"Hearty Damnations" and "Ordered Resistance": Protest, Profit, and Power in Colonial Charleston, 1769

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"Hearty Damnations" and "Ordered Resistance":
Protest, Profit, and Power in Colonial Charleston, 1769.

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A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of
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This Thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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In the hot, dry summer of 1769 something extraordinary occurred in the bustling port of Charleston. After two years of resisting calls from their "sister colonies" to protest, within two weeks Charleston possessed two mutually antagonistic associations calling for halting imports. Where once "silent Neglect" met appeals for resistance to the Townshend Revenue Acts, by the summer of 1769 concerned Charleston residents exchanged "bitter" accusations of complicity and a cacophony of "aspersions" against Parliamentary tyranny. In a city long "famous for our Harmony," each port resident – from the wealthiest merchant to the poorest Jack Tar – faced choices; this thesis seeks to recreate how contemporaries understood this moment of contested protest and their own involvement. To dissect how colonists came to protest, this paper examines how Charleston residents understood their position within the British Empire, traces how conflict over protest arrived amid inaction, and uncovers the drive by the anxious whites towards consensus amid a community characterized by a majority enslaved and restive sailor population. In capturing the range of possibilities for Charleston citizens, the narrative suggests how individuals calculated risk versus reward to engage in protest, why protest emerged within this community, and the relationship of these protests to the coming revolution.
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If Not For You…
Teeming with commerce, the piers of colonial Charleston
“appear[ed]” as if “a...floating market.” Boats from across the Atlantic
unloaded goods while great “numbers of Canoes [and river] Boats”
brought plantation crops down river to ocean vessels converging on
the bustling port city.¹ A merchant from Newport wandered the
streets of Charleston in 1764, dazed at the city’s meteoric population
growth accompanied by a building boom of what he judged to be the
most “handsome houses” in all the American colonies. From the busy
wharves down Broad Street, the city unfolded before him into an
impressive “new world.”² At the center of town, the new State House
and St. Michael’s Church dominated the skyline, while surrounding
shops sold every possible necessity and luxury for “cash or credit.”

The center of trade for the Southern region, Charleston glittered
as a bright star in the constellation of the British ports, intimately
connected to harbors in the West Indies, the Northern Colonies,
Southern Europe, Africa, and the British Isles. With boats coming and
going daily from St. Augustine, Poole, Salem, Tortuga, London,
Falmouth, Philadelphia, Rhode Island, Antigua, Halifax, Firth,

Jamaica, Newcastle, St. Christopher, Boston, New York, Grenada, Beaufort, Georgia, Bordeaux, Liverpool, Lisbon, Oporto, Barbados, Cork, and Georgetown, Charleston’s consumers literally possessed the world at their fingertips.³ Local newspapers brimmed with advertisements announcing the arrival of the latest ships bringing a “Compleat ASSORTMENT of German, Dutch, Russia, and Flemish” cloth, “French horns, trumpets, and fiddles,” “Dutch herrings,” and commodities from “LONDON and BRISTOL” into their store. Customers who read these advertisements for all variety of “VERY CHEAP” imports, learned that merchants also offered “empty cases, stone jugs, dripping stones, RUM and other SPIRITS, MADERA, MALMAY, VIDONIA and OTHER WINES” from Europe and the West Indies.⁴ Reflecting this opulence, Charleston’s elite merchants and planters fashioned their city – America’s fourth largest – as a brick and mortar testimony to their economic and political dominance.

When Charleston’s wealthiest residents stepped from their “sumptuous houses” onto the street, they contacted a vibrant and raucous port town primarily inhabited by sailors, slaves, and

³ This list of ports, comes from a Marine list on The South Carolina Gazette, November 23, 1769, January 12, 1769; from Edward Pearson, “‘Planters Full of Money:’ The Self-Fashioning of the Eighteenth Century South Carolina Elite,” 312-3.

⁴ For this paper, I have maintained the misspellings, capitalizations, and italics from the primary sources, both to preserve accuracy as well as emphases. The South Carolina Gazette, January 12, 1769.
mechanics (independent shopkeepers and artisans). The trade in rice and indigo that enriched Charleston’s wealthy planters and merchants required the labor of lower classes – who in turn supported the stores, dramshops, tippling houses, brothels and inns that lined the city’s wharves and lanes. From the marketplace to the streets, colonial Charleston was a dynamic place of interaction and contest defined by the constant movement of bodies and goods in and out of port.

In the hot, dry summer of 1769 something extraordinary occurred in this bustling port city. After two years of resisting calls from their “sister colonies” to protest, within two weeks Charleston possessed two mutually antagonistic associations calling for halting imports. Where once “silent Neglect” met appeals for resistance to the Townshend Revenue Acts, by the summer of 1769 concerned Charleston residents exchanged “bitter” accusations of complicity and a cacophony of “aspersions” against Parliamentary tyranny. In a city long “famous for our Harmony,” each port resident – from the wealthiest merchant to the poorest Jack Tar – faced choices; this essay seeks to recreate how contemporaries understood this moment of contested protest and their own involvement. To dissect how colonists came to protest, this paper examines how Charleston residents


6 P.R.S.C. (British Transcripts), XXXII, p. 56;
understood their position within the British Empire, traces how conflict over protest arrived amid inaction, and uncovers the drive by the anxious whites towards consensus amid a community characterized by a majority enslaved and restive sailor population. In capturing the range of possibilities for Charleston citizens, the narrative suggests how individuals calculated risk versus reward to engage in protest, why protest emerged within this community, and the relationship of these protests to the coming revolution.7

The People of Charleston

In his regular reports to London, Lieutenant Governor William Bull Jr. described the population of Charleston for the King's ministers. Counting only the white residents, Bull estimated that approximately 5,030 individuals resided within the city. From this total, Bull preceded – like most Charleston residents – to sort the propertied individuals into one of three ‘interested’ classes.8 This demarcation is best understood as akin to modern political parties (people of shared economic, ideological, and social position), rather than an immutable socio-economic class.9 Throughout the colonial period, propertied

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7 This paper seeks to complicate the narrative established by Pauline Maier’s *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776*. (New York: Norton 1972).
9 The multifarious business investments and partnerships of Charleston leave these interest groups appearing – in retrospect – amorphous and impossibly confused. Historians have
whites identified themselves as members of either the planter, mechanic, or merchant groups. In principle, each faction organized around their distinct economic interest and political ideologies; for example, they selected their own candidates for office and, when necessary, petitioned the home government independently. In practice, groups vigorously jockeyed for power within the colonial port.

Newspaper broadsides illustrate the interwoven economics of the propertied interests. Advertisements frequently publicized the variety of wholesale goods merchants marketed to mechanics, reported runaway slaves leased to mechanics by planters, and described partnerships of planters and merchants speculating in plantation land. Together the planter and merchant interests dominated Carolina politics to the determent of Charleston’s mechanic interest (as well as backcountry residents and the colony’s non-propertied residents), by requiring that members of the Commons House of Assembly – the only elected branch of colonial government– possess at least five hundred acres of land and ten slaves (or the

attempted to sort individuals discreetly and to treat these categories as markers of future Revolutionary allegiance, but I find the categories prove woefully problematic. The interest groupings are important in the various alliances, but simply are not reflected in the unchanging lists of individuals that some historians have produced. For another historian’s treatment, see Richard Walsh, Charleston’s Sons of Liberty: A Study of the Artisans, 1763-1789 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press 1968), ix.
equivalent value in city property). When economic winds shifted, however, this traditional merchant-planter collusion devolved into competition. In a business climate that encouraged the pursuit of economic gain in every possible form, political sympathy and economic self-interest often ran in multiple directions and constantly adjusted in response to local and imperial conditions.

The semi-fluid, semi-rigid categories of merchant, mechanic and planter into which contemporaries sorted themselves substantially influenced political discourse in Charleston. Contemporaries understood the political climate through the perspectives of their respective group, and participated in protest accordingly. The demarcation of group membership, however, proves nearly impossible to generalize in retrospect. For example, Christopher Gadsden was often referred to as "the Sam Adams of the South" and served a leading light of the mechanics, but also owned substantial tracks of plantation land (so could be a member of the planter interest), as well as, a large shipping wharf (similar to many of the members of the merchant interest). In the economics and politics of Charleston, these alliances mattered in the day-to-day running of the port, as well as, to contemporary's understanding of their place within the British Empire.

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The majority of Charleston’s residents lived their lives outside of the propertied interests. Observing their city, their colony, and their Empire, the ‘interested classes’ (i.e. merchant, planter, mechanic) defined themselves against these colonial ‘others’ including – an enslaved black majority, angry farmers tilling the backcountry, nearby Native Americans, the ever-threatening Spanish and French colonists, and countless itinerate sailors who daily arrived in the city from around the world. Despite their “Grand Modell” for a genteel town, Charleston elites uneasily coexisted with these ‘other’ port denizens, often complaining of the “abandonly rude, unmannerly, insolent, and shameless” behavior of the city’s lower-class sailor and slave majority. As elites drove through the city in sedan chairs and carriages, they spoke bitterly of idle slaves and sailors playing dice, smoking pipes, and “profanely swearing, cursing, and talking obscenely.”¹¹ Despite its reputation for harmony, even at the best of times– when rice prices boomed and trade buoyed the economic fortunes of all – tensions abounded within Charleston. At times of crisis and economic decline, the uneasy consensus threatened to collapse.

The Coming of Townshend – 1765 - 1767

The euphoria in Charleston following the repeal of the Stamp Act quickly devolved into a period of crisis for the laboring classes. By 1765, an acute shortage of paper currency and widespread freezing of credit brought financial hardship on the majority of Charleston's mechanics – the propertied small storekeepers and artisans – trickling down to those below. As wealthy merchants demanded the repayment of loans, the "industrious" classes of Charleston lamented that a "Man, who does not earn more than Thirty or Forty Shillings in the Day (and few do that) cannot possibly pay House-Rent, Cloath and feed his family." Amid these dire economic straights, the *South Carolina Gazette* published the first news of the Townshend Revenue Acts, legislation designed to raise funds by imposing duties on all glass, lead, paint, paper, and tea imported into America – goods central to the daily income of Charleston's small businessmen.

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12 For many mechanics, including most future Son's of Liberty, the 1760s proved a time of debt. Hard times, as historian Richard Walsh illustrates, touched the most important members of the mechanic's interest, the most radical segment of Charleston's propertied political participants. Tunis Tebout, for example, remained constantly in debt between 1766 and 1770, owing about £4,479 to various merchants, forcing him to curtail his operations, dissolve partnerships, and sell his slaves, coastal schooner, and his "boat negroes." A fellow mechanic and Liberty Tree regular, Benjamin Hawes similarly owed more than £2,260, and found himself completely insolvent by 1770, when the Fellowship Society of Charleston offered him financial aid. From *The South Carolina Gazette*, October 13, 1767, May 2, 1768, October 5, 1769, May 30, 1769; Miscellaneous Court Records, 1770-1771, 98 -100, 110, 264, 338, 374, 392-393; Records of the Court of Common Pleas, 1767, 135, 178, 211, 212, 272-274, 393-396; Minute Book of the Fellowship Society, 1769-1779; Converse D. Clove, *Measuring Charleston's Overseas Commerce, 1717-1767: Statistics from the Port's Naval List* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America), 1982, 157. Richard Walsh, *Charleston's Sons of Liberty: A Study of the Artisans, 1763-1789* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press 1968), 43.

13 *The South Carolina Gazette*, February 2, 1765; Walsh, *Charleston's Sons of Liberty*, 43.
In June 1767, the initial reports of Townshend filtered from ships into South Carolina’s newspapers, reporting in addition to a new round of duties, measures to create a Board of Customs Commissioners for enforcement. By empowering the collection alongside enumerating novel taxes, Parliament made clear its intention that revenue was to be extracted from the American colonies, by force if necessary. For Charleston’s mechanics, like painters George Flagg and Benjamin Hawes, these new duties threatened to double the cost of their business by raising the price of painter’s colors and white lead. Stationers, lawyers, and printers faced a levy on the paper vital to their trades; cabinet makers, builders, and glazers faced new duties raising the cost of glass central to construction. For South Carolina’s planters, who borrowed money extensively to grow cash crops and purchase slaves, the renewed duties threatened to drain all hard currency from the colony. Planters and mechanics – who owed money to merchants in Charleston and London – increasingly found themselves unable to pay off their debts. With foreclosure rates and bankruptcies rising, the future appeared increasingly uncertain.

Rumors spread, as well, of the Townshend Revenue Act bolstering the powers of American courts to aid customs officers in the enforcement of laws. The seizure of a pair of coastal schooners

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14 Walsh, Charleston’s Sons of Liberty, 44; Maier, From Resistance to Revolution, 113.
belonging to Henry Laurens—a prominent citizen, merchant, and (at the time) politically moderate member of the Commons House—followed by a public trial and vitriolic countersuits, confirmed Charleston residents’ worst suspicions.15 Actions by imperial officials struck fear into sailors, captains, and merchants alike—around the port, customs officials became as dirty a word as ‘impressment.’ In a widely circulated series of pamphlets about his experience and public trial, Laurens boldly warned that “such officers” and juryless courts were “most likely...to effect a disunion between the Mother Country and her American offspring,” a bold statement among Charleston’s elites.16

The use of the new duties for “new commissioners of the customs” particularly irritated many Charleston residents—who, in alignment with radical Whig thought—viewed the officials as mere “placemen, parasitical and novel ministerial” officers, abusing their powers by unnecessarily meddling with coastal trade and “sweat[ing]” money from honest businessmen “under the color of law.”17 Indeed, in an infamous tale, Henry Laurens was apparently so incensed by

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15 Prior to efforts of imperial regulation, customs officials did not interfere with coastal trade—a trade which was vital to transporting cash crops to market, even as
their actions and "extortions" that upon spotting the offending customs official on Charleston's busy street, he barated the gentleman and twisted his nose. Word of the incident between a representative of the crown and one of the colony's most respected businessmen quickly spread throughout the colony. For the mechanics and planters directly affected, a widespread conspiracy against Charleston residents' liberty and rights as Englishmen appeared afoot. The solution was clear: the offending legislation must be resisted and repealed. As during the Stamp Act Crisis – a mere three summers earlier – Charleston must again resume non-importation.18

Response to the Townshend Revenue Acts – Inaction

By November 1767, reports of the northern protest movement filtered into South Carolina's three major newspapers.19 Non-importation associations formed in Boston, then spread to ports throughout the North. Charleston, however, stayed aloof to calls for cooperation. For over a year – even as John Dickinson's incendiary pro-non-importation "Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer" appeared in Charleston's newspapers alongside local writers warning that a "most imminent danger threatens" our liberty – the port ignored the

growing movement of non-importation elsewhere. Despite exuberant toasts to liberty and celebrations of English patriots that followed the repeal of the Stamp Act, the booming port city appeared unwilling to resume a regime of “strict OECNOMY” in response to the Townshend Revenue Acts. Continued inaction in Charleston came not from a consensus of the majority, but the power of the merchant minority. For over a year, letters from Boston merchants to their Charleston peers urging cooperation and resistance “were handed from man to man,” Lieutenant Governor William Bull Jr. reported to London, with “silent Neglect.”

Charleston’s economic success depended upon the daily movement of sailors and slaves in and out of the port. For reasons of profit and potential unrest, Charleston’s merchant interest deeply feared any disruption to this status quo. Recalling the tumult in the

20 Charleston’s newspapers also contained information and updates from London about machinations in Parliament. “I fear little will be done for America the next session” reported one letter, “for the Common will not be settled till late in the season.” But also included information about changes in the ministry, including changes due to the ministers’ ill health and possible deaths. The South Carolina and America General Gazette, November 13, 1767, November 20, 1767; The South Carolina Gazette, December 14, 1767, March 14, 1768, April 25, 1768, September 16, 1768, September 23, 1768, October 11, 1768; The South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal, January 5, 1768; Knight, The American Colonial Press and the Townshend Crisis 1766—1770, 89, 94—96.

21 The South Carolina Gazette, June 22, 1769.

22 Boston adopted a non-importation agreement in October 1767, and most of the northern colonies soon followed. February 1768, Massachusetts sent the circular letter challenging the constitutionality of the Townshend Acts and asking for cooperation among the colonies in securing their repeal. Throughout the colonies, petitions were drawn in response and forwarded by assemblies to colonial agents in London to be presented to the King. Events beyond the Townshend Acts themselves, such as their seizure of John Hancock’s sloop Liberty and the quartering controversy in Boston and New York also hastened pressure for action. P.R.S.C. (British Transcripts), XXXII, p. 56; Leila Sellers, Charleston Business on the Eve of the American Revolution. (New York: Amo Press, 1970), 204.
streets during the Stamp Act Crisis, Charleston’s merchant interest
proved uninterested in upending the port’s stable peace with protest.
Loathe to exacerbate hostilities between the colonies and Parliament,
the powerbrokers in Charleston reached a consensus of their own in
1767 to operate solely within approved channels. To limit potential
risk, the merchants preferred a campaign of direct petitioning in
London. For a growing segment in Charleston, however, after two
years of waiting it was clear this limited response had failed. Outrage
against Townshend duties burst from the planters and mechanics
whose personal incomes were most directly endangered.

