Artisans of the South: A comparative study of Norfolk, Charleston and Alexandria, 1763-1800

Mary Catherine Ferrari
College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

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Artisans of the South: A comparative study of Norfolk, Charleston and Alexandria, 1763-1800

Ferrari, Mary Catherine, Ph.D.
The College of William and Mary, 1992

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ARTISANS OF THE SOUTH: A COMPARATIVE STUDY
OF NORFOLK, CHARLESTON AND ALEXANDRIA, 1763-1800

A Dissertation

Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Of Doctor of Philosophy

by
Mary Ferrari
1992
APPROVAL SHEET

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Mary G. Ferrari

Approved, April 10th, 1992

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all I want to express my deepest appreciation to Dr. John Selby for his guidance, patience and skillful editing. I was honored to work with and learn from a person so knowledgeable in Colonial and Revolutionary America. I am also indebted to the rest of the committee whose criticisms and insights I will be grappling with for some time. Dr. Thomas Sheppard contributed a European perspective to the reading of this dissertation. Dr. Mick Nicholls' ability to ask the tough questions, and his willingness to share his own research has not only benefitted me but many other graduate students at William and Mary. Dr. Kevin Kelly was kind enough to share his insights which come from years of research on Colonial Williamsburg. Finally, I wish to thank Dr. James Whittenburg, whose course ten years ago inspired me to learn as much as I could about Colonial History. Dr. Whittenburg's teaching ability and his integrity will always be something I will aspire to.

I am also indebted to another member of the William and Mary faculty, Dr. Judy Ewell without whose guidance my career would never have progressed this far. Dr. Ewell's professional and moral support has benefitted me in many ways, and to me she will always be a role model.

The number of friends and fellow students who helped me along the way are too numerous to mention but I feel lucky to be a part of the Ph.D. class of Ann Martin, Julie Richter, Tom Legg, Chris Hendricks, and Wade Shaffer. Our class has both challenged and supported each other and I am proud to have been associated with such talented and personable people.

My greatest debt is to my family. My husband Peter's knowledge, patience and occasional prodding assisted me in completing this task. Anna's presence helped keep life in perspective; hopefully, she will never realize the sacrifices she made for this project. My education would not have been possible without the financial and other support given to me by my parents. Dad did not live to see its conclusion, but he taught by example how to be a caring professor and a good person. My mother contributed in so many ways to my education that I wish we could share this degree, but the best I can do is to dedicate my work to her as a small token of thanks.
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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the political activities of workmen in Norfolk, Alexandria, and Charleston in the years 1763-1800. British historians, in particular, E. P. Thompson, have discovered radical agitation on the part of artisans and laborers in Great Britain between 1790 and 1832. A similar rise in class consciousness has been documented on northern urban centers at the time of the Revolution.

Socially and politically Norfolk, Alexandria, and Charleston were quite different; yet in each the mechanics did develop some class consciousness and realization of their political worth. The artisans of Charleston united in opposition to British measures in the years before the Revolution and as a result gained political strength for workers unprecedented in South Carolina politics. Political consciousness developed among Norfolk artisans when they worked together after the Revolution to demand a more republican form of local government. Alexandria mechanics experienced political unity in the shadow of national partisan divisions which enhanced their local influence in the 1790s.

Despite attaining some degree of class consciousness the mechanics in these three southern cities were different from the politically and economically oppressed laborers of Britain during the Industrial Revolution. The artisans of the South were mostly middle class, nestled between the laborers, many of whom were enslaved, and the wealthy planters and merchants. Diversity in craft, economic standing and ethnicity played a hand in weakening the artisans’ unity, but their relatively limited political success in provincial and national politics in contrast to local was a function of the mechanics’ hesitancy to challenge those above them. In all three cities the strides the artisans made politically by 1800 were impressive, but in each instance they had yet to achieve the permanent coalescence of a conscious social class.
ARTISANS OF THE SOUTH: A COMPARATIVE STUDY
OF NORFOLK, CHARLESTON AND ALEXANDRIA, 1763-1800
Chapter 1
Introduction

When Josiah Quincy Junior visited Charleston in 1773, he described the residents as, "divided into opulent and lordly planters, poor and spiritless peasants and vile slaves." Later in his journal when he did admit to the existence of a middling sort he viewed them as "odious characters."\(^1\) For most of the twentieth century, historians, just as Quincy in the eighteenth, concentrated on the opulent and occasionally the enslaved. Scholars of southern history have focused on the rural and agricultural nature of the south—and for good reason. Although the South was predominately rural in the eighteenth century, by the time of the Revolution it did have the fourth largest city in the colonies, and a few middle sized port towns. In those urban areas lived more than lordly planters and vile slaves. There resided large numbers of mechanics whose tale needs telling.

Influenced by the work of their English counterparts, some American historians in the last decade began concentrating on early American urban areas, in particular, the role that the working class played in society. Studies of

New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore have found a heightened sense of class consciousness and political participation particularly among the mechanics. Because these studies concentrated on northern cities, it is still not known whether a class of politically conscious and active artisans existed in the southern society of planters and slaves.

In 1963, E. P. Thompson published his monumental work, *The Making of the English Working Class*. In looking at the English laboring classes between 1790 and 1832, Thompson discovered a radical agitation in England, stemming not from the "middle class but from the artisans and labourers." The laboring classes in England discovered a class consciousness which Thompson defined as "the consciousness of an identity of interests as between all these diverse groups of working people and as against the interests of other classes."² Along with an increased class consciousness came working class oriented economic and political institutions such as trade unions, friendly societies, and political organizations. The first of these was the London Corresponding Society, made up mostly of artisans, whose goal was the propagation of political ideas. During these years, working class intellectual traditions, working class community patterns and in general working class feelings developed in England.³

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³Ibid., 194.
The catalyst for this realization of class unity was a combination of the economic exploitation that accompanied the industrial revolution and the political oppression which the government initiated in the late 1790s in an attempt to stop radical opposition. Economically the early nineteenth century in England was a time of flux; the relationships between employee and employer were less paternalistic and more depersonalized. The laborer faced loss of status and independence along with decreasing leisure time and amenities. Although the rise in real wages during this time is well documented in English history, Thompson argued that more workers were underemployed or unemployed. At a time when the artisan felt his standard of living was dropping, he could witness the nation getting wealthier. These economic changes happened to Englishmen who were becoming increasingly more literate and aware of their rights, at the same time as the state was actively trying to reduce worker’s political rights and destroy political organizations and trade unions. By 1830, the workman in England began to view life as part of a conflict between the industrious class and the unreformed House of Commons.

American historians, taking the cue from Thompson, began to look for these same patterns in urban societies in the colonial and early national periods. Gary Nash, in Urban

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{4}Ibid., 203, 249, 258.
\item \textsuperscript{5}Ibid., 712.
\end{itemize}
Crucible, The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution, looked at how class relationships shifted and political consciousness grew in the century before the American Revolution. Boston, Philadelphia, and New York were the largest and most important northern cities. The differences in their background and the composition of their population provided Nash with a laboratory in which class consciousness could be studied.\(^6\) Nash discovered that class consciousness ebbed and flowed depending on factors such as cultural traditions, leadership patterns, and economic factors. Yet, in all three northern cities factional fighting among the elite facilitated the lower orders' realization of their political abilities. Political organizations such as clubs, political tickets, and caucuses; wide dissemination of literature; and mob action, produced a culture in these cities that was increasingly less deferential.\(^7\)

In the decade leading up to the Revolution, the three cities could be placed on a scale of class consciousness with the workers in Boston developing the least, those in New York more, and those of Philadelphia the most. The laboring


classes in Boston, although the most active in the streets, directed their energies against the occupying British armies and, inactive as a group after 1765, made no demands for enlargement of their role in the political process. The working classes in New York city in the decade before the war enjoyed the broadest suffrage requirements of the three cities, and in turn were able to keep thirty percent of the New York City common council seats in the hands of mechanics. Yet, the mechanics of New York could not dislodge the powerful merchants from office. The pull of political factions, some of which stemmed from religious differences, divided the artisans and prevented them from unifying. It was in Philadelphia that the workers made the biggest steps toward real economic and political change. By overcoming the cultural and religious heterogeneity of the city, the mechanics united and pushed for more political opportunity for themselves and less influence for the mercantile elite.\(^8\)

Other American historians have taken Nash's lead and followed the mechanics through the Revolution into the early national period. Howard Rock's study of New York City revealed that as late as Jefferson's presidency the artisans composed a decisive electoral block. New York's mechanics nominated their own tickets, and petitioned for such objectives as a stronger national government, a protective tariff, public education, and relaxed naturalization

procedures. Charles Steffen's work on Baltimore found that the mechanics were the mainstay of the Republican party. The political self-consciousness of Baltimore's mechanics affected Baltimore's response to such issues as the movement for a national constitution, the fight for a more republican city charter, and the development of the first party system in Baltimore.

Other historians have not given eighteenth century factional politics or the Revolution as much credit in breaking down deference and hierarchy as have those who chronicle the rise of the political clout of the mechanics. Robert and Katherine Brown's study of Virginia found that before the Revolution political participation was more widespread than previously thought. The elected officials were from the upper classes, but gained office only if they pleased a broad electorate. Carl Bridenbaugh argued that the craftsmen wanted their say in politics, but they still wanted men with superior talent and education to represent them.

Stuart Blumin did not think the traditional role of the elite

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changed, but Blumin agreed that the middling sort did become active during the Revolution by serving on committees and participating in mob activities, and that they used the Revolution to increase their political decision making. Yet, Blumin found no evidence that the middling sort wished to displace the traditional leaders, which in most cities had been the merchants.¹²

This study will ask similar questions of the workmen of Norfolk, Alexandria, and Charleston in the years 1763-1800. Did the white laboring classes in these cities develop the heightened sense of class consciousness and political participation that appears to have occurred in the northern cities? What economic and political strides were made, if any, by these workers who lived in a society of "lordly planters" and "vile slaves"?

Socially and politically the three towns were quite different. Charleston was influenced by the low country planters who controlled vast plantations, large numbers of slaves and most of the political power in South Carolina. Alexandria was part of the deferential Virginia society of the eighteenth century, in which great planters such as George Washington and George Mason controlled government at all levels. Norfolk, although part of Virginia, was not part of the Virginia planter society. Norfolk was dominated by

merchants and factors, many of whom were not native to America. Factionalism and tumult characterize the politics of Norfolk around the time of the Revolution. Yet in all three cities the mechanics did gain some sense of their uniqueness as artisans and of their political worth.

For the sake of this study the definition of artisan is someone who worked with his hands and had a specialized skill which set him apart from the average laborer. Also in this study the terms artisan, craftsman and mechanic are used interchangeably as they were in the eighteenth century.13

South Carolina's pre-Revolutionary politics were controlled by a harmonious planter elite. Charleston was a haven for planters seeking relief from the unhealthy climate in the low country of South Carolina. Living part of the year in the city provided the members of the elite with the chance to communicate and develop a community of shared values.14 The planters who controlled South Carolina's politics shared the economic interests and social values that went with producing a common crop. A fear of what disunity among the white elite would do to the colony's large slave population enhanced


14Robert Weir, "'The Harmony We Were Famous For': An Interpretation of Pre-Revolutionary South Carolina Politics," William and Mary Quarterly 26 (1969): 482.
planter cohesion.\textsuperscript{15} The pre-Revolutionary ruling elite of South Carolina, inspired by the "country ideology" present in eighteenth century England, desired leaders who were independent, virtuous, and public spirited. These qualities, they believed, were easier to find among the wealthy, who had the economic independence and education to provide leadership.\textsuperscript{16} The voters of South Carolina also thought the elite should rule and continuously elected the wealthy to positions in the assembly and in local government. Electing a middling level craftsmen to serve at even the local level in South Carolina was unheard of before the Revolution.

Despite Charleston's size it was not incorporated until 1783. Charleston was the capital of South Carolina in the colonial period, and the assembly doubled as the city's corporate government. While the assembly provided the legislation which governed the city, it also appointed commissioners to handle the more routine aspects of local government. There were nine street commissioners, five commissioners of work house and markets, several sealers of weights and measures, and six packing commissioners. Only the road commissioners had significant power; they could call for work levies and impose taxes for road improvements.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15}Weir, "Harmony," 482-484.
\textsuperscript{16}Weir, "Harmony," 476-477.
\textsuperscript{17}David Morton Knepper, "Political Structure of Colonial South Carolina, 1743-1776" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1971), 13, 111, 205; Richard Walsh, Charleston's
As the city's legislative arm, the assembly was not successful. It moved slowly on local problems, and as the Revolution approached it often did not meet. Also, the planters who dominated the assembly did not always understand the city's needs. When the city was incorporated in 1783, its name was changed from Charles Town to Charleston, and the city was divided into thirteen wards. Each ward elected a councilman. From those thirteen people, the citizens elected an intendent, whose duties were similar to those of a mayor. The intendent and the thirteen wardens composed the city council.

In colonial South Carolina the most important element of local government was the parish which performed functions comparable to the county government in Virginia. The parish vestry which primarily monitored the ministers and church buildings, also conducted provincial elections and handled poor relief. Each Easter Monday, two wardens and seven vestrymen were elected for each parish.

The judicial functions for Charleston were heard in the


Knepper, "Political Structures," 47, 64.
court of common pleas, which presided over civil suits, and the court of general sessions, which heard criminal trials. Although these courts' jurisdiction was colony wide, they were located in Charleston.\textsuperscript{21}

As a port town, Charleston served as the terminus for the vast river system of the Carolinas and Georgia. Because of its geographic position, Charleston became the center of a vast inland waterway which stretched from the Cape Fear River in North Carolina to the St. Johns River in Florida.\textsuperscript{22} Charleston began the century as a center for Indian trade, but, after Parliament in 1730 allowed direct exportation of rice to southern Europe, Charleston became a leading rice port. Charleston’s two major export crops, rice and indigo, ranked fourth and fifth in value among North American exports.\textsuperscript{23}

To England Charleston exported rice, indigo, deerskins, rosin, pitch, tar and imported cloths, nails, hoes, hatchets, iron wares, beer, paper, rugs, blankets, hats, gloves, dishes, and guns. Charleston also traded with the West Indian

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., 136.

\textsuperscript{22}Herman Wellenreuther, "Urbanization in the Colonial South," \textit{William and Mary Quarterly} 31 (1974): 551; Rogers, Charleston, 7.

Islands, sending them beef, pork, butter, candles, soap, tallow, rice, pitch, tar, cedar and pine boards, and shingles in return for sugar, rum, molasses, cotton, chocolate, African slaves, and money. Approximately 30 percent of the tonnage into Charleston came from Britain. An almost equal amount came from the West Indies, while continental Europe and the northern colonies each contributed slightly more than 10 percent. Of the total tonnage clearing Charleston almost 50 percent went to British ports, 20 percent to the West Indies, about 15 percent to continental European ports, and roughly 10 percent to northern colonies.  

Besides being a port town and a political center, Charleston was a social center. The influx of wealthy planters every year gave the town an air of opulence. To most eighteenth-century travelers, the style of living in Charleston was "extremely luxurious." One visitor noted, "most families keep a coach or a chaise. The Ladies never seem to walk on foot; and the men often ride." To outsiders the people seemed "courteous, polite, and affable, the most hospitable and attentive to Strangers" of any in America. The people of Charleston, one visitor wrote, were "opulent and well bred" and "thriving and extensive, in dress and life; so

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that everything conspires to make this town the politest, as it is one of the richest in America."\textsuperscript{25}

The streets of Charleston were wide and spacious and intersected each other at right angles. In 1763, an English doctor described the streets as "broad, straight, and uniform, . . . those that run East and West extend from one River to the other; the Bay-street which fronts Cooper-River and the Ocean, is really handsome, and must delight the Stranger who approacheth it from the sea." By the 1780s visitors still saw the streets as "straight and spacious, with brick pavements on both sides for the comfort of those who go on foot."\textsuperscript{26}

The streets may have been broad but they were not paved. Instead, the streets were "covered with a loose sand, ground to a fine powder by the multitude of carriages that pass through them. In windy weather, the dust is intolerable; and, after a shower, the passengers would sink into the mud." One traveler noted that every time his foot slipped "from a kind


of brick pavement before the doors," he was "nearly ankle-deep in sand." Besides creating a mess, the sand reflected "the heat to an intolerable degree, and spreads it into the houses."²⁷

Despite being opulent, the city did have problems. LaRochefoucald observed that "cleanliness in the streets, as well as houses, is greatly neglected," and that "offensive smells are very frequent." LaRochefoucald attributed the smell to several graveyards inside the town in which bodies had become disinterred. Another visitor had a different theory; he counted the number of dead animals in the streets and found "forty-two dogs, fifteen cats and as many rats, all in a state of putrifying effervescence."²⁸ Besides the smell, visitors also complained of the water which had "such a brackish taste, that it is truly astonishing how foreigners can grow used to it."²⁹


²⁸Ibid., 1: 579; South Carolina Gazette and Public Advertiser, 9 April 1785.

²⁹Michaux, "Travels to the West," 35.
In the late eighteenth century the majority of houses in Charleston were built of wood, although the recently constructed houses were brick. One traveler noted that the people of Charleston preferred wooden structures "because they think them cooler than those of brick; and they adopt every contrivance to mitigate the excessive heats of summer." The large numbers of wood houses made the city susceptible to disastrous fires. In 1778 and 1796, large parts of the city fell victim to flames.

Charleston's houses generally came in two styles, the double house and the single house. The double house had two floors with four rooms each separated by a central hallway. Often made of brick, the double house was a sign of high social status. The single house, more typical of the middling class, was two stories tall but only one room deep. The entrances in the single house did not face the street but an adjacent lot. The single house had a central hallway flanked by two large rooms. In 1763 there were an estimated 1100 dwelling houses in Charleston, many of them had "a genteel Appearance though generally incumbered with Balconies or Piazzas; and are always decently, and often elegantly, furnished."

Thomas Elfe's house, the only house open for exhibition in modern day Charleston that was owned by a mechanic, is a prime example of a single house.

LaRochefoucald, Travels through the United States, 1: 579; Wakefield, Excursions, 65; Glen and Milligen-Johnston, Colonial South Carolina, 141; Peter A. Coclanis, The Shadow of
At the time of the Revolution, Charleston with a population of 12,000 was the fourth largest city in the colonies. Slightly more than one-half of Charleston’s population was black, either free or slave. By the turn of the century Charleston had grown to a city of 20,473, but it had not grown as fast as Baltimore which surpassed it in population rank. Between 1764 and 1807, 2491 artisans worked in Charleston. In the directory of 1790 of the 1616 heads of households listed, 405 (25 percent) of them were mechanics.

Most of the mechanics of Charleston catered to the opulent planters and merchants who occupied the town. Craftsmen built their dwellings, made their clothes and furniture and provided them with food and drink. The largest group of artisans active in Charleston at this time were in the clothing trade (25 percent). When this percentage is

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Second Census, 1800, Return of the Whole Number of Persons, Washington, 1801.

Names and occupations of artisans for Charleston, Norfolk and Alexandria are gleaned from newspaper advertisements, city directories, city census lists, account books, borough registers, and municipal records such as will and deed books.

Jacob Milligan, *Charleston Directory; and Revenue System of the United States* (Charleston: printed by T. B. Bowan, 1790).
added to that of those in the food and tobacco trades, and the
jewelry trades, 44 percent of Charleston's artisans were in
the service industries. (See Table 1.) The next highest group
of mechanics after those in the clothing trades were those in
the construction industry (22 percent).

Only 7 percent of the artisans in Charleston were
employed in the shipping industry. For a port town Charleston
was unusually deficient in shipbuilding, although
LaRochefoucauld noted, not for lack of materials. South
Carolina had plenty of live oaks, cedar cypress and pine, and
exported naval stores. Yet the shipbuilding industry, he
observed, "lies yet dormant in Carolina." Another traveler in
1764 thought the lack of shipbuilding was because local
merchants chose not to ship in their own vessels. Aaron Lopez
of Rhode Island wrote, "I was convinced that people here don't
incline to be concerned in navigation because of the great
number of vessels which come here from all parts to take in
freight at a very reasonable pay which suits the merchants."
Such shipbuilding as did exist in Charleston concentrated on
refitting foreign vessels active in the rice trade and
constructing craft for coastwise trade. 36

The mechanics of Charleston lived in a world of the rich

36LaRochefoucauld, Travels Through the United States, 1: 581; Bridenbaugh, Colonial Craftsman, 122; "Journal of a
Voyage to Charleston in South Carolina by Pelatiah Webster," Publications of the South Carolina Historical Society (1898): 6;
Moses Lopez to Aaron Lopez, 3 May 1764, in "Charles town in 1764, ed. Thomas J. Tobias, South Carolina Historical Magazine
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<td>furniture crafts</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forging crafts</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>container crafts</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: John Tobler, *South-Carolina and Georgia ALMANACK, for the Year of Our Lord 1782; Being Second after Leap-Year* (Charleston: R. Wells & Sons, 1792); South Carolina and Georgia Almanack for 1785, issued in 1784; Jacob Milligan, Charleston Directory; and Revenue System of the United States (Charleston: printed by T. B. Bowen, 1790); Charleston Directory (Charleston: printed by W. P. Young, 1794); Nelson's Charleston Directory, and Strangers Guide for the Year of Our Lord, 1801 (Charleston: printed by John Dixon Nelson, 1801); J. J. Negrin, New Directory, and Stranger's Guide, for the year 1802 (Charleston: John A. Daqueny, 1802); Eleazer Elizer, A Directory for 1803; containing the names of all the HOUSE-KEEPERS and TRADERS in the City of Charleston (Charleston: printed by W. P. Young, 1803); Negrin's Directory and Almanac for the Year 1806; containing Every Article of General Utility (Charleston: J. J. Negrin's Press, 1806); Carolina Gazette, 1798-1800; Charleston Evening Gazette, 1785-1786; Charleston Evening Gazette, 1785-1786; Charleston Gazette, 1778-1780; Charleston Morning Post, 1786-1787; City Gazette, 1787-1801; Columbian Herald, 1784-1796; Gazette of the State of South Carolina, 1777-1781; Royal Gazette, 1781-1782; Royal South Carolina Gazette, 1780-1782; South Carolina and American General Gazette, 1764-1781; South Carolina Gazette, 1732-1775, 1783-1785; South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal, 1765-1777; South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser, 1783; South Carolina State Gazette, 1789-1796; South Carolina Weekly Gazette, 1783-1786; South Carolina State Gazette and Timothy and Mason's Advertiser, 1796-1800; Abstracts of the Wills of the State of South Carolina, comp. and ed. Caroline T. Moore, 4 vols. (Columbia: R. L. Bryan Co., 1969); Charleston District Inventories, 1764-1800, microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library.
and the enslaved. Of the three cities in this study Charleston was the one with the least equitable wealth distribution. Unfortunately, tax lists do not exist for Charleston in the period under study; inventories are the best available source for the mechanics' economic condition. Using the gini coefficient to measure distribution (one indicating perfect inequality and zero perfect equality), it is possible to compare income distribution across distance and time. The gini coefficient for inventoried wealth from the Charleston district hovered around .65 between 1747 and 1762. Of those people inventoried in Charleston district in 1769, the gini coefficient was .66. In 1774, the gini coefficient was .71.\(^{37}\) For the inventories registered in Fairfax County between 1764 and 1774, the gini coefficient was .68 in Norfolk County, .67.\(^{38}\) Not only was wealth in Charleston less evenly distributed than in either Norfolk or Alexandria but the years before the Revolution witnessed an acceleration of inequality.

The mechanics in Charleston had to compete with wealthy merchants and planters who held much more inventoried wealth. Mechanics represented 19 percent of those inventoried in the

\(^{37}\) Charleston District Inventories, 1769-1774, microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library, Williamsburg, Virginia; George William Bentley, "Wealth Distribution in Colonial South Carolina" (Ph.D. diss., Georgia State University, 1977), 104.

\(^{38}\) "Fairfax County Wills and Inventories, Book B-Book C," microfilm, Virginia State Archives, Richmond Virginia; "Norfolk County Inventories," Chesapeake Circuit Court, Chesapeake, Virginia.
Charleston District in 1769, yet they only owned 11 percent of the inventoried wealth. Throughout the time under study the percentage of wealth owned by mechanics in Charleston would remain at or around 10 percent. Yet, the mechanics of Charleston were not so poor that they themselves could not afford slaves. Of 168 artisans who were inventoried between 1764 and 1789, 81 percent of them owned at least one slave. The large numbers of slaves in the city would be both competition and labor to the mechanics of Charleston.

The artisans of Charleston made up a large proportion of the society that existed between Quincy's "lordly" planter and "vile" slave. Economically and politically, the artisans of Charleston lived with more formidable foes than those in either Norfolk or Alexandria. Despite the unity of the elite and wealth of the planter class in South Carolina, Charleston's mechanics found some political strength. It was the Revolution which proved to be the catalyst for their political rise.

The mechanics of Alexandria also lived in the shadow of a closely knit, powerful planter class. The first qualification for leadership in Colonial Virginia was birth. Eighteenth-century Virginia was a homogeneous society in which most whites had the same occupation and needs but differed considerably in wealth. Only representatives to the House of

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39 Charleston District Inventories, 1764-1789.
Burgess were elected in Virginia before the Revolution. In all other governmental positions the voters had little say in who served. The crown appointed the governor and council, and the gentry controlled all local offices, including the ecclesiastical and military, all of which were appointive. At the local level, incumbents selected the nominees to fill vacancies. Although the Burgess were elected by a relatively broad electorate, it was one which continually deferred to its betters.40 The wealthy planter in Virginia controlled the economic, social, and political landscape of the colony.

Alexandria was an offshoot of the homogeneous colonial Virginia society. Although the planters of Fairfax County took little interest in the daily affairs of the town and purchased little land in the city, the political influence of men like George Washington and George Mason weighed heavily in Fairfax county and hence in the town.

Alexandria, founded in 1749, was chartered in 1779. Prior to this date the town was directed by eleven trustees whose chief duty was to monitor the streets and wharves. The trustees were not politically powerful. Their meetings were at widely spaced intervals. Before the Revolution, the Fairfax County Court handled the judicial and legislative

needs of the town. Alexandria’s charter in 1779 called for a common council of twelve elected members. These twelve chose a mayor, recorder, and four aldermen. The common council met as a whole to conduct legislative business while the four alderman and the mayor comprised the Hustings Court which served as the town’s judiciary.

Alexandria, a younger port than Charleston or Norfolk, had just under 2,000 residents in 1776. The town was located below the fall line of the Potomac River. Initially established as a tobacco port, Alexandria’s economy grew with Virginia’s increased trade in foodstuffs. By 1800, it was a town of 5,000 inhabitants. Alexandria sent wheat and flour to the West Indies in exchange for rum, sugar, molasses and salt. By the 1760s Alexandria matched the larger Norfolk in the exportation of wheat and flour. Alexandria’s hinterland stretched from the Potomac River basin into the Shenandoah Valley. A road built in 1750 linked Alexandria to the Piedmont and the Valley of Virginia, areas that produced large quantities of tobacco and grain.

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42 Second Census of the United States, 1800.

Alexandria was cleaner and more orderly than either Charleston or Norfolk. Travelers to the city in 1790s continually commented on its neatness. One visitor described it as "the handsomest town in Virginia, and indeed . . . among the finest of the United States." The streets, which were "sufficiently wide, intersect each other at right angles"; while spacious squares added "beauty, convenience, and salubrity." "Large commodious quays" were lined with equally "commodious store-houses, and elegant wharfs." In 1777 Ebenezer Hazard found that the houses were "mostly wooden, and small." Yet, by the 1790s, travelers commented that the houses were "mostly brick, and many of them are extremely well built." LaRochefoucald noted that, "although all the buildings have not an appearance of magnificence, all are convenient and neat."4

Alexandria's slave population, estimated at 22 percent of the total, was much smaller than Charleston's. Among the white population, the artisans in Alexandria represented the same percentage as those in Charleston. Of the heads of


5Wakefield, Excursions, 34-35.


households listed on the personal property tax list for 1795, 26 percent were mechanics.\(^4\) Between 1764 and 1800, 728 mechanics can be identified in Alexandria. The majority of Alexandria's artisans worked in the construction industries (29.3 percent). Although Alexandria unlike Norfolk and Charleston suffered little damage from either war or fire during the Revolution, the area, growing quickly, needed more housing. One stimulus to the building industry was the creation of the Federal City across the Potomac from Alexandria.

Compared to Charleston, Alexandria was a smaller city, serviced less of a hinterland, and played less of a role in the society of the neighboring region. The percentage of mechanics employed in the clothing, food, and tobacco industries was much lower than in Charleston. (See Table 2.) The service industries employed 30 percent of the mechanics in Alexandria, ten percent fewer than in Charleston.

Alexandria did mirror Charleston in the percentage of craftsmen in the shipping industry (7 percent). Alexandria had some ship building activity in the 1760s that all but disappeared by the 1770s. Shortage of timber was a factor in the decline but, more important, Alexandria's merchants did not trade on their own. Most were employees of foreign companies which made the decision to construct ships

\(^4\) Alexandria Personal Property Tax Lists, 1795, microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library, Williamsburg, Virginia.
elsewhere.\textsuperscript{49} Even after the war Alexandria built only eight ships by 1800 and twelve between 1800 and 1812.\textsuperscript{50}

Alexandria mechanics differed from those in Norfolk and Charleston in that most did not own slaves. In 1787, forty-five percent of Alexandria's mechanics owned taxable slaves, by 1800, that figure had dropped to twenty percent.\textsuperscript{51} Although they did not invest in slaves, in terms of land wealth, Alexandria's mechanics were economically better off than those in either Norfolk or Charleston. Because wealthy Fairfax County planters did not invest heavily in town lots, land distribution was more equitably distributed within the town. The gini coefficient for land distribution in Alexandria which was .62 in 1787, had dropped to .52 by 1800. The mechanics owned 28 percent of the land wealth in the city by 1795.\textsuperscript{52} In comparison, the gini coefficient associated with inventoried wealth in Charleston remained at .7 for most of the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

Despite their economic advantages, the mechanics of Alexandria were slower to develop political consciousness than


\textsuperscript{50}MacDonald, "Port of Alexandria," 46, 48.

\textsuperscript{51}Alexandria Personal Property Tax Lists, 1787, 1795, 1800, microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library, Williamsburg, Virginia.

\textsuperscript{52}Alexandria Land Tax Lists, 1787, 1795, 1800, microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library, Williamsburg Virginia.
Table 2
Distribution of Occupations, Alexandria, 1764-1800

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>leather crafts</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clothing crafts</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shipbuilding crafts</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jewelry</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>printing</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boiling crafts</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food and tobacco crafts</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>construction</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>furniture crafts</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forging crafts</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>container crafts</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


those in Norfolk or Charleston. The relative size of the towns could have been a factor in the delay, but more importantly, the proximity of the Virginia planter society prevented the development of a political situation which encouraged political activity among the masses.

