Configurações
Revista Ciências Sociais

26 | 2020
Economy and Society: politics, practices, agents, and institutions

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Edição electrónica
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/configuracoes/9963
DOI: 10.4000/configuracoes.9963
ISSN: 2182-7419

Editora
Centro de Investigação em Ciências Sociais

Edição impressa
Paginação: 43-62
ISSN: 1646-5075

Referência eletrónica
Antonio T. Bly e Ryan Ingerick, « "Able and willing to bear Arms": Indentured Servants and the Coming of the American Revolution in Virginia », *Configurações* [Online], 26 | 2020, posto online no dia 15 dezembro 2020, consultado o 21 dezembro 2020. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/configuracoes/9963 ; DOI : https://doi.org/10.4000/configuracoes.9963

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Bly, Antonio T.; Ingerick, Ryan - "Able and willing to bear Arms": Indentured Servants and the Coming of the American Revolution in Virginia. *Configurações*, vol. 26, 2020, pp. 43-62.

"Able and willing to bear Arms": Indentured Servants and the Coming of the American Revolution in Virginia

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Abstract

The subject of indentured servants who were urged to abandon their masters by the Royal Governor, John Murray, the Earl of Dunmore, has been overlooked by scholars. Since 1775, his incendiary Proclamation begs a series of questions historians have yet to answer. Why, for instance, did the Governor include servants? What circumstances prompted him to make such an invitation to bound persons? How did the elites in the colony respond? These, and other questions, are the focus of this essay that explores indentured servitude in Virginia during the age of the American Revolution. Besides enslaved African Americans, indentured servants influenced Dunmore's Proclamation that, in turn, encouraged the gentry in Virginia to break with England.

Keywords: indentured servant, colonial Virginia, bound labor, servant law.

Resumo

"Capazes e dispostos a portar armas": servos contratados e o avanço da Revolução Americana na Virgínia

O assunto dos servos contratados, que foram encorajados a abandonar os seus mestres pelo governador real, John Murray, o Conde de Dunmore, tem sido descurado pelos estudiosos. Desde 1775, a sua Proclamação incendiária despoleta uma série de questões às quais os historiadores ainda precisam de responder. Por exemplo, porque é que o governador incluiu os servos? Que circunstâncias o levaram a fazer tal convite às pessoas vinculadas? Como

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é que as elites da colónia responderam? Essas e outras questões são o foco deste ensaio que explora a servidão contratada na Virgínia durante a era da Revolução Americana. Além de afro-americanos escravizados, os servos contratados influenciaram a Proclamação de Dunmore que, por sua vez, incentivou a nobreza da Virgínia a romper com a Inglaterra.

Palavras-chave: servidão contratada, Virgínia colonial, trabalho forçado, lei da servidão.

Résumé
«Capable et prêt à porter les armes»: Les serviteurs sous contrat et l'avènement de la Révolution Américaine en Virginie
Le sujet des serviteurs engagés qui ont été encouragés à abandonner leurs maîtres par le gouverneur royal, John Murray, comte de Dunmore, a été négligé par les universitaires. Depuis 1775, sa Proclamation incendiaire soulève une série de questions auxquelles les historiens doivent encore répondre. Pourquoi, par exemple, le gouverneur a-t-il inclus des serviteurs ? Quelles circonstances l'ont poussé à adresser une telle invitation aux personnes arrêtées ? Comment les élites de la colonie ont-elles réagi ? Ces questions, ainsi que d'autres, sont au centre de cet essai qui explore la servitude sous contrat en Virginie à l'époque de la Révolution Américaine. Outre les Afro-Américains asservis, les serviteurs sous contrat ont influencé la Proclamation de Dunmore qui a encouragé la noblesse de Virginie à rompre avec l'Angleterre.

Mots-clés: servitude sous contrat, Virginie coloniale, travail forcé, droit des serviteurs.

Introduction

On 25 November 1775, the following proclamation, written by John Murray, the Fourth Earl of Dunmore and the Governor of the Royal colony of Virginia, appeared in John Pinkney's *Virginia Gazette*:

> "I have ever entertained Hopes that an Accommodation might have taken Place between Great-Britain and this colony, without being compelled by my Duty to this most disagreeable but now absolutely necessary Step, rendered so by a Body of armed Men unlawfully assembled, bring on His Majesty's [Tenders], and the formation of an Army, and that Army now on their March to attack His Majesty's troops and destroy the well-disposed Subjects of this Colony. To defeat such unreasonable Purposes, and that all such Traitors, and their Abetters, may be brought to Justice, and that the Peace, and good Order of this Colony may be again restored, which the ordinary Course of the Civil Law is unable to effect; I have thought fit to issue this my Proclamation, hereby declaring, that until the aforesaid good Purposes can be obtained, I do in Virtue of the Power and Authority to me given, by His Majesty, determine to execute Martial Law, and cause the same to be executed throughout this Colony: and to

> the end that Peace and good Order may the sooner be [effected], I do require every Person capable of bearing Arms, to [resort] to His Majesty's standard, or be looked upon as Traitors to His Majesty's Crown and Government, and thereby become liable to the Penalty the Law inflicts upon such Offences; such as forfeiture of Life, confiscation of Lands, &c. &c. And I do hereby further declare all indentured 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 Leige Subjects, to retain their [Quitrents], or any other Taxes due or that may become due, in their own Custody, till such Time as Peace may be again restored to this at present most unhappy Country, or demanded of them for their former salutary Purposes, by Officers properly authorized to receive the same" (Pinkney, 1775).

