great
distress.” According to his intelligence, several of them had actually died, and many
more were now ill for want of “Water, Wood & Fresh provisions.”

100 Virginia Gazette (Pinkney) 13 December 1775, NDAR, Vol. 3, 93. See also Thomas Ludwell Lee to
Richard Henry Lee, 9 December 1775, NDAR, Vol. 3, 27. On naval discipline in this period, see J. D.
Byrn, Jr., Crime and Punishment in the Royal Navy: Discipline on the Leeward Islands Station (Hants,
Navy (London, 1986), Chapter 6; and Greg Dening, Mr Bligh’s Bad Language: Passion, Power and
Theatre on the Bounty (Cambridge, 1992), 113-56.
101 Journal of the Otter, 7-10 and 26-29 November and 9 December 1775, as well as 4-8 January 1776,
observed “a Company of Negroes” guarding a line used for carrying water to the ships from Tucker’s
Point: Andrew Snape Hamond, “Account of A.S. Hamond’s part in the American Revolution, 1775
through 1777 [Written between 1783 and 1785],” HNP, Vol 2, entry for 12 February 1776.
102 Woodford to Pendleton, 30 December 1775, Rev. Va., Vol. 5, 287. Woodford had received a number
of petitions from loyalists requesting permission to come ashore, which he granted on the condition that
women and children would not be permitted to return to British lines and adult males were to be
imprisoned until they could be tried. Not surprisingly, few, if any, were prepared to accept these terms.

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On top of all the deprivation, residents had to contend with periodic fire from the shoreline. Patriot snipers were using buildings along the docks for cover, so on New Year's Day 1776, Dunmore ordered some of the structures burned. In the days that followed, flames reduced the entire city to ashes. Loyalists like Francis Towse, a blacksmith who owned a home and rented a shop in town, could do nothing but watch from the decks of ships as their lives went up in flames. Dunmore was blamed for the destruction in England and America well into the twentieth century, but, as the confidential investigation of the Virginia Convention concluded at the time, he was responsible for only 51 of the more than 1,300 buildings that were ultimately lost. The rest had been deliberately set ablaze by Virginia and North Carolina militiamen, who reviled the town for its Tory sympathies. The American military leadership did nothing to stop the arsonists and lied about what happened in their official reports, in large part because it freed them from having to defend Norfolk, which, they understood, could be easily surrounded and bombarded if enough British ships ever arrived.

And arrive they did. On February 9, the forty-four-gun HMS Roebuck appeared, bringing with it a new senior sea captain and a complement of some 250

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sailors. Commodore Andrew Snape Hamond had instructions to check in with Dunmore before proceeding to Delaware Bay, which he hoped to clear in anticipation of a British attack on Philadelphia. By the time he arrived in Hampton Roads, however, Norfolk had been burned and Portsmouth deserted. Two companies of the 14th Regiment were living in transport vessels, and scores of loyalist refugees were huddled with their property aboard what Hamond estimated to be about fifty "miserable little vessels." Faced with these circumstances, the commodore reluctantly agreed to stay and assist the community in any way he could, if only for a time.

Things seemed to look up with the arrival, about a week later, of General Henry Clinton on board the Mercury. Second-in-command in America to General Howe, Clinton came to Chesapeake Bay as commander of the North ministry’s new southern offensive. Government had long assumed that the prospect of slave insurrection made the mainland South, like the British West Indies, peculiarly dependent on imperial defense. Reports from governors, including Dunmore, had convinced the king and his ministers that strong support for government also existed in the southern backcountry and that colonists throughout the region were coming to resent the excesses of the local committees. The ministry therefore hoped that Dunmore and his counterparts would be able to restore order in the South with a relatively small investment of imperial resources. The idea was not for Clinton to

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106 Hamond to Naval Captains, 9 February 1776, NDAR, Vol. 3, 1188. The complement of sailors may not have been quite this large: “Disposition of Ships...” 3 December 1775, in NDAR, Vol. 2, 1251.
109 Virginia Gazette (Purdie), 23 February 1775, NDAR, Vol. 4, 55.
conquer and hold any particular region, but rather for him to make a display of British strength that would bring thousands of supposed loyalists out of hiding and into the fight on behalf of the king. The new American recruits would then be expected to defend a loyalist stronghold somewhere on the Virginia or South Carolina coast—the location was left for Clinton and Admiral Peter Parker to determine on the ground—while the regular army returned north for an attack on New York City in the summer of 1776.

Dunmore's reports home had done much to inform the southern expedition, so Clinton's arrival must have been enormously gratifying. As it turned out, however, Clinton didn't intend to stay long. Within a matter of days, he and the approximately two hundred troops under his command were to sail for Cape Fear, North Carolina, where they would join the force under Admiral Parker. It was only then that the location of the offensive would be determined. Dunmore was practically unstrung by the news. "To see my Government thus totally neglected," he wrote, "...is a mortification I was not prepared to meet with after being imprisoned on board a Ship between eight and nine months and now left without a hope of relief either to myself,

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or the many unhappy friends of Government that are now afloat suffering with me.”

Where the expedition would take place had yet to be determined, but Dunmore wasn’t holding out much hope. Clinton later revealed that he had favored the Chesapeake for the loyalist asylum, but Parker and Howe both pushed for Charleston, and the expedition eventually took place in South Carolina. For Dunmore, the sting of being passed over persisted well into the spring. “Notwithstanding all my Applications, Representations, Sufferings, and the Efforts I had made with the incompleat Companies of the 14th Regiment,” he told Lord Germain (Dartmouth’s replacement), he was now left “without the smallest assistance, and the preference given to a poor small insignificant Province.” Dunmore felt spurned by the empire for which he and his followers had sacrificed so much.

Why, then, did he choose to remain in Virginia at all? The previous August, Dartmouth had told him in no uncertain terms that he had the king’s blessing to return to England whenever he saw fit, so the choice to stay and fight was his alone. It was one that he made at great personal risk and with little reasonable prospect of victory. Given the odds he was up against, no one could have questioned his bravery, honor, or loyalty to the crown had he left Virginia. On January 4, 1776, with Norfolk literally smoking in the background, he gratefully acknowledged the king’s offer but pledged never to “make use of it whilst I see that my presence here can tend in the smallest

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113 Dunmore to Dartmouth, 6 December 1775, continuation dated 18 February 1776, DC, 672-90, or 5/1353/321-34.
114 The choice of Charleston is foreshadowed in “Precis Prepared for the King of Events Leading up to the Expedition Against the Southern Colonies,” 31 December 1775 [extract], NDAR, Vol. 2, 465-7, and described in Clinton, American Rebellion, 27-29.
115 Dunmore to Germain, 30 March 1776, duplicate, DC, 718-19, or C.O. 5/1353/377-82.
116 Dartmouth to Dunmore, 2 August 1775, DC, 603, or C.O. 5/1353/225-26.
degree to” benefit crown and colony.117 During his brief time there, Clinton came to question Dunmore’s prospects. Particularly after the defeat at Great Bridge, he wondered, what good could Dunmore possibly do with the whole country in arms against him? Confronted with this question, the governor stood his ground. When Clinton departed Chesapeake Bay, he took the Kingsfisher with him but permitted the detachment of the 14th regiment to stay on. Dunmore, he wrote, “seemed to flatter himself that some opportunity might yet offer for his acting to advantage.”118

It wasn’t long before Hamond’s Roebuck left the fleet as well. Having devoted about six weeks to Dunmore’s cause, he set out in March on the more exciting business of his original mission: tracking down “the bold Admiral,” Ezek Hopkins, who was then commanding the Continental Congress’s fledgling navy in Delaware Bay.119 Dunmore didn’t begrudge him this; he understood that there was no hope of “honor, credit, pleasure, or profit” with the floating town.120 Even so, Clinton’s and Hamond’s departures cast a pall over the fleet. The Old Dominion—"the first Colony on the Continent," in Dunmore’s estimation—was now an all-but-abandoned outpost in an ailing empire.121

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The details of life in the floating town—the texture of it, the things inhabitants took for granted—are elusive. One area of relative clarity is the structure of authority.

117 Dunmore to Dartmouth, 6 December 1775, continuation dated 4 January 1776, DC, 687, or C.O. 5/1353/321-34.
119 Hamond to Dunmore, 8 April 1776, DC, 727.
120 Dunmore to Germain, 30 March 1776, DC 718, or C.O. 5/1353/377.
121 Dunmore to Dartmouth, 6 December 1775, continuation dated 18 February 1776, DC, 672-90, or C.O. 5/1353/321-34.
Dunmore’s commission made him Governor General of Virginia and Vice Admiral of the same.\textsuperscript{122} The latter title gave him authority over the vice-admiralty court. As the dispute over the \textit{Magdalen} showed, it did not give him the power to command sailors or vessels in the British Navy. Still, Dunmore was the chief political and judicial officer in all of what remained of British Virginia, including the floating town. Beneath him was the senior navy captain. Initially, this was George Montague of the \textit{Fowey}; later it was Commodore Hamond. From here, the standard chain of command went into effect. Matters were complicated by the extended presence of army officers on board the ships. Captain Samuel Leslie of the 14\textsuperscript{th} Regiment was no doubt the ranking authority in any situation not involving Dunmore or a sea captain, though it was not entirely clear where army and navy lieutenants stood in relation to one another.\textsuperscript{123} Whatever contests over authority took place (and surely there were some), they seem not to have been particularly disruptive.

The question of law enforcement is more tantalizing. A number of different legal systems converged within the floating town. With his formal declaration of martial law, Dunmore had broad discretion in the administration of justice, especially where civilians were concerned. For seamen, however, the naval law embodied in the Articles of War remained firmly in force. In September 1775, Dunmore arrested Captain John McCartney of the \textit{Mercury} for fraternizing with rebel leaders and sent


\textsuperscript{123} For information about naval ranks, see N.A.M. Rodger, \textit{The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815} (London, 2004).
him to Boston to face naval justice. On board the Otter in November, Captain Squire punished a man named Richard Young for drunkenness, "as the Articles of War direct." Trials of one sort or another were probably held. A merchant by the name of Samuel Farmer later claimed to have served under Dunmore as a "Judge of the Admiralty" during his residence in the town. Whether or not naval law applied to army soldiers or civilians aboard the men of war is hard to say. British land forces frequently substituted for marines in the eighteenth century, but jurisdiction was frequently a matter of dispute. There is also evidence of a civilian police force. In his memorial to the loyalist claims commission, James Ingram noted that he had acted "in the Character of a Commissr. of Enquiry and a Magistrate of Police till July 1776." The share of justice that black soldiers and civilians received is unknown. While the processes remain obscure, the administration of law and order was clearly not left solely to the whims of the governor. Were he guilty of arbitrary conduct, Dunmore would have to answer to his own superiors, who at various points included Vice Admiral Samuel Graves, General Thomas Gage, and the brothers Howe.

The diversity of the floating town's population must also have influenced the character of daily life there. The principal groups were African Americans, Scots immigrants, and British military personnel, but there were also Africans and continental Europeans scattered amongst the ships. Having spent most of his life on

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125 Journal of the Otter, 6 November 1775, in NDAR, Vol. 2, 975.
126 Governor George James Bruere to George Germain, 19 April 1777, in NDAR, Vol. 8, 385. See also, Wrike, Governor's Island, 124.
128 Memorial of James Ingram, A.O. 12/56/244 (microfilm viewed at DLAR).
the coast of Guinea, “George Mills” was captured in 1770 and taken to America, where he served a Portsmouth master for five years before finding his way to Dunmore. Harry Washington, formerly the property of George Washington, was another native African inhabitant of the town. The fleet’s mandate to police trade in Chesapeake Bay made it still more cosmopolitan. In 1775 alone, it absorbed trade ships and, no doubt, impressed seamen from St. Eustatius, Rhode Island, Turk’s Island, St. Vincent’s, Glasgow, Grenada, and elsewhere. It also detained French and Spanish smugglers with some frequency.

In the spring of 1776, the Liverpool captured a ship out of Havana called the Santa Barbara, which remained with the fleet through the summer. Though its purpose wasn’t immediately apparent, there was something suspicious about the ship. It was carrying a man named Miguel Antonio Eduardo to Philadelphia on a secret mission, one that seems to have involved purchasing slaves for the American war effort. None of that was clear to Henry Bellew, the captain of the Liverpool, who

130 In April 1776, Dunmore had “between 100 & 150 Sail of Vessels great & small,” according to Congress, “...most of which are Prizes & many of them valuable.” This wasn’t necessarily good news for the British, for “far from being any Addition in point of Strength,” the new ships “will rather weaken the Men of War, whose Hands are employed in the small Vessels”: Marine Committee of the Continental Congress to Esek Hopkins, 23 April 1776, NDAR, Vol. 4, 1217. Two French engineers managed to escape from Dunmore in July 1776: John Page to Charles Lee, 13 August 1776, in The Lee Papers, Part 2, in Collections of the New-York Historical Society, Vol. 5 (New York, 1872), 215; Jack P. Greene, ed., The Diary of Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752-1778, Vol. 2 (Charlottesville, Va., 1965), entry for 15 July 1776, 1057. (According to Carter, these men reported that “no negroes were kept by Dunmore but were fine active fellows, but were all sent away to some of the West India Islands.” There is also a great deal of evidence that the fleet included many who were not “fine active fellows.”) For an earlier example of a French prisoner escaping from the fleet, see Virginia Committee of Safety, 23 May 1776, Rev. Va., Vol. 7, Part 1, 243. For a list of ships captured from the ports mentioned, see Thomas Elliott, “Ships in Norfolk and Hampton Roads,” 30 December 1775, NDAR, Vol. 3, 309.
found 12,500 silver pesos on board and decided to seize it as security for the ship’s remaining with the fleet until the British could decide on a course of action. In the meantime, Dunmore welcomed the new guests by inviting them to several formal dinners. One Sunday evening, Eduardo and Captain Gomalez of the Santa Barbara dined with the town elite in the governor’s spacious cabin. His fine china, sterling silver tableware, and wine collection were all put to use. The party came to an abrupt end when someone spotted two large ships in the distance. At length, these proved to be British suppliers, but the interruption provides a glimpse into the tense atmosphere in the town and the tenuousness of leisure there.\footnote{Diary of Antonio Eduardo, in NDAR, Vol. 5, Appendix B, 1339-51, and Wrike, Governor’s Island, 54-56, 59-60, 103. With the dissolution of the town in August, the Spaniards were finally permitted to go on their way, but not with the 12,500 pesos, which the British retained in its entirety. The main purpose of the fleet was to hinder rebel trade with the outside world, and they were reasonably effective in this regard. Robert Honeyman noted in his diary that private merchants had been fitting out ships and that the Committee of Safety had shipped some tobacco “to the foreign W. Indies for the purchase of powder and other military stores; but the Kings vessels are so watchful that they are afraid to venture out; and some of them have been taken.” Robert Honeyman Diary, entry for 22 February 1776, Acc. 8417, microfilm of original (at Library of Congress), Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.}

Apart from the elite, it is hard to say how much interaction there was between the various cultural groups in the floating town. Some blacks occupied separate and decidedly unequal vessels and, partly as a result, ended up succumbing to disease at a far greater rate than whites. In the summer of 1776, some fifty apparently healthy black women were crowded aboard a ship called the Danluce.\footnote{On the Danluce, see Caley, “Dunmore,” 819. For slaves being “cooped up in small vessels,” see the memorial of Thomas McCulloch on behalf of Andrew Sprowle, 25 January 1784, A.O. 13/31/257. Black and white troops may also have had separate accommodations. When he joined the fleet in February, Hamond noted that the members of the Queen’s Own Loyal Regiment and two companies of the 14\textsuperscript{th} Regiment were living aboard transports in the Elizabeth River but made no mention of the Ethiopian Regiment’s living situation: Hamond, “Account,” HNP, Vol. 2, entry for 11 February 1776.} And yet, the multi-racial crews that patriots discovered aboard the British vessels they captured along the
shoreline suggest that interaction and cohabitation were common, if not the rule. Even the largest warships in the fleet furnished cramped quarters, so the physical separation of people on any basis must have been impractical for the most part.

Perhaps more than anything else, religion helped to set the tone and rhythm of life in the floating town. Church services were rare on board British ships during the war, but at least two Anglican preachers—Thomas Gwatkin (Lady Dunmore’s personal chaplain) and the Reverend John Agnew, former rector of Suffolk Lower Parish—resided with the fleet at different times. A black resident named Moses Wilkinson led a group of slaves to Dunmore in 1776 and was known during this period to preach to fellow black Methodists. “Daddy Moses,” as he was known, went on to become the most influential religious leader in the free black community in Sierra Leone. He no doubt either led or participated in some form of worship aboard ship.


Daddy Moses likely presided over an appalling number of funerals in the floating town. Despite all that befell it before the spring of 1776—the hunger, the illness, the sorrow of watching a home or business burn, the perception of imperial neglect—the worst was still to come. The first signs of smallpox appeared in January.

133 In addition to the crew of the Liberty, captured in 1775, there were “three Whites & two Negroes” on board a ship that ran aground in the summer of 1776: Col. Richard Barnes to the Maryland Council of Safety, 13 July 1776, NDAR, Vol. 5, 1066. On the interaction of seamen across racial lines, see W. Jeffrey Bolster, Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail (Cambridge, Mass., 1997).
134 On church service aboard ship, see Rodger, Command of the Sea, 405. Gwatkin was with Dunmore when he escaped from Williamsburg but left with the Magdalen in June 1775. For Agnew, see Rev. Va., Vol. 6, 355-56 n.10.
135 Pybus, Epic Journeys of Freedom, 219.
This and other epidemic diseases would ravage the community that year, taking the lives of hundreds of inhabitants, most of them newly free blacks.

The progress of smallpox in individuals was horrifying to behold, let alone experience. Contracted through inhalation, the disease incubated for approximately two weeks. Days after the preliminary symptoms (headaches, fevers, vomiting) set in, sores appeared in the mouth, throat, and nasal passages. The rash soon spread throughout the body, with particularly heavy concentrations of blisters on the soles of the feet, palms of the hands, forearms, neck, and back. Scabs eventually emerged from these sores, and foul-smelling clumps of flesh began falling away from the body, leaving behind unsightly scars. All in all, smallpox involved about two weeks of extreme physical suffering. Precise fatality rates are unavailable for the period, but late-eighteenth-century epidemics in Boston and London killed roughly a third of the stricken. Badly scarred and sometimes rendered blind or lame, survivors emerged from the ordeal immune from the disease for life. Because of this, many promoted the controversial practice of inoculation, in which patients were infected with a very small, though still dangerous, amount of the disease in order to achieve immunity.136

Crowded, damp, and in constant demographic flux, the floating town was an ideal site for the exchange of pathogens.137 Not long after the pox first appeared, the fleet seems also to have suffered an outbreak of typhus, better known as jail fever. In March, a dozen deserters from the Liverpool confirmed that the

137 The best treatment of the impact of epidemic disease on the floating town is Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 57-62.
jail distemper rages with great violence on board Lord Dunmore's fleet, particularly among the negro forces, upwards of 150 of whom...have died within a short time, and who, as fast as they expire, are tumbled into the deep, to regale the sharks, which it seems swarm thereabouts, and no doubt keep as sharp a look-out for such provision, as the land animals do for fresh port, good mutton, poultry, &c.\textsuperscript{138}

The image of black bodies tumbling into shark-infested waters was intended to discourage slave flight. Like so many other patriot propagandists, the author also went out of his way to reinforce the link between the enemy and the animalistic. For white readers, the idea of Dunmore's "land animals"—human predators all—as food for sharks was not without poetic justice.

The epidemics plaguing the floating town were indeed taking a particularly hard toll on blacks. That they lived "cooped up in small vessels," as one white loyalist put it, certainly didn't help.\textsuperscript{139} They also lacked the immunity to smallpox that Europeans typically developed before reaching the Chesapeake (most of the town's white residents were natives of England or Scotland). There was also a constant flow of new black bodies into the town for the disease to feed on, for even as the disease ravaged the soldiery, the runaways kept coming—some six or eight a day in early June. When, at Dunmore's behest, Hamond returned to the fleet from Delaware Bay on May 19, he immediately noticed the impact that the disease was having on the Ethiopian Regiment, which was soon reduced to less than 150 effective men.\textsuperscript{140} If not for the epidemics, Dunmore told the ministry he would "have had two thousand

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  \item \textsuperscript{138} Virginia Gazette (Purdie), 8 March 1776, NDAR, Vol. 4, 244.
  \item \textsuperscript{139} Memorial of Thomas McCulloch on behalf of Andrew Sprowle, 25 January 1784, A.O. 13/31/257.
  \item \textsuperscript{140} For Hamond's return, see Hamond, "Account," HNP, Vol. 2, entry for 16 May 1776; for quote, see entry for 10 June 1776.
\end{itemize}
Blacks” under his command that summer, a number with which he could easily have penetrated “into the heart of the Colony.”

In late May, with Dunmore’s force enfeebled by disease and rumors circulating about the imminent arrival of patriot cannon, Hamond recommended that the fleet abandon Norfolk. Reluctantly, the governor agreed, and before the month was out the approximately one hundred vessels of the floating town left the Elizabeth River, never to return. They were bound for a place called Gwynn’s Island at the mouth of the Piankatank River, just below the Rappahannock. Here, on one end of the island, Dunmore established an army camp for the healthy members of the Queen’s Own and Ethiopian regiments; on the other, he built a number of brush huts for the quarantine of smallpox sufferers. He also began inoculating troops. The medical facilities on Gwynn’s Island supplemented a floating hospital that had been established earlier on board the Adonis. While patriot militia in the area reported seeing corpses (white as well as black) wash ashore daily, Dunmore’s force began to stabilize during this period. About a month after the relocation, some 60 white loyalists from Maryland joined the Queen’s Own Regiment, and in early July another 100 new volunteers materialized.

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143 Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter) 15 June 1776, NDAR, Vol. 5, 554. For the “h[osp]ital brig Adonis,” see Virginia Gazette (Dixon and Hunter), 31 August 1776, [3]. Inoculation may have increased susceptibility to typhus and typhoid fever: Pybus, Epic Journeys, 18; Wrike, “Fire Afloat,” 19-23.
144 Andrew Lewis to Charles Lee, 12 June 1776, Lee Papers, Part 2, 65; Wrike, Governor's Island. 63, 77.
The Americans were gathering strength as well. Commanded by General Andrew Lewis, of Point Pleasant fame, patriot militia managed to mount several cannon directly across from the fleet without being detected. From this position, Lewis bombarded the king’s ships on July 9 and 10. Among the earliest targets was the *Dunmore*, where the governor had moved his living quarters. The ship, moored a mere 400-500 yards from a group of eighteen-pounders, sustained serious damage, and the crew was forced to cut anchors in order to drift out of range. One loyalist reported that Dunmore had to have large shards of wood removed from his leg after a direct hit.\(^{145}\) The injuries seem not to have been serious, but the attack certainly was. It left no doubt about the fleet’s inability to repel a full-scale invasion. Over Dunmore’s initial objections, Hamond decided that it was finally time to abandon Chesapeake Bay.\(^{146}\) The order to evacuate Gwynn’s Island threw the floating town into chaos. Many of the sickest inhabitants were left to die. When patriot troops arrived, they were “struck with horrour at the number of dead bodies, in a state of putrefaction,” strewn for some two miles along the shore. A few victims were discovered “gasping for life.” Others burned alive in brush huts that had caught fire during the cannonade.\(^{147}\)

\(^{145}\) For the cannonade on the *Dunmore*, see Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer to Charles Lee, 17 July 1776, Lee Papers, Part 2, 143. The injury is described in James Parker’s war diary, which is in Parker Family Papers, 1760-1795, City of Liverpool Public Libraries, Liverpool, England (microfilm at the DLAR), entry for July 9, PAR 9.56.

\(^{146}\) Wrike, *Governor’s Island*, 83.