Norfolk was officially part of Virginia, but economically and socially it differed greatly from the rest of the Tidewater. The sandy soil in the area around Norfolk produced few cash crops; the type of society typically associated with tobacco and wheat did not appear in Norfolk County. Norfolk was controlled by a mercantile elite, some native and many foreign, most of whom came to the area during the 1750s. Norfolk’s wealth was centered around the West Indian trade.
From North Carolina, Norfolk received naval stores, Indian corn, pork and beef which were shipped to the West Indian islands in exchange for rum, molasses, and sugar.\(^{53}\)

Norfolk is the only one of the three cities in this study to be incorporated before the Revolution. Founded in 1682, Norfolk received a borough charter in 1736. Its government consisted of a mayor, a recorder, eight aldermen, and sixteen common councilmen. The mayor, recorder and aldermen sat as a Hustings Court which served the judicial needs of the city. Each June the common council selected a mayor from the ranks of the aldermen and filled any vacancy among the aldermen from its own ranks. They also selected replacements for themselves when a vacancy occurred. As with all local government in colonial Virginia, Norfolk officials formed a self-perpetuating body.

In 1788, Norfolk's charter was changed to allow property holding residents to elect common councilmen. The term of service for the council was three years. The common council continued to elect the aldermen who now selected the mayor. Even under the new charter, the aldermen served for life.\(^{54}\)

Relations among Norfolk's leaders were not as harmonious as among Alexandria's or Charleston's. The politics of


\(^{54}\)William Waller Hening, comp., The Statues at Large being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia from the First Session of the Legislature in 1619, 13 vols. (Richmond: n.p. 1823), 12: 609-10.
Norfolk matched the society of the raucous port town—unhealthy, unplanned and at times ungovernable. Interestingly, although Charleston was not incorporated until later, South Carolina’s structure of local government afforded that city a longer history of electing local officials than Norfolk or Alexandria. South Carolinians elected not only provincial representatives but also vestry members. Norfolk’s mechanics had to struggle after the Revolution to broaden the scope of local elections; Alexandria, although in the same state won the right to choose its entire council before Norfolk did.

An English traveler noted, "The situation of Norfolk, in a commercial point of view, is one of the best in the United States; for health one of the worst." To visitors, Norfolk "appeared not regular or agreeable." Norfolk was an "illbuilt, and an unhealthy town," and the streets "irregular, unpaved, dusty or dirty according to the weather." In the part of town with the most traffic near the Elizabeth River the streets were "narrow and irregular; in the other parts of the town they are tolerably wide." The side streets were "an innumerable retinue of narrow and filthy lanes and alleys." Instead of being flanked by brick pathways like Charleston’s streets, Norfolk’s were set next to open sewage ditches which

"one crosses . . . on little narrow bridges made of short lengths of plank nailed on cross pieces." One Englishman told of the adventure of crossing the main street of Norfolk after dark. Despite soliciting directions on how to ford the mud, he found himself knee deep. He "plunged and labored some time to extricate" himself which he could not do without the loss of his shoe boot.\textsuperscript{56} Besides the conditions of the streets, "unwholesome swamps, from which arises an intolerable stench" surrounded the town.\textsuperscript{57}

Norfolk appeared as a town developed with no planning or control. Wharves covered the waterfront. As one man noted, the wharves were "put up soley [sic] for the convenience of the owner, are built without any general plan, and inconsiderably shutoff the view of the river without a thought for the future needs of the town."\textsuperscript{58} Isaac Weld who visited the city one year after a yellow fever epidemic killed five hundred people, wondered how the people in a town that just lost so many to pestilence could be "inattentive to cleanliness, which is so conducive to health." Besides the filth, Norfolk had a sickly climate. One traveler discovered


\textsuperscript{57}Wakefield, \textit{Excursions}, 52.

\textsuperscript{58}St Mery, \textit{American Journey}, 47.
"Bilious fevers, ague and putrid bilious fevers" common.\textsuperscript{59}

The houses in Norfolk were as unappealing as the streets they flanked. In the 1790s it was estimated that Norfolk had between 500 and 700 houses, most of them built of wood and "low and unsightly." As late as 1796, the number of ruins remaining from the fire of 1776 was equal to the number of new houses. The public buildings offered no source of pride. The church was "unceiled, unplastered and unpewed." The courthouse was "a plain mean building with a meaner spire." Latrobe wrote of the market house, "the irregular position . . . is in harmony with its filth and deformity."\textsuperscript{60}

Norfolk had a population of 6,000 at the time of the Revolution. The city was completely destroyed by fire in 1776, and it was not until the 1800's that Norfolk again reached its pre-war population. The black population of Norfolk was slightly more than one-third of the inhabitants.\textsuperscript{61} Between 1764 and 1800, 825 artisans worked in Norfolk. According to the tax list in 1790, 29 percent of the heads of households were artisans.\textsuperscript{62} More of Norfolk's mechanics (26.6 percent) were involved in the construction industry, than any

\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., 53; Weld, Travels, 2: 173-74.

\textsuperscript{60}Latrobe, Papers, 1: 75; Weld, Travels, 2: 173-74; LaRochefoucauld, Travels through the United States, 2: 6; St. Mery, American Journey, 47.

\textsuperscript{61}Earle and Hoffman, "Urban Development," 41; Second Census of the U.S. 1800; Browns, Democracy or Aristocracy, 74.

\textsuperscript{62}Norfolk Borough Personal Property and Land Tax List, microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library.
other trade. Yet despite the fact that the complete rebuilding of Norfolk after the war attracted large numbers of workmen to the city, before the war 31.7 percent of the laboring population had been active in construction. (See Table 3 and Graph One.) Norfolk had a lower percentage of its work force active in the service industries than either Charleston or Alexandria. The clothing, food, and tobacco occupations together only accounted for 27 percent of Norfolk's mechanics.

Norfolk differed from Alexandria and Charleston in possessing a large shipbuilding industry, employing 16 percent of its mechanics. The Caribbean trade required more and smaller vessels than the rice or tobacco trade. In the second half of the eighteenth century, ship construction grew in the city. There was ample material available for ship building. One Frenchmen wrote that the area was "well stocked with timber, they can make their own cordage, they have plenty of Iron and all kinds of naval stores." Before the Revolution Norfolk was home to two ropewalks, both of which employed large numbers of slaves. The ropewalk owned by a partnership of several Scottish merchants between 1767 and 1774 paid taxes

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Table 3
Distribution of Occupations, Norfolk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage 1765-1780</th>
<th>Percentage 1765-1801</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>leather crafts</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clothing crafts</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shipbuilding crafts</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jewelry</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>printing</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boiling crafts</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food and tobacco</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>construction</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>furniture</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forging crafts</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>container crafts</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Simmon's Norfolk Directory containing The Names, Occupations, and Place of Abode of the Inhabitants, Arranged in Alphabetical Order (Norfolk: printed by Augustus C. Jordon, 1801); Norfolk Directory (Norfolk: printed by Augustus C. Jordon & Co., 1806); American Gazette, 25 September 1793-29 April 1796; American Gazette and Norfolk and Portsmouth Public Advertiser, 1795-1796; Epitome of the Times, 1798-1800; Norfolk and Portsmouth Chronicle, 1789-1792; Norfolk and Portsmouth Gazette, 1789; Norfolk and Portsmouth Herald, 1794-1800; Norfolk and Portsmouth Journal, 1787-1879; Norfolk Weekly Journal and County Intelligencer, 1797-1798; Virginia Chronicle, 1792-1794; Virginia Gazette or Norfolk Intelligencer, 1774-1775; "Norfolk Borough Register," Circuit Court Office, Norfolk Virginia; "Norfolk County Deed Books," Circuit Court Office, Chesapeake, Virginia.

on an average of thirty slaves a year.\(^5\)

Mechanics in Norfolk owned more slaves than in Alexandria but not as many as in Charleston. Before the Revolution 62 percent of the 194 mechanics who worked in the city owned

Graph One
Occupational Distribution

CITY=Charleston

- cloth: 775 (26.70%)
- ship: 193 (6.65%)
- leather: 240 (8.27%)
- construct: 640 (22.05%)

CITY=Norfolk

- ship: 131 (16.23%)
- cloth: 125 (15.49%)
- food: 89 (11.03%)
- leather: 64 (7.93%)
- construct: 215 (26.64%)

CITY=Alexandria

- cloth: 142 (52.19%)
- ship: 52 (19.51%)
- food: 73 (10.03%)
- leather: 64 (11.54%)
- construct: 213 (29.26%)

[Graphs showing occupational distribution for each city]
slaves, the same percentage of craftsmen as in 1790. In terms of wealth distribution Norfolk also fell between Alexandria and Charleston with the gini coefficient for land distribution in 1790 of .58.

Despite the social, political, and economic differences between Norfolk, Alexandria and Charleston, at some point between 1763 and 1800 the mechanics in all three united socially and politically. The catalyst for class consciousness differed in each of the three cities; yet a pattern of unity among artisans emerged in all three although they existed in a society dominated by "lordly" planters and "vile" slaves the mechanics of these three southern port cities were able to realize a political strength beyond their numbers.

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Norfolk Tithables; Norfolk Personal Property and Land Tax Lists, microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library, 1790.
Chapter 2

The Coming of the Revolution, Early Stirring, 1764-1772

With the end of the Seven Years War, came a change in the relationship between England and her colonies. The colonies took pride in their contribution to the war effort and increasingly looked to England as their model and equal. Meanwhile, the British government, eager to find a new source of revenue to cover defense expenses and alarmed at the independent spirit in the colonies, ended the benign neglect that had characterized her previous dealings with her North American subjects. From 1764 to 1774, the British Parliament passed a series of acts which led to riots, boycotts, and protests in many North American cities. It was opposition to British measures which united the mechanics of Charles Town and gave them political power that even many of them would never have thought possible. In Alexandria and in Norfolk, planters and merchants led the protests. Alexandria was still in the formative stages as a city and left the protest to the powerful planters of Fairfax county. In the decade before the Revolution factional fighting accelerated and left a mark on Norfolk's politics that would continue after the Revolution. In the years 1768 and 1769, local factional fighting rather than resistance to British politics taught Norfolk's artisans
the ways of politics.

After the Seven Years' War, the British government, eager to find a new source of revenue to cover imperial expenses, looked overseas. Prime Minister George Grenville's search for more money began with the Sugar Act in 1764 which reduced the duty on molasses from six to three pence but tightened enforcement and imposed new duties on colonial imports of sugar, indigo, coffee, pimento, wine and textiles. The Sugar Act also called for the trial of custom evaders in admiralty courts. The Sugar Act received little or no reaction in any of the three cities. Yet, when Grenville pushed through parliament a Stamp Act which taxed every kind of legal document along with newspapers, playing cards, and dice, there was controlled violence in Charles Town but not in Norfolk and Alexandria.

Philip Foner has found that in resisting British taxation, the mechanics of northern colonial cities came of age politically. For some, the fight against the Stamp Act and later participation in nonimportation agreements was their initial entry into political life; for others, the resistance enlarged an already established political tradition. Foner found that in Maryland and to the north in most cities the rank and file of the Sons of Liberty were mechanics. The

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leaders tended to be master craftsmen and professionals who were just outside the circle of the merchant elite. Both the rank and file and the leaders of the Sons of Liberty had little prior political influence.2 Charles Town followed the same pattern.

On April 13, 1765, the South Carolina Gazette announced the passing of the Stamp Act. The stamps themselves arrived on October 18, 1765. The next morning an effigy of a stamp collector appeared suspended from a twenty-foot gallows in the middle of town. At the front of the gallows were the words, "Liberty and No Stamp Act" while a sign behind the effigy warned "Whoever shall dare attempt to pull down these effigies, had better been born with a millstone about his neck and cast into the sea." This threat kept the figure in place the entire day, and at nightfall a reported crowd of 2000 people carried it through the streets. The parade stopped at a house of George Saxby, the rumored distributor of the stamps. Finding neither the dreaded stamps nor Mr. Saxby, the crowd inflicted some minor physical damage on the building and proceeded to another part of town where the effigy was burned. The next day Saxby signed and posted a declaration denying he had received either the stamps or a commission.3

Meanwhile at a meeting of citizens Daniel Cannon, a


3South Carolina Gazette, 13 April 1765, 31 October 1765.
carpenter, and Edward Weyman, an upholsterer, and others formed a committee to prevent the landing of paper. A force of about 150 Americans stormed Fort Johnson and seized the stamps stored there. Despite a compromise allowing British officers at the fort to ship the stamps back to England on the H.M.S. Speedwell, a rumor circulated that more stamped paper was hidden in town.4

A crowd looking for the distributor and the stamped paper stalked the town the rest of the week. On 23 October, reacting to a rumor that the stamps had been landed at the house of a gentlemen in Annonsborough (a section of the city), a crowd shouting "'Liberty, Liberty and Stamp'd Paper" called on Henry Laurens and demanded "'open your doors and let us Search your House and Cellars.'"5

Laurens, a merchant and assemblyman, had recently publicly opposed the public's hero, Christopher Gadsden. Gadsden, also a merchant and representative to the Commons House of Assembly, had earlier become a popular spokesman during the Cherokee War. Writing under the name "Philopatrios," Gadsden criticized the handling of the Indian


5Laurens to Mr. Laidler, Charles Town, 23 October 1765, Papers of Henry Laurens (September 1765-July 1768), ed. George C Rogers Jun and David R. Chesnutt (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1976), 5: 29.
war. His attacks were directed toward British regulars, particularly Col. James Grant, whom Gadsden accused of calling the colonial forces cowards. Laurens defended Grant, who by 1765 was governor of Florida, in a letter which was circulated in manuscript but not printed.7

In 1762, Gadsden had again appeared on the popular side of a controversy when the governor refused him his seat in the Assembly on a technicality even though Gadsden had received 80 percent of the vote. The house suspended business until the Governor apologized for interfering in the Commons' right to supervise its own elections. Laurens, who agreed that Gadsden should be seated, did not approve of the suspension of business, and published a letter in the South Carolina Weekly Gazette attacking Gadsden personally.8 Privately, Laurens referred to Gadsden as "One poor rash headlong Gentleman."9 Considering Laurens' position in Charles Town's recent clashes with authority, it was not unlikely that he was harboring the stamps.

The crowd stormed into Laurens' house, reducing Mrs.

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7Laurens Papers 3: 271.


9Laurens to Christopher Rowe, Charles Town, 8 February 1764, Laurens Papers 4: 164.
Laurens, who was eight months pregnant, to "shrieking and wringing her hands." Once the mob was in the house, Laurens recognized several of its members despite their disguises of "Soot, Sailors habits, slouch hats & ca." The crowd superficially searched the house and demanded that Laurens take an oath that he did not know the whereabouts of the stamps. Laurens replied that he would not give any words under duress and that his sentiments on the Stamp Act were well known. Laurens declared himself "an enemy to it and would give and do a great deal to procure its annihilation" but he did "not think they pursued a right method to obtain a repeal."\textsuperscript{10} The crowd both applauded and cursed Laurens, and one of the group declared that all would love him except for Laurens's relationship with Governor Grant. The crowd ended its unwelcome visit by giving Laurens three cheers and departing. Laurens was amazed that "such a number of Men many of them heated with Liquor and all armed with Cutlasses and Clubbs did not do one penny damage to my Garden not even to walk over a Bed and not 15/ damage to my fence, Gates, or House?"\textsuperscript{11}

Laurens described the mob as "about 60 or 80 nearly an equal number of Honest hearted jacks and Towns Men." He implied that the sailors were sent to attack him, but that,

\textsuperscript{10}Laurens to Mr. Laidler, Charles Town, 23 October 1765, \textit{Laurens Papers} 5: 30.

\textsuperscript{11}Laurens to James Grant, Charles Town, 1 November 1765, \textit{Laurens Papers} 5: 39.
after seeing his strong resolve, they applauded him and admitted that "they had been damnably imposed upon and the Gentleman greatly abused."

Who had sent these drunken sailors to frighten an innocent man? The logical person for Laurens to blame was Christopher Gadsden. However, Gadsden had been in route returning from the Stamp Act Congress in New York at the time of the rioting. Instead, Laurens wrote to James Grant that Peter Timothy, printer of the South Carolina Gazette, "had at least put your name into the Mouths of those Anti-Parliamentarians if he was not the sole projector as well as prompter of the Play."

If Timothy did orchestrate the mob, his influence did not last long. In 1768, Timothy wrote to Benjamin Franklin that he found himself "from the most popular reduced to the most unpopular Man in the Province." By suspending his paper during the Stamp Act crisis, and by accepting an appointment in the Post Office and "declining to direct support and engage in the most violent Opposition," Timothy alienated everyone. His enemies, he claimed, set up Charles Crouch, Timothy's former apprentice, "a worthless fellow, against me, whom they

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12 Laurens to James Grant, Charles Town, 1 November 1765, Laurens Papers 5: 40.

13 Laurens to James Grant, Charles Town, 1 November 1765, Laurens Papers 5: 36; James L. Potts "Christopher Gadsden and the American Revolution" (Ph.D. diss., George Peabody College for Teachers, 1958), 170.
support with their utmost Zeal and interest."\textsuperscript{14}

By Saturday of this tense week, the mob had not found the stamps but had discovered that Caleb Lloyd was the appointed stamp distributor. Although there was no account of mob action against Lloyd, who was hiding at nearby Fort Johnson, he resigned.\textsuperscript{15} Mob action in Charles Town had guaranteed that stamps would not be available for use. Without stamps or distributors, the act could not be implemented; ships could not clear the harbor in Charles Town and courts could not open.\textsuperscript{16}

The Sons of Liberty in Charles Town did more than just disturb the peace of the city, they also worked to maintain it. Because ships could not clear the port, large numbers of idle seamen congregated at the docks. These restless seamen, possibly as many as 1400, became disruptive. Gadsden wrote in 1766 that "we were afraid that the number of Sailors would force the stamps upon us as had been done in Georgia." It was in the interest of the Sons of Liberty to control the rowdy sailors. A letter from Charles Town in the \textit{Boston Gazette Supplement} of January 27, 1766 stated, "Our Liberty Boys being


\textsuperscript{15}South Carolina Gazette, 31 October 1765.

content to keep out the Stamps, do not injure, but protect the Town." When a pack of sailors began forcibly collecting money from people in the streets, the "Sons of Liberty suppressed them instantly, and committed the Ringleader to Goal." Finally by February 1766 the governor allowed the port to operate without stamped paper, but the courts remained closed.\footnote{Pauline Maier, "The Charleston Mob and the Evolution of Popular Politics in Revolutionary South Carolina, 1765-1784," \textit{Perspectives in American History} IV (1970): 176; \textit{Boston Gazette} Supplement, 27 January 1766; Gadsden to W. S. Johnson, Charles Town, 16 April 1766, quoted in Potts, "Gadsden and the American Revolution," 176; Clowse, "Cautious Rebellion," 62, 71.}

Who were the Sons of Liberty in Charles Town? In the fall of 1766, after the repeal of the Stamp Act, a group of Charles Town's citizens gathered under an oak tree on the outskirts of town to talk over "mischiefs which the Stamp Act would have induced, and congratulated each other on its repeal." Of the twenty-six Sons of Liberty who met that day, twenty-three were artisans. They were joined by a clerk, a schoolmaster, and a merchant. The merchant was Christopher Gadsden, who "delivered to them an address, stating their rights, and encouraging them to defend them against all foreign taxation."\footnote{"A List of those Persons Who First Met At Liberty Tree, in Charles Town, in the Fall of the Year 1766," in \textit{Documentary History of the American Revolution} (N.Y.: D. Appleton & Co., 1855; N.Y.: Arno Press, 1971), 10-11.} This scene of artisans exercising their political power outside the realm of the established...
government, under the leadership of Christopher Gadsden, typified Charles Town's road to Revolution.

It is unclear how frequently the Sons of Liberty met, or how much they thought of their actions in class conscious terms. In the 1760s the artisans of Charleston had been active in benefit societies. The fellowship society, founded by mechanics in 1762, worked to establish a hospital for the poor. The social organization, Club 45, was also run by mechanics. In March of 1768, the mechanics of Charles Town sponsored a horse race with a 200 pound purse, and a cock fight. By 1768, just as they began to act together politically, the artisans of Charles Town were developing a sense of group identity based on occupation.

During the election for Commons House of Assembly in the fall of 1768, the mechanics assembled at the Liberty Tree and nominated slates of candidates for St. Philip's and St. Michael's parishes. For St. Philip's, the assembly endorsed Christopher Gadsden, Thomas Smith and Hopkin Price while the names of Henry Laurens and Charles Pinckney were also mentioned. On election day only one of the artisans' first choices, were returned, Gadsden, along with two other incumbents Laurens and Pinckney. For the Parish of Saint

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19 Papers of the Fellowship Society, microfilm, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; South Carolina Gazette and County Journal, 3 July 1770; South Carolina Gazette, 21 December 1772.

20 South Carolina Gazette, 21 March 1768, 4 April 1768.
Michael's, the mechanics endorsed Benjamin Dart, Thomas Smith, and Thomas Savage, and also mentioned John Ward, and John Lloyd. There the mechanics did better electing all but one of their first choices. Thomas Smith lost by a wide margin in both parishes. Only one of the men nominated by the mechanics might have been one of their own. But though Hopkin Price owned a tannery and shoe manufactory, he was really a merchant who served in the Assembly from 1762-1768. The mechanics' theatre of power was outside the institutional.

Nomination day was a great social event. Once the nominations were decided, "the company partook of a plain and hearty entertainment." At five o'clock in the evening they went to the Liberty Tree to give many toasts, and by eight o'clock, the "whole company, proceeded by 45 of their number, carrying as many lights, marched in regular procession to town." The South Carolina and County Journal proudly noted, "the utmost Respect was Shown to one another, attended with Unanimity and concord during the whole Proceeding." This meeting of mechanics was to "convince the World of their [mechanics] Steady and fixed Determination to join upon all proper Occasions, in support of the glorious Cause of Liberty." However, the mechanics' unity caused a great stir in

\[21\] South Carolina Gazette, 8 October 1768, 10 October 1768; Robert McColloch Weir, "Liberty, Property, and No Stamps, South Carolina and the Stamp Act Crises," (Ph.D. diss., Western Reserve University, 1966), 55, 484.

\[22\] South Carolina Gazette, 8 October 1768.
Laurens described the meeting as a "Grand Barbacu" given by a "Grand Simpleton." The simpleton was Gadsden. Laurens whom the mechanics had not enthusiastically supported wrote that he walked, "on the old Road, give no Barbacu nor ask any Man for Votes." Because Laurens was frightened by the prospect of Hopkin Price's serving again in the legislature, he gave Charles Pinckney twenty of his extra votes.

The House elected in the "Grand Barbacu" election was the same assembly which accepted circulatory letters from Massachusetts and Virginia protesting the Townshend Acts. Passed in 1767, the Townshend Acts levied duties on colonial importation of lead, paint, paper, glass and tea. Governor Montagu dissolved the House when it endorsed the circulatory letters and delayed the next session until June of 1769.

Frustrated in protesting through proper political channels, the Charles Town residents followed the examples of their northern counterparts and called for nonimportation. This time the movement for Liberty was not left in artisan hands alone.

In June 1769, the mechanics and other citizens met to discuss how they could follow New York's example of

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23South Carolina and Country Journal, 4 October 1768; South Carolina Gazette, 10 October 1768.

24Laurens to James Grant, Charles Town, 1 October 1768, Laurens Papers 6: 122; Laurens to James Grant, Charles Town, 22 December 1768, Laurens Papers 6: 231.

25South Carolina Gazette Extraordinary, 24 November 1768; Drayton Memoirs, xvii.
nonimportation.\textsuperscript{26} The mechanics who dominated the Sons of Liberty now had to convince people from other occupations to join them if nonimportation was to be successful. Merchants and planters worked with the mechanics in representing their common interests.

The plan of association which came out of the public meeting of "planters, mechanics and freeholders" resolved to use only North American manufactures and forbade importation of British goods with the exception of a few items.\textsuperscript{27} The inhabitants resolved to exercise the utmost economy in their habits including the use of mourning. A week later a second meeting added a resolve to refrain from importing slaves. This resolution, adopted without the input of merchants, was signed by 230 people.\textsuperscript{28}

In a letter to the newspaper, however, the merchants made clear that they had not wholeheartedly supported the resolves. They declared that, "If an hardship must be borne for the general good, each individual should be consulted, and such a plan adopted as would make the burthen equal." The first agreement they charged was not equitable because the resolves

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item 26\textit{South Carolina Gazette}, 8 June 1769.
\item 27African cloth, duffel blankets, Osnabrugs, plantation and workmen's tools, powder, lead shot, canvass, nails, salt, coals, wool cards, card wire, printed books and pamphlets were the original exceptions. The merchants' resolves added bolting cloths, drugs and medicine, fire arms, bar steel, flint and mill and grind stones.
\item 28\textit{South Carolina Gazette}, 29 June 1769, 6 July 1769; \textit{South Carolina and County Journal}, 4 July 1769.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
favored "the land-holders" and "such articles as they and the Mechanics indispensably want" were permitted. "Two parts of the community are provided for, while the third is subjected to infinite hardship and distress."29

The merchants adopted their own agreement which promised not to import any European or East Indian goods until the first of January 1771 and to sell goods already on hand at their current price. The merchants resolved to suspend importing African slaves for one year and the importation of West Indian slaves for slightly longer.30 The merchant’s agreement was similar to the resolves of the planters and mechanics except that the merchants placed time limits on the boycott. They also wished to sell their stock without experiencing great hardship. As a letter signed "a mechanic" pointed out, the merchants’ resolves did not, "contain a single syllable for ENCOURAGING AMERICAN MANUFACTURES." The mechanic argued for adhering to the plan adopted at the first meeting because, "the ESTABLISHMENT of American Manufactures is our GREAT and LAST resource."31

The compromise association that the people adopted at a third meeting reflected more closely the plan put together by the mechanics and planters than the merchants. The list of excepted goods resembled the merchants’ list, but there was no

29South Carolina Gazette, 13 July 1769.
30South Carolina Gazette, 13 July 1769.
31Ibid.

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time limit on nonimportation, and the use of morning, something the merchants wanted, was prohibited. Wine and African slaves were not to be imported after 1 January 1770. Goods from Great Britain or any other European or East-Indian country were not to be accepted after 1 November 1769. A final resolve called for a boycott of anyone who did not sign the agreement within a month.\textsuperscript{32}

Thirteen planters, thirteen merchants, and thirteen mechanics formed a general committee to enforce the association.\textsuperscript{33} The committee was in charge of inspection and advertising the varying deadlines of the resolves. But a general meeting of inhabitants had to be called to discuss matters of great consequence such as punishments for violators or exceptions to the association. At these plenary sessions anyone who wanted was allowed to speak.\textsuperscript{34} In reacting to the Townshend Duties, the people of Charles Town realized that different occupations carried different goals. For the first time in Charles Town's political history, artisans' desires

\textsuperscript{32}South Carolina Gazette, 27 July 1769.

\textsuperscript{33}Of the thirteen mechanics five were carpenters, Daniel Cannon, Cato Ash, John Fullerton, Joseph Verree, and Joseph Dill; two shoemakers, Simon Berwick, and John Matthews, a tailor Theodore Trezvant, a bricklayer, Thomas Young, a blacksmith Tunis Teabout, a blockmaker Bernard Beekman, and a butcher William Trusler. One of the mechanics John Prue I am not sure of the occupation. South Carolina Gazette, 27 July 1769.

\textsuperscript{34}South Carolina Gazette, 31 October 1769, 9 November 1769, 28 November 1769, 21 December 1769, 25 January 1770, 9 February 1770, 17 May 1770.
were recognized as having as much weight as those of the merchants and planters. The mechanics who had formally been non-existent in institutional politics had dragged the planters and merchants into their theatre and shared the stage equally with the two groups that had previously dominated the scene.

Not everyone accepted the artisans' new role. William Henry Drayton in a series of letters protested the association agreements because he saw in them "a doctrine which violates the constitution of our country in such a manner, as to have laid a restraint upon, and endeavored to intimidate free-men into novel opinions and politics."\textsuperscript{35} In his letters Drayton objected to men with liberal education consulting "men who never were in a way to study" anything but the "rules how to cut up a beast in the market to the best advantage, to cobble an old shoe in the neatest manner, or to build a necessary house." To Drayton, "Nature never intended that such men should be profound politicians, or able statesmen."\textsuperscript{36}

When attacked for his views Drayton replied that he always thought the industrious mechanic a useful member of society, but each should stick to his own trade. He who steps out of his sphere and sets up as a statesman, "expose[s]..."


\textsuperscript{36}Drayton, Letters of Freemen, 31.
himself to ridicule, and his family to distress, by neglecting his private business:—such men are often converted to cats paws, and made to serve a turn."37

The critics of Drayton, John Mckenzie and Christopher Gadsden, defended the artisans' actions arguing that every man has a right to be consulted about his own property. Gadsden wrote "tyranny generally descends, as it were, from rank to rank, through the people, 'till almost the whole weight of it, at last, falls upon the honest laborious farmer, mechanic, and day labourer." After tyranny trickles down, the worker is "poor, almost irremediably poor indeed!" This fear more than anything accounted for their "being so united and steady," he said.38 To Gadsden the mechanics had exerted themselves nobly, and they were to be depended on.39

Yet, more significant than Mckenzie's or Gadsden's words was the fact that the mechanics defended themselves. The mechanics of the general committee wrote a sarcastic letter to Drayton supporting their actions and abilities. The artisans answered Drayton's main objection to the resolves by asserting, "The Associators never assumed, or pretended to assume, any right, over the judgments of other men."

37A Member of the General Committee to Freeman, Letters of Freeman, 50.

38A Member of the General Committee to Freeman, A Member of the Assembly and Signer of the Resolution to Freeman, Letters of a Freeman, 40, 82.

39Ibid., 34.
Therefore, people were free to sign the agreements. In defending their abilities the mechanics wrote that there was a kind of knowledge called common sense, which no amount of education could teach. Unfortunately, Drayton did not possess common sense; with "a pertinacious opinion of his own superior knowledge," he "shuts his eyes, and stoickally submits to all the illegal encroachments that may be made on his property, by an ill-designing and badly-informed ministry." These men defended their status as tradesmen by noting that not all were as fortunate at birth as Drayton, but they had been given the strength and knowledge to pursue a trade which maintained their families with "a decency suitable to their stations in life." The artisans asked, what if Drayton had not married or inherited his wealth? What would he do? A man like Drayton "could neither pretend to build a house to shelter himself from the weather, nor soal [sic] his own shoes as they ought to be done."40

Despite Drayton's well publicized opposition, non-importation succeeded in South Carolina. Only thirty-one people refused to sign the resolves. The South Carolina Gazette reported in May of 1770 that the resolutions were enforced so well that even those who had not signed were abiding by them. Henry Laurens wrote, "you cannot with any prospect of Success import any Goods for Sale in this province

40Mechanics of the Committee to Freeman, Letters of Freeman, 111-14.
while the General Resolutions of the people here which you are very well acquainted with are subsisting." Imports from Britain dropped by more than fifty percent. Yet, exports must have been continuing the pace. The *South Carolina Gazette* reported that at least ninety-four ships of sail were in port, "A number seldom exceeded at this time of the Year."41

In January 1770, upon taking over as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord North suggested to Parliament that all duties on imports with the exception of that on tea be repealed. By June the news reached South Carolina.42 News of the repeal did not halt the boycott, although, for the first time in the debate over the Townshend Duties, mob action was used to assure compliance in Charles Town.