Supporters of resuming non-importation – supporters of direct
action – gathered in March 1768 under a large live-oak tree in Mr.
Mazyck’s pasture to celebrate the anniversary of the Stamp Act repeal.
Mere blocks from the State House, the Liberty Tree served as a
gathering place “where many loyal, patriotic, and constitutional toasts,
were drank,” often beginning, continuing, and ending with cheers of
support of John Wilkes. It was under this tree, in the joyous days
following the Stamp Act repeal that Christopher Gadsden first warned

23 One reason for the apparent lethargy of Charleston merchant was a petitioning campaign
underway by their agents in Great Britain. Several North American provinces all petitioned for
repeal, and reports from England indicated that the duties would soon be removed. Agents also
sent word that Stamp Act-like disturbances would not be smiled upon in London, thus hurting
chances for a quick repeal of the offending legislation. *The South Carolina Gazette and Country
Journal*, July 25, 1769; *The South Carolina Gazette* July 8, 1769; P.R.S.C. XXXII, 56.
24 For the large export merchants or factors, Parliament appeared to be passing beneficial
legislation aiding their British parent firms in collecting debts and expanding markets for
Carolina’s burgeoning rice industry.
of the dangers of the Declaratory Act, where mechanics chose candidates for office, and where “orderly” assemblies often gathered to proceed into town. In the past these crowds had been seen “carrying [45] lights...down King street and Broad-street” into a tavern “where 45 bowls of punch, 45 bottles of wine, and 92 glasses” emerged, and participants spent “a few hours in a new round of toasts” celebrating the “Patriots of Britain and America.”

On this occasion, however, “it was observed” reported the *South Carolina Gazette* “that spirits were dampened by the late revenue act.” The most somber toasts were drunk in honor of Massachusetts and the Pennsylvania Farmer with mighty cheers for “Perseverance and Success to AMERICAN MANUFACTURES.” Despite meetings, pamphlets, and speeches, the participants – largely mechanics and their sympathizers – felt little optimism for the resumption of protest in Charleston.

*The Summer of Our Discontent – The Renewal of Protest in Charleston*

By early June 1769, a marked change appeared underway in Charleston as “a kind of enthusiasm swept the city.” Writing to his superiors in London, Lieutenant Governor Bull rescinded his prior

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25 The tree suffered during the Revolutionary War, destroyed by British invading the city. Splintered and burned, shards of the tree were then kept as mementos, including one of the gnarly roots made into a cane for Thomas Jefferson. Description of Liberty tree and celebrations from *The South Carolina Gazette*, October 3, 1768.

26 *The South Carolina Gazette*, March 23, 1769; Walsh. *Charleston’s Sons of Liberty*, 46.

27 William Bull to Earl of Hillsborough, October 18, 1768, PRO, reel 10, vol. 32.
assessment of peace in the port. With their fires stoked by the “most
determined leaders” acting as “tribunes of the people,” an alliance of
mechanics and planters gathered “in Taverns” and “under the Liberty
Tree” in opposition to the Townshend Revenue Acts.28 “Loud cries”
now “silence the weaker voices of moderation” as energetic leaders at
the vanguard of non-importation effectively rallied Charleston
residents into “see[ing] how far they could follow the laudable
example” of New York and Boston.29 These “movers of the grand
machine” appeared increasingly “obstinate in urging to extremity”
every “opinion.”30

Buried between an obituary for “Mrs. Susannah Bee...a Lady of
so amiable...a Disposition as renders her Death a Loss to Society” and
an apologetic correction for earlier “MISINFORMATION” reporting a
“marriage between Benjamin Elliott and Miss Sanders,” the South
Carolina Gazette informed its thorough readers on June 15, 1769 that
“Several Societies of Gentlemen in this Town” had formed in protest.

Mere weeks after merchants earned praise from imperial ministers for

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28 William Bull Jr. described the leaders as “Thomas Lynch who, tho’ a man of sense is very
obstinate” in his opinions, Christopher Gadsden “a violent enthusiast in the cause” who
“maintains with great vehemence the most extravagant claims of American exemptions,” and
“John Mackenzie, whose education at Cambridge ought to have inspired him with more dutiful
sentiment. P.R.S.C., XXXII, 416; Walsh. Charleston’s Sons of Liberty, 48.
29 The South Carolina Gazette, June 1, 8, 15, 1769; Walsh. Charleston’s Sons of Liberty, 47-49.
32; Daniel J. McDonough. Christopher Gadsden and Henry Laurens: the Parallel Lives of Two Ameriian
Patriots. (Selingsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2000), 103-4; Walsh, Charleston’s Sons of
"act[ing] like A WISE AND PRUDENT people" by ignoring non-importation, the first association since the Stamp Act vowing to "purchase no kind of British Goods that can be manufactured in America," circulated around Charleston.\textsuperscript{31} Agreeing to "clothe themselves in homespun as soon as it can be got," this first revive non-importation association precipitated a tense standoff within the port.\textsuperscript{32}

\textit{The Strategy of Non-Importation}

Response to the challenge of the non-importation association to "SIGN or BE RUINED" occurred along lines of economic interest and political ideology.\textsuperscript{33} As a strategy of dissent, signers of the association believed that non-importation and non-consumption association could gravely injure British commerce effectively awakening British merchants – so "they would see, they would feel, the oppressions we groan under, and exert themselves to procure Us redress." Some believed that American colonists practicing frugality and supporting local manufacturing would unleash "such a disturbance" among unemployed Englishmen "at home as would endanger the heads and necks" of the authors of the offending laws.\textsuperscript{34} Additionally, non-importation offered a peaceful and effective form of protest within

\textsuperscript{31} The South Carolina Gazette, June 15, 1769; The South Carolina Gazette, June 22, 1769; William Henry Drayton, \textit{Letters of Freeman} (London, 1771), 1-5.
\textsuperscript{32} The South Carolina Gazette, June 1, July 22, 1769.
\textsuperscript{33} The South Carolina and American General Gazette, June 10, 17, 1769.
\textsuperscript{34} Maier, \textit{From Resistance to Revolution}, 114 – 119; William Henry Drayton, \textit{Letters of Freeman} (London, 1771), 111, 141; Knight, \textit{The American Colonial Press and the Townshend Crisis}. 95.
Charleston, by not encouraging anarchy or disorder among the lower sorts within Charleston — non-importation, it was argued, relocated dissent from the street to the spinning wheel.

With the export trade in rice and indigo booming, merchants continued to feel little concern about the specific Townshend duties. Any wholesale price increase could simply be passed to the consumer, whereas a renewed boycott necessarily entailed financial risk. Additionally, the central benefits of non-importation extolled at length in newspapers — a development of domestic manufacturing, the halting of the slave trade, and saving of money through frugality — directly threatened the lucrative business of Charleston’s merchants.35 Conversely, planters and mechanics actually benefited from non-importation schemes because they ensured financial solvency for those in debt and lowered prices of goods, while developing new business within the port.36 After two years of delay, the first June issue of the South Carolina Gazette ushered in a summer where — at the intersection of self-interest and ideology — a contested protest reemerged in a city famous for its harmony.

35 The South Carolina and America General Gazette, November 13, 1767; South Carolina and America General Gazette, November 20, 1767; South Carolina Gazette, December 14, 1767.
36 The list of goods proscribed for importation also varied from colony to colony, and in the South agreements tended to emphasize non-consumption over non-importation. The South Carolina and American General Gazette, September 4, 1767, December 25, 1767, January 1, 1768; The South Carolina Gazette, October 5, 1767; Knight. The American Colonial Press and the Townshend Crisis 1766 — 1770. 83-4, 92-3, 113; Maier, From Resistance to Revolution, 115.
The first non-importation pledges, drafted and signed by the mechanics and planters, resulted in a scheme of protest that struck fear into the hearts and pocketbooks of Charleston’s powerful merchant interest.37 Aware that remaining aloof only invited more extreme measures, the merchant interest gathered on June 30 at Dillon’s tavern to discuss their response to the sudden challenge of non-importation.38 Hoping to reassert the traditional merchant-planter alliance, the meeting selected a committee to draft a rival non-importation association. On July 7, the merchants “in a Number near eighty” presented their scheme “without one differenting voice.”39 The South Carolina Gazette broadside announced the merchants’ association and their letter below a reprinting of the first non-importation association (including an additional, italicized clause urging unity behind a single protest organization) and a preemptive response by “A Mechanic.”40 On a single broadside, Charleston residents faced two contested protest associations. In less than a month, the port city that had for two years avoided action now possessed two mutually antagonistic organizations.

37 The South Carolina Gazette, July 13, 1769.
38 The South Carolina Gazette, June 22, 1769; July 6, 13, 1769; William Henry Drayton, Letters of Freeman, 1-5; Walsh, Charleston’s Sons of Liberty, 47-8; Sellers, Charleston Business on the Eve of the American Revolution, 207.
39 The South Carolina Gazette, July 22, 1769; The South Carolina and America General Gazette, July 17, 1769.
40 By this time, the publisher of The South Carolina Gazette, Peter Timothy, was an ardent supporter of the radical interests, as will be examined in the note on sources below.
The Charleston residents who signed their names to any and all of the non-importation associations risked economic loss, potential retribution by British authorities, and the constant possibility of disorder from the majority population of impoverished sailors and slaves. As they read the paper and discussed politics, individuals formed opinions of recent events through the lenses of political traditions and perceptions of their place in the Empire. In choosing to protest – in weighing the potential of risk versus the possibilities of reward – contemporaries reveal how people oriented themselves within the community, colony, and Empire. At an exceptional moment, one that challenged individuals to take action (or in the case of boycott, inaction), what can we learn by studying this protest? In Charleston, the pattern of competition and consensus illustrates a contested and contentious balance between the ‘interested’ propertied whites the marginalized parts of the community.

"During the Fortnight past," reported The South Carolina and American General Gazette, “several Proposals have been made...for stopping the Importation of Goods...till the Revenue Acts shall be Repealed” with “many” already signing “Resolutions for that Purpose.”\textsuperscript{41} Even as merchants and mechanics exchanged bitter

\textsuperscript{41} The South Carolina and American General Gazette, July 4, 1769; The South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal, July 15, 1769.
accusations – readers learned of several “proposals” underway “for
One General” agreement. Ever fearful of chaos and disorder, a drive
toward consensus quickly emerged in Charleston. The individuals
who joined non-importation efforts in Charleston genuinely believed
in their community’s ability to force Parliament to repeal the
Townshend Revenue Acts through protest, and so the central question
became deciding upon the most effective, orderly form for that protest.

The drive for consensus stemmed from a common fear that
mechanics, merchants, and planters shared about the potential actions
of colonial others – sailors and slaves – residing in Charleston. In the
period of negotiations, mechanics and the planters held “the whip
hand” as members of the first association increasingly refused to “lay
out their money” with merchants participating in the second
association. As lists revealed that a number of merchants belonged to
both boycott associations, while others supported the position of the
mechanics and planters, compromise appeared inevitable by mid-July.
Overtures for a combined agreement by merchants fearing more
extreme actions resulted in a joint committee to draft a uniform
agreement distilling the essentials of the two rival agreements.43

42 The South Carolina and American General Gazette. July 17, 1769.
On July 22, 1769, serving as president of the public meeting Christopher Gadsden twice read aloud a new compromised plan, pausing paragraph by paragraph to field objections from those gathered. By acclaim, the crowd of planters, mechanics, and merchants voted "unanimously" to support a third non-importation agreement which, reported *The South Carolina and American General Gazette* "we have no reason to doubt will be satisfactory to...every Freeman in the Province." The agreement combined the first and second non-importation associations, ultimately granting greater allowances for the merchant and planter economic interests, while expanding the power of the mechanics.

Unraveling how protest resumed within Charleston requires reconstructing this community: tracing the relationships, competition, collusion, and ultimate drive for consensus among the 'interested' classes who drafted, joined, and participated in non-importation schemes shaped by fears of potential unrest among these colonial others. The conflict over protest that emerged on June 15 as mechanics drafted a non-importation association in direct opposition to the merchants' inaction, developed into a brief period with two competing organizations, and ultimately ended with an agreement palatable to the merchant and planter interests: an agreement that endowed

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44 Walsh. *Charleston's Sons of Liberty*, 49.
mechanics for the first time with equal political power in the association, an extra-legal power they would continue to exercise throughout the Revolution.

The rapid transition of Charleston over the summer of 1769 raises fundamental questions about what participating in these associations meant to contemporary people. In all accounts—newspapers, correspondence, pamphlets, and journals—this period appears a real crisis within a community “famous for our Harmony.” In this exceptional moment when different opinions, interests, and ideas about protest circulated and divided the community, what can we learn about how individuals understood their place within the Empire, their persuasive power, and the dynamics of their particular community? What self-interest and ideologies drive action? As we examine these ‘interested’ classes, what can we unravel about their world and their experience? What can we ascertain about those marginalized in this form of protest? How are the interested classes pressed into particular actions by the excluded others? In a moment of conflict and consensus, answers to these fundamental questions about the contemporary experiences of protest challenge us to recreate this soon-to-be-Revolutionary world, reexamining common notions about the origins of American independence.
In hindsight, the renewal of non-importation in response to Townshend Revenue Acts appears a direct trajectory from the protests of the Stamp Act Crisis inexorably pushing towards the Revolution. But for Charleston residents in the summer of 1769, the adoption of non-importation felt like a wholly distinct moment - one informed by English radical tradition and the community's past experiences - but hardly the torch of an irrepressible revolution severing ties with England. So persuaded were those who signed non-importation association of their importance within the British empire, that they truly believed in their own power to change imperial policy through (an often quite limited form of) protest.

This essay examines the origins of the contentious resumption of protest in the Charleston during the summer of 1769 to unpack the interests, loyalties, perceptions, fears, and hopes driving the initial inaction, aggressive articulation, direct competition, and ultimate consensus in protesting the Townshend Revenue Acts. Beyond simply restoring contingency in the protests prior to the American Revolution, by examining this contested moment of protest within Charleston, it is possible to reconstruct how contemporaries conceived of their moment, their rights, their position, and even themselves within the British Empire. While this experience of Charleston does not apply everywhere, it certainly begs us to reconsider and reexamine the
experience of contemporaries within each port community from Rhode
Island to Antigua.

The economic interests and ideological divides between the
merchant, planter, and mechanic interest before the Townshend
Revenue Acts, deeply influenced the variety of responses to the
legislation and ultimately shaped what individuals believed they were
participating in during the resumption of non-importation. Far from
building a communal trust and common understanding suggested by
historian T.H. Breen, non-importation in Charleston originated and
thrived in a contentious, competitive environment. Before even
connecting to other colonies, capturing how the community itself
interacted, points to how protest operated within the British Empire.

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A Note on Sources -
The Charleston Press, Public Opinion, and the Townshend Crisis

A small note appeared on June 1, 1769, informing readers of the
South Carolina Gazette that “in Order...to make for the FRESH
INTELLIGENCE” the editor Peter Timothy has “taken the Liberty to

46 In reading the contemporary newspapers and letters, it seems nearly impossible to conclude
that participating in non-importation built trust or developed common understandings. From the
origins to the enforcement, each individual in Charleston believed they signed on, participated in,
violated, or resisted fundamentally different associations than others within the community. No
consensus existed within the port to build towards a common revolution in the manner that T.H.
Breen or Pauline Maier describe. Choice was part of the equation, but coercion and marginalizing
undesirable, radical elements routinely proved more powerful to the outcome of non-
importation.
leave out...Advertisements... and the whole of the Marine List." In Charleston, and throughout the British Empire, colonial newspapers provided the central source of printed news and information; during times of crisis, the newspaper editors' importance grew exponentially. From newspapers, colonists learned of the comings and goings of vessels in the port, ministers in Parliament, and British armies in the world. While many of the voices of individuals who participated in non-importation associations remain lost to the historical record, the extant colonial newspapers provide an overview of the news, opinions, and political changes which colonists received, read, learned, and filtered into their larger understanding of their place in the empire and potential to influence Parliament.

Recent work on the colonial press reveals that – unlike the limited distribution of pamphlets – newspapers circulated widely, often passing through multiple hands in roadside taverns and public houses. In his work on public opinion in colonial America, Richard

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47 The South Carolina Gazette, June 1, 1769.
48 As a point of comparison, historians estimate that 195 pamphlets on the question of American independence were published in America between 1764 and mid-1776, but of that number, merely 16 percent were published between 1767-1772, the height of the Townshend Revenue crisis. Richard Merritt estimates that one newspaper existed for every sixty-five colonists, a number he believes rises exponentially once second-hand readers are included. A few of the sources analyzing newspapers and public opinion in the American colonies applied to the research for this paper include: Carol Lynn Knight. The American Colonial Press and the Townshend Crisis 1766 - 1770: A Study in Political Imagery. (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 2, 8-9, Richard Lawrence Merritt, "Public Opinion in Colonial America: Content-Analyzing The Colonial Press," Public Opinion Quarterly 27 (Fall, 1963), 356-71; Sidney Kobre, Foundations of American Journalism (Tallahassee: School of Journalism, Florida State University, 1958), 81; Sidney Kobre, Development of the Colonial Newspaper (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1960), 160; George E.
Merritt argues for newspapers as the mouthpiece for the most politically relevant stratum of the population, whose changing attitudes and perceptions circulated through editorials and letters. Contemporaries recognized the impact of newspapers on the community for competing interests and individuals used newspapers as organs to persuade, cajole, and defend their position. Although news undoubtedly arrived in ports as rumors and reports from ships, the newspapers offer a glimpse into what colonists knew, when they knew it, and how they acted upon this knowledge.