Before the surviving residents could leave Chesapeake Bay, they needed to secure water and provisions for the voyage out. The fleet sailed north in search of a staging area, which they found at St. George’s Island at the mouth of the Potomac River. In late July, some of Dunmore’s men were out scouting when they happened upon a newspaper announcing the defeat of Clinton’s army at Charleston. It was a crushing revelation. With the failure of the southern expedition, Virginia would not be wrested from rebel hands anytime soon. 148

Hamond gave vent to his long-standing frustrations with the fleet as he prepared to disband it once and for all. “The great number of familys inhabiting Vessels, ill provided with all Sorts of materials,” he wrote, “...have been found to be so great an inconvenience to his Majesty’s Service that it is become absolutely necessary that they should be sent to a place of Security.” 149 By August, the ninety or so vessels remaining in the fleet were “destitute of allmost every material to Navigate them,” including seamen, which the men of war were forced to provide. 150 On top of this, there were barely one hundred men still fit for fighting in Dunmore’s army. Even in stronger times, the group had been “so few in number, such a motley set, and so full of disease, that it has been totally impossible to do or attempt any thing of consequence.” As a result, “our whole exploits have amounted to nothing more than burning and destroying Houses on the Banks of the Rivers, and taking the Cattle off

148 Wrike, Governor’s Island, 96-97.
149 Hamond to Squire, 13 July 1776, NDAR, Vol. 5, 1315.
150 Hamond to Hans Stanley, 5 August 1776, HNP, Vol. 1, 2-3. See also Hamond to Peter Parker, 10 June 1776, HNP, Vol. 5.
The Farms, which decides nothing."\textsuperscript{151} The entire enterprise had become counterproductive. "Remaining within the Capes without power of acting against the Rebels," Hamond concluded, "only tends to bring disgrace on his Majesty's Arms, and give Spirit to the enemy."\textsuperscript{152}

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The summer of 1776 was a time of demoralizing departures for Dunmore. Forced from Gwynn's Island, the Potomac River, and finally Chesapeake Bay altogether, his beleaguered fleet disbanded near the capes of Virginia in early August. Most of the white refugees set out for St. Augustine or the British Isles, but Dunmore gathered what remained of his loyalist regiments and, together with the surviving black civilians in the fleet, sailed for New York with Hamond's \textit{Roebuck} and about a dozen other vessels.\textsuperscript{153} Many of the former slaves with whom he was travelling would emerge from the war as free people. There was Rachael Fox, the "slow, well sized" John Jones, William and Mary Wells, James Tucker, who was described as "Almost worn out" at fifty-five, and dozens of others.\textsuperscript{154} Having escaped from bondage and survived the ordeal of the floating town, these people must have felt a deep sense of accomplishment and at least a modicum of hope for the future. They were leaving the colony of their confinement, and many trusted in God to see them through the travails

\textsuperscript{151} Hamond, "Account," HNP, Vol. 2, entry for 1 August 1776; Hamond to Stanley, 5 August 1776, HNP, Vol. 5 (quotation).

\textsuperscript{152} Hamond to Montague, 6 August 1776, HNP, Vol. 5.


\textsuperscript{154} The names and brief descriptions are taken from the inspection rolls of ships compiled by the British during the evacuation of New York in 1783: Graham Russell Hodges, ed., \textit{The Black Loyalist Directory: African Americans in Exile after the American Revolution} (New York, 1996), 20, 32 (Jones quote), 40, 198 (Tucker quotes), 213.
ahead. Still, uncertainty pervaded the voyage. For Dunmore, the past was every bit as unsettling as the future. He had lost Virginia. No one in the government blamed him for this, there'd been no resources, but it was a painful reality all the same. Indeed, nothing attests to the gravity of the situation so well as Dunmore's own determination to rectify it, which persisted in the face of unending disappointments throughout the American war and, indeed, beyond.

Dunmore was impatient for redemption from the moment he left Virginia waters. Upon reaching New York, he debriefed the Howe brothers about the state of the southern colonies and, predictably, took the opportunity to solicit "aid" for the reconquest of Virginia, only to hear the familiar refrain—no ships, no soldiers. In the absence of assistance, he was finally forced to conclude that a return to Virginia could "answer no good end to His Majesty's Service," at least for the time being. 155 So he did what he could to be useful in New York. The little more than 100 healthy soldiers under his command were absorbed into General Howe's army of 25,000. 156 Together, they took part in the Battle of Long Island, which led to the British occupation of lower Manhattan. "I was with the Highlanders and Hessians the whole day," Dunmore told Germain, and he found the experience exhilarating. 157 It was the first substantial success he'd tasted since Kemp's Landing the previous fall. The victory was tainted only by the Hessians' abuse of local loyalists, which Dunmore found disgusting. 158

155 Dunmore to Germain, 4 September 1776, DC, 778, or C.O. 5/1353/401-03.
156 On Dunmore's force upon reaching New York, see Brigadier General Hugh Mercer to George Washington, 10 August 1776, PGWR, Vol. 6, 80; Donald J. Gara, "Loyal Subjects of the Crown," 40; Quarles, Negro in the American Revolution, 31. On Howe's army, see Mackesy, War for America, 86.
157 Dunmore to Germain, 4 September 1776, DC, 778, or C.O. 5/1353/401-03.
158 Ambrose Serle, The American Journal of Ambrose Serle, Secretary to Lord Howe, 1776-1778 (San Marino, Cal., 1940), entry for 25 August 1776, 77, 86-87.
Only days after the British moved in, a fire tore through Manhattan. Though available lodgings were reduced by a third, Dunmore managed to find a house on Broadway.\(^{159}\) By November, he was once more on the move. There were whispers in Whig circles that he had been tapped to lead a major expedition to South Carolina involving ten thousand troops. He would have jumped at the chance—anything to be active at this hour—but the truth was far less exciting.\(^{160}\) He was on board the *Fowey* when it left New York harbor on November 11, 1776, along with two hundred other British ships. It was a familiar vessel bound for a familiar port. The army was going back to England for “Winter Quarters,” and Dunmore was going with them.\(^{161}\)

He left behind a legacy of freedom, though not an uncomplicated one. Among the many blacks who had sailed with him to New York were at least two of his own former slaves. In all likelihood, “Sarah,” age forty-two, and “Roger Scot,” fifty-seven, had been with him throughout the floating town period. Whether they continued to serve as slaves aboard his ships or blended into the mass of runaways in the fleet, they both left New York as free people. Sarah, at least, seems to have paid an enormous physical price for her liberty. When she set out for Nova Scotia in 1783 along with thousands of other newly free blacks, British authorities listed her as “stone blind,” very possibly a sign that she had survived smallpox. Despite her disability, she served


in the Black Pioneers while in New York, a group that General Clinton employed in capacities ranging from fortification building to espionage. These tantalizing hints of sightless service are all that remain of her remarkable life.\textsuperscript{162}

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Nothing is “so like an old almanac as an old governor.” So thought Thomas Hutchinson, the exiled governor of Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{163} If anyone could relate, it was Dunmore. Back in England, he too felt superfluous and unappreciated. In June 1777, the South Carolina \textit{Gazette} reported that he and his South Carolina counterpart, William Campbell, “had been in England some Time, yet neither of them had been introduced to the King their Master, to receive his Thanks for their distinguished Services.”\textsuperscript{164} Dunmore wasn’t looking for appreciation alone. Recognition for past sacrifice was no good to him unless it translated into some material mark of royal favor. When he finally did get a meeting with the king later that year, he offered to raise four thousand highlanders from the clans Campbell, Gordon, MacDonald, and Murray in exchange for a promotion to the rank of colonel. The king refused, noting that three of the four clans in question had already agreed to supply men. “Besides,” he told Lord North, the prime minister, “the principle on which I go is that no man is to get above one step” at a time, and Dunmore “quitted the Army several Years ago


\textsuperscript{163} Quoted in Bernard Bailyn, \textit{The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson} (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), 345.

\textsuperscript{164} \textit{Gazette of the State of South-Carolina}, 30 June 1777, \textit{NDAR}, Vol. 9, 194.
and only as a Captain.” In Dunmore’s mind, the war remained a quest for professional advancement as well as personal redemption.

The ministry eventually did find a use for Dunmore in America. In early 1781, Britain was on the march. Government forces controlled Charleston and Savannah, and Cornwallis had begun his fateful Virginia offensive. There was considerable optimism about the war in England, particularly among loyalist refugees and the North administration, the two groups most invested in victory. The ministry was so convinced that Cornwallis would succeed, in fact, that North ordered Dunmore to return to Virginia as governor. The state was paying annual subsidies to loyalist refugees at the time (typically around £100), and it used this leverage to try to encourage Virginians living in England to return with Dunmore. “Having received his Majesty’s Commands to return to Virginia,” Dunmore told former residents of the floating town, “I am Directed by Lord North to inform you that it is Expected you will Either go out with me or relinquish the allowance paid you by order of the Lords of the Treasury.” Those who made the trip, which was to take place in October, would receive free passage and a year’s advance on their allowance to help get them resettled. Dunmore communicated these terms in individual letters dated April 1781.

167 Mackesy, *War for America*, [401], 405.
The response among the recipients was mixed. Those with outstanding debts to collect eagerly accepted the invitation. 169 A group of London merchants expressed “the most lively satisfaction on being informed that the Earl of Dunmore has received His Majesty’s commands to return” to Virginia. “A relief and blessing” to themselves, the news would also “diffuse a joy through all ranks of His Majesty’s loyal subjects.” 170 But these were the sentiments of firm owners, men who did not have to make the trip and recoup the debts themselves. Many of those who were expected to personally return with Dunmore chose not to, often constructing elaborate explanations in an effort to save their subsidies. Among this group was a woman named Joyce Dawson. Born in England, she and her husband, James, had moved to Virginia in 1752 and prospered in the merchant community around Norfolk. After the dissolution of the floating town, they went to Bermuda, where, according to Joyce, they lived “in great distress for 14 months.” After returning to Falmouth, England, James died—the family believed, “of a broken heart.” The grief caused by “our heavy loss and total Ruination,” Joyce told Dunmore, had been more than he could bear, leaving her “a poor disconsolate, Distressed and helpless Widow” with two young sons to support. 171 Bereft of spirit and without means, she was unwilling to set out alone for a new life in a hostile country. She asked Dunmore to represent these

169 Memorial of William Farrer, A.O. 13/28/379; Memorial of James Ingram, A.O. 13/31/128.
170 Memorial of Merchants trading to Virginia and Maryland to Lord George Germain, 3 August 1781, in K. G. Davies, ed., Documents of the American Revolution, 1770-1783, Vol. 20: Transcripts, 1781 (Kill-o'-the-Grange, Ireland, 1979), 215.
171 All quotations from Joyce Dawson to Dunmore, 24 July 1781, A.O. 13/28/220; see also Thomas Robinson to [?], 29 June 1781, A.O. 13/28/217 (which gives the date of James’s death and echoes the “broken Heart” sentiment), and Joyce Dawson to the Commissioners of the Treasury, n.d., A.O. 13/28/229 (sons). For other regrets based on illness, see Peter Wilson Coldham, American Migrations, 1765-1799 (Baltimore, 2000), 586, 590.
circumstances to the Treasury, and given his later support of her application to the loyalist claims commission, he likely obliged. Perhaps her subsidy was continued as a result, but more likely it was not. Thomas Montgomery also pled for the continuation of his allowance when, citing ill health, he too declined to join Dunmore. In response, a skeptical Treasury official attached a note to his file stating, “can't return to Virginia, So to be pd nothing on the allowce settled on that Condition only.”

It was inevitable that some refugees would be unable to return, and their regrets did nothing to diminish Dunmore’s confidence in the mission. Before leaving himself in October, he even went to the trouble and expense of having his belongings sent back to America. Dunmore was still crossing the Atlantic when he learned of Cornwallis’s surrender. Yorktown was a national catastrophe. When the news reached England, it drained the popular will to fight and ushered in a new, anti-war government. For Dunmore, it was the worst possible news at the worst possible time. He was already committed to an enterprise that rested entirely on the assumption of Cornwallis’s success. Instead of proceeding to Virginia via New York, as planned, he and his fellow refugees set a course for Charleston.

Patriots relished Dunmore’s misfortune. One of two poems that Philip Freneau published on the subject took the form of a petition from Dunmore to Virginia:

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172 Thomas Montgomery to Dunmore, 28 August 1781, A.O. 13/31/645-46. Some of those who chose not to return had lived in Virginia as agents for companies that they no longer felt capable of serving. John McDowell claimed to be too sick to make the voyage but also explained that “by being so long out of that Country, I could not be so useful in collecting the money owing to myself and Partners, as some of our Factors who were there long after me”: John McDowell to [Dunmore], 29 August 1781, A.O. 13/31/279.

173 Charles Steaurt to Mrs. Parker, 6 November 1781, in Parker Family Papers, PAR 9-54.
"Humbly Sheweth, / That a silly old fellow, much noted of yore, / And known by the name of John, earl of Dunmore, / Has again ventur’d over to visit your shore.

The reason of this he begs leave to explain— / In England they said you were conquer’d and slain, / (But the devil take him that believes them again)—

So, hearing that most of you Rebels were dead, / That some had submitted, and others had fled, / I muster’d my Tories, myself at their head,

And over we scudded, our hearts full of glee, / As merry as ever poor devils could be, / Our ancient dominion, Virginia, to see;

Our shoe-boys, and tars, and the very cook’s mate / Already conceiv’d he possess’d an estate; / And the Tories no longer were cursing their fate.

Myself, (the don Quixote) and each of the crew, / Like Sancho, had islands and empires in view— / They were captains, and kings, and the devil knows who:

But now, to our sorrow, disgrace, and surprise, No longer deceiv’d by the Father of Lies. We hear with our ears, and we see with our eyes:—

I have therefore to make you a modest request, / (And I’m sure, in my mind, it will be for the best) / Admit me again to your mansions to rest.

There are Eden, and Martin, and Franklin, and Tryon, / All waiting to see you submit to the Lion, / And may wait ‘till the devil is king of Mount Sion:—

Though a brute and a dunce, like the rest of the clan, / I can govern as well as most Englishman can; / And if I’m a drunkard, I still am a man:

I miss’d it some how in comparing my notes. / Or six years ago I had join’d with your votes; / Not aided the negroes in cutting your throats.

Altho’ with so many hard names I was branded, / I hope you’ll believe, (as you will, if your [sic] candid) / That I only perform’d what my master commanded.
Give me lands, whores and dice, and you still may be free; / Let who
will be master, we sha'nt disagree; / If king or if Congress—no matter
to me;—

I hope you will send me an answer straightway, / For 'tis plain that at
Charleston we cannot long stay— / And your humble petitioner ever
shall pray."174

Freneau was playing to an audience that had come to view all royal officials as venal
and depraved. In truth, the real Dunmore was far better suited to Don Quixote
analogies than Freneau's character, who betrays his quest at the faintest prospect of
profit.175 After arriving in Charleston at the end of December 1781, some of the
loyalists with Dunmore returned to England.176 They had had enough of the American
war. Their leader evidently had not—he chose to stay.

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Born of crisis and continually plagued by problems, the floating town was a
source of hope as well as despair for those with an interest in British victory in
America. Much of the suffering that it saw could have been avoided had Dunmore
chosen to leave Virginia when he and his followers evacuated Norfolk in December
1775. Coming as it did immediately following the destruction of that city, his pledge

174 "Lord Dunmore's Petition to the Legislature of Virginia," January 1782, in Philip Freneau, Poems
Written between the Years 1768 and 1794 (Mount Pleasant, N. J., 1795), 199-200. The other poem,
which can be found in the same collection, is entitled, "A London Dialogue, Between My Lords,
Dunmore and Germaine."
175 Katherine Sprowle Douglas told Thomas Jefferson that her son "was also Solicited by Dunmore to
go with him when He went in 1781 on His more than Quixot scheme of Retaking Possession of the
goverment of Virginia, which he refus'd": Katherine Sprowle Douglas to Thomas Jefferson, 30 July
176 Dunmore Memorial to Commissioners of the Treasury, 6 March 1784, DC, 825, or A.O. 13/29/544-
45. For Dunmore's arrival in Charleston, and notices of it in newspapers, see Robert Livingston to
William Livingston, 23 January 1782, in Prince, ed., Papers of William Livingston, Vol. 4, 370; see also
Caley, "Dunmore," 885. For a return to England, see Dunmore to Commissioners of the Treasury, 11
February 1783, on behalf of John Earnshaw, A.O. 13/28/357-60.
to stay on there and fight seems like characteristic bravado. To be fair, it came before disease ravaged his army and before Clinton's expedition bypassed Virginia. Had these or any number of other circumstances not intervened, things could very well have taken a different course. But even if they had Dunmore was a toxic element in America by 1776. As the abuse of his image in patriot writing attests, he was despised beyond all reasonable expectation of a comeback, and he should have known this.

Dunmore overcame a great deal to get to where he was in 1774, and he was loath to relinquish that position under any circumstances. One could argue that he was merely trying to scrub the stain of Jacobitism from his name, or that he was only ever really interested in the places and profits of empire. Whatever the underlying motivation, his even-handed treatment of runaway slaves and his efforts on behalf of white loyalist exiles in London leave little room to doubt that he felt a deep sense of responsibility for those who put their faith in him during the war. Herein lies the tragedy of the floating town: However much Dunmore respected his followers, black as well as white, his most admirable attributes—his courage, his tenacity, his willingness to pursue bold and unconventional policies, his staunch allegiance to the Empire—simply did not serve them well. It wasn't always his fault that they didn't, but they didn't.

177 Dunmore to Dartmouth, 6 December 1775, continuation dated 4 January 1776, DC, 687, or C.O. 5/1353/321-34.

178 The documents cited above from A.O. 12 and 13 are the most revealing in this regard, but see also Mary Beth Norton, The British Americans: The Loyalist Exiles in England, 1774-1789 (Boston, 1972), 172, 186, 189, 308 n. 45.

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Chapter 5

Abiding Ambitions, 1782-1796

Even accepting that American loyalists came in all shapes and sizes, with backgrounds and motives as disparate as the colonies themselves, those who populate Dunmore's story form a surprising group. Mainly from the South and West, they possessed none of the staid rationality, reverence for tradition, or moderation of mind that define familiar icons of loyalty.¹ Far from hidebound, they were quick to challenge authority and perfectly willing to break with custom as long as it advanced the Empire and their place in it. Some betrayed republican leanings after the war by agitating for stricter standards of representation and railing against political corruption. A few even formed business partnerships with Catholic Spain, a move no doubt considered a deal with the devil in some circles. Most striking of all were those who, like Dunmore, continued to pursue expansion in North America in the wake of Yorktown and the Paris peace. With worldviews more Romantic than Enlightened,

they were the last to give up on the war and the first to attempt to roll back its losses. They shared an openness to new strategies, a propensity for risk, high levels of personal ambition, and an emotional attachment not only to “the British Name” but also to “the Scale of the Empire.”

Plenty of Britons held out hope for redemption in America after the war. The counterrevolutionaries who restructured colonial government in Canada had more in mind than preventing future rebellions; they sought to create a model mixed government, a beacon of order and liberty that would inspire the United States to rejoin the Empire upon its inevitable descent into anarchy. Though certainly sympathetic to this project, the diehards who gathered around Dunmore in the 1780s and 1790s took a bolder, more proactive approach. They worked to hasten the day when Britain’s American holdings would not only recombine with the thirteen colonies but also expand into the West, forming what North Carolina loyalist John Cruden predicted would be “the greatest Empire that ever was on Earth.”

To dismiss such hopes as uncomprehending or delusional, as some have, is to underestimate the

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power of contingency in history and undersell the loyalist political imagination. 5

Conditions for a British resurgence in North America persisted into the nineteenth century, particularly in the Old Southwest. That all of Anglo-America did not develop along the path of Dominion, as Canada did, is partly an accident of history. A committed counterrevolutionary imperialist, Dunmore did everything in his power to return Britain to preeminence in North America. Despite their ultimate failure, his efforts go to show just how uneven, uncertain, and undeniably interesting the British Empire’s turn away from the west truly was. 6


 Against the dreary backdrop of Yorktown, there was a sense at Charleston that all had not been lost—not quite. Now a garrison town, the city had attracted the lowcountry’s most devoted loyalists. Upon his arrival there, Dunmore fell in with a group of men with big dreams and little influence, including the commissioner of sequestered estates for the Carolinas, John Cruden. Like many in Charleston, Cruden felt the world he knew slipping away. Desperate but not defeated, he and his

5 For dismissals of the postwar plans of loyalists, see Norton, British-Americans, 251-56, esp. 255, and Ferling, Loyalist Mind, 67-100, esp. 134.
6 For the notion that the American Revolution initiated a swing to the east in British foreign policy, either to Europe or Asia, see Brendan Simms, Three Victories and a Defeat: The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire (New York, 2007); Vincent Harlow, The Founding of the Second British Empire, 1763-1793 (London, 1952), Vol. 1, 62. Despite these works, few scholars would argue that Britain retreated across the Atlantic in 1783: on the Caribbean, see esp. the work of Michael Duffy: Soldiers, Sugar, and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War against Revolutionary France (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); “The French Revolution and British Attitudes to the West Indian Colonies,” in David Barry Gaspar and David Patrick Geggus, eds., A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean (Bloomington, Ind., 1997); “World-Wide War and British Expansion, 1793-1815,” in P. J. Marshall, ed., The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. II: The Eighteenth Century (New York, 1998), 184-207 (hereafter OHBE). For work on Canada, see n. 3 above. British activities in the Old Southwest are less well known, but see the work of J. Leitch Wright, Jr.: Anglo-Spanish Rivalry in North America (Athens, Ga., 1971), Ch. 12, esp. 139; J. Leitch Wright Jr., Britain and the American Frontier, 1783-1815 (Athens, Ga., 1975).
associates met the gloom with bold proposals for getting the war back on track. They had no illusions about what they were up against. In a letter to Dunmore dated January 1782, Cruden acknowledged that it was “more than probable that the Nation at large will insist on the American War being relinquished.” In less than two months, Parliament would indeed vote to effectively end the war, but Cruden believed a window for “Vigorous Steps” existed. The plan he devised grew out of his work as commissioner, which involved managing confiscated property, including slaves, for the benefit of the war effort. Impressed by the bondsmen he employed to protect captured rebel estates, Cruden proposed immediately arming ten thousand South Carolina slaves. With the help of the British force then at Charleston, he argued, the black troops could drive the rebels out of the colony and move into North Carolina, where a great mass of potential volunteers was supposed to be suffering silently. Thus augmented, the army would eventually complete the reconquest of the southern colonies by marching into Virginia.

The prospect was bound to appeal to Dunmore. He was just as personally invested in the survival of British North America as Cruden and just as anxious to change the momentum of the war. As little success as he’d had in the Chesapeake, he also remained convinced that black soldiers could turn the tide. The two men did not agree entirely on the terms of slave service, however. Cruden had no intention of emancipating the bondsmen he enlisted. “Let it be clearly understood,” he wrote, “that

7 John Cruden to Dunmore, 5 January 1782, George Chalmers Papers, New York Public Library, Reel 5, Vol. 2 (microfilm); Wright, Anglo-Spanish Rivalry, 137.
they are to Serve the King for Ever, and that those Slaves who are not taken for His Majesty's Service, are to remain on the Plantations and perform as usual the Labour of the Field." Dunmore disagreed. While describing the plan to General Henry Clinton at New York, he insisted that all of the slave soldiers be guaranteed freedom, even those belonging to loyalist masters (who he felt should be compensated for their losses). That the slaves "may be fully satisfied that this promise will be held inviolate," he wrote, "it must be given by the officer appointed to command them." He also proposed that they be modestly paid.9 Dunmore understood as well as anyone that government needed to incentivize service for all soldiers, black as well as white. Promises must be kept, moreover, in order to sustain the tenuous trust that existed between slaves and government.

Passionate though he was, Dunmore proved a dead end as a channel of influence. Clinton, already emerging as the scapegoat for the Yorktown fiasco, wasn't in a position to promote anything; Germain accepted his resignation in February, shortly before stepping down himself.10 Cruden's plan had the support of Major General Alexander Leslie, the senior military commander in the southern colonies, and even found its way to General Guy Carleton at New York, but it went no further.11 Among the coterie of diehard royalists at Charleston Dunmore also met Robert Ross, a merchant-planter who'd been driven from his home on the Mississippi River

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9 Dunmore to Clinton, 2 February 1782, C.O. 5/175/264, quoted in Schama, Rough Crossings, 124.
during the Spanish takeover of West Florida. After participating in a failed attempt to retake Natchez in 1781, Ross fled to Charleston and began promoting a plan to annex the lower Mississippi Valley to Great Britain. The objective, as he stated it to Dunmore in March 1782, was to provide “friends of Government in America a place of retreat where no power of the rebels can oppress them.” Ross extolled the virtues of Spanish Louisiana, which he considered ripe for permanent British settlement. Not only was the soil congenial to the cultivation of tobacco, rice, and indigo, but with the access that the Mississippi provided to the Ohio River, settlers would be able to trade with northern Indians even in the event of American independence. The region could also serve as a gateway to the trans-Mississippi west. Insurrections then underway in the Andes and New Granada made this prospect particularly attractive. “If it is true that the convulsions in the Southern provinces of Spain have reached” New Mexico, Ross wrote, Louisiana would “afford the means of an intercourse with the Revolters, an event which might be attended with very happy consequences, for it is well known that the Eastern parts of New Mexico are regarded as the grand future resource for Mines.”


