

2014 Harmon Memorial Lecture

**“Abandoned to the Arts & Arms of the Enemy”:
Placing the 1781 Virginia Campaign in Its Racial and
Political Context**

by

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On October 25, 1781 – just six days after Gen. George Washington attained the apex of his military career by forcing the surrender of a British army at Yorktown, Virginia – he issued an order to his troops that has been scrupulously ignored by historians of the American Revolution. Washington directed his officers and “persons of every denomination concerned” to apprehend the “many Negroes and Mulattoes” found in and around Yorktown and consign them to guard posts on either side of the York River. There free blacks would be separated from runaway slaves who had sought freedom with the British, and steps taken to return the latter to their masters. In other words, Washington chose the moment he achieved the victory that guaranteed American independence to convert his faithful Continentals into an army of slave catchers.¹

This is not the way Americans like to remember Yorktown. We prefer the vision President Ronald Reagan expressed during the festivities marking the bicentennial of that celebrated turning point thirty-three years ago. Reagan described Yorktown to a crowd of 60,000 as “a victory for the right of self-determination. It was and is the affirmation that freedom will eventually triumph over tyranny.” While white patriots of Washington’s day would have embraced Reagan’s message, most African Americans – who comprised one fifth of the young republic’s population in 1781 – would have seen Yorktown’s true legacy as the preservation of slavery. And we know that slavery would become the cancer that nearly destroyed the experiment in federated self-government created by Washington and the other Founders.²

Most Americans consume their history in the form of feel-good myths calculated to reinforce pride in their country and, if they wear a uniform, in their respective military branch.

While there is nothing wrong with patriotism and *esprit de corps*, history's true purpose is to help us understand the world as it is, complete with uncomfortable truths, and not justify cherished assumptions. As future leaders of the most powerful component in the world's mightiest military, it is essential that you view the past and the present with eyes unclouded by ideological bias. Our political leadership will rely on you for realistic strategic assessments, and the airmen you lead will look to you for orders that are appropriate to the tactical situations and cultural environments that exist wherever they are deployed.³

Feel-good history is especially rife among accounts of the American Revolution because it functions as our country's founding myth. As far as the Yorktown Campaign goes, American scholars focus so much on lauding Washington's brilliant generalship that they miss how close the British came to subduing Virginia.⁴ They also ignore the dark side to Washington's triumph, which crushed the hopes for freedom entertained by so many Virginia blacks.

One reason why the British lost the Revolutionary War is that they took too long to fathom the nature of that conflict. George III and his advisers initially regarded the rebellion as a plot hatched by unprincipled demagogues who deluded the riffraff of the Thirteen Colonies into overthrowing lawful government. The British sincerely believed that most decent Americans remained loyal to their king. A stern show of force would discredit Rebel leaders and frighten their fickle followers into submitting to royal rule.⁵ Mindful that unrestrained barbarism could cost the crown potential supporters, British commanders tried to restrain the levels of violence that they unleashed on their American cousins.⁶

The British set the basic pattern of the War of Independence during the 1776 campaign in New York and New Jersey. Gen. William Howe decided to draw George Washington's nascent Continental Army into battle by seizing New York City, a major port. Howe deftly defeated

Washington, occupied New York, established a network of outlying outposts – and then waited for the Rebel cause to fall apart. He waited in vain. Washington's beaten forces simply retired beyond easy reach, rebuilt their ranks, and then took positions that threatened the enemy's smaller and more isolated outposts with sudden capture. At the same time, inflamed local militia harassed British garrisons and foraging parties, giving the occupiers no rest. Forced to concentrate to avoid defeat in detail, the British ended up living under virtual siege in a few major towns.⁷

With the Rebels controlling most of the countryside, Loyalists could not rise in decisive numbers. Any Tory who openly declared for the king risked losing his property, imprisonment, and possibly death. Rather than brave such perils, many Loyalists adopted a wait-and-see attitude. If the king's regulars were victorious, loyal subjects would lose nothing by their silence while the issue hung in the balance. Without American help, however, the British did not have enough boots on the ground to occupy much territory. It was a no-win situation.⁸

To break the stalemate that came to characterize the American War, royal commanders seized more cities, which only gained them additional worthless real estate. When a British army tried to divide the colonies by marching down the Hudson in 1777, it met with defeat and surrender at Saratoga. That stunning reverse brought France into the war on the side of the United States, and Spain and the Netherlands soon followed suit. Britain now faced a world war, forcing it to redeploy its limited resources as it struggled to hold a far-flung empire.⁹

Assured that vast numbers of Loyalists inhabited the South, the British shifted their operations to Georgia and the Carolinas. In May 1780, Gen. Sir Henry Clinton, the Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty's Forces in North America, captured Charleston, South Carolina, and more than 6,000 Patriot troops cornered in the doomed port.¹⁰

Clinton soon returned to his main base at New York City, leaving Lt. Gen. Charles, Second Earl Cornwallis, and 8,000 regulars to establish British rule in the Carolinas. Cornwallis was a robust forty-one years of age when he assumed this important command. He carried himself with an easy self-assurance that sprang from an aristocratic background and twenty-three years of military experience. The earl had been fighting the American Rebels since 1776, and he enjoyed a reputation as one of the king's ablest and most aggressive generals.¹¹

At first, Cornwallis' mission in the Carolinas seemed easy. The elimination of an entire Continental army at Charleston left local Patriots demoralized and vulnerable. As the British advanced inland, the Rebels either fled or switched their allegiance to the crown. Magnanimous in victory, Cornwallis permitted them to take an oath of loyalty and join his Loyalist militia.¹²

Then in the summer of 1780, the Continental Congress sent a new Rebel army to reclaim South Carolina. Though badly outnumbered, Cornwallis crushed this threat at the Battle of Camden, August 16, 1780, but this triumph left a bittersweet taste. At the approach of the Continental troops, South Carolina's supposedly repentant Rebels turned on the British. Whole units of "loyal" militia took the arms and equipment drawn from royal magazines and defected to the guerrilla bands massing in the swamps outside Charleston.¹³

Later in the year, Cornwallis confronted a second American army under Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene, Washington's favorite lieutenant. Keeping just beyond reach, the wily Greene goaded Cornwallis into conducting a ruinous mid-winter pursuit across barren North Carolina.¹⁴ Greene led the earl on a grueling chase for nearly two months, finally turning to fight at Guilford Court House on March 15, 1781. Greene's forces outnumbered the British two-to-one, but Cornwallis put his trust in the prowess of the British regular, and he prevailed once more. Nevertheless, he failed to destroy Greene's army while coming uncomfortably close to

destroying his own. More than a quarter of the 1,900 Redcoats, Hessians, and Loyalists that entered the fray fell killed or wounded. The strains of the campaign sickened another 436 of Cornwallis' troops, leaving them unfit for duty.¹⁵

Before Cornwallis' ailing army could recover, Greene marched on South Carolina. This time, however, Cornwallis did not oblige Greene with another game of cat and mouse. Years of hard campaigning in America had finally exposed the flaws in Britain's fundamental strategy. For the rest of that spring and well into the summer – before Cornwallis received orders to entrench at Yorktown – he would experiment with a new approach for subduing the Rebels.¹⁶

Cornwallis' most significant realization was that most Southern Loyalists could not be trusted. "Our experience has shown that their numbers are not so great as has been represented," he wrote from North Carolina, "and that their friendship was only passive."¹⁷ The crown's American supporters made big promises, but they usually deserted the royal cause at the first sign of trouble.¹⁸ When Cornwallis considered the few Southern Tories who joined his reduced force, he described them as "so timid and so stupid that I can get no intelligence."¹⁹

As for the troublesome Greene, the earl had decided that there were less expensive ways to deal with Rebel armies than attacking them directly. Cornwallis would attempt to counter the threat to the Carolinas by striking at Virginia, the American general's logistical base.²⁰

Virginia was the largest, most populous, and richest of the rebellious colonies, its tobacco essential to the survival of America's staggering economy. With Charleston in British hands, Virginia became the mainstay of the Rebel war effort in the South. It provided the men and materiel Greene needed to keep his army in the field. If Virginia could be knocked out of the war, perhaps the whole Rebel confederation might collapse.²¹ These considerations prompted Cornwallis to write on April 18, 1781:

