

“FROM A DETERMINED RESOLUTION TO GET LIBERTY”:
SLAVES AND THE BRITISH IN REVOLUTIONARY NORFOLK
COUNTY, VIRGINIA, 1775-1781

A Thesis

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of

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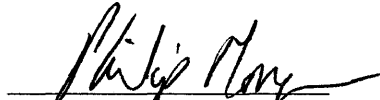
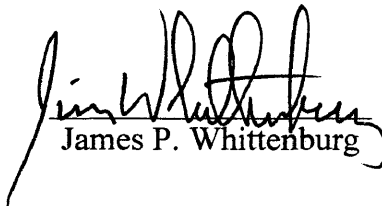
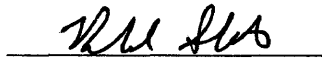

Philip D. Morgan
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ABSTRACT

During the American Revolution a number of British leaders made offers of emancipation to the slaves of rebellious American masters. These offers were made in an effort to deprive the Americans of their slaves' labor and at the same time to attract slaves to British lines, where they could provide the crown with an added source of manpower.

Tens of thousands of slaves responded to these offers over the course of the war, seeing them as possible escapes from slavery. Although large numbers died of disease and hunger or were recaptured, thousands remained with the British until the end of the war and were able to escape to Canada or other parts of the Empire in 1783.

Because few accurate records were kept, it is difficult to know the true size of this wartime exodus, with estimates ranging from fewer than 20,000 fugitives to almost 100,000. Using estimates made by Philip Morgan and Allan Kulikoff, it appears that about five thousand slaves may have been lost by Virginia over the course of the war.

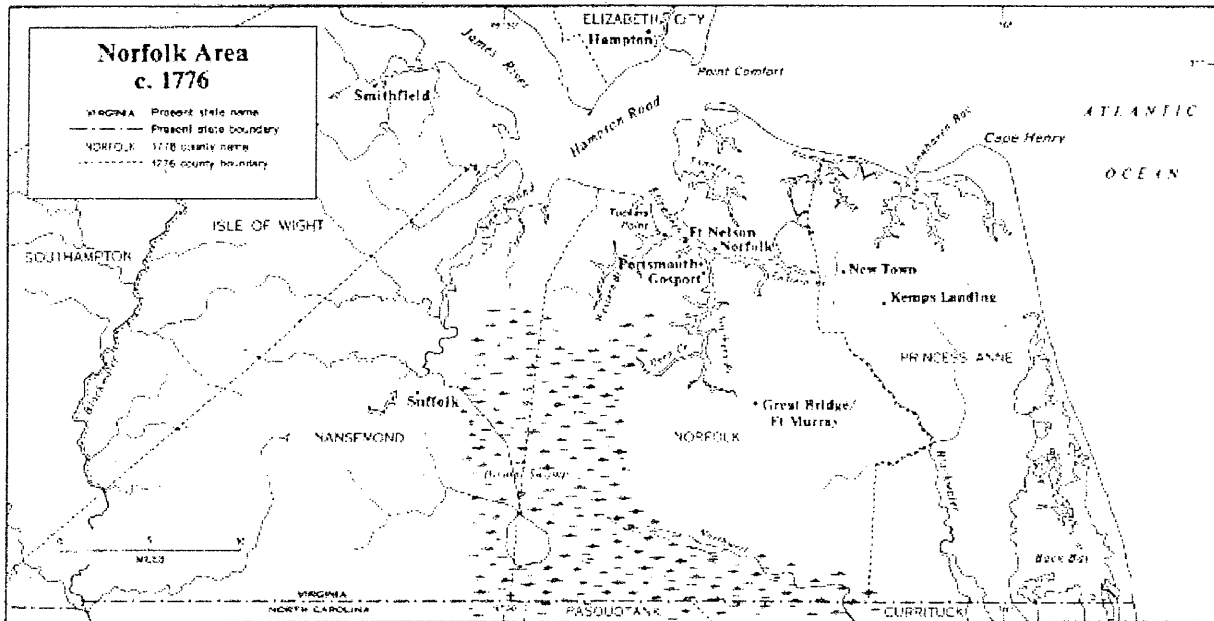
In the case of Norfolk County, Virginia, several sources make it possible to create a more detailed portrait of the runaways than in most other areas. A complete set of loss claims filed by the county's masters after the war, British records of those who departed with them from New York in 1783, and the county's tithable lists for the war years all overlap to some degree and make it possible to create a rough social profile of the runaways from the Norfolk area.

Analysis of the existing sources suggest that approximately one thousand slaves from the Norfolk area fled their masters during the war, with about one third surviving to migrate to Nova Scotia in 1783. Of the slaves who fled between 1775 and 1781, about two thirds were male and one third female. Three quarters appear to have been adults, the rest children. These results indicate that large numbers of slaves were escaping with family units instead of individually. Slaves tended to leave in waves, usually when British forces were present in strength. The two largest groups of runaways were those who reached Lord Dunmore's forces in 1775 and 1776, and those who left with General Matthew's expedition in 1779. The number of runaways appears to have dwindled in the final years of the war.

Although limited, the available evidence does allow for a more detailed study of the Norfolk area than is possible for most other parts of the South during this period. It could serve as a useful addition to the study of the Revolutionary experience of African Americans.

FIGURE 1

MAP OF NORFOLK AREA DURING THE REVOLUTION



Source: Hast. "Figure 2. Map of Norfolk Area c. 1776." *Loyalism in Revolutionary Virginia*, 8. Base for map is US Geological Survey map, *State of Virginia*, Scale 1:500,000. 1935. Manuscript Sources: James Kearney, *Reconstructing Chesapeake Bay* (1818), National Archives; Alice G. Walter, *Borough of Norfolk 1736* (1972), Virginia Historical society, Richmond; *Sketch of Part of Princess Ann Norfolk and Nansemond County's in the Province of Virginia* (1781), Virginia Historical Society; and photograph, "Vicinity of Norfolk, Va., 1778" in Louis C. Karpinski, *Photographs of Maps in French Archives* (n.p., n.d.), Guerre Etats-Majors Scrap Book, L.I.D. 117, found at The Newberry Library, Chicago.

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INTRODUCTION

“His Elopement was from no Cause of Complaint, or Dread of a Whipping... but from a determined Resolution to get Liberty...”¹

The violence and chaos of the American Revolution altered and disrupted life in all of the new states, but the war was particularly unsettling in the South. There, in addition to the same turbulence the other colonies-turned-states experienced, the conflict upset the region’s central institution: slavery. As part of their efforts to subdue the colonists, the British made offers of freedom to slaves who would rally to their side. Thousands of slaves responded to their call, seizing the opportunity the war presented to seek freedom. Although many who did so died or were returned to slavery, thousands were able to gain their freedom by siding with the British. Their history is an important and often unremembered chapter in the history of the Revolution.

In recent decades historians have steadily broadened our understanding of the roles that blacks played in the Revolution. In particular, attention has been paid to those fugitives who saw the British as their best route to freedom. Benjamin Quarles argued that the primary goal of slaves during the war was freedom, regardless of who could provide it. African Americans in the Revolution sided with “whoever invoked the image of liberty,” whether they were British or American. More recently, Sylvia Frey has described the war in the south as a “triagonal war” between two groups of white belligerents and a third of slaves. To the extent that the British tried to encourage, and the rebels tried to repress, slave

insurrection and desertion, the war in the south was a war over slavery. In his study of revolutionary Virginia, Woody Holton has gone so far as to argue that British efforts to enlist the slaves of rebellious Virginians helped precipitate the patriots' push towards independence.²

With the exception of Holton's work, these and most other studies of slaves' relations with the British have tended to be broad in scope, leaving a need for more specific and local histories to expand our understanding of the period. The goal of this thesis is to provide such an account for the county of Norfolk, Virginia. Norfolk is a prime candidate for such a study because it was a key battleground in the "triagonal war." It served as Lord Dunmore's base in 1775 and it was from nearby waters that he issued his proclamation offering freedom to the slaves and servants of rebels. The county was a center of loyalism and saw constant internal fighting. Its location on the Chesapeake Bay made it vulnerable to privateers and the Royal Navy and the county was repeatedly raided, occupied, and plundered during the war. The frequent presence of British forces in the area served as a major incentive for local slaves to flee and drew slaves from neighboring counties as well. At least one thousand of Norfolk's slaves reached the British over the course of the war.

Norfolk is also a good candidate for study because of the nature of the available sources. Three sets of material provide the opportunity to take a closer look at Norfolk runaways during the period. First, Norfolk slaveowners filed loss claims against the British after the war. Although only partial claims survive for other counties in Virginia, Norfolk's appear to be complete. Second, as the British

departed New York in 1783, they maintained a register of the three thousand blacks leaving with them. Over three hundred slaves from Norfolk appear in this register, generally known as “Carleton’s Book of Negroes,” and published in a volume edited by Graham Hodges called *The Black Loyalist Directory*. Finally, the county tithable lists for the period have been published.

All of these source materials have problems and inconsistencies. Even the most detailed descriptions of slaves give very little information. Even where information about a slave is present, such as their name, age, or gender, such information is often inconsistent from one record to the next. Slaves and masters may appear in one set of records, but not the others. In order to avoid burdening the text with lengthy methodological discussions, an Appendix has been added to this thesis, which discusses in greater detail the sources and methods used. Nevertheless, when combined, these sources have made it possible to produce a profile of several hundred slaves.³ Unfortunately, the county order books for the war years were sporadically maintained and have not survived for some years. Where they do still exist, they reveal little relevant information. A search of contemporary Virginia runaway advertisements also revealed little about slaves from the Norfolk area.

Based on the number of slaves appearing in the Virginian damage claims for Norfolk and in Hodges’ *Black Loyalist Directory*, it appears that approximately one thousand slaves from the county were lost to the British over the course of the war. If we accept both this figure and an estimate (based on figures provided by Allan Kulikoff and Philip Morgan) of five thousand slaves

lost for Virginia as a whole during the war, then it appears that Norfolk accounted for a sizable portion of Virginia's losses.⁴ In addition, an unknown number of slaves from neighboring counties, particularly Princess Anne, Nansemond, and the Eastern Shore were also freed by the same British military operations that gave Norfolk's runaways their opportunity.

Because Norfolk and surrounding areas provided many, and perhaps most, of Virginia's wartime runaways, the estimates here are a contribution to the contentious game of trying to estimate the size and composition of the slaves' wartime exodus. If the estimate of five thousand runaways is correct, then the wartime flight of thousands of slaves was probably not as large as Frey has implied. In addition, if a large proportion of them did come from the Norfolk area, then it becomes apparent that slaves left their masters in large numbers only when and where British forces were within reach. That only about one third of Norfolk's runaways left with the British at the end of the war indicates that the majority of runaways perished after fleeing their masters. Disease was the most likely cause of premature death among the runaways. In addition, the damage claims and the *Directory* reveal an important change in the demographic composition of Virginia's runaways during the war. They show that hundreds of slaves fled as families instead of individually, a rare occurrence before the war. In addition, over a third of the runaways were female, contrasted with roughly one in eleven before the war. It is my hope that these findings will help deepen our understanding of the African American experience in the Revolutionary era.

Chapter One of this thesis explores the lives of Norfolk's slave population before the war and the building tensions of these pre-war years. Chapter Two provides an account of Lord Dunmore's efforts to draw slaves to his standard in 1775 and 1776 and of his emancipation proclamation. Chapter three describes later British raids on the county, the partisan strife that ravaged the area, their implications for its slaves, and their evacuation with the British after the war. Finally, Chapter Four summarizes much of the information about Norfolk's slaves found in the surviving records and offers clues as to the kinds of experiences that the war years held for them.

Notes for Introduction

¹ Runaway Slave advertisement printed in the *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter), 18 November, 1775. Reprinted in Lathan A. Windley, ed. *Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790*. 3 Vols. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983). 1:172-173.

² Benjamin Quarles. *The Negro in the American Revolution*. (Chapel Hill, NC:University of North Carolina Press, 1961). Quote on p. xxvii. Sylvia R. Frey. *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). Woody Holton. *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). Pp. 133-163.

³ Records of the General Assembly, Office of the Speaker, Correspondence, Losses Sustained from [the British] from May 23, 1783 (Transcription). Graham Russell Hodges, ed. *The Black Loyalist Directory: African Americans in Exile after the American Revolution*. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996). Elizabeth B Wingo and W. Bruce Wingo, eds. *Norfolk County, Virginia Tithables, 1766-1780*. (Norfolk, Virg., 1985).

⁴ Kulikoff provides an estimate of three to five thousand Virginian slaves lost during the war in Alan Kulikoff. *Tobacco and Slaves*. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 418. Population figures based on estimates provided by Philip D. Morgan show a shortfall of over twelve thousand slaves from Virginia's projected slave population. Philip D. Morgan. *Slave Counterpoint* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 61. Since many of these can be accounted for by migration to Kentucky, I have settled on Kulikoff's upper estimate as a reasonable figure. See Appendix A.

CHAPTER I

NORFOLK ON THE EVE OF THE REVOLUTION

Colonial Norfolk County was an area geographically defined by forest and water. Located on the southern end of the Chesapeake Bay, the county was split by the Elizabeth River, which was fed by three major branches to the south, east, and west, and by numerous smaller tributaries. Near the mouth of the river lay the towns of Norfolk Borough and Portsmouth, the area's principal settlements. Norfolk, lying on the eastern bank of the river, across the water from Portsmouth, was the larger and more important of the two towns. Much of the county's terrain was a mixture of swamp, forest, and farmland crisscrossed by small waterways. To the southwest of Norfolk and Portsmouth lay the northern end of the Great Dismal Swamp.

Although there are no reliable estimates of the county's population before the Revolution, the county's tithables indicate that there may have been approximately 5,400 white and 3,300 black inhabitants in 1774. Another estimate places the population of Norfolk and its vicinity at roughly 6,000 in 1770. The majority of these people either inhabited one of the two towns, primarily Norfolk, or lived along the various branches of the Elizabeth River.¹ (see Table 4-1)

Norfolk grew from a small village in 1700 to one of Virginia's largest towns by 1775. Poor soil and small landholdings meant that little tobacco was grown in the region. Forests were used to produce lumber for shipbuilding, construction, and naval stores. The region also produced large quantities of corn

and livestock. Grain and meat, slaughtered and packed near Norfolk Borough, was shipped to the Caribbean. There it was exchanged for sugar, molasses, and rum. After returning to Norfolk, these goods were in turn traded up the James, York, Rappahannock, and Potomac rivers for wheat, maize and tobacco. These crops were then shipped to Europe or the Caribbean for sale. This trade made Norfolk Borough the principal port of the lower Chesapeake and created a diverse, urbanized local economy. Shipping and related industries, construction, tanneries, distilleries, and slaughter and packing houses all shaped the county's economy and accounted for Norfolk's rapid growth after about 1750. Damage claims filed against the British after the war confirm the importance of many of these industries to the area's inhabitants. Ships, small craft, corn, livestock, sugar, and rum frequently appear with slaves among the county's losses. In addition to bringing urbanization, these industries also accounted for a greater range of occupational roles and demand for skilled labor than most of tobacco-growing Virginia possessed.²

Much of the area's economy was driven by a large population of Scottish merchants. Arriving in large numbers after 1750, the Scottish "factors," were commercially linked to Glasgow merchants and came to dominate Norfolk Borough economically. The county's large Scottish population faced considerable prejudice and resentment from native Virginians that periodically came to a head and would do so again in the Revolution. Despite early cooperation with natives against the Stamp Act and other unpopular imperial policies, when war came the majority of the Scots sided with the crown.³ Prewar tensions within the

community cannot have gone unnoticed by a large and important part of Norfolk's population: its slaves.

In 1774 approximately thirty-eight percent of Norfolk's population was black. All but a tiny handful were slaves. Although not a reliable indicator of slave ownership because only slaves over the age of sixteen who were part of a household were counted, while those who were hired out to other masters or sent to holdings outside the county were not, Norfolk's tithables do reveal that although almost half of the county's whites owned, or at least had the use of black labor, most seem to have had few slaves. Approximately seventy-five percent of Norfolk's slaves resided in households with fewer than ten slave tithables and almost fifty percent in households with five or fewer.⁴ (See Tables 1-1 and 1-2)

TABLE 1-1
SLAVE OWNERSHIP IN NORFOLK COUNTY, 1774

<u>Number of Slave Tithables</u>	<u>Number of Households</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
0	500	51.7%
1	170	17.5%
2	90	9.3%
3 to 5	128	13.2%
More than 5	80	8.3%
Totals:	968	100.0%

Source: Wingo. *Norfolk County Tithables*, 219-244.