13 Robert Ross to Dunmore, 3 March 1782, [copy], Chalmers Papers, Reel 5, Vol. 2.

14 Recent work on Andean insurrection is divided over whether the peasant uprisings were reformist or revolutionary: Sergio Serulnikov, Subverting Colonial Authority: Challenges to Spanish Rule in Eighteenth-Century Southern Andes (Durham, N.C., 2003); Nicholas A. Robins, Genocide and Millenarianism in Upper Peru: The Great Rebellion of 1780-1781 (West Port, Conn., 2002); Ward
or expertise, Ross concluded with minutely detailed plans for an attack on New Orleans. Impressed, Dunmore immediately recommended Ross’s observations to the ministry.\textsuperscript{15} His sympathy for suffering loyalists, his drive to contribute something significant to the cause, and his interest in preserving North America as an arena for land speculation all predisposed him to support such schemes.\textsuperscript{16}

Dunmore remained in an offensive frame of mind when he left Charleston for New York in the spring of 1782. On top of the Cruden and Ross schemes, he was also considering Lieutenant Colonel James Moncrief’s plan to reestablish a British presence in Virginia. Upon arriving at Manhattan, he described the details to Clinton, who promptly reached out to Moncrief. “Lord Dunmore is arrived,” Clinton wrote, and “he tells me you think that a post might be established at Old Point Comfort and Sewell’s Point that would secure James River.” According to Dunmore, materials were already being stockpiled for that purpose. Clinton was surprisingly receptive. If “it should be in our power in better days to go there in such force and remain long enough to establish a post,” he wrote, “and it can be kept afterwards with a small force, I request you to go on providing such materials as you shall judge necessary.” He even suggested that Moncrief visit New York in June to discuss the matter further. Dunmore also pitched some version of Cruden’s plan at New York, for Clinton added

that "the arming of negroes requires a little consideration." His promise to follow up with Moncrief on that subject went unfulfilled, however.\(^{17}\) In less than a month, Clinton would relinquish his command and return to England. Dunmore wasn't far behind, disembarking in London around June 12.

Even after resuming his seat in the House of Lords, Dunmore continued to press for offensive operations in North America. Within a week of his arrival, he was granted an interview with the king.\(^{18}\) The contents of that discussion are unknown, but neither the meeting nor the summer that followed did anything to diminish his interest in the continent. In August, he wrote a long letter in support of the Mississippi Valley plan to the Home Secretary, Thomas Townsend, first viscount of Sydney. His introduction struck a tone of sober determination:

As I think it a duty incumbent on every well wisher to his Country to offer their sentiments to those who are empowered by Our Sovereign to put them in execution at a period too when the fate of the Empire seems impending, I will take the liberty as an individual to offer you my poor sentiments relative to a part of it that once was the glory of the Empire, and which now seem to be on the eve of being wrested from us, I will not say by whose fault, or by what means, but so it is, and my only wish is now to point out, as far as my poor abilities go, by what modes I think it is still recoverable, and that too, by means no ways expensive to the Country, and by which it will risk the lives of but very few of its Inhabitants.

By this time, Parliament had passed a resolution against offensive operations in America. If this turned out to be a prelude to total withdrawal, as Dunmore believed it would, "what must become of the Provincials and Loyalists," he asked, "who have


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shewn (I think you may and will say) more zeal for their Sovereign and their Country, than any set of men ever known to do in the most supersticious times for their Religion.” Genuinely concerned, he submitted several suggestions. Government should, in the first place, offer to send loyalist refugees back to America with enough ships and arms to regain the country themselves. If this was deemed inconsistent with the late resolution of Parliament, he wrote, “you should offer to land them on the Mississippi, there to provide for themselves, in the best manner they can.”

Echoing Ross’s observations about the benefits of the region, Dunmore placed special emphasis on the potential for recovering the thirteen colonies:

> Being in possession of this country and pushing your settlements up the Mississippi, and Ohio, you may soon open a communication with Canada. between it and New Orleans there is a Navigable communication with only Twelve Miles of Land Carriage, and you will open an easy passage for every man on the Continent, who wishes well to the Country or who prefers this Government to the Tyranny and oppression of Congress, to join you. you will also secure the friendship of the Indians, with whose assistance you have it at any time in your power, to drive the Thirteen united Provinces into the Sea, besides receiving the Fur Trade. You have it also in your power to give every aid you please to the Spanish Southern Provinces now in Rebellion.

Here was a vision of North America’s future in which the British Empire was not only predominant but expanding. As Dunmore implied, its fulfillment was only possible with the help of groups that were, and are, traditionally understood as existing outside the Empire. Having only recently recommended the arming of ten thousand slaves in South Carolina, he now reminded Sydney of the role that Indians throughout the hemisphere could play in a resurgent British North America.

True to form, Dunmore offered to lead part of the proposed mission himself. “To shew you that I conceive no very indifferent Idea of the success of this Plan,” he
wrote, “or that I think it is by any means a desperate one; I am most ready and willing to go to America, to be the conveyor and proposer of it, and to take what part in it the Provincialists and Loyalists, shall please to allot me.” He hadn’t been back in England for three months, and he was asking to return to America yet again. He promised that in the absence of a response, he would press the scheme no further, and although Sydney had expressed interest in recovering West Florida elsewhere, only silence followed. Any window for bold, government-sponsored action had closed. Now more than ever, he would have to act the renegade if he wanted to pursue his ambitions in North America.

Much of Dunmore’s time in England was devoted to the cause of the American loyalists. Uprooted and ruined, many of these people were in dire need of financial assistance. The British government had already agreed to reimburse those who had lost property during the war as a direct result of their loyalty, but a method had yet to emerge by 1783. That February, exiled Americans gathered in London to select a committee of delegates from several colonies to promote their interests. Dunmore was chosen to represent Virginia, a position he would occupy for the next four years. There were hopes that the states would oversee the return of confiscated property, but the Treaty of Paris, which contained only the vaguest assurances from the new government, was a disappointment in this regard. Britain had refused to return runaway slaves in accordance with the treaty, so why would the states go out of their

19 Dunmore to Townshend, 24 August 1782, [copy], Chalmers Papers, Reel 5, Vol. 2.
20 Townshend to Richard Oswald, 26 October 1782, Shelburne Papers, William Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich., Vol. 70.
way to reinstate loyalist property? No, the task of addressing loyalist losses would fall to Britain itself. Even before the treaty was signed, Parliament had established a commission to evaluate individual claims and determine appropriate levels of compensation. It was a remarkable step, one based on strikingly modern assumptions about the role of the state. All Britons, no matter how remotely situated, had a right to the protection of the king, but the claims commission seemed to suggest that government was financially liable when that protection failed. Some members of Parliament bristled at the notion that this responsibility was in any way contractual, but most agreed that something had to be done. The benevolence of the British government had been called into question during the rebellion, and, like the state subsidies that some refugees enjoyed, the commission lent a degree of moral credibility.

In order to apply for compensation, claimants had to submit memorials detailing what they had lost along with evidence to substantiate them, typically in the form of letters from respected members of the community. The more eminent the witness, the better. As a peer of the realm and a former governor, Dunmore was in great demand. He took the role quite seriously, writing letters of support, certifying claims of good character, and personally testifying before the board on behalf of

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21 A last minute addition to the Treaty of Paris stipulated that all runaways behind British lines be returned to their former owners in America, but Carleton refused to honor it and Whitehall supported him: Henry Wiencek, An Imperfect God: George Washington, His Slaves, and the Creation of America (New York, 2003) 254-57.

22 Maya Jasanoff argues that the American Revolution sparked innovations in the British state's conception of its responsibility and that the commission was a unique example of state welfare: Jasanoff, "Other Side of Revolution," esp. 231; see also her forthcoming book on the loyalist diaspora. For the resistance of Prime Minister William Pitt, the Younger, and many MPs to the notion of a contractual obligation, see Norton, British-Americans, 206-07.

23 Norton, British-Americans, 185-221.
loyalists of all backgrounds. Some, like Isabella Logan, were “reduced from a State of
great Affluence to the deepest distress.” Her deceased husband, George, had been a
leading Virginia merchant. Dunmore told the commission that the house they owned
near Kemps Landing was one of the finest he’d seen in the colony—“elegantly
furnished,” with four rooms to a floor. He also confirmed the “many hardships” to
which their loyalty had exposed them, including nine months in the floating town.
Isabella claimed to have lost property worth £26,000, an enormous sum.24 Dunmore
also supported far more modest applications, like that of James Tait. According to the
commission, this man “was in a Low Situation & his Losses were small, but he is
highly spoken of for his Loyalty & Services & [we] think it would be proper to pay
him after the rate of £20 a year.”25 It was a small victory, to be sure, but one that might
not have been possible without Dunmore’s help.

Blacks participated alongside whites in the political culture of loyalist
suffering, though almost always without receiving the same benefits. Their memorials
employed similar themes and language as those of whites. In a joint claim with three
other men (at least one of whom was also black), the Guinea-born George Mills noted
that his “Principals of Loyalty” had rendered him “Obnoxious to Congress.”26 This
sort of phraseology runs throughout the memorials, reflecting the broad reach of
loyalist political culture in London. The observance of convention did little to ensure
success, however, particularly for black claimants. In September 1783, Mills, who had

24 Dunmore letter of support, 14 June 1777, A.O. 13/31/161 (“hardships”), and evidence attached to the
memorial of Isabella Logan, A.O. 13/54/111 (“elegantly”). All Audit Office papers (A.O. 12 and 13)
were viewed on microfilm at the David Library of the American Revolution, Washington Crossing, Pa.
26 A.O. 13/114/531-35.

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served under both Dunmore and Admiral Howe, submitted an individual claim for £10. The claim was denied. "This Man is in the same predicament with most of the Blacks," the commissioners wrote, "he gives no proof at all of his Case." Though he did "not pretend to great Losses & he is Candid enough to admit that he gained his liberty by the Rebellion[,] we are clearly of Opinion that he has no right to ask or expect any thing from Government." The prevailing attitude on the board to such claims was that the British Empire had done quite enough for people like George Mills.27

Peter Alexander also initially lacked evidence to support his claim. Once a free black sawyer, he joined the Ethiopian Regiment, perhaps with a view to liberating his wife and three children, who remained in slavery throughout the war. According to his memorial, his service occasioned the loss of "some Chests of Cloaths, 20 Hogs, 4 feather Beds & Furniture & 200 Dollars," all of which was taken by Dunmore for the war effort. The commissioners thought this "a very incredible Story"—why would he have joined the Ethiopian Regiment if the governor had stolen his property? Never mind the claimant's family ties or that scores of white loyalists also listed property seized by the British Army or Navy. "This is the sort of thing which would have required pretty strong proof to Support," the commissioners wrote, and since Alexander admitted that he had no additional evidence, "we pay no Credit to the Story & think him in no degree entitled to the Bounty of Government." Not to be denied, Alexander reached out to Dunmore, who agreed to testify on his behalf. While

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Dunmore’s support removed all doubt about the veracity of Alexander’s account, the commission thought fit to award him a mere £10.²⁸

Dunmore’s sympathy for the loyalists was genuine, but having shared their ordeal, he also shared their financial interests. According to his own reckoning, he had been forced to abandon property worth upwards of £35,000 in America, including thousands of acres of land, over fifty slaves, about a dozen indentured servants, teems of farm animals, race horses, and all sorts of household furnishings. The government had already taken steps to address these losses. Upon returning home in 1776, he was given a lump sum of £15,000 and saw his salary as governor of Virginia, which he collected throughout the war, rise from £2,000 to £3,000 year. He seems also to have received an annual allowance of £750 from the Treasury. Sometime around the peace of September 1783, Prime Minister Pitt personally informed him that his salary was at an end and directed him to the loyalist claims commission to recoup what remained of his losses. Accounting for the salary hike and allowance, a balance of nearly £10,000 remained.²⁹

Dunmore submitted his memorial the following year. In a separate letter, he asked the board to grant him a new allowance pending the satisfaction of his outstanding losses. Flooded with the claims of less eminent sufferers, the commissioners considered this request frivolous, issuing only a stern rebuke in return:

If the country was in a Situation to give Rewards to those who have conducted themselves well in high Situations in America and if this

²⁹ Report on decision, 9 July 1784, A.O. 12/100/349. The £15,000 was paid according to a plan of compensation designed by Pitt, which satisfied 40% of legitimate claims pending a more complete examination: Norton, British-Americans, 209-10.
was the proper place for ascertaining those Rewards We should enter upon the Business with pleasure & should be happy in doing Justice to the conduct of Exertions of the Noble Lord...But when we consider that ours is the very unpleasant task of literally giving bread to those who want it, We cannot express our Astonishment that his Lordship should be put upon this miserable List.

The board acknowledged that Dunmore had lost “very considerable Property” in addition to “a very lucrative Government,” but they felt that he had been amply compensated already:

We think it incumbent upon us to state that Lord Dunmore is at this Moment substantially receiving £750 a year as an American Sufferer which is a much greater Allowance than we have ever thought ourselves at Liberty to recommend because in the year 1776 he received £15000 in part of the Losses which he might ultimately sustain in America. In addition to this we find that notwithstanding the Events of War took this Government from him in the year 1776 he has received an increased Salary from that time to the year 1784. It would be highly improper in us to comment upon this & to say that he has received it too long, it is enough for us to say that he has received it for some years longer than any other Governor, from America.

It wasn’t merely that Dunmore had enjoyed privileged access to government generosity. As one of the sixteen peers of Scotland in the House of Lords, he occupied “the highest Station in this country.” In order to be “qualified for that high Station,” the commissioners reasoned, he must have possessed “a great & independent Fortune.” In this, they were either mistaken or determined to suggest that he was not, in fact, qualified for the office, for Dunmore admitted that he had only a small estate in Scotland and a large family to support. In any event, they concluded that he “ought by no means to have made this application” and that “it would be highly improper (&
dishonorable to the Noble Lord himself) if we were to recommend any Allowance." The words must have stung as much as the decision.

All in all, Dunmore had little cause for complaint. When the painstaking business of the claims commission finally came to an end in 1790, a final report revealed that about two-thirds of the more than three thousand applicants in England and Canada received some sort of compensation. The average return on these successful claims was just 37 percent. By this standard, the government had done quite well by Dunmore. The war had been a humiliation, replete with inconvenience, terror, and gore, but he had not been left without resources. Even so, the few echoes from his postwar life leave a decidedly gloomy impression. In 1786, he was planning to spend some time at Dunmore Park when he learned that his cousin the Duke of Atholl was looking for a place to stay in Edinburgh. Always eager to serve a potential patron, he offered Atholl the use of his house in the city. The Duke was apparently grateful and dispatched an agent to inspect the property. The resulting report was discouraging, to say the least. The house, the agent wrote, contained "no furniture at all, scarce three fourths of the panes in the windows unbroken, the paper and hanging[s] in tatters, stable and coach house unroofed." Dunmore had very little money, and it showed. His estates were small and only marginally profitable, and maintaining residences in London and Edinburgh wasn’t cheap. He needed another

30 Commission report on Dunmore decision, 6 July 1784, A.O. 12/100/349. Dunmore filed his claim on 25 February 1784 (A.O. 12/54/118-22 and A.O. 13/28 fol. D) and wrote a letter requesting a postwar allowance pending satisfaction of the claim on 6 March 1784 (A.O. 13/29/544-45). 31 Norton, British-Americans, 216. 32 G. Farquhar to the Duke of Atholl, 11 February 1786, [extract], Dunmore Family Papers, National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh, bundle 30 (hereafter DFP); it is easiest to locate documents in this bundle with reference to the year in the upper left hand corner of the page.
job, and though it wasn’t long before he found one, his problems persisted alongside his good fortune.

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The year 1785 saw Dunmore’s name run through the rumor mill in connection with several West Indian governorships. “Lord Dunmore is certainly appointed Governor of Jamaica,” declared the *British Chronicle* in May, while English reports in Antigua had him as the inaugural executive of a united Bermuda and Bahama Islands. 33 Some version of the latter story must have reached Lady Dunmore in London, for that fall she informed her husband that he was to be the next governor of Bermuda. It was welcome news. A new appointment would return him to relevance in imperial politics and provide a platform from which to pursue all the old ambitions. Week after week passed, however, without any official notification. In November, his patience worn thin, he reached out to a high-placed patron, possibly Lord Gower. While requesting confirmation of the appointment, he ventured some telling opinions about Bermuda and its role in imperial defense. He was “astonished” that the government had not already taken steps to better secure the colony, for he was sure that “there is not a sptt of Sand belonging to His Majestys dominions (The British Isles excepted) of half the consequence to the welfare (I had almost said the very existence) of the Trade of this Country, that that Island must be, were we at War with

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either France, Spain or the American States." In Dunmore’s mind, periods of peace were but intervals in an ongoing war for America.

Though he wasn’t destined for Jamaica or Bermuda, Dunmore was indeed in the running for an American appointment. Sometime around the summer of 1786, the ministry decided to entrust him with the government of the Bahamas Islands, an increasingly nettlesome province of about 11,000 people, most of them loyalist exiles and their slaves. The Bahamas became a British colony in 1718, when its first governor, the privateer Woodes Rogers, wrested it from pirates, who had dominated it for decades while preying upon ships entering the Gulf Stream. After the American Revolution, the crown purchased the colony from its original proprietors and invited loyalist refugees to settle there. The migration roughly trebled the population, introducing some 1,600 whites and 5,700 blacks, mainly from South Carolina and Georgia by way of East and West Florida. The elites in this group clashed with the existing inhabitants, whom they looked down upon and disparaged as “conchs.” In 1785, tensions became so acute that Governor Richard Maxwell, who supported the old inhabitants, fled the colony. He remained titular governor, but when the interim executive died, Whitehall decided to make a change. In light of “the constant opposition which was given to your administration,” Home Secretary Sydney told Maxwell, the king decided to appoint “some Person entirely unconnected with the

34 Dunmore to [Gower?], 22 November 1785, “Murray, John, 1732-1809,” Miscellaneous Personal File, New York Public Library, Box 75.
present Inhabitants. This may only have been meant to cushion the blow, for Dunmore, with his strong ties to the American loyalists, was no such person.

Dunmore was entering into a more factious political environment than he had ever known in Britain or America. His new home in Nassau, New Providence—situated in the midst of Spanish Florida, Havana, and Saint Domingue—was a war zone within a war zone. Dunmore understood this. If anything, he took the embattled state of his new government too much to heart.

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The commission was signed on May 19, 1787, and for once Dunmore did not tarry. He took the summer to prepare and left England that August. The voyage out was long and, he thought, “tedious,” but after eight weeks at sea, he arrived in Nassau. The approach to the island of New Providence, which sits in the middle of the northern Bahamas, announced the colony’s forbidding beauty. According to Johann David Schoepf, who visited four years earlier, the harbor was guarded by a chain of jagged rocks “over which mad, foaming seas eternally break”—and this in the absence of a single beacon or lighthouse. It was no wonder that Bahamian straits had provided such a happy haven for pirates in the seventeenth century. Even after the golden age of piracy, shipwrecks were so common that their cargoes helped to sustain

37 Dunmore to [?], 3 December 178[7], C.O. 23/28/96. For anticipation of his departure, see Peter Edwards to Evan Nepean (Under Secretary of State), 19 July 1787, C.O. 23/15/242.
38 Johann David Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation [1783-1784], (Philadelphia, 1911, c. 1788), 259-60; [Wylly,] A Short Account, 20.

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many of the old islanders as well as the governor, who collected a fifth of all (officially declared) profits from the “wrecking” industry.\textsuperscript{39}

Dunmore was fortunate. He made it safely to shore, taking the oaths of office on October 26. But there was no denying that he had entered a dangerous world, complete with a storied history of lawlessness, extreme weather, political volatility, and a majority slave population.\textsuperscript{40} In view of such things, most of his family had stayed behind in England. At least one son, Alexander, accompanied him, but it would be nearly a decade before Dunmore saw his wife and daughters again.

There was much to admire about the new setting. Dunmore’s surviving correspondence tells us little about his initial impressions, but Schoepf’s book suggests a number of things that likely caught his eye. Even more remarkable than the “white and dazzling sand” along the beach, Schoepf thought, were the hollow rocks which gave the shoreline “a sharp jagged look, thousand-pointed and knife-edged.” Further inland fig trees abounded, with their low-hanging branches forming new trunks as they reentered the ground; one example, known as “Blackbeard’s tree,” reportedly shaded a circle nearly one hundred yards in diameter. A stranger to the West Indies, Dunmore must also have been struck by the variety and vibrancy of colors. The islands were covered in stone, so there was very little green space, but the color palette was otherwise extraordinary. Schoepf was amazed by the clarity of the sea water. “The boat swims on a substance of crystalline fluidity,” he wrote, “in which, as in air, it seems to hang. Those unaccustomed are like to grow giddy at the

\textsuperscript{39} On wrecking, see Schoepf, \textit{Travels in the Confederation}, 272, 282-85.
\textsuperscript{40} Journal of the [Bahamian] Council, 26 October 1787, C.O. 23/27/73.

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sight.” He was equally impressed by “the high splendid, contrasting colors with which most of the fishes are adorned,” noting that “the most glowing red, the purest blue, green, and yellow are as common among them as such high colors are rare among European fishes.”

The land fauna was remarkable as well. In 1789, Dunmore sent two pink flamingoes to London as special gifts to Queen Charlotte. And then there was the warm weather, which Dunmore could not resist extolling even in his official correspondence. “This is,” he wrote five months after his arrival, “of all Climates I have yet ever seen, the most agreeable.”

Though the seat of a tropical paradise, Nassau wasn’t much of a colonial capital. A town of about twenty-five hundred people, most of them Scots and free blacks, it was large enough. But the built environment was impressive only in its ramshackle impermanence. Most of the structures were composed entirely of wood, and glass windows were rare. There was a brand new vendue house for the sale of slaves and produce on Bay Street, which ran along the waterfront, but the principal public buildings were all insufficient to their purposes. Two years after Dunmore’s arrival, the administration of government and justice remained confined to a single dilapidated structure. One of the two rooms was occupied by the assembly and provincial court, which were unable to meet simultaneously, while the other served as the town jail. This, Dunmore told Sydney, left no “place for an office or for the Juries

43 Dunmore to [Nepean], 4 March 1788, private, C.O. 23/27/114.
45 Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation*, 266-67 (“jagged”), 264 (fig trees), 262-63 (Nassau).
to retire into, and no place whatever for the Governor and Council to meet in, or for the Council to sit in as a Branch of the Legislature." 47 Nor was Government House, where Dunmore was expected to live, commodious enough to conduct business in. Schoepf had admired its elevated position atop Mount Fitzwilliam at the south end of George Street, but Dunmore was used to far less cramped quarters. 48 "The house is so small," he wrote, "that I have not room either for my secretary[,] His Office or servants." The Governor's Palace in Williamsburg it was not. Dunmore decided to rent additional office space and asked to be compensated £100 per year for the expense. 49

The colony was woefully provincial in other respects as well. Anglican religious education was practically moribund throughout Dunmore's tenure, the occasional missionary notwithstanding. There was a church in the middle of Nassau, but when New Providence's sole minister (one of only two in the entire colony) had to leave in 1789 due to ill health, there was no one to officiate service in it. 50 Access to news and information was also limited. The islands were strategically located on the route between Europe and much of America, but packet boats were infrequent. And while the colony's first newspaper, the Bahama Gazette, had been established in 1784,

47 Dunmore to Sydney, 31 August 1789, C.O. 23/29/167-68.
48 Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation, 263.
50 Dunmore to Sydney, 26 January 1789, C.O. 23/30/63, typescript, DFP, bundle 15. Most of the residents of Nassau were either moderate dissenters of Scottish extraction or black Anabaptists, who had their own ministers: Siebert, ed., Loyalists in East Florida, 197; Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, 195.
there was as yet no royal printer. 51 When Dunmore asked the ministry to hire one, he
observed “that neither our Laws nor any other proceedings of the General Assembly
have ever yet been printed.” 52

Since the islands ranged over more than five hundreds miles of ocean, transportation was vital. 53 Dunmore argued that boats befitting the dignity of his office
were hard to come by at Nassau, where the wreckers and fishing vessels all had “very
small Cabbins” and “stinck enough to poison a person not accustomed to it.” For
years, he tried to get the ministry to pay for the construction of a new boat for travel
within the colony, but his superiors insisted that he rent what he could, eventually
granting him £600 per year for the purpose. Well into his administration, he was still
hiring conveyance for every little trip to the out islands. Apart from being expensive
and troublesome, he wrote, it was “humiliating for me to be obliged to go in any dirty
stinking thing I can get.” 54

Its remote, diffuse situation also made the Bahamas an expensive place to live,
and Dunmore wasn’t going to get rich there on government pay alone. His salary was

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51 Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, 190.
52 Dunmore to Sydney, 8 August 1788, C.O. 23/28/41-42 (quotation). Dunmore recommended
Alexander Cameron, who’d published the royal Virginia Gazette in the floating town, for the job. See
Cameron’s petition to Dunmore, 28 July 1788, C.O. 23/28/43. The Lucayan Herald and Weekly
Advertiser emerged the following year as an organ of government with Cameron as editor but doesn’t
seem to have survived very long: Howard S. Pactor, comp., Colonial British Caribbean Newspapers: A
Bibliography and Directory (New York, 1990), 10; J. Leitch Wright, William Augustus Bowles:
Director General of the Creek Nation (Athens, Ga., 1967), 34.
53 Whittington B. Johnson, Race Relations in the Bahamas, 1784-1834: The Nonviolent Transformation
from a Slave to a Free Society (Fayetteville, Ark., 2000), 16. See also the map in Gail Saunders,
54 Dunmore to Nepean, 17 June 1790, C.O. 23/30/225-26 (quotation). On the boat, see also Dunmore to
Sydney, 10 November 1786, C.O. 23/25/452; Dunmore to Sydney, 28 November 1787, C.O. 23/27/76;
Sydney to Dunmore, 21 June 1788, C.O. 23/27/124; Dunmore to Grenville, 6 April 1790, C.O.
23/30/198-99; Dunmore to Thomas Steele (Secretary to the Lords of Treasury), 16 February 1790, C.O.
23/30/200-01; Dunmore to Nepean, 9 June 1791, private, C.O. 23/31/35 (“dirty stinking”). Dundas to
Dunmore, 10 March 1792, C.O. 23/31/101-02 (rental subsidy).
£1,500 per year; Sydney estimated that he could expect to receive another £500 in fees, such as those he collected from successful wrecking expeditions. His enemies accused of him of raising fees upon entering office, and it appears that he had some cause to do so. Prior to his arrival, the assembly removed the governor's right to a percentage of the profits from vessels engaged in illicit trade. “God knows all the other emoluments of my Govt. will hardly keep me in provisions,” Dunmore complained, “which are both very scarce & expensive.” In truth, he had far larger goals in mind than augmenting his emoluments. In London, he had been instrumental in establishing Nassau as a free port, open to Spanish and French vessels carrying goods that were either unavailable or prohibitively expensive through British channels. This effort turned out to be part of a larger scheme to capture the Indian trade in Spanish Florida and possibly push Spain out of North America altogether. Before he could attend to this enormously complicated project, however, he would first have to master the intricacies of Bahamian politics, which were daunting enough in themselves.