If therefore it should appear to be the interest of Great Britain to maintain what she already possesses, and to push the war in the Southern provinces, I take the liberty of giving it as my opinion, that a serious attempt upon Virginia would be the most solid plan, because successful operations might not only be attended with important consequences there, but would tend to the security of South Carolina, and ultimately to the submission of North Carolina.²²

Virginia seemed to invite invasion in 1781. Six years of war had left its people weary and sick of sacrifice. Almost all their Continental regiments had been captured at Charleston, which left only a few half-trained regulars to defend the state. In addition, large drafts of the Virginia militia had trekked far from home to fight under Greene. Those who survived the arduous campaigns in the Carolinas harbored no desire to face Cornwallis' Redcoats again.²³

Nature alone favored the earl's designs. Chesapeake Bay, with its network of great tidal rivers and other navigable streams provided the watery highway responsible for Virginia's prosperity. The Chesapeake also offered the British a ready-made invasion route, with a twisting, 8,000-mile shoreline impossible to defend. As long as the Royal Navy ruled the waves, there was hardly anything of importance in Virginia east of the Blue Ridge Mountains that could not be flattened by British broadsides or menaced by landing parties.²⁴ As Cornwallis astutely observed: "The rivers in Virginia are advantageous to an invading army."²⁵

With these facts in mind, Lord Cornwallis marched north for the Old Dominion on April 25, 1781. By May 20, he had reached Petersburg, near the center of Virginia, where he rendezvoused with a small British army commanded by Brig. Gen. Benedict Arnold. Arnold, the

notorious American traitor, had opened operations in Virginia by raiding up the James River in January 1781, and his quick capture of Richmond demonstrated the Old Dominion's vulnerability to amphibious operations. Maj. Gen. William Phillips joined Arnold a few months later with 2,000 reinforcements, and assumed command of the combined force, only to die of typhoid fever at Petersburg a week before Cornwallis' arrival. After Cornwallis absorbed Arnold's expedition, he had 8,000 seasoned regulars at his disposal, and he proceeded to subject Virginia to the ravages of war.²⁶ Two weeks after this junction, Virginian George Mason, a gentleman lawyer and a leading Virginia Rebel, voiced his despair:

Our Affairs have been, for some time, growing from bad to worse. The Enemy's Fleet commands our Rivers, & puts it in their Powr to remove their Troops from place to place, when and where they please without Opposition; so that we no sooner collect a Force sufficient to counteract them in one Part of the Country, but they shift to another, ravaging, plundering, and destroying everything before them. . . . The Enemy's capital Object, at this time, seems to be Virginia.²⁷

For the next four months, Cornwallis terrorized Virginia Patriots with a new brand of war. He replaced the mistaken assumptions that had hobbled the king's forces for the past six years with a simple but brutal strategy that shook Virginia's political foundations. Less than a month after Cornwallis entered the Old Dominion, Richard Henry Lee, who had helped lead Americans to espouse independence in 1776, sounded like a defeatist: "We shall receive all the injury before aid is sent to us – What will become of these . . . parts heaven knows – We are in the power of the enemy." To that gloomy assessment, Lee added: "Cornwallis is the Scourge – &

a severe one he is – The doings of more than a year in the South are undoing very fast, whilst they rush to throw ruin into the other parts.”²⁸

Cornwallis broke most dramatically with the past by ceasing to bank on Loyalist aid. He no longer wasted his time courting unreliable allies. All he asked of white Virginians claiming fidelity to George III was that they keep out of his way.²⁹

Unlike other British commanders, Cornwallis kept his army on the move almost constantly. He did not just take cities and sit in them. “From the experience I have had,” the earl reflected, “and the dangers I have undergone, one maxim appears to me to be absolutely necessary for the safe and honourable conduct of this war, which is – that we should have as few posts as possible, and that wherever the King’s troops are, they should be in respectable force.”³⁰ Cornwallis kept the Rebels off balance, with swift, frequent marches – bewildering his foes by moving at night and making them feel they possessed few safe places to rally or stockpile arms.³¹

Cornwallis also ensured Virginia’s civilians paid for their rebellious sympathies by exposing them to the horrors of war. If Virginians wanted to defy royal authority, they would not go unpunished. Cornwallis set his far-ranging army to destroying anything useful to the Patriot war effort – including private property. The following order, which the earl issued to his cavalry, typified this strategy:

All public stores of corn and provisions are to be burnt, and if there should be a quantity of provisions or corn collected at a private house, I would have you destroy it. . . . As there is the greatest reason to apprehend that such provisions will be ultimately appropriated by the enemy to the use of General Greene’s army,

which, . . . must depend on this province for its supplies.³²

Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton, the commander of Cornwallis' cavalry, believed that "to strike terror into the inhabitants" of Rebel districts was a "point of duty." He boasted that he would "carry the sword and fire through the Land." Everywhere Cornwallis' soldiers went, they promised to retaliate against the homes and persons of any Virginians in arms against the king. The property of those who figured prominently in the rebellion suffered thorough destruction.³³ This was how Thomas Jefferson, then Virginia's governor, described what Cornwallis did to his estate at Elkhill:

He destroyed all my growing crops of corn and tobacco, he burned all my barns containing the same articles of the last year, having first taken what corn he wanted, he used . . . all my stocks of cattle, sheep and hogs for the sustenance of his army, and carried off all the horses capable of service: of those too young for service he cut the throats, and he burnt all the fences on the plantation so as to leave it an absolute waste.³⁴

While threatening Virginia Rebels with instant impoverishment, Cornwallis insulated his troops from the worst effects of guerrilla warfare by increasing their mobility. The earl's command was well suited for a war of swift maneuver. According to Sir Henry Clinton, "the chief part" of the royal troops in Virginia comprised "the elite of my army." Most of Cornwallis' British regiments had been campaigning in North America since 1775 and 1776. Unremitting drill and extensive combat experience left these regulars equally adept at the formal European

tactics of the day and the open-order woodland skirmishing favored by Rebel irregulars. Among the most valuable units serving with Cornwallis were two green-coated Loyalist corps, the British Legion and the Queen's Rangers. The Legion's light dragoons followed a ruthless young Englishman named Banastre Tarleton, arguably the most talented cavalryman of the war. As for the Queen's Rangers, 40 percent of its personnel were horse soldiers – hussars and light dragoons – while the rest were superbly conditioned light infantry. The Queen's Rangers served under another energetic young English officer, Lt. Col. John Graves Simcoe. An avid practitioner of partisan warfare, Simcoe excelled at ambushing his adversaries.³⁵

By combining the cavalry from the British Legion and the Queen's Rangers, Cornwallis could count on the services of roughly 500 hussars and light dragoons – the largest number of horsemen ever assembled by the British during the war in the South. The size of the earl's cavalry had a particularly intimidating effect on the Virginia militia.³⁶ As the Marquis de Lafayette, the young French general commanding the Continental forces charged with Virginia's defense, complained to George Washington:

Was I to fight a battle I'll be cut to pieces, the militia dispersed, and the arms lost.
Was I to decline fighting the country would think herself given up. I am therefore determined to scarmish, but not to engage too far, and particularly to take care against their immense and excellent body of horse whom the militia fears like they would so many beasts.³⁷

Even as Lafayette wrote those words, however, Cornwallis took steps that prevented the Rebels from impeding the progress of British forces in Virginia. Since the late seventeenth

century, the favorite hobbies of Virginia's gentry were breeding and racing fine horses. Nearly every plantation contained a stable full of thoroughbreds. When Cornwallis invaded Virginia, he seized these spirited chargers for his own use. With this inexhaustible supply of remounts, the earl's 500 light dragoons and hussars could travel thirty to seventy miles a day, which greatly increased the range and unsettling impact of their raids. Cornwallis also put 700 to 800 of his infantrymen on horseback, more than doubling his mounted strength.³⁸ On June 4, 1781, a worried Richard Henry Lee told his brother, "The fine horses on the James river have furnished them with a numerous and powerful Cavalry."³⁹