Late in June, an effigy of a violator of the resolutions appeared in Broad Street. The writing on the figure threatened carting, tarring and feathering to those who did not abide by the resolves. Taken down during the day, the effigy reappeared at night and was carted through the streets and burned. The paper reported, "Moderate people appeared, in general, very much concerned at this Exhibition." But they did not prevent it, "the majority not admitting any reason to be sufficient to justify or palliate any Deviation whatever


42*South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 8 June 1770.
from our Resolutions (by which we must now stand or fail).”

Despite South Carolina’s resolve, the other colonies began to abandon nonimportation. At a meeting of the inhabitants in late June 1770, the people of Charles Town decided that since Georgia and Rhode Island were not cooperating with nonimportation measures, trade between South Carolina and these colonies would be discontinued. In August of 1770, commercial relations with New York were broken because that town too rescinded its resolves. Despite the defections of the other colonies, in Charles Town no attempt to avoid or violate the resolves escaped the "Observation and Inquiry" of Charles Town’s committee. Peter Manigault wrote to Ralph Izard, "I am sorry the New Yorkers have shown any Inclination to rescind part of the Resolutions. We are so staunch here, that if any man were to propose such a thing he would be treated with universal contempt."4

By December, the paper reported "the People of this Province being no longer ambitious of continuing the only serious persons in the very contemptible Farce lately acted throughout the Northern Colonies of this Continent," they decided to amend the resolves. A meeting of inhabitants agreed not to import tea and to send a protest to the northern

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43 South Carolina Gazette, 21 June 1770.

44 South Carolina Gazette, 28 June 1770, 23 August 1770, 6 September 1770; Peter Manigault to Ralph Izard, n.d., Charles Town, "Letterbook of Peter Manigault 1763-1773," South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.
colonies. Those assembled also appointed a committee consisting of Christopher Gadsden, Henry Laurens, Thomas Lynch, John McKenzie, and Thomas Ferguson to design a plan to encourage the manufactures of the province. None of these promoters of colonial manufactures were artisans. The artisans had begun the movement against Great Britain with extra-legal assemblies. Yet, once the artisans let the merchants and planters into their theatre it became only natural that those people would dominate the stage.

The rise of class consciousness among the mechanics of Charles Town came when they were holding their own economically. Between 1763 and 1774, Charles Town experienced growth in the import/export sector, but the wealth in the city was becoming less equitably distributed. The artisans united socially and politically at a time which for them was neither boom nor bust.

According to George Rogers Taylor, wholesale prices for South Carolina products were higher between 1763 and 1770 than in the previous ten years. Fuelled by an increase in the price of rice, the prices of the products that the city exported reached record highs between 1771 and 1775. In addition to the higher prices, the quantity of produce shipped from Charles Town was also increasing. Rice exports between 1766 and 1770 averaged just over 110,000 barrels a year. The

45South Carolina Gazette, 6 December 1770, 13 December 1770.
figure for 1771 to 1774 was just under 119,000 barrels a year. With high prices and an increase in the quantities shipped, the 1760s and 1770s were good years for those involved in South Carolina's import/export trade.46

Not all benefitted from the windfall. The gini coefficient for inventoried wealth from the Charleston district had been around .65 between 1747 and 1762.47 In 1764, the gini coefficient was .63. By 1769, it was .66 and by 1774, .71. (See Table 4.) The increases in income from foreign trade were benefiting the rich but not the poor. Charles Town between 1764 and 1774 experienced a rise in the number of poor. The amount of money needed for poor relief in 1763 more than doubled what it had been in 1755. Contemporaries blamed the rising poverty on the ease with which individuals could enter the poor rolls in Charles Town without fear of being sent back to their home parishes for relief. Another factor was the immigration of impoverished German, Irish and French Huguenot refugees who either did not go to their bounty land or returned to the city. Charles Town also had a large number of dependents left by soldiers killed


47George William Bentley, "Wealth Distribution in Colonial South Carolina" (Ph.D. diss., Georgia State University, 1977), 104.
in the Seven Years' War. Grand Juries consistently complained of the "vagrants, drunkards, and idle persons" who seemed to infest the town. Despite the constant increase in the poor tax over the period, the St Philip's vestry, which provided poor relief for the city, by 1774 owed the provincial government 16,500 pounds currency.

Besides the rise in taxes associated with the poor, necessities such as wood, corn and meat were scarce. South Carolina did not produce enough corn to answer the demand in the West Indian islands without causing shortages at home. In 1772, a letter to the South Carolina Gazette complained that by allowing the exportation of such a rare commodity as corn, the middling and the laboring people "out of the poor pitance of their earnings, shall not be able even to purchase a Bushel of Corn, when all the other Expenses of their Families are paid for." The next month a letter signed "Veridicus" blamed the high prices for corn and wood on retailers "who forestal and engross the necessaries of life." Those people "plunder the wealthy, doom the industrious mechanic to poverty, and

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"South Carolina Gazette, 22 October 1772."
absolutely starve the lower labourers."50

Despite the difficulty of the times, most mechanics in the city maintained their economic position between 1764 and 1774. (See Table 4.) The political awareness and social unity that developed among Charles Town's mechanics in the decade before the Revolution did not develop out of economic need.

Table 4
Wealth in Personal Property and Slaves
Charleston District, S.C.
(decimal pounds currency)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Inventoried</th>
<th>Artisans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>year</td>
<td>mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1764</td>
<td>5697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1769</td>
<td>4779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1774</td>
<td>7932</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Inventories of Charleston District, South Carolina, 1763-1776, microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library.

Reaction to the Stamp Act and resistance to British legislation did not cause as dramatic effects in either Norfolk or Alexandria as in Charles Town. Unlike the situation in South Carolina, the hated stamps never arrived in Virginia. The Virginia stamp collector, who resigned after being greeted by a mob in Williamsburg, claimed to have brought no stamps for the customs house. The governor issued a note after November 2 stating that since stamps were not

50 South Carolina Gazette, 12 November 1772.
available shipping could continue.\textsuperscript{51} In Alexandria, the lack of stamps or any sign of royal authority guaranteed that the town would weather the Stamp Act peacefully. In protesting the Townshend duties Alexandria artisans followed the lead of merchants and planters.\textsuperscript{52} Rather than reacting against the stamps or the collectors, the people of Norfolk waited several months before employing violence against British customs officers.

The citizens of Norfolk borough and county met at the courthouse in the spring of 1766 to protest an act "pregnant with ruin, and productive of the most pernicious consequences." Fifty-seven citizens signed a resolution which promised to sacrifice life and fortune to protect "those inestimable privileges of all free born British subjects," including the right to no taxation without representation and a right to trial by a jury of peers. Of the people who signed the document only four were Norfolk Borough artisans. Instead merchants' and planters' names dominated the list.\textsuperscript{53}

Within days this extra-legal group had turned into a mob.

\textsuperscript{51} Morgan and Morgan, \textit{Stamp Act Crises}, 205.

\textsuperscript{52} Donald Sweig, "1649-1800" in \textit{Fairfax County, Virginia, A History} (Fairfax: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, 1978), 84.

Captain William Smith was accused of reporting a case of smuggling in violation of the Sugar Act to Edward Hack Mosely, Surveyor of Customs, who in turn impounded the ship in question. Tricked by the owner of his vessel, Captain Smith came ashore and was seized by four Norfolk merchants who were also signers of the resolves. John Gilchrist, Matthew and John Phripp, and James Campbell with assistance from a Captain Fleming carried Smith to the Market House where he was bound and tied behind a cart. A crowd, which included the current mayor, Maximillian Calvert, began to throw stones. Smith was then taken to the county wharf where he was tarred and feathered, placed on a ducking stool and pelted with rotten eggs and stones. Not satisfied with this cruelty, the crowd which consisted of "all the principal gentlemen in town," paraded Smith through town and tossed him in the harbor. Most likely people of all occupations joined this mob, but clearly the leading participants were well known Norfolk merchants. Norfolk's first step on the road to Revolution was taken by a united group of principal merchants. This unity among Norfolk's leading citizens would not last.

On May 1766, Norfolk received news of the Stamp Act's repeal which sparked a series of celebrations. A painting to commemorate the occasion was placed in the front of the Court House. The picture included symbols of manufactures,

54Captain William Smith to J. Morgan, 3 April 1766, "Letters of Governor Francis Fauquier," William and Mary Quarterly 21 (1912): 167-68.
agriculture and commerce all with a broad smile, while the left of the painting showed figures of tyranny, slavery and oppression overwhelmed with dejection. The images on the left may have been evenly despised, but the manufacturers, agriculturalist, and merchants were not equal in Norfolk's society.\textsuperscript{55}

The Stamp Act repeal did not end tension with royal authorities. In September 1767, Captain Jeremiah Morgan, commander of the British sloop \textit{Hornet}, led thirty men ashore to impress sailors. The commotion alerted the night watchmen who sounded the alarm. Led by Paul Loyall, the citizens of Norfolk confronted the British. Morgan panicked, and ordered his men to fire, and when they refused, Morgan fled to his ship. Lieutenant Hicks who was left in charge managed to settle the situation peacefully.\textsuperscript{56} Norfolk's crowds reacted to direct threats by local British officials rather than imperial legislation. The mobs were led by the magistrates who were united in protecting their shipping against British aggression.

The unity of Norfolk's leaders in combating British aggressions was shattered by the events of June 1768. The tumults between 1768 and 1769 affected the social and political situation in Norfolk even after the war. Several leading Norfolk citizens, most of Scottish descent, concerned

\textsuperscript{55}Virginia Gazette, 6 June 1766.

\textsuperscript{56}Virginia Gazette, Purdie and Dixon, 1 October 1767.
with the number of ships arriving from the West Indies with smallpox, decided to have their families inoculated. To this end Archibald Campbell, a leading merchant and magistrate, set up a house in the Tanner's Creek area about three miles out of town near the site of a previous pesthouse. Once rumors leaked of impending inoculation, opposition rose to both inoculation and the site of the project. After some unrest, the leaders of both parties agreed to meet. Paul Loyall, Samuel Boush, Maximilllian Calvert, George Abyvon, and Drs. Ramsay and Tailor represented those opposed to inoculation. Those who desired their families inoculated included Cornelius Calvert (the brother of Maximillian), Archibald Campbell, James Archdeacon, James Parker, Lewis Hansford and Neil Jamieson. These men met and worked out a compromise solution that called for a different location which was to be named when some justices returned from court in Williamsburg.

Meanwhile, unrest continued in town. After Cornelius Calvert, a leader of the inoculation movement, was elected mayor on the 24th of June, the Scots and their friends decided to proceed as previously planned without waiting for a compromise location. Archibald Campbell and Cornelius Calvert did agree to move those inoculated to the town's pesthouse as soon as it could be prepared, which they estimated would take four days. On the morning of June 27, Lewis Hansford announced he would not have his children moved. That afternoon, a mob, "well supplied with liquor," led by Joseph
Calvert (sergeant of the borough and brother to Maximilllian and Cornelius Calvert) forced the newly inoculated out of Campbell's house and made them walk five miles in a thunderstorm to an unprepared pest house. Margaret Parker, one of the victims, wrote, "we were drove about from place to place and so ill used that we had Scarcely a chance of recovery." At least four county justices of the peace witnessed the mob's activities but took no part. The victims of the mob blamed Paul Loyall for not commanding "the peace and exerted his authority to quell the riot at its beginning." Loyall claimed he had taken no sides. The supporters of the violence asserted that Joseph Calvert was misrepresented and that he was a man "of true spirit."57

The violence carried over into August 1768, when on the 29th, Archibald Campbell's house, the site of the inoculation, was burned to the ground.58 Yet this was not the end.

The next spring, March 1769, Lewis Hansford, victim of the smallpox riots, was sued for business reasons by Christopher Calvert (brother of the other Calverts). Joseph Calvert attempted to serve a writ on Hansford in his home. Hansford claimed he left the room and when he returned Calvert

57Virginia Gazette, Supplement, Rind, 25 August 1768, Rind, 1 September 1768, Purdie and Dixon, 8 September 1768; Mrs Margaret Parker to Charles Steuart, Norfolk, 21 August 1768, Charles Steuart Family Papers, microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library, Williamsburg, Virginia.

had left. Calvert claimed Hansford had eluded custody. Joseph Calvert convinced his brother Cornelius, still mayor of the Borough, to issue an escape warrant for Hansford's arrest. Cornelius Calvert later rescinded the order after hearing Hansford's side of the story. Joseph Calvert proceeded to take Hansford into custody, and on the way to the jail met his brother, Cornelius. Cornelius attempted to free Hansford by force. Joseph Calvert then called for the crowd to assist him. No one answered his call but "John Fife, a shoemaker, the rest being of their party, and intimidated by them." Joseph Calvert claimed his brother threatened him with a pistol to which he answered "if he had not been my brother, I should treat him as he deserved." Joseph, the younger of the two, nonetheless won the struggle that ensued and with the help of Fife took Hansford to jail.\footnote{Virginia Gazette, Rind, 6 April 1769, 20 April 1769.} James Parker later claimed that Joseph Calvert's account as told in the \textit{Virginia Gazette} was fabricated by Anthony Lawson, a borough lawyer, to influence the smallpox cases currently being tried in the General Court.\footnote{James Parker to Charles Steuart, Norfolk, May 1769, Charles Steuart Papers.}

Two months later, violence erupted again. In May 1769 a vessel belonging to Cornelius Calvert arrived from the West Indies with smallpox. Calvert had three Africans who had worked on the infected vessel inoculated by Dr. Dalgleish who
had performed the previous inoculations. When the news spread, Dr. Dalgleish was arrested and a mob attacked Cornelius Calvert's house demanding he drop an indictment he filed against the participants in the previous year's riot. The mob attacked Archibald Campbell's house and broke his windows. The crowd then moved to James Parker's house where the owner, realizing he was next, greeted the mob armed. The mob's spokesman was Henry Singleton, a carpenter who in the previous year Parker had sued for debt. The mob, numbering about thirty, demanded that Parker, "should come down open the doors, give them Liquer, and drop all law suits." Once the crowd realized that Parker had a gun they dispersed. Parker and Campbell had nothing to do with the 1769 inoculations. Parker speculated "the villains wanted only the shadow of a pretence to this Riot," so that they could get him to drop his suits for debt.\(^6\)

Henry Singleton, a carpenter, William Ward, a ship carpenter, John Fife, a shoemaker, and George Cruchet were taken up and indicted by the General Court for being "Rioters, Routers, and Disturbers of the Peace." To James Parker's disgust the men were bound by small securities which the mob leaders paid. Found guilty in October 1770, Singleton was fined 25 pounds while the other three were fined 10 pounds. Charles Steuart wrote to James Parker that the light fines

\(^{6}\)Virginia Gazette, Purdie and Dixon, 9 January 1772; James Parker to Charles Steuart, Norfolk, May 1768, Charles Steuart Papers.
provided "additional proof of the influence of public prejudices."  

The yearlong violence in Norfolk, which began with Cornelius’s election to mayor, created a division that permeated Norfolk’s politics and economics for the rest of the pre-war period. Norfolk’s reputation for factionalism was so great that Nathaniel Tucker wrote to his brother, St. George Tucker, that "feuds run high in Norfolk" and he was glad his brother lived in Williamsburg.  

Even after the Revolution, when most of those involved had died or left the area, the hatred solidified by the smallpox riots created divisions in Norfolk’s politics. In the 1790s, LaRochefoucauld noted the "warmth of animosity" of the city, "as much as the unhealthiness of the climate, retards the increase of Norfolk." After the riots, Cornelius Calvert wrote, "As to the unjust and unnatural Oppression I have received, I hope I shall always have Spirit to treat it with the Contempt it deserves." Cornelius lived up to his promise. For most of his political career Calvert appeared opposite Paul Loyall in controversial issues. In 1804, the year of his death, Cornelius Calvert, with handwriting shaken by age, signed a petition to the General Assembly which rendered some property

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62 Virginia Gazette, Purdie and Dixon, 9 January 1772; Charles Steuart to James Parker, 12 July 1770, Parker Family Papers, microfilm, Old Dominion University.

63 Nathaniel Tucker to St. George Tucker, 28 November 1773, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Swem Library, Special Collections, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.
owned by Paul Loyall useless.\textsuperscript{64}

The smallpox riots intensified economic competition between the Scots and a few American allies such as Cornelius Calvert on one hand and the English and native merchants on the other. Prior to the riots, William Aitchison, Archibald Campbell, John Hunter, James Parker, and Robert Tucker I, operated a large ropewalk in Norfolk. On one occasion during the unrest slaves from this ropery had been armed and given large dogs to disperse a crowd gathered outside Campbell's house. A letter in the \textit{Virginia Gazette} from "friends of the County and Borough of Norfolk" called the slaves "Blackguard Allies." The next year after the riots, Thomas Newton and Paul Loyall, key anti-inoculationists, opened a ropewalk and "furnished themselves with workmen from some of the best rope-walks in England."\textsuperscript{65} James Parker's description was that "the Mob are Setting up a Rope Walk." Thomas Fleming noted in 1773, "here is two Roperies in Norfolk, one carried on by the Scotch party the other by the Buckskin party as they are call'd in the latter of which the English Merchants are almost

\textsuperscript{64}Francois Alexandre Frederic LaRocheFoucauld Liancourt, \textit{Travels through the United States of North America, the country of the Iroquois, and Upper Canada, in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797; with an authentic account of Lower Canada, 2 vols.}, trans. H. Newman (London: R. Phillips, 1799), 2: 12; \textit{Virginia Gazette}, Purdie and Dixon, 9 January 1772; Virginia Legislative Petitions, Norfolk Borough, Virginia State Archives, Richmond, Virginia.

\textsuperscript{65}Loyalist Claims, P.R.O. A.O. 13/27, microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library; \textit{Virginia Gazette}, Purdie and Dixon, 8 September 1768.
The Scottish party retaliated against the new competition. Prior to 1771, Thomas Newton and Paul Loyall operated the only distillery in Norfolk. In that year Jamieson, Campbell, Calvert and Co. opened a new distillery. The competition from the Scottish owned distillery must have been damaging because James Parker wrote about Thomas Newton and Paul Loyall, "Old Tom Newton and his friend Judas seem to be under a cloud, they have been obliged to stop their distillery."  

In this first wave of factional fighting Norfolk's artisans responded as most leaders would have hoped. They participated in the riots against the inoculation and followed the directions of the town magistrates. They were the ones who were brought up on incitement charges; yet they were supported financially and politically by their mentors. The motivation of the participating artisans can only be estimated. Since the men active in the riots were not politically or economically powerful it seems unlikely they were reacting to the growing political and economic power of the Scots. This motivation would make more sense for some of


67Virginia Gazette, Purdie and Dixon, 1771; James Parker to Charles Steuart, Norfolk, April 1771, Charles Steuart Papers.
the magistrates who opposed inoculation but would later have their own families inoculated, implying their protest was not over the principle of inoculation. Instead, it seems more likely that the mechanics who participated in the disturbances were responding to the anti-inoculationists' call to protect the community against the threat of smallpox.

Just as in South Carolina, in May of 1769, when the legislature in Virginia began discussing the Townshend duties and writing resolves against them, it was dissolved. Unlike the South Carolina assemblymen who left the protest of the acts to the public meetings in Charles Town, the Virginia burgesses retired to Raleigh Tavern to design economic sanctions against Great Britain. The nonimportation agreement the former burgesses designed was similar to the nonimportation agreement that the South Carolina meeting adopted. The first resolve was to "promote and encourage Industry and Frugality" and discourage "all Manner of Luxury and Extravagance." The resolves also called for the nonimportation of all taxed goods and provided a long list of enumerated goods which were to be avoided. Also, like South Carolina's agreement, the Virginia burgesses called for no slave imports after 1 November 1769. This agreement was to be entered into voluntarily with no mechanism of enforcement. Therefore it was not very effective and imports actually rose

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in 1769.\textsuperscript{69}

To create a more effective protest, the Virginia assembly called some merchants to the capital in June 1770 to create a new agreement. The document that resulted looked the same in form as the previous one but provided a committee of overseers to enforce the resolves. The agreement for nonimportation was to go into effect 1 September 1770, although goods already on route could be accepted as late as December 25. This agreement was then circulated within the localities for individuals to sign. Some leading Norfolk merchants including Scotsmen Archibald Campbell, Neil Jamieson, and John Gilchrist signed the agreement. In Norfolk 139 people signed the association, including other victims of the smallpox riots, William Aitchison, and Lewis Hansford. Neither James Parker nor Cornelius Calvert signed the association in either Williamsburg or in Norfolk.\textsuperscript{70}

Of the 139 signatures from Norfolk County and Borough, 31 were Norfolk Borough artisans. Although this number represents a higher percentage of artisans than were active in the Norfolk Sons of Liberty artisans did not constitute a significant portion of the signees. However, to an embittered James Parker the number of workmen affixing their names seemed high. He wrote, "there is hardly a tailor or Cobbler in town

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\textsuperscript{69}VanShreevan and Scribner, Revolutionary Virginia, 1: 75-79.
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\textsuperscript{70}Ibid., 1:79-84; Virginia Gazette, Rind, 26 July 1770.
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but what has signed it."71

Even though some artisans signed the agreement what is significant is that they had no input into its formation. Whereas the mechanics in Charles Town controlled the stage during the Stamp Act crisis and influenced the reaction to the Townshend Duties, the artisans in Norfolk were merely players. As for the artisans in Alexandria, they were not directly touched by the British legislation and continued without interruption the deferential politics that characterized colonial Virginia society.

71Ibid.; Parker to Charles Steuart, Norfolk, Charles Steuart Papers, May 1769.
Chapter 3
The Road to the Revolution, 1774-1775

Revolutionary tensions heightened in all three port towns in 1774 and 1775. By January of 1776, the artisans of Charles Town had made inroads into the provincial government which prior to hostilities would have been impossible. The mechanics of Alexandria had developed enough cohesion to form a militia unit and the workmen of Norfolk, watching their town burn at the hands of patriot troops in January 1776, could only hope that political, economic, and social opportunities would come again to their city.

In December of 1769, the South Carolina Commons House of Assembly agreed to send 1,500 pounds sterling to the Society of the Gentlemen Supporters of the Bill of Rights, a support group for John Wilkes, a London political radical. It was customary but not constitutional for the Commons House to borrow money from the treasury without consulting the council or the governor. The House would simply replace the money with the next tax bill. However, in this case, royal officials were incensed that the Commons was aiding their leading critic. The Privy Council ordered Lt. Governor Bull

to approve only tax bills which allocated money for specific local services. The instructions to Bull also insisted that a clause be attached to all money bills warning the treasurer of permanent exclusion from office and steep fines if he advanced any money without permission of the council or Governor. The Commons, insisting they had the right to spend money without approval, continued until the Revolution to add the 1,500 pounds to tax bills, guaranteeing rejection.

Governor Montagu attempted to force the Commons House of Assembly to accept the royal stance. Montagu dissolved the assembly four times in fifteen months, each time to see the same faces and the same resolve reappear at the next meeting. The governor even tried to hold a meeting in Beaufort to escape the rebellious spirit in Charles Town. The governor arrived in Beaufort three days after the date he had set and immediately sent the assembly back to Charles Town. The House called the Beaufort fiasco, "a most unprecedented Oppression, and an Unwarrantable Abuse of a Royal Prerogative."\(^2\) Because of this deadlock over rights of taxation, no tax bill passed in South Carolina after 1769 and no legislation after 1771. In October 1774, after five years of legislative gridlock, the South Carolina Gazette noted, "we still continue in the Situation we have been for some years past . . . with little more than nominal Legislative Representation."\(^3\)

\(^2\)Ibid., 32-39.

\(^3\)Ibid., 52; South Carolina Gazette, 24 October 1774.
If effectiveness is the measure, royal government had ended in Charles Town four years before the other colonies. After 1773, the people in Charles Town tired of the debate and began to look about for alternative instruments to resist infringements on their liberty. In May 1773, Parliament passed an act giving the East India Company the right to import tea directly to America. Americans interpreted the Tea Act as forcing them to accept both a monopolistic price and the tax on tea.

On 1 December 1773 the ship London arrived in Charles Town with 257 chests of tea. Two days later a general meeting of all inhabitants gathered and demanded that merchants sign an agreement not to import any tea susceptible to unconstitutional duties. Also, the local agents of the East India Company were persuaded not to land the tea. The assembly picked a committee consisting of Christopher Gadsden, Charles Pinckney, Thomas Ferguson, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, and Daniel Cannon to solicit signatures from merchants. Daniel Cannon, a wealthy carpenter, was the only artisan included.

As in the case of the protest against the Townshend Duties, after this initial meeting on the Tea Act, the merchants, planters, and mechanics of Charles Town met separately to plan resolves which would support their economic interests. A second general meeting, held on the 17 December

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4 South Carolina Gazette, 8 December 1773.
1773, decided that the tea should not be landed. Despite the feelings of the public, however, on 22 December 1773, under the cover of darkness, the governor moved the tea from the ship to the Exchange.5

Public meetings were held two more times. The first on 20 January 1774 created a self-perpetuating standing committee with authority to call future public meetings. A second meeting on 16 March 1774 resolved that no more tea should be landed, and that the tea already in the Exchange should stay there. The signers of the resolve also promised not to conduct business with anyone who imported tea.6

Charles Town’s reaction to the Tea Act followed the same lines as its protest of the Townshend Duties. Resisters initiated a nonimportation agreement with provisions to isolate violators. Meetings of merchants, planters, and mechanics attempted to rally their occupational fields individually. Also, the protest to the Tea Act followed the pattern set in the Townshend Duty debates; the mechanics were represented in the committee structure, but were no longer the main players.

In the spring of 1774, the mechanics again organized to


influence provincial elections. A letter from a craftsman to the South Carolina Gazette supported Thomas Lynch over David Deas in a byelection for the Assembly from St. Michaels Parish. Although neither of the men were mechanics, the letter stated Lynch was more knowledgeable and was a Carolinian. Deas on the other hand was a Scot. The writer argued that strained relationships between the council and the lower house made it important that the best person possible be selected for the Assembly. According to the craftsman, the council had "assumed to themselves, the Right of imprisoning your Fellow-Subjects whenever they shall fancy it proper-They have claimed like-wise, a Right to direct us in the framing of Money-Bills; and have so successfully opposed the passing of any Tax-Bill." Besides the reference to the Wilkes affair, the author was also commenting on the arrest of Thomas Powell, whom the authorities imprisoned after he printed council minutes at the request of William Henry Drayton. Although the intervention of the Commons House of Assembly freed Powell the incident further eroded relationships between the two houses. Deas defeated Thomas Lynch. The craftsmen of Charles Town still did not even have the power to select which merchant or planter they wanted to lead them.\(^7\)

In early June 1774, South Carolina received news of the Boston Port Bill. As with the other acts of imperial

\(^7\) *South Carolina Gazette*, 2 September 1773, 4 April 1774, 11 April 1774.
aggression, the people of South Carolina called a public meeting on 6 July 1774. Although representatives were solicited from the entire province, a last minute decision to allow all present to vote still guaranteed that the opinion of the people of Charles Town would weigh more heavily in the meeting.\textsuperscript{8}

Fifteen hundred people attended the July 1774 meeting which became a turning point in South Carolina’s road to revolution.\textsuperscript{9} The crowd passed resolves reiterating allegiance to the crown, and a right to representation and trial by jury of peers. The meeting also organized the raising of a fund to help the distressed people of Boston.

The debate in the meeting centered on who would be the representatives to the Congress in Philadelphia and what their instructions would be. The merchants of Charles Town prepared a list of acceptable representatives and encouraged their clerks to join them at the meeting in an attempt to control the voting, but the assembly picked only two of the merchants’ five choices, Henry Middleton and John Rutledge. The more radical Thomas Lynch, Christopher Gadsden and Edward Rutledge were also sent to Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{10} Lynch and Gadsden were the

\textsuperscript{8}Poythress, "Extralegal Committees," 43-44.

\textsuperscript{9}Josiah Smith to George Austin, Charles Town, 22 July 1774, "Josiah Smith Lettercopy Book," Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

\textsuperscript{10}John Drayton, \textit{Memoirs of the American Revolution, from its Commencement to the Year 1776, Inclusive; As Relating to the State of South-Carolina; and Occasionally referring the
favorites of the artisans who by sheer numbers carried as much weight in the meeting as the merchants.

The mechanics in Charles Town wanted the Continental Congress to adopt the strategy of nonimportation which had helped defeat the Townshend Acts. But when the mechanics could not agree on instructions to the legislature the delegates were left to their own devices.

The July meeting also created a new general committee. Just as the organizers of the General Meeting had attempted to achieve full representation of the entire province, the membership of the permanent committee became more representative of the population of South Carolina as a whole. The General Committee comprised of fifteen mechanics, and fifteen merchants who represented Charles Town and sixty-nine planters. The July meeting thus institutionalized Charles Town’s revolutionary movement. It was the last major public meeting in which everyone had the vote, and it created a permanent ruling institution. With the Commons House of Assembly silenced by the Wilkes Fund controversy, the only active provincial government in South Carolina was the General Meetings and General Committee.

The General Committee was the de facto executive branch of the provincial government. Its members concerned


South Carolina Gazette, 12 July 1774.
themselves with enforcing the resolves against tea, limiting the exportation of arms and munitions, and encouraging merchants not to raise prices.¹²

Artisans, however, no longer controlled the protest against the British as they did in the Stamp Act Crises. Only 15 percent of the positions on the General Committee went to them.¹³ Yet they now had a permanent voice in the provincial government, an arena previously closed to them.

Institutionalizing the out of door meetings did not end mob activity in Charles Town. A Captain Maitland arrived in Charles Town carrying a few barrels of tea. The committee confronted the captain who in turn promised to personally destroy the tea. Instead, he landed the tea, and when word leaked out a crowd of hundreds gathered at Maitland’s ship threatening to tar and feather him. Maitland, expecting trouble, escaped the protection of a British Man of War.¹⁴

In November of 1774, on Pope’s Day, the effigies of Lord North, Governor Hutchinson, the Pope and the Devil were rolled through the streets and burned.¹⁵ Also, in November the


¹³The 1774 committee included carpenters, Daniel Cannon, Joseph Verree, John Fullerton, Timothy Crosby, James Brown, two blacksmiths, William Trusler and William Johnson along with Theodore Trezvant, a tailor, Bernard Beekman, a blockmaker, Peter Timothy, a printer, Anthony Toomer, a bricklayer, John Bervick, a shoemaker, Joshua Lockwood, a watchmaker, and Edward Weyman, an upholster.

¹⁴Drayton, Memoirs, 1: 132-5.

¹⁵South Carolina Gazette, 21 November 1774.
General Committee called another General Meeting in January 1775 to discuss the resolves of the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. This time elected delegates voted in the General Meeting rather than open participation. Each parish sent up to six delegates and Charles Town sent thirty divided between merchants and mechanics. Free white males who paid at least twenty shillings in taxes were eligible to vote, a requirement that allowed most land holders to participate.\textsuperscript{16}

The January 1775 meeting became known as the First Provincial Congress. Many assemblymen belonged to this body, and it adopted the procedures of the Common House of Assembly. Now, however, mechanics made up one-third of Charles Town’s representation. Eleven mechanics, all but one of whom had served on the 1774 committee, joined the merchants and planters in running South Carolina’s legislature.