* The loyalists who took refuge in the Bahamas were undergoing a terrible ordeal. The poorest among them had arrived in a shocking state of destitution. In many cases, the government provisions they needed came too late, and in the spring of 1786 they were reportedly dying daily. The plight of Philip Dumasresq was typical. Once an affluent Boston merchant, he served as Dunmore’s aide-de-camp during the 1782

55 Sydney to Dunmore, 20 August 1787, C.O. 23/27/59-60; Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation, 282-83.
56 [Wylly], A Short Account, 24.
57 Dunmore to [Nepean], 4 March 1788, private, 23/27/114.
58 Siebert, ed., Loyalists in East Florida, 192.

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mission to Virginia. In the Bahamas, Dunmore reported, Dumaresq was reduced "to a real state of Beggary with a large family of Children, who to my knowledge have been often crying round him for bread when he had not a morsel to give them." Even those with enough to eat found it difficult to cope. Dissatisfied with the assistance of the claims commission and relegated to inhospitable corners of the Empire, the loyalists felt abandoned by the very government for which they had risked their lives and lost their livelihoods. Dunmore's old associate John Cruden, who moved to the Bahamas after the war, outlined the alternatives open to those in his position. They could return "to their Homes to receive Insult, worse than Death, or run the Risque of being murdered in cold Blood (the Fate of many who have sought the Protection of the New States) or take refuge on barren Islands, where Poverty and Wretchedness stares them in the Face, or encounter the Rigours of a Northern Climate, destitute of every Necessary of Life—or become Subjects to Spain, and deny the Religion of their Fathers and abandon their still dear Country." For the loyalists who chose to settle the "barren Islands" of the Bahamas, as Cruden did, the sense of alienation he described only deepened.60

The arrival of the American refugees ushered in a new era in Bahamian politics, one marked above all by partisan strife. Having left prosperous circumstances along the eastern seaboard, the newcomers viewed the old inhabitants as lazy and uncultivated. They also looked down on an earlier wave of loyalist migrants from


60 Cruden, Address to the Loyal Part of the British Empire, 4-5.
West Florida, who consequently tended to identify with the “conchs.” In turn, the old inhabitants saw the exiled elites as haughty interlopers. Nonetheless, steps were taken to accommodate the loyalists. Most notably, seats were established in the assembly for recently-settled out islands such as Abaco, and the number of representatives from New Providence, Eleuthera, and Harbour Island, all dominated by the old guard, were cut significantly. The elections that followed were marred by accusations of fraud on both sides, however, and the new inhabitants came away with only eleven of the twenty-five seats. Believing themselves entitled to a majority, a group of dissidents led by James Hepburn of Cat Island formed “The Board of American Loyalists.” With the help of John Wells’s *Bahama Gazette*, then the colony’s only newspaper, they mounted a campaign against the government so intense that Governor Maxwell eventually fled the islands in fear of a coup d’état. When the controversial assembly convened in 1785, Hepburn and eight others withdrew themselves in protest and refused to return. Charged with nonattendance and contempt, they were formally expelled and replaced by moderates in the resulting by-elections. The loyalist-led opposition came away from these events with a pronounced sense of grievance. There were even accusations that some, including Cruden, began plotting for Bahamian independence.  

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The loyalists took heart from Dunmore’s appointment. “A Governor of his elevated rank was universally considered as no small acquisition to an infant Colony,” wrote William Wylly, “but his attachment to his King and Country during the late rebellion, was what rendered his appointment peculiarly grateful to the Loyalists.” The critical question nevertheless remained: Would Dunmore dissolve the assembly? He had called for new elections upon taking office in Virginia, where it was customary to do so, but the Bahamas was different. None of his predecessors had taken this step, including the two loyalists who presided during Maxwell’s absence. Still, dissolution requests flooded his office. Like so many of the petitions he saw over time, these were deferential in form only. Many of them openly accused Maxwell of having packed the legislature. The authors of these memorials were sorely disappointed. In each case, Dunmore responded with the same flat refusal: “I do not think it expedient to His Majesty’s service to dissolve the House of Assembly at this period.” There would not be another general election until 1794.

The loyalists weren’t entirely innocent in the struggle for political power in the Bahamas. They occasionally resorted to the same sort of intimidation and coercion that their former enemies in the United States had used during the Revolution. Thirty-eight signers of one dissolution petition subsequently renounced the document, stating

4; Craton, *History of the Bahamas*, 164-70; and Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 190-91. For the independence scheme, see the deposition of William Augustus Bowles, 9 April 1788, C.O. 23/27/158-59. The humble loyalists who identified with the old inhabitants may well have come from the southern interior of North America, where many valued the British government as a protector; see essays by Jeffrey J. Crow and Emory G. Evans in Ronald Hoffman, Thad W. Tate, and Peter J. Albert, eds., *An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry in the American Revolution* (Charlottesville, 1985).

62 The loyalist executives were James Powell and John Brown: [Wylly], *A Short Account*, 14.

63 The petitions are enclosed in Dunmore to Sydney, 29 February 1788, C.O. 23/27/102-11 (Dunmore quotation on 105) and Dunmore to Sydney, 21 April 1788, C.O. 23/27/133. They were also reprinted as appendices in [Wylly], *A Short Account*, 33-39.
that they had been “called out of their beds in the night” and misled into signing. 64

Those who sympathized with the old inhabitants saw the loyalists as troublemakers. A resident of New Providence explained the situation this way:

these islands since the peace, have been in a continual uproar, by a violent and rancorous dispute between the inhabitants and the American refugees, the latter conceiving themselves entitled to the greatest share in the affairs of government, and every other indulgence, to the total exclusion of their more honest fellow subjects. As soon as lord Dunmore arrived, they, in a tumultuous manner, and in terms far from polite, addressed, or rather required of him, immediately to dissolve the house of assembly, because some of the old inhabitants were [in] the legislature, and set forth that their respectable corps were not sufficiently represented, not forgetting to remind his lordship of their unshaken loyalty during the American contest, and the great sacrifice of property they had made, in support of the royal cause; his lordship has thoroughly investigated the affair; and the malignity and turbulent spirit of these fugitives appearing fully to his lordship, he has refused to comply with their unreasonable requisitions. 65

Dunmore, it was true, took an immediate dislike to the opposition. At best he thought them “malcontents,” at worst a “Lawless Banditti.” 66 He was not alone. Anthony Stokes, the agent for the Bahamas in London, ascribed the colony’s factious politics to “a desire in several violent, unprincipled Men, to crush the Old Inhabitants, who behave in the most dutiful manner to Government.” 67 The ministry also adopted this view. After examining the petitions for a dissolution and endorsing Dunmore’s refusals, Sydney assured him “that there is every inclination on the part of His Majesty’s Servants to discountenance the Leaders of Opposition and to cooperate with

64 Petition from inhabitants of Long Island, 2 April 1788, enclosed in Dunmore to Sydney, 21 April 1788, C.O. 23/27/155.
66 Dunmore to [Nepean], 4 March 1788, private, C.O. 23/27/112; Dunmore to [Nepean], 21 April 1788, C.O. 23/27/156.
you in the pursuit of such steps as may be likely to suppress that Party Spirit which has for some time past unfortunately prevailed within your Government.” Whatever the merits of their grievances, the loyalist leadership had given the refugees a bad name.

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American independence confirmed for British officials what Dunmore had always believed about colonial government, namely that executives were too weak and legislatures too strong to sustain imperial rule. Postwar reorganizations of British Canada and India reflected this conclusion, and the prevailing mood of “proconsular despotism,” and the institution of crown colony government it inspired, suited Dunmore to a tee. He was encouraged by a 1787 speech of William Pitt, the Younger to Parliament promoting a stronger military presence in India. “All the real well wishers to Govt were made extreamly happy to find that the mode of Govt. in all our distant Colonies is to be changed from the present into a Military one,” he wrote, “which in my opinion will be the most fortunate event that ever happened to them...His Majesty may then look upon them realy as his Colonies, where in their present situation they can only be looked upon as so many Nurseries of Rebellion, for be assured had we a war with America to Morrow the Loyalists here...would be those I should have the greatest reason to fear.” Dunmore supported the permanent

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68 Sydney to Dunmore, 21 June 1788, C.O. 23/27/129.
70 Dunmore to [Nepean], 4 March 1788, private, C.O. 23/27/112.
establishment of martial law in the colonies. This put him well outside the mainstream, even among those who had been burned by the American rebellion. Although the ministry ignored his views on martial law, Dunmore had already begun to institute a more autocratic regime in Nassau.

On the first day of April 1788, a loyalist by the name of William Wylly marched up to Chief Justice John Matson on a public street and, in the presence of at least one onlooker, called him "a Damned Liar." Such a dramatic confrontation would have had serious personal consequences anywhere in the British Empire, but in the agitated atmosphere of Nassau, it threatened the very foundations of public life. Wylly's insult, as it turned out, was part of a chain of events that temporarily paralyzed the colony's justice system, allowing Dunmore to indulge his preference for authoritarian rule.

Wylly was a newcomer to the Bahamas even by loyalist standards. Originally from Georgia, he hadn't been in the colony six months when he approached Matson on the street that day. His reputation as a lawyer was such that upon his arrival Dunmore, wanting to welcome him with "a Mark of confidence and distinction," immediately appointed him Solicitor General. The courtship evidently continued for several months. One evening in December 1787, the governor sent Chief Justice Matson to Wylly's Nassau home. Company was present, so the two men adjourned to the piazza. It was dusk. According to Wylly, Matson had come to offer him a captain's commission in the militia in exchange for his support against the opposition, which was still agitating for a dissolution of the assembly. Despite an avowed contempt for

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71 Deposition of John Matson, 1 April 1788, C.O. 23/27/134.

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“ordinary militia” duty, Wyly accepted the distinction but quickly renounced it on learning that someone he did not respect had been made colonel. With the discussion turning into an argument, Matson allegedly said something to the effect that “at present Lord Dunmore seems disposed to serve you — it is very much in his power to do so, and You ought Sir to take a Party.” Several months passed without event, but the following spring, Wyly learned that Matson had denied telling him to choose a party, a revelation that set the stage for the “Damned liar” incident of April 1.

As the events that followed show, Bahamian justice could be a confused, combative process. Publicly insulted, Matson had an assistant judge of the General Court issue a warrant for Wyly’s arrest. Dunmore disapproved of this, but by the time he learned of it, the wheels of justice were already in motion. Because of the chief justice’s direct involvement, the case was to be heard by the assistant judges, who scheduled a public hearing for the following day, April 2. Again, Dunmore disapproved. According to the council, the arrest warrant directed that the hearing take place in private rather than open court. With no actual chambers available to them, the judges were forced to deliberate while huddled in front of a packed courtroom.

This left them exposed to the barbs of defense attorney Robert Johnston, perhaps the

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72 Deposition of William Wyly, 2 April 1788, C.O. 23/27/139.
73 Dunmore to Sydney, 21 April 1788, C.O. 23/27/131. Craton and Saunders state that Dunmore offered Wyly a position on the Vice Admiralty court in exchange for his support against the opposition (Islanders in the Stream, 202), but Wyly made no mention of this in either his pamphlet or his sworn deposition, which names only the enticement of the captain’s commission, a far more modest post. According to Dunmore, Josiah Tatnall proposed Wyly as his replacement on the Vice Admiralty court, but the governor refused on account of Wyly’s “chiming in upon every occasion with” the opposition. Dunmore to Sydney, 29 June 1789, C.O. 23/29/117-22, typescript, DFP, bundle 15. To confuse matters further, Dunmore appointed Matson to the seat, but this turned out to conflict with his role as chief justice: Sydney to Dunmore, 31 December 1788, C.O. 23/28/60-61.
74 Dunmore to Sydney, 18 July 1788, C.O. 23/27/164.
75 Council Minutes, 3 April 1788, C.O. 23/27/146-47.
most incendiary, and Dunmore believed the most dangerous, member of the opposition. Johnston presented several affidavits in Wylly’s defense, then brazenly interrupted the deliberation of the court, at one point exclaiming, “tell me ye Judges learned in the Law what neither of you speak. – do consult. – perhaps what one has not in his wig the other may have in his Tail – You would probably consult better over a bottle of Brandy.”

Intimidated by these theatrics and unwilling to submit their warrant to the scrutiny of a jury, the judges ordered Wylly’s release. It was precisely the sort of humiliation that Dunmore had feared when he learned of the arrest warrant.

He was furious at all the judges involved. In the space of a week, he advised Matson to return to England and suspended the assistant judges indefinitely. He took the latter step with the unanimous support of the council but without any qualified replacements at hand, so the justice system had to be temporarily shut down. It wasn’t the first time Dunmore had seen courts close. Virginia patriots had done just this in response to the Coercive Acts of 1774. Defending his actions to the ministry much later, he argued that he took this step in order to restore order and prevent the courts “from falling into perfect disrepute and contempt.”

On his way to England, Matson carried a letter from Dunmore to the ministry which accused the opposition of

76 Peter Edwards to Dunmore, 18 April 1788, C.O. 23/27/144-45. The charge of drunkenness was commonly leveled against judges in the Bahamas. Wyllly claimed that “the most beastly drunkenness” had compromised “the Seals of Justice.” [Wyllly], Short Account, 20. For Dunmore’s views on Johnston, see Dunmore to [Nepean], 4 March 1788, private, C.O. 23/27/112.

77 For documents related to the hearing, including the affidavits Johnston presented, see C.O. 23/27/135-36.

78 Council Minutes, 10 April 1788, C.O. 23/27/147. On Matson’s departure, see also Dunmore to [Nepean], 8 April 1788, C.O. 23/27/122.

79 Bruce Ragsdale, A Planters’ Republic: The Search for Economic Independence in Revolutionary Virginia (Madison, 1996), 200-01.

seeking independence and proposed martial law. “Nothing less than making this a Military Govt. can effectually eradicate the seeds of Rebelion from amongst them,” Dunmore wrote. The General Court soon reopened for capital cases (critics charged that the replacement judges weren’t even lawyers), but it remained closed to civil trials for nearly a year. This exposed Dunmore, as did Virginia patriots, to the charge that he was using the controversy to shelter friends facing legal actions from creditors. Whatever truth there was to this, Dunmore had effectively instituted martial law for the second time in his career. It wasn’t until the arrival of the new Chief Justice, Stephen DeLancey, on February 24, 1789 that the General Court at last reopened in full.

Following his release, Wylly committed himself in vain to the cause of Dunmore’s recall. He sailed for London not far behind Matson and, once there, submitted a set of grievances to Lord Sydney, complete with petitions and memorials from people who had effectively lost legal actions due to the discontinuance of the General Court. Wylly met a cool reception at Whitehall, but Sydney took note of his charges and ordered Dunmore to answer them in detail. Even without the benefit of this input, the secretary felt free to pass certain judgments: Matson should not have been permitted to leave as he did, and while the assistant judges deserved to be fired (they should have arrested Johnston for contempt), closing the court all together had been a terrible mistake. Still, Sydney remained supportive pending Dunmore’s

81 Dunmore to [Nepean], 8 April 1788, C.O.23/27/122.
82 [Wylly], Short Account, 9-10, 39-40, 42.
83 For brief accounts of this episode, see Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, 202; Riley, Homeward Bound, 172-73.
84 The affidavits are in C.O. 23/29/297-307
explanations. He even stripped a leading Bahamian radical of a lucrative government appointment to prove it. ⁸⁵ Having claimed from the beginning that the complaints of “incendiaries” like Wylly gave him “no uneasiness,” Dunmore had no trouble justifying his actions to the ministry. It all began, he explained, when he opposed appointing Wylly to the Vice Admiralty court, and matters simply escalated from there. He admitted to a few mistakes, but in view of the volatile political culture in which he was operating, these were forgiven.⁸⁶ Rebuffed by the ministry, Wylly was forced to take his grievances to the public. He published an anonymous pamphlet outlining the case against Dunmore in 1789. Valuable though it is to historians, the work did nothing to further endanger the controversial governor’s standing in London.

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Black Bahamians played a critical part in Dunmore’s rivalry with the opposition. Before the American rebellion, the Bahamas had been among the least oppressive environments for Africans and African Americans in the West Indies. New Providence was home to a longstanding community of free blacks, and slaves throughout the islands tended to enjoy more autonomy than their counterparts in neighboring colonies like Jamaica, Cuba, and Saint Domingue, where plantation agriculture was far more profitable.⁸⁷ Unable to support sugar, the rocky soil of the

⁸⁷ Schoepf mentions “a little village” several miles to the east of Nassau called New Guinea: Travels in the Confederation, 264 (quotation), 301. On slave life, including high-rates of self-hire, see Howard Johnson, Bahamas from Slavery to Servitude, 1783-1933 (Gainesville, Fla., 1996), xvii, 33-34. Free black refugees in the London nevertheless rejected the Bahamas as a permanent home, stating a
Bahamas had yet to produce a staple of its own by 1783. A good deal of salt raking and subsistence farming notwithstanding, it remained a maritime world. The “conch lifestyle,” as one historian described it, consisted of “a garden patch ashore, a ship asea.” The loyalist refugees, many of whom hailed from slave societies in the North American lowcountry, were determined to change this. They were particularly eager to plant cotton, and while they had had little experience with the crop in places like South Carolina and Georgia, they did have one requisite in abundance—slaves. Some 5,700 blacks came to the Bahamas in the wake of the American Revolution, most of them enslaved. For all the prosperity it promised, this influx of slave labor (which raised the black majority in the colony from just over one half to three quarters of the total population) made the priorities of oversight and discipline more pressing than ever.

Black freedom was a tenuous thing under these conditions. Many former slaves came to the Bahamas believing that their days in bondage were over only to be re-enslaved upon their arrival. Ninety-seven blacks sailed from New York to Abaco in 1783. Virtually all of these people were labeled “F.P.” in British records, denoting “Formerly Property of,” a clear indication that they had earned their freedom by preference for a place where no traffic in slaves occurred: “Minutes of the Committee in Relief of the Black Poor, July 28, 1786,” quoted in Graham Russell Hodges, ed., *The Black Loyalist Directory: African Americans in Exile after the American Revolution* (New York, 1996), xviii.


joining the king’s troops in accordance with the policy first established by Dunmore’s proclamation. And yet, they were also described as being in the “possession” of particular whites, occasionally the very people listed as their former masters. Whatever this signified (possibly some kind of indenture), the ambiguity reflected the fragile state of their freedom. More newly free blacks came to the Bahamas by way of East Florida when that colony was handed over to Spain in 1784. Hungry for labor, loyalist planters had already begun enslaving any black refugee who failed to produce a certificate of freedom. Among other things, more slaves meant larger land grants from government in the Bahamas. In response to this phenomenon, British authorities permitted blacks to petition the receiver general of the colony to investigate their situations. From 1783 to 1787, however, only eleven people regained their liberty through this process, which clearly failed those it aimed to assist.90 Nor did it act as a deterrent to unscrupulous whites. “It is with great Pain of Mind,” one sympathetic official wrote in 1786, ‘that I, every day see the Negroes, who came here from America, with the British Generals’ Free Passes, treated with unheard of cruelty by Men who call themselves Loyalists. These unhappy People, after being drawn from their Masters by Promises of Freedom and the King’s Protection, are every day stolen away.”91

90 A list of the free blacks who sailed from New York to the Bahamas in 1783 is in Riley, Homeward Bound, 266-69. The equivocal status of these blacks is discussed in Michael Craton, “Loyalists Mainly to Themselves: The Black Loyalist diaspora to the Bahamas Islands,” in Shepherd, ed., Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom, 47-48. There was also a ship carrying about twenty-five blacks, both enslaved and free, that went to Cat Island in November 1783: Hodges, Black Loyalist Directory, Book 2. For the East Florida contingent and the re-enslavement process, see Johnson, Race Relations in the Bahamas, 41-42. See also Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, 183-85; Brown, “Loyalists in the West Indies,” 83.
91 John Berry to [?], 30 June 1786, quoted in Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, 187.
Having fled from their masters during the war, many of the re-enslaved chose to run once more. Some found refuge amongst the free blacks of Nassau, while others formed maroon communities in the Bahamian wilderness, almost certainly alongside legally-enslaved fugitives. When Dunmore first arrived in the colony, these groups had been “committing Outrages” against whites on several of the islands for some time. On Abaco, he wrote, “the outlaying Negroes went about with Muskets and fix’d Bayonets, robbing and Plundering.” 92 The new governor’s approach to the problem made him few friends among the new inhabitants. On the first day of his administration, he published a proclamation offering a comprehensive amnesty to all runaways who surrendered themselves in due course. A week later, he extended the grace period in a second proclamation, which specifically sought to address the concerns of the re-enslaved:

And WHEREAS many of the said Negroes may be apprehensive of surrendering themselves lest they may be still deemed Slaves, notwithstanding their claiming their Freedom, therefore Notice is hereby given, that such Persons claiming their Freedom shall apply, upon their Surrender, to the Receiver-General and Treasurer of these Islands, to enquire into the Nature of such Claims of Freedom; and if properly founded, the said Receiver-General will give a Certificate of such Freedom, which will be certified under my privy Seal and Sign Manual, and a Register thereof kept in the Secretary’s Office. 93

Though this policy originated with Governor Maxwell, Dunmore promised to give it teeth. Virtually all of the administrative mechanisms of imperial authority would be brought to bear to certify legitimate claims of freedom. The proclamation even provided that the government pay to transport black petitioners to Nassau to have their

92 Dunmore to Sydney, 28 November 1787, C.O. 23/27/75.
93 Proclamation, 28 October 1787, and Proclamation, 7 November 1787 (quotation), both enclosed in Dunmore to Sydney, 28 November 1787, C.O. 23/27/77, 78.
cases heard. Notably, the document bore the date November 7, 1787, the twelfth anniversary of Dunmore's first proclamation of emancipation. The governor may have believed the date would resonate with runaways and help to instill trust, or it may have been a coincidence that resonated anyway. Regardless, the proclamation succeeded in drawing runaways out into the open, and Dunmore made good on his promise to investigate their claims.