In this way, Cornwallis created a British army that could outrun its Rebel opponents for the first time in the American Revolution. Lafayette possessed only 4,500 frightened troops, many of them untrained, to counter Cornwallis' movements. That figure included no more than 300 cavalry. To avoid encirclement or surprise by the earl's larger and faster army, Lafayette kept at least twenty to thirty miles away from the British. At that distance, he could neither oppose nor harass the Redcoats.⁴⁰ "The British have so many Dragoons," Lafayette informed Governor Jefferson, "that it becomes impossible to stop or reconnoitre their movements."⁴¹

All through the spring and summer of 1781, Cornwallis found himself free to go where he wanted. He could ravage the Old Dominion unchecked by Lafayette. "The fact is," Richard Henry Lee related, "the enemy by a quick collection of their force, & by rapid movements, are now in the center of Virginia, with an army of regular infantry greater than that of the compounded regulars and militia commanded by the Marquis [de Lafayette] & with 5 or 600 excellent cavalry. . . . This Country is, in the moment of its greatest danger . . . abandoned to the Arts & Arms of the Enemy."⁴²

Although Cornwallis sought to subdue Virginia by shaking its civilian population, he did

not allow his army to degenerate into a mob of freebooters. His war on private property proceeded under strict supervision. From Cole's Plantation, the earl admonished his army on June 5, 1781: "All private foraging is again For bid, and the out posts are not to Suffer any foraging party to pass without a Commissioned Officer." Six days earlier, the commander of the 43rd Regiment of Foot announced: "Any Soldier absent from Camp without leave in writing from the Officer Commanding his Company will be punished as a Maroader."⁴³

Those soldiers defying the earl's efforts to maintain discipline risked prompt and merciless punishment. On June 2, Lieutenant Colonel Simcoe informed Cornwallis that two light dragoon privates from the Queen's Rangers had raped and robbed a woman named Jane Dickinson. An inquiry confirmed the two Loyalists' guilt, and the earl had them executed the following day. Four days later, Cornwallis required a field officer and a captain from each of his brigades, along with a junior officer and twenty men from each regiment, to witness the evening execution of a deserter from the Royal Welch Fusiliers and two others from the 76th Highland Regiment.⁴⁴

Despite these gestures, Cornwallis unnerved white Virginians by liberating their black slaves. Virginia's 200,000 bondmen made up 40 percent of the state's population. Had Cornwallis been permitted to follow his own instincts, these exploited masses might have tipped the balance in favor of his attempted conquest of the Old Dominion.⁴⁵

Today's U.S. history textbooks take care to mention those African Americans who supported the Patriot cause. As Ellen Gibson Wilson has pointed out, however, "There has been some reluctance to face the implications of the fact that the overwhelming majority of blacks who acted from choice were pro-British." Historian David Waldstreicher put it more objectively when he said: "One of the less-well-known facts about the Revolutionary War is that African

Americans fought on both sides, primarily with their own freedom in mind.”⁴⁶ Many African Americans harbored no loyalty to a movement that promised life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness solely to white adult males. Of the 500,000 blacks who inhabited the Thirteen Colonies during the War of Independence, as many as 80,000 to 100,000 flocked to the King’s forces.⁴⁷ Rev. Henry Muhlenburg, a Lutheran minister who worked near Philadelphia, confided to his diary, that blacks “secretly wished that the British army might win, for then all Negro slaves will gain their freedom.”⁴⁸

The British did offer freedom of sorts to slaves who reached royal lines – provided the fugitives’ owners were Rebels. That caveat was forgotten, however, as the news worked its way through the slave grapevine. Most blacks came to equate the sight of a soldier in a red coat with liberty.⁴⁹ This became most evident to the British when they invaded the South, where the overwhelming number of slaves resided.⁵⁰ Colonel Tarleton reported “that all the negroes, men, women, and children, upon the approach of any detachment of the King’s troops, thought themselves absolved from all respect to their American masters, and entirely released from servitude: Influenced by this idea, they quitted the plantations, and followed the army.”⁵¹

As long as the British sought to win the allegiance of white Americans, they discouraged this black exodus. The Redcoats even returned runaways to masters who were reputedly loyal or neutral. By the time Cornwallis entered Virginia, however, he no longer worried about the feelings of colonial slave owners, and he permitted black runaways to tag along with his soldiers.⁵²

The response of Virginia’s blacks astounded both the Patriots and the British. “The damage sustained by individuals on this occasion is inconceivable,” testified Dr. Robert Honyman, a physician in Hanover County, “especially in Negroes; the infatuation of these poor

creatures was amazing: they flocked to the Enemy from all quarters, even from very remote parts. . . . Many Gentlemen lost 30, 40, 50, 60 or 70 Negroes beside their stocks of Cattle, Sheep & Horses. Some plantations were entirely cleared, & not a single Negro remained. Several endeavoured to bring their Negroes up the Country & some succeeded; but from others the slaves went off by the way & went to the Enemy.”⁵³ “Your neighbors Col. Taliaferro & Col. Travis lost every slave they had in the world,” Richard Henry Lee informed his brother William, “and Mr. Paradise has lost all his but one – This has been the genrl case of all those who were near the enemy.”⁵⁴ Other prominent Virginians told similar stories.⁵⁵

Cornwallis’ soldiers actively encouraged Virginia slaves to follow them. Dr. Honyman, who refused to flee his home at the earl’s approach, observed the enemy’s recruitment practices. “Where ever they had an opportunity,” Honyman confided to his journal, “the soldiers & inferior officers . . . enticed & flattered the Negroes, & prevailed on vast numbers to go along with them, but did not compel any.” Capt. Johann Ewald, the commander of a crack Hessian jäger detachment with Cornwallis, explained his comrades’ sudden passion for liberating slaves: “These people were given their freedom by the army because it was actually thought this would punish the rich, rebellious-minded inhabitants of . . . Virginia.” Richard Henry Lee charged that “force, fraud, intrigue, theft, have all in turn been employed to delude these unhappy people [the slaves], and defraud their masters!” Despite such anguished assertions, there is abundant evidence that those slaves who joined the British did so freely.⁵⁶

By the middle of June 1781, thousands of runaway slaves were with Cornwallis’ army.”⁵⁷ How all this appeared to the British can be glimpsed from Captain Ewald’s diary:

Every officer had four to six horses and three or four Negroes, as well as

one or two Negresses for cook and maid. Every soldier's woman was mounted and also had a Negro and Negress on horseback for her servants. Each squad had one or two horses and Negroes, and every non-commissioned officer had two horses and one Negro.

Yes, indeed, I can testify that every soldier had his Negro, who carried his provisions and bundles. This multitude always hunted at a gallop, and behind the baggage followed well over four thousand Negroes of both sexes and all ages. Any place this horde approached was eaten clean, like an acre invaded by a swarm of locusts.⁵⁸

Virginia's fugitive slaves did more than serve the earl's soldiers as porters and body servants. The blacks also contributed substantially to Cornwallis' new style of warfare.

By encouraging slaves to leave their masters, Cornwallis threatened Virginia with economic ruin. Slaves represented the currency whereby the Tidewater planters calculated their wealth. Slaves also provided the cheap labor undergirding the Old Dominion's agrarian prosperity. Thus Cornwallis robbed Virginia of the very means of production required to replace the vital resources his troops destroyed.⁵⁹

The addition of thousands of African Americans to the British forces vastly augmented Cornwallis' ability to ravage the countryside. Dr. Honyman of Hanover County composed this vivid picture of one of Cornwallis' abandoned campsites:

The day after the Enemy left Mrs. Nicholas's [plantation] I went over to her house, where I saw the devastation caused by the Enemy's encamping there. .