The urban setting and the area's diverse economic base offered a wider range of occupational roles and opportunities to slaves in Norfolk than to those in more rural tobacco-growing areas. Although skilled slaves were present throughout Virginia, the nature of Norfolk's economy meant that a higher proportion were present there than in many other counties. In addition to working

as field hands and domestics, slaves were involved in meatpacking, tanning, animal husbandry, smithing, carpentry, maritime trades, and other roles. A list of occupational descriptions included by masters in their damage claims reveals the range of jobs and skills that were available to Norfolk's slaves. (See Table 1-3)

TABLE 1-2
DISTRIBUTION OF SLAVES IN NORFOLK COUNTY, 1774

<u>Slaves per Household</u>	<u>Number of Slave Tithables</u>	<u>Percent of Totals</u>
1	170	10.40%
2	180	11.00%
3 to 5	476	29.20%
6 to 9	392	24.10%
10 to 15	177	10.90%
More than 15	234	14.40%
Totals:	1629	100.00%

Source: Wingo. *Norfolk County Tithables*, 219-244.

The most common nonagricultural roles open to male slaves were those of sawyer, carpenter, or other trades associated with building and the production of lumber and wood products. Woodworking was one of the first trades to be opened to blacks as the number of slave artisans began to increase in eighteenth-century Virginia. Carpenters were the most highly valued of slave woodworkers while sawyers were the least valued, often not much higher in status than field hands. Coopers, wheelwrights, and others fell somewhere in between. Many of Norfolk's woodworkers were undoubtedly employed in the county's shipyards, where there was a ready market for their talents alongside those of blacksmiths, ropemakers and others. Skilled slaves, especially carpenters and blacksmiths, often had the advantage of being able to translate their knowledge into better material rewards and a higher standard of living for themselves.⁵

TABLE 1-3
SLAVE OCCUPATIONAL DESCRIPTIONS IN DAMAGE CLAIMS

Assorted and Composite:		Woodworking:	
"Baker"	4	"Carpenter"	3
"Blacksmith"	6	"Cooper"	1
"Carpenters and Sailors"	5	"Housecarpenter"	1
"Caulker"	1	"Sawyer"	8
"Cook"	1	"Sawyer and Axman"	12
"Cornfield Wench"	4	"Sawyer and Carpenter"	1
"House Wench/Servant"	4	"Sawyer and Laborer"	1
"Laundress"	1	"Sawyer and Boarder"	1
"Laborer"	1		
"Miller"	2	Total Woodworking:	28
"Millwright and Sawyer"	1		
"Plantation Negro"	3	Maritime:	
"Ploughman"	1		
"Shoemaker"	2	"Ferryman"	1
"Spinster"	1	"Pilot"	4
"Tailor"	1	"Sailmaker"	1
"Tradesman"	1	"Sailor"	10
		"Seaman"	2
Total Assorted:	39	"Waterman"	4
		Total Maritime:	22
No Description:	653		

Source: Records of the General Assembly...Losses Sustained...

The second major field of opportunity for male slaves was in the maritime trades. A large number of sailors, pilots, and watermen lived in the county. Black crews handled much of the water traffic throughout the Chesapeake, regularly visiting other parts of the bay, travelling up tidewater Virginia's rivers and also setting sail on the high seas. Slaves manned the regular passenger and mail runs between Portsmouth and Norfolk. As maritime commerce thrived and expanded in the late eighteenth-century, the number of black seamen grew with it. As one of the region's major ports, Norfolk had a sizable population of black mariners.

The low wages and social status of sailors regardless of skin color meant that both black and white seamen tended to reside on the bottom rungs of society. Interracial crews were a common occurrence on vessels of all types, and although whites held senior positions, experience and ability often served to level social distinctions on the high seas. Due to the nature of their trade, black mariners also tended to have greater freedom of movement and freedom from supervision than those whose work tied them to land. Access to the water also provided many blacks with an avenue of escape. For example, while on a regular cargo run to Norfolk in 1772, a forty-five-year-old slave named James Nickolas made off with his master's boat and its cargo of tar for parts unknown.⁶ Those who worked on the water formed a large portion of runaway slaves in eighteenth-century Virginia. Because the British arrived and departed by sea, this avenue of escape would prove crucial for many of Norfolk's slaves during the war. The difficulty of controlling and monitoring the movements of black mariners often meant greater white suspicion. During the war, black sailors and pilots were frequently accused or suspected of aiding British naval operations.⁷

The division of labor among slaves was gendered. Of the eighty-nine slaves listed in Table 1-3, eighty were male. Where owners bothered to list skills and occupational roles, they almost invariably involved men. Like most enslaved women in Virginia at the time, the few who appear in the sample were either field hands or domestic laborers. In addition to working in the fields to produce corn for fodder and export, enslaved women in Norfolk worked as house servants,

laundresses, and spinsters. After leaving their masters during the war, many would continue to perform these functions for the British in order to survive.

The nature of the county's economy, the high number of skilled slaves, and the large number of small landholdings and slaveholdings meant that the practice of slave hiring was probably common in Norfolk during the period. Slaves were generally hired out to a different master for terms of just under one year, from January to shortly before Christmas. Hired slaves usually resided with their temporary masters, who were taxed for the use of their labor. As a way for poorer whites who could not afford large numbers of slaves to enjoy the benefits of slave labor, hiring became an increasingly common practice in Tidewater Virginia in the later years of the century. Although the practice has not been studied for the Norfolk area, it was common during and after the war in nearby Elizabeth City County. With large numbers of small holders producing primarily meat and grain for the West Indies, Elizabeth City County played an economic role similar to Norfolk's before the Revolution. Studying Norfolk's tithable lists reveals that many slaves are not counted under the same master two years in a row. Although some owners held property in other counties and may have been shifting their slaves among their holdings, no doubt many slaves were periodically hired out within Norfolk or the surrounding areas.⁸

The nature of slavery meant that dispersed and broken families were fairly common in eighteenth-century Virginia. Because it was often difficult or impossible for a slave to meet a mate on a single farm or plantation, it was frequently necessary to travel away from home in order to establish and maintain

familial relationships. The dense settlement of Norfolk and Portsmouth may have made it easier for enslaved families to stay in contact than in more rural areas, but the basic problem remained the same. Family was also probably the most common reason slaves, especially men, ran away before the Revolution. Slaves frequently ran from their masters for short periods in order to visit relations and were often sheltered by their families. When slave families were split by the sale of members out of the area, it was also common to run away in the hopes of finding them again, sometimes over great distances.⁹

Physical separation and white supervision did not prevent slaves from creating complex networks of kinship and communications. While whites used one set of roads and channels of communications, slaves traveled along their own paths by land and water and could rapidly disseminate information among other slaves. Whites were often surprised at the speed with which news traveled among their slaves. This spread of information must have been even faster and more widespread in Norfolk than in other areas. Norfolk and Portsmouth hosted black communities that could share news and provide mutual assistance in times of need. As ports, they would naturally have served as clearinghouses of information. Black sailors were well known purveyors of news and linked black communities to the wider world.¹⁰

Although slaves worked primarily for their masters' benefit, they routinely engaged in their own economic activities. Gardening, hunting, and fishing were not only intended to supplement the rations slaves received from their masters, they were potential ways to produce a surplus that could be sold in the streets of

Norfolk to both whites and blacks. As in Charleston and other cities, independent slave marketing seems to have been common in Norfolk during the late eighteenth-century.¹¹ Although white Virginians were displeased with the independence shown by blacks undertaking their own economic initiatives, they were to become far more concerned over the possibility of open revolt.

As a system of coerced labor, the institution of slavery ultimately rested on force. Although divisions within the slave community and rewards were useful means of control, in the end the use of force, or the threat of it, maintained slavery. Although most white Virginians probably felt secure and generally tried to reassure themselves that their slaves were happy in bondage, they could not escape an undercurrent of fear of what might happen if the balance of power were to turn against them. Present to some degree in all slave societies, this fear became particularly acute during conflicts with external enemies. The possibility that slaves might side with external foes made them a potential “enemy within.” Earlier in the century, many slaves in South Carolina fled to sanctuary in Spanish Florida. Fears and rumors of slave insurrections in Virginia appear to have been common during the Seven Years War (1754-1763). During Pontiac’s Conspiracy (1763) some white Virginians worried about the possibility of an alliance between slaves and Indians on the frontier.¹²

The growing conflict between the colonies and Britain in the 1760s and 1770s heightened such anxieties. Sylvia Frey has argued that unrest among slaves increased rapidly after 1765 throughout the South. After the Somerset Decision in 1772 many slaves mistakenly believed that slavery had been outlawed in Britain

and that their turn would come next. Rumors that the Crown might confiscate slaves as punishment for rebellious colonists circulated among Virginians immediately before the war. Some feared that either the British might exploit unrest among the slaves, or that slaves might rebel in the belief that the British would free them.¹³ In November 1774 James Madison wrote to William Bradford:

If America & Britain should come to an hostile rupture I am afraid an Insurrection among the slaves may & will be promoted. In one of our Counties lately a few of those unhappy wretches met together & chose a leader who was to conduct them when the English Troops should arrive-- which they foolishly thought would be very soon & that by revolting to them they should be rewarded with their freedom. Their Intentions were soon discovered & proper precautions taken to prevent the Infection. It is prudent that such attempts should be concealed as well as suppressed.

In his reply, Bradford agreed that Madison's fears were well founded and reported that a letter from England "mentioned the Design of administration to pass an act (in case of a rupture) declaring all Slaves & Servants free that would take arms against the Americans."¹⁴

White fears of slave rebellion intensified along with the conflict with Britain. In April 1775 there were reports of slave plots in five different Virginia counties, including Norfolk. Along with news of Lexington and Concord, the April 29 supplement to the *Virginia Gazette* reported that "Sentence of death is passed upon two Negroes lately tried at Norfolk, for being concerned in a conspiracy to raise an insurrection in that town." The two slaves executed were

named Emanuel and Emanuel de Antonio. Emanuel was the slave of Matthew Phripp, commander of the Norfolk militia. Over the course of the war, Phripp would lose five slaves to the British. The belief quickly spread among many white Virginians that the British had instigated the rash of conspiracies. Indeed, some leaders in England did express an interest early on in using slaves against their rebellious masters. In March 1775 Edmund Burke gave a speech criticizing loose talk of emancipation then circulating in Parliament. By acknowledging that such plans were even being discussed, his address may have lent some credence to masters' fears.¹⁵

Those fears were not necessarily as well founded as slave owners may have believed. Few in Great Britain hoped to see a social revolution in the South. Proposals to free and arm slaves were met with hostile reactions, such as Burke's. Some in England feared that if the Crown began arming slaves, the Americans might do likewise. Furthermore, the profits of the empire rested largely on cash crops grown with slave labor in North America and the Caribbean. Along with Britain's status as a major slave trading power, the importance of slavery to the functioning of the imperial system was a major economic disincentive to emancipation. A few proposals for the abolition of slavery circulated in England before the war, but even these were generally as concerned with finding ways of keeping the plantation economies of Britain's colonies functioning as they were with freeing slaves. At any rate, these schemes attracted little notice or official support. Even if the threat of emancipation was real, why should slaves trust those who had previously participated in and benefited from their enslavement? Burke

captured the dilemma neatly: “Slaves as these unfortunate black people are, and dull as all men are from slavery, must they not a little suspect the offer of freedom from that very Nation which has sold them to their present masters?”¹⁶

It is difficult to know if the insurrection scares Virginia faced in the spring of 1775 were genuine or merely products of the imaginations of frightened masters. Some were probably just rumors. Nevertheless, at least some of the restiveness that white Virginians worried about must have been based on actual cases of slave resistance to their owners. In addition, as Madison’s comment that “such attempts should be concealed as well as suppressed” suggests, evidence of slave resistance may have often been hidden out of fear of setting the wrong example. In 1775 Virginia slaveowners were likely more concerned with possible slave revolts than usual.

As an urban center and an important port, Norfolk must have been thick with rumors and news of unrest and conflict of all kinds. Information from other colonies and England made it likely that the area’s slaves quickly learned of the insurrection scares, of the imperial struggle between the mother country and her colonies, and of the rumors that the British intended to free the colonies’ bondsmen. The ongoing struggle between the county’s population of Scottish merchants and native Virginians over loyalty to the Crown and the enforcement of the Continental Association must have impressed Norfolk’s slaves with the degree of division among the white community. Accordingly, it would not be incredible that some slaves, such as Emanuel and Emanuel de Antonio, may have sought to take advantage of the rift between their masters. Meanwhile, Virginians’ fears

soon came to center on the threats and actions of their Royal Governor, Lord John Murray, the Earl of Dunmore.

In the early spring of 1775, the Earl of Dunmore was popular with Virginians in spite of the growing tensions between Britain and the colonies. The governor was hailed as a hero for leading a military expedition dubbed “Dunmore’s War” against the Shawnee and Mingo Indians on Virginia’s western frontier. The war consolidated the colony’s hold on lands disputed between Virginia, Pennsylvania and the Indians. Dunmore’s victory protected the interests of land speculators and prospective settlers and brought him surprising popularity for a royal governor. In a matter of weeks, Virginians’ good feelings towards the Earl would quickly evaporate in the growing tensions of the Revolution.

On March 23, 1775 the Virginia Convention voted to create a state militia. In response, on April 21 a detachment of British marines acting on Dunmore’s orders seized the supply of gunpowder stored in the magazine at Williamsburg. Removed in the early morning hours, the powder was taken aboard the HMS *Magdalen* in the York River in order to keep it out of the colonists’ hands. Almost immediately, a crowd of angry Virginians gathered in front of the Governor’s palace. In neighboring counties the Independent Companies began marching towards Williamsburg as soon as news of the seizure arrived. Back in Williamsburg, Peyton Randolph, the Speaker of the Assembly, was able to calm the crowd and head off violence. He then led a delegation to see Dunmore and request the return of the powder.

In a dispatch to William Legge, the earl of Dartmouth, Dunmore reported that the Virginians' anxiety was partly due to fear of slave insurrections, "some reports having prevailed to this effect." Dunmore informed them that he had ordered the powder removed "lest the Negroes might have seized upon it," and that he would immediately deliver it if needed. He went on to tell Williamsburg's magistrates that if the advancing volunteers were not halted, "I shall be forced and it is my fixed purpose to arm all my own Negroes and receive all others that will come to me whom I shall declare free." Although few seem to have believed Dunmore's excuse, the *Virginia Gazette* did carry a plea to Dunmore emphasizing that the powder was needed for internal security: "We have too much reason to believe that some wicked and designing persons have instilled the most diabolical notions into the minds of our slaves, and that therefore the utmost attention to our internal security is become the more necessary."¹⁷

Dunmore also privately expressed his intentions to other prominent citizens of Williamsburg. Attorney General John Randolph was convinced that it was Dunmore's intention to free and arm the slaves if necessary for his own protection. Dr. William Pasteur recounted a conversation with Dunmore in which the Governor threatened to "declare freedom to the slaves & reduce the City of Wmsburg to ashes," if he or other officers of the Crown were harmed. The people of Williamsburg took these threats seriously. In a later dispatch to the Earl of Dartmouth, Dunmore noted their anxiety and offered justification for making his emancipation threat: "My declaration that I would arm and set free such slaves as should assist me if I was attacked has stirred up fears in them which cannot easily

subside as they know how vulnerable they are in that particular, and therefore they have cause in this complaint of which their others are totally unsupplied. But I conceive that upon the grounds of self-preservation, if on no other, I had full right to make use of any means I could avail myself of for my defence against a furious people...”¹⁸

Despite his threats, Dunmore was not yet ready to issue any proclamation of emancipation. In addition to reporting Dunmore’s threat to free and arm slaves, John Randolph’s deposition also noted that “some Negroes (by one of his servants) had offered to join him & take up arms, but that his answer to his servant was, to order them to go about their business.” The *Virginia Gazette* also reported the incident and approvingly commented: “It must, however, be observed to the honor of his lordship that he threatened them with his severest resentment should they presume to renew their application.”¹⁹ Although some slaves took the initiative and tried to exploit the opportunity that Dunmore seemed to be providing, in the short term his threat was not carried out. Violence was temporarily averted when a face saving agreement was reached over the powder in which the colony’s Receiver General paid the Assembly for it. At the same time, the independent companies turned around and marched away from Williamsburg.²⁰

The conflict had not been resolved, however, only postponed. Tensions in the capital remained high in the following weeks. Finally, in the early morning of June 8, Dunmore, his aide Captain Edward Fowey, and their families left the palace and made their way to the *Magdalen*. They soon transferred to the *Fowey*

at Yorktown and sailed out into the Chesapeake Bay, anchoring near Norfolk. The Governor fled out of fear that if violence broke out, he or his family might be captured. In a letter he sent to the House of Burgesses, he cited fear for his personal safety as the reason for his departure. Dunmore's flight was not the end of the danger that he might try to use the colonists' slaves against them. Instead, it was the beginning of a process that would culminate in a limited proclamation of emancipation five months later.