If not read in taverns or in the front of most of the courthouses in eighteenth--century Virginia, the Governor's decree was read aloud in or about churchyards. Because like the county court clerks who *published* public documents, churchwardens were responsible for keeping their parishioners informed. Before weekly sermons, they were obligated, as a matter of social custom and law, to read such articles that were printed in the newspaper (Fithian, 1968; Isaac, 1982).

Published less than a year after the infamous Magazine Incident in which the Governor had stoked the fears of the colony's leaders by seizing fifteen half barrels of gunpowder used for the purpose of defending the colony, Dunmore's Proclamation further stirred the passions of many Virginians, especially the grandees of the colony, those who defined their status by having "Money, Negroes and Land enough". By declaring martial law, the Royal Governor usurped their authority and denounced their actions as being those of "Traitors to His Majesty". Despite his best effort to reach a peaceful resolution, he felt compelled to act on behalf of the Crown. For their disobedience, he threatened not only their lives, but also the source of their prosperity. Striking at the heart of their autocracy, the King's man promised to confiscate the rebels' "Lands", as well as offer freedom to their servants and slaves who would elect to side with the King. While not stating it in explicit terms, the Earl's proclamation intimated a radical redistribution of the wealth in the colony. Because as most servants and slaves enjoyed few opportunities to own land, the question of what would be done with those lands taken probably represented an additional incentive to those very persons who had been bounded to the land of their former masters. In this subtle offer of rebel lands to those who would elect to side with the King of England, Lord Dunmore threatened to destroy the rebellion in Virginia before it began in earnest. He also changed the course of Virginia history by transforming those solicited subjects into uncelebrated

founding fathers whose presence forced the power brokers of Virginia to break with Great Britain (Dabney, 1971; Holton, 1999).

Ironically, despite the inflammatory nature of the Governor's proclamation, his solicitation of the public, particularly of indentured servants, has eluded critical attention by historians. Nowhere, for example, in his study of debtors, Native Americans, and enslaved African Americans in Virginia as active historical actors who forced the founding fathers to choose revolution did Woody Holton take into account the plight of thousands of bondservants in the colony. Bound servants whose numbers were thought considerable enough to warrant the Earl's attention are overlooked in his analysis of how ordinary Americans from different walks of life informed the colony's decision to break from England. The same is true of Michael A. McDonnell's study. In his examination of race, class, and conflict in revolutionary Virginia, he does not fully consider indentured servants as significant actors in the social and political events transforming life in the Chesapeake (Holton, 1999; McDonnell, 2010).

Other studies also do not consider bonds people as noteworthy participants in the events that inspired England's largest North American colony to sever its ties with Great Britain. Instead, many have focused on whether or not servitude had been an economically viable system in the development of the New World (Smith, 1947; Galenson, 1981; Bailyn, 1986; Coldham, 1988, 1992; Jordan and Walsh, 2007; Tomlins, 2010; Grubb, 2013). Others have examined the institution within the broader context of the evolution of racial slavery in the Americas (Morgan, 1971; Berlin, 2000; Dressler, 2019). As a result, neglected has been the subject of indentured servants who were also encouraged to enlist in Virginia. To put the matter another way, Dunmore's Proclamation begs a series of questions historians have yet to answer. Why, for instance, did the Governor include servants in his Proclamation? What circumstances would have prompted him to make such an invitation to bound persons? How did the disbanded Virginian forefathers respond? How did indentured servants respond to Dunmore's Proclamation? These questions are the focus of this essay that delves into the context in which the Royal Governor encouraged indentured servants to break with their masters in Virginia during the age of the American Revolution. In addition to black slaves, white servants in the eighteenth-century Chesapeake inspired Lord Dunmore's 1775 Proclamation, an action that forced an otherwise reluctant colony into breaking with Great Britain.

1. Life after Bacon

Contrary to the long-held view that Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 marked the death knell of the institution, indentured servitude thrived in the colony up until the American Revolution. While recent studies of servitude have noted the significance of the institution in the development in the colony, none have observed

the role that the institution played in coaxing Virginia's leaders into breaking with Great Britain. Much in the same way that enslaved African Americans played an important role in Virginia's decision to declare independence, so did indentured servants. While the number of servants in the colony at the time had not been as large as that of slaves, they numbered enough nonetheless to represent a significant threat to the authority of their masters. Surprisingly, while recent scholarship regarding servitude in America all recognize the importance of the institution in America, especially in the South, all neglect a discussion of servants during the turbulent times of the 1760s and 1770s (Morgan, 1971; Smith, 1971; Galenson, 1984; Bailyn, 1986; Coldham, 1988; Fogleman, 1998; Jordan and Walsh, 2007; Tomlins, 2010; Vaver, 2011; Grubb, 2013).