. . The fences [were] pulled down & much of them burnt; Many cattle, hogs, sheep & poultry of all sorts killed; 150 barrels of corn eat up or wasted; & the offal of the cattle &c. with dead horses and pieces of flesh all in a putrefying state scattered over the plantation.⁶⁰

Virginia's fugitive slaves also advanced Cornwallis' campaign in other ways. Runaways sometimes acted as spies and guides for the British. The blacks frequently showed their new friends where fleeing masters had hidden their valuables and livestock.⁶¹ In fact, the African Americans delivered so many horses to Cornwallis that Lafayette exclaimed, "Nothing but a treaty of alliance with the negroes can find out dragoon horses, and it is by those means the enemy have got a formidable cavalry."⁶² At other times, the blacks provided manual labor for the British army. As one Virginian put it, the fugitives "ease the soldiery of the labourer's work." A corps of "Negro Pioneers" or military laborers originally formed by General Phillips buried the offal from butchered cattle after Cornwallis' troops received issues of fresh meat, thus eliminating a nauseating stench and also a health hazard. The black pioneers and officers' servants pulled double duty as stevedores whenever Cornwallis used ships to transport soldiers, equipment, and supplies. The extensive earthworks the British erected first at Portsmouth and then at Yorktown were built largely by black muscle. Maj. Alexander Ross, Cornwallis' aide-de-camp, testified to the value of this labor force when he explained that "our rule . . . on that subject" is "to give up those [blacks] that are willing to return & not be conveniently spared from the Publick Service." Finally, the defection of so many slaves spread the fear of servile revolt – the white South's most dreaded nightmare – throughout Virginia.⁶³

Although Cornwallis benefited from the specter of black rebellion, he did not intend to

unleash a racial reign of terror. The earl posted numerous regulations aimed at ensuring orderly conduct among slaves seeking his protection. To restore his army's proper military appearance and free his columns of unnecessary encumbrances, Cornwallis restricted the number of horses and blacks employed by his officers.⁶⁴ To distinguish African Americans authorized to accompany the army's different units from those who were not, Cornwallis decreed on May 21, 1781: "The number or names of Corps to be marked in a Conspicuous manner on the Jacket of each negro." A week later, the earl announced, "All Negros who are not marked agreeable to the Orders repeated at Petersburg will be taken up and sent away from the Army."⁶⁵

Cornwallis' headquarters frequently reminded unit commanders to purge their ranks of surplus horses and blacks.⁶⁶ Some of Cornwallis' officers, sharing his sense of military decorum, conscientiously enforced their commander's orders. On June 4, Maj. George Hewett, the commander of the 43rd Regiment of Foot, warned his non-commissioned officers and privates: "Any Man found Guilty of sending the Negroes of the Regiment plundering or Maroding the smallest Article from the Houses of the Inhabitants will be severely punished."⁶⁷ Cornwallis kept his black camp followers under control and prevented their eroding his troops' discipline and the army's ability to respond to threats.⁶⁸

Although military expedience governed the earl's treatment of Virginia's slaves, he did betray a glimmer of sympathy for the runaways. In late July 1781, Thomas Nelson, Virginia's newly installed governor, sent Cornwallis a curious letter. "The frequent Applications that are made to me by the Citizens of this Commonwealth," Nelson wrote, "to grant Flags for the Recovery of their Negroes & other Property, taken by the Troops under your Command, induce me to address your Lordship for Information, whether Restitution will be made at all, what Species of Property will be restored, & who may expect to be the Object of such an

Indulgence.”⁶⁹

The earl replied with a *de facto* emancipation proclamation:

No Negroes have been taken by the British Troops by my orders nor to my knowledge, but great numbers have come to us from different parts of the Country. Being desirous to grant any indulgence to individuals that I think consistent with my public duty, Any proprietor not in Arms against us, or holding an Office of trust under the Authority of Congress and willing to give his parole that he will not in future act against His Majesty’s interest, will be indulged with permission to search the Camp for his Negroes & take them if they are willing to go with him.⁷⁰

By the summer of 1781, Lord Cornwallis’ new strategy of conquest bore a strong resemblance to the hard war policies that another invading army would adopt to pacify the American South eight decades later. Cornwallis essentially taught the Old Dominion the same lessons that Major Generals William Tecumseh Sherman and Philip Henry Sheridan would administer to the Confederacy during the Civil War.⁷¹

Cornwallis’ version of hard war was steadily forcing Virginia to its knees. The startling mobility of the earl’s army denied local Continental forces the opportunity to engage in either conventional or guerrilla warfare. Cornwallis’ policy of property despoliation also neutralized Virginia’s last remaining line of defense, the militia. The strength and speed of British forces terrified Virginia’s citizen soldiers. Militiamen grew reluctant to take up arms lest they provoke

the Redcoats into destroying their homes.⁷² They also hesitated to leave their families alone with their slaves. As Edmund Randolph, a Virginia congressman, explained: “The helpless wives and children were at the mercy not only of the males among the slaves but of the very women, who could handle deadly weapons; and those could not have been left in safety in the absence of all authority of the masters and union among the neighbors.”⁷³

At this critical juncture, the swiftness of Cornwallis’ movements made it impossible for Virginia’s state government to function. On June 3, 1781, British cavalry and mounted infantry raided the Virginia Assembly at Charlottesville, capturing seven legislators and forcing Governor Jefferson and the rest of the assemblymen to scatter for safety. In addition to Jefferson, many other well-known Virginians, such as Richard Henry Lee, Edmund Pendleton, and George Mason, fled before the Redcoats, depriving the Patriot cause of some of its best political leadership.⁷⁴

Denied relief by an impotent state government, the Continental Congress, or America’s French allies, Virginians began to consider making a separate peace with Great Britain. The inhabitants of Norfolk, Princess Anne, and Nancemond counties placed themselves under British protection. The men of Montgomery, Bedford, and Prince Edward counties ignored summons for militia duty. When state officials tried to raise the militia in Accomack, Northampton, and Lancaster counties, they encountered opposition from armed mobs. Farmers living around the British base at Portsmouth started trading with the enemy, sometimes bringing the Redcoats military intelligence.⁷⁵ Defeatist sentiment reached such dangerous levels that Richard Henry Lee recommended that General Washington return to Virginia with his troops and assume dictatorial powers until the crisis passed.⁷⁶

Fortunately for the Rebels, British efforts to interdict General Greene’s Virginia lifeline

were short-lived. Interference from above brought a premature close to Cornwallis' campaign to knock the state out of the war. Cornwallis had entered Virginia without prior permission from his immediate superior, Sir Henry Clinton, who damned that move as "a measure . . . determined upon without my approbation, and very contrary to my wishes and intentions." Clinton faulted Cornwallis for exposing the Carolinas and Georgia to recapture by Greene. The British commander-in-chief also still clung to his faith in the Loyalists. He toyed with recalling a large number of British troops from the Chesapeake and using them instead to inspire an uprising in Maryland, Delaware, or southeastern Pennsylvania. Fear of a possible Franco-American siege of New York also made Clinton contemplate concentrating his forces there. At the same time, personal insecurity affected Clinton's strategic thinking. Despite the heavy losses the earl suffered at Guilford Court House, his aggressive efforts to crush the rebellion contrasted sharply with Clinton's relative inactivity at New York. Fearful that the earl's success might precipitate his own removal, Clinton brought an end to Virginia's agony. In the middle of the summer, he ordered Cornwallis to retire to the coast, set up a naval base, and send 2,000 troops back to New York. An exasperated Cornwallis began entrenching at Yorktown on August 2, 1781.⁷⁷

Now fate turned against the British. At the end of August, a French fleet appeared off Chesapeake Bay, denying Cornwallis access to the sea. Seizing this opportunity, Washington pulled out of his lines around New York and slipped down to Virginia with a strong Franco-American army. By September 28, 1781, Cornwallis and his 6,000 weary regulars found themselves besieged by nearly 17,000 Americans and Frenchmen.⁷⁸

Cornwallis knew he was in a tight spot. Although he sympathized with the black runaways under his protection, he was the king's servant first. Hoping to stretch his army's provisions until Clinton arrived with a relief expedition, the earl ordered all but 2,000 of the

slaves sheltering at Yorktown expelled from British lines. Besides being terrified at the thought of returning to their vengeful masters, many of the cast-off blacks were seriously ill. They had contracted smallpox in the earl's camps. Dogged by despair and weakened by disease, hundreds of runaways simply lay down in the no-man's-land between the opposing trenches, where they died of exposure, illness, and starvation. The remainder took shelter in the woods around Yorktown. Many did not live long enough to witness Cornwallis' surrender on October 19, 1781. Of those who survived, some were recaptured and others returned voluntarily to their old homes, where they communicated smallpox to slaves who had lacked the desire or courage to run away.⁷⁹ The full extent of the damage that this smallpox epidemic did to Virginia's black population has yet to be calculated.⁸⁰