The broadsides of the newspaper – bracketed with advertisements for exotic goods, land for sale, and private tutors –


The focus for this paper on newspapers is in part a drive to get away from the Gadsden/Laurens dichotomy of many works, by broadening the source base. To avoid assuming an impending revolution, as a way to recreate the world where this news was read, interpreted, and acted upon the paper relies heavily on newspapers. We are missing several key sources that informed the news, particularly the conversations on the docks between captains and crews coming and going, much of the correspondence, and also many of the papers themselves. For the purposes of this paper, these newspapers serve as arbiters of public opinion, an assumption that overlooks many important factors shaping opinion including – to name a few – religion and churches, as well as, personal conversations and correspondence.
presented colonial readers with excerpts of news from abroad, lists of vessels in and out of Charleston harbor, and various opinion letters. The newspaper directly connected its readers with the community and the empire cementing economic, political, and social links across the Atlantic. This paper uses contemporary newspaper accounts to understand the city in which Charleston residents worked, lived, played, and protested. The world presented in Charleston’s newspapers, however, does not capture all of what occurred within Charleston. As the advertisements for runaway slaves and the movement of ships reveal, a good portion of Charleston residents were actively marginalized to the borders by those ‘interested’ classes, a key factor informing and shaping the ensuing protest.

As editor, compiler, writer, and producer, the colonial newspaper printer played a central role in shaping opinion – often abandoning English standards of impartiality. While many colonial printers served apprenticeships in Great Britain and maintained close ties with their mentors, newspapermen in the colonies tended to position themselves as businessmen. American printers catered the news, information, and editorials to the interests and sympathies of readers, often while vying for the business of the colonial governments.
and assemblies as postmaster or public printer. Three presses – the South Carolina Gazette, the South Carolina and American General Gazette, and the South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal – competed to inform their readers of the current state of politics and politicians. Their papers included possible changes in imperial plans for the American colonies, offered a running commentary on imperial policy, as well as, news of the efforts of Agents, merchants, and sympathetic ministers promoting South Carolina’s interests in England.

Peter Timothy, printer of the South Carolina Gazette, inherited a reputation for impartiality from his father and, upon the father’s death, his mother who ran the press. Timothy’s paper focused upon printing all sides of an issue – generally avoiding editorial essays– and reporting (but not commenting) on news items. The Stamp Act crisis, however, marked a substantial shift in the politics and policies of the Timothy, who as public printer and postmaster, voiced a measured opposition to the duty. The South Carolina and American General Gazette, printed by Robert Wells, a Scotsman and principle bookseller in the Carolinas, competed for readers with the South Carolina Gazette.

Fearful of violating the Stamp Act legislation, Timothy and Wells issued a joint statement increasing subscription prices to cover the cost

52 Knight, The American Colonial Press and the Townshend Crisis 46, 135; Maier, From Resistance to Revolution, xx.
of the required stamps. As the increased duty and prices proved untenable, both papers suspended publication until the act was repealed. As of November 1, 1765 when the Stamp Act took effect, Charleston suddenly possessed no published news outlet. In this interim, Peter Timothy's brother-in-law and former apprentice, Charles Crouch launched his own paper, *The South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal.* Aided by members of the lower house – and with little personally to lose – Crouch violated the Stamp Act to publish his newspaper.

As the Townshend Revenue Acts unfolded into crisis, Charleston's three colonial papers – as well as the other seven published in the South – shared a remarkable degree of uniformity in news and opinion. Even as Robert Well's *South Carolina Weekly Gazette,* and the subsequent *South Carolina and American General Gazette,* provided the main stream of conservative thought and Peter Timothy's *South Carolina Gazette* increasingly served as the organ for residents

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53 Peter Timothy later explained to Benjamin Franklin that the suspension of his paper had been a major mistake, "reducing" him "from the most popular...to the most unpopular Man in the Province." That his former radical readers encouraged his former apprentice and relative Charles Crouch to launch a new paper in defiance of the Stamp Act further angered Timothy. Crouch's *South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal* "immediately attracted a large list of patrons," according to Timothy, which included Henry Laurens and John Lewis Gervais. Three years after the suspension, Timothy estimated that he continued to lose money because of his decision to suspend publication. Jeffery A. Smith, "Impartiality and Revolutionary Ideology: Editorial Policies of the *South Carolina Gazette,* 1732-1775," *Journal of Southern History* 49, no. 4 (November 1983): 511-26; Arthur M. Schlesinger, "The Colonial Newspapers and the Stamp Act," *New England Quarterly* 8 (March 1935): 63-82; Edmund and Helen Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis,* 242; Henry Laurens to John Lewis Gervais, January 29, 1766, LP, 5:5434-35.

pressing the resumption of non-importation, the contain nearly identical news stories from England and other colonies.\textsuperscript{55} Faced with competition from the patriot-leaning \textit{South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal}, Timothy's radical position strengthened in the period following the suspension of printing during the Stamp Act. By the passage of the Townshend Revenue Acts, Timothy's paper became "a virtual anthology of anti-ministerial literature," according to historian Jeffery Smith, often publishing the writings of John Wilkes and John Dickinson alongside events in Boston and New York. Even in leaning towards the patriot cause, \textit{The South Carolina Gazette}'s reporting and practices (such as printing black borders to announce violations of American rights and printing the names of violators of non-importation association), fall in line with the practices of papers throughout the South.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{The South Carolina Gazette}, June 1, 22, 1769, Sellers. \textit{Charleston Business on the Eve of the American Revolution}, 206; Walsh, \textit{Charleston's Sons of Liberty}, 47.

\textsuperscript{56} By the time of the revolution, most papers had taken a decidedly patriotic position. Indeed, only two southern papers prior to the revolution would be labeled 'Tory' – the \textit{Georgia Gazette} and the \textit{South Carolina and American General Gazette}. However, during the years of the Townshend crisis, it was not necessarily easy or even possible to tell patriot from Tory papers by looking at the news and opinions taken from British publications or the news of events in neighboring colonies. The uniformity of Southern newspapers, according to Knight, did not occur merely from shared intellectual tradition and connections with the British press, but from the shortage of printers, the close ties between various printers (kinship, apprenticeship and friendship), and the frequent reprinting of news and letters from papers in other colonies. Knight estimates that approximately twenty percent of the material presented in a given colonial paper had previously appeared in print in another paper. Not only did newspapers reprint stories from each other, but also from British newspapers and magazines, which were presented as accurate and balanced view of British opinions. Knight concludes that this uniformity at the time of the Townshend crisis resulted in a similar image of British initiatives, American responses, and British reactions, which might "account for the common understandings that Americans came to about issues.” This claim is perhaps both overstating the consensus of people reading the papers and their commitment to particular viewpoints. Knight, \textit{The American Colonial Press and the Townshend Crisis},
The Stamp Act Crisis inaugurated a wider position advocacy by printers that with the arrival of news of the Townshend Revenue Acts became central to the resumption of non-importation associations. As with the Stamp Act, the colonial newspapers of Charleston reprinted excerpts from pamphlets, letters from concerned citizens, news from other colonies, as well as, word of possible repeal (and ministerial change) in London.\(^5\)\(^7\) One question that emerges from reading these papers is: how accurate a picture did the colonial newspapers paint for their readers? And, how important were the news reports in shaping colonial action? With more regular contacts abroad, the merchant interest often cautioned against the picture of British politics portrayed in the press, printing their private correspondence from England which cautioned against protest, in favor of a petition campaign. In her study of *The American Colonial Press and the Townshend Crisis*, Carol

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\(^5\) Knight, *The American Colonial Press and the Townshend Crisis*, 4-6.
Knight finds gross misrepresentation of British opinion in the press, often exaggerating both the size and power of the pro-American faction and the tolerance for colonial disobedience, key factors in the arguments supporting renewed non-importation during the Townshend Revenue Act crisis.58

Alongside many in England, Ireland, and the British colonies, Charleston residents perceived a wider plot against freedom and liberty afoot.59 This paper builds upon the scholarship Pauline Maier and neo-Whig historians, but also moves beyond “portents of revolution” to examine how a community understood their position, without overshadowing their historical moment.60 The Charleston residents who participated in non-importation each entered into associations with their own distinct ideas of economic self-interest and ideology, participated in protest with fellow associators possessing diametrically opposite views, and, when they violated the associations, illustrated the wide variety of opinions which fell under the umbrella of non-importation. As there was no direct trajectory to protest in Charleston, there was certainly no direct trajectory from protest to revolution. As a historian, then, understanding protest requires

59 Maier, From Resistance to Revolution, xii – xviii.
60 Maier, From Resistance to Revolution, xviii, x-xi, xx, 114; Pauline Maier, “The Charleston Mob and the Evolution of Popular Politics in Revolutionary South Carolina, 1675-1784,” Perspectives in American History, IV (1970), 171-96; Edward Countryman A People in Revolution,
analyzing how contemporaries in a community understood their moment: what were the inputs driving for protest, what were the dynamics pressing for consensus, and how did the experience of protest match expectations of what they believed they were participating in by signing non-importation agreements. In the following pages, this paper explores these three questions, beginning with an examination of the ideological, political, and economic contexts for the 1769 renewal of non-importation and then traces the contentious resumption of non-importation during the summer of 1769.

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Chapter 1: Charleston’s Perceptions of Position within the Empire—The Economic and Ideological Contexts for the Townshend Crisis

From the goods that filled their homes to the news that filled conversations, colonial Charleston residents consciously and proudly defined themselves as British. Hardly a core or periphery, in their economic, political, and social lives Charleston’s planters, mechanics, and merchants felt a vital part of the British Empire. By the summer of 1769, these feelings of strong attachment and power within the economic empire coexisted alongside genuine fears of being marginalized by political machinations in London. The resumption of non-importation emerged from a web of inputs: including, the community’s (often heightened) perception of importance within a
global empire, their confidence in the power to persuade English politicians, and their sense that they participated in a larger British political conversation. The resumption of protest in Charleston affirms that in the British Empire, not all politics was local.61

Perceptions of Power in the Empire –
The Merchant Community of Charleston

Situated at the convergence of the Ashley and Cooper Rivers – the meeting point between product (deerskins, rice, indigo, and cotton) and market (Europe and the West Indies) – the port of Charleston oversaw upwards of ninety percent of the colony’s imports and exports throughout the eighteenth century. The city’s physical growth occurred alongside its commercial development, so that from 1720 to the American Revolution, Charleston’s population quadrupled to become the fourth largest town in colonial America.62 Far from a single endeavor or narrowly defined interest, the pursuit of economic gain in any possible form defined the multifarious activities of

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Charleston’s business community. This ethic of aggressive economic self-interest thrived in the business climate of the British Empire in the period preceding 1763, when minimal government interference or enforcement enabled Charleston merchants to effectively centralize control of the trade for their surrounding region.\textsuperscript{63}

The export trade in rice – and later indigo – out of Charleston fell under the control of a specialized merchant community who oversaw a sophisticated mortgage exchange spanning the Atlantic World. Carolina’s economy relied upon a near constant flow of credit directed by these colonial merchants who acted as agents or representatives for British firms. Commission merchants or merchant factors (the term used in this paper, as the most common in sources) served the role of importer, exporter, broker, and banker: selling merchandise sent to him by his British firm, purchasing goods for his British correspondents, arranging shipments, and lending money locally for the purchase of land, slaves, and all manner of goods. Exports to the West Indies and Southern Europe, as well as to Great

\textsuperscript{63} For imperial purposes, the “Charleston District” comprised of South Carolina, swaths of North Carolina, Georgia, and after 1763 East and West Florida. The trade from each of these regions flowed primarily through Charleston, and many factors and planters from South Carolina developed the products and farms in the surrounding colonies (particularly Georgia). Sellers, Charleston Business on the Eve of Revolution, x, 4, 8, 31; Nash, The Organization of Trade and Finance in the Atlantic Economy: Britain and South Carolina, 1670 – 1775, 96-7.
Britain, largely occurred on these British rather than South Carolinian account books.64

Merchant factors – the key leaders of the merchant interest in the colonial era – epitomized Charleston’s position as a cosmopolitan port. In an era when personal contacts enabled the global flow of credit key to the cash-crop economy, an individual factor’s wealth, family connections, and friendships powered Charleston’s economy.65


65 In an overview of Charleston factors, it appears the chief requirements were a combination of personal capital and an apprenticeship as a clerk with an English or Carolina merchant firm. The capital was critical for purchasing merchandise (most notably slaves), providing warehouses, goods, purchasing partnerships in ships, as well as extending loans. Wealthy and powerful families sought positions for their sons in the merchant houses, which meant that planters’ sons frequently became merchants. This practice further blurs clear lines of merchant or planter class. The training began as a merchant’s clerk, when aspiring factors learned the basics of shipping and supplying credit through the tedious work of invoices, backcountry travel and overseeing shipping. Clerkships often required young men to travel to the frontier of the province, to plantations, to the West Indies, Southern Europe, and Great Britain, as a way “to establish a correspondence with the merchants trading to Carolina & obtain a share of their commissions.” In an economy that necessitated personal trust, this period proved key to cementing future business. Future factor John Hopton, for example, toured over 500 miles of the frontier country to gain trading partners, followed by foreign travels during his five-year clerkship with Henry Laurens. This preparation, Laurens wrote, would allow Hopton to begin “commercial life upon as good footing as any man he had known in Carolina.” In the transition from clerkship into business, Hopton received the assistance of two established Charleston factors, Laurens and Gabriel Manigault who invested together in a cargo of rice, sending with Hopton a recommendation letter “to give him an introduction into trade and assist him in making West Indian correspondents,” and guaranteeing any loans. Much like Charleston society, this business arrangement relied personal connections in a way almost unimaginable today. Laurens’ correspondence in regards to Horon can be found: Laurens to Mayne & co. Aug. 1, 1770; to Cowles & Co., Feb. 18, 1771; to R. Grubb, March 6, 1771; to Bright & Co., Jan. 12, 1770; a good
With no thought to a separation between colony and metropole, individuals born in Great Britain traded in Charleston and Charleston natives traded in London. With regular contacts in Liverpool, London, Oxford, Bristol, Cowes, Poole, Glasgow, Jamaica, Barbados, New Providence, Tortola, St. Christopher, St. Kitts, Antigua, St. Augustine, Oporto, Lisbon, Madrid, Havana, Guadeloupe, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Rotterdam, Charleston factor Henry Laurens, for example, possessed a network of trading partners eager for a part of the lucrative rice and indigo trade. For some factors, like Samuel Wragg and Scott James Crokatt, trading and living in Charleston proved but a brief sojourn before establishing firms in London.66 British firms not only traded in Charleston, but London merchants also served as agents representing the colony, actively petitioning Parliament and ministers on behalf of Charleston’s merchant interest. Through personal contacts throughout the Atlantic basin, Charleston’s

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66 Trade connections were so numerous that, at the end of the Revolutionary War, five London firms founded by Charleston expatriates claimed sixty-three percent of the prerevolutionary debt owed from South Carolina to London merchants. In this continuing theme of the importance of personal connections, Wragg’s position in London was replaced by James Crokatt, who in the 1720s and 30s, had been one of Charleston’s key merchants before moving to London in 1737, where he acted as South Carolina’s agent. Factor John Beswicke followed a similar path, migrating to Charleston from London around 1734, to return to London in 1747 a major trader, operating a firm only second to Crokatt’s. While personal experience in the colony certainly helped business, a number of London merchants traded exclusively with Charleston interests but had never lived or visited. These merchants often possessed, however, close family and business ties with those who had migrated, and remained in regular communication. One example, John Nutt, a leading London merchant, married James Crokatt’s daughter and worked with his brother, Joseph, who represented his firm’s business interests in South Carolina. Nash, *The Organisation of Trade and Finance in the Atlantic Economy: Britain and South Carolina, 1670-1775*, 92-5.
powerful merchants kept their fingers on the pulse of the Empire. Hardly some parent-child metaphor – a myriad of real personal, financial, and political connections spanned the Atlantic intimately connecting port city to imperial capital.

As part of orchestrating export shipping and delivery, the Charleston factor also served as wholesale importers competing directly with a growing number of independent merchants in the port.67 Between 1732 to 1737, seventy-four traders advertised the sale of dry and miscellaneous goods in Charleston, importing from Britain an average of £ 84,000 per year. Thirty years later, the number of advertisers reached 130 with imports increasing to over £ 271,000 per annum. These independent merchants – often referred to as Country factors – grew in number throughout the late colonial period, operating retail stores in Charleston and placing direct orders for their planter clientele.68 The profusion of local merchants, left “our place...saturated with every Article of Merchandise by Merchants who import...upon their Accounts,” complained factor Henry Laurens to a Bristol correspondent, so that “there is very seldom an Opportunity of making even a saving Sale of Goods.”69 Imported goods inundated

68 Nash, The Organization of Trade and Finance in the Atlantic Economy: Britain and South Carolina, 1670-1775, 82-83.
69 As Henry Laurens wrote to a Bristol merchant in October 1768; Sellers, Charleston Business on the Eve of Revolution, 50, 53.
Charleston's market, as independent importers expanded their business through credit from British firms. This rapid growth of a second type of merchant created a major fault line within the merchant interest.

Country factors – like their planter customers – hoped for high prices for rice, low freight weights, and continual extensions of credit. As the orchestrators of shipping exports abroad, merchant factors, conversely, profited from the combination of low rice prices and high freight rates. Each of the two sides – that representing rice grower (country factor) and rice purchaser (merchant factor) – competed to create a profitable business climate. This jockeying for profits, by limiting the amount of rice in Charleston, flooding the market during a full harbor, and spreading disinformation, pitted the country factors and planters against the merchant factors. This divide between merchants with antithetical business interests emerged alongside a period of changing imperial regulation, substantially undergirding the tensions, perceptions, and responses to Parliamentary legislation.