Notes for Chapter I

¹ For methods used see Appendix A. Numbers are derived from Elizabeth B. Wingo and W. Bruce Wingo, eds. *Norfolk County, Virginia Tithables, 1766-1780*. (Norfolk, Virg., 1985); Harry Roy Merrens. *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth-Century: A Study in Historical Geography*. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 196; and John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard. *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789*. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 131.

² Adele Hast. *Loyalism in Revolutionary Virginia: The Norfolk Area and the Eastern Shore*. (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1982), 9-10. Kullikoff. *Tobacco and Slaves*, 124. McCusker and Menard, 133. Jacob M. Price. "Introduction." *The Papers of Henry Fleming*. (Microfilm, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virg.).

³ Hast, 9-11. John E. Selby. *The Revolution in Virginia, 1775-1783*. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virg. (Charlottesville, Virg.: Distributed by the University Press of Virginia, 1988), 27-30.

⁴ Norfolk's 1774 tithes are in Wingo, 219-244.

⁵ Philip D. Morgan. *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry*. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 227-231, 347.

⁶ *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie) August 27, 1772.

⁷ W. Jeffrey Bolster. *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), especially Chapter 1. Morgan, 236-244, 337-342. Gerald W. Mullin. *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 94-95.

⁸ See Sarah S. Hughes. "Slaves for Hire: The Allocation of Black Labor in Elizabeth City County, Virginia, 1782-1810." *William and Mary Quarterly*. 3rd Ser. Vol. 35, No. 2 (April, 1978), 260-286; and Wingo.

⁹ Morgan, 526-530.

¹⁰ Morgan, 476-477. Bolster, 19-20, 39-41.

¹¹ Morgan, 252, 369.

¹² Holton. *Forced Founders*, 138-139.

¹³ Extract of a Letter from the Gentleman..., 29 March, 1775, in Peter Force, ed. *American Archives: Consisting of a Collection of Authentick Records, State Papers, Debates, and Letters and Other Notices of Publick Affairs...* 4th Ser., (Washington, D.C., 1837-1846), 2:242. Frey. *Water from the Rock*, 49-55. Holton. *Forced Founders*, 138-141.

¹⁴ James Madison to William Bradford. 26 November, 1774; and William Bradford to James Madison, 4 January, 1775. In William T. Hutchinson, et al., eds. *The Papers of James Madison*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962-1983). 1:129-130, 132.

¹⁵ From Edmund Burke's Speech on Conciliation, 22 March, 1775 in Force. *American Archives*, 4th Ser., 1:1757-1758. Frey, 54-56. Holton 141-143. *Virginia Gazette*. (Dixon and Hunter). Supplement. April 29, 1775.

¹⁶ From Burke's Speech in Force. *American Archives*, 4th Ser., 1:1757-1758; 3: 256-257. Christopher L. Brown. "Empire Without Slaves: British Concepts of Emancipation in the Age of the American Revolution." *WMQ*. 3rd Series. Vol. 56, No. 2 (April 1999), 273-306. Frey, 69-73.

¹⁷ Earl of Dunmore to Earl of Dartmouth, 1 May, 1775. C.O. 5/1353, fo. 137. In K.G. Davies, ed. *Documents of the American Revolution, 1770-1783*. (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1972-1981.), 9:108-109. *VG*(Dixon and Hunter). 22 April, 1775.

¹⁸ "Deposition of Dr. William Pasteur." *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*. Vol. 13, No. 1 (July, 1905), 48-50. "Deposition of John Randolph." *VMHB*. Vol. 13, No. 2 (Oct., 1907), 149-150. Earl of Dunmore to Earl of Dartmouth, 25 June, 1775. C.O. 5/1353, fo. 160. In Davies, ed. *Documents of the American Revolution*, 9:204.

¹⁹ "Deposition of John Randolph," 150. *VG* (Pinkney) 4 May, 1775.

²⁰ For the details of the Powder Incident and its aftermath, see Holton, 143-152; and Selby, 1-6, 41-43. For Dunmore's letter to the House of Burgesses, see *VG* (Dixon and Hunter). 10 June, 1775.

CHAPTER II

WAR AND EMANCIPATION, 1775-1776

Dunmore's flight from the capital only further angered Virginians, who suspected that his departure was part of an invasion plan. Leaving Williamsburg also alienated many moderates and helped polarize opinion against the Governor. The Assembly spent several weeks unsuccessfully trying to persuade Dunmore to return to the capital. The House of Burgesses also continued to request the gunpowder's return, ostensibly so that it could be held in reserve against a feared slave insurrection. Dunmore's flight heightened the fears of many white Virginians that he was planning to use their slaves against them. James Madison wrote: "It is imagined our Governor has been tampering with the Slaves & that he has it in contemplation to make great Use of them in case of a civil war in this province. To say the truth, that is the only part in which this Colony is vulnerable; & if we should be subdued, we shall fall like Achilles by the hand of one who knows that secret."¹

Madison's fears were not unfounded. Confined to the water, with only a handful of ships, their crews, and a small number of marines at his disposal, Dunmore must have been tempted by the possibility of gaining thousands of slaves as allies. As the summer wore on the ships assigned to the Governor cruised the Tidewater's rivers foraging for and seizing supplies. They soon began to attract and in some cases harbor a number of runaway slaves, especially in the Norfolk area, where Dunmore's flagship was anchored. As early as June, the

Virginia Gazette attributed restiveness among the slaves to “encouragement from a Gentleman of the Navy, who has distinguished himself lately in our rivers.” In a message to the Virginia Convention dated July 31, the Norfolk Borough Committee reported the arrival of a sloop from St. Augustine carrying approximately sixty Royal Marines. “At present we are under no apprehensions from them,” reported the Committee, “but we find exceeding bad effects have arisen among the blacks from the neighborhood of the men of war, which we have great reason to believe will be very much increased by the arrival of these troops.” Although no details were given, it seems that the presence of British forces and rumors of Dunmore’s intentions were making Norfolk’s slaves what later generations of whites might have called “uppity.” Meanwhile, the idea of recruiting slaves was gathering strength in Dunmore’s mind. On August 2 he sent a dispatch to the Earl of Dartmouth expressing his belief that he could obtain enough slaves, Indians, and “other persons,” presumably white loyalists, to “defend government.”²

In the late summer of 1775 Virginians were nervous about the activities of the British ships operating in their rivers. This anxiety increased when slaves began trying to reach the vessels. Despite these worries, a strategy of harboring and using slaves against their former masters had not yet been firmly settled on, as evinced by the contradictory attitudes of two British naval officers. Captain John Macartney of the *Mercury* made it his policy to return slaves that tried to reach his ship to their masters. Believing that Virginians were innocent of any crimes against the Crown unless proven otherwise, he saw it as his duty to protect

the lives and property of all the King's subjects in Virginia. In a letter to Norfolk's mayor, Paul Loyall, Macartney wrote, "the same principles, which have inured me not to harbour the slaves of any individual in this province, will operate with me to protect the property of all loyal subjects." Loyall subsequently sent Macartney a letter commending the Captain for "discouraging the elopement of slaves, which of late it is notorious has frequently happened."³ These policies, combined with Macartney's leniency towards the colonists, made the *Mercury's* commander a target of Dunmore's anger, ultimately leading to the Captain's recall.

Captain Matthew Squire of the *Otter* was far less obliging towards the colonists. He sheltered a number of runaway slaves and impressed them into the King's service. In a resolution the Norfolk County Committee encouraged inhabitants of the county to have no dealings with Dunmore and Squire, since they were "promoting a disaffection among the slaves, and concealing some of them for a considerable time on board their vessels." Noting that "the Governors Cutter has carried off a number of Slaves belonging to private Gentlemen," the Officers of the Independent Companies at Williamsburg petitioned the Virginia Convention to "establish the doctrine of reprisal & to take immediate possession (if possible of his person) at all events of his property." The Convention ultimately did confiscate and sell the slaves Dunmore had left behind in Williamsburg in retaliation for his proclamation.⁴

Squire's actions soon brought matters to a head when the *Otter's* tender, the *Liberty*, ran aground off Hampton in September. Although Squire narrowly

managed to escape, the Virginians captured and burned the ship. They released the crew, with the exception of two runaway slaves who were returned to their grateful owner. They also refused to accede to Squire's demands that they return the ship's stores unless he surrendered the *Otter's* pilot, a runaway slave from Hampton named Joseph Harris who had been impressed by Squire. The Elizabeth City County and Hampton Town Committee demanded the return of Harris "and all other our slaves whom you may have on board; which said Harris as well as other slaves, hath been long harbored, and often employed, with your knowledge...in pillaging us, under cover of night, of our sheep and other livestock." The *Virginia Gazette* reported that Squire refused "on account of the fellow's knowledge of the rivers" and Harris' loyalty to the King, and "swore he would make no other reply than what his cannon could give them."⁵ Finally, the British launched an attack on Hampton in retaliation for the burning of the *Liberty* on October 27, 1775, beginning open hostilities in Virginia.

During the course of these events, tensions were building in Norfolk. Squire was ridiculed in the Norfolk *Virginia Gazette* by its publisher, John Hunter Holt. The Captain responded by sending a squad of marines ashore to arrest Holt and seize his press on September 30, 1775. Although Holt managed to escape, his press and two of his assistants were taken aboard Dunmore's ship, the *Eilbeck*, and there were sporadically used by the Governor to produce a loyalist *Virginia Gazette*. The event revealed the growing split within the community. When the marines arrived, crowds of Norfolk residents watched, but made no attempt to stop them. Some, joined by a crowd of blacks, actually cheered the British on.

The efforts of Matthew Phripp, the commander of the county militia, to rally his troops failed, preventing any military response to the British. Many of the townspeople were active loyalists, while many others must have been intimidated by the presence of British troops and warships just offshore.⁶

Norfolk's loyalists did not stop at cheering, however. Many of them aided the British by supplying the fleet with provisions. In addition to loyalty to the Crown, the ability of the British to pay for supplies in specie was a strong economic incentive to trade with Dunmore's forces. This trade was extensive enough that the Virginia Committee of Safety restricted all movement to and from Norfolk and Portsmouth in October 1775. After the Governor arrived offshore in June of that year, residents began taking sides in the impending conflict. The majority of the county's Scottish inhabitants, particularly merchants, sided with Dunmore and prepared to resume exporting their wares in violation of the Continental Association. Many residents, mostly Patriots, began to flee the county out of fear for their safety. This flight accelerated after Dunmore landed troops at Norfolk Borough in late October and began to seize weapons. Virginian troops were soon dispatched from Williamsburg to counter the threat posed by the Governor.⁷

On November 14, Dunmore set out from Norfolk with 150 soldiers and thirty black and white volunteers. After stopping to garrison Great Bridge along the main overland route to Norfolk, the British and loyalist force crossed into neighboring Princess Anne County and confronted the Princess Anne militia at Kemp's Landing on November 15. The militia were quickly defeated with

seventeen killed and a number taken prisoner, including their commander, Joseph Hutchings. Ironically, as Hutchings tried to escape he was taken prisoner by one of his own slaves who was now serving with Dunmore.⁸

The Governor seized the opportunity presented by his victory to raise the royal standard and issued a proclamation declaring Virginia to be in a state of rebellion and calling on all able-bodied men to help the King's forces restore order. More importantly from the viewpoint of Virginia's black population, it went on to declare "all indented Servants, Negroes, or others, (appertaining to Rebels,) free that are able and willing to bear Arms, they joining His Majesty's Troops as soon as may be, for the more speedily reducing this Colony to a proper Sense of their Duty, to His Majesty's Crown and Dignity."⁹ Although printed on November 7, it was announced only after the victory at Kemp's Landing gave Dunmore the confidence to finally take the step he had been contemplating and gradually implementing for months.

The proclamation was not one of general emancipation motivated by humanitarian concerns. It granted freedom only to the slaves of rebel masters, and only to those able to bear arms. Nor did Dunmore emancipate his own slaves left behind in Williamsburg. His intent was to deprive the rebels of labor, to force them to divert resources to guarding against possible slave uprisings, and also to gain badly needed manpower for his forces. The proclamation was a limited one "designed to encourage the defection of useful blacks without provoking a general rebellion."¹⁰

The weeks following the battle at Kemp's Landing were dangerous times for Norfolk's patriots. Whether out of genuine loyalty or fear, the majority of the county's residents cooperated with the British. Approximately three thousand whites took the oath of allegiance to the King in Norfolk and Princess Anne counties, although Dunmore estimated that only three or four hundred were capable of fighting. Residents continued to flee the Norfolk area as ex-slaves and white loyalists joined British soldiers in looting patriot homes and businesses.¹¹

After raising the standard at Kemp's Landing, Dunmore retired to Norfolk and set about building fortifications and raising two regiments of loyalists, one white and the other black with white officers. Hundreds of slaves quickly responded to Dunmore's call for recruits. Called "Lord Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment," they reportedly wore badges that read "Liberty to Slaves" and were commanded by Thomas Byrd, son of William Byrd III. In a communication to General William Howe in Boston, Dunmore reported that "the Negroes are flocking in, also, from all quarters, which, I hope, will oblige the Rebels to disperse, to take care of their families and property." He told Howe that "there are between two and three hundred already come in, and these I form into a corp as fast as they come in." He would later acknowledge that it was easier recruiting for the Ethiopian Regiment than the white loyalist regiment.¹²

White Virginians were outraged by Dunmore's actions. A proclamation freeing their slaves seemed to them a vicious assault on their liberties and their property rights. The Virginia Convention resolved: "If, by his single fiat, he can strip us of our property, can give freedom to our servants and slaves, and arm

them for our destruction; let us bid adieu to everything valuable in life, let us at once bend our neck to the galling yoke, and hug the chains prepared for us and our latest posterity.” The pages of the various *Virginia Gazettes* were filled with vitriol towards Virginia’s erstwhile governor. A poem appeared in Alexander Purdie’s publication alongside a copy of Dunmore’s proclamation:

----- *Not in the legions*

Of horrid hell, can come a devil more damn’d

*In evils to top D****e.¹³*

If Virginians’ first reaction was one of rage, their second was one of fear. Edmund Pendleton informed Richard Henry Lee that “letters mention that slaves flock to him in abundance, but I hope it is magnified.” Fearing an imminent attack, the Northampton County Committee expressed concern over their own slaves and appealed to the Virginia Convention for protection from “the fury of his Soldiers and Slaves.” Robert Carter Nicholas told Virginia’s delegates to Congress, “the Tenders are plying up the Rivers, plundering Plantations and using every Art to seduce the Negroes.” Hampton’s jail quickly ran out of room for slaves captured trying to reach Dunmore’s forces. Advertisements for runaways began appearing in Virginia’s newspapers that expressed masters’ belief that their slaves were running to join Dunmore. Although they did not have accurate estimates of how many slaves were actually fighting with Dunmore, the number seemed to Virginians to be rapidly increasing. In a report issued November 11, the Virginia Committee of Safety estimated that the British sheltered approximately one hundred slaves. Eight days later the Committee placed that

number at three hundred. On December 5, a captured slave reported that there were at least four hundred blacks serving in Norfolk and another ninety manning the fortifications at Great Bridge.¹⁴