The laws the power brokers of the colony passed, however, tell a different story. Prior to the events that would lead Virginians to dissolve their bonds with Great Britain, servitude remained a viable institution in the Chesapeake, one that mandated periodic maintenance. Ever fearful of another possible rebellion, the most famous being the revolt that occurred in 1676 under Nathaniel Bacon, the leaders in the colony offered indentured servants a number of incentives to remain obedient over the course of the eighteenth-century. Starting in 1705, for example, the House of Burgesses passed legislation that made it illegal for Christian servants to be purchased by Native Americans, mulattoes or persons of African descent. This ban also applied to the dispossessed sons of Abraham. In other words, as a matter of law, neither Jews nor Muslims were allowed to enter into contracts with their Christian counterparts. At the time, the word Christian signified race. Even though this legislation had not been the first law to draw a distinction between blacks and whites, it did nonetheless play an important part in shaping the development of servitude and slavery in the Chesapeake (Hening, 1812; Morgan, 1971; Vaughan, 1995).

Its purpose had been two-fold. First, regulate the indentured population by separating servants from those whose plight resembled their own. Second, the law created another psychological wedge among the poor, landless, working classes in the colony to deter the possibility of a mass rebellion. To reinforce these racial lines, the colony's leaders passed another law that same year (1705) that set definite terms on all indentured contracts. While enslaved African Americans were expected to serve for the term of their natural life and Native Americans could be compelled to work for indefinite periods of time, the terms of Christian servitude in Virginia came to an end after age twenty-four (Hening, 1812).

With this proverbial carrot, however, came a stick. Servants who forged or stole passes to move about more freely were punished if taken up. The penalty for their wrongdoing: two hours in the pillory and a proscribed number of lashes. That same year, the Burgesses also forbade servants for owning watercraft that could potentially facilitate escape, threatening thus their master's authority over their time (Hening, 1813). Many of the grandees in the colony, who judged these

prescriptions as being more than reasonable, came to adopt the view of themselves as benevolent patriarchs. William Byrd II certainly thought of himself in such favorable terms. The lord of Westover, he took pride in this fatherly role: "I have a large family", he boasted to an English autocrat in 1726. "Like one of the Patriarchs, I have my Flocks and my Herds, Bond-men and Bond-women, and every Soart of Trade amongst my own Servants, so that I live in a kind of Independence on everyone but Providence". But "I must take care", he continued, "to keep all my people at their duty, to set all the spring in motion, and to make every one draw his equal share to carry the machine forward". In Byrd's mind, and likewise other grandees in the colony, servants were thought child-like individuals who required parental oversight. To ensure that "the machine" worked according to its design, Byrd and those of his particular distinction passed additional legislation (Byrd, 1726). Such administration, they reasoned, not only protected their economic interest, but also to assuaged their latent fears of bound servants. To be sure, that same year in which William Byrd II wrote to a friend in England, reveling in his own sense of magnanimity, his well-to-do contemporaries passed additional legislation to curtail their bonds people's aspirations for their freedom. Truancy and the act of running away, for instance, were not to be tolerated. With that in mind, they added years to the contracts of servants who had run away, assumed a new name, and who pretended to be free. They also extended the terms of years for those servants who pretended to be a tradesman when they were not. These social measures and others further highlighted the fact that most grandees considered servants chattel—if not in full than most certainly in measurable parts (Hening, 1813).

By the middle of the eighteenth century, they placed more restraints on bondservants to calm their latent fears of landless servants. If their masters, for example, died before they completed the terms of their agreements, bondservants were subject to transfer, as their contracts were deemed a matter transferable to other persons. Not surprisingly, in these precarious settings, servants were not allowed to keep horses, as horses, like watercraft, provided a means of transportation and escape. What is more, unclaimed servants could be, and many were sold at public auction (Hening, 1813).

Masters could be particularly cruel in their oversight over their bondswomen. While both sexes were forbidden from engaging in sexual activities, women bore an additional burden if her unlawful transgression resulted in children. In both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the grandees of the colony struggled to control women's bodies, as pregnancies not only posed a real and symbolic challenge to their authority, but also threatened their economic bottom lines. As a way of deterring women's "saucy" behavior in that particular regard, masters again employed the legal structure of the colony as a tool of intimidation. When discovered with children, for example, pregnant bondswomen's contracts could be extended to include a full additional term of years. If their children survived infancy, they could be taken away from their mothers and become the property of the church

until the child reached the age of twenty-one (Hening, 1811, 1813; Hodges; Brown, 1996; Block, 2006).

Bondswomen who copulated with mulattoes or black slaves probably encouraged the full wrath of their masters for their indiscretions. Besides additional years of service and the loss of their children, bondswomen who transgressed the racial divide had to bear the stigma of sullying their bodies with persons who were thought less than human. In most instances, they were the subject of gossip. They were also the subject of their masters' distemper. For their pretentious action threatened the fine line that divided slaves and servants and between those who were free, bound or unfree, and slaves. In the minds of most owners, interracial sex disrupted the natural order of the cosmos in which masters imagined themselves as central figures, if not kings or minor lord. In their trespass of the racial etiquette of the day, the actions of these bondswomen further highlighted the fact that slaves and servants outnumbered their masters and that in their numbers lay the seeds of truly turning the world upside down (Hening, 1813).