Confidence and the Currency Crisis – Conflicting Perceptions of Charleston’s Place within the Empire

From its beginnings as a disease-ridden hinterland, a quest for maximum profit and participation in global trade motivated South
Carolina’s planters and merchants. Through various bounties, Parliament and the Assembly of South Carolina promoted market-oriented crops including: indigo, flax, hemp, tobacco, silk, wine, lumber, naval stores, olive oil, barley, wheat, cotton, and ginger.71 Eager to exploit these opportunities, Charleston’s early entrepreneurs combined planting with trade, establishing a pattern that continued throughout the colonial era. The success of rice laid the foundation for Charleston’s heightened perception of its own importance within the British Empire. With a rising slave population in the West Indies, South Carolina’s planters and merchants exported the cheap foodstuffs that fueled the lucrative sugar industry. With naturally overlapping and intertwining interests, South Carolina’s merchants and planters allied together for maximum gain, enjoying enormous profits even as northern ports suffered economic depression.72

For Charleston residents, rice exports not only rebuilt the city in fine English style but, more importantly, cemented their elite status within the Empire. In response to petitions from colonial agents and London firms, Carolina rice traders won a rare exception to the Navigation Acts in 1730, enabling their ships to travel directly into regions south of Cape Finisterre without first passing through British

ports. Not only did this exception radically increase profits for the planters, merchants, and investors in Carolina’s rice, it bolstered a feeling of importance for the port. Charleston business – it seemed to those most closely involved – was so crucial to the Empire as to merit enumeration, advancement, and protection from the highest levels of British government.\textsuperscript{73} In the decades following the 1730 exception, Charleston residents possessed ample justification to look around the Atlantic World and feel like a central, powerful player in the web of empire.

Throughout the 1740s and 1750s, investment in the fast-growing plantation economy of South Carolina proved lucrative business; in England, investments returned at most five percent, while investments in South Carolina commonly resulted in an eight to twelve percent gain.\textsuperscript{74} Eager investors lent money to planters and merchant houses created complex systems of indirect investments in the form of mortgages on slaves and land. The Charleston merchant factor not only provided the link between investor and investment, but also often directly invested in land, slaves, and plantations himself.\textsuperscript{75} The cheapness of land, the possibility of reward, and the initial cost of


\textsuperscript{74} Nash, The Organization of Trade and Finance in the Atlantic Economy: Britain and South Carolina, 1670 – 1775, 95; Sellers, Charleston Business on the Eve of Revolution, 53, 55, 74-75.

\textsuperscript{75} Sellers, Charleston Business on the Eve of Revolution, 57-59.
investment prompted innumerate co-partnerships between merchants and planters to form, dissolve, and reappear. Such diversification in agricultural product, as historian R.C. Nash points out, "was not a symptom of entrepreneurial backwardness," but a "rational investment" in a highly profitable global commodity. The availability of short and long-term credit became increasingly important throughout the colonial period, and left Charleston planters and merchants heavily in debt to London merchants.76

In the period following the Seven Years War, colonial planters and merchants discovered English capital progressively more difficult to access. A change appeared underway, challenging Charleston's self-perception as a co-equal player in the British Empire. As flow of easy credit and ready investment slowed, the fundamental pattern of colonial business shifted. The passage of both the Restraining Act and Currency Act in 1764 dealt Charleston a further blow by forbidding the emission of legal tender currency without the permission of Parliament and effectively preventing the use of paper bills of credit as legal tender, a common practice within the port city.77

76 Nash, The Organization of Trade and Finance in the Atlantic Economy: Britain and South Carolina, 1670–1775, 90, 97.
77 Parliament gravely threatened colonial financial structures by passing in September 1764 "an act to prevent the issue of paper bills of credit in any of the colonies and to prohibit the legal tender of such bills, as were then subsisting, from being prolonged beyond the periods for calling in and sinking them." Walsh, Charleston's Sons of Liberty, 41; Sellers, Charleston Business on the Eve of Revolution, 68, 72; George III, Cap. XXXIV; McDonough, Christopher Gadsden and Henry Laurens, 64.
The ‘currency question’ dominated discussions within the port as paper money became increasingly scarce, a reality that particularly dogged artisans, small merchants, and planters who often found themselves without recourse when repaying debts to merchant factors. Planters chafed under the operation of the law, finding themselves without sufficient funds to pay past debts – often unable to buy goods and services from mechanics or merchants. Similarly as fewer and fewer employers could pay wages, mechanics increasingly resorted to bartering. The Charleston court docket filled with cases of debts, and the newspapers advertised daily demands to settle accounts. Tensions between the merchant, mechanic, and planter interest groups rose, with numerous societies forming to demand relief.

Parliamentary acts to raise revenue (e.g. Sugar, Stamp and Townshend Revenue Acts) threatened to further remove legal tender from the colony. When combined with strict customs enforcement and the news from other colonies – Jack Green and Richard Jellison

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79 Records of the Court of Common Pleas, 1767. Miscellaneous Court Records, 1770-1771, Book DD, MS, typewritten copies, South Caroliniana Library; Walsh, *Charleston’s Sons of Liberty*, 41-42.
80 The Sugar Act, as it was usually called, did not prohibit the exportation of provisions and lumber (the chief American exports) to the French West Indies. It did place such a high duty on the importation of foreign sugars that this vital trade became almost useless for American who wanted to accumulate credits so that they could buy British manufactured goods. Squeezed between rising prices for imports and the falling prices of exports, Americans trading with the West Indies were outraged at a tax that cut further into their profits. In New York, John Watts commented crisply and darkly, “the weak must go to the wall.” Alan Rogers, *Empire and Liberty: American Resistance to British Authority, 1755-1763*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 125; Walsh, *Charleston’s Sons of Liberty*, 53.
have argued – the currency crisis served as a reminder to the colonists that despite their trading position, they remained subordinate to the desires of the imperial government.\textsuperscript{81} Fearful contemporaries measured the effect of Parliamentary actions by Charleston’s most visible bottom line: the harbor, for as one Charleston resident estimated, “soon” ships would be “out of employ: And their burthen together...reckoned 3,500 tons.”\textsuperscript{82} In their petition opposing the Stamp Act, the South Carolina Commons House of Assembly expressed great concern that the “state of the paper currency in use in the province” had dipped dangerously low with merely £106,500 in currency (equal to £15,214 sterling) circulating. The colonial government urged their agent Charles Garth to “use your utmost endeavors to procure for this province liberty to emit paper currency to the amount of £40,000 sterling,” a request that was repeatedly denied.\textsuperscript{83}


\textsuperscript{82} Expressions of anxiety by American merchants cannot be dismissed as simply reactions to a temporary post-war slump. In fact, economic difficulties in the 1760s were caused by fundamental structural changes in the Atlantic economy that had been accelerated by the Seven Years War. Specifically, during the war British firms had extended their business operations so widely that by 1763 they were bypassing established American importers and retailers. Together with the effort by British merchants to reduce the American share of trans-Atlantic shipping, the postwar depression can be seen as a direct challenge to American economic sovereignty. Rogers, \textit{Empire and Liberty}, 127; Sellers, \textit{Charleston Business on the Eve of Revolution}, 63; The South Carolina Gazette, June 27, 1768.

\textsuperscript{83} While the Currency Act of 1764 was largely ignored in the year of its passage for the Stamp Act, by 1769, it was causing major problems within the colonies. The Currency crisis was made worse by the raising of taxes within South Carolina and Charleston during the same period. Between 1750s and 1770s, the population of Charleston nearly doubled, an increase accompanied by an increase in the numbers of poor. Requests for relief from church wardens of St Philip’s rose thirty percent, while taxes increased almost 700 percent between 1751 – 1773. P.R.S.C.
“novel” taxation schemes in “these times of necessity” as Henry Laurens wrote, “when money is scarcer than ever” caused legitimate panic in Charleston.84

**Government and South Carolina:**
**Imperial Dimensions of Local Politics**

Grumblings about the state of colonial currency filled the ornate lobby of the new State House. Since the assumption of royal government in the colony to the present disruptions, the South Carolina Commons House of Assembly had developed into the dominant force in colonial governance. Modeled on the English ideal, the South Carolina government included a democratically elected lower house, a crown appointed executive, and a 12-member Council or Upper House.85 In theory, each part worked harmoniously to govern the colony, but in reality, a “bitter, persistent strife”

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XXXI, 278 – 279; Sellers Charleston Business on the Eve of Revolution, 72; Henry Laurens To Reynolds Getly & Co. LP, Sept. 20, 1770; McDonough. Christopher Gadsden and Henry Laurens, 64; Committee of Correspondence to Charles Garth, September 4, 1764, as quoted in R.W. Gibbes, Documentary History of the American Revolution (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1855), 1:2-3; Knight. The American Colonial Press and the Townshend Crisis, 45.

84 Example of taxation: the tax Act of 1760 required payment of 35 shillings on each slave, 17 shillings 6 pence per centum on the value of town lots, wharves, and buildings. They were also assessed 17 shillings 6 pence per hundred pounds on every note bearing interest “over and above what they pay interest for,” 5% on all annuities, and 17 shillings 6 pence per hundred pounds on the profits of all the professions. Reductions in subsequent tax acts were negligible so that during the years between 1760 and 1765 Carolinians paid more in taxes than ever before. Walsh. Charleston’s Sons of Liberty, 33-34.

85 On elite domination of Carolina’s government, of the 156 merchants elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives, approximately ninety percent owned plantations. Of the self-described “merchant planters” elected to the House, 81 percent were merchants before becoming planters, while only eleven percent began as planters. This information was compiled from Water B. Edgar and N. Louise Bailey’s directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives, which shows that of 156 merchants elected from 1692 – 1775, at least 119 (nearly 90 percent) owned plantations, in Nash, The Organization of Trade and Finance in the Atlantic Economy: Britain and South Carolina, 1670 – 1775, 95.
characterized the colonial government. South Carolina's political history brims with instances of interest group politics dominating the Assembly's proceedings and long standing conflicts between the Assembly and royal governors regularly breaking into open conflict.\footnote{In \textit{A School for Politics: Commercial Lobbying and Political Culture in Early South Carolina}, Rebecca Starr argues that merchants rather than planters dominated South Carolina's political culture (by holding more leadership positions and leading the majority of the day-to-day business of governing, because of residence in Charleston). She argues that interest group politics became the norm, and tended to encourage/demand consensus and internal conflict resolution, essentially accounting for Charleston's famous "harmony." Starr argues, counter to Jonathan Mercantini (presses for South Carolinians as surprisingly aggressive in their determination for independence), that South Carolinians were reluctant revolutionaries. Their debate overlooks contest to focus on this question of consensus, and both accounts appear more interested in uncovering the roots of South Carolina's role in the antebellum era in colonial political development. This trend to locate the origins of the nullification crisis and secession in the Revolutionary era reappears throughout numerous, otherwise balanced works, often skewing towards a teleological argument. Rebecca Starr, \textit{A School for Politics Commercial Lobbying and Political Culture in Early South Carolina}. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Mercantini, \textit{Who Should Rule at Home?} 4, 6, 18.} The design provided the Assembly with a central voice in local governance, but empowered the royal governor as the sole representative of South Carolina to British imperial authorities. The imperial crisis of the 1760s derived much of its shape and rhetoric from this contested political history.

The Commons House of Assembly tipped the precarious balance of powers between local governance and imperial policy in their favor during the period of relatively lax oversight from 1722 to 1748. As the Board of Trade remained aloof from local governance, the Assembly largely ignored the royal governors and treated royal instructions as recommendations rather than imperatives.\footnote{Mercantini, \textit{Who Should Rule at Home?} 5-10.} When
local interests conflicted with London’s legal prerogatives, royal officials in South Carolina found implementation impossible. Colonial representatives defended their local authority as fundamental to their “rights as Englishmen,” establishing a pattern that would reappear at any sign of controversy.

Throughout the colonial period, the Commons House—dominated by Charleston’s elite merchants and planters—proved enormously successful in exercising control over finances, and thereby influencing executive appointments and affairs. Even when, after a protracted struggle, the royal governor finally gained a permanent salary, the Assembly retained the ultimate trump card. In moments of conflict, the Assembly could refuse to pass tax bills, effectively leaving the government without operating funds—a move which inevitably wrung concessions from the governor.

From a series of conflicts over Indian, military, election, and backcountry affairs, the Commons House of Assembly in Charleston won and exercised powers beyond those of the House of Commons in

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88 There was nothing novel about the manner of resistance; the courts, the lower houses of representatives, crowds protesting in the streets, were—by 1765—familiar parts of American politics Maier, From Resistance to Revolution, 5–6; Rogers, Empire and Liberty, 128.

89 The struggle between the assemblies and royal governors for control of the southern colonies is well explained by Jack P. Greene in The Quest for Power: The Lower Houses of Assembly in the Southern Royal Colonies, 1689–1776 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina press, 1963). Green has also provided the authoritative account of the Gadsden election controversy in his article, “The Gadsden Election Controversy and the Revolutionary Movement in South Carolina,” Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 46, no. 3 (December 1959): 469–92; McDonough, Gadsden and Laurens, 47.
England. Attempts at imperial regulation following the Seven Years War, met a Commons House in Charleston that refused to divest its powerful control on South Carolina’s politics.0 By 1763, as historian John Mercantini illustrates, the rights of local control over elections, finances, representation, taxation and Indian affairs which South Carolinians claimed as their English birthrights, “diverged in important ways from traditional English rights.”91

Despite their dominance within the colony’s government, the formal structures of empire favored the royal governor as the “King’s man” in South Carolina. While the Commons House retained an agent to lobby in Parliament and powerful Charleston merchants and planters maintained numerous connections in London, the governor possessed direct access to policy makers. After the Seven Years War, when Parliament sought to rationalize the empire and bolster home authority, an election controversy involving Christopher Gadsden and royal governor Thomas Boone resulted in the dissolution of the legislature – who had withheld Boone’s salary and resolved to pass no law until he formally apologized. The contest ended when Boone left

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90 The issues underlying and the justifications for protest built upon older frameworks. Tensions with Governor Thomas Boone reached a climax when, in 1762, the governor refused to allow Christopher Gadsden to take his seat in the South Carolina assembly. The Cherokee and Seven Years’ War gave rise to older problems – ranging from quartering troops, impressment, to raising of revenue – that coupled with the development of the lower house of assembly as the center of political power exacerbated post-war efforts at imperial regulation. Mercantini, *Who Should Rule at Home?* 10; Rogers, *Empire and Liberty*, 128-9; McDonough. *Christopher Gadsden and Henry Laurens*, 11-12.

the colony in 1764, but served only to heighten tensions and spread fears of a plot against liberty at a critical juncture in local and imperial politics.\textsuperscript{92}

\textit{Participation in an Atlantic Political Conversation-
Imperial Regularization and Charleston’s Reaction}

The attempts to regularize the British Empire following the Seven Year’s War, met an elite in Charleston who were convinced from nearly four decades experience of their centrality within the trading empire, who believed that they exemplified British ideals, and who were convinced that they could and did influence policy at the highest levels. That Charleston’s interested parties understood their position this way powerfully shaped their reactions to the Stamp Act Crisis. Newspapers reported stories of political contests in Charleston using the same radical Whig ideology applied to contests in England (i.e. the on-going John Wilkes saga) cementing a sense in the port that even in the smallest – most seemingly picayune – disputes, Charleston residents participated in a wider conversation defending traditional British rights.

Decades of political contest within the colony left Charleston’s governing planter and merchant elite with a clear sense of their prerogatives within the empire, but importantly their power to

\textsuperscript{92} Mercantini, \textit{Who Should Rule at Home} 22.
persuade both their community and imperial ministers, often through measured resistance. Protest, ultimately derives from a belief in one's power to persuade others to act. This belief served as the backdrop for the announcement of the Stamp Act in Charleston.

Facing an unprecedented national debt and increased costs of defense in America imperial policymakers felt the expense of maintaining an empire should necessarily fall upon South Carolina and fellow American colonies. Predicting resistance, policymakers in London searched for suitable methods to raise revenue, ultimately settling upon extending the stamp duty to America. Since the reign of Charles II, stamp duties (which placed taxes of varying amounts on such items as legal documents, newspaper advertisements, and playing cards) had been commonplace in England as an effective and inexpensive tax to collect.

As the Stamp Act awaited Parliamentary action, the South Carolina Commons House of Assembly again voiced their opposition through their colonial agent Charles Garth. The measure, wrote the

93 With the annual cost of the army estimated at nearly £220,000, Prime Minister Grenville believed it reasonable that America should assume part of the expense. Previously, Grenville had rejected relying upon the traditional methods of requisition - demanding revenue from the colonial assemblies, or the customs service - as inadequate. It was estimated at the time that the British debt per person was eighteen pounds in 1763, whereas America it was only 18 shillings. McDonough. Christopher Gadsden and Henry Laurens. 62.
leading opponent in the Commons House Christopher Gadsden, subverted “that inherent right of every British subject, not to be taxed but by his own consent, or that of his representative.”95 Reporting the latest developments in London, Charles Garth informed the Assembly that Parliament would tolerate no such arguments about the legitimacy of such a tax, nor any claims to the colony’s inability to pay hard currency.

Colonial agent Charles Garth further encouraged South Carolina’s governing elite to appreciate the precedent established by the Stamp Act: that in the future, Parliament would consult with the colonies prior to the passage of any revenue legislation affecting America. Within the context of a currency crisis, the Commons House of Assembly simply could not perceive this as a victory; the actions of Parliament appeared – if not an outright conspiracy – a clear sign of declension from the exalted position Charleston held within the Imperial order. Although the physical stamps never arrived in Charleston, their mere existence challenged the fundamental assumptions held by Charleston’s interested classes about to their

95 Charles Garth consistently counseled the assembly and citizens in Charleston that it would be wise to follow the Stamp Act, given that it established the constitutional precedent requiring that Parliament consult the colonies prior to the passage of the revenue legislation. Morgan, The Stamp Act Crisis, 76-82; McDonough, Christopher Gadsden and Henry Laurens, 63; Thomas, British Politics, 72-76.
place within the empire, their rights as Englishmen, and their power to persuade Parliament.