To this end, he established a special tribunal, composed of the receiver general and two magistrates, with complete jurisdiction over cases in which slaves contested their status. The very existence of such a court presupposed sympathy for black petitioners and suspicion of their purported owners. Dunmore made no secret of this prejudice. He told the ministry that some loyalists had acquired "a great proportion of their property by decoying these poor Creatures from the different Towns, when we evacuated them on the Continent of America, under pretence of saving them from the Hands of their Old Masters." By the spring of 1788, the court was righting these wrongs with some regularity. But while it helped dozens of individuals escape bondage for a second time, Dunmore regretfully acknowledged that "a much greater number have been carried off from the different islands by force to the Spanish & French Islands & there Sold."  

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94 On the creation of the court, see Dunmore to Sydney, 28 November 1787, C.O. 23/27/75, 80. A final version of "the Act for governing Negros, Mulattos, Mustees, and Indians," which established the court, is located in C.O. 23/29/15-21, and "An Act for Explaining and Amending" this law was published on 26 February 1788, C.O. 23/29/268-271.

95 Dunmore even argued that the radicals' campaign for greater representation in the assembly was motivated by a desire "to pass such acts as would secure to them the property of a great number of the poor Blacks who deserted from their Rebel Masters, and came into the British lines." Dunmore to [Nepean], 4 March 1788, private, C.O. 23/27/112.
Dunmore acted decisively, and illegally, in the face of such injustice. That spring, he instructed the owner of the vessel he was renting, a man named Mackay, to sail to Spencer’s Bight on the island of Abaco with a body of armed men. Once there, they were to seize a store of smuggled corn and remove “all the rebel property Negroes,” presumably to give them a hearing before the slave tribunal in Nassau. Mackay and his men threw Spencer’s Bight into confusion in the execution of these orders. According to a petition signed by eleven area planters, many slaves “came in open day before your Memorialists faces, and put their baggage on board said Mackay’s boat.” One of these petitioners was Dunmore’s friend and former aide-de-camp, Philip Dumaresq. The whites managed to prevent the boat from leaving, but in the midst of the disorder, approximately forty slaves, some of them “household-servants,” disappeared into the woods. The petitioners implored the governor to remedy the situation, which they believed could evolve into “an Insurrection” and force them “to relinquish their houses and plantations, destitute of every subsistence for themselves, their wives and children.”

Fearing the abandonment of the settlement, Dunmore sailed to Abaco himself. Here was the same self-confidence that drove him to march over the Appalachian Mountains more than a decade earlier to subdue the Ohio Indians. The slave court allowed blacks to initiate legal proceedings with nothing more than their word, and its establishment at Spencer’s Bight inspired most of the fugitives, only a few of whom

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96 “Memorial of the Planters and other Inhabitants of the Island of Abaco, residing at Spencer’s Bight,” 6 May 1788, reprinted in [Wylly], Short Account, 40-41; an original manuscript version is in C.O. 23/29/283-84. The most detailed account of these events is in Riley, Homeward Bound, 175-76. On Dumaresq, see Jones, Loyalists of Massachusetts, 124; Dunmore to Sydney, 4 June 1789, C.O. 23/29/106-07, typescript, DFP, bundle 15.
had left the island, to come out of hiding. In the hearings that followed, Dunmore later wrote, “those that were entitled to their freedom were declared so, and the others returned peaceably to their owners.” In truth, only one of the thirty slaves who filed for freedom was set at liberty; the other twenty-nine were restored to white masters. Despite the lopsided results, Dunmore was pleased with the proceedings and left the island in what he called “the utmost harmony.” The Abaco planters were relieved and wrote the governor to express “the extreme gratitude which we now feel for the happy consequences of your arrival among us.” One of these men, Dumaresq, would emerge as one of Dunmore’s closest political allies.

In light of this episode, the slave tribunal seems like a charade designed to legitimize re-enslavement, but many whites didn’t see it that way. While the Abaco planters pronounced the trials “fair, candid, and impartial,” most other loyalists were bitterly opposed to the slave court. From the tribunal’s inception, Dunmore reported that it gave “umbrage to some persons” in Nassau. On May 28, 1788, a grand jury in Nassau heard a variety of grievances against the government, including one regarding “the present mode of trying the freedom of Negroes by three men, whereby Negroes are encouraged to elope from their Masters, under pretended Claims of

98 “Humble Address of the undersigned Planters and other Inhabitants of Spencer’s Bight, on the Island of Abaco,” n.d., reprinted in [Wylly], Short Account, 41.
99 Craton and Saunders make this contention in Islanders in the Stream, 187, and Craton repeats it in “Loyalists Mainly to the Themselves,” 49.
100 “Humble Address of the undersigned Planters and other Inhabitants of Spencer’s Bight,” n.d., reprinted in [Wylly], Short Account, 41. The negative reactions to the Negro court among loyalists is discussed in Jasanoff, “Other Side of Revolution,” 221.
101 Dunmore to Sydney, 28 November 1787, C.O. 23/27/75.
Freedom." This wasn’t the first public complaint about the court, nor was it the last. In his 1789 pamphlet, William Wylly characterized it at length as an instrument of arbitrary power, one that, among other things, trampled slaveholders’ right to trial by jury. It was also rumored that Dunmore routinely co-opted the labor of claimants while their petitions were pending. Wylly even argued that the court had been conceived as a way “to establish two or three cotton Plantations for a rapacious and needy individual,” an obvious reference to the governor. Though other members of the opposition echoed this charge, it appears to have had little basis in fact. Whatever the reasons behind the planter-friendly outcome on Abaco, it must be stressed that the proceedings there were only the most dramatic expressions of a system that had operated before and would continue to operate afterward. More blacks were freed under Dunmore than any governor in the history of the Bahamas. The Negro court affirmed the freedom of forty-one individuals during his tenure, compared to eleven in previous administrations and only seven in subsequent ones.

What became of the slaves who won their freedom is a mystery, but there are some clues. The act of assembly that created the Negro court stated that when the claimant was adjudged free, he or she had to either leave the colony within three months, pay a £90 fine, or face re-enslavement. Yet the law seems to have born

102 “Presentments of the Grand Jury, at a Special Court of Oyer and Terminer and General Gaol Delivery for the Bahama Islands...” 28 May 1788, reprinted in [Wylly], Short Account, 41-42 (quotations on 42).
103 [Wylly], Short Account, 21-23 (quotation on 21). See also Riley, Homeward Bound, 169. Even scholars critical of Dunmore’s motives are dubious of this charge: Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, 200.
104 Johnson, Race Relations in the Bahamas, 42. For manuscript records of a few decisions, see C.O. 23/29/279-82.

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little resemblance to how emancipation played out on the ground. Wylyl, for instance, railed against the “considerable village” of free blacks that Dunmore permitted to exist behind Government House. This community served as “an Asylum for runaways and Negro Offenders of every description,” he explained, “and no white Person dares make his appearance within it, but at the risk of his life.” Evidently, crimes against white men were committed with impunity in this part of town. “Many have been assaulted, and nearly destroyed there,” Wyly wrote, “and though several of the Offenders have been prosecuted to conviction, the Governor has interposed and protected them from punishment.”

Dunmore appears here, as he so often did in Virginia, as a traitor to his race—the overlord of a lawless, motley cast of minions.

Free blacks had some reason to view Dunmore as a useful patron. One evening in December 1787, the governor awoke to “cries of Murder” from the village behind Government House. He reportedly ran to his window, where several children explained that “five or Six Gentlemen with swords & Pistols” had broken into their home, beaten their mother, “a free Mullatto woman,” wounded one of their sisters, and “otherwise abused & alarmed the rest of the family.” The intruders, they said, were now trying to burn the house down. Dunmore dispatched several servants to intervene and “save the house if possible.” The leader of the offending party was a prominent loyalist named Josiah Tatnall, who apparently “knocked one of the poor Girls down” during the invasion. When Dunmore’s servants ordered him to leave the family alone,

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106 [Wyly], Short Account, 42 n. m. “The Town of Nassau is actually overawed by a considerable body of runaway and other Negroes,” Wyly wrote, “collected and kept together in the neighbourhood of Government House, and about Fort Charlotte, in open and flagrant violation of the Laws of the Colony, and in the face of repeated presentments solemnly made by the Grand Inquest of those Islands”: Short Account, 22.
Tatnall was reportedly "impertinent," telling Dunmore's emissary that "he neither cared for His Majesty or any other Man." Dunmore had seen the same disregard for royal authority wreak havoc on the continent. All of the offenders were arrested and imprisoned before being bailed out. "If this had been a drunken frolick there might have been some sort of excusing made for them," Dunmore wrote, but the following day Tatnall allegedly swore that "he would burn every house belonging to the free Negroes in that quarter of the Town." With this, the governor vowed to do everything he could "to give these poor people redress," so as "to convince others that whilst His Majesty is pleased to continue me in my present situation, such outrages shall not (if in my power to avoid) go unnoticed." 107

Dunmore's attitudes about slavery and freedom were more complicated than his reputation for self-interested opportunism allows. 108 In 1788, he received a questionnaire from the ministry regarding the conditions of slave life in the Bahamas and the customs and laws governing it. His responses exhibit a propensity to see similarities where others saw differences between blacks and whites. When asked, "Could an European Constitution subsist in a West Indian Climate, under the Labour necessary for cultivating a West Indian Plantation," he responded, "yes it might." When the question was repeated in a different form—"Would it be possible to cultivate to Advantage the West India Islands by the Labour of Europeans or of Free Negroes?"—he answered in the affirmative again. He emphasized similarities between

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107 Dunmore to [Nepean], 20 December 1787, C.O. 23/27/92-93.
108 Scholars have characterized Dunmore's actions with regard to black freedom in the Bahamas as calculated and ultimately conservative, just as they have his 1775 proclamation: Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, 187, 200; Frey, Water from the Rock, 186. For a more sympathetic interpretation, see Johnson, Race Relations in the Bahamas.
blacks and whites across the board when asked about life expectancy, reproduction, and susceptibility to disease. This did not make him a progressive. He wasn’t even a latent abolitionist. In January 1789, he purchased nine bondsmen along with a few hundred acres of land in the very section of Abaco where he’d sent twenty-nine runaways back to slavery the previous year. As a slaveholder and the chief executive of a slaveholding society, he wanted, above all, to preserve the social order. Not long after the Abaco sessions of the Negro court, he happily assured the ministry that “there has been no kind of disturbance whatever amongst the Negroes on these Islands in consequence of the reports of an Abolition of the Slave Trade, nor do they seem in the least anxious about it.” If Dunmore ever expressed any moral compunction about slavery or the slave trade, it has not survived.

And yet, black liberty arguably had no greater friend in the Bahamas. In addition to supporting the large, controversial free black community behind his home in Nassau, he didn’t hesitate to promote black land ownership in its earliest stages. He was fairly liberal in the distribution of land patents to free blacks. Amelia Smith, a free mulatto woman, received 325 acres on Exuma, and five other free people of color, two of them women, were among the original grantees of Dunmore Town, the village the

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109 House of Commons, Report of the Lords of the Committee of Council appointed for the Consideration of all Matters relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations...dated 11th of February 1788, concerning the present State of the Trade to Africa, and particularly the Trade in Slaves...([London], 1789), [456], [458] (quotations).
110 For Dunmore’s failed Long Island cotton plantation, see Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, 202. For his purchase of slaves and land in Spencer’s Bight and Little Harbour, Abaco, see Riley, Homeward Bound, 181, 253 n. 5.
governor designed and named for himself on Harbour Island. Despite the results of the slave tribunal on Abaco, Dunmore seems to have done everything in his power to honor the Empire’s commitment to those it freed during the war. Certainly, his enemies felt that he went too far, but in his view re-enslavement threatened Britain’s status as standard bearer for liberty across the globe. The ministry agreed and gave him high marks for protecting “such as may have been unjustifiably deprived of the Freedom they had acquired from their Services during the War in America.” While some of the lessons British officials drew from the war validated Dunmore’s conservative views about government, his relationship to free blacks was out of step with the trend toward increasing racial subordination and hierarchy in the Empire.

Slavery and freedom were elastic concepts in Dunmore’s mind. Just as liberty wasn’t reserved for whites alone, nor was lifelong bondage an exclusively black condition. Around the time he took office in the fall of 1787, Britain withdrew from the Caribbean coast of present-day Nicaragua, a region then known as the Mosquito Shore. Making way for Spanish authorities, most of the more than 2,500 English-speaking inhabitants moved to Belize. About 200 from the island of San Andres came to the Bahamas, however. Their situation mirrored that of the loyalist settlers in several respects, although they insisted that Dunmore view them “not as American

112 For Smith, see Johnson, Race Relations in the Bahamas, 30. For Harbour Island, see Anne and Jim Lawlor, The Harbour Island Story (Oxford, 2008), 174.
114 Bayly, Imperial Meridian.
Refugees, but as Britons born." For one thing they arrived, as many loyalists had, in
desperate need of provisions and looked to the government to supply them. In both
cases, moreover, the vast majority of the refugees were enslaved. But here also was a
difference—the Mosquito Shore slaves were Amerindian rather than black.\textsuperscript{116}

Amerindian slavery was rare in the British Empire at this time. After
flourishing in last quarter of the seventeenth century, it had dwindled in most places
by the middle of the eighteenth.\textsuperscript{117} But not everywhere. The refugees now applying to
Dunmore for aid came from a place dominated by the Miskito Indians. This group
routinely enslaved other natives and sold them (mainly in exchange for firearms) to
British traders, who then distributed them to whites along the coast. Over the course of
the century, there were perhaps 200,000 victims of this trade, most of them Sumus,
Matagalpas, Caribs, and Jicaques. One white refugee explained that such people,
whom she referred to simply as "Musquito Indians," were bought and sold "daily" on
the Shore and were in many places "even more numerous than the Negroe Slaves."\textsuperscript{118}

Dunmore's involvement with Indian slavery began through an obscure series
of events. In late January 1788, he paid a visit to the Nassau home of George Barry,
who was then serving as Treasurer and Receiver General of the Bahamas. Also present

\textsuperscript{116} Dunmore to Sydney, 28 November 1787, C.O. 23/27/75, 81-82; Dunmore to Sydney, 21 December
1787, C.O. 23/27/97-98. The refugee aid was later approved by the ministry: Sydney to Dunmore, 21

\textsuperscript{117} Alan Gallay, ed., \textit{Indian Slavery in Colonial America} (Lincoln, Neb., 2010), 24-26; Virginia
am indebted to Stephanie Cruimbaugh, who lent her undergraduate thesis at the College of William &
Mary on this topic.

\textsuperscript{118} Memorial of Mary Brown, 15 November 1788, C.O. 23/28/141. On the Mosquito Coast, see David J.
Weber, \textit{Barbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment} (New Haven, 2005), 86-87
(Miskito Indian slave trade), 202 (Belize), 242 (British withdraw); Eliga H. Gould, "Entangled
Histories, Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery," \textit{American
Historical Review} 112 (2007): 764-86, 772-77; Troy S. Floyd, \textit{The Anglo-Spanish Struggle for
Mosquitia} ([Albuquerque], 1967).
were Attorney General Edmund Wegg and an enslaved Indian woman named Sprightly. According to Wegg's affidavit, the discussion quickly turned to "the legality and Propriety of the Sale of Indians." Sprightly explained that following some recent misconduct, her owner, the Mosquito Shore refugee Mary Brown, had ordered her to find a new master. Making no effort to conceal his interest, Dunmore told Sprightly to fetch a man named Seth Yeoman, who lived with Brown and helped to manage her affairs. Why Brown was not consulted herself is unclear. In the negotiation that followed, Dunmore expressed "some doubts" about the legal status of Indian chattels, and though Wegg mentioned having encountered such cases in West Florida, the governor remained skeptical. He agreed to purchase Sprightly, another woman named Diana, and possibly others, but not before their status was confirmed by a meeting of his slave tribunal. It was an odd venue in which to resolve the matter, even though the colony was still without a fully functional General Court, particularly since none of the Indians in question were contesting their status. Yeoman apparently agreed to hire out several of Brown's Indians, including Sprightly and Diana, for work on Dunmore's plantation pending the trial.

Given the chance, Mary Brown would no doubt have disputed these facts. Attorney General Wegg swore that Yeoman had confirmed them before his lawyer advised him not to sign anything. Though her reaction to Wegg's affidavit has not survived, Brown did file a formal complaint with the ministry about the Indians' appearance before the slave tribunal. In a petition prepared by her attorney, none other

119 For Indian slaves in West Florida, see Usner, Indians, Settlers, & Slaves, 107, 132.

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than William Wylly, she maintained that all of the bondswomen in question “had either been born Slaves” in her “Family,” or “fairly and legally acquired by purchase.” If they were “entitled to their Freedom under any Law,” she was prepared to renounce her title to them, but only “upon the event of a Legal Trial.” Needless to say, she considered the slave tribunal an illegitimate body. She also either disapproved of Yeoman’s hiring the Indian women to Dunmore or disputed that he had done so, for she insisted that the governor had no authority to employ her slaves while their case was pending. To see her property “converted to the use of another Person,” she wrote, “...is palpably oppressive and unjust.” Dunmore did pay Yeoman for the eight and a half months that Diana and Sprightly were with him. Brown claimed that he’d had the benefit of three, not two, of her slaves. This likely referred to a woman named Polly, who, according to Wegg, had only stayed with Dunmore for a night before returning to Brown with her two children, Comfort and Nero. ¹²¹

Brown accompanied Wylly on his trip to London in the hopes of presenting these complaints in person, but the ministry declined to see them. As it turned out, she need not have worried. In August 1788, Diana and Sprightly were both adjudged slaves in Nassau. Dunmore seems then to have returned them to Yeoman, who sold them to an unknown party at public auction for a sum exceeding that which the governor had agreed to pay the previous January. Why Dunmore didn’t buy the women according to the initial terms is unclear, as is much else about the episode. ¹²²

¹²² Memorial of Mary Brown, 15 November 1788, C.O. 23/28/141-42.
Were Sprightly and Diana hired legally or arbitrarily appropriated? Why did Polly leave after only one night? Why was she permitted to? In what capacity did the remaining women work? What was their relationship to the black slaves in the governor's household? Whatever the details, Dunmore's ability to so quickly accommodate Indian slavery, an institution with which he was totally unfamiliar, within his moral framework is noteworthy. If nothing else, it suggests, once again, that he did not view slavery and freedom in racially binary terms.

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Of all the issues he faced in the Bahamas, none was more important to Dunmore than defense. Though the money and resources he devoted to it were extravagant, it is hard to imagine a more appropriate priority for someone in his position. In order for the colony to flourish, people with property had to feel safe enough to settle or do business there. The strategic location that made the Bahamas valuable to the Empire—from the Caribbean and points south, it commanded the navigation of the Gulf Stream, the Windward Passage, and the east coast of North America—also made it vulnerable to attack from Spain, France, and the United States. The geographic diffusion of the islands made them very difficult to defend, whether from an outright invasion or smuggling, which was a constant problem even after the Free Port Act of 1787 opened Nassau to Spain and France. “American Vessels and other Smugglers come armed into the very Ports and Harbours of these Islands,” Dunmore wrote, “declaring that they will fight their way in, and have

actually landed the produce of their Country and carried off Cotton in return.\(^{124}\) There were internal threats to contend with as well, including a large slave population and an unruly body of politically alienated whites. Disorder was so deeply woven into the fabric of everyday life, in fact, that the inhabitants hardly took notice of episodes like Tatnall’s attack on the free black family behind Government House.\(^ {125}\) But for all its strategic significance and all its needs, the Bahamas was an obscure place, particularly in the minds of London officials, many of whom had no idea where the colony began and ended.\(^ {126}\) Even if the ministry grasped the need to properly secure it, the government was not in any financial position to do so. Because of this, Dunmore opted, not unreasonably, to take matters into his own hands.

The colony could not have asked for a more committed advocate in the struggle for imperial resources. Dunmore always believed that the Bahamas needed a standing army.\(^ {127}\) It was a view that suited his temperament and gratified his ego but also reflected the conditions he faced. When he took office, the four companies of the 37\(^{th}\) Regiment then stationed in Nassau were ready to leave and awaiting embarkation instructions.\(^ {128}\) Alarmed at the prospect of losing the troops, he used the Abaco slave rebellion as a pretext to delay their departure.\(^ {129}\) He managed to keep them on New

\(^{125}\) Dunmore to [Nepean], 20 December 1787, C.O. 23/27/92.
\(^{126}\) George Chalmers to assembly committee, 1 October 1793, “Correspondence to and from George Chalmers,” 41, in C.O. 23/31.
\(^{127}\) “A considerable Military force should be kept here constantly,” Dunmore wrote, “both for the support of Government and the defence of the Islands in case of Attack.” Dunmore to Sydney, 28 November 1787, C.O. 23/27/75.
Providence for nearly two years. He was constantly fending off orders to downsize the colony’s modest military apparatus. When told to return weapons and ammunition to England, he not only refused but requested that more be sent. 130

Nor did he wait passively for the ministry to comply with these demands. With the 37th Regiment finally set to depart in the summer of 1789, Bahamians were getting nervous. “It is an exceeding unpleasant thing, not to have a single Man to take care of three Forts, Magazines and Stores,” Dunmore wrote, “for which purpose I shall be obliged to Arm some Negroes.” The terms under which he sought to mobilize blacks are not known. If, indeed, he followed through with this step, it is telling that even the cotton-growing opposition seems not to have complained. 131 Dunmore also tried to address the looming security vacuum by detaining a British sloop from Jamaica that had the misfortune to lay anchor in Nassau harbor just before the departure of the 37th. After even that ship sailed in late August, the colony remained virtually defenseless for almost a year. 132 It was not until the summer of 1790, when the Spanish capture of a British trading operation on the coast of Vancouver Island brought both empires to the brink of war, that reinforcements finally arrived in the form of the 47th

Regiment. Though he hardly relished the threat of a sudden attack, the governor finally had his troops. All he needed now was a suitable place to put them.

The replacement of Fort Nassau was the largest undertaking of Dunmore’s life, and, appropriately, it was accomplished almost entirely without the permission of his superiors. As symbols of sovereignty, fortifications served political as well as military ends. They reinforced the community from within and without, instilling confidence among subjects and legitimizing those in power just as they overawed outsiders. In short, they expressed the strength and stability of a given regime. For Dunmore, whose sense of personal and imperial purpose remained as grand as ever, these were weighty considerations. Fort Nassau was not merely embarrassing but dangerous, even in the absence of war. According to Dunmore, its “confined and low situation” contributed to the deaths of about fifty members of the 37th Regiment as well as several of the women and children who travelled with them. It was cheaply constructed, he argued, and the barracks were located far too close to town, where training annoyed the inhabitants and easy access to liquor tempted troops to dissipation. Hoping to

133 Grenville to Dunmore, 6 May 1790, secret, C.O. 23/30/196-97, typescript, DFP, bundle 15; Dunmore to Grenville, 21 July 1790, Secret, 23/30/230.
134 On the symbolic significance of forts in the North American interior, see Peter Griffin, American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier (New York, 2007), 183-84.
135 Dunmore to Sydney, 31 August 1789, C.O. 23/29/167-68, typescript, DFP, bundle 15. The 47th regiment did not stay at Fort Nassau, but they also experienced terrible sickness while awaiting completion of the new barracks, and over 250 lost their lives, including women and children: Dunmore to Grenville, 16 October 1790, C.O. 23/30/322; Dunmore to Grenville, 8 November 1790, C.O. 23/30/325; Dunmore to Nepean, 9 November 1790, C.O. 23/30/332. Casualty numbers are in Craton, History of the Bahamas, 177.
convert the site into a public building complex, Dunmore began a new fortification to the west called Fort Charlotte.136

He did this purely of his own initiative. Without any sort of approval from Whitehall, he embarked on a project that would ultimately take seven years to complete and consume more than £32,000 in public funds. Fort Charlotte still stands today. Despite having room for forty-two large cannons, it has never seen a single shot fired in anger. No wonder, then, that some see it as an enduring monument to Dunmore’s folly.137 Yet, a new fort in Nassau was once a far less ridiculous proposition than it now seems. When he first learned of it, Sydney praised Dunmore’s desire to place New Providence “in a respectable state of Defence” and even promised to pay for the completion of those sections that were already underway. Given the prevailing calm in that part of the world, however, he asked that no new works be started before the Ordnance Department had a chance to approve them.138 Dunmore evidently never got this message. In December 1788, he complained that he had not received a single communication from Whitehall during his first year in office and reported that work on Fort Charlotte was advancing rapidly. He assured Sydney that he had gone to great lengths to minimize expenses, but the bill had already reached £4,000. If he wasn’t genuinely sensitive to the cost constraints involved, Dunmore at least knew enough to pay them lip service.139 The architectural plans for the fort

136 The plans for Fort Charlotte were enclosed in Dunmore to [Nepean], 23 December 1788, C.O. 23/29/48-50. The fort is also described in great detail in Dunmore to Sydney, 15 December 1788, C.O. 23/29/2.
137 Craton, History of the Bahamas, 176-77.
139 Correspondence between London and Nassau was always spotty: Dunmore to Sydney, 28 January 1789, C.O. 23/29/66; Sydney to Dunmore, 4 March 1789, C.O. 23/29/54-56; Dunmore to Sydney 13

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arrived in London in early 1789, and while Sydney agreed to place them before the Board of Ordnance, he ordered Dunmore to cease construction pending its review. Predictably, the governor's compliance was short-lived. He vowed only to continue working on those parts of the fort that were "in great forwardness and nearly finished." When the 47th Regiment arrived, he took the opportunity to begin a new barracks on the grounds.140

William Grenville succeeded Sydney as home secretary in 1789. In view of the enormous expense of Dunmore's pet project, he immediately ordered a moratorium on all work and a full accounting of the costs incurred up to that point.141 The following year, the ministry dispatched officers from the Corps of Engineers to survey fortifications throughout the West Indies. A man named D'Arcy was assigned to Nassau. The governor attempted to charm him by naming part of Fort Charlotte "D'Arcy," but the inspector wasn't so easily influenced. The report he filed in England was mostly negative, though not damning. Aside from the sheer expense involved, there were concerns about fraudulent accounting practices. The allocation of public monies was never a transparent process in the Bahamas, and past administrations were

April 1789, C.O. 23/29/90; Dunmore to Grenville, 16 February 1790, C.O. 23/29/187-88. While introducing his plans the previous February, he'd assured Sydney that "the most frugal means" in his power would be employed in the construction of Fort Charlotte: Dunmore to Sydney, 29 Feb 1788, C.O. 23/27/99. Even so, he never implied that the entire project could be completed for £4,000, as stated in Craton, History of the Bahamas, 176; Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, 203, and Johnson, Race Relations, 5. Rather, he told Sydney that he'd drawn on the Treasury for that amount already: Dunmore to Sydney, 15 December 1788, C.O. 23/29/1-3.