After much debate over the exemption of rice from the list of nonexportable goods, the First Provincial Congress endorsed the Continental Congress’ Association. To compensate non-rice planters injured by the nonexportation, Congress created a complicated system for the distribution of the income from the sales of rice. The Provincial Congress also recommended that inhabitants learn how to use arms and that militia be drilled more regularly. This meeting created local

\textsuperscript{16}South Carolina Gazette, 14 November 1774; South Carolina Gazette and County Journal, 15 November 1774; Walter J. Fraser, Jr., Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 139.
committees of observation in each parish and issued a moratorium on debt cases before the Court of Common Pleas. Instead, the local committees of observation handled suits for debt. A new General Committee replacing the one formed in July consisted of Charles Town’s committee of observation and any members of the Provincial Congress who happened to be in town. After January 1775, the General Committee was the de facto executive of the colony, the Provincial Congress the legislative, and the local committees the judicial.17

The artisans of Charles Town exercised their greatest power in the General Committee. Yet, with the large numbers of planters who lived close to the city and the influence of the merchants serving from Charles Town it is unlikely that the mechanics were able to control the committee.18

The General Committee oversaw the association, which in the spring of 1775 Charles Town complied with fairly well. A key test of the Association came when a resident of Charles Town, Robert Smythe, returned from a long stay in England with his household furniture and two horses. The General Committee considered Smythe’s request to land his possessions. The chairman’s casting vote granted Smythe’s request. The mechanics, reacted angrily when they learned that the association would be violated. A crowd gathered at the


18Poythress, "Extralegal Committees," 165.
waterfront and threatened to kill the horses if they landed. Over 256 people signed a petition asking the General Committee to reconsider. Some members of the General Committee objected to the public questioning their judgment. Acting governor Bull noted that "ill blood was occasioned by the peremptory and sharp opposition made by the mechanics on one hand and by opprobrious terms of contempt towards them on the other."19 Another meeting of the General Committee reversed the previous decision by one vote.20

For the first time the artisans fury was directed toward those who led the revolutionary movement. The artisans had gained in the previous ten years a greater sense of their political ability and had learned to use public protests against what they perceived to be unjust political decisions. William Bull commented that "The Men of Property begin at length to see that the many headed power of the People, who have hitherto been obediently made use of by their numbers . . . have discovered their own strength and importance, and are not now so easily governed by their former Leaders."21 Although the mechanics now had a voice in the provincial

19Ibid.


21Bull to Dartmouth, Charles Town, 8 March 1774, Documents of American Revolution, IX: 89.
government, they never forgot that their exercise of political power was strongest in collective action taken outdoors.

After news of the fighting at Lexington and Concord reached Charles Town in the spring of 1775, the General Committee created a Secret Committee to control future public outside activities. An area that the mechanics once controlled became the domain of merchants and planters. The Secret Committee consisted of William Henry Drayton, Arthur Middleton, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, William Gibbs, and Edward Weyman. Only Weyman was an artisan.

The Secret Committee directed a raid on the royal powder magazines and the armory in April of 1775. The Secret Committee also organized a parade with effigies of the Pope, the devil, Lord Grenville and Lord North. After the parade, the effigies were placed on a frame in the center of town where the person working the controls could make the pope or devil bow as royal officials walked by. The next night the contraption was again paraded through town and was eventually burned. The person who operated the machine was Edward Weyman, the only mechanic on the Secret Committee. Drayton, Memoirs 1: 222-8. The image of the committee member Weyman crouched behind the controls symbolizes the artisans' place in revolutionary Charles Town - one foot in the established structure and one in the crowd.

Two other committees the General Committee created had no

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22 Drayton, Memoirs 1: 222-8.
artisan members. A Committee of Intelligence was in charge of receiving and transmitting information to the General Committee. Its members were William Henry Drayton, Reverend William Tennent, James Parsons, Arthur Middleton, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, J. L. Gervais, and Roger Smith, none of whom were artisans. Another body, the Special Committee, had vaguely defined powers, but was to do whatever was necessary for public security.²⁴ That the three sub-committees, the Secret Committee, the Intelligence Committee and the Special Committee, had only one artisan among their members indicates how far the mechanics' influence on the General Committee had slipped.

By May of 1775 tension had risen to the point that the General Committee found it necessary to call a second Provincial Congress on June 1, 1775. The June meeting went further to put the colony on a war footing. The Provincial Congress organized both militia and regular troops. It ordered the printing of paper currency, and prohibited the exportation of corn or rice.²⁵ It also appointed a Council of Safety and commissioners of the Treasury. The Congress approved an association which the General Committee had recommended calling for the signers to unite and promise that "whenever our Continental or Provincial Councils, shall decree it necessary, we will go forth, and be ready to sacrifice our

²⁴Drayton, Memoire, 1: 231.
lives and fortunes to secure her freedom and safety." Within a few days only thirty people had refused to sign.26

Those who did not sign were threatened. The Secret Committee acting under intelligence that two men, Laughlin Martin and James Dealy, had refused to sign the association and had publicly criticized the General Committee ordered them tarred and feathered.27

The Secret Committee ordered the tarring and feathering, but it was a crowd which carried out the deed. Similarly, although the General Committee was in charge of enforcing the June 1775 Association, it was the artisans who actually distributed the paper for people to sign. Doctor George Milligen-Johnston was one of the thirty who refused. In order to convince him John Fullerton, a house carpenter, and William Johnson, a blacksmith, visited him and when he continued to refuse, two more politically powerful artisans Daniel Cannon and Edward Weyman met with him.28 Finally Milligen-Johnston was visited by a previous victim of the mob. Milligen-Johnston wrote, "the Mob offended at something the Gunner of Fort Johnson had said, seized his person, stripped, tarred and

26Henry Laurens to John Laurens, Charles Town, 8 June 1775, Papers of Henry Laurens (December 1774-January 1776), ed. David R. Chesnutt (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1976), 10: 171; Drayton, Memoirs, 286.
27Ibid., 1: 273.
feathered him and then putting him in a Cart paraded through the Town with him till 7 o'clock using him very cruelly all the time." Milligen-Johnston described the crowd, a majority of whom were newly recruited soldiers at the barracks as "three or four hundred snakes, hissing, threatening, and abusing me."29

After the June 1775 meeting it was the Council of Safety which carried the political power in Charles Town rather than the General Committee although the General Committee and its three sub committees continued to exist. The Council of thirteen handled all military affairs and functioned as the colony's executive.30 Its members were the most powerful men in South Carolina's politics, and none was an artisan. At its first meeting, however, it appointed Peter Timothy printer and secretary. The job of running the government was time-consuming. Henry Laurens wrote that the council met "seven days in the Week without fee or gratuity, but they find in their proper department more than they can discharge to their own satisfaction."31 The only body on which the artisans had a voice was the General Meeting, which the Council of Safety overshadowed. By August 1775 Peter Timothy wrote, "Business has gone on very slowly in the General Committee. The Council

29Ibid., xx.

30Drayton, Memoirs, 1: 255.

seem to have a right to take up all." As in the case of the other committees, even though artisans did not participate, they often were the agents of the council. For example, Joseph Verree was in charge of moving powder from Savannah to Charles Town.

In November 1775 and again in February 1776, the Second Provincial Congress met. This time ten of Charles Town's thirty representatives were mechanics two fewer than in the First Congress. As in other elections since 1768, occupational groups of Charles Town met beforehand to nominate their slates. The merchants meeting first caused the Germans to take alarm and hold their own caucus. In reference to the German gathering, Peter Timothy reported the mechanics were "not thoroughly pleased; they also will have a meeting this week." German unity limited mechanic cohesion. The closeness of the German people was nurtured by the creation of the German Friendly Society in 1766. German artisans dominated the society, consistently holding an average of five of the seven offices since the number of German merchants in Charles Town was low. Between 1766 and 1776, 35 percent of


"Journal of the Council of Safety for the Province of South Carolina, 1775," South Carolina Historical Collections II: 22-64.

Mr. Timothy to Mr. Drayton, Charles Town, 22 August 1775, in Documentary History of American Revolution, 155.
the German Friendly Society's members were artisans.\textsuperscript{35}

Military business and defense preparations dominated the November 1775 session. The Provincial Congress also ordered the printing of 120,000 pounds currency to pay the troops. This congress selected a new Council of Safety, reappointing most of the members of the former council. No mechanics were added. Artisans were also conspicuously absent from the most powerful committees of the November congress, and none served on the committee "to consider and report, what manufactures are proper to be encouraged and established in this Colony."\textsuperscript{36} Artisans were the workers of the new government in South Carolina, but they were losing the power that they had possessed during the Stamp Act Crises.

The February meeting of the second Provincial Congress followed the same form as the November meeting. Military business dominated the session. Mechanics played the same function as they had in the November session. They were appointed to committees to prepare of a member's funeral, to enquire into salt supplies, and to obstruct Charles Town's harbor. But they were absent from more important committees, particularly the one elected to write a constitution for South

\textsuperscript{35} George I. Gongeware, History of the German Friendly Society of Charleston, South Carolina, 1766-1916 (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1935), 189-90.

\textsuperscript{36} "Extracts from Journal of Provincial Congress of South Carolina, 1 November - 29 November 1775" (Charles Town: 1776), microfilm, College of William and Mary.
Carolina.\textsuperscript{37} The mechanic's representative was their spokesman Christopher Gadsden.\textsuperscript{38} On 26 March 1776, after some minor changes, the Provincial Congress adopted South Carolina's first constitution.

In the years leading to the Revolution, mechanics many of whom were inexperienced in political activity participated in provincial government to an extent previously unknown. Of the twenty-two artisans who served on the nonimportation committees in 1769 and 1774 or who served in either of the two Provincial Congresses, only nine, fewer than half, had served in the municipal government in Charles Town between 1764 and 1775.\textsuperscript{39} Those mechanics who served on the General Committee performed judicial functions, a role the mechanics had never performed before.

It was probably to the mechanics that Henry Laurens referred when he objected to local committees hearing debt

\textsuperscript{37}"Extracts from the Journal of the Provincial Congress of South Carolina, 1 February 1776" (Charles Town: 1776), microfilm, College of William and Mary.

\textsuperscript{38}Drayton, Memoirs 2: 174.

\textsuperscript{39}They were: Daniel Cannon, warden and vestryman for St. Philip's, Cato Ash, commissioner of the market in 1769; Joseph Verree, market commissioner in 1771; John Matthews, market commissioner in 1768; Theodore Trezvant, market commissioner in 1769; Bernard Beekman, market commissioner in 1770; William Johnson, market commissioner for 1774 and 1775; Timothy Crosby, market commissioner for 1774 and 1775; and Mark Morris, market commissioner for 1768. \textit{South Carolina Gazette}, 8 October 1764, 13 April 1765, 27 April 1767, 4 April 1768, 30 March 1769, 24 April 1770, 4 April 1771, 23 April 1772, 12 April 1773, 11 April 1774, 21 April 1775; \textit{South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal}, 8 April 1766.
cases because to do so meant "that certain persons who are themselves great Debtors & Some who have no visible Estates have the Reins committed to them" to decide on the debts of others. Laurens' must have passed on his dislike of the lower sort playing such a large role in government to his son who wrote, "it gives me great Concern to hear that some of our lowest Mechanics still bear great Part in our Public Transactions-Men who are as contemptible for their Ignorance, as they may be pernicious by their obstinacy." 

Despite some people's doubts, many other accepted the fact that the mechanics had attained some political power. The Reverend Bullman of Saint Michaels had declared in a sermon after the last meeting of inhabitants in 1774 that, "every illiterate Clown and low bred Mechanic shall take upon him to censure & condemn the conduct of his Prince or Governor, & perversely & wantonly contribute as much as in him lyes to create & promote distrust, jealousies & misunderstandings, which . . . ripen at length into Schemes in the Church & Sedition & Rebellion in the State." Bullman's advice was to "keep in his own rank & do his Duty in his own station without pretending to be judges of affairs, beyond the reach of his understanding." A meeting of parishioners the next day discussed Bullman's sermon and decided to relieve him

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40 Henry Laurens to John Laurens, Charles Town, 18 January 1775, Laurens Papers 10: 30.

41 John Laurens to Henry Laurens, London, 18 February 1775, Laurens Papers 10: 75-76.
of his duties.\textsuperscript{42}

Artisan participation in local political matters was limited in the years between the Seven Years’ War and the Revolution. Each Easter Monday the members of St. Philip’s and St. Michael’s parish elected either six or seven vestrymen charged with choosing the minister and maintaining the church buildings. Each parish also selected two wardens whose duties included looking after the poor and conducting the elections for the Commons House of Assembly.\textsuperscript{43} Two mechanics, George Sheed, a ship carpenter and Daniel Cannon, a carpenter served on the St. Philip’s vestry between 1763 and 1776. Cannon served continuously as either a vestryman or warden from 1765-1780. Sheed was elected warden in 1766 and 1767, and vestryman from 1768-1770.

Despite the gains Charles Town artisans made in politics and their increased political awareness in the years leading up to the Revolution, they neither challenged the traditional ruling powers nor did they attain cohesion among themselves. One limitation on the artisans’ influence was this tendency to defer to power even when in elected office.

The artisans’ deference is obvious in the leadership of

\textsuperscript{42}John Pringle to William Tilghman, Charles Town, 15 September 1774, Preston Davie Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

\textsuperscript{43}David Morton Knepper, "Political Structure of Colonial South Carolina, 1743-1776" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1971), 64-68, 205-206.
Charles Town's social organizations. The South Carolina Society which benefited widows and orphans was originally a Huguenot artisan organization founded in 1737. By 1763, it had evolved into the principal social organization in Charles Town. By then control had long left the hands of artisans.44 During most of the period under study only one of the officers at most can be classified as an artisan.45

A similar pattern is even more clear in the history of the Fellowship Society. Founded by artisans in 1762, the purpose of the society was to establish a hospital for the poor. Of the thirty-three members in 1762, twenty-one can be identified as artisans.46 The merchants of Charles Town admired the society's goal. Henry Laurens asked a friend in England to lobby for royal assent to the society's request for incorporation because he believed they had a "Noble Plan for building an Infirmary and if they are enabled to carry their design into Execution it will probably become of great and general Utility."47 Non-artisans began to join the organization; of the twenty-seven new members in 1774 only five were artisans, and in 1775 only three of twenty-eight. In

44Glen and Milligen-Johnston, Colonial South Carolina, 37.

45South Carolina Gazette, 8 October 1764, 13 April 1765, 27 April 1767, 11 April 1768, 24 April 1770, 4 April 1771, 23 April 1772, 29 April 1773, 11 April 1774, 28 April 1775.

46Papers of the Fellowship Society, microfilm, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

47Henry Laurens to Ross & Mill, Charles Town, 28 September 1769, Laurens Papers 7: 152.

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1774 and 1775 only one of the officers of the organization that the artisans had founded ten years earlier was a mechanic.\textsuperscript{48} When artisans mixed with other occupations they almost immediately deferred to those in the traditional governing classes.

The artisans in Charles Town made some gains in their political status and their sense of common interest on the road to the Revolution. Although artisans dominated anti-British activities in Charles Town during the Stamp Act Crisis, they still needed a spokesman from the merchant class, Christopher Gadsden. The mechanics were forced to share more control over the protests to the Townshend Duties in 1769 with planters and merchants. Nonetheless the artisans of Charles Town still accounted for one-third of the town's representatives to the First Provincial Assembly in 1775. Considering the dominance of a harmonious planter class in South Carolina's politics, this level of representation was an amazing accomplishment.

However, the Revolution did not represent a contest over who should rule at home because the mechanics continually deferred. Nor did the class consciousness of Charles Town's mechanics reach the level of those in Philadelphia in 1776. During the Revolutionary era mechanics took at most halting steps toward political power and cohesion, but did not

\textsuperscript{48}Papers of the Fellowship Society; South Carolina Gazette, 4 April 1774, 13 March 1775.
completely attain them.

In Norfolk and Alexandria, the artisans made few political gains in the Revolutionary movement which the merchants and planters of those two cities dominated. Virginians reacted to the Tea Act and subsequent closing of the port of Boston with nonimportation. In May 1774 Dunmore, the Governor of Virginia, dismissed the assembly for declaring a day of fast and prayer in support of the residents of Boston. As had happened during the protest against the Townshend Duties, the delegates again moved down the street to the Raleigh Tavern, formed a colony-wide nonimportation agreement and called for a Continental Congress. On the local level in the summer of 1774 Norfolk and Portsmouth and Fairfax County among several other regions, created Committees of Correspondence.49

Norfolk and Portsmouth merchants including a few Scots dominated the committee. Its members included no artisans.50 James Parker explained the presence of the Scottish merchants with the remark, "some were put down without being consulted, some consented through fear, and others to temporize."51


50 Virginia Gazette and Norfolk Intelligencer, 15 June 1774.

51 James Parker to Charles Steuart, Norfolk, 7 June 1774; James Parker to Charles Steuart, Norfolk, 16 July 1774, Charles Steuart Family Papers, microfilm, Colonial
symptom of the Scots' reluctant participation occurred during the next months meeting of the committee of correspondence when only one of the people Parker mentioned as involuntary members attended. The power in the committee rested with the American born merchants such as Matthew Phripp, Paul Loyall, and Thomas Newton. A general meeting of the inhabitants of Norfolk borough and county in July to inform the Burgesses of their sentiments resolved that the Boston Port Bill was the "most violent and dangerous Infractions of the solemn chartered Rights of these Colonies, utterly destructive of Trials by the Vicinage, and a very melancholy Proof of the despotick Spirit of the Times."52 The citizens instructed their Norfolk delegates to procure a general association against all imports and exports and to recommend a convention to be held with the other colonies to adopt the same association for all.53

On 18 July 1774, at a similar meeting in Alexandria, inhabitants of Fairfax County approved a lengthy set of resolutions that George Washington and George Mason had drawn up. The document, probably the most elaborate of those drafted by a local committee, denied Parliament's right to tax the colonists without representation and protested violations of civil rights including trials without juries and the late

52Virginia Gazette and Norfolk Intelligencer, 7 July 1774.
53Virginia Gazette, Purdie and Dixon, 14 July 1774.
acts Parliament directed at Boston. The Fairfax Resolves called for the laying aside of luxury and extravagance in favor of "temperance, fortitude, frugality and Industry." Like the Norfolk document, the Fairfax resolves also included a request for nonimportation of goods from Great Britain, especially tea, a stop to slave imports, and after a substantial delay, nonexportation. The Fairfax meeting selected a county committee of correspondence that included no artisans among its twenty-five members.\textsuperscript{54} Planters two of whom, Washington and Mason, became continental leaders, dominated Alexandria’s road to the Revolution.

The Virginia delegates who met in Williamsburg on 1 August 1774 adopted a association adopted similar to those of the spring. The signers resolved not to import any goods from Britain or of British manufacture after 1 November 1774. Slave importations would also be prohibited after that date. A boycott of tea took place immediately. The resolves also asked merchants not to raise their prices from the level of the past year. The convention went beyond previous associations by resolving that, if colonial grievances were not resolved before 10 August 1775, a ban on the exportation of goods to Great Britain would go into effect.\textsuperscript{55}


\textsuperscript{55}\textit{Virginia Gazette}, Purdie and Dixon, 11 August 1774.
Initially the people generally abided by the association of Norfolk. In August, acting on intelligence from two committees in Maryland, inhabitants had a public meeting to discuss what to do about nine chests of tea imported on the brig *Mary and Jane*. The tea, consigned to Neil Jamieson, George and John Bowness, and John Lawrence & Co., was sent back to Britain.\(^5\)\(^6\)

Meetings open to all inhabitants were an aberration from the traditional method of conducting politics in Norfolk. Just as artisans gained political experience from meetings in Charles Town from the time of the Stamp Act crisis, the artisans of Norfolk in the summer of 1774 had the opportunity to watch their politicians operate and for the first time have input in the decision.

Not everyone approved of the public meetings. James Parker said of the May meeting that "such incoherent stupid stuff never I believe was before uttered." A letter to the editor of a Norfolk newspaper signed "Sly Boots" called the public gathering, "a friendly harmless club." The author considered men who made "a greater stir in life than is consistent with their profession" to be "no where formidable but in their own conceit" and declared that they "would never deserve a moment's attention, if they were not necessary to fill up a superficial crevice at public meetings." "Sly

\(^{56}\)Virginia Gazette, Purdie & Dixon, 25 August 1774.
Boots" called the latest meeting "folly in the extreme."57

Earlier in 1774 William Aitichison, Cornelius Calvert, Archibald Campbell, Lewis Hansford and James Taylor, most of whom were smallpox riot victims, refused to attend the Hustings Court although Joseph Calvert remained the court's sergeant. Unsuccessful in their attempt to remove Calvert, Lewis Hansford and the inhabitants of the borough unsuccessfully petitioned the council and the governor to allow the election of common councilmen.58 The failed petition has not survived, making it difficult to determine how many artisans supported the measure. Yet, this combination of smallpox riot victims and citizens whose only political activity was asking publicly for municipal elections reappeared in the postwar period.

While Norfolk's out of doors politics seemed patriotic, Norfolk's newspaper reflected the loyalist sentiment that gave the city its reputation. In the Virginia Gazette and Norfolk Intelligencer during the summer of 1774, the issue of how to protest the Boston Port Bill came up. Many letters from readers objected to the use of nonimportation as a tool. "Columbus" wrote that those who desired nonimportation had

57James Parker to Charles Steuart, Norfolk, 7 June 1774, Steuart Papers; Virginia Gazette and Norfolk Intelligencer, 7 July 1774.

more "Patriotism than Prudence" because commerce was the only source of wealth for the colonies. "Candidus" suggested that instead of nonimportation, the colonists should pay their debts and "convince Mankind on the other side of the Atlantic, that we are not solely governed by Self-Interested Principles." 59

William Skinner, a Norfolk watchmaker writing under the title "An American," urged unity in Norfolk. "You must All unite to guard your rights or you will All be slaves!" he declared. Skinner reflected more sympathy for the out of door activism in Norfolk and for nonimportation than most of the letters. He wrote, "We must instantly break off all commerce with that country which is now forging chains for us-banish all luxery, and return to the frugality of our venerable forefathers." 60

Despite a few patriotic letters the Norfolk newspaper continued to support the loyalist viewpoint. In November 1774, forty subscribers from Alexandria publicly announced in the Virginia Gazette of Williamsburg that they were cancelling their subscriptions to the Norfolk paper because it was "calculated to divide and weaken the friends of American

59 Virginia Gazette and Norfolk Intelligencer, 9 June 1774, 15 June 1774.

60 James Parker to Charles Steuart, Norfolk, 16 July 1774, Stuart Papers; Virginia Gazette and Norfolk Intelligencer, 23 June 1774.
Freedom" and had become "highly obnoxious to us." By December, James Parker wrote of the Norfolk paper "they are now all on our side, they have scared the printer so that he will only write what is agreeable to them." Norfolk entered 1775 a divided city. Popular sentiment supported the patriotic cause, while a large section of the more literate population remained loyalist.

Alexandria left the enforcement of the association to the Fairfax County committee, but out of door activities reinforced the committee's message. Nicholas Cresswell claimed "Committees are appointed to inspect into the Characters and Conduct of every tradesman, to prevent them selling Tea or buying British Manufactures. Some of them have been tarred and feathered, others had their property burnt and destroyed by the populace." In both November of 1774 and 1775 crowds had carried effigies including the Pope, Lord North, and the Devil through the town. Although merchants and planters completely dominated the revolutionary movement in Alexandria, the mechanics were beginning to identify themselves as a separate group. In March 1775 Cresswell recorded that the Mechanical Independent Company in a red and blue uniform were

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61 *Virginia Gazette*, Purdie and Dixon, 10 November 1774.
62 James Parker to Charles Steuart, Norfolk, 6 December 1774, Charles Steuart Papers.
63 *Journal of Nicholas Cresswell* (New York: Dial Press, 1924), 43-44.
By November 1774 Norfolk selected a new borough committee, and it had the same characteristics as the old committee. Dominated by merchants including some Scots, the committee included no artisans. In 1774, the association the Continental Congress adopted in October was the same as Virginia’s except that it delayed the date for nonimportation to 1 December 1774 and non-exportation to 10 September 1775. These resolves were to be enforced by local borough committees.

In the early months of 1775 the Norfolk committee was actively enforcing the continental association. In February the committee summoned Alexander Gordon before it for illegally importing medicine. In March John Brown appeared for importing slaves, and in April the committee publicly cited Capt Simpson of the snow Elizabeth for importing salt. James Parker wrote that "Every thing is Managed by Committee, Selling and pricing goods, inspecting boats, forcing Some to sign scandalous Concessions." However, the Norfolk committee, dominated by merchants, did allow exceptions to the continental resolves. In January they allowed a Captain Esten to use lumber as ballast on his return voyage, a concession

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64Ibid., 46, 58-59, 128.

65James Parker to Charles Steuart, Norfolk, 27 November 1774, Charles Steuart Papers.

that the artisans in Charles Town certainly would not have tolerated. Even James Parker admitted, the Norfolk Borough Committee was "the most moderate of any I have heard of." When the Virginia Convention moved the starting date for nonexportation from 10 September 1775 to 5 August, the Norfolk Borough Committee protested on behalf of the merchants who had already contracted for goods and "have chartered vessels in foreign parts and regulated, without any expectation, or reason to expect any such provincial restriction."68

In May 1775, the inhabitants of Norfolk met as a group to discuss the actions of Captain Collins who had seized a sloop on the Eastern shore and wanted to dispose of it and purchase a pilot boat. The inhabitants agreed, "to give no encouragement to him, or any such men, nor purchase any of their prizes from them, not in the least contribute to their emolument by bidding for the plunder of our country."69

Tensions increased in late April when news of fighting in Lexington and Concord reached Virginia. In June 1775 Dunmore fled Williamsburg and sought shelter on British ships. On 17 July, the H.M.S. Otter with the governor aboard dropped anchor

67James Parker to Charles Steuart, Norfolk, 27 January 1775, 11 February 1775, Charles Steuart Papers; Virginia Gazette, Dixon and Hunter, 14 January 1775.

68VanSchreivan and Scribner, Revolutionary Virginia 3: 364.

in Norfolk's waters.\textsuperscript{70}

With the arrival of Dunmore the citizens of Norfolk and the Norfolk Borough Committee had more than nonimportation and nonexportation to concern them. They had to deal with Virginia's last vestige of royal power docking on their shore. The Norfolk borough committee met in August to discuss the behavior of John Schaw, a Scottish merchant, who pointed out a local resident in the presence of Lord Dunmore as a fifer for a voluntary company. Alexander Main, the accused, was seized and taken aboard one of Dunmore's ships. The committee declared Schaw an enemy to American liberty. A mob gathered in Norfolk. The group, more patriotic than the merchant-run committee, reacted violently to Schaw's actions.

On Friday evening a number of residents collected Schaw and paraded him through town while the accused fifer, who had been released, played "Yankee Doodle Dandy." Just as Schaw was to be tarred and feathered, he managed to escape to the house of an alderman. Cooler heads tried to persuade the people to disperse, but they were not successful until three gentlemen offered security to present him again in front of the committee.\textsuperscript{71} The committee had little control over the populace. When Andrew Sprowle was asked to appear before the Norfolk County committee, which also met in the Borough,\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{70}Selby, Revolution in Virginia, 21, 43; VanSchreeven and Scribner, Revolutionary Virginia 3: 225.

\textsuperscript{71}Virginia Gazette and Norfolk Intelligencer, 16 August 1775.
Sprowle feared the actions of the mob more than the county committee. Sprowle wrote "from their behavior to John Schaw as they say it would appear the Committee has no government of the Mob."{72}

The patriotic masses of Norfolk, where the artisan population was active, harassed a Scottish merchant, but they did not attempt to hinder the King’s troops. On 30 September 1775 fifteen of Dunmore’s troops marched to the newspaper office and seized the printing press and two journeymen printers. The newspapers’ printer, John Hunter Holt, managed to escape. Alarms sounded in town and the action drew the attention of between two hundred and three hundred people although only an estimated thirty five brought arms. There was no opposition to Dunmore’s seizing the press. Dunmore’s justification for his aggression was that in the previous newspaper issue the printer told "a few Antidotes of the Rebellious principles of L. Dunmore’s father." Also, the newspaper implied that Captain Squires of the Otter was "making too free with peoples sheep and hoggs."{73}

The moderation of the Norfolk Borough Committee, the large number of Scottish merchants, and the lack of resistance to the seizure of the press, all seemed to confirm Norfolk’s

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72 VanSchreevan and Scribner, Revolutionary Virginia, 3: 433.

73 Virginia Gazette, Purdie, 6 October 1775, Pinckney, 5 October 1775; James Parker to Charles Steuart, Norfolk, 2 October 1775, Charles Steuart Papers.
propensity toward loyalism. Several letters to the Virginia Gazette in Williamsburg questioned the patriotism of Norfolk's inhabitants. One wrote, "Let no Tory plume-himself on Lord Dunmore's success at and in the neighborhood of Norfolk." The author argued that the situation of Norfolk and Portsmouth was very different from that of any other place in Virginia, "the inhabitants were almost to a man merchants and mechanicks, and a majority of them Scotchmen and rank Tories."\(^{74}\)

Mechanics in other colonial cities were not usually tories. Yet, the artisans of Norfolk had no experience in political unity or leadership. Even the local militia officers were merchants. The only recourse was to act through mobs. Mobs are effective at night against an outnumbered trembling victim, but they are not a fighting force which would even attempt to challenge professional military men. Many patriots were among the thousands of inhabitants of Norfolk, but no avenue existed for the rest of Virginia to hear their feelings.

By November of 1775 it was obvious that Norfolk was to be the sight of hostilities between colonial troops and the British and their followers. The residents, fearing for their lives and possessions, dropped loyalty to either side and concentrated on surviving. Many in Norfolk were willing to agree with both sides in order to achieve peace. Colonel Woodford who led the Virginia forces commented that the people

\(^{74}\)Virginia Gazette, Purdie, 27 October 1775.
of Norfolk were neutral at best. He wrote, "they only Waite a change of Times, to again change their Masters. I have seen none of them who take Arms, or appear inclined to do so." After subduing an ineffective militia in Kemps Landing, Dunmore's troops marched into Norfolk on 17 November 1776 and raised the King's standard. Dunmore instructed people to sign an oath abjuring to the authority of committees, conventions, and congresses and proclaiming allegiance to the King. The signers also promised to fight the colonial troops "to the last drop of our blood." About two hundred people signed.  