But, the Burgesses of the colony, cognizant of this threat to their power, were not completely tyrannical in their treatment of servants. Quite the contrary, many voted and passed legislation that registered their awareness that their bond servants were in fact fellow Christians and countrymen. In 1748, for example, they decreed that "if any person shall… whip a Christian white servant naked", the offending person shall pay a fine of "fifty shillings current money, to the party injured… [and] within six months after such whipping". Unlike servants and slaves of African or Native American descent, bonds men and women of European stock did not have to suffer the indignity of being beaten naked. Instead, the planter class in the colony extended to their bonds people a modicum of modesty (Hening, 1811).

Their generosity with servants did not end there. In 1753, they revisited the subject of who could purchase white labor. Like before, they declared that "no negroe, mulattoe, or Indian, altho' a christian, or any Jew, Moor, Mahometan, or other infidel, shall at any time purchase any christian servant, nor any other except of their own complexion". Much like the legislation they enacted in 1705, the grandees of the colony judged themselves good stewards of the bonds people. By reinforcing the real and imagined divide between servants and slaves along racial lines, they offered their bondspeople a symbolic laurel in which they could identify themselves as being better off than those persons who were neither Christian nor white (Hening, 1817). In Orlando Patterson's comparative study of slavery over time and space, such overtures to servants represented a part of an artfully constructed system of control in which Virginian planters downplayed the fact that servants were at once socially dead and "natally alienated". Even the *better* Sort… would chuse to be *Slaves*", one eighteenth-century observer noted in more explicit terms in 1741, "provided they might exercise an *Arbitrary* and *Tyrannical* Rule over all *below them*!" (Patterson, 1982; Anonymous Author, COMMON SENSE, 1741, 1).

Despite their best efforts to convince their bondservants that they were well treated, many servants did not agree as many were compelled to surrender, even if for a select period of time, their freedom. Over the course of the eighteenth--century, many protested the terms of their servitude by running away. Before the American Revolution, over one thousand absconded (See Appendix A). Fugitive advertisements not only document the discontentment of servants, but also the disgust of their masters with the rebellious actions of their fictive family members (Patterson, 1982). Not long after their servants challenged their masters' authority by running away, masters in Virginia turned to the newspaper in an effort to reclaim their *stolen* property. Overwhelmingly, a close reading of those notices reveal a complex story in which masters fought with their unruly servants. Most, for example, had advertisements placed for their people within a matter of days after their servants had absconded. Few were those instances in which they gave their bonds men and women time to return of their own volition. Unlike fugitive slaves who were given longer periods of time before they became the subject of a newspaper advertisement, many masters believed that their servants had a better chance than their black or mulatto counterparts in *passing* themselves off as *free* persons (See Appendix B).

Denied their freedom and rendered persons unfree, many servants probably did not think much of their master's overtures of *concern*. In the minds of many of them, for example, the law passed in 1748 that forbade the whipping of white servants naked did more harm than good. What the grandees thought an act of benevolence actually encouraged sickness and dangerous infections. For in an era in which bathing had not yet been a common practice, the Burgesses' generosity with respect to correcting servants served only to exacerbate their suffering. Indeed, as Jack Larkin's study of early America has demonstrated, dirt, disease, and pestilence were the hallmarks of American life prior to the 1840s (Larkin, 2010). For many servant's cleanliness and hygiene were not commonplace. Clothes were infrequently washed and proved a double edge sword when the lash had to be applied. In other words, while allowing servants the dignity of wearing their garment during the administration of the law, the shirt, coarse and soaked in sweat and dirt, made the business of receiving lashes dangerous, if not perilous to a servant's well-being. Between the filth of their bodies and that of their clothes, a whipping more than likely opened wounds and those wounds were only made worse by the dirty material beaten into their flesh. Consequently, masters' efforts to treat servants mildly better could and did in some instances resulted in infections that could potentially prove deadly (Hening, 1817).

2. Latent fears

The volume of the servile population in Virginia probably explained the uneven nature of the legal proscriptions enacted by the colony's power brokers. It might also explain the language the Earl adopted in his proclamation. While historians are divided on the subject of how many servants there were in the colony, one thing is certain. The numbers of servants in the colony were numerous enough to be thought a threat. Dunmore certainly thought so. Less than 200, 000 people of European descent resided in Virginia at the advent of the eighteenth--century. A generation later, that figure had nearly doubled. That trend continued in the years leading up to the American Revolution (Fogleman, 1999).