Fearing the possible effects of Dunmore's use of black troops on Virginia's slaves, George Washington advocated a major offensive before more could join his forces. "If the Virginians are wise, that Arch Traitor to the Rights of Humanity, Lord Dunmore, should be instantly crushed, if it takes the force of the whole Colony to do it. Otherwise, like a snow Ball in rolling, his army will get size... But that which renders the measure indispensably necessary, is, the Negroes; for if he gets formidable, numbers of them will be tempted to join who will be afraid to do it without." His cousin Lund Washington, charged with managing Mount Vernon in the general's absence, warned that some of the General's slaves might be tempted to escape in response to the proclamation. "Liberty is sweet," he wrote.¹⁵

Despite these apprehensions, Virginia's leaders had less to fear than their comments indicated. Months before the proclamation was issued, government and masters alike began taking a series of measures throughout Virginia intended to increase security and head off slave revolts or defections. These precautions were used for the remainder of the war and made escape difficult. The proclamation was published in newspapers and issued as a broadside in order to warn masters of Dunmore's intentions. Virginian officials increased slave patrols and encouraged masters to watch their slaves more vigilantly. Owners and military officers locked up or guarded boats, particularly small craft, to prevent slave

escapes by water. Over the course of the war many masters moved their slaves inland, accelerating the westward movement of the slave population that had begun even before the war. Cumulatively, these measures probably made the chances of being caught quite high.¹⁶

The Virginia Convention was also quick to decide how to deal with runaways. On December 13, the Convention issued a declaration that all slaves who joined Dunmore were liable to be punished by death without benefit of clergy. Because the government had to compensate masters for executed slaves, only a few were actually put to death. The Convention offered pardon to slaves who surrendered within ten days of the declaration's publication. Those who were recaptured were usually either sold in Caribbean slave markets or sent west to work in the colony lead mine at Fincastle. After Dunmore's evacuation of Norfolk, the Convention took the added step of ordering slaves capable of bearing arms, along with most white inhabitants, out of Norfolk and Princess Anne counties to deny their service to Dunmore.¹⁷

Alongside these measures, masters tried different appeals and threats in order to dissuade their slaves from running. Whites frequently noted that it was the King who kept open the slave trade when Virginia's leaders had tried to end it. They warned slaves that their lot would be considerably worse with the British, often trying to convince them that they would be sold into the West Indies by their supposed liberators. This threat was cruelly ironic, considering that the Convention would order a number of rebellious slaves sold to the sugar islands.

Masters combined appeals with blatant threats of harsh punishment or retaliation against slaves' families. A message published in the *Virginia Gazette* told slaves "what they are to expect, should they be so weak and wicked as to comply with what Lord Dunmore requires." It noted that Dunmore freed only the able bodied slaves of rebels, not those of loyalists or his own servants. The anonymous author warned potential runaways "not to provoke the fury of the Americans against their defenceless fathers and mothers, their wives, and children." Furthermore, runaways themselves could expect harsh punishment at the hands of their former masters. The author then cautioned slaves against trusting the agents of the world's largest slave trading power, who would be likely to sell them to the West Indies. In contrast, their current masters had worked diligently to abolish the slave trade and to mitigate the harshness of slavery. "Be not then, ye negroes, tempted by this proclamation to ruin yourselves," he concluded, for "whether you will profit by my advice I cannot tell, but this I know, that whether we suffer or not, if you desert us you most certainly will."¹⁸

Military defeat would end the threat posed by Dunmore and his Ethiopian Regiment before they could assume dangerous proportions. Dunmore's forces, including both black and white troops, had fortified and garrisoned a narrow causeway at Great Bridge, to the south of Norfolk Borough. The causeway was a choke point along the primary overland route to Norfolk through swampland that made passage difficult. After the arrival of Virginian troops commanded by Colonel William Woodford, Great Bridge was the scene of a stalemate lasting

several days. For reasons not entirely clear, Dunmore foolishly decided to break the stalemate by attacking.

On December 9, 280 British and loyalist troops launched a poorly executed attack across the narrow causeway that separated them from the patriot forces. They were quickly routed after suffering heavy casualties, including a number taken prisoner, forty-nine wounded, and seventeen killed, including their commander. The British were forced to abandon their fortifications and retreat to Norfolk, while the Americans sent captured blacks and white loyalists marching to Williamsburg in chains. Unable to hold against the advance of twelve hundred troops from Virginia and North Carolina, Dunmore moved his troops aboard ship and abandoned Norfolk. In a letter to his wife, Leven Powell, a Virginian officer, wrote that “upon his defeat he has thought it prudent to take to his vessels again & left his faithful auxiliaries the negroes to shift for themselves.” In fact, Dunmore brought hundreds of slaves on board his fleet, but the loss of Norfolk as a land base made it far more difficult for slaves to reach his forces after this point. Only those able to obtain and pilot boats could hope to reach him for the rest of his time in the Chesapeake.¹⁹

In control only days before, Norfolk’s loyalists suddenly found themselves on the losing side of the conflict. Colonel Woodford’s troops quickly began arresting loyalists and slaves suspected of aiding Dunmore. Many whites were offered amnesty in exchange for information about the British forces. Before the patriot forces arrived, most of the town’s Scottish traders and a few native Virginians moved their families and possessions onto British naval vessels or onto

their own merchant ships, which swelled the size of the fleet hovering in the Elizabeth River.

For the moment the situation was a stalemate. Dunmore's troops were unable to land, but continued to receive supplies from loyalists on shore. Although they dominated on the land, the Americans were not secure as long as they did not control the water. For two weeks there was no fighting except for sporadic exchanges of gunfire. With thousands of soldiers, sailors, and civilians in dire need of food and water, the British unsuccessfully tried to negotiate with the Americans to allow them to purchase supplies on shore. Unable to land because of the presence of American riflemen along the town's waterfront, Dunmore's ships opened fire on New Year's Day in an effort to destroy the buildings used as cover by their enemies. Although the attack burned a number of houses along the wharves, the Americans successfully repulsed the British.

Rather than combat the fires, the Virginians and North Carolinians let them burn. Angry at the strong loyalist sentiment of the town and its inhabitants' support for Dunmore, the soldiers went on a looting spree, plundering the townspeople and spreading their own fires. By the time the conflagration ended, 863 structures, comprising two thirds of Norfolk Borough, had been destroyed. Only nineteen had been destroyed by the British during the attack, while thirty-two were destroyed by Dunmore's men before they evacuated Norfolk. The truth of the destruction of Norfolk was not revealed at the time, and the burning of the town was reported throughout the colonies as an example of British ruthlessness.

Over the next few weeks Dunmore's men fought several skirmishes with the Americans on shore. Finally, on February 6 the American troops withdrew from Norfolk. After recording and assessing their value so that the owners could be compensated, the town's remaining buildings were put to the torch when the Americans left, completing the destruction of Norfolk. The loss of the town destroyed the area's community and economy and resulted in a mass exodus of residents to neighboring counties. At the same time, a large loyalist population remained in the countryside and continued to supply the British fleet.²⁰

Dunmore's fleet remained in the Norfolk area until May, regularly sending out armed parties of both blacks and whites to find and seize provisions. The Governor's forces also carried out supply raids against other parts of the Chesapeake. In addition to providing manpower, slaves brought a knowledge of local geography to the British that must have been a welcome asset and undoubtedly made finding provisions somewhat easier. The arrival of the HMS *Roebuck* with five hundred sailors and marines provided welcome reinforcements for the Earl's forces. Dunmore established a land base at Tucker's Point, near Portsmouth, in February, gaining better access to food and fresh water as a result. The need to feed and protect hundreds of loyalist families and the small size of his available forces kept Dunmore from taking offensive action, but foraging expeditions and loyalists on land enabled him to remain in the area. By early spring, however, his forces were already beginning to deteriorate due to the ravages of diseases that spread through the ranks.

Local patriots' efforts to cut off support for Dunmore and discourage loyalist activities were largely ineffective. Richard Henry Lee and others wanted to force all the inhabitants out of Norfolk and Princess Anne counties in order to stop aid to the British. Despite pleas from the county governments not to take this step, authorities began removing inhabitants from the regions between Great Bridge, Kemp's Landing, and the water. Virginian troops relocated slaves along with masters. In April a compromise was reached in which local patriots would determine the loyalty of the counties' inhabitants. In the future they would only remove those who were deemed enemies. They also agreed to take small boats from coves and river landings in order to prevent slaves from using them to reach Dunmore. Portsmouth was placed under military occupation and all inhabitants were forced to evacuate. Able-bodied male slaves were sent to nearby Suffolk County to be confined while American forces prepared to attack Tucker's Point.

Before the attack came, Dunmore's forces withdrew from Tucker's Point and abandoned the Elizabeth River entirely in early May. Over ninety ships and numerous small craft left the Norfolk area in search of a more secure base to operate from. By this time British forces were already seriously weakened by disease, as the Americans learned when they found three hundred graves at Tucker's point. Although six to eight slaves were reportedly joining Dunmore each day in the early spring of 1776, their total number was kept low by disease. Dunmore wrote Lord George Germain that his efforts to recruit slaves had been successful "and would have been in great forwardness had not a fever crept in amongst them which carried off a great many fine fellows." One observer wrote

of the “malignant fevour” that afflicted the black regiment: “we have daily carcasses driving up by the surf.” Although building barracks for the black troops and providing them with better clothing may have reduced losses from an earlier illness, a smallpox epidemic began in May that decimated their ranks.²¹

The fleet moved north and soon established a base at Gwynn’s Island, a small island at the mouth of the Piankatank River. There disease continued to sap the strength of Dunmore’s forces until the Americans finally evicted them by force on July 9. After destroying ships that could not be used, the British retreated back into the bay. The scene on the island described after their retreat by several observers was horrific. One wrote: “on our arrival, we found the enemy had evacuated the place with the greatest precipitation, and were struck with horreur at the number of dead bodies, in a state of putrefaction, strewed... about two miles in length, without a shovelful of earth upon them; others gasping for life; and some had crawled to the water’s edge, who could only make known their distress by beckoning to us.” The writer went on to estimate that Dunmore’s forces may have lost “near five hundred souls” since arriving on the island. Hundreds of graves were found around the island. The *Virginia Gazette* published a list of blacks found dead on Gwynn’s island. Two hundred and forty bodies were found, ninety-eight of them unidentified.²²

The fleet briefly retired to St. George’s Island in the Potomac River, but found little solace there either. Harassed by American forces, desperately short of food and drinking water, and with his force reduced to only 108 men capable of fighting, Dunmore finally withdrew from the Chesapeake in August. The fleet,

now numbering about sixty ships, was split, with Dunmore going to New York and others going to the Caribbean or St. Augustine. The departing fleet left behind a number of small craft that were not seaworthy and were “occupied by tradespeople and negroes.” What became of their occupants is unclear. The survivors of the Ethiopian Regiment accompanied Dunmore to New York, where they remained for the rest of the war.²³

With Dunmore’s departure Virginia’s slaveowners could breathe easier. The initial threat of a British alliance with their slaves, which had not turned out to be as great as had been feared, was further diminished with his flight. Historians studying Dunmore’s efforts in Virginia have taken different perspectives on the importance of his proclamation and the very limited emancipation that resulted. The number of slaves who tried to reach Dunmore is unknown. Quarles has estimated that approximately eight hundred reached Dunmore. Frey has argued that this estimate is too low, but has offered no alternative number, perhaps because of the impossibility of arriving at one. Holton has given one thousand as his best guess. Of the 613 slaves from Norfolk whose time of departure is revealed by the damage claims and Hodges’ *Directory*, 281 left with Dunmore. (See Table 4-4) They were certainly joined by hundreds of blacks from other counties as well. Based on the available evidence, an estimate of between eight hundred and one thousand seems reasonable.²⁴

All three historians see Dunmore’s efforts as marking the beginning of British attempts to use the colonists’ slaves against them. Holton argues that slaves’ efforts to free themselves by siding with the British helped push the

Virginian elite towards declaring independence. This view probably overstates the threat Virginian masters felt from their rebellious slaves. On the other hand, Gerald Mullin has offered a fairly conservative assessment of Dunmore's impact on Virginia's slaves. He argues that the proclamation did little for either the British or the slaves and that "the royal governor's 'Black Regiment,' little more than a collection of fugitives temporarily welded together to perform a desperate holding action, was largely a creation of the planters' imagination and their newspaper press." Although Holton and Frey may overestimate the size and importance of the black exodus, Mullin is too dismissive of it. It is not insignificant that many white Virginians were terrified by the prospect of thousands of slaves not only fleeing, but also fighting against, their former masters. It is also not insignificant that hundreds of blacks did escape with Dunmore and ultimately gain their freedom. Those individuals might take issue with Mullins' assertion that Dunmore's proclamation was of little importance. What is certain is that Dunmore's actions created both a great deal of anxiety among Virginian masters and a great deal of hope among thousands of Virginian slaves.²⁵

Notes for Chapter II

¹ Selby, 43-45. Virginia House of Burgesses, 16 June, 1775 in Force, *American Archives*, 4th Ser., 2:1218. James Madison to William Bradford. 19 June, 1775, in Hutchinson, *Madison Papers*, 1:153.

² Earl of Dartmouth to Earl of Dunmore, 2 August, 1775 in Force, *American Archives*, 4th Ser., 3:6. Norfolk Borough Committee to Peyton Randolph, 31 July, 1775 in Robert L. Scribner and Brent Tarter, eds. *Revolutionary Virginia: The Road to Independence*. 7 vols. (Charlottesville, Virg.: University Press of Virginia, 1973-1983), 3:378. *VG* (Purdie) 16 June, 1775.

³ Hast, 46. Macartney to Loyall, August 12, 1775; and Loyall to Macartney, 14 August, 1775; in Scribner and Tarter, *Revolutionary Virginia*. 3:431, 443.

⁴ Hast, 47. Officers to President and Gentlemen of the Convention, 1 August, 1775; and Norfolk County Committee, 16 August, 1775; in Scribner and Tarter, *Revolutionary Virginia*, 3:385, 453.

⁵ Holton, *Forced Founders*, 133-135. Wilson Miles Cary to Alexander Purdie: An Open Letter, with Enclosures; and Elizabeth City County-Hampton Town Committee to Matthew Squire; in Scribner and Tarter, *Revolutionary Virginia*, 4:69-70, 119-120. Selby, 58. *VG* (Dixon and Hunter), 23 September, 1775.

⁶ Force, *American Archives*, 4th Ser., 3:847. Hast, 48. Selby, 58-59.

⁷ Hast 29-31, 48. *VG* (Pinkney), 26 October, 1775.

⁸ Edmund Pendleton to Richard Henry Lee, 27 December, 1775 in Force, *American Archives*, 4th Ser., 4:201-202. Hast, 52. Selby, 64.

⁹ The proclamation appears in Scribner and Tarter, *Revolutionary Virginia*, 4:334-335. Since the transcription contains several errors, a picture of the proclamation can be found in Holton, "'Rebel Against Rebel.' Enslaved Virginians and the Coming of the American Revolution." *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*. Vol. 105, No. 2 (Spring, 1997), 183.

¹⁰ Sylvia R. Frey. "Between Slavery and Freedom: Virginia Blacks in the American Revolution." *Journal of Southern History*. Vol. 49, No. 3 (August, 1983), 378.

¹¹ Earl of Dunmore to Earl of Dartmouth, 18 February, 1775, Calendar, C.O. 5,1353, fos. 321-362A, in Davies, *Documents*, 10:218.

¹² Earl of Dunmore to Lord Germain, 30 March, 1776. C.O. 5/1353, fo. 377, in Davies, *Documents*, 12:101. Lord Dunmore to General Howe, 30 November, 1775; and Edmund Pendleton to Richard Henry Lee, 27 December, 1775 in Force. *American Archives*, 4th Ser., 3:1714; 4:201-202.

¹³ Declaration of the Virginia Convention, 13 December, 1775 in Force, *American Archives*, 4th Ser. 4:82. *VG* (Purdie) 24 November, 1775.