For African Americans, the British invasions of Virginia in 1781 set off a surge of hope that ended in tragedy. The Old Dominion had undergone the most notable slave uprising to occur in the United States prior to the Civil War.⁸¹ At the Yorktown bicentennial observances in 1981, the visiting French president, François Mitterrand, paid those desperate fugitives an unintended tribute when he said, "Everywhere one finds the same desire for independence, the same need for dignity."⁸² The African Americans who flocked to Cornwallis registered their hatred for chattel slavery and their desire for liberty – a desire so great they willingly braved the dangers of war to realize it. For an all too brief moment, they found freedom under the shelter of a major power whose interests coincided with their own. When the war turned against the British, however, they ended up abandoning their black allies. It could be argued that the United States did something similar in Iraq by withdrawing its forces from that country before the system of free government it had promised could be perfected.

ENDNOTES

¹ George Washington, “After Orders,” 25 October 1781, Letterbook 6, 67-69, Varick Transcripts, George Washington Papers, Series 3g, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. See also George Fleming, “Orderly Book, Second Regiment of Continental Artillery, 1 October 1781-26 April 1782,” 25 October 1781, MS 2003.12, Special Collections, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Research Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia.

² *Virginian Pilot* (Norfolk), 20 October 1981; *Time*, 2 November 1981, 31.

³ The Right Reverend and Right Honorable Richard Chartres, the Lord Bishop of London, expressed these sentiments quite well in the sermon he delivered marking the seventieth anniversary of the destruction of the Guards’ Chapel at Wellington Barracks, London, by a German V1 flying bomb on June 18, 1944: “We cannot change the past, but we are responsible for how we remember it. Memory is more than lifting down a file from a shelf to recall a past event. Memory is a creative and responsible art which involves highlighting certain aspects of the past and identifying significant resonances. Memory informs our attitudes in the present and opens up or closes down possibilities for the future.” Right Reverend and Right Honorable Richard Chartres, Lord Bishop of London, “Guards Chapel. 22-vi-2014,” 1-2 (copy in author’s possession). The author thanks Bishop Chartres and the latter’s personal secretary and assistant, Janet Laws, for sending him a copy of this sermon.

⁴ Among the many triumphalist histories of the Yorktown Campaign are Henry P.

Johnston, *The Yorktown Campaign and the Surrender of Cornwallis 1781* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1881); Thomas J. Fleming, *Beat the Last Drum: The Siege of Yorktown, 1781* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1963); Burke Davis, *The Campaign that Won America: The Story of Yorktown* (New York: Dial Press, 1970); Joseph P. Cullen, *Victory at Yorktown* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1976); William H. Hallahan, *The Day the Revolution Ended: 19 October 1781* (New York: Wiley, 2004); Benton Rain Patterson, *Washington and Cornwallis: The Battle for America, 1775-1783* (Lanham, Maryland: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2004); Richard M. Ketchum, *Victory at Yorktown: The Campaign That Won the Revolution* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2004). A relatively recent drum-and-bugle account of the campaign with more of a British perspective is Brendan Morrissey, *Yorktown 1781: The World Turned Upside Down* (London: Osprey, 1997). The latest and most scholarly treatment of this subject is Jerome A. Greene, *The Guns of Independence: The Siege of Yorktown* (New York: Savas Beatie, 2005). Unfortunately, Greene is unable to fully free himself of the triumphalist tendencies that influenced the work of his predecessors.

⁵ Piers Macksey, *The War for America 1775-1783* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 12-61; Ira D. Gruber, *The Howe Brothers and the American Revolution* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 3-88; Paul H. Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats: A Study in British Revolutionary Policy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 10-42; Troyer Steele Anderson, *The Command of the Howe Brothers during the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), 10-42; John Richard Alden, *General Gage in America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1948), 151-91, 205-50, 287-98; Marshall Smelser, *The Winning of Independence* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972), 58-117.

⁶ John Richard Alden, *A History of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 141-225; Frederick Mackenzie, *Diary of Frederick Mackenzie*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930; reprint ed., New York: New York Times & Arno Press, 1969), 2: 525-26; John Shy, *A People Numerous & Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 202-22; *Collections of the New-York Historical Society*, Vols. 16-17: *The Stephen Kemble Papers, 1773-1789* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1883-84), 16: 97-99, 263-64, 269-70, 287.

⁷ David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 66-360; John W. Jackson, *With the British Army in Philadelphia 1777-1778* (San Rafael, California: Presidio Press, 1979), 1-52, 81-106; Alden, *American Revolution*, 262-327; Gruber, *Howe Brothers*, 389-93, 397-400; Mackenzie, *Diary*, 2: 525. See also Wayne Bodle, *The Valley Forge Winter: Civilians and Soldiers in War* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

⁸ Shy, *People Numerous & Armed*, 211-22; Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats*, 36-37, 60-77, 79-85, 115-21, 168-74.

⁹ Sir Henry Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, ed. William B. Wilcox (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 86; Alden, *American Revolution*, 284-327, 370-88.

¹⁰ James Simpson to Lord George Germain, 28 August 1779, in Alan S. Brown, ed., "James

Simpson's Reports on the Carolina Loyalists, 1779-1780," *Journal of Southern History* 21 (1955): 517; Charles Stedman, *The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War*, 2 vols. (London: Printed for the Author, 1794; reprint ed., New York: New York Times & Arno Press, 1969), 2: 189; Banastre Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, in the Southern Provinces of North America* (London: T. Cadell, 1787; reprint ed., New York: New York Times & Arno Press, 1968), 13-23; Clinton, *American Rebellion*, 150-74; Alden, *American Revolution*, 408-9, 412-16; Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats*, 121-28; Mackenzie, *Diary*, 2: 447, 525. A reliable biography of the Continental general who lost Charleston is David B. Mattern, *Benjamin Lincoln and the American Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995). The most detailed scholarly account of that campaign is Carl P. Borick, *A Gallant Defense: The Siege of Charleston, 1780* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003). Perhaps the most astute evaluation of the ill-founded assumptions that lured the British into the South is David K. Wilson, *The Southern Strategy: Britain's Conquest of South Carolina and Georgia, 1775-1780* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), xi, xv, 59-62, 265-66.

¹¹ Franklin and Mary Wickwire, *Cornwallis: The American Adventure* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970), 8-137; Stedman, *American War*, 2: 190-95; Clinton, *American Rebellion*, 174-76, 186.

¹² Stedman, *American War*, 2: 190-95; Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 23-32, 71-76, 85-89; Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats*, 128-36; Wilson, *Southern Strategy*, 264.

¹³ Earl Cornwallis to Sir Henry Clinton, 6 August 1780, in Charles Ross, ed., *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1858), 1: 53; Roger Lamb, *An Original and Authentic Journal of Occurrences during the Late American War, From Its Commencement to the Year 1783* (Dublin: Wilkinson & Courtney, 1809; reprint ed., New York: New York Times & Arno Press, 1968), 302, 343, 381; Stedman, *American War*, 2: 198-209; Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 90-96; Wilson, *Southern Strategy*, 263-65. A recent description of Cornwallis' victory is John R. Maass, *Horatio Gates and the Battle of Camden – "That Unhappy Affair," August 16, 1780* (Camden, South Carolina: Kershaw County Historical Society, 2001); Wilson, *Southern Strategy*, 264-65.

¹⁴ A. R. Newsome, ed., "A British Orderly Book, 1780-1781," *North Carolina Historical Review* 9 (1932): 273-98, 366-79; Burke Davis, *The Cowpens-Guilford Courthouse Campaign* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1962), 49-145; Christopher Ward, *The War of the Revolution*, 2 vols., ed. John Richard Alden (New York: Macmillan Company, 1952), 2: 763-83; Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 207-18; Clinton, *American Rebellion*, 229. For a detailed examination of that campaign, see John Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse: The American Revolution in the South* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997).