According to Galenson's study of indentured servitude in America, for instance, the Chesapeake had been the most important destination for many of the servants transported to the mainland of British North America. While extant records suggest that the number of servants transported to the West Indies shifted from Barbados to Nevis to Jamaica, over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Chesapeake remained a central destination for servants. Despite fluctuating tobacco prices and the emergence of racial slavery, Virginia continued to attract large numbers of bondservants. Between the 1650s and the 1770s, English servants entered into contracts wherein they agreed to work in the colony for a proscribed number of years in exchange for the cost of transportation and the promise of a parcel of land or freedom dues, and, of course, clothes, food, and shelter. Before the Revolution, a significant number appeared in the archival records that document the importation of servants into the New World. Before 1760, for example, forty-two percent of those servants who were transported to British America were brought to the Chesapeake. By the 1770s, that figure almost doubled. Compared to the colonies in the West Indies, Pennsylvania, and New England, Virginia and Maryland represented significant hubs for bondspeople. According to Galenson's estimates, between one-half and two-thirds of the white immigrants to the British colonies before the American Revolution were servants (Galenson, 1984; U.S. Bureau of Census, 1976).

Aaron Fogleman's recent study offers a more conservative assessment of the number of servants in America. While Fogleman's estimates are not as high, his study does underscore the strong presence of servants in Virginia during the years leading up to Dunmore's Proclamation. Prior to the American Revolution, servitude represented an important aspect of life in the Chesapeake. In his study of slavery and servitude during the age of the American Revolution, Fogleman revealed that, before Independence, slaves and indentured servants accounted for "three-fourths" of the population in colonial America. By his estimates, bondservants represented approximately twenty percent of the people in the colonies. In this context, reasonable figures for servants can be discerned for the population

in the His Majesty's Royal colony (Fogleman, 1999). In 1700, for example, there were approximately 8,500 servants in Virginia. By the 1730s, that number grew by fifty percent. By mid-century, Virginia had a total white population of almost 130,000 of which 26,000 were bound or unfree. A small number were convicts and felons who were forced to immigrate to the colony. Most, however, were English servants who had entered into contracts with planters for a term of years. On the eve of the American Revolution, there were 259,500 white Virginians in the colony. Approximately 52,000 were bound persons of European descent. These figures help to explain the incendiary nature of Dunmore's Proclamation that called servants to bear arms against the revolting Gentry class. Servants clearly represented an important, if not significant group in the tobacco colony (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1976).

Michael Walsh and Donald Jordan's study of indentured servants in colonial America highlights further the threat servants posed to the colony's grandees who were sympathetic to the patriotic cause. Instead of twenty percent of the population, their work suggests that the number of bound persons in the colony were a full quarter. Rather than 8,500 servants residing in Virginia in 1700s, Walsh and Jordan's study estimates there were more than 10,500 indentured servants in the colony at the time. By the 1730s, that number had grown to 21,000. By the time of Dunmore's Proclamation, Virginia had a servile population of 65,000 (Jordan and Walsh, 2007; U.S. Bureau of Census, 1976).

While it is impossible to know for certain, given extant records, what their actual numbers were in the colony at the time the Royal Governor issued his Proclamation, one thing is clear. Like enslaved African Americans, indentured servants were thought a dangerous group by the elites of Virginia. In his solicitation of them, the Earl documented their fears. He also documented his understanding of the social dynamics of the colony. Servants, he noted, represented a useful means through which to control those Virginians who were fanning the embers of revolt. In his implicitly articulated offer of land, Dunmore, in one stroke, transformed the colony in the minds of many indentured servants into the New Canaan they had been promised. Unwittingly, in that promise to redistribute the wealth of Virginia and to free the colony's property in persons, the Governor inspired men like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and other prominent Virginians to split with Great Britain.

Both alarmed and incensed, the colony's House of Burgesses responded in typical fashion. They enacted legislation. "The earl of Dunmore", the disbanded assembly announced that December, "by his many hostile attacks upon the good people of this colony, and attempts to infringe their rights and liberties, by his proclamation declaring freedom to our servants and slaves, and arming them against us, by seizing our persons and properties" has made it necessary to organize military units to protect and defend the colony. For that cause, they declared that six

additional regiments would be raised. Registering their latent fears of servants, fears almost one hundred years old, fears still simmering from Bacon's Rebellion, they elected to discount the enlistment of servants. "That no recruiting officer shall be allowed to enlist into the service", they explained, "any servant whatsoever, except apprentices bound under the laws of this colony, nor any such apprentices unless the consent of his master be first had in writing; neither any man unless he be five feet four inches high, healthy, strong made, and well limbed, not deaf, or subject to fits" (Hening, 1819).

Their decision in this regard can be read in several ways. First, their decision recorded their long-standing distrust of individuals who did not own any property but were in fact property themselves. Like Thomas Jefferson, who characterized servants and other poor white people who owned no land as "rubbish", most of the grandees in the colony came to regard servants as precarious subjects at best who required direction, or at worse, troublesome, wayward types whose numbers defied their authority. Secondly, their decision captured their deep-seated belief that servants were unredeemable people. Unlike Jefferson who articulated a plan to convert some of their numbers in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, the Burgesses' decision reflects old fears that can be traced back to Bacon's Rebellion. Thirdly, their refusal to enlist servants disclosed their understanding of the paradoxical nature of the revolutionary rhetoric they opted to adopt. Simply put, the Gentry of the colony could not have been completely ignorant of the fact that the very language of their grand oratory, sermons, and treatises, both private and public flourishes that routinely characterized the well-to-do as slaves to the King, created something of a problem between themselves and the servant class. That is to say, to offer to servants the opportunity to join their ranks more than likely would have fallen on deaf ears because servants understood and in truly intimate ways that joining their masters would not transform appreciably their lives or their former status (Jefferson, 1785: 156; Morgan, 1971; Hening, 1819; Isenberg, 2016).