The Stamp Act Crisis – Whig Ideology

A most unusual sight appeared on an early Saturday morning in the fall of 1765 in the center of Charleston. At the intersection of Broad and Church streets, a gallows rose “seventy feet high” with “an effigy, designed to present a distributor of paper” hanging between “a figure of a the devil on right hand, and on left a Boot, with a head stuck upon it.” Throughout the day, Charleston residents filed by and gathered around, but – according to the South Carolina Gazette – no one dared “to disturb” this scene with the slogan “LIBERTY and no STAMP-ACT” conspicuously scrawled upon it. As the sun set, two thousand Charleston residents watched as the “figures were taken down, and received” funeral-style “in a cart or wagon, drawn by eight or ten horses” which processed down “Broad-Street to the Bay...up Tradd Street, halting at the door of a house belonging to George Saxby, Esq; (the distributor of stamps).” While “great prudence” restrained “so great a number” from leveling the home, inevitable “injuries to the windows” occurred, not “owing...to any personal dislike of Saxby, but their detestation of the office.”

96 The South Carolina Gazette, October 19, 31, 1765.
A drive for action in Charleston quickened in the weeks preceding the symbolic display of October 18, 1765. Since the first announcement of the Act, a “frightful Dream” settled over the port city. Uncertain how to respond, reactions ranged from suggestions in *The South Carolina Gazette* that local stamp officers should resign their commissions, to fears expressed by royal officials that “giddy minded” and “evil disposed persons” could incite uncontrollable riot among slaves and sailors.\(^9\) As Charleston residents made sense of these novel developments in imperial policy, anything seemed possible. For contemporaries, reaction to the Stamp Act Crisis occurred at the intersection of economic self-interest and political ideology. The taxation from Parliament challenged bottom lines, as well as colonists’ conceptions of their rights as Englishmen. In Charleston this combination proved a combustible mixture.

The measures in the Stamp Act affected the pocketbook of nearly every inhabitant in South Carolina with the heaviest burden falling upon townsmen in Charleston. Planters, lawyers, and merchants faced a substantial rise in daily expenses as stamps were now required on basic deeds, legal documents, and marriage certificates, as well as, the documentation for every ship clearing the

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port (including the river vessels, which had long skirted customs enforcement). The cost to mechanics securing labor rose precipitously, for the price of a stamp on negotiating agreements with apprentices alone cost seven pounds, which constituted more than half the weekly earning of most masters. In public taverns and private homes, discussion of the Stamp Act met with “hearty damns” and reports of action underway in other ports to prevent the enforcement of the tax.98

Beyond their account books, the colonist’s also faced crisis of political identity within the Empire by the imposition of this taxation without representation. As the colonial assemblies conflicted with royal governors and the presses published political news from the British Isles, colonial thinking about political rights were heavily influenced – as Bernard Bailyn, Gordon Wood, and Pauline Maier have illustrated – by the writings of English revolutionaries John Milton, Algernon Sidney, John Locke, Robert Molesworth, Benjamin Hoadly, John Trenchard, and Thomas Gordon, Francis Hutchenson, and Catherine Macauley. By the advent of the Stamp Act Crisis, South Carolina’s political elites and newspaper editors sympathized with this

98 Richard Walsh illustrates how the mechanics secured labor. Master mechanics faced a tax on indentures costing 2 shillings 6 pence, and a further stamp for negotiating agreements with apprentices costing 7 pounds (accounting for more than half of an average weekly earnings, which ranged between 30 and 45 shillings per day, and at most, 10.6 to 13.10 pounds per week Walsh. Charleston’s Sons of Liberty, 35.
“Real Whig” or “Commonwealthman” tradition, and increasingly understood political developments through this lens.99

News stories from both shores of the Atlantic – from the tales of John Wilkes to the various encroachments on freedom in Boston – were filtered through this Whig ideology into a larger sense of a conspiracy against liberty and of widespread abuse of power by ministers in London. What in retrospect appear as separate struggles between local colonial assemblies and governors or an individual parliamentarian and the Crown, amassed in the minds of many in South Carolina into a full-scale, systematic attack on British liberty. The English form of government – which Charleston colonials believed to be the greatest in the world – was created by the people to promote the public weal. When those empowered violated the public trust, they forfeited their powers back to the people, who were then obligated to reconstitute that political authority.100

The protection of liberty and of the rights of Englishmen against tyranny necessitated constant vigilance by citizens, so that at the first abuse of power action could be taken. Since Whig political theory stressed that if tyranny “is suffered once, it will be apt to be repeated

99 This broader Anglo-American political tradition shaped colonist’s attitudes toward civil uprisings. Colonists thought of themselves as part of the Atlantic conversation, and applied Whig ideas about public authority and popular political responsibilities to local issues. Maier, From Resistance to Revolution, 27.
100 Maier, From Resistance to Revolution, 27-8.
often; [and] a few repetitions create a habit.” It was, then, incumbent upon Charleston residents to definitively resist the Stamp Act, lest this “habit claim proscriptions and right.” With the conception of themselves as important players in the British Empire, Charleston residents felt part of a larger struggle defending the British form of government. Daily newspapers confirmed this sense by keeping residents abreast of all the agitation and arguments in the Wilkes dispute and the happenings in other Northern colonies.

The conversation from the piers and streets that continued into the taverns and State House, paralleled discussions occurring throughout the American colonies of the British Empire. On July 19, 1765, the Commons House of Assembly received the Circular Letter from Massachusetts calling for a meeting in New York to discuss a unified response to the Stamp Act. After some discussion, the Assembly voted to send Christopher Gadsden, Thomas Lynch (a wealth rice planter) and John Rutledge (a 26 year-old lawyer) to the extra-legal congress, specifically opting not to record the vote in the journal of the Commons House. Rejecting the advice of their colonial agent in London, the Commons Assembly also appointed a committee led by Gadsden to prepare a reply to Parliament.

101 Maier, From Resistance to Revolution, 43.
102 Walter J. Fraser, Jr. Patriots, Pistols, and Petticoats: “Poor Sinful Charles Town during the American Revolution.” (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 54; McDonough. Christopher Gadsden and Henry Laurens. 65; Ramsay, History of South Carolina, 2:253.
The South Carolinians denounced the legislation as both unconstitutional and, due to the currency shortage, untenable. The petition highlighted their ideological opposition stating, “The first, and in our opinion, the principle reason, against such a measure, is its inconsistency with that inherent right of every British subject, not to be taxed but by his own consent, or that of his representative.” The Commons House urged repeal, expressing to Parliament its hopes that “when that august body comes to consider this matter they will view it in a more favorable light, and not deprive us of our birthright, and thereby reduce us to the condition of vassals and tributaries.”103 Any loss of the traditional rights of Englishmen brought a terrible specter to light for the colonists: the possibility that Americans were not Englishmen, or as Christopher Gadsden asked, “in order to retain those...natural liberties of British subjects...a man must never stir out of Britain, where they are indisputably and essential his....[for] the moment he sets foot on American ground, he has bid farewell to the dearest of them?” Colonists, argued Gadsden, had emigrated with the belief that their fundamental rights were transplanted, for “no free

103 As quoted in R.W. Gibbes, Documentary History of the American Revolution (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1855), 1:2-3; McDonough. Christopher Gadsden and Henry Laurens. 63; Committee of Correspondence to Charles Garth, September 4, 1764.
men, on such conditions, would have ever thought of coming to America."\textsuperscript{104}

As the date for the first stamp duties November 1, 1765 drew near, the petitioning campaign to Parliament – a first response to offensive legislation – appeared inadequate. For many in Charleston and ports to the North, it became increasingly clear that Parliament would not remove the offensive legislation without greater resistance. Since the “constitutional method” of redress had failed, argued one letter in \textit{The South Carolina Gazette}, resistance was necessary to circumvent the “prospect of future slavery.”\textsuperscript{105} In Charleston, the message of radical Whig rhetoric received particular support from a ground swelling of opposition in mechanic’s organizations like the Fellowship Society and the Charleston Fire Company.\textsuperscript{106}

\textit{Action Unfolds – The Stamp Act Crisis on the Streets of Charleston}

The gallows scene of October 19, 1765 vividly exhibiting the threat posed by the stamps contained an additional warning – those who “shall dare attempt to pull down these effigies, had better been

\textsuperscript{104} Walsh, \textit{Charleston’s Sons of Liberty}, 36.
\textsuperscript{105} \textit{The South Carolina Gazette}, June 2,\textsuperscript{106}
\textsuperscript{106} Resistance to the Stamp Act, as illustrated by historian Richard Walsh, cemented an alliance between Gadsden and the mechanics which did not simply constitute a mob following a demagogue. Charles Gadsden appreciated the usefulness of mechanics “whose worth no man in the city, perhaps, is better acquainted with than myself.” Looking back after the Revolution, Gadsden reflected that “From the first off, and throughout the revolution, none have shown themselves more firm and steady in the most dangerous and trying occasions...had it not been for their assistance, we should have made a very port figure indeed.” Walsh, \textit{Charleston’s Sons of Liberty}, 35, 39; McDonough, \textit{Gadsden and Laurens}, 68.
born with a mill stone about his neck, and cast into the sea."\textsuperscript{107} As carts drew the grim figures down Broad Street toward the piers, the crowd swelled to over two thousand people who halted on Tradd Street before the house of George Saxby, the distributor of the stamps. When yells from the mob met silence, stones broke windows. Leaders of the procession struggled to prevent members of the crowd from leveling the home. Royal officials watched, utterly powerless.

As tensions heightened, the door was opened and a search revealed that Saxby and his family possessed none of the rumored stamps. Accompanied by a funeral dirge emanating from St. Michael’s muffled steeple bells, the mob continued to a field where the effigies were burned and a coffin inscribed with “American Liberty” dutifully buried. Many in the crowd, still excited from the earlier processional, left the funeral for the taverns to drink “Damnations to the Stamp Act.” As the mob converged that night to dissemble the display, form a parade, raid homes for stamps, and drink symbolic toasts – a new more frightening vision appeared for Charleston’s propertied whites: the real possibility of total, uncontrollable chaos in the streets.\textsuperscript{108}

While Peter Timothy in \textit{The South Carolina Gazette} insisted that the only reported damage – a few broken windows– could have been

\textsuperscript{107} \textit{The South Carolina Gazette}, October 31, 1765.
\textsuperscript{108} P.R.S.C., XXX: 281-283, 279-280; \textit{The South Carolina Gazette}, October 31, 1765.
avoided if the home’s inhabitants had answered sooner, for many wealthy merchants and planters the gallows scene raised a far more frightening specter than a few stamped papers.109 For Charleston residents, like their English counterparts, the presence of disgruntled crowds hardly suggested some novel development. Popular uprisings regularly occurred in reaction to impressments, to punish criminals, or to protest abuses of power by public officials. Annually, Charleston’s interested classes watched celebrations of Pope’s Day degenerated into brawls and debauchery.110 The demographics of the port’s slave majority and white minority, however, predisposed merchants and planters towards limiting the size, strength, and recurrence of mobs.

Underlying all this action in the streets lay the widespread belief – derived from radical Whig thought – that when approved channels of redress for grievances proved inadequate or when officials abused their office, immediate action must occur to protect the rights of the citizens. Popular turbulence, as historian Paulina Maier describes, flowed “so naturally from inadequacies of government that riots and rebellions were often described with similes from the

109 The South Carolina Gazette, October 31, 1765; McDonough. Christopher Gadsden and Henry Laurens. 68-9.

physical world.”111 Participants in the action on the streets of Charleston deemed their protest to be necessary. In their view, Parliament not only threatened English liberty but by repeatedly ignored petitions from the colony for redress violated a sacred trust. Members of the Charleston mob, then, possessed the right – indeed, they believed, the duty – to act outside of the bounds of law, as an extra-institutional check on the real abuse of power.

To be considered legitimate, the mob’s actions needed to target the specific grievance (either physically or symbolically), receive the broad support of the community, and control any signs of disorder.112 In Charleston, a constant tension between order and disorder defined much of the debate about mob action.113 As the ranks of protesting crowds swelled with sailors and slave-owners feared the actions of their property, Charleston’s elite knew that weak law enforcement left them unprotected should the majority of the population suddenly

111 Members of the British House of Lords could acknowledge and argue that “rioting is an essential part of our constitution,” and even Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson, who lost his home to a mob, claimed that “Mobs, a sort of them at least, are constitutional.” The key was retraining these mobs, and channeling the energies to productive or symbolic, not destructive purposes. Maiet, From Resistance to Revolution, 22, 29.

112 In his study of the crowd in France and England at this time, George Rude concludes that “mobs” proved “remarkably single-minded and discriminating” in their targets, which were chosen in relation to the grievance. George Rude, The Crowd in History.

113 Throughout this period, South Carolina’s agent Charles Garth continually warned the Assembly (which was reprinted in the newspaper) that news of violence and disorder from the colonies would not be well received in London. Garth and many merchants believed that reports of mobs only hurt a petitioning campaign for repeal. Charles Garth to Committee of Correspondence December 23, 1765, LP, 5:47-48.
riot. Once lit, the tinderbox of socio-economic relationships in Charleston threatened to explode. This fear was confirmed when, only nights after the gallows scene, a mob disguised in “soot, sailors habits, and slouch hats” arrived at the door of several prominent officials again searching for stamps.

On the night of October 23, 1765, merchant factor Henry Laurens awakened to the sounds of a crowd gathering outside his home. Believing stamps to be hidden within the mansion, a mob amased shouting “Liberty, Liberty & Stamp’d Paper, Open your doors & let us Search your House & Cellars.” In his correspondence, Laurens described the scene: a mob of sixty to eighty men banging on the door, threatening the “worse consequences” to his home and person, while his pregnant wife begged him to allow a search of their home. Upon opening the door “a brace of Cutlasses” met his chest, and Laurens

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114 On violence and Whig thought: Maier, From Resistance to Revolution, 13, 17, 39, 57.
115 Henry Laurens to Joseph Brown, October 11, 1765, LP, 5:25.
116 Henry Laurens had previously voiced opposition to the Stamp Act, but did not support the actions on the street. Laurens, like many fellow merchants, urged fellow citizens to obey the Stamp Act until repeal occurred through lawful means. He expressed real concern that the violence in Boston would not “be feebly imitated by some turbulent spirits in this Metropolis.” He wrote to a friend in the days before his house was raided that, “Conclude not hence that I am an advocate for the Stamp Tax. No, by no means. I would give, I would do, a great deal to procure a repeal of Law which imposes it upon us, but I am sure that nothing but a regular, decent, becoming representation of the inexpediency & inutility of the Law will have the desir’d effect & that all irregular seditious practices will have an evil tendency, even perhaps to perpetuate that & bring upon us other Acts of Parliament big with greater mischief. Resignations which people here build so much upon can answer no good end. The Act must be executed & indeed a suspension of it while it is in force would prove our ruin and destruction… In short there remains nothing for us at present to do but to shew a graceful obedience to the Law until we can procure in a constitutional way or to beat to Arms & I defy all the grumbletonians from Quebec to West Florida to point out a medium.” Henry Laurens to Joseph Brown, Oct 11, 1765, LP, 5:25.
began trying to identify the leaders and members of the mob, addressing several of them by name. This failed to have any calming effect – for according to Laurens – the mob replied that they “Loved & respected me” and “would not hurt me or my property but that they were sent by some of my seemingly best friends to search for the Stamp’d Paper which they were certain was in my custody.” A “very superficial search or no search at all” quickly took place and upon finding no stamps, the mob demanded Laurens swear an oath that he did not know the location of the stamps. Laurens outright refused, reiterating his opposition to the Stamp Act and state he “had voluntarily given my work & honour but would not suffer even that to pass my Lips by compulsion.” The mob praised him and raised three huzzahs, before dissolving into the streets. After an hour of tense excitement, Laurens wrote of his amazement that the mob “did not do one penny damage to my Garden not even to walk over a Bed & not 15 pounds damage to my Fence, Gate, or House.”

The midnight assaults upon the homes of Henry Laurens and Chief Justice Charles Shinner prompted wide speculation and debate about the nature of the Charleston mob and its legitimacy. The chief

117 Henry Lauren’s wife, Eleanor, gave birth to a son, James Laurens on November 26, who one of Lauren’s close friends referred to as “George Liberty” after the exploits of this night. Henry Laurens to Joseph Brown, October 22, 1765, LP, 5:27; Henry Laurens to James Grant (the royal governor of East Florida), November 1, 1765, January 29, 1766, LP, 5:55; McDonough, Christopher Gadsden and Henry Laurens, 70; David D. Wallace The Life of Henry Laurens (New York, 1915), 119.
questions became who constitutes the mob, and who’s leading the mob. From the very first moments that the crowd surrounded his home, Laurens recognized “the Cloven foot of a certain malicious Villian,” who incited the mob “from behind the Curtain who could be reached only by suspicion.” Away in New York City at the Stamp Act Congress, Gadsden’s name circulated as a “rash, ringleader of people” inciting “burglary and robbery” under the guise of constitutional principles.\textsuperscript{118}

Since the mob formed in response rumors, Henry Laurens located the immediate source of his discontent with Peter Timothy who in his paper the \textit{South Carolina Gazette}, “put your name into the Mouths of those Anti-Parliamentarians” making him the “sole projector as well as prompter of the [entire] Play.”\textsuperscript{119} In a report to the Board of Trade, Lieutenant Governor Bull reiterated suspicions that Peter Timothy’s paper the \textit{South Carolina Gazette} served as the “conduit pipe” for “busy spirits” to poison the colony with falsehoods “imbibed

\textsuperscript{118} While Gadsden did not send the mob to Lauren’s home, he never denounced its actions. In a letter written following his return to Charleston, Gadsden praised the crowd saying “Our people have behaved as firmly in the common cause as any upon the Continent, without having don the least mischief, and I make little doubt of their continuing so to do, though we have a number of cunning, Jacobitical, Butean rascals…” Christopher Gadsden to William Samuel Johnson and Charles Garth, December 2, 1765.