¹⁴ Robert Carter Nicholas to Virginia Delegates, 25 November, 1775, in Julian P. Boyd, et al., eds. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1950-), 1:267. Edmund Pendleton to Richard Henry Lee, 27 December, 1775 in Force, *American Archives*, 4th Ser., 4:201-202. Virginia Committee of Safety to Virginia Congressional Delegation, 11 November, 1775; Andrew Sproule to Peter Patterson, 19 November 1775; Northampton County Committee to Congress, 25 November, 1775; William Roscow Wilson Curle to Virginia Committee of Safety, 3 December, 1775; and William Woodford to Edmund Pendleton, 5 December, 1775 in Scribner and Tarter, *Revolutionary Virginia*, 4: 380, 434, 467-469; 5:46, 58-59. Some of the runaway ads are reproduced in Windley, ed. *Runaway Slave Advertisements*. See pp. 1:172, 177, 250-251, 334 for ads for runaways who may have fled to Dunmore's lines.

¹⁵ Lund Washington to George Washington, 3 December, 1775; Washington to Joseph Reed, 15 December, 1775 in W.W. Abbot, et al., eds. *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series* (Charlottesville, Va., 1985--) 2:480, 553, 611.

¹⁶ Frey, "Between Slavery and Freedom," 383, 386. Holton, *Forced Founders*, 141-143. Holton, "Rebel Against Rebel," 158. Benjamin Quarles. "Lord Dunmore as Liberator." *William and Mary Quarterly*. 3rd. Ser. Vol. 15. (Oct., 1958), 498-501.

¹⁷ Force, *American Archives*, 4th Ser., 4:81-82, 84-85. Scribner and Tarter, *Revolutionary Virginia*, 5:362-363, 396-397.

¹⁸ *VG* (Pinkney) 23 November, 1775.

¹⁹ Leven Powell to Sarah Powell, 18 December, 1775. Leven Powell Papers. (Swem Library, Special Collections, College of William and Mary). Box 1, Folder 1. Selby, 70-74. For contemporary accounts of the battle at Great Bridge, see Force, *American Archives*, 4th Ser., 4:540. *VG* (Pinkney) 13 December, 1775; 16 December, 1775; 20 December, 1775. *VG* (Purdie) 15 December, 1775.

²⁰ On the destruction of Norfolk, see Hast, 55-59, and Selby, 80-85. See also Leven Powell to Sarah Powell, 31 December, 1775, Leven Powell Papers, Box 1, Folder 1, for a description of slave and white Tory prisoners.

²¹ Dunmore to Germain, 30 March, 1776. C.O. 5/1353, fo. 377, in Davies, *Documents*. 12:101. Hast, 59-65. James Hendricks to Leven Powell, 4 April, 1776. Leven Powell Papers. Box 1, Folder 1.

²² Account of the Attack on Gwynn's Island, 10 July, 1776 in Force, *American Archives*, 5th Ser., 1:150-152. *VG* (Dixon and Hunter) 31 August, 1776.

²³ Dunmore to Germain, 4 September, 1776. C.O. 5/1353, fo. 401, in Davies, *Documents*. 12:219. Lord Dunmore to Secretary of State, 4 September, 1776 in Force, *American Archives*, 5th Ser., 2:158. Hast, 65-66.

²⁴ Quarles, *Negro in the American Revolution*, 31. Frey. "Between Slavery and Freedom," 378. Holton, *Forced Founders*, 156-161.

²⁵ Mullin, 124.

CHAPTER III

WAR AND EMANCIPATION, 1776-1783

After the events of 1775 and early 1776, Norfolk was a devastated county. Both of its principal towns, Norfolk and Portsmouth, had been destroyed, and most of its inhabitants had seen their lives uprooted and torn asunder. Thousands left the county either for shelter in neighboring counties, or on board British ships. Except for those slaves who ultimately gained their freedom, the consequences of the war were disastrous for both blacks and whites alike, as all saw their lives disrupted by the conflict. Although little evidence remains of how Norfolk's slaves dealt with the daily consequences of the war, they undoubtedly suffered greatly. Most slaves experienced a deterioration of their material quality of life as homes, crops, animals and workplaces were lost.

Although Norfolk County was a shattered community by the summer of 1776, Dunmore's departure from the Bay and the absence of British forces for the next three years allowed a gradual recovery to begin. Inhabitants began to return and a number of prewar businesses were rebuilt. Despite British raids on shipping, maritime trade began to revive. Although reconstruction seems to have taken place slowly and only partially in Norfolk Borough, a number of previous inhabitants did return and rebuild homes and shops. Many did not, however, selling their lots and remaining where they had taken refuge during the fighting. Portsmouth remained a functioning port and shipbuilding center, which were undoubtedly the reasons the British would later use the town as a base on their

return to the Chesapeake. The county courts slowly began to function again, and in 1778 taxes were levied again for the first time since 1774. Population estimates based on those returns show approximately 7,900 inhabitants in 1778, including 4,700 whites and 3,200 blacks. These figures show a decline of just over nine-percent from the county's 1774 population. Considering the devastation the county had endured, these totals probably represented a sizable recovery by 1778.¹

Although little information is available that would tell us how their labor was used, returning slaves were most likely preoccupied with the tasks of rebuilding homes, farms, and businesses. Most probably tried to reconstitute prewar connections to other slaves in the area and to recover or recreate what they could of their homes and lives. The population figures given above show only a small decrease (of about one hundred) in the county's black population since 1774. The black proportion of the county's population actually rose by 1778. This development is surprising when one considers that hundreds left with Dunmore in 1775-1776. There are two possible reasons. First, those with means may have purchased additional slaves in order to rebuild and to replace lost bondsmen. Second, those masters with slaves on holdings outside the county may have brought them to Norfolk for the same purposes.

Despite a partial recovery, Norfolk was by no means free of troubles. The economy was still crippled in comparison to the prewar years and county government was only barely functioning at best. More importantly, a large number of loyalists remained even after Dunmore's departure. Most of the

Scottish-born merchants who supported the royal governor had left with his forces, but most of the region's native-born Tories remained. Both groups were closely tied by kinship and business relationships, by hostility to the Revolution, and by the expectation of an ultimate British victory. These factors kept them loyal to the King even after British troops had left the scene. In addition, fear of reprisals and sympathy for individuals kept the county courts from effectively prosecuting active loyalists throughout the war. As a result, the county continued to be torn by partisan violence for the remainder of the conflict.²

Norfolk's loyalists gave both moral and material support to the British. Although expressing dislike for the Revolution or loyalty to the Crown may not have been very harmful to the American war effort, many loyalists continued to trade with British naval vessels and privateers when they appeared in the area, providing the enemy with supplies as they had Dunmore's forces. Others actively served the British. The most infamous group of area loyalists was probably the Goodrich family of Portsmouth.

The Goodriches were a wealthy mercantile family who made their money from shipping, but also owned plantations along the James River. They owned a number of slaves, who they used as both field hands on their land and as crews on their ships. By 1774 they owned twelve ships, which they used primarily to trade with the West Indies. The family initially sided with the revolutionaries, smuggling gunpowder from the Caribbean for them. They also attempted to smuggle in British goods in violation of the embargo for their own profits, for which they were caught and reprimanded by the Virginia Convention. John

Goodrich, Jr. was captured by Dunmore in July 1775 and was followed by his brother William in October. John, Sr. attempted to negotiate with Dunmore for his sons' release. During the course of these events, the whole family switched sides and began serving Dunmore, contributing their ships and knowledge of local waters to the governor's fleet. In the winter and spring of 1776 they joined in British raids along Virginia's rivers in ships crewed partly by blacks who had joined Dunmore. Although John, Sr. and all three of his sons were captured, all would escape and return to bedevil the Americans. For the rest of the war the family served the Royal Navy as privateers and would return with each of the later British expeditions to the Chesapeake.³

Armed parties of Tories harassed and attacked patriots and often plundered their property in order to procure supplies for the British. With the county courts barely functioning and loyalist sentiment strong, the lawless atmosphere of wartime Norfolk County made such violence commonplace. Many of the loyalist raiders were simply thieves who used the King's name in order to enrich themselves with patriot property. A number of the gangs, such as an especially notorious one led by Josiah Phillips and active in 1778, included fugitive slaves among their members. Sometimes freed by the loyalist bandits, runaway slaves joined the gangs for survival, profit, revenge, or all three. After assaulting and robbing local patriots, they and their white compatriots would often retreat into the Dismal Swamp, safely beyond the reach of the small American garrison at Portsmouth or the ineffective local government.⁴

In addition to the violence of loyalist gangs, the county faced threats from the sea as well. British warships and privateers regularly appeared in the Chesapeake Bay and preyed on American shipping after 1776. These ships frequently seized cargoes and occasionally sent out shore parties to gather provisions. The presence of British forces in the area tempted slaves to try escaping, and a small number did so. Of the 613 slaves whose year of departure is known, 28 left in 1777 and 96 left in 1778, totaling almost twenty percent of the wartime runaways. (See Table 4-4).

Full-scale war returned to Norfolk and shattered the county's uneasy recovery when British forces returned in 1779. On May 8, a fleet commanded by Admiral George Collier arrived off Portsmouth carrying eighteen hundred troops led by Major General Edward Mathew. They were also accompanied by the Goodriches, who contributed their ships, crews, and knowledge of the Bay to Mathew and Collier's efforts. A part of Britain's shift to a southern strategy for winning the war, the raid's objective was to destroy supplies intended for the American army fighting in the Carolinas.

Mathews' men quickly occupied Portsmouth and Norfolk. With Portsmouth as their base, they proceeded to plunder the county and launched raids on neighboring areas. The Collier-Mathew expedition was more successful than its commanders had hoped it would be, frightening Virginians and disrupting rebel supply lines. The raid was another great blow to Norfolk, undoing the recovery that had begun after Dunmore's departure. The presence of a strong British force also emboldened area loyalists and led to intensified civil war in the

county. When the fleet left on May 24, they had destroyed or captured 137 American merchant ships and had wrecked the Gosport shipyard at Portsmouth. They destroyed warehouses filled with tobacco, lumber, and naval stores and burned Suffolk, an important supply depot. They also carried off thousands of hogsheads of tobacco and thousands of head of horses and cattle. A small Tory exodus of ninety men and women also left with the fleet. In addition, the Goodriches remained in the area throughout the summer, raiding local shipping and further adding to the county's misery.

According to records cited by John Selby in his history of Revolutionary Virginia, the British also took 518 slaves from Norfolk and surrounding areas with them. At least fifty-six from Norfolk appear in the Virginian damage claims. The claims and the *Black Loyalist Directory* show at least 151 slaves leaving Norfolk in 1779, the great majority probably leaving with Mathew and Collier. The remainder probably were from neighboring counties and areas along the James River. Although hundreds of slaves either escaped to the British in hopes of gaining their freedom, or were forcibly taken by British troops, Mathew did not attempt to use them as fighters as Dunmore or local loyalists had. In fact, he was under orders not to arm blacks during his expedition to Virginia. Although no explanation was given for this order from General Henry Clinton, he and other British officers still felt considerable ambivalence towards the idea of using armed slaves as part of the war effort. That did not stop the British from depriving the Virginians of hundreds of slave laborers, however.⁵

On June 30 Clinton announced an official policy towards slaves from his headquarters at Philipsburg, New York. The Philipsburg Proclamation declared that all slaves captured in rebel service were to be sold for the benefit of their captors. Those who left rebel masters for the British would be free to pursue any occupation they wished within British lines. Intended to demoralize southern rebels and deprive them of labor, the proclamation stopped short of emancipation, but in granting slaves occupational choices was a step towards it. It placed the responsibility for Clinton's actions on the Americans, claiming that the measure was necessary to counteract the Continental Army's use of black troops and auxiliaries. The Philipsburg Proclamation seems to have drawn little notice from the Americans. It did not even go as far as Dunmore's had in 1775 and the Americans were by this time used to the British seizing and sheltering their slaves. If it had any effect at all, it was probably to anger rebel slave owners further and spur them to fight harder, rather than demoralizing them as was intended.⁶

Much of the British ambivalence towards American blacks was due to their need to hold the support of loyalist slaveowners. In most cases British authorities returned the slaves of Tory masters. Even when the slaves in question were those of rebel masters, the British confronted the problem of how to keep the economies of the areas they occupied functioning when much of the labor force was enslaved. As a result, they often compelled slaves to continue working at their old jobs and even used force to suppress slave uprisings on a number of plantations in South Carolina.

The difficulties of dealing with the slaves of Tory masters and deciding the fate of rebels' slaves led Clinton to issue a second proclamation on June 3, 1780. It announced that the slaves of loyalists would be returned only on condition that they not be punished for running away. Loyal masters were permitted to hire slaves to the British army and would be compensated if the slave died in service. The escaped slaves of rebels, however, were now to be considered public property. If they served their new master, the King, faithfully, they would be freed at the end of the war.⁷

While these policies were being formulated, Mathew's raid, the continued depredations of privateers, and increasingly bitter partisan warfare between Patriots and Tories all combined to worsen Norfolk County's plight and led more inhabitants to flee for their safety, often taking their slaves with them. Population estimates for 1780 show a considerable decline from those of 1778. By the summer of 1780 the county had only about 5,800 residents, including 3,600 whites and 2,200 blacks, compared to 7,900 in 1778 and 8,700 in 1774.⁸

There was to be no rest for the war weary county in 1780. On October 20 a force of twenty-two hundred British troops commanded by General Alexander Leslie arrived in the Chesapeake and landed at Portsmouth the next day. Their mission was to establish a base in order to raid supply depots at Richmond and Petersburg in the hopes of diverting American resources away from Lord Cornwallis' army.

Leslie's expedition was far less successful than Mathew's had been, and inflicted little damage. Although they made preparations to stay at Portsmouth by

constructing fortifications and allowed a number of loyalists to return from New York to their old homes, the British changed their strategy. Leslie and his men were suddenly ordered to Charleston less than a month after their arrival. They withdrew from Portsmouth on November 16, leaving behind several hundred blacks who had reached their lines. How many slaves sought refuge with Leslie's force and where they were from is unknown, though proximity suggests that the majority were from the Norfolk area. It is unclear what Leslie intended for the slaves, who were abandoned because there was no room for them aboard the fleet. Not all were left behind, however. Damage claims list seventeen Norfolk County slaves as being lost to his troops, while a total of thirty (who may or may not have been taken by Leslie's troops) were simply listed as lost in 1780. Less than five percent of the county's lost slaves, this number represented only a handful of those lost to the British during the war.⁹ Although Virginians once more felt relief at the British departure, it was to be short lived. On December 30, 1780, just six weeks after Leslie's departure, Benedict Arnold arrived in the bay with eighteen hundred troops. Initially bypassing Portsmouth and Norfolk, the British sailed up the James River to Richmond and Petersburg. There they seized or destroyed large amounts of both private property and military supplies. As they withdrew they plundered plantations along the James, capturing supplies and freeing slaves as they went.

On January 19 Arnold and his men withdrew to Portsmouth and established their base there. Although American forces soon began gathering for the attack, the arrival of a large British relief force of two thousand men

commanded by William Phillips forced them to call off their plans. Throughout the spring of 1781 Arnold and Phillips' troops harassed French and American forces with a series of raids up the James River. Meanwhile, British naval vessels and privateers, including the Goodriches', blocked most shipping in the region.¹⁰

With the presence of British forces, the county's loyalists grew increasingly bold in their attacks on patriots during 1781. As in earlier periods, many of the county's Tory residents actively aided and supplied British forces. Armed parties, often as motivated by profit as loyalism, continued to rob, kill and capture supporters of the Revolution. Loyalty to the British and fear of reprisal were sufficient to suppress patriot support throughout the area. Loyalist sentiment was strengthened by the British ability to pay for supplies in hard currency as opposed to near-worthless continental scrip. This economic motivation led many to prefer trading with the British to the Americans.