By this time many of Norfolk's inhabitants had fled. Sprowle wrote, "The People in Norfolk & Portsmouth has been Struck with such a Panic all Removing into the Country & there effects." Neil Jamieson observed that by November "I don't know a man who had any Property left here but myself." The inhabitants who could not or did not leave were just as fearful of the troops converging from Williamsburg and North Carolina as they were of Dunmore's forces. Hearing rumors that the colonial forces planned to burn the town, the inhabitants petitioned the colonial troops for protection in

75 Vanschreevan and Scribner, Revolutionary Virginia, 5: 193.

76 Ibid., 4: 403-4.


78 Andrew Sprowle to George Brown, Gosport Virginia, 1 November 1775; Neil Jamieson to Glassford, Gordon, Monteath & Co., Norfolk, 17 November 1775, ibid., 4: 313, 423.
order to save their "small substance." The two armies finally met in the beginning of December at Great Bridge. On the 9th Dunmore's troops, confident after earlier successes against drunken militia at Kemps Landing, were badly beaten by a combination of Virginia and North Carolina troops. Dunmore and many loyalists withdrew from Norfolk on board their ships. On 14 December 1774 the colonial troops moved into the city. On 1 January 1776, in an attempt to stop the constant sniper fire from the shore, Dunmore set fire to several docks and warehouses along the shoreline. Colonial troops, influenced by heavy drink and a sense of resentment towards Norfolk's large loyalist population, finished the job Dunmore's forces had begun.

For three days the American forces looted and burned, destroying buildings. Col. Robert Howe, like his fellow leader Col. William Woodford, considered the population "suspicious friends therefore at best" and favored the burning. Howe wrote that controlling Norfolk allowed the British to influence the commerce of two colonies, yet its location made it difficult to protect. Therefore, complete destruction was the best way to defend the area. On 16 January 1776 the fourth Virginia Convention ordered its troops to assist people in evacuating the remaining houses and to demolish them. By February 6 the destruction of Norfolk was

Ibid., 5: 97.
complete.\textsuperscript{80} Even before the Declaration of Independence was signed the people of Norfolk paid dearly for the excellent shipping location that gave them an existence but left them defenseless.

Amazingly, the truth about who burned Norfolk was not publicly known.\textsuperscript{81} The account of the fire in the \textit{Virginia Gazette} implied that Dunmore had burned the city, and that it was "impossible to extinguish them [the flames] on account of the heavy fire from the ships."\textsuperscript{82} A letter from "An American" commented that in the destruction of Norfolk Virginia "can now glory in having received one of the keenest strokes of the enemy, without flinching. They have done their worst, and to no other purpose than to harden out soldiers."\textsuperscript{83} To the citizens of Norfolk, the fire was the worst; the town had been destroyed by the people sent to protect it. While artisans did not become loyalists in large numbers, those who remained in the area and tried to pick their lives out of the ashes remained neutral at best.

\textsuperscript{80}Selby, Revolution in Virginia, 82-84; Col Robert Howe to President of the Convention, 6 January 1776 in Revolutionary Virginia 5: 355-356, 417.

\textsuperscript{81}Selby, Revolution in Virginia, 84.

\textsuperscript{82}Virginia Gazette, Pinkney, 6 January 1776.

\textsuperscript{83}Virginia Gazette, Purdie, 5 January 1776, supplement.
Chapter 4
The War Years, 1776-1782

In June 1776, the common council of Norfolk assembled for the first time since the fire to choose a mayor. After fulfilling this task, required every year by the charter, the five council members who still lived in the area retired to a local farm for a drink. Included in the mandatory toasts to George Washington and to the success of the Revolution was a toast, "May the borough of Norfolk, phoenix-like, rise out of its own ashes."¹ The phoenix of the Elizabeth River proved to be a slow rising bird.

Almost half of the mechanics who worked in Norfolk in the years leading to the war and suffered the loss of their homes and prospects left permanently. Fifty-one (32 percent) of those who labored in the community before the war, lived in the area in 1780. Many others had relocated to the Tanners Creek area of the county, within five miles of the borough’s center, while eleven (27 percent) lived in Portsmouth and another handful along the western branch of the Elizabeth river.²

¹Virginia Gazette, Purdie, 12 July 1776.
Those who remained in the area faced much hardship even beyond the normal cost of war. The residents of Norfolk battled high inflation, along with housing and food shortages. Margaret Parker wrote that "goods in this country are so amazingly high, everything is at least Double the price they used to be, and some things more." Shortages of building supplies and high prices prevented people from rebuilding their homes, and many had to move in with relatives and friends in the surrounding countryside.

Some of the area’s supply problems resulted from continued troop activity in the region. The British occupied the county in the spring of 1779, and again in the fall of 1780 and once more in 1781. A letter signed "Plain Truth" excused the inability of the people of Norfolk to prevent the British from invading their shores at will. The letter described the local forces as "trifling," too few to stop the British even if employed with the utmost skill. The poor people who remained in Norfolk stayed in their houses and asked for mercy. Those who came in contact with the British, according to the letter writer, were "much distressed, and call aloud not only for pity and compassion, but for relief and assistance." The British treated the people of Norfolk better than the colonial forces, who still resented Norfolk’s

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3 Margaret Parker to Charles Steuart, Princess Anne, 5 January 1782, Parker Family Papers, microfilm, Old Dominion University.

4 Virginia Gazette, Dixon and Nicholson, 26 June 1779.
loyalist reputation. In 1780, a letter to the Virginia Gazette signed "Lover of Freedom" complained that British occupation afforded access to British goods and encouraged Norfolk people to expect to continue their normal routine. When the British troops left, the author claimed that a North Carolina militia unit intercepted and took without any compensation provisions headed for the borough market. The author described the action as "inhuman."\(^5\)

Local governmental operations during the war were heavily curtailed. The common council continued to meet each June to elect a mayor but no business was conducted until September 1780 and then only in a few scattered meetings after that. Stable local government did not resume after the fire until 1782.\(^6\) There were few suits for debt because the courts barely met. The borough hustings court gathered once in 1778 and not again until 1780. The court met monthly in 1780, but with the return of the British in the fall, closed again until 1782.\(^7\)

When the people turned to the Virginia government for help, it was slow in coming. The assembly in November 1776

\(^5\)Virginia Gazette, Dixon and Nicholson, 30 December 1780.


received a petition claiming that the residents of Norfolk had been "drove from their peacefull Habitations into the Woods without Food or raiment, at a most incliment Season," their condition "would melt the Heart of the most unrelenting Savage." The citizens reminded the assembly that they had "been deprived of the means of Subsistence by the very people, who were sent by the Country for their protection." The petitioners argued that they "have fallen the unhappy victims in this Contest while the other parts of the Colony have enjoyed Peace & Tranquility."³

Despite the pitiful situation of those in Norfolk, the House chose to postpone the issue until the next session. Finally in June 1777, it appointed commissioners to assess the damage caused by the fire and to offer compensation to those of patriotic sympathies whose houses were destroyed by the troops of the state.

The compensation was not soon forthcoming. In fact, the final tally of those who received money was not listed until 1835. Seventy people on the compensation list were identified as mechanics. On average they received 579 pounds compensation for their losses. Sixty-five mechanics were compensated an average of 582 pounds for real property losses and eighteen an average of 147 pounds for personal property. The amount granted the mechanics of Norfolk averaged slightly higher than the average for all claimants, 756 pounds for real

property and 57 pounds for personal.9

The higher than average compensation for mechanics represents the nature of the compensation process more than the wealth of the artisans during the pre-war period. In 1778, the borough of Norfolk and the areas around North and South Tanners Creek had 28 percent of the number of tithables in 1777 than that same area had in 1773. In 1777, the year that the commissioners arrived in Norfolk to evaluate the damage, 32 percent of the mechanics that lived in the borough before the war were still in the area to submit their claims.10 The availability of mechanics and the refusal of the state to compensate loyalists, many of whom were wealthy merchants, artificially inflated mechanics wealth in relationship to other citizens.

Sixty-three percent of the loyalists who left Norfolk, many with Dunmore, were merchants. Only thirteen percent of the loyalists in the Norfolk area were mechanics.11 Eight artisans from Norfolk borough submitted claims to the British government for compensation for losses sustained during the war. Of those who stated their place of origin in the claims,

9"Journal and Reports of the Commissioners Appointed by the Act of 1777, To ascertain the Losses occasioned to individuals by the burning of Norfolk and Portsmouth in the year 1776," Journal of the Virginia House of Delegates, 1835, microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library.


only one, James Dunn, a carpenter, was a native. Typical of those mechanics who applied for compensation was Freer Armston, a tallow chandler, who was a native of England and who fought with Dunmore. Also included in the loyalist claims was one for Talbot Thompson, a very successful free black sail maker who left with Dunmore in 1776 for New York where he died a short time later. In general the mechanics who were loyalist in Norfolk were foreign born and relatively new to the area.

The artisans of Norfolk cooperated with whatever party was in charge without regard for ideology. When James Woodside, a tailor, and James Leitch, a shoemaker, had been brought to Richmond as prisoners of war in January 1776, the Virginia Committee of Safety determined that they had in "some Measure aided Lord Dunmore but they have not taken Arms or been so active as to be deemed Prisoners of War." William Plume, a tanner of Irish descent, petitioned Great Britain for horses he had sold the British without compensation. During the course of the war both Woodside and Plume received seats on the Borough common council.

Because more mechanics than merchants stayed in the area


14Loyalist Claims, A.O. 13/6/110.
during the war, the mechanics were able to make some political and economic gains. Before the Revolution only two mechanics, Robert Waller, a carpenter, and William Freeman, a butcher, had been selected for the common council. By 1784, four others had served. Most of the people who belonged to the Scottish faction in pre-Revolutionary Norfolk did not return to the city after the war. New leaders would come to the forefront in post Revolutionary Norfolk’s politics, and some of them would be mechanics.

The fire brought destruction to the city, but it also gave some the opportunity to purchase land cheaply. Artisans purchased with inflated currency land confiscated from the British. William Plume benefited the most from the land sales. He bought the ropewalk that had once employed him. Plume developed the business and by 1800 was one of the richest citizens in the area. Plume’s operation furnished most of the cordage of the port, and he exported his leather goods to every part of America.¹⁵

The mechanics in Alexandria did not have the direct exposure to British troops that those in Norfolk or Charleston enjoyed. The only threat to the city was in April 1781, when

a British Warship anchored off Mount Vernon. As a result of the lack of British activity in the area, few citizens fought for the British and no mechanics from Alexandria submitted claims to the British government. The mechanics of the northern Virginia town had to endure the normal hardships of war, but the struggle did not greatly disrupt their lives.

The town did experience problems associated with inflation, the high cost of materials, and a scarcity of workmen. In 1777, a letter from the voters in Fairfax County to their representatives complained of the "High Price of every Commodity now exposed to sale." The constituents wanted George Mason and Philip Alexander to work to increase the value of the currency in circulation in order to lower the price of goods, enhance "workmens wages, and enable the soldier to supply himself with more necessaries." This letter implied that workmen had been able to raise wages somewhat to compensate for the inflation. However, a petition to the legislature in 1778 complained that the subscribers could not comply with the improvement requirement on their leases because of the "scarcity and extravagant price of materials of all kinds for building or the want of the necessary workmen."

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16Donald Sweig, "1649-1800," in Fairfax County, Virginia, A History (Fairfax: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, 1978), 114.

17Virginia Gazette, Purdie, 26 September 1777.

Because Alexandria suffered no physical damage during the war, it grew economically and politically. John Stoessal's study of Alexandria's commerce found that the port expanded during the war years, growth Stoessal attributed to Alexandria's location away from the disruptions of war.19

Alexandria was incorporated during the war. In October 1779, the General Assembly of Virginia passed an act granting Alexandria and Winchester charters which called for a yearly election of all local officers. Only one mechanic had served on the Board of Trustees which ran the city before the war. The initial election for municipal officers under the charter, however, put in office four mechanics.20 By then Alexandria's mechanics had unified enough to have a mechanical militia unit. That unity must have carried to the political realm, and with elections they could chose their own as leaders.

In Charleston the war years were marked by a disastrous fire and two years of British occupation. The war brought economic hardship to the workmen, and the political power that they had gained in the movement toward the Revolution eroded some during the course of the war.


In the early years of the war trade declined in Charles Town but the situation was not perceived as necessarily bad. Josiah Smith in January 1776 commented that the trade of the city was at a "Stand, our Bay and Wharves always at this season of the Year filled with Commodities for Exportation, now quite deserted." Joseph Johnson, looking back over the war, interpreted the situation differently. He wrote, "From the commencement of hostilities in 1775, to the siege of Charleston, in 1780, the State of South Carolina appeared to enjoy as great, if not a greater degree of prosperity, than in any previous term of five years in her history." Writing to Henry Laurens in 1777 John Wells Junior did not paint as rosy a picture as Johnson, but he did write "on the whole our present situation is much to be envied, when compared with that of our neighbours."\(^{21}\)

The import/export trade in Charles Town held its own before 1780, but the city still had problems, particularly with inflation, and supply shortages. The newspaper noted in 1776, "The markets have been of late very scantily provided, and everything sold at extravagant Prices." Many believed the

scarcity of necessities could have been prevented. In 1776, a letter signed "A Citizen" claimed that "a few men of our community are permitted to grind the faces of their fellow citizens; either by making an artificial scarcity at our markets, of the most common articles of subsistence or by imposing an exorbitant price on imported goods." By 1778, "A Citizen" was asking the legislature to help "our poor and middling people, who will soon have no other alternative than perish in our streets." He wrote, "there is scarce a cask of flour, butter, tallow or wax, or a pound of bacon, beef or pork that comes from our back settlements, but what is bought up by the bucksters, and fifty or a hundred per cent put upon them." Forestallers were not the only problem.

Obtaining materials proved difficult. Louisa Susannah Wells, a loyalist, recorded in her journal the problems she had in acquiring clothes for her voyage to England; "With much difficulty and trouble, I obtained three eights of a yard of black serge; I purchased a pair of clumsy shoe heels of a Jew; and in an obscure Lane, I found out a Negro Shoe Maker, who said he could make for Ladies." She questioned the workman's abilities, for as she boarded the vessel, her shoe fell off.

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22 South Carolina and American General Gazette, 19 January 1776, 21 August 1776.

23 South Carolina and American General Gazette, 19 February 1778.

Workmen also had difficulty getting the materials necessary to stay in business. In 1777 eight coopers announced that they declined nailing of rice barrels because nails were so expensive.\textsuperscript{25}

Inflation was high until 1778 and ran rampant after that. By 1777, the inflation rate was 135 per cent, by January of 1778 287 percent. Within a year it had risen to 798 percent and would rise quickly until June of 1780 when it was 8114 percent.\textsuperscript{26}

In the early morning hours of January 15, 1778, a fire broke out in a baker's house on Queen street. Unfortunately the high winter wind that day set aflame many of the city's houses. One witness wrote of the failed efforts to extinguish the fire, "the fire seemed to laugh at their feeble efforts to extinguish its flames." Neither the wind nor the fire abated until the afternoon. By then, about two hundred and fifty homes, one-fourth of the town, were destroyed.\textsuperscript{27} Disaster had struck a city already suffering from shortages and inflation. Repairing the damage from the blaze proved almost impossible "as many of the principal Materials are not to be had, and

\textsuperscript{25}\textit{South Carolina and American Gazette}, 10 July 1777.


\textsuperscript{27}"Diary of Oliver Hart, 1741-1780," \textit{South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina}; Walter J. Fraser, Jr., \textit{Charleston! Charleston!}, \textit{The History of a Southern City} (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 157.
Workmen on Ships[s] as well as everything else excessively dear."²⁸

In that same year, in a dispute over a loyalty oath, the mechanics of Charles Town broke with their spokesman Christopher Gadsden. In 1778, Gadsden, then governor of South Carolina, issued a proclamation postponing the administration of a loyalty oath. A meeting of citizens in June of 1778 declared the proclamation a threat to liberty.²⁹ After he had placed the proclamation in the sheriff's hands, Gadsden complained, "some Myrmidons Alarm'd the Town, Setting up a Proclamation against Law; we were going to ruin their Liberties and What not!"³⁰

The mechanics in Charles Town, as in the past, used out-of-door politics to monitor the institutional. Now that Gadsden was part of the establishment, he wanted the mechanics to follow the proper procedures. He wrote, "if wrong let the people impeach us; that is the Constitutional Method, unless


restless flighty Men of which I am afraid we have too many amongst us want again to be running upon every Fancy to the Meetings of the liberty Tree." Gadsden did not realize that the mechanics never carried enough weight in institutional politics to follow the constitutional method. Their strength was in the street.

In March 1780, British forces crossed the Ashly River and landed on Charleston Neck. For over a month Charles Town was under siege until the city surrendered on May 12, 1780. For two years the city was run by British officials who battled the same problems that had been destroying Charles Town's economy since 1776. Although the arrival of British soldiers carrying specie and a ban on exports of bullion did help the currency problems in the city, despite controls the British were as unsuccessful as the colonists in keeping reasonably priced food available.

The mechanics of Charles Town did what they had to do to continue their trades during the occupation, namely cooperate with the British. Once they were in the city, the British declared all inhabitants to be prisoners on parole. In order to be pardoned and obtain British protection, a citizen had to take an oath of allegiance to Great Britain and to serve in

31 Christopher Gadsden to Peter Timothy, Charles Town, 8 June 1778, Writings of Christopher Gadsden, 130-1.

the British military if called upon. If the city's artisans wanted to continue their trades they had to take the oath.33

Many of the Charles Town's residents eagerly welcomed the British. The war in the South had gone badly for the patriots, and the news from the North looked bleak. In 1780, many did not think the colonist could win. The British presence meant increased shipping, and offered hope for solving the currency and price problems of the city.34

Not all mechanics cooperated, however. Those who had been the leaders in the Revolutionary movement, particularly the men who had served in the provincial congresses, were exiled to St. Augustine. Nine of the thirty-seven citizens sent to Florida were mechanics, who had been active on revolutionary committees or in the assembly.35

Other artisans acquired the loyalist label. Robert Lambert in his study of South Carolina's loyalists found two types: true loyalists and protectionists. The protectionists displayed little loyalty to either side but sought British protection so they could resume their lives. Ralph Izard declared that nine out of ten people who sought British


protection did so out of "compulsion, and believing the cause desperate and almost totally lost." Most artisans were protectionist rather than loyalist.

Charles Town did have a small number of mechanics who were true loyalists. Wallace Brown's study of loyalism in South Carolina found that 9 percent were artisans. A statistical study of only Charles Town's loyalists discovered that 4.3 percent were mechanics. Thirty-six Charles Town artisans can be classified as true loyalists. As with those in Norfolk, most of the loyalist mechanics were foreign born and fairly new to the area. Forty-one percent of these loyalist mechanics were either in the shipbuilding or construction industries. Most of the true loyalists had already left the area or been banished by 1780. James Askew, a silversmith, had been forced out of his house and taken to the fort, in 1778 by a mob. Requested to sign South Carolina's allegiance oath, Askew refused. The abuse he received "by the people had . . . an Effect on several Englishmen, then present, who had previously sworn to protect each other." The Patriots hanged a shipbuilder William

36 Ralph Izard to Thomas Jefferson, 27 April 1784, South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine 2 (1901): 194-5.


38 Loyalist Claims, A.O. 13/125/185.
Tweed, another loyalist artisan for being a spy. William Leslie's fate was more typical of the true loyalists than either Tweed's or Askew's. Leslie, an artist and native of England, had come to Charles Town in 1769 and returned to the mother country when hostilities began in 1776. Other mechanics such as Hugh Pollock, a saddler who refused to take the patriot's loyalty oath, left Charles Town in 1778 for Jamaica.

A few free black mechanics also stayed loyal to the British. William Snow, a mulatto tailor, who claimed that when he signed an association agreement he did not know what it was about, submitted a claim for losses to the British government. Marc Kingston, a free black carpenter, served as guide for the British.

Most of the mechanics classified as loyalists after the war were protectionists. When the British entered the city, 207 citizens signed congratulatory letters to General Clinton. The address stated that the subscribers hoped "speedily to be readmitted to the character and condition of British subjects." Fifty-four signatories (25 percent) can be identified as mechanics. Since mechanics represented about

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41 Loyalist Claims, A.O. 12/47/186; A.O. 12/100/190.

42 The address and the signatures are reprinted in Ella Pettel Levitt, "Loyalism in Charleston, 1761-1784," Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association

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one-quarter of the city's white population, this address did not suggest that the town's mechanics were overwhelmingly loyalist.

The addresses to Clinton circulated widely and when the South Carolina Assembly convened in Jacksonborough in January 1782, the addresses were used to identify loyalists. The Jacksonborough Assembly, held while the British still occupied Charles Town, was bitter toward loyalists. During the course of the Revolution in South Carolina, particularly in the back country, a civil war raged. Many used the war as an excuse to attack their neighbors. Ralph Izard considered "the animosity and hatred planted by them [the British] in the breasts of our citizens against each other, ... the most serious injury they have done us." During the Jacksonborough Assembly the hatred of the British and the need to raise money resulted in long lists for confiscation of loyalist property. The addresses to Clinton became one source of names. Thirty-nine people who signed were on the confiscation lists; 14 (36 percent) of them were mechanics.

Most of the mechanics claimed they had signed the addresses out of fear that otherwise, they would not have been able to continue their trade and support their families. John Wells Junior, the printer, circulated both the list and the threat of forced unemployment. When Patrick Hinds wrote that


43Ralph Izard to Thomas Jefferson, 27 April 1784.
he "hath been Subject of an Asthma and an Excruciating pain in
his head for Several Years," Wells presented Hinds with the
paper and threatened to run Hinds out of town if he did not
sign. Hinds, "being intimidated by such Declaration and
fearing that said Wells, from his well known Invidious
disposition and Resentment towards persons Attacked to the
Interest of America would carry his threats into Execution."
Hinds was convinced "from his then Ill state of Health, that
his removal from Charles Town must be attended with fatal
consequences." Other artisans also alleged that they had
signed because Wells threatened them and they consequently
feared for their families.

Some mechanics offered another excuse. William Cameron,
a cooper, claimed that "having long observed Men reputable for
possessing great knowledge and abilities in affairs of
Government . . . so much divided in the Contest twixt America
and Britain was conscious it would be highly improper and
unbecoming in a Person of his humble station and little
consequence in Life to interfere and be active in matters he
did not understand." Cameron claimed he signed the address
from the persuasion and example of men capable of judging
political affairs, because his "confined Education and narrow
understanding not permitting him to a competent share of

"Petition of Patrick Hinds, 1783, Petitions to the South
Carolina Legislature, South Carolina State Archives, Columbia,
South Carolina.

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knowledge in contested and intricate affairs of the State."\textsuperscript{45} William McKimmy, another cooper, claimed that politics was a matter out of his sphere, and that he signed because of other's example along with "The Dark Complexion of Matters at this Period and the Terror which a Conquering Army is apt to inspire in the Breast of Persons Unused to War and Unskilled and untried in Public Affairs."\textsuperscript{46} If Cameron and McKimmy were sincere in their declaration then the political consciousness the revolutionary movement raised among some of Charles Town's mechanics did not reach all.

The war years were difficult for mechanics in both Norfolk and Charles Town. For those in Norfolk, the destruction of the fire created opportunities for some, but suffering for most. In Charles Town, high inflation, and shortages of material hurt the mechanics economically, but they did what they had to do to survive including, if necessary, accepting British protection. The mechanics in Charles Town had also lost ground politically. In the Second General Assembly, 1776-1778, only seven of Charles Town's thirty representatives were mechanics. In the third session, 1779-1780, the number dropped to five.\textsuperscript{47} The artisans still

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{45}Petition of William Cameron, 1784, South Carolina Legislative Petitions.
  \item \textsuperscript{46}Petition of William McKimmy, cooper, 1783, South Carolina Legislative Petitions.
  \item \textsuperscript{47}Biographical Directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives, Session Lists 1692-1973, comp. Joan Schreiner, Reynolds Faunt, Robert E. Rector, David K. Bowden,
had representatives in the provincial assembly, but their influence was decreasing. In the years immediately after the war the mechanics tried to regain this economic and political strength by employing the sphere of politics they were most comfortable with, the out of doors.

Chapter 5
The Struggle for Local Control, 1783-1794

Norfolk, Alexandria and the newly renamed Charleston at the conclusion of the war faced many challenges. Economically all three ports were hurt by British legislation which restricted trade to the West Indies. Traditional markets for rice and tobacco were shifting. The colonies, as a whole, suffered from lack of specie. British merchants and their goods returned to the port towns immediately after the war. Tension developed between natives and foreigners, particularly in Charleston which had suffered at the end of the war under two years of British occupation. New ports such as Baltimore and Richmond brought greater competition, especially for Norfolk and Alexandria. While struggling to return to their prewar status, the people of Norfolk faced the enormous task of rebuilding a city which had been completely destroyed by fire. Charleston, too, had to rebuild; British occupation and supply shortages had delayed repairs to damage suffered in the fire of 1778. 1 While disruption and damage from the war

placed greater stress on local services, both Alexandria and Charleston politically had to adjust to new corporate governments.

Despite all these problems in the immediate postwar years it was not the poor state of foreign trade or the weaknesses of the Confederation government which dominated the political thinking of mechanics in these three cities. Instead the artisans' energies were concentrated on the struggle to gain a larger interest in local government.

Changes in municipal government were common in the new nation. City governments in all the states were expanding, providing greater political opportunities. In the rethinking of municipal governments came two approaches to the nature of the institution. One group of citizens emphasized a strong closed corporate structure which could promote trade, establish order and improve the physical appearance of the city. Another group of citizens criticized the concentration of legislative, executive and judicial powers in one body and found existing forms of local government to be inconsistent with republican principles. The first group praised the municipal government for its ability to keep order and facilitate trade, while the second group protested the government's format and worked for change.²

In all three cities in this study this struggle to change

the form of municipal government dominated local politics. In Norfolk, Alexandria and Charleston the mechanics were a major part of the citizen group fighting to obtain a more republican form of government which would give them greater access to local governance. In the struggle to change the Norfolk city charter a unity and political consciousness emerged among the artisans that they had not revealed in the Revolutionary movement. In Alexandria, although the mechanics petitioned for better local government, their time to strengthen unity and increase political activity occurred later in the party struggles of the late 1790s. In Charleston in contrast, a failure to accomplish the artisans' goals at the local level marked the end of artisan participation in out-of-door politics and helped destroy the unity that mechanics had displayed before the war. In the course of the 1780s the Charleston mechanics began to unify along trade lines and to shift their demands from political power for all mechanics to more narrower objectives of specific occupations.

In Charleston of the 1780s times were hard for planters and merchants. Agricultural production in South Carolina had been hurt by property destruction during the war and by labor losses. The British restrictions on West Indian trade and changes in the traditional markets for rice hindered the import-export business. Yet, the economic downturn may not

\^Fraser, Charleston!, 173; Richard Walsh, Charleston's Sons of Liberty, A Study of the Artisans, 1763-1789 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1959), 108.
have been as bad as contemporaries believed. Charleston in the 1780s attracted large numbers of foreign merchants. James Parker encouraged his son Patrick to move to Charleston because the mercantile opportunities seemed better than in Norfolk. Patrick upon arriving in the city wrote that people "are in a most deplorable and wretched Situation here . . . whatever high opinion the London merchant may entertain of this State." Yet, as a letter to the editor of the South Carolina Gazette and Public Advertiser explained, it was possible that times seemed bad when compared to expectations rather than to the city's past performance. The letter stated "If we are undone, we are the most splendidly ruined of any nation in the universe and if our merchants are all beggars, there are not such beggars in any other part of the globe." The letter signed "Senex" blamed extravagance on the hard times rather than want of income. The author wrote, "This gentlemen, is universally the case with the people of Carolina; we never were so rich, but we never were so extravagant. The landholder, while he talks of ruin will demand double the rent of his property, and receive it." The merchants, too talked of ruin, but according to Senex a merchant "outsparkles a man of the first fashion at Paris."*

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*Patrick Parker to James Parker, Charleston, 22 March 1787, Parker Family Papers, microfilm, Old Dominion University.

South Carolina Gazette and Public Advertiser, 21 May 1785.
While the 1780s could not be described as good for the mechanic, they were better than the war years. Wages were high. A few letters to the paper in 1783 complained that in a time when the city needed to rebuild, "the price of labour amounts to a prohibition." The author claimed that particularly the building trades "have the extreme modesty to DEMAND as much for one day's employ as a carpenter, &c. would in Europe for four." This letter called for the city government to campaign to attract more workers from Europe and from the northern states. Another letter called for the corporation government to set wages.\(^6\)

The artisans in Charleston did not take this criticism lightly. They defended their high wages in light of the cruelties that the war brought to their business. A letter signed "A carpenter" complained that in 1779, "many a live-long summer's day have I wrought, from the rising to the setting sun, and when my wages were collected, could not with each day's WHOLE wages, purchase one yard of very course linen, to cloath my children, but this is not HALF"; people held what was owed to him for three to four months. Another letter on this theme blamed the planter in particular "who frequently made it a practice to build his house, and furnish it, and even to cloath himself, on credit with the tradesman, and leave his account unpaid for years, and thereby disable

\(^6\)South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser, 18 October 1783, 25 October 1783.
the master workman from procuring hands." But even the "carpenter" admitted that times had become better than in 1779. "But now, because there is a little reverse, of fortune, (and very little God help us) every fellow that is an artisan, must be a villain, an extortioner, and deserves to be punished by the laws."7 Another workman argued that expenses in Charleston for food and medicine were much higher than in Europe. He also confirmed that things were worse during the war years, and "now [that artisans] are enabled to live a little more comfortable," those who suggested petitioning the City Council to set wages wanted "no Artist [to] gain more than daily bread."8 Although artisans themselves admitted that times were better than the war years, they resented the suggestion that the city government bring in foreign workers to control their wages when they were just starting to recover.

The artisans had a legitimate complaint. The war years had been very hard on them. A study of the inventoried wealth for the Charleston District in 1774 and 1783 shows that while the war had more equitably distributed wealth, artisans had lost wealth in relationship to everyone else. The gini coefficient was .71 for estates probated in 1774 and .68 for 1783. Nonetheless mechanics had done poorly during the war.

7South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser, 1 November 1783, 4 November 1783.

8South Carolina Gazette and Daily Advertiser, 22 November 1783.

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In 1774, they owned 10 percent of the inventoried wealth, by 1783 only 6 percent. In 1774 the medium wealth for the rest of the population was 1.25 times greater than the medium wealth for mechanics, in 1783, 2.25 times. With the war years hard on mechanics, the prospect of higher postwar wages gave them new hope.

Politically artisans were regaining the sense of unity and power they had in the beginning of the revolutionary movement. In 1783 and 1784, two issues: resentment toward foreigners and dissatisfaction with both the city and the state governments, drove Charleston artisans back to the out-of-doors politics that had earlier served them so well. Politically as well as economically the artisans' futures had declined during the war years. In pre-revolutionary committees mechanics had held one-third of the positions; in the first municipal elections for Charleston, out of the fourteen positions only one mechanic, George Flagg, a painter and glazier, was elected. Flagg in the directory of 1794 designated himself a planter. The necessity of including mechanics in local politics faded with the Declaration of Independence. In the aftermath of the war the planters and merchants controlled the established government and the mechanics went to the streets.

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9 South Carolina Inventories, Charleston District, 1774, and 1783, microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library.