\textsuperscript{119} While Timothy’s participation in Sons of Liberty is clear, his leadership is questionable. He may have exaggerated, for example, when he informed Benjamin Franklin that the “Opposition to Tyranny was raised by a single inconsiderable Man here,” referring to himself, “under all the Discouragements imaginable, even Gadsden doubting whether it could be attempted.” Peter Timothy to Benjamin Franklin, June 12, 1777, ed. Douglas C. McMurtrie, \textit{Letters of Peter Timothy, Printer of Charleston, South Carolina, to Benjamin Franklin}, Chicago: Black Cat Press, 1935), 17-18; Henry Laurens to Joseph Brown, October 28, 1765, \textit{LP}, 5:30; Henry Laurens to James Grant, November 1, 1765, \textit{LP}, 536.
& propagated from Boston & Rhode Island.”

To those opposed to the mob, a handful of firebrands – not the ‘interested’ community’s consensus – accounted for the actions of the mob. Challenging the basis of the mob – as mere rabble roused by a few firebrands – also challenged the legitimacy of their actions and causes.

In response to the gathering crowds and potential unrest, Lieutenant Governor Bull (acting as top royal official in South Carolina, in the absence of the royal governor), announced the following morning that all stamps had been deposited at Fort Johnson, guarded by soldiers to ensure peace. Alongside this announcement, each crown-appointed stamp official in Charleston publicly resigned their offices, asking on behalf of “his Majesty’s colonies” the “repeal of an act that has created so much confusion.” With the Stamp Act collection slated to begin November 1, it became clear that execution would be impossible. As Charleston residents began to calculate the effect of resistance upon their city (the closing of the courts, the port,

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120 In Lieutenant Governor Bull’s own words, “Some very extraordinary and universal commotions in the town” had occurred, prompted “by the artifices of some busy spirits” who “universally poisoned” the “minds of men...with the principles which were imbibed & propagated from Boston & Rhode Island.” This response was quite typical, to blame outside agitation on ideas arriving on ships from the port, or as Laurens’ did, on certain individuals. William Bull to Board of Trade, November 3, 1765, PRO, v. 30, reel 10; Walsh, Charleston’s Sons of Liberty, 36-7.

121 The South Carolina and American General Gazette, October 31, 1765; William Bull to Board of Trade, November 3, 1765, PRO, v. 30, reel 10, vol. 30.

122 The South Carolina Gazette, October 31, 1765; McCrady, Royal Government, 571-2. P.R.S.C. XXX. 281-283, 279-280.
the newspapers), the mechanic interest pushed the community towards sustained resistance.

With rumors circulating about plans for a Christmastime slave insurrection, the press for peace within the port met the wide support of Charleston's propertied merchants, planters, and wealthier mechanics. For many, the specter of anarchy prompted the consideration of new form of protest – one that ensured order while channeling potential disorder, one that privileged propertied white involvement while marginalizing sailors and slaves, and one that ensured profits while bringing a swift repeal – the answer came in the form of a non-importation association.123

**Charleston's First Foray into Non-Importation**

With no stamps, the civil court and port of Charleston officially closed on November 1, 1765. The Commons House of Assembly approved the resolutions of the Stamp Act Congress, sending yet another series of petitions through their colonial agent in London.

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123 In a city with a slave majority, controlling the violent action of mobs was the single most important goal of South Carolina's interested groups. Individuals were quite fearful that an uncontrolled mob would set alight other dissatisfied groups, particularly slaves. While some, like Henry Laurens believed the slave plot was nothing more than slave who "mimick'd their betters by crying out Liberty," Lieutenant Governor Bull acted quickly to prevent possible rebellion among the slaves. The fear of revolt also calmed some of the radical elements most ardent champions, including Gadsden, who expressed concern over mob action by April 1766, a fact with Henry Laurens noted to his correspondents with unrestrained glee. Henry Laurens to John Lewis Gervais, January 29, 1766, LP, 5:52-53; William Bull to Board of Trade, December 17, 1765; *Documents Illustrative of Slave Trade*, 4:415; Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America, 1743-1776* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), 313; Pauline Maier, "The Charleston Mob and the Evolution of Popular Politics in Revolutionary South Carolina, 1765-1784," *Perspectives in American History*, 4 (1970): 173-96; Christopher Gadsden to William Samuel Johnson and Charles Garth, December 2, 1765, WCG, 44.
Colonial leaders from northern and southern ports crafted a common strategy of non-importation: an “ordered resistance” designed to channel potential unrest into a peaceful, limited form of protest.\textsuperscript{124} Having exhausted “constitutional method[s],” Charleston residents “who had trusted to their representatives [in Parliament]” became “terrified at the prospect of future slavery” and signed onto non-importation association. Ideally, this combination served to ensure a broad consensus among the propertied interest, while limiting the possibility of chaos.\textsuperscript{125}

By the winter of 1765-1766, import trade reached a standstill. On wharves and streets throughout the port city, business adjusted to the new realities of non-importation. Without stamps, civil courts suspended business, indentured servants ran out their contracts, and Charleston’s two newspapers lasted only a few weeks before stopping their presses.\textsuperscript{126} Barrels of rice cluttered the wharves and approximately fourteen-hundred unemployed sailors crowded the taverns.\textsuperscript{127} Tensions abounded in the port, particularly between the

\textsuperscript{124} Maier, \textit{From Resistance to Revolution}, 76.
\textsuperscript{125} Maier, \textit{From Resistance to Revolution}, 36, 64, 75.
\textsuperscript{127} To keep this growing number of seamen in line, the leaders of the protest movement (in concert with the actions of Lieutenant Governor Bull, who reported that the sailors in larger number “grew licentious”) suppressed any sailors deemed unruly and frequently tossed supposed
planter-merchant interest groups and the mechanics. Radical mechanics and the Liberty Boys found themselves forced to agree on an elongated list of goods in order to gain the support of Charleston's merchant and planter interest. And even though Christopher Gadsden prowled “the water side a night to see if anything [was] moving among the shipping” only limited efforts at enforcement occurred.\footnote{The South Carolina Gazette, February 25, 1766; Walsh, Charleston's Sons of Liberty, 39.}

Tensions within the non-importation movement heightened as Gadsden publicly accused the merchants of using the specter of slave insurrection and sailor tumult to “poison the minds of the people” in order to gain greater exceptions to an already weak scheme of protest.\footnote{Fraser, Patriots, Pistols, and Petticoats, 36.} On the whole, the merchant and planters held the whip hand in Charleston, even forcing Lieutenant Governor Bull to permit ships to clear port under certain conditions that spring.\footnote{Radical elements tried to force the courts to open without stamped documents and the complete opening of the port. Lieutenant Governor Bull allowed some degree of violation, by allowing ships to leave for Florida, the Bermudas, and New Providence. He was motivated by fears that the British there would suffer famine and servile insurrection if Charleston's commerce was halted. Eventually, aware of possible outbreaks of violence in Charleston, he allowed clearance to all ships whose captains paid a sum equivalent to the charges required by the Stamp Act. P.R.S.C, XXX, 277-278, XXXI, 22-251 Drayton, Memoirs, 89-91; Walsh, Charleston's Sons of Liberty, 39.} At public meetings and in Charles Crouch's new paper, each interest group exchanged bitter accusations, and the delicate consensus appeared liable to dissolve at any moment. Across the Atlantic, however, the
American boycott stimulated lobbying activities of the commercial and manufacturing interests who applied pressure to Parliament. Suddenly—right at the moment when non-importation faced tough questions in Charleston—news arrived of the “repeal [of] the dreadful Sentence.”

Repeal and Reprieve—Celebration in the Streets

On June 9, 1766, the first “REVIVED” issue of the South Carolina Gazette published news which had already reached every dock, alley, warehouse, tavern, inn, home, nook and cranny in Charleston: Parliament had repealed the Stamp Act. Although rumors of repeal circulated for months, definitive news of the March repeal by Parliament arrived in the port in early May. Upon hearing the news, Christopher Gadsden “was so overcome...that he almost fainted.”

Spontaneous celebrations broke out around the town, for “all was Joy, Jollity, and Mirth,” wrote Speaker of the Assembly Peter Manigault. The white Charleston residents “intoxicated with joy” planned a day of celebration for “our happy deliverance form the apprehensions of oppression and slavery” to correspond with King George’s June 6th birthday.

The morning began with a joyful ringing of St. Michael’s bells and proud displays of British colors. Along the harbor, boats strung

131 Christopher Gadsden to Captain Burden, February 20, 1766, Dartmouth Papers D 1778/2/169.
132 The South Carolina Gazette, June 9, 1766.
their colorful signal flags from mast to mast. From the fort, cannon
shots fired in celebration. Throughout the streets, banners hung from
townhouse windows. Royal officials and Sons of Liberty radicals alike
celebrated Parliament’s decision to repeal the Stamp Act. A parade of
the colony’s militia including Christopher Gadsden’s artillery
company processed for review by Lieutenant Governor Bull, the
Council, the Assembly, and assorted public officials. Following the
public displays, Lieutenant Governor Bull hosted a gathering at
Dillon’s Tavern providing “very elegant entertainment.” At the dinner,
“many loyal and constitutional toasts were drunk amongst which the
best friends to Britain and America were not omitted.” The celebration
ended with a “grand and general” fireworks illuminating the
harbor.133

Throughout the joyful occasion, Charleston’s residents
exchanged good cheer and spirits in even measure all around. To
thank the King for his “great goodness,” the Commons House of
Assembly prepared an address and forwarded resolutions in his honor
to demonstrate that “the inhabitants of this province [remain] a loyal
and a grateful people.” Alongside their praise for the King, the
Assembly voted to erect a marble statue in honor of William Pitt for his

133 McDonough. Christopher Gadsden and Henry Laurens, 76-77; The South Carolina Gazette June 9,
1766.
“noble and generous assistance toward obtaining the repeal,”

including such memorable lines from speeches as, “Americans are the sons not the bastards” of England.\textsuperscript{134} The statue – the first of a public man in America – erected on July 5 in the center of town, at the intersections of Broad and Meeting Street celebrated in stone this great moment of repeal, an achievement accomplished by South Carolinians and their allies.

In the euphoria of the moment, the Stamp Act repeal cemented among Charleston’s merchants, planters, and mechanics their continued importance within the British Empire and their persuasive power within the halls of Parliament. When faced with the abuse of power, Charleston non-importers had successfully crafted a legitimate and peaceful protest in the model of their Whig ideals.\textsuperscript{135} Due to the timing of the repeal, Charleston’s port residents avoided many of the tough questions demanded by protest that would resurface during the Townshend Revenue Crisis.\textsuperscript{136} In their minds at this moment –

\textsuperscript{134} Throughout the colonies, William Pitt was viewed as the star of the repeal effort for his lines like, “I rejoice that America has resisted” and “Americans are the sons not the bastards” of England. His speeches were frequently reprinted and cited as indicative of support for non-importation and protest. Merchants in Charleston were offering a coin with Pitt’s profile on the side. Letters of thanks to Pitt and perceived allies in England appeared in Charleston’s papers. \textit{Knight, The American Colonial Press and the Townshend Crisis}, 32, 71; \textit{The South Carolina Gazette} March 30, April 20, 1767; \textit{The South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal} April 29, May 13, 1766.

\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Maier, From Resistance to Revolution}, 74.

\textsuperscript{136} Particularly, questions about enforcement, leadership, and participation.
Charleston non-importation association members had formed a persuasive argument for repeal, sacrificed to protest injustice, and ultimately convinced Parliament of their legitimacy.

Enthusiastically celebrating their triumph in protecting the rights of Englishmen, Charleston’s celebrating throngs – like those in other ports – largely ignored the ominous wording of the Declaratory Act passed alongside the Stamp Act repeal. The majority of colonists felt that the British government supported their interpretation of the constitutional question, a belief reinforced by colonial news outlets. In her survey of Southern newspapers, historian Carol Knight, found that the news appearing from London and British cities focused primarily on three optimistic stories, including: the double repeal of the Stamp Act and English Cider Act, the ministry’s future plans for increasing trade in the American colonies, and the likelihood of a change in ministers which would benefit the colonies. Among news items being published alongside the repeal celebrations, included rumors and speculations of new plans which the Rockingham ministry were forming for America (not necessarily bad news), plans of creation of a duty-free port in Dominica (a real boon for Charleston business), and potential changes in currency policy to aid the cash-poor colonies. These rumors of changes in imperial policy were read alongside descriptions of individuals in England who had lobbied and acted on behalf of the American colonies, including royal governors, manufacturing towns in the England, and merchant houses. In toto, southerners received a fairly rosy picture of future imperial policies, even as disturbances from northern colonies began to filter into papers. Knight, The American Colonial Press and the Townshend Crisis. 22, 24, 27, 29, 32, 46- 49; The South Carolina and American General Gazette August 1, 1766.
residents’ perceptions of the power of their actions.\textsuperscript{138} Through action, colonists believed they had influenced policymakers during the Stamp Act Crisis in particular directions, establishing a precedent and encouraging future protest.\textsuperscript{139}

While most colonials “Thank[ed] God” that South Carolina became “now again, the land of liberty,” Christopher Gadsden and fellow radicals organized a somber meeting beneath the Liberty Tree. Standing before a high-spirited bunch of Charleston’s mechanics, Gadsden— one participant recalled after— “harangued them at considerable length.” In pure “folly” Charleston’s residents “relax[ed] their opposition and vigilance...indulging the fallacious hope that Great Britain would relinquish her designs and pretensions.” Before the crowd, he read the preamble of the Declaratory Act, “pressing upon them the folly of rejoicing at a law” which “asserted and maintained the absolute dominion of Great Britain” over the colonies. Couching his argument in radical Whig rhetoric, Gadsden outlined “all the chances of succeeding in a struggle to break the fetters...imposed on them,” to which mechanics joined hands and “swore their defense against tyranny.”\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{138} Knight, \textit{The American Colonial Press and the Townshend Crisis}. 25; Maier, \textit{From Resistance to Revolution}, 107; \textit{The South Carolina Gazette}, June 16, 1766.
\textsuperscript{139} McDonough, \textit{Christopher Gadsden and Henry Laurens}, 77; Walsh, \textit{Charleston’s Sons of Liberty}, 41.
Beyond the Liberty Tree's reaches, other colonial residents also noted that the once celebrated victory remained incomplete. As details of the Stamp Act repeal filtered in, skeptical observers cautioned their fellow colonists that the 240 to 133 victory of repeal in Parliament represented a comfortable, but hardly secure majority. That the Declaratory Act passed in rapid succession to the vote further challenged Charleston merchants' and planters' perceptions of their power within the Empire. Many felt, like Henry Laurens, that despite new statues and shared toasts, "all America will undergo many pangs yet before there is a hearty reconciliation." 

Repeal of the Stamp Act did not solve the issues dividing Anglo-America. As we know in hindsight, colonial opposition in Charleston reawakened in 1769 in response to the Townshend Revenue Act of 1767. Those carefully reading the news or corresponding with London merchants noted that – not only did London policymakers disapprove of American actions during the Stamp Act Crisis – a growing number argued that the petulant non-importers deserved to be punished, tamed, and reminded of the

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143 An essay printed on April 15, 1768, *The South Carolina and American General Gazette* voiced many of these tensions and fears. Paraphrasing Barre, the author reiterated that Parliament was no longer treating America as its children, warning that if Britain became a tyranny, America would not willingly become her slaves. *The South Carolina and American General Gazette*, April 15, 1768.
authority of Parliament. Many in England described how “alarming” the “disturbances from North America” were “to those Gentlemen who have large sums due them there.” Letters from London often expressed a measured support for the American position during the crisis with the persistent caveat: “except for the acts of violence”.\textsuperscript{144} No one within the port or within the colony, however, saw in this moment foresaw revolution.\textsuperscript{145}

The intervening years between the euphoric summer of repeal in 1766 and the contentious summer of dissent in 1769, further challenged Charleston’s interested classes’ perceptions of their place in the empire, their powers of persuasion in London, and their understanding of the dynamics within their own community. The Townshend Revenue Act Crisis in Charleston developed, as describe above, from divergent and contentious trajectories from individual’s economic and ideological experiences in the years following the Stamp Act Crisis.

Charleston entered the period of imperial regulation as a peripheral community convinced of its own centrality. For planters, merchants, and mechanics this belief came increasingly under assault

\textsuperscript{144} The South Carolina Gazette, June 16, 1766; The South Carolina and American General Gazette, August 8, 1766; Knight. The American Colonial Press and the Townshend Crisis 1766 – 1770, 31.

\textsuperscript{145} Maier, From Resistance to Revolution, xvii, x-xi, xx, 114; Pauline Maier, “The Charleston Mob and the Evolution of Popular Politics in Revolutionary South Carolina, 1675-1784.”
by renewed enforcement of customs,\textsuperscript{146} a critical currency shortage,\textsuperscript{147} a rash of bankruptcies,\textsuperscript{148} as well as, news from northern colonies.