The continued presence of blacks among Tory bands that roamed the countryside indicates that they probably freed an unknown number of slaves. Unless they were among the few that were lucky enough to escape with the British, most were probably recaptured later. Meanwhile, in Portsmouth, Arnold made use of slaves who had joined his forces to build fortifications around the town. During the course of the construction, an epidemic decimated their ranks.¹¹

Although British troops left in August to join Cornwallis' advancing army, partisan warfare continued for over a year after the British defeat at Yorktown. With the British Army taken prisoner in October of 1781 and the navy scaling back its operations, there was little opportunity for Norfolk's slaves to escape to

His Majesty's standard. Even when Arnold was present it seems that few departed with the British. Norfolk's damage claims list only twenty-six slaves lost in 1781. This low number suggests that many of the slaves working on Portsmouth's fortifications during Arnold's stay were either from other areas or were the hired or requisitioned slaves of loyalists. Some may also have been left behind and recaptured by the Americans after Arnold evacuated the area. As with General Leslie the year before, it appears that evacuating rebel slaves in the Norfolk area had become a fairly low British priority by 1780. Hundreds of slaves had been gathered around Portsmouth, however, and four hundred were sent to the Peninsula to provide labor for Cornwallis' forces when the town was evacuated. Four hundred others, sick with small pox, were sent across the river to the Norfolk side with rations. It is unknown how many died or recovered.¹²

Cornwallis' defeat at Yorktown marked the beginning of the end of the British war effort. Afterwards, the Americans were concerned with recovering the slaves who had joined his forces in its march across Virginia. Many had already died of disease and the remainder had been abandoned by Cornwallis and forced out of British lines when food supplies ran low. George Washington issued orders to prevent French and American troops from claiming others' slaves in the confusion of the British surrender. Despite these orders, a number managed to find shelter among the French troops. Thousands of others, including most of Norfolk's surviving runaways had already been taken to New York, Britain's principal base in North America and the last port to be evacuated by the King's

troops after the war. Over three thousand were evacuated from there over the course of 1783.

The preliminary peace treaty signed in November 1782 contained an article agreeing that no slaves or other American property would be removed by the British during their evacuation. George Washington raised concerns over the departure of a number of former slaves in the spring of 1783 with Guy Carleton, the commander of Britain's North American forces. In a meeting at Orangetown, New York on May 6, Carleton took the position that his government could not have meant to abandon those blacks who had entered British lines under the protection of earlier official proclamations. To do so would both violate Britain's national honor and break faith with the former slaves.

Instead he argued that they were already free; hence he was not violating the treaty by allowing people who were already free to depart. He gave orders that any slaves that joined the British before the provisional treaty was signed on November 30, 1782 were free and could go where they pleased. He did however order that a register be kept of all blacks departing on British ships. The register, now published as *The Black Loyalist Directory*, was to be used to provide monetary compensation for American masters if Carleton's actions were later found to have violated the treaty. In addition, Carleton did make an effort to placate the Americans by establishing a board of inquiry to examine disputed cases. In the end, the board compromised and returned a number of slaves to their American masters. Judith Jackson was one. The slave of a Norfolk loyalist named John McLean, she had been sold to Jonathan Eilbeck. She fled him to join Lord

Dunmore in 1776. In 1783 the board returned her to Eilbeck.¹³ Back in England, Lord North agreed with Carleton's arguments and approved his policies towards the ex-slaves.

In addition, Carleton took a number of concrete steps to protect the former slaves preparing to leave New York. After American owners and their agents began appearing in New York and trying to claim their former slaves, he ordered that they be protected from these efforts to recapture them. Carleton issued certificates signed by Generals Samuel Birch and Thomas Musgrave to 1,156 ex-slaves that officially recognized their freedom and granted them the right of passage out of New York. The British listed them in their military rolls and granted them pay and veterans' status. They were also allowed to emigrate on British naval vessels alongside thousands of destitute white loyalists. Finally, Carleton advocated giving the former slaves land in Nova Scotia in reward for their service.¹⁴

Although the Americans were outraged by what James Madison called Carleton's "palpable and scandalous misconstruction of the Treaty," there was little they could do, short of reopening hostilities, to prevent the departure of thousands of slaves from New York during the British evacuation in 1783. The American commissioners appointed to observe the British departure informed Washington that efforts to account for departing blacks were often lax and that certificates had apparently been given out with little regard for when their holders actually entered British lines. Furthermore, a number of departing ships were not checked at all for departing ex-slaves. Some later proposed that British creditors

be prevented from recovering their American debts unless masters were compensated for their slaves, but this threat was never actually carried out.¹⁵

The issue of compensation for slaves continued to be a recurring diplomatic problem in Anglo-American relations for decades after the war, arising in 1790, during John Jay's negotiations in 1794, and again in 1798. The Americans initially sought the return of the slaves, but later modified their demands to monetary compensation. During the War of 1812 the British claimed that the war freed them of any obligation to pay reparations. During that war British forces would also depart with thousands of American slaves in spite of treaty provisions to the contrary. Although the British agreed to compensation in principle, they refused to pay for any American property, slaves included, on board British ships at the time the peace treaty was ratified. Unable to resolve the dispute, the two sides agreed to seek outside arbitration of the matter, eventually accepting an offer from the Tsar of Russia. The Tsar decided in the United States' favor in 1822. Despite continued wrangling over the details, the British finally paid reparations, which were distributed to individual owners and their heirs by 1828.¹⁶

The former slaves who were the object of these diplomatic disputes joined thousands of white loyalists migrating to Nova Scotia after their departure from New York. There they began the arduous task of attempting to build settlements with few resources in the frigid northern climate. Black communities, such as Birchtown, arose near larger white settlements. As part of a process of creating their own communal ties and organizations, a number of ex-slaves formed

religious congregations, mostly Baptist or Methodist. Usually receiving little or no land, and with those who did confined to the poorest soil, many of Nova Scotia's free blacks worked for white masters for wages or food, often in the fishing, lumbering, and boat building trades. Ironically, these were many of the same occupations Norfolk's slaves had engaged in when they were slaves in Virginia. Without other means of support, many others were reduced to begging or attempted to survive on government rations. While the authorities were generally indifferent to their concerns, white settlers were frequently hostile to the former slaves. In 1784 the town of Shelburne erupted into a race riot as whites, many of them economically distressed former soldiers, drove all black settlers out of the town.

The harsh treatment they received at the hands of the authorities and white settlers quickly led to disillusionment and resulted in interest in going to Africa. Ultimately several hundred blacks, including some from Norfolk, were involved in a government sponsored colonization scheme that resulted in the creation of Sierra Leone in Africa. The plan originated among a group of clergy in England who hoped that thousands of impoverished blacks from around the empire who had settled in London could be convinced to emigrate to Africa. With government financial assistance, the first group of over four hundred black settlers left Plymouth in 1787 for what would become the colony of Sierra Leone. Initially called "the Province of Freedom" by its settlers, the colony lasted only thirty months before it foundered. Its government was based on a constitution written by Granville Sharp, one of the leading organizers of the effort in England. The

colony was to be governed by a representative assembly. All males over the age of sixteen possessed the right to vote and serve in the militia, and all adult settlers were entitled to parcels of land regardless of sex. Internal dissension and conflict with native Africans and slave traders who operated in the area beset the colony from the start, and in 1789 the main settlement Granville Town was destroyed during a conflict involving American slavers, a British warship, and a local African ruler.

Hearing news of the settlement in Africa, but apparently little of its travails, a number of Nova Scotian blacks circulated a petition that both protested their treatment in Canada and requested permission to go to Sierra Leone. The petition was taken to England in 1790 by a former slave named Thomas Peters, who was able to win approval for their plans, largely due to the support of English anti-slavery advocates who hoped to save the foundering African colony. The colony was revived as a government trading company, the Sierra Leone Company, which assumed not only control over trade, but over the colony's government as well. Granville Town was reestablished and renamed Freetown, and the few survivors of the earlier settlement located and returned from the surrounding countryside. In the summer of 1791 handbills were circulated among Nova Scotian blacks promising them land and rights equal to those of any white settlers if they went to Africa. In December 1791 almost twelve hundred of them left aboard a British fleet bound for Freetown. How many of them were from Norfolk is unknown, but fifty-five of the one hundred fifty-five heads of

household who signed British registers before leaving gave Virginia as their place of origin.¹⁷

The settlers arrived to find few provisions made for them. As in Nova Scotia they had to build their homes and provide much of their own food from scratch. To make matters worse, the colony's government was located in London and never provided adequate support for the settlers. Although it did not grant them a large degree of self-government, blacks were allowed to serve on juries and hold a number of minor official positions. A legislature with limited power was also revived, and women were allowed to vote until 1797. In the coming years, those blacks who served in the local government would periodically struggle with the Company government in England and with the white settlers who dominated colonial offices over the right to make decisions.

Although the settlers soon began to establish farms, build homes, formed congregations, and create a community, the founding of the colony proved difficult. Illness, poor weather, internal conflicts among the settlers, a raid by the French that looted and burned much of Freetown in 1794, conflict with native Africans, and the presence of powerful slave traders in the area combined to unsettle the first years of the colony. In spite of these hardships, the colony survived and grew, although it never became as profitable as the Company hoped. Angry over the Company's willingness to deal with slavers, its failure to provide protection from the French or help rebuild after their attack, and finally, its efforts to impose heavy quitrents, the black settlers became increasingly restive. Their

frustrations culminated in a brief and unsuccessful rebellion in 1800 that aimed to overthrow the rule of the Company and the white settlers.

Although they would ultimately be absorbed into the larger native population, some of the descendents of the former American slaves were still prominent figures in that nation's politics and economy in the twentieth century. For those who remained in Canada, their communities have continued to survive to the present and in recent years have begun to rediscover the history of their origins.¹⁸

The number of black settlers originating in Norfolk who went to Sierra Leone is unknown, but a few make fleeting appearances in the record. Peter Young was one of them. Owned by Charles Conner before the war, he left to join the British in 1779 at age seventeen. He later became a blacksmith and found work with the British army in New York. Described in Carleton's register only as an "ordinary fellow," he left New York for Nova Scotia in 1783. After living there for a time, he later joined those who settled in Sierra Leone. For him, the war seems to have provided not only a path to freedom, but also to a skilled trade that enabled him to survive after his escape.¹⁹

James Reid belonged to a doctor in Norfolk Borough before the Revolution. At some point he learned how to read and write, although it is unclear whether this occurred before or after the war. In 1776, at the age of twenty-six, he and his wife escaped Virginia by joining Lord Dunmore. Later in the war he was attached to the Royal Artillery. In 1783 he and his wife left New York with the British and settled in Birchtown, where he was given the responsibility of

distributing government rations to a number of settlers. Four years later, a James Reid joined the first wave of black settlers who migrated from England to Sierra Leone. Since the Reid who settled in Birchtown was apparently a pilot, it is possible that he may have gone to sea, made his way to England, and ended up among the settlers. The Reid who went to Africa served in the colony's government, including a brief stint as the colony's second governor in 1787 and later as a marshal empowered to summon juries, make arrests, and carry out other court duties. When the Sierra Leone Company later took over the administration of the colony, he became the company's jailer and commissary officer. He was also one of the first settlers to open a shop in Freetown, and was successful enough that he owned three houses there when he died in 1814.²⁰

Finally, Mary Perth was the slave of John Willoughby, a Norfolk master who lost ninety-seven slaves to Dunmore's forces during the war. Born around 1740, Mary converted to Methodism during the Great Awakening. She somehow learned to read the New Testament and worked hard to proselytize other slaves, going so far as to sneak out of her owner's household at night in order to preach to secret slave congregations. In 1783 she and her husband Ceasar left New York aboard the *L'Abondance* for Port Roseway (now Shelburne). The two were among the founders of Birchtown, where they had a daughter named Susan. After her husband died, Mary went to Birchtown in 1792, where she opened a shop in Freetown two years later and soon owned her own house. In Africa Mary continued her missionary work, teaching African children in a schoolhouse run by the colony's white governor, Zachary Macaulay. She also cared for Macaulay's

children and when he returned to England in 1799, Mary accompanied him along with twenty-five of her students. In, England she helped Macaulay establish a missionary school for the children and returned to Freetown in 1801. She remarried in 1806 (the name of her husband is unknown) and died sometime before 1813.²¹

The stories of Peter Young, Mary Perth, and James Reid (if he was in fact the same James Reid who fled Norfolk) are only three out of thousands. They only hint at the depth and breadth of experiences of Norfolk's wartime runaways. They also serve as a reminder that those who have been studied here largely as sets of numbers were human beings. A more thorough examination of records relating to Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone might reveal more detail about others who left Virginia during the war. Nevertheless, it is important to reconstruct as much as possible about the wartime experiences of Norfolk's fugitives, in the hope that the larger story of thousands might shed light on the many individual stories that might otherwise be lost to history.

Notes for Chapter III

¹ Hast, 91-92. For population figures, see Wingo and Appendix.

² Hast, 82-85.

³ Hast, 48-50, 74-76. Michael Jarvis. "An Archival Assessment of Bridge House (1657-1971), St. George's, Bermuda." Report prepared for the Bermuda National Trust, August 1993. 23-49.

⁴ Hast, 96-99, 185.

⁵ Frey, *Water from the Rock*, 150. Hast, 99-103. Selby, 204-208. Henry Clinton to George Germain, 18 June, 1779. C.O.5, 98, fos.1-24d, in Davies, *Documents*, 16: 120. Sylvia Frey has estimated that as many as fifteen hundred slaves were taken by Mathew's forces, but her estimate is based on contemporary observations and no corroborating evidence is offered. The figure of 518 is offered by Selby and Hast, who used British military returns. Since this seems a more sound estimate, I have used it as well. The estimates of the number of Norfolk runaways in the group is based on Records of the General Assembly and Hodges.

⁶ Frey, *Water from the Rock*, 113-114. Quarles, *Negro in the American Revolution*, 113-114.

⁷ Quarles, *Negro in the American Revolution*, 138.

⁸ See Wingo and Appendix.

⁹ Alexander Leslie to George Germain, 27 November, 1780. C.O. 5/183, fo. 250 in Davies, *Documents*, 18:234-236. Frey, 153. Hast, 106-109. Selby 216-217, 221.

¹⁰ Frey, *Water from the Rock*, 154-155. Hast, 106-110. Selby, 221-225.

¹¹ Frey, *Water from the Rock*, 157-158.

¹² Frey, "Between Slavery and Freedom," 393.

¹³ Ellen Gibson Wilson. *The Loyal Blacks*. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1976), 68.

¹⁴ Guy Carleton to George Washington, 12 May, 1783. C.O. 5/109, fo.313; and Lord North to Guy Carleton, 8 August, 1783. C.O. 5/110, fo. 62, in Davies, *Documents*, 21: 165-166, 202. Frey, *Water from the Rock*, 172-173, 192-193. Hodges, xi-xix. Thomas Walke to Virginia Delegates, 3

May, 1783, in Hutchinson and Rachal, *Madison Papers*, 7: 5-6. Quarles, *Negro in the American Revolution*, 167-172.

¹⁵ James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, 13 May, 1783, in Boyd, *Jefferson Papers*, 6: 268-269.

James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson, 20 July, 1784, in Boyd, *Jefferson Papers*, 7: 381.

Commissioners of Embarkation to George Washington, 18 January, 1784, in W.W. Abbot, et al., eds. *The Papers of George Washington. Confederation Series*. (Charlottesville, Virg.: University Press of Virginia, 1992-) 1:50-51.

¹⁶ Arnett G. Lindsay. "Diplomatic Relations between the United States and Great Britain Bearing on the Return of Negro Slaves, 1783-1828." *Journal of Negro History*. Vol. 5, No. 4 (October, 1920), 391-419.

¹⁷ Wilson, 219-220.

¹⁸ For accounts of black settlement in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, see Christopher Fyfe. *A History of Sierra Leone*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962). James W. St. G. Walker. *The Black Loyalists: the Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870*. (New York: Dalhousie University Press, 1976). Wilson. *The Loyal Blacks*. On black Nova Scotians' growing recent awareness of their historical roots, see James Brooke. "For Nova Scotia Blacks, Veil is Ripped from Past," *New York Times*, 8 October 1999, International Section.

¹⁹ Hodges, 195. Wilson, 64.

²⁰ Fyfe, 21, 23, 48, 98. Hodges, 196. Wilson, 28, 87, 160, 167, 169, 173n. 7, 298-301.