141 Grenville to Dunmore, 6 November 1790, C.O. 23/30/314-15; Grenville to Dunmore, 26 November 1790, C.O. 23/30/317.
criticized for it just as Dunmore's was. Upon Grenville's review, Dunmore had to pay for a few things that he had improperly charged to the state, but no serious irregularities were found.

In the end, the Treasury bore the full burden of Fort Charlotte, a structure that the ministry had neither ordered nor wanted. Remarkably, when war broke out with France in 1793, Dunmore had enough political capital left, and sufficient gall, to erect another fort, which he built on top of the ridge overlooking Nassau and named Fincastle in honor of one of his secondary titles. While they've earned him a good deal of criticism, much of it justified, these fortifications stand today as evidence of Dunmore's considerable skill at the game of imperial politics and his persistent will to make a mark. The structures also provide cold, hard evidence of the frequent futility of metropolitan authority in America.

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While lavishing resources on Bahamian defense, Dunmore continued to focus his grandest ambitions on the North American mainland. His enduring interest in the continent was not obsessive or delusional. There was good reason to remain active there. The fate of East Florida and the Old Southwest remained very much an open question. If Britain reestablished a foothold there—and more or less everyone expected them to try—virtually anything was possible. Dunmore might even return
one day with legal title to his lands on the banks of Lake Champlain. Stranger things had happened.

For all of its interventions in the region, the Treaty of Paris hardly resolved a thing. On paper, the Floridas and Louisiana belonged to Spain, but its presence was limited to a handful of ports. Despite winning vast claims between the mountains and the Mississippi, the United States had yet to establish any sort of control there, a fact that did nothing to stop independently minded Americans from streaming into the area from Georgia and elsewhere. Standing between these settlers and the Spanish Empire were roughly 50,000 Indians, mainly Creeks and Cherokees but also Seminoles, Choctaws, and Chickasaws. The Creeks were able to parlay this position into military support from Spain, who underwrote their opposition to the Americans for a time, but such alliances were always subject to change. Much depended on the disposition of Great Britain. Firmly entrenched in Canada, reluctant to evacuate their forts in the Old Northwest, and still the Indians’ preferred ally, the British had no intention of leaving the continent to their rivals, whatever the Treaty of Paris said. They’d been eager to reestablish themselves in Florida ever since surrendering Pensacola to the Spanish in 1781. Dunmore’s interest in this part of the world dated back to his time in Charleston, where he had heard Robert Ross sing its praises. With

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146 The combined white population of Spanish Louisiana and West Florida was only about thirteen thousand in 1785: Usner, Indians, Settlers, & Slaves, 114-15.
148 Townshend to Richard Oswald, 26 October 1782, Shelburne Papers, Vol. 70; Wright, Jr., “Lord Dunmore’s Loyalist Asylum,” 376.
easy access to the peninsula and Gulf Coast, Nassau was a natural staging area for British operations there, and Dunmore came to the Bahamas fully intending to use it as such.\textsuperscript{149}

The southern Indians, while embattled, were still the most important people in the region. They occupied and controlled most of what is now Alabama, Mississippi, southwestern Georgia, and Florida. Practically the only remaining bulwark against American expansion, they were also avid consumers of European goods. They required access to a wide variety of products, including blankets, clothing, leather shoes, pots and pans, all sorts of tools, tobacco, rum, salt, firearms, and, most importantly, gunpowder. In exchange, they tendered deerskins, which ended up on the European market as leather. In addition to being quite profitable, this trade was also diplomatically imperative. In order to ensure that the Indians would not ally with Britain or the United States and start raiding its settlements, Spain needed to prove its value as a trade partner. The problem was that the Indians were accustomed to British goods. Given its limited resources and strict shipping regulations, the Spanish Empire could not compete with these products, not in terms of volume, quality, or price. At the persistent behest of an influential Creek chief named Alexander McGillivray, Spain turned to established British traders in the region to help keep its new Indian neighbors happy.\textsuperscript{150}


\textsuperscript{150} On the Indian trade, see Kathryn E. Holland Braund, \textit{Deerskins \& Duffels: The Creek Indian Trade with Anglo-America, 1685-1815} (Lincoln, Neb., 1993); Usner, \textit{Indians, Settlers \& Slaves}, 120-21, 244-75; William S. Coker and Thomas D. Watson, \textit{Indian Traders of the Southeastern Spanish Borderlands}: 291
Life in the Lower Mississippi Valley did not lend itself to the strict observance of imperial boundaries. McGillivray's career, indeed his very existence, attests to this. The son of a Scots trader and a half-French, half-Koasati mother, he was raised in Indian country and educated in Charleston. He rose to prominence among the Upper Creeks during the 1780s on the strength of his mother's family connections and his ability to deal with whites. He managed to play Britain, Spain, and the United States against one another in an effort not only to enrich himself, which he did, but also to protect the land of the tribes that made up the Creek confederacy. 151 His partnership with a merchant named William Panton was essential to his success. In 1784, McGillivray accepted a silent interest in Panton, Leslie and Company, a loyalist trading firm whose partners, Scotsmen all, had opened up shop in East Florida after being run out of South Carolina and Georgia during the war. In exchange, he managed to convince Spanish authorities to allow the company to continue doing business with the Indians after the British evacuation of East Florida. Underscoring the risks involved in neglecting the Indian trade, McGillivray secured the goods his people

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Panton, Leslie & Company and John Forbes & Company, 1783-1847 (Pensacola, 1986). For a list of products critical to the trade, see Coker and Watson, Indian Traders, 34-35. On the inability of Spain to compete with British goods, see also Weber, Bárbaros, 203.

wanted while demonstrating an ability to negotiate with high-level Spanish officials. The deal both reflected and consolidated his growing influence.\(^{152}\)

By the time Dunmore took office, Panton, Leslie and Company had a de facto monopoly on the Indian trade throughout East and West Florida. This meant that a British firm owned and operated by Scots had an exclusive right to do business in the empire of His Catholic Majesty, King Charles III. The Panton organization remained loyal to George III, of course, just as it had during the American rebellion, but it never let political or religious commitments get in the way of business. As long as the two powers remained at peace, loyalties could be safely divided. Such an arrangement was only possible on the margins of empire, and only there because it was absolutely necessary. Born of Spain’s inability to adequately supply its Indian allies, the partnership ultimately bespoke Spanish weakness. The inter-imperial character of life in the borderlands of the Old Southwest was, in this sense, a function of instability.\(^{153}\)

Dunmore was on a collision course with Panton from the beginning. While helping to establish Nassau as a free port, a status that permitted Spanish and French merchants to trade there, Dunmore befriended John Miller, a member of the Bahamian Council and a partner in the Nassau trading firm of Miller, Bonnamy and Company. After working together for the passage of the free port law, the two men shared the

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voyage from England to New Providence. With plenty of time to discuss their mutual aspirations, they formed a partnership. Dunmore was open to any scheme that combined the aggrandizement of Great Britain with personal profit. For his part, Miller was hungry to expand his business at the expense of Spain, which had dispossessed him during the takeover of West Florida and sent him to prison in Havana for outfitting privateers during the subsequent occupation of Nassau. Miller also had plenty of reason to resent Panton, Leslie and Company. He and his partner, Broomfield Bonnamy, had been on the losing end of the firms' commercial rivalry for years. Furthermore, they were West Floridians and Panton's people were all eastern seaboard loyalists, a circumstance that put them on opposite sides of the great divide in Bahamian politics. Hostilities between Panton, Leslie and the government only escalated after Dunmore's arrival. At one point, the new governor seized 6,000 piastres as contraband from one of its vessels. Dunmore was eventually forced to return the money, but plenty of bad blood remained.

154 “Evidence of John Miller (and Others) before the Committee for Trade,” 1 May 1787, in Vincent Harlow and Frederick Madden, eds., British Colonial Developments, 1774-1834 (Oxford, 1953), 324-26; Wright, Anglo-Spanish Rivalry, 144. The United States was excluded from free ports in British America until 1794: Chalmers to assembly committee, 18 November 1794, “Correspondence to and from George Chalmers,” 63, in C.O. 23/31.
156 Thomas Forbes, who ran Panton's Nassau operation, was particularly active in the opposition. He was at the home of Richard Pearis on the island of Abaco when Captain Mackay appeared with orders from Dunmore to seize smuggled corn and carry off area slaves. He was also in the company of William Wylly when he called Chief Justice Matson a liar: Cashin, King's Ranger, 181-82; Deposition of John Matson, 1 April 1788, C.O. 23/27/134.
157 On the seizure of Panton's boat, see Parrish, “Records of Some Southern Loyalists,” Vol. 2, 148-49, 409-10; Coker and Watson, Indian Traders, 115. This may have been the vessel that Dunmore referred to when lamenting the removal of the governor's share in vessels seized in the colony: Dunmore to [Nepean], 4 March 1788, C.O. 23/27/112.
It wasn’t long before an opportunity to undermine Panton’s monopoly presented itself. In the winter of 1787-1788, the Creeks were in crisis. Spanish authorities had been subsidizing their war with the Georgians, but after several impressive Creek victories, Governor Miro of Louisiana abruptly withdrew this support, at least partly in an attempt to woo the frontiersmen away from the United States.  

158 Spurned by Spain and as desperate as ever to keep the Americans off Creek lands, McGillivray was suddenly a free agent, open to assistance from virtually any quarter.  

Enter the incomparable William Augustus Bowles. Raised in western Maryland, Bowles left home at the age of fourteen to fight for the British in the American Revolution. He never returned. His service took him to New York City, Philadelphia, Jamaica, and Pensacola, where, only sixteen, he resigned from the army and fell in with a group of Lower Creeks. He traveled widely thereafter, very often as a prisoner of Spain, all the while moving between the Indian and white worlds with remarkable facility. He was living with his Creek wife, Mary, and her father, Chief Perryman, along the Chattahoochee River when the Spanish pulled away from McGillivray. Eager for influence, he sailed to Nassau to seek a solution to the crisis. He had known Miller at Pensacola and no doubt planned to enlist his assistance. On his arrival, he aligned himself with Dunmore’s party by accusing several loyalists,

158 McGillivray to Zespedes, 6 October 1787; McGillivray to O’Neill, 20 November 1787; McGillivray to Zespedes, 5 January 1788; and McGillivray to Miro, 10 January 1788, all in Caughey, McGillivray, 162-66.  


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including John Cruden, of having attempted to involve him in a scheme for Bahamian independence during an earlier stint in the colony.\textsuperscript{160}

Dunmore liked the swashbuckling Bowles. The two men had a lot in common. Both were hot-tempered, fond of adventure, and pathologically enterprising. As Bowles’s first biographer put it, “the leading feature of his soul is ambition, to which every other passion is made subservient.”\textsuperscript{161} Perhaps the same could be said of Dunmore, though Bowles, still only twenty-five, possessed much of what the governor lacked in the bargain, including charisma. Still, there was no jealousy between them. As eager as Dunmore was to establish a foothold in the Old Southwest, he couldn’t have dreamt up a more useful partner.

With instructions from Dunmore and Miller, Bowles soon went back to Florida to gauge McGillivray’s receptiveness to aid from New Providence. The immediate goal was to install Miller, Bonnamy and Company in the Indian trade, a development from which Dunmore and Bowles almost certainly stood to profit directly. Bowles’s appearance betrayed a larger agenda as well. In order to enhance the illusion of official backing from Britain, he was outfitted with a gold-laced suit of regimentals and a twenty-five pound sterling silver sword. George III knew nothing of these events, yet all of the principal conspirators hoped to wrest control of the region from the Spanish on his behalf. The meeting with McGillivray took place at the principal Lower Creek town of Coweta. The two men were destined to be rivals for Creek

\textsuperscript{160} Deposition of William Augustus Bowles, 9 April 1788, C.O. 23/27/158-59. Although William Wylly questioned this account ([Wylly], \textit{A Short Account}, 24, n. 24), Cruden had expressed interest in establishing an autonomous haven for loyalists in Florida: Bennett, \textit{Florida’s “French” Revolution}, 8.

influence, but they’d been friendly at Pensacola and their needs were now in perfect harmony. The terms of the deal they reached directed that Bowles provide the Indians with supplies in exchange for McGillivray’s promise not to interfere with Miller, Bonnamy’s activities. The needs of the Creeks apparently compelled McGillivray to risk his relationship with Panton, a friend as well as a business partner.162

Back in Nassau, Dunmore helped prepare for an attack on East Florida. Miller outfitted two vessels with goods for the Indians and provided potential recruits with free food and drink. No doubt, promises of land and plunder were made. Dunmore allegedly opened the jail to fill out the ranks and used the public arsenal to arm them. About fifty men made the trip, most of them Florida loyalists. Under the leadership of Bowles and Broomfield Bonnamy, the two-ship fleet reached the east coast of Florida in October 1788. Over one hundred pack horses from the Lower Creek towns met them near the mouth of the Indian River. As planned, Bonnamy then returned to Nassau to hire an armed vessel, which was to rendezvous with Bowles at Apalachee Bay for a coordinated attack on Panton’s Wakulla River warehouse on the other side of the peninsula, not far from the Spanish fort at San Marcos. In the meantime, Bowles was supposed to seize another store, Concepcion on the St. Johns River, and gather Creek and Seminole auxiliaries while moving west toward Apalachee Bay. None of this came to plan, however. Bowles was indecisive in his movements, and the troops, facing severe privations, turned themselves in to Spanish authorities. Neither store saw any action that fall. Had he made it to Apalachee Bay, Bowles would have

162 Wright, Jr., William Augustus Bowles, 6-13, 24-31. Bowles denied Dunmore’s involvement, but Spanish authorities knew better: McGillivray to Leslie, 20 November 1788, and Zespedes to McGillivray, 8 October 1788, both in Caughey, McGillivray, 205, 203.
encountered a far larger force than he expected. Panton had received word of the expedition from Nassau and arranged for reinforcements. As it was, Bowles took refuge among the Lower Creeks and lived to fight another day.163

So ended yet another abortive return to North America for Lord Dunmore. It was the kind of failure that makes the ambitions behind it seem ridiculous, but the Spanish knew better. They immediately reinstated their military subsidy to the Creeks. Many southern Indians nevertheless remained unhappy. Panton’s inventories were too low and his prices too high. In the spring of 1789, a joint Creek-Cherokee conference convened to address the situation. Those present wanted to establish their own free ports and looked to Britain to help protect them.164 The Dunmore-Miller-Bowles platform still had an audience in Indian country. A few months later, Bowles addressed a grand council of Lower Creeks and Seminoles at Coweta. Styling himself “Director General of the Creek Nation”—Estajoca to the natives—he delivered a stirring performance. The council empowered him to travel to England to solicit the support of George III in person. A nearby meeting of Chickamaugas (separatist Cherokees) appointed a few of its own chiefs to join him. With this modest mandate—hardly universal among the Creeks, let alone the Cherokees—Bowles set out to secure


a British alliance for an independent Creek-Cherokee state, which he called Muskogee.165

Before crossing the Atlantic, Bowles and the other chiefs came to Nassau to consult with Dunmore, inciting a new round of partisan wrangling in the process. Panton, Leslie and Company had recently hired William Wylly as legal counsel and filed a petition at Whitehall accusing the governor of conspiring with Bowles.166 Dunmore flatly denied the charge, but the Indians now at Government House didn't help his case. That summer, the Bahama Gazette openly referenced his involvement in the Florida campaign. Bowles tried to take sole responsibility in the Lucayan Royal Herald, the new organ of government in Nassau. He insisted that neither Dunmore nor Miller had known anything about it.167 It was an overreaching denial, too comprehensive to be credible.

Since Dunmore was indeed behind the 1788 expedition, it is not unreasonable to assume that he influenced much of what Bowles did during this period. Whether at the governor’s command or not, Bowles left no stone unturned in his efforts on behalf of Miller, Bonnamy and Company. While still in Nassau, he wrote to Secretary of State Floridablanca and other Spanish officials in an attempt to convince them that it

165 Wright, Jr., William Augustus Bowles, 37-39, 182-83 n. 63. In a typical moment of extravagance, Bowles’s first biographer claims that he was “appointed ambassador to the British King by the unanimous voice of twenty thousand warriors”: [Baynton], Authentic Memoirs, 67. Some scholars have expressed doubts that Bowles had any meaningful mandate from the Creeks; William C. Sturtevant, “Commentary,” in Samuel Proctor, ed., Eighteenth-Century Florida and its Borderlands (Gainesville, Fla., 1975), 40-47, 46.
was in Spain’s interest to open the Indian trade. Panton, Leslie’s price gouging was alienating the Indians, he argued, and Miller’s participation would raise volume and lower prices. He stressed the new Creek-Cherokee alliance, estimating its combined force at twenty thousand warriors, and claimed that they had refused offers from backcountry Americans “to penetrate into and Attack His Catholic Majesty’s Subjects in Louisiana and other parts beyond the Mississippi.” Without improved trade conditions, he warned, there was no telling how long such forbearance would last. The Spanish agreed with Bowles’s assessment of their situation—Panton wasn’t perfect, and they knew the Indians would welcome competition—but they never trusted him. They were probably right not to. If indeed Dunmore had anything to do with them, his vows to honor Spanish rule were almost certainly made in bad faith.168

Rumors of war with Spain in 1790 suddenly brightened the prospect of a British-Muskogee alliance. Spain had initiated a confrontation over control of the entire Pacific Coast the previous year by shutting down a small British trading center in what is now Vancouver. They seized vessels anchored in Nootka Sound and imprisoned the men on board. Refusing to back down, both sides prepared for war. It was during this stand off that the ministry finally sent troops to the Bahamas. Dunmore may have welcomed the Nootka crisis on other grounds as well, for it lent fresh relevance to his work with Bowles. Before crossing to England, the Muskogee delegation stopped in Canada hoping to convince authorities there to arm the southern tribes. In the event of war with either Spain or the United States, Bowles argued, they

168 Bowles to Secretary of State Floridablanca, 30 August 1789, C.O. 23/15/251. See also Bowles to the Governor of St. Augustine, 21 August 1789, C.O. 23/15/247-48; Bowles to the Governor of Havana, 21 August 1789, C.O. 23/15/244-46.
would be invaluable allies. Reactions in Halifax and Quebec were mixed, but Governor Parr thought enough of Bowles to pay for his passage to England.169

Bowles was a sensation in London. He socialized with eminent Britons, had his portrait painted, and saw an adoring account of his life rushed to publication. Crowds turned out to watch him and his fellow chiefs take in the sites. Amid widespread enthusiasm for war with Spain, the doors of government were flung open to them. Secretary Grenville was particularly welcoming. Bowles was neither the first nor the last adventurer to try to enlist his aid in Spain's undoing. Francisco de Miranda, "el Precursor" of Latin American independence, was in London at that very moment lobbying the ministry to support his project, which was even bolder than Bowles's. Like Governor Parr, Grenville was impressed by the Muskogee proposal and arranged for the delegation to meet with the king. A formal alliance was nearly at hand when, just before the scheduled audience, news of an accommodation of the Nootka crisis arrived. Spain was in no position to defend its sovereignty along the Pacific Coast alone, and with France in the midst of revolutionary turmoil, Charles IV was forced to back down. In the interest of reconciliation, the meeting between George III and the Muskogee emissaries was cancelled. Bowles remained active in the cause despite the tantalizing turn of events. Double dealing as usual, he made frequent visits to the home of the Spanish ambassador to press the case for free trade in Florida, all the while plotting with Whitehall to push the Spanish off the continent. In the end,

Grenville agreed to allow Muskogee trade at Nassau, an encouraging nod to Creek-Cherokee sovereignty. Anything more was, for the time being, out of the question.\footnote{Wright, Jr., \textit{William Augustus Bowles}, 48-55.}

The ambiguity of Bowles’s association with the British government was further reflected in his finances. The Muskogee delegation spent five months in London, and the Treasury paid for the entire trip, including the many gifts they received.\footnote{Grenville to Dunmore, 1 April 1791, C.O. 23/31/6-7.} Generous as this was, Dunmore was hoping that the state would also pay the more than £1,500 that Bowles owed Miller, Bonnamy and Company from his efforts in Florida. Miller argued that he had extended this credit in “support of the British Interest in the Creek and Cherokee Nations.” Since no one had asked him to do this, and since he’d stood to profit handsomely from the risk, the request for reimbursement was denied.\footnote{Letter from Miller enclosed in Dunmore to Grenville, 9 June 1791, C.O. 23/31/29; Dunmore to Grenville, 8 June 1791, C.O. 23/31/26.} In June 1791, with the delegation back at Nassau, Dunmore asked Grenville to reconsider the decision. Insolvent though he was, Bowles could not be imprisoned, for such a step would “destroy the Idea which the Indians entertain, from the great attention paid to them in England, that they are not deserted by Great Britain.” If the ministry valued “the Attachment of those Indians who had formerly been her friends,” Dunmore wrote, “and whom she might probably at some future period, think proper to employ in her service,” Bowles’s tab should be paid. That Britain might one day soon need the Indians for an offensive operation in North
America was indisputable. Yet, the ministry continued to treat the Florida expedition as the filibuster that it was. Bowles was still more pirate than privateer.173

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Understanding how quickly these labels could change, Dunmore remained committed to covert action in Florida. He had reason to believe that Panton and the Spanish were more vulnerable than ever. In 1790, McGillivray and a number of other chiefs travelled to New York City to make a deal with the United States. By the public terms of the treaty they signed, the Creeks ceded some three million acres in what is now Georgia, land that was already heavily settled but still in dispute. For its part, the federal government vowed to protect the Creek claim to lands presently used for hunting. The agreement also included a number of secret articles, by which McGillivray swore an oath of allegiance to the United States in return for a brigadier general’s commission and an annual pension. Despite some adroit diplomacy on McGillivray’s part, the Treaty of New York was a failure. The Georgians ignored it, and whatever his intentions, George Washington was powerless to prevent their encroachment. Equally problematic was the disapproval of many Creeks, who resented the cession of any land to the Americans and felt betrayed by the chiefs who had planned and profited by it. Together with the discontent surrounding Panton’s trade regime, this new distrust inspired Bowles to challenge McGillivray. If successful, he would be in a position to pursue not only Muskogee’s development but

173 Dunmore to Grenville, 9 June 1791, C.O. 23/31/29; Grenville to Dunmore, [?] September 1791, C.O. 23/31/41.
also his larger goal of a grand, British-allied Indian confederacy stretching from the
Great Lakes to the Gulf Coast.\textsuperscript{174}

"A new flag was displayed here on Wednesday," announced the \textit{Bahama Gazette} in August 1791, "that of the Creek nation, worn by the vessel carrying
General Bowles and the Indian chiefs to the American continent."\textsuperscript{175} The colors and
the state it represented were new, but the objective remained the same. Once again,
Dunmore, Miller, and Bonnamy backed the trip in the hopes that Bowles would be
able to unite enough of the southern Indians to finally establish a trade base and, if
necessary, dislodge the Spanish. Posing as a British Superintendent of Indian Affairs
and dodging Spanish ships sent to intercept him, he made his way to Coweta, where he
addressed a council of Upper and Lower Creeks, Seminoles, and Chickamaugas. He
denounced Panton and McGillivray, stressed the importance of allying with the
northern tribes, and promised easy access to goods, including military supplies, from
Canada and Nassau. Some Upper Creeks walked out in protest, but the speech was
generally well received. The attendees approved the creation of two free ports, one at
Indian River on the east coast and another near the mouth of the Ocklochonee, not far
from San Marcos. Sensing the erosion of his influence, McGillivray dispatched three
warriors to assassinate Bowles, but they couldn't get anywhere near him. The
"Vagabond," as McGillivray now called him, enjoyed significant support among the

\textsuperscript{174} Coker and Watson, \textit{Indian Traders}, 142-50; J. Leitch Wright, Jr., "Creek-American Treaty of 1790:
Alexander McGillivray and the Diplomacy of the Old Southwest," \textit{Georgia Historical Quarterly} 51
36.
\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Bahama Gazette}, 2-5 August 1791, quoted in Wright, Jr., \textit{William Augustus Bowles}, 56. For details
on the flag, see also Lyle N. McAlister, "William Augustus Bowles and the State of Muskogee,
Lower Creeks, Seminoles, and Chickamaugas. He had even made some inroads among the Upper Creeks. Still, everything depended on his coming through with the supplies he promised from Dunmore and Miller. 176

Work soon began at the Ocklochonee site, where a town was laid out beneath the Muskogee flag. As construction progressed, Bowles grew impatient for the goods he was expecting from Nassau. Eager to consolidate his gains, he began to consider an attack on the Panton warehouse at San Marcos, just six miles up the Wakulla River from the Spanish fort. William Panton had allegedly embezzled a store of goods from the Indians during the evacuation of St. Augustine and, more recently, put a $2,000 bounty on Bowles’s head. This was all the justification that Estajoca and his associates needed. 177 With about one hundred Creek and Seminole warriors and a handful of whites, he seized the store on the evening of January 16, 1792. Guns and provisions were distributed among the Indians and prices on remaining stock slashed by 25 percent. With Bowles’s force encamped outside the warehouse, the fifty-soldier Spanish garrison dared not leave the friendly confines of the nearby fort. When reinforcements arrived, the Spanish commander approached Bowles and offered to take him to New Orleans to negotiate with the new governor, Baron de Carondelet. Possibly flattered by the invitation, he accepted. Just a few days after his departure, the long-awaited goods from Nassau arrived at Ocklochonee. This time, Dunmore had outfitted the vessel himself. Surprised by Bowles’s absence and discouraged by the number of Indians and deerskins at the port, however, the captain turned around.