Throughout the colony, mechanics and planters suffered the harsh economic realities of economic downturn. Within the city, wealthy merchants recalled the street scenes during the Stamp Act Crisis, remaining deeply concerned – even paranoid – about a “contagion of liberty” spreading among the black majority and itinerate sailors. The quick formation and power of mobs reminded Charleston’s power structure of its tenuous position. Despite their apparent success in the Stamp Act Crisis, individuals within the port city carefully calculated

\textsuperscript{146} On customs enforcement: In the spring of 1767, a new royal customs collector arrived in Charleston. Daniel Moore quickly alienated himself from nearly every resident of the port, particularly the merchant interest by his tactics, vigor, and methods. Moore proved particularly interested in tightening customs enforcement to increase his own personal fortunes. As mentioned above, the most famous case among many, occurred in the Spring of 1767 when coastal schooners – Broughton Island Packet and Wambaw – owned by Henry Laurens were confiscated for not properly clearing the port. Laurens became so angry that he not only brought suit against the customs collector, but upon spotting Moore on a crowded Charleston street, twisted his nose and yelled at him. Laurens’ case came to be heard in Charleston’s new vice Admiralty court under judge Egerton Leigh (a relative of Laurens by marriage). In the meantime, customs collector George Roupell was found guilty by a local jury and ordered to pay damages. To retaliate, Roupell and P.H. Hatley cease another of Laurens’ ships, and offered to release the vessel if Laurens would not collect the damages. Laurens was incensed at this extortion. A situation which could have been diffused, now worsened into a series of bitter exchanges and attacks in the newspaper accusing public officials of working in their own self-interest. Laurens pamphlets circulated widely in the colonies. Mercantini, \textit{Who Should Rule at Home?} 23-24; Calhoon and Weir, “Scandalous History of Sir Egerton Leigh,” 53; Henry Laurens \textit{Extracts from the Proceedings of the Court of Vice-Admiralty in Charles-Town, South Carolina} reprint ed \textit{HL}, 6:189 – 216 (\textit{The Papers of Henry Laurens (HL)} ed. George C. Rogers et al., 16 vols.)

\textsuperscript{147} On the currency crisis: Correspondence in newspapers indicated that many in England believed that there would be plenty of cash in America to pay the taxes. Knight, \textit{The American Colonial Press and the Townshend Crisis}, 24, 70; \textit{The South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal}, December 23, 1766, May 5, 1767; \textit{South Carolina and American General Gazette}, January 23, 1767.

\textsuperscript{148} The increasing collection of debts particularly affected Charleston’s planters and mechanics. See more information above. \textit{The South Carolina Gazette} September 7, 1769, May 30, 1769; Walsh, \textit{Charleston’s Sons of Liberty}, 42-45; Miscellaneous Court Records, 1770-1771, 9899, 100, 110, 264, 338, 374, 392-393; Records of the Court of Common Pleas, 1767, 135, 178, 211, 212, 272-274, 393-396; \textit{Minute Book of the Fellowship Society}, 1769-1779; Gayle, “The Nature and Volume of Exports from Charleston, 1724-1774,” pp. 31-33; Ship Registers, 1730-1774.
risk versus reward in their reaction to the Townshend Revenue Acts in 1767. For all the earlier toasts to Liberty and “Damnation to the Stamp Act,” residents of Charleston appeared at first, wholly uncertain of how to react to this new revenue measure.

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Chapter 2: Charleston at the Arrival of Townshend – Inaction, Contention, Consensus

“Whereas it is expedient that a revenue should be raised in your Majesty’s dominions in America” declared Parliament in the Revenue Act of 1767, “for making a more certain and adequate provision for defraying the charge of the administration of justice, and the support of the civil government...and towards further defraying the expenses of defending, protecting, and securing, the said dominions...have therefore resolved to give and grant unto your Majesty the several rates and duties herein after mentioned.” This preamble to a bill more commonly refered to in the American colonies as the Townshend Revenue Act flowed from the pen of the Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Townshend as a new plan for rationalizing colonial administration.149

149 Charles Townshend’s ideas about taxing and regulating American trade had been taking shape for at least a decade with other ministers and policymakers. The tax schemes were not the result of unilateral action by Townshend, but had the general support of the cabinet and Parliament. Great Britain, The Statutes at Large...[from 1225 to 1867] by Danby Pickering (Cambridge: Printed by Benthem, for C. Bathurst); Knight, The American Colonial Press and the Townshend Crisis 77-78; Walter H. Conser, Jr. and Ronald M. McCarthy, “Circular Letters, Customs Officers and the Issue of Violence: The Background to the Townshend Acts Resistance,” in Resistance, Politics and the American Struggle for Independence 1765–1775, ed. by Walter H. Conser, Jr., Ronald M. McCarthy,
The problem of extracting colonial revenue that plagued King George III's ministers became increasingly urgent by 1767, as the annual cost of garrisoning the army units in America approached 400,000 pounds, nearly twice the original estimates. The act raised funds through taxes, which could be defended as trade duties to colonists' constitutional arguments against interal taxation. Additionally, the act provided measures to "more effectually prevent the clandestine running of goods in the colonies and plantations." This act appealed to members of Parliament by providing funds, reasserting imperial authority, and reassuring the royal rule of law and order in each colony. Conversely, this act threatened colonists in America by extracting funds, reasserting imperial authority, and undermining the political gains of the popularly elected branches of government.  

In October 1767, Boston became the first port to renew non-importation in response to the Townshend Revenue Act, followed in

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succession by fellow northern ports. Although news of these protests, copies of John Dickinson’s influential “Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania,” and various other attempts to incite action appeared on the broadsides of each of Charleston’s newspapers, the port appeared – at least among the propertied whites – largely uninterested in adopting any scheme of “strict OECONOMY.” Among the colony’s political elite (i.e. the wealthy planters and merchants) word of new Regulator disturbances in the backcountry were considered a far greater threat to South Carolina’s economy and stability than a few small duties on paper, tea, and miscellaneous goods. For mechanics and indebted planters, the opposite appeared true, prompting somber rallies under the Liberty Tree to toast Boston and “to see how far they could follow the laudable example of their brother tradesmen in New York.” Meanwhile, merchants calculated the costs and benefits to

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151 News that Boston was organizing a non-importation and non-consumption movement arrived in Charleston as early as November 1767. *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, November 13, 20, 1767; *The South Carolina Gazette*, December 14, 1767.
153 Internal problems within the colony dominated discussion in the Assembly from 1767 and throughout much for 1768. By September 1768, writers could declare “appprehension from the Regulators is over and we are generally convinced that our fears were groundless. Happy people should we be, if every man might pursue his proper Occupation; but no sooner are we at rest at home than we are alarmed from Abroad, and the most imminent danger threatens.” Refocusion attention from the backcountry to the lowcountry, the writer declared “We are no longer Strangers to the Measures Great Britain is determined to use in treating with her loyal colonies in America.” *The South Carolina Gazette*, October 11, 1768; *The South Carolina and American General Gazette*, September 16, 23, 1768.
154 See above. *The South Carolina Gazette*, June 1, 8, 15, 1769.
calls for resumption from their northern peers.\textsuperscript{155} Newspapers became a central forum for the debates over resumption of non-importation to occur.\textsuperscript{156}

\textit{June 8, 1769 - The Press for Action}

Through their inaction, Charleston’s planters and mechanics, argued the ‘Planter from Pedee,’ “bought” the “rod for our own breech.”\textsuperscript{157} The arrival of Lord Hillsborough’s congratulations to “our friends in trade” for treating Boston’s “circular letter...with the SILENT contempt it deserved,” provided the author with the spark to alight a tinderbox in hot, dry summer of 1769. In allowing the merchant interest, “mere Bird of Passage...here to make a fortune,” to speak for the community those interests “fixed to the country” left Charleston lagging behind “her noble sister colonies” in asserting their rights within the Empire. While the merchants earn praise from imperial ministers for “act[ing] like A WISE AND PRUDENT people” amid the crisis of the Townshend Revenue Act inaction on the part of South Carolina’s planters, mechanics, and freeholders threatened true English liberty. Now was the time for action, wrote Christopher Gadsden as the ‘Planter from Pedee,’ for planters and mechanics

\textsuperscript{155} \textit{The South Carolina and American General Gazette}, June 3, 1768, December 5, 1678.
\textsuperscript{156} For more examples of toasts see: \textit{South Carolina and American General Gazette}, May 13, 1768, November 30, 1768, December 5, 1768; For more on the possible efficacy of petitions: Knight, \textit{The American Colonial Press and the Townshend Crisis}, 121-28; \textit{The South Carolina and American General Gazette}, May 6, 1768, May 13, 1768; \textit{The South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal}, January 28, 1768.
\textsuperscript{157} \textit{The South Carolina Gazette}, June 8, 1769.
“cannot expect the merchants” to again “desist from importations”
following Hillsborough’s “compliment.”\textsuperscript{158} After two years of delay, the first June issue of the\textit{South Carolina Gazette} ushered in a summer where – at the intersection of self-interest and ideology – a contested protest reemerged in a city famous for its harmony.\textsuperscript{159}

\textit{June 15, 1769 – Charleston’s First Agreement}
\textit{The South Carolina Gazette} informed its readers on June 15, 1769

“Several Societies of Gentlemen in this Town” had formed in answer to the Planter’s challenge. For over a year, letters from Boston merchants to their Charleston peers urging cooperation and resistance “were handed from man to man,” Lieutenant Governor William Bull Jr. reported to London, with “Silent Neglect.”\textsuperscript{160} Despite exuberant toasts to liberty and celebrations of English patriots that followed the repeal of the Stamp Act, the booming port city appeared largely uninterested in resuming a regime of “strict OECONOMY” in

\textsuperscript{158}The \textit{South Carolina Gazette}, June 22, 1769; William Henry Drayton, \textit{Letters of Freeman} (London, 1771), 1-5.

\textsuperscript{159} The debate which began this paper, the Planter from Pedee appeared in the \textit{South Carolina Gazette}, as did Christopher Gadsden’s subsequent letter as “Pro Grege et Rege” addressed “To Planters, Mechanicks, and Freeholders of the province” declaring that never before “were so glaringly a few against us” than the importers, stigmatized as strangers in the province. Maier \textsc{RtR} 135, Walsh, Gadsden, “To the Planters, Mechanics, and Freeholders of...South Carolina,” June 22, 1769, in \textit{Gadsden Writings}, 77. SCG. 1769

\textsuperscript{160} Boston adopted a non-importation agreement in October 1767, and most of the northern colonies soon followed. February 1768, Massachusetts sent the circular letter challenging the constitutionality of the Townshend Acts and asking for cooperation among the colonies in securing their repeal. Throughout the colonies, petitions were drawn in response and forwarded by assemblies to colonial agents in London to be presented to the King. Events beyond the Townshend Acts themselves, such as their seizure of John Hancock’s sloop \textit{Liberty} and the quartering controversy in Boston and New York also hastened pressure for action. \textit{Public Records of South Carolina} (British Transcripts), XXXII, p. 56 Cited hereafter as \textsc{P.R.S.C.}; Leila Sellers, \textit{Charleston Business on the Eve of the American Revolution}. (New York Amo Press, 1970), 204.
response to the Townshend Revenue Acts.\textsuperscript{161} Within days of the Planter’s exhortations and the societies meeting, the first agreement since the Stamp Act to “purchase no kind of British Goods that can be manufactured in America,” circulated around the Charleston.\textsuperscript{162}

Following weeks of maneuvering and posturing, the announcement on June 15 of an association vowing to “cloathe themselves in homespun as soon as it can be got,” precipitated a tense standoff within the port.\textsuperscript{163} “WE, His Majesty’s dutiful and loving Subjects,” began Charleston’s first renewal of non-importation published June 22, 1769, “being sensibly affected” by “the abject and wretched condition to which the BRITISH COLONIES are reduced by several Acts of Parliament,” believe we can “most probably procure...Relief” do “solemnly promise” that “until the Colonies be restored to their former Freedom, by the Repeal of the said Acts, we will most strictly abide by the following RESOLUTIONS.” After carefully articulating both grievances and prior petitions, the non-importation association pledged to “encourage and promote...the use of NORTH-AMERICAN MANUFACTURES” by not importing “Any of the Manufactures of GREAT-BRITAIN” except from those items “such as may have been shipped in consequence of former Orders” or

\textsuperscript{161} The South Carolina Gazette, June 22, 1769.
\textsuperscript{162} The South Carolina Gazette, June 15, 1769;
\textsuperscript{163} The South Carolina Gazette, June 1, 1769, July 22, 1769.
"NEGRO CLOTH, DUFFIL BLANKETS, OSNABURGS,
PLANTATION and WORKMEN'S TOOLS, POWDER, LEAD, SHOT,
CANVAS, NAILS, SALT, COALS, WOOL CARDS, CARD WIRE,
printed BOOKS and PAMPHLETS." Upon signing, association members
agreed not to "raise the Prices" and to "immediately countermand all
Orders." 164

In "our Persons, Families, Houses and Furniture," non-
importation supporters vowed to exercise "the utmost OECONOMY"
in particular vowing to "use NO MOURNING, nor give Gloves and
Scarves at Funerals." Now published and disseminated, the authors
and signers, looked to "every Inhabitant of this Colony, who refuses or
neglects to sign this Agreement within one Month...as no Friend to the
true Interest of the Colony" and swore "upon no Account, at any
Time...to purchase from...such a Person." Those "Gentlemen desirous of
promoting so laudable and at this Time evidently necessary" an association
should immediately "set their Hands" upon "Blank Copies of the above
Agreement" at "TIMOTHY'S Office in Broad-Street [printing house of the
South Carolina Gazette]...at Mr. ISAAC MOTTE'S on the Bay, and
CHRISTOPHER GADSDEN, Esq'g where Charleston residents might

164 The South Carolina Gazette, June 22, 1769.
also view “a List of the Names of many respectable Gentlemen” already pledged.165

June 30 – July 7, 1769 – The Merchant Interest Responds

With no association, the merchants appeared to be abdicating control over the contours of dissent to the planter and mechanic interests. Facing an aggressive challenge from radical leadership, anxiously predicting financial hardship under the circulating non-importation scheme, and fearful of losing their position to a strengthening planter-mechanic alliance, the Charleston merchants took action. On June 30, the merchant interest gathered at Dillon’s Tavern to respond to the sudden resumption of non-importation. Aware that remaining aloof only invited more extreme measures, the large meeting appointed a committee to draft a rival non-importation plan aimed at both moderating the mechanics – Charleston’s most radical element – and cementing a traditional planter-merchant alliance.166

On July 7, the merchants “in a Number near eighty” presented their scheme “without one differenting voice.” Declaring that “WE...feeling ourselves burthened and sensibly affected, by the many Impositions of Taxes...for the Purpose of raising a Revenue in AMERICA” vow to “adopt

165 The South Carolina Gazette, June 13, 22, 1769.
166 The South Carolina Gazette, June 22, 1769; July 6, 13, 1769; William Henry Drayton, Letters of Freeman, 1-5; Walsh, Charleston’s Sons of Liberty, 47-8; Sellers, Charleston Business on the Eve of the American Revolution, 207.
every Plan of OECONOMY" and “hereby solemnly promise and engage...that we will faithfully observe and keep the following RESOLUTIONS.” Seeking a balance between the Stamp Act precedents, the rival mechanic-planter scheme, and their own interests, the authors and subscribers agreed “from and after this Day, we will not import...and European or East-India Goods...(but such as may be already ordered and cannot be countermanded) either from Great-Britain, Holland, or any other Place whatsoever, until the first Day of January, 1778, unless the Revenue-Acts...should be sooner repealed.”

Demarcating a clear beginning and ending date, the authors also allowed “the following Articles” to be imported: “NEGRO CLOTH...striped DUFFIL BLANKETS—OSNABURGS—coarse white LINENS, not exceeding One Shilling and Six Pence Sterling per Yard—CANVAS—BOLTING CLOTHS—DRUGS and FAMILY MEDICINES—PLANTATION and WORKMEN'S TOOLS—NAILS—WIRE CARDS—FIRE ARMS—BAR STEEL—GUN POWDER—SHOT-LEAD—FLINTS—SALT—COALS—SALT-PETRE—MILL and GRIND-STONES.” The merchant’s non-importation association adopted similar language to Charleston’s Stamp Act precedent, but allowed a greater number of goods to be imported. Beyond the extensive list of exceptions, signers agreed to countermand orders, “not purchase from any Masters of Vessels, transient Persons, or Non-
Subscribers’ forbidden goods “excepting COALS and SALT,” to sell all items “at the same Rates” as before, that “from and after the first Day of January 1770, to the first Day of January 1771 we will not IMPORT, BUY or SELL, any NEGROES that shall be brought into this province from AFRICA” nor after “the first Day of October next, any NEGROES that shall be imported from the WEST-INDIA ISLANDS, or ANY OTHER PLACE, unless the said Acts should be sooner repealed,” and added “WINES” to the list of forbidden goods due to the “heavy Duty” imposed upon them. Those subscribers “who shall not, strictly and literally, adhere” to the resolutions “will deserve to be treated with the utmost Contempt.” The merchants tipped their hats towards small merchants, planters, and even mechanics in shaping the association’s requirements, but in whole, the association protected the economic interests of its promoters. The inclusion of specific deadlines served to limit the scope of protest. As the meeting adjourned, the merchants felt confident of the successful adoption of their association by the community in Charleston.