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76; Newsome, "British Orderly Book," 388-92. See also Thomas E. Baker, *Another Such Victory: The Story of the American Defeat at Guilford Courthouse That Helped Win the War for Independence* (Conshohocken, Pennsylvania: Eastern National, 1997).

¹⁶ Stedman, *American War*, 2: 353; Clinton, *American Rebellion*, 284.

¹⁷ During the struggle for the South in 1780 and 1781, the most formidable and steadfast Loyalist units proved to be those that the British imported from the North and not locally raised commands. Wilson, *Southern Strategy*, 89-90, 117, 176, 238, 243, 262-63; Earl Cornwallis to Lord George Germain, 18 April 1781, in Ross, *Cornwallis Correspondence*, 1: 90.

¹⁸ Earl Cornwallis to William Phillips, 10 April 1781, P.R.O.30/11/85, Charles Cornwallis, First Marquis and Second Earl, Papers, National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew, England (hereafter cited as Cornwallis Papers); Earl Cornwallis to Sir Henry Clinton, 29 August 1780; Lord Rawdon to Sir Henry Clinton, 29 October 1780; Earl Cornwallis to Lord George German, 18 April 1781, all in Ross, *Cornwallis Correspondence*, 1: 58, 62-63, 90-91; Newsome, "British Orderly Book," 372; Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 229-30, 256-57, 312-13.

¹⁹ Earl Cornwallis to Banastre Tarleton, 18 December 1780, in Ross, *Cornwallis Correspondence*, 1: 74.

²⁰ Earl Cornwallis to Lord George Germain, 18 April 1781; Earl Cornwallis to Lord George Germain, 23 April 1781, both in Ross, *Cornwallis Correspondence*, 1: 90-91, 94-95; Stedman,

American War, 2: 347, 353-54; Lamb, *Journal*, 357.

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³⁵ Gregory J. W. Urwin, “The British Guards in the Revolution,” *Campaigns* (July/August 1981), 48-51; Robert D. Bass, *The Green Dragoon* (Columbia, South Carolina: Sandlapper Press, 1973), 44-58, 72-126, 139-73; Philip R. N. Katcher, *Encyclopedia of British, Loyalist, and German Army Units, 1775-1783* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 1973), 1-148; Philip Katcher, *The American Provincial Corps* (Reading: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 1974), 3-32; Isaac Samuel Harrell, *Loyalism in Virginia* (Durham: Duke University, 1926), 49; Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 101, 270-76; Stedman, *American War*, 2: 183; Lamb, *Journal*, 381; Clinton,

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Banastre Tarleton's controversial American career is reassessed in Anthony J. Scotti, Jr., *Brutal Virtue: The Myth and Reality of Banastre Tarleton* (Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books, Inc., 2002).

³⁶ McMaster, "Honyman Journal," 398, 403, 406; Lee, *Memoirs*, 415; Marquis de Lafayette to Thomas Jefferson, 26 May 1781, in Boyd, *Jefferson Papers*, 6: 18; Richard Henry Lee to George Washington, 12 June 1781, in Ballagh, *Letters of R. H. Lee*, 2: 235; H. Young to William Davies, 26 May 1781, in Palmer, *Virginia State Papers*, 2: 120; "State of the Troops that Marched with the Army under the Command of Lieut. Genl. Earl Cornwallis," 1 May 1781, P.R.O.30/11/103, Cornwallis Papers; Scotti, *Brutal Virtue*, 41.

³⁷ Marquis de Lafayette to George Washington, 24 May 1781, in Louis Gottschalk, ed., *The Letters of Lafayette to Washington, 1777-1799* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1976), 198.

³⁸ During the height of the Virginia Campaign, the Queen's Rangers counted an enlisted strength of 632 men. Two hundred forty-eight of this number belonged to the regiment's four troops of hussars and light dragoons. The remaining 375 were divided among eleven infantry companies and an additional detachment armed with rifles and swords. While in Virginia, the rifle detachment usually operated as mounted infantry. In an engagement at Spencer's Ordinary on June 26, 1781, however, the versatile mounted riflemen joined the regiment's cavalry in delivering a horseback charge. Evelyn M. Acomb, trans. and ed., *The Revolutionary Journal of Baron Ludwig von Closen 1780-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958), 176-77; Howard C. Rice, Jr., and Anne S. K. Brown, trans. and eds., *The American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army 1780, 1781, 1782, 1783*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 1: 68; T. H. Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 3 (April 1977): 239-57; Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 98-10; McMaster, "Honyman Journal," 395, 399; Marquis de Lafayette to Thomas Jefferson, 28 May 1781, in Boyd, *Jefferson Papers*, 6: 26; Lee, *Memoirs*, 303, 415; Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 286, 288, 299; Lamb, *Journal*, 371; *Royal Gazette* (New York), 7 July 1781; "State of the Queen's Rangers 25th Aug.^t 1781, With Casualties from 25th June to 24 Aug.st 1781"; "State of the Queen's Rangers 25th December 1781 with broken periods from 25 Oct. to 24 Dec.^r 1781," both in Ward-Chipman Papers: Muster Master General's Papers and Regimental Papers, 1776-1785, Canadian National Archives, Ottawa, Canada, microfilm at the David Library of the American Revolution, Washington Crossing, Pennsylvania; Simcoe, *Military Journal*, 107-8, 230, 233; De Witt Bailey, *British Military Flintlock Rifles, 1740-1840* (Lincoln, Rhode Island: Andrew Mowbray Publishers, 2002), 72-74.

³⁹ Richard Henry Lee to Arthur Lee, 4 June 1781, in Ballagh, *Letters of R. H. Lee*, 2: 231.

⁴⁰ William Feltman, *The Journal of Lieut. William Feltman, of the First Pennsylvania Regiment, 1781-82. Including the March into Virginia and the Siege of Yorktown* (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1853; reprint ed., New York: New York Times & Arno Press, 1969), 2-6; George Mason to George Mason, Jr., 3 June 1781, in Rutland, *George Mason Papers*, 2: 693; Lee, *Memoirs*, 414-15; Ward, *War of the Revolution*, 2: 874-75; Marquis de Lafayette to Thomas Jefferson, 26 May 1781, in Boyd, *Jefferson Papers*, 6: 18; *Royal Gazette* (New York), 13, 20 June 1781.

⁴¹ Marquis de Lafayette to Thomas Jefferson, 28 May 1781, in Boyd, *Jefferson Papers*, 6: 26.

⁴² Richard Henry Lee to James Lovell, 12 June 1781, in Ballagh, *Letters of R. H. Lee*, 2: 237.

⁴³ Brigade Orders, 31 May 1781; General Orders, 5 June 1781; Regimental Orders, 31 May 1781, all in Orderly Book: H. B. M. 43rd Regiment of Foot General Orders: From 23 May to 25 August 1781, Manuscript 42,449, British Museum, London, England. These orders not only reflected Cornwallis' personal inclinations, but also well-established British policy. Mindful that excessive plundering under Gen. Sir William Howe had cost the king's cause American hearts

and minds, Gen. Sir Henry Clinton, Howe's successor as commander-in-chief, decided to institute a change in course. In 1779, he tasked two of his ill-fated subordinates, Maj. Patrick Ferguson and Maj. John André, to write detailed papers explaining how British armies operating in the interior could live off the countryside without alienating the populace. Clinton had copies of André's memorandum made for both Benedict Arnold and Lord Cornwallis, and the two generals attempted to implement the new policy in their orders during the Virginia Campaign. See Patrick Ferguson, "Attempt to Correct Ye Army," November 1779, Sir Henry Clinton Papers, 78: 18, and John André, "On Plundering with Proposed Regulations," 1779 [?], Sir Henry Clinton Papers, 82: 23. Evidence testifying to at least the occasional effectiveness of Cornwallis' efforts cropped up among the hundreds of affidavits that Virginia planters filed with their state government in 1782 tabulating the property they lost to the British in the previous year. "Certificate of Chas. Steadman Commissary British Army as to Cattle Taken from Mr^s Jane Reddick," 19 July 1781, Norfolk County, St. Bride's Parish, Citizens Claims of Property Lost to British Army, 1782, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. On the initial rapaciousness exhibited by the king's troops, see Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 177-81; Stephen Conway, "To Subdue America: British Army Officers and the Conduct of the Revolutionary War," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 43 (July 1986): 381-407; and Stephen Conway, "'The Great Mischief Complain'd of': Reflections on the Misconduct of British Soldiers in the Revolutionary War," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 47 (July 1990): 370-90.