On 21 July 1783, a group of citizens called a public meeting and resolved to petition the legislature to stop any further indulgence toward loyalists. The crowd demanded that any residents who had "borne arms with the enemy, and quitted this State with them, may be precluded from returning." As a sign that outdoor meetings no longer carried the clout they had in the revolutionary movement, nothing came of the resolves. It was time to try other methods. In the summer of 1783, a "considerable number of the people assembled for the purpose of pumping persons who were thought obnoxious to the State." This type of rioting continued in the streets of Charleston for the next year and a half. Alexander Gillion, a sea captain and merchant who had served as commander of the South Carolina Navy during the war, who had founded a society to protest the lenient treatment of tories, the Marine Anti-Britannic Society, led the street rioting. Some political leaders in South Carolina criticized Gillion for his conduct of the navy during the war. As a result, Gillion became bitter toward the establishment and its liberal treatment of returning tories. Besides personal motives, Gillion had economic reasons to fear the returning British; he had invested heavily in confiscated lands and stood to lose money

11South Carolina Weekly Gazette, 26 July 1783.

12Walsh, Sons of Liberty, 117; South Gazette and General Advertiser, 12 July 1783.
with any reversal of the confiscations. Francisco de Miranda, a future Latin American revolutionary, was in Charleston at the time as part of his study of the "new democracy in America." Miranda described Gillion as a "rogue" and a "caudillo of the rabble." According to Miranda, Gillion would call respectable citizens Tory "in order to carry out his mercantile transactions without competition." Although the leader of the Marine Anti-Britannic Society was a merchant, the bulk of the followers were artisans. In February of 1784 the society presented a petition to the South Carolina legislature protesting the legislature’s decision to allow James Cook and Gilbert Chalmers, two loyalists, to return to the state. A mob accused Cook and Chalmers of asking British authorities during the occupation to prevent the prisoners of war on parole, a category including citizens who did not sign the British oath of allegiance, from practicing their trades. This petition provides the best available information about the Marine Anti-Britannic Society

13Walsh, Sons of Liberty, 114-15; Robert Lambert, South Carolina Loyalists in the American Revolution (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), 293.


15Walsh, Sons of Liberty, 118; Lambert, South Carolina Loyalist, 293; "South Carolina Legislature Petitions," February 1784, South Carolina Archives Department, Columbia South Carolina; South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser, 1 July 1784.
membership. Of the eighty-four readable signatures, fifty-five (65 percent) can be positively identified as artisans. Of those who were artisans 33 (51 percent) were carpenters. The carpenters' complaints were not limited to issues at the state level. It was the carpenters who had been singled out as having high wages, and they were particularly frightened that the city council would set a limit on their wages.

Historians such as Pauline Maier have seen the Marine Anti-Britannic Society's interests as limited to opposing the British and their friends in the city. But the society which captured the mechanics' attention also opposed the structure of the current state and city governments.\textsuperscript{16} The rioters felt helpless in stopping what they viewed as leniency toward their former enemies. In the first summer of activity a letter to the paper signed "a Patriot" declared, "Faction and tumult where there is no oppression, can only spring from a contempt for government, or views of ambition." The author thought that the rioting was a combination of both.\textsuperscript{17} Gillion's motivation may have been retaliation or personal gain but artisans, particularly carpenters, had little reason to prefer native merchants over foreign. Those who joined the society did so out of contempt for a government that no longer


\textsuperscript{17}South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser, 15 July 1783.
included them.

The mechanics of Charleston were angry with the state legislature which they did not deem responsive to their demands. In the spring of 1784, a dispute arose between John Rutledge, a member of the House of Representatives in South Carolina, and William Thompson, a tavern keeper, over Thompson’s apparent snub of a slave whom Rutledge sent to Thompson with a message. When Rutledge believed the slave’s word over Thompson’s, the tavern keeper refused to apologize to Rutledge and was jailed for a week for violating legislative privilege. The dispute which was widely discussed in the newspapers fueled a debate over who should control the state, the people or a pro-British aristocracy. The incident appeared to some to be an attempt on the part of the state legislature, to stretch its authority too far and establish an aristocratic government.\textsuperscript{18}

Once the mechanics took their complaints to the street, they became even more dissatisfied with the state and local government’s reaction to their behavior. Policies once condoned toward British supporters before the war were now considered "indiscretion, folly and insolence." In April 1784, the governor offered one thousand pounds to anyone who gave evidence against the group. The intendent of Charleston announced in April that to quell the riots more quickly, as

\textsuperscript{18}Michael E. Stevens, "Legislative Privilege in Post-Revolutionary South Carolina," William and Mary Quarterly XLVI (1989): 74-80.
soon as a disturbance erupted, the bell at St. Michael's would summon the intendent and wardens to meet.19

Letters in the paper criticized the Marine Anti-Britannic Society on several grounds. One was that the disturbances hindered commerce and were bad for everyone. "A Patriot" argued that if commerce was free and safe, "this country will be rich and happy; but if riot and disorder check the spirit of commerce, industry must languish, and poverty prevail. Tumult may serve the ambitious or unfriendly views of a few, but it is ruinous to the happiness of the community."20 In another piece "Patriot" contended that for commerce to be free it must be in the hands of many people. By restricting trade to the few, even the planters and mechanics would be hurt. While a monopolizer would jeopardize the planters' income, "The mechanic may apply with industry to his business, but the languor into which his country will fall, will soon reduce him to poverty and contempt."21

Some of the protests centered on the Marine Anti-Britannic Society's eagerness to influence the established government. A letter from "A Planter" argued, "A single action, or a common accident, however worthy or lamentable in

19South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser, 29 April 1784, 1 May 1784.
20South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser, 15 July 1783.
21South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser, 19 July 1783.
themselves, cannot authorize a person to claim the confidence of the public." Only those with a long record of government service deserved respect. "Men who have proved their principles by their practice, may be confided in; but those who are forward in politics, as in friendship, should be trusted with caution."22 Others felt that to follow the dictates of the mob was a different form of oppression but still tyranny. A letter signed "a steady and open republican" wrote that all governments were better than a licentious one; "if we are to have masters, let every body know who they are, that we may act accordingly. But if one club of men may issue official Mandates, why not another, and an hundred."23 In 1785, the mob was described as one set of men trying to force out another set of men who had a legal right to remain in the city. The activities of the Marine Anti-Britannic Society, if successful, would have been "a national disgrace, and a perpetual record of supine weakness in the city magistrates." The author went on to ask, "What government would that be, where this or that set of men could chalk out to the magistrates what line of conduct they ought to pursue?"24

In April 1784, a handbill signed "By Order of the 600 A Secret Committee," appeared listing the names of twenty-eight

22South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser, 9 August 1783.

23South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser, 13 May 1784.

24Charleston Evening Gazette, 5 September 1785.
people, six of them mechanics, who must leave the state within ten days. The notice also warned those who had been previously listed on the Banishment and Confiscation list and then pardoned not to return to Charleston. If the twenty-eight promised to leave the state they would be given three unmolested months to settle affairs. The handbill ended with the statement that the committee did not wish to harm the tory's person or property, but were "determined they shall not be coequal citizens with us."25

By the summer of 1784, tensions were running high in Charleston. In April the Marine Anti-Britannic Society used another pre-revolutionary method, a circular letter, which promised to seek redress "not only with respect to the Tories, but with regard to other grievances not less afflicting, and inconsistent with the first principle of a Republican Government." The circular letter also called for the voters to turn out those officials who did not vote as constituents directed. The piece accused the wealthy families of the state of retaining "their former principles of monopolizing power, and all the honorary and lucrative offices of the State to themselves." They accomplished this goal by "destroying the republican equality . . . of citizenship, for which they generally neither toiled nor spun, and for which the middling

25Alexandria Gazette, 17 June 1784.
and the poor had shed their blood in profusion."  

The Marine Anti-Britannic Society was more than just an organization to harass tories. This society, whose rank and file were mechanics, was fighting for what mechanics in Norfolk and Alexandria petitioned for, that is, to bring the government to the people. In the revolutionary movement in Charleston with its open meetings and committees equally divided among merchants, planters, and mechanics, the artisans of Charleston had experienced political participation which over the course of the war had slipped away from them. When after a year of taking to the streets, they had failed to get their power back, they decided in 1784 to show their strength in local politics. The society concentrated especially on the September election for intendent in Charleston.

By the summer of 1784, the mechanics under the influence of Alexander Gillion had drawn their opposition into the street. A letter, signed "Another Patriot," announced that "an Association of the Good Citizens is now forming, who are resolutely determined to support the dignity of Magistery to the utmost." On July 8, 1784 the two parties clashed. Alexander Gillion later described the pro-establishment mob as "a pre-enlisted band of American Tories, British Merchants, Factors &c. &c. all acoutred with swords, bayonets and

26South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser, 16 September 1784.

27South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser, 29 April 1784.
pistols." This motley crew, Gillion charged, were let loose to "RIFLE HOUSES, insult and abuse peaceable citizens, trample them under their horses feet, drive them with taunts and reproaches through the streets." The other side replied that in the episode the wardens did a good job of dispersing "a factious, riotous and daring set of unprincipled banditti, who, with a displayed standard, and arms in their hands, seemed determined, . . . to destroy the whole tranquillity of government."^{28}

Merchants and planters could compete with the mechanics in the street, but the artisans could no longer influence politics as they had before the war. In September of 1784, Alexander Gillion lost the intendent election to Richard Hutson by a vote of 387 to 127. The editor of the paper wrote that the election which returned all but three of the thirteen incumbents to city council and seated only one mechanic, George Flagg, "has again restored to power, men eminent and tried for PUBLIC and PRIVATE VIRTUE." In other words, wealthy merchants and planters.^{29}

The failure to influence the 1784 election marked the end to widespread support for the Marine Anti-Britannic Society. The election was also the turning point in the political activity of the Charleston mechanics. They would no longer be

^{28}South Carolina Gazette and Public Advertiser, 3 September 1785, 6 September 1785.

^{29}South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser, 7 September 1784, 14 September 1784.
unified in any one society or cause. A series of occupation based mechanics groups appeared in the 1780s to pursue their respective economic ends. The Marine Anti-Britannic Society stopped outdoor activities and changed its name to the South Carolina Marine Society.

Protests against the government had to be conducted in a more peaceful manner after 1784 in order to win support. Both mechanics generally and Alexander Gillion specifically criticized the local government either by letters to the newspapers or petitions to the legislature. Popular meetings and street disturbances that had been so effective and had helped create the artisan's sense of political worth disappeared. In a letter to the newspaper a "friend to liberty" commented that "The recollection of the disturbance that prevailed in this metropolis about four years ago, is sufficient to prevent any peaceably disposed citizen from wishing to see popular meetings any more in vogue." Instead, petitions to the legislature became the only acceptable form of protest, and even then it was not "to be justly apprehended that the industrious part of the community, would be subscribing their names, [or] become obnoxious to their powerful neighbors."

The mechanics signed petitions and Alexander Gillion wrote a series of letters in 1785 signed "Amicus" criticizing the city government. In one letter Gillion complained of

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30Columbian Herald, 6 September 1787.
"ill-timed, unnecessary and grinding taxes which they have imposed on the distressed inhabitants of this City." He complained of the "heterogeneous, unnatural, disliked kind of CITY GOVERNMENT, whose POLICE is calculated to promote rather factious and mercenary views of certain individuals." The letter called for the destruction of the city charter. Gillion wanted a government which would clean the streets and have an effective night watch, "totally subverting the negro street traffic." Gillion also called for limiting the blacks in the city "until can be introduced white mechanics and servants."31 While Gillion was writing letters to the newspaper, the mechanics of Charleston chose to petition the legislature for their needs.

In 1787, a group of citizens from Charleston petitioned the state to the effect that they had been long harassed and oppressed by the city council whose powers were "too unlimited undefined despotic and discretionary." The petition's specific grievances included, "the very being of an incorporated body of magistrates possessed as they actually are with powers legislative executive and judicial." In fact, the petitioners argued that the corporation had the authority "to determine on the property of a freemem and even to rob him of his personal liberty and to mulet him with excessive fines contrary to the constitution" since the citizens enjoyed no

31South Carolina Gazette and Public Advertiser, 1 September 1785, 3 September 1785.
benefit of a jury. The petitioners asserted that the city council savored too much the trappings of royalty which "the republican freemen of this state have but lately shaken off." The citizens also complained that the incorporation took place without a request by citizens. The petitioners further alleged that the high city taxes did not result in any "proportional benefit accruing to the health and cleanliness or ornament of the city." Of the 184 people who signed this petition, 78 (42 percent) can be positively identified as artisans and another 11 percent as shopkeepers. Only four who signed were merchants.

A counter petition was also presented to the legislature. This petition praised the laws which had been passed since incorporation and extolled the magistrates' "parental sollicitude[,] indebeatable industry[,] impartial and disinterested conduct." Of the 155 names on this petition, only 9 (6 percent) were artisans. Five of the nine were jewelers, most of whom were more involved in importation rather than home production. Seventy-four (48 percent) were merchants or planters. The merchants and planters in Charleston were supporting a government which they controlled and to which artisans had little access.

The other issue that interested the mechanics of

32"South Carolina Legislative Petitions," 1787.
33McElligot, Charleston Residents 1782-1794.
34Ibid.
Charleston was competition from slave labor. In 1783, thirty-six house carpenters and bricklayers, the occupations most likely to be associated with the Marine Britannic Society, declared in a petition that they had been under great strain since the beginning of the war "having scarce had sufficient employment to support their families owing, they apprehend in a great measure to a number of jobbing negro tradesmen." The carpenters and bricklayers wanted a law prohibiting blacks from hiring themselves out.  

The state tried to appease them. In 1783, an ordinance was passed requiring slaves hired out to have a badge which could be obtained from the Charleston city council. The cost of the badge was dependent on occupation. The law also prohibited slaves from hiring out on their own account. The act was not enforced, and in 1786 the legislature amended it to require every black working out on hire to wear his badge.

Still the act was not enforced. In 1793 some cordwainers and subsequently the Master Tailors Association and the painters, glaziers, and paper hangers, announced they would assist those appointed to prosecute violators of the slave code. That same year, the coopers also protested that "the Slaves of Charles Town have been privileged although illegally

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35 "South Carolina Legislative Petitions," February 1783.

36 South Carolina Weekly Gazette, 28 November 1783.

37 State Gazette of South Carolina, 23 November 1793, 12 December 1793; Columbian Herald, 26 November 1793.
to sell traffick and barter, as well as to carry on different trades and occupations free from the Direction or superintendence of any White" a practice which the petition argued caused "the great and manifest Injury of the mechanical part of the Community."\textsuperscript{38} These efforts again failed. In 1796, the Grand Jury of the District of Charleston presented as a grievance, "that slaves, who are mechanics, are suffered to carry on various handicraft trades on their own account to the great prejudice of the poor white mechanics in this city."\textsuperscript{39}

Slavery it would seem remained a blessing and a curse to the mechanics of South Carolina. In 1783 all but one of the artisans inventoried owned at least one slave.\textsuperscript{40} In the artisans' efforts to limit cheap competition can be seen the decline of the mechanics' consciousness of themselves as a political entity. In post-war Charleston the artisans' orientation was more to their occupation than to promoting a sense of solidarity as had been the case before the war.

Each occupational group had its own agenda. The bakers protested through most of the 1780s over the price of bread set by the city government. In 1784 they petitioned that the price of bread had not risen in forty years while they were obligated to pay four times as much for wood, "three times as

\textsuperscript{38} "South Carolina Legislative Petitions," 1793.

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Columbian Herald}, 27 January 1796.

\textsuperscript{40} "South Carolina Inventories, Charleston District, 1783."
much for the rents of their houses and four times as much for the hire of their journeyman." In November of 1786 the bakers tried to force up the price of bread. They announced they would stop producing bread because "to bake up to the present assize is not in our power, for they require a greater quantity of baked bread out of a hundred of flour than it will really make." Obviously these efforts were not successful because in 1787 the bakers were still protesting the assize of bread passed by the city council.41

In a rare petition signed mostly by females, the seamstresses of Charleston protested that "by the loss of their husbands, friends or near relations during the war, they are reduced to indigent circumstances." They blamed their hard times on the large imports from "a nation whose policy it is to employ their own industrious poor rather than give bread to foreigners." The seamstresses wanted a much larger duty on the importation of ready made clothes.42

The mechanics of Charleston developed craft consciousness over class consciousness. Although they had supported a more accessible city government, more in line with republican principles, in the end they failed either to procure a change in the city charter or to preserve the group consciousness that they had gained in the revolutionary movement.

41"South Carolina Legislative Petitions, 1784"; Morning Post, 13 November 1786, 23 March 1787.

42"South Carolina Legislative Petitions," February 1788.
In Norfolk the revolutionary movement had been controlled by merchants. The mechanics of Norfolk became unified in their fight for a more republican city government, and since they never accepted defeat, this issue united them throughout the 1780s and 1790s. Those who inhabited Norfolk when the war finally ended in 1783 faced many challenges. Much of the city still had to be rebuilt. Thomas Rutherford complained that "trade has been very dull and money very scarce, so that there is at this time much talk, of Paper money being Issued by the States to supply the want of a circulating Medium."43 According to Patrick Parker, rents were high but "Provisions of all Sorts are very Cheap to make amends for the extravagant rents."44 A petition from the borough to the state legislature in 1785, signed by 96 people, 27 percent of whom can be identified as artisans, complained that the state of trade, was "labouring under many evils and disadvantages in consequence of its being monopolized by Foreigners, particularly British Merchants and Factors." With the loss to American merchants from the ban on trade to the West Indies came the loss to shipbuilders; "a total stop is already put to that valuable branch of Business Ship building . . . whereby the great number of Mechanics usually employed in that Branch


44Patrick Parker to James Parker, Norfolk, 10 January 1784, Parker Family Papers.
are reduced to the greatest distress."\(^{45}\)

A study by Peter Stewart of Norfolk's economic conditions during the 1780s shows that for the most part Norfolk rose to the challenge. Although the British Islands were closed to trade, other islands such as St. Eustatius, Santa Domingo, and Martinique welcomed Norfolk's business. By 1783, Norfolk had come close to matching the volume of tobacco exported in 1771-1772. On the whole Stewart estimates that Norfolk's postwar economy maintained about 75 percent of its prewar levels of trade. British restrictions hurt but did not ruin Norfolk in the 1780s. The nature of Norfolk's post-war commerce remained the same as in pre-war days. Tobacco, grain, and lumber products were exported and rum, molasses, salt and European goods were imported.\(^{46}\)

The town was slow to rebuild from the fire. In 1785, a traveler described the town as "a vast heap of Ruins and Devastation." As late as 1796 Benjamin Latrobe noted, "The ruins of the old houses in this town are almost as numerous as the inhabited houses."\(^{47}\) The city's population did not reach its prewar level until 1800.

Despite the fluctuating currency and high rents, the

\(^{45}\)Norfolk Borough Petitions, 4 November 1785, Virginia State Archives, Richmond.

\(^{46}\)Stewart, "Elizabeth River Commerce," 63-65, 72.

services of mechanics in Norfolk were in enough demand that they could set their prices accordingly. As in Charleston, artisans were able in the 1780s to charge high prices. John Joyce wrote that "workmen of all Denominations have most enormous prices for their Work." Also like Charleston the mechanics of Norfolk petitioned to have a government that they could influence.

On 10 November 1786, a petition before the Virginia Assembly asked that Norfolk's charter be annulled. The petition objected to granting offices for life without consent of the freeholders and the imposition of "Taxes on your petitioners without consent, which is contrary to the rights of free citizens. And opposite to the genius of a Republican government." The petition called for "a new charter, securing to [the city] the same rights and privileges as your Honourable House have granted, to other incorporated cities and towns," in particular the right of free election of municipal officers.

A counter petition the same day argued legalistically that the present charter had been confirmed by the state.

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48 "Virginia in 1785," 408.

49 By 1786 the Assembly had granted some form of municipal elections to those cities chartered since the split from England. Alexandria, Fredricksburg, Petersburg, Richmond, and Portsmouth all had municipal elections. William Waller Henings, comp., Statutes at Large being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia from the First Session of the Legislature in 1619, 13 vols. (Richmond: n.p., 1823), 10: 172-176; 11: 45-46, 156, 315, 382-7, 529; Norfolk Borough Petitions, 10 November 1786.
government at a convention held in Williamsburg in 1776. The counter petition credited the move to change the charter to those opposed to a new municipal law limiting tippling houses. The petitioners argued in response that, unless the corporate government is kept away from "disorderly and evil-disposed persons," business "in the commercial line" would be hurt.  

In 1786 the legislature did not act on either petition. The struggle over charter changes continued in Norfolk for the next fifteen years. Petitions for a charter change were sent to the assembly cast in language of republicanism, and opposition petitions extolled the efficiency of the existing government and protested giving power to the rabble. In the quest to adjust the charter can be seen the remnants of the factional fighting which characterized Norfolk in the pre-war period and provoked the rise of political activism on the part of the artisans.

In 1787, the House of Delegates of Virginia voted 82-7 to amend the Charter of the Borough of Norfolk. One of the seven opposed to the charter amendment was Thomas Matthews, the borough's representative in the House.  

On 24 December 1787 the speaker of the House signed the bill, "To amend the charter of the borough of Norfolk." Under the new act councilmen were elected every three years and met separately

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50Ibid.

from the Court of Hustings. The council controlled taxation and enacted by-laws. The governor selected the aldermen on recommendation of the council. The Hustings Court still consisted of the aldermen, mayor and a recorder selected the mayor.  

The reformers were unable to win the first election in 1788. The newly elected common council submitted a petition to the Assembly objecting to the charter change. They argued that by changing the charter their rights and privileges were taken from them without trial or hearing. This was the last petition that addressed the election of the common council. In the 1790s the focus of petitions shifted to popular election of aldermen, a privilege which the Assembly had granted to other cities in Virginia, but not to Norfolk.

On November 13, 1790, a petition from residents of the Borough and the County claimed that they had been "most grievously oppressed and injured both in their persons and properties by the Aldermen of the said Borough." The harshly worded petition accused the aldermen of unfair trial practices, destruction of property, and active participation in riots. Again a counter petition defended the policing of the town, especially in view of the "great resort of Seamen & others of all Nations to this Town, & the increase of

52Henings, Statutes at Large, 12: 609-10.
53Norfolk Borough Petitions, 28 June 1788.
54Norfolk County Petitions, 13 November 1790.
Inhabitants since the peace." Again the petitioners labeled those who supported changes in the charter "a few disappointed Characters, who have frequently disturbed the peace & Harmony of the Town, & . . . who have taken a solemn Oath to support the Charter." The assembly decided that the charges in the petition against the current charter were not supported and hence refused to act.

In 1794, 1797, and 1798 petitions repeatedly asked for a charter change. These reform petitions, like the one in 1786, pointed out that aldermen currently had powers "incompatible with the spirit and genius of a Republican Government." The fact that the aldermen were not elected to office in effect taxed the people without representation. Opposition petitions in 1794 and 1798 claimed the dissension stemmed from, "ignorance and ambition" along with "groundless decent and party motives."

The state would not change the charter to allow for the election of a mayor and aldermen. However, the house did respond to the charge of taxation without representation by authorizing the common council to make provisions for the support of the poor, which had previously been a

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55 Norfolk Borough Petitions, 13 November 1790.


57 Norfolk Borough Petitions, 26 November 1794, 31 December 1798; Norfolk County Petitions, 10 December 1798.
responsibility of the Hustings Court. In 1799 the house ended all controversy over the collection and expenditure of taxes by passing "An act authorizing the common council of the Borough of Norfolk, to appropriate and apply the taxes thereof." However sensitive the state was to the charge of taxation without representation, it would not let Norfolk elect its aldermen and mayor.

The final attempt by the citizens to elect aldermen was in the next year, 1799, when the petitioners argued that the aldermen had rights inconsistent with the rights of a free people. Yet, since the state had granted the common council all rights of taxation, the only specific right left to the aldermen that the petitioners could complain of was that of choosing themselves into office. Again, the state would not let riotous Norfolk have what the other cities in Virginia had.

Four hundred and thirty-eight people signed at least one petition asking for a charter change. Of those who signed the petition in 1798 favoring elections who appeared in the Norfolk directory of 1801, 58 percent were artisans, 29 percent shopkeepers, and only 4 percent merchants. Of those who signed the petition favoring the status quo in 1798, the directory lists 56 percent as merchants, doctors, and lawyers,


59 Norfolk Borough Petitions, 13 December 1799.
8 percent shopkeepers and only 6 percent artisans. Of the Norfolk artisans who signed petitions addressing the charter change issue, 73 percent favored election of municipal officials while 27 percent supported the existing charter.

The artisans who liked the current structure of city government were the artisans most economically successful, owning in 1790 land worth 2.72 more in value and 2.27 times the number of slaves as those who supported the reform movement. (See Table 6.) In fact, the average land wealth of those mechanics was more than 1.58 times that of the whole population. Clearly one of the factors determining the stand of an artisan in regard to the charter change was economics. The artisans who supported the charter change were poorer than even the average artisan. (See Table 6.)

Mechanics dominated the movement to elect officials and place powers of taxation in the hands of the people. This newfound interest in local politics coincided with a greater awareness among artisans of themselves as a separate group. Concurrent with the movement to change the local form of government was the creation of Norfolk's first mechanical society, which petitioned the legislature in 1790, 1791 and 1792 for incorporation. In the 1790 petition the mechanics defined the need for such an organization "to Imbody

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60Norfolk Borough Petitions, 31 December 1798; Simmon's Norfolk Directory containing the Names, Occupations, and Place of Abode of the Inhabitants, Arranged in Alphabetical Order (Norfolk: printed by Augustus C. Jordon, 1801).
themselves in a Society in Order to promote mutual fellowship,. . . to prevent litigation and disputes among Tradesmen and to promote Mechanical knowledge" and to establish a relief fund for widows and orphans of deceased members.61 Sixty-one members signed at least one petition for incorporation. The largest block of craftsmen in the Mechanics Society were in the shipbuilding crafts (20 percent) and the clothing crafts (18 percent). With the exception of the construction industry which employed 27 percent of all artisans in Norfolk but only contributed 11 percent to the members of the mechanic society, the members of the society were distributed among crafts proportionately to each craft's numbers in the city's population as a whole. The Mechanics Society did not represent only the wealthy artisans in the borough. In fact, according to the 1790 tax list members of the society had land holdings worth an average of 27.8 pounds in yearly rent and owned an average of 1.7 slaves while the averages that year for all who can be identified as mechanics are 26.8 pounds in rent and 1.9 slaves.62 Sixty-two percent of the members of the Mechanics Society owned taxable land, a figure that compares favorably with 66 percent of all mechanics in 1790. The distribution of land among the Mechanics Society members reflected the wealth levels of the

61Norfolk County Petitions, 2 November 1790.
62Norfolk Borough Tax List, 1790; Norfolk Borough Petitions, 1790, 1791, 1792.
population as a whole rather than just of wealthy artisans.

Although most merchants preferred to continue the existing structure of city government, one merchant, Cornelius Calvert, led the movement to achieve municipal elections. The movement to elect officials was connected to the factional fighting that dominated Norfolk's politics before the war. After becoming a victim of the small pox rioters in 1768, Cornelius Calvert wrote, "As to the unjust and unnatural Oppression I have received, I hope I shall always have spirit to treat it with the contempt it deserves." Calvert turned out to be a man of his word, as he spent most of his life after the war criticizing the person he blamed most for the riots in 1768, Paul Loyall. By 1788 Calvert had convinced himself that Loyall was indebted to the Church of the Elizabeth River for the money that the state had paid to repair the church. Calvert believed the vestry in 1779 had taken the money without rebuilding the structure. In a poem to the Norfolk and Portsmouth Journal, Calvert jeered Loyall who had recently lost a suit in Richmond,

If he [Loyall] will call to mind
He can remember still,
That his place of abode
Is in hot water be it where it will.

The incendiary did the petition
Of C____ts and others insult;
And had always been clear
For mob, riot, and tumult.

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63Virginia Gazette, Purdie and Dixon, 9 January 1772.
He divided ye in
The year of sixty eight,
And could not rest until a C____t
Gave him a broken pate.

Norfolk he has kept in hot water
Upwards of twenty years past.
And its well known the incendiary
Got his head broke at last.64

As was typical of Norfolk’s politics, particularly when involving Cornelius Calvert, the public insult was answered with a near brawl. George Loyall, Paul Loyall’s son, attacked Calvert in the street. Calvert published the account of the attack because he believed "The mobites still continue to infest this town." Calvert also took it as his duty to "open the eyes of the public and to guard them against bad men."65

Paul Loyall and his supporters, all of whom had signed petitions requesting that the charter not be changed, accused Calvert of being a tory. A letter to the paper in 1787 criticized "C.C.," obviously a reference to Calvert, "for his well known attachment to Great Britain during the last war."66 With the same lack of poetic ability that Calvert displayed, a poem signed OLD WIGS in the paper, read,

"I wonder what tempts you in rhyme to appear,
E’en prose you can’t write, in your sixty-fifth year.
The C____ts you wish to ‘unite and strike home,’
With the spirit of party, to fret and to foam;"67

64Norfolk and Portsmouth Journal, 20 February 1788.
65Norfolk and Portsmouth Journal, 27 February 1788.
66Norfolk and Portsmouth Journal, 28 July 1787.
67Norfolk and Portsmouth Journal, 5 March 1788.
Calvert answered the accusations with yet another poem in which he argued that "While public virtue glows within my heart, I mean to act a Patriot’s honest part." 68

Before the war Cornelius Calvert had been aligned with the Scottish merchants in Norfolk. Many of Calvert’s former friends were loyalists who left with Dunmore in 1776 and never returned. After the war, Calvert, eager to continue his vendetta against Paul Loyall and others, needed support. In 1787 he aligned himself politically with the mechanics of Norfolk who were beginning to unite and to demand a local government in which they had more voice. While not working for the same end Calvert and the mechanics were united in means. In the spring of 1787, just after the first petition requesting a charter change was submitted to Richmond, Patrick Parker wrote his father of this union, "Old Neely C- had plaid y Devil in Norfolk- He has formed a Strong party called y Plebeyans- Himself at y head-Have had a scandle(?) into y Public Money.[vestry scandle]." Parker goes on to comment that "Old Judas [Paul Loyall] has Had a writ Served in his House for All his Furniture & in short y Old Man is Determined to Expose y Tyrant." 69 Parker predicted that "before long they I mean y Plebysans will be the Strongest Party."

The mechanics’ consciousness of their unique interests,

68Norfolk and Portsmouth Journal, 12 March 1788.

69Patrick Parker to James Parker, Charleston, May 1787, Parker Family Papers.
the animosity between Calvert and his former enemies and the movement to have officials elected in Norfolk all surfaced within a span of two years and were interconnected. The political and social divisions that came to Norfolk also spilled over into the religious realm.