The Burgesses' reasoning notwithstanding, William Scott agreed with the measures to keep servants from enlisting. When his "convict servant man named CHARLES SHERRY" disappeared, the Prince William County resident made it a point to remind the public at large that he desired "that no recruiting officer may enlist" his bondsman". Considering the politics of the day, Scott had been more than aware of the threat servants posed to the patriotic cause. His protestation against using servants, however, might have been premature. Two years after Dunmore issued his inflammatory proclamation, the colony struggled to raise soldiers (Purdie, 28 February 1777).

Confronted with the prospect of not being able to protect their interest, the colony's power brokers responded again in typical fashion. Because "many counties in this commonwealth, from various causes" have "failed to furnish their quota of men as directed by an act of assemble", the disbanded Burgesses declared that each resident must serve. Those who refused were subject to a fine of

"two hundred pounds". Interestingly, the grandees did not consider servants to meet their manpower needs. Ever steadfast in their distrust, they elected not solicit bound persons. In many of their minds, the prospect of soliciting servants probably came at too high of a price: freedom or land or the possibility of both. Neither of these options seemed viable for the well-to-do as they represented those persons who held a monopoly on both. Not until 1777, would the founding fathers of the colony change their minds about enlisting servants. Even so, in their minds, all servants were not thought equal. Only hired "servants" and "apprentices" could be recruited (Hening, 1821).

3. Answering the call

Whatever their reasons might have been for not soliciting servants, masters' fears were not misplaced. Not long after Dunmore issued his Proclamation, servants elected to leave their masters. Not even a week had passed when an unnamed "white servant" who belonged to Andrew Leitch left his master to make his way to the Earl. In addition to documenting the burgeoning problem of servants in the colony, the fugitive advertisement that appeared in the newspaper captured the full scope of the Earl's solicitation. For when the bondservant left his master, he did not leave alone. According to the notice printed in Pinkney's *Virginia Gazette*, he ran away in the company of a "negro man named CHARLES". As a matter of fact, it appears that the "sensible fellow" might have persuaded the servant to join him as he made his way to the Dunmore. As his master, Robert Brent, told it, Charles had been "remarkably indulged, indeed, too much so". Prior to the publication of Dunmore's Proclamation in the *Virginia Gazette*, the runaway had been aware of the document's content before it had been set in print. Because he could "read and write", it is possible that he might have come across it in manuscript form. Because he served his master as a domestic, it is also possible that he became aware of the document as he waited on his master whose parlor talk include news about Dunmore. Either way, when Charles left his master, he shared the news about the revolution coming to Virginia. Among those who decided to join him in answering the Governor's call: Leitch's man (Dunmore, 1775; Pinkney, 16 November 1775).

After almost a year after Dunmore's proclamation, a month after the colonies declared their independence from England, more servants in Virginia continued to answer the British call for liberty. In August, Andrew Kelly, "an Irish servant man . . . by trade a brick maker" left his master in Alexandria. To the best of James Parsons' recollection, the "very talkative" man had a plan. Despite his fondness for liquor, he believed his bondsman "may offer to enlist in the land or sea service or attempt again to go to the British troops". Evidently, Kelly found little in the way of merit in the colonial declarations that they were, in fact, slaves to the king of England and that they were therefore justified in severing the bonds of imperial tyranny.

(Incidentally, Kelly had been unsuccessful in his endeavor to join Dunmore's ranks. Several days after he absconded, Alexander Purdie printed a notice in his *Virginia Gazette* that informed the public that Kelly had been taken into custody and was ready to be delivered to" his master (Purdie, 20 September 1776).

As more time elapsed, additional servants answered the Earl's call to arms. "BAKER FULLAM", for example, ran away from his master, one Thomas Blackburn of Prince William County. Before leaving to "offer his services to lord Dunmore", the domestic robbed the family's tutor for additional articles of clothes. Reportedly, Fullam found refuge among "some of the free mulattoes or negroes" in the county. Like Leitch's unnamed man, the "well set fellow, about 27 years old" probably thought Dunmore's Proclamation offered him perhaps his best chance to acquire his freedom. Similarly, when Isaac Zane turned to the *Virginia Gazette* for help in securing his "two English convict servant men" and a "country born negro", he believed that the rebellious party were making their way for the British side (Appendix C). Besides enumerating their ages and their physical descriptions for the public, the owner of the Marlboro Iron Works recalled that at least one of the absconded groups expressed contrary thoughts regarding the political crisis of the day. Charles White, he noted, "by trade a stocking weaver, born in Rutlandshire", remained loyal to the crown. He has been heard, Zane continued, "to say soe atrocious things in respect to the dispute between Great Britain and the colonies" (Dixon and Hunter, 29 June 1776).