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⁴⁶ Wilson, *Loyal Blacks*, 21; David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 210.

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⁴⁸ Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein, trans. and eds., *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenburg*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Muhlenburg Press, 1942-58), 3: 78.

⁴⁹ *Rivington's Royal Gazette* (New York), 25 September 1779; Sylvia R. Frey, "The British and the Black: A New Perspective," *The Historian* 38 (February 1976): 225-29; Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams*, 10 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1850), 2: 428; Wilson, *Loyal Blacks*, 29. Judith L. Van Buskirk offers a vivid discussion of the African Americans who fled to British-occupied New York in *Generous Enemies: Patriots and Loyalists in Revolutionary New York* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 129-54.

⁵⁰ David Ramsay, *The History of the Revolution of South Carolina, from a British Province to an Independent State*, 2 vols. (Trenton: Isaac Collins, 1785), 2: 31-32; Wilson, *Southern Strategy*, 118. The most comprehensive discussion of this issue is Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁵¹ Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 89-90.

⁵² Frey, "British and the Black," 228-29; Stedman, *American War*, 2: 193, 217; Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 89-90; Wilson, *Loyal Blacks*, 32-36; Wilson, *Southern Strategy*, 176, 234; Sir Henry Clinton to Earl Cornwallis, 20 May, 1780; Nesbitt Balfour to Earl Cornwallis, 24 June 1780, both in P.R.O.30/11/2, Cornwallis Papers.

⁵³ McMaster, "Honyman Journal," 394.

⁵⁴ Richard Henry Lee to William Lee, 15 July 1781, in Ballagh, *Letters of R. H. Lee*, 2: 242.

⁵⁵ George Mason to George Mason, Jr., 3 June 1781, in Rutland, *George Mason Papers*, 2: 690; Edmund Pendleton to James Madison, 30 April 1781, in Mays, *Pendleton Papers*, 1: 354; George Mason to Nathanael Greene, 27 July 1781. Quoted in Ward, *General George Weedon*, 205; Thomas Jefferson to William Jones, 5 January 1787, in Boyd, *Jefferson Papers*, 11: 16; St. George Tucker to Fanny Tucker, 11 July 1781, in Coleman, "Tucker Letters," 207; Acomb, *Von Closen Journal*, 180.

⁵⁶ McMaster, “Honyman Journal,” 400; Ewald, *Diary*, 305; Logan, “Memoirs of a Slave,” 562-72; Edmund Pendleton to James Madison, 29 July 1782, in Mays, *Pendleton Papers*, 2: 402; “State of the losses of Thomas Jefferson in the county of Cumberland by the British in the year 1781,” 27 January 1783, in Boyd, *Jefferson Papers*, 6: 224-25; Marquis de Lafayette to George Washington, 23 April 1781, in Gottschalk, *Lafayette-Washington Letters*, 187; *Royal Gazette* (New York), 29 August 1781.

⁵⁷ Thomas Jefferson to William Gordon, 16 July 1788, in Boyd, *Jefferson Papers*, 13: 364; Ewald, *Diary*, 305.

⁵⁸ Ewald, *Diary*, 305.

⁵⁹ William Duane and Thomas Blach, trans. and eds., *The Journal of Claude Blanchard* (Albany: J. Munsell, 1876; reprint ed., New York: New York Times & Arno Press, 1969), 162, Rice and Brown, *Rochambeau’s Army*, 1: 67; Acomb, *Von Closen Journal*, 187; Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 136.

⁶⁰ McMaster, “Honyman Journal,” 401-2; Ewald, *Diary*, 305; Acomb, *Von Closen Journal*, 174; St. George Tucker to Fanny Tucker, 11 July 1781, in Coleman, “Tucker Letters,” 207-8.

⁶¹ Acomb, *Von Closen Journal*, 166; McMaster, “Honyman Journal,” 399; Marquis de Lafayette to Thomas Jefferson, 28 May 1781, in Boyd, *Jefferson Papers*, 6: 26; Rice and Brown,

Rochambeau's Army, 1: 154; Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 353; Simcoe, *Military Journal*, 165.

⁶² Marquis de Lafayette to George Washington, 20 July 1781, in Gottschalk, *Lafayette-Washington Letters*, 209.

⁶³ *Royal Gazette* (New York), 29 August 1781; Joseph G. Rosengarten, trans. and ed., "Popp's Journal, 1777-1783," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 26 (1902): 38; William Phillips to Sir Henry Clinton, 3 April 1781, P.R.O.30/11/96, and Alexander Ross to Lieutenant Paterson, 20 June 1781, PRO 30/11/87/15-16, both in Cornwallis Papers; Regimental Orders, 28 July 1781; After Orders, 4 August 1781; Morning Regimental Orders, 25 August 1781, all in 43rd Foot Orderly Book, 23 May-25 August 1781; Earl Cornwallis to Charles O'Hara, 4 August 1781, in Ross, *Cornwallis Correspondence*, 1: 113; Edmund Pendleton to James Madison, 10 September 1781, in Mays, *Pendleton Papers*, 1: 371; Robert J. Tilden, trans., "The Doehla Journal," *William and Mary College Quarterly History Magazine*, 2nd Ser., 22 (1942): 243.

⁶⁴ General Orders, 21 May 1781, 43rd Foot Orderly Book, 23 May-25 August 1781.

⁶⁵ General Orders, May 21, 1781; Orders May 28, 1871, both in *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ General Orders, 5 June 1781, *Ibid.* See also Regimental Orders, 5 June 1781; Brigade Orders, 18 June 1781; General Orders, 25 June 1781, all in *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Regimental Orders, 4 June 1781, 43rd Foot Orderly Book, 23 May-25 August 1781; Ewald, *Diary*, 305-6.

⁶⁸ Orders, 28 May 1781; Brigade Orders, 8 June 1781; General Orders, 11 August 1781; General Orders, 20 August 1781; General Orders, 25 August 1781, all in 43rd Foot Orderly Book, 23 May-25 August 1781.

⁶⁹ Thomas Nelson to Earl Cornwallis, 23 July 1781, P.R.O.30/11/90, Cornwallis Papers.

⁷⁰ Earl Cornwallis to Thomas Nelson, 6 August 1781, *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Philip H. Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles L. Webster & Company, 1888), 1: 487-88.

⁷² Marquis de Lafayette to Thomas Nelson, 26 August 1781, in Gilbert Chinard, ed., *Lafayette in Virginia: Unpublished Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1928), 54; St. George Tucker to Fanny Tucker, 14 September 1781, in Coleman, "Tucker Letters," 206, 211; Richard Henry Lee to George Washington, 12 June 1781, in Ballagh, *Letters of R. H. Lee*, 2: 233; Marquis de Lafayette to Thomas Jefferson, 28 May 1781, in Boyd, *Jefferson Papers*, 6: 26; McMaster, "Honyman Journal," 393, 394, 416; Ward, *General George Weedon*, 203, 216.

⁷³ Randolph, *History of Virginia*, 285. This fear was an American military weakness throughout the Revolution. As historian David K. Wilson observed, "The threat of a slave

insurrection (and/or Indian attacks in the case of frontier counties) usually kept half of a southern county's militia at home." Wilson, *Southern Strategy*, 3.