176 Wright, Jr., William Augustus Bowles, 57-60; Coker and Watson, Indian Traders, 150; McGillivray to Panton, 28 October 1791, in Caughey, McGillivray, 299 (“Vagabond”).
without unloading his cargo. The force that Bowles had left behind at the San Marcos warehouse eventually dispersed but not before appropriating nearly all of its goods. Panton claimed to have lost in excess of £2,500 during the takeover.  

The Spanish encountered a good deal of specious information while investigating this episode. Some of the least credible intelligence came from a defector from Bowles’s party named William Cunningham. After giving a self-serving and altogether unlikely account of his involvement in the raid, Cunningham claimed to have examined Bowles’s private papers. Besides an inconsequential “instruction from Lord Dunmore & Mr. Miller,” he found no evidence of official backing from Britain. “The whole of it was a plot of conspiracy,” he said, designed by Dunmore and a rogue’s gallery of land speculators, including Elijah Clark of Georgia, Governor William Blount (author of the subsequent Blount conspiracy), John Sevier of the State of Franklin, and several others with ties to the Yazoo land companies. This group supposedly intended to “open the navigation of the Mississippi River, & to make themselves independent of the United States & Britain with the support of British merchants.” According to Cunningham, they managed to raise a body of eighteen thousand men over three or four years of planning.  

It’s hard to know what to make of this story. Cunningham seems to have connected a host of regional interests hostile to Spain with a conspiracy theorist’s eye for grand design. His examiners didn’t believe a word of it.

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178 Material in the two preceding paragraphs is drawn from the statement of Edward Forrester, 28 February 1792, in Kinnaird, “Significance,” 171-76; Wright, Jr., William Augustus Bowles, 65-70; Coker and Watson, Indian Traders, 149-56 (“Statement of the Losses sustained by the Plundering Indians at Appalachy...” is on 155).  
Rather than negotiate with Bowles, the Spanish decided to arrest him. He was considered so dangerous, in fact, that they shipped him all the way to Manila in the Philippines for confinement. While Dunmore tried in vain to persuade Whitehall to intervene on Bowles’s behalf, efforts to establish the Ocklochonee port proceeded. In January 1793, George Wellbank, Bowles’s most trusted lieutenant, reported that there were “some Principal Chiefs now at the Bahama Islands with Lord Dunmore,” who was “a great friend” of the Ocklochonee “settlement.” Dunmore and Miller were even then outfitting another vessel for the port. When the Resolution left Nassau, eleven Creek and Cherokee chiefs were on board, including Philatouche Upaiahatche, the Tiger King, who Dunmore commissioned to train Indian warriors in anticipation of British intervention in the region. To the Creeks at Coweta, Dunmore was “our Good friend the Island King.” While they awaited word of the Resolution’s arrival, however, the Spanish intercepted it, having increased patrols between Nassau and the Gulf. In October, Dunmore was told that the ministry would not be protesting the seizure. All hope of recouping the investment was lost.

In 1796, Dunmore’s eldest son, George, told the manager of the family estate that his father was begging him “most particularly to send him over his Grants of Land in America.” The aging governor evidently believed he might have some use for them yet. But thereafter his involvement seems to have been limited to pestering the ministry to reimburse him for Bowles’s adventures. The Muskogee dream nevertheless

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181 Wright, Jr., Anglo-Spanish Rivalry, 146-48.
182 Coweta Indians to McKee, 12 April 1793, in Hamer, “British in Canada,” 120.
183 Lord Fincastle (George Murray) to Thomas Jack, 18 March 1796, Dunmore Papers, Earl Gregg Swem Library Special Collections, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va., Box 3, fol. 107 (hereafter DP).
survived. While being moved from Manila back to Spain, Bowles managed to escape his captors in Sierra Leone. It is possible, though unlikely, that he encountered former members of Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment, whose ongoing search for freedom had taken them from Nova Scotia to Africa. By 1800, Bowles was back in the Old Southwest and making significant progress on Muskogee. No doubt tired of all his misrepresentations and failed promises, the Creeks ultimately turned him over to Spain. He died while a prisoner at Havana's Morro Castle in 1805, still only in his early forties. 184

Removing the Spanish from Florida and Louisiana was Britain's best chance to link its West Indian holdings to Canada and possibly reverse the outcome of the American Revolution. Whether they were trying to establish a British colony for displaced loyalists there, or supporting the creation of a multi-ethnic Indian state along the lines of Muskogee, British imperialists retained an interest in the region into the nineteenth century, albeit one increasingly limited after 1800 to the control of ports. 185 Dunmore's part in this placed him in a well established tradition of colorful Caribbean governors with grand dreams of imperial conquest. His activities anticipated the better known schemes of Citizen Genet and William Blount. Tempting as it is, it would be wrong to dismiss these projects as quixotic. 186 After all, Napoleon later agreed to sell

185 Duffy, "French Revolution and British Attitudes to the West Indian Colonies," 87, 96.
186 On Blount, see Buckner F. Melton, Jr., The First Impeachment: The Constitution's Framers and the Case of Senator William Blount (Mercer, Ga., 1998); Andrew R. L. Cayton, "'When Shall We Cease to Have Judases?': The Blount Conspiracy and the Limits of the 'Extended Republic'," in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., Launching the Extended Republic: The Federalist Era (Charlottesville, 1996).
Louisiana to the United States in part because of the expense involved in protecting it from British ambition.\textsuperscript{187}

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These were extraordinary times in Nassau, the Caribbean, and the world at large. Though he still refused to dissolve the Bahamian assembly, Dunmore was losing ground in the political tug-of-war at Nassau. Early on, he had enjoyed cozy relations with the legislature, so much so, in fact, that in 1789 William Wylly counted that body amongst the colony’s “oppressive and contemptible oligarchy.”\textsuperscript{188} Even in the absence of a dissolution, however, the assembly gradually assumed a posture of dissent as the expense of Fort Charlotte rose and loyalists gained seats in occasional by-elections. By about 1790, the division between old and new inhabitants had given way to a more conventional arrangement of interests, whereby popular forces associated with the assembly opposed the agents of prerogative. Some vestiges of the original alignment survived. The poorest among the old inhabitants remained committed to Dunmore. An Anglican missionary agreed with the prevailing view on Harbour Island that “the Governor and Council act humanely in protecting the old inhabitants who are all very poor ignorant people from the oppression of the new who effect [sic] to despise them.”\textsuperscript{189} Hostilities between Dunmore and the assembly peaked between 1791 and 1793. During this period, the governor made a habit of calling the


\textsuperscript{188} [Wylly], \textit{Short Account}, 15.

legislature into session when he needed money and, disgusted with its proceedings, promptly proroguing it. It was a familiar cycle in the eighteenth-century British Atlantic.190

Dunmore tried to use his power to grant lands to broaden his base of support but was mainly frustrated in the attempt. He was turned down flat when he proposed barring the opposition from grants while rewarding the council with them.191 The ministry also said no when he suggested that “the very poor industrious” people of Harbour Island and Eleuthera be allowed to survey land free of charge, a privilege once enjoyed by the loyalists.192 And there were accusations of corruption. In 1790, the ministry placed a moratorium on all automatic grants to loyalists, a move that some believed reflected uncertainty at Whitehall about the governor’s ability to administer them fairly.193 According to Wylly, he “prodigally squandered away the Crown Lands upon himself and his friends (who besides having no just pretentions to them, have no slaves for their cultivation)” while “capriciously” withholding them from deserving cotton planters.194 This charge doesn’t entirely stand up. While Dunmore was indeed generous with himself (5,355 prime acres) and his family (a son received 1,773 acres), the biggest beneficiary of loyalist land was the dissident

190 Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, 199, 203. Relations between the executive and the legislature in the Bahamas were strained across administrations: Johnson, Race Relations in the Bahamas, xix, 5. For the pervasiveness of this tension throughout the empire, see Jack P. Greene, The Quest for Power: The Lower Houses of Assembly in the Southern Royal Colonies, 1689-1776 (Chapel Hill, 1963), vii; O’Shaughnessy, Empire Divided, 192-93.
192 Lawlor, Harbour Island Story, 79.
193 Chalmers to assembly committee, 15 July 1798, “Correspondence to and from George Chalmers,” 102, in C.O. 23/31.
194 [Wylly], Short Account, 24.
Thomas Brown (6,300 acres). Other political enemies got grants as well. Three of them received lots in the newly laid out Dunmore Town on Harbour Island.

Party feeling in Nassau softened in 1793 in response to what George Chalmers, the Bahamas' new agent in London, called "the unhappy event of the Murder of the French King." The subsequent war with revolutionary France gave Britain an opportunity to permanently disable French naval power while pursuing expansion in the Caribbean. Suddenly, everyone in the Bahamas took an interest in defense. Acting on behalf of the assembly in London, Chalmers joined Dunmore in protesting the number of troops stationed in the islands, which, he told the new home secretary, Henry Dundas, hardly amounted to "more than a Guard for the Police." Under these circumstances, Dunmore was able not only to continue work on Fort Charlotte but also to complete Fort Fincastle. Because of its strategic location, the Bahamas was never more important than during wartime, and before long the garrison at New Providence was raised to its highest level in history.

The Haitian Revolution was, of course, also underway by this time, as were British efforts to prevent the spread of radical ideas to its West Indian holdings. Dunmore had visited Saint Domingue in 1789 and dined on the very estate where the

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195 Cashin, King's Ranger, 179. By purchasing properties such as Hog Island, Dunmore eventually acquired approximately 10,000 acres in the colony: Bahama Gazette, 20-24 May 1791; Craton, "Loyalists Mainly to the Themselves," 50.
196 Lawlor, Harbour Island Story, 74. Dunmore had previously denied grants to one of these men, Josiah Tatnall; Dunmore to [Nepean], 4 March 1788, C.O. 23/27/113.
197 Duffy, "French Revolution and British Attitudes to the West Indian Colonies," 83.
198 Chalmers to assembly committee, 14 January 1793, "Correspondence to and from George Chalmers," 24, in C.O. 23/31. See also Craton, History of the Bahamas, 175; Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, 202.
199 On the French Revolutionary War in the Caribbean, see Duffy, Soldiers, Sugar, and Seapower. On the war's impact on the Bahamas, see Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, 207-08.
slave uprising began two years later. Given the Bahamas’ uncomfortable proximity to the action—several of the islands were closer to Saint Domingue than New Providence—counterrevolutionary measures were taken quite seriously there. Yet everything seemed to be under control in the spring of 1792, when Dunmore reported “that there is not the least appearance of any disorderly behaviour among the Slaves in this Government and that we have very little communication with any French West Indian Islands.” The situation nevertheless remained tense throughout the Empire. Writing to Nassau from London, Chalmers urged vigilance with regard to all foreigners as well as “such Books as may be circulated among the Servants and Slaves.”

Sugar-producing Saint Domingue was the jewel of the French Antilles and the most profitable colony in all of the Caribbean. In an effort to capitalize on the unrest there, Britain invaded and occupied the colony in 1793. This intervention did little to assuage anxieties about a possible contagion of liberty among British slaves. Just before the French National Assembly issued its famous emancipation decree in 1794, Dunmore signed “An Act for laying certain Rates, Duties and Impositions on all French Negroes and other French Persons of Colour now within these Islands, or who

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202 Dunmore to Dundas, 11 April 1792, C.O. 23/31/109, quoted in Craton and Saunders, Islanders in the Stream, 207.
203 Chalmers to assembly committee, 14 January 1793, “Correspondence to and from George Chalmers,” 24, in C.O. 23/31. On the Haitian Revolution in the Bahamas, see also Johnson, Race Relations in the Bahamas, 4.
may hereafter be brought within the same." 204 The situation worsened after the 1794 emancipation decree of the French National Assembly and the subsequent breakdown, in 1795, of the British occupation. Suddenly, white Bahamians had to worry about black prisoners of war as well as the radicalized slaves of French refugees. Just when planters on Long Island were requesting new protection against slave insurrection, Dunmore reported the discovery of a plot to burn Nassau, free French prisoners of war, and massacre all whites. Whatever truth there was in it, the militia was put on alert and another prohibitive duty more or less ended the importation of French slaves. 205

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The most important development of 1793 for Lord Dunmore had nothing to do with revolution or world war. The secret marriage of his daughter Augusta to Prince Augustus Frederick Hanover would forever change his relationship with the king—and by no means for the good. The couple met and fell in love in Rome, where they were wed without the knowledge of their parents on April 4. 206 Under normal circumstances, this would have caused a scandal, but in this case it was a crime as well. The Royal Marriage Act of 1772 forbade the descendents of George II from marrying without the approval of the reigning monarch before the age of twenty five.

204 Dunmore to Hawkesbury, 2 January 1794, C.O. 23/15/313.
206 Prince Augustus to Thomas Erskine, 30 July 1798, [copy], and letters of engagement, dated 21 March 1793, all in “Chronicles of the Dunmore Branch of the Atholl and Tullibardine Families,” in DFP, NRAS 3253, [Bundle 28], RH4/103/1 (microfilm. N.B.: This section begins immediately following Bundle 6 on the microfilm reel but is unmarked. Its contents, when compared to the calendar of papers at the NAS, suggest that it is Bundle 28. Also, the pagination is so irregular that it is best to navigate with reference to the year being covered, which appears in the top left corner of each page.)
While his bride was in her early thirties, Prince Augustus was himself only twenty at the time. It wasn’t until the summer, when Lady Augusta became pregnant, that Lady Dunmore was finally let in on the secret. Presumably, Lord Dunmore also learned of it around this time. Even though the Roman wedding had been conducted by an Anglican minister, Lady Dunmore encouraged the couple to marry again on English soil for the sake of the child. She later admitted to having known that the union was illegal but said that she “looked upon it as valid in the sight of God.” Never mind that she hadn’t been to church since Christmas.\textsuperscript{207}

All was shrouded in secrecy when Augusta returned to England with her mother in the fall of 1793. The prince had preceded them on orders from the king. Alerted to an inappropriate relationship, he had no idea that his perpetually infirm son was capable of anything like an unauthorized marriage. The second ceremony took place at St. George’s in Hanover Square on the morning of December 5. In the interest of anonymity, the bride and groom simplified their names and dress. The only other person present with full knowledge of the situation was Lady Dunmore’s sister, Lady Euphemia Stewart, and even she attended in a veil. The mother of the bride passed the morning nervously at her home on Lower Berkeley Street in Manchester Square, London, where she was relieved to learn that everything had gone smoothly. A few

\textsuperscript{207} Prince Augustus to Lady Augusta Murray, 2 August 1793, Prince Augustus to Lady Augusta Murray, [7 August] 1793, and Prince Augustus to Lady Dunmore, 28 February 1794, all in “Dunmore Papers,” DFP, NRAS 3253, [Bundle 14], microfilm, E5, E6, E17 (hereafter “Dunmore Papers,” DFP). Lady Dunmore’s testimony is in Privy Council Minutes, 27 and 28 January 1794, in A. Aspinall, ed., \textit{The Later Correspondence of George III}, Vol. II (Cambridge, 1963), 155-61 (quotation on160) (hereafter \textit{LCG}). The identity of the man who married them, a Rev. Gunn, was a long-held secret, one that Lady Dunmore seems to have paid to keep when her Italian servant, a man named Montichelli, blackmailed her with threats of revealing it to the king: Lady Dunmore to Augusta Emma D’Este, 19 November 1817, “Dunmore Papers,” DFP, E49.
weeks later, on January 13, 1794, Augusta gave birth to a son, the future Augustus Frederick D’Esté. Loved with a vengeance by his mother, he would inherit his father’s poor health but not his status. On top of an ambiguous social position, D’Esté was also cursed with multiple sclerosis. His life proved a torment.208

The entire affair came to light shortly after the child’s birth. Uncommonly jealous of the royal blood, the king was outraged. He immediately launched an investigation, and several of those involved were dragged before the Privy Council to be questioned by the leading lights of British public life, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Chancellor Loubourough, Lord Grenville, Lord Amherst, Chief Justice Kenyon, Lord Hawkesbury, Secretary Dundas, and others. Lady Dunmore was composed but defiant during her testimony. Ordered to produce the letter in which the prince had first informed her of the marriage, she refused, explaining, “it is a private letter written to excuse my child for her reserve towards me, and surely it will be very hard to oblige me to produce it.” When she returned for further examination the following day, she told the board that she had burned the letter in the presence of her daughter, who had solemnly asked her not to submit it. There was no copy.209 George III wasn’t moved by this display of family loyalty. “I cannot say the evidence of Ly. Dunmore either raises my opinion of her capacity or principles,” he wrote.210

Although both Lady Dunmore and Lady Euphemia were adjudged liable to


209 Privy Council Minutes, 27 and 28 January 1794, LCG, 159.

210 George III to Dundas, 28 January 1794, LCG, 174.
prosecution for their parts in the matter, neither was charged with a crime. The Court of Arches officially annulled the marriage in July.\textsuperscript{211}

The scandal led to a retreat among Dunmore’s political patrons, most notably Lady Gower. The Marchioness of Stafford, as she was now known, was mortified by the news and wrote a frantic letter of apology to the king assuring him that she had had no “knowledge of this lamentable affair.” When she visited Lady Dunmore after hearing rumors in the country, she was told that Augusta was too sick to see her. It was a lie, of course, but one that spared her, if only for the moment, from “the misery of knowing that so near a relation had caused so mortifying a sorrow to” the king. When she came face to face with Augusta during a subsequent visit, there was no hiding the truth. “I enter’d into no conversation with her,” Lady Stafford told the king, “she cried, & I said nothing to her. Nor do I mean ever to see her again if that is what your Majesty chuses.”\textsuperscript{212} Lady Stafford had been close with Augusta, paying for a full-scale, three-quarter length portrait by George Romney in the early 1780s.\textsuperscript{213} But she despised all “the Bustle and Talk” about the situation in London, and while she regretted “the Disadvantage to and Distress of Lady D. and her whole family,” she knew there was nothing even she could do about it. Through no fault of his own, young Jack Murray lost a sought after promotion because of the marriage.\textsuperscript{214} Nor did it


\textsuperscript{212} Lady Stafford to George III, 7 February 1794, \textit{LCG}, 175-76.

\textsuperscript{213} Barbara Luck, “Seeing Double: Colonial Williamsburg’s Two Miniature Portraits of Lord Dunmore,” \textit{Interpreter} 27 (Spring 2006): 8-10, 10 n. 6.

\textsuperscript{214} Lady Stafford to Lord Granville Leveson Gower, quoted in Gillen, \textit{Royal Duke}, 81.
bode well for his father. Controversial governors of obscure colonies were hardly indispensable.

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In February 1797, the London Gazette announced that “the King has been pleased to appoint John Forbes, Esq; to be Captain General and Governor in Chief in and over the Bahama Islands, in the room of the Earl of Dunmore.” So ended a career in imperial service that had spanned more than four decades and touched the lives of countless subjects, for better as well as worse. The case against Dunmore involved drunkenness, extravagant spending, irregularities in granting lands, the keeping of mistresses (including the Rebecca Dumaresq, the wife of the Receiver General), and the suspension of the justice system in 1788-1789. The charges were not new. A few years after William Wylly first brought them to London, George Chalmers had taken them up on behalf of the Bahamian assembly. Why, then, were they suddenly sufficient to drive Dunmore out of office?

The alleged corruption was only one of several factors that led to Dunmore’s downfall. The scandal surrounding Augusta’s marriage did nothing to endear him to the king. Years later, when the royal family wanted to prevent Augustus Frederick D’Este from joining his parents in Berlin, the Prince of Wales threatened Dunmore and his daughter “with very unpleasant consequences.” The king may well have sought or acquiesced in Dunmore’s recall as a result of the ongoing scandal. His

216 Riley, Homeward Bound, 188; see also Chalmers to assembly committee, 9 July 1796, “Correspondence to and from George Chalmers,” 73-76, in C.O. 23/31. There is a portrait of Rebecca Dumaresq in Jones, Loyalists of Massachusetts, Plate 18 (opposite 123).
217 Prince of Wales to Duke of Cumberland, 4 September 1799, in A. Aspinall, ed., The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales 1770-1812, Volume IV 1806-1809 (New York, 1969), 76.
position was destabilized further in 1794 by a reshuffle at Whitehall that left Gower, now the Marquis of Stafford, out of government, sent Dundas to the War Department, and ushered the Duke of Portland into the Home Office. There was bad blood between Portland and Dunmore dating back to the 1783 battle over the East India bill, a measure that sought to increase parliamentary control over the East India Company at the expense of royal patronage. Then prime minister, Portland unsuccessfully courted Dunmore’s support while campaigning for the bill in the House of Lords. After passing the Commons, the bill failed in the Lords under pressure from the king. The defeat was a deathblow to the Fox-North coalition, which Portland lead. Dunmore believed that Portland had never forgiven him for voting against the bill and that the new appointment provided an outlet for this resentment. “The fact is, and I can prove it,” Dunmore told Prime Minister William Pitt, the Younger, “that ever since his first entrance in Office he has formed a scheme for my ruin.” Whatever the reason, Portland did prove far more receptive to the case against Dunmore than any of his predecessors.