Eager to press their position, the merchants released an open response to the “Planter from Pedee” alongside the publication their

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167 The South Carolina Gazette, July 13, 1769; The South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal, July 10, 25, 1769.
168 The South Carolina Gazette, July 9, 13, 1769; Sellers, Charleston Business on the Eve of the American Revolution, 56.
169 The South Carolina Gazette, July 9, 1769.
newly penned non-importation association. Published in Charleston’s three major newspapers, the “MERCHANTS OF CHARLESTOWN” systematically refuted the accusations “Published in Mr. Timothy’s Gazette on the 22d of last Month.” The merchants offered this “Vindication” not for the “anonymous Writer,” who “we regard with...indifference,” but to “lay before the publick” their position supported by justifications of protest in radical Whig tradition. In response to the “Aspersions thrown” on the merchants for treating the circular letter with “silent Contempt,” Charleston factors argued that fewer than “a Fifth Part of the People in Trade had an Opportunity of seeing The Letter.” Indeed, the Planter from Pedee took “uncommon Pains to Misrepresent us to our Fellow-subjects” as “Strangers, many of but a few years standing...who have never shown...any Thing but...Regard for ourselves and our own private interests.” Had he “been disposed to give himself any Time for Recollection,” the merchants responded, the Planter would certainly have remembered the times that “the Merchants alone...boldly stood forth, and, at an enormous Expense solely defrayed by themselves” protesting and defeating “a plan that would have subjected the Planting Interest to inconceivable Hardships.”

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170 The South Carolina Gazette, July 22, 1769; The South Carolina and America General Gazette, July 17, 1769.
Once established in their past protest credentials, the merchants' response continued by denouncing the methods of the "Planter from Pedee" and the first non-importation association in Real Whig tradition. The mechanic's agreement represented little more than "an unjust Attempt of one Part of the Community...to throw a Burthen on the Rest more grievous than...the most arbitrary Minister of the most despotic King." The new motto "SIGN or BE RUINED," adopted by those supporting the "Planter from Pedee," "strikes at the Welfare of each Individual" embodying "nothing but a Spirit of Tyranny." The first "Plan of Economy" provides for but "two Parts of the Community" by "necessarily increase[ing] the Landholders Estates" and allowing the import of "such Articles as they and the Mechanicks indispensably want," leaving "the third" – the merchants – "subjected to infinite Hardships and Distress." If, suggested the merchants citing common belief of English Whig radicals, "hardship must be borne for the general Good, each individual should be consulted" and the resulting "Plan adopted...would make the Burden equal." 171 Thus the second non-importation association should be adopted as the only mutually consensual – and therefore legitimate – scheme of protest.

Contest

171 The merchants also respond through a letter from PRO LIBERATATE ET LEGE. *The South Carolina and America General Gazette*, July 7, 10, 1769; *The South Carolina Gazette*, July 13, 1769; *The South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*, July 7, 1769.
The South Carolina Gazette broadside announced the merchants' association and their letter below a reprinting of the first non-importation association (including an additional, italicized clause urging unity behind a single protest organization) and a preemptive response by "A Mechanic." On a single broadside, Charleston residents faced two contested protest associations. Why would "ANY PLANTER, MECHANIC, or OTHER inhabitant, DISTINCT from their body" subscribe to "their Resolutions" which "do not contain a single syllable for ENCOURAGING AMERICAN MANUFACTURES." As both sides jockeyed for support, the Mechanic continued that, although the merchants complain that "each individual should be consulted," but "Were any besides MERCHANTS, invited to their meeting...as at ours? That "so unpardonable an omission happened," the community must "unanimously adhere to our FIRST PLAN, with exemplary firmness." Only in consensus for the first plan, 'A Mechanic' argued, could the "ESTABLISH-MENT of American Manufactures" occur. The debate borrowed claims of legitimacy from traditions of English dissent but represented the economic self-interest of their authors.

Consensus

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172 By this time, the publisher of The South Carolina Gazette, Peter Timothy, was an ardent supporter of the radical interests, as will be examined below.
173 The South Carolina Gazette. July 13, 1769; Richard Walsh, Charleston's Sons of Liberty, 48.
174 Legitimate resistance, it was believed, must involved the body of the people, must take peaceful forms over violence, and must confine itself to proscribed limits. Maier, From Resistance to Revolution, 114.
“During the Fortnight past,” reported *The South Carolina and American General Gazette*, “several Proposals have been made...for stopping the Importation of Goods...till the Revenue Acts shall be Repealed” with “many” already signing “Resolutions for that Purpose.”\(^{175}\)

Even as merchants and mechanics exchanged bitter accusations – readers learned of several “proposals” underway “for One General” agreement.\(^{176}\) The drive for consensus stemmed in large part from common concerns that mechanics, merchants, and planters all shared about renewed disorder by slaves and sailors in the port. Past experience during the Stamp Act Protest and Whig tradition stressed that legitimate resistance involved the body of the people, in peaceful forms, defining clear limits to agitation.\(^{177}\)

The individuals who joined non-importation efforts in Charleston genuinely believed in their community’s ability to force Parliament to repeal the Townshend Revenue Acts through protest, and so the central question became deciding upon the most effective form for that protest. In the period of negotiations, mechanics and the planters held “the whip hand.” Overtures for a combined agreement by merchants fearing more extreme actions resulted in a joint committee to draft a

\(^{175}\) *The South Carolina and American General Gazette*, July 4, 1769; *The South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*, July 4, 25, 1769.

\(^{176}\) *The South Carolina and American General Gazette*, July 17, 1769.

\(^{177}\) Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*, 114.
uniform agreement distilling the essentials of the two rival agreements.\textsuperscript{178}

On July 22, 1769, serving as president of the public meeting Christopher Gadsden read aloud a new compromised plan. By acclaim, the crowd of planters, mechanics, and merchants voted "unanimously" to support a third non-importation agreement which, reported \textit{The South Carolina and American General Gazette} "we have no reason to doubt will be satisfactory to...every Freeman in the Province."\textsuperscript{179} The agreement combined the first and second non-importation associations, ultimately granting greater allowances for the merchant and planter economic interests, while expanding the power of the mechanics. The conflict over protest that emerged on June 15 as mechanics drafted a non-importation association in direct opposition to the merchants' inaction, developed into a period with two competing organizations, and ultimately ended with an agreement amenable to the merchant and planter interests, that endowed mechanics for the first time with equal political power in the association, a power they would continue to exercise throughout the Revolution.

\textsuperscript{179} Walsh. \textit{Charleston's Sons of Liberty}, 49.
After reiterating the grievances enumerated in the first agreement, the signers “whose names are under-written” agreed to “most strictly abide the following RESOLUTIONS…until the colonies be restored to their former freedom, by the repeal of the said acts.” To acknowledge the mechanics’ demands, signers promised to “encourage and promote the use of NORTH AMERICAN MANUFACTURES in general, and those of this province in particular,” with vendors applying “the same rates a heretofore.” As well, the importation, buying, or selling of “any NEGROES…brought into this Province from Africa” would go into effect “After the first day of January 1770,” while the moratorium of the importation of “any NEGROES…from West-Indies or any other place” began the “first day of October next.”

In negotiations, the list of goods excepted grew to include all the exceptions of the merchant’s association as well as “BOLTING CLOTHS” and “Fish-Hooks.” All non importation members pledged to observe “the utmost oeconomy in our persons” and “particularly” to “give no mourning or gloves or scarfs at funerals.” Within a month, “any resident” of South Carolina “that refuses or neglects to sign the agreement,” would receive no business from signers. While borrowing the language of previous agreements – that “every subscriber who shall not strictly and literally adhere to this agreement…out to be treated with the utmost contempt,” a new
committee of enforcement strengthened the measures within the association.180

The committee to enforce the boycott of British goods reflected as well the blending of the two competing non-importation schemes. At the “General Meeting of Inhabitants” it “was determined, That the General Resolutions” of non-importation “should be most strictly adhered to” with the “General Committee” empowered “to take every necessary and justifiable Step for preventing the least Deviation therefrom.”181 Formed on July 22, the South Carolina Non-Importation Association Committee contained thirteen representatives from each of the three interested parties: the planters, the merchants, and the mechanics, thus securing mechanics equal power in enforcement.182 Charged with gathering signatures and policing signers, the Committee collected 142 names by August, with the list ultimately growing to 268 individuals.183

The Resumption of Non-Importation

180 The South Carolina and America General Gazette, July 24, 1769; The South Carolina Gazette, July 22, 1769.
181 The South Carolina Gazette, September 7, 1769.
182 The mechanics who were appointed to the committee included Thomas Young, John, Matthews, Joseph Dil, John Fullerton, William Trusler, John Pure, Theodore Trezvant, Bernard Beekman, Cato Ash, Simon Berwick, Joseph Verree, Daniel Cannon, and Tunis Tebout. As an extra-legal body, the mechanic’s participation on this committee of enforcement established the precedent for their equal inclusion throughout the imperial crisis and Revolution. Interesting to note here, that leadership in this protest in no way presages a particular allegiance during the Revolutionary War. The South Carolina Gazette, July 13, 27 1769; Walsh, Charleston’s Sons of Liberty, 50.
183 The South Carolina Gazette, October 5, 1769; Walsh, Charleston’s Sons of Liberty, 52; Bull to Hillsborough, Charleston, March 6 and October 20, 1770, PRO, CO 5/393, ff. 22, 119; Maier, From Resistance to Revolution, 122, 131-2.
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By December 1769, few sails could be spotted coming or going from Charleston Harbor, and Peter Timothy reported that only thirty “irreconcilable” individuals remained in the port. The newly formed committee of enforcement adopted the motto of “Sign or Die”

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184 The South Carolina Gazette, September 7, 1769.
185 The mechanics who were appointed to the committee included Thomas Young, John, Matthews, Joseph Dill, John Fullerton, William Trusler, John Pure, Theodore Trezvant, Bernard Beekman, Cato Ash, Simon Berwick, Joseph Verree, Daniel Cannon, and Tunis Tebout. As an extra-legal body, the mechanic’s participation on this committee of enforcement established the precedent for their equal inclusion throughout the imperial crisis and Revolution. Interesting to note here, that leadership in this protest in no way presages a particular allegiance during the Revolutionary War. The South Carolina Gazette, 13, 27 July 1769; Walsh. Charleston’s Sons of Liberty. 50.
186 Walsh SoL 51 (Fraser, Walter PPP 45)
Another witness to these happenings claimed that few ships were in harbor in December, a time when the port was usually bustling. Moreover, figures show a marked decline in the overseas trade for the period of the resistance to the Townsend Act – Walsh SoL 51, David MacPherson, Annales d’Commerce (4 vol.; Edinburg, 1805).
(sometimes “Sign or be Ruined”) and harsher tactics for tactics for enlisting recalcitrant non-subscribers and punishing violators than their Stamp Act model. Although the summer began with individuals arriving a protest based upon their own ideological concerns and economic self interests, the push for consensus among the propertied interests due to fear of a massive slave and sailor uprisings enabled a more rigorous enforcement than many joiners thought either would occur or was necessary. The associations required all trade relations be suspended within one month, and delinquent subscribes would be handed by the elected Committee. The Committee decided that since “it was determined, That the General Resolutions...should be most strictly adhered to” strict enforcement was necessary to achieve results. In addition to this stricter enforcement, Charleston’s now more powerful mechanic class organized to plans to help domestic manufacturers, including schemes to establish a paper mill and provide goods such as “Liberty

187 Walsh SoL 50 - SCG - November 16, 23, 30 1769, December 7 1769, February 1, 14, September 14, 27, Oxrovwe 3, 11, 18, 25, November 1, 8, 1700. Pr.R., XXXII, 103, 200-201 SC Gaz July 27, 1769
188 SCG Sept. 7, 1769
189 The South Carolina Gazette, September 7, 1769, November 16, 23, 30, 1769, December 7, 1769, February 1, 14, 1769; P.R.S.C., XXXII, 103, 200-201.
umbrellas" for "Lovers and Encouragers of American Manufacturers."190

Within Charleston, the voices of opposition – like William Henry Drayton, John Gordon, and William Wragg – at first expressed their positions in the newspaper, but soon found themselves not simply marginalized, but no longer part of the community. In the backcountry as well, men like Charles Woodmason complained that the Sons of Liberty and fellow Charleston residents did not care “who may starve so that they can but eat – who sinks, so they swim, who laborers and are heavy laden, so they can keep their Equipages. Their throats bellow one thing. But their hands would execute the reverse...These are the Sons of Liberty.”191 The economic interests and ideological divides between the merchant, planter, and mechanic interest before the Townshend Revenue Acts, deeply influenced the variety of responses to the legislation and ultimately shaped what individuals believed they were participating in during the resumption of non-importation.

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Conclusion

190 The South Carolina Gazette, March 7, 1769, July 6, 1769, August 10, 1769, September 28, 1769, November 30, 1769, January 4, 11, 18, 1770, June 7, 1770, August 16, 1770; Walsh, Charleston’s Sons of Liberty, 52.

In a summer of 1769, when drought threatened "the CORN, throughout the province," residents of the port of Charleston experienced an extraordinarily blistering few weeks. In a city that prided itself on "Harmony," the summer of 1769 proved anything but harmonious. From inaction to conflict to consensus, the resumption of protest in Charleston forced each resident of the harbor town to question their relationship to the British Empire and to one another. For every individual, the Townshend Revenue Acts forced a reconsideration of the port's place within the British empire, the city elite's persuasive power in London, and their relationship to British political traditions. This moment emerged from a colonial history rich with political strife, an economic depression literally ruining planters and merchants, as well as, the constant fear of disorder from sailors and slaves. Far from harmony – this period of Charleston's history is best characterized by near constant contention, collusion, and disunion within the community.

In the summer of 1769, Charleston's newspaper broadsides and resident's private correspondence consistently echoed an anxiety unprecedented five years earlier. The period following the Seven Years War, as the British government sought to regularize the empire, Charleston suffered an identity crisis that deeply shaped their

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192 The South Carolina Gazette, July 13, 1769.
participation in protest. This essay attempted to recreate how contemporaries understood this moment of contested protest and their own involvement. To dissect how colonists came to protest, this paper examined how Charleston residents understood their position within the British Empire, traced how conflict over protest arrived amid inaction, and uncovered the drive by the anxious whites towards consensus. In capturing the range of possibilities for Charleston citizens, the narrative suggests how individuals calculated risk versus reward at the intersection of ideology and self-interest to participate in protest.193

Where once the city conceived of itself as a central player within the web of empire, after the Seven Years War, suddenly the port appeared to be just another periphery in the eyes of London policymakers. As they engaged in protest, Charleston’s interested classes continued to believe in their ability to persuade English officials to change imperial policies. This belief faded at varying rates for port residents – quickly for those mechanics injured by the currency crisis and more gradually for those merchants who still relied upon imperial trade networks. Even as they protested, Charlestonians engaged in a tradition within the Empire, linking their own cause with others in

193 This paper seeks to complicate the narrative established by Pauline Maier’s From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776. (New York: Norton 1972).
England, Scotland, and Ireland. Charleston residents participated in a wider, Atlantic conversation, one that increasingly appeared ignored by those on the far side of the Gulf Stream.

Up the coast from Charleston, the tobacco port of Norfolk – for example – echoes many of the tensions and drive to consensus found in Charleston. Seven of the twenty Norfolk and Portsmouth Committee of Correspondence members decrying the “tyranny” of King George during the Townshend Crisis, returned to Britain as loyalists after the war. Two members of the Committee actively fought against American independence, aiding the British army in securing financing and a fleet of privateers to harass the very port trade they once sought to protect.¹⁹⁴ No single trajectory defined allegiance in pre-Revolutionary port towns; understanding the dynamism of these communities in protest reveals more accurately the process of revolution.¹⁹⁵ Before even connecting to other colonies, capturing how the community itself interacted, points to how protest occurred within the British Empire.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Understanding the changing faces of protest – from the non-importation associations of the Stamp Act to the Coercive Acts – avoids the narrow binary of individuals as patriot or loyalist. Treatment of former protest leaders reveals not only latent antagonisms but also a high degree of tolerance for dissenting opinion within the two communities. With economic connections spanning all areas of American Colonies, the Caribbean, the British Isles, and the European continent, the cash crop merchant factors' participation and abandonment illustrates not only how economic motivation underlies protest, but also the class dynamic within port communities.
¹⁹⁶ In reading the contemporary newspapers and letters, it seems nearly impossible to conclude that participating in non-importation built trust or developed common understandings. From the
Beyond simply restoring contingency in the protests prior to the American Revolution, by examining this contested moment of protest within Charleston, it is possible to reconstruct how contemporaries conceived of their moment, their rights, their position, and even themselves within the British Empire.

In choosing to protest – in weighing the potential of risk versus the possibilities of reward – Charleston’s experience in the summer of 1769 reveals how people oriented themselves within the community, colony, and Empire. That individuals in Charleston each arrived at different conclusions from this calculation should not be surprising, nor should the fact that each individual brought different meanings to joining, participating, and violating the association – but as historians, we consistently overlook the dynamics of protest to paint an inevitable trajectory from resistance to revolution. While the story of this particular summer, in this odd Southern city, appears exceptional, the experience of this port also points towards a more complex picture of protest in a colonial world. Individuals in Charleston – like those in Savannah, Philadelphia, Antigua, Jamaica, St. Christopher, Beaufort, and elsewhere – based their actions and decision upon a calculus of origins to the enforcement, each individual in Charleston believed they signed on, participated in, violated, or resisted fundamentally different associations than others within the community. No consensus existed within the port to build towards a common revolution in the manner that T.H. Breen or Pauline Maier describe. Choice was part of the equation, but coercion and marginalizing
economic self-interest, political ideology, and the nature of the community.