⁷⁴ Emory G. Evans, *Thomas Nelson of Yorktown: Revolutionary Virginian* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975), 100-101; Edmund Pendleton to James Madison, 4 May 1781; Edmund Pendleton to James Madison, 6 July 1781, both in Mays, *Pendleton Papers*, 1: 356, 365; Lee, *Memoirs*, 438; Stedman, *American War*, 2: 387-88; Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 295-97; *Royal Gazette* (New York), 4 July 1781; Earl Cornwallis to Sir Henry Clinton, 30 June 1781, P.R.O.30/11/74, Cornwallis Papers; Richard Henry Lee to Arthur Lee, 13 May 1781, in Ballagh, *Letters of R. H. Lee*, 2: 233; George Mason to Pearson Chapman, 31 May 1781, in Rutland, *George Mason Papers*, 2: 688; McMaster, "Honyman Journal," 401.

⁷⁵ Richard Henry Lee to Arthur Lee, 4 June 1781, in Ballagh, *Letters of R. H. Lee*, 2: 230; George Mason to George Mason, Jr., 3 June 1781, in Rutland, *George Mason Papers*, 2: 693-94; Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 297-98; George Corbin to Thomas Jefferson, 31 May 1781, in Boyd, *Jefferson Papers*, 6: 44-46; James Arbuckle, Charles Bagwell, and D. Bowman to Thomas Jefferson, 15 May 1781; J. Parker to the Speaker of the Virginia Assembly, 9 June 1781; J. Parker to Thomas Nelson, 29 June 1781; William Preston to William Davies, 28 July 1781; William Preston to Thomas Nelson, 28 July 1781; James Innes to Thomas Nelson, 29 July 1781, all in Palmer, *Virginia State Papers*, 2: 97-100, 151, 189, 246-67; Harrell, *Loyalism in Virginia*, 59-62; Tilden, "Doehla Journal," 240; Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 276.

⁷⁶ Richard Henry Lee to George Washington, 12 June 1781; Richard Henry Lee to James

Lovell, 12 June 1781, both in Ballagh, *Letters of R. H. Lee*, 2: 233-37.

⁷⁷ Sir Henry Clinton, *The Narrative of Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Clinton, K.B., relative to His Conduct during Part of His Command of the King's Troops in North America* (London: J. Debrett, 1783), 7-8; Sir Henry Clinton, *Observations on Some Parts of the Answer of Earl Cornwallis to Sir Henry Clinton's Narrative* (London: J. Debrett, 1783), 11-12, 16; Sir Henry Clinton to Earl Cornwallis, 8 June 1781; Sir Henry Clinton to Earl Cornwallis, 11 June 1781; Sir Henry Clinton to Earl Cornwallis, 15 June 1781; Sir Henry Clinton to Earl Cornwallis, 19 June 1781; Sir Henry Clinton to Earl Cornwallis, 8 July 1781, all in Benjamin Franklin Stevens, ed., *The Campaign in Virginia 1781: An Exact Reprint of Six Rare Pamphlets on the Clinton-Cornwallis Controversy with Very Numerous Important Unpublished Manuscript Notes by Sir Henry Clinton, K.B., and the Omitted and Hitherto Unpublished Portions of the Letters in Their Appendices Added from the Original Manuscripts*, 2 vols. (London: Privately Printed, 1888): 2: 14-17, 18-23, 24-25, 26-28, 29-30, 49-56, 62-65; Earl Cornwallis to Sir Henry Clinton, 30 June 1781; Earl Cornwallis to Sir Henry Clinton, 24 July 1781; Earl Cornwallis to Sir Henry Clinton, 22 August 1781, all in Ross, *Cornwallis Correspondence*, 1: 103-6, 107-10, 112, 113-16, 117; Sir Henry Clinton to Earl Cornwallis, 11 June 1781, P.R.O. 30/11/68, Cornwallis Papers; James Robertson to William Knox, 12 July 1781; James Robertson to Lord Amherst, 8 December 1781; James Robertson to Lord Amherst, 27 December 1781, all in Milton M. Klein and Ronald W. Howard, eds., *The Twilight of British Rule in Revolutionary America: The New York Letter Book of General James Robertson, 1780-1783* (Cooperstown, New York: New York State Historical Association, 1983), 209, 231, 234; John Ross to Lord Ankerville, 2 March 1781, RH15/44/103, National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland; Ira D. Gruber, ed., *John Peebles' American*

War: The Diary of a Scottish Grenadier, 1776-1782 (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 1998), 464; Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763-1789* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1971), 376-79; Clinton, *American Rebellion*, 284, 289-90, 301-2; Macksey, *War for America*, 409; Wickwire, *Cornwallis*, 352-53; William Smith, *Historical Memoirs*, ed. William H. W. Sabine (New York: New York Times & Arno Press, 1971), 406, 407, 418.

⁷⁸ Tarleton, *Campaigns*, 368-69; Ward, *War of the Revolution*, 2: 879-87; Stedman, *American War*, 2: 414; Tappert and Doberstein, *Muhlenburg Journals*, 3: 443; Donald Jackson, ed., *The Diaries of George Washington*, 6 vols. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1976), 3: 409-10.

⁷⁹ John C. Dann, ed., *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 244; Joseph Plumb Martin, *Private Yankee Doodle: Being a Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers, and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier*, ed. George F. Scheer (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), 241-42; Fleming, *Beat the Last Drum*, 175-76, 256; Ewald, *Diary*, 314, 318, 328, 335-36; Edward M. Riley, ed., "St George Tucker's Journal of the Siege of Yorktown, 1781," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 5 (1948): 387; McMaster, "Honyman Journal," 420; Logan, "Memoirs of a Slave," 572; Feltman, *Journal*, 6; Frey, "British and the Black," 232-33; Earl Cornwallis to Sir Henry Clinton, 22 August 1781; Earl Cornwallis to Sir Henry Clinton, 16 September 1781; Earl Cornwallis, 20 October 1781, all in Ross, *Cornwallis Correspondence*, 1: 117, 120, 127-28; Wilson, *Loyal Blacks*, 42; Tilden, "Doehla Journal," 238, 241-46, 251; Rosengarten, "Popp's

Journal,” 41. Anntte Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 140. Elizabeth A. Fenn, *Pox Americana; The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-83* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), provides a gripping overview of the smallpox epidemic that swept North America at the time of the Revolution. A medical history of Cornwallis’ Virginia campaign that credits another origin for the smallpox plague that swept the blacks who followed the British is Philip Ranlet, “The British, Slaves, and Smallpox in Revolutionary Virginia,” *Journal of Negro History* 84 (Summer 1999): 217-26.

⁸⁰ See Cassandra Pybus, “Jefferson’s Faulty Math: The Question of Slave Defections in the American Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 62, 3rd ser. (April 2005): 243-64. The author has located hundreds of depositions filed in 1782 by Virginia planters the year before regarding property taken or destroyed by the British the previous year. While not every county affected by the invaders is represented, this data will facilitate a more exact reckoning of the number of slaves who ran away, the number who returned, and the number killed by contagion.

⁸¹ The subject of slave resistance during the era of the American Revolution has received increased attention from historians, but thus far they have failed to properly link this phenomenon with the course of military operations. See Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Robert Olwell, *Masters, Slaves, and Subjects: The Culture of Power in the South Carolina Low Country, 1740-1790* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006); Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and Their*

Global Quest for Liberty (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006); Alan Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Gerald Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of America* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

⁸² *Virginian Pilot* (Norfolk), 20 October 1981.

4.3 Virginia campaign. 4.4 Return to Britain. 5 Governor-General of India. Cornwallis continued to serve under Howe on his campaign for control of the rebel capital, Philadelphia. Supplies not available locally (like uniforms, camp gear, arms, and ammunition) were delivered all too infrequently, supply ships were frequent targets of local privateers, and bad weather impeded the work.[37] In order to help provide fresh food and forage for his troops, Cornwallis established two commissioners. Phillips, placed in overall command of British forces in Virginia, proceeded to conduct another raid, taking Petersburg on April 25. In late May 1781, Cornwallis moved to subdue Virginia. His forces raided as far west as Charlottesville and captured the main American supply depot at Point of Fork on the James River. In the aftermath of the largest infantry engagement to occur in Virginia during the American Revolutionary War, Lafayette issued general orders commending Wayne and his forces, noting: "The General is happy in acknowledging the spirit of the detachment commanded by General Wayne, in their engagement with the total of the British army, of which he happened to be an eye witness.