²¹ Fyfe, 101-102. Hodges, 85. Wilson, 7, 9, 13, 75, 319, 354-356.

CHAPTER IV

THE WARTIME EXPERIENCE OF NORFOLK'S RUNAWAYS

Norfolk's slaves left little testimony about the war's effects on their lives. All historians are left with are impersonal records of what happened to a few hundred, sometimes so lacking in detail that they do not even have names attached to them. Any effort to determine how the county's African Americans lived from day to day, what motivated their actions, or what kinds of experiences they had must be based on a great deal of speculation. However, an attempt to study the lives of a group of slaves would be incomplete if such an effort were not made, for it would leave out those at the heart of the story.

The war years were clearly a trial for Norfolk's enslaved population. Homes and belongings were destroyed, family and community ties were severed, and slaves were frequently uprooted and forced out of the county. Despite a partial recovery after 1776, the county suffered considerable losses in population during the war. (See Table 4-1) In addition, the repeated devastation of Norfolk and Portsmouth and the disruption of the regional economy meant drastic changes in slaves' roles as laborers. Before the war the nature of the regional economy meant that male slaves at least were offered a greater range of opportunities than in most other parts of Virginia. Large numbers of blacks worked as watermen, woodworkers, smiths, and at other skilled professions. As a result of the war, most of the slaves who remained in Virginia faced the loss of their positions and probably suffered a decline in their material quality of life. Those who left with

their masters or with the British may have gone on to do the same tasks elsewhere that they had done in Norfolk, but the world they had been a part of before the Revolution was gone.

TABLE 4-1
NORFOLK COUNTY POPULATION, 1774-1780

	<u>1774</u>	<u>1778</u>	<u>1780</u>
White:	5,400	4,700	3,600
(Tithables:)	1,355	1,287	900
Black:	3,300	3,200	2,200
(Tithables:)	1,627	1,591	1,099
Total:	8,700	7,900	5,800
(Tithables:)	2,982	2,775	1,999

Source: Wingo. *Norfolk County Tithables*. (See Appendix)
Estimates based on methods used in Merrens, 196.

Whatever benefits particular occupations may have conferred on some slaves, they and the rest of the county's black population were a subject people, ultimately kept in place by force or the threat of force. It is hardly surprising that slaves chafed at their bonds and that large numbers sought ways to escape. Outright rebellion was rare because the odds of failure were immense. The coming of the war and the opportunities presented by Dunmore and later British officers proved inviting to many slaves. The divisions among the county's white community and the presence of British forces willing to shelter runaways gave many of Norfolk's slaves their first real opportunity to escape from their masters. This opportunity was far greater in Norfolk than in most other parts of Virginia because of the frequent presence of the British and the chaos of the war.

It is also not surprising that even more chose not to flee to British lines. The chances of getting caught and the threat of severe punishment must have convinced many that siding with the British was a foolish choice to make. Those who were caught were usually rewarded for their efforts with service in the state lead mine at Chiswell, or, with sale in the West Indies. Family ties and the reluctance to leave loved ones who could not or would not run provided another compelling reason to stay. Furthermore, many slaves must have viewed British offers of freedom with suspicion. After all, the British only offered freedom to the slaves of rebel masters and only if they served the Crown, often under conditions little better than those they had left. They must also have been aware of Britain's status as a slave trading nation and the presence of slavery throughout the empire. Some must have wondered why they should trust one group of slaveholders over another. In general, there were as many reasons to stay put as there were to try to gain freedom in British lines.

Of course, some slaves had the decision made for them. British troops undoubtedly took some slaves against their will. It is impossible to tell from the damage claims filed by Norfolk's masters who fled to the British on their own initiative and who suffered at the hands of armed raiding parties. However, there seem to have been very few (if any) slaves who freely chose to return to their masters after the war. Even those taken against their own will used the opportunity given them and left with the British at the war's end.

Not all of those leaving with the British were slaves. Although they may have been legally free, a number of free blacks saw evacuation with the British as

a path to a better life. Six of those listed in Carleton's Book of Negroes claimed to have been born free and to have lived in Norfolk. Apparently those four women and two men saw nothing for them in a Norfolk where almost all other blacks were slaves and where they could look forward to lives constrained by racism. Although he does not appear in Carleton's register, Talbot Thompson was one of the free blacks who left with the British. The only slave in eighteenth-century Virginia known to have freed himself through self-purchase, Thompson had gone into business making sails in Norfolk. Dependent on his customers for survival, he and his wife chose to leave with them when they departed Virginia. Their case shows that connections of business and patronage may have provided additional reasons for Thompson and other free blacks to choose departure with the British.¹

Regardless of whether or not they left of their own volition, approximately one thousand slaves from the Norfolk area did leave their masters for British lines. The existing records provide only minimal information about them, but they do give just enough to construct a rough demographic profile of the runaways. As Tables 4-2 and 4-3 indicate, although the majority were adult males, large numbers of women and children accompanied the wartime exodus. Over a third of the fugitives were female and a quarter were children. Apparently the British sheltered many women and children in spite of their preference for able-bodied men who could serve as laborers or soldiers. Perhaps the number departing with the British might have been even larger but for this preference. In addition, a number of elderly and infirm slaves seem to have been taken along in spite of their lack of military value to British forces.

TABLE 4-2
GENDER OF NORFOLK'S WARTIME RUNAWAYS
(WHERE AVAILABLE)

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Male:	423	63%
Female:	249	37%
Total:	672	100%

Sources: Wingo. *Norfolk County Tithables*. Hodges, *Black Loyalist Directory*. Records of the General Assembly...Losses Sustained from [the British]...

TABLE 4-3
AGES OF NORFOLK'S WARTIME RUNAWAYS

<u>Age</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Adult (over 16 years):	490	76%
Children (Under 16 years):	159	24%
Total:	649	100%

Sources: Wingo. *Norfolk County Tithables*. Records of the General Assembly...Losses Sustained from [the British]...

What also becomes apparent from the masters' damage claims and especially from the *Black Loyalist Directory* is the presence of families among the runaways. Family connections are not noted in the majority of the damage claims, but, since families who were able to remain together until the end of the war left New York and were recorded in the *Directory* together, it is possible to identify them. The most conservative figure that can be formulated using these sources is

that at least 156 slaves appearing in the records left Norfolk with other family members. The great majority of these family connections cut across property lines and often across county lines as well. Slave families divided among different white households were the norm in Virginia.

Before the war, visiting family members was one of the most common reasons for slaves to run away. The majority of fugitives were men trying to maintain the familial relationships they had formed across property lines. In his study of eighteenth-century slavery in Virginia, Gerald Mullin examined thousands of runaway ads placed by masters and found that they described 1,138 men between 1736 and 1801, but only 142 women, or, approximately 11 percent of the total.² As Table 4-2 indicates, thirty-seven percent of Norfolk's wartime runaways were female. Before and after the war, most runaways were single males, often leaving their masters to see family members. During the war, however, entire families attempted to escape. Rather than running away in order to visit relations, slaves were now trying to escape from the system of slavery as a whole, bringing their families with them if possible.

With some idea of who was running away in mind, it is equally important to ask when they were leaving. Information is available for only about two thirds of the slaves who appear in the records. If we assume that those for whom no information is available left in the same proportions as those whose period of departure is known, a pattern does become apparent (see Table 4-4). The largest number of slaves fled to Lord Dunmore's forces in 1775-1776. Few left in 1777, but the number of runaways surged upward in 1778, and was even higher in 1779.

Most of those leaving in 1779 probably went with Mathew and Collier's expedition. Later British expeditions seem to have placed less of a priority on evacuating rebels' slaves. Leslie abandoned several hundred in 1780, and Arnold does not appear to have liberated large numbers. Only a handful appear in the records as leaving in 1780 and 1781. This decline in the number of fugitives may have been partly due to the losses suffered by the county's slave population over the course of the war. Although the incapacity of local government during the war may have hampered official responses such as increased slave patrols, the decline in the number of runaways may also have been due to greater vigilance and security measures on the part of individual masters. The removal of many slaves during the war years was also bound to reduce the pool of runaways. Finally, many may have seen the fate of those who joined Dunmore and Arnold or were abandoned by Leslie and felt that their chances for survival were better if they simply stayed home.

Many of the slaves who served the British and later left North America with them were neither runaways nor captured prizes, but were the slaves of loyalists. Because of the need to retain the allegiance of loyal masters, slaves of Tories were left out of Dunmore's Proclamation and subsequent offers of emancipation. Freeing slaves must have been a major point of tension in the Norfolk area due to its large population of white loyalists, many of whom undoubtedly owned slaves. Even though they did not free them, Dunmore and later British commanders drafted undetermined numbers of slaves into service. Other owners volunteered their bondsmen for the Crown's use. Regardless of

their service, at the war's end loyalist slaves left with their masters. The British unwillingness to free the slaves of loyalists probably only confirmed for many slaves who chose not to flee that their would-be liberators could not be trusted. Carleton's record does reveal at least one exception to this pattern for the slaves of Norfolk's loyalists. Betsy Wilson and her two children were freed when their owner, identified as "Mrs. Randsberry," died. They left New York for Nova Scotia in 1783.³

Table 4-4
Departure Dates of Norfolk Runaways

<u>Years of Departure</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
(1775)	(22)	(3.6%)
(1776)	(126)	(20.5%)
("Dunmore"- no date)	(133)	(21.7%)
Total 1775-1776	281	45.8%
1777	28	4.6%
1778	96	15.7%
1779	151	24.6%
1780	31	5.1%
1781	26	4.2%
Total:	613	100%

Sources: Hodges. *Black Loyalist Directory*. Records of the
General Assembly...Losses Sustained from [the British]...

For those slaves who did flee to the British of their own volition, getting there was the next step once the decision to go had been made. This objective was obviously easiest when British forces were in the area in strength. During these periods slaves could reach their lines on foot, evading their masters and slave patrols to reach British units. Escape by water was obviously how many, perhaps most, reached the British. The numerous waterways of the county made it possible for slaves to slip down the Elizabeth River to waiting British ships or

troops on shore. Alternatively, these same channels were paths that British and loyalist raiders could use to travel into the interior of the county on their foraging expeditions. In the process they frequently brought slaves back with them. The large number of experienced mariners among the county's enslaved population would also have seen the water as a natural escape route. Either way, the trip was a hazardous one, with the risk of being caught always looming over the effort to escape.

The hardships slaves faced did not cease once they actually reached British forces. Able-bodied men who joined Dunmore were armed and organized as combat troops. Although Dunmore continued to advocate the use of black soldiers for the rest of the conflict, only one other black unit was organized by the British for combat. Formed in Charleston in 1782, it saw little action before the war ended. As a result, Norfolk's slaves probably supplied the majority of those who saw service with the front lines of the British forces. Military service undoubtedly had a strong psychological effect on many slaves who fought. For example, one slave who whites had called Yellow Peter before the war escaped to join Dunmore and was later seen armed and calling himself Captain Peter.⁴ Although military service no doubt boosted slaves' self-esteem, the risks of death, injury and capture meant that battle was hardly a safe way to emancipation. Many slaves suffered all of these fates in the course of the fighting.

Most blacks serving with the British during the war were attached to British units and used as laborers, teamsters, cooks, and personal servants for officers. The Royal Artillery made heavy use of ex-slaves in order to haul cannon

and supplies. Quartermaster and engineer units also made frequent use of black support troops. The register of departing slaves taken by Carleton's men includes the unit assignments of a number of Norfolk's slaves and their families (see Table 4-5). Although the listings in the British register are not an accurate count of how many accompanied these units, more women and children appear than adult men. That women and children were listed alongside men in these units indicates that the families of black men were allowed to accompany them. Women usually tried to survive by nursing, cooking, cleaning, and sewing for British troops. Some also worked as domestic servants for white officers. Those slaves taken from the Norfolk area by the British probably performed these tasks in the New York area, which was where they were most likely to have been taken and where they would later depart from.

Table 4-5
Runaways' Assignments in British Units.

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women and Children</u>
Royal Artillery	21	20
Wagon Master General Division	5	3
Black Pioneers	1	15
Engineer Department	4	3
42nd Regiment	2	0
Total:	33	41

Source: Hodges. *Black Loyalist Directory*.

In addition to service on land as both combat and auxiliary troops, blacks commonly served on the water as pilots and crewmen on privateers and British naval vessels. These former slaves were more likely to see action on the water than were those on the land. For example, the Goodriches employed black crewmen on their privateering expeditions and Captain Squire used Joseph Harris as the *Otter's* pilot in 1775. The maritime experience of many of Norfolk's slaves and their knowledge of local waters made them particularly valuable to the British navy.

This knowledge of the local geography, whether on land or water, made slave defectors natural spies, guides, scouts, and foragers, and they served British forces in those capacities. As members of the loyalist guerilla bands that regularly assaulted and plundered the area's remaining patriots, those slaves who did not leave with the British but remained in the area were often far more threatening to their former masters than those who did. Records indicating how large these bands were or how many former slaves were among their ranks are sparse. The most notorious of these groups was the Josiah Philips gang, which was active throughout 1777 and 1778 and at different times included between ten and fifty members, including an undetermined number of ex-slaves. They and other such gangs were strong enough to severely disrupt the local economies and civil administration of Norfolk and Princess Anne counties.⁵

Life within the British camps was harsh. Blacks were assigned separate quarters and poor rations. They regularly faced harsh discipline and discrimination at the hands of British officers and were often overworked by their

would-be liberators. In a war in which British regulars often lacked enough food, blacks could expect only meager rations or were forced to do without. In the case of those who followed Lord Cornwallis to Yorktown, when food supplies began to run low, blacks were evicted from British lines to fend for themselves.

The lack of food, hard labor, and the poor sanitation and hygiene common to eighteenth-century military camps all combined to make disease rampant. Large numbers of blacks arriving in British lines died of epidemic disease, especially smallpox. Those who served with Dunmore and later with Arnold were decimated by illness. One indicator of the toll disease took on Norfolk's runaways is the mourning returns of blacks found dead on Gwynn's Island. A total of 240 black dead were found. Of the 142 who were identified, 54 have the same surnames as Norfolk masters who lost slaves. Furthermore, eight of the dead slaves match both last and first names appearing in the damage claims. It is likely that more from Norfolk were among the dead as well, but their names are unknown. Far fewer whites died of smallpox because the majority of British troops were inoculated, while blacks were not.⁶

Sale back into slavery in the West Indies was a fate that patriots constantly warned slaves would befall them if they came into British hands. Although some slaves experienced this cruel fate, it does not seem to have been common practice. In any case, some privateers and unscrupulous British officers seem to have done so, adding the threat of resale into slavery to the dangers faced by those who joined the British ranks. Dunmore was accused of selling some of the slaves who joined him to the Caribbean for his own profits, but there seems to be little

evidence that he actually did so. Many who had been seized by British troops were sold in North America for the benefit of their captors, since slaves captured in rebel service were considered legitimate spoils of war.⁷

The harshness of life in British camps did not prevent the ex-slaves from trying to build their own lives outside of slavery. Twelve black men and women from other parts of Virginia and other states left New York with husbands and wives from Norfolk County in 1783, revealing that marital unions certainly continued after joining the British. At least forty-seven children who appear in the *Black Loyalist Directory* were born into freedom behind British lines, attesting to a measure of normality as children were born and raised despite the hardships they and their parents faced.⁸ Although British service was often hard, the promise of full freedom from service at war's end gave reason to hope for a better future. Finally, in the same way that seeing combat may have made many slaves more determined and independent, escape with the British provided opportunities for the slaves to reinvent themselves outside of the bounds set by their former masters.

One possible sign of this reinvention was that a significant number of ex-slaves seem to have assumed new names after joining the British. While masters usually referred to their slaves only by their given names in the damage claims (if they provided their names at all), most of the slaves who departed with the British at the end of the war have surnames in Carleton's register. In many cases these names were simply the same as their former owners', but some former slaves also claimed or were given different surnames. Since some slaves in eighteenth-

century Virginia did have their own surnames, it is possible that some of the different names predated escape. Some masters may have given their slaves last names. For example, it is unlikely that a slave would have claimed the name “Timothy Snowball” as one does in the *Directory*. Timothy apparently did not change his name after leaving his master, however. In the case of women, some of these changes can be accounted for by marriage, but in others the reason is less apparent. Thus, William Bailey’s middle-aged slave James took the surname Smith and John Baynes’ slave Tom appears in Carleton’s directory as “Thomas Saunders.” Of the 315 slaves that appear in Carleton’s directory, 169 have surnames different from their masters’. At least 40 of these are women and children who have taken the name of the male head of household. Thirty-two gave no last names, and the remaining 114 ex-slaves retained the names of their former masters.