In 1787 a vacancy occurred in the Elizabeth River Parish. The two candidates for the position were Thomas Bland and James Whitehead. According to Benjamin Latrobe, Bland was "a man of great popular eloquence, but of violent and extremely immoral character, illiterate and vulgar in his manners and appearance;" Whitehead on the other hand, though "with less brilliant ability has the manners and character of a gentleman." As is not surprising in a town with the rough and tumble traditions of Norfolk, Whitehead also turned out to have an "ungovernable temper and disposition not suffering him to let any one be at their case unless they agree with him on all points." A letter to the paper in 1796 accused Whitehead of beating a black in the head, and thrashing "a Negro woman with a babe in her arms in the street, because she would not call him master." Anne Ritson included Whitehead in her long poem about Norfolk when she wrote,

Therefore the man who us'd to teach
And in the court-house gospel preach,
Was now to prove true orthodox,

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71 Norfolk Herald, 15 December 1796.
Tho’ most knew he could better box;
For once upon a time he fought,
And hard at fisty-cuffs was caught,
In Market-Street, with one who hir’d
A house he own’d, and rent desir’d;
But quarrelling, began to chatter,
Agreeing to fight out the matter:
The standers-by diverted were,
To see their parson fighting there;
And ever after people thought
But poorly of the doctrine taught,
By one who knew not to command,
Either his temper or his hand; 72

Supporters of both Whitehead and Bland claimed they were the legal vestry of the Elizabeth River. Of those who supported Bland four of eight were artisans. They were joined by Cornelius Calvert and his brother John, and two members of the Boush family, Nathaniel and Charles. 73 None of the members of the vestry which supported Whitehead was an artisan. By 1794, seven of the eleven members of the Bland vestry were artisans. 74 The Bland vestry was also dominated by people who had signed petitions favoring the election of municipal officers.

The Bland supporters accused the others of taking 2,737.15.6 pounds Virginia currency that had been given to the vestry by the state to rebuild the structure heavily damaged


73Norfolk and Portsmouth Journal, 20 February 1788.

74Virginia Chronicle and Norfolk and Portsmouth General Advertiser, 6 April 1794.
by the fire of 1776. It was alleged that the money had been loaned to Paul Loyall, Thomas Matthews and others.\textsuperscript{75}

The conflict in the Elizabeth River Parish was never fully resolved. In 1789, the vestry supporting Whitehead locked the church yard, which was still in ruins from the Revolution. When Henry Cornick, a tallow chandler and a member of the other vestry, forcibly broke open the gates, he was arrested. The case went to the District Court in Suffolk, which found Cornick not guilty. The Bland vestry took this verdict as a sign that they were the rightful vestry of the Elizabeth River Parish.\textsuperscript{76} In 1793, at a Bishops Court presided over by the Reverend James Madison, Bland was found "guilty of obstinate disregard and contempt of the rules and regulations of the Protestant Episcopal Church" and was suspended as a minister.\textsuperscript{77} The Whitehead vestry in turn used Madison's decision as proof that they were the true vestry.

The reaction to Bland's suspension on the part of his supporters was to deny the legitimacy of the Bishop's Court. Cornelius Calvert called it an "inquisition court." The vestry, still dominated by artisans, again argued for the sanctity of elections. Regardless of what a Bishop's Court ruled they held that the vestry had "a right vested in them, 

\textsuperscript{75}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{76}Norfolk and Portsmouth Chronicle, 23 July 1791, 2 June 1792.

\textsuperscript{77}Virginia Chronicle and Norfolk and Portsmouth General Advertiser, 9 March 1793.
by an act of Assembly, to elect Trustees to manage their religious concerns, and to take care of their Religious property." They objected to the convention trying to "force Trustees, on the People, for whom they never voted." Finally, the Bland vestry objected to the Bishop's Court for religious reasons, arguing that in religion men had a right to think for themselves without the approval of a Bishop or standing committee. This vestry kept Bland as their minister and announced that when the Bishop's Court is "agreeable to the Constitution, and rights of mankind, ... we will pay proper respect to their proceedings:" 7 8

By 1790, socially, politically and religiously, the mechanics of Norfolk had decided that they wanted a voice in their destiny. They organized as a society to promote mutual fellowship and support. Politically they petitioned to have local officials made accountable. Religiously they insisted on their choice for minister and, like the French at the time, they denied the legitimacy of bishops' courts.

The mechanics newfound sense of political consciousness paid off in their access to local office. Before the revolution only two mechanics, Robert Waller, a carpenter, and William Freeman, a butcher, had been selected for the common council. During the confusion of the war years some artisans made strides in local government. Three were selected to be

7 8 Virginia Chronicle and Norfolk and Portsmouth General Advertiser, 23 February 1793, 23 March 1793.
on the common council in 1780, William Smith a cooper, Joel Mohun a blacksmith and John Woodside a tailor. In 1784, William Plume, James Parker's old servant who had purchased the ropewalk owned by the Scots for a very low price, was selected to the common council.79 Once the confusion of the destruction of Norfolk and its occasional occupation by the British was over, none of the people selected to serve on common council was an artisan.

Unlike their counterparts in Charleston, the mechanics of Norfolk, through elections, achieved for the first time widespread participation in the common council. Results of the first election in 1788 returned most of the same people who had served on council previously; including artisan incumbents James Dyson, John Woodside and William Plume. None of the three was a member of the mechanical society and all had signed petitions against having elections.

Yet, by the second election for common council, the mechanics, newly united and angry over the controversy with the Church, had more success in local government. Woodside and Plume were reelected, but also chosen were Philip Ritter, George Wilson and John Smallwood; five out of sixteen council spots went to artisans. Ritter, Wilson and Smallwood were all members of the Mechanics Society and all had supported the petitions favoring elections. In 1794, nine of the sixteen

79 Alexander Diack to James Parker, Norfolk, 11 December 1784, Parker Family Papers.
elected positions went to artisans. William Willoughby, Oney Dameron, Goldsberry Hackett, Jesse Ewell, Lemuel Carter, John Peters, and Daniel McPherson joined Woodside, Plume, Ritter on the council. With the exception of Lemuel Carter, all of the new mechanics on council were members of the mechanical society, and all except William Willoughby had petitioned for municipal elections. The election of 1794 would prove to be a peak year for artisans. By 1797 only four of the sixteen spots went to artisans. New mechanics on council were Richard L. Green and William Dick both of whom had supported the movement for elections.80

Altogether fourteen artisans were elected to common council in the 1790s, most of whom were members of the Mechanics Society. Four of the fourteen also served on the vestry which supported the Rev. Bland. By 1794, the mechanics in Norfolk had achieved some degree of cohesion and some sense of their political worth. They did not control Norfolk’s politics but they insisted on a share in the decisions. Despite their tremendous gains from the prewar period, when they had let merchants control the borough’s politics, they still were not strong enough to make it on their own without a merchant spokesmen such as Cornelius Calvert.

Calvert wrote most of the letters to the paper

criticizing the handling of Norfolk's politics and religion. His name was prominent in all the petitions asking for a charter change. Calvert even signed a petition for incorporating the mechanical society. The mechanics and Cornelius Calvert united not out of common goals but out of common enemies. The mechanics' political awareness coincided with the loss of Calvert's former allies. Without the Scottish merchants such as James Parker, Calvert needed a new audience, and the mechanics needed a spokesman.

Calvert's connection with the mechanics was one of necessity and coincidence and most likely would not have occurred had the Revolution not interrupted the stay of many of the Scottish merchants. Calvert himself was a man more consumed with revenge than with altruism. Cornelius Calvert is quoted by Latrobe as saying, "I can't bear to hear of the will of the people. In the first place the people have no will. In the second if they had a will, it cannot be collected, and in the third, if it could be collected it ought never to regulate the measures of Government." Calvert went on to describe the mob as "The herd of mechanics, who labor with their bodies, and never improve their minds, who cannot possibly have the least idea of Government."\footnote{Latrobe, Papers, 1: 445.} Latrobe, a friend to the more agreeable merchants in Norfolk, may have misquoted or even fabricated his conversation with Calvert. Yet, Calvert seems much like Christopher Gadsden and Alexander
Gillion in Charleston, a maverick looking for a new audience.

The rise of the artisans' political awareness, and sense of their own uniqueness, came at a time when the artisans were neither making great strides or losing ground economically. Throughout the 1790s the average holding among slave owners fluctuated around 3.2 slaves. As a group artisans owned 26 percent of Norfolk slaves in 1790, and in 1794 34 percent. The average number of slaves held by artisans who owned slaves rose from 3.0 in 1790 to 3.38 in 1794. In the latter year, too, a greater number of artisans owned slaves; in 1790 63 percent of the mechanics who appeared on the tax lists owned slaves whereas in 1794, 79 percent did. Artisans between 1790 and 1794 were investing more in slave labor.

Yet artisans did not gain in land ownership. In 1790, 66 percent of the artisans owned land but their average holding of 26.79 pounds rental value was well below the average of 40.2 pounds for all taxed landowners and even further below the 45.77 pounds for non-artisans. (See Table 6.) In 1790 the mechanics owned 21 percent of the taxable land wealth in Norfolk, by 1794 that figure was 19 percent. In the early 1790s the mechanics began investing more of their wealth in slaves and less in land. The loss in land ownership

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82 Norfolk Borough Tax List, 1790, 1794, 1798.

83 After 1786, houses and lots in towns in Virginia were taxed on their assessed rental value regardless of whether the real estate was rented or lived in by the owner. Hening, Statutes at Large 12: 286.
Table 5
Mean Number of Slaves Held, Norfolk, 1790-1794

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1790</th>
<th>1794</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>all head of household</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all slave owners</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all mechanics</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slave holding mechanics</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>those opposed to the charter change</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>those in favor of the charter change</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gini coefficient</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Norfolk Borough Tax List, 1790, 1794.

Table 6
Mean Rental Value of Land Holdings, Norfolk, 1786-1794

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1786 (decimal pounds)</th>
<th>1790 (decimal pounds)</th>
<th>1794 (decimal pounds)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>all property holders</td>
<td>47.28</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>72.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-mechanic property holders</td>
<td>52.58</td>
<td>45.77</td>
<td>82.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mechanic property holders</td>
<td>29.94</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>49.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>artisans who opposed charter change</td>
<td>47.66</td>
<td>63.53</td>
<td>135.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>artisans who favored charter change</td>
<td>23.17</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>43.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gini coefficient</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Norfolk Borough Petitions, 10 November 1786, Norfolk County Petitions, 13 November 1790, 26 November 1794, 31 December 1798; Norfolk Borough Tax List, 1786, 1790, 1794.

sufficiently overshadowed the gain in slave wealth; the mechanics just barely held their own in the first part of the
1790s. Neither distressed economic times nor boom times were a factor in the artisans' rise in political and social awareness in Norfolk.

The mechanics of Norfolk were better off in relationship to their neighbors than the artisans in Charleston. Charleston had a larger number of very wealthy planters and merchants than Norfolk. Wealth in Norfolk was more evenly distributed. The gini coefficient for inventoried wealth including slaves for Charleston was never lower than .63 (reached in 1764). Through most of the period of this study it was closer to .7. Of those whose inventories were listed in 1793, the gini coefficient was .74.⁸⁴ In Norfolk, on the other hand, the gini coefficient for land distribution in 1790 was .58 and slave distribution .37. In Norfolk the artisans owned close to 20 percent of the land wealth whereas in Charleston they owned less than 10 percent of inventoried wealth before the war, and 13 percent in the 1780s. The people with whom the mechanics of Norfolk competed for political power were not as socially or economically dominant as in Charleston.

Economically the artisans of Alexandria were better off than those in either Norfolk or Charleston. Land wealth was more equitably distributed in Alexandria and the mechanics owned a larger percentage of the taxable wealth than those in

⁸⁴South Carolina Inventories, Charleston District, 1793.
the other two cities. (See Graph Two, and Table 7.) In fact, the property held by artisans in Alexandria was worth more than that owned by non-mechanics. The first part of 1790 was a time of great economic gain for the mechanics of Alexandria. As land wealth was becoming more equitably distributed, the artisans were controlling a greater percentage.

Table 7
Mean Rental Value of Land Holding, Alexandria, 1787-1795

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1787 (decimal pounds)</th>
<th>1795 (decimal pounds)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>all property holders</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>68.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-artisans</td>
<td>67.42</td>
<td>67.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>artisans</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>71.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage owned by mechanics</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gini coefficient</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Alexandria Land and Personal Property Tax Lists, 1787 and 1795.

Yet, the mechanics of Alexandria invested less in slaves than mechanics in other cities, and they were rapidly moving away from slavery as a prime source of labor. In 1787, fifty-five percent of the mechanics who were heads of households did not own slaves. In 1795, seventy percent of the artisans did not own slaves, and that percentage continued to rise in the course of the decade. Not only were fewer mechanics owning slaves, but those who did held decreasing numbers of slaves.
Graph Two
Wealth Distribution: Charleston, Norfolk, Alexandria

The Charleston curve represents inventoried wealth while the Norfolk and Alexandria curves are land wealth.

Sources: South Carolina Inventories, Charleston District 1793, Norfolk Borough Land Tax Records 1794, Alexandria City Land Tax Records 1795
With less money invested in slave labor, the mechanics were able to increase their land holdings. Overall the first five years of 1790 were economically beneficial to the artisans of Alexandria.

(See Table 8.)\textsuperscript{85} With less money invested in slave labor, the mechanics were able to increase their land holdings. Overall the first five years of 1790 were economically beneficial to the artisans of Alexandria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1787</th>
<th>1795</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>all slave holders</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-artisans</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mechanics</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slaves owned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by artisans</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gini coefficient</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Alexandria Personal Property Tax Lists, 1787, 1795.

In the immediate post war period the mechanics in Alexandria were also interested in control of local government. In 1778, a petition signed by 103 residents of Alexandria claimed that because of the "present number and daily increase of the Inhabitants, and great improvements made," the town should be incorporated. Thirty of the signatories (29 percent) were mechanics. The petition called for the yearly election of twelve corporate officials, who would chose among themselves those who would serve as mayor,

\textsuperscript{85}Alexandria Personal Property Tax Lists, 1787, 1795.
aldermen and common councilmen.\textsuperscript{66}

In October 1779, the General Assembly of Virginia passed an act granting Alexandria and Winchester charters which provided for a yearly election of all local officers. These two cities were the first in Virginia to be granted such a privilege.\textsuperscript{67} Prior to 1780, Alexandria had been loosely governed by a board of Trustees, which had been dominated by wealthy planters and merchants. Between 1749 and 1780 members of the board comprised of fifteen merchants, six planters, three attorneys, one shipbuilder and one person whose occupation is unknown.\textsuperscript{68} In the initial election under the new charter in 1780, four mechanics who most likely would not have obtained a governing position otherwise were elected. All four, Peter Wise a tanner, John Harper a tailor, Adam Lynn a silversmith, and William Bushby a glazier, were chosen to serve on common council.\textsuperscript{69} Of those elections for which results are available, mechanics in Alexandria continued to win at least 25 percent of the elected positions, yet, always


\textsuperscript{67}Henings, Statues at Large, 10: 173.

\textsuperscript{68}Thomas Presser, "Eighteenth Century Alexandria, Virginia, Before the Revolution, 1749-1776" (Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1977), 171.

on common council. In 1785, Benjamin Shreve a hatter and William Lyles a distiller were elected along with Peter Wise. In 1787 Peter Wise was joined by William Duvall, a tailor, and John Saunders, a joiner.90

Although the mechanics of Alexandria achieved their goal of elections in 1779, they sought additional means of maintaining control over those who led them. On 2 December 1784 a petition from the Mayor, Aldermen and Commonality of the town, asked the assembly to appoint commissioners "to regulate and determine all matters respecting the streets." The petitioners thought the relatively short terms of municipal office called for a more permanent administrations.91 That same day a counter petition from other citizens of Alexandria objected to the city officials' idea. This petition stated that if the opposing petition were granted, those chosen as commissioners would be given "absolute powers." The petitioners believed that matters of such magnitude should only be conducted by people who are "disinterested and hath no attachments nor connections toward their judgements." The petitioners argued that for two of the people to be named by the Mayor, Aldermen, and Recorder was not appropriate.92 Of the 63 readable names on this petition

90Virginia Journal and Alexandria Advertiser, 17 February 1785, 22 February 1787.

91Alexandria Legislative Petitions, 2 December 1784.

92Ibid., 2 December 1784.
26 (41 percent) were artisans. The mechanics of Alexandria did not argue in terms of the nature of republican government as had their counterparts in Norfolk, but they did question the activities of their leaders.

The mechanics in Alexandria did not reach the level of political unity that the artisans in the other two cities did. Alexandria did not have controversies at the local level around which the mechanics could unite. Although the artisans petitioned to have a government that they could influence, the city's inclusion in the consensus oriented society of Tidewater Virginia prevented the development of an artisan based faction. In none of these southern cities did class consciousness exist among the mechanics to the point where they developed their own leaders. The antics of Alexander Gillion and Cornelius Calvert would not have been tolerated by the powerful planters in Fairfax county. In all three cities the mechanics needed a non-artisan spokesman in order to crystallize their budding sense of political importance. The local situation in Alexandria produced neither the situation nor the leader.

As the mechanics of these three cities entered the partisan days of national politics in the late 1790s, most had already developed a sense of their own political worth. The factional fighting between those who wanted local government in line with republican idea's and those who wanted to maintain order and efficiency taught them how to participate
politically and where their strengths lay. Their activity on the national scene was a continuation of local politics rather than a fresh beginning.
Chapter 6

Artisan's Role in National Politics, 1793-1800

In February of 1793, France declared war against Great Britain which raged in Europe until 1802. This European war affected the southern port cities. With the two largest European powers distracted by war, the West Indian Islands were again open to American shipping. In all three ports commerce reached the highest level since the founding of the nation. The war in Europe also crystallized the development of the first party system. Artisan political interests were centered around local issues, and with the development of a party system, artisans became more active in national politics.

The political parties of the 1790s gave American voters for the first time national candidates with clear differences. The Republicans, who took many of their ideas from early 18th-century English opposition thinkers, supported the French revolutionary movement, distrusted a strong federal government, and were more egalitarian than the Federalists. The party of Alexander Hamilton favored a strong federal government with ties to the mercantile community, admired the British economy, and was elitist.

Federalists who had the upper hand in national politics
in the 1790s worried about an America that was endangered by popular license, localism, and selfishness. Federalists esteemed the British economy and supported the British in international affairs. The revolution in France to the Federalist was a prophesy of what could happen in this country if the people became too influential. The tone of the Federalist party was in general elitist. Federalists supported popular government but limited the role of constituents to choosing among policies advocated by elite leaders. Alexander Hamilton's plans for the federal economy included a more modern structure of finance than the colonies had enjoyed that allowed long term debts, tied the speculator to the government, and encouraged manufacturing.1

The Republicans tended to see the economic and foreign policy decisions of the Federalist government as part of a conspiracy to strengthen the federal government at the cost of state power. Republicans inherited from British opposition leaders a hatred of a structure of finance based on a large federal debt which they thought would undermine the balance of the republic. While the Republicans encouraged manufacturing, they supported the cottage industries which dominated

production in the new nation. More industrial aspects of manufacturing to Republicans conjured up images of workhouses producing luxury items. Large scale manufacturing signalled poverty and dependence. Hamilton, on the other hand, believed that manufacturing was a sign of national maturity and that an agricultural society with only household production would remain stagnant and primitive.²

Republicans were more egalitarian in tone than the Federalists. Party leaders believed that the relationship between ruled and ruler involved responsibility and responsiveness. Because the Republican leaders took from James Harrington the idea that the legislature should mirror the interest of the people, they pushed for short terms of office and rotation of personnel.³

Between 1792 and 1793 the disputes between the two parties were limited to discussions of Hamilton’s economic programs, and remained in the halls of Congress rather than on the streets of port towns. Once the war broke out between England and France, with Washington’s subsequent proclamation of neutrality, meetings and societies appeared in towns. The controversy over whether to favor Great Britain or France dominated the debates between the two parties until 1798. With the uproar of the XYZ affair Republicans toned down their

²Banning, Jeffersonian Persuasion, 17-18, 51, 68; McCoy, Elusive Republic, 108, 144, 147.

³Banning, Jeffersonian Persuasion, 51; Chambers, "Party Development," 54.
support for France. However, within a short time, the passing of the Alien and Sedition Acts shifted the debate again to the Federalist misuse of national power.

In general the party infighting did not significantly change the deferential politics in either Virginia or South Carolina. Despite the existence of democratic societies and meetings in Charleston, Norfolk, and Alexandria, state and national politics were still controlled by the upper class which consisted of planters, lawyers, and merchants.4

In theory the more egalitarian and responsive stance of the Republicans should have had more appeal to the mechanics of these port towns who demanded responsiveness on the part of their leaders at least at the local level. Yet, artisans were both Federalists and Republicans. David Hackett Fisher hypothesized that the difference between those who became Federalist and those who did not was between attainment and aspiration. In other words, the Federalists consisted of those who had, whereas the Republicans were those who wanted. The difference between attainment and aspiration stretched across class lines. It was not just the poor against the rich but the rich who wanted more against those who were satisfied. Fisher projected that, in terms of craftsmen, those in trades with little respectability and less mobilization voted for

Jefferson.\(^5\)

In Norfolk, the only one of the cities included in this study for which there is evidence of the partisan affiliation of artisans, the differences were more economic than occupational. A poll for the Norfolk Borough election of 1796 exists in the Borough Deed Books. In that election the Federalist elector, John Nivison, received 71 votes while Josiah Reddick, the Republican, received 85.\(^6\) Twenty-four (61 percent) of those identified as mechanics voted Republican while fifteen (38 percent) voted Federalist. The fifteen Federalist voters were divided evenly among the crafts represented in Norfolk.

In the election of 1796, economic standing best predicted whether a mechanic was Federalist or Republican. The mechanics who voted Federalist owned three times as many slaves and property worth four times as much as those who voted Republican.\(^7\) Lack of surviving personal papers for the mechanics listed in the poll makes it impossible to test Fisher's theory that attitude toward one's attainment dictated


\(^6\)Norfolk Borough Deed Books, 1796, Norfolk Circuit Court, Norfolk, Virginia.

\(^7\)The average slave holding for the Republican artisan according to the Norfolk Personal Property and Land Tax List for 1798 was 2 while the average among Federalist was 7 slaves. The Federalists owned property worth 508 dollars in rent, while the Republicans owned 113 dollars worth. The average rental value for artisans in 1798 was 253.76.
party affiliation. Based on the economic standing of those mechanics listed in the poll, the haves voted Federalist while those who had less voted Republican.

The citizens of Norfolk met in the spring of 1793 and formed the Republican Society after news of the outbreak of war between Britain and France reached the borough. The members centered their complaints on the lack of responsiveness on the part of Federalists and on Federalist support for Great Britain. On June 8, 1793, the citizens of Norfolk issued a Declaration of the Republican Society of Norfolk and Portsmouth which charged that the tyrants of the world were combining to crush the spirit of freedom unleashed by the French "whose virtuous exertions (in a cause so lately our own) we cannot as men, and as Republicans, behold with indifference, or contemplate without a mixture of sympathy and admiration." The declaration included a line which encapsulated the mechanics' philosophy: "That the inattention which many of our fellow citizens discover towards the dearest rights, privileges and immunities of freemen, is to us matter of serious concern and regret." The next year the same organization proclaimed, "we claim a right, when those to whom power is entrusted, pervert it to the oppressions of the people," to reprimand and displace them.\footnote{Virginia Chronicle and Norfolk and Portsmouth General Advertiser, 6 April 1794.} \footnote{Virginia Chronicle and General Advertiser, 1794.} The Norfolk
Republican Society included the magistrates of the borough among those who supported the "enemies of America."\textsuperscript{10}

In 1795 the citizens of Norfolk met at the courthouse to discuss Jay's Treaty. The resolutions that came out of that meeting criticized the treaty article by article. The citizens declared Jay's Treaty "injurious to our interests as Americans, destructive of our rights as an independent nation, [and] . . . insulting to our understandings, and we feel ourselves degraded by it." Besides the particulars, the Republicans of Norfolk considered the treaty as a whole to be against the wishes of the majority, a violation of congressional power to regulate commerce, and anti-French in its language.\textsuperscript{11}

But not all the people of Norfolk were Republican. In the 1790s the town split over most issues. When another meeting of citizens in April 1796 discussed Jay's treaty, it adopted a weakly worded resolution. The resolves dwelled on the role the House of Representatives had played in accepting the treaty. The resolves asked the House to consider the treaty apart from "any partial or local considerations of policy." The only hint of a Republican tone in the resolve is the last line which states that the people were convinced "the faith, honor, interest, and happiness of the people of the United States, will not be endangered by with holding the

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{11}Norfolk Herald, 12 August 1795.
appropriations required to carry the treaty into effect." The vote on this vaguely worded document was 90 to 85 in favor. As the election poll of 1796 also showed, the borough of Norfolk was evenly split between Federalist and Republicans.\(^\text{12}\)

The Federalists of Norfolk expressed the same elitism which was common to the party and to those who continually argued against changing Norfolk's charter. In 1793, the author of a letter signed "An Aristocrat" stated that if he was a Governor, County Lieutenant, A Magistrate, or even a Mayor "I'd scourge, with the lash of the LAW, all such anti-federal, mob-existing, riot-raising scriblers with a vengeance. I'd teach them to behave better and speak more reverentially of their 'superiors'."\(^\text{13}\)

Petitions for charter change targeted the Aldermen of the Borough who tended to be Federalists. In 1799, when presented with an Address from the General Assembly discussing the Virginia Resolutions, the Aldermen refused to promote the measure. They wrote that, "they cannot consistently with their duty take any steps in promoting a measure which to them appears to originate in the exercise of powers truly anomalous and alarming-injurious to the public welfare." They continued that "they cannot allow themselves to be instruments of disseminating opinions and principles tending to undermine the

\(^{12}\)American Gazette and Norfolk and Portsmouth Public Advertiser, 29 April 1796.

\(^{13}\)Virginia Chronicle and Norfolk and Portsmouth General Advisor, 24 August 1793.
federal authority, and [which] may probably lead to a dissolution of the social Compact."  

Besides Federalist aldermen, Norfolk was represented for most of the 1790s by a Federalist congressman, and in 1799 the town elected a Federalist to the state legislature. A weak relationship exists between artisans who supported changing the borough charter to allow for more municipal elections and those who supported the established system. Ten (38 percent) of those who wanted a charter change voted Federalist while sixteen (62 percent) voted for the Republican elector. Artisans were more united over local politics than over national, however the factional fighting which dominated Norfolk's local politics did creep into national politics. Cornelius Calvert, the spokesmen for the artisans, in the poll in 1796 voted for the Republican elector. In 1793 William Plume, the owner of the town's ropewalk and tannery, who sided with the anti-Calvert faction on the charter change issue wrote to Henry Tazewell inquiring of the town's congressman, Josiah Parker, a Federalist. Plume grumbled that "I have ever held his principles in the utmost detestation, although I have exerted myself in supporting him merely because he was opposed by a set of factious worthless scoundrels that I despise if

14 Lower Norfolk County Virginia Antiquary, vol. 1, 16-17; Norfolk Borough Hustings Court Records, 22 April 1799, microfilm, Virginia State Archives, Richmond, Virginia.

15 South Carolina State Gazette and Timothy's Daily Advertiser, 20 May 1799.
possible more than I do him."\textsuperscript{16} Local animosities influenced, at least in the case of William Plume, national party affiliation.

LaRouchefoucauld also noted the strong divisions between "the circle of English merchants and the creatures of the consul" who viciously attacked the party favorable to France. According to the Frenchman, the majority of the community had embraced the Republicans who supported the French cause "with equal warmth: so that naught but division reigns at Norfolk in consequence." LaRouchefoucauld, commenting on the factious nature of Norfolk's politics, observed that "This warmth of animosity, as much as the unhealthiness of the climate, retards the increase of Norfolk, where few new merchants come to settle, notwithstanding its advantageous Situation for commerce."\textsuperscript{17}

Residents of the borough disagreed about the usefulness of Republican societies. A letter from "Graccus" in the local paper called for the Republican societies not to relax in their pursuits. "Graccus" wrote, "let no considerations of past services, or temporary dignity, deter you from exhibiting to public view the public servant who has abused his trust."

\textsuperscript{16}William Plume to Henry Tazewell, Norfolk, 31 October 1793, manuscript, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

"Graccus" thought that those who objected to Republican societies were attempting to keep the people enslaved with little political input.  

Others saw the societies as a hinderance to the interest of the United States. "One of the People" wrote that "It is well known also that the intemperate zeal of parties generally transports them beyond the bounds of reason, moderation and justice, which ought to be held sacred." Men of true republican virtue should avoid the societies "which are formed to advance some private ends, and to lay prostrate, if possible, the grand interest and happiness of the United States." Another letter in 1798, signed "C," objected to the organization of a Republican meeting which claimed unanimity in the meeting's resolves when "there were not ten persons agreed in opinion." He accused those of the "Jacobin mint" of opposing the government for the last five years not only through the press, "but in trumpeting forth their contaminating and pernicious doctrines in grog shops and taverns;" nothing being too mean to stop them from "the destruction of our beautiful Constitution."

The uproar over the XYZ affair placed the Republican party which had united itself around the cause of France in an uncomfortable situation. The Republicans' only alternative

18Virginia Chronicle and General Advertiser, 9 July 1794.  
19Norfolk Herald, 11 March 1795.  
20Norfolk Herald, 12 April 1798.
was to argue that the Federalist favoritism toward Britain forced the French into taking unfriendly actions. A meeting of citizens in the town hall in Norfolk in 1798 produced a resolution to President John Adams stating that, while admitting to a friendly interest toward France, they "reject with honest indignation her inadmissible demands; we spurn with manly pride the imputations of disunion and disaffection to our government, on which these demands were founded." They asked that the American government avoid war, "with every means consistent with our national honor, and compatible with our national interest." \(^{21}\)

After the election of 1800, the Republican citizens of Norfolk, many of whom were artisans, were finally successful. In February 1801, the citizens met to celebrate Jefferson's election and the coming of the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century had begun under favorable auspices, they proclaimed "Peace, liberty, social bliss and every human comfort together with the arts and sciences, grace [its] train, and the golden age of poets is about to be realized in America." \(^{22}\) Also by 1800, the citizens of Norfolk had experienced eight years of economic prosperity.

The European war did more than accelerate party animosity in the United States; with Europe embroiled in war, American shipping expanded. In Norfolk, exports rose from a little

\(^{21}\) *Norfolk Herald*, 10 May 1798.

\(^{22}\) *Epitome of the Times*, 3 February 1801.
over a million tons in 1792 to two million in 1795 and by 1804 stood at over four million. The rise in volume, which increasing demand for shipbuilding and rising pay for ship carpenters mirrored, attracted large numbers of workers to Norfolk from surrounding areas. With the increase in commerce came a population boom stimulating the demand for people in the house construction industry. The rising tide of commerce carried most of the people of Norfolk with it. The Gini coefficient for the land and personal property tax list for 1798 was .54, well below the distribution of .61 that Norfolk had in 1794. Artisans now owned 24 percent of the taxable land wealth, up 6 percent from five years earlier. (See Table 9.) In terms of use of slave labor, the artisans' investment did not increase in the four years between 1794 and 1798 as it had in the previous four. The average number of slaves owned by mechanics was 2.5, and they owned 30 percent of the taxed slaves in the Borough. (See Table 10.)