News of the recall came by the hand of Dunmore’s replacement, a loyalist associate of William Panton’s named John Forbes. The official explanation cited excessive and improper use of public funds. For Dunmore, this was merely a pretext for personal revenge. That Portland immediately approved Forbes’s completion of

219 Duke of Portland to Dunmore, 8 July 1796, DP, Box 3, fol. 10. Portland told Forbes that in order to prevent “enormous and unnecessary” expenditures in the future, the Home Office would be monitoring governors more carefully: “Extract of Letter from the Duke of Portland to Lieutenant governor Forbes,” 9 July 1796, The State of the Nation...Committee on Finance...Vol. II. (London, 1798), 384.
Fort Charlotte showed, he argued, that the objection was not to the impropriety of the expenditures but rather to the man who made them. Whatever truth there was to this, it did nothing to minimize the humiliation of the recall. When Dunmore demanded a fuller explanation from Portland, the secretary reportedly noted “that it was wisely placed by the constitution in His Magestys power to chuse and dismiss his Servants free from any controul or account what ever.” With his aristocratic bearing, the Duke of Portland didn’t waste time with unnecessary explanations. Precisely because he affected the same political style himself, Dunmore despised it in others. He was now opposed by the same kind of arbitrary power that he had tried to exercise in America, and he didn’t like it one bit.

Appraisals of Dunmore’s administration fell along party lines. Lieutenant Governor Forbes believed that he had fleeced the public, packed the assembly, and illegally “protected defaulting Treasurers with Handsome Wives,” a reference to the alleged affair with Barbara Dumaresq. Dunmore and his allies were also tainted by charges of piracy, just as they had been in Virginia:

The lower order of white here being rather a lawless race, the descendants of Pirates, they have not departed from the principles of their ancestors, though their practices may assume the different names of wrecking vessels and Privateers. Between my predecessor and these People a sort of reciprocity of Abuse was established; and a species of implied compact of mutual conniving at the violation of the law by the one and the Peculation on the British side by the other.

With loyalists now in complete control of the government and the press, this became the dominant version of history. Yet Dunmore was not without friends and admirers.

on his departure. Residents of Crooked Island praised his “benevolent disposition” and thanked him for his “constant and patriotic attention to whatever appeared for the advantage of these Islands in general and in particular the indulgences which your Excellency was pleased to shew this Island at its first settlement.” They expressed particular gratitude for his lifting of trade restrictions on the United States during an acute agricultural crisis, something “which has alone prevented that calamity which must without such precaution have proved their ruin.” The governor’s removal even inspired a “disinterested friend” in Nassau to verse. The poem extolled the “monumental” Fort Charlotte and maintained “that none heretofore discharg’d better his trust, / Or acted on grounds more equal, more Just.” Wishing him a safe voyage back to England, the poet concluded, “May Heaven preserve you while on the rough Main, / And speedily send you to govern again.”

Dunmore was, in fact, harboring hopes of a return. He was sixty-six years old and, predictably, facing a mountain of debt. His son George, the future fourth earl, was being “tormented with applications for payment” every day from lenders in London. Harrowing though it was, George’s bills were modest compared to the debt his father had racked up in Nassau. Dunmore claimed to have incurred most of his outstanding obligations in the course of his public duties, so he looked to government to satisfy them. “Let me know for God’s sake when they may expect their Accounts will be paid,” he implored Pitt after returning to London. “During this interval of suspense,

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222 Inhabitants of Crooked Island to Dunmore, 10 February 1797, DP, Box 3, fol. 110.
223 “Disinterested friend” to Dunmore, 24 February 1797, DP, Box 3, fol. 111.
224 Fincastle to Thomas Jack, 9 February 1796, DP, Box 3, fol. 106.
my mind, my health, are all suffering." 225 He waited in London for months "in constant expectation of having the Bills drawn by me as Governor of the Bahamas, for publick services paid by the Treasury." The ministry ignored him. It wasn't merely his own fate that hung in the balance but also those of his creditors. "I fear the utter ruin of many of them & their poor families." 226 Given Dunmore's desperate state, there's no telling what, if any, truth there was to this. No doubt, John Miller was suffering. When Dunmore learned definitively that his bills would not be covered by the Treasury, he blamed Portland and again urged Pitt to intervene: "Your love of justice will I am sure induce you to protect an old servant of the Kings, and the unshaken friend of your Administration." 227 Here, Dunmore employed the same instrumental flattery that marked so many of the petitions he had received over the years, albeit in vain.

Badly in need of a job, Dunmore stooped to asking Portland to reappoint him to the Bahamas in 1797, a humiliating and hopeless request. Even "if I was at liberty to recommend Your Lordship to the King for that appointment," Portland wrote, "I should consider it my duty to enter my most decided protest." 228 It was probably only out of spite that the secretary responded at all. Nearly two years after returning to London, Dunmore still hadn't had a single word from Pitt. After decades of "hard, & faithfull services" to government, he complained, he was now living on a £600 pension. He was supporting a number of his grown children on this "nominal" sum.

225 Dunmore to Pitt, the Younger, 8 September 1797, PPMGB, 30/8/131/103-4.
226 Dunmore to Pitt, the Younger, 11 October 1797, PPMGB, 30/8/131/105.
227 Dunmore to Pitt, the Younger, 26 November 1797, PPMGB, 30/8/131/107.
228 Portland to Dunmore, 5 August 1797, DP, Box 3, fol. 112.
including Virginia, who would never marry and always struggle financially. "May I now Sir request that you will immediately either employ me, in any way you may think I can be of service, or make me such Allowance as you think my past services may entitle me to." This was the only way, he concluded, that "I may pass in some degree of comfort, the short time I expect to remain in this World." He stayed in London solely for the purpose of receiving Pitt's reply.\textsuperscript{229} By this point, he should have known better.

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In the literature on the American Revolution, the loyalists are a principled but inert group, slow to respond to the world-changing events around them and meek in the response. "Too many Loyalists simply gaped in astonishment as the Revolution ran its course," writes Wallace Brown, "as if the sun had suddenly started to rise in the west and set in the east. Even when finally roused, they did not act boldly or decisively; they lacked the quality attributed by the Reverend Charles Inglis to Tom Paine—'that daring, decided spirit which seldom fails.' Reduced finally to despair, they could only hope that their reward would come 'in a future life.'"\textsuperscript{230} Dunmore's story plainly belies this characterization. The loyalists in his orbit were active, adaptive, and often daring.\textsuperscript{231} They acted on their own, occasionally in bold, if not always admirable, directions. Dunmore himself freed slaves and armed them against other Britons. He issued military commissions to some natives while enslaving others.

\textsuperscript{229} Dunmore to Pitt, 25 April 1799, PPMGB, 30/8/131/101.
\textsuperscript{231} For other examples not discussed above, see the cases of Maurice Morgann in Christopher Leslie Brown, \textit{Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism} (Chapel Hill, 2006), 216 and Lord Sheffield in Piers Mackesy, \textit{The War for America, 1775-1783} (Lincoln, Neb., 1993, c. 1964), 38.
He built unauthorized fortifications at great public expense. He helped to stage filibusters in the Old Southwest against Spain and its British partners, who also happened to be Scots loyalists. That someone with Jacobite roots could do all of this (and more) without compromising his allegiance to the king is a testament to the elasticity of loyalty in the British Empire. Though unsuccessful, he and his associates were undeniably dynamic.

When a Virginia newspaper reported, incorrectly, that Dunmore had been recalled from the Bahamas in 1789, Lucy Ludwell Paradise hoped it was true. "He is trying to get the Indians to cut our throats," she told Thomas Jefferson. It had been thirteen years since Dunmore had left Chesapeake Bay after trying to raise the western Indians against the patriots. Yet, Paradise wasn't wrong to worry. The last royal governor of Virginia was even then working with the Creeks and Cherokees to undermine American independence. The issues and characters of the Revolution survived in the minds of people like Paradise, in part, because the outcome of the conflict wasn't entirely clear yet. It is therefore fitting that Dunmore's grandson Augustus Frederick D'Este, though soon to suffer the onset of multiple sclerosis, was among the vanquished British soldiers at New Orleans in 1815. Had the War of 1812 gone another way, Dunmore's ambitions in that part of the world might bear a much different complexion than they now do. But, of course, it takes more than a "daring, decided spirit" to end up on the right side of history.

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234 See quote above, from Brown, Goods Americans, 224.
Conclusion

This is a strange time to be highlighting the role of the individual in the history of empire. Now more than ever, the exploration of eighteenth-century empires seems to require a wide-angle lens. We now take for granted that the great oceans were conduits as well as barriers, carrying people, goods, ideas, and microbes from continent to continent. Atlantic and global histories have uncovered a staggering multiplicity of imperial experience, the complexities of which transcend a number of long-standing binaries, including subject/alien, periphery/center, and empire/home. In recognition of the pervasiveness of inter-imperial engagement in the Atlantic world, moreover, scholars are now less and less likely to focus on individual powers, often choosing to explore the ways in which Spain, Britain, France, and others were bound up in a single hemispheric system. More entangled in today's scholarship than ever before, empires are also far more extensive, stretching beyond the Atlantic and Indian Oceans into the vast and, for many historians of Anglo-America, unfamiliar Pacific. The internal diversity, interconnectedness, and global reach of European empires make them more imposing as subjects than ever before. No wonder, then, that so few

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students of empire are working microhistorically. Understandable though it is, the present dearth of imperial biographies is regrettable, for when approached in a way that eschews both the representative individual and Great Person theories of history, biography is uniquely well suited to the challenges of studying and writing empire in the early twenty-first century.

As I understand it, the term biography applies to all works of non-fiction, regardless of medium, that attempt to reconstruct individual lives. There are many different types of biography, and even within the category of print (as opposed to television, film, or painting), some are more subject-centric than others. The work of Alfred Young, for instance, is arguably more concerned with patriotic myth-making and the fluidity of identity in early America than it is with the personal truths of George Robert Twelves Hewes and Deborah Sampson. Academic historians embrace this type of inquiry as “microhistory” but keep “biography” at arm’s length. If “biography is largely founded on a belief in the singularity and significance of an individual’s contribution to history,” Jill Lepore writes, “microhistory is founded upon almost the opposite assumption: however singular a person’s life may be, the value of


examining it lies in how it serves as an allegory for the culture as a whole.\(^4\) Kenneth Silverman conceives the distinction another way: “History concerns what Napoleon did; biography concerns what it meant to him.”\(^5\) Why must the genres be understood in such sharp distinction? The examined life is, after all, most interesting and useful when it is a means to an end as well as an end in itself. In that spirit, I have attempted to balance the imperatives of “biography” and “history” in the forgoing narrative, following Dunmore’s personal journey through the British Empire while elaborating the political cultures he inhabited.

Dunmore was an unusual figure with an extraordinary fund of experience. Despite a family history of armed opposition to the House of Hanover, he managed to acquire a commission in the British Army, serve in the House of Lords, and obtain three high-level appointments in the American colonies. This position of influence (moderate in the grand imperial scheme) gave him the latitude to safely break with convention in a number of ways. In addition to his controversial proclamation of emancipation, he undertook an unauthorized Indian war in the Ohio Valley. Later, he purchased several Amerindian slaves at a time when the African slave trade (let alone the Indian) was facing tremendous popular opposition. In view of all this, it is helpful to think of him as a transgressive imperialist—someone who bent and broke the rules, often in defense of the system that ensured his privilege. As such, he provides an

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opportunity to explore the boundaries of what was possible in the Atlantic world at the end of the eighteenth century.

No matter how remarkable their personalities or circumstances, individuals are always contact points. To follow a name through the historical record is to encounter a prolific array of people, places, and ideas. Because Dunmore was so widely connected, his story involves individuals at virtually every level of the imperial social structure, including slaves, free blacks, indentured servants, poor white fishermen, frontiersmen, land speculators, Scots merchants, patriots, loyalists, princes, kings, the French, the Dutch, the Spanish, Shawnees, Delawares, Cherokees, Creeks, and a host of others. He even had a vibrant symbolic life in print, where American propagandists depicted him transgressing the racial and sexual boundaries within which they struggled to define an inchoate political community. Rather than isolating and analyzing the experiences of all these groups, I have tried to treat Dunmore as the epicenter of a web of interrelations. This strategy was partly dictated by available source material, for while Dunmore left an emphatic public imprint, none of his personal correspondence survives. Rather than speculating about his interior life, in many places I’ve tried to evoke the richness of the worlds he inhabited.

This approach can serve as a check against the distortions of the encyclopedic style in which some of the most important imperial history has been written in recent years. An invaluable resource, The Oxford History of the British Empire nevertheless treats Great Britain as though it were a collection of discrete units rather than the
amorphous set of interconnected parts that it was. By assuming the organizational structure of the subject’s life, an integrated biographical narrative is better able to approximate the disordered unity of this past. Stories are constructed things, and because they arrange events in a way in which they were not experienced, they can be misleading. But the tendency to disaggregate, to categorize, and to dissect, while essential to virtually all humanistic analysis, invites potentially even greater distortions. They threaten to leave readers adrift in a sea of texts without context. Historian Stephen Oates has noted that, like the Victorian novelist, the biographer has the power to provide “a panoramic view of an age,” one in which attention to parts does not obscure the whole. The goal for biographical historians of empire, then, should be to deliver a single imperial experience in stereo, something that, in the context of the Atlantic world, necessarily involves all kinds of other people.

Placing an elite figure at the center of a biographical history is potentially problematic, especially at a time when scholars have been so assiduous in reconstructing the lives of the hitherto obscure. As the two-part “Atlantic Biographies” session at the 2008 American Historical Association meeting in Washington D. C. attests, subaltern life writing is now a burgeoning subfield within Iberian Atlantic world studies. And the recent work of Cassandra Pybus, Vincent Caretta, and others is challenging the assumption among Anglophone scholars that the records cannot

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9 Of course, this approach relies on more specialized studies like those in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*. But this shouldn’t count as a mark against biography, for what it lacks in topical depth it makes up for in specificity.

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support biographies of the faintly documented.\(^{10}\) This is all to the good, of course, and hopefully historians will continue the difficult work of reading and writing the lives of all kinds of individuals.

As long as its practitioners recognize the historical realities of colonial hierarchies without reproducing the fallacies that sustained them, imperial biography need not flow from the bottom up in order to illuminate obscure lives. Dunmore’s career provides access to the experience and influence of a wide range of people, notably women.Regrettably, we cannot know enough about Diana and Sprightly, the Indian slave women who lived and worked on Dunmore’s plantation in 1788, for a prosopography let alone individual biographies. What little we do know needs to be told, however, and not merely because it hasn’t been already. When considered alongside Dunmore’s conflicted history with indentured servitude and black slavery, Diana’s and Sprightly’s stories suggest that the racial basis for freedom in the late-eighteenth-century Atlantic world was still far less rigid than it would soon become.

To take another example, the actions and ambitions of women were central to Augusta Murray’s marriage to Prince Augustus Frederick, a controversy that was rich with public significance. Over the course of Dunmore’s career, people outside formally established structures of authority were continually making political history, even in the old-fashioned sense of the term.

While I have tried to treat Dunmore himself as an individual—something more human than the enduring caricature of historiography—it has been just as important

for me to humanize those who helped to shape his story. Not every reasonably well-documented figure can boast the same volume and variety of associations as Dunmore. But those skeptical about the availability of potential subjects for this brand of biography would do well to remember John Donne, whose famous observation that no one is an island unto themselves rings particularly true in the context of the diverse, entangled, and expansive worlds of eighteenth-century empire.\textsuperscript{11}

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The appointment of William Dowdeswell as governor of the Bahama Islands at the end of 1797 more or less made it official: Dunmore’s career in imperial service was over. His would not be a restful retirement. Idleness was a comfort he could ill afford. Between the saga of Lady Augusta’s marriage and the family’s troubled finances, sources of anxiety were legion and every day a struggle.

George III was determined that his son never see Augusta again, but despite years of crown-mandated separation, the prince remained committed to his young family. In the spring of 1796, he recalled the consummation of his marriage with rapture. “To this day my treasure,” he told Augusta, “do we owe the origin of our dear little boy...this day three years ago was the first full Pleasure I enjoyed of my Wife.”\textsuperscript{12} After hearing exaggerated reports of his failing health in 1799, Augusta travelled to Berlin under an assumed name to see her husband. The couple spent several happy weeks together there. During this period, the prince even asked Dunmore to mail their


\textsuperscript{12} Prince Augustus to Lady Augusta Murray, 8 April 1796, in “Dunmore Papers,” Dunmore Family Papers, National Archives of Scotland, NRAS 3253, [Bundle 14], microfilm, E15.
marriage certificate from London.\textsuperscript{13} And when Augusta decided to return to England, her husband followed. For much of 1800, they lived at 40 Lower Grosvenor Street with their son, much like the family they longed to be.\textsuperscript{14}

These were tense, uncertain times for Dunmore. Though healthy, he was still buried beneath a mountain of debt. If he saw Augusta’s connection to the royal family as a potential source of salvation, he knew enough not to depend upon it alone. In 1800, he and John Miller were in London again, this time trying to convince the ministry to reimburse them for their investment in Bowles.\textsuperscript{15} The failure of this effort coincided with a painful turn of events for Augusta. When the prince took his usual leave of England in the winter of 1800-1801, she was pregnant with their second child, a daughter named Augusta Emma, the future Lady Truro. Malicious gossip gave rise to rumors that the pregnancy had resulted from an indiscretion. Possibly influenced by these stories of infidelity, the prince abruptly ended the relationship in December 1801, only days after being created Duke of Sussex. The news came as a shock to Augusta. She went to Lisbon in the spring of 1802 in search of an explanation only to be turned away from his residence, an insult that she felt made her “the sport of his mistress & dependents.” She defended her honor and tried to shame her detractors in an affecting letter to the Prince of Wales, but the damage was done.\textsuperscript{16} Compounding

\textsuperscript{13} A\textsuperscript{[}Augustus\textsuperscript{]} F\textsuperscript{[}rederick\textsuperscript{]} to \textsuperscript{[}Dunmore\textsuperscript{]}, 29 September 1799, Dunmore Family Papers, Swem Library Special Collections, College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, Va., Box 3, fol. 114.


\textsuperscript{15} J. Leitch Wright, Jr., \textit{William Augustus Bowles: Director General of the Creek Nation} (Athens, 1967), 142, 151, 156.

the humiliation, Augustus had left her with two children and no regular income. He was having a hard time securing his own allowance from the Treasury at this time, but unlike Augusta he never had to struggle to pay for his bread.\(^{17}\)

Outraged by his daughter’s treatment, Dunmore managed to set up a conference with the king in October 1803. It was the last time the two men would ever meet. “Our Father has just returned from his Audience with the King in a most famous rage,” Jack Murray informed one of his brothers. The story, as retold by Jack, provides a rare glimpse of Dunmore both in old age and through the eyes of his children:

He informed us that before he went to the King, he was urged by Mr. Addington [the Prime Minister] to be as moderate as possible on the subject he was about to bring under His Majesty’s consideration—as it was one to which he was most particularly alive. Our Father then went on to detail to us that having laid before the King the marriage of his daughter Augusta with his Son at Rome—he then proceeded to expatiate on the treatment she had experienced at his hands, by leaving her penniless and subject to all the misery of being arrested and of having her house daily beset by Creditors asking and demanding payment of her for things which had been furnished while her husband was living with her and many of which he had taken with him to Lisbon, leaving her without a shilling to provide for herself or his family during his absence or to pay the debts so contracted by him before his departure, all of which was quietly [taken] by the King until our Father went on to enlarge also on his [Augustus’s] unfeeling conduct to his children in leaving them in such a state of destitution, on which the King broke out in a rage, calling them ‘Bastards! Bastards!’ To which our Father replied by observing ‘Yes, Sire, just such Bastards as your [children] are!’ On his stating which the King, he said, became as red as a Turkey cock, and going up to him repeated ‘What, what, what’s that you say, My Lord?’ ‘I say, Sir, that my daughter was legally married to your son and that her children are just such Bastards as Your Majesty’s are’—on hearing which the King stared at him—as if in a violent passion and then without uttering a word retired into another room and thus terminated the interview, while our Father, having finished his narrative, observed to us God damn him—it was as much as I could do to refrain from attempting to knock him down——

\(^{17}\) The financial tangle is laid out in Gillen, *Royal Duke*, 130-37.
when he called them Bastards! And really the Old Cock, tho' in the seventy second year of his age, looked at the moment as if he could have done [it] without much difficulty and which, if I am to judge from the grip which he can yet give with [his] paw, he is yet equal to have done.¹⁸

However true in the details, the account suggests that Dunmore was as passionate and proud as ever in 1803. Even if only in self-aggrandizing stories told to his children, his fiery temperament had survived the disappointment of virtually all his dreams. Two years later, Jack Murray died in the West Indies aboard a British ship during the blockade of Curacao. The seventy-five-year-old father who survived him remained formidable still.

Augusta's situation got worse before it got better. Since many of her obligations, which eventually exceeded £25,000, had arisen from the unfulfilled promises of the prince, she filed suit against him in the Court of Chancery. With the decision pending, she was nearly arrested for her debts, escaping imprisonment only through the eleventh-hour intervention of a friend.¹⁹ Finally, in 1806 she reached an accommodation with the royal family, by the terms of which Augustus and the Treasury combined to pay her bills in full (or nearly). She was also granted an annual pension of £4,000 as well as additional funds for the upbringing of the children. In exchange, she had to drop the lawsuit and forever relinquish her ties to the prince. This meant forfeiting the title Duchess of Sussex, which in her pride and bitterness she had taken to using. Thenceforth, she was to be known as Lady Augusta De Ameland, a

¹⁸ Jack Murray to [?], 28 October 1803, quoted in Douglas Firth, The Case of Augustus D'Esté (Cambridge, 1948), 4-5. See also Gillen, Royal Duke, 135-36, 256 n. 326.
¹⁹ Lady Augusta to Dunmore, n.d., reprinted in CGPW, Vol. 4, 278-79 n. 1; see also additional letters from Lady Augusta in CGPW, Vol. 4, 35-36 n. 1.
name from Dunmore’s family line. These were largely public concessions, however. In private, she continued to encourage her children to view themselves as unequivocally royal. The first cousin of Queen Victoria, Augustus Frederick D’Este was still pursuing legitimacy through the courts as late as 1831.20

Lord and Lady Dunmore spent their last years near the ocean. A popular destination for those seeking salubrious air and bathing, the seaside town of Ramsgate in Kent was also home to Augusta and her daughter (young Augustus was usually away at school). As the beneficiary of a royal pension, Augusta almost certainly helped to support her father and mother in their dotage.21 With a degree of financial security, these were apparently happy times, at least for Augusta, for whom “dear Ramsgate” always held special significance.22

On February 25, 1809, Dunmore died. He was seventy-eight years old and suffering from what a contemporary described as “decay.”23 Shortly before his death, Augusta commissioned a miniature portrait of him, a tribute to her “Beloved father,” who she called “Pappy.” At first glance, the picture seems a world apart from the youthful, heroic version of Dunmore rendered by Joshua Reynolds more than a half century earlier. The miniature is striking in its realism alongside the larger Romantic

21 For descriptions of Ramsgate during this period, see George Saville Carey, The Balnea: or, an Impartial Description of All the Popular Watering Places in England... (London, 1799), 38-41; [?], A Companion to the Watering and Bathing Places of England... (London, 1800), 117-20; Robert Edward Hunter, A short description of the Isle of Thanet... (London, 1799).
image. A frail Dunmore slumps in his seat, his bald head exposed save for patches of long white hair covering his ears. As in 1765, he wears tartan, and a Scots bonnet rests on a table beside him. His expression bears the hint of a smile, but his eyes are tired. In the foreground, his right hand forms a fist on the arm of the chair, as if punctuating some unheeded insistence.  

24 For “Pappy,” see the letter from Augusta to her brother Alexander dated 25 October 1803, quoted in Gillen, Royal Duke, 135. Colonial Williamsburg owns both miniatures; see Barbara Luck, “Seeing Double: Colonial Williamsburg’s Two Miniature Portraits of Lord Dunmore,” Interpreter 27 (Spring 2006), 8-10.
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The New-Hampshire Gazette, and Historical Chronicle
The New-York Gazette; and the Weekly Mercury
The New-York Gazette; or, the Weekly Post-Boy
The New-York Journal; or, the General Advertiser
The Providence Gazette; And Country Journal
Thomas’s Massachusetts Spy; or, The American Oracle of Liberty

American Periodicals Series Online, 1740-1900
(http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.wm.edu/pqdweb?DBid=5197&LASTSRCHMODE=1&RQT=575):

The American Museum...
The New-York Weekly Museum
The Pennsylvania Magazine; or, American Monthly Museum
The Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine

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