In addition to Charles White, fugitive notices reveal perhaps most fully servant's willingness to bear arms for their King. Between 1736 and 1789, over one thousand servants left their masters. More servants probably left, considering the non-extant issues of the Virginia Gazettes printed in the colony. In the first three years of the paper's publication, 133 absconded, twice as many as those reported in the following decade. The 1750s marked the beginning of a significant rise in fugitives. Compared to the previous decade, the number of servants who left their masters increased 32 percent. Not surprisingly, during the burgeoning crisis between the colonies and Great Britain, that figure increased exponentially. In the following decade, 557 servants were reported as having disappeared. Caught between the First Great Awakening and the American Revolution, servants seized upon the social and political instability of the day and declared themselves free (See Appendix A).

Incidentally, most of their declarations of independence were not declarations against the crown or members of Parliament. To be sure, neither held them in bondage. Rather, their declarations were against the tyranny of their Virginian masters, the property laden Burgesses, the esteemed members of Committees of Correspondence, many of whom proudly declared themselves no longer tethered to Great Britain, many of whom were blind to the plight of their servants. Between 1765 and 1775, numerous instances of servants' flight appeared in the colony's newspapers, revealing additional details of their complex story in which they too

demanded their natural rights. Thomas Spears and William Webster, for instance, "two servant men", ran away from George Washington a few months after he had been unanimously elected commander in chief of the Continental army. Surely, Dunmore's Proclamation gave grandees like Washington a reason to be concerned. Along with the Magazine Incident months before, the Royal Governor's declaration of martial law in Virginia signaled a dangerous call to action that promised to undo the class structure in the colony (Pinkney, 4 May 1775).

4. Forced Founders

Like Bacon's Rebellion, Dunmore's Proclamation threated to turn upside down the orderly cosmos that the planter class enjoyed in Virginia since the beginning of the colony. Prior to its publication, they responded to the developing crisis between Great Britain and its North America subjects in largely moderate terms. Instead of allowing themselves to get caught up in bellicose language of the day in which republican ideas were connected with the problematic notions of freedom, tyranny, and slavery, Virginians watched as things heated up in the North cautiously. While New Englanders passionately declared themselves as slaves of the King, most Virginians responded in a more reserved manner. A radical alteration of their blissful way of life had been the furthest thing from their minds (Bailyn, 1967; Maier, 1972; Wood, 1991).

Their restraint is perhaps best captured in their responses to the violent events that would ultimately lead up to the 'Shot Heard Around the World". In 1773, as that often recounted story goes, New Englanders protested the Tea Act by disguising themselves as Native Americans and in the dead of night, boarding His Majesty ships, the Beaver, Dartmouth, and Eleanor, anchored in the Boston Harbor, and throwing more than hundred chests of the King's tea overboard. The Crown retaliated by passing the Boston Port Act that ultimately closed off the harbour of Boston to all imported goods. When the news of the King's wrath had reached Virginia, the leaders there meet to discuss how to respond. On the evening May 23, 1774, they decided to stand with their compatriots in Massachusetts. To that end, they adopted a measure in which they would observe a day fasting, prayer, and humiliation. Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, Richard Henry Lee, and other grandees in colony believed that their moderate response to the Crown's clampdown on their New England counterparts a bold act (Dabney, 1971; Maier, 1972).

Dunmore agreed. Less than a week had passed before he dissolved the House of Burgesses in Virginia. In his view, the grandees had crossed the line. Their observance served only to challenge the authority of the King and Parliament. As their representative, he had little choice in the matter, but to respond. While the Burgesses disagreed with the Governor, they were not prepared to sever their relationship with Great British. Instead, George Washington and others decided that

best of course of action, at least at that moment, would be for them to go to church and fast all day. Hoping for an equitable resolution between the two parties, they went to church. They fasted all day (Dabney, 1971).

Almost a year would pass before the patience of those who once governed the colony would be tested again. By mid-April 1775, British authorities attempted to suppress the emerging rebellion in the colonies by seizing the rebel's capacity to resist. Accordingly, the word had been sent out to the King's men, capture their stockpiles and silence their ability to rebel. On the night of April 18, several hundred Regulars based in Boston crossed the Charles River to Cambridge and began their march to Concord. At the North Bridge, the Minutemen confronted the Regulars and so began the American Revolution in New England (Maier, 1992; Gross, 1976).

Three days later, some 600 miles to the south of Boston, Regulars aboard H.M.S. Magdalen, quietly made their way into Williamsburg, the capital of Virginia, and stole away with 15 half-barrels of gunpowder. By the time the rebels in the colony knew what had happened, the Redcoats were gone. In the days that followed, Virginians organized militia units and threatened to march on Williamsburg. They were angry because the Governor had successfully secured their property without any resistance. They were also angry because the Magazine incident made them feel defenseless. Before marching to the Governor's Palace, however, they sent word to the King's representative. Return the gunpowder or face the consequences. Negotiations ensued. Calmer heads prevailed. At the end of the Magazine Incident of 1775, no shots were fired. No lives were lost. Instead, reasonable men reached a sensible conclusion. If the King wanted to keep the powder, the former Burgesses had reasoned, he may have it, but only if he agreed to pay for it. In both of these decisions, the power brokers in Virginia put off for another day the American Revolution (Dabney, 1971; Holton, 1999).