Despite the economic good times of the 1790s, the artisans of Norfolk had to battle disease and a large fire that disproportionately affected mechanics. Yellow fever

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24Norfolk Borough, Land and Personal Property Tax Lists, 1798.

25Ibid.
Table 9
Rental Value of Land Holdings: Norfolk, 1794-1798

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1794 (decimal pounds)</th>
<th>1798 (decimal pounds)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mean all household heads</td>
<td>72.95</td>
<td>78.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medium value</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean - nonartisans</td>
<td>82.17</td>
<td>87.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean - artisans</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>58.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage owned by artisans</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gini coefficient</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Norfolk Borough Land and Personal Property Tax Lists, 1794, 1798.

Table 10
Mean Number of Slaves Held: Norfolk, 1794-1798

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1794</th>
<th>1798</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>all slave owners</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-artisans</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>artisans</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage owned by artisans</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gini coefficient</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Norfolk Borough, Personal Property and Land Taxes, 1794, 1798.

visited the borough in 1795, 1797 and 1800.26 Although the frequent outbreaks of the disease helped natives develop immunities, the disease was especially deadly for newcomers, many of whom were mechanics eager to take advantage of the

26American Gazette and Norfolk and Portsmouth Public Advertiser, 1 September 1795; Norfolk Herald, 19 October 1797; Norfolk Herald, 4 September 1800.
high wages. Benjamin Latrobe noted in 1796 that, "Most of the Journeymen Mechanicks who arrived here last season from England were affected by the Agues & Fevers, and many of them died."27 Those who survived were so fearful they left the city. In February 1798 a large fire broke out on Woodside's Wharf which destroyed houses within the square bounded by Water, Commerce, and Main streets and Beale's Wharf. The greater part of the homes destroyed were "built of wood, and occupied principally by tradesmen."28

Rapid population growth and disease added to the general uncleanliness of Norfolk. Already under attack because they were not elected officials, the Mayor and Aldermen were criticized for Norfolk's wretched condition. In 1797, the Mayor and Alderman issued an announcement that the yellow fever epidemic was over. This declaration, evidently based more on wishful thinking than fact, brought a letter to the editor pointing out the number of cases still in the city. The letter ended with "Happy Norfolk! hail the auspicious day, that heaven has blessed you with such Godlike rulers!"29 The editors of the papers begged the magistrates to inspect back yards and alleys because "filth collected into back yards and


28South Carolina State Gazette and Timothy's Daily Advertiser, 16 March 1798.

29Norfolk Herald, 19 October 1797.
cellars, produced worse effects than in the streets, as such places are less exposed to fresh air.\textsuperscript{30} In 1796, a satirical municipal creed anonymously submitted to Norfolk Herald stated that "we believe absolutely in the infallibility of Aldermen in the exercise of their office . . . [who] . . . "from Nature or Education they may not possess much information, yet are they not either unintelligent or intelligent, but intelligent only."\textsuperscript{31}

The first controversy between Federalists and Republicans in Alexandria centered around Jay's Treaty. In August 1795, a letter appeared in the paper claiming that the author had not talked to anyone in his neighborhood who approved of Jay's treaty. The author viewed the treaty as tying down "American citizens to an inviable peace and sincere friendship with a nation hitherto hostile, and from whom he has not procured that reciprocation, without which, it is impossible those [treaties] can exist." The author warned that ratifying a treaty which is "universally reprobated" could lead to civil war.\textsuperscript{32}

Although the public meetings that occurred in Alexandria in April of 1796 showed a town divided in its opinion of the treaty, the majority seemed to favor its ratification. In the

\textsuperscript{30}Norfolk Herald, 17 June 1797.

\textsuperscript{31}Norfolk Herald, 5 December 1796.

\textsuperscript{32}Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette, 1 August 1795.
morning of 20 April a meeting took place at the courthouse, resulting in a recommendation to the town's congressman that the Treaty which at this point the Senate and the President had already approved should not be stopped by the House. However, some participants complained that the morning meeting did not have sufficient attendance and called an afternoon meeting to draft another letter. That meeting did not approve of the treaty for its own sake as had the earlier meeting. Instead, the afternoon meeting stated in its letter that for the House to withdraw the appropriations to put the treaty into effect would endanger the balance and unity of the federal government. They asked the representatives to act so that the "political bark may not only steer clear of the shoals of civil dissention, but long remain proof against the storms of foreign invasion, foreign jealousy and foreign interference." A letter signed a "Calm Spectator" commenting on the two meetings stated that the sentiment was "in uniform, although their proceeding were a little discordant; and the true friend to Alexandria, to Virginia, and to the Union, will rejoice to find the Southern sentiment, here at last, so different from what it has been elsewhere represented." The Alexandria representative voted against the appropriations despite the people's entreaties otherwise. Mr. Brent, the

33Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette, 21 April 1796, 23 April 1796.

34Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette, 26 April 1796.
area congressmen, said of the afternoon assembly, that it was "not composed of more respectable characters than that of the Morning."^{35}

Despite the dominance of Federalists in Alexandria, many mechanics were still Republican. The artisans of Alexandria had been slower than those in either Charleston or Norfolk to develop a sense of their uniqueness as mechanics and to be aware of their political consciousness. Whereas the mechanics of Charleston united in the revolutionary movement and those in Norfolk rallied around local politics that dominated the 1780s, it was not until the second half of the 1790s that the mechanics of Alexandria began to unite. In 1795, a mechanics' organization was founded in the city. By 1796 the mechanics also had their own fire company. The city had three fire companies, divided by occupation. Of the eleven officers of the Friendship Fire Company, all but one can be positively identified as a mechanic. The Sun Fire company was run by merchants while the Relief Fire Company was more mixed but still had only three artisans as officers.^{36}

It was during the first anniversary meeting of the Mechanical Relief Society that the mechanics had a chance to express an opinion toward Jay's Treaty. A series of toasts, published in the paper showed the mechanics' political

^{35}Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette, 12 May 1796.

^{36}Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette, 18 February 1796.
persuasion and unity. The first toast was to the Mechanics of the United States, "may they always be looked on with that respect, to which by their services they are entitled." Without mentioning Great Britain the mechanics then toasted, "The Republic of France-success to their arms and wisdom to their councils." The mechanics also wished that the House of Representative make their decisions "influenced by no considerations but the public good." They also acclaimed American commerce and agriculture, "may it flourish without being shackled by Treaties."\(^{37}\)

As might be expected, the toasts received some criticism. A letter to the paper suggesting that the merchants, farmers and other members of the community who had supported Jay's treaty did not know the common good as well as the mechanics or the "Demagogues of the House of Representatives."\(^{38}\) A letter signed "a mechanic" replied "Are they [mechanics] not capable of judging what is for the general advantage?" The author suggests that "Merchants, Farmers, and Mechanics cannot exist without giving to each other mutual assistance."\(^{39}\)

The artisans in Alexandria were sensitive to criticism that they had no place in government. In the Alexandria newspaper a poem appeared in the fall of 1796 advising country politicians,

\(^{37}\)Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette, 5 May 1796.
\(^{38}\)Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette, 10 May 1796.
\(^{39}\)Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette, 24 May 1796.
Go weed your Corn, and plough your land,
And by Columbia's interest stand,
Cast prejudice away;
To abler heads leave state affairs,
Give railing o'er and say your prayers,
For stores of corn and hay.40

A mechanic, not a farmer, replied it was the duty of every
citizen to counteract an argument written with "aristocratic
and despotic principles." The mechanic urged others to
"Proceed, then, my fellow-citizens, Merchants, Farmers, and
brother Mechanics in your rational political enquiries, as the
best means of preventing abuses from contaminating our
government."

Political enquiries were not limited to national
politics. Another letter signed "a mechanic" protested land
qualifications for voting. He argued that in the state of
Virginia, a large proportion of its inhabitants were taxed
without representation and had to perform militia duty
"without being even virtually represented either in Congress
or the Legislative Assembly of the State, nay without being
allowed the smallest share in any thing that comes under the
denomination of Government." The author stated that "I have
always considered the Journeyman Mechanic, who supports
himself and family by preserving industry, as being entitled
to equal rights with any other citizen of the country."41

40Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette, 23 August 1796.
41Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette, 27 September
1796.
In 1798 when the town was reacting to the XYZ affair, a division between the Federalist town and the Republican mechanics emerged. In April 1798 a town meeting in Alexandria produced a letter to John Adams praising the "rectitude and integrity of your administration." The letter was signed by five people, none of whom was an artisan.42

As had happened at the time of Jay's treaty, the public meetings in Alexandria on the XYZ affair coincided with the Mechanical Relief Society's annual meeting. In 1798, the toasts again reflected the artisans Republican leanings. One recalled the nations who assisted in the Revolution and hoped for "Justice to their government and Liberty to their people." Another asked for "An amicable adjustment of our differences with the French republic." The final toast hailed "Our connection with the present government of Great Britain-May it be annihilated by Bonaparte, in the same place where it was cemented by Jay."43 The mechanics of Alexandria did not have the political power to influence public meetings in the heavily federalist city but they made their opinions known through their own society.

Still, as in Norfolk, Alexandria mechanics were not overwhelmingly Republican, particularly given the prospect of a war with France. Some artisans were uncomfortable with the wording of the toasts. A letter from "Y.Z." claimed that only

42Times and Alexandria Advertiser, 28 April 1798.
43Times and Alexandria Advertiser, 2 May 1798.
twelve members of the society joined in the toasts. A rebuttal from "One of the Members" replied that "seven eighths of that society, and three fourths of the AMERICAN inhabitants of Virginia, possess the same opinions," as the Mechanical Society's toasts expressed.  

To solve the issue, the Mechanical Relief Society convened a special meeting which decided that the published toasts did not represent the opinion of the society at large. The society's statement went on to assert the right of dissent. It charged that "a most illiberal, unjust and dangerous combination exists" among employers not to employ "Mechanics who differ from themselves in political sentiments." The organization vowed to "support our own opinions, uninfluenced or unawed by the frowns of any men or set of men whatsoever." Even though the mechanics denied the representativeness of the toasts, they asserted that they "view a more intimate connection with the government of Great Britain, full as dangerous to our independence as a war with France." In the last line of their resolves they declared that if Great Britain attacked they would fight.

Two years later in May 1800, the Mechanical Society's toasts again stated a commitment to a responsive government and Republican tendencies. One of the meeting's first

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44Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette, 5 May 1798; Times and Alexandria Advertiser, 7 May 1798.

45Time and Alexandria Advertiser, 9 May 1798.
thoughts was for the "Sovereign People-May they ever be able to regulate the instruments of the Political machine." Following this toast was praise for Thomas Jefferson, "that after the fourth of March next, he will be employed by the people, as their first workman." Not to forget the other side of the issue the society toasted "The combination of royalists and aristocrats against the Liberties of the People; May they speedily find that they have begun a bad job and quit work." The society denounced the Alien and Sedition Acts as "bad work" put together by "bungling workmen, who deserve to be turned out of employ."  

By 1800 the mechanics of Alexandria had developed enough political consciousness to participate more actively in town meetings; although they did not dominate as had mechanics of Charleston before the war, they did have an impact. On 9 October 1800, just before the election, a group of Republican citizens of Alexandria and Fairfax County met. Besides resolving to support Jefferson, the meeting arranged for a committee to assist voters going to the poll. The committee appointed included two artisans. While the mechanics did not control the Republican party in Alexandria, they were active in it. In 1796 Alexandria had been a heavily Federalist town; by 1800 the city was divided, and the political awakening of 

46 Times and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser, 2 May 1800.

47 Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette, 11 October 1800.
the mechanics assisted in this development.

The mechanics of Alexandria not only gained an interest in national politics, but they made their weight felt in the local government. In the election for municipal officers in 1793, all but one of the six chosen for the common council were mechanics. The artisans continued to hold their own in local elections through 1800, capturing on average at least one-third of the elected local positions.\textsuperscript{48} In 1795, for the first time two mechanics were selected as aldermen. In 1800, six of the twelve elected to local government were artisans. That year, Amos Alexander was selected to be the mayor of Alexandria.\textsuperscript{49} Amos may have been a merchant, but he was an officer in the Mechanical Relief Society.\textsuperscript{50} Whether he was a mechanic who switched professions or he was always a merchant, Amos obviously had close ties to the mechanical community.

The election of 1800 proved that the mechanics of Alexandria had come of age politically. A citizens' meeting had met prior to the poll to recommend a slate of candidates that was "calculated to remove the political and local


\textsuperscript{49}\textit{Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette}, 20 February 1800.

\textsuperscript{50}T. Michael Miller comp., \textit{Artisans and Merchants of Alexandria Virginia, 1780-1820} (Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books Inc., 1991), 4.
prejudices, which have too long divided the citizens and deeply affected the fundamental interests of the Town." The ticket included one mechanic, Alexander Smith. Yet when election day came, only Alexander Smith and three others from the twelve-person slate were elected while five other mechanics in addition to Smith were elected. The day after the election a sarcastic letter to the paper threatened a petition to have the city charter changed "so as to prevent any MECHANIC from being elected, to serve either as Mayor, Alderman or Common Councilmen." The author's reasoning was "a Mechanic has no right to think on politics, or to talk about government and the rights of the people." The only right mechanics had was to pay the taxes.

When mechanics served in the local government, they pushed for responsiveness and fairness in government. In 1794, the only two mechanics serving on council that year, James Irvine and Alexander Smith objected to the taxing of tithables for street paving. Not only was such a levy a regressive tax, but these artisans realized that because of the need for live-in workmen and slaves mechanics as a rule had higher numbers of tithables than merchants. In 1798, again two artisans moved that it was improper for common council to nominate any of their own members to offices of

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51 Times and D.C. Daily Advertiser, 1 February 1800, 13 February 1800.
The mechanics of Alexandria came to political awareness later than the artisans in the other two cities studied. They also achieved political success without the assistance of a merchant spokesmen. An outspoken outcast from his own class the likes of Cornelius Calvert, Christopher Gadsden, or Alexander Gillion would not have been tolerated in the streets on which Washington walked. Alexandria was too much a part of the close-knit deferential Virginia society to tolerate an outspoken renegade. Yet in a county that planters controlled and a heavily Federalist city that merchants controlled, the mechanics of Alexandria were able to gain some sense of their political worth. As with the other cities, their influence was strongest at the local level, yet they had national interests as the toasts at their yearly meetings reflected.

The mechanics of Alexandria came to their political awakening at a time when they were benefitting from the overall economic rise of the city, but in relationship to other Alexandrians they were barely holding their own. (See Table 11.) The stable gini coefficient of .52 in 1800 varied little from the gini of .53 in 1795, thus indicating wealth distribution varied little between the two years in Alexandria. The land of mechanics on average was worth less

in the latter years. Artisans still controlled 28 percent of the land wealth but with the growth of the city in 1800 mechanics represented 29 percent of the heads of households as opposed to 27 percent in 1795.\textsuperscript{53} The mechanics made their political move in a time of economic stability.

Alexandria mechanics were decreasing their dependence on slavery as a source of labor. (See Table 12.) Although the average holdings of all citizens who owned slaves rose slightly between 1795 and 1800 and the percentage of the city's slaves owned by artisans remained constant, while the percentage of mechanics who owned slaves declined from 30 to 20 percent by 1800.

As with the two Virginia cities, Charleston's economic activity boomed after 1792. Wealth in exports increased from just over two million dollars in 1792 to ten and one half million in 1800 while total tonnage in that same period went from 52,721 tons to 82,944.\textsuperscript{54} In general, planters, merchants and mechanics all benefitted from the trade boom in the late 1790s. In a letter to the editor "Jonathan Brothers" complained that all three groups were becoming rich, a state

\textsuperscript{53}Alexandria Land Tax Lists, 1795, 1800, microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library, Williamsburg, Virginia.

\textsuperscript{54}John Drayton, A View of South Carolina as Respects Her Natural and Civil Concerns (Charleston: W. P. Young, 1802; reprint, Spartanburg, South Carolina: Reprint Company, 1972), 168.
Table 11
Mean Rental Value of Land Holdings, Alexandria, 1795-1800

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1795</th>
<th>1800</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>all property</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>67.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>owners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-artisans</td>
<td>67.75</td>
<td>68.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>artisans</td>
<td>71.75</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>owned by artisans</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gini coefficient</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Alexandria Land Tax Lists, 1795, 1800.

Table 12
Mean Number of Slaves Held, Alexandria, 1795-1800

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1795</th>
<th>1800</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>all slave owners</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-artisans</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>artisans</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slaves owned by</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mechanics</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>artisans who do</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not own slaves</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Alexandria Personal Property Tax Lists, 1795, 1800.

which he feared ruined their chances of heaven. Of the mechanics he wrote, "Great demands for vessels, plenty of money to pay for them, and ship builders, blacksmiths and joiners, are all getting rich, very rich."55

Charleston, like Norfolk, had its share of disasters in

55Columbian Herald, 4 December 1795.
the 1790s. In 1796, a great fire burned 300 buildings, leaving at least 600 families homeless. Although the fire was reportedly worse than in 1778, because of good economic times the residents rebuilt more quickly. By 1802, most of the destroyed structures had been rebuilt, this time in brick rather than wood.\textsuperscript{56}

Like most other cities on the eastern seaboard, Charleston was frequently visited by the yellow fever in the 1790s. LaRouchefoucald reported that attacks of the fever in 1792 and 1794 were particularly hard on foreigners. In 1796, William Read reported to his brother that "A fever prevails here inflammatory and highly malignant." It "carried off a number of Strangers and country persons" and newly returned natives.\textsuperscript{57} In 1799, Charles Cotton reported that the fever attacked natives as well as strangers and produced 10 to 12 funerals a day.\textsuperscript{58}

Just as in Norfolk, the ill health of residents and sickly conditions in town were blamed on the local government, in which in 1790 artisans still had little say in. One letter writer, "a Citizen," appalled by the filth on Charles Street,

\textsuperscript{56}Drayton, 204-205; \textit{Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette}, 30 June 1796.

\textsuperscript{57}LaRouchefoucald, \textit{Travels Through the United States}, 1: 579; William Read to Jacob Read, 19 August 1796, Read Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

\textsuperscript{58}Charles Cotton to Father and Mother, Charleston, 24 October 1799; Cotton Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.
thought that the citizens should question the Commissioners of Health and the Commissioners of the Streets. "Citizen" suggested that perhaps the stagnant water could "give a high seasoned flavour to their Turtle and other rich soups, which our superiors enjoy." The author charged the reason for the city's oversight was that "the inhabitants of Charles Street are poor, and therefore neglected."\(^{59}\)

The city government was so powerless in enforcing health measures that in 1793 a meeting of citizens, took measures into its own hands. The meeting forbade vessels arriving from the Delaware River from entering the city for fear of introducing the yellow fever widespread in Philadelphia and surrounding areas. The meeting established a quarantine for such vessels and appointed a permanent committee to enforce it.\(^{60}\) The citizens of Charleston attacked yellow fever with the same methods they used against British aggressions before the war. The public meeting highlighted the municipal government's impotence more than it succeeded in preventing yellow fever from entering the city.

By the 1790s mechanics of Charleston had lost whatever influence in municipal government revolutionary notoriety had won them. The three artisan leaders in the 1780s, Daniel Cannon, Bernard Beekman, and George Flagg, had become wealthy.\(^{59}\) *South Carolina State Gazette and Timothy's Daily Advertiser*, 22 August 1798. 

\(^{60}\) *Columbian Herald*, 10 October 1793.
Two, Flagg and Beekman, had lost track of their mechanical roots and listed themselves as planters in the 1790 directories. The third, Cannon, who was the only one of the three still to consider himself a mechanic, was one of the largest land owners in Charleston.

By the late 1790s none of the men who had gathered under the Liberty Tree three decades earlier remained active in local politics. It was time for the next generation of mechanic politicians to step up, and not many did. Only two artisans John Casper Folker, a shoemaker, and Daniel Strobel, a tanner, were elected to warden positions between 1793 and 1800. Without the revolutionary movement to rally around and the strong sense of solidarity, it was difficult for the mechanics of Charleston to compete with the merchants and planters who traditionally controlled South Carolina government. As had the election of 1784, the 1787 campaign for intendent proved that the mechanics did not have the votes to win in the city. Of the 275 voters in 1787 only 56 (20 percent) are identifiable as mechanics. For comparison, mechanics represent twenty-five percent of the heads of households in the 1790 city directory, some of whom had to be

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61 Carroll Ainsworth McElligott, Charleston Residents 1782-1794 (Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books, 1989), 55, 58; South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser, 2 September 1783, 7 September 1784; Charleston Evening Gazette, 5 September 1785, 6 September 1786; Columbian Herald, 6 September 1787.

renters and ineligible to vote. The turnout in 1787 was high, but the numbers were insufficient to make a significant impact.

The mechanics could still send some of their own to the General Assembly, but the number had decreased since the Provincial Congresses in 1775 and 1776 when Charleston mechanics occupied one-third of the available seats. During the 1780s the artisans of Charleston supplied on average four of the city's thirty-man congregation. As with those who served in municipal government during the 1780s, these delegates were men who had gathered around the liberty tree and had proved themselves politically acceptable during the war. The delegates who served from Charleston between 1783 and 1790 included: Anthony Toomer, a bricklayer and Captain in the Charleston Battalion of Artillery. Michael Kalteison, who served consecutively from the first Provincial congress until 1790.63 William Johnson, a blacksmith, who served in the two Provincial Congresses and represented St. Michael's and St. Philip's off and on until 1790; and George Flagg, the painter and glazier turned planter, who served in the Assembly between 1785 and 1788.64

63 By this study's definition Kalteison was not an artisan but was of similar social standing. He founded the German Friendly Society, an organization dominated by artisans.

Daniel Cannon, owned in addition to his city holdings several plantations throughout the state as well as a share of the vessel Cannon, still considered himself a carpenter. Economically and politically the most successful mechanic of his day, Cannon had been one of the few mechanics to serve as a vestryman of Saint Philip's before the Revolution. He served in the legislature throughout the war and from 1785 to 1790. He was an officer in the prestigious South Carolina Society, Charleston Library Society, the Fellowship Society, St. George's Society, and Mount Zion Society. He founded the Carpenters Society and served as its first president.65

In 1790, the State of South Carolina rewrote its constitution and reduced Charleston's representation from 30 delegates to 15. The reduction further weakened artisans' political influence. William Johnson, Michael Kalteison, George Flagg, and Daniel Cannon did not serve in the legislature after 1790. The only mechanic of the Revolutionary era to continue into serve the 1790s was Anthony Toomer who served until his death in 1798.

In the early 1790s, mechanics of Charleston could only elect two of their own to the Assembly. Samuel Stent, a tailor who was a founder of the Master Tailor's Society joined Toomer during these years.66 With the increasing interest in politics because of the European war and the rise of


66Ibid., III: 540.
partisanship at the national level, Charleston mechanics sent more of their number to the two assemblies of 1796 and 1798. In most cases the lists of delegates the newspapers printed for these elections did not indicate party preference. Only one in 1798, which did not include any mechanics, was designated the Federalist slate. Between six and seven of the candidates on this list appeared on other lists in both 1796 and 1798. Most lists also included Anthony Toomer and Samuel Stent who were currently serving in the House but no other artisans. Nonetheless, in both years artisans clearly won the day. In 1796, Basil Lanneau, a tanner, joined Stent and Toomer in the House of Representatives. In 1798, four of the fifteen city seats went to mechanics. The names of two, John Casper Folker, a shoemaker, and Jacob Sass, a cabinet maker, had not appeared on any of the suggested ballots. Although the mechanics' votes alone could not have elected Sass and Folker, the interest national politics generated obviously turned them out for these two elections.

The flag the mechanics rallied around was the flag of France. Charleston's citizens, in general supported the French. In January 1793, the French consul had thanked the people for the "attachment that they have shewn to the cause

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67Columbian Herald, 28 September 1796, 3 October 1796 to 10 October 1796; South Carolina Gazette and Timothy's Daily Advertiser, 2 October 1798, 3 October 1798, 4 October 1798, 5 October 1798.

68South Carolina Gazette and Timothy's Daily Advertiser, 13 October 1798.
of France on every occasion, but particularly on Friday the 11th instant, when they commemorated the successes of the patriotic armies against the oppressors of Europe." On January 11, 1793 the city held a huge celebration of the revolutionary events in France. The festivities, which were attended by the governor and most of the local militia units, featured a parade, an oration, and a feast.\(^5\)\(^9\) Citizen Genet's first stop in the United States was at Charleston and he was made very welcome. Charleston became a center for French privateering, particularly between January and July 1795, to the benefit of the local economy. One privateer, Jean Bouteille, sponsored elaborate public feasts and donated food and money to Charleston's poor.\(^7\)\(^0\)

Besides being a haven for French belligerents, Charleston had a large and active Republican Society whose members linked the French cause with their own. The Republican Society of South Carolina formed in 1793 in reaction to the outbreak of hostilities between England and France. In September 1793, the society issued a statement of its beliefs which declared that if France lost the war in Europe, "the craving appetite of despotism, will be satisfied with nothing less than American vassalage, in some form or other." The society vowed to fight "tyranny and iniquitous rule" whether it be in Europe

\(^6\)\(^9\)South Carolina State Gazette, 17 January 1793.

or in the United States.  In March 1794, the society warned that anyone who held "doctrines and principles derogatory to the cause of France" and supported "the base measures of the combined despots of Europe, particularly Great-Britain" was subversive to the interest of the United States and "well deserves the severest censure from all true republican citizens of America." Probably most appealing to artisans was the society's testament, "That all public officers are appointed under the constitution, their political creator and ruler, and they are but servants of the public." In these words resonated the mechanics demands in the 1780s that municipal government be responsive to the citizenry.

Eugene Link, in his study of the Republican society of South Carolina, found that identifiable craftsmen accounted for 30 percent of the members of the Republican Society. Link's methods, particularly his definition of craftsman, makes 30 percent a low figure. The city also had a French Patriotic Society as well as the American Revolution Society, Mechanics Society, the Palmetto Club, and other groups that supported the French cause. All of these organizations

71 Columbian Herald, 7 September 1793.
72 Columbian Herald, 19 March 1794.
attracted artisans. Still it remained true that whenever artisans joined planters and merchants in a cause, they were supporters and not leaders. Only one artisan, the printer John Markland, served on the Republican Society’s seven-member Committee of Correspondence. Two mechanics, Thomas B. Bowen, another printer, and Dominick Geoghegan, a baker, were on the Society’s nine-member standing committee. Geoghegan died a month after his selection, leaving the mechanical leadership in the Republican Society in the hands of printers.

Heavily influenced by French agents in Charleston, the Republican Society of Charleston actively supported the French cause. In August 1793, when the Jamaican cutter Advice began to arm itself to attack French privateers, the Republican Society proclaimed the action a breach of American neutrality and took it upon itself to disarm the vessel. A party of citizens backed by the Battalion of Artillery boarded the ship after the captain delayed in disarming, and took all the weapons off the ship.

Some Charlestonians opposed the Republican Society. In February 1794, a letter by "Virgil" in the Columbian Herald

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75 "Republican Society of South Carolina, Charleston, 1793," Evans Imprints #46864.

76 Columbian Herald, 1 October 1793.

77 Jackson, Privateers in Charleston, 22; Columbian Herald, 10 August 1793.
criticized Genet and those who followed him. The letter warned people not to be led by foreign agents and not to accept unauthorized bodies which "arrogate to itself the rights of the people." Inasmuch as the whole United States was a Republican Society of four or five million people, the author dismissed "an association of one hundred individuals styling themselves a Republican Society," who wanted to "disturb our neutrality, favor a party and steal us into folly under the masque of gratitude." 78

In response "Tom Thumb" defended Citizen Genet and the Republican Society. The best part of the controversy, the writer asserted was the interest that Genet's action's sparked. Because of the conflict, "light is struck out of darkness; the people are roused from their lethargy, and their reason, is set at work." The debates led people to "make enquiry into the nature of republicanism, and the rights of man." 79

As events in Europe continued to escalate party differences, the people of Charleston continued to support the French cause. In 1795, public opinion in Charleston ran strongly against Jay's Treaty. In July 1795, the townspeople agreed at a town meeting to elect a committee of fifteen to prepare a memorial to George Washington. William Read commented to his brother that this meeting heard much oratory

78Columbian Herald, 28 February 1794.
79Columbian Herald, 10 March 1794.
"against the treaty, but not one word for it." Over eight hundred people voted for the committee which included only one artisan, William Johnson, a blacksmith. The select committee prepared a long list of specific criticisms of the treaty and summarized their objections by observing that the treaty lacked "the reciprocity which ought to be the basis of all contracts- that it contains no provisions in favor of the Unites States, in any manner proportionate to the various concessions made to Great Britain." 80

The varying reactions to Jay's Treaty in Norfolk, Charleston and Alexandria reflected the differences between the three port towns. Charlestonians almost unanimously despised the treaty, Norfolkians split on the issue, and Alexandrians supported ratification. As a result of the issue, mechanics in Charleston experienced a resurgence of the identity as workmen they had known during the Revolution and once again worked in concert for what they wanted politically. Norfolk's artisans continued the political activity sparked by local issues in the 1780s while Alexandria's mechanics with the advent of partisan politics came into their own.

Despite the political, social, and economic differences among the three southern port towns, between 1763 and 1800, in all three a budding sense of class consciousness developed.

80 William Read to Jacob Read, Charleston, 27 July 1795, transcript, Read Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society; Citizens of Charleston South Carolina to George Washington, Charleston, 6 July 1795, George Washington Papers, microfilm.
The Revolution and its consequences created opportunities for mechanics in Norfolk and Alexandria to increase their role in local politics. The mechanics of Charles Town who played a more active part in the revolutionary movement than in the other two cities were able to elect their own to provincial assemblies. Mechanics in all three cities formed social mechanical organizations, indicating their increase sense of uniqueness. In all three cities unity came at a time when the economic fortunes of artisans in comparison to nonartisans were holding steady.

In none of the cities did mechanics reach the same level of political activity as that found in workmen in England, or Northern U.S. cities. Southern mechanics did not develop societies that were primarily political nor did they actively try to educate their members. The mechanical societies in Alexandria, Charleston, and Norfolk were essentially benefit societies which were only political in that they brought people together. Unlike the laborers that E. P. Thompson studies, the artisans of the South were a middle class, nestled between the laborers, most of whom were enslaved, and the wealthy planters and merchants. The workmen in Norfolk, Alexandria, and Charleston were not as politically or economically oppressed as those in England. With the exception of opulent Charleston, the percentage of wealth held by the artisans did not diverge far from the percentage they represented of the population. In Charleston, Alexandria and
Norfolk, too, most artisans could express their political opinions in town meetings and local, state, and national elections.

In these southern cities most of the lower orders of society were enslaved. Slavery was a blessing and a curse to southern artisans, providing both labor and competition. The artisans working in a slave society were less radical than their northern counterparts because they identified more with the class above them rather than those below them. The southern artisan continually deferred to the more powerful planter or merchant, many aspiring to enter those occupations themselves. In Norfolk and Charleston mechanics turned for spokesmen to members of the planter-merchant elite who were estranged from their fellows. In all three cities the strides the artisans made politically by 1800 were impressive, but in each instance they had yet to achieve the permanent coalescence of a conscious social class.
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