It is impossible to know if these names were chosen after reaching the British, or if they were given to the slaves before leaving Virginia. Most names appearing more than once, such as “Jackson,” “Brown,” or “Johnson,” do not by themselves provide any hint as to why they may have been chosen or given. Some, such as “Whitten,” “Taylor,” and “Herbert,” are shared with other slaves’ masters, but it is impossible to tell from the available records if there was a connection between them or if the names were simply adopted because they were common to the Norfolk area. Despite these uncertainties, it is likely that at least some of the fugitives adopted new surnames after leaving Norfolk. Their reasons and the significance of the names they chose to adopt may not be apparent, but the

fact that they did so provides at least a hint that some of those blacks lucky enough to be freed in the war were now using their liberty to begin recreating their identities.

After enduring life with the British military in Virginia or in the crowded encampments of New York, 315 surviving slaves who had come to the British from Norfolk chose to leave with them for Canada in 1783. There they would endure further hardships as they attempted to build new lives for themselves after slavery and the disruptions of the war. Although they would face discrimination and privation in their new homes, they would do so as free men and women, not as property. This new-found independence must have seemed an improvement regardless of other hardships they faced. In Nova Scotia and in Africa black settlers formed their own religious congregations and engaged in missionary activities. Until their rights were revoked by the Sierra Leone Company, many of those who ultimately migrated to Sierra Leone found themselves serving on juries and in representative bodies for the first time in their lives. In addition to this taste of citizenship, many also were able to prosper economically as farmers, retailers, and tradesmen in ways that would have been unimaginable back in Virginia. Although only a minority of the fugitives achieved freedom after the war, that minority came to enjoy greater freedom than they had known under slavery and also gained the opportunity to form new social, religious, civic, and economic identities.

Of the thousand or so slaves from Norfolk who left with the British over the course of the war, just over three hundred, or about one third, left New York

for Nova Scotia in 1783. The fate of the others is less certain. Most probably died of disease or hunger. Attempts to reach the British may have been more common than the small numbers here suggest, but we have no way of counting how many slaves tried to run and were recaptured, nor can we tell how many slaves went uncounted.

Despite this uncertainty, the records that survive for Norfolk County make it possible to establish at least a lower limit to the number of slaves who fled or were taken from their masters. These numbers are significant because Norfolk probably lost a larger portion of its enslaved population than most other parts of Virginia. The figures presented here could thus be considered the low end of the upper limit of losses for counties that saw some of their slaves end up behind British lines. Hopefully, this local study will prove useful to others trying to answer the larger questions surrounding the story of African Americans in the revolutionary era.

Notes for Chapter IV

¹ Morgan, 486.

² Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, 40, 103-104. Michael Mullin. *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean, 1736-1831*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 289-290.

³ Hodges, 115.

⁴ Holton, *Forced Founders*. 156.

⁵ Hast, 97-98, 141.

⁶ For the conditions blacks faced behind British lines, see Frey, *Water from the Rock*, 121-129, 178. For the mourning returns from Gwynn's Island, see *VG* (Dixon & Hunter) 31 August, 1776.

⁷ Frey, *Water from the Rock*, 160. Hodges, xv. Selby, 67.

⁸ Hodges. I have not counted children born behind British lines or spouses from other areas in my totals of Norfolk's runaways.

CONCLUSION

Thousands of slaves escaped from slavery as a result of the extraordinary circumstances of the Revolutionary War. Although the existing sources often reveal only limited information, taken together they nevertheless reveal clues as to who the runaways were and what their experiences were like. By examining Norfolk County, this study attempts to uncover some of these clues in order to add greater depth and detail to the growing body of scholarship on the African American experience in Colonial and Revolutionary America.

Approximately one thousand runaways left Norfolk County over the course of the war. This number represents about thirty percent of Norfolk's prewar slave population. Since Norfolk lost a significant minority of its slave population during the war, this proportion is useful for setting an upper limit to how large (proportionately) losses to the British from other localities might have been, although it undercounts the number of runaways perhaps it is the lower limit of an upper range of slave population losses.

If the estimate of five thousand slaves lost by Virginia as a whole during the war is fairly accurate, then the size of Norfolk's losses takes on added significance. Assuming that both estimates are fairly close to the actual number of runaways, Norfolk's runaways comprised at least a fifth of all of Virginia's slave fugitives. This represents a major share of the state's losses and makes the study of the runaways' composition even more important. In addition, areas close to Norfolk saw many of their slaves flee to the British as well, particularly Princess

Anne and Nansemond counties and the Eastern Shore. Partial claims survive for 226 slaves from Nansemond County, but no material appears to have survived for the others. Since it was also regularly raided, it would not be surprising if Princess Anne's losses were similar in scale to Norfolk's. While it is more difficult to estimate the size of their losses than Norfolk's, it is certain that these areas together supplied a major portion, possibly a majority, of Virginia's total runaway population.

That a large percentage of Virginia's losses came from Norfolk and surrounding areas also indicates that slaves only fled to the British in large numbers when and where His Majesty's forces were within reach. Given the odds of being recaptured, this finding is hardly surprising. Even if slaves far from the front lines knew where British troops were, their chances of getting there in time to join them were slim. It is likely that the majority of Virginian slave fugitives who were not from Norfolk and neighboring counties were from the areas along the route taken by Cornwallis during his campaign through the state that ended at Yorktown.

At most only one third of Norfolk's escaped slaves left New York in 1783, indicating that the remainder probably died before the war ended. The most prevalent causes of premature death among the runaways were undoubtedly the epidemic diseases that ravaged their number throughout the war. Hundreds who joined Dunmore died during his operations in the Chesapeake, and more during Arnold's stay at Portsmouth years later. More probably met similar fates in the unsanitary conditions of camp life that they faced when they escaped to New

York. The majority of those who tried to gain their freedom with the British probably did not live to achieve their goal.

Examining Norfolk's damage claims and Carleton's register reveals that large numbers of women and children fled their masters during the war. Over a third of Norfolk's runaways were female and at least a quarter were children. Furthermore, hundreds of these slaves remained together and left New York as families in 1783. Before the war the overwhelming majority of slave fugitives were young, single males who sought to either leave the colony or reach another place within Virginia where they could possibly pass as free and seek a better life for themselves. Although many slaves who ran away before the war fled for short periods of time in order to visit relations, during the war whole families seized the opportunity to escape the system of slavery as a whole.

Once they reached British forces, slaves served the Crown as laborers, scouts, teamsters, spies, sailors, cooks, and soldiers. In their service to the British they discrimination from British troops and officers, hard labor, short rations, and unsanitary living conditions. The slaves of loyalists were rewarded for their efforts by being returned to their masters. For those who were the slaves of rebels, however, service was a route to freedom and escape with the British at the end of the war. Although they faced many new hardships in their migration to Canada along with white loyalists after the war, they no longer faced those difficulties as the property of others. In Nova Scotia they built a community that survives to the present day. Those who ultimately went to Sierra Leone found themselves enjoying, for a time at least, greater socioeconomic status and more political

rights than the life of a slave in Virginia could ever bring. For the few hundred survivors from Norfolk who reached freedom in Canada or Africa after the war, all of the trials and hardships of the war years could not keep them from achieving their own Revolutionary goal of freedom from slavery.

APPENDIX

SOURCES AND METHODS

One source used in this thesis was a transcription of the damage claims filed with the General Assembly by Norfolk's masters in 1782. In contrast to the files for other Virginia counties, the claims for Norfolk appear to be complete. Claims were filed by 155 owners for a total of 741 slaves. Each master's claims includes the number of slaves lost to the British, their value, and often includes more detailed information, including names, ages, sex, dates of departure, occupation and family information. The primary weakness of the damage claims is that they are not consistent. While some masters gave a good deal of information about their slaves, many gave none. Often the number of slaves lost and their collective value is the only information to appear.

A second source used was Graham Hodges' *Black Loyalist Directory*, a published version of the British record made of blacks leaving New York in 1783, commonly known as "Carleton's book of Negroes." Almost all of the more than 3,000 entries it contains provide the subjects' names, the names of their former masters and when they left them, their ages, genders, and occasionally family and descriptive information. Crucially, most entries also tell where the ex-slaves' were from. Three hundred fifteen of the people in the British register gave their previous residences as Norfolk, Portsmouth, or other places within the county. Although it is more consistent and usually more detailed than the damage claims, the chief limitation of the *Directory* in attempting to study Norfolk's slave

community is that it only includes those who made it to New York City and were able to leave with the British in 1783. In addition, not all of those from Norfolk who appear in the *Directory* appear in the damage claims. It is also possible that some may have changed their names or falsely identified their masters or where they were from, compounding the unreliability of the register. Except where specifically mentioned in the text, I have not counted children born after their parents reached British lines or spouses from areas other than Norfolk county among.

A third source, used along with the first two, was the compilation of Norfolk County tithable lists assembled by Elizabeth Wingo. Listing all white males and slaves over the age of sixteen, as well as a few female heads of households, the tithables provided the basis for an admittedly very rough estimate of Norfolk county's population in the Revolutionary years. In this case I used Harry Roy Merrens' method for estimating the population of North Carolina using tithables. Essentially, this is to multiply the number of white tithables by four, and the number of black tithables by two.¹ (see Table 4-1) I also attempted to check the names found in the damage claims and in the *Directory* against those in the county tithes. Whether or not a slave appears in the 1778 or 1780 lists can sometimes provide a clue as to when they might have left. In some cases slaves appearing in one or both also appeared in the tithes, confirming the claims of either the masters or their former slaves. Slaves were listed by first name only, and only by the household in which they were living at the time, which was not necessarily their owner's household. As a result, it was difficult to confirm

whether many slaves appearing in the claims or the *Directory* were the same ones listed as tithables. Since many slaves would not have been counted as tithables, or were not listed by name in the Damage Claims, only 298 of the slaves listed in Wingo's compilation appear in either the Claims or the *Directory*.

TABLE A-1
NORFOLK COUNTY SLAVES REPRESENTED IN SOURCES

<u>Sources</u>	<u>Number of Slaves</u>
Damage Claims:	741
Carleton's Book of Negroes:	315
Present in both (Duplicates):	59
Possible Duplicates:	35
Total (minus duplicates and half of possibles):	1013

Sources: Hodges. *Black Loyalist Directory*. Records of the
General Assembly...Losses Sustained from [the British]

Unfortunately, in most cases it was not possible to do this kind of double-checking. Because tithables include only those who were sixteen or older, they leave out children entirely. In addition, they count slaves by household. Slaves who may have been shifted to other holdings outside the county, or who may have been hired out to other masters (and consequently are listed under their temporary masters' households) are not counted. As a result, individual slaves often appear in one year in a particular household, but not the next. The nature of the war accounts for another major limitation of the county tithes: because of the destruction of Norfolk and the disruption of local government they stop in 1774

and do not resume until 1778. They are not conducted for 1779, resume in 1780 and then cease again for the last year of the war. The result is a huge gap in what these records can tell us about the war years.

All three sources suffer from similar problems. Many slaves and their masters do not appear at all, or appear in only the faintest detail. This lack of detail means that hundreds cannot be included in estimates of age, sex, occupations, dates of departure, or family relations. When making such estimates I have done so using only those for whom such information was available. Unfortunately there is no way to know what the true numbers were due to the limitations of the existing records. Therefore the estimates I have arrived at should be considered minimum figures. I have done the best I can to count those who did not completely slip through the cracks of history.

In addition, because many slaves and their masters do not appear in all three of these sources, the existence of most cannot be double-checked. This raises the possibility that slaves or masters may have provided false information for their own reasons. Since there is no way to compensate for this problem, I have operated on the assumption that the claims of both are true in the absence of any other evidence.

Another problem is that of duplication. Some of the slaves do appear in both the damage claims and in the British records. But given the vagueness of the claims it is often difficult to avoid counting subjects twice. I have been careful to avoid counting twice those who appear in both. In order to keep my estimates on the conservative side, in cases where the damage claims list only the number of

slaves lost while the *Directory* provides information about slaves owned by the same master I have not counted those who appear in Hodges towards the total number. I also counted slaves who appeared in both Hodges and the Claims only once. To account for those who were possible (but not certain) duplicates I made two counts of the total number of slaves. One included all possible duplicates while the second did not. I then used the two to arrive at an average figure that split the difference. Since the two totals were very close (with only a difference of thirty-five), any discrepancy with the total I have arrived at should be very small. I have not included children listed in Hodges who were born after entering British lines. Using this method, I have arrived at a rough estimate of 1013 slaves lost to the British over the course of the war.

Many entries give specific ages of slaves, many only use words like “wench,” “man,” “fellow,” or “child,” and some give no information at all. Discounting those that give no information, I have counted slaves whose specific ages are given. I have added to these totals using my best judgement based on the descriptive terms used. For example: “fellow,” “wench,” “aged,” “man” and “woman” are probably used to describe adults, while “child,” “boy,” and “girl” probably describe children (although there is plenty of room for question here). I have counted those over sixteen at the time of departure or those described using the terms listed above as adults and those under age sixteen or described as listed above as children.

The slave’s time of departure is indicated in about two thirds of all cases. In a few instances a specific date is provided. In the majority only a year is given.

In a number of cases the name of the British commander at the time of their departure (“Leslie” or “Matthew” for example) is listed, making it possible to know the year of departure. In the case of Lord Dunmore, this is more difficult, since his activities spanned 1775 and 1776. Accordingly, slaves leaving with Dunmore have been grouped together in Table 4-4, while others are listed by individual years.

In order to place the number of slaves lost by Norfolk in a broader context, I have used a figure of five thousand slaves lost by Virginia over the course of the war. This figure is derived from two estimates. The first is provided by Allan Kulikoff, who argues that between three and five thousand Virginian slaves fled to British lines. The second estimate is derived from population figures compiled by Philip Morgan. In *Slave Counterpoint*, Morgan provides estimates of the growth of the enslaved population in Virginia during the late eighteenth century. (See Table A-2) Assuming an average annual growth rate of 2.5% (based on the decadal growth rates), Virginia’s slave population should have stood at about 242,800 in 1782. Morgan estimates a population of 230,000 in 1782, however, showing a loss of 12,800 slaves. Not all of these slaves were lost to the British. Thousands of slaves migrated to Kentucky with their masters during the war years, accounting for some of the population loss. Because this would still put the total number of slaves lost to the British at well below ten thousand, I have decided to settle on the upper limit of Kulikoff’s estimate as the approximate number of Virginian slaves lost to the British during the war.² Although this

estimate is based on a good deal of speculation, it at least provides a benchmark to compare Norfolk's losses against.

TABLE A-2
SLAVE POPULATION OF VIRGINIA

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>
1770	180,500
(1775)	205,000
1780	224,000
(1782) Projected	242,800
(1782) Actual	230,000
1790	293,000

Source: Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 61. Figures and years in parentheses are based on Morgan's decadal estimates.

Despite all the limitations of these sources, it is not a futile exercise to attempt to build a social profile of slaves who left Norfolk with the British during the Revolution. Although the figures I have arrived at are largely a series of minimum numbers, they are a beginning. Those slaves who can be counted form at least a low estimate of the losses masters sustained. The demographic information compiled here could be compared to other areas if and where similar records exist. Since Norfolk probably suffered heavier losses than other parts of Virginia due to its repeated occupation, an estimate of the losses of slaves it sustained (even a minimal estimate) could serve as an upper limit for other Virginia counties. In this way, I hope to make a small contribution to the contentious debate over the size of the African-American exodus during the war years.

Notes for Appendix

¹ Harry Roy Merrens. *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth-Century: A Study in Historical Geography*. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 196.

² Kulikoff. *Tobacco and Slaves*, 418. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 61.

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