Their willingness to moderate the contagion of liberty that seemed to be sweeping over certain parts of the North American colonies ended on November 7, 1775. On that day, the Governor declared that the colony's leaders were in a state of rebellion. On that day, the Earl reaffirmed his position as the King's man. On that day, he established martial law in Virginia. On that day, indentured servants became another group of forced founders, who alongside enslaved African Americans and other willing persons, pushed the leaders of the colony of Virginia into the American Revolution.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Runaway Servants in Colonial Virginia Measured over Time in Extant Copies of the *Virginia Gazettes*.

Periods	Number of Servants Absconded
1730s	133
1740s	67
1750s	98
1760s	168
1770s	557
1780s	43

Source: Readex: America's Historical Newspapers Database; and Eighteenth-Century American Newspapers in the Library of Congress in Microfilm. BLY, Antonio T., HAYGOOD, Tamia (2012), Escaping Servitude: *A Documentary History of Runaway Servants in Eighteenth-Century Virginia*, Maryland, Lexington Books, 352.

Appendix B

Intervals between when servants and slaves absconded and when masters placed advertisements for fugitive in extant newspapers in Virginia (Measure by Percentages)

Periods	Less than 1-month	one month	two months	3-5 months	6-12 months	n/a months
			Servants			
1730s	73%	4.5%	3%	4.5%	1.5%	14%
1740s	50%	21%	7%	6%	3%	13%
1750s	64%	6%	1%	2%	0%	27%
1760s	66%	4%	3%	5%	2%	20%
1770s	53%	2%	5.5%	3%	1%	35.5%
			Slaves			
1730s	54%	25%	9%	6%	3%	3%
1740s	22%	26%	11%	7%	15%	19%
1750s	43%	26%	4%	6%	13%	4%
1760s	23%	20%	11%	14%	8%	20%
1770s	26%	22%	10%	16%	8%	16%

Source: (Servants) BLY, Antonio T., HAYGOOD, Tamia (2015), *Escaping Servitude: A Documentary History of Runaway Indentured Servants in 18th Century Virginia*, Maryland, Lexington, 352. (Slaves) WINDLEY, Lathan A. (1983), *Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History*, 4 vols., New York, Greenwood Press; SMITH, Billy G., WOJTOWICZ, Richard (1989), *Blacks Who Stole Themselves: Advertisement for Runaways in the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1728–1790*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press; HODGES, Graham Russell, BROWN, Alan Edward (1996), *'Pretends to Be Free': Runaway Slave Advertisements from Colonial and Revolutionary New York and New Jersey*, New York, Fordham University; BLY, Antonio T. (2013), *Escaping Bondage: A Documentary History of Runaway Slaves in Eighteenth-Century New England, 1700–1789*, Maryland, Lexington; Readex: America's Historical Newspapers Database; and Eighteenth-Century American Newspapers in the Library of Congress in Microfilm.

Appendix C

Respondents to Lord Dunmore's Proclamation

SIXTEEN DOLLARS REWARD.

Frederick county (Virginia) November 10, 1775.

RAN away last night, from Marlborough iron works, two English convict servant men, imported last summer, and a country born negro, viz. Charles White, by trade a stocking weaver, born in Rutlandshire, about 28 years of age, 5 feet 10 inches high, slim made, short dark brown hair, pug nose, high cheek bones, sallow countenance, having had the flux lately, and his hands broke out in biles; had on, or took with him, a small felt hat, an old black cloth coat, old brown cloth breeches, mottled worsted stockings, tow shirt and trowsers, and new shoes, with carved metal buckles. James Leighton, born in Cambridgeshire, about 20 years of age, 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high, strong and clumsy made, swarthy complexion, full face, thick lips, grey eyes, and straight hair; had on a small felt hat, brown cloth jacket, with sleeves, tow shirt and trowsers, and good shoes, tied with strings. Negro man named Will, about 20 years of age, 5 feet 9 or 10 inches high, slim made, large eyes, and shews the whites of them much; had on an old cloth coat, tow shirt, old oznabrig trowsers, good shoes, tied with strings, and had about his neck an iron collar, with the horns cut off, being a notorious runaway, and much given to drinking. It is probable they may change their dress, as they are supposed to have stolen the following articles, viz. a dark brown cloth coat, with plated buttons, an old ash coloured duroy coat, black velvet jacket, with leather pockets, a new ash coloured cloth jacket, with high topped horn buttons, a pair of light coloured Germantown stockings, a pair of white cotton ditto, a fine shirt, two fine shifts, and a check apron. White has been heard to say some atrocious things in respect to the dispute between Great Britain and the colonies, from which it is suspected they may part, and some of them make to seaports. Whoever secures the said servants, so that I get them again, shall receive eight dollars for each of the white servants, and what the law allows for the negro. ISAAC ZANE.

This notice appeared in Pinkney's *Virginia Gazette* on November 23, 1775. In this advertisement, Isaac Zane reported that three fugitive servants had absconded on November 10, 1775, three days after Dunmore's Proclamation appeared in print. This notice captures fully the social implications of the Royal Governor's solicitation of "all indentured Servants, Negroes, or others, (appertaining to Rebels), free that are able and willing to bear Arms, they joining His Majesty's Troops".